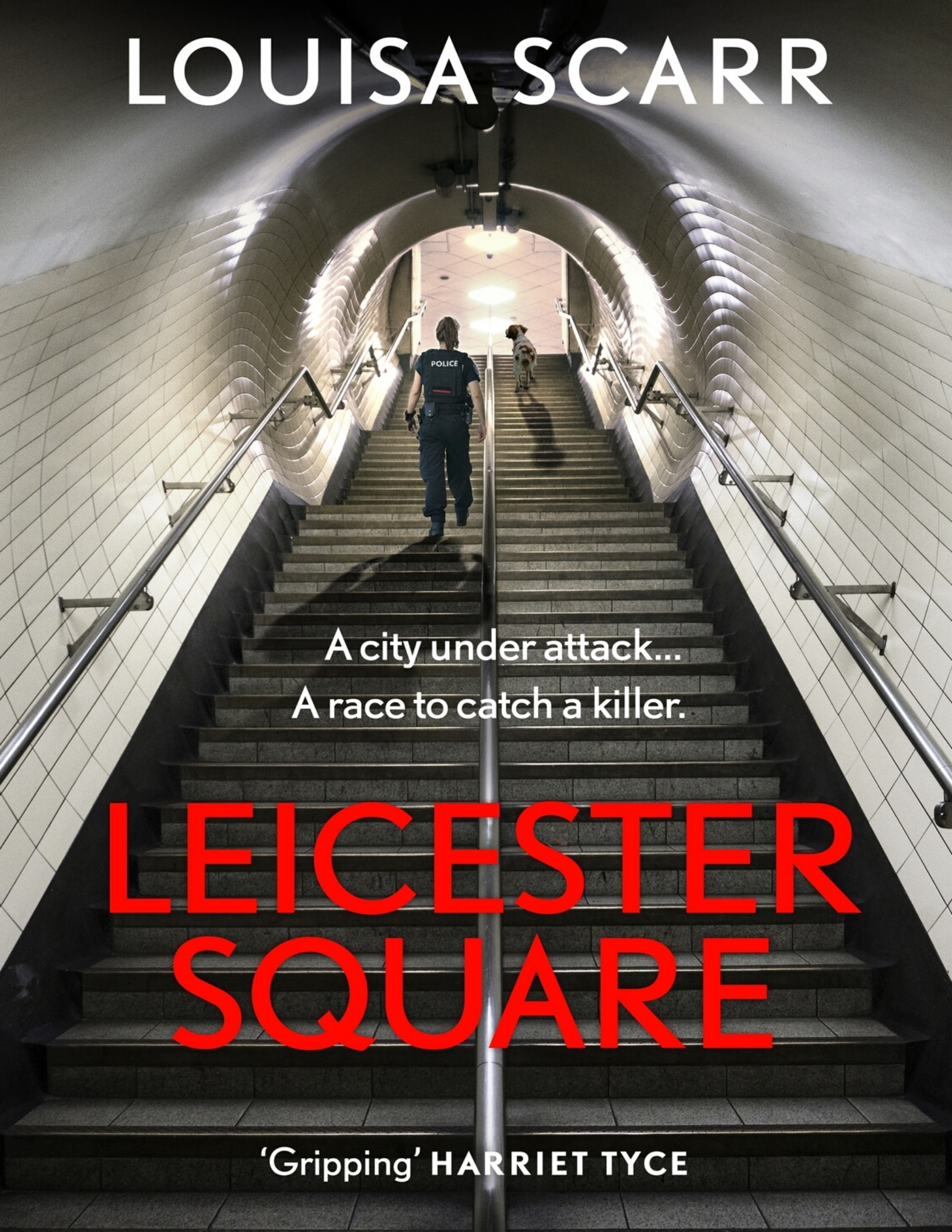


A police officer in a dark uniform with 'POLICE' on the back is walking up a wide, arched subway staircase. A small dog is walking ahead of the officer. The staircase is flanked by white tiled walls and metal handrails. The scene is lit by overhead lights, creating a sense of depth and perspective.

LOUISA SCARR

A city under attack...
A race to catch a killer.

LEICESTER SQUARE

'Gripping' HARRIET TYCE

LOUISA SCARR
LEICESTER
SQUARE



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*Dedicated to the memory of the 52 men and women who lost their lives
in the 7/7 bombings.*

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Every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end.

Lucius Annaeus Seneca, 4 BC–AD 65

Vitality shows in not only the ability to persist but the ability to start over.

F. Scott Fitzgerald, 1896–1940

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PROLOGUE

Early evening, and Oxford Street is humming. Pedestrians push and shove; a man on a pink tuk-tuk waits for passengers, blasting out Seventies tunes; a woman in a headscarf thrusts roses in people's faces, desperate for a sale. But none of it ruins Sally's good mood.

It's Good Friday and she's spent the day shopping. A rare long weekend off work, and she's determined to make the most of it, pausing in front of the window displays at Selfridges and the pastel-coloured dioramas of eggs and bunnies. Her mum is looking after Rory, her two-year-old son, while her husband goes to the football, and she looks forward to driving to her parents' house later, seeing everyone there and spending the weekend eating delicious home-cooked food and gorging herself on chocolate.

But for now, she takes a detour to the main double doors, looking up at the yellow flags, the art deco façade. *I'll just have a little look*, she tells herself. *And maybe buy a present for Mum, her birthday's next month, after all.*

She pushes through into the white marble lobby, the open atrium above. Dior, Loewe, Armani, Prada – the best London has to offer. A woman walks past, a dachshund on a lead at her feet wearing a tweed coat and Sally smiles. Happy shoppers crowd around with yellow bags containing Chanel or Mulberry – who knows, one day she might be able to afford a handbag like these, but for now, a posh lipstick will have to do. She walks into the make-up hall, the full-height screens showing women with bright red lips, and she pauses, debating a Bobbi Brown palette.

But she doesn't get any further than that.

There's a roar, and a rumble. A scream and a crack like thunder, followed by a creaking, a crunching that sends Sally into a panic. The ground shakes, the lights flash. An earthquake? But no, not here. A wave of hard heat washes through the lobby, hot air being pushed by an indescribable force, bringing shards of glass and pieces of metal, tearing through the flesh of the man next to the door, reducing him to a red mush in front of her very eyes.

Some primitive part of her recognises what's going on before her brain does; she drops to her knees, raises her hands over her head. And as windows shatter and the floor crumbles, the world turns dark.

London is under attack.

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PART ONE

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DAY 1 – FRIDAY

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CHAPTER ONE

The stars have aligned; their shift patterns have been co-ordinated. And, magically, Lucy and Pete are out on a date.

It's been a long time coming – weeks have passed since they've managed to get any time together. And here they are: just the two of them, no dogs, no call-outs. Lucy's even turned off her mobile phone.

The lack of one-to-one time has had an effect on their relationship, Lucy realises as they're led to their table. Pete's been odd this past week. Her normally straightforward and uncomplicated boyfriend hasn't been answering her calls, claiming a hectic work schedule when he eventually replies. She suspects he has something on his mind, and tonight she's determined to find out what.

They sit down, and the waiter hands them their menus. The table is quiet and secluded, at the back of the busy restaurant, and Lucy glances around, taking in the other clientele. An old police habit, well ingrained – assess your surroundings, check for trouble. But nothing could possibly go wrong in a place like this.

The restaurant's posher than they're used to – Pete's choice, and she was surprised. He's out of his usual worn T-shirt and faded jeans, into a shirt and chinos. He's even trimmed what was becoming a full beard into smarter stubble.

She's also gone to some effort, in a low-cut patterned dress, her hair washed, curling in long waves down her back. It's annoying her already and she itches to tie it up.

They order starters, talk about work, about the dogs. Safe topics of conversation but Pete's answers are no more than two-word grunts, and he fidgets, picking at his nails, until Lucy leans forward and places both her hands on his.

'Pete. What's going on?'

He looks up, his dark eyes meeting hers. *God, he's a handsome bugger*, she thinks, and grins. But he doesn't return her smile, looking away again quickly.

'So, Lucy...' he begins. 'I know it's not been a great few months—'

'That's an understatement,' she replies, unnerved.

‘—and one of the reasons I wanted us to go out, tonight, was to have a proper conversation. Really talk. I feel like I’ve barely seen you lately, you know?’

Lucy does know. She wonders whether it’s her fault; realises it probably is.

In December, four months ago, Lucy’s half-sister was found dead, her body washed ashore at the edge of Southampton Water. The resulting investigation has stalled, with the coroner declaring an open verdict. Nobody can decide if Tansy’s death was accidental or suspicious; even DCI Jack Ellis, her friend and brilliant detective, has reached a dead end.

Lucy blames herself. Of course she does – three months before Tansy’s body had been found, Tansy had been with Lucy. They’d argued and Lucy’s half-sister disappeared. All attempts to find her came to nothing – until Jack received the call just before Christmas.

She was fully clothed, and there were no obvious signs of foul play, but she’d been floating in the Solent, so it was hard to distinguish cause of death from the other injuries to her body caused by animal predation or bashing into rocks under the surface. Dr Francesca Rosetti, forensic pathologist and best friend to Lucy, couldn’t narrow her time of death down further than between one and three months after the argument. She could have died the day after she left Lucy, or months after.

All the uncertainty doesn’t make for a restful existence.

And then, to top it off, Lucy’s general purpose dog, Iggy, got injured. Nothing serious, merely a sprained hind leg, but he’d spent the last few months recovering on the sofa, leaving Lucy one dog down. Hampshire Police like their handlers to be fully utilised, so while Iggy got better, Lucy trained up a new dog.

Otto was the newest member of her household: a one-year-old brown-and-white springer spaniel, full of enthusiasm and energy, fresh out of his thirteen-week explosives training course, and currently wreaking havoc on her already fractured and chaotic existence. She’s barely had time to eat and shower, let alone hang out with her boyfriend.

‘I’m sorry,’ Lucy begins. ‘It’s my fault. What with Otto’s training, and—’

‘I’m not trying to assign blame, Lucy. I just want to talk.’

Maybe Pete’s trying to split up with her, she wonders. His serious countenance would fit, and she wouldn’t blame him; she brings a whole

heap of emotional baggage into the relationship and that was before you added the dead half-sister into the mix.

But why would Pete take her to a posh restaurant to break up with her? It makes no sense, unless...

Shit.

Her breathing catches for a moment, her heart skips a beat. He's not... He's not going to propose, is he? It's not beyond the realms of possibility. They've been together just over a year; they often share a bed, Lucy usually staying over at Pete's, the dogs residing in the copious kennels out the back. She has spare uniform and a drawer there now. Her own toothbrush next to his in the bathroom. And neither of them is getting any younger. Lucy turned forty in November – a milestone that she resolutely ignored despite both Jack's and Pete's best efforts to celebrate – and Pete's a year older than her.

It wouldn't be unreasonable for him to want commitment. But can she do it? She's been married before and that didn't go well. Pete's nothing like Nico, Lucy's late husband, but could she risk doing it again?

Pete holds her hands tightly, tenderly rubbing his thumb over her fingers.

'Lucy,' he says, portentously.

She smiles, trying to dissipate the tension. 'Pete.'

'You know I love you. And you love me, I think.'

'I do,' she says automatically, but profanities repeat inside her head on a loop. *Shit, shit, shit.*

'And I thought—'

Shit.

'Where's the waiter gone?' Lucy says, glancing around. She's buying time, but now she's asked the question, she realises all the restaurant staff have disappeared. Even the maître d' has left his post. 'I'm starving.'

'Lucy, focus,' Pete laughs.

'Sorry.'

'I'm trying to say something important here.' He pauses, looking at her with those dark puppy-dog eyes she loves so much. How can she say no to this man? 'And it's annoying, don't you agree, the two of us driving backwards and forwards to your house and mine. So, I wondered – would you like to move in with me?'

'You want...' Lucy sighs out a breath, relieved. 'You're asking me to live with you?'

‘Yes, if you want. Do you? I mean, we could move into yours, but I thought – I have more space for the dogs, and it’s closer to Netley HQ, and work, and...’ He stops, his face flushing. ‘Is it an awful idea?’

‘Oh, God, no, Pete. It’s a lovely idea.’ She squeezes his hands. ‘You’ve just taken me by surprise. I thought for a moment that you were going to ask me to marry you.’

‘Oh! No! I assumed, what with the whole Nico thing—’

‘My abusive, dead, shithead husband?’

‘Yes, him. That we should probably take things slowly. One thing at a time.’

Lucy nods. Of course Pete would understand, of course he wouldn’t pressure her at all. But the hideous twisting in her gut still remains, reminding her of what happened before.

Pete’s still talking: ‘We could rent out your place, for a while. Potentially buy somewhere new, the two of us.’

‘You’ve really thought about this.’

‘Yes, I guess so. But I didn’t know what you were going to say.’ He pauses. ‘I still don’t.’

Lucy thinks for a moment. It makes sense. Logically, his house is bigger. Between them they have five dogs, and he has more space for kennels – no chance of getting that in her tiny back garden. And it’s not just the practical side that appeals. The thought of waking up next to him every day – could there be anything better?

She can joke about it now, but before Nico’s death – or his murder, to be more precise – he all but ruined her life. A violent, secretive man, who took his jealousy out on Lucy. That sort of thing leaves scars, and over the last few years she’s taken pains to carve out a sense of safety in a world that once made her own home feel dangerous. To give up her new place and the security it’s provided – it’s hard.

She realises she’s been silent for a while, lost in her thoughts. But when she next looks up, Pete is distracted, glancing around the restaurant. She follows his gaze, sees what he’s noticed: the restaurant is oddly quiet and the other diners are talking in whispered tones, their phones out, staring at the screens.

‘What’s going on?’ she asks Pete.

She reaches for her bag, grabs her mobile out of the pocket and switches it on. But before it comes to life, the door of the restaurant opens with a

crash, and Jack stands in the doorway, his face grave.

If it wasn't for the strange sense of foreboding, she might laugh at his dramatic entrance. All six foot two of him in a dark suit and black overcoat, striking with his short dirty-blond hair and strange grey-blue eyes. Quite the leading man.

He scans the restaurant, spotting her quickly and heading over in two long strides.

'For fuck's sake,' Pete mutters. 'One night. Can't he give us one night?'

'Something's going on, Pete.'

'Why is your mobile off?' Jack snaps once he's reached their table.

'Nice to see you, Jack,' Pete says sarcastically. Jack ignores him.

'What's happened?' Lucy asks, and the phone in her hand bursts to life with a series of beeps. Missed calls, WhatsApp messages, news alerts. 'Oh, shit,' she says, reading the first headline.

SUSPECTED BOMB ON OXFORD STREET. MANY FEARED DEAD.

She looks up, her shock and fear reflected on Jack's face.

'We need you,' he says. 'We need you and Otto. In London.'

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CHAPTER TWO

Jack had been having a quiet evening on the sofa when the news came in. An alert on his phone, causing him to jump, startling the dog.

While Edie, his old lurcher, looked at him confused, he searched for information. At first, the news sites reported an explosion – a gas leak, maybe. But when Jack saw the photos, he knew it was more than that.

The whole front of the building was down. It was impossible to tell from the pictures, but the newsreader reported it was the flagship Selfridges store on Oxford Street. Hundreds were feared to be hurt or injured, many still trapped inside.

His first thought was to check on the few people he knew who lived in London. And as reassuring replies came in, his next concern was for the first responders racing to the scene.

Edie nudged his hand, waking him out of his stupor. He ran his fingers down the coarse fur on her back, then looked dumbly at his phone, ringing in his hand.

Weaver, it said. His Detective Superintendent. He answered it, apprehension pulling him into high alert.

‘You’ve seen the news?’ Weaver said. ‘Is your vetting up to date?’

‘Should be. And I’m reading about it now.’

‘I’ve had a call. They want you.’

An old colleague of Jack’s was Weaver’s equivalent in the Met, and he wanted Jack up there, now. Jack had done a stint in Counter Terrorism back when he was a DI. His knowledge was rusty, but enough.

And Jack’s thoughts turned to Lucy.

They would need dogs. Urban Search and Rescue. Explosive detection. And later – for victim recovery. Lucy had just completed her EDD training with her new spaniel, Otto, and she was one of the best.

However, there are formal channels to go through, as Lucy is telling him now, right in the middle of the restaurant.

‘I can’t just load Otto and Moss into a van and drive up to London. It needs to come via the PolSA, through the force control room.’

‘Yes, but if you put in a request—’

‘And why would she do that, Jack?’ Pete says. He’s glaring at Jack, a rarity when Pete’s normally such an affable man. Jack looks around for the first time, aware of their surroundings. The nice restaurant, Lucy in a dress, bottle of wine. She’d told him that she was going out, and he’d raised his eyebrows at the name of the restaurant. An unlikely place for Lucy and he hadn’t thought much more about it at the time but now he’s here, he realises he’s interrupted something important, which would account for Pete’s frosty tone. But this must take priority, surely?

‘They need the best people up there,’ he says. ‘And you’re one of them.’

‘I’ve only just finished EDD training. Otto’s new. I’m probably the least experienced explo handler out there.’

‘And the BBC haven’t even confirmed it’s a bomb,’ Pete says, looking at his phone. ‘They’re still saying gas leak.’

‘It’s confirmed,’ Jack whispers grimly. ‘They just haven’t put out a press release yet.’

‘Jack,’ Lucy says. ‘Give us a moment, will you? I’ll call you.’

She gives him a pointed stare; he definitely walked into the middle of a serious conversation. And, unexpectedly, his heart sinks – it couldn’t have been *that*? A quick glance at the table, and then her left hand – there doesn’t seem to be a ring. But who knows, in this day and age.

He backs away, apologising, and strides back to his car; once inside, he calls the person who’s been leaving voicemails since he arrived at the restaurant.

‘Digby,’ Jack says, as the man answers. ‘It’s been a while.’

Detective Superintendent Edward Digby sighs. ‘And I wish it was under better circumstances. You’ve had the initial briefing?’

‘I don’t know much. Fill me in?’

Jack puts the phone on handsfree as he drives home.

‘One explosion – but it was big enough to take down the centre of the building, so God knows what they used. We’re looking at multiple casualties, both inside and out. The building’s unstable, we’re waiting for search and rescue to make it safe. But it’s bedlam out there, Jack. Everyone’s panicked, major trauma centres are almost at capacity, it’s a huge mess of confusion. All our multiagency partners are panicking – fire, ambulance, local authorities, the military – and to cap it all off, one of my DCI’s out on sick leave and the other’s as much use as a chocolate teapot. I need a safe pair of hands. How soon can you get here?’

‘Tonight?’

‘Good. I’ll get someone to book you into a hotel, but come straight to New Scotland Yard.’

‘Isn’t Counter Terrorism Command at the Empress State Building?’

‘It is, but hoax calls are going mad. We’ve already had a bomb threat to ESB so we’re relocating. I’ll get my assistant to reserve you some parking.’

Jack arrives home and immediately starts throwing clothes into a suitcase. Suits, ties, shirts – he mentally recites the list. How long is he going to be there? It could be weeks; he chucks in another few pairs of socks.

All the while, he’s keeping an eye on his phone. Lucy still hasn’t called. She’s right, there are processes to follow, and he reflects on why his first instinct when he heard about the explosion was to go straight to her.

But it’s not hard to fathom. Since their drunken night out back in September last year – and the resulting kiss – Jack’s found it hard to keep Lucy out of his head. *Friends, that’s all*, he tells himself for the umpteenth time, but he still feels a flash of jealousy when he sees her with Pete.

They agreed at the time that it was a one-off, a mistake, never to be repeated. They were both mindlessly drunk. And strong, reliable Pete is a far better match for her. A dog handler himself, he’s fit and handsome and doesn’t seem to mind the ever-present mud and mess that come with working with police dogs. Jack’s controlled, uptight – as Lucy has told him on more than a few occasions. And up until last year, Jack didn’t even like dogs. He’s fond of Edie, though, and the thought reminds him that he needs to find somewhere for her to go while he’s away.

He sends a quick message to his neighbour, Gillian, an older woman who’s got to know Edie well and takes her out for walks when Jack’s working late. It comes back immediately – *I’d love to* – and Jack breathes a sigh of relief. That’s one thing ticked off the list.

Jack closes his suitcase with a thud. Edie’s watching him from the doorway, her big brown eyes only too aware that her favourite person is leaving.

Jack crouches down and takes the dog’s face in his hands, rubbing her ears. ‘It won’t take long, old girl,’ he says to her. ‘I’ll be home before you know it.’

But his words feel fake; he can’t even lie to his dog.

This bombing is a major incident in London. Maybe the biggest the capital's ever known. And he's about to head into the heart of it all.

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CHAPTER THREE

The streetlights are a blur as Jack drives up the M3, the radio updating him on the events of the night as he draws closer to London.

Cars stream out of the capital. Jack imagines the chaos inside – the Tube full of delays; buses stopped in the street as the threat is assessed. He remembers the 7/7 bombings. Jack wasn't anywhere near London at the time but he saw the footage – the quiet procession of pedestrians heading over Tower Bridge, everyone doing their best to get home to their loved ones.

And he's heading into the chaos. To what – he has no idea.

Inside the M25, the traffic grinds to a stop. He crawls through darkened streets, the red brake lights transmitted from one car to the next like a contagion, as his phone rings. He jumps to answer it, hoping to hear from Lucy, his heart sinking at the unknown number.

'Jack? This is Pete.'

Jack's wary, he's never had a call from Pete before. 'Everything okay?' he asks.

'I got your number from Lucy's phone, she's upstairs getting ready for bed, and...' He pauses, taking a long breath. 'You shouldn't have done that.'

'Shouldn't have done what?'

'Told Lucy to go to London.'

'I didn't—'

'She can't go. She can't. You need to stop her.'

'You can't tell Lucy to do anything. As you and I know full well.' Jack nudges the Mercedes another few feet through South Kensington. 'What's going on, Pete?'

'It's just... With everything that happened with Tansy – she's not in a good place at the moment. She blames herself for Tansy's death, and putting her in a high-pressure situation – it's not a good idea.'

'Maybe she needs a distraction. Maybe it'll do her good to focus on something else?'

'She needs to grieve. She needs peace and quiet to come to terms with what happened. And instead, she's doing what she always does – running

away from her problems.'

'And are you one of her problems?' Jack replies.

Pete takes a sharp intake of breath, and Jack regrets his words. But Pete was annoying him – talking about Lucy behind her back, acting like he knows what's best for her.

'Listen,' Jack continues. 'I don't want to get involved in whatever you two have going on, but Lucy's a grown-up. She's been through a lot, and she needs support, not judgement—'

'I'm not—'

'—or whatever it is you're doing right now. London is in crisis, and if she wants to help, I can't stop her.' Jack pauses. 'I'll look out for her.'

'I bet you will.'

'Fuck's sake, Pete. We're friends, that's all.' Jack swears and slams his brakes on, narrowly avoiding going into the back of a Ford as he pushes out of a junction. 'I haven't got time for this. If Lucy wants to go to London, let her. People grieve in different ways, don't assume you know what's going through her head right now.'

Pete scoffs. 'As if I ever could,' he says, and hangs up.

Jack sighs. Trouble in paradise, but he doesn't want to get stuck in the middle of Lucy and Pete's relationship. He's done enough to mess that up already.

But Pete has reminded him, he needs to speak to Amrit.

DS Amrit Gill is one of Jack's most trusted team members, and she answers on the second ring.

'Let me guess, guv,' she says. 'You're in London.'

'Trying to be. Stuck outside Westminster.'

'What do you want me to do?'

He likes Amrit's no-nonsense attitude, always has. 'I need you and Oscar to hold the fort at MCIT. Leave Oscar with the day-to-day stuff, you need to focus on the Tansy Holmes investigation.'

DI Oscar Vaughn joined the team last November, a recruit from Northumbria Police, quickly finding his feet and striking up a rapport with Amrit. They work well together, a relief since Amrit could have easily taken umbrage at someone coming in a rank above her. But they split the cases, Jack choosing Amrit to lead the investigation into Tansy's death.

'Guv, you know we've reached a dead end—'

'Just have another look. Please? For me – and Lucy.'

Jack feels bad doing it, piling on the emotional guilt trip, but the lack of progress on the case haunts him. Like Lucy, he feels a sense of failure for what happened to Tansy. He should have tried harder to find her after she left Lucy's house that day, especially since it transpired she didn't even leave Southampton. He was called out to identify the body; he was the one to break the news to Lucy, to see her face crumple as she struggled to come to terms with it. And the first question she asked: was Tansy murdered?

They don't know anything for sure. Tansy drowned, and was alive when she went into the water, but it could have been suicide, it could have been an accident. Tansy had problems with her mental health, and Lucy suspected schizophrenia, like their mother. There were no other wounds on her body, no signs of a struggle. Forensics had come up blank, hardly a surprise given she'd been in the water for a while, and despite a campaign in the press asking for information, nobody had seen her.

'She had a rucksack with her,' Jack says. 'That's never been found.'

'It could be at the bottom of the Solent by now—'

'Or it could have washed ashore, found by someone.'

Amrit sighs. 'I'll do my best. And, guv?'

'Yes?'

'Take care.'

Amrit's words ring in Jack's head as he pulls into the underground car park of New Scotland Yard, where SO15 – otherwise known as Counter Terrorism Command – have relocated. He climbs the stairs to reception and shows his credentials; a tired-looking woman on the front desk asks him to sign in and makes a call upstairs.

It's no surprise when a plain-clothes detective comes to meet him.

'Detective Superintendent Digby is busy, I assume?'

'We're all over the place,' the detective says, letting his mask slip. 'I'm sorry, guv,' he adds quickly. 'It's—'

'It's been a long day, I get that,' Jack says, reassuringly. 'Not that it's about to end any time soon.'

He's shown through security and up to the main incident room. Detectives have galvanised into action, phones ringing, officers staring at laptops, a huge wall of screens showing CCTV and news feeds from across the city. Jack spots his old friend on the other side of the room, talking to a woman in a smart dress; he spots Jack and waves him across.

‘No time for formalities,’ Digby says. ‘This is Jane Franklin, press manager. Get to know each other quickly, the press briefing is scheduled in fifteen.’ He looks Jack up and down. ‘Good to see you’re always dressed for the cameras, Jack. Nice suit.’

‘You, too,’ Jack replies, although the detective superintendent looks crumpled and hot, his nearly bald pate shiny with sweat. He ruffles the piece of paper, annoyed.

‘God, I hate these things. No questions, please,’ he directs to Jane. She nods.

Jack follows them out of the incident room, leaving his case and suit carrier out of the way in Digby’s office. Down the stairs to the press suite, where a full house of journalists and cameras await.

‘Stick to my side,’ Digby mutters. ‘You won’t be asked anything but I want you out in front as soon as possible. Get the operational SIO seen, reassure everyone we’re doing all we can.’

Jack’s stunned to be thrown into the limelight so quickly. He assumed he would get a briefing and then work in a support role. Now it seems he’s the figurehead of the whole damn thing.

Jack’s reputation precedes him. He gained a certain amount of infamy from events in his childhood, when his best friend was abducted and he was considered a suspect in his murder. But he’s made a name for himself since. Solving assaults and murders quickly, with minimum fuss. Those on high love him for his conviction rates, the press for how he looks in front of the camera. Or so Lucy says.

The cameras flash, the clamour dies to a low murmur as Digby and Jack enter the press room and sit behind the white-covered table. The blue backdrop is dotted with the shield of the Met Police; it’s one of the biggest briefing rooms Jack has ever seen, and it’s standing room only.

Digby clears his throat and begins. ‘Thank you to everyone for coming this evening and being patient. I would like to make a statement about today’s events – and I’m going to cover three main areas. What we know about the incident on Oxford Street, the ongoing operation, and what London can expect over the coming days.’

He takes a deep breath, and Jack looks out into the sea of expectant faces. Many will have family and friends affected by the attacks; some of them may even have loved ones in hospital. And yet, they’re here, listening.

Digby continues: ‘As you know, at approximately seventeen thirty-six today, a massive explosion took down the front of 400 Oxford Street, the premises of the Selfridges department store. This explosion caused the front of the building to fall, and many of the floors within to collapse. We are not yet able to ascertain the extent of the damage, but London Fire Brigade have been deployed to make the building safe so we can start the rescue operation as soon as possible.’

A clamour of voices starts up. Everyone desperate to know what caused it, and – more importantly – who. Digby calms them with a wave of his hands.

‘While this explosion was originally reported as a gas leak, we now believe this to be an act of terrorism, caused by a bomb that was driven up to the main entrance in a van, and then detonated. No group has taken responsibility for the attack, and Counter Terrorism Command are carrying out a full investigation. We don’t yet know the extent of loss of life, or how many people may have been affected.’

He pauses, taking a sip of water.

‘Officers have been drafted in from across the country, and we are giving this operation our full priority. Please pay attention to the hotline numbers – the first for family members to report missing persons, and the second if you know anything about the crime. I will be able to update further in due course. Thank you.’

The room immediately breaks out into chaos. Shouted questions, demands.

‘Is this Al-Qaeda?’

‘Do you know the identity of the bombers?’

‘Could we be facing more attacks?’

‘Can DCI Ellis find the bombers before they strike again?’

That last question hits home, sending a ripple of nerves Jack’s way. But Digby looks unfazed, getting to his feet, and Jack takes his cue, following him out into the corridor.

‘Whole thing’s a mess, Jack,’ he says as they walk back up to the incident room. ‘MI5 don’t have a clue – none of their intelligence was even close to predicting this attack, and their surveillance teams were all watching other targets. All innocent – of this at least. We need to wait until morning before we can set up a Forward Control Point – until then, we’re working from here.’ He stops and turns, placing his hands on Jack’s shoulders. ‘I want you

to take charge, Jack. Look into the bombing, follow the CCTV. I want to know who left that van there. And I want them caught. Soon. Understood?’

Jack nods, solemnly. ‘But, sir, don’t you have another DCI to take the helm? Or an experienced DI ready for a step up? My CT knowledge is out of date and—’

‘And nothing,’ Digby interrupts with a frown. ‘Look, Jack, I called you here because you have potential. I’ve been watching your career – this is the opportunity you need to make it further up the ranks. I’m putting all my faith in you.’ He studies Jack carefully, catching his uncertain expression. ‘Is that unwarranted? Should I be looking for someone else?’

‘No. It’s not a problem. I’m more than up for the job.’ Jack forces confidence into his voice, despite the doubts spinning inside him. ‘And the plan for the rescue?’

‘Leave that to the fire service. The bomb was the start – the real loss of life is going to be from the building as it fell. Bricks, stone, glass – you’ve seen it, and that’s not even talking about the risk of secondary collapse.’ He stops, rubbing his eyes, and for a moment Jack thinks he’s wiping away a tear. ‘How can anyone possibly survive in that mess? It looks impossible.’

He blinks for a moment, then starts walking again, Jack following. When they get to the incident room, the huge screens are displaying the feed from a news helicopter hovering over Oxford Street, showing the building at its worst.

Floodlights have been set up around the ruins, throwing the broken brick into menacing shadow. Walls teeter ominously; the roof has partly caved in; the historic stone columns of the façade have crumbled and disappeared. Only one lone yellow flag remains, tattered and flapping in the evening breeze.

Jack stares at it, gripped by the extent of the devastation. And he has to agree with Digby. No one could possibly survive that.

No one at all.

CHAPTER FOUR

Press briefing over, it's time to meet the team.

A woman introduces herself to Jack.

'DI Sharon Lynch,' she says. 'For the purposes of Operation Staircase, I'm your right-hand man. Or woman,' she adds with a smile.

'Staircase?' he says with a raised eyebrow.

'Random word generator, guv. And it was better than scramble or surprise. Those were a little on the nose. Anyway, what do you need? Tea, coffee?'

He likes her immediately. 'Can you get the team together? In whatever room's big enough?'

'Conference room one's free.'

'There, then.' He smiles. 'And I can make my own tea.'

Jack's met women like Sharon before. Ruthlessly efficient, friends with everyone from the top brass to the late-night cleaner, this is someone he wants on his side. The old adage is correct – you want something done, ask a busy woman. Sharon is the epitome of that.

He makes tea, watching Sharon as she corrals the team. Within five minutes they're all gathered in the conference room and Jack joins them, doing a quick head count. Eighteen people, a mix of sergeants and constables – but that number will grow into the hundreds over the coming days.

Digby's made it no secret – Jack's priority is tracking down the bomber. An initial review of the CCTV showed a man running away from the van mere seconds before it exploded, and Jack wants this guy in custody.

He places his mug down, leaning against the desk at the front. It's a pose that feigns casual, needed when his brain is racing. Everyone there will have heard about him and have their own expectations; every set of eyes turns to face him, quiet, waiting.

'My name is DCI Ellis, but please call me Jack, and it looks like I'm the operational SIO for this investigation. We're all here for one thing, and one thing only – to find the people who did this. It's day one, and I'm sure you're all already tired, and you don't need me to tell you that it's only going to get worse. But we all joined the police force for moments like this

– to make a difference. And we’re damn well going to do that today.’ He gets up, taking a seat at the table. ‘Now, apologies if I don’t learn your names straight away. I’m terrible at it, and I assure you, it’s nothing personal. But I will do my best. Let’s start from the left – you. What’s your name, what are you working on and what progress have you made?’

They move around the room. Most have been gathering and studying the CCTV. In the chaos that followed the explosion, it was hard to find the right people with access to the recordings, but now events have calmed a little, hundreds of hours of footage is coming their way. It covers streets, shops, tube stations – both inside and out.

‘We’ve now got video from across the street from Selfridges – the adidas shop,’ one of the DCs says. ‘And here’s what happened at the time of the bomb. Watch.’

He connects his laptop to the projector and Sharon dims the lights as a grainy black-and-white image appears. The time stamp says 17:35:46, thirty seconds before the bomb exploded, and Jack’s heart thumps as a white delivery van pulls up, its bonnet directly in front of the entranceway of Selfridges. It gets a few looks; pedestrians seem confused, wondering what a man’s doing as he jumps from the driver’s side and runs away. Then the whole thing explodes in a gust of black smoke.

Jack swallows, calming his breathing. The whole room is silent. He clears his throat. ‘Rewind to just before the explosion.’ The DC does. ‘Pause it there.’

Jack points up to the screen. ‘We can’t see the passenger-side door – can we get that?’

‘Working on it.’

‘And we need a better view of our bomber’s face – this guy could be anyone.’

Black hoodie, maybe wearing jeans and white trainers. Nothing to clearly identify him, and certainly no shot of his face.

‘But this guy, see here?’ Jack continues, pointing to a man to the side of the van – he stops, staring, then hurries away in the opposite direction, barely seconds before the whole thing goes up. ‘This bloke saw something he didn’t like. Something that felt bad enough for him to run away – and it probably saved his life. We need to find him. As well as the CCTV footage from the other side.’

‘Will do, guv.’

‘And here,’ Jack taps on the paused image on the screen. ‘We’ve got a clear view of the number plate – anything on that?’

‘The plate is registered to a 1992 Nissan Sunny, so it’s clearly stolen or cloned, but we’ve been tracking it on ANPR across the city. We should know where it originated from by first thing tomorrow.’

‘Thank you. Good work. And the tube stations? How did our bomber get away?’

Another detective speaks up. ‘We have thousands of hours of footage, with too many people wearing dark clothing and jeans. So without knowing who to look for, we’re working in the dark. We need an identifying mark, a starting point.’

‘Anything useful from social media?’

‘Absolute shitshow,’ one of the DCs says, then flushes. ‘Sorry, guy, I mean – we have the usual keyboard warriors, so-called specialists telling us exactly what we should be doing right now. Then another load going for full-blown racism and blaming it on immigrants. It’s hard to ascertain fact from fiction at the moment.’

‘Guv?’ one of the DSs says quietly. ‘Who was behind it?’

Jack sighs, remembering the ridiculously sparse intel document from MI5 that Digby passed him before he left. ‘Nobody’s claimed responsibility so far, so the official line is “enquiries ongoing”. We’re expecting more once the forensic teams get access to the site, and I hope I don’t need to tell you this, but no information leaves this building – the last thing we want are copycats. We’ve already been inundated with hoax calls?’ A DC nods grimly. ‘The best we can hope for is this guy is a lone wolf, and the bomb’s a one-off.’

‘Good work, all of you. Speak to your informants, check all the financial flags. There’s no way someone planned an attack like this without raising some eyebrows. Keep chasing. Keep watching that CCTV. Something somewhere will pop out. Sharon will put my mobile number on the board – call if you find something. Okay, thank you everyone, you know what to do.’

The team go back to their desks, primed and ready to catch this guy. On the surface they seem like any other group of detectives but Jack watches them closely. His arrival will have set the cat among the pigeons – some may resent his sudden appointment, others may have wanted the step up

themselves – and sure enough, he gets a few side-eyes, notices a couple of whispers in corners. But he can't worry about that now.

As yet, they know nothing about this bomb – where it came from, who set it, who it was intended for, how it was made, its signature. There might be others out there, waiting to go off, putting more innocent lives at risk. And, professionally, the whole country is watching: put one foot wrong and it's the end of his career.

He's been thrown into the middle of a swirling sea. And right now, there's no choice but to swim.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Time passes slowly in the darkness. Sally has no idea if she's been lying here for minutes, hours or days as the dust settles around her, in her hair and eyes, her mouth, her nose.

The noise was terrifying. It boomed around her – a low rumble then an ear-splitting crash as the concrete collapsed. The floor dropped out from under her; she found herself tossed in the air like a ragdoll before landing heavily on her leg.

The pain raced through her body, causing her to cry out, and then vomit. The next thing she knew she was waking up, still here, silence falling around her, a heavy blanket of black.

But while the quiet was bad, the screaming that soon followed was worse. Desperate pleas for help echoed off the walls. Some close, others in the distance. Cries of pain intermingled with metallic cracks as victims hit whatever they could find against concrete to draw attention to themselves. But they soon stopped when no one came.

Now all she can hear are quiet moans.

Sally shifts as much as she can, assessing her situation. Her head's thumping; a trickle of blood works its way down her forehead. She explores the egg-sized lump with her fingers, wincing as a sting bursts from the cut above it. But being battered and bruised is the least of her problems – she's trapped in a small coffin of broken building: a large, smooth lump of concrete above her, more below. She lifts her hand tentatively upwards; her fingers come into contact with hard rock barely inches away from her face and the resulting claustrophobia makes her nauseous.

She's been buried alive.

Her leg throbs with pain above the ankle – but now it's gone numb and that scares her more. She explores downwards, carefully, touching something wet, then a splinter of bone. A bolt of pain shoots back up her leg, leaving her desperately sucking in oxygen.

She needs to get out of here. But how?

Emergency services must know people are trapped. But the concrete creaks and groans; there's no way anyone's setting foot in here until it's safe.

How long can she survive? Without food, without water? She can hear drips and splashes, but it's distant, too far away. *Three days* pops into Sally's mind but that's from movies, so how true is it? What happens in the real world? The thought of staying down here for seventy-two hours elicits a buzz of panic and dizziness, as she hyperventilates in the darkness.

She's thirsty, hungry, bleeding. She needs help. Without it, she won't get out of here alive.

So many must have died already. Buried in this tomb, hidden away, never to be hugged, or kissed. Never to have their hands held again. Sally wants her mum, her husband; she wants to be home, eating chocolate on the sofa. She wants to see Rory, hold her son in her arms and smell his soft baby hair.

And with that thought in her mind, in the cold and the darkness, she starts to cry.

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DAY 2 – SATURDAY

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CHAPTER SIX

Lucy's skipper, Sergeant Andrews, thinks that going up to London with Otto is a great idea.

'Get some experience,' he says in his broad Black Country accent. 'And it's good for Hampshire – showcase what we can do. Plus,' he adds, looking happier than he should, 'Kent have a high-profile misper, so their whole dog unit is tied up in that one, and Surrey are already committed on a murder. Good that we're able to come to the rescue.'

And so, the resource – her and Otto – is allocated to London. But not before a standing row with Pete.

Last night hadn't ended well.

'Why do you have to go?' Pete had asked for the third time as they paid the bill at the restaurant and headed back to her house. 'They'll put the request out to other constabularies first, you know that.'

'But Jack's right – they'll need good explo dogs. And it's good experience for Otto.'

'For Otto – or for you?'

'For both of us... Why does it matter, Pete?'

'Because Jack says jump, and you say how high.'

Lucy had glared at him. 'Oh, for fuck's sake! Not this again. There is nothing going on between Jack and me.'

'Maybe not from you. But from his side, yes. I can see it in him.'

'If I go to London, I'll be working. I won't even see him. A lowly dog handler hanging out with the big-shot DCI? Come on, you know it's not going to happen. And besides, Jack is not interested in me. I've told you.'

'And I'm telling you – you're wrong. I see the way he looks at you.'

Lucy threw her hands up in exasperation. Pete's not an unreasonable man, and he's not jealous, by nature, but ever since Lucy got back from Newcastle in September last year, Pete's been convinced that Jack's after Lucy. And fuck, does Lucy feel guilty for that.

Pete doesn't know about the kiss. Lucy's come close to telling him so many times but what would be the point? It's done, finished, there's nothing between them, never was. And Lucy values Jack's friendship – if Pete knew about what happened she couldn't see Jack anymore.

But Pete's not stupid. He knows something's up, and now it's a problem.

It's rare for the two of them to argue. And usually over no more than whose turn it is to pick up after the dogs. But Pete's been grumbling all last night, and now it's time to go, it seems he still has a point to make.

'You can't run from your life,' he says, as she loads her bag into the back of her car. 'Sometimes you need to face the problem head on.'

'And what's the problem in this scenario?' she snaps back. 'You?'

'I'm not—'

'You don't get to tell me what to do.'

'I'm just worried about you. You've had a hard few years—'

'Thank you for reminding me.'

'And a few months ago, you were barely getting out of bed.'

Lucy's shoulders sag. He's right. She blames herself for Tansy's death. It was a stupid argument that caused Tansy to leave – Lucy reacting badly to Tansy's ill-founded come-on to Jack – and they should have tried harder to find her. But Lucy had only known her for twenty-four hours, had only known her name for a few days before that. Tansy was a grown-up; vulnerable, yes, but still responsible for her own decisions.

And then her body was found. The guilt hit Lucy like a sledgehammer. Lucy had always dreamed of having a sister, and now she's gone, along with all those dreams and hopes of having a relationship with this woman, getting to know her as family. Lucy's mother died when Lucy was eighteen, but Lucy saw a resemblance in Tansy. And now she was dead, the last connection to her mother gone along with her.

It was grief. It was guilt. It was a depression like Lucy had never experienced before. And if it hadn't been for Pete, Jack, her dogs and some strong medication, she might still be in the middle of it now.

She turns to Pete. 'I know,' she says, quietly. 'But I'm better now.'

He softens, rubbing her upper arms with his palms. 'Even so. You're about to head straight into a national emergency.'

'I'll be fine.' She turns away from him and opens the boot of her car, then the door to Otto's crate, calling the dog from where he's sniffing around in the garden. The spaniel looks between his two caretakers, unsure. 'Otto, in,' Lucy says to the dog, and this time he obeys, jumping up with ease. Moss follows, keen not to be left behind, and Lucy ruffles his ears, bending her head to his and taking reassurance in his biscuity doggy smell.

She shuts the crate and looks back to Pete, now standing in the doorway, his face stricken. It's not like him to be controlling or possessive, and being a dog handler himself, he knows the demands of the job. She sighs, going over to him and standing on the top step so that they're face to face.

'Besides, it'll give me time to think about that question you asked me.'

He smiles, a slow grin smoothing out the frown lines. 'So, it's not a definite no?'

'Is that what you thought?'

He nods. 'I wanted to ask you, because, well, I'd love for you to move in, but I know it's difficult for you.'

Difficult to trust. Difficult to believe that someone might not suddenly change and smash your skull into a wall.

Lucy forces a smile. 'I love you, you know that. But my house is my sanctuary, the first place where I've felt safe for a long time. It's a hard decision to give that up.'

'I get it. I do. Take your time.' Pete leans across and gives her a big kiss. 'I'm worried, Lucy. You, up there. The risk of more bombs. I... I couldn't stand it if anything happened to you.'

Pete's not wrong. There is a risk of more devices, and the possibility of the next one targeting the emergency services. It's been known. But she'll be careful, she swears to herself now. No unnecessary risks. Tricky when you're the one searching for explosives.

'I'll be fine,' she repeats. 'Thank you for looking after Iggy.' And with a final light kiss, she goes back to her car, shutting the boot and climbing in the driver's side.

Pete waves as she heads off, and as she takes the first roundabout towards the motorway, she feels the tension melt away.

Ever since Pete's proposition yesterday, she's been a ball of nerves. She assumed it was to do with the bomb, but now, in full uniform, the smell of her excited dog permeating the vehicle, she feels better than she has for a while. Pete accused her of running, and maybe that's what she's doing, but fuck, it feels great. Out in the field, with her dogs, she knows what she's doing. Otto may be new, but he's shown good instincts and she loves the enthusiastic little spaniel. Fluffy tail wagging, he's always eager to please, and even Moss has enjoyed having a younger friend to boss around. The two dogs are lovely together, both now snoozing in the back of her car.

She pushes the mess with Pete out of her mind and works through the plan for the day.

She's already spoken to the PolSA – or Police Search Advisor. Another copper from Hampshire, Brian Miller is an old hand and used to managing and organising large search teams. She's worked with him many times before and is reassured that he's going to be one of those in charge.

Otto will be up first. The police will need a Forward Control Point – or FCP – and her job will be to clear the area, making sure there's nothing planted that could put the officers at risk. Otto's been trained to find a large number of explosives – C4, P4, HMTD, detonator cord, ammonium nitrate, Semtex, TMP, Triacetone Triperoxide... This dog's sensitive nose can find them all. Then, once that's done, her attention will turn to Moss, and the grisly side of the operation.

Moss is a victim recovery dog, trained to search for bodies – of which there will sadly be a huge number – and blood. Once the initial clean-up has finished and the victims' bodies documented and taken away, her and Moss will step in, looking for the pieces that got left behind. It's a grim job, but necessary, and Moss is the best in the field.

As she drives, a call comes in, and Lucy answers it quickly. It's Fran – and Lucy's cheered to hear her best friend's voice. She gets to the point straight away.

'I hear they need explo dogs,' Fran says. 'Are you one of them?'

'On my way now. You?'

Fran's a forensic pathologist and has been summoned to disasters across the world – from the Bali bombings at the start of her career to the California wildfires in 2018. It makes sense she would have been one of the first to be called in a situation like this.

'They're setting up a temporary mortuary in the gardens of the Honourable Artillery Company,' Fran says. 'Near the Barbican.'

'Same as they used in...'

'Yeah, same as the 7/7 bombings.' There's a moment of silence, both women quietly hoping the one bomb doesn't turn into four. 'It's all hands on deck,' Fran says quietly. 'And I'll be staying up there, so I doubt I'll see you. You're over in the west, right?'

'Yeah, although I've no idea what hotel they're using.'

'I wanted to say – look after yourself, okay, Luce? If it's too much, leave. No one will think bad of you.'

Lucy sighs. Why is everyone so suddenly concerned? But Fran's worry comes from a good place – she's seen it all before, knows the toll it can take on the human psyche. 'I will,' Lucy replies. 'And you too, Fran. Love you.'

'Love you too.'

So much unspoken. So many worries and thoughts about what has happened, what both of them could be facing in the long days ahead. For the first time, Lucy feels out of her comfort zone. A newly trained dog, in the middle of London. Is she mad for thinking she can make a difference?

She saw the news coverage this morning. A ticker tape bulletin ran along the bottom of the screen announcing what Lucy already knew: *EXPLOSION IN LONDON CONFIRMED AS BOMB*. A shot from an overhead helicopter showed Oxford Street, the road full of blue flashing lights: ambulances, police cars, fire engines. And then, a view of the front of the building, and Lucy's breath caught in her throat.

It was nothing but rubble. The walls either side stood tall, highlighting how huge the building was, how massive the damage. Iron girders poked out of concrete; huge boulders lay in giant piles, dwarfing the first responders as they bustled around the scene. Water was being sprayed from a heavy-duty hose, putting out fires from the gas mains as smoke and dust rose in great plumes.

Lucy shakes her head, trying to block the image from her mind. She has to focus. She has a job to do and she resolves to work hard, not complain, crack on with the tasks assigned.

She gets to London in good time, following directions to Keston, the Met's dog training unit, where Moss will be housed. She's greeted by one of the full-time kennel staff, who takes Moss off her hands. Lucy gives him a quick ruffle of the ears, safe in the knowledge he'll be looked after here. And Otto will join him at the end of the day, so he won't be lonely.

With a final goodbye to her faithful mutt, she leaves her car at Keston and takes a lift in the dog van to the centre of the city. Life goes on – the roads are as busy as ever, people trying to get to work but fearful of the Tube and buses – and they get stuck in stop-start traffic most of the way. So when she arrives at her designated start point, she's late, and tired and flustered.

The Forward Control Point needs a wide-open area – to erect temporary tents and shelters, and to be a place for officers to sit and relax between deployments, as well as somewhere to carry out briefings. Space is a luxury

in the crowded city centre, so Lucy wasn't surprised to hear that Hyde Park had been chosen as the best site. But any would-be terrorist would also know this, so it's Lucy and Otto's job to check for explosives.

She greets Miller with a smile, taking a radio and a bottle of water and kitting up, letting Otto out of the back of the van and putting him in a harness. Immediately, the dog's tail is wagging – the promise of fun and reward – but on a deployment like this, Lucy hopes for a negative result. No explosives and an all-clear; a reward for Otto later.

'Are you ready?' Miller says, looking over the top of his wire-framed reading glasses. 'You don't want a sit-down first?'

'I've been sitting down for two hours,' Lucy says. 'Put us to work.'

He nods approvingly and taps a bitten nail on the map. 'Start here. Twenty minutes, half an hour tops. We don't want to tire out the dogs this early in the game.'

Lucy and Otto have their orders. And they begin.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Unsurprisingly, Jack couldn't sleep last night. He left CTC in the early hours, dragging his suitcase and checking in to the hotel where the Met have made a block booking. A standard Premier Inn, his room on the third floor, halfway along the corridor. It's close to three a.m. by the time he's unpacked and collapsed on his bed, but sleep is elusive. After a few hours tossing and turning, he gives up, switching the light on and reading the briefing notes that have come in overnight.

There's not much. He reaches for a notepad and pen and writes down every possible question in his head. Then, that done, he eventually gets some shut-eye.

But it's not long before his alarm goes off and he wakes with a groan. He showers, gets dressed in a clean suit, shirt and tie. Has a quiet cup of tea, knowing that his next moment of peace might be some time away.

A car greets him at the entrance of the hotel and drives him to New Scotland Yard. He's already itching to be out at the FCP; he's never fared well being trapped in an office looking at things from afar, but he needs to talk to his team, and get a handle on any progress they've made since he left last night.

Digby meets him at the door and walks him up to his office.

'I've just been with MI5,' the detective superintendent says. 'Emergency COBRA meeting at the Houses of Parliament with the PM and the home sec.'

'Let me guess – they know nothing?'

Digby nods, grim-faced. 'On the one hand they're saying they can't possibly watch everyone, but on the other, they're certain it's not Al-Qaeda. You've got none of the hallmarks of their style of bombing.'

'They could have evolved?'

'They say not. And they're quick to rule out the IRA, too. The type of bomb is similar, but it's rare for those guys in this day and age, plus nobody's claimed responsibility. They mentioned there were a spate of thefts of agricultural fertiliser from farms in the East Sussex area about six months ago, but no leads on who. Leave that with them. They're calling it a terrorist act, and that would make sense – serious violence, damage to

property with the aim of intimidating the public – and JTAC have raised the terrorism threat level to severe.’

‘An attack is highly likely?’

‘A bit stable door and horse bolting, if you ask me, especially as nobody has any idea of the political or religious cause behind it. They’re looking at the target, though. Why did the bombers choose Selfridges, of all places, and they’re looking closer at any terrorist groups who might have skin in the game.’

Jack cringes. He hates that phrase. ‘We’re getting more officers, I assume?’ he asks. ‘An investigation of this size...’

‘Yes, yes, on their way. Although you know what they say – police officers don’t grumble when things are difficult. They grumble when they’re bored.’ He points to the room of already overworked detectives. ‘Maybe we make sure these guys don’t get bored.’ He grins at Jack, but Jack doesn’t take the bait.

‘Send me more officers,’ Jack says sternly.

‘Okay, okay. I better get on – both the King and the PM want to give a statement of sympathy. As if we don’t have enough to do.’ Digby taps him on the arm. ‘Good to have you here, lad. We all have high hopes.’

‘I want to get down to the FCP as soon as possible. Get a sense of what they’re working on.’

Digby gives him a long look, then shrugs. ‘No problem, get DI Lynch to drive you. And make sure you’re seen by the press. Good for your career.’

‘That’s not—’ Jack starts, but Digby’s not listening, distracted by the arrival of his assistant, the woman placing a mug of coffee in his hand.

Jack sighs and looks away, up to the TV screen where the news is playing.

‘Turn that up, will you?’ he shouts, and someone clicks the volume control.

The screen shows a man in uniform, a red fox Labrador at his heels.

‘...and with search and rescue attempts now beginning on the site,’ the newsreader says, ‘the whole country is hopeful that victims will start coming out of the wreckage alive.’

It’s hard to believe anyone could emerge out of that unscathed. But Jack knows that within an hour of the missing persons hotline being set up, they’d had over forty-two thousand calls.

Families, friends, parents, children, all desperate to see their loved ones again.

And Jack's certain – if anyone can find them, these amazing dogs will.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

The energy at the bomb site is palpable as Graham Johnson turns up just past ten in the morning. As he pulls his van to a stop, his dog gets to his feet; Graham can hear his claws tip-tapping against the bottom of the crate, eager to go.

‘Give me a moment, Saxon,’ Graham says to the dog, climbing out and walking across to the incident commander and the team leader. A map has been laid out in the rendezvous point, outside the outer cordon. But Graham is seeing the wreckage for the first time, and up close, it’s an intimidating sight.

Smoke still rises from the ruins. The air is acrid with chemicals, and a layer of dust covers the marooned parked cars. The shop windows were shattered in the blast; spiderwebs of splintered glass cover some, while others lie like diamonds on the pavement. Floral tributes have been left, bright tulips and carnations a stark reminder of what’s at stake, who might be left, dying in the mess, while discarded shopping bags lie in the gutter.

Parts of the 540 thousand square feet of selling space have been reduced to rubble. The walls of the Grade II-listed building still stand either side of the bomb site, but what was once the grand entrance has completely gone, leaving behind huge lumps of concrete, steel beams twisted into strange shapes, the four floors above ground sinking into the basement below. Pieces of tile, bricks, wood and shattered glass cover what was once the pavement; Graham bends down and plucks a shiny gold cylinder from the mess, recognising it as a tube of once-posh make-up; the air has a sickly sweet scent – from the obliterated perfume counters – underpinned by a more familiar smell. Broken bodies, burning oil, singed flesh.

Graham’s worked for Urban Search and Rescue for most of his life, but he’s never seen devastation like this. Starting out as a firefighter, he’s seen whole buildings burn to smouldering rubble, but the potential loss of life has never been so huge. Still, he tells himself, he has a job to do, and standing here open-mouthed isn’t going to help anyone.

He knows the drill. Overnight, the explosive ordnance teams from the Army, Navy and the Met would have been checking for secondary bombs, ensuring no risk to the first responders. They will be joined by the explo

dogs from the police this morning, completing the canine team. The fire crews have been putting out fires, clearing space for the paramedics from the Hazardous Area Response Team to triage the walking wounded, treating those they can on site and taking the more seriously injured to the four major trauma centres in London – St George's, St Mary's, Royal London and King's College – where the critical care teams will work. The air ambulance will be on standby, ready to deploy for those with life-threatening injuries.

Officers would have been clearing away rubble, digging through the pile, piece by piece. Collecting it in huge dustbins and taking it away to where it will be raked through, painstakingly looking for anything that might assist in the investigation. The forensic teams are standing by, ready to collect any evidence found.

Next, what's left of the building would have been made safe and a path made so rescue teams can gain access. Graham can see scaffolding holding up walls, strong metal bars supporting the huge RSJs, while specialist cutting equipment breaks and breaches. The last thing they want is secondary collapse, and huge wagons containing metal cutters, lifts and jacks are parked at the perimeter. Overhead, a drone buzzes, giving an aerial picture to those watching below. Looking for potential hazards, voids in the rubble and other risk areas before the rescue teams go in.

Graham's – and Saxon's – role is to save lives. Find the survivors trapped underground, using the dog's keen nose to sniff out live scent. Because living humans give out a different smell to the dead. Expelled breath, skin cells, sweat, clothes – the dog picks up on it all, even down to the polish on their shoes and the aftershave they put on that morning.

Graham's been Saxon's handler for four years, training him from a puppy into a well-honed dog. They started on rubble piles, giving an enthusiastic volunteer a toy and sending them off to hide in a secluded corner of the training ground. The key for the dogs is to make it fun so they don't consider it work – this is a game to them, pure and simple.

There's no defined time limit for the rescue. No set timescales for when the operation swaps from rescue to recovery; the decision of 'life unlikely' is made by the police and the fire service, and they're a long way from that yet, even though Graham's only too aware that the last person pulled out alive from the Twin Towers disaster was on the twenty-seventh hour – a time they're fast approaching.

But everyone here has rescue embedded in their soul. Survival is a miracle, and they won't stop until they find every single person in this mess.

Graham heads back to the man in charge.

'Where do you want me, guv?'

The man studies the map. 'We've cleared the west side of the area already, at least for now. Can you and Saxon get started on the east side, here? Sector 3C.'

'No problem. Is anyone coming out alive?'

'We pulled a man out this morning. In bad shape, no feeling in his legs, but he'll live. So, yes, this is still a rescue operation. Forty minutes on, then rest. Got it?'

Graham nods and strides back to his car. He pulls his orange overalls on while Saxon waits impatiently, letting out a series of excited yelps as Graham opens the crate, slipping the harness on his dog. He's worried about potential glass or sharp corners, so he places four protective boots over Saxon's feet, securely fastening the Velcro.

And Saxon's ready to go.

He's been trained for just this scenario. As a puppy, he had a strong play and prey drive, keen to be out there, having fun. He's smart, independent, with attitude – nothing fazes him; he shows no reaction to noise or loud bangs. And most of all, Saxon has a love of balls, and Graham puts his favourite in his pocket – a ball at the end of a rope, chewed and loved over the years so it's no more than a rag.

The two of them make their way towards the bomb site. He walks to the main area of search, indicated on the map, then lets Saxon off the lead. He wants to start with a free search, let the dog have his own nose, and he sends him off with a quick, 'Away, find.'

Saxon doesn't waste any time. Nose to the ground, he clambers over the rubble, head darting to and fro in his search for live scent. Graham has a safety officer behind him, watching, navigating and mapping the area, ready to shout if there's any risk to man or dog, and Graham takes reassurance in this, his gaze laser-focused on the dog.

Scent moves in unpredictable ways. Made up of skin cells, it diffuses out from the body, moving within the voids of a building, bouncing off walls and ebbing and flowing depending on the air temperature. It fans out from the central location, creating a scent cone, widening and diminishing the

further away it gets. Saxon can tell the difference between a live victim and a dead one, indicating for both but remaining silent for the latter.

Graham attracts the dog's attention with one peep of his whistle, then directs him with a shout of: 'Saxon, over!' and a wave of his hand. The dog obediently changes direction, his tail wagging furiously as he works. He'll give the dog some time before he moves to a directed search, making sure that nothing is missed.

But then it happens. The dog swings back in a handbrake turn, his nose skirting over a pile of broken bricks, and then stopping dead. Graham scrabbles to catch up with him, and pauses, watching Saxon's body language. His nose is against the ground, over a hole, but he's silent, eyes locked on the gap between the bricks.

Heart beating, Graham takes a GPS reading of the spot and radios down to the team leader.

'We have a positive indication of the possible presence of human scent from the K9 team within Sector 3C to the east side.'

A shout goes out, and Graham pauses as they respond, calling for silence, switching off the flood lights and the generators before the team leader hollers: 'Search and rescue, can you hear me?'

They listen for voices, cries for help, the sound of something tapping, deep below ground. But there's nothing.

Graham can see his boss looking up at him, then a quick, sad shake of the head.

'Good work,' he hears on the radio. 'We'll take over.'

Graham pulls the ball on the rope out of his pocket and rewards Saxon with a quick: 'Yes!' The dog snatches the ball and chomps happily, as Graham clips him back onto his harness, leading him down and back to the car.

Now they'll use a variety of equipment to investigate what's down there. The DELSAR – to look for sound. Thermal imaging, searching for body heat. CO2 detectors, monitoring human breath. And finally snake-eye cameras – long, thin probes so they can see down into a void.

But Graham knows his dog. He loves Saxon more than anything else in this world and he trusts him. The dogs are trained to bark when they detect live scent; if they can get down a hole, they will, and they won't stop barking until the handler calls them away. Saxon's silence was a bad sign.

Graham turns, his heart sinking as he offers his dog water, then loads him into the crate until his next assignment. That area is someone else's job now. Because whoever's down there is dead.

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CHAPTER NINE

Two hours later, the potential site for the Forward Control Point is cleared, including all possible routes in and out of the location. Lucy and the other handlers have been alternating their dogs, running their sensitive noses over the allocated zones, asking them to: ‘Look, look,’ and fortunately coming up with nothing. For now, the PolSA is happy and Lucy waits with Otto while he laps at the water bowl. Refreshments done, he looks up at her, jowls damp, tongue lolling. It’s like he’s smiling, keen to find out what’s next.

She crouches next to him, running both hands over his ears, down to his flanks, giving him a good scratch.

Because of the way dog units are structured, Lucy’s only too aware that once Iggy’s back to full speed, she’ll have to surrender Otto to another handler. Two dogs per handler – that’s the way it works – but she’s already attached to the affectionate springer spaniel. It’s going to be hard when the time comes to give him up.

For now, she leans down and places a kiss on his snout. ‘Time for a rest, little man,’ she says. It’s up to her to make decisions on behalf of her dog; if it was up to him, Otto would keep going, a typical spaniel with seemingly unlimited amounts of energy. But to keep him at his best, he needs to sleep, and she loads him in the back of the dog van, giving him a final stroke before she closes the door.

It’s a mild day so Lucy has no qualms leaving Otto as she walks away from Hyde Park. She buys a sandwich and a bottle of water and heads slowly in the direction of Oxford Street. Flags fly at half-mast while floral tributes line the pavement, missing posters crudely sellotaped to walls.

Marble Arch tube station is closed and the road is empty, a cordon in place at both ends, a police officer standing guard. He gives Lucy a weak smile when she says hello.

She avoids the main bomb site, not wanting to get caught up in the rabble of onlookers, and takes a detour, down a side street. It’s quieter, and Lucy finds the silence eerie. The drills and hammers from the search and rescue teams echo off the buildings but they’re distant and indistinct down these quiet roads.

She passes a coffee shop and a car park, discovering both full. Even here, so close to the death and destruction, people are going about their normal business. There is a sense of confidence and defiance – if you change your behaviour, they’ve won – and Lucy finds the resilience of Londoners cheering: pedestrians on scooters and bicycles, refusing to be cowed by the actions of one small group of people. But who? That question remains unanswered.

Selfridges was a busy department store, bustling with shoppers on a bank holiday Friday when the bomb went off. How many people are dead? How many buried in all that rubble, many even still alive? Reports on the news that morning gave the number as maybe six hundred casualties, twenty-five in serious condition in hospital, but that will rise as more victims are found.

She thinks of the fire and rescue dogs, spaniels and Labradors trained to look for live human scent, and wonders how they’re getting on. Tears spring into her eyes, and she turns away quickly, walking decisively back to Hyde Park. There is work to be done, no time for unwelcome emotions. She drops the remainder of her sandwich in the closest bin, the bread turned to sawdust in her mouth.

When she gets back to the FCP, their hard work that morning has already come to fruition. Vehicles are parking up; tents are being erected, chairs and tables brought in. A cluster of press have formed outside the cordon, some snapping photographs, others chatting idly. And through all this chaos, she spots a tall man in a dark grey suit taking it all in, noticeable for his air of quiet calm among the hustle and bustle.

DCI Jack Ellis – the man in charge. She watches him for a moment, his head bent, talking to a short blonde woman in plain clothes. One of his London team, Lucy assumes, and she’s obviously passing on bad news, since Jack’s jaw tightens, frown lines forming around his eyes.

Lucy’s been friends with Jack for nearly two years now; it’s a strange meeting of minds but one she values. As a dog handler, it would be easy for someone of his rank to talk down to her. *Many do*, she reflects ruefully. But Jack respects her opinion, and he listens. A rare commodity, in all this chaos.

Idly, Lucy wonders what her life might have been like if she’d stayed on the detective career path. She’d transferred to the dog unit over three years ago now, when her job had been put at risk thanks to her shithhead of a husband, and for the most part she’s happy with the road she’s since

followed. But sometimes she wonders. Might that have been her? In charge, making the important decisions?

The thought of it makes her tired. The idea of taking command of all of this. She's glad to be a part of it – and play an important role – but making the decisions, when life and death are at stake?

No, thank you. Not anymore.

The bright chime of a ringtone sounds out, and as the woman takes a call, her attention distracted, Jack notices Lucy and lifts a hand to wave. She smiles and walks over to him.

'You're in charge of this, then?' she asks.

'Looks that way,' he replies. 'I wanted to come down to the FCP, get a sense of what we're working with.'

'Otto and the other dogs have been over it. You're safe.'

'I should bloody well hope so.' He scrubs his hand down his face, tiredness already showing.

'You okay?' she asks.

'Nothing that eight hours' sleep won't fix.'

'You won't be getting one of those for a while.'

He forces a smile. 'No, I guess not.'

There's a shout from behind them; Jack's name is being called.

'You should—'

'I should—'

'Yes, go,' Lucy says.

'Where are you staying?'

'The Premier Inn – on Leicester Place, I believe.'

'Same as me. See you there?'

'Tonight?'

'Yes, tonight.' He turns away, but then pauses, thinking for a moment. He looks back at Lucy. 'Be careful, won't you?'

'Me? I'm always careful.'

'You run straight towards danger, Lucy. Every time.'

She goes to make a joke, but hesitates, sensing a real fear behind his warning. 'What's going on, Jack?'

He glances at his colleague, the blonde lady watching them, eager to leave. He nods at her then lowers his head, closer to Lucy's.

'We just found out – the bomb? It was supposed to be two.'

Lucy looks up at him, confused. 'What do you mean?'

‘The forensic team have pieced it together already – there was a second bomb, on a timer. Set to go off half an hour after the primary explosion. So that when the first responders arrived at the scene...’

He doesn’t have to say any more. ‘The bomber would take them all out, too,’ Lucy finishes.

Jack nods grimly. ‘But something went wrong – they believe the first was supposed to have been moved away, but as it was, it triggered the second, so Selfridges got the full force of both bombs. It was some sort of mixture of agricultural fertiliser and petrol, Lucy. Set off with a charge of Semtex. And all that can be highly susceptible to accidental detonation. So, please, be careful. They’re not going for innocent victims, they’re targeting us, too. Maybe we’re even their main goal. So if you or Otto spot anything suspicious, run. Go. I don’t want anything to happen to you.’

His name is shouted again, and without another word, he turns, striding away and joining his blonde colleague at the waiting car.

Lucy watches him go, dread constricting her lungs.

‘Be careful, too, Jack,’ she whispers, and for the first time she wonders whether coming up to London was the right thing to do. She could have been home, safe, with Pete, watching it all play out on the news.

She hears her name shouted, and with that, she’s sure. She didn’t join the police force to sit on a comfortable sofa. She wants to do everything she can to help. But as she prepares to go back to work, a shiver runs down her spine.

The bombers are going after the first responders. But since they didn’t achieve their goal, what might they do next?

CHAPTER TEN

As Jack walks away from the FCP, DI Lynch updates him on the latest.

‘They’ve found him,’ she says, once they’re in the car, and instantly Jack knows who she’s referring to. The man that ran away moments before the bomb exploded. He could have seen the bomber in the front seat of that van; this could be the lead they’re after.

The discovery of the failed second bomb has increased the already headache-inducing pressure. It’s more evidence that there could be another device out there, and the thought of the bombers targeting first responders reminds Jack of an investigation last year. Call-outs to burglaries or criminal damage, where ACAB had been spray-painted on the walls. *All Cops Are Bastards*, a familiar refrain in the wake of a rising tide of anger towards the police, but could it be connected?

There’s no time for that now. Jack and DI Lynch are met at the entrance of New Scotland Yard by one of the DCs, who talks as they head upstairs.

‘We followed him on CCTV back through the gates at Bond Street. We matched that to the time he went through – he used a credit card and his bank were only too willing to help. Long story short – we gave him a call. He arrived ten minutes ago.’

Mr Ali Abbas is waiting in the interview room as Jack and Lynch walk in. Mid-forties, balding with a beard, dressed casually in a shirt and jeans, he scratches nervously on the rough tabletop. The noise puts Jack on edge.

‘I’ve been waiting for your call,’ Mr Abbas says, barely noticing the cup of coffee as it’s put in front of him. ‘I couldn’t sleep last night, worrying about whether to phone you.’

‘Why didn’t you?’ Jack asks, gently. He’s got to play this right – the man looks terrified. The last thing he wants is to spook him and end up with nothing.

Abbas points to his face. ‘I’m a brown-skinned man in London and I was right next to a bomb before it went off. You do the maths.’

‘You’re Muslim.’

‘I am.’

‘You’re not a suspect, Mr Abbas. We’ve seen the CCTV. We know you had nothing to do with it.’ Mr Abbas lets out a long sigh. That’s the short

version of what the Intel team have been up to – quickly but painstakingly raking through Mr Abbas’s life. Who is he? Why was he there? Where did he live? What did he do? They came up with nothing suspicious.

Mr Abbas’s hands are shaking when he picks up the coffee and takes a sip. ‘But we’re hoping you can help us,’ Jack continues. ‘We believe you were a direct witness to the bomber. The man in the front of that van?’

Mr Abbas nods. ‘He was white.’

‘You’re sure?’

‘Yes. He had a cap on, and a hoodie over the top, but there was no doubt about it. He was white. That’s why I hesitated. He looked like your average delivery driver, except he wasn’t wearing a uniform. And where he’d parked. Nobody parks there.’ He stops, his chin wobbling. ‘And I ran. You may not blame me, but I blame myself. I knew something bad was going to happen, so I ran. I could have saved those people, I could have—’

‘You listened to your instincts, Mr Abbas. And that saved your life. There’s no guarantee you could have stopped it or saved anyone. You probably would have died.’ The man looks unconvinced, and Jack notices his wedding ring. ‘You’re married?’

Mr Abbas stares at his hand, as if seeing it for the first time. ‘Yes,’ he says. ‘Sixteen years. Two kids.’

‘You did exactly what your partner would have wanted you to do – you stayed alive so you could be a father to your children. That’s all any of us can hope for.’

Mr Abbas stares at him for a moment. Then back to the ring. He nods, solemnly.

‘We would be grateful if you could work with one of our e-Fit artists to draw up an image of his face. Could you do that for us?’

‘Yes. Yes, I think so.’

‘Thank you—’

‘What about the other guy?’

‘Sorry?’

‘There were two of them in the van.’

‘You’re sure?’

‘Yes, but the other person was turned away. I didn’t see their face, just noticed a figure in the seat.’

‘Did you see where they went?’ Mr Abbas shakes his head. ‘Thank you, you’ve been a great help. I need to go, but please tell my colleague anything

else you remember,' Jack adds, getting to his feet, leaving Lynch in the interview room.

There were two of them.

He enters the incident room at speed, approaching one of the DCs watching CCTV. 'There were two of them,' Jack says. 'Two bombers,' he shouts out to the room. 'Look at the passenger side of the van. See if we can get a view.'

The DC gets to work immediately, as the new information is written up on the board. Knowing that hovering over someone's shoulder while they work doesn't help matters, Jack goes into his office and waits impatiently. He reads a few reports from the team, and emails from those on high, pushing Jack for updates, for progress. He's ignored two of Digby's calls in the last hour alone.

The newspaper headlines this morning were bold but vague. *CITY OF FEAR*. In the light of zero confirmed information, they're speculating.

Lynch arrives back, a single piece of paper in her hand. She holds up the e-Fit. And it's distinctive. So many of these reconstructions end up generic, a face that could fit a thousand men, but this guy is unique. Wide, flat nose. Thin lips, with spaced-out teeth. Eyes that stare into your soul.

Lynch pins the photograph on the board and Jack follows her into the incident room, hitting his palm against the plastic, getting everyone's attention.

'This is our number-one priority,' he says. He points up at the screens of CCTV footage. 'This man, IC1, wearing a black hoodie and cap. Running away from the scene. Find him.'

The room buzzes into action. It's a lead. There might be a hundred white men wearing black hoodies in London but now they have a face, they can start to narrow it down. Plus, these detectives are experienced. They're looking for fear, guilt, for someone moving fast away from Selfridges at that time.

The other DC is still looking for the second man, but updates Jack with a shake of his head. 'I can't find him. None of the cameras are pointed at that side of the van, and I can't find anyone running away.'

'Keep going,' Jack replies. 'Please, let them find something,' he then mutters quietly. Everything depends on this.

His prayers are soon answered as someone shouts: 'I've got him.'

They project the footage up to the big screen – it's grainy but the man on the CCTV fits the description. Cap, hoodie, wide nose, ugly face. He's clearly scared – looking anxiously behind him as he flees the scene. When the bomb goes off and everyone stops, staring, shocked, he keeps running.

Other analysts take the thread, pulling up camera footage, following him from every angle as he moves through London. Onto the Tube at Oxford Circus, following the Bakerloo line down to Elephant and Castle. Then he's on his feet, out and running down the A302.

'Get traffic cams from that area. We need to find him.'

Jack's big worry is he'll move out of range of the CCTV. Central London and the Tube network are well covered, but as their suspect moves towards smaller roads, it'll be a challenge. The man will wander into residential areas and disappear.

Jack notices something new. 'Wait! That's him, but he's in a T-shirt now. Where's his hoodie and cap gone? Where did he discard it?'

Backwards now, rewinding until... There! Outside the Elephant and Castle tube station, but still in range of the cameras, he quickly strips out of his top and shoves it in the nearest bin.

'Get someone down there, now. Get that clothing.'

More hurried phone calls, sending coppers from Response and Patrol. Finding that cap or hoodie could give them DNA – and a name. But this was last night. What if the bins have been emptied this morning? What if that precious evidence has disappeared?

'Guv,' one of the DCs says, a phone clamped to his ear. 'They've got it.'

A cheer goes up; everyone knows the importance of these two items of clothing.

'Blue-light it to the lab. Get them to test it, asap.'

It's all they need. One speck of DNA and they can run it through the system. Somebody like this, they'll have offended before.

And soon, Jack hopes, they'll have one of the bombers. And from there, they can hopefully find the second, and any other accomplices. But a spark of discontent takes fire in a corner of his mind. In a world where hatred and discontent have been allowed to grow, can it be this easy?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Lucy sits on the edge of the van boot, sipping her coffee; Otto's warm, slim body is resting next to her, his head on her leg. Every so often he looks up, his eyes beseeching, as if to say, 'What's next?'

She runs her fingers through his soft fur, unable to answer the question, and idly listens to conversations in the bustling FCP. There's a reassuring mix of accents, people called in from across the country, and she tunes in to some murmurings about the new DCI coming in and taking over. Some officers are bitchy, the language fruity – when the tide turns.

There's a palpable shift in the atmosphere; conversations silence as the PolSA takes a call, his tone serious. Miller looks her way.

'They have a suspect. They're going out to get him,' he says. 'And they want an explo dog standing by. T minus thirty. Get ready.'

Otto's already on his feet; Lucy grabs a bottle of water and loads the dog in the back, then blue-lights it to the location. She follows directions to where the operations commander has taken up post, watching on a small screen via the body-worn cameras on the armed response team.

He looks up when she and Otto arrive. 'You the explo?'

'The one and only.'

'Grab a chair. You've got front-row seats to the best show in town.'

'How did they find the suspect?' she asks, settling Otto at her feet.

'They recovered discarded clothing, tested DNA, got a match. Gary King, his name is. Record for robbery, possession and intent to supply, and assault. Not to mention a few rape charges no one could get to stick.'

'Nice guy.'

'And this is his registered address.'

Lucy watches as the armed team assemble. They're cautious – and rightfully so. The last thing they want is to be caught in the middle of a booby-trapped house, so they'll be breaching a window first, taking the suspect by surprise with stun and smoke grenades.

Lucy gears up while she waits – tac vest and helmet, then a set of booties for Otto, to protect his feet from glass and debris. The commander barks orders down the radio, and they're off.

They need this to go well. Having a suspect in custody will go a long way to calming the residents of the UK, as well as soothing the bigwigs on high. Lucy thinks about Jack; he must be feeling the pressure right now.

There's a thunder of boots, crashing, then two explosions as grenades go off. Through the feed, Lucy watches as the house fills with smoke. More shouting: 'Police. If you do everything we say, you will be safe.' But no response.

It's repeated – no reply.

The commander frowns, his breathing quick. This is his decision – whether to breach the front door and risk his officers' lives, or take a safer, slower approach.

The commander makes a call, talking in brisk tones about intel and surveillance.

'He might not even be there?' he snaps down the phone and hangs up. 'Alpha two, enter the property. Repeat: enter the property.'

On the video feed, an officer steps forward with a red battering ram, taking the front door down in two easy strokes. Guns in front, the officers advance. Smoke blurs the video as the masked officers in black move swiftly inside, searching each room in turn.

'All clear,' comes the final assessment and the commander sits back in his seat.

'Shit,' he mutters. He looks at Lucy. 'You're up.'

'I'll need to assess it before I bring the dog in.'

'Be my guest,' he says. 'The place is empty.'

She encourages Otto into the van, to his obvious annoyance, and heads inside. The front door hangs off its hinges; windows are now open, letting the smoke clear and giving her a full view of the house. The place will be searched from top to bottom by licensed search officers, and from here, it looks like a normal bachelor pad. Widescreen TV dominating one wall, surround sound, leather armchairs. An assortment of beer cans litter the coffee table, a full ashtray in the centre.

It's not clean, but Lucy's seen worse, by a long mile. The kitchen is much the same: filthy, grease-filled frying pan on the hob, a dirty plate and cutlery in the sink. But there is little risk to Otto so she goes back and fetches her dog.

The spaniel starts sniffing straight away. He doesn't need a command, he knows there's fun to be had and he pulls ahead, leading Lucy back into the

house. She has to pause to focus him a few times, direct him to spots he's missed, but generally she lets him search on a loose lead.

Armed officers are milling around, preparing to go back to base, but the commander follows Lucy and Otto in. She senses eyes on her. Their last hope of finding something to demonstrate this wasn't a complete waste of time.

Ground floor finished, she heads up the stairs. A master bedroom, the sheets in a pile on the floor; clothes, underwear, left as they fell. She picks up the duvet with a gloved hand – Otto sniffs but gives no indication.

The bathroom – grey with dirt, shit stains in the toilet. And on to the final bedroom – the spare. She pushes the door open and Otto sniffs, his tail wagging furiously, his nose swinging to and fro in the enclosed space.

And then he stops. He lowers his nose to a patch of carpet just behind the door and inhales. Then freezes.

There's nothing visible to the naked eye, but Otto has roughly forty times more smell receptors than humans. And she trusts her dog. The spaniel looks up at her and she redirects him with a quick, 'Show me.'

His nose goes straight to the same patch on the floor.

She shouts for the commander. He takes the stairs two at a time and joins her in the spare bedroom.

'You've got something?'

'A trace, left behind. Maybe where something was?'

There's no doubt there were explosives in this room. But where are they now? That's anyone's guess.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Fran knew it would be bad, but nothing prepared her for this.

She's been a forensic pathologist for over twenty years. She's seen the inside of more bodies than she can count. But this level of destruction and loss of life is beyond her comprehension.

Two large white marquees have been set up in the gardens of the Honourable Artillery Company on City Road. The same place they set up the temporary mortuary twenty years ago, on 7 July 2005, when four bombs ripped through London. Back then it was one marquee per crime scene; having the second up and ready fills her with foreboding.

Fran had been doing a post-mortem at Southampton General when she heard the news. It was a simple procedure – a forty-year-old walking heart attack had dropped down dead at work, and she quickly confirmed the cause of death. Undiagnosed severe coronary artery disease, leading to massive myocardial infarction and cardiac arrest. She had the radio on quietly in the background, while dictating notes into her overhead recorder, and the newsreader had interrupted, talking about an explosion on Oxford Street. *Gas leak, my arse*, she thought as she contacted an old friend in charge of the disaster response teams. These guys have been called in across the world – from the Bali bombings to Hurricane Katrina – but this one was closer to home.

She was in London by nine o'clock that night.

There are processes in place – well-practised procedures where everyone knows their role. A receiving line takes the body bags; each one is logged and tagged. The pathology techs X-ray each bag, making sure there aren't any surprises. Then pockets and clothes are checked by police, safely storing evidence that could corroborate identification later. Each body is examined for trace, then washed and autopsied.

In theory, it is organised. In practice, there are hundreds of people working here, from the crime scene investigators to the coroner's office, and Fran does what she's told. Scrub in, carry out a post-mortem, write up findings, move on to the next.

They have one goal – to return a loved one to their family. In some cases, it's a body. In others, it's a shoebox full, where they've only had fragments

to match to those confirmed missing. But it's something to bury, and that makes a difference.

She prides herself on her resilience and her stoicism, being able to detach her emotions from her actions, but some things still shake her. A pregnant woman, the foetus barely four months old. A wedding ring, encrusted with mud. A child, the same age as Fran's boys. And she would pull her scrubs off, step out into the sunshine, if only for a moment, to remember why she's there.

To give dignity to the dead. To ensure they're treated with respect and care. To make sure that any evidence is captured and stored and logged, to guarantee that whoever did this won't get a chance to ever do it again.

She's lost count of how many bodies she's seen today. Time passes without comment; she misses lunch, looks forward to dinner and rest. But this new man in front of her seems different. All day she's studied crush injuries, bruises and contusions from falling debris as the building collapsed, and she can tell a lot from these abrasions. Patterns on the skin from the causative object – parallel lines from the tread of an escalator, brush abrasions from gravel or the road, lines from floor tiles. But this man – he has none of that.

What's left of his body is peppered with lacerations, some where the flesh has been torn from the bone, shrapnel still embedded. She pulls out a nail, drops it with a metallic clang in the stainless-steel dish. The bomb was made more lethal by the addition of nails and other missiles around the explosive, but the level of injury to this guy seems far worse than that seen on other bystanders.

Significant burns, with no recognisable facial features. Traumatic amputations of his left arm at the shoulder and right hand. His internal organs are little more than mush, pulped by the sheer force of the explosion, and that's without mentioning the hemicorporectomy. Anything below the waist has gone. Pulped into nothing.

This man was close when the bomb went off. Maybe even...

She calls across to one of the detective sergeants assigned to help identify the victims. He'd been circulating with photos of the missing – their tattoos, the glasses they may have been wearing – with the hope to put a name to some of the unknown bodies, but now he joins her outside the makeshift autopsy room, Fran carefully holding her gloved hands out in front of her to avoid touching anything.

‘The man in here.’ She recites the identification number. ‘Where was his body found?’

‘Er, so...’ He pauses, resting his laptop on the nearest surface and pulling up the data. ‘Close to the entrance, in front of what was left of the van.’

‘Outside the main building?’

He gives her a long look. ‘Possibly. What are you thinking?’

‘There’s no doubt that he was killed in the blast. But it’s my belief he was in the van when the bomb went off, and the force of the explosion pushed him through the windscreen of the vehicle. What did he have on him?’

Another check of the records, this time with more urgency. ‘Here.’

Fran pulls off her gloves and white suit and follows the detective to the room where the belongings are being stored. She watches as the man looks through the evidence bags, eventually locating the correct one. He holds it up to the light.

‘It doesn’t look like the man had any ID, but...’

‘But?’

He carries a plastic bag across to Fran, and the two of them look at the small, cheap handset inside.

‘He had a mobile phone in his jacket pocket.’

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Lucy and Otto spend the next few hours checking the garden and surrounding area of Gary King's house for explosives, and, finding nothing, she gets the spaniel safely back to Keston and heads to her hotel.

The day has left her sticky with sweat, grime and dog slobber, so she has a shower, gets dressed in a simple T-shirt and jeans, and heads down to the restaurant.

It's quiet, and for that, she's glad. A couple of other tables are occupied, and she recognises a few faces even before their demeanour marks them out as police. They're clearly winding down after a long day, drinking with the intensity of people needing to be blind-drunk in order to sleep, and she has no wish to join them, wanting quiet reflection rather than comradery, however distracting. She takes a seat at the back, studying a menu.

A message comes through from Pete; one of many that she's received during the day. Only now does she have the opportunity to read them properly. The latest one says:

Hope you're okay. Saw you were at Hyde Park this afternoon. Thinking of you x

She stares at the text, debating. They've had the Find My iPhone app set up between them for a while, making it simple to co-ordinate at the end of shifts, but seeing it in such stark terms makes something twitch uncomfortably in her head. Her ex-husband had been jealous and controlling, and it was apps like this one that made it easy for him to manipulate her. Pete's nothing like Nico, but still. It doesn't sit well.

Back at hotel, knackered. Speak to you tomorrow? she replies, opting to avoid him.

And it's not just that. Pete had been right: the day had been tough, maybe too tough for this inexperienced dog and his handler. Otto had been an absolute star today, he'd 100 per cent delivered; no, it's the human part letting the team down.

All while she was searching, she couldn't help thinking about the victims. The dead, the wounded – and their families receiving the worst possible news of their lives. So much death and destruction, it makes sense that she'd be feeling low, but there's something else. A darkness, hovering out of sight. Not that she's going to admit that.

A man comes over to her table, holding a bottle of Peroni and one of Coke, both capped, distracting her out of her glum thoughts.

'I'm sorry to disturb you, but I wanted to buy you a drink and I wasn't sure what you'd go for. These were my best two guesses.'

Lucy barely has energy to roll her eyes, let alone tell this man where to go.

'I've got a boyfriend,' she mutters, her eyes dropping back to her menu.

'No, no, you've got me all wrong. I'm Graham. Graham Johnson. I'm one of the dog handlers for USAR. Fire and rescue. I wanted to say hello. I recognised you – you work for Hampshire, don't you? I'm based with the Met but I trained my dog at Netley.'

'Oh, shit, yes. I'm so sorry. Have a seat.' She knows him now – red fox Labrador. 'Simon or... Jackson? Your dog's name?'

'Saxon.'

'Lovely Lab.'

'I won't keep you. I know you've probably had a long day. What's your poison?'

He gestures to the Coke or the beer.

'Peroni, please,' Lucy replies, and he opens it. 'Thank you. How's it been going? Have you been at the bomb site?'

'Yeah, we've been doing as much as we can. Search and rescue are still clearing and making safe.'

'Found anyone?'

He pauses. 'No one. No one alive, anyway.'

'I'm sorry.'

'You know what it's like. We do our best, we look after our dogs. You've been doing explo work?'

'Yes, new dog, but he's got great potential. I'm not sure where we're being deployed tomorrow. I've got my VRD with me, Moss, but it's too early for that, right?'

'Much too early, we're still hopeful. But listen, we're short on officers to do victim recovery, so if you're at a loose end tomorrow, come down. The

more hands on deck, the better.'

'I'll speak to my PolSA. I'll do what I can.'

Her phone buzzes, distracting her. *Heading back to hotel. You there?*

It's Jack, and she starts to reply, as Graham gets to his feet.

'Anyway,' Graham says. 'I wanted to say hello.' He points to a lively group on the other side of the restaurant. 'Sure you won't join us? We won't give you shit for being a copper.' He grins. 'Not too much, anyway.'

'No, I'm okay. Thank you for the drink.'

'Anytime. We have to look after each other at times like this. Otherwise, they've won, right?'

She returns his smile, watching him head across to his colleagues. Given the extent of the devastation, she can't help thinking, *They've already won, haven't they?*

She pushes the thought away, replying to Jack: *In restaurant. Join me?*

She watches the grey dots rotate as he types.

Order me something. On my way.

She flags down the waiter, quickly appraises the menu and orders a burger for herself, and a veggie version for Jack. She sits back, feeling lighter, and she reflects on why she's happy, almost keen, to have Jack's company when she can't tolerate anyone else's. Maybe it's the shorthand they've developed – no time for niceties. By now, their friendship is well worn and comfortable, like a favourite sweatshirt you pull on at the end of the day.

He arrives, and she waves him over. He collapses in the chair opposite her with a sigh, sprawling his long legs under the table.

'How is it you still look pristine at the end of the day?' Lucy asks him. 'I was a mess.'

He glances down at his smart suit, then pulls at his tie, loosening it and opening the top button at his neck. The action makes her stomach flip, a ripple of something pleasant she doesn't want to think too much about right now.

'I am the epitome of calm and restraint at all times,' he says with a smile.

'Repressed and buttoned-up, more like.' He won't take offence; it's a commonly trod path. 'How was it? I saw you on the news.'

'Busy. You and Otto were at the raid?'

'Yes. Disappointing.'

‘But we’re hopeful. Forensics are in there now. It won’t take us long to find something about the guy – work out where he might be hiding. Shake down a few of his known associates.’

‘Shake down? Who do you think you are? Beverly Hills Cop?’

He acknowledges her teasing with a smile. ‘We found his car, though.’

‘You did?’

‘Parked at Herne Hill station. That’s where he picked up the van. We traced it all backwards. Bomb disposal are heading there now.’

‘Don’t you need to go too?’

‘To watch them blow up a Vauxhall Corsa? I’ll be fine without, thanks. They’ll call if they need me. And it’ll be good to hide from the press for as long as possible.’

Lucy gives him a questioning look, and he turns his phone around to face her.

BOTCHED RAID BRINGS DCI INTO QUESTION, the headline screams.

‘It wasn’t botched!’ Lucy says. ‘We found evidence explosives had been there. And you’ve only been on this operation for one day, what do they expect?’

Jack shrugs. ‘I knew I’d get some backlash from the team.’

‘You think someone close to the investigation’s blabbing to the press?’

Jack raises his eyebrows. ‘Must be. Nobody else knows this level of detail.’

Lucy’s furious on his behalf, but tempers her anger, knowing it’s not going to help him now. ‘How are you doing?’

‘I’m fine,’ he replies, although he’s clearly not. Deep frown lines are etched between his eyes, the corners of his mouth turned down.

She reaches out and touches the top of his hand where it rests on the table. ‘You know you can talk to me, right?’

‘I know, Lucy. Thank you.’

Their dinners arrive – golden brioche buns with crispy chips throwing off the most mouth-watering aroma. Lucy asks for ketchup as Jack appraises his burger with an approving nod.

‘I thought it was the safe option,’ she says. ‘And I can eat your chips if you don’t finish them.’

‘Who says I won’t?’ Jack replies.

They both dig in, no time for conversation while they chew. Lucy realises how hungry she is, and finishes her burger quickly, wiping her hands and

her face on a napkin, then going for Jack's chips. He eats carefully, removing the gherkins and flicking them onto Lucy's plate. She pops them in her mouth with a grin.

Lucy's phone vibrates on the table. She glances at it.

'That Pete?' Jack asks, leaning back. He seems much restored, colour back in his cheeks. 'You have ketchup on your chin,' he adds.

She wipes it off, then picks up her phone. 'Yeah.'

'Look, I wanted to say – on Friday night, I shouldn't have stormed in like that. I got the feeling I interrupted something important.'

'Oh, you did. But it's fine, don't worry. Pete understands.'

'He does?' Jack pauses. Lucy senses there's something he's not telling her but doesn't have the energy for a confrontation tonight. 'And?' he prompts.

'He asked me to move in with him.'

'Oh, great!' Jack sees her expression and frowns. 'Isn't it?'

'Yes, but.'

'But?'

'But I'm not sure I'm ready. I like my little house.'

'I get that. Your place of sanctuary.'

'Yes! That's exactly it. It's mine, I pay for it and it's where I feel happy. Away from Nico, and all that shit.'

He nods. He's aware of her late husband and everything that happened.

'You've found peace in your new home. But, Lucy – Pete's not Nico.'

'Don't you think I know that? I'm just not sure I want to give it up.'

'That's understandable.' He picks up her beer and takes a sip; when he sets it down, she pushes it across to him, figuring he needs the alcohol more than she does. 'And you've discussed this with Pete?' he continues. 'Rather than storing it all up and overthinking it?'

He knows her too well. 'I have!' Lucy says joyfully. 'We had an open and honest conversation.'

'Good for you. Personal growth.'

'Isn't it.'

'And Pete understands?'

'He does. Damn him,' she adds with a laugh.

He smiles warmly. 'Annoying, these well-adjusted, empathetic adults.'

'And what about you, Jack? Anyone new to disrupt the sterile minimalist box you call home?'

‘Edie.’

‘Apart from the dog.’

‘Then, no. When am I supposed to have met someone, Luce? I work. I come home. I go to bed. Rinse and repeat.’ His phone starts to ring in his pocket and he pulls it out with a grin. ‘Saved by the bell.’

He looks at the number, then frowns, getting up and moving away from the table.

Lucy watches him go, missing his company already. It’s an odd friendship. The hotshot DCI and the scruffy dog handler. They first met at a bad time in their lives, the fallout from the trauma of Lucy’s abusive husband and Jack’s neglectful childhood bonding them beyond normal friendship. It’s a familiarity she cherishes, but is it more than that? When she asked him about anyone new, she felt a twitch of jealousy. When Pete’s around and normal life brings them together for chats over coffee or the occasional dinner, it’s easy to remind herself there’s nothing between them. But here, alone, it’s harder to ignore.

And for the first time she wonders – is she being truthful with herself and Pete? Is it as she said – that she doesn’t want to move in with him because she doesn’t want to give up her independence?

Or is it something – or someone – else?

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

‘Go on,’ Jack says to Lynch, once he’s in a quieter part of the restaurant.

‘We have him,’ Lynch says, her voice eager with excitement. ‘We have the second man.’

Jack’s stunned. ‘You do? Tell me everything.’

As Jack takes a taxi back to New Scotland Yard, Lynch fills him in on what’s happened.

‘So, one of the pathologists down in the temporary mortuary identified a body as someone who was close to the bomb – probably in the van before it blew.’

‘What happened? He didn’t get out in time?’

‘Can’t have done. The bomb pushed him right out the windscreen, splitting him in half in the process. And with that in mind, they went through his belongings and found a mobile phone. We got it to the digital team—’

‘And? What’s on it?’

Jack’s out of the taxi now, taking the stairs two at a time to the incident room, where he meets Lynch. She lowers her phone from her ear, and together they stand next to her laptop.

‘Not much. The techies say it’s a pay as you go, probably bought for this purpose. But the only number on it?’

‘Go on...’

‘Is live and currently at a flat in Oakmount Estate, south-east London.’

Sharon grins, and he returns her smile, his heart pounding. He can hear his blood racing in his ears, feel the buzz of adrenaline in his veins. This could be it. This single mobile phone number could lead them to Gary King.

He takes a long breath in, looking up at the clock. Half past nine. There’s still time to get a result this evening. ‘Let’s start surveillance on this place, now. Get Digby to authorise it. Hell, call the commissioner of police if you need to, but we need to see everyone going in or out of that flat.’

Lynch gets straight on the phone, barking instructions to the team. The whole incident room is on fire; everyone knows what’s at stake. They could catch this guy, tonight. Jack just needs him to be there.

Before long they have men on the ground. Surveillance operatives, every one meeting the Goldilocks test – not too big, not too small. Not too tall, not too short. Designed to blend in and not attract attention.

Now all they can do is wait. And it's driving Jack mad.

'Tell me about Gary King,' Jack says, once Sharon has a quiet moment.

She sits down, passing Jack a mug of tea. 'Born 1979, forty-six years of age. British national. Never married, one child – a daughter, born in 2019. She's six. Most recently worked a series of cash-in-hand jobs, from construction to road maintenance. A few stints inside but got out in 2018 and has kept out of trouble since.'

'A home-grown terrorist?'

'Looks that way.'

'We need to track down the mother of his child. Find out more about him.'

'On it.'

'And are we any closer to getting an ID for the dead bomber?'

'Nothing back from the lab. And before you ask, yes, we've been chasing.'

'Good, thank you.'

Jack hovers behind members of his team; he makes impatient calls to the sergeant in charge of the surveillance operation; he annoys the hell out of everyone. And still the answer comes back: we have to be patient. He goes into his office and paces, desperate to be doing something rather than simply waiting.

At just past midnight, Lynch knocks on his doorframe, a massive grin on her face.

'They think they've got him.'

'Show me.'

She places her laptop on his desk, running through images. 'It didn't take the surveillance team long to work out which window matched with which flat, and they quickly identified that the lights were on. They could see movement behind the curtains.'

'Somebody's in?'

'Exactly. But no one emerged from the main door of the block until 23:04, when this guy strode out.'

It doesn't take a genius to see this skinny kid isn't Gary King. 'Not our guy,' Jack says.

'No. And they arrested the poor sod only to discover he's a neighbour, popping out for some fags. Scared the life out of him, but he was happy to talk. Said there's been a disgusting smell coming out of that flat for weeks, and earlier tonight he had to knock on the door, ask them to turn the music down.'

'What time did he do that?'

'About twenty-two hundred hours. After the surveillance team were in place. And guess what?' Lynch smiles, her excitement palpable. 'He identified the man that came to the door as Gary King.'

Jack grins back, thumping his fist against the table. 'Brilliant. Get the armed team on their way. And bomb disposal. I assume he hasn't left the flat since?'

'Confirmed. No one else has left the building. We'll get a link set up, so you can watch the op from here.'

This is potentially huge. Arresting Gary King is a massive step forward in their investigation, going some way to soothing the fractured community. He needs this to go well.

'I want to be there,' he says, pointing at the photographs.

Lynch gives him a look of disbelief but hides it quickly. 'I'm sure that can be arranged.'

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

It seems there's nothing Lynch can't do. With Digby manning the operation from command, Jack and Lynch don bulletproof vests and arrive in time to get into the van with the second tranche of armed officers. Counter-terrorism firearms, trained to the highest level, they're almost military in terms of how they enter a property and tackle an offender. And now, dressed all in black, they're focused on the task at hand, paying little attention to the suit in their midst.

Sitting with them, here, brings it into stark focus for Jack. He might make the decisions, but these guys are the ones in the line of fire. Not only are they putting their lives at risk, but there's a real chance they will have to deploy their weapon. Never an easy decision to make.

They arrive at the location, the officers filing out one by one. A few acknowledge him with a quick nod of their head and a whispered, 'Guv,' but otherwise the night is silent.

He takes a chair next to the operational firearms commander and waits, his hand nervously tapping on the table. They've had one fruitless raid today. Forget about the press – questions will be asked from those on high about his competence if this turns up nothing, too. The pressure is on.

The flats around them have been stealthily evacuated. Jack's barely able to breathe as he holds a radio up to his ear, listening as the commander gives the green light. He hears the crash of the armed officers, the shouts, the dull thuds of the smoke grenades. There's the low, repetitive thrum as a police helicopter hovers overhead, and Jack turns his attention to the live feed from one of the officers as CS gas rounds are fired inside. Huge floodlights from the helicopter focus on the front door of the house where the armed police wait, crouched on the ground, their rifles trained on the doorway. Smoke pours out, as slowly, steadily, a man emerges. He's in his underwear, stripped to avoid any chance of concealing a bomb, hands up.

And through the grainy feed of the body-worn camera, Jack can identify him. Their prime suspect. Gary King.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Jack wants to be the one to interview this guy. To see the man up close, look into his eyes and see the evil.

Over his twenty-one years in the police force, Jack's met murderers, rapists, sadists and paedophiles, but this man exploded an ammonium nitrate fuel oil mix in the doorway of a busy department store. As of this moment, they have twenty-seven confirmed dead, including five children, who knows how many reported missing and many more in hospital. Untold death and destruction. Was this man behind all the misery and pain? Or just a puppet, acting on someone else's orders?

Luckily, with six guns pointed at his chest, their suspect did the sensible thing and surrendered; Jack watches as Gary King is taken away and then goes back to the video feed of the armed officers as they start to clear the property. A shout goes up – they need the bomb disposal team in here, now.

'Do you want a cup of tea, boss?' Lynch asks, next to him.

'Only if you're getting one yourself,' Jack replies, although yes, he wants hot caffeine more than anything else right now.

Calls are made to the specialist bomb disposal team, and Jack waits, cradling his mug between both palms. In the quiet, he turns his attention to his current second in command.

'Have you got a family, Sharon?' he asks.

'Sorry, guv?'

'A family... kids, partner? Where should you be, right now?'

'Oh. No. No family, not even a steady boyfriend. Familiar story.'

'No one can cope with the demands of the job?'

She smiles. 'Got it in one.' She takes a sip of her coffee. 'My sister's got two, though. A niece and a nephew. Brilliant kids.' She looks out to the middle distance, reflective. 'I thought I met someone new a while ago but...'

'But?'

'Charming, handsome, hot as hell.' She laughs, although it sounds forced. 'Total arsehole, it turns out.' She switches her attention to Jack. 'What about you, guv?'

'No, no one.'

‘That’s why you’re so successful at such a young age,’ Sharon says, with a decisive nod.

‘I turned forty-two last month!’

‘Still. Good for you.’

Jack watches as a van pulls up, and the bomb disposal expert suits up. Layers upon layers of insulation and padding, helmet, gloves. As he waddles inside, Jack considers the fact he’s single. It’s never bothered him before, and Sharon’s right – it’s how he’s managed to move around the country, gathering experience and moving up the ranks as he went. But now he’s in Southampton, he feels settled. He’s even got a dog. Perhaps there’s no avoiding it, perhaps domesticity catches up with you in the end. Still, there’s no queue by the back door of eligible admirers wanting to be Mrs Jack Ellis. And the only woman he’s been attracted to in the last six months is contemplating blissful cohabitation with another man.

Jack sighs, as the whole team wait, frustrated.

After another half an hour, as Jack’s about to ask difficult questions, the bomb disposal expert emerges, immediately pulling off the hot, restrictive PPE.

‘There’s explosives in there, all right,’ he says to Jack, his hair plastered to his forehead with sweat. ‘But nothing that’s any risk.’

‘So if I go in there, I won’t get blown up?’

‘Sure,’ the bomb guy says with a shrug.

Jack doesn’t like his apathy. ‘How sure?’

‘Hmm, 90, maybe 95 per cent? Nothing’s for certain, DCI Ellis. We do the best we can.’

He leaves them and Jack looks towards the ops commander for advice.

‘Those guys, they’re built different,’ he says. ‘Go in if you want. You’ll be fine.’

Jack decides to take the risk. He wants to see for himself what they’re dealing with, and he suits up in a white crime-scene coverall, then steps inside.

Overhead, bare bulbs swing in a narrow hallway. Floral wallpaper peels in long strips to the dirty brown carpet; the damp flat smells of cigarettes and bleach and harsh chemicals, and Jack coughs, the air bitter and biting even through his mask.

The place is tiny. From what Jack’s seen, the other rooms are empty, save for a few sleeping bags and empty Pot Noodle tubs, but the room at the end

is a hotbed of activity. Every surface is strewn with stuff – from tools, wires, batteries, respirators and boxes for mobile phones, to a few hotplates with blackened pans on the top. Filter papers, bottles of hydrogen peroxide, SIM cards, ice bag wrappers. The table in the middle of the room is covered in a white powder, where Jack assumes they've been boiling off chemicals. And it stinks. He makes his way down to the bathroom – in the white tub is a number of smaller containers, all holding a thick brown substance. And that's what smells. Death, faeces and dead animal, all rolled into one pungent stench.

But even with Jack's rudimentary knowledge of explosives, he can tell – this is a different sort of bomb. You can't grind down agricultural fertiliser in a first-floor flat; best guess, Jack would go for TATP. A potent mix with concentrated hydrogen peroxide, same as the type of explosives used on 7/7.

He leaves the bathroom quickly, heading back into the main room. As Jack the canary hasn't dropped down dead, the CSIs have followed him in and have started documenting the area, bright flashes from the camera making Jack's eyes sting. He leans over to see what one CSI is taking shots of – something that looks like a gas mask to Jack's untrained eyes.

'It's an industrial respirator,' the CSI says. 'So they don't breathe in the chemicals.'

A thought occurs to Jack. An unpleasant one. 'How many respirators have you found?' he asks.

'Two in the bedroom, two in here, one in the bathroom,' the CSI replies. 'So, five.'

Five. Five expensive industrial respirators in a TATP bomb factory. Gary and the dead guy in the front of the van make two.

A shiver of fear runs down Jack's spine. They may have found one bomb factory, but this is not where the original bomb was made. And if the equipment is to be believed, there are three more guys out there.

One bomb has gone off, but this is far from over.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

They're not taking any risks with Gary King. He's been taken to the specialist counter-terrorism custody suite at a secure site, a short distance from New Scotland Yard. The man has had a full strip-search and has been placed in a dry, forensically clean cell on suicide watch. He's not going anywhere.

He's asked for a lawyer and the duty solicitor looks pale at the thought of being the defence for this man's charges. Murder. Attempted murder. Conspiracy to murder. And that's before they get started on the terrorism and explosive offences. It's four a.m., Gary King has eaten a sandwich and drunk a can of Coke and he's ready to go in interview room one.

They've discussed and agreed the interview strategy; Digby and who knows who else out of the top brass will be watching via video link in the next room.

No pressure, then, Jack thinks as he goes in, DI Lynch by his side.

Gary King looks up at him – the man almost exactly resembles his e-Fit photo. The corner of his mouth twitches in a lopsided smile.

'I saw you. On the news. Had a good day?'

'I've had better.' Jack sits down, places the file in front of him, sets the recorder going with a loud beep. 'My name is DCI Jack Ellis; this is DI Sharon Lynch. In front of me is the duty solicitor...'

'Joanne Forbes.'

'...and Gary King. The time is four thirty-six a.m.'

'And I'm tired, an' all.'

'Would you like to rest, Mr King?' the solicitor asks.

'No. Good to go. Got a few hours of shut-eye. More than I can say for you handsome folks.'

Jack blinks. He's not wrong – Jack's been up and running for twenty-one hours now; the burger with Lucy feels like days ago.

'I would like to start by asking you about your whereabouts on Friday afternoon, Mr King.'

He looks at Jack. Smiles. 'No comment,' he says.

'Did you plant a bomb next to the Selfridges department store, on Oxford Street?'

‘No comment.’

Jack opens the file and takes out a still from the CCTV. The one of Gary King leaving the van just before it was about to blow. He turns it around and pushes it across the table.

‘Is this you, Gary?’

Gary makes a show of looking closely at it. ‘Could be anyone. You can’t even see their face.’

Another photo – a black hoodie and a black cap, laid out on a white table in the forensic lab. ‘Recognise these?’ Jack asks.

A quick blink of recognition, but not much else. ‘No comment.’

‘We recovered these items of clothing in a public bin on the corner of Oswin Street in Elephant and Castle. They have your DNA on them. Certain you don’t recognise them?’

‘No comment.’

‘Why were you at flat 17B on the Oakmount Estate today, Gary?’

‘No comment.’

‘Our officers are in the process of searching that property, top to bottom, but we’ve already found evidence of hydrogen peroxide.’

‘Bleaching my hair, weren’t I,’ he says with a swipe of his hand over his bald head.

‘We believe these premises were used to manufacture bombs. You’re facing charges of terrorism and murder – this is serious stuff. You need to talk to us, before things get worse.’

‘No comment.’

‘Who was with you in the van before it blew up?’

A quick glance at Jack, meeting his gaze for a split-second before, ‘No comment.’

‘There was a man with you, wasn’t there? This guy.’

Another photo – this one taken of the dead man in the temporary mortuary. A mess of blood and bone, completely unrecognisable. The solicitor looks, then regrets it, turning away with a quiet cry.

‘Who is this, Mr King?’

Gary King has no such qualms. He looks at it closely, then smiles. ‘No comment.’

‘Because we’re testing his DNA now. Along with samples found on the respirators in flat 17B. Are we going to get a match to you?’

‘You tell me. You seem to know so much.’

‘Who’s in charge of your bombing operation? Where did you get the explosives from?’

‘No comment.’

‘Who made the bomb, Gary?’

‘No comment.’

‘Were you behind the Semtex theft at Payne Quarry, in Essex, back in September?’

‘No comment.’

‘Because you used to work there, didn’t you, Gary?’

‘No comment.’

‘Where did you make the ANFO mixture, Gary? Was it at a farm, or a garage?’

‘No comment.’

‘How do you know how to make explosives? Who have you got working for you?’

‘No comment.’

‘Where are the other bombs? The ones made in flat 17B.’

‘No comment.’

‘We found something else in that flat – a device made out of a battery-powered kitchen timer. You used one similar on the Oxford Street bomb, didn’t you? Designed to go off half an hour after the first bomb. Are you annoyed it didn’t work?’

That gets a response. ‘The more dead policemen, the better,’ King replies.

‘So you did set the bomb up?’

‘Didn’t say that,’ King points out. ‘You’re putting words in my mouth. No comment.’

Jack tries a different tack. He pushes another photo across. A Vauxhall Corsa, parked in a deserted station car park. ‘Is this your car, Mr King?’

‘No comment.’

‘Because you’re the registered owner.’

‘I own a Vauxhall Corsa, so what?’

‘We tracked the van used in the bombing. And this is where it originated. Parked in this station car park. You left your Vauxhall and took the van into London. Were you planning on going back for it, Mr King?’

‘No comment.’

Another photo, blurred, black and white, face covered. ‘Who’s this man? He left the van in the car park. A friend of yours?’

‘No comment.’

More photographs, one after the other, showing Gary in the front seat of the van, reversing his movements back, to the black Vauxhall Corsa.

‘See this, here, Gary? Your car. And because we suspect you of terrorism, we’re a little wary about going near this vehicle. So, it’s currently surrounded by the explosives team. You know their old adage? “If you don’t know it, blow it.” They’re going to take the whole thing out, Gary.’

‘You what?’

Jack has his attention now. ‘Yep. We’re going to blow it up. There’s going to be nothing left but a few singed hubcaps when we’re done.’

‘I spent thousands on that car! One of a kind, got the sort of mods you could only dream of.’

Jack knows this, only too well. One of the DCs in the team is a petrolhead and quickly identified the V6 turbo engine, the lowered springs, adaptive dampers, body kit and turbo-back exhaust. Gary’s pride and joy. About to be reduced to splintered metal and oil.

‘We don’t want to take the risk—’

‘There’s nuffin in that car. Nuffin.’

‘Although we did manage to get a cable into the main control module. Nice upgrade, thank you, Gary. Downloaded the data from your top-of-the-range satnav.’

King glares.

‘What’s in Essex?’

‘No comment.’

‘Because you’ve been there a lot over the last few weeks,’ Jack says, as Lynch pushes the printout across. ‘Five times, stopping off in a town called Grays.’

‘So what? I’m allowed to go shopping.’

‘Tell me what we need to know, Gary. And maybe we could take a less... forceful approach with your car.’

Gary looks at Jack, then at the solicitor. The solicitor does a subtle shake of her head.

‘No comment,’ Gary says, angry now.

‘Okay, your choice,’ Jack says flippantly. He gets to his feet. ‘I’ll give the go ahead. Not that it matters – we have enough to charge you, Gary, we just hoped that maybe you’d help us out and then we could do the same for you.’

‘No comment.’

Jack leans over, his finger on the stop button of the recorder. ‘Interview concluded, 5:04 a.m.’

The recording stops, and Jack and Lynch walk to the door.

‘Fucking pigs,’ Gary mutters.

Jack’s learned not to respond to such childish insults, and he’s heard this one so many times that it barely makes a dent. But the next thing Gary says stops him in his tracks.

‘You think this is it,’ King says, spitting the words. ‘But you have no idea.’ Jack turns on the spot. King’s resolve is clear; the hatred directed towards him.

Gary King smiles, but Jack only sees evil.

‘I know what’s coming next. Nothing gets past me. And locking me up in here won’t make the tiniest bit of difference. You think Oxford Street was bad? You have no idea.’

King looks at him, determination and anger burning in his eyes.

‘We’re only just getting started,’ he says, with a wink.

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The man sits in his 500 square-foot living room, watching the news on his 98-inch Crystal UHD television. Voices come from his top-of-the-range sound bar; coffee from his bean-to-cup machine. He drinks it black.

It's going to be a long night.

The news has covered the bomb all day. Showing dust-covered victims, traumatised police officers, the devastation of the site, a mass of bricks and metal where the department store once stood. He appraises it with a calculated eye; not everything went to plan but he can still take pride in months of work coming to fruition. It's why they have a back-up, after all.

He bends down, carefully appraising the lines of white powder on the glass coffee table. The purest cocaine money can buy, and he should know. He lowers his head, the silver tube held up to his nose, taking a long, strong sniff, then falling back against the sofa cushions. It's good shit; he's pleased.

His mobile rings. He looks at the number, then answers it with a sigh.

'Why are you phoning me?' Curt, abrupt. The caller knows he's fucked up.

'I... I'm sorry, but—'

'What?'

'Are we still—?'

'Yes. Don't call me. And dispose of whatever burner you're using,' he growls, and hangs up.

'Fucking idiots,' he mutters, then gets to his feet, carrying the mobile to his kitchen where he drops it in the blender. An ear-splitting grind of plastic and it's gone, the pieces chucked into the bin, but not without checking the SIM card first. Satisfied it's wrecked beyond recognition, he throws it in with the rest of the phone.

He leans against the counter, his good mood ruined.

Soon, he thinks to himself. *Soon* he will get his just deserts.

But not without having a little more fun, first.

PART TWO

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DAY 3 – SUNDAY

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CHAPTER NINETEEN

Jack's head barely touches the pillow before a buzzing on his bedside table wakes him with a jolt. He gropes for his phone and answers the call.

'Boss? It's Amrit. You okay?'

Jack glances at the clock. Half past eight – two hours since he got back to his hotel to sleep. 'Late night, that's all. I'm fine.' He scrubs his hand down his stubble with a sigh. 'What's up?'

'I wanted to let you know – Tansy's rucksack? We found it.'

'You did?' He's wide awake now.

'Yeah, none of the police stations in that area had a red rucksack handed in since we last checked, but I phoned around the businesses that run out of the Solent – shipping companies, maritime, the White Star Line, the Cruise terminal, you know—'

'I do—'

'And one came back. A red rucksack found bobbing near the viewpoint. A fisherman hoicked it out. Gave it in to the lost property at the Red Jet passenger terminal. I'm driving over to collect it now.'

'Let me know what you get from it.'

'I will.' She takes a beat, before she asks, 'Jack? Are you okay?'

'I'm fine. As I said – late night.'

'Okay, then. Speak to you later.'

He puts his phone down and slumps back on the pillow. It might come to nothing, but knowing they have a lead in Tansy's death prompts a wave of anticipation. There's no way he's going back to sleep now.

He pulls himself up, looking at his phone again as a message comes through from Lynch.

Call me as soon as you can.

He does as he's told. 'Don't you ever sleep, Sharon? What's the emergency?'

A small chuckle. 'I'm fine, guv. We've had some developments. Are you up? I'm sending a car. It'll be with you in ten.'

Jack mutters a swear word and hangs up, rubbing his eyes, and pulling his weary body out of bed. Ten minutes, barely time to shower and shave, but he does both, quickly, putting on a fresh suit and cleaning his teeth. He's still smoothing his hair down when his phone buzzes to tell him his car has arrived.

Once he's on the way, Lynch updates him.

'The results came back from the DNA from the body we believe was in the front of the van when it detonated.'

'And?'

'And it comes back to a man called Daniel Bevan. Aged twenty-two. Convictions in 2020 for possession of a class A as well as intent to supply. Community service order, nothing more. Now, his registered address is in Winchester, your neck of the woods, guv, but get this – his parents called the hotline on Saturday. He's been reported as a missing person.'

'So get someone out to interview them.'

'We would, but...' She pauses. 'They live in Central London, near Pimlico, and Control say it's going to take an hour or more to get someone out there. Roads are still a mess. The team are busy and all the family liaison officers are out with other misper families and—'

He glances out of the window at the stationary traffic, then asks the driver to pull over. 'I can walk there. I'll go myself.'

This is the next piece of the puzzle. If they can establish a direct link from Gary King to Daniel Bevan, then maybe they can find his other accomplices. Intel have been researching every inch of Gary King's life, but they don't have much. Maybe Daniel Bevan is the key to it all.

Tiredness forgotten, Jack thanks the driver and steps out onto the busy pavement. This is his chance to look these people in the eye, get a sense of them, face to face. But it's not normal for a DCI to do the grunt work – certainly not when he's the SIO of a major terrorism incident – and at the end of the phone Lynch is silent, confused.

'Call if you need me.'

'Okay, right, yes.'

But Sharon Lynch makes things happen, and within five minutes he's briefed and striding towards Pimlico.

It's good to be out. It's Easter Sunday, but even so, Sharon was right – the roads are busy with cars, families still trying to avoid public transport. Those pedestrians that are out walk with a solemn air, caught up in their

own troubles, their own worries. Jack glances at his phone, but he knows where he's going: through Westminster, past Vincent Square.

This is no grubby bomb factory. The town houses here are a gorgeous white stucco design, built in the nineteenth century. These residences go for millions, and as Jack stops at the address Lynch has given him, he's speechless. Five floors, probably six bedrooms – and these aren't houses people live in all year around. This is a little pied-à-terre – a London bolthole for when life at the countryside estate gets too boring.

Jack squares his shoulders, adjusts his tie. And rings the bell.

It takes a few minutes before it's answered. A man, in a sports coat and chinos, tweed slippers on his feet.

'Mr Stephen Bevan?' Jack asks, and the man nods. 'DCI Jack Ellis. I'm here about your son, Daniel.'

The man visibly pales. His hand flies to his mouth but he retains his manners.

'Please, come in,' he says, moving out of the way of the door.

Coats are lined up on hooks in the hallway – a Burberry trench and a smart wool Hugo Boss, contrasting with the lime-green North Face jacket next to it. The carpets are clean and plush; Jack resists the urge to remove his shoes. No shoes mean a slow escape; he needs to keep his guard about him. This is a suspect's house, and he should remember that, no matter how high the income.

He's shown through to a light and airy kitchen, where double doors open to a small patio area. White kitchen units, top-of-the-range appliances, marble countertop. When offered, he sits down at a sturdy oak table, the wood varnished to a sheen.

'Tea, coffee?' Mr Bevan asks, and Jack declines.

A woman joins them, invisibly summoned. They do quick introductions and she warily sits down opposite Jack, her eyes locked on him.

'Is he dead?' she says quietly.

'I'm afraid I can't confirm that officially. But we matched DNA from a body at the main crime scene to your son, Daniel. We believe he died in the blast, yes.'

He's being economical with the truth. He's read the pathologist's report – recognising the signature at the bottom as Fran's – and appreciates the significance of the extent of his injuries. Daniel Bevan was directly in the

line of fire, the bomb forcing his body out through the windscreen. But why hadn't he run? And who was Daniel Bevan?

At the news, the woman lets out a small sob, covering her face with her hands. The husband stares at her, stoic, then gets up and starts making coffee at a swanky machine with more knobs and whistles than Jack's car. The noise makes it impossible for Jack to ask any other questions, and he finds it odd that in the face of the news that his son is most likely dead, this is what he does, rather than comfort the mother of his child.

Coffee made, he sits opposite Jack. He doesn't even look at his wife.

'So, how can we help? We want these bastards caught.'

'I appreciate that, Mr Bevan. But I have some tough questions to ask.' The husband frowns. Jack goes on: 'We have found evidence that links your son to the explosion – a mobile phone found in his belongings led us to the location where we believe a bomb was made.'

'That's ridiculous!' Mr Bevan explodes. 'He had some trouble in the past, yes, but that's behind him.'

'The drugs convictions?'

'Yes, but it was silly teenage boy stuff. Trying to impress his friends.'

'So he hasn't been in any trouble since 2020?'

'No, and this whole thing is preposterous. I won't stand for it. We're victims of this atrocity. Daniel is a victim and here you are, questioning us like... like...' The bluster goes out of him in a split-second and he rubs his eyes, breathing heavily.

'I'm sorry, Mr Bevan, but this is important. If Daniel was involved—'

'He's not.'

'—Then it's important we follow up. In case there's a second bomb out there. If he's not, then I can only apologise for the disruption. But we have to be sure.' Jack hears footsteps above him. 'Sorry – is there someone else here?'

'Our other son, George. He's twenty-five – Daniel's older brother.'

'He lives with you?'

'Yes, both of them do. Did.' Stephen Bevan blinks rapidly at the realisation that one of his sons isn't coming home. 'Cost of living crisis,' he mutters. 'Kids can't afford to buy their own homes nowadays. Do you need to speak to him?'

'Yes, please.'

There's a pause as George is called, via a text message on Mr Bevan's phone. A clattering of footsteps and a young man appears, hovering in the doorway.

'George, this is DCI Jack Ellis,' Mr Bevan says. 'He's here to talk to us about Daniel.' The young man nods and takes a seat at the table, wordlessly. 'Daniel is dead, George.'

Talk about blunt. Jack recoils as the young man gawps at him, then looks at his father.

'Was he killed in the bomb?' he asks, after a moment.

'We believe so, yes,' Jack says, gently. 'I'm sorry for your loss.' Jack leaves a suitable pause, before he asks, 'Has Daniel ever mentioned a man called Gary King?'

'Gary King? No.' Jack slides his phone across to them, a photograph on the screen. Mr Bevan visibly recoils. 'Oh, God, no,' he says, at the shot of the vicious-looking skinhead. 'Daniel would never be involved with someone like that.'

Jack passes it around the rest of the family. A definite head shake from the mother. The same from George, but Jack notices a slight hesitation.

'When did you last see Daniel?'

'Friday lunchtime,' Mr Bevan says. The mother stays mute, turning a ball of tissue around in her fingers. 'He said he was going into town.'

'Do you know what he planned to do there?'

'No idea, sorry.'

'Do you know if Daniel's been frequenting any farm buildings or garages?'

It's an odd question, and George gives him a questioning look as his father replies, 'I don't think so.'

'Does he have a girlfriend?'

'Not that I know—'

'He did,' George interrupts. 'But they split up before Christmas.'

'Do you know her name? Address?' Jack pushes, but George shakes his head. 'And did he leave any belongings behind? A laptop, or a phone?'

'He would have taken those with him, but all his stuff is upstairs.'

'Can I see?'

The husband hesitates, then gets to his feet. 'Sure. The faster you do this, the faster you'll leave us alone.'

‘And could I have something of Daniel’s? To confirm the DNA match. A hairbrush, or his toothbrush?’

A quick nod. ‘Follow me.’

Jack gets to his feet and follows Mr Bevan as they take the hardwood stairs to the first floor. Jack glances into a plush living room – complete with chandelier, huge television on the wall, controllers for a games console on the cream carpet – then up to the second floor.

Normally, they’d need a warrant to search a suspect’s home, but Mr Bevan’s agreement means they’ve circumvented that necessity. It’s saving time, especially when it’s possible the Bevan family might not allow access further down the line.

Daniel’s bedroom is as Jack expected. A few old posters on the wall – *Fight Club* and *Inception* – an unmade bed, clothes scattered on the floor among discarded bowls and cups, old food dried inside. The curtains are closed, and Mr Bevan opens them, throwing dust motes into the air.

‘See? He’s a normal kid. We have a house just outside Winchester – that’s our usual residence, Daniel’s too. We only bought this place ten years ago, but we’ve always encouraged the boys to make it feel like home. It’s nice when all four of us are here...’ His voice trails off as he picks up a T-shirt from the pile, holding it to his face for a moment. ‘This is something that happens to other families,’ he mutters. ‘Not us.’

‘Mr Bevan?’ Jack says, gently. ‘The toothbrush?’

‘Yes, yes, I’ll get it for you now.’

He leaves Jack alone, and he takes advantage, quickly putting on some gloves and raking through Daniel’s drawers. He finds a small tin and some rolling papers, a small lump of what Jack assumes to be pot. And further back, something more suspicious – a lone sock, a lump within, and when Jack opens it up he pulls out a credit card in the name of Julian Anderson, and a baggie of white powder. Cocaine? Jack photographs them with his phone and puts them all into evidence bags, then looks up as someone clears their throat in the doorway. George is watching him.

‘You think he’s one of the bombers,’ he says. A statement, not a question.

‘What makes you say that?’

‘It’s day three after a major incident. I can’t imagine the DCI in charge of the investigation is personally visiting the families of all the missing people.’

Jack stands up and meets his gaze. ‘No.’ George watches him for a moment. ‘Is there anything I should know, George?’ Jack adds.

But George looks away as his dad comes back into the room. ‘Here it is,’ he says, lightness forced into his voice.

Jack takes the toothbrush and places it into an evidence bag. ‘Thank you. And do you have a recent photograph?’

‘Yes, downstairs.’

Jack turns to leave, but notices George isn’t following – he’s looking into his brother’s room, a frown on his face. Jack pauses, considering his options. He could push the older brother – arrest him, even, for obstruct police – but applying pressure when he’s not ready to talk might alienate him further. There’s no actual evidence George knows something; a hunch is not reasonable suspicion.

Daniel Bevan has been identified as a suspect but Jack needs to temper his impetus – this is a grieving family and there’s a fine line between determination and being downright callous.

Instead, Jack takes the soft approach, reaching into his pocket and pulling out a business card.

‘Here,’ he says. George looks at it for a moment, then takes it, folding it into the pocket of his jeans. ‘Call me if you think of anything.’

‘I will,’ George says, as Mr Bevan shouts for Jack.

‘Please,’ Jack adds, and George nods, then turns, going into the bedroom to the left and closing the door, conversation over.

Jack follows Mr Bevan into the living room, where he takes a frame down from the mantelpiece, opening the back and passing Jack the photograph. It’s a formal pose, and Jack can see that Daniel Bevan would have been a popular lad. Shiny white teeth, tanned skin, perfect hair.

If Jack’s theory is correct, and Daniel Bevan is connected to the bomb, what made him go down that path? He had his whole life ahead of him, all the opportunities money could buy.

What happened to turn this golden boy into a killer?

CHAPTER TWENTY

Lucy struggled to sleep last night. After Jack had left, she had gone back to her room, but the events of the last few days rotated in her head, a cinema reel of fear and chaos and death. She tossed and turned for a few hours, before passing out with sheer exhaustion, waking just after daybreak. She rubbed her scratchy eyes and sighed. She may as well get the day started, do something useful.

A message from her PolSA was already waiting. Otto's explosive-detection skills weren't required, so she was being put to work with the victim recovery team.

Now, she stands at the site, suited up in a white crime-scene coverall and mask. It's nasty work – but essential. While the rescue effort for survivors is still ongoing, there are victims within the wreckage that need to be removed.

Everyone that died when the bomb went off has to be respectfully collected, put in body bags and sent to the temporary mortuary. Given the nature of the injuries, many of the bodies have been crushed, others dismembered; sometimes only small pieces of a body are retrieved. Others seem perfect, buried in the dust, barely an injury to their skin. This is the first step – gathering everything visible to the naked eye. Moss's job comes later, finding everything that's been missed. They must get all they can.

Lucy's given her area to search and methodically works her way over the debris. She sees Graham in his orange overalls, directing his dog's sensitive nose over cracks in the rubble, looking for live scent. Outside the cordon, a small gathering of people wait. Families of the victims, no doubt, distraught, wanting to be close to where their loved ones were last seen, but Lucy's curious for a moment and watches them, looking for someone trying too hard to blend in.

Were any of these onlookers responsible for the bomb? Had they returned to admire their work, or maybe they were connected and sent to report back to those in charge? Jack's news that there were two intended bombs yesterday makes her wonder if there could be others out there. It's a terrifying thought and Lucy tries her hardest to block it out, concentrating on the importance of the job in hand.

Every piece of the wreckage has to be retrieved, sieved through and stored in huge black bins, so every hardware shop, every B&Q, has been raided, every plastic bin bought. And now, slowly, the masonry that once made up the iconic entrance of Selfridges is being shovelled into them and taken away. Layer by layer, ensuring nothing – and no one – gets forgotten. Looking for evidence, something that might give away the identity or methods of the bombers. Not only to aid the investigation, but to make a case that can be tried in court later. Lucy and her colleagues work alongside the PCs collecting debris, silent except for the hum of the news helicopters overhead.

It's back-breaking work. At first, Lucy proceeds on autopilot. Numb, unthinking, trying not to imagine families and friends waiting for news of their loved ones. But after a while, it seeps in.

These were once people. Living, breathing, innocent victims, out shopping; they couldn't have known what was going to happen when that bomb exploded. Lucy wonders whether their death was quick. Did they have a chance to comprehend the danger they were in or was it over in a split-second, the nails and glass and concrete ripping through their fragile bodies?

Lucy feels tears dampen her cheeks, seep into her mask. Vision blurred, she makes her way down the wreckage and, once outside the cordon, she pulls off her gloves, mask and hood and takes a long swig from a bottle of water. She waves to her supervisor, who approves her break with a thumbs up, and she angrily wipes her tears away, frustrated by the unwelcome emotions.

She can't help but think about her half-sister, Tansy, and the way she died. A common misconception would like you to believe that drowning is a good way to go, quietly sinking through the dark water as your lungs fill, but Lucy knows otherwise. The suffocation, the choking; had Tansy been scared? Had she thought of Lucy as she died?

They'd argued before Tansy left. Lucy had apologised, but the damage had been done, and Lucy never saw her half-sister again. Yet another failure on Lucy's part. Someone else she'd let down.

Lucy misses her sister. She hadn't known her for long, so maybe it was merely the thought of her she grieves for, but nonetheless, she can't help imagining what might have been. Evenings out, dinners, late nights getting to know each other. An ally and a friend; now it'll never happen.

Lucy drinks her water slowly, watching as an unmarked white van arrives and the driver loads the body bags into the back. They're going to the temporary mortuary, and Lucy has a sudden desperate urge to see Fran. A comrade among the chaos.

'Can I get a lift?' she shouts across to the driver.

He regards her dubiously. 'You know where I'm going, right?'

'My friend's there. One of the pathologists.'

'Oh, okay. Climb in.'

They start the drive in silence.

'It's grim out there, right?' the driver says. He's young, no more than early twenties, with a red burn of shaving rash across his chin. Lucy assumes he's part of the Artillery Company, drafted in to help.

She nods, sips her water. She doesn't want to be rude but has no wish to revisit the horrors of her morning.

'I heard they have a suspect in custody. They should hang, draw and quarter the bastard, same as they did in 1605.'

Lucy can't help but smile. 'I think his lawyer might have something to say about that.'

'Still. Prison's too good for him. Do they know why he did it yet?'

'I know as much as you.'

'But I recognise you. You're friends with the DCI... The man in charge? You both work in Hampshire, right? I saw you in the paper.'

He points to a newspaper at Lucy's feet and she picks it up. It's one of the red tops, and the headline is as inflammatory as expected. *BRITAIN UNDER SIEGE*, it says, in bold. The main photograph is the same as all the other papers – an aerial shot of the main bomb site on Oxford Street – but when Lucy turns to the coverage inside, she sees what the driver is talking about.

It's a shot of the end of Oxford Street, at the corner of Hyde Park, looking down to the tents and tables of the Forward Control Point. And standing outside the cordon is Jack – talking to Lucy.

Taken in the narrow window of their brief conversation, Otto is sitting patiently at Lucy's feet while she's looking up at Jack, smiling, his hand resting lightly on her arm.

Senior Investigating Officer, DCI Jack Ellis, the picture is captioned, *takes a moment to talk to one of the dog handlers, currently working the scene*. It's innocuous enough, but it conveys a level of familiarity that can't

be denied. The main text talks about Jack coming up from Hampshire Police; even this guy assumed that they're friends.

The driver's still waiting for an answer, and Lucy drops the newspaper in the footwell.

'I know as much as you,' she repeats, and looks pointedly out of the window to her left, conversation over.

They arrive at the temporary mortuary and Lucy's impressed by the professionalism as they hand over their precious cargo. It's a hard job. Every part has to be matched to a victim, every DNA sample reviewed and double-checked, every piece of property logged, bagged and tagged.

Lucy messages Fran to see if she's free, then checks the texts she's received. One from Pete, another from Jack. She calls Jack back first.

'How are you doing?' he asks instantly, his voice full of concern. 'Where are you working today?'

'On victim recovery, on the Oxford Street site. Just on a break.'

'Oh, Lucy.' His voice softens. 'That's awful work.'

'It's got to be done, right?' She doesn't let him reply. 'Jack, we're in the *Sun*, did you see? Talking at the FCP. I don't want anyone to get the wrong idea – I'm not vetted. You'd never share anything confidential with me.'

Jack chuckles quietly. 'I have, and I do, Lucy. But they don't know that. Besides, I can argue it's operational necessity.' He pauses. 'It's nothing, Lucy. Are you worried?'

'I don't want to get you into trouble. I can only guess what's going on in your neck of the woods – the politics, everyone vying for promotion.'

'Isn't that the truth? Everyone here is out for whatever they can get. That article yesterday is the tip of the iceberg – some of the team clearly don't like me being here, nosing in on their big chance at glory.' He sighs. 'But it's nothing to worry about. The top brass have enough problems, it's fine.'

'Did you manage to get some sleep?'

'Not much—'

'Jack...'

'I know what you're going to say, but it's fine. We got a lead on someone who might be involved. I'm just walking back from interviewing the family. But it was odd.'

‘Odd how?’

He tells her about the multimillion-pound townhouse in Pimlico. The obvious wealth and good upbringing.

‘This isn’t some Islamic extremist,’ he finishes. ‘This is a nice little white boy.’

‘Nice little white boys do horrible things,’ Lucy says, remembering their case last year. The missing woman and the incel misogynists.

‘True. And I got the feeling the brother knew more than he was letting on, but there was no way he was going to say so in front of his parents. Look, I’ve got to go. I’ll see you tonight?’

‘Yes, call me when you finish.’

She hangs up, feeling better. Just knowing Jack’s going to be there at the end of the day takes the pressure off; she has someone to talk to. Even if it’s only about the weather, or the latest episode of *Yellowstone*.

And Jack’s not her only friend in London. Lucy turns at the sound of her name to see Fran heading towards her. Dressed in bright green scrubs, Crocs on her feet and a sandwich in her hand, she barrels towards Lucy then grabs her in a tight hug.

They embrace, a broad grin on Lucy’s face as they step apart.

‘Fuck, I’m glad to see you,’ Fran says, smiling. ‘It’s like having a friend in hell.’

‘Fast forward fifty years, you might catch me there,’ Lucy replies.

As if reading her mind, Fran passes half of her sandwich to Lucy, who takes a bite, suddenly hungry.

‘How’s it going?’ Lucy asks.

‘Sunshine and rainbows,’ Fran replies. ‘You know.’

‘I do.’

They share a sad smile. ‘I saw Jack on the news. He’s here?’

‘We’re staying at the same hotel.’

‘You are?’ Fran’s words are loaded.

‘What’s that supposed to mean?’

‘It means that it’s not hard to work out why Pete is sad at home in Hampshire, waiting for you to answer his reasonable and heartfelt proposal —’

‘You know about that?’

‘Only because he called to ask my advice. He wanted to know – as your best friend – what I’d recommend he do.’

‘And you said?’

‘That I didn’t know. That you are as complicated as anyone I’ve ever met and he’d never know unless he asked.’

Lucy can’t believe this – her best friend and her boyfriend colluding behind her back.

‘And before you get all uppity and angry—’

‘I don’t get uppity!’ Lucy says, but Fran knows her too well.

‘Well, before you get angry, then, tell me – did you say yes?’

‘Since you and Pete are best buddies now, you must already know I said I’d think about it.’

‘And that takes how long?’

‘Someone blew up London! I haven’t had much time for contemplation.’

Fran gives her a look. *That* look. The one that drives Lucy mad because it’s almost as if Fran can read her mind. ‘Just trying to keep you honest,’ Fran says. ‘Be nice to that poor man. He loves you.’ She pauses. ‘And yes, I’m talking about Pete.’

Lucy shakes her head. ‘Shut up.’ And then, ‘I’ll phone him back tonight.’

‘Good.’

Two men settle near, lighting up cigarettes and laughing. Lucy glares at them, suddenly furious at their mirth. Fran catches her expression.

‘Guys,’ she calls across. ‘Smoking shelter’s around the back.’

They nod and go on their way, as Fran turns back to Lucy. ‘It’s okay for people to laugh, Luce. Life goes on.’

‘I know, but... it makes me so fucking mad. All of this.’

‘I get it.’ Fran touches her arm, gently. ‘Focus on what you can control. The bit of difference that *you* can make. And the rest...’ She shrugs. ‘Let it go.’

Fran glances back to the mortuary with a frown. ‘I have to get back. Still a lot to do.’ She leans forward and gives Lucy a quick kiss on the cheek. ‘I love you. Stay safe.’

‘I love you, too.’

And then, as Lucy walks away, Fran shouts, ‘What are you going to say to Pete? Are you going to move in with him?’

Lucy doesn’t turn, just yells over her shoulder, ‘Since you and Pete are such good friends, I’m sure he’ll tell you soon enough.’

And she smiles, appreciating the moment of levity, knowing without even having to check that Fran’s sticking her finger up at her departing

back.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Eighty miles away, in Southampton Central police station, DS Amrit Gill is preparing to go through Tansy's rucksack.

It's Easter Sunday, and as no one else is in, she commandeers one of the conference rooms, covering the long table with a sterile sheet and laying the rucksack down in the middle. She's wearing a full white coverall, gloves and mask and is videoing the whole thing; if she does find something, she wants it to be considered evidence.

But she's not holding out much hope.

The rucksack had been left in a dark corner of the lost property office for two months. The man who passed it out to her said they'd done a quick look through the outside pockets but hadn't found any ID, so had left it at that. Amrit can see why.

The rucksack is caked in mud; it must have been underwater for a while before the fisherman dragged it up. Even in its now desiccated state, it smells – of old fish, diesel and sewerage. She doesn't even know for sure that it belonged to Tansy.

She starts with the side pockets, laying the contents on the white plastic and taking photographs as she goes. Three silver pill blister packs, once containing paracetamol and aspirin. Another one, with something different. Amrit can just make out the writing: sertraline, an antidepressant, if she remembers rightly.

Assorted pens. A mushed-up packet of chewing gum. A purse – and Amrit opens it with enthusiasm, only to find some stuck-together, dried-up receipts. No identification, no credit cards, and it makes Amrit wonder where it came from.

'What are you doing?'

A voice from behind her, making Amrit jump. She turns, and Oscar is standing in the doorway.

'I didn't expect anyone else in today,' she replies.

Detective Inspector Oscar Vaughn is, strictly speaking, Amrit's boss, but ever since his arrival last November, he's never acted as such. Recruited from Newcastle, he's been a welcome addition to the team, and Amrit enjoys his company.

‘Olivia’s gone to a spa day with some of her friends, so I thought I’d catch up on some work,’ he replies, in his broad Geordie accent.

‘You didn’t fancy some alone time? Before the twins arrive?’

He grins. ‘Never been a fan. Better to get some work done while I can. With Jack away, it’s mounting up.’ His gaze rakes over the rucksack, and its contents spread on the table. ‘Is that Tansy Holmes’s bag?’

‘Hopefully,’ Amrit replies.

‘Do you need some help?’

‘Oh, yes, please! If you don’t mind? Could you photograph while I empty it out?’

Oscar nods and suits up quickly, joining Amrit at the table and picking up the old digital Canon.

It’s much quicker with the two of them. Once the side pockets are cleared of various sweet wrappers and old now-solidified tissues, Amrit turns her attention to the main compartment, slowly pulling out items of clothing and laying them flat.

A long purple skirt, a white vest, a black shirt, a few pairs of knickers and assorted unmatched socks. A red lacy bra, a packet of condoms. A washbag, containing bottles of shampoo and conditioner, a toothbrush and paste, a comb, and some make-up, congealed and broken.

As they work, they chat. About Oscar’s worries about being a dad for the first time – and a dad of twins, no less. About Amrit’s recent botched renovation work on her spare bedroom; speculation on how Jack is getting on in London; wondering when he might return home.

‘Oh, hello,’ Amrit says, pulling out a hardback notebook – a diary? – but her hopes are quickly dashed as the pages are stuck together, rippled with water damage.

‘Maybe forensics could work their magic?’ Oscar suggests, taking a quick photo.

‘Let’s hope so. You know, I have to wonder – if it was anyone else’s half-sister, would we be making this much effort?’

Amrit’s not resentful – Tansy’s case is important, but the pressure from Jack to follow up on the case is interesting. It’s not the first time Jack’s shown Lucy preferential treatment.

‘I’d like to think we would,’ Oscar says, pausing. ‘The coroner might have put it down as an open verdict, but if we find something, he’d have to change his mind.’

‘Like what?’ Amrit sighs. ‘All the pathologist said was that she drowned. But Tansy could have died by suicide. It could have been an accident. There’s nothing to suggest her death was suspicious.’

She picks up the rucksack again. Feels around in the now empty main compartment. Nothing there.

‘So...’ Oscar begins, and Amrit waits. She knows that tone of voice. Working with him for six months has taught her there’s gossip to be had. ‘Tell me, truthfully – is there anything going on between Jack and Lucy Halliday?’

Amrit raises her eyebrows. She’s clearly not the only one who has picked up on Jack’s focus of attention. ‘What do you think?’

‘I think that if I was Pete Nash, I would be wondering why my girlfriend spends so much time with a handsome, single man.’

‘Nothing’s ever happened between them,’ she says with a smile, playing along.

That look again from Oscar. ‘You’re sure? There was Newcastle, remember? And I detected some real vibes between them back then.’

‘They’re so different—’

‘Not so much. They’re both dedicated to their work, same sense of humour—’

‘You’re just bored. With your smug marriage, and your bundles of joy on the way.’

‘It’s true. I’m living my life vicariously through my boss and his inappropriate crush.’

Amrit laughs. ‘You think that if Lucy was single, Jack would ask her out?’

‘In a millisecond. Now, is that thing empty? Can we call it a day and get some lunch?’

Amrit turns back to the rucksack, holding it upside-down over the white plastic and giving it a shake. And to her surprise, along with a mess of dust and mud, a small parcel falls out.

She picks it up. Something’s been bundled up in a once-red scarf, and she unwinds it, carefully, Oscar watching over her shoulder.

It’s a Tesco bag for life, folded up. She opens it, taking out the contents and laying them down in a neat row, her heart beating.

Baggies of white powder – five of them. And a large ball of brown resin, probably skunk.

Oscar snaps photos of it. ‘Cocaine, do you think? What... A gram in each?’

‘At least,’ Amrit says. She turns her attention to the last baggie – no drugs in this one, but five credit cards, all with different names.

‘Oh, Tansy,’ Amrit whispers. ‘What did you get yourself into?’

Because this is it. What they were looking for.

This could be the reason Tansy died.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

The more Jack thinks about it, the more he thinks the brother was holding back, at that swanky house in Pimlico. Either George Bevan is hiding something about himself, or there are secrets about his brother he doesn't want to tell his parents.

Jack asks Intel to dig deeper into Daniel Bevan and his family, including George. Maybe something interesting will shake loose, a valuable excuse to go back.

Jack goes through his day – updating Digby and the chief constable on progress, getting reports from his team, redirecting lines of inquiry, reading results from forensics – but there's still nothing forthcoming to help them. CCTV is scoured, witnesses interviewed. Intel research into every possible suspect, not ruling someone out until they know exactly who they are and where they've been. The CC puts out appeals to the public, looking for anyone who might have seen something suspicious that day, and Gary King stays silent in his cell.

Because of the terrorism charges, they can hold King for up to fourteen days, even after he's been charged. That's two weeks to track down and compile evidence, looking for something, anything, that might get King to talk. His warning still echoes in Jack's mind, and, together with those extra respirators at the bomb factory, that worries him. There might be people out there, waiting to strike. But the why and how – and, most importantly, where – still elude him.

The motivation of it all puzzles Jack. If what Gary King was saying is true, if his target was the police, why plant a bomb of that size, knowing you're going to kill and injure potentially hundreds of innocent victims? Jack needs to speak to someone who knows about this stuff, and his thoughts turn to an old housemate from university, Russell Goddard, now a professor of Psychology at the University of Oxford. Russell did his doctorate on the mindset of bombers, and from previous conversations, Jack's aware that Russell regularly works with the Met Police, offering insights when required. They could definitely do with that now.

He calls and leaves a message, but it's nearing the end of the day when Jack's phone rings. Expecting it to be Russell, he answers quickly, only to

be surprised.

‘DCI Ellis? This is George. George Bevan? Daniel’s brother.’

‘Hi George, it’s good to hear from you.’ *I knew it. I damn well knew it*, Jack thinks, trying hard to keep his voice calm and steady. ‘How can I help?’

‘Well... I...’ A pause. ‘After you left, I couldn’t help thinking...’

‘About Daniel?’ Jack prompts.

‘Yeah. And Mum and Dad were talking bollocks... I mean, they were talking crap earlier. Daniel has been weird for months, not himself. We used to be close, but lately – I don’t know. He’s been secretive. Barely talking to me or our parents.’

‘And why do you think that was?’

‘I don’t know. So I searched his room – and I found his laptop. Dad assumed he had taken it with him but I’ve seen him hide it – different places, in his bedroom.’

‘And you’ve got it now.’

‘Yeah. I’m looking at it. And... there’s some nasty shit.’

‘You know the password?’

‘The name of our first dog – Dan wasn’t Einstein. All the best schools and the idiot couldn’t come up with anything better.’

Jack’s buzzing. This is new, this is important stuff. ‘George, can someone come around to your house to get the laptop? And can you tell them everything you know about Daniel?’

‘You don’t need to come around. That’s why I’m calling – I’m outside New Scotland Yard now.’

Jack’s been holding the fatigue at bay with mugs of strong tea and sugar, but George’s arrival – and the possibility of something game-changing – starts Jack’s heart racing, instantly wide awake. His cautious approach has paid off; George is here to talk.

He almost runs to reception, out of breath by the time he meets George and ushers him through security. Lynch follows closely behind, doing the paperwork and ensuring everything is locked up tight, transferring the laptop over to the police. Once it’s carefully placed in an evidence bag,

Lynch hurries it up to the tech department, where they'll fingerprint it, check it over and find out exactly what's inside.

Meanwhile, Jack ushers George into one of the family rooms, offers him a drink, then sits opposite him as the video records their every word.

George seems more relaxed here, out of earshot of his parents.

'Dad knows nothing about Daniel,' George says, before Jack even has the chance to ask. 'He'll claim they're close, but Dan hated his guts. They haven't spoken in years. Dan would have moved out but he was skint.'

'What happened between them?'

'It wasn't one single thing. But Dad used to be in the police force – he didn't mention it?'

'No,' Jack says, hiding his anger that Intel hadn't discovered this earlier; yet more evidence the team's stretched too thin.

George makes a derisive grunt. 'Probably because he got kicked out, in the end. He was an inspector, here, in the Met. And the most racist, sexist bastard you'll ever meet. Got caught on a WhatsApp group with some other guys, sending videos. Awful shit, they deserved to get fired.'

'And Daniel hated the police?'

'Dad is the epitome of everything he despised. It all started when Dan got arrested – for the drugs. He claimed he was roughed up, that the coppers wanted him to tell them the name of his dealer, and when he wouldn't, they got a few punches in for good measure.'

'Did he complain?'

'Yeah, but it didn't go anywhere.' Jack thinks back to Daniel Bevan's police record. There was no mention of a complaint. 'That's what you'll find on Dan's laptop. Videos of police brutality. Some old, some recent – he'd saved them all.'

'What for?' Jack asks, although his mind is racing, thinking about that second timer on the bomb.

'No idea. Some were definitely AI, too, but Dan wouldn't have cared about that. He had a one-track mind – wanted all police dead.' He laughs. 'I know what you're thinking.' And Jack reels, knowing that the second timer is confidential, details that haven't been released to the public. George continues: 'The money, right? An inspector in the police doesn't earn enough to support two homes? Well, it's Mum's. Family inheritance.'

'Oh, right,' Jack says, relieved. 'And what's your relationship like with your dad?'

‘Agree with Dan – hate his guts. But for different reasons.’ He pauses, biting the inside of his cheek.

‘George, whatever you tell me in here is confidential. Nothing you say will ever get back to your father.’

George stares at Jack for a moment, as if deciding whether to trust him. ‘Dad hits Mum,’ he whispers, and Jack sees real sadness in his eyes. ‘Always has. Both me and Daniel wanted Mum to leave him, take the money and go, but she won’t. She loves him, or some other such bullshit. That’s why I still live at home – to stay close to Mum. He won’t do anything while I’m around.’

Jack pauses, the silence heavy in the family room. The things this boy must have seen. ‘Does he ever hit you? Did he hit Daniel?’

‘Not now we’re older.’ George smiles. ‘And bigger. But he used to, yeah. And he said that if we ever tried to go to the police to report it, it wouldn’t matter, because they were all his buddies.’ He glances around the interview room, his gaze settling on the camera. ‘I must admit, being here is unpleasant. He used to take us to his police station when we were young, lock us in one of the cells. Sometimes overnight. First time he did it, I was seven, but Daniel was four. He wet himself, he was that scared. A warning, Dad said, but all it did was make us terrified of coppers.’

‘I’m sorry, George,’ Jack says, and the boy swipes at his eyes, clears his throat. ‘You mentioned that Daniel had a girlfriend. Do you know her name?’

‘No, I never met her. I heard him talking to her on the phone. Sex stuff, you know.’

‘When was this?’

‘Back end of last year sometime. Not sure.’

‘That’s okay. Do you know any of Daniel’s friends? Who does he normally hang out with?’

‘See, that’s just it. Dan went to uni for a bit but dropped out last year. And since then, he’d been living here, in the city, rather than going back to Winchester. Just him – me, Mum and Dad only joined him for the holidays. And he’d met some new people. They used to come by, pick him up sometimes. I’ve only seen them once or twice and he was super evasive when I asked about them. But they’re into some nasty stuff.’

Jack narrows his eyes. ‘What do you mean?’

George shakes his head. 'I don't know. Daniel seems – sorry, *seemed* a different person lately. Angrier.'

There's a knock on the interview-room door. Jack ignores it, but whatever spell George has been under has vanished. George gets to his feet.

'I've got to go. I promised Mum I wouldn't be out late. She's nervous – because of the bomb.'

'That's fine, thank you for coming in,' Jack says. 'I've got your number – can I call you if I have any other questions?'

'Yeah, sure.'

'And do come by here again if you remember anything else.'

'Thank you.'

George opens the door and is gone, walking fast past Lynch as she waits in the corridor.

'How did that go?' she asks.

Jack shakes his head. 'You can watch the video back. But abusive childhood, Dad beats up his mother, other nasty stuff.'

'Well, on the subject of nasty stuff,' Lynch says. 'The tech guys got into the laptop. It's Daniel Bevan's all right. And you're not going to like what we found.'

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

There are videos. The ones George Bevan described and more. Jack, Lynch and the tech guys watch horrified as they scroll through multiple displays of violence, bullying and name-calling, all at the hands of the police. It makes Jack sick, that cops could be out there, misusing their power in this way. Sometimes it's not one bad apple but a whole barrelful.

'All of these,' the techie says, 'are fake. See the Sora watermark? That means it's AI. But the rest, I don't know. They could be originals.'

'He had a vendetta against the police,' Jack says. 'Rightfully so, if these videos are anything to go by, but is there anything about explosives or mentions of a bomb?'

'No, but there are emails between Daniel and Gary King. Dates and times, no more than that – I assume places they met, made plans. The cookies in the internet browser show he was on message boards – Reddit, 4chan, the lot.'

The names resonate in Jack's mind, taking him back to a case last September. 'What were the message boards talking about?'

'Let's see...' The techie clicks a few times, then starts to scroll. 'Daniel was most active on the UK anti-policing sites, which makes sense, given where he lived, along with a whole load of "defund the police" US rhetoric. But he touches on a lot of different topics.'

'Such as...?'

'Alpha-male shit. Incel sites. Pro-rape—'

'Does he ever talk to a man called Kevin Walsh?'

'Let me see... Okay, yes. Quite a few conversations, dating back to last summer.'

'Guv?' Lynch asks, confused.

Jack leans back in his seat, steepling his fingers against his lips. This all sounds too similar – coincidence, or something else?

'Last year, I investigated a group of incels for rape,' he explains. 'Soliciting violence against women, that sort of thing. We tracked them down via message boards, much like these, and discovered they were led by a man called Kevin Walsh. We caught him – but not before he had a nasty run-in with one of our female dog handlers.'

‘Was she okay?’ Lynch asks.

‘Yes, her dog saved her.’ Jack smiles at the memory: Lucy’s German shepherd firmly attaching himself to Kevin Walsh’s groin, allowing Lucy to make the arrest. It ended well, but if it hadn’t been for Iggy, it could have easily gone the other way.

‘He’s now in prison,’ Jack continues, ‘but could this be related? We knew the group had ties to other cities, mainly Newcastle, but is it possible it had spread further than we thought? To London?’

‘But anti-policing versus incel culture,’ Lynch says. ‘That’s two different ideologies.’

‘If what we’re seeing is true, Daniel Bevan knew both Gary King and Kevin Walsh. And there’s no love lost between Walsh and the police. What are the chances they collaborated on this? Worked together to construct a bomb, deliberately targeting first responders? One thing we know about Kevin Walsh is that he was well connected. And incredibly good at persuading men to do his bidding.’

‘And he’s locked up?’ Lynch says.

‘Yeah, since September. But that’s not to say they haven’t communicated in other ways. It’s not unknown for mobile phones to make their way inside prisons.’

‘But why hasn’t anyone claimed responsibility?’ Lynch says.

‘Why would they need to? They wanted to spread fear – they’ve achieved that goal – but the second timer didn’t go off. They failed.’ Jack turns to the techie. ‘I want as much information as possible on Daniel Bevan – rake through this laptop with a fine-tooth comb and then turn your attention to Gary King’s phone. There must be something on it. Sharon – how is the search going on Gary King’s registered address or the flat in the Oakmount Estate?’

‘Slow, on both counts. The forensic teams are spread thin.’

‘Well, get them searched from top to bottom. And if someone on these message boards even talks about Selfridges, or another potential target, we need to know. Plus, I want all you can find on Stephen Bevan.’

‘The abusive dad?’

‘Exactly.’

Jack follows Lynch back to the incident room. Inside, Lynch heads straight to their analysts, talking about what needs to be done. He admires

her attitude, never stopping for one moment, but Jack needs to be more circumspect.

This is only a theory at the moment. If these three men are connected and worked together on this bomb, in a crusade to attack the police and first responders, he needs evidence to prove it – and work out what's coming next. A wrong turn at this stage could take them all off in the wrong direction and waste precious hours. They need to dig further into Daniel Bevan and, given what they know, Jack needs to interview Gary King again. But he wants evidence first.

He needs to go back to where this could have all started – the offences committed in Southampton last year. He picks up his phone, searches for a number and dials. Pete answers immediately.

'Jack? Has anything happened to Lucy?'

Jack's wrong-footed. 'No, why do you ask?'

'Because I haven't had more than a text from her since she left, and now you're calling me out of the blue. Have you seen her?'

'Last night, yes. She's working on victim recovery today.'

'With the... Shit!' Jack can hear Pete's frustration, imagines him running his hands through his hair in annoyance. 'Why didn't you stop her? She's supposed to be there with the dogs, not digging for dead bodies.'

'Have you ever tried telling Lucy no?'

'But victim recovery. That's nasty stuff.'

'She can handle it. You haven't spoken to her?'

'No.' A long sigh. 'Why are you calling, Jack? If it's not to do with Lucy?'

Pete and Jack have never been friends, and as Pete's a dog handler, they have little crossover at work. Plus, Jack's motivation to avoid him has increased tenfold since Pete's call on Friday night – but this is important.

'We've discovered a link between the bombing on Friday and a hatred of the police. One of our theories is the bomb was trying to take out first responders.'

'Okay?'

'And I wondered about those break-ins you had last summer – the ACAB bullshit. Did you ever get anyone for it?'

'Dax nibbled on a few. But they tapered off – we haven't had any for a while. At the time it felt like they were just doing shitty stuff to distract us.'

Pull us away from more serious crimes, but we couldn't find any strong evidence of that.'

'We'll look into it, thank you. Can you send over the case numbers?'

'Sure.' A pause. 'Is that all?'

'Yeah. Thanks, Pete.'

'No problem. And if you see Lucy, tell her to call me.'

Jack hangs up and opens his laptop, refreshing his messages and waiting for the emails to load. He thinks about Pete and Lucy. Pete's frustration was obvious, and to some extent Jack can understand why. She can be stubborn, bottling up her worries, and that – added to the emotional baggage left over from her late husband – is a lot. But Jack's always liked and respected Lucy for her determination and resilience. Plus, he has to admit, he fancies the pants off her. Not that he'd ever make a move while she's with Pete, but he's thought about it, more than a few times. He wonders why Lucy hasn't phoned Pete since she left. It can't be because of the proposal to move in together?

His email pings – an update and some photographs from Amrit. He opens it and squints at the images. Cocaine, it looks like – and some stolen credit cards. He phones her back straight away.

'You found these in Tansy's rucksack?' he says.

'Yes – it looks like she found other ways to make money. I got in touch with one of the names on the cards – the man confirmed his wallet was nicked back in October, at knife point. The muggers were never found. Had Tansy got herself in with a bad crowd, and it got her in trouble?'

'Could be.' A faint memory echoes in Jack's mind and he pulls up the photos from Daniel Bevan's room. The drugs – and the credit card in someone else's name. 'Read me the names on the credit cards?' he says to Amrit.

'Wait a sec.' There's a pause. 'Here.' She reads a list of six names, and one of them is a match to the card in Daniel Bevan's drawer. He tells Amrit the connection.

'But that's... nuts,' she says, echoing the thought that's spinning in Jack's head.

'Daniel Bevan could have met her while he was living in Winchester. But I agree, that's one hell of a coincidence. Carry on digging, Amrit, thank you. And keep me updated.'

Jack hangs up, then swings on his office chair, thinking, a niggles of disquiet taking root. First, there's a link between Kevin Walsh and Daniel Bevan, and now there's a possibility that Tansy knew him too? They didn't find anything in the investigation last year, but it's possible Dan and Tansy could have met later, once Kevin was in prison. Was Tansy the girlfriend George mentioned? But if so, how is this all related? It all seems too convenient, too close for it to be chance.

But if it's deliberate, Jack doesn't like it. He doesn't like it at all.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Sally must have slept – if you could even call it that. Drifting in and out, her consciousness barely aware. Is this the second day or the third? It's impossible to know.

The pain in her leg has dissipated, leaving her with a useless limb, and she wonders if she'll lose it. Would she care, if she makes it out of this alive? A headache throbs behind her eyes and if she moves too quickly, she sees stars, a bright kaleidoscope obscuring her vision. She keeps her eyes closed, trying to ignore her reality, trying to stay calm.

Time passes. And, gradually, daylight trickles in through the gaps in the rubble, slowly at first, catching the edge of a slab of concrete, reflecting off tiny beads of glass. Groans and sighs drift her way from people around her, but quieter, and she wonders how many of them lost the fight overnight. The grinding and the drilling continue outside. Her imagination puts them louder, and closer – but is that no more than wishful thinking? Her mouth is parched; she's desperate for water. She can barely think, let alone find a way out of this mess. In a way, her helplessness is freeing. She just needs to wait. And pray.

She imagines her parents at home, awaiting her arrival and realising where she must be. Why she hasn't shown up. Frantic phone calls to the police, her father not wanting to make a fuss or be any trouble, but her mum knowing that reporting her missing is necessary. Did her husband give Rory an extra story last night before bed? Hold him close, reassuring him that Mummy will be home soon. Does he understand, does he miss her?

A lone tear escapes, scoring a line in the dust on her cheeks. She captures the moisture on her fingertip, runs it around her chapped lips. It makes no difference.

'Hello? Hello?' A voice cuts through her consciousness – a man shouting to her left, echoing in the void. 'Hello?'

She recognises the voice – he'd been screaming all night, panicking in the darkness. He shouts again, getting more desperate, and this time she calls back.

'Hello,' she says, but it comes out as no more than a croak. She tries again. 'What's your name?'

‘What? Who’s there? Save me, save me, please.’ His voice rises with panic. ‘I don’t want to be down here anymore.’

‘I’m trapped, same as you,’ she shouts back. ‘What’s your name?’

‘My name? What?’ Confusion obscures his thinking, until: ‘I’m Brian. Brian Carroll.’

‘Hello, Brian. I’m Sally. You need to calm down. Please? You’re wasting energy.’

‘I can’t... I can’t...’

‘They know we’re here. They’re doing their best to get to us. Talk to me. Can you do that?’

‘Okay,’ he says, quieter now. ‘Okay.’

‘How old are you, Brian?’

‘Eighteen,’ he whispers. ‘I wanted a cable for my iPad, that’s all. Just a cable. Oh, God...’

‘Are you hurt?’

‘I... Yes, I think so... I was bleeding. I had...’ His voice tapers off. ‘Am I going to die?’ he whispers.

‘No,’ Sally says defiantly. ‘They’ll get us out. They will. We need to be patient.’

Sally thinks about Brian and his cable. The tech bar was on the floor below hers; she must have fallen through into the basement. So they’re below ground, with tonnes of rubble on top of them, and after a day, those diggers aren’t getting any closer.

‘They’ll get us out,’ Sally repeats. But this time, her voice wavers.

She’s not so sure anymore. She’s a long way down. They’re going to die.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Day done, Lucy heads back to the hotel. Her back is aching, her muscles fatigued; she feels dirty, and not just the physical kind. Sweat, dust and who-knows-what coat her skin; the smells of burning and bodies fuse inside her nose, making her nauseous.

She strips off and gets in the shower, turning the heat up as high as she can bear, scrubbing herself from top to bottom. But as much as she tries, she can't escape the faces of the dead.

They stick in her mind. Someone's daughter, brother, mother, uncle. Fran and her team at the mortuary will do their jobs as thoroughly and as quickly as they can, but Lucy remembers the missing posters and imagines the pain of their nearest and dearest, waiting for the call.

Lucy's aware from her own experience with her husband that not knowing the fate of your loved one is a torture in itself. Finding out that they're dead gives the living a chance to grieve, to hold a funeral and move on with their lives as best they can. But it's no consolation, and she takes a moment to cry, letting the shower absorb her tears, washing them away.

Once the sadness has subsided, Lucy gets dressed in clean jeans and a T-shirt. She tries Pete's number, but it rings out; she doesn't leave a message and sends a text instead. *Hope you're okay, phone me back when you're free*
x

Jack next, and she sends a WhatsApp; it stays unread, so she goes down to the restaurant anyway, thinking she can always sit with him later. She tries for something healthy, orders a chicken Caesar salad and eats it, one eye on the news as they report on the day. There's nothing new, just more footage of the demolished building, search and rescue crawling over it like ants. Londoners chat to the camera: how are they feeling? Scared but determined; uncowed; resolute. Victims are interviewed, now discharged from hospital, fear still etched in the lines on their faces.

There's a group of coppers at the other end of the restaurant, getting drunk on police-funded wine. They gesture for her to join them, but she smiles wearily and trudges back to her room. Sadness eats at her bones, and she recognises it as the dreaded precursor to not wanting to get out of bed,

the fatigue and the difficulty concentrating she struggled with before. But what can she do about it now? Out here, alone?

It's late, and she wonders where Jack is, checking her message and finding it still unread. Pete hasn't replied either, and she assumes he's on a late turn, busy and unable to chat. She hates to admit it, but she's relieved. The last thing she wants to admit is that Pete could be right – she can't cope with this, she needs to go home. Something he would tell her straight away, and that's the last thing she wants.

She gets changed, climbs into bed. She's knackered but she won't be able to sleep and, sure enough, as soon as the light is out and her head hits the pillow, her brain spits out image after image.

Severed limbs, lifeless bodies, eyes and mouths full of dust and dirt. They haunt her and she tosses and turns. Too hot, too cold, too distracted. She must sleep eventually but her dreams are more of the same – finding herself trapped, the walls closing in, the roar of the explosion in her ears.

She wakes with a gasp, sheets stuck to her legs, lungs tight as if she's drowning. She takes two deep breaths, then lies in the darkness, staring at the ceiling.

This isn't going to work. She needs a diversion and picks up her phone. Fifteen minutes past midnight. No one will be awake at this hour, the restaurant and bar long closed.

She gets up, pulling on joggers and a sweatshirt. Slipping her feet into her trainers, she opens her bedroom door and looks down the long, dim corridor. Jack shared his room number yesterday: 312. What if she asked for a quick conversation to distract her? A nightcap? A cup of tea?

This thought takes her down the corridor, outside his door. She looks at the number, but she can't knock. He's in charge of the investigation; he needs his sleep. She can't wake him for her own selfish reasons.

'Lucy?'

She turns and Jack is walking towards her. His jacket is crumpled, tie askew, but it isn't until he gets up close that she can see the grey shadows under his eyes, his weariness, the fatigue embedded in his bones.

'Are you just getting back?'

'Yeah, we had some developments in the case.' He's next to her now and takes his key card out of his pocket. 'Are you okay? What are you doing here?'

Lucy opts for the truth. 'I couldn't sleep. I had a nightmare. I was hoping for some company but when I got here, I realised I couldn't wake you.'

'Good job I'm still up, then.' He places his key card against the door and walks inside. He looks back to Lucy, where she's hesitating in the doorway.

'Are you coming?'

'Yes, yes, okay.'

Inside, he shrugs off his jacket and smooths it; he takes a hanger out of the wardrobe and puts it away. Jack's room is identical to hers, even down to the layout, but where hers is covered in discarded clothes, some still spilling out of her open case, his is neat and tidy. Clothes put away, suitcase empty and closed up in a corner. Nothing on the desk. She peaks inside the bathroom – his toiletries are neatly lined up on the shelf. Deodorant, aftershave, razor. There's even some moisturiser. It's a woman's one, from Boots.

She picks it up. 'I'm impressed.'

'I'm not getting any younger,' he says with a shrug.

Lucy puts it back and joins Jack in the bedroom. He's discarded his tie and is now sitting on his bed, taking his shoes and socks off.

'I'm not much in the mood for conversation, Luce. I'm sorry.'

She looks at the door, realising how unfair she's being. He has enough on his plate without her adding to it. 'I'll go. I'm sorry.'

'Are you okay?' His concern, combined with her tiredness, makes tears prickle behind her eyes. She turns away and nods, not trusting herself to speak. The bed springs creak as he gets up. A gentle touch on her arm. 'Bad day?' he asks gently.

'Yeah,' she says, but it comes out as a squeak.

'You need to sleep.'

She nods again.

'You can stay here, if you like. It's a big bed. It's not like we haven't done it before.'

She turns around and he's smiling. A wave of relief catches her off-guard; she doesn't want to be alone.

'Okay,' she says, shaking the thought of Pete's disapproval from her mind. Then, trying for a joke: 'But no dodgy stuff, Ellis. Hands to yourself.'

'I promise. But the right side is mine. No arguments.'

She kicks her trainers off and pulls her sweatshirt over her head, getting into bed in her joggers and T-shirt. Half of her feels awkward as hell; the

other half is grateful she won't have to go back to her room. To that nightmare and those memories. The dead, haunting her when she closes her eyes.

She stays turned away as Jack gets undressed. A jangle of his belt, a rustle as he pulls his shirt over his head, putting something else on. The light turns on in the bathroom, and she listens as he cleans his teeth, then closes the door. A dip in the mattress as he gets in next to her. The lights turn off, and he sighs, softly.

She stays like this, unnaturally still. Her mind empties, but now a different thought intrudes. She can hear him breathing, feel his body heat. Smell him on the pillow. There's barely a foot between them.

He's right – they have shared a bed before. But last time they were utterly wasted and ended up kissing. If it hadn't been for Jack racing off to the bathroom to be sick, who knows where it might have led.

Back then, Lucy fell into a deep, drunken sleep, hardly giving a second thought to the man beside her.

But today, stone-cold sober, it's another thing entirely.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Jack had one objective when he made it back to the hotel tonight – sleep. It felt like every cell in his body hurt; his muscles ached; his eyes were scratchy and sore. But now he's in bed with Lucy, it's the last thing on his mind.

It's rare Lucy will ask for help. Even less likely that she'll let anyone see her cry. His heart went out to her; what sort of a callous friend would he be if he turned her away?

'Was today awful?' he whispers into the darkness.

For a moment, she's silent, and he wonders if she's asleep. But then he hears a quiet sniff.

'So bad,' she says. 'I don't think...' Another pause, and he waits. 'I don't think I can do it again tomorrow. But I can't be that person.'

'What person?'

'The one that lets everyone down.'

'Oh, Lucy.' He turns over, facing her. He can see the back of her head in the darkness; her hair tied back in its usual French plait. 'You wouldn't be letting anyone down. And besides, I need you tomorrow.'

'Huh?' She rotates to face him. 'What do you mean?'

He briefly explains today's progress. The brother phoning. The father's connection to the police force. Daniel Bevan's laptop and the violent videos it contains. The link between Daniel Bevan and Kevin Walsh.

'We know that Daniel spoke to Kevin on the message boards,' Jack concludes. 'He might know something about what they planned next.'

'He's not going to talk to you. You locked him up.'

'That's why I need you.'

Lucy scoffs, her eyes shining in the darkness. 'He's definitely not going to talk to me.'

'You and Iggy are the reason he got caught. If we provoke him, he might just get angry enough to let something slip.'

There's a pause. 'Okay. I'll come.'

'Thank you.' They sink into silence again, and Jack closes his eyes, trying to ease the stress lurking below the surface. They're still waiting for the DNA analyses from the respirators found at the flat – three more people,

ready to go out tomorrow and take innocent lives. And what's worse, given they're targeting the police, the next victim could be a colleague of Jack's. A friend.

He has a hundred things he needs to follow up on. Reports to write for the higher-ups, and resource requests to send out, demanding more detectives, more analysts. And that's without taking into account the things he might have forgotten, the lines of inquiry they've not concluded, theories gone unexplored.

To try and take his mind off it, he broaches another topic.

'I spoke to Pete today,' he says.

'You did? Why?'

'To get the files on those ACAB cases he was involved in.'

'They're related?'

'They might be. He asked about you.'

'What did you say?'

'Not much. Lucy – why haven't you spoken to him?'

A sigh in the darkness. 'I tried to call tonight but he didn't answer. And I was kind of glad.'

'Why?' Jack asks softly.

'Because he'll want to know what I've been doing, and I don't want to talk about that. And then he'll ask how I am and...' Her voice cracks. 'And I don't know how I am.'

'He'll understand.'

'Of course he'll understand. Because that's all Pete is – understanding, and empathetic and wonderful – and I'll be the bad guy again. The fucked-up insane woman.'

'You are none of those things, Luce.'

'Yeah...' she says, but he can tell she doesn't believe him.

'You're not.'

She doesn't reply for a moment, but turns around in the bed, facing away again. 'You need to get some sleep, Jack. I don't want to keep you up.'

'Okay. Night, then.'

'Night.'

Jack closes his eyes, but his brain spirals, thoughts raging out of control. He's failing, in every way. Failing the victims, and his colleagues. Disappointing Digby.

He heard two of his detectives talking tonight. About him. They were young, letting off steam, but the words still hit home.

‘He doesn’t know what he’s doing,’ the woman said. ‘They should put Sharon in charge – she’s more on it than he is.’

‘And have you heard about him?’ They leaned forward in a conspiratorial whisper. ‘He’s not married. No kids. No life. What’s he going to do if he doesn’t catch this bomber? He’ll get fired and then he’ll have nothing.’

‘Poor guy,’ the first one said and Jack backed away, having heard enough.

What would he do? The failure would haunt him, and that’s assuming there are no further attacks. What if more people die on his watch? What then?

And then there’s Tansy’s murder. He desperately wants to know what happened to her, catch the killer – and the link between Tansy and Daniel Bevan troubles him. He needs to tell Lucy, but she has enough on her plate. He doesn’t want to add to her problems.

A chill reaches into his bones; he tries to cocoon himself in the duvet, trap the heat, but he can’t help shivering. Normally, when insomnia hits, he will recite the seven times table backwards or name a bird for every letter of the alphabet, but this time the record’s stuck, it won’t play. He shifts position in bed, facing away from Lucy now, tucking his knees up in the foetal position.

‘Jack,’ Lucy whispers. ‘You’re shaking.’

‘I’m just cold.’

She reaches out, placing a hand against his neck. ‘You’re freezing. Here.’ She moves so that she’s behind him, her body pressed against his back, her legs touching his. Her breath whispers against the back of his neck as she wraps one arm over the top of him. ‘Your heart’s racing.’

He reaches for her hand, holding it in both of his and clasping it to his chest. And, slowly, he feels himself calm.

‘Talk to me,’ he murmurs. ‘Tell me something nice.’

‘Nice? I don’t know. Um...’ She thinks for a moment. ‘Did you know a Belgian Malinois can jump up to ten feet high?’

‘I did not know that,’ he says softly.

‘That’s why they make such good police dogs. And the longest vertical jump is thirty-three feet.’

‘Sounds just your type.’

She huffs a laugh. He feels a slight pressure on his back as she rests her head against his T-shirt. Her fingers loosen their grip, but she doesn't pull away.

And he stays like that, with her, until they both fall asleep.

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DAY 4 – MONDAY

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Lucy wakes early, as daylight creeps through the curtains. Jack's still sleeping, now facing towards her on his side, mouth open slightly, face relaxed. She watches him for a moment, resisting the urge to run a hand through his mussed hair, touch the light stubble across his jaw.

She contemplates last night. Had she overstepped? Was it wrong of her to stay, share his bed? But he offered, they didn't do anything wrong, and it's the best night's sleep she's had in weeks. Maybe even months.

Lucy ignores the niggle in her head that Pete might have a different take, and she mentally adds it to the rapidly increasing pile of secrets between her and her boyfriend.

A pressing need to use the loo takes over all coherent thought, and there's no way she's weeing here, not when a perfectly good bathroom awaits her down the corridor. She carefully slides out of bed, pushing her trainers onto her feet and grabbing her key card from the desk. To her relief, nobody sees her sneak out of Jack's room and, once back in her own one, she uses the bathroom, then picks up her phone from where she left it on the side.

One message from Pete. *Got back late last night. Speak to you tomorrow? x*

She drafts a reply, but everything she writes seems wrong. Too bland, too blunt, too uncaring. She'll phone him tonight, she resolves with a flash of guilt. Have a proper conversation. And leaving it on read, she heads into the shower.

Hair washed, showered and clean, she hears her phone beep as she cleans her teeth. It's Jack.

Prisoner request has been approved. Ready when you are.

They meet in reception. Lucy in a clean, tidy uniform; Jack in his usual suit. She smiles at him and Jack grins – it's good to see him back to his usual self.

They walk to fetch his car. It's still early; coffee shops coming to life, commuters in smart suits staring at their phones. They feel no pressure to

talk, walking in silence side by side, Lucy cradling a coffee, Jack with his tea. The old Mercedes has been sitting out the back of New Scotland Yard for the last few days, and as they edge away towards Hammersmith and the M4, Lucy feels the pressure lift.

‘Just like old times,’ she says, enjoying the boost as caffeine hits her bloodstream.

‘Except this is my car, and Monster Munch is banned. No crumbs in here.’

‘Spoilsport.’ Her thoughts turn to the case. ‘Did you find out any more about the father?’

‘Stephen Bevan? Yeah, Lynch sent something through this morning.’

‘Doesn’t that woman ever sleep?’

‘Apparently not. And Bevan Senior is a nasty piece of work. He was an inspector in the Met, led a team in covert policing before a whistleblower reported him and six officers for excessive use of force, and making discriminatory and misogynistic comments. He was fired for gross misconduct about five years ago. Hasn’t worked since.’

‘Seems a bit much for Daniel Bevan to blow up a department store because of daddy issues,’ Lucy comments.

‘He had a bad experience when he was arrested for possession of class As. Claimed he got beaten up when he wouldn’t tell them the name of his dealer, although he got let off with a fine and a community order, which seems fair.’

‘Did he put in a complaint?’

‘The brother says he did but there’s no record of it. The team are still looking, although it’s a needle in a haystack and one more thing they haven’t got time to do.’ He scrubs one hand down his face as he drives. ‘Ugh. Maybe I’m wrong, maybe we should prioritise it. You and I both know crimes have been committed for less.’

‘True.’

It’s clear the pressure’s getting to Jack. She’s known him for two years now and it’s rare that he’ll doubt himself. But it’s an avalanche of information in a world of nothing but uncertainty and risk; one wrong move and more people could end up dead.

Lucy’s about to ask what their plan is for interviewing Kevin Walsh when Jack’s phone rings loudly, connected to handsfree.

‘Sharon, are you superhuman?’ Jack says as he answers it.

A soft laugh, and Lucy feels a twitch of jealousy towards this woman. Is she single? Out to impress Jack? And why should Lucy care?

‘Why sleep when there are bad guys to catch?’ Sharon says. ‘And you’re going to want to hear this – the DNA profiles came back from the respirators.’

‘Go on.’

‘There were five separate profiles across the five respirators. One is a definite match to Gary King, and Daniel Bevan is another. We have Kevin Walsh’s biologicals on file so I asked the lab to test against him. Unsurprisingly, it’s not Kevin – given he’s been locked up since last September.’

‘What about the wider database?’

‘Running that now, so I’ll call you back when they’re done. I’m going to reinterview Gary King, see what he has to say for himself.’

‘Excellent, keep me posted,’ Jack says, and hangs up.

‘You must have enough to charge Gary King at this point?’ Lucy says.

She’s forgotten how much she missed this – the thrill of the chase, following the evidence.

‘We arrested him at the bomb factory, and his DNA was found on the hoodie and cap he discarded when we tracked him on CCTV from the scene. We have the e-Fit from the man who saw him running away from the van, but we both know how unreliable eyewitnesses can be.’

‘True, but there were explosives at his house. Otto said so.’

‘The CPS will probably agree to charge, given the pressure to get a conviction, but I want more. Something he can’t ignore. Something to make him talk.’

‘And you think Kevin Walsh will give us that?’

Lucy’s dubious. Kevin Walsh is in prison for multiple counts of rape, but terrorism and murder are completely different. He’s not going to implicate himself and get a whole life tariff.

‘There has to be something in it for him,’ Lucy continues. Then she adds, quietly, ‘A reduction in his sentence for co-operating?’

Jack glances away from the road towards her for a moment. ‘The last thing we want is that man out of prison. I’d put him away for life if I could.’

‘I know, but lives are at risk.’

‘Women are at risk if he gets out.’

Lucy takes a deep breath. 'Okay, so if not the carrot, then the stick? We know Daniel Bevan was talking to him on the message boards. Throw conspiracy at him?'

'Conspiracy to murder. It's possible.'

Lucy watches as Jack's brow lowers, as he retreats into himself. Stress lines return on his forehead, and Lucy wants to touch his face, smooth them out. Take away the pressure weighing down his shoulders.

She tries for light relief instead. 'Did you know there's an Instagram account on you?'

A faint whisper of a smile touches his lips. 'Shut up, there is not.'

'There is. Look.'

Unluckily for Jack, they've paused at the traffic lights, and Lucy holds out her phone. *@policehotties*. And the top post has a shot of Jack. It's the one of him at the original police briefing, lurking behind Digby, a scowl on his face.

'Fuck's sake,' he mutters as the lights turn green. 'This is serious.'

'I know. Very serious.' But Lucy's grinning, enjoying his embarrassment. 'Admit it, Jack, you're a sex symbol now. Everyone fancies you.'

'Everyone does not fancy me. Even my dog won't do what I ask.'

'Perhaps you need to be firmer. Women like it when you take control.'

And as Jack turns an even brighter shade of red, Lucy snort-laughs into her phone. But she's glad to have taken his mind off everything, if only for a second. They both needed a bit of levity.

Before the hard work really starts.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Kevin Walsh sidles out, taking his own sweet time as he enters the interview room, sitting opposite her and Jack. The man hasn't changed in the seven months since Lucy arrested him.

He still seems muscular and strong, his white-blond hair cut to a severe grade one, his face tattoos dark in contrast. Prison hasn't diminished him, and it's not hard to imagine he has a following in here, same as he did on the outside.

Lucy remembers when he was arrested. Iggy – her German shepherd – protecting her, aiming for a good solid bite of his arm and missing, grabbing his privates instead. She can't help but smile when she remembers his high-pitched squeal, as he tried to stem the bleeding from his balls.

'How are you, Kevin?' she asks now. She glances down. 'All recovered?'

She smiles at his slight wince. 'I could still sue. Get your dog put down.'

'Go ahead and try.'

She sits opposite him, Jack on her right. They'd agreed the strategy – Lucy's role is to piss him off, Jack's is to come in on his side.

'How are you finding prison life?'

'Food could be better.' Kevin flexes his muscles. 'The gym's top notch.'

'I can see. How about we take that privilege away from you? How about we tell your governor that there are threats on your life – get you thrown in solitary.'

His eyes blaze in anger. 'What the fuck I done to you?'

'To me – nothing. But to all those girls? I bet they'd like to see you rot in here, shrivel away to a husk.'

'What d'you want? You two come in here, request to see me. And now you're making threats. You must want something.' He looks at Jack. 'You're in charge, right? Why you letting the little girl run the show?'

Jack takes his time. He reaches into his jacket pocket, taking a photo out and placing it on the table. Kevin looks at it.

'Who's that?'

'You tell me,' Jack says slowly.

'Not a clue.' He pushes it back towards Jack.

‘His name is Daniel Bevan. He was killed on Friday evening. In the bomb at Selfridges.’

‘So what? You can’t pin that shit on me. I was here. Best alibi in the world.’

‘But you knew Daniel. Last summer, you chatted to him online. He shared a video. Do you remember it?’

Kevin narrows his eyes. A small glimmer of recognition.

Jack’s seen it too. ‘Do you know the one I mean?’ he says.

‘Yeah. Fucking pigs beating up that bloke.’ Kevin pauses. ‘Bevan’s dead? Pity, he had a lot of potential.’

‘Who else had potential, Kevin? Who did Daniel hang out with?’

He glares. ‘No comment.’

‘Is this the motivation behind the bombs? To target the police?’

‘No comment.’

‘All because some police dog got the better of you?’

‘You want to know what’s going on?’ Kevin says. ‘You should look closer at your fucking pigsty.’

‘Why? What happened?’

‘No comment.’

Jack sits back; he’s telling Lucy it’s her go.

‘You know we’re not going to stop, Kevin,’ she says. ‘We’ll find out who did this, and we’ll bring them in.’

‘Good luck with that.’

‘We found the bomb factory. We know there are three more people involved, and it won’t be long before we have their names.’

‘Why won’t you get the hint? No comment.’

‘Do you know what will happen when we catch them? Because of the risk, we send the armed police in. And they can get nervous, itchy with their trigger finger. Do you think your friends will be careful, Kevin? Do you think they will do the sensible thing and come out with their hands up, or will they be stupid?’

Kevin looks directly at Lucy then, and she detects the slightest change. Is it fear she can see in his eyes? Worry? Jack shared some of the intel they had on Walsh: he grew up bouncing between foster homes, has no family they’ve been able to find. But could it be he’d forged relationships in other ways?

‘Why are you being so loyal to these people?’ she continues. ‘They’re on the outside, living their best life while you’re locked up in here. You know that DCI Ellis isn’t going to stop until he persuades the CPS to charge you. Terrorism, Kevin. Conspiracy to murder. That’s not good.’

Kevin blinks at her, flinching.

‘Give us their names. Tell us where they are, and we’ll make sure they’re unharmed. Hell, we might even make sure they end up in Winchester prison, if you’re really helpful. And then you and your mates can spend the rest of your miserable lives here together.’

Kevin glares at her, then across to Jack.

And just as Lucy thinks Kevin’s resolve is weakening, he turns.

‘No. Fucking. Comment,’ he says and the interview’s over.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Lucy leaves first, Kevin's gaze boring a hole in her back.

'You fucking cops,' he mutters as he gets to his feet, fists balled at his side. 'How dare you go for me.'

Jack stands up slowly, pulling himself to his full height. He's not as muscular as Kevin but he can hold his own, and he's damned if he's going to be cowed by this bully.

'If I find so much as a sniff of your DNA in this mess,' Jack hisses. 'I'll have you.'

Kevin glares, then takes a step back from the table. 'Just you wait.'

'Wait for what?'

Kevin smiles, his lips drawing over his teeth in a snarl. 'That bitch,' he says, pointing towards the door. 'She needs to watch out.'

'What do you mean?'

'They know what her dog did to me. Put me in here. And they've been after her since day one.'

He has Jack's full attention now, and he feels the anger building. 'Who's "they", Kevin?'

Kevin chuckles. 'Shoe's on the other foot now, isn't it? When it's someone you care about. And don't deny it – I've seen the way you look at her, how you're always hanging out together. They've got eyes. They see you and that other bloke of hers – wrapped around her little finger. You need to grow a pair – both of you. But we'll help you out.'

'Do what—?'

Kevin leers. 'Do whatever we like. When the time's right. And you won't be able to stop us—'

'Don't you dare—'

'Hey, hey, not me.' Kevin's suddenly the picture of innocence, holding his hands out in front of him, defensively. 'I'm in here, what do you think I can do?' He turns away, shouts for a guard. 'I'm just sayin'. She should watch her back.'

The guard arrives before Jack can do anything rash. Before he grabs Kevin by the ears and slams his head into the table.

He storms out of there, barely controlling his frustration before he catches up with Lucy in the corridor.

‘We knew it was a long shot,’ she says. ‘But worth a try.’

He takes a few shuddering breaths, containing the anger bubbling up inside him. ‘I guess so,’ he says after a moment. ‘I’ve requested his contact sheet – we’ll find out who’s been visiting.’

‘Good. That’s all you can do.’ She looks closely at him. ‘So why are you so pissed off?’

‘It’s nothing.’

‘It’s clearly not nothing. Hey.’ She grabs hold of his arm, stopping him from walking away from her. ‘Talk to me.’

He pauses, meeting Lucy’s gaze. He’s learned from experience that secrets are no good, and Lucy can read him like a book – she knows something’s wrong.

‘Let’s get a cup of coffee,’ he says with a sigh.

Leaving Jack’s car within the prison walls, they choose the closest place – the Costa inside the entrance of the Royal Hampshire hospital, across the road.

They order their usuals, and Jack carries his tea and Lucy’s flat white to the table, where Lucy’s waiting.

‘So?’ she prompts.

‘He threatened you. He said they were going to come after you and you should watch your back.’

Lucy considers it for a moment, then half-smiles. ‘If I had a pound for every time someone’s threatened me...’

‘But this guy is serious, Lucy. He has connections – we’ve seen that from his links to these bombers. Kevin Walsh has been inside since September and still he knows more about this bomb than we do.’

‘He’s bullshitting. He had a few chats with Daniel Bevan on a message board and thinks he knows it all. That’s it.’ She reaches out and covers his hand with hers. ‘I appreciate you worrying about me, but I’m not going to stop doing my job because some shitbag tells me I should.’

‘But, Lucy—’

‘No. I’m going back up to London with you. Think about it – it’s the safest place. Everywhere I go, I’m surrounded by cops. I’m in some sort of police cordon, usually under armed guard. Nobody can get to me—’

She stops abruptly, looking over Jack’s shoulder and pulling her hand away from his. Jack turns, as Pete comes barrelling towards them.

‘Pete, what are you doing—?’

‘Looking for you. Jesus Christ, Lucy, are you okay?’

She frowns. ‘I’m fine.’

Pete, however, is not fine. He’s flustered, his face red. His hair looks as if he’s run his hands through it a thousand times.

‘I was nearby and I checked for your location, saw you were here, at the hospital, and I... I panicked.’ He pulls out a chair and slumps into it. ‘Fucking hell, Lucy. I thought you’d been injured.’

‘In London? Why would I be at Winchester hospital if I’d been injured in London?’

‘I don’t know, I...’ He exhales, looking up to the ceiling. ‘You don’t return my calls. You didn’t reply to my text this morning and all I see on the news are men with guns and people with bombs. You’re driving me nuts.’

Jack feels awkward as hell. ‘I’ll give you two some space,’ he mutters, backing up. Pete doesn’t even look at him. ‘I’ll meet you at the car,’ Jack finishes and walks away.

But before he leaves them, he glances back. Lucy’s glaring at Pete. Whatever state their relationship is in, it’s nothing good.

CHAPTER THIRTY

‘Fucking hell, Pete – you can’t storm in here and expect me to be happy to see you. I’m working.’

‘You’re hanging out with Jack!’

‘We’ve been at the prison interviewing a suspect. Kevin Walsh – remember him? Well, he’s involved.’

Pete shakes his head. ‘I don’t care. Honestly. I’m sorry I raced over here but I thought you’d been hurt. And you don’t give a shit.’

‘I do give a shit—’

‘You don’t! I tell you I love you and I want to move in with you, and you disappear for three days. We haven’t spoken once. I’ve had two texts from you. Lucy – this isn’t good.’

‘I’ve been busy. Someone bombed London!’

‘Do you think I don’t know that? You’ve been out there doing victim recovery, one of the worst jobs there is, and I stupidly thought you might want to talk to someone about it. But apparently, that means anyone but me.’

Lucy’s emotions have oscillated from anger to frustration, but now she’s just feeling bad. She’s let him down – again.

‘I should have called you,’ she says. ‘I’m sorry.’

Pete takes a long breath, calming himself. ‘I know. And I’m not looking for an apology, Lucy. I just want you to *care*.’ He slumps in the chair next to her, looking at her closely. ‘You look like shit.’

‘Thank you?’

‘No, I mean – have you been sleeping?’

‘Not much.’

‘Lucy...’

Here it comes – the inevitable ‘I told you so’. That she’s too fragile, too consumed by grief to do this job. And she fucking hates it.

‘I’m not coming home, Pete. I’m not leaving—’

‘Jack?’

‘No! I’m not leaving everyone to carry on without me. There are hundreds of people here, and I’m a part of it. This is what I do. I go out with

the dogs, and we search. And yes, it's difficult, shitty work, but it's my job. You know this, Pete. We do this every day, rain or shine.'

'Victim recovery isn't your job—'

'But I'm out here, helping. That means something to me. I can make a difference.'

Pete pauses, his eyes narrowing. 'And what about Jack?'

'What about Jack?'

'He's here. You're both here, together. I see the way he looks at you. I know he wants more. I can't stand the thought of you being here with him.'

'So I need to come home because you're jealous? Do you know how ridiculous that sounds?'

'Ever since you came back from Newcastle, you've been different. You never mention Jack around me, like you're deliberately trying not to bring him up, when before it was always "Jack this" and "Jack that".'

'Sorry, you *want* me to talk about him?'

'No, I...' Pete scrubs his hands down his face, clearly frustrated. 'I want you to talk to *me* at the end of the day. I want to look after you, keep you safe. To be the person you call when you're upset or scared. But I never am. It's always *Jack*.'

'I don't want someone to look after me. I want to do my job!'

'I...'

'What are you saying, Pete?' she snaps.

'This is what you do, Lucy. Can't you see that? Things get difficult in your personal life and you run. You shut off your feelings and find an excuse—'

'This isn't an excuse!'

'You need to decide. Either you walk out of here, collect your stuff from London and come home, or...'

'Or, what?'

'Or that's it. It's over.'

'Pete—'

'I can't stand this anymore,' he interrupts. 'You say that, yes, you do want to be with me. But you'll leave here, and you'll go back to London, with Jack. And then you won't call me. Again. So this is it. Make a decision. And maybe give some thought to the fact that whenever something's bothering you – whenever you run – you end up with him.'

He gestures to the door of the café, and Jack, outside, talking on the phone.

‘There’s nothing going on between me and Jack,’ Lucy says, but her protestation feels weak.

Pete just nods. ‘So you say. But when Nico’s body was found, Jack was there. When you went to Newcastle, to confront your dad about Tansy, Jack went with you. And here you are again, with Jack. It’s up to you, Lucy. Come home, or you and me? It’s over.’

And with that, Pete gets to his feet and leaves the café. Leaving Lucy, sitting alone. Hating herself. Again.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

They drive back to London in silence. Jack wants to ask what she talked about with Pete, but judging from her furious expression, it was nothing good.

Kevin Walsh's warning plays on his mind. Jack's keen to make sure that they're taking all the possible precautions, but it'll only start an argument. And that's not what he wants. At all.

So they drive up the M3, in silence. They sit in traffic on the M4, in silence. And only when he's pulling up outside their Premier Inn does Lucy speak.

'See you tonight?' she says.

'What time?'

'Meet you in the restaurant at eight?'

He nods and Lucy gets out of the car. She still hasn't met his gaze.

Luckily, the investigation doesn't give Jack any time to worry. He's swept back in the middle of everything the moment he arrives at CTC, Lynch talking nineteen to the dozen as she goes through the events of the day. A tall, thin man trails behind them, one of the new DCs, Jack assumes.

'Gary King is still refusing to talk but we've got him nailed down,' Sharon says, following Jack into his office. 'His route from the point of the explosion to where he dumped his clothing is fully tracked, and we have multiple fingerprints and DNA samples from the bomb factory that confirm he was there. CPS have given the green light to charge.'

'Brilliant.' Jack shrugs his jacket off and settles behind his desk, as Lynch continues.

'The deep dive into Kevin Walsh and the Bevan family is ongoing, give us more time on that one. I've left another message for Gary King's ex, but she's not returning my calls. They're still searching both Gary King's address and the bomb factory flat – no useful intel yet, but they have found a set of timers, which takes us to Craig.'

‘Craig?’

Sharon points to the tall thin man, who waves somewhat comically, given the circumstances. ‘Our resident bomb expert.’

‘Ah, Craig, take a seat. Thank you.’

Craig sits awkwardly in the chair opposite, while Sharon leans against the wall behind him.

‘Go on...’ Jack says.

‘Well, DCI Ellis, the first bomb is what we suspected – an ANFO, or ammonium nitrate fuel oil mix. Combine that with a small charge of Semtex—’

‘The stuff stolen by Gary King from the quarry?’

‘Right. Trigger the Semtex first and the whole thing explodes. It was the same type used in the 1993 Bishopsgate bomb, so we should be thankful it didn’t cause more damage.’

Given the ever-rising casualty numbers, Jack doesn’t feel particularly appreciative, but he lets Craig continue.

‘Forensic teams have been filtering through the wreckage. It’s surprising what survives – power supplies, switches, wires. The plastic from a lunchbox or whatever it was contained in. Every bomb leaves clues and, in this case, they found pieces of a timer in the wreckage, confirming my theory that that’s the mechanism they used to delay the second bomb. Except, as we know, it went off early, killing Daniel Bevan. They might also be using traps like tilting devices or switches on lids, which detonate automatically when they’re disturbed.’

‘To prevent people disarming them?’ Craig nods. ‘I’m assuming this couldn’t be made in a small flat or house?’

‘Absolutely not. This was not made on the Oakmount Estate. You’re looking for a garage or a farm. Some sort of large outbuilding. The ammonium nitrate is an agricultural fertiliser and would need to be ground down to a fine powder. In the past, the IRA used small handheld coffee grinders – but I’m assuming they have something more efficient now. Either way, that stuff stinks, then mix it with petrol or diesel and there would be no hiding it.’

‘And they stole this from farms?’

‘As MI5 said. The location should be obvious – a lot of cars or trucks going to and fro, probably a fair amount of noise. Pity they couldn’t have narrowed it down sooner.’

Indeed, Jack thinks with a frown. They still don't know where these bombs were made – another priority to add to the list. 'And the bombs manufactured at the Oakmount Estate?'

'TATP, as you thought. A nasty mix, very unstable, made from concentrated hydrogen peroxide. Now, you can easily buy that, although if you purchase a lot without a good reason, people ask questions, so they must have had to use the guise of a hair salon, or something similar. It's shockingly easy to buy the rest – bits and pieces from any hardware store, no one would bat an eyelid. A bomb like that isn't massively powerful, but bombers usually pack nails and screws around it, making it more lethal. Same as the type used on 7/7. A battery is linked to that, then an electrical wire to the button. You press the button or set the timer to countdown, and... boom.'

He looks positively thrilled, and Jack reluctantly accepts that this is this guy's Disneyworld. Craig can have his moment in the sun. 'And where is that bomb now?' Jack asks.

Craig looks to Sharon, and she pauses, her face stricken. 'That's the problem. We don't know. And before you ask, nor does MI5.'

'Excellent,' Jack mutters sarcastically. 'Where would they have got the expertise to make these sorts of bombs? Would one of them have to be a chemist?'

'Not necessarily,' Craig replies. 'Search Google and we'd have them on a watch list, but there's so much information on the dark web, they could have just gone there. Because ISIS want people making bombs, they happily share this sort of information. The anarchist's cookbook is still the number-one bible for these people.'

'Thank you,' Jack says, and Sharon ushers Craig away, leaving him alone.

Jack sits for a moment, listening to the bustle and chatter outside in the incident room. Huge teams of detectives working to locate the garage, track down the three accomplices, find the missing bomb.

Detective Superintendent Digby may be the strategic SIO but Jack's the one on the ground, keeping Operation Staircase running.

If they don't find that bomb, if the wretched thing explodes, if more people are killed – that's on him.

The pressure sits on Jack's chest, threatening to suffocate him.

He can't let that happen. He won't.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

Destructive self-recriminations will have to wait – it's not long before Sharon pokes her head around the door.

'Oh, and guv? I forgot to say – there's a psychologist here to see you in conference room one. Been waiting all morning.'

'Oh, shit! Seriously?'

Jack jumps to his feet, and Lynch follows him, confused, as Jack embraces the man, patiently waiting in the side room.

'Russell!' Jack says, and the two men greet each other with manly slaps on the back. 'I'm so sorry to keep you waiting. You should have told me you were coming.'

'I did – I sent an email,' the man replies, but he's smiling. 'I figured you were busy. Some things never change, eh, Jack?'

'Sorry, Sharon, this is Professor Russell Goddard. We were at university together. Russ – this is DI Sharon Lynch, my second in command.'

'We've met,' Sharon says, shaking Russell's hand. 'And he's here because...?'

'Believe it or not, Russell is a forensic psychologist. He talks to serial killers.'

'Only one,' Russ says, with a shrug. 'And that was years ago. Most of the time I'm lecturing or in my office. Working with the Met when they need me—'

'But your speciality is the psychology of terror attacks, right?' Russell nods, bashfully. 'Sharon – gather the team!'

Russ protests half-heartedly but seeing his old friend has given Jack a massive boost. They lived in halls together – Jack studying law with criminology, Russell doing psychology, so their lectures intersected. Since then, Russell's made a name for himself, and Jack has enjoyed seeing his friend's intelligent comments quoted in newspapers and articles, providing invaluable insight into the people that kill, especially bombers. Jack didn't expect him to return his call so quickly, let alone turn up, but he's keen to hear what he has to say.

The team gather, happy to have a break from monotonous CCTV or trawls through endless phone bills, and Jack stands up in front of them.

Despite his extensive experience at the front of lecture halls, Russell seems nervous, pulling at the collar of his tweed jacket.

‘Everyone,’ Jack begins, ‘this is Professor Russell Goddard. Please listen carefully, because he has important information to impart.’

‘Oh, I don’t know about that,’ Russell says, nervously.

Jack takes a seat at the side of the room, giving Russell an encouraging smile.

The professor clears his throat, then pulls a sheaf of paper from his messenger bag, dropping a few pieces on the floor. One of the DCs hands them back to him, and Russell shuffles them, searching for the one he needs.

‘So,’ he says. ‘Bombers.’

His nerves have the team worried, a few of them glancing Jack’s way, confused. But Jack has faith in Russell. At university he was the same. Coming across as bumbling and insecure, before he swooped in, winning the girl, or the round in *University Challenge*, as he had in 2003.

Now, Russell dispenses with his notes and looks out at the sea of expectant faces.

‘What do we know about bombers?’ he asks. The room is silent. ‘What could make someone commit such a terrible act? What is their driving force?’

‘Revenge?’ one of the DCs suggests. ‘As with 9/11 – because they hated the West.’

‘That’s simplifying matters,’ Russell says with a nod, ‘but yes, mission-orientated bombers have a specific demographic in mind. A person or group they are focused on. Ted Kaczynski, the Unabomber, believed that all development since the Industrial Revolution was dangerous, and targeted educational establishments, technology companies and corporate businesses. Anything else?’

When no further suggestions are forthcoming, he continues: ‘Three factors interplay when we’re looking at motivations – malice, power disparity and mental illness. And in our case, I believe we’re looking at all three.’

He glances over at Jack, and Jack grins. This is the man he remembers – smart, knowledgeable, compelling.

‘Groups such as the IRA had no wish to injure innocent victims, so often sent out bomb warnings. These showed intent and were a means of

extortion – to make their feelings known. But our man did no such thing – he wanted people hurt, and we have to ask why.’

‘Sadism?’ Lynch asks.

‘Partly, yes. They wanted to see people suffer. Scare London into submission. That’s your element of malice. But I think what’s most interesting here is the power disparity. DCI Ellis shared the theory with me that the bombers are going after first responders – police being their main target – and what better example of a group of people with power. Literal authority to lock you up. It’s been said that dynamite is the great equaliser, and I believe they see themselves as David, felling Goliath with their equivalent of a slingshot. They feel powerless, wronged somehow – so you’re looking for an event in their past that provided the inciting incident.’

Jack thinks about Daniel Bevan and his abusive father. The well-respected DI who beat up his wife. So what was in Gary King’s past? What was the tipping point in his life?

‘You keep on saying “they”,’ one of the DC asks. ‘Are we looking for a group rather than one individual?’

‘In the past, bombers tended to be suspicious loners who didn’t trust anyone, but now, as with 9/11 and 7/7, we’re looking at organised groups with similar aims. It’s not easy to work out how to make a bomb without triggering MI5, so you’re looking for someone technical, who takes pride in the brilliance of their design and construction, as well as someone power-motivated – who’s attracted to the destruction. They’re probably of average intelligence, and an underachiever. Cowardly and inadequate, they’re the sort of person you wouldn’t be able to pick out of a crowd. Does that match the guy you have in custody?’

Nods from the team, and Jack has to agree – that does sound like Gary King. But Kevin Walsh comes to mind, so Jack asks: ‘What about the ringleader – the guy in charge? What can we expect from them?’

Russell thinks for a second. ‘They’d need to be neat, meticulous, organised,’ he says, almost to himself. ‘To incentivise a group like this – where so much danger is involved – he’s persuasive, smart and ruthless. When we’re looking at profiling criminals, it comes more from the target and the victims. What’s the motivation? Look for the why. The first and second crimes are most significant in terms of their behaviour – they’re rough and ready, they make mistakes that tell us what’s going on.’ He looks at Jack. ‘But you don’t have a second bomb, do you?’

A shiver runs down Jack's spine, bringing back the cold as he thinks about the bomb factory and the TATP. 'Should we expect one?' he asks.

'Almost certainly. They'll have got the taste for it now. The power, the destruction. If your current suspect is the man on the ground, you need to be searching for the man in charge.' Russell looks out to the team, each one spellbound by his words. 'Cut off the head of the snake. Before it strikes again.'

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CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

The man walks the streets of Marylebone, confident, assured. He blends in; in his black, wool coat and smart shoes, he looks like any one of these suits, hurrying to get to their meetings, to snatch a bit of lunch before their next appointment. He has none of that urgency; right now, there is nowhere he needs to be, but here.

The hard work has been done, the groundwork laid. So the first bomb didn't go as planned, but they have fallbacks for just this eventuality. Two types of bomb in two different bomb factories. Spread your risk, diversify your portfolio. Not so different to a businessman. After all, he's here to make money, just as they are.

He's learned a bit about bombs. Which ones will take down a building, which ones are easiest to carry. He enjoys the precision of the manufacturing process, the skill in creating. This is the sort of stuff he likes to learn about, so no wonder he did terribly at school – they weren't teaching him the right things.

He takes a left and ends up on Oxford Street. From here he can see the bomb site, smell the smoke. He walks towards it.

Huge boards have been erected around the area, blocking Londoners from the wreckage beyond. But the extent of the devastation is still clear. The hole where the building once stood, teetering walls either side, barely reinforced with scaffolding and metal.

He's not a humble man; he wouldn't have got this far if he was. He takes pride in his achievements, listening to the people beyond the hoarding, digging, shouting, desperately searching for survivors. He smiles, selects a cigarette out of his pocket and lights it, taking a long drag. He did this. He made this happen.

He starts to walk again, considering the days ahead. So the police have arrested Gary King and they've been talking to Daniel's family. But he's not worried. Nobody knows the full picture. Only tell the worker bees what they need to keep the honey coming, that's his motto.

But something about it bothers him. They were the weak links – Gary and Daniel. He doesn't like to work alone but he's not one of those bosses who stands by, shouting instructions. No. He gets involved.

He lives for the rush of adrenaline, the blood racing in his veins. He likes nothing more than the feeling of a human body in his hands, the catch of their breath, the terror in their eyes. The sweat and the smell of their fear as they realise what's coming next. Men, women – they're all the same, but he has to admit, he prefers the fairer sex. Their soft skin, the warmth of their mouths. Their sobs while he fucks them.

The cigarette's finished while he's been standing here. He drops it and crushes it underfoot, then turns for home.

Another shipment is coming in, more product to satisfy his customers, and he needs to be ready.

There's still time, he tells himself. He needs to be patient.

He'll get his hands dirty soon enough.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

‘Sorry to be the bearer of bad news,’ Russell says after, as they sit in Jack’s office. ‘I can be a bit blunt.’

‘No, you were fine,’ Jack replies. He looks out to the incident room where the team are busily working, heads down, trying to locate the missing bombers. ‘It’s good to be reminded what the stakes are.’

‘You’re no closer to catching whoever’s at the top?’

‘We’re making progress. Slowly.’

‘Well, if anyone can do it, you can. I remember what you were like at university, Jack. You haven’t changed.’

‘What do you mean?’ Jack says with a smile.

‘Single-minded. Determined. At the expense of everything else, usually. Remember when you were writing your dissertation? You didn’t sleep or eat for days.’

‘You’re exaggerating—’

‘I’m not. Let me guess – you’re still single. No kids?’

‘Spot on.’ Jack laughs. ‘I forgot how annoying you can be, Russ. Go on, then, what else have you noticed about me?’

Russell studies him for a moment. ‘There’s something on your mind.’

‘Yeah, catching a murderous bomber.’

‘More than that. Share?’

Jack sits back with a sigh. ‘There’s this woman—’

‘There always is.’

‘Close friend, copper. We work together and... well, she received a death threat this morning.’

‘Is it credible?’

‘The man’s in prison, but he has connections on the outside. And I think he’s linked to this bomb. Should I be worried?’

‘Yes.’ Russell sits forward in his seat. ‘You probably see this sort of thing every day, but you need to take it seriously. Isn’t it better to take precautions and have nothing happen, than the alternative?’

‘True.’ Jack’s phone starts ringing on his desk. He picks it up: *Amrit*.

‘You’re busy, I’ll get out of your hair.’

‘It was good to see you, Russ. Thank you for coming down.’

And with a final handshake, Russell heads off, closing the door behind him.

Jack answers the phone. 'Amrit, what's up?'

A laugh down the line. 'That's what I like about working for you, guv. No faffing around.'

'Sorry – how are you? How's the team?'

'They're all fine. I'm fine. And yes, I didn't call to chat.'

'You've got something back on the rucksack?'

'Not yet, no. But I was going through the responses on the tip line, from January, when we first went out to the public, and I think there's something here. A witness says she saw Tansy arguing with a young man, in November last year.'

'Where? In Southampton?'

'No, Winchester town centre, but close enough.'

'Why didn't we follow up on this at the time?'

'We were busy. Low on staff, and that stranger rape had come in. Anyway, better late than never, she's coming in tomorrow. I'll update you then – wanted to give you the heads-up.' She pauses. 'You told Lucy about the credit cards, right? The possible link to Daniel Bevan?'

'No. Not yet.'

'Jack! We've been here before. Tell her. Tonight.'

'Fine. Fine. I will.'

Amrit hangs up, reassured. Lucy hates secrets, but the last thing Jack wants to do is add to her stress. Still, Jack knows Amrit's right – he has to be honest, and make Lucy see the danger behind Kevin Walsh's threat.

For the first time, Jack feels like they're making progress. They have one man in custody, an ID for the second and a link to a man in jail, who's going nowhere. One of the bomb factories has been locked down, and it won't be long before they find the second. The more search and rescue dig, the more survivors they find – another man was pulled out this afternoon, and the resulting optimism cannot be underestimated.

But it doesn't take long before Jack's bubble is burst. Raised voices from the incident room attract his attention, and he looks out to where Lynch is having a stand-up row with one of the DCs. He gets to his feet, striding out to their desks.

They stop as Jack approaches.

'What's going on?' he asks.

‘Tell him,’ Sharon barks at the DC.

The DC colours. ‘I was set the task of looking into Gary King’s background but I got distracted and I only came back to it today...’

Jack feels an echo of Sharon’s anger – this should have been priority. But shouting at the team won’t get them anywhere, especially when they’re barely on his side as it is.

He suppresses his annoyance. ‘And?’

‘And in 2012, when he was arrested for agg burg, he put in a complaint to the IOPC. Claimed he was beaten up by the arresting officer. It came to nothing, the IOPC found no fault, but could this be...’

‘His inciting incident? Yeah, it’s possible. Starts a decades-long grudge against the police. Do we know who the arresting officer was?’

‘Looking into it.’

‘And Gary King’s daughter? Have you found the mother of his child?’

‘Still not returning our calls.’

‘Bloody follow up,’ Lynch snaps. ‘Get someone from Response to go out there and track her down if you need to.’

Jack watches this exchange with interest. It’s unlike Lynch to lose her temper with the team. ‘Sharon? A word?’ he asks as they move away. She follows him back to his office. ‘Close the door.’

‘I’ll follow up, guv. I’m sorry – this shouldn’t have happened. I should have kept an eye on him—’

‘Sharon,’ he says, interrupting her.

She stops, looking sheepish.

‘Is everything okay?’ he asks.

‘Okay, guv?’

‘Yes. That in there – I’ve only known you for a short time, but you’re not usually so abrupt. What’s up?’

She sighs and stares at the floor. ‘I’m just tired,’ she says to her feet.

Jack’s heart goes out to her. ‘This is a tough job, and you’ve been working harder than most. Go home. Have an early night. Come back rested in the morning.’

‘But—’

‘No buts. We can live without you for one evening.’

‘Okay. But, guv, we are going to catch these guys, aren’t we? I saw the latest stats – thirty-one confirmed dead, hundreds injured. We can’t let them

get away with it.' A trace of anger bites through as she says this, her cheeks pink in the middle. 'I asked to be on this team, I want to see it through.'

'And you will. We do our best. And that will get results.' He appraises her for a moment, limbs stiff, jaw tight. 'Are you sure you're okay?'

'Yes, fine. Thanks, guv. See you tomorrow.'

She turns and leaves; Jack watches as she collects her bag without a word to anyone.

She's frustrated, full of rage and running on fumes, but it seems to Jack there's something else, lurking beneath the surface. Something personal. If they're correct, and the police force is the target for the bombers, then they all have a right to be scared and fearful.

But why does it seem to be hitting Sharon Lynch harder than most?

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CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

The last thing Lucy wants to do is sit alone in her hotel room, but the PolSA confirms there is no job for Otto or Moss this afternoon, instructing her to take some well-earned rest.

As if she can. The argument with Pete circles through her mind and, sick of staring at the same four walls, she puts her running gear on and sets off through the capital.

She hadn't expected she would use her trainers, assuming she'd be tired past exhaustion every night, but now she's out she feels a hundred times better. The pavement under her feet, a fresh wind keeping her cool, dodging pedestrians and commuters as she takes a route down to the Thames and along the embankment. She runs for miles, a Nineties playlist thumping a beat past St Paul's, ending up at the Tower of London.

Thoughts bubble and pop in her brain. Pete said he wanted to look after her, but the thought of it is suffocating. She doesn't want to be wrapped in cotton wool; she wants to be out there, helping. And yes, it's been hard, and yes, at times she feels down and can't sleep, but what's the alternative? She goes home, gets put on light duties? Loses her dogs to some other handler? To a *man*?

No, that's not what's going to happen. She's proven herself as one of the dog unit. As good, if not better, than the male handlers on the team. So, why can't Pete understand she's not going to pack it in at the first sign of weakness?

She gasps a breath, resting her hands on her knees. The shame and anger around Pete's ultimatum have faded, replaced with sadness. She's not packing up and going home, so what does that mean? Is that it? She feels totally at sea, lost and alone.

How have things gone so wrong, so fast? Less than a week ago, they'd been having a romantic dinner for two and now they've split up.

But maybe there had been signs before.

Pete's growing resentment of Jack. Lucy's descent into depression when Tansy's body was found. She blames herself for Tansy leaving and has been taking it out on everyone around her. Pete's been tolerant and understanding

– up to now. She doesn't blame him for dumping her; he's taken more than enough shit over the year they've officially been together.

But that ultimatum. *Come home or it's over.* Ever since Pete said it, it's replayed like a broken record, reminding her of different times. She leans on the railing, looking at the tower and the turrets beyond. Pete is nothing like Nico, her ex-husband, but in that moment, it felt like control. It felt like manipulation. It felt like if she didn't do as he said there'd be consequences for her at home.

And that's a feeling she can't ignore. Not again.

She turns for the hotel, covering the three miles in record time. She takes a moment when she gets back to rest her legs and lies back on her bed, only to wake up hours later, cold and shivering.

The day has passed without her noticing. Her tiredness caught up with her, and now the evening has closed in, casting shadows across the room. She realises she's ravenous so showers quickly and, pulling on jeans and a sweatshirt, heads downstairs for dinner.

Jack is waiting for her in the restaurant. He has his laptop out on the table and he's peering at it, a mug of something – probably tea – on his left. His jacket is still on but his tie is loose, the top button of his shirt undone.

Lucy pauses: someone is approaching him. A woman. Probably mid-thirties, in a skirt and jacket. She stands next to his table, and he looks up, unsure but polite. She twirls a lock of her blonde hair around a finger and Lucy hears her twinkly laugh. *She's flirting with him*, Lucy thinks, with a sting of jealousy.

She watches them for a moment, noting as that twitch of envy turns into something more. *So you do like him*, her consciousness notes. *You're not 'just' friends.*

Jack slowly closes the lid of his laptop. Lucy can't hear what they're saying but she can imagine. The tilt of her head – *Can I join you?* Jack's uncertain smile, then, *Sorry, no.* He points to the chair next to his. *I'm waiting for someone*, maybe? Because Lucy can't understand why he'd turn this woman down. She's gorgeous – the height of her heel makes her calf curve beautifully as her jacket cuts in, highlighting her delicate waist. Lucy wants to barge in there, split up this nice chat, but he's looking around now, catching her eye. His smile changes, broader, warmer, and he points to where she's standing in the doorway. The woman turns, and her expression evolves into disappointment and confusion. She's thinking, *How can this*

woman – *this scruffy mess with no make-up – be with this man?* There's no escaping it now; Lucy heads over, giving the woman a polite smile.

'Hi, I'm Lucy,' she says to the woman. 'I work with Jack.'

'You work together?'

'For the police.'

'You're...' Her tone has changed. No longer so flirty, more guarded. She recovers with a smile. 'I thought I'd seen you before,' she says to Jack. 'You were on TV.'

'I guess so.'

'The DCI.'

'That's me.'

There's an awkward pause, then the woman laughs. 'Well, I'll leave you to it. I'm sorry I disturbed you—'

'Not at all—'

'But with everything that's happened over the last few days, life is too short. And if I don't approach a handsome man when I see one, I'll regret it later.'

Lucy looks at Jack, amused, as his cheeks colour. 'Nice to meet you,' he stutters out, and the woman smiles one last time, and is gone.

Lucy sits opposite him with a grin, lighter now the threat has left. 'You could have had a nice evening with her,' she teases. 'Maybe even a nice morning, too.'

Jack scoffs. 'Don't be daft. She said she's away with work. She wanted some company, that's all.'

'Company in bed, more like.'

He gives her another look. 'I'm having dinner with you.' He leans back, picking up his mug and taking a swig of what must be cold tea. 'Ready?'

'For something stronger, yes. You?'

'Get me a pint of something. And the menus.'

Lucy does as she's told, but once she's at the bar, ordering their drinks, she looks back to their table. He's opened his laptop again and looks so characteristically Jack that Lucy pauses for a moment, trying to see him for the first time, as that woman had. Handsome, yes, but tired, his shoulders slumped, his hair ruffled. If she were single, would she approach him at a bar? Assuming, as that woman had, that he was a businessman away with work. No wedding ring. Alone. Would she give him a second glance?

But Jack means more to her than just a random man in a bar. She's always felt comfortable in his presence; he has a competence and calmness she likes. She trusts him implicitly, always has.

He looks over at her and smiles, and she feels that odd shift again. Last time it was when they were up in Newcastle. Away from home. Expectations removed, and he was someone different. They both were.

And Lucy has to admit: she likes that Jack turned that woman down. That he didn't even consider the possibility of a one-night stand, or maybe more, because having dinner with her was more important. Lucy means something to Jack. She doesn't know what, but *something*.

'That'll be £11.50.' The barman distracts her away from her strange thoughts, and she presses her card against the reader, then carries the drinks across to the table, two menus tucked under her arm.

'How was the rest of your day?' Jack asks, as she takes a seat opposite him again.

'They didn't need me, so I went for a run.'

'All afternoon?'

'Six miles total, to the Tower of London and back. And then I had a nap. I guess I was tired.'

'Good. You needed the rest.'

'Looking old and haggard now, am I?'

'Never,' Jack says with a grin. 'Listen, Lucy,' he begins, serious now. 'I need to talk to you about something.'

'Look – I refuse to take Kevin Walsh's bullshit threat seriously. I have a life to live, a job to do—'

'It's about Tansy.'

'Oh.'

'While we've been away, Amrit has been reviewing the case files and following up on some unresolved leads. And she found Tansy's rucksack. It had been fished out of the Solent and handed into lost property at the Red Jet.'

'What was in it?' Lucy asks. Her hunger has disappeared, replaced by something else, chewing in the pit of her stomach.

'Clothes. A diary they're hoping to dry out. And a few credit cards. Stolen credit cards.' He pauses. 'One of them was in the same name as the card found in Daniel Bevan's bedroom.'

‘What?’ Lucy’s guilt is replaced by confusion as Jack takes her through the possible link between their dead bomber and Lucy’s half-sister.

‘They knew each other?’

‘They might have done. Or they were sold credit cards from the same stolen batch. It’s hard to know. But Amrit’s interviewing a witness tomorrow. Someone who says she saw Tansy arguing in Winchester a month before her body was found.’

‘An eyewitness! What can they possibly remember now?’

‘I don’t know,’ Jack says, levelly. ‘But it’s worth a try.’

‘Right.’ Lucy takes a long swig from her beer, wishing she’d ordered spirits. ‘I just want to know what happened to her.’ To her surprise her voice catches, emotion forcing its way through. She clears her throat and takes another sip. ‘Is that too much to ask?’

‘No, it’s not.’ Jack leans forward across the table, placing a hand on her arm. ‘And it’s not a weakness if you ask for a break. Go home. See Pete. You’ve done more than enough already.’

‘I’ll be fine—’

‘Someone in my team asked to be transferred today. And nobody thought any less of him—’

‘Jack...’

‘Plus, this threat from Kevin Walsh—’

‘No. Please, Jack. Can we just order dinner and leave it be?’

He gets the hint. ‘Fine.’

‘And besides, it’s done with Pete. It’s over.’

‘Seriously?’

Lucy can’t make eye contact. Why is it that when Jack tells her she should go home, she reacts differently? There was none of the same anger or annoyance. Maybe it’s because Jack knows when to stop; he trusts her to make her own decisions, rather than trying to contain her, put her in a little box. Something between her and Pete has shifted, and she doesn’t like where it’s going.

But Jack’s still watching her, waiting for her to explain.

‘Pete gave me an ultimatum,’ Lucy says. ‘Come home or we break up. You can work out the rest. Now can we change the subject?’

Jack slowly nods, digesting the news. ‘Okay. But if you ever want to talk about it—’

‘I won’t. Now, if I get the chicken curry and you get the halloumi skewer, can I have some of your chips?’

They order; the food arrives. They eat in silence, comfortable in each other’s company. Lucy finishes off Jack’s fries and, after, they split a chocolate brownie.

‘Are you going to be able to sleep after your marathon nap earlier?’

Lucy runs a finger through the remainder of the sauce, feeling pleasantly dopey and full. ‘I think so.’

‘In your room or mine?’

It’s a genuine question, given last night, but Lucy feels a strange fizz in her belly, a twist of anticipation.

‘Yours?’ she says, tentatively.

‘Okay. Do you want another drink?’

‘No, I’m good.’

The conversation turns stilted, and soon after they get to their feet, Jack packing up his laptop. She follows him out, thanks him for holding the door open, presses the button for the lift.

All of a sudden, she can’t look at him. The lift rises to the third floor; they get out, walk along the corridor.

‘I’ll...’ she says, holding up her room key.

‘Okay.’

She lets herself into her room, gets changed into her joggers and T-shirt, then goes into the bathroom and cleans her teeth. She looks at herself in the mirror, mouth white with froth, skin pale under the harsh lights, and dismisses the thought that’s been going through her head for the past ten minutes.

No, she tells herself. He doesn’t see you like that.

She spits out the toothpaste, rinses her mouth and hesitates.

‘You’re overthinking this,’ she says sternly, out loud to her empty room.

And with that, she picks up her key card and phone and walks the few doors down to room 312.

She knocks.

Jack opens the door, backs away to let her through. He’s discarded his jacket and tie, and as the door closes behind her, she senses something’s

changed. She's not sure whether it's the way she's suddenly hyper aware of him – the smell of his aftershave, the way he stands, watching her – or the look on his face. Whatever easy air they had at dinner has gone, replaced with a strange silence, an intensity.

He's standing close to her. Too close, so that she's looking up at him as he gently cups the back of her head in his hand. The butterflies have turned into a full army; she meets his gaze, his eyes searching, questioning.

And then she doesn't have to wonder anymore. He bends down, touching her jaw with his other hand as he presses his lips to hers. At first, it's gentle, but she reaches for him, pulling him closer, and he responds, gripping her hip, his fingers in her hair.

She tastes the mint of his toothpaste, loves the way he brushes his tongue against hers, the feel of his stubble rasping against her chin. She presses closer to him. Everything touching. *Everything*, and it feels so good.

He pushes her back against the wall but hesitates; she can feel the desperation in his breathing as he pulls away.

She looks at him, curiously.

'Tell me to stop,' he says, his mouth almost on hers.

'Don't,' she breathes back, and it's all the encouragement he needs.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

It's been a bloody long time since Jack's had sex and all he wants to do is rip her clothes off, but this is *Lucy*. This is no one-night stand. He needs to be careful, not go too fast too soon, but it seems she hasn't got the memo. Her legs are tangled in his, bringing them impossibly close together, and *shit*, he hates these trousers, the cotton of his boxer shorts, the fabric of the joggers she's wearing. She pushes one hand down the waistband and grabs his bum, pulling him closer, but he hesitates. For the first time in his well-thought-through life he went after what he wanted and kissed her, but now he hates himself as he pulls his mouth from hers again.

'Are you...?' he whispers.

'Sure?' He nods. 'Yes.'

'This is—'

'Yes. This is what I want.'

He looks at her a moment longer, a wisp of escaping hair framing her face, her lips red.

'I don't want you to regret this,' he says, quietly. 'Tomorrow.'

She kisses him tenderly, then runs her fingers slowly up his back, under his shirt. It makes Jack almost shudder with longing.

'I won't,' she whispers, her breath warm against his ear.

And that's as much as Jack can stand.

The time for thinking is over. His mouth crashes against hers in a sudden kiss; he runs his hands down to her arse, her legs, picking her up and dropping her on the bed. She laughs as he climbs on top of her with a smile, finding the waistband of her joggers and sliding them down. Over her hips, down her thighs, and she kicks them off, dropping them in a heap on the carpet. His hands slip under her T-shirt, up the soft skin on her side, cupping her bloody perfect breasts, lowering his mouth to her nipple to suck and tease and nip. She gasps, tugging her T-shirt off, pulling his shirt over his head so his warm skin is against hers for the first time. He pulls her close, savouring it all. He can't get enough of her, running his tongue over her collarbone, tasting her skin, burying his face in her neck and inhaling her as if she were a drug.

She responds, making a noise deep in her throat that crystallises his desire, and he runs his hands down, enjoying every curve, every dip.

And she's doing the same. Her hands roam; the flat of her palm over his shoulders, her legs around his hips. He moves lower, running his mouth, his lips, his tongue over her stomach, gently biting at her hip bone, sliding her knickers down, his hands on her bum, his fingers, tongue inside her.

Her hands in his hair, her hips coming up to meet him.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

Whatever Lucy thought Jack would be like in bed, it wasn't that. She imagined him polite, gentle, reverent, and while he was all of those things, he was also urgent, almost desperate, and really fucking assured.

After, still catching her breath, she looks over at him, and he meets her gaze, his blue-grey eyes meeting hers, crinkling around the edges as he smiles.

'Well...' he says.

She grins, all self-consciousness gone. 'Well.' She rolls over to her front, and he pulls her into his chest. She rests her head on him, hearing the thud of his heartbeat, feeling the rise and fall of his breathing.

There's a reassuring solidity to him, and she wraps her arms around him, holding him close. For a moment, it makes her want to cry. This strange connection, a sudden ray of sunshine in a world that has otherwise seemed so dark.

'We should have done that sooner,' he says, kissing the top of her head.

'No,' she replies, and he looks down at her quizzically. 'I think we did that at exactly the right time.'

They pull apart long enough for them both to use the bathroom and then, wrapped in each other under the duvet, they fall asleep.

Lucy doesn't notice the time when they doze off, but when she next wakes, a pale blue dawn is trickling through the edge of the curtains. She glances across, confused, but it's not her alarm making all the noise, it's Jack's phone.

He's sleeping so deeply that he doesn't wake until she gently runs her fingers through his hair, placing her hand tenderly on his chest.

'Jack. Jack?' He grunts, his eyes still shut. 'Your phone's ringing.'

His eyes snap open, instantly alert, and he turns, grabbing it from the bedside.

His voice is gruff with sleep as he answers, 'Ellis?'

The transformation is immediate – his forehead crinkling into a frown, his mouth forming a hard line. He nods, listening.

‘I’ll be ready in fifteen. Have a car waiting.’

He replaces the phone on the bedside table and for a moment he’s still.

‘What is it, Jack?’

He stays silent, rolling over towards her, pulling her into a tight hug. She responds, confused, until he pulls away, pressing a final kiss against her forehead.

‘I’ve got to go.’ And he says the words they’ve been dreading all week. ‘There’s been another explosion.’

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DAY 5 – TUESDAY

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CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

PC Grant Cooper has been a copper in the Metropolitan Police for approximately nine years and eight months, but he has never felt fear like this. He's faced knife-wielding thugs in dark alleyways, drug dealers frothing pink at the mouth as he administered CPR, but stepping into this dark Tube tunnel is something else.

Men and women stream past him. Their previously smart suits are crumpled and dirty, covered in some sort of greasy residue. Tears leave clean lines on their dust-covered faces as they head up the stairs, jumping the gates, heading towards the light and clear, fresh air. Black smoke grows thicker as Grant descends; it smells sticky, of chemicals and something bad.

He's police. He's had the training – he runs towards the danger, not away; adrenaline takes over as he gets to the platform. The train is about a hundred metres down the tracks. Stopped, stationary. Slowly, he climbs down from the platform, taking pains to avoid the rails, even though they're telling him the power has been cut. He's not taking the risk.

The procession of walking wounded is slower. Hands pressed to their bleeding heads, blood dripping down their arms, they see him in uniform and try to talk. To tell him what's going on, but few are coherent, words slurred in their panic and shock. Others are catatonic, staring into the distance. He directs them all up – to the fresh air, where the ambulances and paramedics wait.

It goes against his every instinct to turn them away. But his job as first responding officer is to find out what's happened, assess the situation and relay information to the top.

He walks on.

Down the tracks, towards the train. The lights are out in the tunnel and the top third is full of black smoke. He clicks his torch on, the beam catching on the stones beneath his feet, speckled with red, and dropped possessions. A hairclip, a mobile phone, a bank card. Not his job to gather evidence, he tells himself. Keep walking.

The light is dimmer, but now he can hear the screams. Cries for help, wails of pain and desperation. He puts his hand on the metal train; it feels

warm, like a living creature, and he can feel how the walls are buckled and bent. He finds a door; it's twisted and he heaves it open.

He steps into the train. And what he sees is worse than anything he could have imagined.

The seats, the floors, the ceilings are coated in blood. Pools and splashes, streaks and spatters. And among it are the bodies. Some barely human, limbs missing, parts blown off. Others look like they've been barely touched – their eyes open, staring, blank, one man with both legs missing. Those that are still alive, call out to him now, pleading, begging, but he can't stop. There's brain on the ceiling.

'Help is coming,' he says, but he's not so sure. Emergency services can't possibly attend to all these people. They're already spread thin; the bomb on Oxford Street has stretched them to their limits.

Because that's what this is – he's sure now. He stands next to the crater in the middle of the carriage, black scorch marks and twisted metal all around it. The injured and dismembered look like casualties of war from those films Grant likes to watch – a ricochet of death and destruction. He will never see those movies in the same way again.

He puts his hand to his radio, notices his fingers are coated in blood. How did that happen? He presses the button on the top.

'Charlie Alpha Six-Zero,' he says, then clears his throat. 'Charlie Alpha Six-Zero.'

'Go ahead.'

The voice from the control room reassures him, and he clings to it. Clarity, authority, someone in charge.

'It's a bomb,' he says, and he can't stop his voice shaking now. 'Repeat, it's a second bomb.'

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

Detective Superintendent Digby meets Jack in the corridor, looking more crumpled and harried than usual. A sheen of sweat makes his bald head shine, his tie abandoned at half mast.

‘What can I tell you, Jack? It’s a clusterfuck. The higher-ups are shouting at everyone in range, and MI5 are clueless.’

‘What do we know so far?’ Jack says, straightening his collar even though it’s immaculate.

‘It’s a second bomb, no doubt about that. Took out a tube train outside Green Park.’ They start walking down the corridor, heading for the incident room. ‘Forensic teams, bomb disposal and the dogs are down there now but initial reports seem to indicate it’s different from the Selfridges device.’

‘In what way?’

‘The intensity, for one. Something as powerful as the Selfridges bomb would have taken down the whole tunnel. They’d have been digging through rubble for weeks.’

Jack thinks about the TATP bomb manufactured in the flat. ‘We’re assuming this is the same group?’

‘Sounds like it. The hallmarks are the same – public place, no threats or warning call, close to the original bomb. And what are the chances of having more than one group of nutters prepared to blow up London?’ Jack leaves it rhetorical as Digby continues. ‘Although, this time there’s no one fleeing the scene. Whoever went down with the bomb didn’t come up again.’

‘We know this for sure? Where did this come from?’

‘Initial evaluation by 5.’

‘Hmm,’ Jack replies, unconvinced. MI5’s assessments haven’t been helpful up to this point, but he lets it go. They’ll get confirmation for themselves soon enough. ‘A suicide bomber, or an accidental detonation?’

‘Time will tell.’ They pause outside the incident room. ‘DI Lynch has been in for half an hour, pulling together the CCTV. The only good thing about this mess is we’re hitting the ground running – we don’t have to waste time pulling the team together. And before you ask – they’re not changing the terrorism threat level, even though I think we could argue

another attack is highly likely in the near future. They don't want to cause a panic.'

'But they're shutting down the Tube, right?'

'What do you think?' Digby gives him a look. 'That's a lot of lost revenue and it would start a precedent that nobody wants. No – the transport network stays open. We need to catch these guys, ASAP. And by "we" I mean "you". No pressure, Jack. Keep me informed.'

He has the gall to follow that up with a smile, and then Digby is away, hurrying towards his office no doubt, where he can field calls from the press and those on high in peace. Jack doesn't envy his job – politics has never been his strong point – and appreciates the work his boss is doing, keeping the stupid questions away from him.

The doors are closed to the incident room, but Jack can hear the frantic gabble of conversation, phones ringing, hurried footsteps. He feels panic settling in and takes a moment to collect himself in the corridor. *You have a job to do*, he tells himself sternly. *This is what you signed up for. What you do best.*

His brain may be in turmoil, but he must seem calm and collected on the outside. He's the SIO, the man in charge. He will not let his team down.

But how he wishes he could be somewhere else right now. He imagines Lucy, still in bed. The warmth of the duvet, the softness of her skin. In reality, she would have been called and now be up and working, but the image is calming and he takes a moment, remembering last night, her smile, the way she looked at him – part surprise, part desire.

The door opens forcefully next to him, making him jump out of his reveries.

'Oh, guv. You're here.' Lynch, in full panic stations.

'I am. Fill me in.'

'At the moment, reports are saying twenty to twenty-five people have been killed, many more injured. We were lucky – it was early so there weren't many people in the carriage. Imagine if it had been rush hour.' She points to the huge TV screen as they walk inside. 'The news channels have seized on it already. Reporting an explosion on the Tube, just outside Green Park station. Less than a mile away from Oxford Street.'

Jack stops and watches the news for a moment. The journalists are already questioning the capability of MI5 and the Met Police, conjuring up a storm of righteous indignation. A hurricane he's in the heart of.

The footage shows commuters wandering, phones pressed to their stunned faces. Suits rendered grey from the dust. Faces black, gaping mouths, wide eyes. Blue lights flash on the brickwork.

There is a stoicism to the emergency responders. Gritted teeth as they get on with their jobs. Paramedics treating the wounded; uniformed police officers taking down names and information; the fire and rescue teams huddled over a map, working out the best routes in and out.

‘Guv?’

‘Sorry, go on.’

‘The bomb team are down there now, looking for the detonator, and they’ll test to determine the sort of explosive, but they’re working on the theory that it’s TATP – the same mix used in the 7/7 bombs. At the moment we don’t know whether the bomber got on at Green Park, or whether he got on the Jubilee line earlier, but we’re scouring CCTV.’

Jack nods in approval. ‘Carry on, keep me updated. But treat everyone as a suspect – every victim, everyone injured. Until we have concrete evidence that the bomber was killed in the blast, we have to rule them out, one by one.’

‘Will do. But, guv?’

‘Yes?’

‘Are we still sticking to our previous theory? That they’re targeting coppers. Because this attack doesn’t hold up, does it?’

Jack sighs. ‘No, it doesn’t.’

There were no police officers working on that Tube. No paramedics or fire and rescue. For one awful moment, Jack contemplates another bomb, set to go off after the first, but explosive dogs are down there now, checking every nook and cranny. He hopes Lucy isn’t one of them.

What could be the possible motivation behind a second bomb? What purpose is there, crippling the capital less than a week after the first explosion? And if the bomber was going for optimal destruction, waiting until later for rush hour would have caught far more victims.

It’s hard to know what was going through the bomber’s head. And without knowing who they are, it’s even harder.

But they have one thing in their favour this time – a suspect in custody.

And Jack wants to start there – with Gary King.

CHAPTER FORTY

There is no chance of a lie-in this morning. And Lucy has no wish to stay lounging about in bed when there's work to be done, so almost the instant after Jack was out of the door, Lucy was doing the same. Back to her room, quick shower and dressed, already talking to the PolSA as she walks out of the hotel.

'We need you and Otto clearing other potential targets – he's on his way in as we speak.'

'Which targets?' she asks, walking quickly to the FSP at Hyde Park. She scowls up at the rain, only too aware that the downpour will hamper any rescue efforts – both in Oxford Street and at the new Green Park site.

'They've cleared Green Park for secondary devices already, so now we're looking at other tube stations in this vicinity. Hyde Park Corner, Victoria, Piccadilly—'

'Tell me where to start.'

Otto's already there when she arrives, his tail wagging as he greets her. She's missed the innocence of her dog and immediately crouches to his level, wrapping her arms around his warm furry body and giving his butt an enthusiastic scratch. There's something instantly reassuring about a dog and she takes pleasure in his wagging tail, his meaty dog breath as he licks her face.

'Okay, enough, enough,' she says, straightening up with a laugh. 'We have work to do.'

The moment she takes out his harness, his joy increases, his whole body wagging along with his tail, ready for the fun to begin.

They begin with Hyde Park. Checking the same areas around the FCP as they did before, ensuring that all first responders are safe to do their jobs. As the rain continues to pour, soaking them both to the skin, Otto sniffs on a long line; Lucy only needs to direct him every now and again, as his sensitive nose scans dustbins, benches, the public toilets. As the search gets wider, she feels eyes on her; members of the public read the badge on her jacket and wonder just what the handsome spaniel is looking for.

Lucy can sense their wariness, their fear. A second attack within a week has sent most people running for home, but the Tube and buses are in

disarray – some choosing to avoid them, others forced to out of necessity.

The dogs work forty minutes on, forty minutes off. Every time the shift is over, they return to the FCP and report back to the PolSA. Otto is rewarded and watered, his fur towelled down, then they go again. In one of these breaks, Lucy takes the opportunity to check her phone; she has multiple messages from her concerned family asking if she's okay. She replies to them all quickly, then turns her attention to the most recent one. From Pete.

Just tell me you're okay. Please.

She stares at it, and a sucker punch of guilt hits home as she replies quickly: *Yes, I'm fine*. She wouldn't change anything about last night, but there's so much that's unsettled. Pete deserves the truth. She should have waited and spoken to him before jumping into bed with Jack, and resolves to call him and be honest, as soon as she can.

On the surface of it, her night with Jack could be put down to retaliation or rebound. But it wasn't that. Being with Jack felt right – the best she's felt in a long time. It was comfort, friendship – the beginnings of something like love, maybe. But it was also confusing.

Her head tells her that she and Jack shouldn't be together. You'd be hard-pressed to find two less compatible people – their jobs, their way of life, down to the state of their houses. And yet.

And yet.

After Fran, Jack is her closest friend. She trusts him, she respects him. They have fun together. And he's fucking hot. She likes how he looks in a suit. How he looks naked, damn it. She couldn't get enough of him last night and just thinking about it now makes her face blush and her insides flutter in a way she hasn't felt for a while.

'Lucy? You're up,' the PolSA shouts, and instantly Otto is on his feet, tongue lolling, ready to go. And Lucy can't help feeling relieved. If there's one thing that's always good to distract her from the mess of her personal life, it's her dogs and work. And today of all days, she's glad she can help.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

Sally's lost track of the days and nights; the hours and minutes went a long time ago. Her consciousness drifts, shivering with cold one moment, sweating and overheated the next. She hears sounds – banging, shouting, but also pop music. A tinny track over and over – Girls Aloud, she thinks. 'Long Hot Summer'.

She dreams of being out of here, resting in a soft warm bed with her husband, Rory sleeping in the room next door. And when she wakes, the reality hits her like a blow to the head, leaving her sobbing, tears scoring lines in the dust on her face. The hunger pains have abated but her thirst rages. Sometimes it's all she can think about – a tall glass of water, condensation misting the side.

She hallucinates someone close – voices, shouting – and screams and hollers until her voice is hoarse. Other times she hears the rattle and clank of machinery and that terrifies her even more. What if this place collapses further? What if the concrete above her falls, and she's squished like a bug under a boot? But at least it would be quick. At least she wouldn't feel the pain.

Brian is quiet now. They spoke for a long time, about their lives, and inconsequential things, anything to hold on to in the dark, but eventually he didn't reply. She assumed he was sleeping, but she's called out to him for a while now, and she worries he has gone. Given up the fight.

And then, in the distance, she hears the storm. At first, she thinks it's another hallucination or a dream, but then, it starts to trickle down. Blissful, glorious rain, turning the dust into rivers of dirt, but it's water, and she presses her mouth to the wet concrete, sucking up as much as she can. It's gritty and tastes of mud but she's never known relief like it.

She drinks as much as she can. And then, as the rain stops, she prays for rescue. She prays for death, for this to be over. In her darker moments, she thinks about her funeral, wonders how many of her friends would come. Maybe they won't find her body until months, even years, later and she'll be a dried-up husk, nothing for her mother to identify.

But mostly she cries. For the life she is on the edge of losing.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

Jack stands outside interview room one, his hands balled into fists by his side. His head is bowed, but his shoulders are tight, every muscle constricted into a tight rage. He draws a breath deep into his lungs and lets it out slowly. He needs to calm down.

An intrusive thought rotates through his brain – *we should have stopped this*. They had the time; they had the resource. Shit, they even had someone in custody. Yet they'd failed. *He* had failed. A ball of anxiety scratches in his brain. This could happen again; he needs to do everything in his power to make sure it doesn't.

DI Sharon Lynch walks down the corridor towards him.

'His solicitor is here,' she says. She points to the closed door. 'Inside.' She looks at him closely. 'You okay?'

Jack lifts his head, stretches his fingers wide. 'I'm fine.'

They go in, silent. They take their seats opposite Gary King and his solicitor. The solicitor looks nervous, her knee jiggling under the table.

'Interview started, ten thirty-five. Present are...' Sharon runs through the names.

Jack stays silent, his gaze locked on King.

'My client—' the solicitor begins, but Jack cuts her off.

'Your client is going to stay silent. It's my turn to talk.' Jack wants to see how King reacts when he's told about the recent bomb, so they instructed the solicitor not to inform him. Jack hopes she's done as they asked.

He turns his attention to King. The man has his legs crossed; his arms are folded across his chest. His head is tilted down, and he glares at Jack from under lowered brows.

'Whatever you think I did—'

'What did I just say?' Jack says, his voice shaking with menace.

King rolls his eyes, annoying Jack further.

Jack begins. 'This morning, at about six a.m., a bomb went off on a tube train, outside Green Park. It killed at least twenty people, and we believe this included the bomber.'

'You what?'

Jack has his attention now; Gary is sitting forward in his seat, his hands on the table.

‘A bomb. On the Tube. What do you know about it?’

‘On a tube train?’

‘Yes. What can you tell me about it, Gary? Because from where I’m sitting, you’re in a very bad position. Not only are you responsible for one bomb, but I would chance a guess that your group is now behind another. And that’s going on you, too – conspiracy—’

‘I’ve been here for days!’

‘Doesn’t matter. If you knew about it – which you said you did – then you’ve got one hell of a prison sentence coming your way. You’re never going to see the light of day again—’

‘But that’s not—’

‘Think of your daughter,’ Sharon interjects. ‘What about Isabelle? You’ll never see her grow up, get married, have children. She’s not going to visit you in prison – not after what you’ve done.’

Jack wonders whether Sharon’s piling on the emotional blackmail a little too much, but when he looks back to Gary, his eyes are watery, his lip quivering.

‘Did you know about the bomb?’ Jack asks.

‘I... No! This wasn’t the plan.’

‘But I thought you were in charge? Isn’t that what you said?’ Jack calmly looks at Sharon, who checks her notes.

‘“Nothing gets past me.” Isn’t that what you said, Gary?’ she says.

‘Yeah, but... No. They talked about a second bomb, but not there. Not on the Tube.’

‘Where were they targeting?’

Gary glares at Jack, and then at his solicitor.

‘Remember my advice, Gary,’ the solicitor mutters.

But Gary turns to Jack. ‘I don’t want this on me. We never talked about tube stations, only...’

‘Only what?’ No reply. Jack decides to lay some cards out on the table. ‘Look, we know about your complaint in 2012. We know there’s no love lost between you and the police force.’

‘I wasn’t the only one!’ Gary protests.

‘Who else was involved? Did you know this guy?’ He pushes a photo across. ‘His name was Daniel Bevan. He was in the van with you – he got

caught in the blast.'

'Yeah.' Gary looks downcast. 'He got stuck somehow. He was struggling with the seat belt, but there was no way I was going back. I liked Dan. He was a good bloke.'

'Who else, Gary?'

He glances at Jack, and then at Sharon. 'No comment.'

'Where else are you targeting?'

'No comment.'

'Where else did you discuss?'

'Dan mentioned police stations, but we didn't think they were big enough. Like, there's one in Notting Hill, and—'

'And Counter Terrorism Command,' Jack says. Green Park is on the Jubilee line, on the way to Westminster. 'He didn't mean to bomb the tube train. He was heading for New Scotland Yard.'

'No comment.'

'We found the bomb factory on Oakmount Estate. Where we arrested you. That's where this one came from?'

'No comment.' He pauses. 'They died? Whoever had the bomb?'

'We believe so.'

'Look, I don't know who it was. I worked out there were five of us, but we worked in shifts, and I only met Dan. We had agreed code words for comms, and talked via chat boards, closing one down and opening another. We had burner phones which we chucked after a few calls, email addresses we changed every few weeks. I never met the others. Whoever did that tube train – that wasn't the plan.'

'What was the plan, Gary?'

'No comment.'

'Is there another bomb?'

'No comment.'

Jack stares at him for a second. Gary King's just a patsy, a worker bee in an ecosystem of criminals. They're not going to get any more from him today. 'Interview concluded,' he says, 'ten fifty-one.'

Jack gets up and leaves the room; Sharon follows.

'Do you believe him?' she asks, once they're in the corridor.

'I hate to say it, but yes. He looked genuinely shocked when we told him the location.' Jack considers it for a moment. 'He worked out there were five in the team – but he knows more than he's letting on. Remember what

Russell said – there's no way Gary was in charge. This type of thing takes money and organisation – that's not Gary King.'

'Leave him for a few hours then reinterview?' Sharon suggests. Jack nods. 'And you think New Scotland Yard was the target?'

'It makes sense. The first plan failed – so why not take a bomb to the one place with maximum police casualties?'

'But this place is crawling with security. They wouldn't have even got close.'

'Maybe they didn't know. Maybe it wasn't as thought through as the other bomb. But whatever the reason, given what Gary said, it sounds like something went wrong and the bomb deployed on the Tube, taking them and half the carriage by accident.'

'So, who was it? And who are the other two people involved?'

'That's what worries me,' Jack says, as they head for the incident room. 'There are two other bombers out there. They could strike again at any time. And we have no idea who they are.'

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

Craig, the bomb guy, arrives just before lunch.

‘Your instinct was correct,’ he says, pushing his glasses up his nose. He has the slightly sweaty pallor of someone enjoying himself and trying hard not to show it; in terms of a good time, this is a Labrador unsupervised in a butcher’s shop. ‘The bomb on the tube train was definitely the TATP they were making in the flat,’ he continues. ‘Easily made at home, but also highly unstable. Get the mixture wrong and boom.’ He makes an expansive gesture with his hands, then suppresses a smile.

‘So carrying it to the target was risky?’ Jack asks.

‘Very. But it makes sense, given what we know about the two bombs. The first one – the ANFO bomb – has a wide blast area, but it’s hard to transport. You need a van, as they did. But the TATP, it’s more mobile. To a point.’ He waves his hands again, mimicking an explosion, but seeing Jack’s frown, he clears his throat, consults his notes. ‘And we found what we believe to be the detonator,’ he continues, quieter now. ‘A mobile phone linked up to a battery.’

‘Whoever took it in there didn’t intend to die?’

‘No. I believe he meant to dump it and set it off once he was a good distance away. Much like the other bomb. But this team aren’t doing a great job at staying alive.’

What Craig’s telling them lines up with Gary King’s confusion over the target. They weren’t aiming for the Tube.

‘So who was this bomber?’ Jack turns to the busy incident room, to the detectives working hard behind their computer screens. ‘Anyone?’

All faces look his way, as he stands in front of the whiteboard. Jack uncaps the pen, writing four words across the top.

WHO IS THE BOMBER?

‘We need to know this,’ Jack says, punctuating his words with bangs on the whiteboard. The whole room jumps. ‘Find out who this guy is, and it’ll hopefully lead to more potential bomb factories, more associates to shut down. Before this happens again.’

‘Do you think that’s likely?’ one of the DC asks.

‘Given the events of this morning, I would say every possibility is on the table, wouldn’t you?’ He looks at his team, at their ashen faces, the shadows under their eyes. ‘It’s been a long few days, and it’s only going to get worse. Make sure you are taking breaks. Swap in and out. Go home. Hug your kids, kiss your partner. Then come back in again, remembering who we are and why we do this job. The second bomb is on my conscience, and I don’t want a third, do you?’

Murmurs from the room.

Jack continues, ‘Anything back from the lab? Do we have DNA results from blood samples taken at the scene?’

‘Not yet, guv.’

‘Chase them up. We get a match to the usual databases, and we have an ID. In the meantime, anything else?’ Silence. ‘Anything back from forensics?’

‘I hit on a connection between your ACAB guys.’

Jack turns his attention to the analyst speaking. ‘The ones in Southampton?’

The young man cowers in the spotlight. ‘Yeah. You wanted a link between them? Well, I found one. For most, the criminal damage and vandalism was a first offence, none were detained in custody for long. But all were arrested in a drugs bust, in a place called Southwood?’

‘I know it. East of Southampton. When was this?’

‘February this year. Forty kilograms of cocaine, with a street value of about four million.’

Jack frowns, trying to make sense of this new development. Had all these men been working together from the start? To what end?

‘Where are they now?’ he asks.

‘Prison. They got between four and nine years, depending on previous offences.’

‘Good work. Keep digging into these guys – I want to know acquaintances, possible links to London. Any way they could be connected to what’s going on here. Now, CCTV?’

A different DC speaks up. A younger woman, keen and diligent. ‘I was looking at the crime scene photos – the initial ones just came through.’ She turns her laptop around. ‘And here, this here...’ Jack looks, it’s no more

than a scrap of fabric in the black. 'I believe this is a fragment of a rucksack. He must have carried the bomb in something, right?'

'Right...'

'So, I started looking through the CCTV for men with rucksacks.' She stops, flushing. 'There's a lot.'

'Everyone, follow this lead. Look for men with rucksacks, walking through Green Park Tube, then spread wider to connecting stations.' Jack points to the map. 'Piccadilly Circus. Victoria. Keep looking.' He pauses. 'Everyone, thank you. Now go.'

The change in energy is palpable. Renewed purpose, definite lines of inquiry to follow.

Jack thanks Craig, then goes into his office and opens his laptop, loading up the crime scene photographs the DC had been studying.

They make for disturbing viewing.

Taken after the victims had been rescued but before the dead bodies had been removed, Jack can't help but feel detached, like it's a scene from a movie. Nothing this terrible could happen in real life. This many people dead. This many people's lives ruined, forever.

Yet here it is.

The black smoke from the bomb has covered everything in a fine layer of grey; scuff marks in scarlet show the direction people ran, desperate to get free of impending death. They were the lucky ones: bloodied, broken bodies sprawl over grubby seats, blackened holes where their skin should be.

Jack looks away for a moment, his heart thumping, but the images scar his retinas. He'll be revisiting it all tonight when he tries to sleep, the horrors haunting him for weeks or even months to come. And it's bad enough seeing it on a photograph; Jack spares a thought for the teams working in the tunnels, seeing it all up close. From experience, Jack knows some officers will leave the force. Others will need counselling and therapy, while the rest will push it deep down inside, hoping it won't catch up with them later. Such is the reality of frontline policing.

But there is a job to be done. Moving away from the wider view, Jack zooms in on the image, close to the centre of impact. And there's the rucksack the DC was referring to. A burned-out piece of plastic that might have once been a clasp; a length of charred nylon that could have been a strap.

And there's something else. Maybe a piece of clothing: another fragment of charred material, sticking to the melted cushion of the seat. It sets off an alarm in Jack's brain, a moment of recognition before it's gone. That colour, that unmistakable shock of lime green.

He's seen it before. If only he could remember where.

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CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

This day will never end. Hoax calls complicate their investigation, and Lucy and Otto are sent from one deployment to another, this latest one being at New Scotland Yard, current home of Counter Terrorism Command.

Now it's been confirmed as the most likely target for the second bomb, it's high priority to ensure there are no additional risks. Most floors have been evacuated, but other coppers remain in situ, determined not to let the small matter of a deadly bomb get in the way of operationally critical work.

She's not the only dog handler. Four of them are driven out to the landmark building, and they get out, quickly escorted through heightened security to the offices within. As she walks through reception, Otto at her heels, Lucy contemplates how differently things could have turned out. If the bomber had succeeded, this place could have been rubble, too.

They pause in reception as the PolSA speaks to the building manager, then comes back to them, passing on their orders. Lucy and Otto are to take the first floor, and they quietly make their way up the stairs.

It's strange, seeing this place empty. This is one of the evacuated floors, desks and chairs deserted, full mugs of tea long grown cold. Lucy keeps Otto on a long line and gives him the command – 'Look, look' – but he's already sniffing. His nose searches high and low, down to the carpeted floor, under desks, moving on quickly, his tail wagging furiously as he scours each workspace in turn.

Lucy makes two rotations around the floor, but they find nothing. Without an indication, Otto doesn't get a reward, so to motivate the dog she makes him wait while she hides a ragger out of sight in one of the conference rooms. Otto's quick to track it down, prancing with the toy in his mouth. It's a strange sight, almost dystopian – the dog an anachronism in this empty office, his wagging tail knocking paperwork from desks, his slobbery jowls leaving snail-like trails on the carpet.

Despite her weary bones, Lucy's taken pride in her work. Jack may have the authority and the power, but she takes satisfaction in the simple life, a job well done. Lucy's aware time is of the essence, but as she and Otto have worked efficiently, they can take a moment, so she lowers herself to the carpet, sitting cross-legged as Otto twirls around her. She grabs at the

ragger and he springs away with a playful growl, then returns, settling his furry rump in her lap, pushing his big head against her face.

She wraps her arms around him, pressing her nose against his fur and inhaling that familiar biscuity scent. She misses Moss. She knows he'll be well looked after at Keston, but he was her first dog, and she's accustomed to him being with her, her loyal fluffy black shadow.

Calls start down the radio. Negative indications, no trace of explosives found, and she presses the button, adding hers to the chorus. With a final pat to Otto, she hauls herself to her feet and she and her spaniel head back down the stairs, only pausing when Lucy notices a familiar figure.

She's been aware that Jack would probably be at New Scotland Yard, somewhere, but she hadn't expected to see him. But here he is: standing alone down the corridor, head bent, hands over his face, perfectly still. He hasn't seen her and something about his posture tells her to keep her distance.

She can't imagine the stress he's under. Senior officers demanding updates, working with an unfamiliar team who don't have his back, the press baying for blood. And that's not mentioning the pressure he puts on himself, the high standards he works towards, day in, day out. He's taken a rare moment of quiet, and she doesn't want to disturb that; not to mention that a dog handler giving a DCI a hug in the middle of police headquarters is probably not the level of professionalism he's striving for.

With a heavy heart, she drags herself away, down to the ground floor where the other handlers have gathered; Otto displays his ragger with pride, tail wagging around the other dogs.

The PolSA releases the building back to the relieved manager, then declares the day over. A van greets them by the pavement, ready to take the dogs away, and with a final pat and sniff, Otto enthusiastically jumps into his crate, ready for a well-earned sleep.

'Do you want a lift?' one of the other dog handlers calls to Lucy.

A long hot shower and a warm bed are waiting for her, so she climbs into the back of the police van.

'We need to go via Oxford Street, pick up some others,' the driver shouts, and Lucy sits back, watching the world go by through the tinted windows.

She's surprised by how many people are still out on the busy streets. Refusing to be bowed by two bombs in their capital, commuters in smart

suits and trainers head homewards, as joggers dodge pedestrians, desperate to maintain their five miles a day.

It would be so easy to blend into this milieu. So many are carrying rucksacks, anything from smart black numbers to rough-around-the-edges brands, more suited to mountains and hikes than the concrete of London. How can anyone possibly know which are innocent, and which have the potential to ruin lives?

She thinks about Jack again, idly wondering what time she'll see him tonight – *if* she'll see him tonight – until the original bomb site looms up in front of them.

The hoardings are open, and Lucy can see they've made progress since she was there on Sunday. Paths have been cleared through the rubble, huge lumps of concrete moved out of the way, piled like monoliths in the road.

A dog and his handler are still working, the safety officers placed around them. The dog is off the lead and the bell on his collar jangles as his nose searches the area, tail wagging. She climbs out of the car to watch, admiring their determination – still hunting after all this time.

And then a sound echoes across the ruined building. A sharp bark. The Labrador, paused, doing as he's been trained to do, nose down, pointing to the focus of the scent. The whole site pauses and the handler scrabbles over rubble to get to the dog. Unlike Moss or Otto, fire and rescue dogs are trained to speak when they find their quarry, and this one shows no sign of stopping, letting out a volley of barks. Immediately, the teams burst into action. At first, a request for silence, the fire and rescue guys calling out, hoping that the injured person will respond. Then, when there's no noise back, they start to dig.

The challenge with a positive indication is finding the source of the smell. The injured person could be anywhere. The dog has detected the scent, but this travels – down pipes, across water, through voids. They send a long thin search camera down and everyone waits, until the man in charge shouts out.

'Here. We've got one.'

The urgency is palpable. The team leader calls down to the victim: 'What is your name? Make some noise – bang on a piece of metal or concrete. Can you hear me?'

The team huddle, discussing the best way to get to the victim, then spring into action, removing boulders, bricks, masonry – some by machinery, most

by hand. Lucy waits outside the cordon where a crowd has gathered. Every single one of them is frozen, transfixed by the ruined building, hoping, praying, that someone will be pulled out alive.

They all need this win. A victory, among the carnage.

Shouts, calls and requests for paramedics sound out – they must be getting close. And then they see it, an arm, rendered black with dust. A yellow T-shirt, blue jeans. A body, one trainer missing. It's limp as it's carried away from the building, laid gently on a stretcher. Lucy holds her breath as the paramedics work.

Lucy focuses on that single shoe. An adidas trainer. Much like the ones she has at home. What had that person thought about that afternoon? Had they been excited, looking forward to a shopping trip to Selfridges, or had they just popped in, on their way to somewhere else? Who had they thought about as the building crumbled, as they ended up trapped inside? Their family, friends, partner, dog? Who did they love? Did they have regrets?

They'll never know. The paramedics step back, their faces grim. Slowly, one of them shakes his head. Whoever this is has gone.

The dog detected live scent, but this person is dead. She considers the dog, rare for them to make a mistake, but one thing is for sure.

The bomb has claimed another victim.

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

Darkness is closing in. Another day is ending, but Jack wants to make some headway before he leaves. Just something, however small, that he can pass on to Digby and the higher-ups to show his progress and cheer the team. Because there has been nothing uplifting all afternoon.

His team have been working hard. Faces pressed to computer screens as they scan the CCTV; witness reports sent in and studied, recorded, looking for something that correlates, evidence that ties to details they already know. Often an investigation comes down to one thing, one opportunity, and they're up and running.

They've had a few near misses. Forensics out at the crime scene had found a phone, burned to a crisp, but it belonged to one of the victims, an eighty-seven-year-old woman, unlikely to be their suspect. The rucksack believed to belong to the bomber has been identified as North Face, navy blue, but with thousands sold every day, it isn't a great lead.

However, it has led them to a suspect on CCTV. A man in a lime-green jacket and jeans, tall, swapping between the Victoria line and the Jubilee line at Green Park, a navy-blue rucksack slung over his shoulders. Everything about his body language marks him out as suspicious – head down, walking fast, infuriatingly good at avoiding the cameras. Jack studies the latest footage now, Lynch by his side.

'And we never see his face?' Jack asks, frustrated.

'Not even a glimpse,' the DI confirms. 'Although we can trace his movements back, heading northbound on the Victoria line.'

'Where does he get on?'

'We're working on that now,' he says, and Jack huffs his annoyance. He wishes they could catch a break.

Lynch leaves him, and he takes a moment to check his phone. No notifications. No messages, which is a good thing, given how many times Digby has demanded an update today, but also nothing from Lucy.

He got a message, early on, saying she was out and about with Otto, but it's annoyingly vague and he worries. Kevin Walsh's words still echo in his head and he takes reassurance that if she's working, she's got her radio with a team of people tracking her every move. Nothing can happen to her, but

still. Lucy's never been one for following orders, and he hopes that for once in her life she keeps out of trouble.

He can't lose her, he thinks, a flutter threatening to turn into full-blown panic. He knows he's overreacting, but he can't help making parallels to Theo, his best friend who disappeared when they were both eleven and whose eventual fate was only discovered last year. Those events left a mark. And a regret – that he didn't do more to search for Theo, either at the time or in the years that followed. It haunts him to this day.

'Guv?' Lynch stands next to him and Jack jumps, distracted in the dark rabbit hole of his thoughts. She continues: 'We've got a witness downstairs – someone from the Green Park Tube. We're about to start an interview, do you want to join us?'

'I'll come. I'll watch via the video feed.'

Lynch nods and they head down to the family room.

'She was initially rushed to the hospital, but she saw our appeal on TV and discharged herself. She wants to talk.'

'Good on her,' Jack says, but inwardly wonders what state this witness is in.

His questions are answered as he turns on the video link. A woman is sitting in the family room, her hands laced together in her lap. As Lynch and the DC enter, she looks up, her eyes bright white in the dust and grime coating her face. Jack guesses she's mid-fifties; she's wearing what would have originally been a smart business suit, now crumpled and dirtied beyond repair, and he wonders what could possibly be so important that she discharged herself from hospital and came here. He feels a quick burst of optimism – this could be the lead they're after.

She smiles weakly after an introduction; the two officers sit opposite.

'Emma,' Lynch begins. 'Thank you for coming in to speak to us. I'm sorry, you must have had a horrible day.'

'I was right there,' the woman says. The skin on her face and hands is speckled with tiny cuts, some dressed with bright white bandages, others left to heal. 'Right there,' she continues. 'And he saw me. Our eyes met.'

'Who saw you?'

'The bomber – the man with the rucksack. He walked past me when he got on the Tube and he looked right at me. It seems silly but...' Her voice trails off.

'But?' Lynch prompts.

‘He reminded me of my son. He was so young.’

‘Young? How young?’

‘No more than mid-twenties. He looked like my eldest – all awkward elbows and long limbs. Like they’ve grown and haven’t filled out their body.’

‘And how old is your eldest?’

‘Twenty-two. He looked like that... and now...’ Her voice breaks and she holds a tissue against her mouth. ‘He’s dead now, right?’

‘He is, yes,’ Lynch says softly.

‘So young, and he’s dead. All for what?’

‘That’s what we’re trying to figure out. Did he talk to you? Make conversation with anyone?’

‘No, he just walked past me and went to the end of the carriage.’

‘And where was the rucksack?’

‘In his lap. He was cradling it, like it was precious.’ She pauses. ‘I suppose it was,’ she adds, quietly.

‘And then what happened?’

‘And then it went off. We’d barely left the station. There was this loud bang – smoke, the lights flashed. And... and... metal grinding, like you hear in a car accident but a thousand times louder. And then the train stopped, and people started screaming.’ She screws her eyes shut, then pushes her fingers into the sockets. Lynch reaches out and places a reassuring hand on her arm while the woman cries.

Emma was lucky. If she’d been a few metres further into the carriage, if the bomber had chosen a different spot to sit, she might be dead right now. But as it is, she’s going to have flashbacks, face years of trauma and therapy. Jack wouldn’t blame her if she never got on a train again.

She’s started talking again, Lynch asking her to describe the man. Short brown hair, tall – probably six foot – but slim. Wearing jeans, a cap, and a hoodie under a lime-green jacket – matching the description of the man they’ve been tracking on CCTV.

Jack looks away as his phone starts to ring. The crime scene manager, hopefully with some good news; Jack quickly answers the call.

‘You need to tell your team to stop phoning us,’ she says. ‘The more time we have to spend answering their queries, the slower we get. You know that, right?’

‘Right. And I’m sorry—’

‘You’re not. You’d do it again tomorrow.’ She sighs. ‘But we’ve got something. The DNA on your bomber matched to someone in the system.’

Jack sits up straight, his senses on high alert. ‘Who?’

‘It’s not a direct match. It’s 38 per cent—’

Jack’s confused. He doesn’t know enough about genetics. ‘So a child, or a parent?’

‘No, a child or a parent would share 50 per cent.’ She pauses. ‘This is a sibling.’

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CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

DS Amrit Gill doesn't have high hopes for this witness. It's been nearly six months since this woman saw Tansy arguing with a man on Winchester High Street. Six months for the memory to be corrupted, merged with other thoughts and expectations, then spat out again today, only to muddy the waters of the investigation. Still, it's all they have.

Her expectations drop further when she sees the little old lady waiting in reception. Elaine Burrows has curly grey hair, styled in a wave behind her ears, her back bent like a prawn, her gnarled hands clutching a pink handbag on her lap. Her walking stick rests on the chair next to her.

'Mrs Burrows?' Amrit asks, and the woman nods. 'I'm Detective Sergeant Amrit Gill. Would you like to come with me?'

Amrit takes a step back, ready to help the woman to her feet, but Elaine grabs her stick and is up in seconds.

'Lead the way,' she says.

Amrit takes her to the family room, Elaine keeping up with her step for step. She offers her tea or coffee but Elaine declines.

'Does horrible things to my guts,' she explains. 'Water would be good, though.'

A glass of water duly collected, Amrit sits on the sofa opposite, starting up the recording equipment.

'I hope you don't mind, but it's good to have an accurate record of our chat,' Amrit says.

'Do what you like, love. I'm in no rush.' Her eyes twinkle. 'This is a nice day out for me. Got to go on the bus, and I'll pop into Marks's food hall later, pick up something nice for my tea.'

'Lovely,' Amrit says, with a smile. 'Now, could you tell me – do you remember seeing this woman?'

Amrit slides a photo of Tansy across the table. Despite having different fathers, Amrit finds it remarkable how much Tansy looks like Lucy. The same thick wavy dark hair, the same deep brown eyes.

In this shot of Tansy, her hair is down and wild around her face, her eyes shining, her red painted mouth open mid-laughter. She seems so vivacious

and full of life, it seems incomprehensible that she's now dead, in a hole in the ground.

'Yes, love,' Elaine says. 'I recognised her straight away when I saw her photo on the news. She was so pretty, I was in two minds whether to go over and tell her to finish with that gentleman. She could have had anyone she wanted, and he was clearly no good for her.'

'You said they were arguing?'

'Yes, as I told the policeman at the time. But he clearly didn't put any stock in the memory of an old lady like me.'

Amrit glances at the notes. The details of the call were originally taken by a PC and include the handwritten scrawl 'unreliable witness', so it was screened out before it reached her desk. Amrit will be following up with his skipper later. Of that, she's sure.

'Do you know what they were arguing about?'

'I couldn't make it out. At first, he was right in her face and was saying something like "don't you dare" or "you'll regret it". Something like that.' Elaine frowns. 'He grabbed her arm, tightly, I thought. She pulled away and walked off but he followed her, still shouting. Nasty piece of work, he was. I didn't like him at all.'

'And where was this?'

'By the Buttercross, down Winchester High Street. Next to that nice pastry shop. It was just past midday, because I'd been in to get a pasty for my lunch, and I was going to eat it by the cathedral, but they were right there. They had an audience too, but it was a Friday, everyone going about their business.'

'Anything else? What was she wearing?'

'A long purple skirt. I remember because she looked so colourful. So many young people nowadays are in black and grey – she was quite the breath of fresh air.'

'And him?'

She frowns. 'No, I'm sorry. I don't remember.'

'Thank you, Elaine, you've been a great help.' Amrit smiles. Elaine's account of that day is better than that of the majority of the witnesses they interview; the old lady seems as sharp as a tack, and Amrit couldn't be more pleased. 'If you don't mind,' she continues, 'I've got a few photos for you to look at. You need to tell me if you recognise the man.'

Amrit slowly places ten photos on the table, prepared earlier. All white males, the same age as Daniel Bevan, with similar hair colour. Daniel Bevan came from Winchester. Tansy had the same name on the stolen credit card in her possession. If there is a connection between them, then it would make sense that Elaine could recognise him from this line-up.

The old lady carefully studies the photos, one by one. She pauses at the shot of Daniel Bevan, and Amrit holds her breath, but Elaine moves on. Taking her time, making sure.

And then, just as Amrit's preparing to call it a day, Elaine places a finger against one of the shots.

'Him. That's the man.'

Amrit stares at the photo, astonished. 'You're sure?'

Elaine nods, her mouth in a hard line. 'Definitely. A bad egg if I've ever seen one.'

Amrit picks up the photo and studies the man's face. Because this guy is the last person Amrit was expecting her to choose. And she needs to call Jack straight away.

CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

Once again, Jack stands on the doorstep of the nice house in Pimlico. Once again, he presses the doorbell, waits for the sound of footsteps, arranges his face into an expression of professionalism and remorse. But this time, he has a team behind him. A gathering of crime scene investigators, digital technicians and licensed search officers, ready to go.

The door opens, and Stephen Bevan, the father, looks at him. But this time he knows – his face crumples, his legs sag, sending him to the ground. His wife is next. A look of incomprehension, followed closely by awareness as she starts to wail. A quiet keening sound starting in her chest, growing louder as she realises both her sons are dead.

‘It was him,’ she cries. ‘It was George?’

‘It was, Mrs Bevan, I’m sorry,’ Jack replies. Because he is so fucking sorry that he didn’t work it out before, and now both her sons have been killed by the bombs they helped to make.

He presents her with the warrant but she drops it, her fingers unable to grip, her brain unable to process. Jack pushes through, the team behind him, and together they start the search, going through George’s bedroom, putting his laptop, his belongings, his sheets, his toothbrush, into evidence bags. Looking for something, anything that might explain why twenty-five-year-old George Bevan blew up a tube train, taking himself with it.

Their Winchester residence will be next, but that’s not the worst of it – once the media get hold of the identity of the two young men involved in the London bombs, Mr and Mrs Bevan will be hounded, called bad parents at best, terrorists at worst.

But Jack has a job to do. He gently encourages the parents into the kitchen, makes two mugs of hot sugary tea and places them on the counter.

‘I’m sorry to ask, but we need to know: who had George been hanging out with in London? Who did he phone? Who did he meet up with?’

The father hangs his head. ‘I have no idea. He went out. I didn’t ask who he was going to see or what he was doing.’

The mother looks up, desperate. ‘Are you sure? Are you sure it was George?’

Jack takes two photographs out of his bag. Pushes them across the table. 'These are two stills taken from the CCTV at Green Park tube station. Is this George?'

'But...' She looks up, her eyes wide. 'But you can't tell anything from that.'

'That's George's jacket,' her husband says, monotone. 'George's rucksack—'

She interrupts her husband. 'But thousands of people must own those. It could be anyone.'

'A credit card was found in the rucksack. It belonged to George. And the DNA came back as a 38 per cent match to Daniel. We need to confirm with a final DNA test, but we are working on the assumption it was your son. It was George. I'm sorry.'

The wife starts sobbing, her head in her hands. The husband pats her shoulders uselessly, then looks up at Jack.

'Did he... Did he mean to do it?'

'It's our belief that the bomb went off accidentally. That he was carrying it to a different location.'

'What location?'

'I can't share that at this time.'

'Did he suffer?' the wife asks, looking at Jack with puffy, bloodshot eyes.

'It was quick.'

'And these people... these people invading our space?'

'They'll be as unobtrusive as possible, but they need to do their jobs, and then they'll go. You'll need to move out – to a hotel or a friend's house? – and one of my team will follow up with you, soon, but in the meantime, you have my number. Please call me if you have any questions. Otherwise, I'll leave you in peace.'

With a final nod to the crime scene manager, Jack retreats from the house. The search teams know what they're doing; they don't need him there, getting in their way. He takes a left and walks slowly down the streets, returning to New Scotland Yard, but as he gets closer, his feet drag, his walking laboured.

He can't bear to go back. Not yet. To see the photos of the crime scenes, stark reminders of the misery inflicted by these bombs. He doesn't know whether George suffered. Whether he experienced pain, regret or surprise as

the bomb tore through his flesh and bones. Jack just wanted to offer some reassurance to the parents, who have lost both their sons.

He doesn't blame Mr and Mrs Bevan for what their children have done. Their sons were grown-up, old enough to have independent lives, but Jack doesn't believe for a second that these boys were the ringleaders of this operation. They have identified three bombers so far – Daniel and George Bevan, and Gary King – and none of them had the money or the network to set this up. There are two other people out there. Nameless, faceless individuals with an agenda of their own. So, who are they?

Jack walks on, numb, and it takes him a few moments to realise his phone is ringing. He answers it on autopilot, pressing against his ear.

'Guv, it's Amrit. And I have news.'

Jack stops in the shadow of Westminster Abbey, leaning against a tall oak in the square. 'Go on.'

'Tansy wasn't seeing Daniel Bevan. She was with George – his brother. We need to get him in for interview—'

'You can't.' And Jack slowly explains where he's just been, the evidence that they've found against him.

'Oh. Shit,' Amrit says, mastering the art of understatement. But she recovers quickly: 'So how is it that George Bevan – who you're investigating now – links to Tansy Holmes? Lucy's bloody half-sister. That can't be a coincidence?'

'I don't know, Amrit.'

'Did he look for her deliberately? Did he target her? It seems likely he's behind her murder—'

'It's possible—'

'I'll keep looking, boss. I'll be in touch.'

Jack starts walking again, his mind a mess of whirling thoughts. Lucy was involved in the arrest that put Kevin Walsh away, putting a target on her back. But Lucy's a police officer, surrounded by vicious police dogs and her – now ex – dog-handler boyfriend most of the time, it's not easy to get close to her. But Tansy was vulnerable. Wandering, homeless. They go after her – to get information, maybe? – and in the process underestimate how clever Tansy can be. Did she threaten to tell Lucy, and she had to go? Was she murdered by the same people planting bombs across London?

But it's all conjecture. And ridiculous, at that.

As he walks, his professional failure ricochets in his brain. He could have stopped this. He met George, he spoke to him – face to face. Why didn't he realise George was involved? The boy implicated his brother, gave Jack his laptop, but Jack realises now it was no more than a duplicitous way to make sure the world discovered their motivation. The mission behind these bombs – that the police were being targeted, spreading fear through the ranks.

Jack realises, in his haze, that he's back at his hotel. He stumbles into the lobby, fumbles the key card to get through the outer door. He can't bear to wait for the lift, so he takes the stairs two at a time. But he doesn't go to his room. He bangs on another, hard, over and over, until his fist is sore.

He hears her voice inside. 'Okay, okay, I'm coming.' Footsteps.

She opens the door and Jack falls into her arms, holding her close, letting her soothe away the tension, the regret, the sorrow.

That once again, he failed.

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CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

They stay that way for a while. Lucy, with her arms wrapped around Jack's middle, his head bent, face pressed into her hair. Slowly, she feels him relax, his muscles relenting.

'Bad day?' she says gently, into his shirt.

That elicits a laugh – a small rueful chuckle she hears from deep within his chest. She looks up, cupping his face in her hands and kissing him gently. 'Do you want to tell me about it?'

He paces at first, removing his shoes, jacket and tie as he talks. She sits on the edge of her bed as he recounts what they know about the explosion, the shellshocked witness, the CCTV and finally, George Bevan. A twenty-five-year-old accidentally self-immolating with a bomb. His future, gone, along with his brother's.

'And he knew Tansy,' he says, stopping and focusing on her for the first time.

It catches Lucy off guard. 'Sorry, what?'

'Amrit found a witness that saw Tansy arguing with a man in Winchester last November. Identified him as George Bevan.'

'But how?' Her head spins. How can her half-sister's death be connected to the events here?

He sits next to her. 'I don't know. We're going to find out. But, Lucy—'

'If you're going to tell me to go home and lock myself in my house out of fear from some random threat – don't.'

'But you must admit – the connection between them is worrying.'

'Yes, but I'm not running scared. Okay?'

'Okay,' Jack says, but she can see from the look on his face that he's not going to let it go. 'How was your day?'

'Tiring. Unproductive – in a good way.'

'Tell me.'

He lies back on her bed, Lucy shuffling up next to him, resting her head on his chest. Before he arrived, she'd been preoccupied by her own bad day but now he's here, she finds solace in the deep rumble of his voice, the steady beating of his heart, the rise and fall of his chest. She regrets not going to him when she saw him earlier. Sod professionalism, it was clear he

needed a hug. He pulls her closer, kisses the top of her head. How quickly they've got to this – this intimacy.

'What do they know about the latest victim?' he asks when she mentions the body being pulled out of the rubble.

'It was a man – Brian Carroll. Eighteen years old.'

'Shit,' he mutters. 'They're still looking for other survivors?'

'For the moment. They can't continue much longer, although I don't envy the person who has to make the call to change it from rescue to recovery.' She looks up at Jack. 'Do you have to go back in today?' she asks.

He sighs. 'Probably. I'll check my messages. There'll be something, although Sharon's keeping it all running smoothly.'

'Are you going to poach her for Hampshire, too?' Lucy says, referring to DI Oscar Vaughn, Jack's recent hire from Northumbria, and Jack huffs a laugh.

'No, I think she's settled here. Although, after all this...'

He leaves it unfinished, but Lucy knows what he means. The way of life of everyone living in the capital has been threatened. Their sense of complacency has been shattered – the bombs have long-reaching consequences; although Londoners are loyal, and resilient, they have their limits.

'I wonder...' Jack begins.

Lucy pushes herself up on her elbows, looking at him. 'What?'

'I wonder whether I'm good enough.' His voice cracks and he clears his throat, staring up at the ceiling. 'Am I the right man for this job?'

'Yes. Good God, Jack. Yes. They were right to call you. You're the best they have.'

'I missed George Bevan. He was right there—'

'You're one man, Jack. You're not superhuman.'

'But I'm in charge.'

'Digby is in charge. The chief constable is in charge. For fuck's sake, Shabana Mahmood's the home secretary, she's in charge. Keir bloody Starmer if you want to go all the way to the top. But not you. You're not responsible.'

He presses his lips together and nods, quickly. Lucy shuffles up so their faces are almost touching.

'The bomb today was not your fault, Jack.'

‘Okay.’

She reaches forward and cups his face in her hands, then presses her lips to his. Softly, gently. He responds in the same way. There is none of the urgency from last night as he pulls her close, wraps his arms around her, kisses her back. There is a new confidence to their relationship now, and it makes her legs weak.

Slowly, they edge under the covers. They remove clothes, tossing them carelessly to the floor, and in the last moments of fading dusk she looks into his eyes – those light grey-blue eyes she found so strange when she first met him – and sees him differently. Jack’s not her friend. He’s her best friend, and her lover, and— Could he be something more? Something permanent?

They move slowly together, languid, as if they have all the time in the world. She finds new parts of him that elicit a quick intake of breath, others that make him groan. And – her favourite – a slow sigh, a long release that does something to her very core.

After, he pulls back, still inside her, their legs intertwined, and he kisses her gently on her cheek, her lips, her nose.

‘Don’t go,’ he whispers.

‘I won’t.’

‘Ever.’

‘I won’t.’

And, fuck, she means it. Because at that point, she doesn’t know.

She doesn’t know what’s going to happen next.

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DAY 6 – WEDNESDAY

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CHAPTER FORTY-NINE

Jack wakes with a start in the middle of the night. It's pitch-black, only the slightest light slithering in from between the curtains, and total silence. He must have fallen asleep, despite his plans to go back into work, but his phone hasn't rung; they must be coping without him. He lies still; Lucy is sleeping next to him, curled on her side, and he watches her, feeling a swell of affection.

It's the two of them against the world. Cocooned in this bubble – a terrible bubble of bombs and fear, but it insulates them, nonetheless. What will happen when they go home? He considers Pete, and Jack's gripped by a rare feeling of insecurity. Will she go back to him? Will things carry on like before? That's what happened when they kissed in Newcastle – they ignored it, pretended it didn't happen. But this is more than that, isn't it?

She mutters in her sleep, rolling over to face the other way. He shuffles up behind her, spooning her body with his, and after a moment, she squeezes his hand.

'You okay?' she whispers, her voice slurred with sleep.

'Yes, fine. Sorry, I didn't mean to wake you.'

An unintelligible mumble, and she slips back under again. Jack tries to do the same, closing his eyes, but the threat from Kevin Walsh rears its ugly head. Yesterday, Jack hadn't been keen about Lucy wandering the city, and today all he wants to do is get her as far away from this as possible. Kevin Walsh aside, there's a real risk of another bomb, and her and Otto finding it. There's no chance of him sleeping now, his head full of images of Lucy. Her body broken, burned; her skin ripped and torn by flying glass or nails. And he spends the rest of the night like that, eyes open, waiting for morning.

Lucy wakes early, uncurling and stretching like a cat. She rolls into him, running a finger down his face.

‘Why so serious,’ she says. She pulls back and looks at him. ‘Have you slept at all?’

‘Not much.’

‘What’s going through that big old brain of yours?’ She kisses him lightly on the cheek, resting a finger against his forehead.

‘It’s fine.’

‘Talk to me.’

He sighs, lying back against the pillow. ‘I think you should go home.’

She frowns. ‘What do you mean?’ she asks carefully.

‘It’s not that I don’t want you here, you have to know that,’ Jack says quickly. ‘This, us, everything that’s happened in the last few days – it’s more than I ever dreamed of. If I had my way we’d never leave this bed.’

She relaxes slightly. ‘But?’

‘I’m worried about you. Being out there, with Otto. Close to potential explosives.’

‘I’m doing my job. Same as I always have.’

‘And look how that’s working out for you? Over the last few years, you’ve been abducted at gunpoint, nearly drowned, and then, last year, attacked by Kevin bloody Walsh.’

‘What’s your point? You want me to quit?’

‘I... Shit, no.’ He looks at Lucy, at that same determined, bloody-minded expression he’s seen on her more times than he can count. ‘No, you love your job. I’m just saying – sit this one out.’

Lucy gets up suddenly, reaching down to the floor and picking up a T-shirt. She glares at him as she puts it on.

‘Every job in frontline policing entails a level of risk. Have I been caught up in more of it than I’d like? Yes. But I’m not quitting.’

‘I’m not saying—’

‘I’m not going unless my PolSA tells me we’re done. And given the current terror alert, that’s not going to be any time soon. You brought me here! You interrupted my dinner with Pete and told me to come with you to London. What’s changed?’

‘This!’ Jack sits up, pointing between them. ‘This – whatever you call this! I’ve only just got you. I couldn’t bear it if anything happened.’

Her face softens. ‘Nothing is going to happen to me.’

‘You don’t know that. And now there’s Kevin Walsh—’

‘Jack, we’ve been over this—’

‘Why can’t you see the danger? Kevin Walsh makes a threat to your life, and then we discover that George Bevan knew Tansy. It can’t be coincidence – they went looking for her—’

‘You don’t know that!’

‘I’m not prepared to take that risk. You need to go.’

Her eyes flare with anger. ‘You don’t get to tell me what to do, Jack.’

‘I do—’

‘Since when?’

‘Since—’

‘Since you fucked me? Is that what this is all about? Two nights together and you think you’re in charge?’

Jack’s floundering. This wasn’t how he wanted this to go. ‘As your DCI —’

‘Oh, no. Fuck off with that. All this time, you’ve never once pulled rank. And God knows, there were enough opportunities when you’d have been right to. And now – now we sleep together – you think this is the time?’

He’s fucked up. Big time. He’s never seen Lucy with such fury in her eyes. She bends down and picks up his clothes, throws them at him.

‘Get out.’

‘Lucy—’

‘I’m serious,’ she says, her voice low and menacing. ‘Get the fuck out of my room.’

He pauses for a moment, but he can tell she damn well means it. He pulls his boxers on, his trousers, picks up his shoes and socks. He tells himself: she needs time to calm down. And then he can apologise. Explain. But as the door closes behind him, leaving him half-dressed in the corridor, he knows – it’s going to take more than a few hours before she’ll speak to him again.

Maybe she never will.

He puts his key card in his door with a heavy heart. He’s barely in the room before he’s berating himself for being such an idiot. How did he manage to wreck something so good, so quickly? He’s about to turn around and immediately apologise when his phone buzzes in his hand. A number he doesn’t recognise, and he answers it.

‘DCI Ellis?’ the male voice says. ‘This is Stephen Bevan. George and Daniel’s father. And, well, I think I have something that could help you.’

CHAPTER FIFTY

Lucy stomps around her room, working herself up into a right fury. How dare Jack tell her what to do? How dare he tell her to go home? First Pete and now him, what's going on with these men?

She's been in the police force for sixteen years. In that time, she's encountered her fair share of misogyny, and she's ignored it all, exceeding expectations and forging a path into a career she's successful at. And now, Jack's got the nerve to tell her to be careful? Fuck that!

She's made her way through life by jumping in with two feet – and yes, she's had a few hospital visits as a result, but she's not going to bloody well stop now. Some weak pencil dick like Kevin Walsh threatens her and she should run away with her tail between her legs? Hell, no!

She's good at her job. The dogs she trains are brilliant and brave, and as much as this job can show her the worst side of humanity, it also gives her a reason to get up in the morning. She's doing good here. She's useful, and the team is making progress, clearing sites and making sure there's no further threat to the public. Yes, Otto might find an explosive, or the trace of one, but then they step away. The bomb disposal team are the real heroes, in Lucy's opinion.

After an expletive-filled moment, her fury has burned out, and she slumps, half-dressed, on the edge of the bed. Her anger has made way for sadness, and feeling tired and tearful, she takes a long, jagged breath in. Her and Jack finding each other here was unexpected, but God, it has been good. She'd never imagined a connection like that – not with him, not with anyone. Her need for him had been overwhelming and it still lurks – for the first time, she can't imagine life without him. She loves everything she does, but the thought of being without Jack makes her feel grey and sad.

Suddenly, she understands his protectiveness, his worry. It was misguided and expressed poorly, but it came from a place of care and concern. There's no way she's giving up her job – and she'd never expect Jack to give up his – but her anger has dissipated, and she realises how hard she had been on Pete.

That time, his protectiveness led to them splitting up, so why does she feel so differently with Jack?

Since her husband died, she'd sworn not to become that attached again. Look where it led the first time. Violence and murder – absolutely not. True to her word, she'd been happy with Pete but she never thought she couldn't survive without him. But Jack? Being with him is as natural as breathing – like he's a part of her, and the thought of losing him so soon feels akin to removing a limb.

She gets up, throws a jumper and joggers on, and opens the door, quickly walking down to Jack's room. She knocks on the door, twice, heart beating, ready to talk this through, to come to an agreement together. But there's no answer.

Has he gone out already? It's possible. She tries again, still no reply, and shuffles slowly back to her room. She considers phoning him, but what she has to say needs to be done face to face.

Later, then.

Phone in hand, she notices the messages lighting up the screen. Her PolSA, asking what time she's going to arrive at the FCP today.

She sighs and goes for a shower. There is still work to do. And she's going to do it. No matter what a silly man has to say.

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CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE

Jack jumps in a taxi outside the Premier Inn and, barely twenty minutes later, arrives to meet Stephen Bevan in the reception of a swanky boutique hotel in Pimlico.

Stephen Bevan is already waiting and greets Jack with a nod.

‘The house is still a no-go area,’ Bevan says as they take a seat in a secluded corner. ‘Full of your guys. We’ve had to get a room at this place.’

Jack considers the plush velvet sofas, gold trim and mood lighting. It’s hardly slumming it.

‘How are you doing? How is your wife?’ Jack asks.

Stephen answers with a shrug. ‘Tabitha’s upstairs, in bed. She cries, all the time. Neither of us slept a wink last night.’

‘I’m sorry for your loss.’

‘You blame us, don’t you?’ Jack opens his mouth but Stephen stops him with a wave of his hand. ‘I saw it on your officers’ faces. As they searched the house, bundled up our belongings and took it all away. The disdain when they interviewed us – it was obvious. Recording it all, giving us the caution – as if we were criminals ourselves.’

Jack keeps quiet. The caution and the interviews were necessary. Maybe if Jack had been more thorough when he first met the family, George might still be alive.

‘I need to go back to the Winchester house today,’ Stephen continues. ‘Let your officers in so they can search without bashing the door down. God knows what they think they’re going to find.’

‘We’re hoping for something that might lead us to whoever is behind it all.’ Jack leans forward so nobody around them can hear. ‘I don’t think George and Daniel were alone in this. I think there’s someone else, someone who manipulated them.’

‘They were only young,’ Stephen mutters, almost to himself. ‘They didn’t know what they were doing.’ He looks at Jack. ‘George told you, didn’t he?’

‘Told me?’

‘That I...’ He glances behind, to the other patrons nearby. ‘That I used to hit Tabitha.’

Jack decides to be honest. 'He did, yes.'

'And you know I was fired – from the police force?'

'Yes.'

'I was a different man then. I was always so angry, so much pent-up aggression. You must know what it's like?'

'I don't beat up my family, Mr Bevan,' Jack replies, plainly, but a voice in his head reminds him of this morning. Shouting at Lucy, telling her what to do. There's no doubt the stress of his job makes him occasionally behave horribly – something he clearly needs to address.

'They hated me – both George and Daniel. And I don't blame them.'

Jack stays quiet, letting Stephen Bevan speak, but he plunges into silence, his gaze locked on a point in the middle distance. He's quiet for so long, Jack has to ask, 'I'm sorry, Mr Bevan, but why did you call me?'

He looks at Jack, confused, until the fog clears.

'The men...' he says. 'Your officers. They asked us about mobile phones. Had we ever seen the boys using a phone we didn't recognise? Had Daniel or George ever made a call in front of us? And we said no, nothing, the boys were generally out or in their rooms, we didn't talk much. If at all. But there was this one time – and I remember because the boys so rarely argued – they'd fallen out. We heard shouting upstairs, couldn't make out what they were upset about, until Daniel came charging down. I asked, and Daniel said that George had taken his phone and wouldn't give it back.'

Jack's confused, unsure as to where this is going. 'And?'

'And it seemed like a stupid thing – they weren't kids anymore, arguing over toys – so we left them to it. Daniel went back upstairs, shouting at George and this time I caught it – he said that it was urgent, he needed to make a call, *now*. And George said...' He flushes. 'Well, you don't need to know exactly what George said, but Daniel came flying back down the stairs, went into my study. He saw me and pushed the door shut.'

'What was he doing in there?'

'He must have been making a phone call. That's our only landline – because who needs a landline nowadays, with the mobiles? I've been meaning to cut it off but never got around to it.'

Jack's interested now. 'Daniel made a call on your landline? When was this?'

'About a month ago. And it must have been important – given all the shouting.'

‘Mr Bevan, do you give us permission to access your phone records?’
Stephen blinks. ‘Yes. Of course.’

Jack strides back to New Scotland Yard, his mind racing. They haven’t found phones for either Daniel or George; Jack assumed they were at the bottom of the Thames by now, but this could be a solid lead. He makes calls to Lynch, telling her to pull the paperwork together, get Stephen Bevan to sign it as soon as possible so they can find out who Daniel Bevan called.

Once in the incident room, he makes his way around each of the teams, checking on CCTV footage, on witness interviews. He sees the lone figure of George Bevan get on the Tube at Pimlico, the rucksack already in his possession. He uses an Oyster card – one was found, charred and melted, in what was left of his back pocket. It was bought at Waterloo station a month prior, loaded with twenty quid cash. On the CCTV, George has zero contact with anyone, speaks to no one, barely lifts his head enough to be seen on the cameras. Witness statements agree – IC1 male, approximately six foot tall, dressed in a black hoodie and cap with a lime-green jacket, holding a navy-blue rucksack. He was silent before the bomb went off.

There is nothing to indicate he was working with someone, nothing to give any indication who was in charge. But there was no way he built that bomb at the house in Pimlico – someone must have given it to him between his house and the tube station.

‘Have we checked Ring doorbells?’ Jack asks the DS in charge of the CCTV. ‘Traced his route from Denbigh Street to the tube station?’

‘Not yet. We’re working on it.’

‘Do it faster,’ Jack snaps. ‘That bomb didn’t spring up from nowhere.’

The DS raises her eyebrows at her colleague and Jack regrets his tone. But they’re under pressure – they need to find out where that bomb came from. And more importantly, if there are others.

The argument with Lucy this morning hasn’t helped. He thinks of her searching the Pimlico house, thankful she’s well away from either bomb site.

‘Guv? We have it,’ a man says next to him. A tall thin DC, with glasses, he holds a laptop in one hand, the screen open.

‘Have what?’

‘The number that Daniel Bevan called.’

‘Let’s see?’ Jack gestures to the nearest table and the two of them sit down, crowding around the laptop. He looks around for Lynch but she’s nowhere to be seen. He leaves her alone; the woman has to have a break every now and again.

‘With Mr Bevan’s help, we narrowed down the itemised bill to this.’ The man points with a thin finger to an 078 number – a mobile. ‘And it certainly seems to be suspicious. It’s an unregistered pay as you go, bought about two months ago from the Tesco superstore in Hornchurch.’

‘Where is Hornchurch?’

‘East of London, near Dagenham. Essex. And it was one of a batch – we’ve managed to discover fifteen SIMs that were bought at the same time. We’re chasing ten, but five of those already have links to crime.’

‘What? Who?’

‘Nobody’s got that far. Two linked to cybercrime and three to drugs.’

‘So whoever this is, they’re up to no good. Is it still in use?’

‘Nobody’s made a call on this number for over two weeks. But,’ he adds, ‘when they did, the location pinged to a cell tower near Gray’s Beach Riverside Park – here,’ he finishes, pointing to a location on the map.

‘A kids’ play area?’ Jack says.

‘And a skate ramp, a zip line and a sandpit.’

‘Fuck’s sake,’ Jack mutters.

‘I’ll keep an eye on it, though, and call you if it comes online again.’

He thanks the DC, taking a copy of the map and sticking it up on the board, marking the Tesco superstore and the park with red dots. They’re not far from each other; it would indicate whoever this is has a stomping ground, but it brings them no closer to finding this person.

Jack stands at the board and considers the evidence. Two posh private-school boys – blown up. One bomb successfully reaching its target, another premature, taking George Bevan with it. Not their plan, if Gary King is to be believed. The teams are tracking down known associates but, so far, the only people they’ve come up with are friends from their private school, and teammates from rugby or football. Posh twats annoyed at being questioned by coppers for a crime they know nothing about.

And what of Gary King?

Jack thinks of their suspect – still locked up in the CT cells nearby. Even though he’s now been charged, they’ve been able to keep him in custody,

arguing they need to prevent his communication with the outside world. He's the lead suspect in all of this – no way Jack's letting him out of his sight.

But last time Jack spoke to him, he sensed a fear. The arrogance retreating, leaving a vulnerability: whoever had given him that bomb and sent him to Oxford Street last Friday was no longer protecting him. He was alone now to face the consequences.

Maybe another chat could loosen him up further.

He takes a taxi north, shows his ID as he goes through reception, heading to the CT wing. He pauses to speak to the custody sergeant.

'Cell three,' he says. 'Do you want me to call his lawyer? Get him sent up to the interview suite.'

'Yeah, in a moment. Cell three, you say?'

The custody sergeant nods, confused at a DCI wandering about in the lower levels of a quiet nick, when they're normally safely ensconced in a warm office.

'One of your lot was just here, though,' he shouts after Jack. Then quieter: 'This guy's getting more visitors than Al Capone.'

Jack trudges down the corridor. The lingering aroma of old coffee and dirty protests, mixed with bleach, crowds his senses.

But cell three is quiet.

Jack opens the peephole and peers through. For a second, his brain can't reconcile what he's seeing – a line of tight white cord descending from above, the top of a bald head, just visible through the window. Until he recoils with shock and steps backwards from the door, shouting, screaming for help.

The custody sergeant arrives at his side, feet thumping down the corridor. Alarm bells are ringing, requests for medical assistance, back-up. He fumbles the keys in the lock but gets it open the second time, revealing Gary King, suspended from the top of the door frame.

Jack jumps forward, lifting the man by the legs as the sergeant cuts him free. King slumps to the floor of the cell, and the sergeant begins mouth to mouth, but even Jack can see there's no point. The man's face is mottled purple and red, his tongue protruding from his blue lips. A makeshift noose made of narrow cord slips from his neck, leaving a deep groove in the flesh.

It would have taken a while. Minutes that felt like years. A slow suffocation, as the last remaining oxygen in King's lungs was choked from

his body.

But there's no doubt in Jack's mind.

Gary King – their only lead, their sole surviving witness – is dead.

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CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO

Lucy and Otto are driven down to a house in Pimlico. A gorgeous place that would have been neat and as tidy as a pin before half of London's police force tramped through the doors. She quickly makes the connection – this is where the brothers lived – and her job is to check for any trace of explosives, either present now or previously.

Crime scene techs are still filing in and out, collecting evidence, taking it away by the boxful. She signs in with the scene guard, and she and Otto begin their search.

She keeps Otto on a long line, letting him sniff, only redirecting him when there's an area he might have missed. Through the kitchen, out of the double doors to the small, concreted garden. Tail wagging furiously, he continues to look, sometimes pausing to sniff the air, then he's nose down, checking every nook and cranny.

They move on, up the stairs, two bedrooms, one bathroom. The master suite is huge, with posh furnishings on a massive bed, a chaise longue at the end. But the curtains are closed, the bed covers thrown back, and Lucy wonders where the parents are. In their grief, she can imagine all they want is to be left alone, yet they have strangers in their house, taking their belongings away.

Otto continues to search, while Lucy waits in the doorway. She hears snippets of murmured conversation from downstairs.

'You can't tell me they didn't know?' A whisper behind a mask. 'Both their children are now implicated in terrorism, and the mum and dad deny all knowledge?'

A hum of agreement. 'But what happened to those children when they were growing up that meant they resorted to violence like that?'

'You're thinking abuse?'

'I'm thinking something must have happened. A twenty-five-year-old doesn't just wake up one morning and decide to bomb a tube train.'

Otto pulls Lucy out of her eavesdropping, nudging her with his nose, waiting for her command. She bends down and places a hand on his head, strokes his silky ears. From her experience, nothing's as simple as those crime techs are making out. Who knows who influenced those kids over the

years. Once a child goes to school, they're no longer under the parents' control. They make friends, meet new people. And they were adults. You can't blame the parents – there are other factors at play. The internet, message boards, YouTube. Friends, people they meet down the pub. Maybe they felt powerless; maybe they wanted to effect change. Just chose the wrong way to do it.

Lucy moves on. Second and final floor – the brothers' bedrooms. The normalcy of them breaks Lucy's heart – the posters on the walls, the clothes heaped on a chair. Otto makes a beeline straight towards a pair of jeans, crumpled on the floor. He sniffs, then rests his nose against them in a perfect example of a passive indication. He looks at Lucy; she crouches next to him.

'Show me,' she says again, and he goes straight to the same spot.

She rewards him with an enthusiastic, 'Yes!' and a chew on his ball on a rope, guiding him away from the bedroom and shouting downstairs to one of the CSIs. A man joins her in the bedroom.

'Positive indication from that pair of jeans,' she says.

He photographs them in situ then picks them up with a gloved hand, placing them inside a brown paper evidence bag.

'We'll get them tested,' he replies.

Lucy and Otto continue their search, but finding nothing else, they head back down to the street. It's reassuring that the house isn't filled with boobytraps or discarded explosives, but the positive indication on the jeans shows one of them came in contact with something over the last few days.

But where, Lucy has no idea.

She speaks briefly to the crime scene manager, signs out, and makes her way back to the van. Otto is still sniffing, never off the clock, always looking for something interesting. He pauses next to a drain, inhaling slowly. It sends a chill up Lucy's spine but he doesn't stop, moving on quickly.

It was probably a small animal or a discarded apple core that caught Otto's attention, but the problem with drains is they lead to other places – the origin of the scent. Lucy knows of cadaver dogs giving indications at the overflow of pipes or drains – where the scent has carried on the water from hundreds of metres away, a dead body waiting at the other end.

And then the thought occurs to her. Last night, the fire and rescue dog barked at the location of the dead body. They're taught to look for live scent

– and only bark at that. A dead body will elicit an indication, but not a bark, and that dog had clearly found something he liked the look of. The officers there assumed that the victim only died recently, but what if the dog hadn't been barking at them at all?

She'd had the beginning of the same thought, back at the site yesterday, but fatigue hadn't brought it to conclusion.

She does that now: what if there was someone else down there? Someone further away, whose scent had carried through the voids in the rubble.

And what if that person was still there, waiting to be rescued?

Lucy quickly loads Otto into the boot of the van and gets on the radio. Someone at that crime scene must answer. Because how long does this person have left?

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CHAPTER FIFTY-THREE

With Jack, things are very bad.

Within seconds, there is a crowd of people outside cell three. The chest compressions and mouth to mouth continue while they wait for the paramedics, and Jack steps away. It won't be long before all hell breaks loose; everything about this death will be dissected and analysed, pored over by Professional Standards and the IOPC – and that's even before the news gets out to the wider public.

Jack slowly makes his way back to Counter Terrorism Command. He takes a seat in his office, concentrates on his breathing. His head is swimming; the first warnings of panic are edging into his periphery. Breathe in for a count of four, breathe out for four. Repeat. He clutches the edge of the table so tightly, his knuckles blanch white.

After a moment, he realises the room outside has gone quiet. The whole team are waiting.

He takes a long breath in and out, then gets to his feet and joins them in the incident room. 'So, I'm guessing you've heard about Gary King's death in custody,' he begins. A few of the team nod, one mumbles a quiet, 'Yes.'

'So you'll also know we have one hell of a mess on our hands. People are going to be upset and angry – hell, *I'm* upset and angry – and if that's the case, you need to take a minute and come back when you're ready to do the job. And if after that you still don't want to be here, then ask for a reassignment and go home. I won't judge you for that.'

He sits up straight, surveying the team. The unwashed hair, the crumpled clothes.

'We've been working now for six days straight – and there's still no end in sight. A second bomb went off – under our watch. Two of our main suspects are dead, and the third has killed himself—'

'But how?' one of the DCs interrupts.

Jack has asked himself that very question. All prisoners in custody are under 24/7 surveillance, and in that wing, even more so. They have anything problematic removed when they enter the cell. Where did Gary King get the cord from? Why did he kill himself? And how come nobody noticed as he strung himself up from the door frame?

‘Honest answer,’ Jack says. ‘I don’t know. But there’ll be an IOPC investigation, and we’ll hear the answers in due course. We are not allowed to touch this, do you hear me? I want to know what happened as much as you do, but we are not to compromise an independent inquiry.’

The door is pushed open and Digby appears. He stands for a moment watching, then tilts his head to the right. *Come and talk to me*, he’s saying. Jack holds up a single finger – *one minute* – and Digby nods, leaving them in peace.

Jack turns his attention back to the team, desperate for a crumb of something before the inevitable dressing-down from Digby.

‘Our priority lies with the bombing. So, tell me – where are we? What leads are we following? Someone must have something.’

His gaze tracks around the room, making eye contact with each and every member of his team.

‘Hannah?’ he asks the DS in charge of the CCTV. ‘What do we have?’

She shuffles uncomfortably. ‘We’ve tracked George Bevan backwards from Green Park station to where he enters via the Pimlico Tube. But we have nothing before that. He doesn’t come from his house.’

‘What time did he leave home?’ Jack turns to the board, reads the timeline. ‘Five forty-five a.m.?’

‘Approximately,’ DS Hannah Wright says. ‘But he didn’t enter the tube station until half an hour after that – so he must have gone somewhere else first.’

‘To collect the bomb.’

‘Right. But there aren’t any cameras in that area. We can’t find him, and there’s nothing from Ring doorbells yet.’

‘Dashcams? Anyone driving past? Have a look at ANPR.’ She nods, and Jack turns to his other DS. ‘Anything from the witnesses?’

‘Patrol are still doing interviews, but everything we’ve seen so far says the same thing. He arrived alone, he spoke to no one, blew up the train. End of story.’

‘Well, it’s not, is it?’ Jack snaps. ‘Two additional DNA profiles were found on the respirators, and that means there are two other accomplices out there, waiting to set another bomb. Look for them. Find them.’

The team stare at him; Jack picks out his other sergeants. ‘Anything back from forensics? Our explosives expert? Anyone else?’ Another shuffling of feet. ‘Chase them up. And do it now.’

He looks around, searching for Lynch. Once again, she's absent.

'Anyone seen Sharon?'

'She went on a break over an hour ago.'

'Okay, well, someone go and find her. Get her to call me when you do. And for God's sake, keep looking. We need something that will take us to where this bomb came from. Now,' he adds, and finally the team burst into life.

'Shit,' he mutters, only too aware that everyone's tired, everyone's stressed. Hardly the hallmarks of a high-performing team.

He gets to his feet, heading out to find Digby. As he walks, he checks his phone. No messages. The lack of contact from Lucy has him worried and irritable. He sends off a quick text.

I'm sorry about earlier. And I know you're angry with me - you're right to be - but please reply and let me know you're okay. x

He presses send, watches the second tick arrive on the screen to say it's been delivered. It doesn't turn blue.

Digby hasn't gone far. He's waiting at the end of the corridor, phone in his hand. He looks up as Jack approaches, points to the closest room. Jack follows him in.

'Close the door,' Digby says, sitting down, and Jack does the same, opposite him, silent. They're in an old interview room, repurposed as storage, but despite the boxes and files, Jack still has an odd feeling of being sent to the headteacher's office.

'Jack, you know this isn't good. I've had the chief constable screaming at me, the home secretary is screaming at him. We have no living suspects, no idea where these bombs are coming from and no idea if - or where - they're going to strike next.'

'What do MI5 and 6 say?'

'They're covering their arse. Saying it's home-grown terrorism so MI6 couldn't give a shit, and 5 are saying that because it doesn't seem to be any of the usual suspects, they couldn't have seen it coming. They're blaming us for not passing on intel, or some other such bullshit. Basically, everyone's panicking. And now our only Hail Mary has killed himself in

police custody.' He runs his hands over his shiny skull. 'It's a fucking mess, that's what it is.'

Without anything reassuring to say, Jack stays silent.

Digby looks at him, then sighs. 'And this only makes things worse.'

He bends down and pulls out a laptop, opening it up and pressing play on the video loaded onto the screen. Jack leans forward, squinting at it.

There's no sound, but it's obvious what it's recording. The CCTV feed from Gary King's cell. The date in the corner of the footage is today, the time 13:46, about thirty minutes before Jack arrived. The man himself is sitting on the bench, very much alive.

'I missed him by half an hour,' Jack says.

'Keep watching.'

Jack does as he's told, and after another thirty seconds a door opens and someone walks in. DI Sharon Lynch.

Jack's shocked. What was she doing there? As he cranes closer to the video, she talks to King, even moving to sit next to him on the bench. And as Jack stares, she hands him something. She's talking all the while; King isn't looking at her, his head bent, his gaze locked on the ground. But he takes the length of cord that he's been given, running it between his fingers.

He says something to her, and she passes him her mobile phone. He makes a call, no more than fifteen seconds, and hands it back to Sharon.

'Who was he speaking to?' Jack says.

Digby stays quiet – just points at the screen.

Sharon says a few more words, then gets up, leaving him alone.

It doesn't take long. Jack's mouth is dry as King sobs, surveying his room through his tears. He spots the jutting doorframe and somehow wraps the end of the cord around it. Still crying, he places it around his neck, pulling it tight as he sits down. The cord goes taut as King pushes his legs out from under himself, all his weight on the noose around his neck.

It takes longer than Jack imagined. Seconds tick by as his body spasms. His eyes bulge, his legs kick out, his fingers scrabbling at the cord. And then his arms go slack, falling to his sides.

Jack swallows as Digby turns off the video.

'Six minutes later, you walk in. And you know the rest.'

'But Sharon... What's she got to do with this? She's been here, every step of the way. Why would she give him the means to hang himself? And where is she now?'

‘Isn’t that the question? According to her pass, she’s here, arrived back about ten minutes before you left. We’ve got security scouring New Scotland Yard. As soon as we find her, I’ll ask exactly those questions.’

‘And in the meantime?’ Jack senses this conversation is far from being over.

Digby exhales noisily. ‘Jack, you need to go home. The press haven’t got hold of this yet but it’s only a matter of time. And they’re going to be looking for someone to blame.’

There’s a long pause, as Jack realises what Digby’s intending to do.

‘You’re throwing me under the bus, is that it?’ A ripple of anger grows in Jack, fizzing and popping.

‘I put my faith in you,’ Digby says with a glare. ‘I put my name on the line and called you up from Hampshire because I thought you were the right man for this job, and now look where we are. You’re the operational SIO. Sharon Lynch was reporting to you. I’ll do what I can, but this has ruined my reputation—’

‘No, I get it,’ Jack snaps. ‘You don’t want to be taken down by this so you’ll push it on to me. Great. Thanks.’

Jack gets to his feet, striding out of the room before he says something he’ll regret. He came to London as a favour. He could have stayed in Southampton, putting the finishing touches to an assault conviction, or even a few nice safe cases of breaking and entering, but no. He stupidly jumped at the first sign of something big. Wanting to save the world, as usual.

He marches away from the incident room, pressing his pass against the exit gates but pausing when he sees the mob outside. A crowd of press have gathered, cameras poised. The last thing he wants is to get caught up in whatever lies they’ve been told – the infamous DCI and his fall from grace.

He looks at the staircase behind him, and heads back into the building, taking the two flights down to the underground car park. Only the bigwigs get to park here; the small concrete space is filled with top-of-the-range Mercedes, Audis and BMWs. There’s even a Bentley, the driver waiting, focused intently on the phone in his lap.

He doesn’t look up as Jack passes, heading for the ramp to the outside. He needs to get out of here, go back to the hotel, phone Lucy, beg for forgiveness, anything, and then get both of them out of London.

But before he reaches daylight, his phone rings in his pocket. His first thought is: *Lucy!* but when he takes it out, there’s a surprising name on the

screen.

Sharon Lynch

‘Sharon! Where are you?’

‘Guv...’

Her voice is weak, strained.

‘Let us help you. We can—’

A strangled sob. But this time, the noise is doubled – coming from the phone and somewhere else in his vicinity. Somewhere close, and Jack wheels around, trying to locate the source as Sharon cries down the phone.

To his left, and he’s walking quickly now. ‘Sharon, tell me where you are...’

‘I’m here.’

She’s right in front of him, sitting on the concrete, behind a pillar. He drops into a crouch next to her. She’s in the same clothes as she was wearing this morning, but her face is grey, her skin blotchy. Her eyes are half-closed and as Jack says her name, her mouth drops open. There’s a water bottle next to her, on its side, empty.

‘Sharon, what have you done? What have you taken?’

He grabs her handbag, dumping the contents onto the concrete. Silver blister packs scatter, the foil broken, and he lifts them up to the light, trying to read the tiny words on the surface. Paracetamol, zopiclone, sertraline, aspirin. And they’ve all gone.

Jack dials 999, then lifts his phone to his ear, asking for an ambulance.

‘Yes, the underground car park of New Scotland Yard. And come quickly. She’s taken half a pharmacy.’

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CHAPTER FIFTY-FOUR

The ambulance arrives quickly, the paramedics pushing Jack to the side and attending to the now-unconscious Sharon Lynch.

Jack calls Digby to update him, but the detective superintendent is less than sympathetic.

‘What a mess,’ Digby says. ‘You’ll contact next of kin?’

‘That’s your job now,’ Jack replies. ‘I’m off the case, remember?’

‘Right,’ Digby says with a sigh. ‘I guess we should be glad she phoned you,’ he adds and hangs up, leaving Jack with the distinct impression that Digby would have preferred if Lynch had finished the job.

Jack waits as Sharon is loaded into the ambulance on a gurney, a uniformed officer with her to keep guard.

‘We’ll take her to St Thomas,’ the paramedic says. ‘Call later, they can update you.’

Jack nods, watching as the ambulance screeches away. Suddenly knackered, he turns in the direction of his hotel and starts walking. Just the act of putting one foot in front of the other is an effort, and all he can think about is climbing into bed, pulling the duvet over himself and not moving until all this has gone away.

He wants desperately to see Lucy. But she’s still not answering his text.

At the hotel, he trudges up to the third floor and knocks lightly on Lucy’s door. No response, so he tries again, louder. Still nothing. He checks his phone. Still no blue tick on his earlier message. She hasn’t read it.

A hotel employee is trundling down the hallway with her trolley. Jack stops her, politely.

‘Do you know if someone’s still staying in this room?’ he asks her.

She looks at him, chewing gum slowly. ‘What?’ she says after a few seconds have passed.

‘My friend,’ Jack manages, summoning his last remaining crumb of patience. ‘She was staying in this room. Has she checked out?’

She blinks slowly, reminding Jack of a pleasant cow, chewing the cud. Then she reaches for her clipboard, running a finger down the lines, stopping at room 309.

‘Nah,’ she says. ‘She’s still here. See?’ She points to the Do Not Disturb sign hanging off the handle. ‘Room’s a mess. We’re glad we don’t have to clean it.’

Jack can’t help but smile at the woman’s assessment of Lucy’s housekeeping and thanks her, going down to his own room where the sheets are crisp and the towels neatly arranged on the rail.

He sits down heavily on the bed, then lies back, staring at the ceiling. He can’t help but dwell on the events of the past week. Had he made the right decisions on the case? Had he managed his team effectively? Why hadn’t he noticed what was going on with Sharon? On the surface of it, she had been a hard-working, dedicated DI, but today she took a length of cord into Gary King’s cell and then tried to kill herself. What on earth happened?

If someone else had been in charge, maybe they would have got to the bottom of all of this by now. And maybe they’d have recognised George Bevan as a threat and arrested him before the second bomb. Who knows? Jack finds himself going around in circles, second-guessing every decision he made.

He puts the television on to distract, but there’s nothing on but news. They’re still talking about the bomb at Green Park Tube – and the banner along the bottom tells Jack that twenty-nine people are now reported dead, to add to the tally of thirty-nine from the Selfridges explosion. Who knows how many others injured and in hospital. They don’t mention Gary King’s death and they don’t mention Jack, which is reassuring, but he wonders how long it will take. Days, hours, until the press get hold of this failure, and demand his resignation, or worse?

Right now, Jack couldn’t care less.

He worries about Lucy. It’s both reassuring and petrifying that she’s still in London, and he’s desperate to get hold of her. If she’s out with Otto, she’s potentially in the line of fire from more bombs, but if she’s not working, she’s at risk from Kevin Walsh. But he can’t stifle her, and he certainly can’t tell her what to do. The impotence drives him mad.

It feels strange to be sitting here in the middle of the day, doing nothing, so he takes his laptop out and logs on. He tells himself it’s so he can catch up on the goings-on in Southampton, and as he thought, the team have been copying him in on their progress reports, although Amrit and Oscar are capably holding the fort. He misses the team; working with people he hand-picked, whom he can trust. Jack’s aware he can come off prickly and abrupt

to people who don't know him, and in London it's felt like everyone's been working against him, set on their own agenda. Jack scans the messages quickly, until his gaze rests on an email from HMP Winchester.

He clicks on it, interested. It's the visitor's list for Kevin Walsh, the one Jack requested on Monday, and he scans the names and dates. For a long time, there are the same repeated names: Rebecca Walsh and Roger Walsh. His parents, Jack assumes. *They must be very proud*, he thinks with a rueful smile. They visit every month, and then in January this year two other names are added to the list:

George Bevan.

Daniel Bevan.

They'd met Kevin Walsh. It wasn't just a casual contact on some message boards; they'd met face to face. Jack was right – they were connected, and they visited him regularly. Once a week for three months, stopping at the beginning of April, two weeks ago.

He picks up his phone, about to message Sharon out of habit, but stops. There's another name on the list. It only appears once – on 21 December – a month before Daniel and George Bevan, and a week after Tansy's body had been found. A lone visitor arriving on a different day to the others.

Marcus Whitmore.

No additional information. Jack types it into the Police National Computer but there are too many people by that name to narrow it down. Jack feels a surge of optimism, then remembers that this isn't his job anymore.

But maybe it still could be. Here is one name, and a chance to redeem himself. He can get CCTV from the prison and a copy of this guy's ID. And maybe, just maybe, they have a lead.

He makes a call; she answers quickly.

'Amrit,' he says, the smile already on his face. 'Are you busy? I need you in London.'

CHAPTER FIFTY-FIVE

The man appraises the drug dealer in front of him. He's slumped in a chair, cable ties securing his hands tightly behind him, but this man doesn't have the ability to go anywhere.

He leans back, putting all his strength into his fist, his knuckles coming into contact with his captive's face. Skin splits, the cheekbone breaks; his head drops for a moment, a long line of bloody dribble reaching to his lap.

The man leans forward, holds his victim's face between finger and thumb.

'Do you understand now, Ricky?' the man asks.

Ricky looks at him through swollen eyes and mutters something incomprehensible.

The man squeezes tighter. 'Do you? Because I can't have little shits like you skimming off the top. You were my favourite, Ricky, but you see the message it sends if I don't deal with it? That was my cocaine, my profit. And you snorted it up your fucking nose.'

The man pokes at the mess in the middle of Ricky's face, a mashed-up pulp of blood and bone. 'Not that you're going to be doing that again soon,' he finishes with a sneer.

'Marcus?'

A shout from the room next door, and the man turns to look. His brother appears, filling the doorway with his bulk. The same features, the same hair, the same muscles – just not quite as attractive. In Marcus's opinion.

'What, Josh?' he snaps. 'I'm busy.'

Josh joins him next to the bleeding drug dealer. 'Don't kill the kid.'

'That's always been your problem, Joshy. Too weak to do what's necessary.'

His brother blinks; Marcus knows he doesn't have the guts to argue with him. Never has.

As expected, Josh turns away. 'Willem is on the phone. Wants to confirm details for tonight.'

'Fine.' Marcus sighs, taking one last look at the now-unconscious drug dealer. 'Take this one somewhere remote and dump him. Alive or dead, your choice.'

He goes to take the call, speaking fluent Dutch to his contact. Confirming the details to his satisfaction, happy that at least someone out there can do their job properly.

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CHAPTER FIFTY-SIX

The mood on the Oxford Street site is low as Lucy arrives; Graham meets her outside the cordon, Saxon at his heels.

‘They made the decision to move from rescue to recovery this morning,’ he says. ‘We’re not searching for live victims anymore.’

‘Did you run Saxon over the same place as yesterday?’ She bends down to stroke the Labrador and gives his silky ears a good massage.

‘Yes, and he gave a positive indication.’

‘He barked?’ Graham nods. ‘So, that’s two dogs now. What more do they need? We have to check it out thoroughly.’

‘Be my guest,’ Graham says, allowing her to walk past him. ‘I tried.’

Graham and Saxon follow Lucy through the cordon, signing in, then to the rendezvous point where the incident commander is studying a map. He sees them all approaching and sighs.

‘As I told Graham – there’s nobody down there. We ran a camera down – nothing.’

‘Two dogs say you’re wrong. Have you tried thermal imaging? Or the CO2 probe?’

‘PC Halliday—’

‘Please? Let me look. Half an hour, that’s all I ask. And then I’ll fetch Moss and personally start searching for cadavers.’

The commander looks at Graham, and then up to the rubble. He rolls his eyes. ‘Go on, then. It’s going to take that long for the VRDs to arrive anyway.’

Lucy waits, as Graham deploys the dog across the rubble for the second time. Her eyes lock on the place where the dog indicated last, but Saxon needs to locate it independently again if her theory is to be believed. Graham’s hanging back, letting the dog sniff, checking every nook and cranny, his four legs faster and more graceful than their two.

But then he finds it. Lucy notices the body language change, as his muscles tense and his tail wags furiously. He has something. It takes the dog a few more attempts to hone in on the scent, but soon it’s clear – it’s close to where they found the boy yesterday. And if Saxon’s nose is to be believed, this person is alive.

The dog barks enthusiastically, dodging to and fro, trying to get closer to the source. But as Lucy joins Graham on top of the rubble, she can see the problem.

There's a tiny gap where two huge boulders meet. The dog could get through, but, like yesterday, there's no way of knowing what's below it.

The positive indication is radioed to the RVP, and the commander joins them, peering down into the darkness.

'Can you hear me?' he shouts into the space. His voice echoes and distorts; it seems impossible that someone could reply. 'What is your name? Can you see daylight? Make a noise, if you can hear me.'

There's no reply, and the commander straightens up, looking at Lucy as if to say, *See?*

'I'm not risking my dog,' Graham says, and the commander nods.

'I'll send one of our men,' he says, and looks back to where a crowd of burly firemen are gathering.

Lucy can tell what he's thinking: with their wide shoulders and broad chests, there's no way they'll fit down that gap.

'I'll go,' Lucy says.

The two men look at Lucy as if she's crazy.

'Think about it. I'm small, I could fit through. And once I'm in, I can see what we're dealing with. Hook me up to a line if you're worried, but I'm your best bet of getting that person out alive.'

'If they even are still alive,' Graham says. 'It's been six days since the explosion. Nobody can survive that long without food or water.'

'It rained on Tuesday, you never know. And just because there hasn't been any indication of life for a few days doesn't mean there's no one down there. Please, let me try? Isn't it better we know for sure? Think about the win.' She looks up at the incident commander, appealing to his ego. 'Imagine how that would help morale. And on your shift, too. What a boost. The man who was in charge when the last victim was pulled out alive from the rubble.'

He nods, considering it. 'Okay, then. Hard hat, full harness, no arguments.'

'Absolutely.'

'And you come out when I say so. Have you had experience of caving before?'

‘A bit.’ Lucy refrains from telling him it was when she was eighteen, on an Outward Bound course, and she hated it.

‘Good. We’ll get a camera rigged up to your helmet so we can see what’s going on. And if anyone asks – this was your idea.’

‘A hundred per cent.’

Lucy’s nerves are buzzing as she climbs into the orange overalls and clamps a hard hat on her head. She’s given thick gloves as she steps into the harness, a carabiner holding her safe.

‘Give us the word, and we’ll pull you out.’

‘Roger that, boss.’

The fireman put in charge of her rope looks her up and down. ‘Ready to go?’

‘Ready,’ she says, forcing bravado into her voice.

At first, it’s easy. She squeezes through the small gap without a problem, carefully manoeuvring herself over bricks and lumps of concrete. Light trickles down from above, and the lamp on her hard hat is more than adequate. But she soon realises this isn’t going to be as easy as she thought.

Pieces of masonry shift under foot; sharp talons of broken metal risk injury at every turn. Shards of glass litter the rubble like lost jewels. Lucy can see why no one – man or dog – has been sent down before and finds a secure place to rest. She shouts out into the darkness.

‘Fire and rescue, can you hear me?’

She pauses, listening to the echo as it bounces away. No reply.

She could do with a dog down here, to focus her search, but it’s too much risk to the animal. She has to make do, trust her instinct.

A voice comes down the radio, solace in the darkness. ‘Brian Carroll was south of where you are now.’

Lucy looks down into the abyss, into the black. A shiver of claustrophobia freezes in her core.

‘In for a penny,’ she mutters, and tentatively makes her way forward.

CHAPTER FIFTY-SEVEN

Half an hour later, Lucy's cursing her decision. She's in the depths of hell, surrounded by the dead. Women, caught by falling masonry. Men, pinned between large lumps of concrete. Some have obviously been dead for a while, giving off that sweet, sickly odour of decomp, while others look unchanged, undamaged. As if they passed away in their sleep.

The incident commander was right. There's no one alive here.

Fine brick dust coats her gloves, sticks in her nose, her mouth, her ears. Her muscles ache from climbing over boulders, pushing her way through tiny crevices. The tension from the unknown terrifies her, where the unstable structure could shift any second.

She resolves to give it one more try and shouts out into the darkness. She waits. Nothing.

She puts her hand on the radio to call up, when she hears something. Almost impossibly quiet, a whisper. A hiss of breath, growing louder, forming words.

'Please. Help me.'

Lucy's energy returns in a rush. 'Who's there?' she shouts.

The returning cry is louder this time. 'Please. Help.'

'I'm coming to find you. Hold on.'

Lucy radios up to the surface, and the crackle tells her that the rescue team is mobilising.

'Keep talking to me,' Lucy says, only too aware she needs to keep her victim conscious. 'I am here to rescue you. I'm not going to leave you alone.'

'I'm here. My name's Sally. Please, help. Please.'

'Sally, I'm Lucy. I'm going to get you out.'

Lucy follows the sound, to her right, and down. She gets to her knees on the hard rubble, directs her torch into the fractures between the rocks. And there she is. White eyes, shining in a blackened face.

Lucy holds out her hand, pushing through the wreckage to reach her. She feels the touch of fingers through her glove and grips them tight.

'We'll get you out of here, Sally. Hold on.'

Far above, Lucy hears the rumble of machinery. The promise of rescue; diggers and trucks clearing the way, getting them out. But then there comes another noise. A deep grumble, from deep below. Concrete shifting underneath them, an earthquake of shaking debris and glass and stones.

It feels like the whole world is breaking; Sally shouts her name, her voice full of fear. And the ground moves, dropping Lucy into the void.

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PART THREE

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CHAPTER FIFTY-EIGHT

Sally's hallucinating. There's a woman here, wearing a bright orange jumpsuit and a hard hat. It must be a dream, because she's so small and pretty, what is she doing in hell?

And then she speaks.

'Sally? I'm Lucy. I'm going to get you out.'

Get her out? But how? They're in the middle of an earthquake; they're going to get squashed by thousands of tonnes of rubble. The ground shifts and the woman drops out of sight. Which is a pity, because Sally likes this woman, she trusts her.

Sally finds herself strangely calm. At last, she accepts her fate, and she closes her eyes, but the woman – Lucy? – is back. A harness is pulled tight around her waist and legs, holding her securely in the darkness. She reaches out and grabs Sally's hand, and she finds herself being dragged forward. Through a tiny gap, no bigger than a child could fit through. But Lucy places her other hand on the side of Sally's head, protecting it, and she's persistent; she encourages Sally onward, dragging her useless leg behind her, until she's clipped into the woman's harness, suspended in the air.

'Are you ready?' Lucy says. 'We need to go.'

This woman means business, but Sally's scared. And she's tired, oh, so tired.

It's been so long, down here. No food, only the slightest bit of water. Her head thumps, her muscles ache.

'It's okay,' Sally says, in no more than a whisper. 'I'll stay.'

The woman meets her gaze, and Sally can see how she got down here, determination blazing in her eyes.

'Hell no,' Lucy says. 'You're coming with me.'

CHAPTER FIFTY-NINE

Jack meets Amrit a few hours later in the middle of Waterloo Bridge and hugs her like a long-lost friend.

‘Easy there, boss,’ Amrit replies when he lets her go, her face flushed with surprise. ‘I didn’t realise how much you missed me.’

‘It’s...’ He thinks about Digby, the backstabbing, the team he doesn’t trust. ‘It’s been a hard week,’ he concludes.

‘You know I’m not vetted?’ Amrit says, referring to the higher level of security clearance all officers in Counter Terrorism need to have.

‘At this point, I don’t give a shit,’ Jack replies. ‘Given someone with full DV clearance basically killed our only suspect, I don’t think that’s what’s important right now.’

They start walking along the embankment towards New Scotland Yard. Jack fills her in on the investigation – Gary King’s suicide, Lynch’s involvement and overdose, and the new name on the visitors’ list.

‘Digby says I’m to go home, but this is a solid lead, one we need to follow. And I’m not leaving until it’s done.’ He grimaces. ‘So, sorry, it’s not going to be much fun for you, today, but I need someone I can trust.’

‘I’m fine,’ she says with a smile. ‘I could do with a bit more drama in my life. And this Marcus Whitmore guy – are we sure he’s not just some random school friend, wanting a nice chat with his old mate?’

‘We don’t. But I’ve requested his ID and the CCTV from his visit, so we should know more soon.’

‘And Lucy? Where is she?’

They stop to cross a road, Amrit reading Jack’s face in seconds. ‘So, you two...’

‘Yes.’

‘And Pete?’

‘Out of the picture.’

‘We wondered. Oscar and I.’

‘Nice that you two have had time to gossip.’

Amrit grins. ‘Where is she today?’

‘I don’t know. I...’

‘What did you do?’

She knows him too well and he cringes. 'I fucked up. Told her that she was in danger and should go home.'

'Ah. Lucy took that well, I take it?'

'What do you think?'

Jack checks his phone as he walks. Still no reply, and it worries him. She's probably busy, still furious with him, but Lucy does tend to get into trouble.

They arrive at New Scotland Yard, and Jack's pleased to see his pass still gets him through the entry doors. He signs Amrit in, and the two of them head up to the incident room.

Jack's bravado has brought him this far, but standing outside the double doors, he doesn't know what to expect. Will Digby call security and have them thrown out? Or will he be prepared to listen?

Heads turn when Jack pushes through the door, Amrit following. Conversation quietens as he walks through to where Digby is sitting in Jack's old office, head down, listening to someone talk on the phone. Jack stands in the doorway and waits.

Digby does a satisfying double take when he sees Jack, then points to the chair in front of the desk. He wordlessly puts the phone down after another few moments, then looks up at Amrit.

'Who's this?' he says.

'DS Amrit Gill. The best there is.'

'And she's here because...?'

'Because you're fucked, and you know it.' Digby pales at Jack's tone but doesn't interrupt. Jack takes that as a good sign. 'We have three dead suspects, and two unknown bombers. Burner phones that originated in Essex, a pair of jeans with a trace of something unknown next to the scent of explosive – and that's it. Am I right?'

'The intel on Kevin Walsh came back – but yes. You're not far off.'

'You hate being hands-on. You need me.' Before Digby can reply, Jack continues: 'And I have a new lead.'

'Go on...'

'A man called Marcus Whitmore visited Kevin Walsh in prison. It could be nothing...'

'Or it could be something.' Digby sighs, leaning his head back against the chair. 'That was the chief constable on the phone – and he's fucking furious.'

He's got the home secretary on one side, and the press on the other. This needs to be sorted, Jack. And soon.'

'So, I can come back?'

'Yes.' Jack waits a moment, torturing his former friend. 'Please,' Digby adds reluctantly.

Jack nods and heads out to the incident room.

'Everyone, gather round. I need a full update, and then we need to find out everything we can about a man called Marcus Whitmore.'

'Boss, wait.'

Amrit points to the television screen that's still playing the newsfeed on loop. It's showing the Selfridges bomb site, the ticker tape along the bottom saying:

SURVIVOR FOUND.

'Put the sound on,' someone says, and the team crowd around, eager for a piece of good news.

There's a pulley and a winch rigged up over a huge hole in the rubble. And as they watch, two people are hauled out. The first is a woman with long hair, almost unrecognisable from the mud and muck coating her from head to toe. And the second person, smiling, cheerful, is Lucy.

Blood rushes to Jack's head; he feels faint and wobbles as Amrit guides him down into a chair.

'Put your head between your knees,' she says. 'But look, it's good news. Lucy helped save someone.'

'She went down into an unstable crime scene,' he mutters, 'with no thought for her own safety...'

'Isn't she marvellous?' Amrit says with a grin, and Jack has to agree.

CHAPTER SIXTY

Lucy's never been so glad to see the light of day again. When the building shifted and masonry started to fall, she thought that was it. That finally her stupid decisions had got the better of her and she was going to be squashed into a mess of blood and bone under the weight of the concrete.

But her harness held her tight. And in the hail of dust and dirt, she grabbed Sally's hand, pulling her towards her.

'Come on, keep moving. We need to go.'

Lucy scuffed her elbows, grazed her shin. Dust got in her eyes as, slowly, she coaxed the exhausted woman out of her cave, shuffling forward through gaps barely wider than their own bodies. Lucy hooked her into the harness, gritted her teeth, thought of Jack. Cursed him for telling her to go home, for always being damn well right, and resolving that once she got out of here, she was going to call him, apologise – anything to make it better.

The monologue continued in her head as they were pulled upwards and the light grew brighter. A hundred metres... Less than that, closer now, and they emerge, a burst of sunlight making her squint. Lucy takes solace in the babble of voices above, and a cheer erupts as they clear the surface.

Paramedics take over, carefully transferring Sally onto a stretcher and carrying her off the rubble pile. Lucy clambers down, accepting a helping hand from Graham until they get on solid ground.

'Bloody good work,' the commander says, his previous scepticism forgotten. 'You've got balls, Halliday.' He looks sheepish, realising what he's said. 'You know what I mean.'

'I do. But if it's okay with you, I'd rather not do that again.'

Wincing, she lowers herself down to the kerb, pulling her trouser leg up to check on the grazes and cuts on her skin. Graham brings over her belongings and a bottle of water; she takes them both gratefully, pulling her phone out of her bag.

There's only one number she wants to call.

'Jack?'

'Oh, Christ, Lucy.' It's clear that her heroic rescue made the news. 'What made you do that? What if the whole thing had... You might have been...'

'Jack, breathe.'

He does, a quick inhale. ‘Are you okay?’ he asks, softer.

‘Yes, I’m fine. A few cuts and bruises. Listen, Jack, I’m sorry—’

‘No, I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have—’

‘But I rather proved your point, didn’t I?’

He laughs, an explosion down the phone, and she smiles. ‘Can we agree that from now on I don’t tell you what to do,’ he says, ‘and you don’t deliberately put yourself in harm’s way?’

‘Deal.’ It’s an almost physical relief to have made up with Jack, and all she wants is to see him, hug him, touch him. It’s a strange ache, being so far away. For the first time, she can’t imagine a future without him – a thought both scary and joyful.

‘When do you finish work?’ she asks.

‘Oh, Lucy. It’s been a long day. And we’re only just getting started. Amrit’s here.’

Lucy’s confused. ‘She is?’

‘Come to New Scotland Yard and I can update you. Please?’

‘Okay.’

‘See you soon. Bye, Lucy.’

There are words on the tip of her tongue, three little words, but he’s hung up. She takes a sip of water and hauls herself up from the pavement. A small group of press have gathered, and when she walks out of the safety of the RVP, they shout and clamour for a comment or a photograph. She turns away, looking for safety, spotting Graham and Saxon waiting by the dog van.

‘We thought you might need a lift,’ he says with a smile.

‘New Scotland Yard,’ she says, and Graham frowns.

‘Have you seen yourself?’

She bends down to the wing mirror. Her hair is matted with dust, her face almost black. Her uniform is battered and scuffed – there’s no way she can walk into Counter Terrorism Command looking like this.

‘You might be right,’ she says. ‘I’ll have a shower first.’

CHAPTER SIXTY-ONE

‘Marcus Whitmore is definitely not one of Kevin Walsh’s school friends,’ Amrit says, wasting no time settling in. ‘Winchester prison have sent over his ID and the CCTV from his visit, so we know who he is now. Marcus James Whitmore, born 2 November 1985. He has no record on the PNC – so we don’t have his biologicals on file – but he is known to police. Suspected in a number of crimes from intent to supply to agg burg.’

‘Have you watched the CCTV yet?’ Jack asks, sitting down next to her.

‘Waiting for you.’

Jack smiles as she loads it up. This is how he likes to work. No messing around, no pretence – just brilliant detectives doing their job.

The CCTV is grainy but it is in colour. Jack and Amrit watch as a tall, dark-haired man enters the visitors’ hall. He’s strong and well built, with a black tattoo running from his ear into the neck of his T-shirt.

He’s the sort of man Kevin Walsh aspires to be, and Jack’s amused to see Kevin almost bowing to the man as he strides over, all smiles and ingratiating nods. They sit down and start talking; their heads are so close together, they’re almost touching, clearly discussing something they didn’t want overheard.

‘I assume we don’t have sound?’ Jack asks.

‘Sadly not. And he didn’t stay long. They talk for a quarter of an hour, then Whitmore leaves, never to return. He has an address in Ealing and – get this – a brother.’ Jack raises his eyebrows, interested. ‘Joshua Whitmore, two years younger. Also, no record, but there’s a note on his file that says he’s being investigated by special ops for importing class As.’

‘I wonder if Perry knows him,’ Jack says, referring to their colleague from the drug squad in Southampton. ‘I’ll call him.’

Amrit catches up fast. ‘Are you thinking these two could be our missing DNA profiles from the two remaining respirators?’

‘Could be.’

‘And I don’t know if this helps, but forensics have come back on a stain found on a pair of jeans belonging to George Bevan. As well as explosive residue – identified as Semtex – there’s trace of what the forensic guy described as FC-W.’

‘Translate that for me?’

‘A marine oil, typically used by four-stroke marine engines. Boats, boss,’ she adds, when Jack still looks blank. ‘What was George Bevan doing on a boat?’

‘That’s what you’re here to find out.’

Jack leaves her to it, and heads to his office to make a call. DCI Robert Perry has helped Jack out a few times in the past – he’s hoping he’ll be able to do it again.

‘Sure, I know them,’ Perry says. Jack imagines him leaning back on his chair, self-satisfied but curious. ‘Nasty pair. We suspected they were running some sort of drugs ring out of Southampton docks but we’ve never been able to catch them at it. Special ops at the Met took over, thought they’d have more luck but I’m guessing not, if you’re asking about them.’ He pauses. ‘You think they’re involved in the London bombings?’

‘Their names have come up.’

‘It’s not their normal thing. Those boys are motivated by money, nothing else. I can’t see what they’d have to gain out of it. But they’re sneaky and smart. And the people that work for them are loyal – I can’t imagine you’ll get anyone to talk.’

‘Tell me about the raid in February. Five offenders and forty kilograms of coke?’

‘I remember. Down in Southwood. We suspected they might have been part of the Whitmore empire, but we couldn’t prove anything. What are you thinking?’

‘Before they were arrested, they were all involved in some ACAB bullshit. Vandalism and criminal damage. It just feels...’ Jack pauses, struggling to pull it all together in his mind. ‘Connected.’

Out of the corner of his eye, Jack sees someone arrive in the incident room, immediately swept up by Amrit, who hugs her furiously.

‘Thanks, Rob. I’ve got to go.’

‘No problem. Call me if—’ But Jack’s already hung up, on his feet and opening the door to his office. In three long strides he’s next to Lucy, but he realises in the nick of time where he is. The middle of his incident room is hardly the place for displays of affection.

She’s in a clean uniform, hair washed but still damp in its usual French plait. She has a small graze on her cheek but otherwise seems unscathed as

she grins up at him. Next to them, Amrit bounces on the balls of her feet, clearly excited.

Jack clears his throat awkwardly. 'Shall we...?' He points to the corridor, and Lucy nods. 'No, you can't come,' he says to Amrit as he whisks Lucy out of the room, his hand on the small of her back. They end up in the same storage room as earlier in the day, but Jack has a different agenda now.

As soon as the door's closed, he's on her. His lips clash with hers; he holds her tight, desperate not to come that close to losing her again.

'I could fuck you right here in this cupboard,' Lucy says, her lips still against his, and he laughs, reluctantly pulling away.

'I've been fired once today,' he says. 'Let's not go for a second.'

'You have?' She pulls back, studying him carefully. 'Are you okay?'

'It's not important. Amrit will fill you in.' He cradles her head gently, running his thumb over the graze on her cheek. 'You could have been killed,' he says, quietly.

'I'm fine.'

'But—'

'I'm fine,' she says decisively. 'Let's not get into this again, okay?'

'Okay. Are you staying? We could use your help. You don't have any dog stuff?'

'No dog stuff,' she replies with a smile. 'Now, shall we get back?'

He moves close to her, her back against the wall as he presses against her. 'Do we have to?'

She reaches up, kissing him gently. 'Come on,' she whispers. 'We'll have plenty of time for that later.'

They walk back to the incident room, side by side, hands barely touching. Amrit smirks when they return, but apart from that, nobody pays them much attention.

Lucy walks up to the whiteboard, studying the maps and the notes left as the investigation progressed. She taps a finger against the line that says *Kevin Walsh background*.

'Tell me about this,' she says.

Jack leans against one of the desks. 'Kevin Walsh – removed from his mother's care aged six, when she was arrested by the police for possession with intent to supply class As. I've read the file – the whole house was a disaster waiting to happen. Discarded needles, white powder everywhere.'

'And he never returned?'

‘The mother died of an overdose soon after. And that started a long vendetta against the police, culminating when his foster brother – Nathan Harris – died in custody in 2014. He was forcibly restrained when he got violent but unfortunately hit his head and died.’

‘The IOPC said the restraint was justified and the case was closed,’ Amrit says, joining them at the board.

‘Are you saying that Kevin Walsh was working with Daniel and George Bevan?’ Lucy asks. ‘And who do the other respirators belong to?’

‘Marcus and Joshua Whitmore,’ Jack says.

Lucy raises her eyebrows. ‘You have names already?’

‘That’s who we think. Marcus Whitmore visited Kevin Walsh in prison at the end of December, and he and his brother are well-known to the police in both London and Southampton for drug offences.’

‘So, what’s the link between drugs and bombs?’

‘That’s what we need to work out,’ Jack says. ‘My current hypothesis is that Kevin bonded with George and Daniel Bevan on the message boards over their hatred towards the police and recruited them for some sort of plot to get revenge. Of course, Kevin Walsh’s arrest last year rather bugged up the plan, but George and Daniel Bevan continued, somehow tying up with Gary King. But how that connects to the Whitmores...?’ Jack thinks for a second, remembering DCI Perry’s assertion that they’re only in it for the money. What could they possibly gain from mass murder and throwing London into chaos? ‘If only we could get a sample of the Whitmores’ DNA...’ he thinks aloud, then looks at his ringing phone and Digby’s name on the screen.

Annoyed to be interrupted, he answers.

‘I hear you’ve been looking into Marcus and Joshua Whitmore?’ Digby says.

‘Good news travels fast. Special ops have something to say about it, I assume?’

‘Yes, but that’s not why I’m calling.’ He pauses. ‘Sharon Lynch is awake. And she’ll only talk to you.’

CHAPTER SIXTY-TWO

Jack meets Digby at the entrance to the Emergency Department at St Thomas' hospital, where he's smoking a cigarette directly opposite the ambulance bay.

'Can't get out of the habit of these cursed things,' he mutters, dropping the butt and crushing it underfoot. 'And now is not the time to give up.'

Jack watches him sweep the butt into the gutter, resolving never to work with this man again. 'How's Sharon?' he asks.

'Rescued from death's door, and not out of the woods yet. She managed to get a good cocktail down her gullet before you found her.' He appraises Jack, sulkily. 'Says she'll only speak to you. And we need to get some sort of statement off her in case she snuffs it. So do your job.'

His attitude rankles. 'That's what I was doing before I was fired this morning.'

Digby regards him from under lowered brows. 'Mind your tone, Jack. I'm extending this courtesy, because we need you. But don't overstep.' A large black BMW cruises up next to them, and Digby points towards the Emergency Department. 'She's in there. Ask at reception. Let me know what she says.'

The driver holds the door to the BMW open, and Digby climbs inside without a second glance. The BMW glides away, leaving Jack seething on the pavement.

Inside the ED, Jack's shown to a bed at the end of a long ward, out of the way from prying eyes, the curtain drawn around it. A uniformed officer stands guard.

Jack shows his credentials. 'Give us a moment, would you?' he says, and the officer leaves quickly, glad of the respite.

'Knock knock,' Jack says, as he pushes the curtain aside. He tries for lightness and fails. 'How are you?'

Sharon looks awful. Grey pallor, a trace of black around her mouth where they must have filled her with activated charcoal to mop up the last of the toxins. She slowly swings her gaze across, looking at him with bloodshot eyes.

‘I feel like shit.’ She points to a glass of water and Jack hands it to her. She slowly takes a sip. ‘I’m sorry, I...’

Her voice breaks and she starts to cry.

Jack places a gentle hand on her shoulder. ‘It’s okay, you’re here now. I’m glad you called me.’

‘I shouldn’t have. I wish... What life do I have now, guv? I’m going to prison. You know how that will go – a copper behind bars. They’ll kill me, they’ll...’

Jack has nothing to say to that. He assumes the investigation into what happened with Gary King is ongoing, but the likelihood is Sharon will be charged with encouraging or assisting suicide, at least. And that will mean jail time, however they spin it.

But there are so many unanswered questions.

Jack takes his phone out of his pocket and places it on the table between them. ‘I’m going to record our conversation,’ he says, switching it on. Sharon stares at him, dully, as he recites the caution and the time and the date.

‘Tell me what happened this morning, Sharon,’ he asks.

‘I had to,’ she whispers. ‘He said... Oh God...’ She puts her head in her hands and sobs silently.

He places his hand on hers, gently moving it away from her face. ‘Please, Sharon. I can’t help you unless I know what’s going on.’

She looks at him and sniffs. He hands her a tissue from the box on the side and she blows her nose, loudly.

‘All I ever wanted was to be a police officer,’ she says, dabbing at her eyes. ‘To do some good in the world, but over the years all I’ve learned is that once you chop one head off the snake, another two grow in its place. I’ve worked all the overtime going; I’ve worked my holidays. I’ve never had a long-term relationship because of the demands of the job, and I thought that was okay, but...’ She starts crying again. ‘I’ve wrecked my life, for nothing.’

‘You’re a good detective,’ Jack murmurs. ‘These last few days – I’ve never known anyone more hard-working, more dedicated.’

‘But isn’t that the point? We did everything we could, and we still didn’t stop the second bomb. We were too late. So many people, dead, and all because we didn’t do our job.’

‘We did our best, Sharon,’ Jack replies, but his words feel hollow. It’s exactly how he’s felt, these last few days. They tried, and they failed. It wasn’t enough.

Sharon doesn’t seem to have heard him, lost in her own world. ‘And then when I was walking home last night, a man cornered me. He’d obviously been following me, and he gave me a burner phone. Said someone would be calling.’

‘A burner?’

She manages a small smile. ‘Right? How cliché. And I planned to throw it away, but something in me was curious, so I kept it. It rang this morning. And a man spoke to me.’

‘Who?’

She shakes her head, chin wobbling. ‘No. I can’t give you his name. I can’t.’

‘Had you spoken to him before?’

She stares at Jack, as if trying to decide whether to trust him. Then she nods, once.

‘Have you known him a while?’

Another nod. Then quietly, she says, ‘I fucked up. I met this bloke. My ex – the one I told you briefly about?’ Jack nods. ‘I couldn’t believe my luck – he was the perfect man. Drop-dead gorgeous, so charming, always had money, always wanted the best for me. And I was at a real low point in my life. My sister, she’d just got divorced and her ex was threatening to take her kids away from her. My niece and nephew – I love them as if they were my own kids, and we needed to pay for a lawyer and...’ She swallows. ‘This man helped us. He offered to pay if I did a few favours for him. Nothing big, a bit of information, here and there.’

Jack stays quiet.

‘But then it was one thing after another. Once you’ve started, that’s it. He turned nasty, said he’d report me if I didn’t do as he asked, so I gave him what he wanted.’

‘What sort of information did he ask for?’

‘Details about operations – times, dates, when places would be raided. Mostly drug busts.’

‘So he could make sure he wasn’t arrested?’

She nods.

‘Did the same person tell you to speak to Gary King?’

Another nod. She starts crying again, tears rolling unchecked down her face. ‘He said he’d kill my niece and nephew. He knew where they lived, what school they went to. And it was just one simple thing – I had to give Gary King the length of cord and mention his daughter’s name.’

‘Sharon!’

‘I knew he’d probably kill himself, but I thought – so what? He deserved everything that was coming to him. And they were going to give his daughter money. Said she’d never want for anything for the rest of her life.’

‘But how...? How could you do such a thing?’ Jack can’t help the anger in his voice, the disbelief. ‘You threatened his child. The same as these guys were doing to you—’

‘He planted a bomb that murdered thirty-nine people – and counting! Who cares if he dies? That’s one less trial for the taxpayer. One more murderer off the street.’

Jack glances at his phone, still recording her statement. There’s mitigation here, that this man threatened Sharon’s family, but without any remorse from her, any plea to go easy will get dismissed.

Jack changes the subject. ‘Do you still have the burner phone?’

‘No, I chucked it. Dropped it in the Thames. He told me to.’

‘So we have no way of corroborating your story?’

‘Whose side are you on, Jack? I thought you were one of the good guys —’

‘Sharon, you can’t expect to get away with this—’

‘I wrote the number down.’

Jack stares at her. ‘You did what?’

‘The number he called me on. And I pinged it. It bounced off a cell tower in Ealing. The information is in my emails – I was going to send it to you, but then...’

‘Then we found Gary King dead in his cell.’

‘And I knew I’d fucked up.’ Big heavy sobs rack her body. But the address has sent alarm bells ringing in Jack’s head.

‘Does the name Marcus Whitmore mean anything to you?’

It silences Sharon in an instant. She turns, slowly. ‘Say that again?’

‘Marcus Whitmore.’

She starts shaking, whole body trembling with barely concealed panic.

‘You have to help me,’ she stutters. ‘You have to get my family into protective custody. He’ll assume I told you and he’ll come after them. I’m dead. I’ll never make it to prison. I’ll be dead before the day’s out—’

‘Sharon...’ Jack tries, unsuccessfully, to interrupt her ramblings. ‘Sharon! Is he the man? Is he the one who threatened you?’

‘It’s been him from the start. He’s my ex. It’s always him—’

‘We can arrest him. Put him away.’

‘No,’ she says, and she grabs Jack’s hand, squeezing it painfully tight. ‘You don’t understand. He’s Teflon, he’s protected. He’s the man at the top of the chain. You’ll never catch him. Never. He’ll kill us all and there’s nothing you can do about it.’

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CHAPTER SIXTY-THREE

Over the next hour, Jack grills Sharon Lynch for everything she knows about Marcus Whitmore. And once she gets started, there's no stopping her.

There's no doubt they're talking about the same person – she visibly pales when he shows her a photograph and tells Jack about when she first met him. The classic – at a bar, Marcus approaching her and offering a drink. On the surface, he was the perfect man. Handsome, confident, smart, but underneath the façade lurked a cruel streak a mile long. Rules didn't apply to him; he couldn't bear to be told no and when the charm didn't work, he resorted to violence. She'd seen photographs on his phone – men, beaten, faces bloody.

At first, Jack can't understand why Whitmore would take the risk of dating a cop. But then he realises – it was the ultimate fuck-you. At the beginning she was besotted with him, and having Sharon under his control gave him a doorway to the information he'd always dreamed of. Background on potential accomplices; intel on what operations were going down and where; access to evidence stores.

Sharon looks over at Jack, calmer now.

'You think Marcus set up the bombings?' she asks.

'Who else could it be? He knows Kevin Walsh. He blackmailed you into bringing Gary King the length of cord.'

'Do you think he was targeting me from the beginning? It was all a ruse?'

The desperation is clear on her face. Despite everything she knows about him now, some part of her is still under his spell.

'It's likely, yes. What do you know about Joshua – his brother?'

She frowns. 'Not a lot. I only met him once, but I got the feeling they did everything together. Wherever you find Marcus, Josh won't be far behind.'

Jack reaches forward to his phone and ends the interview. 'Thank you, Sharon. Your honesty has been invaluable in tracking down this guy. And until we get this man behind bars, I'll get someone to stay with your family. Keep them safe. Look after yourself. Get better.'

'Will you put in a good word for me? Get the charges reduced?'

Given what she's done, Jack doesn't hold out much hope, but he says, 'I'll do my best,' and gets to his feet. But before he goes, a final thought

occurs to him.

He turns back to Sharon. 'In the cell, when you were talking to Gary King, you gave him your phone. Who did he call?'

She looks up, and her face falls as the memory resurfaces. 'He wanted to phone his ex,' she stutters. 'To say goodbye...'

'That's all he said?'

'He couldn't get through. I think he left a voicemail. And there was something else, he told her to get out of London.'

The words make Jack's blood run cold. 'Where? When?'

'I don't know. I don't!' She starts crying again, her words mumbled and slurred. 'I wasn't listening. I just wanted to get out of there.'

'Think, Sharon. Please. What else did he say?'

'I don't know. I'm sorry, boss. I don't...'

She dissolves in a mess of snot and tears, leaving Jack rigid with anticipation.

Gary King knew more than he let on. There's going to be another bomb. More people are going to die. And they have no idea where or when.

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CHAPTER SIXTY-FOUR

Jack's phone call back to Counter Terrorism Command sends the team into action and Amrit's keen to be put to work, taking instructions from one of the DIs.

The pressure is on to find Gary King's ex – the recipient of the phone call before he died. She's been elusive so far, but with this new information, they've been granted a warrant to ping her mobile phone, track her down any way they can.

Lucy works alongside them. After the excitement of the rescue earlier, Lucy's been told by her PolSA to stand down and rest, but she's rolled up her sleeves and got involved, and Amrit knows her detective experience from earlier in her career will come in handy.

Jack returns and dives straight in.

'Tell me – where is she?'

'Her mobile phone places her at her home address in Clapham,' one of the DIs says. 'Get uniforms out there?'

'Yes, but only to keep her in place. I want you guys right behind them. Amrit, Hannah – you two go. Get a copy of that voicemail message – seize her phone if you have to.'

Amrit and Hannah requisition a patrol car and are driven with full blues and twos to a pretty terraced house to the west of Clapham Common. It's small, with a plain green front door and white-painted sash windows, but Amrit knows the houses must go for around the million-pound mark. Given what she knows about Gary King, she's keen to meet his ex.

Amrit can hear the shouting as soon as they arrive; the door is opened by a weary uniformed cop.

'I'm glad to see you,' he says. 'She's not happy.'

'I can tell,' Amrit replies, following Hannah through to the colourful living room.

'Sorry to keep you,' Amrit says, as the woman wheels around to face her. Gary King's ex is slim and attractive, with long highlighted hair and bright, red-painted lips. A suitcase is open next to her, clothes spilling out onto the floor.

‘And I should think so. What’s going on? I’ve been in Thailand for the last week, on a yoga retreat. No phones. I get to Gatwick this morning and the moment I get home I’m met by two cops who won’t let me leave. What the fuck’s going on?’

‘Where’s your daughter, Ms...’

‘Mrs Green. I remarried last year. My husband’s at work right now. And my daughter’s been staying with a friend. Having a lovely time – I spoke to her at the airport.’ She freezes. ‘Izzy’s okay, isn’t she?’

‘Yes, Izzy’s fine, but we’d like to get both of you into protective custody as soon as we can, if that’s okay with you, Mrs Green? And we need to see your phone.’

‘Yes, but what’s going on? This is about Gary, yeah? If there’s trouble, it’s always about Gary. The latest was that robbery at the salon. Is that what this is about? I always thought it was him. What’s he done now?’

Amrit exchanges a glance with DS Wright. ‘What robbery?’

‘We had a break-in, and a whole load of our supplies were nicked. It was a right pain, none of our ladies could get their colours done.’

The source of some of the hydrogen peroxide used in the TATP bomb. Gary King had obviously started close to home.

‘Mrs Green, please sit down. This isn’t about the robbery.’

The woman does as Amrit asks, silencing, clearly realising the seriousness of the situation. She taps her bright red nails against her legs, anxious.

‘Mrs Green, we’re sorry to tell you that Gary killed himself today. He was arrested—’

‘What do you mean, killed himself? Oh, God.’ She reaches for her phone, opening it and staring at the screen. ‘He left a message. I haven’t listened to it, it’s always something with him, and I wasn’t in the mood for his drama.’

‘It’s important we listen to that message,’ Amrit says. ‘Gary was arrested in the early hours of Sunday morning for murder. We believe he was responsible for the bombing in Oxford Street on Friday.’

‘Gary... What...? A bomb? Murder...?’

‘The phone, please,’ Amrit says, and Mrs Green opens it and hands it over, her fingers trembling.

It’s an iPhone, and Amrit quickly finds the voicemail. ‘Excuse me.’

Hannah follows her out into the hallway, where Amrit clicks on the message, playing it on speaker.

‘Oh, Tania... Shit...I’ve got myself in trouble, love, and...’ Sobs echo down the line, and Amrit’s chest tightens. The last words of a doomed man. ‘I’m sorry for making such a mess of everything between us. You were the best thing in my life. You and Isabelle. Give her a kiss for me. Tell her I love her.’ He pauses, and the line crackles with static. ‘But you need to...’ he continues, his voice barely audible. ‘You need to get out of London. Take Izzy, now. Stay out of London tonight. Please.’

The line goes dead, and Amrit looks at Hannah, the fear reflected on her face.

‘This was recorded today...’ Hannah says.

Amrit finishes the sentence for her. ‘The bomb’s going off tonight.’

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CHAPTER SIXTY-FIVE

They know when, but they have no idea where or who. There has never been so much riding on this investigation and getting it right; Digby's made it clear to Jack – MI5 have nothing. This is his decision now.

No pressure, then.

Amrit and Hannah return, and the team crowd around as the voicemail from Gary King is played. It's an emotional moment, and Jack can't help but imagine what was going through his head – his imminent suicide to save his family, at the expense of more lives potentially lost. A bomb he refused to disclose, down to his last dying breath.

Jack stands in front of his detectives. *This is it*, he thinks. *The moment of truth.*

'It's my working assumption that the two unknown DNA profiles found in the bomb factory last Saturday belong to Marcus and Joshua Whitmore.' Lucy's still here, and he catches her eye as she gives him an encouraging smile. 'We've got the lab checking for a sibling match between them,' he continues, 'but without an arrest, we can't be certain. Hannah – can you take us through what we know so far.'

DS Wright gets to her feet, starting with the map.

'Daniel Bevan called this number, which pinged a cell tower, here, with a pay-as-you-go phone in February. There's been nothing since, but this was a phone bought along with a batch from a Tesco superstore in Essex. And these dots are the last locations the other fifteen numbers pinged from.'

'All around Essex?' Amrit says, looking at the grouping to the east of the capital.

'Mostly. It goes without saying that all are out of service now. But there is a definite link to Essex. As well as the mobile phone sites, Gary King's satnav shows him driving in and out of there regularly.'

'But why Essex?' Amrit asks. 'Marcus Whitmore lives in Ealing. And on that matter, why are Marcus and Joshua Whitmore even involved? Perry said that the Whitmores are only interested in money. They're being investigated for the import and supply of drugs. It doesn't tie up.'

A thought comes into Jack's head – what Pete said to him earlier in the week when he was talking about the ACAB vandalism. *It was like they were*

messing with us. Wasting our time when we could have been focusing on more serious crime.

He thinks about the connection between the four men involved. The drug offences, the raid later, when they all ended up behind bars. The suspicion they were part of Whitmore's crew. And it starts to make sense.

'What if...' he begins. 'What if the two things are connected?'

All eyes turn to him, and he has a brief and silent moment of panic. What if he's barking up the wrong tree? What if he's got this wrong and the bomb goes off?

He pushes on: 'The Whitmores aren't stupid. They've avoided arrest this far, and they haven't managed that by taking risks. But they must know we're watching. Both Perry's team in Southampton and special ops in the Met have their eye on them, right?'

The team stay silent, until Amrit says, 'Okay...'

'So what better way to distract the entire police force of London than set off a series of bombs.'

'You think the Selfridges bomb was no more than an elaborate diversion? Surely that's pretty drastic. And only a temporary solution, at best.'

'And special ops have been watching them for a while and have nothing,' Hannah says. 'Why now?'

'I don't know. Maybe there was an opportunity they couldn't refuse. A shipment worth more than before. Millions even. Amrit – speak to special ops. Find out if they've had any intelligence that something could be arriving.'

'Will do. But, boss, do you think the Bevans and Gary King knew?'

'No. I believe Daniel and George Bevan, and Gary King genuinely believed they were targeting the police,' Jack says, grimly. 'But Marcus Whitmore – no. His interests lay elsewhere. Keep the police and MI5 busy, and while we're all running around trying to find the bombers, they import as many class As as they like.'

'But how did Marcus Whitmore find such willing accomplices?'

'It wouldn't have been hard,' Jack says. 'They didn't hide their hatred for the police; they'd been blasting it over every Reddit thread and message board for months. From what Intel have told us about those message boards, they're well-known places for anti-police sympathisers. Easy for Marcus Whitmore to find someone radicalised enough to do his bidding. Marcus Whitmore gets in touch with Kevin Walsh, visits him in prison, and

Kevin recruits the Bevan brothers. Or maybe Daniel Bevan had known him directly? He had a drugs conviction, so maybe Whitmore was his dealer. It makes sense that Daniel would refuse to give him up.'

'At that point all they needed were the explosives,' Amrit says, 'and Gary King stole those from his job and his poor ex-girlfriend's salon...'

'A few robberies at a few farms. Job done.'

'And the ACAB vandalism in Southampton?'

'That was a trial run. The genesis of the idea. They commit a few crimes, keep the police on the ground occupied, and carry out a few drug deals in the background.'

'Which they got away with at the time,' Amrit says, slowly. 'Until the whole team were arrested in February. Okay, it makes sense.'

'Now all you've got to do is prove it,' Lucy says.

'Small snag,' he replies with a smile.

'So, working on this assumption...' Hannah says slowly. 'The Whitmore brothers will be importing another shipment tonight. Into where? And what's the target for the bomb?'

'There's only two of the original gang left,' Amrit adds. 'Assuming they haven't recruited anyone else – which they might have – that's one brother to drop off the bomb and another to manage the shipment.'

It's a lot of assumptions, and that makes Jack nervous. The room goes quiet as everyone stares at the board.

'Let's start with the drugs shipment,' Jack says. 'It must be a large enough haul to make this worthwhile, so we're looking for something from overseas. Southampton docks are out, because Perry's team have been watching them like a hawk for months. So...'

The four of them stare at the board. Jack rubs his eyes, Hannah sighs. Until Amrit taps her finger on the map.

'There,' she says, triumphant. The others stare, open-mouthed. It's so obvious, it's been right in front of them all this time.

The phones were bought from a superstore outside Dagenham. The phones all pinged in and around Essex. And the stain on George Bevan's jeans was marine engine oil from a boat. Even Gary King's satnav recorded an address within the county.

'The drugs are coming into Tilbury Docks,' Jack says, in a whisper.

CHAPTER SIXTY-SIX

Joint operations between multiple constabularies can take weeks or even months to prepare, but these guys have been watching the Whitmores for a long time and motivation is high. Forces mobilise from the Met, Essex and Hampshire, with explosive detection and drugs dogs requested from whoever can spare them.

Tilbury Docks operate over a thousand acres, with fifty-six berths over ten kilometres of quayside and five million square feet of warehouse space – they need every copper they can get. Amrit and Hannah wait with surveillance; they've quickly located both Marcus and Joshua Whitmore, and confirm they're at their home address in Ealing, while new teams set up, monitoring the roads in and out of the docks both in person and via the network of 500 cameras and six ANPR feeding live to the control room.

Luckily, the Port of Tilbury Police jumped to attention the moment Jack phoned in about the operation. And now their fifteen officers sit with representatives from the drug squads and the armed unit, in a disused Portakabin just outside the main docks.

'Our priority right now is to keep a low profile,' Jack begins. 'Intel believe there's something incoming, but info is sketchy and they've reached a dead end. There is no way we can search the entire docks so until either Joshua or Marcus Whitmore come close, we keep quiet.'

They've already discovered that Marcus Whitmore is a registered employee of the docks, with access and a pass – adding to Jack's confidence in the accuracy of their target – and the officers in the room all fidget, keen to get going.

Their inspector speaks up. 'And how large is the shipment?'

Jack gestures to his colleague from Southampton's drug squad, DCI Robert Perry.

'We've been watching these guys for years, but they've never got close enough to the action for us to make an arrest. The last bust made in Southampton docks was in February, when we seized just over forty kilos of cocaine. We were sure the Whitmores were behind it, but none of the men would talk – they're good at fostering loyalty, either through threats of violence or cold hard cash. Make no mistake, these are dangerous men.'

They've been quiet for a few years, so it stands to reason they've transferred their operation to somewhere else, waiting for the big one. They have the capacity and the network to import a lot more, and it would have to be one massive haul for them to take the risk.' He turns to the inspector of Tilbury Police. 'You're certain you've not had any unexpected shipments over the last few days?'

'We're sure.'

'Certain? Because this is a big place.'

The inspector bristles. 'We run a tight operation here. And our officers have been working since your call, identifying every single shipping manifest in this place. As I told your senior officer—' He points to Jack, knowing full well Jack and Perry are the same rank, deliberately annoying Perry. '—we've identified five possible suspected shipments and as soon as your team have these narrowed down, we'll go in.'

'How can you be sure the Whitmore brothers are going to turn up here?' Perry says to Jack. 'We've had tip-offs before, and all we've managed to arrest are the underlings.'

'We believe this shipment is too important for them to leave alone. They've taken a hands-on approach to many of the events this week, and hopefully they've been lulled into a false sense of security by the policing going on in the capital.' He stops as his radio squawks, telling him that the brothers are on the move, dividing the teams into two.

'Marcus Whitmore is heading north up the A1 in a white BMW,' Jack says.

'To join the M25?' Perry asks, and Jack nods. 'And Joshua?'

'On foot, catching the Central line at Ealing Broadway and heading east. DS Amrit Gill has split off with special ops. They're going to wait until he picks up the package, then arrest him.'

'Good. Now all we have to do is wait.'

CHAPTER SIXTY-SEVEN

Joshua Whitmore leaves 134 Woodville Road, Ealing, just after twenty-two hundred hours, heading on foot towards Ealing Broadway tube station. The surveillance team trail him, keeping a few steps behind, out of sight.

Amrit watches from operational command – an ugly white van parked a few streets away, the Thames Water logo splashed on the side. The air inside is thick with the smell of warm bodies; the tension is getting to them all, but nobody is showing it.

Amrit's full of admiration for the way these operatives work. Whispered updates, decisive orders; casually swapping out a loving couple for a lone man, never once losing sight of their target.

Joshua Whitmore is walking fast, his imposing figure clear on the black-and-white feed. He's wearing a fitted black jacket, jeans, trainers, no rucksack. He has nothing on him to suggest a bomb or some other explosive device. No trailing wires, no space within the coat for a suicide vest.

'Alpha Delta Four, subject one is left, left, left, from White City tube station, I have the eyeball.'

'Alpha Delta One, negative, I have the eyeball, can you stand by in case of compromise?'

'Alpha Delta One, subject one heading south towards Shepherd's Bush. I have the eyeball.'

Operational command is on the move, the driver taking them closer. Amrit's only too aware that the streets are emptier at this time of night, making it harder to follow without suspicion, and they study the maps, the ops commander searching for something, anything, that could give away Whitmore's destination.

'For all we know he's going to a gig at the Empire,' he mutters.

'What about here?' Amrit asks as she's shaken to and fro in the van. The area looks industrial on the map: large grey buildings, a railway line to the left.

'That's the bus depot.' He taps his finger on the location. 'But there are arches under there.'

The commander relays the possible destination to the surveillance team, preparing them for a possible arrest as Joshua Whitmore heads west down

Goldhawk Road, then left, down Wells.

Amrit can hardly stand the stress. They're close, so close, but the reality of Joshua going into that garage is the possibility of who knows how much ignitable ammonium nitrate inside. One wrong move, and the whole place could blow, risking their operatives, the innocent public and their suspect.

'Subject one is held, subject one is held at lock-up 197. Under the arches. I am held with cover, who is my backup?'

Amrit leans closer to the screen as the camera records Joshua Whitmore putting his key into a metal green door. He glances behind him once, then he's in. Amrit holds her breath; the door closes behind him.

Next to her, the operational commander is readying the armed team. Dressed in black, their faces and heads covered, they swarm the area, taking up position, guns trained on the entrance.

And then everything changes. The door opens, Joshua Whitmore emerges and an order is given down the radio. The night fills with shouting and the thump of heavy boots.

'Armed police, down on the ground, down on the ground.'

They're not messing around, not when so much could be at stake. Through the body-worn cameras, Amrit can see the officers force Joshua Whitmore to the concrete, his hands cuffed behind his back.

'And the bomb?' Amrit asks. 'Does he have a bomb?'

None of this matters without the explosives. They arrive in the van with a screech of brakes; Amrit is first out of the vehicle, running across to the arches.

Whitmore isn't moving, his face pressed into the gravel by the armed officer, while another searches him for detonators. And next to him is a large rucksack, much like the one they saw on George Bevan, before his bomb exploded on the Green Park tube.

'Come and have a look at this, sarge,' one of the armed officers says to Amrit.

She walks towards the arches on trembling legs, looks towards where the officer is shining the torch.

Inside the lock-up are barrels of agricultural fertiliser and cans of diesel oil, a desk where electrical parts are scattered. The whole lot stinks. Amrit can't imagine being in that lock-up for one moment, let alone the time it must have taken to make the bomb. But it's also where they stored the TATP devices, where Joshua Whitmore went to collect the final one.

She backs away, breathing a sigh of relief. She feels nauseous, her whole body shaking with adrenaline, the stress finally taking hold.

They have Joshua Whitmore. They have the second explosives factory. And they have the bomb.

Now all they need is Marcus.

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CHAPTER SIXTY-EIGHT

Jack is tired of waiting. As night closes in on the docks, shadows loom in every dark corner. More places where bad guys can hide.

Jack's under no illusions – these are dangerous men, most likely armed, and he pulls the straps of his bulletproof vest tighter under his arms. He thinks about Lucy and Otto, being briefed in another part of the docks, waiting for the go. He's glad she only has an explo dog today, meaning she'll head in after the area is secured. He hates knowing that if she had Iggy she'd be in the middle of the action, and resolves to find some way to cope with this anxiety so she can do her job without his fussing.

But still, he worries.

He jumps with every crackle of the radio, listening as Marcus Whitmore takes the path they expect. Clockwise around the M25, coming off at the junction with the A13, trailed by an expert team of operatives, swapping cars in and out to avoid suspicion. Jack grows more nervous the closer Marcus Whitmore gets, knowing how much is at stake.

And then the call comes down the radio. 'Control, this is Delta Two-Three. State nine, one male in custody. Send in the bomb disposal team.'

'ETA ten minutes. Confirm name of suspect, over?'

'Name of suspect is Joshua Paul Whitmore. Arrested for attempted murder and possession of articles with intent to commit terrorism. The bomb has been placed in a secluded area, over.'

Jack heaves a massive sigh of relief as Perry claps him painfully on the back. 'One down, one to go, Jacky-boy.'

'It's not over yet, Rob,' Jack says.

The bomb is no longer a risk, but there's still so much that could go wrong. Marcus Whitmore could realise he's being tailed; he could notice a heavier police presence at the docks than usual. He could realise his brother has been arrested and abort his plan. Hell, he could have another copper on the inside, telling him all about this operation, and he could turn up – empty car, empty shipment – proclaiming his innocence.

They need to catch him red-handed. Otherwise, he'll wriggle out of it, all that cash providing him with the best solicitor money can buy.

‘White BMW going straight at the roundabout, onto St Andrew’s Road,’ the radio declares. Then, ‘Turning left.’ There’s a pause, and everyone listening holds their breath. ‘That’s it,’ the radio declares, ‘he’s through. Handing over.’

The surveillance is done. It’s their job now.

‘You heard the man,’ Jack says. ‘We’re on.’

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CHAPTER SIXTY-NINE

Lucy's never seen so many dogs and their handlers together in one place. They have general purpose dogs, ready to chase and track anyone who gets away; drug detection dogs, to find the good stuff; and explo dogs, like her and Otto, to rule out the presence of any explosives.

To her surprise, Pete is one of the handlers on site, driving up from Hampshire. He'd crept in late to the briefing, taking a seat at the back, and she'd wondered whether he was here with Dax, his GPD, or Pepper, trained to sniff out drugs. Their eyes had met and she hadn't seen warmth or love, just worry and regret and loss. They needed to talk, but there was no chance to now; they had their assignments, and off they went. Time was of the essence.

But it's been hours. Waiting in her unmarked van, she watches as dusk gives way to night, as floodlights mark the roads while shadows form and creep behind the behemoth crates. Catastrophes form in her head and the more time she has to think, the worse it gets. Otto sleeps in the back, unconcerned. She wishes she could borrow a few traits from her spaniel – the ability to leap into every situation without thought, total trust, bestowing love and affection on everyone he meets. By now, she is a weary old hound, kicked and battered by life, hopefully finding salvation in something new.

And then it happens. Marcus Whitmore has arrived; the radio bursts into life.

Go go go, followed by thumping footsteps, crashing and banging. Shouts of *Stop, Armed Police*, and she jumps as a loud crack of gunfire fills the air. Retaliatory pops sound out in the distance and her stomach contracts at the thought of Jack and her colleagues in the line of fire.

But the ensuing silence is worse than the noise. She waits, almost holding her breath, until the answering call sounds out.

All clear. Ambulance to site please. Drug and explo – report to duty.

She gets out of the van, quickly harnessing Otto and jogging across to the main theatre. She greets the PolSA, who directs her to a huge metal crate.

'This is the one he went for, but the ARVs went off early, before he opened it. We need to know if it's booby-trapped. The last thing we need is more casualties.'

‘Who’s been hit?’ Lucy asks, swallowing her fear.

‘None of our boys. There was another guy – a crane operator, off-duty but working with Marcus Whitmore. They both opened fire so we retaliated – caught him in the arm and right in the centre of his chest. Went down like a sack of spuds.’

‘Marcus Whitmore’s dead?’

‘No, the other guy. Whitmore...’

‘What?’

‘He got away. We don’t know how, but the GPDs are tracking him now.’ He smiles at Lucy. ‘NPAS are on their way. We’ll have him before morning, don’t you worry.’

The thought of NPAS is reassuring – a police helicopter with thermal cameras, used to picking heat signatures out of the darkness. And the thought of Whitmore out there with a pack of general purpose dogs on his trail makes her smile. German shepherds and Belgian Malinois with sharp pointy teeth. She hopes he doesn’t surrender too soon; give them a chance to really have some fun.

There’s no sign of Jack, but she has a job to do, commanding Otto to heel and walking across to the huge metal container. The lock has been broken open but the door remains closed.

‘Look, look,’ she directs to her dog, and he gets to work without hesitation, sniffing around the joints of the door, pressing his nose against the gap and inhaling with a long snort. With their knowledge of explosives, it’s more than possible that the Whitmores could have rigged something to blow once the door was opened, taking out every copper within range. But Otto doesn’t pause; his body language doesn’t change. Lucy moves him on, directing him around the container, left and right, then returning to the front. She feels every set of eyes on her, desperate to open the double doors. The success of the raid depends on what they find within; important people on high will be waiting, demanding an update.

She points to the edges of the front again, only too aware of the potential risk. But Otto remains unchanged, calm and relaxed, no sign of what he’s trained to find.

DCI Robert Perry joins the crowd by the crate. She notices Jack, his height marking him out among the team. He gives her a small smile and a nod, but they’re there to work, no more.

‘Well,’ Perry says impatiently.

‘There’s nothing there,’ she says.

‘You’re sure?’

‘Certain.’

Perry doesn’t hesitate. He puts gloves on then leans forward, grabbing the metal handle, pulling it up and towards him. The container opens with a grind of metal against concrete; the collective crowd holds their breath, hoping for treasure.

A torch is shined inside, revealing brown cardboard boxes. Televisions, DVD players, microwaves. Perry grabs the first one, hauling it out and opening it with a knife.

White polystyrene gives way to a clear plastic bag, protecting the sound bar within. Perry mutters a swear word, pulling it out and discarding it on the concrete. But then there, at the bottom, is what they’ve been searching for.

Slowly, Perry reaches in and picks up the small, white parcel. Cocaine.

‘There’s three of them in here,’ Perry says, as the crime scene techs take over, photographing and documenting the find. Perry shines his torch back into the crate. ‘Fuck knows how many is in there. Let’s get going, team,’ he shouts out, and they surge forward, gloved hands removing the boxes one by one, searching, laughing as more cuboids are found.

Lucy backs away. Her job is done, her responsibility lies with her dog, making sure he is rewarded, fed and watered.

‘Are you going to stick around for a bit?’ Jack asks, joining her.

‘Nah, I’ll make sure Otto’s safely on his way back to Keston. You don’t want to get involved?’

Jack looks over to where the stack of carefully wrapped parcels is rapidly growing. A dozen, two dozen. A pile forms.

‘I’ll let those guys have their fun. Then swoop in and take the glory,’ he says with a self-deprecating smile.

‘I suspect Perry’s beaten you to it,’ Lucy replies, as Perry poses in front of the haul, holding up V signs and sticking his tongue out. ‘What a cock.’

Jack laughs, but it’s restrained.

‘What’s bothering you?’

‘Whitmore,’ Jack replies, turning and looking out into the darkness. ‘I don’t like him being out there. I hate to think what he’ll do.’

‘His brother’s locked up and he’s just lost millions of pounds worth of product.’

‘Exactly. He’s a desperate man.’ He sighs. ‘I’m going to be here for hours yet. I’ll see you back at the hotel?’

‘Your room or mine?’ Lucy whispers.

‘Mine. I’ve left a key card for you at reception. I’ll join you later.’

She looks up and meets his gaze with a smile. ‘Okay.’

She watches him walk back to the shipping container, restoring some order in the gleeful extraction, getting it all logged and photographed. But she feels a prickle on her back, somebody behind her, watching.

She turns, and Pete’s there, Pepper at his heels. He must have been there a while, a silent observer to her conversation with Jack.

They didn’t hug, they didn’t kiss, they didn’t even touch. And even though he’s too far away to have overheard them, Lucy can tell by the look on his face – Pete knows.

‘I’m sorry,’ she says, barely audible.

He looks at her for a moment longer, then bows his head, walking away. And Lucy feels shit. After all the time they’ve been together, everything Pete’s done for her, without question, without complaint – this is how it ends.

CHAPTER SEVENTY

Marcus Whitmore stops and looks back, just for a second. He's on his knees in a ditch, cold water seeping into his shoes, mud between his fingers. And he's fucking furious.

How could he have been so stupid, so blinkered, not to notice a whole fucking police force out there? How did they know to come here? How?

He should have known something was up when the bomb didn't go off. He'd been listening to the radio the whole drive over; he should have realised and turned around, gone home, called it off. But he hadn't.

And now they have it all.

He's mad with himself, mad with Joshua. Two hundred and three kilograms of high-purity cocaine at last estimation – and it's all gone. To be locked away in some police storage facility... What a fucking waste.

But he allows himself a small smile. The police thought they had this place locked down, but he knows these docks better than them. He's worked here; he'd driven a forklift around the huge crates for months on end, mapping hidden corridors, back alleyways and escape routes in his mind. He knew something was out of place when he arrived: the layout had changed, the rent-a-cops at the gate were different. He knew when to run.

If only he'd done it sooner.

Floodlights shine his way, and he ducks back down. He can hear footsteps, the jangle of leads as the police dogs approach. He can't stay hiding in this stinking hole – he needs to get out of here, and fast.

'Fuck them,' he whispers as he spots the van in the distance: black, nondescript, doors open, with keys under the wheel arch. A contingency he always asks for but has never needed. Josh mocked him, but where is his stupid brother now, eh?

He runs swiftly across the last hundred metres, throws himself into the front seat and tries Josh again. Straight to voicemail, and he hurls his burner phone out of the window, listening to it splinter and crack on the concrete.

Josh shouldn't have taken the last bomb. But Marcus didn't trust anyone else with it, and with the other three all dead, what choice had they had? It was their last big run and they foolishly thought it was worth the risk.

Seventeen million pounds, all in all, once they'd sold it on the street – more than enough to live a life of luxury, but look where they are now.

Where to? Not home, not Ealing, but he has other places, safe houses, people he can call.

Anger burns in his stomach, red-hot coals of fury as he looks back to the floodlights and the bustle. And then he spots him. A tall, slim figure, dressed in black, standing just beyond the mountain of crates.

A face he's seen on TV. The man in charge of the investigation.

The man he blames for it all.

And Marcus smiles.

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CHAPTER SEVENTY-ONE

‘Absolutely marvellous work, Jack,’ Digby says, arriving at Tilbury Docks half an hour later. He swans in as if he’s royalty, clapping a hand hard against Jack’s back. ‘Biggest seizure in UK history, they’re saying. With some of the purest cocaine we’ve ever seen. There are some seriously pissed-off junkies out there tonight.’

Despite the late hour, a crowd of journalists has already assembled behind the crime scene tape, keen to get the inside scoop. Digby spots them and gives a quick chuckle.

‘Better go and give a statement,’ he says. ‘You don’t mind if I do it, old chum?’

Jack snorts a rueful laugh. ‘Knock yourself out,’ he says, but Digby’s already striding away, happy to take the credit for everyone else’s hard work.

‘What a prick,’ DCI Perry says from behind him, and Jack turns, smiling at his colleague.

‘Thank you for your help today,’ Jack says.

‘Wouldn’t have missed this for the world. Just got to wrap up a few loose ends—’

‘Marcus Whitmore is a pretty big loose end, Rob.’

‘Yeah, but they’ll find him soon enough.’

Perry waves a nonchalant hand at the dogs in the distance, the helicopter circling overhead. Jack wishes he had his optimism. Whitmore’s escape nags in the pit of his stomach; a dangerous, desperate man out there somewhere – who knows what he might do.

‘Go on, then,’ Perry continues. ‘What’s next for you, Jack? Digby may be the one in front of the cameras but we both know your name’s going to be all over the news. I assume you’re out of the doghouse?’

‘You heard about that?’

‘Everyone heard. But we all knew Digby was letting you take the fall. No more, though, eh? Up to you where you end up next. Superintendent? We all know Weaver’s considering retirement.’

‘Oh, God, no. Stuck behind a desk for the rest of my career?’

‘Better than standing in the cold at three a.m.’

‘That’s true. No, I’ll go back to Southampton. Back to Major Crimes.’

Perry laughs. ‘I’ll give you a year before you’re bored.’ And with that, he gives Jack’s hand a warm shake and heads off.

Jack considers his words, watching as the rest of the raid starts to close down. Someone from Essex police will take over the operation here and the search; his job is done and Jack couldn’t be more thankful. A raft of paperwork threatens his future, but he’ll be glad to get home. To the peace and quiet of his tidy, organised house, and to his dog.

But first, back to the hotel. A hot shower, then into bed, where Lucy’ll be waiting. The thought of her makes a blush rise on his cheeks but there’ll be none of that tonight – sleep’s the only thing on his mind, but wrapping himself around her before he drops off will be the perfect conclusion to a satisfying day.

Muscles weary, he walks slowly to the Portakabin on the edge of the docks. There will be someone there heading into London. An hour back, maybe, this time of night, he thinks, carefully watching his step. The further he gets away from the main action, the darker it gets, and he pauses to fish his phone out of his pocket to light the way.

And then he hears it. Someone breathing behind him. He turns, but before he can raise his hands to protect himself, the man is on him, hitting him hard in the face. Jack’s nose explodes, he sees stars, tastes blood as he falls. And the last thing he sees, before he blacks out, is Marcus Whitmore’s hand, smacking the back of his head against the concrete.

DAY 7 – THURSDAY

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CHAPTER SEVENTY-TWO

By the time Lucy gets back to the hotel, all she can think about is sleep. The night manager passes over Jack's key, and she wastes no time in letting herself into his room, stripping down and collapsing into bed.

She wakes a few hours later with a jolt. Daylight is seeping in through the gaps in the curtains and she knows, even before she checks her phone, that it's well past sunrise: 8:04 a.m. Blinking, she realises that Jack isn't back yet. He can't still be at work?

She sits up in bed, sending him a quick message. She waits for it to go through, for the two grey ticks to turn blue, but the second one doesn't arrive. Has his phone run out of battery? Maybe he's on his way back now and doesn't want to wake her.

She lies back on the pillows, debating whether to go back to sleep. Despite the success of last night, there is still work to be done. Victim recovery, with Moss, at least.

But the world can wait a few minutes more.

She gets up and fills the kettle, switching it on. While it boils, she considers the differences between Jack's room and hers. He's been staying here for nearly a week, yet everything's neatly put away, suits hanging on the rail, underwear in the drawer. She actually kind of likes it – the order is calming. Maybe minimalist chic agrees with her after all.

She's making herself a coffee, when her phone rings. For a moment her heart leaps, but it's Brian, her PolSA.

He gets straight to the point.

'Lucy, I'm sorry, I know you had a long night, but we need you – and Otto.'

'What for?' she asks. Brian wouldn't call unless it was important.

'We're still inundated with bomb threats and hoaxes, but this one seems more genuine than most. A bomb on the Piccadilly line, just off Leicester Square. Near you, right?'

'Yes, down the road.'

'Otto's on his way as we speak. They'll meet you at the junction of Cranbourn Street and Charing Cross Road. They've closed the roads already. Not taking any chances.'

‘I’ll be there in five.’

She abandons her coffee, quickly pulling last night’s uniform on and cleaning her teeth. Everything else will have to wait.

The roads are crowded with pedestrians as she hurries the few metres from her hotel, pushing through the throng. Annoyed motorists beep, trapped in the gridlocked streets around the closed roads.

Lucy shows her ID and signs in, meeting Brian at the entrance to the Leicester Square tube. Otto strains on his lead when he sees her, and she bends down to give the enthusiastic springer a stroke.

‘What do we have?’ Lucy asks.

‘We don’t know much,’ Brian says with a scowl. ‘Reports differ. One person says suicide bomber, while others talk about a drunk man with a rucksack. It could easily be another hoax. A few uniforms are already down there but given the events of the last week, they’re reluctant to go any closer until we’re sure it’s clear for explosives. The bomb disposal team are caught in traffic – so it’s up to you. We can wait for them, or you and Otto can take a first sniff.’

She looks down at her spaniel. Unlike her, he seems rested and raring to go, and if it’s a large quantity of explosives, as the other bombs were, his body language will change straight away, even at a distance.

‘We’ll give it a look,’ she replies, and Brian nods, passing her a radio.

‘Last reports put the supposed bomber inside the train, and someone pulled the emergency alarm as they were leaving the station, so it’s just a little way into the tunnel. The power to the rails is out, but don’t get closer than you need to. If you see anything or anyone, get back, and we’ll get the armed team in. They’re fifteen minutes out.’

Lucy nods and bends down to Otto. ‘Just you and me, kid. Let’s go.’

It’s an eerie feeling, entering an empty tube station. The entry gates are locked open and the escalators have been stopped; Otto’s nails tick on the metal slats as they head down. Two uniformed officers wait at the bottom, shuffling their feet. She gets it – a picture of the Selfridges bomb site in their head, they’d rather be anywhere but here. The platform is deserted and it reminds Lucy of the beginning of a zombie movie, hardly a reassuring thought.

She looks down to where the train waits, a few metres into the tunnel. No sign from Otto yet, so she lowers herself from the platform to the track, then grabs Otto around his middle, helping the spaniel down. Any other dog would be bothered by the new environment – the metal rails, the strange smells and noises – but Otto's training included acclimatising him to a variety of different surroundings. Nothing bothers him now. Lucy wishes she could be the same.

Lucy takes a step towards the train. She hasn't yet given the command but Otto knows what to do, his nose to the ground as he sniffs, looking for any trace of explosives.

The two of them step carefully over the metal rails, dirty concrete beneath their feet. Her breathing accelerates, but she pushes forward, Otto checking the air around him.

And then he stops. His body language changes, instantly taut, his tail wagging furiously as he tugs in front of Lucy. He's keen to get to the origin of the scent but she holds him back, knowing the potential danger lurking in the darkness.

She's about to turn, when she hears footsteps. Slow, steady, shuffling closer. A figure appears, but in the darkness, she can't make out their face, only a dim outline. Tall, with a round body, disproportionate to their size.

Her hand goes to her baton strapped to her tac vest, then to her pepper spray.

'You,' she shouts, forcing bravado into her voice, the sound echoing off the concrete walls. 'Put your hands up and step into the light.'

The figure pauses, then walks forward. He holds his hands above his head, but as the light hits him, she sees the horrific truth.

He's wearing dark trousers and a white shirt, both stained with white-grey dust and spatters of red. His face is filthy, dried blood oozing from a cut on his forehead, down to a bloodied nose, his eyes circled with dark shadows. There's something in the palm of his hand, wires running down his arm, mingling with the straps of the rucksack, and what looks like a bicycle chain wound around the straps.

The rucksack itself is navy blue, like any you'd find in a camping shop, but she's seen a photo of this one before. Stuck to the wall of the incident room, the same one as the bombers used for the second device. Inside will be a detonator and a battery, probably a mobile phone, primed for someone to send a signal.

She looks down at Otto; the dog's tensed, his nose pointing towards the man in a perfect indication. Confirmation, as if she needs it, that the rucksack's full of explosive. Ready to go off at any second.

The man looks at her, his eyes apologetic, pleading. She meets his gaze, terrified.

'Oh, Jack,' she whispers, her voice cracking with emotion. 'No.'

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CHAPTER SEVENTY-THREE

‘You need to go,’ Jack says. He tries to control the fear in his voice – she can’t be here, she can’t be caught up in this, she can’t. ‘Please, Lucy. Take Otto and go.’

‘I’m staying,’ she says.

‘Lucy—’

‘Shut up, Jack. You don’t get to tell me what to do. Not here. Not now, when you’ve got a bomb strapped to your back.’ He registers her shock, but also the set of her jaw. The determination in this crazy, brave woman. ‘I’m going to radio for help and we’re going to get out of here alive. Now tell me what happened.’

‘I don’t know.’ Jack remembers little after the raid at the docks, but he woke up, head thumping, confused, in an empty house. ‘It was Marcus,’ he says.

‘Marcus Whitmore did this to you?’

He nods, and the movement sends a burst of agony to his brain. ‘I don’t remember much – waking up on that tube train, covered in a black overcoat. I don’t know how I got there – I assume Marcus must have carried me, pretended I was drunk, or...’ His head bows as he remembers.

Waking up on the tube train, muddled, head throbbing. He pulled at the coat covering him; he took off the hat, opening up the cut on his forehead, blood running into his eyes.

He noticed people watching him. A woman, with a toddler pulled close. A man in a suit, the croissant paused in his hand.

He tried to stand up, but his head swam. And it was at that point that he realised something heavy was behind him. He looked down, frantic, his hands pulling at the mess of straps and chain and padlocks, securing the navy-blue rucksack to his back.

A bomb.

The realisation pulled all of the air out of his lungs. He gasped, tugging at the chain, whirling on the spot, trying to see what was there. His head spun, he saw stars. And then the train came to a sudden stop, throwing them all forward.

People fled. Terrified, desperate to get away. The doors were wrenched open; alarms sounded as everyone in the carriage ran. Jack panicked, a feeling of abject horror overwhelming him as he realised the situation he was in. With the sure and certain knowledge: he was going to die.

‘Can you take the rucksack off?’ Lucy asks, pulling him back into the here and now.

‘I’ve tried, but I don’t want to shake it up too much.’ He attempts a smile. Fails. ‘Bombs like this are unstable, so I’m told.’

‘Oh, Jack.’

He can see she’s trying hard not to cry, and all he wants to do is go to her, reassure her that everything’s going to be okay.

But nothing could be further from the truth.

He can’t help but think about George Bevan. Reduced to flesh and bone in seconds. At least it’ll be fast, Jack thinks, but not with Lucy here. Not Lucy.

She takes a step towards him. ‘I could help, hold it steady, while—’

‘That won’t help. I have this in my hand.’ He shows her the piece of plastic and metal in his palm, the skin red-raw, blood oozing around the areas where he’s tried to get it free. ‘It’s glued on, I can’t get it off. I think it’s some kind of trigger. If I press the button, it’ll explode, but there must be some sort of fail-safe built in. I don’t want to risk cutting the wire.’

‘The bomb disposal team are on their way, Jack,’ she says. ‘They’ll get you out of this.’

‘I don’t know that I have that long. It could be on a timer. It could be on a tilt switch and already primed to go off. Please, Lucy. Please go.’

‘No. I’m not leaving you.’

He wants to cry. He wants to scream with frustration. His whole body is trembling with adrenaline; his brain stutters and skips. His heart is pounding so hard, he feels like it might explode, taking the bomb along with it.

‘I need you to calm down,’ Lucy says. She goes to step forward, but he holds his hands out in front of him, keeping her away.

‘Please, Lucy. No.’

‘Jack, you’re shaking. I’m worried you’re going to set it off. Let me help.’

She takes one pace towards him – closer, too close – and reaches forward, taking his free hand in both of hers. He looks down at them. Her clean, soft hands. And his – black dirt engrained in his skin, blood under his fingernails.

‘Look at me,’ she says.

He blinks, swallows. Meets her gaze.

‘Okay, now breathe with me. In for four. That’s good. One, two...’ She continues to count and his attention narrows, focusing on the feeling of her warm hands, her dark brown eyes. He feels disconnected, as if this – this bomb, this imminent danger of being blown into a thousand tiny pieces – is happening to someone else.

‘Good,’ she says. ‘And again.’

She’s so preternaturally calm, so still. It helps.

‘Did you know spaniels are thought to have originated in Spain?’ she says quietly. He stares at her. ‘Hence the name.’

‘I did not know that,’ he replies.

‘And that the first cocker spaniel to identify cancer in humans was called Tangle.’

‘Tangle, huh?’

She nods. ‘He had an 80 per cent success rate.’

‘Good for him.’ To his surprise, Jack manages a small smile. But that’s when another noise attracts Jack’s attention.

Rumbling, thudding footsteps in heavy steel-toecap boots. A man comes into view, then another. A black helmet, the visor covering his eyes, a balaclava obscuring his features. Some holding handguns, others with rifles. Pointed directly at Jack.

They surround him and Lucy, as the man at the front starts shouting orders.

‘PC Halliday, step back. And you – raise your hands. Take the rucksack off and raise your hands.’

Lucy turns. ‘He can’t,’ she shouts. ‘He can’t take the rucksack off.’

‘Take off the rucksack. You will be safe if you do exactly as we say. Take. It. Off.’

‘It’s chained to him. He can’t possibly—’ But the word is whisked out of her mouth as one of the men steps forward and grabs her around the middle,

pulling her away, kicking and screaming.

Jack raises his hands above his head. He can hear Lucy shouting as she's dragged away. 'Don't shoot, don't shoot him.'

The armed cops edge closer. 'Take the rucksack off,' the man bellows, again. Jack can hear the tremor in his voice and that scares him even more. What happens when the man with the gun is afraid? What then?

'I can't,' Jack tries to shout but his mouth is dry and it comes out in a croak. 'I can't.'

He lifts his hands as high as he can above his head. He prays they see the chain, the lock, the switch. That they realise who he is, how he got here.

Before it's too late.

He sees the barrel of the guns, pointing directly at him. The trembling trigger fingers, the fear in the men's voices.

And he closes his eyes, waiting for the shots.

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CHAPTER SEVENTY-FOUR

Lucy screams with frustration as she's pulled apart from Jack, her legs kicking as she's lifted off the ground and physically carried away – up onto the platform and beyond. Another officer takes control of Otto, her dog barking as he's separated from his handler.

'He's chained to the bomb,' she shouts, once she's placed on the ground. 'Don't you see? He can't put it down. He can't let go of the switch. You're going to shoot him and he's the victim! He's done nothing wrong.'

The armed officer looks at her, his expression unreadable behind his visor. She knows she needs to make him listen – and to do that, she has to be calm.

'You need to pay attention.' She takes a deep breath and lets it out slowly in juddering gasps, her lip quivering. 'The man down there is DCI Jack Ellis. He's the SIO on this whole investigation. He's been set up.' She tries to push past him but is stopped with a solid hand on her arm. 'Let me go.'

'Stay where you are,' he barks, not releasing his hold. He lowers his head to his radio, says a few words. She can still hear shouting from down the tunnel, and her body constricts with panic, imagining Jack's fear as the officers bellow, giving him instructions when he can't possibly comply. Meanwhile, the clock could be literally ticking, the bomb primed to go off at any second.

She holds her breath, dreading the gunshots, the explosion.

Another officer in black comes into view. Gun lowered, he lifts his visor and looks at her with age-scored eyes.

'Is that true?' he barks. 'The man in the tunnel – that's a police officer?'

'DCI Jack Ellis,' she repeats. She gulps in two breaths, trying to slow her frantic breathing. 'I don't know how he got here but he's not the bad guy. He was forced to do this by Marcus Whitmore. Please, don't shoot him.'

The officer regards her silently for a moment and all she can think about is Jean Charles de Menezes, the innocent man killed in the wake of the 7/7 bombings. All he had was a rucksack, while Jack is clearly strapped to a bomb. What are his chances of survival when the risk is as high as this?

'And you're PC Lucy Halliday?' the officer asks.

‘Yes. Dog handler. But Jack, he’s my...’ She doesn’t know how to describe him when everything is so complicated. ‘This isn’t Jack’s fault. Please – call Detective Superintendent Digby, he can confirm. Jack wouldn’t do this.’

‘And you’re sure he’s not dirty? Because we’ve already had one – how do you know he’s not working with Sharon Lynch? If he is who you say he is, she was in his team.’ Lucy goes to speak but he cuts her off. ‘Because that’s my men in that tunnel with him. Their lives at stake.’

‘He’s innocent,’ Lucy says, measuring her words slowly. She has to convince this man, she has to. ‘I know Jack, better than anyone in this world. And there’s no way he’s involved.’

Another long stare and just as Lucy thinks all is lost, the radio blares on his shoulder. He lowers his head and listens, not taking his eyes off her for a moment.

‘Bomb disposal are on their way,’ he says to her. ‘We’ll leave this to them. You need to go—’

‘No—’

‘That is not a question. We can’t have you down here.’ Someone hands her Otto’s lead. ‘Take your dog and go.’

Armed officers start to emerge from the tunnel, their guns lowered, at ease compared to the high tension from before. But Jack’s still down there, alone. She can’t imagine how scared he must be; already worn out from zero sleep and a long investigation, he’s now clearly injured.

Anger turns to frustration and she starts to cry, crouching down and soothing her still frazzled dog.

‘Please...’ she says in desperation. ‘Please.’

The armed officer stops, lowering the balaclava from his mouth. She can see his whole face now, old, weathered. The edges of his mouth pull down in sympathy.

‘Look, I’m guessing you’ve been a copper for a while,’ he says, gently. ‘So you should know when to leave something to the experts. There’s nothing you can do now except stay the hell away. Let them do their jobs, PC Halliday.’

Lucy nods, mute, and lets herself be led, Otto obediently following behind. She’s seen for herself how well-meaning, emotional relatives can delay an investigation, obstructing it in the worst of circumstances. But this feels wrong, her muscles tight, her body growing heavier with every step.

Guilt and regret sour her stomach, and as tears run down her face, she takes the last stairs towards the light. Every step feeling like a betrayal, condemning Jack to his death.

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CHAPTER SEVENTY-FIVE

The last vestiges of calm leave Jack the moment Lucy is pulled away. Having her next to him, when he could have killed her at any moment, had been his worst nightmare, but she was the only thing keeping him sane. Now she's gone, the panic returns.

Six semi-automatic SIG MCX carbine rifles are pointed at his chest by faceless officers; they have no wish to pull the trigger but Jack knows if he does anything sudden or unexpected these guys won't hesitate to shoot. The only problem is, he's not feeling so good.

His arms are aching from holding them aloft so long. The pain in his skull is increasing, a throbbing keeping time with his racing heart. He blinks to dispel the blood in his eyes, still oozing from the cut on his forehead, while adrenaline rushes in his veins, narrowing his focus to a fine point.

'I am not going to move,' he says, his voice shaking. 'You have no reason to shoot.'

Except for the massive bag of explosives strapped to your back, Jack's brain fires back.

But he can't think about that. He can't.

Not if he wants to get out of this alive.

Being close to death has one advantage. Anything unimportant has faded away, leaving him with only one wish – to see Lucy again. To lie in her arms, to hear her soft breathing in the middle of the night. To see her laugh with joy, gasp in ecstasy; to run his fingers through her hair, pulling dark strands out from her tight plait.

This can't be how it ends, it can't.

He senses a change in the armed officers. The muzzles lower, the men shift to a more relaxed stance.

'You,' one of them says. 'Stay here. Don't move.'

Jack does as he's told, but as the officers move away, the desperate fear returns.

'What's happening?' he asks. 'Please. What's going on?'

'Bomb disposal are on the way,' the man replies, and is gone, vaulting up to the platform behind his colleagues, striding purposefully towards the

exit.

Jack lowers his arms, feeling the blood return to his hands. He notices the tremor in his fingers, realises his whole body is shaking with exhaustion. He can't remember the last time he ate, not that he could stomach anything at the moment.

One man returns, the operational firearms commander, judging from the badge on his vest. He sits on the edge of the platform, swinging his legs; casual, as if they're about to chat about the weather.

'DCI Ellis, I gather?' His visor is up, serious dark eyes in a lined and battle-worn face.

'That's me,' Jack says, but it comes out as a croak.

'Good. Now, I've been chatting with your colleague up there, and it seems you've got mixed up in something unpleasant. So don't do anything sudden and we're going to be friends, okay?'

'Okay.'

The man opens a bottle of water, holds it out to Jack. 'Gently, now.'

Jack does as he's told, reaching out slowly, taking a few gulps and swilling it around his mouth. His tongue feels gritty, throat sore. His body recoils from the water, a surge of vomit threatening as he re-caps the bottle and hands it back to the commander.

'We've got bomb disposal coming, so until they arrive, we're going to chill out here, okay?'

Jack makes a noise in his throat; it comes out as a squeak. He nods.

The man smiles, approvingly. 'Now, how did you get here? What can you remember?'

'Marcus Whitmore,' Jack says. 'He cornered me at Tilbury Docks, knocked me out. Took me to a house.'

'A house, where?'

'I don't know. I wasn't there long until...' He reaches up with his free hand, tentatively touching the cut on his forehead, wincing from the sting of pain.

'Yeah, that looks bad. You're going to need a few stitches when you get out of here.'

'If I get out of here.'

'Let's not go down that route, eh?' the OFC says with a hint of a smile. 'Not while I'm sitting next to you.' He pauses. 'What do you know about this device?'

‘Nothing. Nothing at all.’

‘Don’t move.’

The man jumps down to the rails and rotates around Jack, taking photos of the mess of bicycle chains at his front and the bag behind. ‘It’s heavy?’ he asks.

‘Very.’

‘And you didn’t see what they put in here?’

‘Not at all.’

The man finishes and leans against the edge of the platform.

‘That dog handler up there, you know her?’

‘Yes, Lucy.’

‘She’s spirited. Doesn’t give up without a fight.’

Jack manages a smile. ‘That sounds like her.’

‘What I’d give to have a woman like that on my side.’ He gives him a knowing look. ‘Make the most of it.’

‘I intend to.’ Jack presses his lips together as a wave of emotion overtakes him. He won’t cry in front of this man, he won’t.

‘Has she got one of those big dogs, too? The Malinois or the Alsations?’

Jack nods. ‘Iggy’s a German shepherd.’

‘Don’t get on the wrong side of him, then.’

‘I try not to.’

The dog chat seems pointless, but the man knows what he’s doing. Meaningless stuff to distract Jack, and it’s working. His body relaxes a fraction, his shaking not so pronounced.

Until the calm is shattered by a ripple of chatter from the radio. The OFC listens, then looks at Jack with a nod.

‘It’s time,’ he says, pulling himself up onto the platform. ‘Bomb disposal are here.’

CHAPTER SEVENTY-SIX

The bomb disposal team arrive in a bluster of noise and barked instructions, their voices echoing down to where Jack waits. These men are his best chance of getting out of here alive; the majority of them are ex-army, trained to do the most dangerous of tasks. There's nothing they don't know about disarming bombs.

Or so Jack hopes.

The OFC goes to meet them, leaving Jack alone. Without anyone to distract him, his mind goes into overdrive, swinging wildly between despair and optimism, covering every emotion in between.

After what feels like hours, a man emerges, stepping purposefully forward in his heavy kit. Jack's heard it described as 'the lonely walk' – going out alone to defuse a bomb, but this time Jack's here to meet him. The man is dressed head to toe in dark green protective clothing, the blast suit made up of layers of Kevlar, plastic and foam, designed to withstand the impact of an explosion. Jack almost laughs. In comparison, he has no chance of surviving.

The man waddles over to the edge of the platform, then carefully climbs down, bringing a large black bag with him.

'Jack,' he says from within his helmet. 'My name is Steve Smith, but you can call me Smudge. My goal today is to defuse this bomb and get us both out of here alive. That okay with you?'

'Yes.' Jack clears his throat. 'Yes, please.'

'Good. Now stay still and let me have a look.'

Jack holds his arms out to the side as Smudge completes a full 360 around him. Every now and again he reaches out, gently lifting a wire or a part of the rucksack, but for the most part he remains silent.

'Can't you just cut the red wire?' Jack asks, weakly attempting a joke. Anything to alleviate the silence.

Smudge chuckles. 'I wish. Sadly, bomb makers tend to use the cheapest thing they have to hand, and that's usually boring black wire. Right now, I'm trying to identify the different components – the primary explosive, propellant, power source, the switches, whatever detonator they're using. Can I see your hand?'

Jack holds out his right hand, the one holding the switch, and the man examines it. He makes an annoyed grunt in the back of his throat.

‘You can’t get your fingers away from this?’ he asks.

‘No. You can see that I’ve tried.’ The man has a go, a bloom of red blood forming as Jack’s skin is pulled away. He lets out a hiss of pain.

‘Okay, fair enough,’ Smudge says. ‘Let’s look for another way.’

He starts poking and prodding again, talking as he goes.

‘The advantage we have today is I’ve been working with your forensic experts on the devices used this week. I’ve seen how they were constructed – and bomb makers generally have a signature. A preferred way of doing things.’

‘But the type of explosives were different?’

‘Doesn’t matter, that’s just the main charge – the other bits work in the same way. What starts the explosive train progressing... What he uses as the power source... They’re never made the same way twice, but for example, I know your guy likes a timer delay. Sensible if you’re the placer and you want to get away without getting blown up. Not that it worked for those guys. Oh.’ He pauses, behind Jack. ‘This is interesting.’

‘It is?’ Jack says, trying to crane his neck around. ‘Is that good news or bad news?’

‘Even with a signature, there is always some unpredictability in how they construct the bomb, and I can see your guy has been learning on the job. Normally, my first move is to take the power source away – no power, no detonator, no bomb – but he’s set up a few fail-safes. If I remove the power source, it’ll explode.’

‘Let’s not do that, then.’

‘Hmm, no,’ Smudge mutters under his breath. ‘And I would ideally like to get you away from the bomb so we can detonate it safely, but they’ve done a good job here.’

He turns his attention to the network of wires, chains and bicycle locks Jack has wound around his body, in and out of the straps of the rucksack, some glued or attached to the rucksack itself. He bends down to his bag, takes out a serious-looking bolt cutter and applies it to the biggest chain, slicing through it easily. He repeats this a few times, pulling them free and dropping them on the track.

‘That was the easy part,’ he says, replacing the bolt cutter in his bag. ‘There are so many variables when disarming a bomb. The environment,

the materials, the target. And you know what they say?’

Jack looks at him in disbelief. ‘No?’

‘If you can’t identify the target, it’s probably you. Or *you* – in this case. There’s no doubt this guy wants you dead.’

‘That’s reassuring,’ Jack mutters, sarcastically.

‘It’s almost impossible to know which wires are safe and which would trigger the explosion. And this one...’ He follows the wire up Jack’s arm to the switch. ‘This is the biggest problem.’

‘How so?’

‘Well, this is your detonator. The link between the circuits and the charge. But... Hmm.’ He looks at it for a second, following the wire back to the rucksack.

Then: ‘Bear with me.’

He walks a good distance away from Jack, then speaks down the radio. Jack can’t make out what he’s saying but his head is tilted down, his shoulders slumped. It’s not good news.

Jack concentrates on his breathing to stave off his fear. He’ll get out of here soon – the experts are working on it; he has faith they know what they’re doing.

Smudge finishes on the radio, but he pauses on the far side of the tracks, inclining his head. Jack watches him, the bad feeling intensifying.

After a few moments, Smudge looks up and walks across to Jack. He doesn’t say anything, just rotates around him again, his face close to the wires, studying each one, gently lifting and poking. He follows one around Jack and then up to his hand. A quick glance at his face tells Jack everything he needs to know.

‘What’s going on?’ he asks.

Smudge looks at Jack, his expression dark. ‘We have a problem.’

CHAPTER SEVENTY-SEVEN

The more time passes, the more Lucy panics.

She thought that the bomb disposal guys would turn up and that would be it. They've been working on these bombs all week – they literally know what makes them tick. But so much time has passed, and still nothing.

The PolSA came by and took Otto away without a word. The cordon is moved back, first ten metres away, now more like fifty. Crowds gather, journalists clamouring for quotes, photographers snapping. But Lucy can't take her eyes off the entrance to the tube station, willing Jack to emerge. The armed police have gone but Detective Superintendent Digby has arrived, wearing a stab vest over his suit. He looks ridiculous.

Nobody speaks to Lucy. The men in charge occasionally whisper and glance her way, but they leave her be.

Watching. Waiting.

'Please,' she whispers. But nobody's listening.

Time passes. And then as minutes turn into an hour, she hears footsteps on the stairs. Lucy's heart leaps, but the face emerging from the tube station is downcast and dejected. He pulls the helmet off and speaks to his commander, shaking his head.

Lucy hurries over to them, grabs at his arm. 'Where's Jack? What's happened? What's going on?'

But he shakes his head. 'There's nothing we can do—'

'What do you mean there's nothing you can do? You need to disable it! That's your job!'

'The bombers – they're not targeting the tube station, or members of the public – they were targeting Jack. We can't get the device off him without triggering the switch. I was willing to try, but...'

'He told you to go,' Lucy says miserably. Brave, strong, stupid, *stupid* man. Didn't want to risk injuring this guy to save himself.

The bomb disposal guy nods. 'I'm sorry. I gave him a quick overview. Told him what to cut, what he could try, but...'

'You think it'll trigger the explosion.'

'Yes. I'm sorry. I gave him my radio.' He reaches back, taking a similar unit from his colleague. 'Here. You can speak to him.'

‘What? Now?’

‘He’s waiting for you.’

Lucy stares at the radio in her hand, same as the one she’s used every day for more than a decade, but she can’t make her fingers work, can’t press the button. What can she possibly say to him to make any of this better?

Lucy stares at the entrance of the tube station. She feels sick as she opens the microphone.

‘Jack?’

There’s a hiss of static, then his voice. ‘Lucy?’

‘Yes, I’m here, Jack. I’m here. You need to let the man try. You can’t—’

‘I’m not going to risk his life.’

‘You can’t give up.’

Jack clears his throat. ‘I need you to listen to me, Lucy—’

‘But—’

‘No, Lucy, listen. Please. I’m not giving up. I’m going to do what Smudge told me, but... I don’t know.’ His voice cracks, and all Lucy wants to do is run to him, save him – somehow – but her legs won’t obey. They wobble, weak, and she slides down the wall, clutching the radio to herself as if it were a part of him.

‘I’m listening,’ she whispers.

She hears a small sob, and she waits. He clears his throat again, loudly. ‘This last week, with you, has been the best few days of my life. I mean, it’s been awful, and exhausting, but just having you there...’

She nods, her throat closing up, overwhelmed with emotion.

‘And I should have said it before, but I love you, Lucy. I have loved you since we went to Newcastle, and I should never have agreed to keep everything quiet after that kiss. I should have said how I felt, and fought for you, but... I don’t know. Ever since I met you, I knew we had a future together—’

‘You hated me,’ Lucy says.

Jack laughs, the sound bittersweet. ‘I did. But I quickly changed my mind. Lucy – you are the strongest, the most determined, most beautiful person I have ever met, and my biggest regret is I’m not going to be able to spend the rest of my life with you. But I love you, and... I thought you should know that before...’

His voice trails off and she presses her finger against the button.

‘Jack, no. Jack, talk to me, please...’ But all she gets is dead air.

She turns to the bomb disposal team, who must have been listening to their every word. 'You can't leave him down there!' she shouts. 'You need to stop that bomb, defuse the damn thing, do your job!'

But they don't move, dejection and defeat written on their faces. Lucy looks from them to the Tube entrance. She can't leave Jack alone down there, she can't, and on the spur of the moment, she stops thinking and starts to run, every step heavy until she's caught around the middle by someone, pulled back. Still kicking, fighting, screaming until something propels them both to the ground. A whoosh of wind, a loud bang, muting Lucy's hearing, pushing the air out of her lungs.

She falls heavily onto the concrete. A loud high-pitched whistle deafens her as she struggles to her feet, staring incomprehensibly at the scene.

Grey smoke and debris billow out of the mouth of the tube station. A few onlookers are screaming; police officers struggle to maintain order; people stampede away as a man pulls on Lucy's arm. She shrugs him off, and in that moment, she realises what happened.

The bomb exploded.

And Jack is dead.

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CHAPTER SEVENTY-EIGHT

After the initial chaos, there is silence.

Only the emergency responders remain. Paramedics, checking over cuts and knocks from the debris and glass; the fire crews, rolling out a hose in readiness to tackle any flames. Uniformed police push the cordon back and radio reports to control, updating on the damage and casualties.

But there is only one person dead.

Lucy stares at the entrance to the tube station in a daze; there's something wet on her face and she reaches up, touching her cheek, numbly looking at the blood on her finger. She's dimly aware that this must be what shock feels like – blood thumps in her ears and she should cry, shout, scream – anything – but all she can do is watch, confused, as a figure staggers from the doorway to the tube station.

His clothes are white with dust. Blood streaks his face as he crumples to the pavement. But Lucy's there, with him, some part of her responding before her consciousness catches up.

His name forms on her lips but no sound comes out; she wraps her arms around his middle, holding him tight as his body collapses into her, both of them on the concrete, limbs intertwined. She cradles his face in her hands, laughing, kissing him, and he smiles back, just for a moment.

'Jack, how did you... What did you...?' she manages at last. His hair is filthy with dust and blood, and she gently pushes it back from his face, wiping her thumb along his cheekbone. The cut on his forehead is bleeding again and now she's up close, she can see the blood at the back of his head, feel the egg-shaped lump where he must have been knocked out. But he can get help now. He can go to a hospital – because he's here. He's alive.

Paramedics crowd around them and they're forced apart. But he reaches for her and she takes his hand between both of hers, holding it tight.

And she doesn't let it go. Not when an oxygen mask is fitted over his face; not as he is gently lifted onto a stretcher. She holds on as he's loaded into the ambulance, sitting next to him as the doors are closed and the sirens sound. His eyes slowly close, surrendering to unconsciousness, but she doesn't let him go.

'I'm not going anywhere,' she whispers. 'I'm not leaving you, Jack.'

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CHAPTER SEVENTY-NINE

Jack doesn't remember much of what happens over the next few hours. Once the adrenaline and stress burned out, his body gave in. He left his fate in the hands of the paramedics.

He's aware of the ambulance, of arriving at the hospital, the doctors checking him over, looking for broken bones and bloodied limbs. He mumbles answers to a few questions, but otherwise he lies back on the blissfully comfortable hospital bed, holding Lucy's hand.

He takes comfort knowing she's there. Tethering him to the here and now, holding his panic at bay. Because every now and then he'll drift off, waking with a jolt, thinking he's back there. At the house. Or down in the tube station, strapped to explosives.

There was nothing they could do to disable the bomb. He took the news stoically, as if, yes, that was what he was expecting. Marcus Whitmore was too smart, too many steps ahead of them for it to be anything else. He was going to die there.

So when he cut the wire and it started beeping, he expected the worst. But he also remembered what Smudge had said. *Time delay switch. If nothing goes off, start cutting.*

And he did as he was told. Snipping the wire connecting the switch to his hand, tugging his arms out from the straps, shrugging the rucksack off his shoulders and running. Telling every fatigued muscle in his body to run. Now.

Run.

He must have been halfway up the stairs when the damn thing blew. A gust of air, sucking all the oxygen out of the stairwell, then throwing him forward. He stumbled on the stairs, falling, scraping his hands, his knees, but he didn't stop, pushing up again, crawling, taking the stairs two at a time in the darkness, coughing as the dust and smoke overtook him.

Until he made it to the light. Blinding him as he gasped on sweet, fresh air, until his legs decided that was it, game over.

And then Lucy was there. Lucy, whom he'd assumed he would never see again, wrapping her arms around him, and he grabbed her, expecting smoke

and dust, a hallucination, only to find her real and crying and laughing, kissing his face.

He was free. He was safe. But he would never be the same again.

The doctor declares Jack relatively unharmed. A few fractured ribs, a bruised nose – not broken, luckily – the rest no more than bruises and aches and pains. With patience, a nurse painstakingly uses saline to extract the switch from his hand, and he stretches his cramped fingers, glad to be free of the reminder of how badly today could have gone.

‘I’m still not happy about that head,’ the doctor says.

‘But the CT was clear?’ Jack asks.

‘Unremarkable, yes, but given you were knocked unconscious twice, I want to keep you here overnight—’

‘I’m fine—’

‘One night,’ the doctor insists. ‘I’m worried about concussion. And even after that, I want someone with you twenty-four hours.’

‘I think that could be arranged,’ Jack says with a smile as Lucy arrives back, two mugs in hand.

‘I persuaded the nurses to give us the good stuff,’ she says. ‘Proper caffeinated teabags and milk. They were only too happy to oblige. No muck out of the machine for you.’ She places the mugs down on the table. ‘What? Why are you both staring at me?’

The doctor sighs. ‘To *observe*. Nothing else. Any nausea, vomiting, confusion, balance problems, double vision or seizures and you’re to come straight back here. Call 999 if you need to.’

‘Absolutely.’

The doctor leaves them to it, and Lucy passes him the tea. ‘What was that all about?’

‘When they let me out of hospital tomorrow, you’re going to need to observe me. All hours of the day.’

‘That can be arranged.’ She raises an eyebrow. ‘At night?’

‘Absolutely.’ She smiles and bends down to kiss him. ‘Seriously, though. How are you doing?’

‘Sore. Tired.’ He lifts his hand to his hair, and winces; sweat, dust and blood have stuck it together in hard peaks. ‘I need a shower...’

‘You need to sleep,’ Lucy says. ‘I can come back later—’

‘No, don’t go.’ Jack can’t stand the thought of being alone, even in this hospital full of nurses and doctors. ‘Please.’

‘Okay.’ She sits down next to his bed. ‘Digby came by, but the nurses wouldn’t let him in. He says you need to have a formal interview.’

‘I only remember bits and pieces. I’m not sure what help I’ll be.’ He takes a sip from the mug, then another. ‘This is the best tea I’ve ever tasted.’

‘Near-death experience will do that to you.’ She flushes, pressing her lips together. ‘Oh, fuck. I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to joke. It’s not funny. You nearly died.’ She looks up to the ceiling, trying not to cry.

‘Hey, hey.’ He puts the mug down and reaches for her, holding both of her hands in his. ‘It’s okay now.’

‘When that bomb went off... I thought...’

‘But I’m not – I’m here. Somehow. And everything’s going to be fine.’

‘It is?’

‘Of course. It takes more than one bomb-wielding psychopath to take me out.’

‘Oh, Jack. Fucking hell.’ She reaches forward and gives him a long, slow kiss. ‘When I get you out of here...’

She leaves it unfinished, and he laughs, then leans back on the pillows, finishing off his tea. He wants to hold on to this good feeling as long as possible, but there’s still one question left unanswered.

‘Have they caught Marcus Whitmore?’ he asks. He tries to keep his voice light, but just saying the name sends a bolt of fear straight to the pit of his stomach.

Lucy’s face clouds. ‘No. But, Jack, you’re safe now. There’s a copper on the door here, and every man on the street is looking for him. His face is on every news bulletin; there’s an all-ports alert out – he can’t leave the country. He’s a known terrorist, and he attacked a police officer – nobody’s going to stop until he’s behind bars. He’s hiding, like a rat in a hole. You’re not in danger anymore.’

Logically, Jack knows Lucy’s correct. Whitmore would be stupid to try anything now, when he’s the most hated man in the country. But he did it before.

Whitmore abducted him, took him to a house in the middle of nowhere, then dropped him back in the middle of London. He’s arrogant, narcissistic,

confident. He's not afraid to act, and is well connected, with access to explosives, firearms and narcotics. And what's more, he's going to be furious that Jack survived.

Jack knows one thing for sure – Marcus Whitmore isn't going to make that mistake again. Next time he comes for Jack, he's going to succeed.

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DAY 8 – FRIDAY

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CHAPTER EIGHTY

Lucy spends the night dozing in the chair next to Jack's bed. He told her to leave, get some proper sleep, but when he jerked awake, just past midnight, fear in his eyes, she resolved to stay. If she can make a tiny bit of difference to his peace of mind, she will.

She waits as he drops off to sleep again, as the worry lines fade from around his eyes and his face relaxes. She gently pulls the blanket higher, noticing the dust that remains in his hairline, the stitches bisecting the cut on his forehead.

She heard the nurses talking earlier, about how Jack got away lightly with the injuries he has. He could have had a fractured skull, or his broken ribs could have punctured a lung. Subdural haematoma, intracranial haemorrhage – all of these things would have been possible if Marcus Whitmore had hit him that little bit harder.

Her worries flourish in the early hours, and as Lucy feels tears threaten again, she swallows them down. She will be strong for him. He's here and he's okay. That's the main thing. He's okay.

She must have dropped off, because she next wakes to the clatter of the breakfast trolley and the chatter of nurses in the corridor. She lifts her head, wiping her mouth and blinking.

Jack is watching her. 'Morning, sleepyhead.'

'Morning. How are you feeling?'

'A bit better. Head's still pounding, but I can sit up without wanting to puke.'

'Should we get a doctor? They said if you felt sick—'

He stops her, his hand on her arm. 'It's nothing serious,' he says, gently. 'Relax. Now – do you want tea?'

There's a knock on the open door, and Amrit sticks her head around.

'Am I too early?' she asks. She comes in, then flinches when she sees Jack up close. 'Blimey, boss, you've looked better.'

‘You should see the other guy.’

She laughs, then puts a box of Maltesers on the nightstand. ‘I brought these, but the nurse said you’re getting out today?’

‘I hope so, yeah. Then home. Never thought I’d be so glad to see the sights of Southampton again.’

‘I would say we can do this when you’re back, but Digby’s nagging the shit out of me and...’

‘No, now’s fine.’

She places a small tape recorder on the table, then they both look at Lucy. With a start, she realises what Amrit’s there for. The follow-up interview about what happened to Jack.

‘I’ll go and look for coffee,’ she says, and leaves them to it.

It’s a formal interview, and it makes sense that she wouldn’t be there, but part of her wonders what they’re discussing. What Marcus Whitmore might have said, where he took Jack, what he put him through.

Jack may have been lucky with the physical side of his injuries, but the mental recovery is just beginning. It’s hard to imagine how scared Jack had been, being that close to death, and her worry morphs into anger.

Hundreds of officers have been drafted in to help with the manhunt, and Lucy imagines an army of general purpose dogs, tracking Whitmore through London. The sooner, the better as far as she’s concerned. She wants Marcus Whitmore to rot in jail for what he did; she wants the world to know who was behind that bomb on Good Friday, and she wants him punished.

She grabs a coffee from Costa and takes a seat at the back of the café, turning her phone on and checking her messages. A few have come in overnight.

Updates from the PolSA at the Oxford Street crime scene, telling her they’re inundated with victim recovery dogs, and she and Moss are off the hook. One from Fran last night, checking up on her and Jack, and then a follow-up this morning, with a photo.

She clicks on it. *You’ve made the front page!* Fran says, and the photo loads, showing the front of the *Guardian*. The headline: *DETECTIVE SAFE AFTER THIRD BOMB* with a photograph front and centre.

‘Fuck,’ Lucy mutters.

It shows the outside of the Leicester Square tube station, a plume of smoke and dust billowing out of the doors as two figures crouch outside.

Jack, covered in dust, and Lucy, her arms wrapped around him. It's a beautiful shot, and even through her annoyance, Lucy can recognise the skill and luck involved in capturing that, just at the right time.

So much for keeping their relationship quiet... The whole country now knows. They're not kissing but it's obvious – as the multiple voicemails confirm. They want her and Jack to tell their side of the story. An exclusive interview – and they'll pay.

She deletes them all.

But she does need to speak to Pete.

She finds his number and presses her finger against it. It rings, once, twice, before he answers.

'Hi.' There's a long pause, in which Lucy wonders if Pete's hung up, until he says, 'How are you?'

'I'm fine.'

'And Jack?'

'He's still in hospital, but he'll be okay.'

'Good.' Another long pause. 'I saw the photos.'

Lucy winces. 'I'm sorry. I didn't want—'

'I guess we need to talk,' he says, interrupting her. 'Face to face. We're not doing this over the phone.'

Lucy takes a sharp intake of breath. He's not letting her off easy. 'Okay.'

'I'm still in London. I go home tomorrow. Iggy and Dax are in kennels,' he adds, before Lucy can ask.

'Yes, we're... I'm heading home tomorrow, too. Shall I meet you somewhere central, tomorrow morning? Near Hyde Park?'

It makes more sense to talk when they both get home, but she wants somewhere neutral. Somewhere that won't remind her of the future he expected to have with her, the hurt she's inflicted. How quickly things have changed.

They cordially agree a time and a place, and when she hangs up, Lucy feels eyes on the back of her neck. Maybe she's being paranoid, but it's also possible someone recognised her; a quick Google search shows the photograph from the tube station is everywhere. Across social media, on all the news sites. One journalist is already calling it 'this generation's *The Kiss*', referencing the photograph of the woman and the sailor on V-J Day in Times Square. She doesn't have time for such ridiculous hyperbole, and

gets to her feet, finishing her coffee and dumping the cup in the bin as she goes.

There's someone else she wants to see.

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CHAPTER EIGHTY-ONE

Amrit places the old clunky device on the table and rests her hand on the record button.

‘We don’t have to do this today,’ she says. ‘We can wait until you’re feeling a bit better, until you’re home.’

‘No, it’s important we do it now.’

Jack’s seen for himself how quickly eyewitnesses forget. The human memory is unreliable, and even in the course of a few hours, history can be rewritten and salient information lost.

No, he wants to get this done now, however painful it’s going to be.

Amrit does the introductions for the tape, then turns to Jack.

‘Take me through it, step by step. What happened?’

When Jack woke, he wasn’t at the docks anymore. It must have been early morning, still dark, and a dim lamp in the corner showed him all he needed to know – it was an empty room, bare apart from a few old sofas, a dirty carpet pressed into his face. A stench in the air of old cigarettes and months-old sweat filled his nose.

He tried to move, then struggled, and finding his hands and feet bound with silver tape he panicked, but all that did was press his face further into the filthy carpet. Breathing heavily, he forced himself to stop. *Get a grip, get control*, he told himself. *You’re making things worse*.

His hands were bound behind his back, but he managed to wiggle around, manoeuvring himself into a sitting position. He couldn’t hear anything from outside. No cars, no conversation, nothing. His head was throbbing, a thumping pain that made him want to vomit when he tried to move. A concussion, maybe. A plug of blood blocked his nose – broken, he assumed – but that seemed to be all. He tried shouting, but nobody came. He was alone.

It didn’t take long before he heard footsteps on gravel outside. Instinct told him to stay silent as he heard a key in the door, followed by a rush of

cold air as the door to the room opened. A man stood above him, looking down with a wide grin. Marcus Whitmore. In the flesh.

Up close, he was a fearsome sight. Broad shoulders, muscular chest, thick biceps. He was wearing a black jacket, black jeans, black boots, but even through the layers of clothing, Jack knew – this was a man he needed to worry about.

‘Nice to meet you properly, Detective Chief Inspector.’ Marcus pushed at Jack’s head, causing Jack to fall to the side, then swung his leg back and planted a hard kick into his ribs; Jack felt a bone crack and he compressed into two with pain, his face back against the stinking carpet.

Marcus lowered his face to Jack’s. ‘How lovely we should meet in these circumstances.’

‘Let me go,’ Jack growled through clenched teeth.

‘All in good time, *sir*,’ he said, mocking.

He crouched next to Jack, then grabbed a handful of his hair, pulling his head back at a painful angle.

‘You arrested my brother. You fucked up *everything*.’ Spittle showered Jack’s face, Marcus’s foul breath against his cheek. ‘Don’t you think that deserves a conversation?’

‘So, talk.’

‘All in good time.’ Marcus released Jack and he fell backwards, scooting away from the man as best he could. ‘There was nearly seventeen million pounds worth of cocaine in that shipment, did you know that? Two hundred and three kilograms.’ Marcus took a cigarette out of his pocket, lighting it and blowing out a plume of self-satisfied smoke. ‘And you took it all. I should get something in return.’

‘You killed over fifty people,’ Jack gasped, every breath agony from his broken ribs. ‘You deserve to be locked up for life. Hand yourself in, let me go.’

‘You’re in no position to make demands, DCI Ellis. I underestimated you, that was my mistake. I assumed that Gary would be the weak link, but no, it was my own arrogance.’

Marcus was nothing like Jack imagined he would be. His accent was southern, with a slight hint of cockney, and the language he used was cultured, refined. Jack realised with a sting that he misjudged this man.

‘You killed Gary King,’ Jack said. ‘You manipulated Daniel and George Bevan to do your dirty work for you.’

‘In my defence, neither of the Bevans was supposed to die. Not at that point, anyway. I would have had to dispose of them later, so I guess I should be thankful the bombs did my dirty work for me.’ He laughed and at that point Jack noticed the gun in his left hand, resting on his thigh. A small black 9mm, illegal and deadly. ‘They were so easy to manipulate, all three of them. And fucking hell, did they hate you. The police, I mean. Coppers. They couldn’t wait when we told them our plan. That’s what an abusive parent can do to you. I should know.’

Jack realised then. How could he have been so stupid? ‘You grew up in the same foster home as Kevin Walsh.’

‘See, I knew you were smart. Bang on, Jack. Me, Josh and Kevin, we had each other’s backs. So I knew Kev would help us. Once he went to prison, he got a bit more demanding – wanted that dog lady dead. What’s her name?’

Jack glared.

‘Lucy Halliday, that’s it. Said I’d do that for him if he put me in touch with some other soldiers for our cause.’

‘You killed Tansy.’

‘Who’s that? Oh, her sister? No, Josh killed Tansy, strictly speaking. George wouldn’t do it, fucking pussy. And we wouldn’t have had to do that if she’d kept her trap shut.’ He shook his head, disapprovingly. ‘Don’t look at me like that. We were simply making use of the resources at our disposal. Tansy came to us. Wanted something to take the edge off and we were only too happy to oblige. We didn’t know at that point that Lucy was her sister, but under the influence of a couple of nostrils of coke she got a bit more talkative. Told Daniel and George about this sister in the police force who’d kicked her out. I mean, how could Lucy have done that to her?’

‘Lucy didn’t kick her out,’ Jack muttered.

‘She certainly didn’t welcome her with open arms. And we thought we’d make the most of our discovery. Lucy was always surrounded by big fucking dogs, and I didn’t want to get bitten, so George made a move on Tansy. And fuck, Tansy was so desperate for attention, it was easy. Too easy, I almost felt sorry for the poor girl. Free coke, a few credit cards for a bit of disposable cash, and Tansy was ours. We planned that Tansy would unwittingly draw Lucy out, get her to meet us somewhere. But Tansy clocked George was dodgy, did some digging of her own and said she’d go

back to her sister, tell her everything. Well, we couldn't have that, could we?'

A thousand thoughts ran through Jack's mind. The planning for the bombs had been going on for months, maybe even years. And nobody knew anything, except poor misfortunate Tansy. Somehow, she'd found herself in the middle of this mess and got herself killed.

'You didn't have to bomb London,' Jack said. 'You could have carried on importing your cocaine, no problem.'

'Except you guys were on to us. We needed a diversion and, fuck me – it worked well.' He laughed, squashing the butt of his cigarette into the carpet and lighting another. 'You coppers, all running around, chasing your tails. You caught Gary quicker than we thought you would, but you didn't have a clue! I'd have loved to have seen the look on your face when that second bomb went off. Just brilliant.' His face changed, smug, arrogant. Angry. 'Two shipments came in – one on Friday night and one on Tuesday. We only had this last one to go and we would have gone. Lived a life of luxury on a nice beach somewhere, that was the plan. But you—' He lifted the gun and pointed it right between Jack's eyes. 'You had to interfere.'

Jack's guts turned to mush; his vision narrowed on the small black hole at the end of the gun, until Whitmore lowered it with a smile.

'I'll get Josh out, and then we'll get the fuck out of here.'

'Josh is going to be in prison for the rest of his life,' Jack said, not able to contain the anger any longer. 'I'll make sure of it.'

'You?' Whitmore raised his eyebrows, mocking. 'You're not going to do anything, not after I've finished with you.'

He lifted the gun again and Jack thought, *This is it.*

Until the grip smashed into Jack's forehead, and the world disappeared once more.

'I woke up in the carriage of the tube train and, well, you know the rest.'

Amrit switches the recorder off.

'Shall I go?' she asks, softly, and Jack takes two long breaths, in and out, feeling his heart thumping hard. The panic feels real, as if he was back there again, a fine sheen of sweat on his forehead.

‘No, no, stay,’ he says, after a moment. ‘I want to hear what you’ve discovered since. Have you managed to work out how I got there?’

‘We found you on CCTV,’ Amrit replies. ‘And yes, it was Marcus. He managed to half-walk, half-carry you onto the train at Ealing Common, somehow – you’re not a small man, boss – then left you at Piccadilly Circus. Someone raised the alarm at Leicester Square, probably as you woke up.’

‘Marcus took a big risk. What if the bomb had gone off? What if someone had raised the alarm earlier?’

‘He caught the first Tube into London – just past half-five in the morning. Not many people around at that time of day.’

‘And where did he go after Piccadilly?’

‘Crossed over, and caught the next Tube back, getting off at North Ealing. We lost him at that point.’

‘Shit.’ Jack thinks for a moment, remembering the quiet of the house, how isolated he felt. ‘There’s no way that house was in Ealing. There must have been a car or a van to drive me from wherever we were to the first Tube. Maybe the same one he used to get away at the docks?’

‘The team are looking into it, Jack, I promise you. Your only job, right now, is to go home and recover—’

‘I know, but—’

‘But nothing. Digby has been talking about some brilliant DCI he’s getting in.’ Jack laughs, ruefully, knowing he was once that guy. But there’s no jealousy, just pity for the poor sod coming in next. Amrit continues: ‘I’ve never seen such a well-resourced team; the overtime budget must be destroyed.’ She stops, looking at Jack. He knows that expression. Amrit’s serious face – no arguing with her now. ‘Go home,’ she repeats. ‘Get some sleep. Spend some quality time with Lucy.’ She grins. ‘You two are famous now.’

‘What?’

‘Here.’ She finds the right page on her phone then holds it out to him. He squints at the tiny image.

‘But that’s...’

‘You and Lucy. Maybe one to frame for the wall.’

Jack shudders. ‘Not a chance. There’s no way I want to revisit that moment.’

‘But seriously, Jack. Digby’s team are on it. They’re building a brilliant case against Joshua Whitmore. They’ve found him on a Ring doorbell a few streets down from the Pimlico tube, passing the rucksack to George Bevan on Tuesday morning. We have the second bomb factory – a lock-up under the arches in Shepherd’s Bush, where they made the Oxford Street ANFO bomb. He led us there on Wednesday night.’

‘So there are no more bombs?’

‘No more bombs,’ she confirms. ‘That lock-up is full to the brim of evidence – fingerprints, DNA, the lot. And a worker at the bus depot across the road said there had been noise and cars going to and fro for months now. He identified Joshua. They have him, Jack. He’s never going to see the light of day again, and soon they’ll have Marcus. He can’t get far.’

‘And there’s no risk to Lucy?’

She smiles. ‘Lucy’s going to be fine. Oscar went to the prison yesterday to see Kevin Walsh, told him all about how Marcus used him, manipulated him and George and Daniel, all so he could move some product.’ She laughs. ‘Kevin’s fucking furious. He thought Marcus believed in the *cause*, all that bollocks. And now he has a few terrorism charges to add into the mix, he’s spitting feathers. That brotherhood is over, I can guarantee that.’

Amrit slips her phone back into her pocket and collects her stuff, ready to go. ‘They’re letting you out today?’ Jack nods. ‘Then I’ll see you in Southampton. And don’t hurry back. Oscar and I have everything under control.’

‘I bet you do,’ Jack says. ‘Thank you, Amrit.’

‘No problem.’

With a final smile, she leaves Jack alone, for the first time since he arrived in the hospital. The solitude gives him time to think. How could he not remember being taken to the Tube? His hand goes up to the bump at the back of his head and the stitches in his hairline. He must have been more out of it than he realised. And the fact that Marcus is still out there fills him with worry.

He underestimated the man once. He won’t make that mistake again.

CHAPTER EIGHTY-TWO

Sally gets out of hospital today, and she can't bloody wait. Her family have been in every day to visit but she's desperate to go back to her parents' house, sleep in her old bed, watch *Hey Duggee* and *Bluey* with Rory on the sofa, and be thoroughly pampered.

They've all left, promising to return in a few hours once the doctor has discharged her, and she waits, impatient, until a woman pokes her head around the door.

She's wearing a once-black grubby police uniform; her hair is tied back in a French plait and she looks tired. At first, Sally's worried, expecting the policewoman to be bringing bad news, but then she recognises her.

'Oh, God,' Sally says, her hand flying to her mouth. 'You're her. You're the woman who found me.'

The woman smiles. 'I am. I'm Lucy. Lucy Halliday. It's nice to see you looking so well, Sally.'

'Yeah, apart from this.' She taps her finger on the white plaster cast on her right leg. 'Broken in two places, they said.'

'But apart from that, you're okay?'

'Yes, thanks to you.'

Six days buried under that building had taken their toll. But the doctors gave her fluids, antibiotics, and gradually reintroduced food. The Weetabix and mug of tea she had yesterday were almost heavenly; the bar of Dairy Milk after that was a transcendental experience.

'But what were you doing down there?' Sally asks. 'They said you're a dog handler.'

'I am. And it was a dog that found you – I can't take the credit. A red fox Lab called Saxon. He knew you were down there. He just needed someone to listen. And I was the only person who could fit down the hole.'

'Well, thank you.' Lucy smiles and gives her a small nod. 'Are you okay?' Sally asks. 'You seem a bit tired.'

Lucy gives a small laugh, and Sally can see tears hovering just behind the façade. 'Sit down,' she says, pointing to the chair next to the bed; Lucy collapses into it.

‘I’m okay, it’s...’ She looks up at the ceiling for a moment, then clears her throat. ‘My... My boyfriend, I guess you’d call him – he got caught up in the most recent bomb and could have died.’

‘But he’s okay?’

‘Yes, he’s over in the North wing. He’ll be fine, but... it was close.’

‘And you didn’t realise how much he meant to you until you nearly lost him?’

Lucy stares at her for a moment, as if Sally had told her the meaning of life, and then promptly bursts into tears. ‘Yes, oh, fuck.’ She’s crying properly now, and Sally reaches down, placing what she hopes is a reassuring hand on her back as she sobs, her head in her hands.

‘I’m not normally like this,’ Lucy directs to the floor. ‘But... But...’

‘It’s been a long week?’

‘Oh, fuck, it really has.’ Lucy looks up and laughs; Sally hands her a tissue and she wipes her eyes. ‘The worst thing is – he got to speak to me before... you know... the worst happened. And he said he loved me, but...’

‘You didn’t say it back?’

‘No.’

‘But he’s okay now?’ Lucy nods. ‘Well, you know what they say.’ Sally looks at her, pointedly. ‘It’s never too late.’

Lucy looks frozen for a second, then jumps to her feet, seemingly coming to a decision. ‘I need to go,’ she says. ‘I’m glad you’re okay,’ she calls behind her as she hurries out the door.

‘Thank you for saving me,’ Sally shouts after her, then leans back in her bed, chuckling. She’d wanted to know the name of the woman who climbed into hell to get her, and for a while Sally even wondered if she’d been hallucinating. But now, after that conversation, Sally maybe gave something back.

Maybe not saved her life. But close.

CHAPTER EIGHTY-THREE

In the end, it takes longer than they expected to get Jack discharged from hospital. Lucy had returned to his room after her visit to see Sally, full of confidence, intending to declare her love for Jack and map out their future, but finding him sleeping, she had spent the next few hours wracked with indecision and doubt.

Had he said he loved her over the radio solely because of the heightened emotions of the situation? Was he regretting it now? Had he come to his senses, and was keen to go home to his calm, tidy house and serenely quiet dog, leaving Lucy to her own mess and problems?

Having worked herself up nicely, there's no chance of a nap, and she feverishly drinks coffee to stave off the exhaustion. Eventually, admitting defeat, she calls Fran, sitting in the corridor outside Jack's room.

'Sorry, what are you talking about?' Fran says, after Lucy has wittered on at her for a good five minutes. 'Of course Jack loves you. Jesus fucking Christ, everyone in the country is aware of this fact, given the photograph on the front of every single paper in the UK this morning, and you're still doubting it?'

'I just...'

'No "just". Stop overthinking. Go in there, give that poor man a big kiss, then take him home and fuck him senseless.'

'Fran!'

'Okay, maybe wait a few days for that last one. Make sure he's feeling better, then fuck him senseless. And report back, I need to know every detail. I need everything I can get to make it through the next few weeks.'

Lucy feels instantly awful. 'Fran, I'm so sorry. Here's me going on about Jack, and you're still in the middle of it all.'

'It's fine. Life goes on and I want to hear about all the good things when I'm surrounded by the bad.'

'You're staying?'

'For the foreseeable. Mike's admirably holding the fort at home and I'm needed here. Experienced forensic pathologists are thin on the ground and there's still so much to do. So many people, Lucy. So many bodies. And that means I stay, until every last person in this tragedy is identified and

back with their family.' She sighs, and Lucy imagines her sitting outside the temporary mortuary, sandwich in one hand, can of Coke in the other. 'Look, I've got to go,' Fran says. 'But keep in touch, yeah? I want to hear about all of it, no matter how small.'

Lucy says her goodbyes and goes back into the room, where Jack has woken up and is looking around, confused.

'I wondered where you'd gone,' he says.

She sits down next to him, holding up her phone. 'Fran.'

'Ah. Is she okay?'

'Yeah, but she's staying on for a while longer. And I wondered – should I... Moss and I...?'

'Stay?' Jack asks, and Lucy nods. 'No. You've done enough – more than enough – and to be perfectly honest, I want you with me. I know it's selfish, but I don't care.'

'Okay.'

'Okay?' Jack looks at her, surprised. 'That's all? No argument?'

'No argument.'

'Wow, I should get strapped to a bomb more often, if it means I can boss you around.' Lucy feels her throat tighten, as stupid, annoying tears well up. And as much as she tries, this time she can't stop the waterworks.

Jack leans forward, appalled. 'Oh, God, too soon for jokes? I didn't mean to upset you.'

'No, you didn't. It's...'

'What?'

'You said you loved me, on the radio. Yesterday. And I didn't have the chance to say it back, and then the bomb went off, and it was all I could think about. That you were dead, and I didn't tell you that I loved you, and I feel so awful, even now, and...'

She manages to sneak a look at his face. He's grinning.

'You do?' he says.

She hiccups a laugh, wiping her eyes with her sleeve. 'Yes, I do. I love you.'

'And I love you, too.'

She leans forward and kisses him, gently. 'Good. Because after all this worry you put me through, you'd bloody better.'

It's way past eight at night when they finally get out of the hospital. They look a strange sight – Lucy in her police uniform and Jack in too-small scrubs, supplemented with a jumper from the lost and found. They avoid the press, taking a taxi from the rear of the hospital and driving back to the hotel, hand in hand. Every now and again, Lucy catches Jack's eye, and he returns her smile, gently, knowingly. That for the moment, life is simple, and easy.

Without discussion, Lucy lets them into Jack's room and the moment the door closes behind them, they're taking off each other's clothes. But as much as Lucy wants him, there are other priorities, emphasised by the huge red-purple bruise across Jack's side.

He looks at it, curiously, in the mirror, then leans forward, assessing the stitches on his forehead.

'He did a good job, didn't he?' he says, quietly.

She circles him from behind, carefully wrapping her arms around his middle. 'Not that good. You're still here.'

'Yes, I am.' He lowers his lips to hers, for a moment, before turning his attention to the bathroom. 'Now, can I please have a shower? I must absolutely stink. I still have dust in my hair.'

'I must insist on joining you,' Lucy says with a smile. 'You remember what the doctor said? Twenty-four-hour observation.'

'Well, if it's doctor's orders...'

'It is.'

Fran would be disappointed – their only priority lies in scrubbing off all the dust and grime and sweat. With the water turned up as hot as they can bear, Jack bends down, letting Lucy shampoo his hair, until the water runs clear.

After, she helps him get dressed, and he collapses into bed, pulling her with him. She almost groans with the simple pleasure of being warm under the covers; Jack falls asleep immediately, and Lucy stays next to him, listening to his breathing. Knowing that she came close, too close, to losing him.

She's drifting off when her phone buzzes from where she's left it charging on the desk. Carefully, so as not to wake Jack, she climbs out of bed and answers it, whispering a hello to Amrit.

'I'm sorry, is it too late?' Amrit says. 'Jack told me to call, but I'm guessing he still doesn't have a replacement phone?'

‘No, and it’s fine.’ Lucy goes into the bathroom and closes the door, sitting on the edge of the bath. ‘Jack’s asleep but I can tell him.’ There’s an ominous pause. ‘Amrit? You know he’s going to tell me anyway.’

‘Yes,’ she says, hesitant, ‘but it’s about Tansy.’

‘Then you definitely need to tell me.’

A sigh, and Lucy knows she’s won. ‘How much do you know?’

‘Start from the beginning.’

‘Well, it seems that Tansy was in a relationship with George Bevan, and that they were using her to get to you. All on Kevin Walsh’s orders.’

Lucy takes a sharp inhale of breath – so Jack was right, she had been in danger. ‘Go on?’

‘And Marcus Whitmore said his brother was the one who killed her. But Joshua is talking and he’s not feeling particularly loyal. He claims it was all Marcus – and we found messages on George’s WhatsApp that confirm it.’

‘I didn’t think you had his phone?’

‘No, but we have his laptop. And it’s all there. Marcus gave the order to kill her, and when George refused to, he pretended to be him and met her down in Woolston. And he drowned her. I’m so sorry, Lucy.’

‘When was this?’ Lucy chokes out.

‘End of November. Just after the witness saw her arguing with George in Winchester.’

‘So I could have stopped it? If I’d found her?’

‘No, Lucy. All that would have happened is you would have been killed, too. Marcus would have murdered you both.’

‘But it’s my fault she was involved—’

‘No, that’s all down to Kevin Walsh. We’ve already additionally charged him with solicitation of murder. Neither him nor Marcus Whitmore will get away with this, I promise you.’

‘But they still haven’t found Marcus?’

Another pause. ‘No – but they will, Lucy. Now go back to bed and tell Jack to phone me as soon as he wakes up tomorrow morning. Okay?’

‘Okay.’

Amrit hangs up and Lucy sits on the edge of the bath in the darkness, thinking of Tansy.

She can’t help but imagine Tansy’s fear when she was faced with Marcus Whitmore. Had she known what he planned to do? How much did she struggle when he held her in the water? How long had she taken to die?

There's no doubt in her mind that Marcus Whitmore is evil. He blew up London solely as a diversion to import class A drugs into the UK. He murdered Lucy's sister in cold blood and kidnapped Jack, assuming that he would be killed by the bomb he strapped to his back. He's smart, and resourceful, and Lucy has no doubt that if he wants to stay hidden, he will.

They're never going to find him.

Lucy climbs back into bed next to Jack, and as he mumbles in his sleep, pulling her close, she resolves, somehow, that Marcus Whitmore will face justice for what he's done.

He murdered her sister. He tried to kill Jack.

He'll never get the chance to hurt anyone again.

Over her dead body.

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DAY 9 – SATURDAY

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EPILOGUE

Walking through London, just over a week after the first bomb, it's hard to believe that it all happened. The sun is shining as Lucy strolls through Hyde Park; friends and couples are picnicking on the grass, enjoying the good weather. It's reassuring how quickly London returns to normal, and Lucy takes some comfort in that.

They held a minute's silence this morning, for the victims killed by the bombs. As Big Ben chimed, they read out the names of the forty-two identified so far in Oxford Street on Good Friday, and the twenty-nine killed on the Green Park tube, four days later. Hundreds have been seriously injured. That number will continue to rise over the next few weeks, and Lucy thinks of Fran and the rest of the team at the mortuary, still working through the belongings and the bodies, as more victims are pulled from the wreckage on Oxford Street. It will take weeks, maybe even months, until the work is finished, and Lucy feels a flash of guilt for leaving when she's still needed.

But her priority must be Jack.

He's keen to get home, to Southampton, and Lucy knows that once he gets back, it'll be hard to keep him away from the nick. But he needs time – to rest and recover.

Last night, he woke in the early hours with a gasp, sweaty and frantic, until Lucy reminded him where he was, that he was safe. He's reluctant to share what happened with her in detail – and that's fine, that's what therapists are for – but talk he must. Lucy knows from her own experience how trauma can get stuck, impacting you for years after the event, and she's determined that Jack doesn't block it out, in the same way he did when Theo died all those years ago.

But that's not what she's here for today.

In the distance, Pete waits at Speakers' Corner, on the north-east corner of Hyde Park. He looks the same as he always does – a slight scruff on his chin, worn jeans, grey sweatshirt, boots, sunglasses resting in his messy dark hair. He greets her with a smile and when he leans in for a kiss on the cheek, he smells of plain lemon soap. She's still attracted to him, but she

sees him differently now, almost as a bittersweet memory, or a long-forgotten friend.

‘You guys were based here?’ he asks, pointing to the large expanse of squashed grass and compacted mud where the Forward Control Point once stood. The tents and equipment have been taken away as efficiently as they arrived, with operations now being managed on the site itself. Hard to believe this was one of the epicentres of operations as the world changed around them.

‘Yeah. Seems like weeks ago now.’

Conversation feels stilted and awkward – so much left unsaid – and they automatically start walking down one of the paths, doing what always came easiest.

Lucy doesn’t know where to start. It seems incomprehensible that over a week ago they were talking about moving in together and now they’re splitting up. Pete was always so well suited to her. They had the same job, the shared dedication to their dogs, and Pete was always kind and understanding, the perfect man in so many ways.

But then there’s Jack. Even before the terrible events at the Leicester Square tube, all Lucy wanted was to be with him, in a way she finds impossible to explain. Despite their differences – and there are so many differences – he’s a part of her.

‘It’s an incredible thing you did,’ Pete says now. ‘Coming here, helping out.’

‘It was my job,’ she says, but Pete shakes his head.

‘It wasn’t. And you knew it was going to be hard, but you came up here anyway.’ He pauses, looking down at her for a moment. ‘Would you have gone if I hadn’t asked you to move in with me?’

‘That wasn’t why, Pete,’ Lucy says, quietly. ‘But yes, a small part of me wanted to run away and this was a convenient excuse.’

‘This is it, isn’t it? Between us.’

He looks so sad, Lucy’s heart breaks. ‘I’m so sorry, Pete.’

He sighs and starts walking again. ‘I saw that photo yesterday – you and Jack. After... you know.’

‘The Tube explosion?’

‘Yeah. And the two of you looked so... together. The way you were hugging him, with all those people around. You didn’t care.’

‘He nearly died, Pete.’

‘I know, but...’ He shrugs. ‘You’ve never been like that with me. You’ve always held back. And some part of me knew that it would never have been right between us. That some part of you would always wonder if I was going to turn into Nico.’

‘You’re nothing like Nico,’ Lucy says. ‘I know that.’

‘But you and Jack – it’s different, right?’

They’ve reached the fringes of Hyde Park and they pause at the edge of Bayswater Road. Huge great birch trees tower above them; cars pull to a stop as a mother and her child navigate the zebra crossing.

She doesn’t know how to explain it to Pete in a way that makes sense.

‘Jack and I... I don’t know. Do you remember the first time I met him – I’d been called out with Moss to look for that dead body in Gallows Wood. And there was this new DI – rod up his backside. But I immediately trusted him. And he found Nico, he helped me get closure—’

‘You slept with him, didn’t you?’

Lucy pauses for a second. But Pete deserves the truth. ‘Yes,’ she admits.

‘When you went to Newcastle?’

‘No, not then. This week.’

‘But something happened up north?’

‘We kissed. We were drunk, I didn’t think anything of it. Honestly. But then... I’m sorry, Pete.’

He shakes his head, looking up, the disappointment etched on his face. ‘I knew, deep down. These past six months, you just haven’t been there. You checked out of our relationship.’ He pauses. ‘Are you two together now?’

‘I think so, yes,’ she says, feeling wretched. ‘I know I’ve gone about this all the wrong way. I should have spoken to you first, before anything even happened with him. I should have... I don’t know. You deserve someone wonderful, Pete. Someone who knows how brilliant you are, who loves you wholeheartedly. I’m so sorry.’

‘I’m sorry, too,’ he says, then leans forward and gives her a hug, pulling her into his chest. She wraps her arms around his middle, holding him tight, burying her face in his jumper and taking in that faint doggy-biscuity scent. ‘I hope that you’re happy, Lucy. And you find—’

He stops, and Lucy looks up in surprise as he glances away, his gaze locked on something behind her. His whole manner has changed – muscles tense as his arms grip tightly around her – and before she has time to react, she feels herself being lifted off the ground and thrown to the side. She

lands in a heap against the railings, dazed, as a huge SUV mounts the pavement. It strikes Pete straight on; all she can do is watch in horror as it flips him over the bonnet. There's a sickening crunch as his head hits the windscreen. An explosion of shattering glass, then the car reverses, and in a screeching of tyres, it's gone, gunning down the road and away.

For a moment, Lucy's stunned, the air snatched out of her lungs. It all happened so fast – one minute they were there, hugging, and the next minute he's lying on the concrete, in front of her.

Lying on the concrete.

The words spur her into action, and she gets to her feet, running over to him and dropping to her knees at his side. He still hasn't moved; his legs are bent unnaturally underneath him; his face is scraped and covered in blood as a puddle of dark red seeps out from underneath his head.

'I've called an ambulance,' a man says next to her. 'Are you his wife? I saw the whole thing – it went straight for you. Did you catch the number plate?'

'Did I... What...? No.' Her brain struggles to catch up with what the man's saying. The car went straight for them, but Pete pushed her out of the way. Pete saved her and now he's... He's... Her first-aid training kicks in and she presses two fingers against his neck, looking for a pulse. Finding nothing she gets to her knees, applying pressure to his chest. This is all so wrong. This can't be Pete – this crumpled body on the pavement. This kind, resilient, strong man – this can't be him, dying. Someone crouches next to her, doing mouth to mouth, and as Lucy hears the sirens in the distance, she silently repeats under her breath.

'Please, Pete, no. No.'

No.

Acknowledgements

Ever since I started writing a series about a police dog handler I knew I wanted to take Jack and Lucy to London, in the aftermath of a bomb. What I didn't realise at the time was that police dogs don't look for trapped victims (oops), that's a job for fire and rescue.

So, as always, utmost thanks must go to Paul Sainsbury, for taking time out of his busy schedule to talk about large-scale disasters, and for putting me in touch with Graham Howlett. Graham is the proud handler of Eric and Saxon (a red fox Lab, like in the book), and he took me through the incredible work done by fire dogs in emergency response. There's no doubt that writing this book would have been impossible without them.

In addition, typing 'how to make a bomb' into Google is not advisable unless you want to find yourself on some pretty serious watchlists, so thank you to David Smart for answering all my questions about counter-terrorism and explosives, and filling in the large gaps in my knowledge. Thank you to Graham Bartlett for putting me in touch with David, and if you ever need an expert in anything from forensics to policing, Graham is your man. Find him at www.policeadviser.co.uk.

To Dr Matt Evans, thank you for always being at the end of a WhatsApp and answering my frequent and random medical questions. Thank you to Dan and Charlie Roberts for advice on police procedure and 999 control.

All mistakes, whether deliberate or otherwise, are down to me, and me alone.

Thank you to all the brilliant booksellers who make me so welcome when I'm in, talking about yet another book I've written. Particularly to Sarah and Jazz at The Book Shop in Lee-on-the-Solent, to Robyn and Daniel at the Imaginarium in Lymington, to Steve at P&G Wells, to Katy and William at Tea Leaves and Reads, and to everyone at all my 'local' Waterstones – from Romsey, Southampton West Quay and Portsmouth, to Winchester Brooks and High Street, Salisbury and Whiteley – thank you for stocking my books and letting me scribble my name to my heart's content.

I consider myself exceptionally lucky to be represented by Ed Wilson – thank you for your tolerance in the face of my impatience, and all the motivational talks. Thanks must also go to Anna Dawson, Magdalena

Guzdziol, Hélène Butler and the rest of the fabulous team at Johnson and Alcock.

To the publishing side: thank you to Louise Cullen, Alicia Pountney, Aidan Kavanagh, Iain Millar, Kim Yudelowitz, Kate Shepherd and the rest of the brilliant team at Canelo and DK for working so hard to get the ‘dog books’ out into the world.

Thank you to the editorial team outside Canelo – to Chere Tricot for the structural edits, Daniela Nava for the exceptional copyedit and Paris Ferguson for the proofread. Thank you for getting these books as refined and polished as they could possibly be.

Thank you to Henry Steadman for the beautiful cover.

Thank you to the gaggle of unruly and relentlessly entertaining authors for saving me on many a slow day at the office. To Fliss, Heather, Jo, Clare, Kate, Niki, Rachael, Dom, Barry, Tim, Victoria, Simon, Adam, Elle, Polly, Liz, Rob, Harriet and Susie, thank you. Thank you also to Liv Matthews and Karen Hamilton, my Winchester partners-in-crime, and Cressida McLaughlin for cheering on Lucy and Jack.

A special thank you must go to Heather Critchlow for reading this book as I wrote it and making brilliant and insightful suggestions. The sex scenes before editing were a *little* long, yes, so I’ll save those smutty nuggets for the ‘Director’s Cut’ later.

Last but not least, thank you to my family: to Chris and Ben (not forgetting Max!); Dad; Susan, Jon, Megan and Anwen; and Tom, Mel, Leo and Henry. I love you all.

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First published in the United Kingdom in 2026 by Canelo

Canelo Crime
an imprint of Canelo Digital Publishing Limited
20 Vauxhall Bridge Road,
London SW1V 2SA
United Kingdom

A Penguin Random House Company

The authorised representative in the EEA is Dorling Kindersley Verlag
GmbH. Arnulfstr. 124, 80636 Munich, Germany

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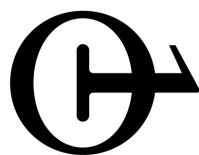
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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Ebook ISBN 9781835985960
Print ISBN 9781835985861

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