
The Heights
A Novel
Ian Rankin
New York Times Bestselling Author


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Sir Ian Rankin is the multimillion-copy worldwide bestseller of over thirty novels and creator of John Rebus. His books have been translated into thirty-six languages and have been adapted for radio, the stage and the screen.

Sir Ian is the recipient of four Crime Writers' Association Dagger Awards, including the Diamond Dagger, the UK's most prestigious award for crime fiction. In the United States, he has won the celebrated Edgar Award and been shortlisted for the Anthony Award. In Europe, he has won Denmark's Palle Rosenkrantz Prize, the French Grand Prix du Roman Noir and the German Deutscher Krimipreis.

He is the recipient of honorary degrees from universities across the UK, is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, and has received an OBE for his services to literature. In 2022 he received a knighthood as part of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations.

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The Heights

IAN RANKIN



CARDINAL
NEW YORK BOSTON

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One

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1

Gish's first view of the Heights was as she turned off Park Lane. Eighteen storeys high and facing Hyde Park. London at 2 a.m. was as quiet as it ever got, but there was still traffic. No media as yet, but they would come. She noted that few of the darkened windows felt the need for curtains or blinds, reckoned those who could afford to live in the building would want the rest of the world to know what they were missing. There was a drop-off area in front of the entrance. Two vans and four unmarked cars were already parked. Gish added hers and got out, approaching the hindmost of the vans. The one in front with the pristine black paint job would belong to the mortuary, but this matt-grey one with the nicks and dents could only be scene of crime. Its rear doors were wide open, interior illuminated.

'Evening, George,' Gish said to the man who emerged from within.

He glanced over her left shoulder towards her vehicle. 'Wages you're on, I'd have expected something a bit flashier.'

'Wages I'm on, a loan of my mum's Yaris is about as good as it gets.'

He reached back into the van and found what he knew she needed – a set of disposable hooded overalls and a pair of shoe covers. Gish started to get ready, nodding towards the parked vehicles. 'Gang's all here,' she commented.

'You're the last,' he confirmed.

'Who's leading scene of crime?'

'Mick Bentham. Should have been Lesley, but they did a swap. She got lucky.'

'How bad is it?'

'You'll have seen worse.' He handed her a pair of blue nitrile gloves. Gish started pulling them on as she headed to the front door of the complex, wiggling her fingers.

The ground floor, unlike the rest of the building, was brightly lit, floor-to-ceiling glass windows and door showing her the reception area, with two sofas and a low granite table. A wall-mounted TV was playing what looked like high-grade computer animation, coloured shapes melting, coalescing, then reverting to their original form. Between the sofas stood what looked like a seven-foot-tall cactus, but red instead of green. A huddle of figures dressed identically to her could be seen around the reception desk. A uniformed officer guarded the door.

‘Detective Sergeant Gillian Gish,’ she told him, showing her warrant card. He made a note of her name on his clipboard and pressed a teardrop-shaped plastic fob against a discreet black box next to the door, which clicked open. Gish indicated the fob.

‘Belongs to the deceased’s girlfriend,’ the officer explained, pushing the door open.

Gish walked inside, controlling her breathing even though her heart had other ideas. She’d been to plenty of crime scenes; as similar as they were in many respects, each held its own special power. As she passed the cactus, she saw that it was glass, its needles formed of what looked like sex toys. Behind the reception desk stood an open doorway. The body lay on the floor, half in and half out of this other room. A glimpse inside showed her another desk, an array of blank CCTV screens, and a sink with a kettle alongside it. Detective Inspector Jack Milton appeared in the doorway, manoeuvring carefully past the corpse. He was closely followed by Mick Bentham. Milton’s eyes widened slightly when he recognised Gish.

‘Thought Bob Jackson was on call-out tonight,’ he said.

‘Sick again, apparently.’

‘Guy’s a complete waste of a cop’s salary,’ Milton muttered. Then, gesturing towards Bentham, ‘You know Mick, right?’

‘I know Gillian,’ Bentham said, offering her a nodded greeting. There was a sheen of perspiration on his face, evidence that he’d been working the scene for some time.

‘You saw the art?’ Milton asked Gish. ‘Its twin is over by the lifts. Mick reckons they’re by…’

‘The Chapman Brothers,’ Bentham confirmed.

All three of them watched for a moment as Bentham’s crew worked the locus, photographing and filming, checking for latents, fibres, blood flecks.

‘Deceased’s name is Dwayne Hogarth,’ Milton said. ‘Night-shift security, but this being the kind of place it is, they’re all called “concierges”. Twenty-three years old and has worked here just over a year.’

‘Cause of death?’

‘He was thumped from behind, but what probably killed him was his left temple connecting with a corner of the marble reception desk as he went down. Bleed on the brain, the doctor presumes. Autopsy will tell us more.’

‘Such a waste,’ Bentham added with feeling. He had found a tissue and was dabbing his forehead.

‘Feeling the heat, Mick?’ Milton asked.

‘My time of life,’ Bentham muttered. ‘Hot flushes, the works.’

‘What about the girlfriend?’ Gish asked Milton.

He studied her for a moment, wondering how she knew. ‘Found him lying right there and called it in. Her stopping by was a regular thing, apparently.’

‘In the middle of the night?’

‘To break the monotony, she says.’ Milton tilted his head towards the ceiling. ‘She’s waiting for us upstairs in the spa.’ He saw her eyes narrow. ‘Therapists on call twenty-four-seven,’ he explained. ‘Fully fitted gym, Olympic-size infinity pool. There’s a cinema, too – reclining leather massage chairs and a popcorn machine, fridge full of champagne and ice cream. Then there’s the underground car park and the rooftop gardens…’

‘Can’t think why we’re not all living here,’ Bentham commented.

‘Anything from the surveillance cameras?’ Gish interrupted.

‘System’s switched off.’ Milton offered a shrug. ‘We’ll be asking the building’s owner about that. He lives in the penthouse.’ He paused, running his tongue along his lips. ‘So what do you think happened?’

‘Well, it’s not an accident,’ Gish replied, nearing the body, her two colleagues in tow. ‘Smears of blood on the floor in front of the victim’s head. Whoever hit him started dragging him into the control room but then stopped for some reason.’ She gestured towards the doorway. ‘Am I clear to take a look?’

Milton turned his head to check with Bentham, who in turn was checking the small bodycam clipped to his overalls. Every member of the scene-of-crime team wore them. The uniformed constable on door duty had worn one, too. Gish wondered for how much longer detectives would be

immune.

‘You’re clear,’ Bentham eventually obliged.

‘He was face-down,’ Milton recited as they made to pass the body. ‘Girlfriend rolled him onto his back to check if he was breathing.’

Bentham’s team had moved aside to let the group past. Two or three of them knew Gish and nodded a greeting. The photographer was loading a fresh battery into his digital camera. Dwayne Hogarth was dressed in a black suit, white shirt and slim black tie. The outfit probably came with the job, but the shoes were his own – cheap and scuffed. His head was turned to one side, eyes vacant and glassy. He was lean and of medium height. A tabloid newspaper sat on the desk, folded at the puzzles page. There was a pen there, too, branded with the words *The Heights*. The margins of the paper were a mass of doodles, but not a single puzzle had been attempted. Further along the desk sat another bank of blank CCTV monitors.

‘He’s had a nosebleed,’ Gish commented, noting the crusting around the nostrils.

‘Doctor didn’t know what to make of that,’ Milton said with a shrug.

‘What did we find in his pockets?’

‘Paper hankies with some blood on them, plus a fob, and a couple of bank cards in a plastic wallet. His outer jacket’s on a peg in the control room. House keys and small change.’

Stepping around the body, avoiding the congealed blood, Gish entered the control room. The surveillance screens remained blank. A small refrigerator hummed – she very much doubted it would be filled with champagne. There was a grey metal box fixed to one wall, a numerical keypad attached to the front. She touched a gloved finger to the side of the box and let it swing open. Inside sat several rows of hooks, each with a teardrop-shaped fob attached.

All except one.

Gish couldn’t see any obvious numbering system. She sensed Milton at her shoulder.

‘I’m guessing this is usually kept locked,’ she commented.

‘But not when we got here,’ Milton told her.

She pointed to the empty hook. ‘We need to know which door.’ She turned and watched Milton give a slow nod.

‘I’m hoping the building’s owner can help.’

‘He lives on the premises, you said?’

‘Duplex penthouse – he spelled it out for me. Means two whole floors.’

‘So you’ve already met?’

‘He saw the commotion outside, came down to the lobby. He was the one who suggested Rosa would be more comfortable in the spa.’

‘Rosa’s the girlfriend?’ Gish didn’t need an answer to the question.

‘Waiting for us five floors up,’ Milton said.

‘Well, I’m ready if you are.’

Milton turned towards Mick Bentham, but Bentham was already back with his team, checking their progress, tissue still gripped in his hand. The lifts stood at the far end of the hallway. There were three altogether.

‘One’s a service lift,’ Milton explained. ‘God forbid the great and the good should have to rub shoulders with the servants.’

‘We’re their servants, too, don’t forget,’ Gish said with a thin smile, her eyes on the second cactus, this one blue rather than red. ‘Who did you say these were by?’

Milton shrugged. ‘Mick’s the knowledgeable one.’

‘How come?’

‘His daughter studied art history.’

‘So what does she do now?’

‘VIP hospitality at Arsenal.’ He threw Gish a glance. ‘It wasn’t the degree that got her *that* job.’

‘Let me guess – she’s a looker.’

‘Gets it from her mum’s side, but don’t tell Mick I said that.’

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The lift doors were opening. Both detectives stepped in, Milton producing another teardrop, tapping it against an electronic screen before adding the number of the floor they wanted. He noticed the look Gish was giving him. ‘Not from the hook,’ he explained. ‘Owner handed it over. He had one to spare.’

‘What’s his name?’ Gish had begun to peel off her overalls, Milton copying her – Rosa would be in enough of a state, and they needed to seem as normal and unthreatening as possible.

‘Allan Franklyn. That’s Allan with two ls and Franklyn with a y. He was very particular. Guy’s a high-end developer. Don’t suppose he got this piece of prime in a fire sale.’

‘Maybe I’ll see if he’ll do me a deal.’

‘Not that there’s anything wrong with Tottenham… How’s your mum doing?’

‘Carers come in three times a day, neighbours the rest of the time – makes a huge difference.’

‘You should stipulate no night-time call-outs.’

‘And miss the fun? She’d be mortified if she thought she was holding me back. Besides, she has a panic button.’ Gish paused. ‘How about you – how’s Adam?’

‘Still working as a barista, but reckons he might open his own place soon. God knows London needs another source of overpriced soya milk and caffeine. I tried to get Phoebe to have a word with him about finishing his studies…’

‘Phoebe being?’

‘Mick’s daughter. They’ve known one another since they were kids. I did wonder at one time if they might… But Adam had other ideas.’

‘I keep forgetting how far back you and Mick go.’

‘Which means we’ll bow out together, too – more or less.’

Gish looked at him. ‘Remind me how long?’

‘Three months, two weeks, two days.’

‘Not that you’re counting.’

‘I’ve an app on my phone does that for me – same as Mick.’

‘Joint retirement party?’

‘We’re talking about it.’

Their smiles faded as the lift doors opened, delivering them into an expansive lounge area with doors off it. There were signs for treatment rooms, sauna, steam room, pool and hyperbaric chamber. The pool itself was visible through a large window. It was lit from below, the water a shimmering blue. Two figures rose from a banquette as they approached. One was the constable who’d been acting as babysitter. Gish recognised her from the station. The other was a distraught young woman who could barely control the tremors running through her body. A waste-paper bin on the floor next to her was already half full with crumpled and sodden tissues. Her eyes were on the folded overalls the detectives were carrying.

‘Rosa?’ Gish checked, receiving a twitched nod in reply. She identified herself, Milton following suit.

‘Let’s sit down again,’ he added, gesturing for the constable to make way. Milton and Gish settled across from Rosa. Gish leaned her elbows on her knees, narrowing the gap.

‘This must be very distressing for you, Rosa,’ she began quietly. ‘I’m so sorry for your loss. How long had you been going out together?’

‘Four months.’ Rosa plucked another tissue from the box and dabbed it to her reddened eyes.

‘So Dwayne was already working here?’

‘He liked the job. Said it was cushy, but the nights could be dull as.’

‘He worked nights exclusively?’

‘Ten till six.’

‘And you often dropped in?’

‘If I wasn’t asleep.’

‘You live nearby?’ Milton interrupted.

Rosa snorted. ‘Who can afford to live round here? I’m in Catford, and even that’s a stretch.’

‘What about Dwayne?’

‘Limehouse. He shares with his brother.’ She paused. ‘Shared, I mean.’ Fresh tears appeared in her eyes.

‘And what do you do, Rosa?’ Gish asked.

‘Work in a café. I do some singing, too. R&B. Hoping a record company will take notice, like all the other thousands.’

‘Is that how you two met?’

Rosa nodded. ‘In a club. Mark was DJing. That’s Dwayne’s brother. Black Markus, he calls himself.’ She broke off, eyes widening. ‘Who’s going to tell him? And Dwayne’s mum and dad – who’s going to break the news?’

‘It’ll be taken care of,’ Milton assured her.

‘Mark was here tonight, DJing at the party.’

‘What party?’ Gish glanced at Milton, who shrugged with one shoulder, indicating that this was coming as news.

‘In one of the flats – except Dwayne was always told to call them “suites”. He said to wait until the coast was clear before visiting.’

‘What time did the two of you speak?’

‘About eleven, but we didn’t speak – it was a text. He said the party was already winding down and everyone would be gone soon enough. I was singing in a bar in Soho.’ She looked down at her loose-fitting jeans and top. ‘Changed before leaving, obviously.’ She broke off as she thought of something. ‘That message of his, he added a PS – said he had something to tell me.’

‘Can we take a look?’

Rosa gestured towards the constable. ‘She took it off me.’

‘Standard procedure, Rosa,’ Milton explained. ‘If you started sharing the news, Dwayne’s family wouldn’t have time to prepare themselves. Better if we break it to them – we’re trained at that sort of thing.’

Rosa nodded, seeing the sense of this. The constable handed the phone over and Rosa opened it to messages. Gish read from the screen before passing the device to Milton.

C U soon. Something to tell you.

‘No clue as to what he might have been going to say?’ Gish asked. Rosa shook her head. ‘Do you have his parents’ and brother’s details on here?’ Rosa nodded again. ‘If you share those with the constable after we’re done,

that would be helpful.’

Rosa had her hand out for the phone, but Gish returned it to the officer instead.

‘Did anyone else ever visit Dwayne?’ Milton enquired. ‘Other friends, I mean?’

‘Only me.’

‘And how long have you had that fob?’ Rosa shifted uncomfortably. ‘You’re not in any trouble,’ he assured her.

‘Against the rules, though, isn’t it?’

‘If Dwayne’s based in reception,’ Gish added, ‘why couldn’t he just let you in?’

Rosa fidgeted again. ‘He liked it when I surprised him. He might be in the control room, or doing a floor patrol. When he came back, there I’d be.’

‘Do you know if he gave a fob to anyone else?’

‘Just me.’

‘When you arrived tonight, did you see anyone outside – someone who might just have left?’

‘No.’

‘And after you found Dwayne, you didn’t go into the control room?’

Rosa shook her head. She looked from one detective to the other and then back again. ‘Someone killed him, didn’t they? For a second I thought maybe an accident…’

‘No accident, Rosa,’ Milton confirmed. He watched as her face collapsed. ‘Has he ever been in any trouble that you know of, made any enemies?’

She recovered, bristling. ‘Because he’s black, you mean?’

Milton ignored this. ‘No fallings-out or money worries?’

‘Who doesn’t worry about money?’ She broke off, eyes darting towards the swimming pool. ‘Well, none of this lot do, I suppose. But who’d want to hurt Dwayne?’

‘That’s what we need to find out.’ Milton was rising to his feet. ‘You’ll have to come to the station to make a formal statement. The constable here will accompany you. And if it’s okay with you, we’ll take fingerprints and a mouth swab.’

‘Why?’

‘Purposes of elimination.’ Milton turned to the uniformed officer,

gesturing towards Rosa's phone. 'Contact details for Dwayne's next of kin,' he reminded her.

'Yes, sir.'

Gish made eye contact with Rosa. 'How did Dwayne get on with the people who live here?'

'He liked the job.'

She forced a smile. 'That's not quite what I'm asking, Rosa.'

'Some liked him all right. Others pretended he didn't exist.'

'And the other staff – I assume there are other staff?'

'Used to be two on a night shift until the cuts. Dwayne only ever sees the other concierges at changeover.'

'Cleaners? A handyman?' Gish took in her surroundings. 'Gym, pool, spa attendants?'

Rosa gave a shrug.

'Okay, one last thing – the passcode to Dwayne's phone would be helpful.'

'That's easy, it's his birthday.' Rosa reeled it off.

Gish turned towards Milton, who, hands in pockets, seemed to have nothing to add. The constable reclaimed her perch as the two detectives returned to the lift.

'Excuse me?' Rosa had followed them. 'My prints and stuff?' She watched Gish give a slow nod. 'Sometimes we went to an empty suite or even one of the cars in the garage. Just for a change, you know?' Her eyes shifted to the floor, like a kid in school caught by the teacher.

'Thanks, Rosa,' Gish said, as the lift doors opened.

Another tap of the fob and they were heading upwards, not to a numbered floor this time but to one with the single letter P. Neither had anything to say, their minds busy sifting and filing. When the doors slid open, they were in a carpeted hallway, its walls festooned with gaudy paintings. Milton paused for a moment.

'Mick says that when this place opened, it was in the news – art collection worth north of seven figures.'

'You'd have to pay me to live with it,' Gish countered. 'I've been here ten seconds and I'm getting a migraine.' She watched Milton press the bell of the single polished wooden door, making sure he was visible to the camera and therefore to whoever was inside.

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The man who eventually opened the door seemed to Gish a born performer. His prematurely greying hair was slicked back from a high forehead, crisp white shirt open at the neck, displaying tufts of chest hair. He was tanned and toned, stretching an arm out in welcome, his shirt cuffs flapping, cufflinks removed.

‘Ghastly,’ he said. ‘Just bloody hellish.’ The line sounded rehearsed.

‘Mr Franklyn,’ Milton said, ‘this is Detective Sergeant Gish.’

Franklyn clasped her hand in both of his, squeezing the life from it, then led the two detectives past more art and into a vast open-plan living space with floor-to-ceiling windows on three sides, outside balconies visible. Gish couldn’t help herself, drawn to the view as if by a magnet. Hyde Park and its lamp posts lay spread out in front of her, the city twinkling and glittering all around.

‘Let me show you something,’ Franklyn said. ‘Dark glass!’ he called out. The view in front of Gish vanished as the window went black.

‘That’s quite a trick,’ she was forced to admit.

‘Damned expensive, but just one of the Heights’ many wow factors.’ He fluttered his hands in front of him as he spoke.

‘Not much wow factor from a body in your reception area,’ Milton said coldly, bringing Franklyn’s act to an end. His face grew sombre.

‘I’ve forgotten your name,’ he said, apologetically.

‘Detective Inspector Milton.’

‘And your colleague downstairs, the one who recognised the Chapman Brothers?’

‘Mick Bentham.’

‘Bentham, yes.’ Franklyn scratched at his jaw.

Gish had torn herself away from the window and was studying a large

curving staircase in the middle of the room, each step made of illuminated glass. ‘How well did you know Dwayne Hogarth, Mr Franklyn?’ she asked.

‘We chatted in passing. I’m not really a nightbird.’ He glanced down at his attire. ‘With the occasional exception.’

‘Were you at the party, sir?’ Milton asked. He was prowling the room, studying the artworks and everything else.

‘For a spell, yes.’

‘Who was hosting this party?’

‘Maeve, fourth floor.’

‘How late did you stay?’

‘It finished just after eleven.’

‘Early for a party.’

‘It wasn’t exactly a rave.’

‘And then straight up here?’

‘That’s right.’

‘You went on your own, then?’

‘My date had to head off early – flight to Paris in the morning.’ Franklyn checked his watch. It was a solid timepiece with a metal bracelet and a complicated-looking fascia. ‘About three hours from now, actually.’

‘You didn’t mention this party when we spoke earlier.’

He looked up. ‘I was in shock. Besides which, I very much doubt it’s of any relevance.’

Milton said nothing, continuing his circuit of the room. Gish cleared her throat.

‘Dwayne didn’t have cause to report anything to you? Suspicious characters, attempted break-ins?’

‘Absolutely not,’ Franklyn stated. He leaned in to blow some dust off a floor-standing sculpture.

‘Does the same go for the other concierges?’

‘Nothing’s been brought to my attention.’

‘You’ll understand that we’ll need to check that with them?’

‘Of course.’

‘We’re told Dwayne used to have a night-shift colleague,’ Milton said. He had come to rest in front of a metre-high maquette of the Heights, sealed in a glass display case. Franklyn joined him.

‘My baby,’ he said. ‘I put heart and soul into this project, same as I’ll do

with the Heights 2.' He gestured towards the breakfast bar, where an architectural plan had been spread out. 'Bigger and better than the Heights – but don't tell any of my residents that.'

'Better how?'

'A larger pool and cinema, orangery and helipad on the roof, two chauffeured Rolls-Royces available day and night. Deposits payable by bitcoin, naturally.'

'Naturally,' Gish muttered, studying the plan. 'Can you remind me what a hyperbaric chamber is?'

'Oxygenates the body – good for general wellness and longevity.'

'So you designed this?' Milton asked, nodding towards the maquette.

'God, no, my architect designed it. He lives right here, that's how proud of it he is – and rightly so.'

'So what was your role?'

'I took the Heights from inspiration to finished majesty. That's what the best developers do.'

'Right up until they have to start cutting back on costs?'

The colour rose to Franklyn's cheeks. 'The building's dead at night. Two concierges proved more than we needed.'

'Who was it that hired Dwayne?' Gish asked, joining them in front of the maquette.

'Me personally.'

'So you'd have had him vetted?'

There was a pause before Franklyn answered. 'Naturally.'

'Are all the properties occupied currently?' Milton asked.

'Lord, no. There are twenty-five suites in total – most take up a whole floor. Including this one, I'd say eleven are permanently occupied.'

'And the other fourteen?'

Franklyn offered a shrug. 'A few are owned by hedge funds and overseas entities. One corporation retains theirs for visiting bigwigs.'

'And the rest?

'A smattering of owners who live elsewhere but might require a London pied-à-terre. A few are still waiting for discerning buyers.'

'So how much are we talking about?' Milton enquired.

Franklyn made a show of doing the calculation. 'Maybe fifteen?' he ventured.

‘Fifteen million?’ Milton checked.

‘For one of the smaller suites,’ Franklyn confirmed.

While Milton puffed out his cheeks, Gish had another question. ‘These ten occupants other than yourself – who would they be?’

‘Discretion is one of the reasons people choose to live here. That and the security.’

‘I wouldn’t say security’s your strong point, sir,’ Gish countered. ‘Dwayne’s girlfriend could get in any time she liked.’

‘That’ll be one of the ancillary fobs – opens the main door but nothing else. Strictly against protocol for him to have passed it on to her.’

‘But,’ Milton said, ‘you handed me a spare, too, and that one gets me lift access.’

‘Each owner has a couple of sets.’ Franklyn gave a shrug.

‘Any idea why the security cameras are switched off?’

His jaw tensed. ‘Are they?’

‘Screens are blank.’

‘Then someone must have done something.’

‘To come back to that list of residents…’ Gish persisted.

‘Privileged information,’ Franklyn stated, folding his arms.

‘That’ll be seen as obstruction,’ Milton warned him. ‘Which is a serious matter in a murder inquiry.’

Franklyn stared at him. ‘I thought he fell?’

‘Dwayne was attacked by person or persons unknown.’

Slowly Franklyn unfolded his arms. The two detectives watched as he walked in silence to the windows, sliding open a set of French doors and stepping out onto the balcony. Milton and Gish weren’t slow to follow, their pace increasing as he gripped the edge of the balcony with both hands.

‘Mr Franklyn,’ Gish cautioned. But rather than throw himself off, Franklyn was peering down at the parked vehicles below.

‘I thought all this attention was because the Heights is the Heights.’ He lifted his head, meeting Gish’s eyes. ‘Dwayne was a nice kid. I can’t believe this.’ He pondered for a moment. ‘I need to call Ebury Killick.’

‘Who’s Ebury Killick?’

‘My PR firm. This has to be handled… delicately.’ He ran a hand across his forehead.

‘With respect, sir,’ Milton said, ‘the best result is a quick result – which

is why we need those names.'

Franklyn mulled this over. 'Quite right,' he said, leading them back indoors. Gish slid the French doors closed and turned the lock. Franklyn took a deep breath, counting the names off on his fingers as he recited them. Milton's notebook was out, pen at the ready. 'Well, there's me, of course. And my architect, Lorn Macneal. Then there's Joe Spalding – he's a high-end art dealer. Lev Godunov, Maeve Gallacher, Jessica Forrester, Zafk…'

'Zafk?' Milton checked. Gish spelled the name out for him.

'He's a singer,' she explained.

'Zafk's manager has another of the suites,' Franklyn continued. 'His name's Roddy Collins. Maita Macheso – she's Zimbabwean. Her personal protection officer lives in the unit next to her.'

'Why does she need protection?'

'It's an image thing, isn't it? Lev has a couple of minders, too. He made a mint in post-glasnost Russia. I did wonder if he might offer on my penthouse, but he doesn't seem keen on heights.' He paused, seeking a reaction and then wincing. 'Bad joke, terrible taste, I'm sorry.' He looked at his fingers. 'Who am I forgetting? Oh, Toby Scully. I think that's everyone.'

'And who's Toby Scully?' Gish asked.

'You'd call him an entrepreneur.'

'To back up a bit,' Milton interrupted, consulting the list he'd made, 'would Maeve Gallacher be Mrs Eddie Gallacher?'

'You'd have to ask her that.'

'It's you I'm asking, sir.'

'All right then, yes.'

'Eddie Gallacher the gangster?'

'I've never met the fellow.' Franklyn folded his arms again.

'And she's the one who hosted this party? Was it just for her neighbours?'

'Neighbours and friends.'

'With Dwayne's brother on the decks?' Gish added.

'If by "decks" you mean an Apple MacBook and a couple of Bluetooth speakers, yes.'

Milton was still staring at the list. 'We'll need to speak to everyone. And we also need to verify that all the other properties are empty.'

'People aren't going to be happy.'

‘Be that as it may, sir—’

‘Where do I know Jessica Forrester’s name from?’ Gish interrupted.

‘Actor,’ Franklyn said. ‘Reality TV, modelling, all of that.’ He paused. ‘Actually, not everyone’s here right now. Maita didn’t make it to the party and Joe’s in Manhattan – in hospital, in point of fact.’

‘For an operation?’ Gish checked.

‘He was hit by a car. It’s pretty serious.’

‘So if we start knocking on doors,’ Milton said, ‘we might find eight people to talk to. Eight people in an eighteen-storey building?’

‘Quite high occupancy for a super-prime,’ Franklyn argued. He fanned his hands again. ‘Welcome to London.’

Gish and Milton shared a look before Milton shifted his attention back to Franklyn. ‘Speaking of doors, we noticed the key box in the security room was open. Would that usually be the case?’

‘Absolutely not.’

‘And one of the fobs seems to be missing. Would you be able to tell which?’

Franklyn’s brow furrowed. ‘I would think so.’

‘In that case, would you mind coming with us? I should warn you, you’ll have to pass Mr Hogarth’s body.’

Franklyn considered for a second before nodding. Then he started rolling down his sleeves, scooping up his cufflinks from a table and fixing the cuffs. Milton had wandered over to an alcove tucked away by the staircase. There were framed photos of footballers, plus a signed jersey.

‘Arsenal fan?’ he commented.

‘My dad started taking me as soon as I could walk. An expensive hobby these days.’

‘I’m Chelsea myself,’ Milton offered. ‘While I seem to remember poor DS Gish here is Spurs.’

‘Nobody’s perfect,’ Franklyn said, lifting his suit jacket from the back of a chair.

‘You probably don’t need that,’ Gish said. ‘You’ll be wearing protective clothing, same as the rest of us.’

‘Even so, it’s a matter of paying one’s respects.’ Franklyn pulled his shoulders back. ‘I’m ready when you are.’

As they headed to the front door, Milton tapped a photo of two boxers in

action in the ring.

‘That’s my dad on the left,’ Franklyn informed him. ‘Won a fair few bouts in his day.’ He patted his pockets to make sure he had his own fob, then ushered the two detectives out.

While they waited for the lift, Milton told Franklyn that Gish had been admiring the cacti.

‘Anything to do with your art dealer neighbour?’ he added.

‘Joe has little interest in anything post-nineteenth-century. The Heights employs its own curator. He’s young but *very* well connected.’

‘You talk about the Heights as though it’s flesh and blood,’ Gish commented.

‘As far as I’m concerned, that’s exactly what it is,’ Franklyn shot back. ‘And if you cut it, it bleeds.’

The lift doors pinged and opened, and all three of them stepped in.

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Gish was on her way to the scene-of-crime van to fetch overalls for Franklyn when she saw that a black cab, unable to access the drop-off area, had stopped on the main road to allow two passengers out. One was older than the other and looked as though he'd been enjoying himself. The younger had pulled the hood of his skiing jacket over his head and was wearing sunglasses, his hands bunched into his pockets. They stood for a moment as the taxi drove off, assessing the scene before them. Gish walked in their direction.

'Zafk?' she said, recognising the younger of the two. It was his companion who answered.

'Hell's going on here?' he slurred.

'There's been an incident.' Gish was studying the speaker. Cropped grey hair, facial tan, maybe some subtle cosmetic surgery. He wore a cream jacket and designer denims with brown loafers. 'Roddy Collins?' she guessed.

He gave her a moment's appraisal before nodding.

'I'm Detective Sergeant Gish.'

Zafk had slid his glasses down his nose and was peering in the direction of the reception area. The windows were being covered with sheets of paper to prevent gawpers. 'Is it Dwayne?' he asked. He had an educated voice to go with his youthful, unblemished face.

'What makes you think that?' Gish watched him shrug.

'We just want to get to bed,' Collins remarked, weaving slightly.

'Reception is off limits, I'm afraid,' Gish informed him.

'Parking garage?' Zafk suggested, nodding towards the slope at the corner of the building.

'I'll have to check. Can you wait here?'

‘If Zafk hangs around, someone’s bound to pap him,’ Collins complained.

‘They’ve all gone home, Roddy,’ Zafk responded.

‘There were photographers here earlier?’ Gish checked.

‘There usually are,’ Collins grumbled. ‘Leeches, the lot of them.’

‘Can I ask where you’ve been?’

‘A club.’

‘And were you at the party earlier?’ Gish watched him nod. It was obviously an effort.

‘Roddy really needs a lie-down,’ Zafk commented.

‘Sit in my car for a minute and I’ll go ask my boss.’ She led them to the Yaris. Collins slumped into the passenger seat while Zafk got in behind the steering wheel. He wasn’t as tall as he looked in the magazines and on TV; she didn’t even have to adjust the seat.

‘Thanks,’ he said. Collins was already nodding off, but Zafk seemed alert, no sign he’d taken any intoxicants. He removed his hood, giving her a view of curly brown hair, which he ran his hand through.

‘You never said why you think it’s to do with Dwayne,’ she probed.

‘The party got a bit ugly; they hustled Dwayne’s brother out. When Dwayne tried to help him, he got a punch in the face.’

‘Who hustled him out?’

‘Ray Stanton and Richard Hollister.’ He broke off. ‘I think.’

‘You think?’

‘I don’t want to give them any grief.’

‘This isn’t going to get back to anyone, Zafk.’

He thought this over. ‘Ray played the scene out for us at Richard’s club.’

‘So was it Ray who threw the punch?’

‘There was a bit of provocation.’

Gish waited a moment before speaking. ‘Dwayne’s dead, Zafk. Somebody killed him.’

Zafk closed his eyes for a moment and angled his head back.

‘We’ll need statements from both of you.’ He opened his eyes again and glanced at his dozing manager. ‘Don’t worry,’ Gish added, ‘it can wait till morning. I doubt we’d get anything useful right now. Sit tight and I’ll be back.’

She pushed shut the driver’s-side door and walked to the SOC van. Its

rear doors were still open, George as busy as ever.

‘That who I think it is?’ he asked.

‘The one and only Zafk,’ she answered.

He looked at her. ‘Who?’

‘In the hoodie. The pop star.’

George just shrugged. ‘I meant the other one – Roddy Collins. Time was, every song he produced was a surefire hit. That was before the stories started.’

‘What stories?’

He wrinkled his nose. ‘Dodgy dealings. Speaking of which – what are you after?’

‘I need another lot of overalls, plus trimmings.’

George made an exasperated sound. ‘They’re in high demand. Boss says a sculpture in reception tore a set open.’

‘That would be a cactus.’ Gish managed a smile.

‘Well, everyone needs to be careful – this is my last one.’ He handed her the overalls, adding shoe covers and nitrile gloves.

The uniformed officer on the door let Gish back inside. Milton and Franklyn were standing next to the lifts, as far out of the way as possible. Gish handed the clothing to Franklyn.

‘Zafk and Roddy Collins are outside. They’ve been clubbing. Collins is zonked and currently asleep in my car. I reckon we need to put them to bed.’

‘Can’t bring them through here,’ Milton stated.

‘Zafk wondered about the car park.’

‘Is that feasible?’ Milton asked Franklyn.

‘Fob will open the grille and barrier,’ Franklyn said. ‘There’s a lift down there that’ll take them to their floors.’

Milton considered this option. He looked over to the windows, where a detective constable called Peter Ames was overseeing the job of covering them up.

‘Ask Peter to go with them.’

Gish nodded and walked over to Ames, explaining the situation and handing him her car key. He got her to spell out Zafk’s name.

‘Was it a typo on the birth certificate?’ he asked before heading off.

Franklyn, suited up, was looking more nervous than ever, eyes flitting

towards the prone body, now covered by a plastic sheet prior to being loaded into a bag. Milton gave him a reassuring pat on the shoulder before leading the way. Mick Bentham was still in the control room, his attention focused on the CCTV monitors.

‘Thought you’d be done by now,’ Milton commented.

‘I’m never done, Jack, you know that.’

‘Mr Franklyn here is a fellow Arsenal fan,’ Milton informed him. ‘So you’ll have something to talk about once the art chat dries up.’

Gish knew that Milton was trying to put Franklyn at his ease, but it didn’t seem to be working. The developer squeezed shut his eyes, the sweat stinging them. Gish saw some kitchen roll next to the sink and handed him a couple of sheets. Milton was waiting for his assessment of the CCTV equipment, Bentham listening in.

‘Something’s been done to it,’ Franklyn eventually obliged.

‘Does the footage go to a server off-site?’ Gish asked.

‘Just to the hard disk here,’ Franklyn answered. ‘And it self-erases every week to save memory.’ He got busy on the keyboard. The screens sprang to life. ‘Looks like it was okay up until midnight.’ As he rewound and fast-forwarded, Gish caught glimpses of comings and goings; not just the reception area, but each separate level of the building, car park included.

As the clock neared midnight, Dwayne Hogarth could be seen at his desk, newspaper in front of him as he studied his phone. Then the screens went black.

‘So if it’s been deleted, it stays that way?’ Gish checked.

‘As far as I know.’

‘Not exactly state-of-the-art.’

‘Nothing stays state-of-the-art for long,’ Franklyn commented, nettled by the criticism.

‘We’ll take the hard drive to the lab,’ Milton told Bentham. ‘Get them to look at it.’ Bentham nodded slowly, the three officers following Franklyn as he moved to the key box.

‘Always kept locked?’ Gish checked.

‘Always.’

‘And who would know the numerical code?’

‘Just myself and the concierge team.’

‘So how many people is that?’

‘Seven in total.’

‘How about anyone who used to work here but no longer does?’

Franklyn looked at her. ‘The code is changed regularly.’

Milton touched a gloved finger to the edge of the cover, easing it open. Franklyn took his time studying the layout.

‘Suite 6 is missing,’ he eventually decided. Then, after a further pause, ‘That’s Jessica’s apartment.’

‘Jessica Forrester?’

He nodded, eyes widening as the implications struck him. ‘I should call her to check.’ He began feeling for the pocket his phone was in.

‘Best if we visit in person,’ Milton advised. ‘Which floor do we need?’

‘The sixth. I better come with you.’

‘Maybe as far as her door, Mr Franklyn,’ Milton told him. ‘We’ll take it from there.’

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When they reached the sixth floor, Gish noted three doors, one of them marked *Fire Escape*. ‘Those stairs,’ she asked Franklyn, ‘can anyone access them?’

‘To go down, yes. Wouldn’t be much use in a fire otherwise. But an alarm sounds whenever the door is opened.’

‘And the other door?’

‘Another apartment. Both owned by Mikey Tan.’

‘He’s Jessica Forrester’s landlord?’ Gish watched Franklyn nod. ‘So who lives there – Mr Tan himself?’

‘It’s vacant at present. I did wonder if Mikey might use it last night, but he headed off.’

‘He was at the party?’ Milton asked.

‘For a time – Mikey’s not what you’d call a great one for mixing.’

Milton had already pressed the bell and had his ID held up to the camera. Gish made a zipping motion across her lips for Franklyn’s benefit. ID still held up, Milton gave the door a thump.

‘What do we do if no one opens up?’ Gish asked him.

‘Sledgehammer,’ Milton answered.

Franklyn’s Adam’s apple bobbed. ‘These doors cost thousands. There’s a master fob in my office – it’s only half a dozen streets away.’

But they could hear a lock turning, a woman’s face appearing in the narrow gap as the door was pulled open. She was blinking blearily into the light.

‘Allan?’ she said. ‘What’s going on?’

Franklyn stayed mute as Milton introduced himself and Gish, asking if they could come in.

‘I’m in my PJs.’

‘It’s quite urgent, Ms Forrester.’

The woman eventually relented, opening the door wide, Gish signalling to Franklyn that he should wait where he was.

While Jessica retreated to the en suite bathroom to put on a robe, Milton and Gish prowled the rooms. The apartment wasn’t big and had only one window looking on to Hyde Park – and no balcony. The living room wasn’t tidy and nor was the kitchen, but both were stylish and well appointed. Milton checked the guest bedroom while Gish did the same for the utility room and main bathroom. When they regrouped in the living area, both detectives shared a look. No one else was here. Gish doubled back to the hallway, taking note of several piles of delivery boxes, none of them opened.

Jessica was pulling tight the belt of her thick white robe when she stepped out of her bedroom. She noticed Gish in the hallway.

‘Beauty companies,’ she called out in explanation. ‘Always after me to promote them in some way or other. My PA usually passes them on to charities. She’s off sunning herself somewhere at the moment.’

She was in her mid thirties, her long blonde hair swept back behind one ear. Re-entering the open-plan living area, Gish tried not to be jealous of the woman’s figure, height and bone structure. She’d recognised her without any need of help from the numerous framed photos and awards filling wall space and shelving. Milton had paused to admire a picture showing Jessica with Jude Law and Tom Hardy.

‘Don’t ask me to choose between them,’ Jessica said, perching on the edge of a cream leather chair. Gish noticed that the robe was branded with the words *The Heights*.

‘Nice touch,’ she said.

‘Every resident is offered one. Hard to turn down a freebie.’ Jessica paused. ‘So what’s all the fuss about?’

Milton began to explain. ‘There appears to have been an intruder—’

‘How did they get past Dwayne?’ she asked sharply.

The detectives settled on one of the room’s two sofas, facing her at an angle. ‘I’m afraid Mr Hogarth is dead,’ Milton said quietly.

The actress put a hand to her mouth. ‘No!’ she said from behind her fingers.

‘Have you been asleep all this time?’ Gish asked.

‘Since about midnight.’

‘Were you at the party?’

Jessica lowered her hand. She was staring at a spot on the wall between Milton and Gish, part of her brain busy processing. ‘No,’ she eventually said. ‘I wasn’t invited.’

‘And you’ve been here alone all evening?’ Gish watched her nod. ‘No visitors? Nothing woke you up?’

Jessica stared at her, her eyes gaining focus. ‘What are you saying?’

‘The intruder,’ Milton obliged, ‘seems to have taken only one key fob from the control room…’

They both watched her take this in. Then she rose determinedly to her feet and strode towards her bedroom. The detectives followed her, using the opportunity to glance into the en suite – nobody there. Integrated wardrobes lined one wall. Jessica slid a door open, revealing shelving crammed with clothes and a small safe. She entered the code and yanked open the door, checking through some documents, a wad of what looked like dollars and euros, and several jewellery cases.

‘Everything’s here,’ she said, locking the safe again. ‘I’m a light sleeper, I’d have known if somebody broke in.’ She slid shut the wardrobe door and turned towards the detectives. ‘Bloody Mikey,’ she hissed.

‘Mikey Tan?’

‘He wants me out – and he’s getting more desperate.’ She stalked back into the living area and over to a cupboard stocked with bottles, unscrewing one and pouring a measure of dark rum. She held the glass for a moment, studying the liquid. ‘This one’s for you, Dwayne,’ she said, raising it to her lips and swallowing the contents.

Milton and Gish had returned to the sofa, and Jessica took the hint, settling on her chair.

‘Mikey has a thing for me,’ she began to explain. ‘Ever since he saw me in *Acting the GOAT*.’ She paused, noticing the blank look on Milton’s face.

‘DI Milton doesn’t have much time for television,’ Gish explained. Then, for her colleague’s benefit, ‘Reality show where a group of young actors basically live in the *Big Brother* house and act out scenes from well-known films.’ She turned towards Jessica. ‘You won it, right?’

‘Season one.’ Said with a smile. ‘They never got close to matching those viewing figures again.’

‘And Mr Tan was a fan of the show?’ Milton checked.

‘Mikey loves old films. He wrote to me a few times, then we bumped into one another at a charity benefit. He mentioned the Heights, said I could have a suite for next to nothing.’ She paused. ‘Well, not quite next to nothing, but cheap for the location. Then suddenly he started trying to up the rent to a figure even I’d find unacceptable.’

Milton asked the obvious question. ‘Why would he have attacked Dwayne?’

Jessica shrugged. ‘But Mikey knows people. He’s chummy with the Gallacher woman for a start – probably with her husband, too.’ She broke off to look at Gish and Milton in turn. ‘You’ll know who he is?’

‘We know,’ Milton replied.

‘Maybe he asked a favour – some thug who’d come and put the fear of God into me.’

‘All because he wants you gone?’ Gish sounded sceptical. ‘Why not just do it the legal way – a letter giving you notice to quit?’

‘I *might* have dropped a hint that I’d have to publicise our falling-out to my followers.’

‘On social media, you mean?’

‘I have several hundred thousand on TikTok and Substack alone – some of them even more infatuated with me than Mikey. They’d do anything for me if I asked.’ Her eyes widened. ‘Maybe one of them! What if they come back? They have the fob – what’s to stop them?’ She stretched an arm towards the door to reinforce her point.

‘You’ve got a deadbolt,’ Gish pointed out. ‘Keep it engaged whenever you’re here, until the code on your own fob can be changed.’

Jessica was staring at the wall again, tears forming at the corners of her eyes. ‘Poor Dwayne,’ she whispered. ‘Ever since Laurence was let go… I’ve been saying one overnight guard isn’t sufficient. Our service charges never go down, but the service does. The smell from the bin store…’ She began shaking her head slowly.

‘Any other reason you can think of for someone wanting in here?’ Milton asked. Jessica’s hand went to the neck of her robe and squeezed it more tightly shut.

‘It’s not as if I’m the wealthiest resident,’ she said. ‘Probably not even the most famous these days.’

‘You mean Zafk?’ Gish checked.

‘Talk about crazy fans – you sometimes find them camped outside and even trying to barge their way in…’ She broke off. ‘Oh,’ she said, leaning forward, narrowing the distance between her and the sofa. ‘Jason…’

‘Jason being?’

‘My ex. He tried getting into the building a month or two back. Security had to deal with him. Laurence was on duty that evening.’

‘Not Dwayne?’

Jessica shook her head. ‘Before his shift started.’

‘Can we have Jason’s surname, Ms Forrester?’

‘Sievewright. He’s an actor, too. We met on *GOAT*.’

‘I remember, the pottery scene from *Ghost*,’ Gish said.

Jessica managed another thin smile. ‘Yes, that was Jason. There was definitely a spark, but then I went and won and he only came third. I don’t think he ever got over that. When we broke up, I reckon Mikey saw himself as my white knight.’ She took a deep breath and gave a sigh. ‘Jason’s back in touring theatre – Agatha Christie and that sort of thing – albeit often in a leading role…’

‘While you’ve made a bigger splash,’ Gish said, watching Milton add Sievewright’s name to his notebook. ‘Have you had any trouble with him since?’

Jessica shook her head again. ‘I think it was Zafk he wanted, actually. He’d just stepped out of a limo. Jason chased after him.’

‘Why?’

‘The internet had decided that we’re an item – Jason got jealous.’

‘And are you an item?’

‘We’re friends – let’s just leave it at that.’

‘Why weren’t you invited to the party?’ Milton interrupted.

‘Oh, the woman loathes me,’ Jessica admitted with a shrug.

‘Any particular reason?’

‘Jealous, maybe? I’ve always been told you can’t buy class – or talent or looks come to that.’ She rose to pour herself a refill, her eyes on the contents of the glass. ‘This isn’t going to help, girl,’ she said to herself. But she knocked it back anyway. ‘Maita said that if I wasn’t invited, then she wasn’t going either. We would sit out on her terrace, sip champagne and say “stuff you” to the lot of them. But then she got a better offer.’

‘Do you know where exactly?’

‘Could be anywhere – she loves Paris, Nice, Milan.’ Jessica found her phone, opened it at the photo folder and started scrolling. She turned the screen towards the two detectives. ‘She’s beautiful, isn’t she? Zafk thinks so, too – not that I’m the jealous type…’

The photo showed all three of them, Zafk in the centre with his arms around both women. Jessica turned the screen back towards herself.

‘Would you say you knew Dwayne fairly well?’ Gish asked.

‘Oh yes, he was a sweetheart, for someone who’d had such a tough start – him and Mark both.’

‘You know his brother?’

‘From club nights.’

‘He was DJing tonight.’

Jessica nodded. ‘But not his usual stuff – a lot more sedate. I had my window open for a while and I could barely hear it. Christ, does he know about Dwayne?’

‘It’s all in hand,’ Milton said, tapping his pen against his notebook. ‘Do you have contact details for Jason Sievewright?’

‘I deleted him from my life, but his mobile’s still up here, more’s the pity.’ She pointed a finger at her head and reeled the number off.

‘Anyone else we should be talking to?’ Gish asked. Jessica shook her head. ‘Maybe have a think about those fans of yours, see if there are any who seem just that bit too zealous.’

‘And if you *do* think of anything…’ Milton slid a business card from his pocket and placed it on the arm of the sofa before rising to his feet, Gish following suit.

‘Ground floor might be out of bounds for a time,’ Gish advised. ‘I’d use the car park if I were you.’

Jessica gave a nod of understanding and led the way to the door. They waited in the hallway while she closed it again, listening as she engaged the deadbolt. Franklyn was standing next to the lifts.

‘Would you mind going back to the key box,’ Gish asked him, ‘and bringing up the fob for the other flat?’

He swallowed back whatever questions he had and entered the lift. Once the doors were closed, Milton asked her what her thinking was.

‘This Tan character was in the building last night, and he has a thing for

Jessica.’

‘But Franklyn reckons he saw him leave the party early, meaning he should be on the CCTV.’

‘Maybe he had second thoughts and came back, didn’t like that Jessica was about to set her troll army on him.’

‘Is she really famous?’

‘Maybe not as much now. She had a daytime chat show that only lasted about three minutes before it was pulled.’

‘You don’t think one of her fans could be in the frame? If they got the fob, why stop there?’

‘They hadn’t meant to kill Dwayne but it happened anyway. They panicked and ran.’

‘But still with the presence of mind to delete the security footage?’

‘Yeah, it’s not perfect,’ Gish conceded.

Milton’s phone was ringing. He took it out and answered. It was from downstairs, Bentham checking that Franklyn had permission to take the fob. Bentham then asked if there had been any progress.

‘Not so you’d notice,’ Milton said, ending the call and making another. ‘That you, Emma?’ he checked. Gish knew this would be Emma Amberson, one of the DCs. ‘We need to start door-to-doors. You’ll find most of them unoccupied, but no matter. And a couple of persons of interest – Mikey Tan and Jason Sievewright. Neither lives here, but Tan owns a couple of the flats – grab Allan Franklyn for his contact details. Sievewright’s an actor.’ He checked the phone number Forrester had given him and recited it into the phone, then listened as Amberson said something. ‘Yes, probably best,’ he eventually said. ‘As full a sweep as we can manage. Boss is going to want to tell the media that no corners were cut and the Met is still very much up to the job of keeping London’s citizens safe, despite all evidence to the contrary.’

Gish gave him the smile she felt he expected. Having ended the call, Milton walked to the second of Mikey Tan’s flats and pressed the buzzer. After a moment, he put his ear to the door, then crouched to peer through the letter box.

‘Old school,’ Gish said as he attempted to straighten up. ‘Just like those business cards. I thought they’d been phased out?’

‘I print my own,’ Milton informed her, turning as the lift arrived,

Franklyn stepping out wiping fresh perspiration from his brow.

‘I’m to tell you the body’s no longer on the premises,’ he said, holding up the fob. ‘Don’t you need a search warrant or something?’

‘We’re checking rather than searching,’ Gish improvised. ‘And as we’re accompanied by the building’s owner…’

This seemed to satisfy Franklyn, who touched the fob to the sensor, the door clicking open. Milton led the way, flicking the hall lights on. There was no art on the walls, for which Gish gave silent thanks. The living area had the same footprint as Forrester’s, but the walls were lined with what looked like silk. Here, a few artworks stood out.

‘Dali and Matisse,’ Franklyn offered. ‘Signed prints rather than originals.’

The furnishings looked generic, more suited to a contemporary hotel than someone’s home. Gish ran a finger over a surface and examined it.

‘Cleaners have been in,’ she commented.

The bed was made, but the drawers either side were empty. French doors led to a narrow balcony, not for the faint-hearted. The kitchen was well appointed, every pan, dish and utensil looking brand new. A narrow second bedroom boasted only a bed and a wall of empty built-in wardrobes.

‘What did you say Mr Tan uses this for?’ Gish asked Franklyn.

‘It’s an investment property. They often sit vacant their whole lives. You might call it their *raison d’être*.’

‘I could call it some other things, too,’ Gish muttered.

‘You know there’s been a bit of grief between Mr Tan and Ms Forrester?’ Milton interrupted.

‘Mikey did ask me to have a quiet word,’ Franklyn confessed. ‘Her rent *was* insanely low.’ He paused. ‘My instinct was she needn’t have paid any rent at all, in exchange for certain favours. She made it abundantly clear to Mikey that such an arrangement was not on the cards.’

‘So she spurned him,’ Gish surmised, ‘and he decided to hike her rent to a sum she’d struggle to swallow – threw his toys out of the pram, in other words?’

‘It’s not quite that simple.’ Franklyn paused to take a breath. ‘Zafk was on the scene by then, and he and Jessica became… well…’

‘Tan was jealous?’ Gish watched Franklyn nod.

They were back in the living area by this point, Milton stifling a yawn.

‘Ms Forrester doesn’t seem short of suitors,’ he said pointedly.

‘You mean her ex? Yes, I believe that got a bit ugly.’

‘He tried forcing his way in.’

‘But got no further than the front desk.’

‘After which you fired the concierge?’

Franklyn almost visibly winced. ‘Surplus to requirements, as I’ve already said.’

‘It was either him or Dwayne. Your preference was obviously the latter.’

‘Dwayne was a better timekeeper than Laurence.’

Milton took out his notebook and skimmed its pages, his cue for Gish to add any final questions.

‘Ms Forrester reckons Tan is on good terms with Maeve Gallacher – and maybe with her husband, too?’

‘That’s not for me to say.’ Franklyn avoided meeting her eyes. Milton walked up to him so the two were face to face.

‘Do *you* know Eddie Gallacher’s whereabouts, Mr Franklyn?’

‘Absolutely not.’

‘The wife’s never dropped a hint or let anything slip? You know he’s on our Most Wanted list? Has been for a good few years now.’

Franklyn shrugged.

Gish let the two men stare one another out for a few seconds before interrupting. ‘Our colleague DC Amberson will be in touch to get contact details for Mr Tan. I assume you’ll have those in your office?’ She watched Franklyn nod, breaking off eye contact with Milton.

‘Mikey lives in a mews off Kensington Church Street,’ he said. ‘He prefers traditional bricks and mortar to glass and steel.’

‘Nice to have the choice, though.’

Franklyn looked like he was beginning to lose patience. Then again, maybe he was just tired, or the hangover was kicking in. ‘I could go fetch his address now, if you like?’

Milton nodded his agreement. ‘And bring the master fob, please. It’ll help the team navigate the lifts – everybody needs to be questioned.’

‘You also need to reprogramme Ms Forrester’s fob,’ Gish added.

Franklyn hesitated. ‘You won’t go barging into any more of the vacant suites? These are very influential people – you might cause a diplomatic incident.’

‘So much more serious an offence than cold-blooded murder,’ Milton commented. Then, as Franklyn began heading to the lifts again, ‘And do remind me – which flat is Maeve Gallacher’s?’

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6

Before locking the door to Tan's spare flat, Milton had placed another business card on another sofa arm.

'Old school,' Gish repeated.

'I suppose you'd send him a TikTok?'

'Do you even know what TikTok is, Jack?'

'Adam tells me things. Not often, but sometimes.'

They headed down two floors in the second of the lifts. As soon as the doors closed, Gish asked the obvious question: 'Why Jessica Forrester?'

'She's already given us three reasons.'

'Mikey Tan, Jason Sievewright and online nutjobs.' Gish nodded her agreement. 'So are we looking for someone from the outside or someone on the inside?'

'Why not someone on the inside making it *look* like someone from the outside? A building that contains everything from dodgy Russians to home-grown gangsters…' Milton pinched the bridge of his nose and squeezed shut his eyes.

'Bit of a stretch to try connecting it to Eddie Gallacher, no? I seem to recall you were one of the team tasked with taking him down.'

'Lots of teams tried taking him down, Gillian. Slippery as a well-soaped eel, that one.'

'The pair of you have got history, though, that's all I'm saying.'

He glared at her. 'A history that is not going to affect my professionalism.'

'Of course not, Jack,' she said quietly. Then, as the lift bell pinged, 'Here we are…'

When they pressed Maeve Gallacher's bell, the door flew open almost immediately, as though the woman inside had been waiting. She was in her

forties, clothed extravagantly, face made up, and holding a half-full champagne flute. She was wearing well, Gish thought, though these days you could never tell how much was down to good genes and how much the surgeon's scalpel and syringe. Her face, so expectant, fell as she saw who was standing there – or, rather, it seemed to Gish, who *wasn't*.

The detectives were holding open their IDs. Maeve Gallacher gave them a cursory inspection.

'Noise complaint from the bitch upstairs?' she enquired.

'Bit more serious than that,' Milton offered.

'Not Eddie?' Her face fell further.

'We should be so lucky.'

She focused on Milton, eyes narrowing. 'I know you, don't I? One of Eddie's chasers?' Her voice had coarsened, any veneer gone.

'Any chance we can come in, Mrs Gallacher?' Gish asked, all politeness. 'Only, there's been an incident in the main lobby. The concierge, I'm sorry to say…'

Before Gish could finish, Maeve had turned on her two-inch heels, clacking her way across the polished floor towards the balcony. She stepped out and peered over the rail towards the roofs of the police vehicles below. Gish and Milton took the opportunity to make their way inside. Looking around the vast space, Gish noted the obvious contrast with Franklyn's penthouse. Maeve Gallacher looked to have brought her previous home with her in its entirety. There were patterned velvet curtains with elaborate ties, while gaudy ornaments covered most available surfaces. Between them sat plates of half-eaten food and smudged wine, champagne and spirit glasses. Darkwood panelling had been added to every wall. Framed photos showed sunshine holidays, Maeve's oversized, bare-chested husband usually with a meaty arm around her neck. Between two columns of photos sat a huge TV, soundlessly tuned to an all-night shopping channel. There was a sunken seating area in the middle of the room, filled by a battered leather sofa, leaving no space for the matching recliner chair, which looked like the woman's usual perch. A vape sat on one chair arm and there was a faint aroma of apples in the air. A long mahogany counter separated the living area from a fully stocked bar. On the counter itself sat a MacBook and two large Bluetooth speakers. Gish dabbed a finger against the touchpad and a music playlist materialised on the screen.

Milton was still studying the photos of Eddie Gallacher when Maeve re-entered. The sounds of the waking city travelled in with her, though it wouldn't be light for another couple of hours.

'Is Dwayne all right?' she demanded to know.

'I'm afraid not,' Milton said, turning towards her. She collapsed into her chair, placing her drink on the floor.

'Christ, Ray only bopped him on the nose…'

'It wasn't a punch that killed him,' Gish explained. 'It was a blow to the back of the skull.'

'Would Ray be Ray Stanton by any chance?' Milton ventured. 'Stands to reason he'd be at your party.' He turned his attention towards Gish. 'Eddie Gallacher's trusted lieutenant,' he explained.

'Dwayne's dead,' Maeve was saying. '*Dead?*' She fixed her eyes on Gish. 'I don't understand – why would anyone…?'

There was a large dining table at the far end of the room, covered in empty bottles. Its chairs had been removed and were dotted around the place. Milton hoisted a couple and carried them towards the armchair, resting on one while Gish took the other.

'When did you last see him?' he asked. 'Dwayne, I mean.'

'Night shift before last – to remind him about the party. Which cars were allowed into the garage, et cetera.'

'And after your friend Ray punched him in the face?'

'I sent him a text to apologise.'

'How did it come about?' Milton pressed.

But Maeve wasn't really listening. She studied the mess around her and got to her feet, seeking a top-up and finding just about enough in one of the bottles. When she sat down again, she vaped apple smoke at the two detectives.

'You were telling us how it came about,' Milton prompted her.

'Dwayne's brother, the DJ,' she offered, part of her mind still elsewhere. 'Stuff he was playing wasn't to all tastes. When the requests got too much for him, he lost his rag. Ray and Rich decided they'd had enough, started marching him out. When they got to reception, Dwayne tried stepping in. Well, I could have told him, you don't mess with Ray bloody Stanton. That's about the size of it.'

'Rich?' Milton echoed, hoping for clarification.

‘Richard Hollister.’

‘Proprietor of Holli’s nightclub?’ he checked.

‘That’s him.’ She took another suck of her vape. ‘Dwayne was good as gold,’ she said.

‘Unlike your husband, then?’ She glared at him again, not that it seemed to bother Milton.

‘Can I check who else was at the party?’ Gish asked, hoping to defuse things.

Maeve thought for a moment. ‘You can’t imagine any of them…?’

‘I’m just trying to put together a picture,’ Gish assured her. ‘Maybe you could compile a list for me?’

‘I can do that,’ the woman eventually conceded.

‘A *full* list, please,’ Milton stressed, earning another look.

‘We’ll have someone collect it in the morning,’ Gish interrupted. ‘And thank you.’

Maeve seemed mollified. She looked down at herself. ‘Dozed off in the chair. Woke up to champagne that needed finishing. I should probably get to bed.’

‘We’ll be in touch again tomorrow,’ Gish said. ‘Well, later today, I suppose I mean. One last thing…’

‘Yes?’

‘We think downstairs was maybe a burglary gone wrong, but we’d welcome any other theories.’

Maeve thought for a moment. ‘My Eddie has enemies, of course he does, but mostly among *your* lot. Dear old Joe Spalding’s never got on the wrong side of anyone. Lev’s maybe another matter – we all know about Russians and their money. He has protection, though, same as Maita – though hers is more like a prison guard, poor cow.’

‘She couldn’t come to the party, is that correct?’

‘Sent her apologies. She’s off somewhere exotic.’

‘Jessica Forrester wasn’t at the party either, was she?’

‘Turns her nose up at the likes of me.’

‘What about her landlord?’

‘Mikey’s a gentleman. He brought flowers and some Krug.’

‘We hear he’s got a thing for Ms Forrester.’

Gallacher rolled her eyes. ‘Can’t see the attraction myself – and it’s not

like he's stalking her or anything.' A memory came to her and she smiled. 'My Eddie followed me around for weeks once he'd decided on me. It was flattering, though my squeeze at the time probably didn't think so.'

'Did the squeeze make it out of the situation alive?' Milton interjected.

'I'm not talking to you,' she said coldly. 'Far as I'm concerned, you're not even here.'

'Trust me, there are places I'd rather be.'

Maeve rose from her chair and started walking towards him. Gish got up and held her hands out, palms up.

'Let's all calm down,' she said. Milton was on his feet, too. Maeve Gallacher turned her attention to Gish.

'I don't want to see him here again, understood? You want me to cooperate, that's the price.'

'We'll let you get some sleep,' Gish said. 'We're all pretty tired.'

Milton took one of his business cards from his pocket and placed it on the seat of the chair he'd just vacated. Maeve saw them out in silence. In the hallway, Gish turned to add a few final words of consolation, but the door slammed shut on her.

'We need her on our side, Jack,' she said as they walked to the lift.

'We really don't.'

'She was expecting someone, wasn't she? Still dressed to the nines and all smiles when she opened the door.'

'Though there could be another explanation. Did you notice the iPad tucked down the side of her armchair? UAE is a few hours ahead of us – maybe a bit of morning FaceTime with her Eddie.'

'Maybe.' Gish sounded unconvinced.

They were stepping into the lift when they heard Maeve's door open again. Her arm emerged, hand opening to let fall what looked like a small sprinkling of confetti.

'Your business card,' Gish commented.

'My business card,' Milton agreed.

Downstairs, the scene-of-crime team had finished. They were outside, gathered around George's van. Beakers of tea and coffee had been purchased from somewhere. Mick Bentham paused in unclipping his

bodycam and gave a shrug in the detectives' direction – nothing new to report.

'Getting too old for this,' he muttered.

'Gold watches for the pair of us soon enough,' Milton offered.

Allan Franklyn had arrived with the master fob and Mikey Tan's address. Peter Ames walked over and handed back Gish's car keys.

'It went okay?' she checked.

'Me and the kid had to take an arm each, but we got Collins to his flat in one piece. Kid went in with him to make sure he made it to his bedroom.'

'You didn't go in?' Milton asked.

'Should I have?'

'A look around might have been useful.'

'If you'd told me to, I would have.'

'There's a certain thing called initiative, Peter.'

'No signs of life in the car park?' Gish interrupted.

Ames shook his head. 'Just a bit of a whiff from the bins.'

'Their fame precedes them,' Gish said.

Milton was watching two uniformed officers roll out a long streamer of blue and white tape marked with the single word *POLICE*. Its purpose was to deter the public getting too close. 'It's good of us to flag up that there might be something worth seeing,' he muttered. The windows and door to the reception area had been successfully covered up. Next thing would be for the clean-up crew to arrive. The hard drive from the control room computer had been bagged and labelled and was somewhere inside the SOC van. 'I want a rush job on that footage,' Milton said. 'Do we know who's attending the post-mortem?'

'Emma drew the short straw,' Ames said.

'Well, she's got a stronger constitution than some…'

Blood began to tinge Ames's cheeks. 'It was just that one time,' he complained.

Milton gestured towards the cordon. 'Go tell those idiots that we need to get our vehicles out of here before they hem us in. Then get the concierges' details – we'll want to interview them.' He glanced at Gish. 'What do you reckon?' he said. 'A couple of hours' kip?'

'We won't be much use to anyone otherwise,' Gish reasoned.

Milton nodded his agreement while staring over towards Bentham and

his team. ‘Someone took that fob but then did nothing with it – maybe they’re trying to con us and Dwayne died for some other reason.’ He turned his attention back to Gish. ‘Lot of digging still to do, Gillian.’

‘Lucky we don’t mind getting our hands dirty, Jack,’ she answered.

Milton was peering up at the Heights. ‘It really is another world,’ he sighed.

‘Maybe it was, but it’s *our* world now…’

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7

Maeve Gallacher stood on her balcony watching the vans and cars start to leave, phone pressed to her ear. The call had already gone to messaging twice, but she was trying a third time.

‘Bloody hell, Maeve,’ Ray Stanton answered croakily. She could hear a woman’s voice complaining in the background.

‘Is that Tara?’ Maeve asked. ‘Or did you trade her in for a newer model at Rich’s club?’ She listened as Stanton began composing himself, getting out of bed and making his way out of the room.

‘I’ve already got one mum, Maeve. Last thing I need is a surrogate.’

‘What did you do to him, Ray?’ She could hear Stanton sparking up a cigarette. He inhaled, then blew out some smoke.

‘Who are we talking about?’

‘Dwayne, you prick.’

‘The kid on the front desk?’

‘You know exactly who I mean.’

‘I know one punch had him on the ropes. You should tell them the place needs proper security. I know guys who could help.’

‘You killed him,’ she stated. There was silence on the line.

‘I did what?’

‘He’s dead. Somebody whacked him.’

‘Not me, darling. He wasn’t *quite* that big a nuisance.’

‘Cops will be wanting a word with you.’

‘I was with people all night – unlike some.’ She heard him open a cupboard and take out a glass. A moment later came the sound of a tap running.

‘Well, somebody did it,’ she stated, listening to him drink. ‘I need to know who.’

‘We all know you liked the kid, Maeve,’ Stanton said after swallowing, ‘but this isn’t something we should be messing with.’

‘You have ears and eyes in the Met, right? Time to start using them.’

‘Why not just leave the filth to get on with it?’

‘You’ll do this for me, Ray,’ she said coldly, walking back indoors. The flat – she’d never got used to calling it a suite – was a tip, but it would all be cleaned away soon enough. ‘It’s the one way you can prove to me you weren’t behind it in the first place.’

‘If Eddie gets wind, he’s going to wonder why we’re putting ourselves out.’ He broke off. ‘You don’t think he…?’

‘No, I bloody don’t. Just put some feelers out and be quick about it, understood?’

‘I still don’t think—’

‘I couldn’t give a rat’s fart what you think, Ray – you’ll do it.’ She ended the call and slumped back into her chair, staring out at the city, recalling moments from the party, who was there and who wasn’t, who was plotting, who was whispering.

And above all, remembering Dwayne…

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Two

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8

Next morning the squad gathered in the large yet airless incident room within Marylebone Road police station. Gish had managed about half an hour's sleep at home, waking with her head against her computer keyboard when the carers arrived to get her mother ready for breakfast. She had showered and changed clothes, joining her mother at the table and giving her a kiss on the forehead.

'I never see you these days,' her mother commented.

'Jacqui, you see Gillian all the time,' one of the carers corrected her.

'At least she knows who I am,' Gish added. 'Today at any rate.'

Jacqui Gish had suffered a stroke several years back, which had been followed by early-onset dementia. She'd brought her daughter up single-handedly after Gish's father had run off with somebody else. Jacqui now slept in the living room, and a childproof gate had been added to the bottom of the stairs after she'd fallen down them once too often. The house was part of a terrace in Tottenham Hale. Jacqui had lived there for decades and had good, reliable friends on the street – a godsend to her daughter. The visiting carers were all right, but they were always against the clock – too many clients, not enough hours in the day. The neighbours had a timetable that they shared between them, and today an old friend from the other side of the river had arranged to visit and take her shopping.

'I'm not useless, you know,' Jacqui complained as the carer helped her grip the specially angled spoon.

'I'm well aware of that, Jacqui,' the woman teased, sharing a wink with Gish.

There were more good people than bad in the world – Gish had to keep reminding herself of that. They just made less noise.

'I'll try not to be late,' she told her mother, kissing her on the forehead.

‘Take care of yourself out there.’ Jacqui’s hand had curled itself around her daughter’s wrist, squeezing with as much pressure as she could muster.

‘I was brought up to look after myself, Mum. I’ll be fine, I promise.’

She’d printed out a sheaf of background information on as many of the players as she could, enough to drain her ink cartridge. The whole lot had gone into a carrier bag she’d taken to the car with her, watched by a group of five boys on electric bikes parked at the end of the street, all of them hooded and with their faces muffled. Only their eyes were showing, but that was enough – Gish knew each one by name, and they knew her, knew she’d grown up in the same manor but was now a cop. She had unlocked the car without bothering to check the paintwork, confident it would not have been vandalised – not because she was police, the filth, a pig, but because she was Tottenham born and bred.

Walking into the station, she had noticed how drab it was, water stains on peeling patches of ceiling, the whole interior unloved, the windows unwashed. Her chief inspector, a sandy-haired, pencil-thin Scot called Alec Jeffries, had started the day with one of those speeches he seemed to specialise in and probably thought of as rousing. Emma Amberson was at the mortuary, awaiting the start of the post-mortem. She had texted Gish to say that the duty pathologist was ‘Creepy Connors’, adding an emoji of a horrified face. Gish had read the message while listening to the chief stress to the team that a result was needed PDQ.

‘The media are already howling. Pop stars and millionaires in the mix – it’s like all their Christmases have come at once. I’ll fend them off as best I can, but the sooner we can wrap this one up the better. My feeling is that the grief has only just started. No room here for screw-ups, leaky ships or lone wolves.’

At which point he had scanned the faces in front of him, seeking out Gish and noting the absence of Jack Milton. Gish had already tried calling her partner, but it had gone to messaging. On her desk, alongside the carrier bag, was background on Jason Sievewright, including news stories about his relationship with Jessica Forrester and its aftermath. His attempt to force his way into the Heights had been caught by photographers outside. The stories Gish read lacked attribution, but one of them mentioned police being called to the scene. There was even a blurry photograph of a uniformed officer who seemed to be discussing the situation with Sievewright and a

concierge.

Gish walked over to Peter Ames's desk. He was swinging to and fro on his chair, a ballpoint pen between his teeth.

'Enjoying a nice relaxing break, Peter?' she asked coolly.

He removed the pen from his mouth. 'Not for much longer, I'm guessing.'

She handed him Amberson's notes. 'I need you to find the officer involved.'

'Can do.' He gave a grin. 'Told my sister I'd met Zafk. My nieces now think I'm some kind of deity.'

'And here I am bringing you back from the heavens with a bump.' She paused. 'We need to question Jason Sievewright, check his alibi for last night. Maybe talk to Jessica Forrester's PA, too – she's on holiday, but Forrester will have her number.'

'What's she going to tell us?' Ames asked sceptically.

'Forrester might have stalkers she's not aware of – her PA probably deletes the nutters before Jessica's even aware of them.' Gish paused. 'Is that enough to satisfy you, Peter?' She took out her phone and started sending him Forrester and Sievewright's numbers. 'I'm giving it to you on a platter,' she said. 'It's what we mere mortals do for our gods…'

She turned and headed to one of the other desks, where two of the younger detectives – Timpson and Lorimer – had been tasked with checking footage from the various council-owned cameras outside the Heights. Colleagues referred to the pair as the Twins, though neither really resembled the other. They had been part of the same intake, however, and had remained inseparable ever since. And they did love their computers.

'Any joy?' Gish asked. She noted that Timpson had been making detailed notes as to timings and sightings.

'Take a look,' he said, offering her his seat.

'The quality's not brilliant,' Lorimer warned her, 'but it's good enough.' He scrolled through some footage and then paused it. 'Usual busy night in London. Buses, cabs, delivery bikes. There's no specific camera trained on the front of the building, but you can see most of the slip road leading down into the car park. Not too many comings and goings, but this is a Mercedes registered to Richard Hollister. Arrives at five past eight.' He tapped his pen against the timer running along the top of the screen. 'Leaves at eleven ten.'

He moved the footage along. ‘We reckon this cluster of onlookers must be paparazzi and the like – maybe a few of Zafk’s fans in the mix too. They all clear off by eleven thirty. Either fed up or cold or a bit of both. Earlier they look like they’re getting excited, and then this fellow appears. One or two of them head towards him, but he flags down a cab and is offski. Any ideas?’

‘Maybe the DJ. What about this car?’ Gish pointed to a dark-coloured saloon that had stopped on the far side of the road. ‘It’s been parked there a while, no?’

Lorimer wound the footage back, froze it, and then played it forward, checking. ‘Probably belongs to one of the photographers. It leaves the same time they do.’

‘In point of fact,’ Gish corrected him, gesturing towards the timer, ‘it’s gone by eleven minutes past eleven, pretty much the same time Hollister’s Merc leaves the car park.’

‘Richard Hollister owns Holli’s, right?’ Timpson checked.

‘He does,’ Gish said.

‘Maybe to do with him, then – bodyguards or something?’

‘Except it was already parked by eight p.m. and he didn’t arrive until a little after. Reckon you can clean the footage up so we can ID the reg?’

‘Feasible,’ Lorimer said, his partner nodding in agreement.

‘And what about post-midnight?’ Gish continued.

They showed her what little they had. ‘Hard to tell whether anyone entering the frame has come out of the Heights or has just been walking past it. And you’d be hard pressed to identify any of the faces anyway.’ Lorimer sped the footage up. Official cars and vans began to arrive on the scene. Gish watched her Yaris disappear from view as it pulled into the turning circle.

‘Bloody shame we can’t see the front door,’ she muttered under her breath. Then, ‘Hold up, go back a little.’ Lorimer did so. ‘Who’s that?’ She pointed at the screen again. The clock read 0345. Three men had appeared on the pavement opposite the Heights, the smaller flanked by two taller, bulkier figures. All three seemed to have their hands in their pockets. The man in the middle wore a three-quarter-length raincoat, the other two shorter jackets, maybe black leather. All three had what looked like shaved heads.

‘First of the day’s gawpers,’ Timpson guessed.

‘For gawpers, they’re not exactly lingering,’ his partner corrected him. Sure enough, after less than half a minute, they walked away.

‘Going back the same route they came,’ Gish commented. ‘So it’s not like they were just passing on their way elsewhere.’

‘What then?’ Lorimer asked.

She dug out her phone and called Allan Franklyn. She hadn’t been able to find much online about Lev Godunov, and there didn’t seem to be any photos of him. Franklyn sounded groggy when he answered.

‘Is there news?’ he managed to ask.

‘Just a quick question, sir. Lev Godunov – can you give me a brief description?’

‘Slightly stocky, five foot nine or thereabouts.’

‘Shaven head?’

‘That’s right.’

‘Would he be likely to wear a dark raincoat?’

‘Racing green, actually. He says you can never trust the English weather.’

‘And he has two bodyguards who are a bit bigger than him?’

‘Has something happened?’

‘It’s just that I think our presence at the Heights spooked him. That being the case, any idea where he might go?’

‘No, sorry.’

‘Let me know if you see him. How are things this morning?’

‘Now the news is out, I dare say I’m going to be fighting a few fires.’

‘I’ll probably be seeing you later, Mr Franklyn. Best of luck till then.’

As Gish ended the call, she saw Milton arrive. ‘Good work so far,’ she told the Twins. ‘But get me that licence plate if you can.’

She gave Timpson back his chair and headed to her desk, which faced Milton’s. She knew why, four months back, she’d been told she was switching partners. Jack Milton was the wise owl, watchful and careful, a man the bosses could trust to rein her in. Gish, they said, had shown ‘an occasional streak of recklessness’. But as she’d argued at the time, how reckless could it be when she kept getting results? It was what she’d grown up with. It was what made her an asset.

‘Just do what Jack tells you,’ she’d been told, ‘and you’ll be fine. He’s

one of the very best.'

Then just what the hell am I? she'd almost retorted. But she'd pressed her lips together instead, hands behind her back, fists clenched.

Blinking away the memory, she removed the sheaf of paper from her carrier and placed it in front of him.

'Franklyn changed his name to make himself sound posher,' she announced as she sat back down. 'Used to be plain Alan with one l, Franklin with an i. Private school paid for by his parents. Dad was a boxer, as we know, and did pretty well from it. Got out before he was too damaged and became a successful businessman. Franklyn decided to ditch university and went into property instead.' She broke off, watching him stifle a yawn. 'No sleep?'

'Not much. You?'

'The same.' She tapped a fingernail against the energy drink on her desk.

'Caffeine tablets for me,' Milton said, 'though I'll suffer for it later.' He unlocked his phone and turned the screen towards her. A grainy colour photograph showed two men in a boxing ring, one in a suit raising the beefy arm of the other, who was naked to the waist, face swollen, chest gleaming with sweat. 'That's Franklyn's dad there – Benny Franklin. But do you see who's next to him?' He watched her shrug. 'None other than Eddie Gallacher. In his younger days, he fancied himself as a promoter, including a number of Benny's fights.'

Gish studied the photo more closely. 'Where did you find it?'

Milton reached up to pat his shoulder. 'I had a hunch, Gillian – mate of mine used to run the crime desk at the *Express*. He put me in touch with an even older lag from sports. I bought him breakfast an hour ago and this was the result.'

'So you weren't just dodging the chief's pep talk?'

'Call it a satisfying by-product.'

'Franklyn told us he didn't know Eddie Gallacher.'

'Might still be true.'

'You don't sound convinced.'

Milton shrugged and started sifting through the paperwork Gish had handed him. 'Mind summing this up for me, seeing how I'm not at my sparkiest?'

Gish took a gulp of her drink, feeling her nerves jangle afresh. 'No one

home at Maita Macheso's residence. Flat is owned by her father. He's some kind of preacher, lives most of the time in Africa. Jessica Forrester we know about. Her and Zafk are close. Zafk himself – Zachary Wilson – acts and sounds "street" but went to Westminster School and had private music lessons throughout. His dad is in finance. Parents take a close interest, but then so does Zafk's manager, Roddy Collins. No sooner did Zafk move into the Heights than Collins did likewise. Zafk is big in the Far East and that'll probably remain the case as long as he stays out of trouble.'

'Meaning?'

'Well, he's vegan and he drinks almost nothing but bubble tea and matcha. His lyrics are all about being a nice guy while falling in love.'

'Would I know any of his songs?'

'I very much doubt it.' Gish studied her notes again. 'Collins grabbed himself a few column inches in the past by allegedly taking a bigger cut from his artists than he was due.'

'Hasn't happened with Zafk?'

She shook her head. 'I doubt I could add much to Maeve Gallacher's history that would come as news to you. Very little info on Lev Godunov or Michael Tan. Tan grew up in Hong Kong, Godunov somewhere in Russia. I was checking the street cameras earlier and Godunov seemed to be on his way back to the Heights shortly before four a.m. He noted our presence and changed his mind.'

'Interesting.'

'There was a car parked opposite for most of the evening. Twins think it might've belonged to one of the paps, but I'm not so sure.'

'That's a good shout, though – we need all the paparazzi footage, see if it throws up anything of interest.' Gish nodded, she had already added this to her to-do list. 'Anything else from the door-to-doors?'

'The businessman Franklyn mentioned, Toby Scully…' She consulted her notes. 'He made a not uncontroversial pile from PPE during COVID. Fast-tracked to the VIP procurement lane despite a lack of experience. Probably helped that one of his besties was a government minister at the time, now elevated to the House of Lords. Franklyn termed Scully an "entrepreneur", but I might opt for "leech".' She paused. 'Only other chat last night was with the building's architect, Lorn Macneal. Like Scully, he was at the party, but went to bed straight after. Meantime, Joseph Spalding

is indeed an art dealer, currently in a coma in New York after being the victim of a hit-and-run while on his way to see a client. It was in the papers, mostly because it happened outside a gallery hosting an exhibition called *Crash*. He's expected to pull through. And that leaves us with our developer…' She paused while Milton flicked to the relevant pages. 'Big question there, as far as the internet is concerned, is where did the money for the Heights come from? It's by far Franklyn's biggest project and he seems to have found most of the funding via offshore entities.'

'Meaning dark money?'

'Loaned by people who would like to remain circumspect, though I wouldn't be surprised to see the likes of Godunov and Tan involved.'

'Not forgetting Eddie Gallacher.' Milton rubbed at his haphazardly shaved chin. 'Maybe the architect could fill in the blanks?'

'Maybe,' Gish agreed.

'But even if Franklyn did borrow to finance the block, he'll have made that back with bells on when the flats sold?'

'Except that hasn't quite happened, remember? Franklyn mentioned "a few" that are still waiting for their first buyers. It's actually seven unsold, added to which a further three – with offshore owners – are listed online as being for sale.'

'I make that ten out of twenty-five?'

Gish nodded. 'My feeling is, the high rollers don't see London the way they used to, despite which, we still have no shortage of HNWs and UHNWs…' She broke off and looked at him.

'Enlighten me.'

'High- and ultra-high-net-worth individuals,' she obliged. 'Half a million of them in the UK, mostly right here. Half the property sales in central London last year went to foreign buyers.'

Milton digested this. 'So if Franklyn is paying interest on all these loans and nobody's buying…'

'Troubles ahead – especially when you factor in the Heights Mark 2.'

Milton lapsed into thought for a moment. 'You've been busy,' he acknowledged. 'But let's get back to the victim. Next of kin have been notified?'

'His parents are devastated, naturally.'

'He shared a place with his brother – have we been there for a nosy?'

‘Couple of officers are there as we speak.’

‘Make sure they ask about the assault.’ He watched Gish nod. ‘And we’re bringing Rosa in for a proper chat?’ Another nod. ‘Victim’s mobile?’

‘Is being looked at.’

‘Then the chief has nothing to complain about.’

‘Which won’t stop him trying.’

Milton thought of something. ‘The control room hard disk?’

‘Already checked by the lab. They doubt they can recover anything – apparently it’s a cheap, shitty system. But there’s plenty of footage from before midnight.’

‘Including the brother being manhandled out?’

‘Here’s hoping.’

‘As good an excuse as any to drag Ray Stanton in for a chat.’

‘And here we are back at your favourite topic – Eddie Gallacher.’

‘You never know what’ll happen if we keep shaking the tree, Gillian.’

The desk sergeant from downstairs had entered the office and was making his way towards Milton’s desk. He handed him a folded scrap of paper.

‘Thought you might want to see this,’ he said.

Milton opened the note and read it. ‘Speak of the devil,’ he told Gish. ‘Ray Stanton requests our company at the Monkey Bars.’

‘What’s that?’

‘Pub in a side road not five minutes from here. Probably not your sort of watering hole.’

‘Are you forgetting I grew up in Tottenham?’

‘But you’re more the bubble tea and matcha type these days, no?’

‘You don’t really know me at all, do you?’ Gish checked her watch. ‘It’s not nearly opening time.’

‘I doubt business hours mean much to Ray Stanton.’ Milton had risen to his feet. ‘Ready when you are, Tottenham crew girl.’

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9

Allan Franklyn had been standing in front of the Heights 2's architectural plan for a good twenty minutes, doing nothing but fielding calls, trying to quell his investors' fears. He was minded to start ignoring all three of his phones, but the next name to pop up on the nearest screen was that of his dad, so he sighed and then answered.

'Listen to me, Allan,' his father began, skipping any pleasantries.

'I always do.'

'Just bloody well shut up and listen.' Benny Franklin had lost little of his swagger with the passage of time. His son stared towards the framed photos near the door. The boxing ring was his father's natural environment; in a sense, he'd never really left it. 'Eddie Gallacher is not a man to be messed with. Same goes for the other names I introduced you to – they're pals of mine and I want them to stay that way. So do me one big favour, eh?'

'What's that, Dad?'

'Don't fuck things up any more than you already have.'

'An employee is in the mortuary – I can't make that not happen.'

'What about this PR firm you pay so much money to?'

'They're talking to editors, aiming for minimal coverage.'

'It's all over the radio and TV!'

Franklyn closed his eyes for a moment. 'Tell your friends their money's safe as houses.'

'You don't build houses, though, do you? You build safe-deposit boxes – and we all know what can happen to those.'

'Your friend Eddie certainly does.'

'Eddie and Maeve are not people you cross, son. They've put a lot of money your way.'

'They also wanted costs cut – which is why Dwayne was on his own last

night.’

‘You better not start saying shit like that in front of Maeve.’

Franklyn had another caller trying to reach him: Mikey Tan. ‘Dad, I have to go. I’ll talk to you later.’

‘Just heed my advice, because if you don’t, you’ll—’

Franklyn ended the call, but too late to catch Tan. A text arrived instead: *Stop ignoring me, Allan. You need all the friends you can get.* Franklyn took a deep breath and exhaled. He noticed a small brown stain on the plan where a drip of coffee had landed at some point. He rubbed it with his thumb, to no effect. Then he called Tan, who answered immediately.

‘How are you, Mikey?’ Franklyn asked, trying to sound his usual unfazed self.

‘You must know, Allan, that your Heights 2 is dead in the water.’

‘I’ve always liked that about you, Mikey – the way you ease into a difficult conversation by starting with some small talk.’

‘No one I care to know has time for small talk, Allan.’

I’ll bet, Franklyn thought.

‘You do agree with me, though? These things happen in business. Best if you pay off your creditors in full – that way you retain your good name. Then at some point in the future you can begin afresh without any party feeling aggrieved.’

Franklyn’s eyes moved to the curving staircase, following each shining step as it led upwards. He hated the fact that Tan, a few years his junior, spoke to everyone as though he was their elder and (by some stretch) better. He sought a barb and found one.

‘Have the police spoken to you yet?’

There was silence on the line. ‘About what?’ Tan eventually asked.

‘Why you might want Jessica Forrester to come to harm.’

‘What a preposterous accusation!’

‘The police don’t seem to think so.’ Franklyn imagined Tan squirming.

‘What does this have to do with the concierge’s death?’

‘Maybe everything – but best if the detectives tell you themselves. I’ve already let slip more than I should…’

Franklyn listened for a moment as Tan struggled to find whatever it was he wanted to say, then he ended the call. Even though Tan phoned him again immediately, he decided against answering. Text after text arrived and

he ignored them all.

‘So much for “dead in the water”, you little shit,’ he muttered, fetching a damp cloth to deal with the coffee stain.

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10

The door to the pub was locked, but they could see a figure seated at a table, facing the window, eyes watchful. He mouthed a few words and they could hear a key turning. The barman let them in, relocked the door, then made himself scarce.

Stanton had placed himself at the corner of a banquette. He wore stonewashed denims with designer fraying, an open-necked check shirt and a loose-fitting jacket, plus brown leather loafers with no visible socks. His face was tanned, hair styled. You might mistake him for a successful tradesman if you chose to ignore the old damage done to both cheeks by a blade or three. There was a glass of sparkling water in front of him – either that or an unfeasibly large gin and tonic.

‘All right, Jack?’ he said, his voice unreconstructed cockney.

‘You could have come to the office, Ray.’ Milton pulled out one of the wooden chairs and sat down, Gish copying him.

‘Yours is the sort of office I prefer to avoid.’ Stanton glanced towards Gish. ‘This your latest project?’

Gish opened her mouth to protest, but Milton beat her to it.

‘Detective Sergeant Gish is a lot sharper than me, Ray. Wouldn’t do to underestimate her.’

‘And does DS Gish have a first name?’ She could feel Stanton’s eyes drilling into her, as if she might suddenly crack open.

‘Gillian to my friends,’ she told him. He held out a hand, which she ignored, causing him to chuckle. He gave a shake of the wrist, the two gold bracelets he wore shimmying as he did so. He had another gold chain around his neck and a gold watch hanging loosely on his left wrist.

‘How’s Eddie these days, Ray?’ Milton enquired with mock casualness. ‘You been out to see him in his desert kingdom?’

‘Christ, Jack, you never give up, do you?’ Stanton gave another chuckle.

‘I take it Maeve got straight on the blower to you, warned you we’d be wanting a word?’

‘I don’t know who did for the poor bastard, but I can tell you right now, I was nowhere near.’

‘So where were you?’

‘We headed off to Holli’s. I was there till all hours.’

‘And who’s “we” exactly?’

‘Me and Rich, plus our girls.’

‘The girls you took to the party?’

‘That’s right.’

‘Anyone else?’

‘Roddy Collins and his boyfriend followed along later.’

‘You mean Zafk?’ Gish checked.

‘Bloody nonce name. He might be dipping his wick in that actress, but I know which one of them Cokehead Collins would prefer.’

‘How about Lev Godunov?’ Gish added.

‘We did offer, but him and his lady had a hankering for a casino.’

‘No one else from the party with you?’

Stanton shook his head. ‘I’ll be on all the club’s cameras, though – timestamped to boot. So you need to start looking elsewhere for your fall guy.’

Milton made a show of doing a moment’s thinking. ‘Then all we’ve got you bang to rights for is a vicious and unprovoked assault that was eyewitnessed and almost certainly captured for posterity on the security cameras.’

‘Vicious? Do me a favour – one little tap I gave him, and only after he went for me. All I was trying to do was remove a disruptive presence from a nice friendly party.’

‘That disruptive presence being the victim’s brother,’ Gish stated.

‘I didn’t know that at the time, though. We just wanted to bundle the bastard out of the building. Suddenly we’re under attack from the streak-of-piss nightwatchman.’ Stanton gave a bark of laughter and started shaking his head at the memory.

‘This was you and Richard Hollister?’ Gish checked. Before Stanton could answer, Milton had a question of his own.

‘What did Mark Hogarth do to get everyone so riled up?’

‘He got all mouthy with our dates. They wanted a good time and he was playing this trance shit. People were nearly nodding off.’

‘Can I have the women’s names, please?’ Gish interjected.

Stanton glared at her, taking his time making his mind up. ‘Tara Greaves and Mel Tarrant,’ he eventually conceded.

‘Mel short for Melanie?’

‘Melinda,’ he corrected her. Then, turning to Milton, ‘Cushy number for you, Jack, just sit around and let your pet do all the grafting.’

‘We’ll need to see the footage from the club, Ray,’ Milton said tonelessly, ‘just to confirm your version of events. Plus we’ll be talking to Richard Hollister.’

‘Think I’d go back and top the little scrote when I had the offer of a warm bed and a warmer Tara? You know me better than that, Jack.’ Stanton waited for an answer that was never coming, then gave a sigh. ‘Check all the footage you want. Knock yourselves out. But Rich is somewhere over the Atlantic right now, destination Mustique. He did offer to take me and I’m wishing now I’d said yes.’

‘What happened to Angelica?’ Milton asked.

‘Angelica? Ancient history, mate.’

‘So how long have you been with Tara?’

‘Hell’s it got to do with you?’ Stanton turned towards the window. ‘Jesus, what now?’ he muttered. A face was peering in at them, eyes narrowing in furious recognition. The man started rattling the door, which shook on its hinges. The barman appeared, but Stanton shooed him away. ‘It’s the brother,’ he told Milton and Gish. ‘So do we let him in or what?’

Milton looked to Gish and made up his mind. He turned back to Stanton. ‘To be continued at a later date. Don’t go thinking you’re off the hook.’

‘Self-defence, Jack. You know damn well it’ll never reach court.’

Mark Hogarth was back at the window, giving it a good thump. Stanton offered a mocking grin and thumbs-up as Milton made for the door, Gish behind him. As the lock turned, Hogarth made to barge past, Milton shoving him back on to the pavement. Once outside, Gish made sure the door was closed behind her.

‘Let me at that bastard!’ Hogarth yelled.

‘Not going to happen, Mark,’ Milton said calmly. ‘Take a few deep

breaths, that way I don't have to arrest you.'

Hogarth stared at him. 'You're cops?' He watched Milton give a slow nod. 'What the hell are you doing with him? He attacked my brother, nearly broke his nose. I saw it with my own eyes. And now Dwayne's… Dwayne's…'

Slowly the fight went out of him, his shoulders slumping. Gish relaxed a little and studied him. He was well over six feet tall, broad-shouldered and broad-chested, dressed in an olive-drab T-shirt, baggy grey joggers and oversized sneakers with the laces hanging loose. The charging cable for a phone was hanging from a trouser pocket and there were full-sized headphones clamped around his neck.

'What are you doing here, Mark?' Milton was asking. Hogarth had bent forward slightly, hands on knees, as though getting his breath back.

'I was on my way to talk to your lot, try to find out why you've not caught anyone yet.'

'It's not even been twelve hours.'

'We sent officers to your home,' Gish added.

'Fat lot of use they were.' Hogarth angled his head up to lock eyes with Milton. 'Dwayne was in a big bright glass box on a busy street, all the CCTV in the world pointed at him – how fucking difficult can it be?' He straightened up and saw Stanton watching from the window. Hogarth gestured for him to come outside. Milton wagged a finger towards the window and Stanton just shrugged.

'Last time I saw my little brother alive, he was fighting my corner,' Hogarth said. 'How do you think I feel about that?'

'Let's go to the station then,' Milton suggested. 'You can tell us all about it.' He stretched out an arm in the direction of Marylebone Road, Hogarth eventually acquiescing. Gish said she would catch them up. Once they were a safe distance away, she opened the pub door. Stanton was standing just the other side of it.

'What a lovely surprise,' he said with a smile. 'Join me for a drink?'

'Two things,' she said, ignoring the invitation. 'One, we need contact details for Tara and Mel. Second, a word of caution…'

'Oh aye?'

She gestured towards his wrist. 'Lot of thieves on the streets out there, despite our best efforts. You know the type – riding bikes, faces covered. So

you might want to stow that bling of yours elsewhere when you're out and about.'

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11

Mark Hogarth sat in the interview room, hands cradling a paper cup filled with milky tea, knees going like pistons. Milton and Gish were seated opposite.

‘First thing to say, Mark,’ Milton told him, ‘is that we’re sorry for your loss. We realise how devastating this is for the family and we’re doing our utmost to bring you some closure.’

‘So lock him up, then,’ Hogarth growled.

‘It would be a help to us if we could get the story clear. You were asked to DJ at Maeve Gallacher’s party – so you already knew her?’

‘Never met her,’ Hogarth corrected him. ‘It was Dwayne who put in a word for me. He said there’d be people there who could be useful.’

‘Useful in what way?’

‘Say Zafk wanted some beats laid down or Roddy Collins decided to produce me or that Hollister guy needed some fresh sounds for his club. But I knew what Dwayne really wanted – he wanted me putting in a word for Rosa. She’s a singer, you know?’

‘Putting in a word with the three people you’ve mentioned?’ Gish watched him nod. ‘But he knew them better than you did?’

‘And he’d done his best. But me being a DJ, he thought they might be more likely to listen.’ He paused. ‘Wish I’d never said yes. I could tell as soon as I got there I was in the wrong place – the woman didn’t want music, she wanted wallpaper. And they were all talking over the beats anyway, and whenever I tried cranking it up, I was told to turn it back down again.’ He gave a slow shake of the head.

‘Then what happened?’ Gish asked.

Hogarth’s mouth twisted. ‘Those two women just kept getting louder and louder. I reckon they were doing lines or something in the toilet.

Dresses too tight for them, make-up like a coat of paint. They liked the look of me, though – kept sidling up, hands everywhere.'

'These would be Tara Greaves and Melinda Tarrant?'

'Yeah, those two. Acted like they owned the place. Didn't seem to bother their pal Gallacher – she kept egging them on. That was when they started dissing the music. "We want Harry Styles or Beyoncé. Not this trance shit. Something we can dance to." I tell you, I tried, I really did, but they got to me.'

'And then?'

'They weren't used to not getting their way, didn't like me giving them verbals. Went running to their blokes. Before I knew it, I was being dragged out.'

'Did you resist?'

Hogarth stared at her. 'You know who Ray Stanton is, right?'

'And you obviously knew, too.'

'Dwayne filled me in on who would be there.' He paused again, the immensity of his brother's death slamming into him once more.

'When you reached reception,' Milton asked, 'what exactly happened?'

'Dwayne saw us come out of the lift, me arguing that I needed my gear. They weren't going to let that happen, though. Stanton had one of my arms twisted up my back. Hurt like hell. Hollister was on the other side of me. Next thing I know, Dwayne is hurtling towards us, hauling at Stanton. Stanton only has one free hand, but he uses it to give Dwayne a whack. Sends him flying. Next thing, I was out the door.'

'You didn't try getting back in?'

'I knew that wasn't going to work. Hollister gave me a look that said as much. Dwayne was dabbing at his nose. Little bit of blood but not much. Stanton had his hands up as if making him some sort of half-arsed apology. I was fuming but didn't reckon I was doing any good hanging around – might even make things worse for Dwayne. There were people nearby, journos, asking me what the story was, but I just wanted gone. There was a cab coming, so I jumped in.' Hogarth leaned back and studied the ceiling. 'Maybe I should have waited, checked on Dwayne. Instead, I messaged him. He said everything was cool. He'd go fetch my stuff and bring it home with him.' He lowered his gaze, focusing on each detective in turn. 'But fetching my stuff meant going to that witch's flat.'

‘Why do you call her that, Mark?’

‘Because she’s pure evil.’

Milton leaned forward a little. ‘Evil in what way?’

‘The way she uses Dwayne, dragging him up to hers, giving him coke or weed or booze until he’s in no fit state to say no.’ Hogarth broke off. ‘You know what I’m saying, right?’

‘Dwayne had complained to you about her behaviour?’

‘Not complained, no, but I could see what was going on – she’s got all the power, hasn’t she? It’s coercion or whatever you call it, treating Dwayne like a fucking servant or something.’

‘You went there last night to have words with her?’

‘Fucking A.’

‘And did you?’

‘As they were dragging me out, she got right in my face. I told her I knew something her bloke might be interested in. She grabbed my shirt and whispered, “The messenger sometimes gets shot.”’

‘Those exact words?’

‘Those exact words.’ He drained the last few drops of his tea and placed the cup next to his phone on the scarred and pitted table. Gish had noticed the amount of activity on his screen – a constant stream of messages and notifications. ‘Too late now,’ he said under his breath. ‘Way too late…’

‘This won’t be easy for you, Mark, but I need to ask…’ Milton made sure he had Hogarth’s attention. ‘Dwayne shared a flat with you, the pair of you seemed close. Can you think of any enemies he might have had – maybe nothing to do with the Heights?’

Hogarth stared at him. ‘Oh, I see where this is going – the cover-up’s already under way. People you need to protect, all those *important* people, not ones like me and Dwayne.’ He began nodding, confident he had gleaned the truth of the situation. ‘That’s the London you lot work for, not *my* London, not my family’s London. *Money* London!’ He leaped to his feet, snatching up his phone.

‘It’s not like that, Mark,’ Gish began to argue, but the look from Milton told her she was wasting her breath. Hogarth was already pushing the door open.

‘We’re done here, yeah?’ he snarled. ‘Maybe I’ll go get some answers of my own.’

‘It wasn’t coincidence, was it, Mark?’ Gish called out. ‘You being at that pub this morning? It was Stanton you planned to visit, not us?’

‘Steer clear, Mark – of Ray Stanton and the Heights both,’ Milton advised him, receiving a raised single digit for his trouble.

‘We’ll get your stuff back to you,’ Gish called along the corridor. But Mark Hogarth was gone.

Back in the office, Emma Amberson had arrived from the post-mortem, luring the chief from his inner sanctum as she gave her report. Jeffries had his sleeves rolled up to show the team he was keeping busy. Milton and Gish made a space for themselves in the circle surrounding Amberson.

‘The blow from behind was with something heavy and rounded – a cosh, hammer or similar. But it was falling against the marble counter that killed him.’

‘Not murder then?’ someone piped up.

‘Still a homicide,’ Jeffries countered. ‘It’s for the courts to argue the finer points.’

Amberson was handed a mug of coffee, nodding her thanks. ‘In any event,’ she said after a sip, ‘he’d have been unconscious from the blow to the skull. Pathologist reckons if it had been called in and paramedics had got to him, there’s a chance he would have pulled through.’

The team took a moment to digest this.

‘Anything else, Emma?’ Jeffries asked.

‘Time of death anywhere between midnight and two – but we already knew that. Last meal was a Tesco deal, as per packaging found in the bin in the control room. No immediate evidence of drugs or alcohol, but the lab will give us a full breakdown later today or tomorrow.’

‘What about the rest of you?’ Jeffries enquired of the room at large. ‘Anything from the crime scene?’

‘A mass of prints and hair samples,’ Ames answered. ‘We still haven’t checked on everyone in the building.’

‘Still no sign of the Russian?’

‘Not yet, sir. I spoke to Ms Forrester’s ex – he has a solid-looking alibi for last night. And Ms Forrester’s PA can’t think of anyone with a grudge not already on our radar.’

‘That’s very good work, Peter.’

Gish tried not to bristle as Ames soaked up the praise, chest swelling.

Jeffries folded his arms and puckered his mouth. ‘Well, I should tell you that I’m getting a bit of heat from all directions. Embassies, PR agencies, even the odd MP.’

‘Embassies, sir?’

‘Russia for a start, interested in Mr Godunov. Plus the Mozambique high commission. It seems that although Ms Macheso is a Zimbabwean national, she was living in Mozambique with her father, who’s still there and very good friends with the president. Foreign Office tell me there are ongoing trade negotiations and they’d rather we didn’t rock the boat. As you can imagine, I took that *very* well.’ There were smiles around the room. ‘Press are behaving like proctologists, of course – seems most of the civilised world is on tenterhooks. So let’s not keep them waiting.’ He clapped his hands together. ‘Back to work, and no slacking.’

Gish and Milton settled at their desks, staring across the distance between them.

‘We need to talk to Maeve Gallacher about what Mark just said,’ Gish said.

‘Indeed we do.’ Milton nodded in the direction of Gish’s shoulder. The Twins were standing there, just beyond her eyeline.

‘That number plate comes up as unrecognised,’ Timpson said, handing over the DVLA printout.

‘So it’s a fake?’

‘Looks that way.’

Gish met Milton’s eyes. ‘Who uses fake plates?’

‘Maybe they’re dodging the congestion charge,’ he speculated. ‘Or else they’re villains.’

‘Would Ray Stanton have bodyguards?’

‘Not Ray’s style,’ he stated.

Ames arrived, armed with more sheets of paper, handing them out. ‘Party attendees,’ he explained. ‘Collated from the security cameras. Times of arrival, times they left. Basically they were all elsewhere by midnight. Mrs Gallacher says she stipulated an eleven p.m. curfew and she seems to have stuck to it. Our victim had a delivery driver fetch his supermarket supper. I doubt it’s worth tracing them. There’s also footage of the DJ being

bundled out at ten twenty – I've added a few stills. But if you turn to the last page…'

They did so, and found four grainy photographs of the reception area.

'A short time after,' Ames said. 'Deceased is back behind his desk after the altercation, still a bit twitchy, when a young woman arrives. Seems to have her own fob. Quick chat with Dwayne and then she's off again.'

'Interesting body language,' Lorimer commented.

Gish could only agree. The girl – maybe mid teens? – was pressing her upper body against the countertop, leaning over as far as she could towards the seated Dwayne Hogarth, who didn't look put out in the least.

'The video footage is available for anyone who wants a closer look,' Ames said. 'No audio, sadly…'

'Heading to the party but changed her mind?' Timpson offered.

'Our friend from Mozambique?' Lorimer added. Milton gave him a hard stare.

'I'm going to assume Maita Macheso isn't a fifteen-year-old white girl with blonde hair.'

Gish pointed at Milton. 'That's how he made it all the way to DI,' she told Lorimer, whose neck was reddening. Gish lifted her phone and took a picture of the clearest of the photos, focusing on the face, then tapped a message to Allan Franklyn – *Any ideas?* – and sent it.

The chief had returned from his adjacent office, sleeves rolled back down and jacket on. 'I'm due to give an update to the bosses, so if anyone has cracked the case, this would be the ideal time to share.' He looked around at each face. 'No? Thought not. Well, wish me luck.' He turned to go, but then remembered something and locked eyes with Milton. 'Mikey Tan has been in touch. He's ready to talk, but it needs to be at his home.' He handed over the address.

'Why?'

'Christ knows, but he's another UHNW the government would rather we didn't upset. So here's hoping he doesn't break down and confess.'

The group watched him leave. Gish saw the puzzled look on Timpson's face.

'It means ultra high net worth.'

'Something none of us will ever have to worry about,' Milton commented, checking the address and gesturing for Gish to follow him.

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12

Mikey Tan had a personal assistant called Tabitha, who looked like she had just stepped out of Cheltenham Ladies' College and who served them 'Second Flush' Assam tea in bone-china cups. Tan's home was in a narrow mews behind Park Lane. The buildings would at one time have provided stabling and garaging for the grander residences in the vicinity. At first Gish had thought it moderate in scale, but they were led through corridor after corridor as through a maze and she realised Tan or some previous owner had knocked several properties together as well as adding an extension to the rear.

'It's a bloody antique shop,' Milton commented as they waited for Tan in what Tabitha had called the morning room. Chintz and flower patterns predominated, and the various occasional tables and footstools looked fragile.

Tan, when he arrived, pronounced himself satisfied that tea had preceded him. He was around forty, dressed in a tweed three-piece suit, a silk cravat tucked into the neck of his pale blue shirt. The waistcoat boasted a watch chain, presumably with the watch itself hidden in the pocket. There were polished oxblood brogues on his feet, topped off with pink socks He had a face that probably wouldn't age for a while yet, and slick black hair, freshly barbered. A waft of soap followed him into the room. Gish wondered how long he had spent in front of the mirror preparing to make his entrance.

'Sorry to drag you away from your croquet match,' Milton drawled.

Tan beamed a smile. 'The famously droll humour of the native-born Englishman.'

Tabitha put her head around the door to check if he wanted anything.

'Just sparkling water, please.'

She had a glass ready in her hand, topped with slices of lemon and lime.

‘She knows me too well,’ Tan told the detectives, taking the drink and watching her leave. He hoped the tea was to their satisfaction. ‘The British drink so much of it, yet it’s intolerably hard to find a well-brewed example. Thank you for taking the trouble to come and see me. I’m never fully at ease in public buildings.’

‘Sign of a guilty conscience?’ Gish pretended to guess.

‘Too many germs,’ Tan explained.

‘You’ve obviously made a bit of cash, Mr Tan,’ Milton interrupted. ‘Mind telling us how that happened?’

Tan seemed put out only for a moment. He placed his drink on the table, making sure he was satisfied with its positioning. ‘I inherited a respectable amount, which I put to good use starting a financial services company in Hong Kong. London was not the only city to benefit from the Big Bang. I moved here when things began to be less comfortable politically and got lucky with some fintech innovations.’ He gave a shrug, then thought of something. ‘I did wonder whether I required legal representation for today’s meeting…’

‘We’re just gathering information, Mr Tan,’ Milton assured him. ‘Is Michael a typical boy’s name in Hong Kong?’

‘My parents were Anglophiles – as am I.’

‘What’s your favourite thing about the country? Maybe our TV and film industries?’

Tan gave a brief smile. ‘You’ve been talking to Jessica.’

‘And you’re aware of what happened last night?’

‘Dwayne’s unfortunate demise, yes.’

‘You were on first-name terms with him?’

‘We all were.’

‘Yet you don’t seem particularly affected by his death,’ Gish interrupted.

Tan pondered this. ‘I’m not in the least affected.’ He made a show of examining his fingernails. ‘He was a security guard and London is a dangerous city. I would expect the police to appreciate that more than anyone.’

‘You were at Maeve Gallacher’s party, weren’t you?’

‘I thought it polite to make an appearance.’

‘Not your usual scene?’

He looked at Gish as though seeing her for the first time. ‘No,’ he

confirmed. ‘Too noisy and boorish, to be frank – people getting sloppy after imbibing too much.’

‘Despite which you arrived with some extra booze.’

Tan’s back stiffened. ‘Krug 1990 is hardly “booze”.’

‘Were you there at the time of the incident?’ Milton asked, pretending not to know the answer already – the security footage had shown Tan leaving the party at half past nine.

‘I left well before Dwayne met his unfortunate demise.’

‘I meant the other incident – two of the guests taking against the DJ and throwing him out.’

‘This is news to me.’

Milton glanced in Gish’s direction, letting her know it was time.

‘The thing is, Mr Tan,’ she began, ‘we think that whoever killed Dwayne Hogarth did so while trying to gain access to Jessica Forrester’s flat.’

‘Suite,’ he corrected her, reaching for his glass.

‘And since there’s been a falling-out between the pair of you…’

‘Hardly a falling-out.’ Tan couldn’t stop himself beginning to look flustered. His glass remained on the table, his hands instead gripping the arms of his ornate chair. ‘A simple recalibration of our lease arrangement.’

‘A lease you fixed at a very low rate in an attempt to woo her into a relationship, despite which she started spending time with Zafk.’

‘That’s ridiculous.’

‘Others we’ve spoken to don’t think so.’

‘Well, they’re completely mistaken…’ He broke off. ‘Is this Lev Godunov?’

‘What makes you say that?’

‘The man’s a simple thug – and he knows that I know it. Anyone who made their fortune post-glasnost is one step up from a street hooligan. Tell me I’m wrong.’

‘We would do, but we’re having trouble finding Mr Godunov.’

‘Whereas here I am, baring my soul to you – is that the action of a common criminal?’

‘When was the last time you saw Dwayne?’ Milton asked.

‘I’ve really no idea. He worked nights and I would normally visit the Heights during business hours.’

‘When you left the party, did you see anyone in the vicinity?’

‘The usual paparazzi and lowlifes outside; one or two of Zafk’s fans who should have been in the parental home.’ Tan broke off at the sound of soft tapping on the door. Tabitha’s head appeared.

‘Your Boston call is in fifteen minutes,’ she reminded him.

‘I’m quite aware, thank you, Tabitha.’ The assistant disappeared again and Tan turned his attention back to the detectives. ‘I wish I could help, really I do, but…’ He made as if to rise to his feet, meeting over. Gish and Milton stayed where they were.

‘You also own the flat next to Ms Forrester’s,’ Milton stated.

Tan made to correct him, but thought better of it. ‘I do,’ he conceded.

‘You don’t rent it out, though, meaning you don’t really need the money – yet here you are hiking the price to Ms Forrester and there she is threatening to set her fans on you. I’d say there’d have to be a *little* friction in the relationship, no?’

‘Maybe so,’ Tan conceded. ‘But I don’t dislike her – how could anyone dislike her?’

‘She wasn’t invited to the party, though – practically the only resident to be snubbed in that way.’

‘Ah, yes, that’s true. Maeve has never quite got on with her.’

‘Why do you think that is?’

‘I couldn’t possibly say.’

‘Any views on the other residents, Mr Tan?’

‘I really don’t visit the building that often.’

‘Not even to press your ear against the adjoining wall of the two flats?’ Gish asked.

‘That comment is beneath you,’ Tan answered coolly.

‘You have fobs, though, right?’

‘Not to Jessica’s apartment.’ He thought for a moment. ‘I’m not the vindictive type, you know, but I am a businessman, and I realised I was missing out on a lot of rent from the Heights.’

‘When she threatened you with her minions, that didn’t upset you?’

‘A prime example of pitchfork diplomacy. But I have no social media presence – virtual pitchforks can’t hurt me.’

Gish’s phone vibrated and she took it out. Allan Franklyn had got back to her.

Can’t be 100% but looks a lot like Lu.

She tapped a brief reply: *Lu?* Milton's eyes were on her, wondering if they were done with Tan. She gave a slight tilt of the head.

'Well, we'll let you get to your phone call,' he said, pushing himself upright. 'Not thinking of leaving the country, are you?'

'Is there any reason why I shouldn't?'

'We might need to speak to you again – in a more formal setting. Don't worry, you can always bring some antiseptic wipes with you. Thanks for the tea, though to be honest, I prefer Typhoo…'

'I thought it was tasty actually,' Gish said once they were back on the street. Rain was threatening, Milton turning his collar up and tucking in his chin.

'Me too,' he admitted, 'but I wasn't going to tell the pompous little git that. What was the message?'

'From Allan Franklyn,' Gish explained as her phone buzzed again. 'And here's the follow-up.' She turned the screen towards Milton.

Lucinda. Toby Scully's daughter.

'Back to the Heights?' she asked.

'Back to the Heights,' he agreed.

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The crime-scene tape was still in place, the reporters gathered alongside calling out to Milton and Gish as they stooped to pass beneath it.

‘Jack! Gillian! Spare us a word?’

‘Stardom at last,’ Milton said. ‘We’ll have our own reality show next.’ Gish’s attention, however, had been drawn to a lone man standing at a distance from the melee, two placards propped up on the pavement either side of his legs.

‘What’s that about?’ she asked Milton, who just shrugged.

A different officer from previously let them in through the door. The glass was still covered, giving the interior a suitable feeling of gloom. The area behind the desk where Dwayne Hogarth’s body had lain had now been covered with a discreet Persian runner. Evidence of blood and fingerprint powder had been cleared away. The desk itself, however, was not in use. What looked like a decorator’s folding table had been set up next to the sofa and cactus, the two daytime concierges seated behind it. An extension cable meant they still had landline telephones and another cable allowed them a single CCTV screen. A path from the door to the lifts had been marked out in tape. The concierges were obviously under instructions to behave as normal, smiles fixed in place as the detectives approached. But those smiles melted as Milton held out his ID.

‘We’re here to see Toby Scully,’ he announced.

‘I don’t think there’s anyone home,’ the older concierge said, checking with his colleague, who nodded his agreement.

‘How about his daughter?’ Gish added.

‘Lu? She lives with her mum.’

‘A regular visitor, though?’

‘Fairly regular,’ the man agreed.

‘Anyone else from our team here?’

‘Been and gone.’ He lifted his hands, palms out. ‘Took our prints and a DNA swab. Can’t say I’m too happy about that.’

‘Your colleague’s been killed,’ Milton reminded him. ‘I’d have thought you’d want to cooperate.’

‘All goes into the computers, though, doesn’t it? Meaning anyone can get their mitts on it.’

‘Our protocols are pretty good,’ Gish tried to reassure him, but the man didn’t look impressed.

‘So who *is* here today, as far as you know?’ Milton enquired. ‘I don’t suppose Mr Godunov is at home?’

‘Haven’t seen him.’

‘Ms Macheso?’

‘Still away on her travels.’

‘Mrs Gallacher’s always here,’ his colleague added. ‘And Mr Macneal’s here as far as I know.’

‘He’s the architect?’ Milton checked. ‘Maybe we’ll start with him, then.’

‘You don’t seriously think one of the residents…’

‘We’re keeping an open mind. Were you able to tell the officers anything useful?’

‘We hardly knew Dwayne, to be honest. Five-minute changeovers. At the end of a shift, you’re keen to be elsewhere.’

‘Felt sorry for him, actually,’ the younger concierge added. ‘Night shift’s a long stretch when you’re working solo.’

‘He sometimes had company, though,’ Gish added.

‘Didn’t know about that till we heard it on the news.’

‘Might explain why he didn’t seem too bothered when Laurence was let go,’ the older man muttered.

‘Yeah, that was harsh – we keep thinking it’ll be one of us next. Funny how austerity never seems to creep upwards.’ The younger concierge angled his head towards the ceiling. ‘Should we call Mr Macneal, tell him you’re here?’

‘Just his flat number,’ Milton said.

‘*Suite* number,’ the man corrected him, before reciting the details.

Lorn Macneal wasn't alone. When he ushered them in, Gish recognised Roddy Collins, seated on an elongated sofa, hands squeezed together as though interrupted at prayer. He wore a baggy T-shirt, denims, and blue running shoes that looked freshly unboxed. Gish introduced him to Milton.

'Remember me, sir?' she asked him. 'You took shelter in my car.'

'Needed valeting,' he commented.

'You or the Yaris, sir?'

'Sorry to interrupt your meeting,' Milton told the two men.

'Not really a meeting,' Macneal answered. 'We were just comparing dabs.' He held up his fingers to indicate that he too had been fingerprinted. Collins, meantime, was checking the time on his phone.

'I'd better be going,' he said, getting to his feet. 'Need to watch the film.'

'Film?' Milton echoed.

'Concert footage of Zafk. Netflix are interested.' Collins looked at Macneal. 'I can wait for you if you're not going to be long?'

'I'll see it another time, Roddy.'

'We'll probably have a few questions for you later on,' Gish advised Collins.

'*More* questions, you mean,' Collins corrected her, letting her know the team had been busy. 'I'll see you later, Lorn.' The two men shook hands and Macneal showed him to the door, giving Gish a chance to study the room. It was more meanly proportioned than any she'd been in, and there was no balcony. Not that it faced the park in any case. The walls were bare and the furniture looked flat-pack. Macneal saw her looking.

'This is more of a pied-à-terre than anything else,' he explained. 'My family home's in Scotland.'

'Explains the accent,' Milton said. 'Okay if we sit down?'

'Of course.'

All three sat, the detectives waving away the offer of coffee or tea. Macneal looked to be in his sixties and in very good shape, with thick reddish-gold hair and bushy eyebrows.

'Allan did me a deal,' he continued to explain. 'He thought it would be a good advert for the Heights if its chief architect lived on site.'

'And was it?' Macneal blinked a few times at Gish's question. 'It's just, we hear there are units that have been unsold since day one and others

already up for resale.’

‘Clever money’s moving out of London,’ the architect said with a shrug. ‘Oligarchs prefer to keep their assets mobile. Hence all those superyachts clogging up the ritzier Mediterranean ports.’

‘You designed the building, sir, but did you have any say in the security?’ Milton asked.

‘Only to object to it – the cost-cutting started early on. A fairly basic CCTV set-up, and as for the fobs…’

‘What about them?’

‘They’re hardly state-of-the-art. I suggested an iris-scanning system, but Allan wasn’t having it. The original plans also had a secondary entrance – another set of doors you had to go through before you reached the lifts. That got knocked back, too.’

‘What was here before the Heights?’ Gish wanted to know.

‘A community centre – underused and underfunded. Give Allan his due, he negotiated night and day to win approval.’

‘I’ve been doing some reading on the super-prime market,’ Gish said. ‘There’s usually an element of social housing attached to the agreement.’

Macneal gave her an appraising look. ‘Quite correct. The original plans did include some “affordable” units. I can’t say I was keen.’

‘Why not?’

‘The stigma attached – there was going to be what’s called a “poor door”. You know what that is?’

‘I can guess.’

‘So the wealthier owners need never rub shoulders with the less fortunate. Anyway, Allan came up with a different solution – build a number of affordable homes on a site in Edmonton.’

‘And did you design those?’

‘They didn’t really require any design.’ He gave a sigh, taking in his surroundings. ‘The apartments here were sold as shells, each crafted to the buyer’s individual requirements.’

‘Your own requirements seem to have been minimal,’ Milton commented. Macneal rewarded him with a thin smile.

‘Some of them are more minimal still – never lived in and probably never will be.’ He swept an arm through the air. ‘Functional living area, one small bedroom, shower room with no bath. Designed for owners who might

at best spend a few weeks here over the summer, when it gets uncomfortably hot in the Middle East or wherever. Nice central location and a safe space for the Range Rover; maybe a place the offspring can use when they visit London for shopping and parties.'

'Is the Heights 2 your design, too?'

Macneal shook his head. 'My firm's too busy with other projects.'

'We hear it's going to be bigger and better,' Gish commented.

'The brochure will certainly say so.'

'I have to admit, I'm not sure how you can get bigger than an Olympic-size pool.'

The architect smiled. 'Do you know how big an Olympic pool is?' He watched her shrug. 'No, and nor does anyone else – that's the whole point. And as for the mooted orangery – probably half a dozen potted trees inside something resembling your grandad's greenhouse.'

Gish stared at him. 'Was your firm really too busy to pitch, Mr Macneal?'

'No comment.'

'Do you mind me asking what keeps you here?'

'It's my baby,' he said quietly, meeting her eyes. 'I'm proud of what we achieved here. And now I'm afraid I'll for ever be linked to last night's tragedy. Linked *and* tarnished.'

'I'd say living cheek by jowl with a gangster might already have rubbed off a bit of gloss,' Milton stated.

'Maeve Gallacher is not a gangster.'

'Her husband is, though.' Milton leaned forward, elbows on knees. 'How much do you know about the financing of the Heights, Mr Macneal?'

'Next to nothing.'

'Russian money? Gangster money? *Laundered* money?'

'I just drew up the plans, made sure it was workable and sustainable.'

'And did the costings, too, yes?' Milton watched the architect shrug. 'How was the party, by the way? You were there when the DJ got dragged out?'

'I wouldn't say he was "dragged" out.'

'Bit ugly, though – for a party, I mean. You didn't go on anywhere afterwards?'

'I was tired.'

‘Straight to bed, then? So the last time you saw Dwayne would have been…?’

‘I told your colleagues this. I got home from a meeting at half past five. Dwayne hadn’t started his shift. So it was probably the evening before last.’ Macneal’s face lost a little of its animation. ‘I liked him a lot.’

‘Can you think of anyone who didn’t?’

The architect shook his head. ‘Just find them, please – my building needs you.’

‘Mr Franklyn said much the same thing,’ Gish added.

Macneal shrugged again, then checked his watch. ‘Maybe I will go see the film, if we’re done here?’

‘Which cinema?’ Milton asked.

‘The one right here. Seats twenty. Problem is, the seats are so comfortable I keep falling asleep.’

‘Probably not the reaction Mr Collins is looking for,’ Gish commented.

‘Probably not,’ Macneal agreed with a thin smile.

‘Is Lu a fan? Of Zafk’s music, I mean?’

‘You mean Toby’s Lu? I’ve really no idea. I suppose she’s the right age.’

‘How about the fans who gather outside? Do they ever find a way in?’

‘Not that I’ve heard.’ Macneal thought for a moment. ‘You don’t think they could have tried last night? Ended up attacking Dwayne?’

Gish fixed the man with a look, then offered a shrug of her own.

‘Thanks for your time,’ Milton said. ‘We’ll let you get to your film.’

‘It pays to keep in with Roddy,’ Macneal said. ‘VIP passes and suchlike. Keeps my family happy.’

‘Best stay awake then and not upset the golden goose,’ Gish commented, following Milton to the door.

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‘He’s clearly attached to the place,’ Gish commented as they took the lift to Maeve Gallacher’s floor. ‘Not sure he’s much of a fan of its developer, though.’ Milton just nodded, checking his phone for messages.

‘You’re copied in on this,’ he told her. ‘Dwayne’s phone is spilling its guts. Texts and Instagram posts… contacts…’ He scrolled through the email. ‘Had a Snapchat account, too.’

‘Where everything self-destructs after a short time,’ Gish stated, her eyes on her own phone.

‘So now we have to talk to each and every contact. That’s going to keep someone busy.’

‘Any sign of Richard Hollister?’

‘Invited to Mustique by an acquaintance. His lawyer’s the only one doing any talking. Says his client is currently “off grid”.’

‘Doesn’t sound likely. Reckon he has something he doesn’t want to tell us?’

‘You’ve seen the footage – he didn’t touch Dwayne. Lawyer’s happy for us to watch the recordings from the club, so there’s obviously nothing there to worry either of them.’

They pressed Maeve Gallacher’s bell, Milton standing in front of the camera with an exaggerated smile on his face.

‘I’d be as well not having a door,’ she said when she opened it. Then, to Milton: ‘And I thought I said I didn’t want to set eyes on you again.’

‘Can’t always get what you want, Maeve.’

‘We really do need a word, though,’ Gish added.

The woman bared her teeth, but then made an exasperated sound and led them inside. The place was spotless, all the party’s detritus removed.

‘Do you do your own cleaning?’ Gish asked.

‘Don’t make me laugh. They had the devil’s own job getting past your sentry, too.’

Gish had wandered over to where Mark Hogarth’s equipment sat. ‘Said we’d get this back to him,’ she explained.

‘Take it and go,’ Maeve growled with a dismissive flick of the wrist as she threw herself back into her favourite chair. The TV was on, showing some countryside documentary.

‘It’s not as simple as that,’ Milton said. ‘Mind turning that off?’

‘TV off!’ Maeve barked. The screen went blank. The detectives placed themselves in front of her chair as she offered a long-drawn-out sigh.

‘The thing is,’ Milton went on, ‘Mark Hogarth has made certain allegations…’

‘I never touched him.’

‘Do you mean Mark or Dwayne?’ Gish asked, earning a fiery look.

‘What did he tell you?’

‘That you’d been pressuring his brother for sex.’

Maeve let out a guffaw. ‘I’ve never needed to twist anyone’s arm for a bit of the other, thank you very much.’ She lifted her vape and sucked on it.

‘Can’t be easy for you, though,’ Milton commented, ‘with Eddie being so far away.’

She stared up at him. ‘Your wife did a runner, didn’t she? Has that turned you into a sex maniac? Some of us are content to wait for the good stuff.’

‘You’re saying you didn’t have a relationship with Dwayne Hogarth?’

‘You’ll doubtless do your digging, so I might as well spare you the trouble. I’ve known Dwayne a long time. Eddie and me sponsor a bunch of youth clubs all around the city. I visited one of them and found Dwayne there. Seemed a good kid, but we all know that isn’t always enough.’

‘You took him under your wing?’ Gish guessed.

‘Well, he was probably a handy age for county lines,’ Milton added coldly.

‘Christ, you’ve got an evil mind.’

‘Did you get him the job here, Mrs Gallacher?’ Gish asked, trying to deflect the fight that seemed about to break out. Maeve eventually nodded.

‘How convenient,’ Milton said, ostensibly under his breath. Maeve made to rise to her feet, but Gish stepped forward, gesturing for her to stay seated.

‘Mark also said that as he was being taken out, he threatened to go to your husband, and you replied that it’s sometimes the messenger who gets shot.’

‘I don’t remember that. If you ask me, it was money he was after – his sort usually are.’

‘I’d think that might be something you’d want to discuss with him. You told us you messaged Dwayne to apologise – you didn’t decide to go downstairs and speak to him face to face?’ Gish watched the woman shake her head. ‘When we arrived at your door last night, you looked like you were expecting to see someone else standing there.’ She paused. ‘Dwayne, yes?’

But Maeve wasn’t about to answer this. ‘Know who really upset Dwayne?’ she countered. ‘That Forrester woman. Wanted him to get her some coke – Christ knows why she couldn’t just ask Roddy Collins, except he’s not exactly her best pal either.’

‘And why’s that?’

‘He reckons no good will come of her getting her claws in Zafk. She’s a decade older than the kid and not much more than tits and teeth. Zafk keeps her in the spotlight, but she hardly chimes with the image Roddy and everyone around him needs Zafk to hang onto.’

‘Did Dwayne come through for her?’ Milton asked.

‘Not as far as I know.’

‘Have you told Eddie what happened last night?’

‘He knows.’

‘He’ll be worried about you – want me to speak to him and put his mind at rest?’

‘Nice try,’ Maeve sneered. She gestured towards Mark Hogarth’s stuff. ‘His backpack’s on the floor. Tell him he can whistle for the other half of the money.’ She drew in a breath. ‘TV on!’ she commanded, the same show reappearing on the screen.

Gish stuffed the notebook computer and Bluetooth speakers into the backpack.

‘Don’t bother keeping me posted with news,’ Maeve said. ‘My sources are probably better than yours.’

Milton turned back towards her. ‘You’d be well advised to stay out of it,’ he warned.

‘Won’t be my finger on the trigger,’ she replied with an ice-cold smile.

In the lift, heading to the ground floor, Gish turned her face to Milton. ‘She *was* sleeping with Dwayne, wasn’t she?’

‘What she was doing, Gillian, was walking through a bloody minefield, dragging the poor sod with her.’

‘Because of what Eddie would do if he found out?’ Gish nodded to herself. ‘Lucky he’s so far away then.’

‘Isn’t it?’ Milton said, so quietly she almost didn’t catch it.

When the doors opened at ground level, they saw a man in full chef’s whites standing in the service lift opposite, facing them from behind a food trolley. His expression remained impassive as the doors slid closed.

‘Where’s he off to?’ Milton asked the concierges.

‘Mrs Gallacher.’

‘And where’s he come *from*?’

‘Hotel further along the street. Two Michelin stars.’

‘Same as did the catering at last night’s party?’

The younger concierge nodded. ‘A lot of the suites, owners decided they didn’t want a kitchen – didn’t see the point when they never cook.’ He lifted his nose and sniffed the air. ‘Smells good, too…’

Outside, the scrum was still there, supplemented by commuters and tourists who had heard the news. But Milton’s attention was elsewhere – a dark-coloured saloon, parked kerbside. A man emerged from the passenger seat, leaving the door open, one hand resting against the car roof. He was looking straight at them.

‘Hmm,’ Milton said as he started walking towards the man, Gish veering off so she could check something: same licence plate as the car the DVLA couldn’t identify. The man stretched his arms out at Milton’s approach.

‘Jack,’ he said. ‘You don’t look a century older.’

‘Hello, Oliver.’

‘Your office or mine?’

‘Mine doesn’t include wheels.’

‘Get in quick, then, before the paps come running.’ He opened the rear doors. Milton got in and slid across, making room for Gish. She hesitated, but the man called Oliver offered a benign-seeming smile. Once she was in,

he jumped back into the front passenger seat and they set off. The driver was a scrawny, twitchy individual in a leather blouson who kept checking the mirrors as he pulled into the stream of traffic.

‘Gillian,’ Milton said, ‘meet DS Oliver Carlyle.’

‘DI these days, Jack,’ Carlyle purred. He had the smooth look of a car salesman, well dressed and urbane. He was probably Gish’s age. She ran with his name but came up with nothing.

‘Still with the NCA?’ Milton asked, giving a meaningful glance in Gish’s direction. She responded with a nod of understanding: National Crime Agency.

‘You were watching the Heights last night,’ Gish told Carlyle.

‘Not me personally, but yes.’

‘And you stayed until the party was winding down – meaning you were there because of it.’

Carlyle made eye contact with Milton. ‘You’ve got a good one here, Jack.’

‘DS Gish is more than a match for you and me, Oliver.’

Carlyle turned his focus on her. ‘It’s Gillian, right? We knew you’d probably spot the car. Didn’t take you long, either. DVLA flagged up your interest, at which point we could have run silent and deep…’

‘Instead of which you came up for air,’ Milton agreed.

‘Well, when I heard you were attached to the case, Jack – old allies and all that.’

‘Oliver and I worked together for a spell,’ Milton explained to Gish. ‘Long time ago now.’

‘You’re NCA,’ Gish told Carlyle. ‘That means organised crime.’

‘Indeed it does.’

‘So you’re watching the Heights because of Maeve Gallacher?’

‘Mostly, yes.’

‘Mostly?’

‘Might be other crooks in there – dark money going in one door and coming out the other all freshly laundered.’

‘Anyone in particular?’

‘I’m not choosy.’

‘Lev Godunov?’

‘Lev’s pretty much untouchable.’

‘How so?’

‘He just is.’

‘I’d love it if you were going after Toby Scully,’ Gish commented.

‘We might get to him eventually – lot of undeserving people trousered far too much of the nation’s cash during COVID.’

Now that they were clear of the Heights, the driver had calmed down, keeping the speed slow and steady.

‘Ray Stanton?’ Milton hazarded. ‘You saw him go for the concierge?’

‘My crew did, yes.’

‘You could have lifted him then and there.’ He broke off. ‘But then he’d have known you were watching.’ He nodded to himself.

‘It’s Eddie Gallacher, isn’t it?’ Gish piped up. ‘You think he’s in England?’

‘We *know* he is, Gillian. But we’d rather he didn’t get wind of that.’

Milton was still nodding. ‘Pity you didn’t stick around. You could have ended up solving a murder.’

‘You think you can put Stanton in the frame?’

He considered this. ‘Probably not.’

‘Having heard his side of the story?’

‘You were outside the pub this morning? Well, of course you were.’

‘It would be nice to put Stanton away, no argument there, but you and I know there’s a bigger prize just sitting there.’

Milton angled his body towards Gish. ‘Me and Oliver were part of a team who spent months drilling down into Eddie Gallacher’s gang. We knew who his men were, where the money was and how they were making it.’

‘Still didn’t get him into a courtroom,’ Carlyle said ruefully.

‘So what makes you think you’ll succeed this time?’ Gish asked.

‘The taxman had a lot of questions about unexplained wealth, questions we knew Eddie wouldn’t have answers for. He only got away with it by fleeing the country. Word is, he’s back on home turf. He’s not visited the Heights yet, but he’s almost bound to.’

‘You thought maybe the party?’

‘Didn’t pan out.’

‘We might have something for you,’ Milton drawled. Gish gave him a warning look, but he ignored her.

‘I’m all ears, Jack.’

‘The victim, Dwayne Hogarth, could have been involved with Maeve.’

Carlyle sucked this in as it if it were oxygen. Even the driver glanced in his direction, knowing immediately that something important was happening.

‘If word of that ever got back to Eddie…’ Carlyle mused.

‘Who’d have the balls to break it to him, though?’

‘I’ll have to give that some thought. You happy to work with us on this, Jack?’

‘We’re sort of busy on a murder inquiry,’ Gish stressed. ‘That’s our number one priority. We can’t have anything else getting in the way.’

‘She’s a live one all right,’ Carlyle told Milton with a chuckle. Gish leaned forward and punched him hard on the shoulder.

‘You talk to *me*, not *him*!’

‘Jesus wept!’ Carlyle rubbed at the spot where her punch had landed.

‘That’s assault,’ the driver said, grinning and showing a line of small rounded teeth.

‘She’s on the money, though,’ Milton said. ‘Our focus has to remain Dwayne Hogarth’s murder. Maeve tells us she met him at a youth club, decided to become his guardian angel soon after.’

‘We can check that for you,’ Carlyle offered, hand still massaging his shoulder. ‘See if the kid played any other role in the organisation.’

‘Unlikely he’d have ended up a security guard if so.’

‘Except it kept him nice and close to Madam Gallacher – maybe she had other and bigger plans for him.’

Gish noticed that they had done a circuit and were nearing the Heights again.

‘We can drop you here or take you to base,’ Carlyle offered.

‘Base is fine,’ Milton said.

‘Actually,’ Gish interrupted, ‘I’ll get out here. Couple of things to do. Sure you won’t come with me, Jack?’ She watched him make up his mind and start shaking his head.

‘I can take Mark’s backpack,’ he offered.

‘Okay,’ she said, drawing the word out, her eyes fixed on him. She could almost see the figure of Eddie Gallacher filling his vision, erasing all else. There was an app on his phone ticking down the days until the job was done

with him. And now here he was, faced once more with the one who'd slipped his net…

The car was pulling to a stop, the driver's eyes busy on the mirrors again.

'Nice to meet you, Gillian,' Carlyle said. 'I'll send you a photo of the bruise.'

She had barely closed the door when the car sped back into the flow of traffic, ignoring the horns behind it. Carlyle had twisted his body so that he was face to face with Jack Milton. He seemed to be offering him his hand.

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Gish walked in the direction of the waiting journalists and photographers, some of them looking like hobbyists.

‘Anything for us, Gillian?’ one veteran asked, holding his phone towards her, primed to record.

‘It’s you who can give me something,’ she said. ‘Footage from yesterday – video, stills, recollections.’

‘Yeah, your boss said the same thing at the press conference. I’ll ask you what I’d have asked him if he’d stuck around – what’s in it for us?’

‘Have you spoken with Zafk?’ a young Asian woman asked. Her jacket lapels were festooned with badges showing the singer’s face.

‘We’re talking to everybody who lives here and everyone who passed through its doors yesterday.’

‘What’s he like?’ the young woman persisted, videoing herself before turning her camera towards Gish. The journalist shook his head in exasperation, letting Gish know the fan was strictly amateur hour.

‘Did Zafk spend the night with Jessica Forrester?’ a man in a brown suede jacket asked.

Gish ignored him. ‘I’m serious about the footage – we need every scrap of it.’ She glanced in the direction of the man across the street with the placards. ‘Any of you know who he is?’

‘That’s Lewis,’ the suede jacket answered. ‘He’s here most days, weather permitting. Clocks off around five, though – just like a regular job.’

‘Lucky beggar,’ someone complained light-heartedly, eliciting a few tired smiles.

‘None of you stayed past midnight,’ Gish commented. ‘Do you think whoever attacked the concierge could have been waiting for you to leave?’

‘Didn’t notice anyone.’

‘Other than the car you just stepped out of,’ suede jacket said, fixing her with a look that told her he had an idea who the car belonged to. She studied him for a moment. Early thirties, clean-shaven, wavy brown hair, and blue eyes that he probably used to his advantage. She knew a few journalists’ faces, but not his.

‘Park’s not well lit at night,’ a photographer added. ‘Easy enough to hide in the shadows.’

‘You’d know all about that, Gaz,’ the veteran teased. ‘Number of shots you’ve taken through unguarded windows.’

‘Not much chance of that here,’ the photographer complained. ‘Bloody blackout glass.’

‘You were here when Mark Hogarth was ejected from the party?’ Gish pressed on.

‘Some of us.’

‘I saw the photos online.’

‘Guilty as charged,’ the photographer said.

‘We tried getting a quote from Mark, but he wasn’t having it, and the look on his face, we weren’t going to push.’

‘After things calmed down, Dwayne just went back to work?’ There were a few nods.

‘You reckon Stanton came back and finished the job?’ suede jacket probed. ‘Has the preacher’s daughter returned from her jaunt yet?’

‘You seem to know a lot about the place.’

The journalist shrugged. ‘Enough stories in there to keep us fed and watered all year.’

‘Speak for yourself,’ the veteran muttered. ‘The way word rates have fallen, I might as well call myself a volunteer.’

‘When is Zafk’s movie coming out?’ the Asian woman asked excitedly. ‘Tell him his fans are waiting. Maybe he’ll speak to me if I give you my number…’

But Gish was already walking away. When there was a break in the traffic, she crossed the road, almost at a jog. The protester watched her the whole way.

‘Timing on those lights is shocking,’ he said when she got near. ‘Motors have always taken precedence.’

His placards were sheets of cardboard torn from packing boxes. They

were written on in thick black marker pen.

PEOPLE BEFORE PROFIT

YOUR MANSIONS KILL OUR HOPES

COMMUNITY OVER CASH

GIVE US BACK OUR CITY

‘Lewis, right?’ Gish said with what she hoped would pass for an unthreatening smile.

‘Lewis Schofield at your service, Officer.’

‘So you know who I am?’

He gave a small bow of acknowledgement. His hair was straggly, needing both a trim and a wash, and a few days’ worth of grey stubble had taken up residence on his cheeks and chin. She placed him in his late fifties. His clothes were shabby but a cut above the bargain bin, and his shoes were scuffed, with laces that didn’t quite match.

Gish looked back across the road. ‘They say you’re here most days.’

‘Honouring my mother,’ he said. He had a local accent but with the edges smoothed off.

‘Your mother?’

‘She spent the best part of her life there, doing what she could to help people.’ He was gesturing towards the Heights.

‘You mean the community centre?’ Gish deduced.

‘Razed to the ground and the community along with it.’

‘Is your mother still with us, Mr Schofield?’

‘Died of a broken heart – all because of that.’ He threw a baleful look in the building’s direction.

‘Do you still live nearby?’

‘Couple of miles to the west. Part of the Peabody Trust – you know who they are?’

‘Affordable rents?’ she said, eliciting a nod.

‘There are still a few of us left, you know – real people, I mean. The community centre was the beating heart of it. Library, Citizens Advice, sports hall, meeting rooms…’

‘What did your mother do?’

‘Worked in the kitchen. Got to know everyone and heard every story. I’d go there after school to help out. Lost my job in my forties and became a regular. Kept telling Mum to put her feet up, but she wouldn’t hear of it. A

born grafter she was – not many of them about these days.' He paused, shifting his feet. Gish noticed that one placard was propped up against a Thermos flask, another a Tesco bag filled with what she took to be sandwiches and snacks.

'You've been coming here since the Heights was built?'

'Way before that – used to be a couple of dozen of us, protesting about plans to demolish the centre. We were told it was "surplus to requirements" because there was no community left. We couldn't believe what we were hearing – we *were* the bleeding community!'

Gish's attention was distracted momentarily as a sleek car came up the ramp from the parking garage beneath the Heights. Schofield snatched up a placard and waved it from the edge of the pavement as the car waited to merge with the traffic.

'London for Londoners!' he called out.

'Who is it, do you know?' Gish had noticed the press taking an interest, the Asian woman scampering towards the car.

'Roddy Collins and Zafk,' Schofield said. 'That's Collins' Maserati – I think he has a couple of them, one red, one black.'

'You know all the vehicles?'

'Not sure about that.' The car was disappearing, the fan trotting back the way she'd come, her phone facing her as she shared the sighting with whoever might be interested.

'Were you here yesterday?'

'If I'd seen anything, I'd have come forward.'

'Thank you.' Gish paused. 'I know what you mean about community, by the way – I've lived all my life in Tottenham.'

'You've seen some changes then.'

'Not as drastic as other manors, but yes, a few changes. Tell me, do my colleagues ever give you grief?'

'Franklyn's been known to set them on me.' Schofield smiled. 'Means I'm getting to him. He's the bastard I blame, more even than the ones who bought into what he's selling.'

'How about the architect?'

'Only doing his job, wasn't he? But for what?' He stared at the Heights from top to bottom. 'An eighteen-storey bank vault for some of the least scrupulous people you'll ever meet.' He turned his attention back to Gish.

‘There was going to be social housing, you know.’

‘So I’ve been told.’

‘But once Franklyn had planning approval, of course he reneged.’

‘He did build some further north,’ Gish countered. But Schofield wasn’t listening.

‘Council turned the usual blind eye – paper bags stuffed with fifties if you ask me. Not that you’ll find any evidence. I took it to Tom, but he told me the same thing. No chance of proving it.’

‘Tom?’

He nodded across the street. ‘Brown jacket,’ he said. Gish looked, and noticed that the reporter in the suede jacket – Tom – was interested in her conversation. When Schofield gave him a wave, Tom waved back.

‘Which paper does Tom work for?’ Gish asked.

‘Something online,’ Schofield muttered. Then, ‘It’s all bad publicity this, isn’t it? For Franklyn, I mean.’

‘It’s probably not going to lead to a rush of new buyers,’ Gish conceded.

‘That’s a result then.’ He broke off. ‘Not that I’m not sorry about what happened. Of course I am. But every cloud, eh?’ He looked up at the skies. ‘Speaking of which, I reckon we’ve got maybe twenty minutes before the rain comes. Might pack up for the day.’ He studied her again. ‘Best of British luck to you, Officer.’ He gave a mock salute and began to gather his things.

‘Thanks,’ Gish said.

She started to make her way towards Marylebone Road. She had turned a couple of corners, the Heights no longer in sight, when she felt someone at her shoulder. She spun quickly, ready for confrontation, but it was suede jacket. He saw her apprehension and held up his hands in surrender.

‘I come in peace,’ he told her with a grin. ‘I’m Tom, by the way. Tom Simmons.’

‘It’s never wise to sneak up on a police officer, Mr Simmons,’ she said. The pavement was busy, pedestrians looking annoyed as they had to manoeuvre past them. London had to keep moving forward, ever onwards.

‘I don’t think you could call it sneaking, but I needed to be sure the others wouldn’t see us.’

‘You reckon me leaving and you heading off in the same direction a minute later isn’t going to raise their suspicions?’

‘Fair point,’ he acknowledged. ‘But I wanted to talk to you.’

‘What about?’

‘Can I maybe buy you a drink?’ Gish realised they were standing outside a pub.

‘Coffee would be better.’

‘There’s a kiosk in the park. I use it sometimes.’

She checked the time on her phone.

‘You need to be somewhere else?’ he guessed.

‘It’s not that. Just give me a minute.’ She held up a finger, walked a few steps away from him, and made the call, cupping her free hand to her mouth to stop him listening in.

Her mum’s friend Babs answered. ‘Hey, you,’ she said.

‘How’s Mum?’

‘She’s been asking for you.’

‘The shopping worked out okay?’

‘The bright lights of Wood Green worked their magic. She even told me a few stories I hadn’t heard a dozen times before.’

Gish smiled. ‘I should be home in an hour, ninety minutes tops.’

‘We’re fine, honest. Marion’s due to pop in. If anyone can keep your mum entertained, it’s her. And Letitia’s keen to do tomorrow.’

‘Thanks, Babs. Tell Marion I won’t be long.’ Gish ended the call and returned to Tom Simmons.

‘We’re okay for coffee?’ he checked, watching her give a nod. ‘Trust me, it’s the best around – and I should know.’

He smiled at her again with those blue eyes…

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It *was* good, too, Gish admitting as much as she prised the lid off and took her first sip. The park wasn't as full as it got on a sunny afternoon, pedestrians happy to use it as a shortcut on their route home. Plenty of joggers, and a few buggies pushed by nannies rather than parents. The dog-walkers, too, looked like they were being paid by the hour. The clouds had certainly thickened, but that didn't always mean there'd be rain. Gish and Simmons settled on a bench, content to watch the passing parade for a moment. Gish tried to ignore the Heights as it loomed in the near distance.

'So what is it you need to tell me, Tom?' she eventually asked.

He thought for a few seconds before replying. 'You've got Dwayne's phone. I assume you're going through it?'

'Correct.'

'Well, you'll come across my number in his contacts.'

'Will we now?' Gish took a bigger sip, almost scalding the roof of her mouth. 'And why is that?'

'Your colleagues would call him a CI.'

'Confidential informant.' Gish nodded her understanding. 'Helping ensure you always had something that would put food on the table?' It was the journalist's turn to nod, trying his best to look sheepish, though Gish knew it for the act it was. 'He'd be paid in return, of course?'

'I saw him right.'

'This was, what, salacious gossip? Who's stoned, who's tiptoeing out of whose flat in the wee small hours?'

'That sort of thing.'

She stared at him. 'I don't quite buy it.' He met her gaze and held it while she spoke. 'See,' she told him, 'when I was talking to you earlier, it was Maita Macheso you asked about – not an actress or singer or music

mogul. And Lewis Schofield came to you with questions about corruption and whether he could fight it. You're not selling to the gossip columns, Tom.'

'Trust me, I am.'

'Well, if you are, my guess is it's to fund something more serious.'

He moved his eyes away from her, once more taking in the passers-by, the smile widening across his face. 'You're very good,' he commented.

'So Maita then?'

'Maybe a little. Her father – his name's Charles – took his believers for every penny they had, much of it amounting to embezzlement. When the government came knocking, he fled Zimbabwe with Maita. He's been friends a long time with the president of Mozambique. No chance he'll be extradited unless there's a falling-out or regime change.'

'So why is his daughter in London?'

'A very good question – not only here, but determined to have the ubiquitous good time until her dad brought in a bodyguard. That definitely curtailed her activities.'

'And what does this have to do with Dwayne?'

'Probably nothing, but you did ask.' He blew across the surface of his flat white, his eyes drifting in the direction of the Heights. 'Then there's Maeve Gallacher, but she's almost too much of a sitting target. There's not much to see there that you don't already know about.' He saw the look she was giving him. 'Come on,' he said. 'The car that turns up whenever Ray Stanton comes calling, plus detectives doing regular walk-pasts while trying to look like civilians. We sometimes whistle the *Sweeney* theme tune to let them know we know. They're NCA, yes? Don't even bother answering – we both know they are.' He smiled to himself and licked some foam from the rim of his cup.

'Toby Scully?'

'The King of Useless PPE – there's tons of it rotting in a field somewhere on the south coast. Interesting ties to Lord Maugham, Tory minister as was. Rumour is, the ermine elevation was offered in return for his silence. Well, it beats falling from a high window.'

'Silence about what?'

'All the cosy PPE deals, Tories lining their mates' nests.'

'And speaking of high windows…'

‘Ah yes, dear grim-faced Lev Godunov – where’s he got to, eh? Mind you, if you saw the escort he brought to the party…’ He broke off. ‘I’m assuming you *have* looked at the security footage?’

‘Of course.’ Gish wasn’t about to reveal that the hard disk had been tampered with. But yes, she had seen Godunov arrive with the woman, a statuesque blonde who towered over him, helped by three-inch heels. His minders had walked a couple of steps behind, the camera catching them staring at her figure and sharing an appraising look.

‘If they’re still in a bedroom somewhere, good luck to them, I say.’ He glanced in Gish’s direction. ‘They didn’t go to Holli’s, right?’

‘A casino,’ she offered, not seeing any gain from not telling him.

‘Godunov does like a bit of blackjack – been known to place four- and five-figure bets.’

‘You have eyes and ears there, too?’

‘An old college friend. Made his mind up early on that he could make more as a croupier than a teacher. He’s probably not wrong.’

‘So why is Lev Godunov on your radar?’

‘Because he’s a fixer. You know all those high-minded sanctions we put in place after Putin invaded Ukraine? Godunov’s speciality is getting round them. Oligarchs use him as a front when buying property. He’ll set up a shell company somewhere offshore and take it from there. Wherever the money comes from, he can make it look as though seraphim and cherubim minted each and every coin. Plus he arranges investor visas for all sorts of people with deep enough pockets.’

‘So why hasn’t he been sanctioned?’

He wagged a finger in front of her. ‘Excellent question. My best guess is, he’s protected.’

‘Protected how and by who?’

‘By people like your friends at NCA, and by extension MI6. As to why…’ He pondered for a moment. ‘All I know is, if he’s playing both sides, that’s a high-risk game.’

Gish leaned back a little against the bench, her drained cup held in both hands. ‘Roddy Collins?’ she ventured.

‘Has almost certainly ripped off most of the musicians who’ve come within his orbit. Plus he has a habit of being a bit handsy with young talent of both sexes.’

‘Does that extend to Zafk?’

He gave another smile. ‘Dear Zachary had his lawyers and accountants in place long before he signed any contracts. So no, Roddy’s never tried anything – quite the opposite. Zafk’s currently his golden boy, but that too-good-to-be-true image has to be rigorously maintained, which is why Zafk is seldom seen out and about without Collins holding tight to his leash.’ Simmons broke off. ‘As for Mikey Tan, Christ knows. Yes, he has a thing for Jessica Forrester, but so does half the hot-blooded heterosexual population of this great island. He genuinely does seem to be some kind of techie genius. I’ve had financial reporters sit down and try talking me through the ins and outs of fintech and crypto, but after twenty minutes they’re as lost as I am.’ He shrugged and tipped the last of his coffee into his mouth. ‘That’s about the sum of it. You’ve drained me dry.’

‘Will we find messages on Dwayne’s phone between the pair of you?’

‘We used Snapchat mostly. There might be some WhatsApps, I suppose.’

‘How did you pay him?’

‘Online banking, so when you get to his financials, you’ll see I played more than fair.’

‘You witnessed him being assaulted – did you check he was okay?’

‘Sent a Snapchat.’

‘You wanted to know what it was all about?’

‘He wasn’t in the mood to say – I never got a reply.’

‘What time did you leave?’

‘Once the party had broken up, there was no point staying.’

Gish allowed the silence to settle between them. ‘Why leave Allan Franklyn out of that long list of yours?’ she eventually asked. The journalist offered only a shrug. ‘Because if you’re interested in dodgy transactions and opaque overseas money,’ she went on quietly, looking straight ahead, ‘from what I’ve learned so far, the Heights comprises all of that, and who knows what the service staff might pick up – cleaners, chefs, delivery drivers – all of them potentially sharing the goss with the concierge…’

Simmons nodded slowly. ‘It’s true that a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing.’

Gish turned her head and met his unblinking eyes. ‘Why do you think he was killed, Tom?’

‘I know as little as you do, Gillian.’

‘I wonder if that’s true.’

‘I could buy you dinner while you try to find out.’

‘I need to be elsewhere.’

‘Another time maybe?’

She held out her hand for his phone. ‘Let me give you my number.’

‘Nice try,’ he said. ‘I’ll add it myself, if you don’t mind.’

‘Afraid of who I’ll see in your contacts?’ Simmons wasn’t about to answer that, so she recited the digits for him. ‘And thanks for the coffee – or do I have your employers to thank?’

‘You’re thinking of the wrong decade, Gillian. No expense accounts these days. Besides, I’m freelance.’

‘I never thought to ask,’ she said.

Simmons got busy on his phone and Gish’s own device gave a ping. ‘That’s me giving you my number,’ he said. Then, fixing her with a look, ‘One last thing I should mention – Toby Scully might have worked out that I had a connection to Dwayne.’

‘Oh?’

He made a pained expression. ‘Scully was walking to the lifts, chatting to Maugham on his phone. Dwayne passed word along. A few days later, I was trying to ask Scully about his pal and he started fobbing me off, told me they hadn’t spoken in weeks. I said something like “Not even by phone?” The way he looked at me, I could see the cogs turning.’

‘Did you warn Dwayne?’

‘Never quite got the chance.’

‘You mean you didn’t want him to get spooked and maybe stop leaking?’

‘I’m not always proud of myself, Gillian – which of us is?’

Gish checked the time on her phone. ‘I really have to go.’

‘If I’ve not put you off, I’d still like us to have dinner sometime.’

‘I’m not sure that’s such a good idea, Tom.’

‘But you’ll think about it?’ He flashed her a smile, eyes twinkling.

‘I’ll think about it,’ she eventually conceded.

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Lewis Schofield was still there when Simmons got back to the Heights. He looked ready to leave, but Simmons got the feeling he'd been waiting for him.

'All right, Lewis?' he said.

'No complaints, Tom.'

Simmons scanned the skies. 'Rain's not quite here yet.'

Schofield ignored this. 'You done what I asked?'

Simmons offered a shrug. 'Can't find any clauses or codicils that would have prevented the centre being sold, repurposed or demolished.'

'How hard did you look?'

'I looked, Lewis. I promised I would, and I did.'

'My mum was a good friend to your mum back in the day.'

'I know.'

'What about the social housing?'

'Franklyn went through the proper channels. It's all above board.'

'He cheated and got away with it.'

Simmons could only shrug, his eyes everywhere but on the older man.

'What's on your mind, Tom?' Schofield eventually asked.

'It's just… you've usually clocked off by five, but last night…'

'Big party, son, potential for lots of influential people to be coming and going – money people, the sort Allan Franklyn depends on. How could I resist getting up their noses?'

'And did you?'

'Whenever someone came out onto the balcony, I flicked them the Vs.'

Simmons gave the smile he felt was expected.

'Cops got you doing their job for them, Tom? I saw you chasing after that detective.'

Simmons shook his head. ‘This is strictly between you and me, Lewis, but you were still here when me and the others left.’

‘So?’

‘So I’m wondering what you maybe saw.’

‘Hogarth was still breathing when I packed up, if that’s what you’re getting at.’

Simmons’ eyes met Schofield’s. ‘It’s always Hogarth, isn’t it? Never Dwayne. Is that because you got friendly with Laurence and didn’t like it when he was given the heave-ho?’

‘I’m not sure what you’re insinuating, Tom. Laurence is good people, but I’m confident *Dwayne* was, too.’ Schofield paused. ‘Happy now?’ The rain had finally started, fat drops landing on their shoulders. ‘I’d best be off home.’ He nodded in the direction Gish had taken. ‘She’s a cutie, I’ll give you that. But you can’t always trust the lookers, can you?’ Without saying any more, he turned and began walking away, his gait stiff after hours of standing.

Across the street, the few snappers who were left were putting their cameras away. The superfan was holding a small transparent brolly over her head. Simmons wasn’t surprised to see that it had pictures of Zafk on it. He unbuttoned his jacket and held it above him as he started crossing the road, replaying his conversation with Gillian Gish, confident he hadn’t given her anything she wouldn’t have found out by herself, but enough that she would maybe feel beholden. From the way she held herself and spoke, he knew not to underestimate her. Maybe he’d do a bit of digging later. It wouldn’t do any harm to know her better – and not necessarily just as a potential confidential informant.

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18

That evening, while her mum lay in bed, eyes closed but not asleep, humming a theme tune that had been on the TV earlier, Gish sat in a chair, legs tucked beneath her and her computer open, googling Tom Simmons.

Some of what she read was attributed and some had a question mark where the author's name should have been, notes from readers pointing out that the style and tone seemed very like Simmons' other work. There was fluff – and plenty of it – mostly sold to the online gossip columns belonging to the tabloids. But other sites were more investigative, digging beneath the surface in search of corruption, and this seemed to be Simmons' speciality. There were tales of hedge funds, dotcom equity, family trusts, investor migrants and the 2020 Russia Report. Wealthy Russians in exile had a habit of dropping dead while seemingly fit as fleas. Simmons referenced a book called *Londongrad*, and others titled *Moneyland* and *Butler to the World*. She skimmed their synopses, which didn't do anything to improve her mood. Living on the Dowsett Estate, it didn't feel like she was living in a city awash with billions, yet here was the proof.

She thought back to the Heights, knowing there were other edifices like it – some even grander – in the vicinity and beyond, with plenty of plans for more. Franklyn had mentioned that his next development would include a rooftop helipad. She wasn't sure London's airspace would allow for take-offs and landings, but maybe that wasn't the point. Like the Olympic-size swimming pool that wasn't, it was all about the USP. Dwayne, she was coming to realise, had moved with a fair degree of fluency between the two Londons, and maybe had come to harm because of that.

Her mug of tea had grown cold, her mother's sitting untouched on the table next to the bed. Gish picked up her phone and messaged Milton.

How's things?

His reply was almost immediate. *Got Adam here. He brought curry. You?*

Just doing some reading.

Want to talk? Give me half an hour.

She sent a thumbs-up and decided to wait in the kitchen so as not to disturb her mum, cleaning up to pass the time, checking the cupboards and fridge and making a list of what needed buying. Back when she was a kid, she'd often been torn away from a book or magazine by her mum calling up the stairs to her bedroom, requiring her help with the day's routine of washing, tidying, shopping. Then there had been the cooking lessons, and the long lectures about how to behave, how not to get into trouble. Despite which, there had been plenty of skirmishes and near misses in Gish's teenage years, everything from petty theft to a couple of pregnancy scares. She had joined the Met seeing it as an escape route, but that had never quite happened. She liked to tell herself that it was the pull of Tottenham, but really it was her mum. In a parallel universe, she could picture herself playing Lewis Schofield's role, honouring a mother and everything she stood for. Then again, sometimes she had dreams of funerals – never her mother's, though on waking she would know what her subconscious had been up to, and would feel guilty for a few minutes.

She was folding up the tea towel when her phone vibrated. She answered the call, pressing the phone to her ear, keeping her voice low.

'Hey, you,' she said. 'How's Adam?'

'Same as ever,' Jack Milton said. 'Actually, he reminds me more and more of his mum. Speaking of which, how's yours?'

'Today was a pretty good day.'

'I know it's tough when you're in a job like ours. If you need time off, you only have to ask.'

'You saying the crew wouldn't fall apart without me?'

'We'd struggle on as best we could.' Gish realised he sounded energised; she didn't have to guess too hard why. 'So what's this reading you've been doing?'

'The filthy rich with their hand-carved washbasins, solid elm doors and cashmere mattresses.'

'Are they as happy as us, though, Gillian? That's the question.'

'I didn't see you when I got back to Marylebone.'

‘I only popped in to leave Mark’s stuff.’

‘Yes, I saw. And then back downstairs to hang with your old pal Oliver?’

‘As it happens, he did invite me along to Citadel Place.’

‘NCA central,’ Gish commented.

‘Quick tour and then I was on my way home.’ Milton paused. ‘You could have tagged along, you know. Oliver might prove useful to you in future.’ He paused again. ‘What was it you went back to the Heights for anyway?’

‘Trying to convince the journos to hand over their footage. Plus I thought it was worth talking to the protester.’

‘Learn anything useful?’

‘Bits and pieces.’

Milton was silent for a few seconds. ‘Doesn’t do to get too close to the Fourth Estate, Gillian. More often than not, they bite.’

‘One of them was quite chatty, actually.’

‘Not always a good sign – what’s the name?’

‘Tom Simmons.’

‘I don’t think I know him.’

‘He’s freelance, does most of his work online. He was paying Dwayne for information about the Heights.’

‘What kind of information?’ Gish knew she had Milton’s attention. He sounded more alert even than previously.

‘About the residents and their money. Thing is, he reckons Toby Scully might have worked out that Dwayne had been talking.’

‘Did he tell Dwayne that?’

‘No.’

‘So Scully might have had a showdown with Dwayne?’

‘We won’t know till we ask – and we still need a word with Scully’s daughter.’

Milton remained silent for a few more seconds. ‘I won’t lose focus, Gillian, I promise. Catching whoever killed Dwayne remains a priority.’

‘It would be the cherry on top, though, wouldn’t it, nabbing Eddie Gallacher just prior to collecting the gold watch? Not many would blame you for trying.’

‘I get the feeling *you* would, though.’

‘Maybe a bit. I see too many like Dwayne whose lives don’t seem to

matter as much as other people's.'

'That's never been my way, Gillian, all the years I've been doing this job.'

'Then don't start now, Jack, that's all I'm saying.'

'Must be nice for you up there on the moral high ground.' His tone had stiffened. Gish gave a sigh.

'I know how hard you worked to put Gallacher away. I did my research when they paired us up.'

'I did my research, too. The bosses like you, but they don't like the people you learned from.'

'You mean Lenny Crowther?'

'You were young when you worked with him; stands to reason you thought he knew best. History suggests otherwise.'

'Well, Lenny himself is history now.' She broke off. 'Did *you* ever work with him, Jack?'

'Once or twice, and good riddance, I say – no offence.'

'None taken.' She sighed again.

'You sound exhausted.'

'I'm knackered – same as you should be.'

'We both deserve a decent night's sleep.'

'Well, I know for sure one of us will be getting it.'

'I'll see you in the morning, Gillian. Tell your mum I was asking after her.'

'She's keen to meet you, you know.'

'I know. Maybe when we're not so busy, eh?'

'I hope she sticks around that long.'

'From what you've told me, she's built to last. But remember what I said: if you *do* need time away from the desk…'

'Night, gaffer.' She ended the call and tapped her phone against her cheek. *If you do need time away…* Where had that come from? Did he want her out of the way so he could spend time with Oliver Carlyle and the NCA – or was there some other agenda, one she couldn't yet see?

Back in the living room, her mother was asleep. Gish wondered why Jack had brought up Lenny Crowther: maybe warning her not to start straying. Which meant he *did* plan to spend more time with his NCA pals. She considered going upstairs to bed, but settled back into the armchair

instead, wrapping a cardigan around her and dimming the floor lamp. She checked her phone for messages, but Tom Simmons hadn't been in touch.

More often than not, they bite…

Maybe so, but she knew she would see the journalist again. She was remembering his brown suede jacket and the blue of his eyes as she closed her own.

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Three

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19

When Gish arrived at Marylebone Road, the incident room was alive with activity, officers busy on computers or making phone calls. A murder wall had been erected, and was filling up fast. A photo of Dwayne, sourced from his parents, sat top and centre. Contact details for the various witnesses and persons of interest ran down the left-hand side, technical details to the right. A rota had been handed round so that officers could indicate their willingness to do (probably unpaid) overtime.

Footage from the party had been found on various social media sites, most of it sent there by Tara Greaves, Mel Tarrant and Roddy Collins. Tara's even included a few seconds' worth of video showing Ray Stanton before he stuck a hand in front of the camera lens.

'Spoilsport!' she could be heard shouting. More footage showed her dancing with her friend Mel, both women still holding onto their cocktails as they shimmied. Further photos featured the pair flanking Mark Hogarth. He still had his headphones clamped to his head, which didn't stop them planting kisses on him. Friends had left comments beneath the footage:

I would!

Tell me you at least tried!

Snap his arse next time!

Tell Ray to cheer up FFS.

Photos of the DJ taken from further away showed him scowling as he focused on his playlist. Gish could make out two figures behind him, having a huddled conversation: Lev Godunov and Toby Scully. Roddy Collins meantime had snapped a few shots of Zafk, showing him holding up an orange juice and pointing at it. These had garnered tens of thousands of likes and little red hearts. The architect, Lorn Macneal, sat on the sunken sofa alongside a stunning woman Gish took to be either Godunov's date or

Franklyn's. Their conversation looked desultory at best. A further photo showed Zafk and Collins, arms around each other, raising a toast. Beyond them, Gish could make out Maeve Gallacher and Allan Franklyn. They were on the balcony, but turned towards the party rather than the view, like scientists watching a lab experiment from a safe distance. A second photo seemed to have been taken moments later. Gallacher's hands had gone to Franklyn's face and were squeezing the flesh either side of his mouth in what fell far short of a show of affection.

Gish looked elsewhere but couldn't find any other footage of the pair. She glanced across her desk to where Milton was going through the information they'd stripped from Dwayne's phone. He spoke without looking up.

'A snowflake is somebody who's weak or fragile, right?'

'Usually,' Gish replied.

'Any idea why Zafk would call Dwayne a snowflake?'

'What page are you on?'

'Twenty-eight.'

Gish found it. Zafk's text consisted of a single snowflake emoji followed by a question mark and a pair of hands, palms pressed together as if in prayer, to which Dwayne had replied with an angry face and one where the eyes were rolling upwards.

'It can also mean cocaine,' she explained. 'Looks like Zafk wanted Dwayne to get him some.'

'What, our clean-living idol of the bubble-tea masses?'

'Their conversation dries up after that,' Gish said, scrolling forward a page.

'Dwayne selling to the residents?'

'Not judging by his bank account, plus the fact he stayed in his brother's spare room, which wasn't even a bedroom according to our team when they went there – more of a utility space that he shared with the washing machine and boiler. Work suits on hangers but everything else in IKEA bags.'

'Reckon Collins knows his boy is on the hunt for a buzz?'

Gish offered a shrug.

Chief Inspector Jeffries had been prowling the room, for all the world like a teacher checking his pupils' painful progress. He hadn't rolled his

sleeves up yet, but the jacket was off. When he reached the centre, he clapped his hands together to get everyone's attention.

'Okay,' he called out, pivoting as he spoke. 'Let's see where we are, shall we? More interviews scheduled at the Heights.' He gestured towards the murder wall. 'Progress report to our lords and masters by mid afternoon. Still no sign of Ms Macheso or Mr Godunov – I don't want any letting-up there; keep phoning them and check if their friends and associates can help. Same goes for Richard Hollister, though he's provided a written statement via his lawyer stating that he knows the square root of sod all.'

Timpson had a hand held up. 'We've spoken with the chef and the drinks waiter from the party,' he said. 'They were hired from the hotel along the road.'

'Mrs Gallacher wanted them gone sharpish – said they could collect everything the next day,' Lorimer added.

Jeffries gave a nod and moved on. 'So what have we learned from the victim's phone and computer?'

'We've almost finished contacting everyone in his address book,' Emma Amberson said, chewing gum as she spoke. She was wearing yet another of her immaculate business suits, her hair perfect, cheeks glowing. Amberson had shifted gears after her long-term partner walked out. These days when she wasn't at work she was in the gym or out jogging. Her twenty-a-day habit had been switched for gum, and to Gish's eyes, she'd dropped a stone or more in weight. 'Only residents he had a note of,' she went on, 'are Mrs Gallacher, Zafk and Mr Franklyn.'

'Very little traffic between them,' Timpson commented. Milton shared a look with Gish – he wasn't the only one who hadn't picked up on the potential meaning of the snowflake.

'There's someone called Tom S,' Amberson continued. 'Not answering our calls or texts, but we'll keep trying.'

Milton and Gish shared another look. He raised an eyebrow, inviting her to speak up, but she shook her head.

'There's also someone called Lu. Again, we've not reached her yet – if it *is* a her.'

'I can help you there,' Gish said, raising her hand and waggling the pen she was holding. 'It's short for Lucinda. We ID'd her from the CCTV on the night of the party. Allan Franklyn confirmed the name.'

‘So who is she?’ Jeffries asked.

‘Toby Scully’s daughter. Doesn’t live with him but comes for visits.’

‘Age?’

‘We’re not sure yet. Judging by the video, fifteen or sixteen.’

Jeffries frowned. ‘She was at the party?’

Gish shook her head. ‘Only went as far as the front desk.’

‘Do we know why?’

‘We plan to find out.’

‘Please do that, Gillian.’ Jeffries addressed the room again. ‘What else do we have?’

Amberson cleared her throat. ‘Another name, sir. Tara. We rang the number. A woman answered but cut us short when we identified ourselves.’

‘Tara Greaves?’ Gish suggested. ‘She’s Ray Stanton’s girlfriend. What would Dwayne be doing with her mobile number?’

‘Plenty of other Taras in the city, Gillian,’ Amberson said. But Gish wasn’t so sure. She scrolled down her computer screen until she found the entry, then began typing out a text message. Milton had risen from his desk and walked around to hers, watching over her shoulder.

Is this Tara Greaves? My name is Detective Sergeant Gish. I’m part of the Dwayne Hogarth team and we’re wondering how Ray would feel about your details being in Dwayne’s phone. If you’d like to discuss it confidentially, get back to me.

She looked up at Milton, who nodded slowly, so she clicked send and turned her attention to the chief, who was doling out the day’s activities. Her eyes soon drifted back to her computer screen, though. Dwayne and Mark had exchanged plenty of messages over the past few months, despite sharing digs. Most of them revolved around family stuff – parents always keen for a visit; the brothers trying to find excuses to skip a lunch or dinner. The bulk of the texts, however, were between Dwayne and Rosa and spoke of yearnings, assignations and future plans. Once or twice he used an emoji of a car followed by a question mark, and Gish remembered Rosa saying they’d occasionally used an empty flat or a resident’s car for their meetings.

There was no sign of anything amiss in Dwayne’s life. When messaging his male friends, he was all jokey bravado, the emojis piling up. Gish noticed that he used emojis in his contacts list, too. Three hearts alongside Rosa’s name and two little explosions. A microphone next to Zafk plus two

female dancers (for his fan base, maybe?). Nothing at all next to Maeve Gallacher's name. Tara merited no hearts but one explosion, while Lu had earned herself one heart but three explosions – more dynamite than his actual girlfriend but not quite so lovable.

She noticed Jeffries approaching. He rested his knuckles against Milton's desk.

'You'll track down this Lucinda, yes?'

'Thought we'd start with her father – might be a wiser course if she's as young as we think.'

Jeffries nodded his agreement. His gaze shifted from Milton to Gish and back again. 'Neither of you looks in great shape, if you don't mind me saying. You're no good to me if you're not fully in the game.'

'We're not all like Emma,' Gish commented.

'No, you're not.' Jeffries turned his head in Amberson's direction and lowered his voice, almost as if he were talking to himself. 'I just wish she didn't chew that bloody gum all the time…' Then he was off again on his rounds.

'Toby Scully, then,' Milton said.

'And maybe Zafk too?' Gish suggested. She had an incoming text and held up her phone to read it. 'But making a slight detour,' she informed Milton. 'Tara Greaves requests our company at her place of work, but she'll only be there until eleven this morning.'

'Whose turn to drive?'

'You mean NCA haven't placed a driver at your disposal?'

'Don't start,' Milton said, pointing a finger but doing so with the beginnings of a smile.

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Although it was overcast, Jessica Forrester wore her Dior sunglasses. She had tried four different outfits before opting for the one she'd first thought of. Checking in the mirror at the spa, she had noticed that her tan was fading. She needed to do something about that. She would look at holiday options once her PA, Zinni, was back from hers.

Only a couple of the photographers approached her as she left the Heights, walking backwards in front of her, firing off shots. She held her chin up, ignoring questions about Dwayne's death. They were soon done with her, eyes on their camera screens as they retraced their steps, leaving her to take her usual route, past Berkeley Square and across Regent Street into Soho. She carried a small clutch bag containing her phone and a single credit card, plus some essential make-up and a gold ballpoint pen in case autographs were needed, though these days a selfie normally sufficed.

She was waiting to hear back from Allan Franklyn about her fob, had even mooted to him that she might want to move elsewhere. She hadn't been able to relax since the police visit, her suite feeling more like a trap. She kept checking behind doors for whoever could be lurking there. Zafk wasn't much help either, too busy to offer her the comfort she needed. Zinni had texted to say that police officers had interrupted her break, telling her the news. She had added a few words of support but no offer to cut her holiday short. Jessica would remember that.

She was perspiring a little as she reached the café, a waiter bowing and leading her to her preferred spot. Visits here were part of her routine – they knew her, shooed away overexcited fans, gave her the same special table; just public enough but also discreet. No need for her to order – they all knew what she liked. There were a few tourists at the tables nearby, but none of them seemed to recognise her, eyes glued to their phones. She took

her own out: no messages. When her matcha arrived, she nodded her thanks, but the server had seated himself across from her. She looked up into the face of Jason Sievewright.

‘What are you doing here?’ she asked, heart beginning to pound. Sievewright pushed her drink closer to her.

‘Bringing you your precious lavender matcha.’

There were dark rings under his eyes, those stormy eyes that had caught her attention back on *Acting the GOAT*. His hair was still thick and unruly, but his face was becoming jowly, his torso thickening. She remembered him saying on set that he had always modelled himself on Richard Burton. Maybe so, but Burton Mark I and Burton Mark II were very different beasts.

‘You can’t be here, Jason,’ she hissed, looking around to check that help wasn’t far away.

‘I don’t remember any restraining order being issued, Jess.’

‘Don’t think I won’t get one if you’re going to start following me.’

He gave a snort. ‘No one needs to tail you – your life’s right there on Instagram.’ He nodded towards her phone. ‘Morning workout; pre-lunch matcha; photo shoots and evening galas.’ He looked around. ‘No Zinni, though.’

‘She’ll be here soon,’ Jessica improvised.

‘Won’t take me long to say what I have to.’ He squared his shoulders, making sure he had her attention. ‘I just wanted to thank you for setting the Met on me.’

‘That wasn’t my doing.’

‘It was, though.’ He leaned forward, elbows against the table. ‘All because I once had a go at your little popsicle star. You couldn’t wait to land me in it again.’

‘Someone tried to get into my suite, Jason!’

‘Well, it wasn’t me, darling, so don’t flatter yourself. I’ve moved on and it’s like a huge dead weight’s been lifted from me. There’s a TV drama coming up with me in the lead. You won’t believe the talent involved. In fact, you’ll be *seething*.’ He gave a humourless grin. ‘Meantime, I hear work’s drying up for you.’

‘Rubbish – I’m busier than ever.’

Sievewright ignored this. ‘The popsicle will lose interest, too, sooner

rather than later – and then where will you be? You might have to go running to that Chinese guy, ignore the drool dripping from his mouth and lather yourself with his cash.'

'You're disgusting.'

'No, Jess, what I am is *real*. I maybe didn't used to be, but I am now. That's the difference between us.' He began pulling himself to his feet, leaning over her. 'Your face has gone as green as that drink – I'll let you get back to it.' He took a couple of steps, but then paused and turned. 'I suppose you'll go running to the cops again. Make sure you tell them what I said – the precise wording, I mean. No threatening language or behaviour, just a few home truths that you're probably too scared to mull over. Enjoy the rest of your life, Jess. I intend to enjoy mine.'

She watched him leave. The way he walked – with confidence, as though he owned the very air he passed through – maybe it was all for her benefit and maybe it wasn't. Jessica snatched up her phone and googled him, looking for news of the TV project. When she drew a blank, she gave a snort and then took a sip of her drink. He'd been bluffing. But then again… She texted her agent, just to be sure. While she waited, she tried slowing her heart rate, concentrating on the café's ambient music. Her agent's reply arrived after only a few minutes.

Yes, it's big but it's under wraps – how did you hear?!

Jessica let her phone drop to the table. Her waiter wanted to know if anything was wrong.

'The man you allowed to harass me,' she snapped. 'Don't let him in here again, understood?'

The waiter looked nonplussed, but eventually nodded his agreement and retreated. Jessica picked up her phone again and checked her calendar. One meeting about a potential radio advert; one interview discussing her favourite childhood pet for a women's magazine she'd never heard of.

It's big.

She knew she could alert the police, tell them what Jason had done, but she got the feeling that doing so would become another win for him. Instead, she finished her drink, noting with a ripple of sudden pleasure that one of the tourists was attempting a surreptitious photo of her. She put down her glass, beamed a smile and waved the woman over for a proper selfie with a star.

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The shop was called Teez. Gish reckoned it was a play on the first letter of Tara's name. *A Lifestyle of Leisure* was written in flowing script on the window, behind which sat a display of fashion and accessories.

'Who needs a riding crop in Belgravia?' Milton commented, noticing what one of the mannequins was holding. The figure was dressed in jodhpurs and a red jacket with sunglasses and a scarlet beret.

'Mikey Tan, maybe?' Gish suggested, pushing open the door. An old-fashioned bell above it tinkled, Tara Greaves rising from behind a desk that wouldn't have looked out of place in Versailles. Her make-up and hair were identical to the party footage, though her clothes were now monochromely tasteful. Looks-wise, her best years were beginning to be behind her, Gish thought. A few years back she would have stunned suitors at twenty paces.

'Thanks for seeing us,' Gish said, holding up her ID.

'Normally we don't do house calls,' Milton added, 'but I can see you're rushed off your feet.'

'You'll be Milton, then?' Greaves checked.

'Maeve's been in touch?' he surmised.

'She's a mate – told me everyone at the party would get a visit.'

'Is she *your* mate, or more properly your boyfriend's?' Gish checked.

'Ray introduced me to her, but we clicked straight away – same taste in crappy daytime TV and good gin.'

'Plus gangsters, of course,' Milton added.

'So you must've known Dwayne pretty well?' Gish interrupted, while Greaves scowled at Milton.

'Not much of a detective, are you, love? *Daytime*, I said. Dwayne worked nights.'

'So you know that much at least,' Milton commented. 'Is that because

Maeve talked about him? Filled you in on the juicy details?'

'What details?'

He tried for a disappointed look, as though he couldn't believe she'd try lying to him.

'So if you didn't know him well,' Gish asked, 'how did your number end up in his phone?'

'Beats me,' Greaves said with a shrug, retreating behind her desk and sitting down. She opened her MacBook and began playing with the touchpad.

'You'd have seen him when you left the party?' Milton asked.

'We went straight to the garage,' she corrected him. 'Rich had left his car there.' She paused. 'I was with Ray all night. I doubt he was out of my sight for more than two minutes.'

'You've been well coached,' Milton said with a thin smile while pretending to show interest in a shelf of clutch purses and shoulder bags. 'Who by – Maeve or Ray?'

Before Greaves could hit back, Gish offered a question of her own. 'How did you feel when Dwayne's brother was ejected from the party?'

'Guy was up himself – he got what was coming. We only wanted something we could dance to rather than the trance shit he kept playing.'

'We've seen the footage of you and Mel pawing him,' Milton commented casually. 'And the things your online pals said afterwards.'

'Just girls trying to have fun.'

'Doesn't look like Ray thought so. You're all over Mark, so Mark has to go – and Dwayne gets caught in the crossfire.'

She slammed shut the computer. 'I've told you all I'm going to, and now I'd like you to leave.'

'Just as I was on the verge of making a purchase,' Milton chided her.

'Something for your son, maybe?' she shot back.

Milton stiffened, his hands forming fists. Gish steered him towards the door and out onto the street, Greaves's cackle following them.

'I'm going to apologise to you now for what I'm about to say.' There was the slightest tremble in Milton's voice.

'Go for it,' Gish said.

'Fucking bitch.'

She allowed the silence to settle. 'Better?' She watched him nod. 'How

does she know Adam's gay?'

'From Gallacher, probably. I mean, he's "out and proud", as the saying used to go.'

'But it means Maeve's done her research – she knew all about your wife, too. Meaning she sees you as a proper threat.'

'Good.'

They began walking the few yards to where they'd left the car.

'Did you believe her?' Gish asked. 'About her phone number?'

'Hell, no. A few gins too many, the afternoon turning into evening. Sozzled when she's passing through reception and there's Dwayne to open the door for her.'

'Did he ask for her number or did she press it on him?'

Milton shrugged. 'But if Ray Stanton found out, he wouldn't be the happiest of bunnies.'

'The punch to the nose as retaliation, or maybe a warning to steer clear?'

Milton got into the car without answering. As he began fastening his seat belt, he angled his head towards Gish. 'Did you see the price of some of that stuff?'

'I didn't notice anyone buying, though. And that lovely thick carpet beneath us hadn't seen too much tread.'

'A hobby to keep her out of mischief? Bankrolled by the boyfriend?' Milton nodded to himself and Gish realised he was filing the ramifications away, to be shared later with his good friend DI Oliver Carlyle.

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22

The crime-scene tape had gone, along with the uniformed sentry, and the sheeting had been removed from the windows and doors. They parked on the turning circle in front of the Heights, Milton scanning the scrum of onlookers – much depleted from the previous day.

‘He’s not there,’ Gish said, knowing he was seeking out Tom Simmons. She’d been doing exactly the same thing. She saw Lewis Schofield waving from across the street while holding the cup from his Thermos in his other hand. Gish waved back before following Milton inside.

Peter Ames was in the control room, going through the motions of questioning one of the concierges while enjoying a mug of coffee and a biscuit. He saw Gish and Milton through the doorway and nodded a greeting.

‘Nice of you to join us,’ he said.

‘Just you carry on, Peter,’ Milton called back. ‘The grownups have arrived.’

‘Got something for you, actually,’ Ames said. ‘Magnus here was telling me that his ex-colleague Laurence has just got his old job back – he’s the concierge who used to work alongside Dwayne.’

‘And now that Dwayne’s no longer here…’ Magnus added, crossing himself.

‘All the concierges,’ Ames went on, ‘reckoned Dwayne had something to do with Laurence being let go. Apparently the two of them had verbals before Laurence was sent packing.’

Milton nodded his thanks as he digested this, joining Gish at the makeshift front desk. She was asking the other concierge if Toby Scully was home.

‘One of your lot’s with him right now.’ The man offered Scully’s

apartment number.

‘How about Jessica Forrester?’

‘Think she’s maybe at Zafk’s.’

‘Oh?’

‘She was in the lift, got out on his floor.’

‘You’re wasted in this job,’ Milton told him. Then, to Gish: ‘Two birds with one stone?’ She nodded and he turned towards the concierge. ‘Let Mr Scully know we need a word with him after our colleague’s finished.’

While they waited for the lift, Milton played with the master fob.

‘Old tech, apparently,’ he mused, ‘yet I’m still amazed I can open a car door without putting a key in the lock.’

‘But then you can remember chimney sweeps and rickets, Jack.’

‘You think you’re joking, but I actually can.’ They were still smiling as they reached Zafk’s floor and pressed his bell.

Opening the door, Zafk recognised Gish and nodded a greeting, ushering the detectives inside. His living area was a riot of colour. Jessica Forrester had been seated on an egg-shaped swivel chair but rose as they entered. The two sofas nearby boasted zebra stripes. Speakers the size of small wardrobes flanked an audiovisual system. Wherever there was space, it had been filled with plastic figurines, some from films like *Star Wars* and shows like *Doctor Who*, others Gish didn’t recognise at all. Huge swirls and squiggles had been painted directly onto the white plaster walls and even parts of the ceiling.

‘Do you want to report it?’ Milton said, taking everything in. ‘I mean, someone obviously broke in and graffitied your home…’

Zafk laughed. ‘A couple of street artists – they’re becoming very highly regarded.’ His voice revealed his expensive education, though he was dressed for the street in black hooded top and black jeans.

‘I was just heading back to mine,’ Jessica told Gish, avoiding eye contact, a tremble in her voice.

‘What’s wrong, Jessica?’

It was Zafk who answered. ‘My parents want me to move back in with them. I was just breaking the news when you arrived.’

‘You’re going to do it?’

‘What Zafk’s parents want, Zafk’s parents get,’ Jessica stated with a touch of bitterness.

‘What does your manager say?’ Milton asked Zafk.

‘Roddy’s not keen.’

‘Probably because there isn’t a spare bedroom for him,’ Jessica huffed, before taking a deep breath. ‘I’ll leave you to talk to Zafk…’

‘We wanted a word with the pair of you, actually,’ Milton said. He slid his hands into his pockets and eased his feet apart a little. ‘It’s just something that’s come to our attention and needs a bit of explaining.’

Jessica and Zafk had moved a little, each in the other’s direction. Gish could tell Jessica wanted to reach out and take his hand. Maybe Zafk realised too, because he made a show of folding his arms.

‘Here’s the thing,’ Milton continued, his eyes on Jessica. ‘We’ve heard a rumour that you asked Dwayne Hogarth if he could supply you with some drugs.’

Her mouth fell open.

‘Absolute balls,’ Zafk stated. ‘Who told you that?’

‘Was it the Gallacher woman?’ Jessica added.

‘What makes you think that?’

‘Anything to deflect from her and Dwayne.’

‘It’s not true, then?’

‘Of course not.’

‘Why would Dwayne tell her it was?’

Jessica gnawed at her bottom lip as she considered this. ‘One night,’ she began, ‘not too long back, I stumbled home from a premiere.’ She glanced at Zafk. ‘You were in Madrid, I think. Well, Dwayne saw the state of me and offered to escort me to my suite. I wasn’t so drunk that I didn’t know what was going on, but he tried steering me towards the lift. Gripped me so tight he left bruises. I shrugged him off and told him I’d be reporting him.’

‘And did you?’ Gish asked.

Jessica shook her head. ‘He was just trying his luck, wasn’t he?’

‘The little shit,’ Zafk snarled, unfolding his arms and pawing a hand through his hair.

‘Ms Forrester didn’t tell you?’

‘No, but I remember seeing the bruise.’ He turned towards Jessica and the two of them hugged for a moment. Milton was content to wait, his focus shifting to the singer.

‘And how about you, Mr Wilson?’

‘Nobody calls me that – it’s just Zafk.’

Milton gave a twitch of his mouth. ‘Okay then, Zafk, how about you?’

‘What?’ The young man’s brow furrowed.

‘Asking Dwayne Hogarth for drugs – specifically cocaine?’ Zafk’s mouth had opened, but Milton held up a hand to interrupt whatever denial he was about to make. ‘We’ve looked at the texts on his phone,’ he stressed.

‘He was supposed to delete those.’

‘Zafk?’ Jessica questioned, taking a step away from him.

‘I wasn’t going to use it, Jess. You know me better than that.’

‘What then?’

His hand went to his mop of hair again. ‘I just wanted the buzz of knowing I had some. It would be sitting there in my pocket and no one would ever know. A secret fuck-you to Roddy and everyone around him.’

‘Just so we’re certain where we stand,’ Milton pressed, ‘Dwayne never did punt any coke or anything else your way?’

‘Wouldn’t even speak to me for a few days,’ Zafk admitted.

‘While we’re in the confessional,’ Gish added, ‘can we talk a bit more about the party?’

‘I wasn’t there,’ Jessica blurted out.

‘Because you weren’t invited,’ Gish agreed. She looked towards Zafk. ‘Quite the snub, wasn’t it? Pretty much every other resident was present, yourself included…’

‘I tried my best to get out of it.’ Jessica’s look told Zafk he could have tried harder. ‘Roddy wouldn’t take no for an answer. He wanted to show me off to Rich Hollister.’

‘You obviously enjoyed yourself, though – off to Hollister’s club afterwards rather than popping in to console Ms Forrester?’

‘We’re not married, you know,’ Zafk blustered.

‘Just friends with benefits?’ Milton commented. ‘No benefits waiting for you that night, though, eh?’

‘I was back here before four, as you well know,’ Zafk countered, ‘and stone-cold sober besides.’

‘When you were with Ray Stanton, is it correct that he mentioned the bust-up with Dwayne?’

‘Mentioned it *and* acted it out. I felt bad about the way he made a joke of it, telling Hollister that Dwayne wouldn’t be so lucky next time.’ He

paused. ‘I should have stood up for Dwayne.’ His head dropped a little, but then rose again. ‘Mind you, now that I know he came on to Jess…’

‘Were you with Stanton and Hollister throughout?’ Gish asked.

‘And the two women, Tara and Mel. One of them grabbed my crotch when I was coming back from the loo – don’t ask me which one. I was just meat in the room, as per.’

This time, Jessica reached for his hand, and he clasped it before turning his attention back to the two detectives.

‘Jess’s fob still hasn’t been changed,’ he said. ‘Can you do something about that?’

‘We’ll have a word.’

‘I’ve told her she’s welcome to stay with me.’

‘Not at your parents’ place, though,’ Jessica said.

‘God, no,’ Zafk answered with a grin.

‘I think we’re just about done here,’ Milton said. Gish noticed that Jessica was thinking of adding something, but after a moment she swallowed back whatever it was. The two detectives headed for the door, but then Milton paused and turned, digging out a business card from his pocket. He handed it to Zafk, who studied it, then saw that Milton was holding out a pen.

‘Signed to Adam, please,’ Milton said.

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As they reached Toby Scully's floor, they met a detective constable called Ben Boothroyd. He was tapping notes into his phone and had obviously just finished interviewing Scully.

'How did it go?' Gish asked.

'Some place, this,' he answered without looking up.

'Don't let it go to your head,' Milton cautioned. Boothroyd met his eyes.

'Wait till you see – he has a panic room of all things. Guy's a petrolhead, too. He's got a Ferrari and an Aston in the garage – told me I wouldn't believe what else is down there.'

Boothroyd, they both knew, could bore for England about automobiles and their vital statistics. The home screen on his phone showed a Bugatti Veyron and he kept a scale model of a Lamborghini next to his work computer.

'He said I was welcome to take a look. Any objection?'

'Just so long as you don't start sniffing and licking them,' Milton said. 'You'll need a fob to get back out, though.'

'I'll ask the concierge.'

Boothroyd was mid thirties, overweight, married, always with a slight hint of body odour, but he still managed to look like a kid for whom Christmas was imminent.

'Off you go then,' Milton said. 'But don't dawdle. Who's next on your list?'

'I'm pretty much done, unless you can conjure up Mr Godunov and Ms Macheso.'

'I'll see what we can do.'

They watched him as he loped towards the lifts.

'Can't recall when I last saw Ben so animated,' Gish commented. Milton

gave a nod of agreement and pressed the bell.

When the door opened, Toby Scully knew straight away that he was standing in front of more detectives. He made an exasperated sound. ‘A revolving door would be simpler,’ he said, walking back into his suite, leaving them to fend for themselves.

‘We did tell the concierge to warn you we’d be dropping by,’ Milton said.

‘Is that who rang? I was a bit busy with your colleague.’

The interior, Gish noted, was different again – muted colours and Scandinavian design, but offset by automobile and aeronautical memorabilia. She paused by one framed photo of Scully in an aeroplane cockpit, hands on the controls.

‘You have your pilot’s licence?’ she enquired.

‘God, no, but when you buy a plane, they let you pretend.’

Gish had moved on to the next photo, which showed Scully in one of the few seats onboard, champagne in hand, surrounded by walnut and chrome. When she turned, he had returned to the chair he’d been sitting on for Boothroyd’s interview, part of a set of eight that surrounded a long glass dining table. He picked up his phone to check for messages while Milton prowled the room. Scully had done some racing – rallycross and Formula 3 by the look of the medals and ribbons. A plethora of die-cast model cars covered the wall units – little wonder Boothroyd had bonded with the man.

When Gish studied him, taking a seat opposite, she found no discernible charisma. He was short and bald, sporting circular tortoiseshell glasses and grey clothing. The smartwatch on his left wrist lit up every few seconds with an update.

‘Wife not at home, sir?’ Milton pretended to want to know as he took the chair next to Gish.

‘I’m divorced.’

Gish knew what Milton was itching to say next – *I would never have guessed* – but silenced him with a look. Jousting could always happen later; for now they needed to keep the tone convivial in the hope Scully would open up without too much effort. The man tossed his phone back onto the table.

‘So what is it you’d like me to repeat for the umpteenth time?’

‘Apologies if our colleagues have been boring you. We’ll try to do

better.’ Milton’s smile didn’t reach his eyes.

‘We’re hoping you can give us the contact details for your daughter,’ Gish stated.

Scully, not expecting this, sat a little more upright. ‘Lu?’ he checked. ‘She lives with her mum.’

‘But visits you sometimes?’

‘Yes.’

‘Stays over?’

‘Now and again – why do you ask?’

‘When did you last see her?’

‘Probably a week ago – she was at a birthday party nearby, parents had rented a hotel ballroom for the occasion. Easier for Lu to sleep here than trek back to Barnes at all hours.’

‘Have you spoken with her since?’

‘A few texts.’ He broke off. ‘You’ve still not said why you’re interested.’

‘I’m assuming Lucinda has her own fob?’ Milton queried, but Scully had had enough, folding his arms and pressing his lips firmly together.

‘We’re interested, sir,’ Gish explained, ‘because your daughter was here on the night of the party. We have footage of her if you’d like to see it.’

Scully stared at her, then nodded, so Gish found the video clip and turned her phone towards him, reaching across the table. He leaned forward for a better view, unfolding his arms.

‘Your daughter and Dwayne Hogarth, sir,’ Gish clarified.

‘Having a nice friendly chat,’ Milton added.

‘After which she leaves again.’ The clip finished and Gish pulled her arm back.

‘Okay, so she was here the other night.’ Scully shrugged.

‘And we need to discuss that with her,’ Milton said. ‘If you’ve no objection.’

‘I still don’t see—’

‘Did you know Dwayne Hogarth kept her number in his phone?’

Scully paused a moment before answering. When he did, it took the form of a brief shake of the head while blood crept up his neck.

‘How old is Lucinda, sir?’ Gish asked.

‘Fifteen next month.’ A guttural sound emerged from the back of Scully’s throat. ‘Bloody, bloody Dwayne.’ He shot up from his chair and

began pacing the room. They watched and waited until he stopped at the glass doors leading to the balcony. He stared out at the view without really seeing it.

'How do you mean, sir?' Milton asked, taking a few steps towards him.

'He's…' But Scully was struggling to find the right words.

'This is obviously coming as a surprise to you,' Milton went on, 'but there's nothing to suggest any impropriety.'

'That would be a first, then.' Scully spun round to face the detective. Gish had risen from her own chair to join them. 'You know he only got a job here because of Maeve? I mean, we all know what that's about. It's why Laurence was let go – less chance of anyone knowing what Maeve and Dwayne did at dead of night. We've all had reason to be in reception at some time or other and nobody's there. And that's not half of what Dwayne got up to…'

'Maybe you could enlighten us, sir?'

'You know he used to bring women here?'

'Women plural?'

Scully offered a shrug. 'I needed to go to the garage one night and he was with someone in Lev Godunov's Bentley, all cosy on the back seat.'

'How did he get in?' Gish asked.

'Lev's hopeless that way – he once left the boot wide open overnight.' Scully rubbed at his forehead.

'I believe you own a couple of nice cars yourself,' Milton commented.

'I worked hard for them, too.'

Gish cleared her throat. 'Do you happen to know a journalist by the name of Tom Simmons?'

Scully gave a sort of snarl and headed back to the table, snatching up his phone. 'I need a lawyer here, don't I? I thought it was Lu you were interested in. Instead it's the same old harassment.'

'I only asked a question.' Gish tried to sound aggrieved.

'While knowing the bloody answer.' Scully seemed to be scrolling through his contacts list.

'We know Simmons has spoken to you.'

'He's *tried* – the conversations are always strictly one-way. Everyone looking for a scapegoat.' He glanced up at Gish. 'Short bloody memories you all have. Things were desperate. *People* were desperate. Hospital staff

reduced to wearing bin bags and second-hand masks. I grafted night and day, managed to source what was needed.' He wagged a finger at the detectives. 'I almost certainly saved lives.'

Gish thought of asking how much of the PPE had ended up in landfill but swallowed the question back. Scully had given up trying to find his lawyer's number.

'We just need permission to speak to her,' Milton stated calmly, 'maybe at her home in Barnes?'

'My wife won't let me over the threshold.'

'As long as one parent is present, we're fine.'

'It has to be me.' Scully tapped his chest. 'Understood? I can get Lu here this evening – maybe around eight. I'm on a Teams call before that.'

'Eight would be fine, sir,' Milton said, though he could tell Gish was less keen. 'But we do need to ask you a couple more questions connected to Dwayne Hogarth.' He managed to sound almost apologetic.

'It never ends,' Scully muttered, but the fight seemed to be going out of him as he sat back down at the table. Milton and Gish stayed on their feet, facing him.

'I'm just wondering if there'd been any bad feeling recently between you and Dwayne?'

'You've already mentioned Simmons, so I'm assuming you know.'

'We'd still like to hear your side of things, sir.'

'There is no "side"! Dwayne was running to the press with anything and everything he could get!'

'What brought you to that conclusion, sir?'

'Something Simmons said, a snippet of a phone conversation I'd had. I worked out that only Dwayne had been in earshot.'

'Did you talk to Dwayne about it?'

'Decided to get some backing first. I spoke to as many other residents as I could find – though not Maeve, obviously. Told them Dwayne was selling us out for a few measly quid.'

'What did they say?'

Scully shrugged. 'Nobody wanted to get on the wrong side of Maeve.'

'Not even those who were already there?'

'You mean Jessica? I didn't manage a word with her.'

'Zafk?'

‘Roddy Collins said he would pass the message on.’

‘And did he?’

‘You’d have to ask him that.’

The detectives let the silence gather for a moment. Milton broke it by asking what Scully did after the party.

‘Straight home to bed.’

‘Didn’t fancy Mr Hollister’s club?’

‘I wasn’t invited.’ Scully sniffed. ‘Some people believe what they read in the gutter press.’

‘You’ve made a few enemies? Does that explain your panic room?’

‘The other officer told you?’

Milton looked around. ‘I don’t see it.’

‘You’re not supposed to.’ Scully tapped at his phone and there was a soft motorised hum as part of one wall began to open. The detectives couldn’t help wandering over for a look.

‘It’s only the size of a dressing room,’ Scully said. ‘It’s not like a bunker or anything. As to why it’s here, the previous owner installed it. Basically it’s a talking point more than anything else.’

‘So who owned the flat originally?’

‘Lev.’

‘Lev Godunov?’ Gish watched him nod. ‘I saw the two of you having a tête-à-tête at the party.’ He looked at her for an explanation. ‘Footage posted on socials,’ she offered. ‘Discussing anything interesting? Dwayne’s snooping, perhaps?’

‘I really can’t remember.’

‘Or maybe how to keep a mound of cash away from the taxman’s grasp?’ Milton suggested. ‘That seems to be Mr Godunov’s particular gift…’

Scully’s only response was to activate closure of the panic room door.

Milton looked towards Gish, who twitched a shoulder, meaning she’d nothing else to add.

‘Thank you for your time, sir,’ Milton said as the door became a wall again. ‘We’ll see you at eight.’ He placed a business card on the table, realised it was the one Zafk had signed and switched it for another. Scully was walking back towards the balcony, hands behind his back, as they left.

While they waited for the lift, Gish told him she would bet any money Boothroyd was still in the garage. Milton gave a brief smile in agreement.

‘Dwayne didn’t exactly sell *every* story he could,’ she then commented. Milton nodded.

‘Zafk and the snowflake,’ he said. ‘My guess is, it would have been too dangerous – as soon as it was printed, Zafk would know there was only one person it could have come from. Besides, I think Dwayne liked Zafk.’

‘And the same couldn’t be said for Toby Scully?’

‘A man who made a fortune from the pandemic? The least popular guy in any room? No, Gillian, I don’t think Dwayne would have felt the need to have his back.’

‘He was selling them all out, though, wasn’t he, to a greater or lesser extent? And almost all of them knew – funny nobody’s admitted as much in any of the interviews.’

‘Well, would *you* want the police to know you bore a grudge against a guy who ended up dead?’

‘Fair point,’ Gish conceded, scratching at her throat. ‘Is Scully a suspect?’

‘I don’t see why not – protective of his business *and* his daughter.’

‘He didn’t know about Dwayne and Lu, though.’

‘Or else he’s a good actor – people in business often are.’

‘So you’re putting him at the top of the list?’

Milton puffed out his cheeks and exhaled. ‘You’ll be shocked to hear I’ve got the Gallachers and Ray Stanton up there, too.’

‘Gallachers plural?’

‘The wife because Dwayne had gone sneaking to his brother about her, and maybe also because Dwayne wanted to stop playing her little game. The husband if he got wind of the affair. Remember, he’s not as far away from here as he wants us to believe.’

‘And I suppose Stanton for similar reasons to Eddie?’ Gish watched Milton nod. ‘What about Lev Godunov, caught deep in conversation with Scully, heads close together to keep it just between the two of them, and now hiding from us?’ Milton nodded again. ‘But then what about the missing fob?’ Gish went on. ‘Aren’t we forgetting that Jessica seems to be linked to everything?’

‘Maybe Jessica and the murder aren’t as connected as we think,’ Milton

offered. ‘And let’s not rule out Laurence the concierge – with Dwayne out of the way, the man who probably cost him his job, he gets his feet back under the table.’ His phone was buzzing. ‘Ben,’ he explained to Gish as he answered. Then, having listened for a moment: ‘Whoa, slow down, mate. Say that again.’ His eyes drilled into Gish’s. ‘All right,’ he said, the words slowing to a crawl in his mouth. ‘We’ll be right there.’ He stepped into the lift, Gish at his heels.

‘Something waiting for us in the garage,’ he said.

‘What?’

‘You’ll know in a minute.’ He pressed the button and the lift doors closed.

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The smell hit them straight away and both recognised it. Gish tugged at her sleeve, holding it over her mouth and nose. She could hear flies buzzing. The car park had a low concrete-screed ceiling and was dimly lit. Many of the allotted bays stood vacant; others boasted vehicles covered by dust sheets. There were large air-conditioning fans behind grilles attached to the roof, but they couldn't altogether mask what had happened.

'Hit me as soon as I got down here,' Boothroyd said, holding a bunched handkerchief in his hand.

Gish looked over to a door marked *Bin Store*.

'Have none of us been down here since the killing?' Milton asked.

'Ames,' Gish answered. 'Blamed the rubbish, same as Jessica Forrester.'

Boothroyd had led them to a gloss-black Bentley Continental, its boot part way open. He used his handkerchief to widen the gap. There was a stained white duvet cover inside, a shiny black shoe protruding from it. The flies bustled around, Milton swatting them away.

'I had a quick look,' Boothroyd said. 'Male, non-Caucasian, not too many years on the clock. How long do you reckon he's been here?'

'Since well before Dwayne died,' Milton speculated. 'You forced the boot?'

'Car's unlocked,' Boothroyd corrected him.

'Do we know whose it is?'

'Personalised plates with the letters LG,' Gish pointed out.

'Our missing Russian.'

'We need to search his flat,' she stated.

'Reckon there's a connection with Dwayne?' Boothroyd asked.

'Has to be, hasn't there?' Gish fixed her eyes on Milton. 'Who do you think it is? Should we check his pockets?'

‘Let’s get Mick Bentham and his team back here,’ Milton said, digging his phone out.

‘No signal,’ Boothroyd told him. ‘I had to go halfway up the ramp to call you.’ All three of them walked towards the ramp, glad of the chance of some fresher air. Milton pressed his fob to a keypad attached to the barrier. Both the barrier and the metal shutters beyond began to part. They could hear the traffic noise. Milton checked his phone again and this time managed to make the call.

‘Mick?’ he said. ‘Another job for you, mate, and you’ll never guess where…’

With the police cordon back in operation, scene-of-crime and mortuary vans parked behind it, the vultures had soon returned. Oliver Carlyle had already phoned Milton to ask what was going on. The chief had been informed and would now have to pass along to his superiors the news that a whole team of investigators had somehow missed a body in the vicinity of what was already an active crime scene. Milton had ridden out Jeffries’ fury before adding with a calmness of tone he didn’t really feel that they needed more urgently than ever to trace a Russian national by the name of Lev Godunov.

‘Their embassy won’t be happy.’

‘I feel for them, I really do.’

After which Gish had led her partner back into the building and up to the spa, where she made them some strong coffee to accompany their racing thoughts.

‘Can’t bring Lucinda here now,’ she commented.

‘She can come to the station.’

‘I’ll make that happen.’

‘You talk to her, Gillian – you and maybe Emma.’

‘You’ll be staying here?’ She sounded sceptical. ‘We’re worn out, Jack. I already promised I’d try to be home a bit earlier today.’ She checked the time on her phone. ‘I’m going to have to apologise and beg for a few more hours.’

Milton wasn’t really listening. The infinity pool was visible through a long interior window. No one was using it. The whole spa looked to be yet another underused selling point. No masseurs or therapists, no one using the

heated loungers. Gish had opened the door to the room containing the hyperbaric chamber. It was a gleaming module of white-painted steel and polished glass and might as well have stayed in its packaging – she saw no sign whatsoever that it had ever been used.

Milton was seated on the same banquette where they'd interviewed Dwayne's girlfriend, Rosa, when Gish handed him his drink. Seemed like half a lifetime ago since they'd last sat here, but it hadn't even been forty-eight hours. He stared at the surface of his machine-made Americano as if he might conjure answers from it.

'Godunov?' he offered. 'He turned up here with his protection, fled as soon as he saw police were present.'

'He was spooked for sure – but to leave a body in his own car where it was bound to be discovered?' The caffeine was doing its business; Gish could feel her heart thumping.

Milton's phone was pinging with message upon message. 'We should head back down,' he said, 'get suited up.'

'Reckon they'll allow us to lead on this one?'

'They're not two separate cases, Gillian.'

'We still need to convince the chief it wasn't us who mucked up by missing the body.'

'Bloody Ames.' Milton gave a heavy sigh and drained his cup in one gulp.

'There you are,' Allan Franklyn said, his face ashen as he stepped out of the lift. 'This is an absolute fucking nightmare.'

'We're not going to disagree on that,' Milton told him.

'Everyone wants to know what's going on.'

'There isn't much we can share as yet, sir.'

'First Dwayne, now this. It's… well, I don't know what it is.'

'A nightmare, I think you said,' Gish offered.

'My residents are up in arms. I wouldn't be surprised to see flaming torches.' Franklyn checked his phone screen. Like Milton's, it was receiving text upon text upon text. Gish, on the other hand, had just had the one call – from Tom Simmons – which had gone to voicemail. When his phone started ringing, Franklyn answered, turning away and opening the door to poolside.

'Yes, Maeve,' was all they heard before the door closed after him. But they could see him through the window, gesticulating with his free hand as

he paced to and fro.

‘Let’s make our escape,’ Milton said.

‘To the garage?’

‘*I’m* going to the garage,’ Milton corrected her. ‘*You’re* going to arrange to meet Lucinda and her father at the station. And after you’ve spoken to her there, I want you to hotfoot it home.’ He knew she was about to object. ‘That’s an order, Gillian, so don’t fight it – and I promise I’ll keep you in the loop.’

She tried staring him out but knew it wouldn’t work. ‘You better had,’ she said instead. ‘I’m the loose cannon, remember – you’re Mr Dependable.’

‘There was a time…’

‘Times change, Jack.’

‘Yet the same old crimes keep coming.’

‘And our salaries with them.’

Milton offered a thin smile. ‘You’re like me, though, Gillian – you’re not doing this just for the wages. It’s in your blood, same as it is in mine.’

‘What makes you so sure?’

He reached up to pat his own shoulder. ‘Let’s just say I have a hunch.’

‘Those hunches of yours seem to be adding up. Maybe one of them will get us a solution.’

‘Wouldn’t that be nice?’ Jack Milton’s smile widened.

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The incident room was almost deserted, all available officers being busy at the Heights. The interview room wasn't the most welcoming of spaces, so Gish decided, the station being quiet, that they could talk to Lucinda in the public waiting area instead. It boasted a single row of plastic seats, bolted to the floor.

When Lucinda and her father arrived, Gish gestured for them to make themselves comfortable. Emma Amberson had provided a couple of chairs from the office for her and Gish. They sat down facing Toby Scully and his daughter.

'Thank you for coming,' Gish said.

'I nearly didn't,' Scully said. 'It's all kicking off back home. Residents have dragged Allan to a meeting – things they need to get off their chests.' He waved his phone. 'From what I hear, he keeps being interrupted by phone calls from furious investors and absentee owners.'

'Your wife could always have brought Lucinda,' Gish commented. Scully snorted.

'Not bloody likely.' He tried to squeeze his daughter's hand, but she snatched it away. Lucinda was dressed demurely, but looked awkward, and her face was shiny where make-up had been removed – all her father's doing, Gish judged. Amberson had done a quick social media trawl and pulled up photos of Lu wearing more slap than clothing, partying with friends dressed and painted similarly. They seemed to specialise in pouting, as if ready to kiss the camera. The parties they attended happened two or three times a week. Boys were few and far between.

'Do you know why you're here, Lucinda?'

'I told her,' Scully said while his daughter nodded. Her hands were on the knees of her three-quarter-length cream dress, her fingers working away

at the cotton.

‘How well did you know Dwayne?’ Gish asked.

‘Only a little.’ The girl’s voice was so muted, Gish strained to catch her words.

‘You liked him well enough, though?’

‘I’ve already told her she was stupid to—’

Gish held up a hand to cut him off. ‘Please let Lucinda speak for herself.’

‘I know I shouldn’t have given him my number,’ the girl obliged.

‘He asked you for it?’

‘Maybe.’

‘Did you keep in touch – messaging and socials, I mean?’

‘Dwayne liked Snapchat.’

‘I bet he did,’ her father muttered.

‘Did the two of you ever meet up, somewhere away from the Heights?’

Lucinda shook her head. ‘We wanted to, but it never happened.’

‘If you’d done it, where would you have gone?’

‘His brother’s a DJ.’ Lucinda’s eyes met Gish’s for a moment.

‘So one of his club nights, maybe? You like Mark’s music?’

‘Mark?’

‘Black Markus,’ Gish corrected herself.

‘He puts stuff on YouTube and Bandcamp – it’s banging.’

‘Did Dwayne ever introduce the two of you?’

Lucinda shook her head. She wore her blonde hair long and parted, tucked behind her ear and swept across her forehead so it fell over one eye – a style popular with her peer group.

‘I’m sorry about what happened,’ she said. Gish wondered how much of what she was being shown was an act. She’d seen the video clips, the wildness in the girl, giddy with gilded confidence.

‘How about Zafk?’ Amberson added. ‘Are you a fan?’

‘A bit,’ Lucinda decided. ‘I met him once when I was at Dad’s. He seemed okay.’

‘But you prefer Mark’s music?’

‘Definitely.’

‘We’ve got some footage of you,’ Gish broke in, ‘from the night Dwayne died. What were you doing at the Heights, Lu?’

‘I’d been at a friend’s, not more than a mile away. Thought I’d drop in on Dad. But Dwayne told me he was at some party.’

‘You could have come,’ Scully told her, glancing up from his phone.

‘Did the two of you talk about anything else?’

‘Just… meeting up sometime.’ Her father made a noise that was almost a growl. She turned her head towards him. ‘I’m allowed to live my own life, aren’t I?’ Her voice had risen, her cheeks tinged pink.

‘You’re fourteen years old, Lu,’ her father argued. ‘Half his age almost.’

‘So if he’d been fourteen it would have been fine? Except it wouldn’t, would it? You’re the same with every boy I know.’

‘Your mother and I just want to protect you.’

‘I don’t *need* protecting!’

‘So that was all you talked about?’ Gish asked, trying to reel them both back in. ‘The possibility of meeting up sometime?’

Lucinda gave a firm nod. ‘Oh,’ she remembered, ‘and the blood on his shirt. He told me the guy who did it was going to be in big trouble.’

‘Meaning what?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘Those were his exact words – “big trouble”?’

‘I think so.’ She paused, her eyes flitting between the two detectives. ‘Was I the last person he spoke to?’

Gish shook her head and Lucinda’s face fell slightly; she’d obviously been hoping for a story to share with her pals. Gish glanced towards Amberson. ‘Well, unless there’s anything you’d like to add, Lucinda…?’ But Scully wasn’t about to give her time to think. He was up on his feet, buttoning his jacket.

‘I think it would be for the best if my daughter could put this behind her now, don’t you agree?’

‘Unless we have another reason to question her,’ Gish warned. The girl flinched slightly as she got up.

‘DC Amberson will see you out.’ Gish lifted her chair and started carrying it back into the incident room.

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Gish had bought a box of chocolates as a thank you to Letitia, the best money could buy at the twenty-four-hour petrol station. She'd added a few women's glossies – her mum liked to pore over the photo spreads, mouthing the words silently as she read along. There were days she struggled to place her daughter, yet she could still yield forensic details of celebrity marriages and spats.

Gish had her phone switched to silent as she sat bedside, the room calming her with its unchanging familiarity. She sometimes had to stop herself thinking too clearly about what would happen to the house once her mum was gone, knew damned well she would sell up and never look back – a small flat nearer the heart of things, somewhere with no baggage. The bikers were outside again, pulling wheelies and whooping into the night sky. There had always been gangs in Tottenham, a constant background hum of tension. She remembered once, as a kid, walking up to a police constable with a question. He'd looked left and right, as if she were bait of some kind, an attack imminent. Things had changed since then, young professionals moving in, bringing with them their start-up companies, but the place still had that edge. On walks, Jacqui would nod at each shop they passed, explaining who used to own it and what it used to sell. Watching her mum's face now, Gish could still see the younger woman hidden just beneath, the one who'd been so strong and caring.

When Tom Simmons sent her his eleventh or twelfth text, Gish relented, telling her mum she was going to make them a cuppa. In the kitchen, once the kettle was filled, she called him back. He picked up immediately.

'Someone's been busy,' he said.

'Do you mean me or the killer?'

'You're thinking the same culprit for both?'

‘No comment.’

‘Got a name for the victim?’

‘I refer you to my previous answer.’

He was silent for a moment and she listened to the sounds around him. A café or bar. Cups rattling in saucers, so probably the former. ‘I’m going to make a bet with you,’ he said. ‘I’m betting that after our meeting, the first thing you did was google me. No need to lie – I did the same with you, not that you’ve much of a footprint.’

‘Size seven actually.’

‘Well, you might want to be wearing running shoes tomorrow. Going to be a lot of people keen to corner you so they can throw you to the lions. Not just you either – your boss, your whole crew. I might step back, but you can be sure my colleagues won’t – and it’s not as if the Met doesn’t have its enemies in Parliament…’

‘Well, I’m certainly glad I called you now – I’ll sleep easier tonight.’ She dropped tea bags into both mugs and fetched milk from the fridge. ‘You wouldn’t happen to have anything actually *helpful* to tell me, would you?’

‘Word is this new victim’s Afro-Caribbean – friend of Dwayne’s, do you reckon?’

Gish started filling the mugs. ‘How much progress have you made with Toby Scully?’

The change of subject had him switching mental gears. ‘If I had a team to help me out, I might have cracked the story by now.’

‘He’s friends with Lev Godunov, yes?’

‘Godunov sold him a flat and they live in the same building, so I’d assume so.’

‘The money Scully made from the PPE deal – he’s got to be worried that he’ll have to hand it back some day?’

‘A chunk of it maybe, if there’s any left.’ He got her meaning. ‘Godunov could help shift it offshore?’

‘And if Scully thought that was being jeopardised because Dwayne had eyes and ears on him…’

‘He’s a significant person of interest then?’

‘The stuff you’ve compiled on Scully, it would be helpful if I could see it.’

‘In exchange for what?’

‘My gratitude,’ Gish said, scooping the tea bags into the swing bin. She saw that she had another caller: Milton. ‘Got to go,’ she told Simmons. ‘Give it some thought.’

She cut the call and connected to Milton, leaving her own tea where it was and taking her mother’s through to the living room. ‘Hiya, Jack,’ she said into her phone.

Her mother looked up. ‘Is that Jack?’ she called out. ‘Ask him why he stopped visiting.’

‘He’s never been here, Mum.’ *That’s the dementia talking*, she wanted to add.

‘Tell her I’ll pop by some day,’ Milton said. Gish relayed the message as she placed the half-full mug in her mother’s hands.

‘Try not to spill it,’ she cautioned, making to return to the kitchen. ‘I’ll only be two minutes…’

She rested her free hand against the worktop next to her drink. ‘What have I missed?’ she asked Milton.

‘Victim is in his twenties, probably mid to late. Nothing on his person to identify him. Suit he’s wearing is from a chain store. No obvious wounds to the body. Pathologist reckoned he’s been there anywhere between four days and a couple of weeks. We’ve made a start on checking missing persons – and the CCTV footage from the car park, though it’s pretty useless: only covers entrance and exit ramps plus the lifts.’

‘Plus, as we know, it wipes itself every week.’

Milton gave a deep-felt sigh. ‘All units have been alerted to be on the lookout for Lev Godunov. I’ve asked permission to talk to the Russian embassy.’

‘I’m actually surprised they’re still operational.’

‘The sanctions are mostly trade-related.’

‘You reckon they’ll talk to us?’

‘I doubt they’ll know much more about Godunov than we do.’ He paused. ‘Your reporter friend, on the other hand…’

‘I was on the phone with him when you rang,’ Gish admitted.

‘Remember what I said about getting too close?’

‘And yet here you are telling me to ask him about Godunov.’ She paused. ‘Victim is Afro-Caribbean, yes? Tom wondered if that maybe meant a friend of Dwayne’s.’

‘Because black men are such a rarity on our streets?’

‘No obvious signs of violence,’ Gish mused. ‘Could it be an overdose?’

‘The lab will hopefully tell us more. Another autopsy in the morning – reckon Emma will be up to it?’

‘She’d be fine, but you should send Ames instead – call it his punishment.’

‘The first of many,’ Milton agreed. ‘We spoke to Rosa – she confirmed that the car she and Dwayne used was the Bentley, meaning we’ll find their prints on the back seat and door handles. One of the concierges remembered checking the car park one morning and finding the boot open. He told Godunov, who didn’t seem too concerned.’

‘And the concierge passed that on to Dwayne?’

‘Who could then have told any number of residents.’ Milton broke off. ‘I’m forgetting to ask about Scully’s daughter…’

‘Not a lot to tell. She either volunteered her number to Dwayne or he charmed it out of her. The two of them wanted to take their relationship further, but it never quite happened. She went to the Heights to see her dad, but he was at the party.’ Gish thought for a moment. ‘He’s naturally protective, but she’s not the sort who’d thank him for it.’

‘How do you mean?’

‘She’s at that stage in life where she’s just discovering she has the power.’

‘What power?’

‘She turns heads, gets men’s tongues hanging out. I can see why she rated so highly on Dwayne’s chart.’

‘He kept a chart?’

‘Little explosions for how hot a woman was. But then she’s not a woman.’

‘They grow up fast these days.’

‘Grew up fast in my day, too, Jack – doesn’t change the fact she’s underage, flirt or not. Anyway, Dwayne rated her above his own girlfriend.’

‘And suddenly Rosa becomes a suspect, too,’ Milton commented tiredly.

‘Something else Lu mentioned – the blood on Dwayne’s shirt. He told her there’d be consequences for the person responsible.’

‘You think he was serious?’

‘Either that or just trying to regain face.’ She listened as Milton failed to

stifle a yawn.

‘Mark was kicked out at ten twenty,’ he commented, ‘she visited at ten forty, party finished at eleven.’

‘That’s about the size of it.’

She listened to him yawn again, not trying to disguise it this time. ‘You’re still at the station; you should go home.’

‘I was thinking a camp bed in one of the cupboards would save me the bother.’

‘I’m assuming the boss wants us in nice and early for a bollocking?’

‘Eight thirty at the absolute latest.’

‘What a lovely start to proceedings.’

‘Whole day’s going to be a shitshow, Gillian, but we still have a job to do, so get some rest if you can.’

‘I’m a couple of dozen steps from my pit, Jack, unlike some. I’ll see you in the morning.’

She ended the call and went back through to her mum. Jacqui had managed to dribble some tea down her front. Gish took the cup from her.

‘Tom Cruise still does all his own stunts, you know,’ her mother said.

‘You told me that earlier.’ Gish paused, got her mum’s attention and angled her head.

‘How about some toast?’ she suggested.

‘Lovely.’ It was Jacqui’s turn to pause. ‘And don’t forget to pop a slice in for Jack. What time is he coming?’

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Four

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The team were gathered in the incident room so they could watch Chief Inspector Alec Jeffries vent his anger and frustration. He looked as if he was suffering from too little sleep and too much adrenaline, pretty much like everyone around him.

‘They’re out for our blood,’ he was saying, ‘from the Home Secretary and Foreign Office down. Despite which, I’m keeping my donor card in my pocket and so should you. But it means we need to work harder and with more determination – and a damn sight fewer mistakes. I want answers to the big questions by end of play today.’ He glanced at his watch. ‘I’m going to give the media Godunov’s name and photo in about an hour’s time.’

‘They’re already parked outside,’ one officer said, peering from a window. Gish had seen them too, setting up video cameras on tripods, taking up too much space on the pavement.

‘Circus will soon move on,’ the chief commented. ‘Meantime, how are we doing with the missing persons register? Our victim needs a name, and according to Allan Franklyn, no one – staff or resident – is unaccounted for.’

‘Doesn’t help that it was common knowledge Godunov kept his motor unlocked,’ one of the team piped up, having read Milton’s report.

‘All the same,’ the chief said, ‘the car park isn’t exactly accessible to outsiders.’

‘So do we show the residents a photo of the deceased, see if he’s a known entity?’

‘It’s on my list, trust me.’

Gish’s attention was on her screen. Tom Simmons had sent her links to about a dozen news stories. When she opened the first, she was confronted by a photo of her and Milton, taken on one of their visits to the Heights.

Their faces had been replaced by those of Statler and Waldorf. The headline read: *MEET THE MET'S MUPPET SHOW!* She didn't bother with any of the other links.

Her phone pinged; it was a text from Milton, seated opposite: *At least they got our good side*. She met his eyes, then mouthed the name 'Carlyle' at him. He tapped out another message and hit send. *Spoke last night. No help*.

The chief was telling the team that the Bentley had arrived at the forensic lab. They'd had to drive it onto the forecourt, the garage not being able to accommodate a trailer. The car had been covered in a dust sheet, but even so, it had made the early news. He then moved on to the autopsy, saying that Ames would be doing the honours. Gish saw Milton give an almost imperceptible nod, letting her know he'd had a word. Ames for his part had been sitting like a statue throughout the meeting, all too aware of his error – something that might take years to live down.

The speech was coming to an end, everyone readying to get back to their tasks, when Milton's phone rang. As he answered, his eyes settled more fixedly on Gish. The hubbub around them made it impossible for her to hear all but a few words.

'Speaking… I see… Well, maybe we can help…' He rose to his feet, gesturing for her to follow suit. He was still talking as he made for the door. In the corridor, he ended the call and half turned towards her. 'Godunov's lawyer,' he explained. 'They were coming in, but the cameras have got them rattled. I told them to go round the back. I'll meet them there, you get the interview room ready. We need this recorded.'

'Do I alert the chief?'

Milton considered for a moment. 'Let's gift-wrap it first, Gillian. I'll see you in five.'

The lawyer was in his mid sixties, sporting a mane of silver hair. His suit was tailored, his tie and matching pocket square made of silk, his pen gold. His name was Sylvester DuMont and Gish reckoned he probably earned per hour what she made in a week. She hadn't heard of him, but as he had entered the room with his client, Milton had led her to one side.

'If your pockets are deep enough, DuMont doesn't care how dirty the

banknotes are,’ he’d confided.

A video camera was directed at the meeting table from a corner of the room, and Gish had set up a mic between the four of them. Water had been offered, but nobody wanted any.

‘Interesting that you felt the need of Mr DuMont,’ Milton said as he took his seat. Godunov said something in Russian that the lawyer obviously understood.

‘English, please,’ Milton said, indicating the recording equipment. ‘Saves the hard-pressed taxpayer the cost of a translator.’ He paused, his eyes moving between the two men. ‘I can explain the term “taxpayer” to you if you like…’

‘Mr Godunov,’ the lawyer drawled, deciding to ignore the jibe, ‘has come here today from a sense of civic duty.’

‘Very noble of him. Where are his bodyguards?’

‘They’re nearby. I was assuming my client would be safe inside a police station.’ DuMont’s thin smile told them he was attempting a joke.

Gish slid a grainy photograph across the table. ‘Might have been more civic-minded to come forward three nights back. But here you are, scurrying away from the scene like a frightened rabbit.’

Godunov studied the photo while she appraised him. He was bull-necked and shaven-headed, eyes small and deep-set. He was no longer wearing the dark raincoat, and stubble was beginning to show where he’d been unable to shave. His clothes looked unchanged from the night of the party.

‘I admit,’ he said, his voice a low rumble, the English heavily accented, ‘to a momentary loss of nerve.’

‘What did you think was happening?’

‘Something serious.’

‘When did you learn it was to do with Dwayne Hogarth?’

‘Allan texted me.’

‘Allan Franklyn?’

The Russian nodded.

‘When was this?’

‘Early morning, six or maybe seven.’

‘You didn’t exactly rush back,’ Milton said.

‘I was otherwise occupied, as you say.’

‘And was it also Mr Franklyn who told you what we found in the boot of your car?’ Godunov nodded again, eyes on the table. ‘So not your good friend Toby Scully?’

‘Toby and I are neighbours, that’s all.’

‘Oh, I think you’re more than that,’ Milton said, gesturing with a glance for Gish to take over.

‘You sold Mr Scully his flat, yes?’ she began. ‘How many others in the Heights do you own?’

‘Just the one I live in.’

‘That’s not true, though, is it? The flat you live in is owned by one of your many shell companies, at least on paper – the same company that owned the flat Mr Scully bought and that still owns two units that are sitting empty.’

Godunov looked towards his lawyer and gave a shrug.

‘I’m not sure what relevance this has to anything,’ the lawyer duly commented. Godunov’s eyes were back on Gish.

‘You’ve been talking to that reporter,’ he said, ‘the one who lives in the gutter outside the Heights.’

‘My client was elsewhere at the time the concierge was killed,’ DuMont pressed on. ‘Gambling at a casino between the hours of eleven fifty p.m. and three in the morning. We have witnesses of unimpeachable character.’

‘When you decided not to return home, where did you end up?’ Milton wanted to know.

‘I stayed with a friend.’

‘The friend who kept you “otherwise occupied”?’ Gish watched the man nod. ‘Any chance of a name?’

Godunov spoke in Russian again.

‘Mr Godunov would rather not say. The woman in question is married and her husband is out of the country.’

‘So you went back to her house,’ Gish went on, ‘and stayed there in hiding?’

‘I was waiting for things to calm down,’ Godunov said.

‘But they didn’t,’ Milton said, while Gish placed a photo of Godunov’s Bentley on the table. ‘And this time you knew you’d have to come forward, expensive lawyer in tow.’ He tapped the picture. ‘Your car, parked in your bay directly beneath your home.’

‘My beautiful car,’ Godunov conceded, turning the picture towards him and running a finger along it.

‘When did you last use it, Mr Godunov?’

‘Weeks ago, maybe months.’

‘And you regularly leave it unlocked?’

‘The car park is secure – maybe I was complacent.’

‘Any idea who the male in the boot might be?’ Milton described the victim, Godunov shaking his head throughout. ‘Maybe if I showed you a photo…’ He found what he was looking for on his phone and turned the screen towards the Russian and his lawyer. Godunov studied the victim’s face dispassionately while DuMont ignored it altogether.

‘I do not know this man,’ Godunov eventually stated.

‘The car is currently undergoing forensic testing,’ Gish added. ‘We’ll need your fingerprints and DNA for purposes of elimination.’

Godunov looked to his lawyer, who offered a twist of the mouth, indicating that this wasn’t something they could dodge.

‘Any idea why *your* car was chosen, Mr Godunov?’ Milton added.

‘As you know, it was never locked.’ The Russian paused. ‘Maybe someone wanted to cause me some trouble.’

‘You have enemies?’

‘Doesn’t everybody? Though perhaps “enemies” is too strong a word.’

‘Yet you feel the need for a panic room.’

‘They were the fashion at one time.’

‘And your bodyguards?’

‘Mere ornamentation – when I walk into a meeting with them, people take me seriously.’

The lawyer shifted in his seat. ‘My client is being generous with his time and candid in his responses to your questions. You can’t seriously think he would deposit a body in his own unlocked vehicle and leave it there in plain sight?’

The silence in the room lengthened until Gish broke it, her attention still on the Russian. ‘You saw Dwayne when you left Mrs Gallacher’s party?’

‘Yes.’

‘How did you get to the casino?’

‘By limo. I have a company contract – easier by far than trying to park the Bentley.’

‘And Dwayne seemed his usual self?’

‘There had been an altercation – you’ll know about that?’ He watched Gish nod. ‘So no, he wasn’t quite his usual self. I would say he was agitated.’ He thought of something. ‘The last time I saw him like that was maybe a month ago. I was coming home from the casino. He usually wanted me to stop and tell him about the glamorous people I’d rubbed shoulders with – especially the women… *always* the women. But that night he was sullen, not even looking at me, so I asked him what was wrong. One of the residents had asked him to source some drugs. He wouldn’t tell me who.’ Godunov seemed lost in thought for a moment. ‘Dwayne thought it was because of the colour of his skin – people immediately calculated that he would know people who know people – I’m assuming you’re aware of his past?’

‘Let’s not assume anything,’ Milton said, leaning forward an inch.

‘Dwayne had some trouble when he was younger.’

‘Drug trouble? Police trouble?’ Gish and Milton couldn’t help sharing a look.

Godunov sucked in a breath and exhaled. ‘But none of this explains why someone wanted the fob to Jessica’s apartment, or why an unknown person ended up in my car.’

‘So Allan Franklyn told you about the fob, too?’ Milton checked. ‘He finds it hard to keep a secret, doesn’t he? Or maybe he just knows better than to keep you in the dark, Mr Godunov. How well would you say you know the other residents?’

‘We seldom mix.’

‘Despite the parties, cinema and spa? You left your car boot open overnight once – how many of them knew about that?’

‘Some, I suppose. The front desk no doubt shared the news.’

‘Meaning Dwayne? You seem to have been on friendly terms with him, despite what Mr Scully told you.’ Gish watched for a reaction, but Godunov’s face remained impassive. ‘Dwayne had been selling stories to a journalist – you can’t have been happy about that. I assume you had a word…’

‘Yes, I spoke to him.’

‘And?’

‘He assured me that anything he passed along was mere froth,

something to satisfy the media's appetite without actually offering them any substance.'

'Did you believe him?'

Godunov angled his head slightly. 'Frankly, no – no one did.'

'You could have spoken to Allan Franklyn, had him dismissed from his post.'

'Making an enemy of Maeve Gallacher in the process? Thank you, but no.'

'It wasn't exactly "froth" that Dwayne was passing along when it came to your friend Toby Scully,' Milton added.

'Then speak to Toby – I've told you all I can.'

Gish started gathering up the photographs, hoping her next question might sound like mere curiosity.

'How did you make your fortune, Mr Godunov? Looking after people's investments?'

'All legal and above board,' the lawyer interrupted, 'and beyond the remit of your current investigation.'

'Did you help finance the Heights?' Gish pressed.

The lawyer was studying his Rolex. 'My client has meetings scheduled for the rest of the day. I think we're done here, don't you?'

'There's still the matter of fingerprints and a swab,' Milton countered. 'And of course we'd like permission to carry out a search of Mr Godunov's home.'

'You'll need a warrant,' the lawyer stated. But Godunov patted his arm.

'That won't be necessary, Sylvester. I have nothing to hide and business can always wait.'

'In that case, we'll send a colleague along to carry out the procedure. If you'd kindly wait here. I know the meter's ticking,' Milton gestured towards DuMont, 'so we'll be as quick as we can.'

As they walked back to the incident room, Gish turned to Milton. 'Godunov's definitely dodgy, but he's not stupid enough to leave a body in his own car. Could he be right about someone setting him up?'

'Maybe he was deciding how and where to get rid of the victim. Then we arrived and he panicked. Next thing the body's been found and he knows he's going to have to come forward, all lawyered up.' Milton shrugged. 'The thing about supposedly clever people, Gillian, is that they

often do stupid shit thinking they'll get away with it because everyone's always told them how clever they are.'

'You got that from *Columbo*, right?'

Milton considered this. 'Maybe I did at that.'

Amberson was at her desk when they approached. She eased herself back in her chair, knowing something was wanted from her.

'Lev Godunov is in the interview room,' Milton said. 'Can you get someone to do prints and a swab for purposes of elimination? Then alert the tech team to be on the lookout for any DNA or dabs in the Bentley that don't belong to the owner or Dwayne or Rosa.'

'And once you've done all that,' Gish added, 'run a more thorough check on Dwayne Hogarth – see if he's ever been on our radar.'

'How far back do you want to go?'

'Is the womb asking too much?' She turned to face Milton. 'I suppose now we can go tell the chief about Godunov?'

Milton nodded. 'But let's keep Dwayne out of it. If the guy has a record and we missed it…' He puffed out his cheeks. 'Well, I reckon there are already enough black marks against us for one day, don't you?'

Gish couldn't help but agree.

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Most of the reporters had drifted away from Marylebone Road, and at the Heights only a desperate smattering remained. There was no sign of Tom Simmons.

‘News doesn’t stay news for very long these days,’ Milton commented as they parked on the concourse.

Gish’s attention was drawn to the opposite side of the road, where Lewis Schofield was passing the time with what looked like a concierge, albeit one new to Gish. They both held takeaway drinks cups and were laughing about something. She followed Milton inside and stopped at the temporary desk, where the day shift were tucking into a box of doughnuts. Gish remembered that one of them was called Magnus.

‘Who’s that talking to the protester?’ she asked him.

He craned his neck to peer through the glass.

‘Laurence,’ he said through a mouth crammed with pastry.

‘As in dismissed-from-his-job Laurence? I recall you telling me he was back, but his shift doesn’t start for hours yet.’

‘He had a meeting with Mr Franklyn. We reckon he negotiated a pay hike.’

‘He brought us these,’ his colleague added, lifting the box.

Gish turned towards Milton. ‘Give me two minutes,’ she said, making for the exit.

Laurence had finished his chat with Schofield and was walking away. Gish risked life and limb weaving in and out of the traffic. Schofield didn’t see her, being too busy picking up one of his placards, ready to brandish it. One or two drivers, recognising him, sounded their horns in solidarity. Laurence was sipping from his cup when Gish caught up with him.

‘Laurence?’ she checked. The man stopped.

‘Police?’ he enquired. She started digging out her ID, but he waved the offer away. ‘Found out who was in the car yet?’

‘I don’t suppose you have any ideas?’

‘Whoever put the poor sod there, it won’t have been Lev.’

‘I tend to agree with you. How many people knew he kept his car unlocked?’

‘Probably quicker to list the people who didn’t.’

Gish gestured towards his suit. ‘It’s good that you got your job back.’

‘Silver linings and all that.’

‘The rumour is, Dwayne was behind your sacking.’

‘Rumours aren’t always false. Things Dwayne got up to of a night, witnesses weren’t welcome.’

‘The visits from Rosa?’

‘And others – not that poor Rosa ever knew.’

‘Plus Maeve Gallacher, obviously.’

Laurence met her eyes. ‘That seems to be more of an open secret than I thought.’

‘I hear that you had a heated exchange with Dwayne after you were dismissed.’

‘Yeah, I was angry – but not enough to think of topping him.’ He held her gaze, not blinking. Gish gestured over his shoulder.

‘You’re friends with Lewis Schofield? I’m not sure management would approve.’

‘They don’t, but me and Lewis are Peabody boys. That’s a bond that can’t be broken.’

‘You must have mixed feelings about the Heights?’

‘Doesn’t matter what my feelings are, does it? Money always gets its way.’ He glanced back in Schofield’s direction. ‘Lewis’s mum did more for London than Franklyn and his kind ever will.’ A tiny frond, gusted from the park, had landed on his lapel. He lifted it between finger and thumb, studying it for a moment before flicking it away. ‘The cops who questioned me, I told them everything I know.’

‘But they were only really asking about Dwayne, weren’t they? There’s probably a lot you could add about the residents and their goings-on. You were on duty the evening Jason Sievewright tried to gatecrash?’

‘Ms Forrester’s ex?’ He nodded his agreement.

‘I thought you worked the overnight shift with Dwayne?’

‘I pulled a double.’

‘Is it true Sievewright’s target that evening was Zafk?’

Laurence nodded again. ‘He’d have got to him, too, if I hadn’t been quick.’

‘I’m surprised Zafk doesn’t have security of his own.’

‘Wouldn’t go with the image, would it?’

‘Well, I hope he at least thanked you.’

‘Privileged little twat gave me nothing. Never a tip at Christmas either. Some people don’t know they’re born.’

‘Anyone else I should know about? Maeve, Lev, Maita…?’ She watched him decide not to take the bait, a thin smile the only answer she was going to be granted. ‘What were the pair of you laughing about anyway?’ She pointed in Schofield’s direction.

‘Lev Godunov, if you must know. Well, him and Mikey Tan both.’

‘Oh?’

‘Businesses they’re in, discretion is everything. Two very private men who’ve suddenly been made public – especially Lev. That Bentley of his with the six-figure vanity plate, it’s plastered all over the internet, isn’t it? Karma, Lewis calls it.’

‘Would that extend to what happened to Dwayne?’

Laurence’s look became stern. ‘Nobody deserves what happened to Dwayne – nobody.’

‘Is that why you didn’t grass him up to Eddie Gallacher?’

‘You’ll know a lot more about grasses than I do. Never been one and never will.’ He pulled back his shoulders and set off again, brushing past her.

Gish turned and retraced her steps. Schofield had seen at least some of the meeting.

‘You’ve upset him,’ he stated. ‘No need for that. His head’s back in the game.’ He lifted the cup to his mouth, glowering at her over its rim. ‘Laurence is one of the good guys, but it doesn’t always do to get on his wrong side.’

‘Like Dwayne Hogarth did, you mean?’

He was shaking his head. ‘Good guys have their limits, same as everyone else.’

‘And of course you see yourself as one of the good guys?’ Gish knew she sounded tetchy, but she was beyond caring.

A van driver tooted and Schofield waved a greeting.

‘Do you think half of them even know what you’re doing out here?’ she asked. ‘Do you even know yourself?’ She didn’t wait for an answer, sticking her hand up in front of her, palm towards the traffic, as she crossed the road and strode towards the Heights.

When Gish arrived at Godunov’s apartment, she found Milton in the long, dimly lit hallway. It was thickly carpeted, its walls lined with a procession of ornate display cases, inside which sat dozens of religious artefacts.

‘Place is a museum,’ he commented. ‘They’re icons, apparently. Russian.’ He pointed at one. ‘I think the artist’s name is Rublev. Fourteenth century.’

Gish left him where he was and wandered towards the living area. The walls were wood-panelled and looked as though they’d been stripped from a much older building. More artworks, predominantly religious paintings, were displayed on them. Godunov and his lawyer were standing by the open door of the panic room. It had been turned into a bar, lined with glass shelves of spirit bottles, illuminated from below.

‘You see how concerned I am about my safety,’ Godunov told Gish.

One of the officers assigned to the search team made to lift a bottle, the better to study it.

‘Careful,’ the Russian warned him. ‘That’s a Hibiki – I paid rather a lot for it.’

DuMont made a show of folding his arms, indicating the futility of the search. Privately, Gish agreed. On the other hand, you could always learn something from a person’s home. The dining table was covered in business magazines and auction catalogues. She flicked through one of the latter.

‘How well do you know Joseph Spalding?’

‘I invited him to view my little collection.’ Godunov gestured in the direction of the display cases. ‘I don’t think they were to his taste.’

‘Lot of art collectors in this place – yourself, Mr Franklyn, Mr Spalding…’

‘Joe is not a collector. He buys and sells, that’s all. Yes, Allan collects,

but he favours the avant-garde.'

'You're not a fan of the stuff in the public areas?'

'It was worse in the early days – some pieces are no longer here.'

'So all the stories about the biggest art collection…?'

'Might have been true at one time. More likely it was another marketing ploy. I don't have a problem with that.'

'You know Mr Spalding's in hospital in New York?' Gish watched the Russian nod, then turned her attention back to her surroundings. 'How will you know when you have enough?'

'I already have more than enough – and yet…' The shrug he gave was expansive, but then his face fell a little. 'I suppose I will need to replace my Bentley.'

'I'm sorry about that, but I'm sorrier for the victim.'

'You are right, of course.'

Milton had come to stand alongside Gish. The search team's leader emerged from the kitchen. His pout told the detectives that nothing had been found.

'No loved ones, Mr Godunov?' Gish asked. 'I was expecting a few photographs?'

'I'm not the sentimental type,' he offered. 'But I am truthful, and I'm a good friend, added to which my money was made legitimately, despite what your journalist may have told you.' He turned to DuMont and said something in Russian.

'Everything seems to be concluded,' the lawyer announced. 'I take it you won't need to trouble my client any further?'

'That all depends on where our investigation leads,' Milton stated.

'I'd say it's already taken you well off the beaten track, DI Milton – as usual, I might add.' DuMont stretched out an arm in an attempt to usher the visitors towards the door. The team were pulling off their nitrile gloves. Gish and Milton were at the back of the line.

'You two have history?' she asked.

'He's Eddie Gallacher's lawyer,' Milton said.

'Just one more victim of your vindictive police force,' DuMont stated.

'Don't pretend you wouldn't represent Satan himself if he got his leather-bound chequebook out.'

'Such a quaint notion, a chequebook,' DuMont said with a wry smile.

‘Ah yes, I forgot – they leave a paper trail, and that’s the last thing anyone around here would want happening to their millions.’

The lawyer’s smile widened as he shared a look with Godunov. ‘And once again DI Milton tells us how out of touch he is – thinking a few million might be of any material value.’ His laughter followed them all the way back to the lift.

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They rang the bell half a dozen times with no answer, Milton's fury just about abating.

'Front desk swore he was home,' he informed Gish, giving the door a thump. 'So where did you dash off to?'

'Turns out concierge Laurence and our lone protester are old pals.'

Milton digested this as he began to launch his fist at the door again. Roddy Collins threw it open, saw who was standing there and rolled his eyes.

'God in heaven,' he said in exasperation. 'I'm trying to work here.'

'We won't take much of your time, sir,' Gish assured him. Collins stood his ground, then strode back into his apartment. It was cluttered with music memorabilia, everything from framed tour posters to wall-mounted gold and platinum discs. A bottle of red wine and another of bourbon sat on the coffee table. There was a flat-screen TV that wouldn't have looked out of place in Gish's local cinema plus a stereo system with futuristic-looking speakers. Collins had marched past all of this, heading towards the bedrooms, Gish and Milton a few steps behind. One room had been turned into a studio, soundproof baffling lining walls and ceiling. It contained a rack of guitars and a couple of electronic keyboards, plus mics and mic stands. On a chair in the middle of the room sat a young Asian woman, her face veiled by long black hair. She was cradling a six-string acoustic.

'Sorry, Lian. Give the middle eight another go while I deal with this.' He closed the door on her and turned to face the detectives. 'The next Kate Bush,' he predicted. 'And Chinese kids will go wild for her.'

A desk had been set up in the hallway next to the studio door. Two notebook computers sat on it, their screens busy. Leads snaked beneath the door back into the room where Lian could be heard strumming.

‘Your mixing console?’ Gish enquired.

‘When I think of the amount of gear we used to need,’ Collins said. ‘Not to mention the studio costs…’ He broke off. ‘Is this visit to do with what happened in the garage? Because I can’t help you there.’

‘We’re here because of something Toby Scully shared with you, Mr Collins,’ Milton said.

‘Oh?’

‘He mentioned to you that Dwayne had been selling stories to the media.’

‘True.’

‘Which I’m guessing wouldn’t have sat lightly with you?’

‘You mean because of Zafk?’ Collins nodded slowly. ‘You’re right, of course.’

‘So did you maybe talk to Dwayne about it?’

‘Never got round to it.’

‘But you warned Zafk?’

‘Didn’t get round to that either.’

‘Can I ask why not?’

Collins could only shrug. ‘Never got round to it,’ he repeated.

‘Do you mind if I make an educated guess?’ Gish interrupted. ‘You don’t like the fact that Zafk and Jessica Forrester are “friends”. Seems to me a few negative stories doing the rounds might drive a wedge between them.’

‘It’s an interesting take,’ Collins offered. ‘Doesn’t mean it’s necessarily true.’ He looked from Gish to Milton and back again. ‘Now if you’ll excuse me…’

‘And you’re losing him anyway, aren’t you?’ she went on. He glared at her.

‘What do you mean?’

‘He’s moving out, meaning away from you – back home to live with his parents.’

‘Can you blame him, with the publicity this place is suddenly attracting?’

‘The Heights keeps him newsworthy, though. Not so true if he takes himself elsewhere. Maybe you’re already on the hunt for fresh meat.’

‘How old is she anyway?’ Milton interrupted, pressing a finger to the studio door.

‘Lian’s seventeen.’

‘The hooch in the other room won’t be for sharing afterwards, then? Or whatever powder you’ve got stashed away?’

Collins’ face had turned puce. ‘Get out,’ he demanded, baring his teeth. But Milton was already opening the door, angling his head into the studio.

‘Stay safe,’ he advised the teenager. ‘Keep your phone handy, don’t take anything he offers, and make friends with a lawyer if you intend signing with him.’

The girl’s eyes were widening, mouth open, as Milton and Gish made their exit.

In the lift, Milton got a text from Marylebone Road. ‘Preliminary autopsy findings,’ he told Gish. ‘Our victim was strangled manually then rolled into the duvet cover. We have prints, hair and fibres. Not much in his stomach other than red wine.’

‘So what do we do now? Check every flat for missing bedding?’

‘Swiftly replaced, wouldn’t you think?’

‘Still nothing to ID the victim?’ Milton shook his head. He noted that she was staring at him. ‘It’s not racist to be thinking it, you know,’ she said.

‘What?’

‘He’s black, and so is one of the residents, one we’ve been unable to trace.’

‘Maybe she doesn’t keep an eye on the news.’

‘Somebody around here must have told her.’

‘No one we’ve asked,’ Milton said with a shrug. ‘Not even her bestie Jessica Forrester – *if* she’s telling us the truth.’

‘I’m amazed Maita’s number wasn’t in Dwayne’s contacts.’

‘You think he maybe tried it on with her?’

‘Wouldn’t surprise me in the least.’

‘What do we know about her close protection?’

‘Provided by the Mozambique high commission as a favour to her father,’ Gish said.

‘So somebody there definitely has the bodyguard’s number.’

‘Nobody’s responded to our request.’

‘Then we should push harder.’

‘Foreign Office told us to lay off, remember? Crucial trade talks plus a state visit in the offing.’

‘We don’t work for the Foreign Office, Gillian.’

‘Thanks for reminding me.’

The lift doors slid open, depositing them in the reception area. Magnus and his colleague were behind the desk, looking replete.

‘Were either of you on duty the day Maita Macheso headed off?’ Milton asked.

They shook their heads. ‘But I know she took her car,’ Magnus offered.

‘How?’

He gestured towards the floor and what lay beneath it. ‘Empty bay.’

‘What kind of car is it?’

‘Porsche?’ He looked towards his colleague, who nodded.

‘Bright red,’ the colleague added. ‘911, I think.’

‘Would you happen to know the registration?’

‘It’ll be on file.’ He got busy on his computer. Half a minute later, he was reading out the details, which Gish added as a note on her phone. ‘If she calls again, want me to give her a message?’

Gish stared at him. ‘You’ve spoken to her?’

‘Yesterday. She’d heard about Dwayne and wanted to know what happened.’

‘Did she mention the second death?’

‘This was before you found the poor sod.’

‘We’ve been trying to reach her, left countless messages.’ She watched the concierge offer an apologetic shrug. ‘Did she say where she was?’

‘Somewhere across the Channel, I think.’

‘On her own?’

‘She’s never on her own,’ Magnus offered.

‘You mean her bodyguard?’ He nodded. ‘What’s his name, do you know?’

‘Amos.’

‘Amos Chissano,’ his colleague clarified.

‘Is there any way to find the number she was calling from?’

‘Maybe if Mr Franklyn gets an itemised bill.’

‘Is Mr Franklyn home right now?’ Magnus shook his head.

‘I’m on it,’ Milton said, placing the call and raising his phone to his ear.

Gish listened as he asked the question. He met her eyes and started shaking his head. ‘Is there any way to find out?’ he was saying. ‘If you could ask your provider, that would be helpful. It would have been a call to the main desk at…’ He turned his focus on the concierge.

‘Around noon.’

‘Noon yesterday,’ Milton said. ‘Thanks again.’ He ended the call. ‘He’ll see what he can do.’

‘You didn’t tell him the caller was Ms Macheso,’ Magnus commented. ‘You don’t want him to know it’s her you’re interested in.’

‘Well done, Sherlock,’ Milton said with a smile. ‘And on that note – fewer people who know, the better.’ He pressed a finger to his lips.

‘How did she sound, by the way?’ Gish asked the second concierge.

‘Absolutely gutted. Kept saying “no” over and over, like she couldn’t believe it.’

‘Any hint as to when she’d be coming back?’

The man shook his head. Milton handed him a business card.

‘If she calls again, urge her to contact us.’

‘Which parking bay is hers, by the way?’ Gish added.

‘Seventeen,’ Magnus said.

‘That’s two along from Mr Godunov’s?’ She watched him nod. ‘And the bay between them?’

‘Empty as long as I’ve worked here – belongs to one of the unsold flats.’

‘Suites,’ his colleague corrected him.

‘Suites,’ Magnus agreed.

As they left the building, Gish was back on her phone, sending the Porsche’s registration number to the DVLA. Milton unlocked his Peugeot and climbed into the driver’s seat, starting the ignition.

‘She’s with this Chissano fellow,’ he told Gish.

‘If we’re to believe her.’ Gish began doing up her seat belt.

‘Any reason not to? Why would she phone the Heights if she had something to hide?’

Gish pondered this. She peered up at the building as the car began to move off. ‘Too many secrets behind those windows, Jack,’ she muttered. Lewis Schofield waved a placard at them as they made to pass him. Milton obliged with a single honk of his horn.

‘Still got a bit of anarchy in you,’ Gish commented.

‘This job can do that to you if you’re not careful.’

Gish reached forward and turned on the car radio. As usual, it was tuned to Smooth 80s.

‘Even anarchists like good tunes, Gillian,’ Milton said in his defence.

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Lev Godunov watched them leave from his balcony, phone in hand and connected to his wireless earbuds.

‘Yes, Lev, what can I do for you?’ Oliver Carlyle eventually answered.

‘I’ve been interviewed by some police officers. They’ve also made a search of my home. I thought myself shielded from such unpleasantness.’

‘A dead man turned up in your car, Lev – no way you’re not going to be asked a few questions. Was it Jack Milton, by any chance?’

‘Him and a young woman.’

‘That’ll be Gish. I can deal with them, don’t worry. But Lev?’

‘Yes?’

‘Our friendship has become far too much of a one-way street for my liking – you with your constant demands but giving diddly-squat in return.’

‘“Diddly-squat”?’

‘Don’t try the dumb foreigner act with me. You know more English than half my colleagues.’

‘I told you about the party, didn’t I?’ Godunov noticed that the man across the street, the one with the placards, was gesturing with two fingers. He turned his gaze towards the parkland beyond, and the city skyline.

‘You said Eddie Gallacher would show his face,’ Carlyle was telling him.

‘Now you are guilty of misrepresenting the facts. I only said there was a reasonable chance. Maybe your men scared him off.’

‘So give me something else.’

Godunov affected a sigh. ‘People don’t speak as freely as they once did, even on an encrypted line.’

‘Do you think the body in your car was a message from someone?’

‘I don’t know. Maybe you’ll have better luck finding out.’

‘Whatever Jack Milton uncovers, I’ll know straight after. That’s about as much as I’m willing to offer.’

‘I need him to keep his distance so he doesn’t frighten off those I’m trying to help.’ Godunov’s voice faded away when he realised Carlyle had ended the call. He swore under his breath, found Allan Franklyn’s number and rang him, turning away from the view and heading back inside.

‘You’ll appreciate I’m a bit busy here, Lev,’ Franklyn answered, not bothering to hide his irritation.

‘Then I’ll be quick.’ Godunov began making a circuit of his suite’s main room. Nothing was quite where he’d left it. The detective named Gish hadn’t closed the auction catalogue after skimming it. There were numbers marked on the open pages, prices fetched by the various items. Godunov remembered the sale. He’d been tempted only by the auctioneer herself, eventually taking her for a dinner that had cost almost as much as one of the *objets d’art* he was now looking at.

And was worth every penny.

‘The thing is, Allan,’ he began, ‘you need to be very careful. I know I’ve explained this to you before, but the people I introduced you to, some of them are not nice or reasonable people like you and me. If their investment is not safe, *you* are not safe.’

‘And yet I’m not the one with a corpse in the boot of his Bentley,’ Franklyn retorted.

‘A misfortune from which I will bounce back. You, my friend, might not be so lucky.’ Godunov paused. ‘Has Eddie Gallacher spoken to you yet?’

‘That’s between me and him.’

‘You said he was expected at the party.’

‘Did I?’

‘But with what’s happened since… yes, I believe he will have spoken to you, probably not the most comforting of conversations.’

‘Jesus, Lev, you never give up, do you? Now if you’ll excuse me, I’ve got a barn full of shit to clear up.’

‘My advice would be to wear disposable clothing, Allan – and good luck.’

Godunov ended the call, closed the catalogue and sat down on the sofa to do some thinking.

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The atmosphere at Marylebone Road was sombre. Ames sat at his desk, still green around the gills after the post-mortem. Close-ups of the victim's face, front and profile, had been fixed to the murder wall, the wall itself now divided in half by a thick black line – Dwayne Hogarth to one side and the body in the boot to the other. Either side of the black line sat large question marks, a reminder that the two cases might well end up as discrete entities.

Milton and Gish sat at their desks, quietly reading the updated case notes before adding their own findings. Nothing new had been gleaned from the Bentley. The prints lifted belonged to Lev Godunov, Dwayne and Rosa. Only Godunov's were found on and around the boot. Gish studied the photos of the victim's clothing – M&S suit; Timberland shoes. His personal effects had obviously been removed to slow the process of identification. Two further attempts to get information from the Zimbabwe embassy and the Mozambique high commission had led nowhere. The chief had been summoned to New Scotland Yard for a carpeting. Everyone knew that he would come back in yet another foul temper and they'd be in the firing line.

'No news on the Porsche?' Milton enquired.

'I've given the details to every police force in the country.'

'Worth asking port authorities, too?'

'Maybe.' Gish's tone indicated what she thought of the idea.

'If the pair of them have flown somewhere, their details will be in somebody's system.'

'If we were allowed to search their flats, we'd know whether they took their passports.'

'We can ask the chief again about warrants, but I doubt he'll be in an accommodating mood, at least not for the rest of today.'

'Fobs to both are sitting right there in the control room.'

Milton stared at her. ‘You know as well as I do that we can’t do that, Gillian.’

Gish gave a twist of the mouth and got up from her chair, stretching her legs. Her first partner in the job, Lenny Crowther, wouldn’t have been so cautious – he’d have grabbed the fobs and hang the consequences. But then that was why he was no longer on the force. She walked over to the murder wall. Emma Amberson had planted herself there, arms folded as she studied it.

‘Wouldn’t it be nice if Jessica’s missing fob turned up somewhere?’ she mused.

‘Maybe we’ll get lucky and the intruder will go back to finish the job.’ Gish caught Amberson’s look and held up her hands. ‘Bad joke, sorry.’

‘Not as bad as some of the stuff other forces are posting online about us. Turns out the Muppets were as mild as the memes get.’ She turned her attention back to the photos of the victim. A close-up of his neck showed clear thumbprints. ‘No other injuries. He’d had quite a lot of wine, though. Pathologist made Ames sniff the stomach contents.’

‘No wonder he’s looking off colour.’ The two women glanced in Ames’s direction. He was doing a good job of pretending to be busy. ‘You still think maybe someone was sending Godunov a message?’

‘If so, they chose one hell of an envelope. By the way, I couldn’t find any sign that Dwayne had been in trouble at any point. Duff information?’

‘It was Godunov who suggested it,’ Gish said.

‘Trying to shift our focus away from Dwayne’s job at the Heights?’

‘Or maybe someone trying to turn Lev against Dwayne,’ Gish speculated.

Amberson’s stomach rumbled all too audibly. She pressed her palm to her midriff.

‘No lunch?’ Gish guessed.

‘No time,’ her colleague confirmed.

‘I’ve one of those breakfast protein bars in my drawer.’

Amberson shook her head. ‘Thanks anyway,’ she said, popping another piece of chewing gum into her mouth, adding it to the three or four already there.

Back at Gish’s desk, a mug of instant coffee had arrived, courtesy of Milton, who held another in his right hand.

‘Cheers,’ Gish said. He never made it quite to her liking, but she wasn’t about to complain.

‘Reckon your friendly reporter might have had Maita in his cross hairs at any point?’ Milton asked.

‘I suppose I could ask. But he’s bound to wonder why I’m suddenly interested.’

‘Tell him we just want to talk to everyone who had dealings with Dwayne Hogarth,’ Milton said. ‘Maybe you could bundle it in with the various uninhabited units – all those hedge funds and tax haven fronts. Nudge him about those, too.’

‘I thought you told me not to get too close to him?’

‘I’m not asking you to sleep with the enemy, Gillian – a simple text message will suffice.’

‘I can do that,’ she said, lifting her phone. She’d been going to do it anyway, but was happy for Jack to think it was his idea. It took a while to get the tone of the message right, however. In the end, it was longer than she’d have liked, and she followed it up with one that just said: *Sorry for waffling*.

It was a further forty minutes before he replied.

Is it okay if we cut to the chase? You want Maita, right?

Never try shitting a shitter, Gish thought. Then she typed the single word *Right* and pressed send.

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The Trophy was an ordinary-looking pub on a busy thoroughfare in Walthamstow. There were a couple of wooden picnic-style tables outside and a sandwich board near them advertising the food offerings inside. Double yellow lines meant no parking in front, except for one car. Mark Hogarth knew who its owner would be. He had walked past the bar a couple of times in the past hour, glancing through the open door, seeing not a single non-white face inside. That made it too risky for him to go in, so instead he had picked out a spot at the entrance to an alley sixty or seventy yards further along. The alley itself seemed to be a repository for bins, empty pallets and dog shit. Mark kept his phone in front of his face, as if checking his socials while waiting for a friend. He took a few photographs of the drinkers and smokers who had taken up residence in front of the pub. When a traffic warden stopped to check the car, one of the drinkers approached and had a word, the warden moving on briskly afterwards, no ticket issued.

Yes, it was Ray Stanton's Beemer all right, and this was his pub, one of several he owned or part-owned – the Monkey Bars in Marylebone was another. But the Trophy had been his first purchase, and Mark had heard that this was where he and his gang tended to hang out. Mark didn't think Stanton would have done the deed himself, but he would have ordered it. He'd been told by one of the people he'd pumped for information: you don't disrespect Stanton and suffer no consequences. Dwayne had laid hands on the man, loosening some of the stitching on the shoulder of Stanton's suit. Mark had heard it rip, and so had the suit's owner, which was when he'd thrown the punch – a fast and accurate one, the sort that proper training in a boxing gym provided.

Mark wondered now if the man who'd spoken to the warden was one of

Stanton's crew. He'd snapped a few photos of him just in case. Mark knew a few useful people; he could find out who the man was, maybe catch him on his own sometime soon and put a few pertinent questions to him. There were plenty of other gangs in London and Mark knew some of them by repute, members attending club nights he DJ'd at, occasionally offering a fist-bump of appreciation at his skills. He could pull in some favours, but he knew it would cost him down the line. Well, that was fine – he owed Dwayne that much at the very least. Some people he'd spoken with had said they didn't rate Stanton and his crew at all. Eddie Gallacher had been the brains, the one people respected as well as feared. The stories were legion, many of them no doubt exaggerated, but the funerals of his rivals had been real enough. Stanton was living on his boss's reputation and legend, but he was small and human by comparison.

'City's there for the taking,' one dealer had said with quiet confidence. 'And trust me, it's getting taken…'

There was no sign of Stanton himself, and Mark began to wonder if the pub boasted a back room maybe, somewhere private where Stanton hung out and made his plans. He'd checked the building and its surroundings online. A high wall topped with barbed wire separated it from the builders' yard that backed onto it. There was no way for him to loiter there. A few commuters passed him as they trudged home. Cars filled with careworn faces crawled past. Mark thought of his mother and father, the pain etched into them. They wanted him to choose the funeral music and say a few words. What the hell was he supposed to come up with, other than: I'm sorry, bro?

He was swallowing back emotion when his head exploded and the world around him collapsed.

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33

That evening, Gish's mum was more lucid than she had been for weeks, her eyes focused on her daughter as Gish sat in the chair, feet tucked beneath her, notebook balanced precariously.

'You should go out more,' Jacqui stated.

'I'm out all the time.'

'I don't mean work. You never seem to enjoy yourself. At school you had all these friends. You'd bring them home and I'd make them cups of tea they never drank.'

'I still have friends, Mum.'

'Not a boyfriend, though – or a girlfriend, come to that.'

Gish wrinkled her nose.

'That's not the real world, you know.' Jacqui wagged a finger towards Gish's screen. She moistened her lips with her tongue. 'I bet you're working right now, aren't you?'

'Trying to.'

'You'll burn yourself out, young lady.'

Gish couldn't help but smile. 'Not so young these days, Mum.'

'And wasting what's left of the good years.'

Gish gave up, slowly closing her screen and giving her mum her full attention. 'So what shall we talk about? The care home everyone says you should be in?'

'Not *everyone* says that.'

'The professionals do.'

'And that includes you, does it?' Jacqui sounded peeved. 'Know how much those places cost?'

'We could manage.'

'Maybe if you started doing OnlyFans in your spare time.'

Gish burst out laughing. ‘How do you know about OnlyFans?’

Jacqui wafted a hand across the magazines on her bed. ‘Speaking of which, I’m done with those.’

Gish checked the time. ‘Garage shop will still be open. I could take you in the chair.’

‘I hate having to use that thing, especially when it’s dark out. How come wheelchairs don’t have suspensions?’

Gish laughed again, stretching out and giving her mum’s hand a squeeze. ‘You’re a live wire tonight. Is there anything on the telly?’

‘Nothing worth watching.’

‘All those film channels I pay for – there must be something.’ Gish started juggling the two remotes, scanning the programme list. ‘Do you remember a villain called Eddie Gallacher?’

‘Does he have his own show these days?’

‘His wife’s addicted to reality TV. Worth an absolute fortune, lives in a palace, and sits in a knackered old armchair glued to property porn and shopping channels while sucking on a vape.’

‘Is this at the Heights?’ Jacqui watched Gish nod. ‘I know you don’t like sharing what you’re working on, but I see the news, same as everyone else. Letitia told me some people were being nasty about you online.’

‘I don’t pay any attention to that, and neither should you.’ Gish broke off. ‘Is that why you’ve gone all chatty? Trying to take my mind off things?’

‘I knew policing wasn’t going to do you any good.’

‘Yes, a real morale-booster you proved to be back in my training days.’

‘The people you come up against, the things you have to look at… I can’t help worrying about you, Gillian.’

‘The Met has counsellors these days, Mum. If the job’s getting to us, there are people we can talk to.’

‘But do you? Would you?’

‘Why wouldn’t I?’

‘Because you’ve got a stubborn streak, same as me. When your dad was here, even if I knew he was right and I was wrong, I would never admit it.’

Gish thought for a moment. ‘I’ve got some holiday coming. We should go somewhere.’

‘*You* should go somewhere, preferably with someone your own age. I’m

fine where I am.’

Gish’s phone began to buzz, Tom Simmons’ name appearing on the screen. She rose from her chair. ‘I’ll make some fresh tea,’ she said, heading towards the door and lifting the phone to her ear.

‘If he’s eligible, invite him out for a drink!’ Jacqui called.

Simmons was still laughing when Gish reached the kitchen. ‘Your mum?’ he guessed. ‘So you still live at home?’

‘What have you got for me?’ Gish asked, colour tingeing her cheeks.

‘I’m about to ping you a few stories and photos – you might already have seen them if you’re as thorough as I think you are.’

‘Hang on, I need my MacBook.’ She sped into the living room, avoiding her mother’s eyes as she snatched up the device and beat a retreat. She placed it on the kitchen counter and opened it.

‘Any stories that made it to print are probably from African papers,’ Simmons was saying. ‘They’re the only buyers in the market, and even then it’s her father they’re really interested in, hence the headlines…’

Gish skimmed the stories as she listened. One publication had taken to calling Maita ‘Princess Hedonism’. Whenever there was a photo of her, there was one alongside featuring her father, Charles, in his preaching pomp. The stories themselves were thin, usually little more than a short paragraph padded with historical detail. One photo showed Maita stepping out of her Porsche, a valet readying to park it for her. She wore a short silvery dress and stiletto heels, clutch purse in one hand, phone in the other, her hair tightly braided, eyes full of mischief and expectation.

‘Recognise the club?’ Simmons was asking.

‘Not really my world, Tom.’

‘It’s Rich Hollister’s place.’

Gish peered more closely at the photo. ‘When was it taken?’

‘Three or four months back, maybe.’

‘So she knows Hollister?’

‘You can see for yourself – she’s a looker. Plus she’s single, solvent and driving a Porsche. Just the sort of person Hollister wants rocking up at his club.’

‘Does that mean she probably knows Ray Stanton, too?’

‘You’d have to ask him. Whether he deigns to answer is another matter entirely.’

‘We have ways.’ Gish realised that the point of the stories was not the text itself – any old rerun would do – but the photos. They showed Maita leaving Bond Street jewellery stores, designer clothes outlets and expensive restaurants.

‘She never seems to be with anyone,’ she commented.

‘Unless they were newsworthy, the snapper wouldn’t bother. Easy enough to crop them out before you press send.’ He paused. ‘You need to open the final attachment, Gillian.’ She listened to him take a slurp of whatever he was drinking.

There were two thumbnails. She tapped on the first: a single grainy photograph, taken in an underlit nightspot.

‘Snapped by a civilian on their phone,’ Simmons said, ‘hence the quality. Posted online to a gossip site.’

‘Is this Hollister’s club?’

‘God, no, this is the real deal. Probably grime or drill or whatever the latest buzzword is. I’d guess some underground club night, somewhere sketchy.’

Gish peered at the picture. The DJ was trying hard to concentrate on the equipment in front of him while Maita leaned in to speak to him.

‘You on the second photo yet?’

She opened it. The DJ, headphones around his neck now rather than clamped to his ears, had taken a step back and was grinning as Maita took control of the decks. She had her mouth open in a whoop of joy, her free hand punching the air, onlookers clapping their approval.

‘It’s Mark Hogarth,’ Gish commented.

‘Black Markus himself,’ Simmons confirmed. ‘Probably more his sort of crowd than Maeve Gallacher’s party. Is that why it all kicked off?’

‘A couple of the women were bothering him,’ Gish admitted, deciding that Tom deserved something for his trouble.

‘The Muttons?’ Simmons backtracked immediately. ‘Sorry, but that’s what one or two of the older guys call them – mutton dressed as lamb. Explains why it was Stanton and Hollister who threw Mark out of the building.’

‘You didn’t hear it from me.’

‘Ditto on the photos.’ He paused again.

‘I probably wouldn’t have found these without you – seems I’m not so

thorough after all.’ She zoomed in on the second photo. A man was standing just behind Macheso, his hand on her shoulder as he watched her work the decks, his mouth open, telling her something. Gish was about to ask Simmons if he knew him, but he was already speaking.

‘Maybe you should invite me for a drink to thank me – you’d be making your mum happy.’

‘Stop it.’ Gish couldn’t help but smile.

‘It’s like the Gobi Desert in here!’ Jacqui called from the living room.

‘I promised to make her a tea,’ Gish explained.

‘I better not keep you, then. Want me to keep looking?’

‘Yes, please.’

‘I’m assuming Maita is a suspect?’

‘We just need to be able to say we’ve spoken to everyone.’

‘Is that why you’ve got every police force in England looking for her car?’

Gish stiffened. ‘How do you know that?’

‘The Met leaks like an old bucket. Why haven’t you asked us for help? Scared a news story might frighten her all the way back to Daddy?’

‘It’s up to the chief what we take to the media and when.’ She sucked in some air through her teeth. ‘I wouldn’t mind knowing who’s behind the leak, though.’

‘Can’t do that, Gillian – and you’d be wise not to go running to Chief Inspector Jeffries.’

‘Why?’

‘Because *you’ve* been talking to the media and that means you might leap to the top of his naughty list. Don’t worry, though – I won’t go blabbing, just so long as things stay nice and friendly.’

Gish felt her skin prickle. ‘Are you threatening me, Tom?’

‘Just stating the obvious.’

‘I need to go back through to Mum.’

‘You do that. And have a think about that drink. I can assure you I’m mostly harmless.’

Gish ended the call without saying anything more. Having switched on the kettle, she started composing a text to Milton: *I’ve found out some interesting stuff about Maita*. But she hesitated before sending it. He’d no doubt call her straight back and would eventually want to know where

she’d got it. She needed time to decide how much to tell him. Hadn’t he warned her to keep things professional and not get too close to Tom Simmons? And here she was, freshly off the phone with him while ostensibly off duty. Twenty minutes ago, she’d have had no hesitation in taking up Simmons’ offer of a drink. But then twenty minutes could seem a very long time.

I’m mostly harmless…

Gish wasn’t so sure about that any more.

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Five

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34

It had rained in the night, exacerbating the smell of mould and damp inside Marylebone Road police station. Milton sat at his desk and studied the photos of Maita outside Holli's nightclub and taking over Mark Hogarth's DJ set. He seemed more interested in the Holli's photo.

'She was a regular, huh?' he muttered. 'Well, I doubt Hollister will be forthcoming.' Nevertheless, when he started sending a text, Gish knew the recipient would be Oliver Carlyle. Maita to Hollister, Hollister to Ray Stanton, Stanton to Eddie Gallacher. Jack Milton wasn't a great believer in coincidence.

'We don't know where this place is?' he asked, showing Gish the photo of Maita at the decks.

'Lifted from Instagram. All it said was "Princess Hedonism at the controls".'

'She didn't post it?'

Gish shook her head. 'Someone called Blam-Blam. I've sent them a message, but I think they've gone.'

'Gone?'

'Their last post wasn't long after that one. My guess is, they opened a new account, different username.'

'Life used to be a lot simpler.'

'So do we go talk to Mark Hogarth about Maita?'

'Reckon he might know something?'

Gish shrugged. 'Leave no stone unturned – isn't that what the chief says?'

Milton scanned his surroundings, noting one of the Twins strategically placing a plastic waste-paper bin under a drip in a corner of the room.

'Okay, let's go,' he decided.

Traffic was sluggish as they headed towards east London, and without the blues and twos, they didn't take too many liberties with red lights. Not that Milton seemed to be in any hurry – Gish knew he was gearing up to ask her how she'd found the photos while already having a good idea of the answer.

The flat Mark Hogarth had shared with his younger brother was above a row of shops on Commercial Road. Milton decided against placing the sign inside the windscreen identifying them as police. Better to risk a parking ticket than a keying. There were six buzzers next to the graffitied front door, but the door itself was slightly open, so they went in unannounced. The stairwell didn't smell too fresh, the gutted remains of a racing bike chained next to the bottom step. More graffiti had been scratched into the walls.

'Seen worse,' Gish commented. 'Area's up and coming, from what I remember.'

'Then I'd hate to see what it came up *from*.'

They knew from the report of their colleagues' previous visit that Mark's flat was on the second floor. Milton was tiring by the time they reached the landing. He took a moment to catch his breath, gesturing for Gish to do the honours. She gave the door a knock and waited, noting that the frame was reinforced in an attempt to deter a forced entry.

'What?' a voice barked from behind the door.

'DS Gish and DI Milton,' she announced.

'Come back later.'

'We need a word now, Mark,' she said.

'I'm in the middle of something.'

'So are we, if you've not forgotten…' She waited for her words to sink in. Eventually there was the clicking of a couple of locks and the door opened an inch.

'Have you got someone for Dwayne?' He was trying to keep his face turned away, but Gish could see bruising and swelling, one eye puffed up so it was no more than a slit.

'What happened to you?' she asked.

'Got jumped outside a pub.'

'By anyone we know?' Milton added, face pressed to the gap.

Mark would have scowled if the damage had allowed it. He relented and turned away, walking into the living room. Gish and Milton followed. Four

doors off the cramped hall: Mark's bedroom and the utility room Dwayne had bedded down in, plus living room and bathroom. Plaster was missing from the ceiling and the wallpaper was beginning to come loose from the walls. Gish paused by a couple of framed photos – Mark and Dwayne in their early teens, looking like a team, plus both boys a few years younger, flanked by proud parents. The living room itself was a mess of DJ equipment and keyboards, plus a TV too big for the space, a games console attached to it. In place of a sofa or armchairs there were beanbags and floor cushions. Mark's DJ rig sat on a plank raised from the floor on piles of used bricks. In an alcove sat a bombsite of a kitchenette. There was an overpowering smell of skunk, Mark lifting the guilty spliff from an ashtray and taking another hit.

'Medicinal purposes,' he said through a stream of smoke.

'This kit must be worth a few quid,' Milton commented.

'I didn't nick it, if that's what you're getting at.'

'Explains your security precautions.' He fixed the young man with a look. 'Otherwise I'd be guessing you had people you needed protecting from.'

Gish was peering through the unwashed window. 'The Troxy's just along the road, isn't it? Ever DJ'd there?'

'I've done opening sets a couple of times.'

'You've played for some notable people, too,' Milton went on. 'Maita Macheso, for example.'

Mark blinked with his one good eye, then offered a shrug. Gish showed him the photos from the club.

'Her?' he eventually offered. 'Never caught her name.'

'She lives at the Heights.'

'That a fact?' Mark collapsed onto one of the cushions, content to leave the detectives standing.

'Pair of you look pretty friendly to me,' Milton commented.

'It's my job to be friendly.'

'Except at parties attended by Ray Stanton and his pals.' Milton gestured towards Mark's face. 'Just a wild guess you bumped into him again?'

Mark made a noise deep down in his throat. 'All I wanted was a quiet word.'

'If you're ready to press charges, we're here to assist.'

‘Never saw who did it.’ He offered another shrug.

‘Which pub was this? The Monkey Bars again? Or maybe the Trophy? Latter’s where he usually lurks.’ Milton saw that Mark wasn’t about to answer, which was answer enough in itself. ‘You sure a quiet word’s all you wanted, son?’

‘No comment, Officer. Anyway, what’s she got to do with Dwayne?’ Mark pointed at Gish’s phone screen, where the photos were still displayed.

‘Which club is it?’ Gish asked in place of an answer.

‘Some sort of storage unit out Hackney way.’

‘Do you know someone called Blam-Blam?’

‘Should I?’

‘He or she took the pictures.’ She watched Mark shrug again. ‘And the other guy – the one over Maita’s shoulder?’

‘I wish I could help.’

‘Do you know who runs the club?’

‘It was a one-off. Someone finds a venue, word gets round.’

‘Not widely publicised, then? So how do you think Maita found out about it?’

‘You’re thinking Dwayne? Maybe you’re right. He was always trying to send people my way, people he thought might be useful.’

‘Just like the Gallacher party,’ Milton said.

‘Just like,’ Mark echoed, taking another hit from the spliff.

‘She didn’t mention Dwayne to you?’ Gish asked.

‘Not that I recall. What you see in those photos is pretty much what I got. She wanted to work the decks, but she was worse than useless. So she went back to the dance floor, acting like she owned the place. I never saw her again after that. Not even close to being her scene.’ His look went from Gish to Milton and back again. ‘She’s been gone from the Heights for a week or more – no way she had anything to do with what happened to Dwayne.’

Milton’s eyes narrowed. ‘How do you know that?’

‘At the party, someone was talking about someone called Maita. She took a private jet somewhere, right?’

Gish searched through her phone until she found the party photos posted on social media. She lowered her screen until it was level with Mark’s eyeline.

‘Maybe these two?’ she enquired.

‘Could be.’ Mark thought for a moment. ‘Yeah, they were behind me almost the whole time, yakking away. You can see it’s getting on my nerves. A DJ has to stay focused, you know?’ He blew out another puff of smoke. Gish knew she was in danger of getting a contact high. She didn’t know if the slight smile on Milton’s face was him trying to be friendly or beginning to feel the effects. She held her phone out so he could see the picture of Toby Scully and Lev Godunov. He nodded with more vigour than was necessary and Gish knew she had to get them out of there. She tugged on his sleeve to bring him back.

‘So just to confirm,’ she checked with Mark, ‘you only met Maita that one time?’

He held up a forefinger in agreement. ‘Not even close to being her scene,’ he repeated.

That was good enough for Gish. She thanked him and guided Milton back to the front door and into the stairwell, still gripping his sleeve. ‘Take a few deep breaths,’ she advised him.

‘I can handle a bit of weed, Gillian,’ he chided her. Then he began to laugh. He was still chortling as they arrived on the pavement.

‘I’m driving,’ she said, digging his key fob out of his jacket. When he was safely in the passenger seat, she dashed to a corner café and returned with a couple of double espressos. They drove back to the station with the windows open, Milton humming along to music only he could hear.

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When they reached the incident room, Alec Jeffries was listening to something Ben Boothroyd was telling him. Seeing them, Boothroyd waved them over.

‘I’ve just been telling the chief – I’ve tracked down the Porsche.’

‘Where?’

Boothroyd led the way to his desk. His computer screen showed a photo of the car parked on a double yellow line. ‘It’s a private airfield in Kent. There’s a car park not fifty metres away, but this is where she left it.’ He clicked his mouse and a fresh image popped up. The Porsche had been issued with a parking ticket. Gish and Milton shared a look, remembering the conversation Mark had overheard at the party: *private jet*.

‘It’s still there?’

Boothroyd shook his head. ‘After twenty-four hours they towed it.’

‘Was she on her own?’ Gish asked, thinking of the bodyguard.

Boothroyd just shrugged. ‘I can ask the airfield.’

‘You do that, Ben,’ Jeffries said, pulling out the detective’s chair for him and placing him on it. He then moved away a few steps, knowing Milton and Gish would follow. ‘What’s your thinking?’ he asked in an undertone.

‘If she fled because of what was left in Godunov’s boot,’ Gish said, ‘our best bet is a search warrant for her flat – grab some prints and fibres and see if we get a match to the deceased. I know the Foreign Office won’t be happy with us, but so what?’

‘I still don’t see how it ties in with the concierge,’ Jeffries commented.

‘There’s a lot we’re not seeing just yet – but we will.’

Jeffries gave a lengthy sigh and bowed his head slightly. ‘One of the online rags has flagged up our interest in Ms Macheso. Someone’s been talking.’

‘Was there a byline?’ Milton asked.

Jeffries’ head snapped up. ‘What difference does that make, Jack?’ Milton gave a shrug that could have been mistaken for indifference. ‘No name attached,’ the chief continued, ‘but they used the photo of her going into Richard Hollister’s club. I don’t like that there’s a leak on this team.’

‘To be fair, we’ve been asking everyone at the Heights about her – needn’t have come from here.’

‘I wish I shared that view, Jack, I really do…’ Jeffries stalked back to his office. Milton returned to his desk, Gish arriving a couple of minutes later with fresh coffees.

‘Thanks for not dropping me in it,’ she said.

Word about the Porsche had gone around the room, leaving people slightly more upbeat. It might not last, but it was there and they were working with it.

‘Drove to a private airfield,’ Milton commented, studying Gish as she took her seat. ‘Left the car kerbside. In a hurry – or is that just how the super-rich behave?’ He paused. ‘You reckon she was on her own, don’t you?’

‘I’d put money on it. How much do you reckon Scully and Godunov know?’ She was tapping out a text as she spoke.

‘We should definitely ask them.’

Gish hit send. The text consisted of a single word, addressed to Tom Simmons: *Bastard!* While Milton sipped his drink, Gish pulled up the online news story. She had just got to the line ‘Maita, who until recently did more clubbing than Greenland’ when a message arrived from Simmons: *You owed me, remember? And hey, I could have used the pic from Mark’s DJ set. Respect for the bereaved and all that. Drink?*

Gish had no intention of responding. She placed her phone on the desk and looked across towards Milton. ‘Toby Scully owns a private jet, making him the obvious candidate. We should summon him here, make sure he’s nice and uncomfortable.’

‘He’ll come lawyered up.’

‘Let’s do it anyway,’ Gish said, a glint in her eye.

After a visit to the toilet with the constantly running cistern, Milton loitered

in the corridor, wishing he'd brought the spare Twix from his desk drawer. He had sent a text to Oliver Carlyle – *Any chance of a word?* – and it wasn't long before his phone rang.

'Something I can do for you, Jack?' Carlyle purred.

'Ray Stanton still owns the Trophy, doesn't he?'

'You know perfectly well he does.'

'Runs most of his business from there, too – so I'm guessing you have eyes on the place?'

'And?'

'And Mark Hogarth was keeping tabs on it, too, until he got jumped. Thing is, Oliver, your boys probably saw it happen, same as they saw Stanton give Mark's brother a bloody nose, and in neither case did you step in, because that might have jeopardised your precious operation, yes? For me, that crosses a line.'

'You want me to apologise?'

'I want you to tell me who jumped him.'

'Just kids, Jack, kids who want to be players.'

'An initiation, then?'

'Maybe they see it that way. What matters to Stanton is that he's kept out of it. A random street attack – we probably get a few dozen a day in London.' Carlyle paused. 'Did Hogarth report it, is that why you're phoning?'

'No.'

'No, I'll bet he didn't. Reckon he'll heed the warning?'

'I don't know. It'd be nice if he had a guardian angel out there.'

There was silence on the line until Carlyle gave a resigned sigh. 'Okay, you win. If my lads see him again, they'll shoo him off. Good enough for you, Jack?'

'Just about. Any updates on Eddie Gallacher?'

'It might help if I didn't keep getting interrupted. Why the interest in Mark Hogarth anyway?'

Gish was peering around the door of the incident room, seeking Milton out. She made a gesture with her head. He held up a finger: *one minute*.

'Family's already lost one son,' he said into the phone. 'I'd rather they didn't lose another on my watch.'

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Toby Scully entered the interview room accompanied by a waft of eau de cologne and the scent's bearer, the lawyer Sylvester DuMont.

'Why am I not surprised?' Milton muttered.

'My client is the one who was surprised by your summons, DI Milton,' DuMont stated. Taking his seat, he pinched the knee of each trouser leg. Gish got the feeling it was a habit he'd been taught as a young man. Then he slid his horn-rimmed glasses down his nose and peered over them at the detectives. 'Surprised *and* slightly chagrined,' he added.

'Maybe scared, too,' Milton shot back, 'hence the need for a pricey attack dog.'

DuMont puckered his lips and glanced at his watch, adding nothing more. The interview was being recorded so Gish identified herself and Milton, asking Scully and DuMont to do the same. There was a pause afterwards as Milton made a show of going through the file in front of him. It was thick, which didn't help settle Scully's nerves. He dabbed at his face with a voluminous cotton handkerchief.

'Not that warm in here, is it?' Milton asked Gish.

'I'm fine,' she responded.

'You seem to be the only one feeling the heat, Mr Scully,' Milton told the man.

'Let's just get on with it, shall we?' DuMont looked like he had places to be. No small leatherbound notebook or gold pen, just arms folded to display his cufflinks and Rolex.

'Did your friend Lev suggest Mr DuMont?' Milton asked Scully.

'That's of no relevance,' the lawyer answered. 'Please get to the point.'

'The point is…' Milton rested his elbows against the edge of the table so he could lean in towards Scully's face. 'At Maeve Gallacher's party, you

were overheard discussing Maita Macheso. You seemed to know that she had left the country by private jet. We're wondering if it was *your* private jet, sir?'

Scully turned towards the lawyer, who angled his head slightly, inviting an answer.

'Not mine,' Scully said.

DuMont placed his palms against the table. 'Well, if that's all you wanted to know…' He made as if to rise.

'But you knew she was leaving the country,' Milton pressed on. 'I'm assuming that's because she told you? I mean, it has to be either you or Mr Godunov…'

'She wanted to use my plane,' Scully acknowledged. 'Problem was, it was having a check-up.'

'She couldn't wait?' Gish asked. Scully just shrugged. 'This was a spur-of-the-moment thing? Not a trip she'd been planning for a while?'

Scully appeared to be thinking back. 'It was only a brief conversation. I was slightly taken aback, actually. I don't suppose we've exchanged more than a few hellos and goodbyes since I moved in, but there she was at my door asking a favour, and happy to pay whatever it cost.'

'How did she seem?'

He thought again. 'Absolutely fine.'

'Was anyone with her?'

He shook his head. 'I told her that if she could wait a few days, I might be able to help, but apparently there was something she had to do in France – an exhibition that was closing, something like that – so I suggested a few charter companies who'd be glad of her business.'

'So was it Paris she was headed for?' This time Scully nodded. 'And when exactly did this conversation take place?'

'Maybe nine or ten days ago?'

'Can you be more specific?'

'Not really.'

Gish turned her head towards Milton, who was still pretending to be studying the file. She got the feeling they were done here, but before either of them could say anything, there was a tap at the door. It opened, and Emma Amberson's head appeared. She paused long enough in her gum-chewing to indicate that there was something they were needed for. Gish

ended the recording.

‘A simple phone call would have sufficed,’ DuMont complained.

‘How is Lev anyway?’ Milton asked Scully as he tidied away the file.

‘You don’t have to answer that,’ DuMont said crisply.

‘Everything all right with your daughter?’ Milton ploughed on.

‘Or that,’ DuMont snapped.

‘Lu’s fine,’ Scully replied anyway. ‘Still a bit shocked by what happened to Dwayne.’

‘She knows about the body in the Bentley?’

He nodded. ‘How are things progressing? Is that why you’re so interested in Maita?’

‘I don’t have to answer that,’ Milton stated, giving the lawyer a sour glance before pushing open the interview room door.

Ben Boothroyd was relaying what he knew to a team that now included Gish and Milton as well as the chief and Amberson.

‘Two people boarded the flight, male and female. Passports identify them as Maita Macheso and Amos Chissano. It was a private charter, one way, probably cost them north of 10K. Destination a private airfield outside Paris. I got the pilot’s phone number and was able to talk to him. He says they were relaxed, didn’t touch the complimentary fizz. Hand luggage only, so he reckoned it was a short jolly – an art exhibition was mentioned.’

‘Do we have footage from the terminal?’ Gish asked.

‘I get the feeling it’s more of a glorified shed than a terminal, but I’ll ask.’

‘So is there a connection to the body in the boot or not?’ Alec Jeffries asked, not expecting an answer.

‘At least we know it’s not Chissano,’ Milton said, looking at Gish.

‘What about the Porsche?’ Jeffries continued.

‘We’ve got officers at the pound, giving it a once-over,’ Amberson answered. ‘Should we pass it onto the lab?’

‘To what end, other than adding to the strain on our existing budget?’

‘If she’s the killer, she’s not going to be coming back,’ Boothroyd said with a shrug. ‘It’ll be Europol’s problem, not ours.’

‘If she’s the killer,’ Jeffries echoed, ‘who exactly did she kill?’

‘Do we put the post-mortem photo out there, ask the Great British Public to help?’ Timpson suggested.

‘I think we’re getting to that point,’ Jeffries agreed. ‘Okay, good work, people. Let’s keep pushing – something’s going to give eventually.’ He clapped his hands together before turning to leave.

Gish replenished the coffee mugs. When she placed one on Milton’s desk, she saw that he was reviewing the footage taken by the crime-scene team on the night Dwayne was killed. She recognised Mick Bentham, even in his full kit. His crew worked well under his command – meticulous but retaining a necessary sense of humour. They seemed evenly balanced between male and female. Looking around, she knew the Met had work to do on that score.

‘Better hope Mick doesn’t find out you’re checking his homework. He wouldn’t let anything sloppy get past him.’

‘There’s a first time for everything.’ He toasted her with his mug before placing it untouched on his desk. ‘You mind if I put some headphones on?’ he asked.

‘Won’t bother me. Listening for anything in particular?’

He shook his head and pulled the headphones from his drawer, plugging them into the computer. ‘Just easier to focus without all this…’ He spun a finger in the air, indicating the constant buzz of chat and clacking of keyboards. When Ames gave an exaggerated belch, Gish considered grabbing her own earbuds from her bag. Instead, she went online and started searching for museums and galleries in Paris. Glancing up at one point, she saw that Milton was offering her half his Twix. She smiled but shook her head.

‘I’m not the one with the munchies, Jack.’

After half an hour’s further reading, she concluded that no major exhibitions had ended recently or were in their final days. She studied a map of France. There were other cities, other galleries and museums, but if you were travelling by private plane, you ran your own schedule – if the show were in Bordeaux or Lyon or Lille, why not fly there? Detective Sergeant Lenny Crowther suddenly popped up in her head. He’d been raised on streets similar to hers, where rules were made to be tested to snapping point.

I know, she wanted to tell him.

Milton still seemed intent on his computer. Gish gnawed at her bottom lip for two more minutes before rising to her feet, indicating that she was stepping out. He seemed hardly to notice. He was counting silently to himself, face resting on his palms. She slipped her jacket back on and went out to where her car was parked.

It was time to play by Tottenham rules.

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Ten minutes later, she was pulling to a stop on the forecourt of the Heights.

Magnus and his fellow concierge were seated behind the makeshift desk. Magnus asked when they could move back to their normal seats, but Gish could only shrug. She had a question of her own.

‘Would you be okay to look at a photo of the person we recovered from the Bentley?’

Neither man looked thrilled, but they didn’t say no either. Before they could change their minds, Gish held her phone up in front of them. They appeared only slightly queasy, Magnus’s colleague averting his eyes first.

‘It does look a lot like Amos,’ Magnus decided.

‘Yes, but Amos was still alive after this happened,’ Gish said. ‘Maybe someone else you know, someone you recognise because they’ve been a visitor here?’

‘Maybe,’ he conceded.

Gish studied the photo herself. She knew the words she wanted to say, but still swallowed and took a breath before opening her mouth. ‘I need the fobs for both suites, Maita’s and Amos’s.’ The concierges looked uncertain. ‘I have a warrant,’ she assured them, trying to keep her voice steady. She gave her phone a waggle, hoping they wouldn’t ask to see the non-existent paperwork. Magnus eventually rose to his feet, heading to the control room, skirting the section of floor where Dwayne had lain. He handed her both fobs.

‘How do I tell them apart?’ she asked.

‘Tiny number stamped on the reverse,’ he explained.

She turned both fobs over and could just about make out the numerals. She nodded her understanding and walked to the lift.

Once she had reached Maita’s floor, she took a moment to compose

herself. If she went in, she was breaking every set of rules. Well, all except one.

‘Time to play,’ she said to herself.

The fob clicked against the sensor on the first door and she stepped into a short, narrow hallway leading to an open-plan living area with breakfast bar. It was the smallest apartment she’d been in so far, and she knew straight away that it had to be the one used by Amos Chissano. The flat-screen TV was hooked up to a games console not unlike the one in Mark Hogarth’s living room. An iPad lay nearby. The walls were bare and there was no balcony. The window, while large, looked onto buildings to the rear of the Heights, which explained how dim the daylight seemed. There was just the one bedroom. Clothes were scattered on the bed, and the mirrored door of the fitted wardrobe had been left open. There were drawers inside, also open, as was the single drawer of the bedside cabinet. Gish peered in, seeing cables and adaptors for some of Chissano’s electronic devices, plus a packet of ibuprofen and another of condoms, but no passport. A small hard-shell suitcase sat on the carpet next to the bed, obviously deemed surplus to requirements. The bathroom didn’t add much, apart from the fact that nothing seemed to have been taken – toothbrush, toothpaste and an electric razor were arranged on the shelf above the sink. The mirrored medicine cabinet was empty.

All in all, the place wasn’t much more than a bolthole. She got the feeling the bulk of the man’s belongings might be at some other location, a place he called home when not tasked with keeping an eye on Maita.

She snapped a few photos with her phone, then closed the front door and headed across the corridor. Maita’s quarters were altogether more opulent – thick carpeting underfoot instead of wooden flooring, art on the walls, and furnishings that spoke of serious money. Gish studied the mail that had been gathering on the floor inside the front door. She noticed one that seemed to be a parking fine and another from the car pound. Entering the large living area, her eyes were drawn to a chair lying on its side. Two wine glasses and an empty bottle stood on an ornate coffee table. One of the glasses had been snapped at the stem, while the other bore traces of lipstick. There were red-wine stains on both the table and the cream carpet. On the kitchen area’s marble worktop sat a corkscrew with the cork still in it. Gish checked the level in the bottle – almost empty. Barolo, according to the label.

The glass in the French doors leading to the balcony had been left darkened. Gish had to get close to them to make out the view of the park. African artefacts took up most of the shelving. Framed photos attached to the walls showed Maita and her father. Another, from further back in time, was of a woman in traditional dress cradling a baby. Maita and her mother, Gish presumed. There were two bare picture hooks not quite a metre apart. Gish wondered which photos Maita had taken with her – and why. She took a few more shots before heading further into the apartment. There were two bedrooms, the smaller turned into a home office. The master bedroom was more of a suite, with a large marble-floored bathroom just off, along with a dressing room. Drawers and doors had been left open in the latter, with more signs of hurried packing. Or maybe the rich just weren't that tidy. Gish looked at the fourposter bed, clothes laid out on it. Then it dawned on her what was missing. She pressed a finger to the goose-down duvet.

'No cover,' she muttered to herself.

Her phone started ringing. Caller ID: Jack. She let it ring while she snapped a picture of the bed. There was a pinging sound as a photo arrived. She opened it: Jack in the reception area downstairs, looking far from pleased. Swearing under her breath, she called him.

'It's good that you got that search warrant,' he drawled.

'Do you want to come take a look?'

'Best not, eh? All things considered.' She knew what he meant, knew too that he wasn't about to spell it out in front of the concierges.

'Signs of a struggle in Maita's flat, Jack – and no duvet cover on her bed. So will you help me convince Jeffries that we need that search warrant, or do I try to do it by myself?'

'To be discussed once you're out of there. Just tell me you're gloved up?'

'I've not touched anything.'

He lowered his voice to a whisper. 'If you've left as much as a hair follicle for Mick Bentham to find…'

'I'm heading out the door now,' Gish assured him, giving the room one last look. 'By the way, how did you know where to find me?'

'You forgetting what I do for a living, Gillian. Your face in the office told me you'd had what you probably thought was a bright idea, and there was only ever one destination on my list.'

‘You have the makings of a fine detective.’

‘I’d have said the same about you until ten minutes ago.’

‘I take it I’ve failed the audition?’

‘Just get your backside out of there.’

‘Yes, sir.’

When the lift doors opened and Gish got in, she studied her face in the mirrored wall, trying for a look of suitable contrition.

But inside she was absolutely buzzing.

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Ray Stanton was in his office at the Trophy when his phone told him Maeve Gallacher was trying to reach him. Very few people were allowed to visit him in what he thought of as his den. No expense had been spared – and that wouldn't sit well with the image folk had of him. They reckoned him to be as rough-hewn and down to earth as the pubs he owned, in keeping with his background. Ray was 'one of us', and because of that, he felt an invisible shield around him, made up of locals who knew, respected and feared his reputation. The door of the den was kept locked at all times, even when he occupied it. It was up a creaky flight of wooden stairs with a red rope fastened at the bottom. Bits of the Trophy had been altered and restored, but he would never allow anything about the staircase to be changed – those noisy steps were as good an alarm as any guard dog.

They couldn't prevent the intrusion of phone calls, though. Stanton usually glanced at the screen without answering. A message might be left, which he would either ignore or reply to. The only person he picked up for was Eddie. But Eddie's wife had now called for the fourth time. She wasn't one to leave a message, but he knew what she wanted. This time he decided to speak to her, tapping the phone and switching on the speaker.

'Maeve,' he said, leaning back in his leather swivel chair.

'About sodding time,' Maeve Gallacher growled. Stanton could tell she'd had a drink.

'If you're wondering about Dwayne, I've got nothing for you.'

'That's not good enough, Ray. Not nearly good enough.'

'I'm doing everything I can.'

'You don't give that impression.'

Stanton shot forward in his seat, lips close to the phone laid flat on his antique desk. 'I'm a bit busy running things for your other half, making sure

you've got plenty of cash to burn through.'

'All while skimming a bit for yourself, from what I hear.'

'Bollocks to that,' Stanton said, thinking: *Has Tara been talking?* He was due a few strong words with her anyway if what his sources said was true – her number prominent in Dwayne Hogarth's contacts. 'I've always looked after you, you know that.'

'Not as well as you used to.'

'Look around you, woman – times are tough and it's not like we lack competitors.'

'Competition was never a problem when Eddie was in charge. He knew how to deal with it.'

'I don't hear him complaining.'

'You don't *want* to hear him complaining, Ray, trust me.'

'What's happening about the body in the garage?'

'You tell me,' Maeve Gallacher drawled.

'What's that supposed to mean?'

'You were down there with Rich the night of the party. Don't tell me you didn't recognise the smell, and yet the pair of you chose to ignore it.'

'Reckoned it was rats or something,' Stanton muttered, squeezing the bridge of his nose.

'Some of us can smell a rat easier than others.'

'Think you're smart, don't you, Maeve? Wasn't it you that persuaded Eddie to sink so much into that bloody high-rise and its offspring when there were better opportunities out there gagging for his money?'

Ray looked around his den, imagining her in her fancy flat in one of the priciest blocks in the city. He still lived in Stepney, not half a mile from where he was born and raised. What did she know about anything? The square root of naff all. He kept his mouth close to the phone when he spoke again.

'Maybe I *should* send Eddie an update.' He'd had just about enough of her silent treatment. 'It's probably well overdue. He'll be interested to hear how close an eye you're keeping on Dwayne's death. I'm guessing he'll be especially interested in *why* you're keeping such a close eye…'

'You're the same little scrote you've always been, Ray, same as when Eddie lifted you out of the gutter and gave you a chance.'

'And I've paid him back in spades, sweetheart – spades *and* blood.

Whereas you…’ Instead of finishing the sentence, he dabbed a finger against the screen, ending the call. She waited a full thirty seconds before ringing back, but Stanton pushed the phone away and leaned back in his chair, a cold smile on his face as, not for the first time, he began juggling all his available options.

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Neither detective could be sure that Chief Inspector Jeffries believed their story – an anonymous tip-off, voices heard arguing nine or ten days back, obviously called in by a neighbour but no way to know which one – but he eventually caved in and got them the search warrant, then travelled with them to the Heights, where they were met by Mick Bentham and his scene-of-crime crew. George scowled as he handed them their overalls.

‘I’m running short again,’ he complained.

‘I promise not to damage mine on a cactus,’ Gish assured him.

The team liked what they saw in Maita Macheso’s apartment, in that there were plenty of prints. Bentham noticed that Gish didn’t have her hood pulled up over her head and told her to be quick about it. She did as she was told, risking the thinnest of smiles in Milton’s direction. If she’d left any evidence of her first visit, she now had a cover story.

‘We can get comparatives from the deceased and the lady’s Porsche,’ Bentham said, checking his team’s progress.

‘I’d say there are three different individuals here at the minimum,’ one of his colleagues piped up.

‘Only two in the bedroom so far,’ someone else added.

‘What do you make of the picture hooks?’ the chief asked.

There were shrugs and shakes of the head.

‘If they were extra special to her and she wasn’t thinking of coming back…’ Gish offered.

Milton was asking Jeffries if the victim’s photo was in circulation yet.

‘Bosses vetoed it for now. Want us to put in a few more hours and maybe save upsetting people.’ Jeffries caught Bentham’s eye. ‘The bedding?’

Bentham nodded. ‘If it’s part of a set – duvet cover, sheet and

pillowcases – we'll soon know. Chances of that *not* being the case are slim, I'd say.'

'Let's take it step by step, Mick.'

'How does it all connect to the concierge?'

'Step by step,' Jeffries repeated.

'Bit of a coincidence otherwise…' Bentham's voice trailed off.

'Mick's not wrong,' Milton said for Gish's benefit. She gave a twist of her mouth in response. He then leaned forward a little, peering at Bentham's bodycam. 'Bit of a smudge on the lens,' he commented, rubbing with a gloved finger.

Bentham checked for himself. 'It's fine,' he said.

'Christ in heaven, what now?' The voice came from inside the doorway, and Gish realised they'd not placed someone there to act as a deterrent. Allan Franklyn was scanning the room, taking in the level of activity. Gish stretched out both arms as she walked towards him.

'You can't be in here, sir.'

When Franklyn rested a hand against one wall, Gish could sense Mick Bentham wincing behind her. Having manoeuvred him back into the communal hallway, she gestured for him to wait. She then went back inside and headed for Bentham.

'That reminds me,' she told him. 'Jessica Forrester is good mates with Maita. She might have been a visitor.'

'Well, we already have her dabs on file – easy enough to match her with anything we find here.'

'To rule her out or rule her in?' Milton asked. Gish looked at him, unsure if he was being serious or making mischief. Jeffries was waving a finger in Milton's direction as if to say: good point.

Gish turned and went back to Franklyn, who was now at the similarly unguarded door of Amos Chissano's flat.

'I deserve to know,' he told her. 'This is my whole life you're dismantling in front of my eyes. Who the hell's going to want to live here after all of this?'

'We'll be finished soon enough.'

'The press are back, you know, gathering like vultures as we speak.'

On cue, Gish's phone rang: Tom Simmons. She ignored it, but his text followed almost immediately. *Big break? Do tell.* Followed by a winking

emoji, tongue out. Gish shut her phone down and slid it into her pocket. She knew she had to delete the photos she'd taken at Maita's – plus pray that the front desk wouldn't say anything about her visit. A couple of SOCOs emerged from Chissano's flat, shaking their heads when they noticed her interest.

'Just the one person's dabs,' one of them said. 'Not the most sociable of sorts.'

She noticed that Chissano's iPad had been bagged and was leaving with the SOCOs, as were other bags containing the lifted fingerprints, strands of hair, and the man's toothbrush, this last because DNA could sometimes be extracted. The photographer was checking the screen on the back of his camera, looking as satisfied as a SOCO ever did. Gish turned to Franklyn.

'Have you got a number for Mr Chissano?'

'I'm not sure I even knew that was his name.'

'Is that a no then?'

Franklyn gave a firm shake of the head. 'I don't think we ever met.'

'But you knew Maita, right?' She watched him nod. 'You've been inside her suite?'

'Not until just now. She spends a lot of her time away from the Heights, as you've noticed.'

Gish took her phone out again and found the photo of the living room wall with its denuded picture hooks. 'So you've no idea what used to sit here?'

Franklyn studied her screen and then shrugged. 'More family photos?' he offered.

Gish wondered if Jessica might know. Maybe Maita would have opened up to her about her family and childhood. She had just decided to pay her a visit before leaving the building when her phone rang again. Adrenaline coursed through her when she saw that the caller this time was her mum's pal Marion. She turned her back on Franklyn before answering, cupping her free hand to her mouth to muffle her words.

'What is it, Mar?'

As she listened, she felt the world around her dissolve, and leaned one shoulder against a wall as if she might otherwise slump to the ground. When she eventually gathered herself, ignoring Franklyn and walking back into Maita's apartment, Milton could tell something was wrong.

‘Jacqui?’ he guessed. Gish just nodded. ‘Do you need someone to drive you?’ She shook her head. ‘Then go,’ he commanded.

Gish went.

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Marion was seated in the busy waiting area of the A&E, squashed in next to a woman and her teenage son, the latter cradling his injured arm. On her other side, a dozing pensioner was resting his head against his walking stick. Seeing Gish, Marion managed to manoeuvre herself to standing without waking the old man. She met her halfway across the linoleum floor.

‘She’s being treated,’ she explained. ‘In a cubicle along there.’ She pointed towards one of the corridors. Gish began walking, Marion catching her up, casting a backwards glance to where her prized perch had already been claimed.

‘She fell, you said?’ Gish checked.

‘I only left her for five minutes to fetch something from mine for her to read. She decided to go to the kitchen for whatever reason – that’s where I found her.’

‘What’s the use of a panic button if she won’t use it?’ Gish watched Marion offer a resigned shrug. ‘I just hope she’s not done her hip,’ she muttered.

They found her on a trolley, hooked up to a monitor. Gish could tell from the look on her face that she was in pain but determined not to show it. Her eyes were closed, but they opened when Gish leaned over to brush her hair back from her forehead. There was a sheen of sweat there.

‘I was daft, no other word for it,’ Jacqui announced. ‘Not Marion’s fault, so don’t you go blaming her.’

‘It’s *you* I blame,’ Gish stated. ‘What possessed you?’

‘I thought I could manage.’

‘To do what exactly?’

‘I fancied a change of scenery.’ Tears were threatening to come, but she forced them back. ‘I feel so trapped in that room.’

‘We take you out, don’t we?’ Marion said, giving Jacqui’s forearm a gentle squeeze. ‘Me and Letitia and Babs, not to mention my Rob when he can.’

‘Once upon a time, I didn’t need help.’

‘But you do now, Mum,’ Gish intoned softly. ‘You realise that, don’t you?’ She watched her mother nod. The hands clasped atop her stomach were twitching slightly, as usual. Gish sought in vain for a clipboard or any record of treatment. The monitor seemed to be showing heart rate and blood pressure, not that the readings made much sense to her. Staff were thin on the ground and there was no curtain to give even a semblance of privacy.

‘You’ve been seen, right?’ she checked.

‘Doctor doesn’t think anything’s broken, but they might take an X-ray if it’s not too busy.’ Jacqui’s eyes were staying closed a little longer with each blink.

‘Painkillers?’ Gish asked.

‘A couple of tablets,’ Jacqui confirmed, her voice trailing off. A few moments later, she was asleep.

Gish’s phone kept pinging. She switched it to flight mode.

‘You’re popular,’ Marion commented. ‘I’m fine to stay with her if you need to be elsewhere. Rob said he’ll swap with me after work if she’s still here.’

‘Do you reckon they’ll keep her in?’

‘I doubt it. When I went looking for a loo, I must’ve passed a dozen trolleys lined up waiting for beds.’

‘You managed to get her here in your car?’

‘I wanted to ring for the paramedics, but she didn’t want the fuss.’

‘Let me pay you for the parking…’ Gish started checking her pockets.

‘Don’t be daft, Gillian. I really shouldn’t have left her – all for the sake of an unread *Take a Break*.’

‘We’re so lucky to have you.’

‘It’s not just me, though, is it?’ Marion looked towards the sleeping woman. ‘Jacqui’s made so many friends in her life.’ She squared her shoulders. ‘I need to start phoning them. They’ll want to know.’ She noticed the look of concern on Gish’s face. ‘It was just a fall, Gillian. Way she coped getting in and out of my Micra, no bones broken – I guarantee it.’

Gish nodded slowly, eyes still on her mother.

‘You wait here and catch your breath. I’m going to fetch another disgusting coffee. Then you’re free to do whatever you need to do – but remember: Jacqui knows your job’s important to you, and that means it’s important to her, too.’

‘Work’s pretty manic right now,’ Gish conceded. ‘If I *do* head back, you’ll keep me posted?’ She watched Marion nod.

‘Can I fetch you a drink?’

‘To be honest, you didn’t exactly sell it to me.’ The two women shared a smile. ‘But take your time if you need a break.’

‘I’ll be five minutes, tops,’ Marion said as she began to leave. ‘I might try the hot chocolate this time, though…’

Gish watched until she was out of sight, then stroked her mother’s forehead again, her fingers just brushing her skin. Five or ten minutes wouldn’t hurt, she knew. The case would jog along without her. She unbuttoned her jacket, shrugging it off. Looking around for a chair, she realised there wasn’t one. Instead, she crouched by the trolley, her back resting against the wall, the monitor humming and giving an occasional bleep, the hospital going about its business around her and completely oblivious to her existence. It was a full thirty seconds before she switched her phone back on and started scrolling…

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The texts on her phone had all been from Tom Simmons. Gish hadn't responded to any of them. As she walked into the incident room, Milton got up from his desk and strode towards her, placing his hands on her shoulders, his face showing concern.

'Everything all right?'

'Fine. She tripped and fell. They're checking her over.'

'You should be there.'

'And yet here I am.' She slung her jacket over the back of her chair. 'So what did I miss?'

'When did you last eat?'

'I told you, I'm fine.'

Emma Amberson arrived and placed a mug of tea on Gish's desk. Gish thanked her with a smile.

'Have you told her?' Amberson asked Milton.

'I was just about to.' His eyes met Gish's. 'Prints taken from Amos Chissano's flat are a decent match for the body in the Bentley. We won't get DNA results for a while yet, but the lab seem pretty confident. Same prints were found on the wine bottle and the glass with the snapped stem. We got Maita's dabs from a couple of her perfume bottles. They're a match for the other wine glass and they're on the bottle, too.'

'I sense a but.'

'Not really, though there are other prints, not including a couple belonging to Jessica Forrester – we found those on the surface of the breakfast bar and the coffee table.'

'And the unidentified prints?'

'All belong to the same person – some in the en suite bathroom and living room, some on the bedposts and headboard.'

‘Not just any old visitor then – but they weren’t on the wine bottle?’

Milton shook his head. ‘Just Chissano’s and Maita’s.’

‘So if her bodyguard’s been dead all this time, who got on the plane with her?’ Gish looked from Milton to Amberson and back again. It was Amberson who spoke.

‘We’ve been promised footage from the airfield – should be arriving any minute.’

‘And we’re running the unknown prints through the system,’ Milton added.

Gish’s mind was racing. ‘Almost a full bottle of wine they got through between them. Then someone arrives and – what? – a fight breaks out?’

‘Assuming Maita didn’t strangle him herself.’

‘We’ve all seen the photos of her – she’s tiny by comparison.’

‘He’s dulled by drink and not expecting it,’ Amberson speculated. ‘From the autopsy, looks like he had most of the bottle to himself.’

‘Two people drove to that airfield, though – and one of them had Chissano’s passport. Stands to reason that whoever that is, he’s involved.’

‘Why is nothing ever simple?’ Milton said, pinching the bridge of his nose.

A text pinged on Amberson’s phone. ‘Photos from the airfield are about to arrive,’ she announced, just as Boothroyd waved his hand in the air.

‘Got them here,’ he called.

They all clustered around his computer, studying the screen. CCTV cameras had picked up the Porsche pulling to a stop kerbside, two blurry figures emerging, the woman from the passenger side. The man with her carried both of their holdalls as they strode the few yards to the terminal.

‘That’s less than I pack for a weekend in Clacton,’ Amberson said, through a mouthful of gum.

‘It’s a good point,’ Gish commented. ‘Her dressing room is full to the brim – why take so little?’

‘Maybe going somewhere she knows, a place she keeps clothes?’ Boothroyd offered.

Inside the building there wasn’t even a check-in desk, just a smartly dressed young man who glanced at their passports while the pilot shook hands and discussed the flight. A third member of staff took both bags. The best shots were stills as they exited to the runway. Gish asked Boothroyd to

go back to those. Then she grabbed some photos from her desk and returned to the huddle. She held the photocopies up either side of Boothroyd's screen – Maita Macheso outside Holli's and manning Mark Hogarth's DJ rig.

'You don't think it's her?' Milton surmised.

'Do you?'

'Hair's braided the same,' Amberson said. 'Similar build and cheekbones.' She looked more closely. 'I don't know.'

'What about the male companion?'

'Wears his hair longer than our victim,' Boothroyd said. 'Lighter skin tone, heavier build.'

'Passport control at a regular airport would have laughed them out of the building,' Gish decided.

'One rule for the rich,' Amberson mused.

'So Ms Macheso is still in the country?' Milton asked.

'Minus her passport,' Amberson added.

'And these two are… who?' Milton nodded towards the screen.

'Friends, maybe, or paid help. She just needed someone to throw us off the scent.'

'Why, though? If she killed her bodyguard, fleeing our jurisdiction is exactly what she'd do, no?'

None of them had an answer to this. Milton indicated the screen again. 'We need to identify these two. They land in France, get off the plane, but then what? Let's see if our French cousins can help. We know the names they travelled under – are they still pretending to be Maita and Amos? And if Maita really is still here or hereabouts, who's protecting her?'

'If we're confident that the victim is Amos Chissano,' Amberson suggested, 'maybe it's time to talk to the Mozambique high commission again. They provided Amos as a favour to Maita's father. I can't see them being thrilled with the outcome, which means they might well open up.'

'That's a decent shout,' Milton said. 'So everyone's agreed – we take this to the chief right now?'

They were all keen to be involved, but as they started leaving the room, Gish held back. When Milton spotted this, she waved for him to go ahead. Then she sat down at Boothroyd's computer and ran the airfield footage again.

'I *know* you,' she said softly, her eyes on the male figure using a

murdered man’s passport.

But try as she might, she couldn’t remember how.

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Marion’s husband, Rob, helped Gish manoeuvre her mother into the passenger seat of the Yaris. He had swapped with Marion after his cab shift ended, and had managed to put a twinkle back into Jacqui’s eye – men of any age often did, Gish had noticed. He had offered to go with them in case they needed help at the other end, but Gish had assured him they’d be fine.

Jacqui had a slight limp – she’d gone over on her ankle, now swollen and turning purple – plus bruising on her elbow where it had connected with the kitchen floor, but ibuprofen was all she required and they had boxes of that in the medicine cabinet. The one good thing the council had done in the recent past was designate a disabled bay outside the house. Neighbours usually made sure it was kept free, and today was no different. There hadn’t been much chat during the drive, but with the ignition switched off, Gish swivelled towards her mother.

‘Time for a grown-up talk,’ she said, causing Jacqui to scowl, knowing what was coming. Two bikes whizzed past, pulling wheelies. ‘You need a proper care package, twenty-four/seven. We can’t keep depending on friends to fill the gaps.’

‘I’m fine with things as they are.’ Jacqui pretended to be interested in the cyclists.

‘You’re not, though – none of us are.’ Gish reached a hand out to take her mother’s. ‘You know what the alternative is.’

Jacqui knew all too well: a care home, surrounded by strangers and those nearing end of life, maybe miles away from the streets and people she loved.

‘There are long waiting lists, you know,’ she said quietly.

‘Not if we go private.’

‘We can’t afford that.’

‘I think we can. But if you say no, there’s always one other option.’ Gish paused until she had her mother’s full attention. ‘I can put the job on pause to look after you properly myself – don’t think I won’t. Because carers popping by three times a day is no longer cutting it.’

‘You know your career means more to you than anything.’

‘It means a lot less than you do.’

‘You’d end up hating me.’ Jacqui was blinking back tears.

‘I’ll hate myself if I don’t do *something*, Mum.’

‘It was a daft fall, that’s all. Lesson learned.’ The cyclists were making another pass. ‘Is that Kemi Preston’s lad?’

‘Kemi Preston’s lad is married with kids and lives in Chingford. As for the “daft fall”, this is you on a good day. Sometimes you don’t know who any of us are. You stare at your magazines without recognising the words. Everything’s a jumble and you get scared and I can’t blame you – I’d be scared, too.’ Gish took a breath. ‘You’re not going to get better, Mum, but you *are* going to get worse – and I know you know that.’

‘They have drugs these days,’ Jacqui said, the fight going out of her. ‘Maybe one of these years they’ll be able to do something.’

‘But until then…’ Gish moved her face closer, demanding eye contact, her mother eventually acquiescing with a nod.

It took them a good five minutes to get from the car to the living room. Jacqui didn’t want Gish to fetch the wheelchair from the house.

‘Exercise will do me good,’ she said.

The carers arrived soon after and, having listened to Gish’s update, got Jacqui ready for bed. Neither mother nor daughter felt like eating much, so Gish microwaved two portions of curry from the freezer, placing Jacqui’s on a tray. She ate her own from a bowl, legs tucked beneath her on the armchair. The TV was on, subtitles enabled so they didn’t need the volume turned up too high. Jacqui swallowed two tablets with her mug of tea, then drifted towards sleep, Gish taking the opportunity to check her phone. She got back to the various friends and neighbours who’d asked for updates. They all wanted to visit, so she told them to liaise with Marion. Then, keeping her voice low, she called Marion to fill her in and suggest some kind of rota. Tom Simmons had stopped texting, which was a blessing of sorts. His last message had read: *My tone was off and I apologise. I’d never do anything to threaten our growing friendship. Let’s meet for that drink –*

no agendas. Gish had deleted it.

A text eventually arrived from Milton: *All good?*

She replied at once: *Any news?*

It can wait. You joining us in the a.m.?

Try and stop me!

I already did. It didn't work. Jacqui's okay, though?

Sleeping like a baby.

Tomorrow then. Accompanied by an emoji of a yawning face.

Gish switched off the lights but kept the TV on so the room wasn't completely dark. Then she put her earbuds in and selected some easy listening on her phone. Stretched her legs out and covered herself with a picnic rug. It had been her gift to her mum a few birthdays back. She wondered if it would ever see the outdoors.

It can wait.

She couldn't help thinking what 'it' might be…

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Six

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The office had known for a full fifteen hours what Gish only learned when she arrived at work. The prints found in Maita Macheso's flat had thrown up a match, because their owner had priors.

'Jayden Hewlett,' she intoned, reading from the information forwarded to her screen. 'Possession and dealing – both class C – plus possession of a bladed weapon and affray. A total of one community order and one suspended sentence.'

'Nothing for the past five years,' Milton said. 'So he either mended his ways or got more savvy.'

'He doesn't happen to work for Eddie Gallacher, does he?'

'Not quite.'

Gish looked at him for an explanation.

'I asked Oliver Carlyle. He knew the name. Hewlett often works security at nightclubs, including Holli's, as owned by Ray Stanton's good friend Rich Hollister.'

'A club not unknown to a certain Maita Macheso,' Gish said. 'So why the hell didn't you tell me this last night?'

'We all need to switch off a little, Gillian.'

'Is that what you did, Jack? Or did you keep digging until all hours?'

'Have you been spying on me?' Milton smiled, but his eyes were dark-ringed and bloodshot. Gish had already noted the blister pack of caffeine tablets sitting on his desk, next to a notepad with nothing but numerals on it. 'I did manage to speak to Hollister. He's still on Mustique. Couldn't add much about Maeve's party or the trip to his club afterwards, and says he doesn't deal with door security at Holli's.'

Gish had turned her attention back to Hewlett's mugshot. 'He's the guy from the airfield, right?'

‘Looks like,’ Milton agreed. ‘The jet is currently sitting in a hangar – it’s been cleaned, but the lab’s going to send someone anyway, see if they can lift any prints from the seats and tables.’

‘Do we have a current address for Hewlett?’

Milton shook his head. ‘The one on file is long out of date. Tenant denies knowing him or even receiving mail for him.’

‘What about the landlord?’

‘Same story. Guy owns dozens of properties, mostly short lease. He’s Azerbaijani, loaded by the sound of it – and guess what?’

‘He’s thinking of leaving the country because it’s not as tax-friendly as it was?’ Milton nodded while Gish concentrated on her computer screen. ‘I take it we’ve circulated his photograph?’

‘To all patrols, yes.’

‘How about more widely?’

‘You mean the media? The chief is in discussions with New Scotland Yard right now. I can’t see them saying no.’

‘You ever had dealings with him, Jack?’ Gish gestured towards the screen.

‘Not that I know of.’

‘You’ve seen him, though.’

Milton’s brow furrowed. ‘At the airfield, yes.’ Gish was shaking her head. She opened her drawer and lifted out copies of the two photos from Black Markus’s DJ night, sliding them across her desk to his. Milton turned them round and studied them, then lifted his eyes to meet hers.

‘Why didn’t you say sooner?’

‘Came to me last night, just as I was on the verge of sleep. I thought maybe you needed to switch off a little, too.’

Milton gave a twitch of the mouth, holding one photo up alongside the mugshot. ‘Could well be,’ he offered.

‘No “could” about it. That’s Jayden Hewlett right next to Maita, watching her work the decks. Maybe Mark will know his whereabouts.’

‘He already told us he’d no idea who the guy was,’ Milton cautioned. Then, ‘So do we drive out to the wilds of east London, or…’

‘Let’s have a patrol bring him in,’ Gish decided. ‘Makes life that little bit easier.’

‘Speaking of which…’

Gish nodded. ‘We’re going to look at full-time care.’

‘She was fine this morning?’

‘Mostly – once she remembered where she was and who I was.’

‘You sure your head’s in the game?’

‘Do you see any evidence to the contrary?’

‘None whatsoever,’ Milton said with another smile.

‘And what about *your* head – still filled with dreams of nabbing Eddie Gallacher?’

‘Who’s he when he’s at home?’ Milton gave a wink. ‘Go top up our mugs while I get a car to pick up the DJ.’

Gish nodded, then gestured towards the notepad next to Milton’s computer. ‘What’s with the numbers game?’

‘Just doodles,’ he explained with a shrug.

During the walk from her desk to the kettle, various colleagues wanted to know how Gish’s mum was doing. While she checked the freshness of the milk, she thought about how the police had become her family. Her father was gone, her mother had no siblings and neither did Gish. There was just her and Jacqui, plus friends, neighbours and the people circling her in this room. She couldn’t think when she had last let her hair down with someone who wasn’t a cop. Tom Simmons had asked her out – before him, who knew? Her mother had once suggested online dating, having seen a piece about it in one of her magazines.

‘I hope I’ll never be that desperate,’ Gish had responded.

Looking around, she saw people who were single, dating, married, divorced. It wasn’t that the job necessarily robbed you of a social or family life, but it would if you let it.

By the time the drinks were ready, Milton had left his desk and was standing in front of the murder wall. The two cases were still there, divided by that thick black line. Gish handed over his coffee.

‘The more progress we make on Amos Chissano,’ she said, ‘the further Dwayne seems to recede from view.’

‘Somebody knows something, Gillian – somebody always does. But the people at the Heights have all those secrets they need us not to uncover. My feeling is, if we get a result with the bodyguard, they’ll be more amenable to talking.’

‘Because we’ll have become the good guys again?’

He gave a slow shake of the head. ‘Because they’ll realise we never, ever give up, and the longer they hold back, the more of those secrets we might accidentally uncover.’

They’d been back at their desks for over an hour when the message arrived that no one was answering the door at Mark Hogarth’s flat. Milton told the patrol car to stay there, then headed off to relay the news to the chief. Ames, who had been tasked with another sweep of the public CCTV from the streets around the Heights on the night of Dwayne Hogarth’s death, wandered over, stretching his spine and trying to blink his eyes back into focus.

‘How come I drew the short straw?’ he complained. Then, remembering how he had failed to identify the smell that first night in the car park, ‘Don’t answer that.’

‘I take it the short straw leads to a brick wall?’ Gish guessed.

‘It’s just traffic, Gillian, traffic and pedestrians. Number plates are almost never clear enough to identify; faces are just blurs. Delivery bikes and double-deckers and cabs.’

‘We’ve checked the various taxi firms?’ Gish asked.

‘Nobody picked up anyone in the vicinity – other than Mark Hogarth himself. The only dodgy-looking car turns out to belong to Jack’s pals at NCA. So what do you reckon – are we dealing with a ninja or what?’

Gish allowed him the smile he was looking for.

‘If anyone was bothering to ask me,’ he went on, ‘I’d say it has to be an inside job. That time of night, why would Hogarth open the door to someone he didn’t know? And who apart from the residents would know to delete the security footage? Someone with a grudge – maybe fuelled by the drink they’d consumed at Maeve Gallacher’s party – came down in the lift and whacked him. End of.’

‘And took Jessica Forrester’s fob because…?’

‘You know as well as I do, we’ve no proof there’s a connection. Quite the opposite, since nobody bothered using the fob to enter Forrester’s flat. It’s either lost or there’s some other reason why it’s gone AWOL.’

‘An attempt to lead us down the wrong path, maybe buy the killer some time?’

‘As discussed previously ad infinitum,’ Ames said, nodding. ‘Anyway, I’m done with it.’ He stretched out his arms, palms towards her. ‘If anyone

else wants a go, best of luck to them. I've done my time, wouldn't you say?'

When Gish responded with a shrug, Ames decided she was agreeing with him. He checked his wristwatch. It had been his grandfather's, dated back to World War II – no one meeting Ames for the first time got away without hearing the story.

'I'm nipping out to grab a bite,' he stated, his words seeming to have an effect on Gish's stomach, which started rumbling, reminding her that she'd been too focused on making her mother's breakfast to eat anything herself. As Ames left the room, Milton re-entered.

'Chief's pleased we're making progress. I think he was under pressure to split the cases.'

'Might still be an idea,' Gish commented. 'The more hands the merrier.'

'Beware too many hands, Gillian. They sometimes get stepped on.'

'So are we giving Hewlett's photo to the media?'

'It's under consideration.' Milton noticed that she had lifted her jacket from the back of her chair.

'Early lunch,' she explained. 'Can I grab you something?'

'Those caffeine tablets seem to suffice.' He paused. 'Maybe a Marathon, though.'

'They've not been called that for thirty-odd years, Jack.'

'Some traditions need upholding.'

'A Snickers bar it is then,' Gish pronounced, shouldering her bag.

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The nearest Tesco Metro was busy, especially around the Meal Deals. Gish got herself a cheese and ham sandwich and an energy drink, plus Milton's chocolate. A message from Marion arrived on her phone, a photo of Jacqui in the folding wheelchair, the picnic rug across her lap. She looked to be in Down Lane Park. The message read*: I think this is our reward for yesterday!* Jacqui was scowling, face half turned from the camera. There would have been some internal struggle before she'd deigned to go out into the world looking like an invalid. Gish replied with a string of hearts and thumbs-up emojis and started scanning her items. The energy drink wasn't included in any of the shop's various deals, but she could live with that.

As the automatic doors opened to let her out, a man started walking through them from the pavement.

'Oh,' Tom Simmons said. 'Small world.'

'Too small sometimes,' Gish said, swerving past him. A few seconds later he was at her shoulder.

'An al fresco lunch? Mind if I join you?'

'You didn't buy anything.' Gish kept her eyes on the route ahead.

'I was only going for cigarettes.'

'You don't smoke.'

'But the people I meet with sometimes do. The offer of a ciggie can work wonders.'

Gish drew to a halt and turned to face him. 'What do you want, Tom?'

'I thought maybe I needed to say sorry.' He looked around, as if wary of eavesdroppers, and drew in a breath. 'Know why I put my name to all the gossip crap I write but not the serious stories?' He waited a moment, but Gish remained stony-faced. 'If the writer stays anonymous, super-injunctions are harder to impose, and the rich really like a super-injunction.

But I’m on borrowed time, Gillian; they’ll shut me down one way or another. If I’ve been brusque or unfair, bear that in mind.’

Gish took a moment to consider this. ‘Okay,’ she said, before recommencing her walk. It was a matter of seconds before Simmons caught her up.

‘There’s been movement on the case, hasn’t there? Macheso, I mean. CID have been back to the airfield. I know she didn’t use Toby Scully’s jet, but did he offer? Is he part of the cover-up, do you think? Did my photos help, the ones of her out on the town?’

Gish stopped again. ‘You didn’t recognise the man standing next to her when she was pretending to be a DJ?’

‘Jay Hewlett?’

Gish’s eyes drilled into him. ‘You didn’t think to mention that?’

‘Is he part of the story?’

‘How do you know him?’

‘I don’t. The clubber who sold me the photo gave me his name. Just said he was one of the regulars.’ Simmons broke off. ‘He *is* part of the story?’

Gish shook her head.

‘You’re not allowed to say?’ he guessed from the look in her eyes.

‘Is there someone at the club I can talk to about him?’

‘There’s no “club”. These places come and go – less chance of your lot raiding them.’

‘But there’s an organiser?’

He thought for a second. ‘I could make a few calls while you eat your sandwich. There’s a bench right there across the street.’

Gish didn’t say anything, but when she crossed the road in the direction of the bench, he followed a few steps behind.

True to his word, Simmons got busy on his phone while Gish tried to ignore the ravens who were attacking the bin next to where she sat. One of the people he spoke to seemed to be Blam-Blam, the clubber who’d taken the picture, but he didn’t know any more about Hewlett’s whereabouts than anyone else.

‘He remembers that night, though, the pair of them dancing.’

‘Hewlett and Maita? They knew one another?’ She watched Simmons shrug, then offered him her leftover sandwich. He nodded in gratitude and took it.

‘It wasn’t just coincidence, us meeting?’ she said, watching him suddenly having trouble swallowing.

‘I wanted to say my piece. Didn’t think a text would do the job.’

‘They really want to shut you down?’

‘You’ve already had dealings with one of their lawyers.’

‘DuMont?’ She watched him nod. ‘So who are we talking about – Godunov, Scully, Mikey Tan?’

‘They’ll do for starters.’

‘Allan Franklyn?’

‘Has more to lose than most – the others can always relocate, and probably will, mainly offshore. But it’s Franklyn’s building, at least on paper.’

‘Does Eddie Gallacher own a chunk?’

‘One of his many fronts does – from an address in Dubai.’ Simmons risked another, smaller bite of sandwich. ‘He roped in some of his “associates”, too – mainly because Papa Franklyn vouched for his son.’

‘How close are you to running a story that’ll make a difference?’

His eyes dulled slightly. ‘Everything’s buried so deep. It’s like archaeology.’ He fixed her with a look. ‘All help gratefully received.’

Gish considered for a moment. ‘NCA are convinced Eddie Gallacher is in the country.’

‘Tell me something I *don’t* know.’ He paused. ‘But thanks for trusting me with that.’

Gish shrugged and finished her drink, tossing the can into the bin, scattering the birds. She got to her feet, brushing a few crumbs from her clothes. Pigeons replaced the ravens, landing on the pavement and starting to peck their way through her scant leavings.

‘Walk you back to the station?’ Simmons suggested.

‘No shop talk,’ she warned.

‘No shop talk,’ the journalist promised.

‘Where have you been?’ Milton said as she handed over the Snickers.

‘Clearing my head.’

‘They brought Mark Hogarth in. He’d only been buying groceries. He’s waiting for us in the interview room with a cup of instant and a uniform for

company.’ Milton placed the chocolate bar on his desk, then, remembering what cop shops were like, pulled out a drawer and hid it inside, glancing around for witnesses. ‘En route, you might want a quick look at this.’ He handed her a sheet of paper, a printout from Dwayne Hogarth’s phone. Gish digested the information as she walked.

They found Hogarth seated so low in the chair that he was almost horizontal. His hands drumming against the rim of the table either side of the emptied cup, headphones clamped to his ears. Milton gestured for the uniformed officer to leave.

They seated themselves across the table, Gish gesturing for Hogarth to remove the headphones. He slid them down around his neck, muting the music.

‘Feeling any better?’ she asked, indicating his still-bruised face.

‘This is starting to look a lot like harassment,’ he shot back.

Gish slid the photograph from the club towards him. ‘You recognise the gentleman?’

He shook his head.

‘Sure about that?’

‘I don’t know every punter in every club.’

‘I think you know this one, though. His name’s Jayden Hewlett.’

Hogarth shrugged. He was dressed in a thick black puffer jacket, zipped to the neck, plus a baseball cap bearing the insignia of a New York team.

It was Milton’s turn to slide a sheet of paper towards him.

‘Texts between Dwayne and you from two months back. He’s telling you about some big-name DJ from the US who’s due to play London. Can you read us out your response?’

Hogarth studied the sheet of paper but gave a defiant look, so Milton spoke for him. ‘You say: “Yeah, bro, Jay told me.” Then you give a thumbs-up.’

‘We’re assuming Jay is Jayden Hewlett,’ Gish added. ‘Unless you have another candidate for us?’

Hogarth stopped drumming and folded his arms, hampered by the thickness of his jacket’s sleeves.

‘So what?’ he commented.

‘So you *do* know Jayden Hewlett.’ Gish watched him shrug. ‘Were they already friends,’ she asked, indicating the photograph, ‘or was this the night

they met?'

Hogarth studied the photo, saying nothing.

'We know they're pretty close,' Milton added. 'He's even been to visit her at the Heights. Would Dwayne have known who he was?'

Hogarth's eyes rose to meet the detective's. 'Maybe,' he conceded.

'You knew Jay and Maita were dating?' Milton pressed.

Hogarth shook his head slowly. 'But after they met, I stopped seeing him around.'

'Is he an okay guy?'

'Yeah, Jay's solid.' Hogarth avoided eye contact and the words lacked confidence.

'Do you know where he's living at the moment?' Gish asked. Another shake of the head. 'Do you know anyone who *would* know?' The head kept shaking. 'Do you know why we might be keen to talk to him?'

'It can't be Dwayne, so it must be the girlfriend, right?'

'That's right. The pair of them could be mixed up in something very serious.'

'News to me.'

'So serious that Jay has fled the country.' Gish paused. 'Which just leaves Ms Macheso. I don't suppose you know where we might find her?'

'She moves in different worlds.'

'Not so different, Mark. Jay might have asked you to offer her some help – a safe place to stay, maybe?'

'Haven't heard from him in weeks.'

'We'd like to speak to his other friends. Can you save us some time by putting us in touch with them?'

Hogarth pushed himself upright, rapping the table with his knuckles. 'Why is this more important than Dwayne? Macheso's loaded – is that the difference?'

'Solving one might help us solve the other,' Milton said quietly.

'How?'

It was Milton's turn to offer a shrug.

'You're full of bullshit, the lot of you.'

'We're just trying to get justice for the victims, Mark,' Gish said with sincerity. 'No bullshit.'

Hogarth took some seconds to consider this. His eyes met hers.

‘I can ask around,’ he eventually conceded. ‘See who knows what.’

‘We’d appreciate it.’

‘Can I go now? I need to see my mum and dad – funeral arrangements and all that.’ He lifted his phone to check the time.

‘One last thing.’ Milton showed him the photos from the airfield. ‘Any idea who the woman accompanying Jayden is?’

Hogarth looked and shook his head.

‘We know this is a tough time, Mark,’ Gish told him. ‘We don’t want to make things any harder than we have to, but we do want to find whoever’s responsible. You understand that, right?’

‘Yeah, I overreacted a bit. I’ll see what I can do.’

She held out her hand. Mark looked at it, in two minds, but then relented, took it and shook. Milton held his own hand up in a gesture of goodbye. The uniform was in the corridor, waiting to show the visitor out.

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‘What now?’ Milton asked, once he was back at his desk and busy peeling the Snickers.

‘You’re the senior officer here, Jack.’

‘Say you were me – what would you be doing?’

‘Eating chocolate, most likely.’

He made a face and examined the wrapper he was holding. ‘Forgot how sweet these things are – and so small. You sure you didn’t pick up a fun size by mistake?’

Gish smiled and checked her computer for emails, then picked up her phone. Tom Simmons had texted to say how much he’d enjoyed their ‘*déjeuner sur l’herbe*’. Jacqui was back home, tired after the fresh air. Apparently it had turned into a procession of well-wishers, with Jacqui growing more regal with each compliment. She opened her photos, making sure the one of her mum had been saved. Then she scrolled back a little until she was once more in Maita Macheso’s apartment, looking at the spot where Amos Chissano had most likely met his end. And there was the wall with the family portraits and the gap where more should have been. She turned her phone screen towards Milton.

‘Best guess?’ she said.

‘You should have deleted those,’ he answered with a frown.

‘I meant to.’ She studied the photo for herself.

‘Damaged during the struggle?’ Milton offered.

‘No shards of glass on the carpet.’

‘Sentimental value?’

‘Why them and not the others?’

He could only shrug, watching as Gish gnawed her lip. ‘You’ve got a theory?’ he guessed.

‘Not a theory, no. But I’m wondering about Jessica Forrester. She was probably Maita’s best friend at the Heights and we found her prints inside Maita’s flat. Maybe she’ll remember what the photographs showed.’

‘So give her a bell.’ Gish said nothing, just kept looking at him. ‘You’re missing the place?’ he guessed.

‘It’s just… I think the answer’s there and we might not see it if we’re not in the right spot at the right time. It’s not as if we’re accomplishing miracles sitting here.’ She watched Milton dislodge a fragment of peanut from between his teeth.

‘Whose turn to drive?’ he said.

Laurence Kemp was one of the two concierges seated behind the temporary reception desk.

‘I thought you were working Dwayne’s night shift?’ Gish said.

‘Covering for a medical appointment,’ Laurence explained.

‘Double shifts seem to be your forte. Is Jessica Forrester at home?’

‘Haven’t seen her leave. Need me to get the lift for you?’

Milton waved his fob. ‘Thanks all the same.’ He walked with Gish to the end of the hallway. When the lift doors opened, they saw that a catering trolley had been left inside, along with a lidded salver, plate and cutlery. Milton crooked a finger towards Laurence, who joined them.

‘That shouldn’t be there,’ he stated. ‘He took the service lift up.’

‘Delivering to Maeve Gallacher?’ Milton checked.

Gish lifted the lid. Hidden beneath were chef’s whites and a crushed toque. She looked to Milton for an explanation. ‘Go call Mrs Gallacher,’ he instructed the concierge. They walked back to the desk and watched him make the call, listen, then shake his head: no one answering.

‘Usual chef?’ Milton checked. Both concierges shrugged. ‘Cameras will have him, right?’

Laurence’s colleague got busy on the keyboard, Milton and Gish flanking him, eyes on the CCTV screen.

‘What’s your name?’ Gish asked.

‘Marlon,’ he answered, watching as the chef approached the Heights, wheeling his trolley, toque firmly attached to his head, face bowed as if concentrating on the task at hand. The door was opened for him: no checks

needed. He gave a wave as he headed to the lift, Marlon accompanying him so he could activate the door with his fob.

‘What’s he saying to you?’ Milton asked.

‘He hoped the food was still hot.’

‘Can you go back a bit and pause?’ Milton leaned over Marlon’s shoulder. ‘You’ve not seen him before? You didn’t recognise him?’

‘It’s a big hotel – different chefs on different days.’

‘He’s Maeve Gallacher’s husband,’ Milton stated.

‘What?’ Gish blurted out.

Milton met her eyes. ‘One hundred per cent,’ he told her, stabbing a finger at the screen. ‘That’s Eddie Gallacher.’ Then, to Laurence, ‘Does the service lift go down to the garage?’

‘With the right fob.’

‘But residents can’t use it – hence leaving the trolley in the residents’ lift.’ He nodded to himself. ‘Can one of you check if the Gallachers’ car is still there?’

Laurence looked to Marlon, who headed to the lifts.

‘Not the one with the trolley in it!’ Milton warned him. Then, to Laurence, ‘How long since the “chef” got here?’

Laurence checked the time on the CCTV screen. ‘Twenty minutes.’

‘You weren’t suspicious that he hadn’t come back down?’

‘Mrs Gallacher likes a bit of company. Getting away from her can be the problem.’

Gish’s eyes were on Milton. ‘Why now?’

‘Someone grassed her up would be my guess.’

Laurence gestured towards the CCTV feed. Marlon was standing in front of one of the garage cameras, shaking his head.

‘She managed to drive out of here without either of you noticing?’

‘Our job is to keep people out, not in,’ Laurence huffed. ‘One car looks much like another to my eyes.’

‘Maybe get your eyes checked then,’ Milton said. ‘You’ll have a record of the vehicle, though, same as for Macheso’s Porsche?’

‘Black Mercedes S-Class,’ Laurence stated, finding the registration number, which Milton added to his phone. When he started making a call, Gish guessed who the recipient would be.

‘Oliver?’ he said, walking away from the desk. ‘I take it you’ve not got

eyes on the Heights right this minute?'

Marlon had arrived back. 'What do we do with the trolley?' he asked.

'Can you lock the lift so no one can use it?' Gish asked, watching the man nod. 'Do that then – without touching anything.'

'Fingerprints,' Laurence explained to his colleague.

Milton, having ended the call, rejoined the group.

'It was never a round-the-clock surveillance,' he told Gish. 'They're only here when Ray Stanton or another of Eddie's gang pays a visit.'

'Where will he take her? What will he do?'

'Oliver's got the car details. If anyone can chase it down, he can.'

Gish glanced towards the lift. 'Trolley's safely isolated. My prints are on the lid, but there should be plenty to identify Eddie Gallacher.'

'Oliver's on his way here. By the time he arrives, he'll have a search warrant for Maeve's flat as well as a forensic team. If we'd got here twenty minutes earlier…' Milton gave a rueful shake of the head.

'What about our interview with Jessica Forrester?'

'You okay to do it solo? One of us needs to be here when Oliver arrives.'

Gish gave a reluctant nod of agreement. She held out her hand for Milton's fob, but he was reluctant to part with it.

'I can take you,' Marlon announced. Gish allowed him to lead her to the one passenger lift still in commission.

'Maybe give Maeve's door a thump,' Milton called out. 'Though I'm a hundred per cent sure she's elsewhere.'

'I used to moan about how dull this job was,' Marlon muttered, meeting Gish's eyes. 'Those were the days.'

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Jessica Forrester had to undo her door's deadbolt to let Gish in.

'Your fob's not been reset?' Gish commented.

'Not for want of asking. Anyway, I've told Allan I can't stay here – he's supposed to be finding me a suitable alternative.'

Having led Gish into the living area, Jessica sat down at the dining table, where a ring light and professional-looking microphone sat next to her MacBook. Make-up and a hand mirror lay close by, as did a bottle of water and a glass of white wine.

'Sorry to bother you,' Gish said.

'I've got forty minutes before the next one.'

'You're doing interviews?'

'Auditions,' Jessica corrected her. 'So much easier than taking a red-eye to LA or wherever.' She raised the wine glass in a toast to technology. 'Steadies the nerves,' she explained to Gish, who had pulled out another of the dining chairs so she could sit down.

'This won't take long,' she assured Jessica.

'You know Zafk's gone?'

'Staying with his parents?' Gish watched her nod. 'How do you feel about that?'

'That's between me and my therapist,' Jessica stated coolly. Then, 'Is this visit to do with Dwayne?'

'Actually, no.'

'So the body in Lev's Bentley, then? Or has my ex come back on your radar? You know he accosted me? Well, of course you don't – I didn't report it, and I know I should have. The bastard was blaming me because your lot had a word with him.'

'Where did this happen?'

‘A café in Soho.’

‘We’re talking about Jason Sievewright?’ Gish checked. ‘Did it turn physical?’

Jessica shook her head and then took a deep breath. ‘So if not my ex, then the Bentley, yes?’

‘You haven’t heard?’ Jessica looked blank. ‘We’re trying to locate Maita Macheso.’

‘Oh yes, one of your colleagues came asking. I said I hadn’t heard from her since she left.’

‘You’re close friends, though?’

‘Sure.’

‘And you’ve been inside her suite.’ Gish held up her phone, showing the actress the photo of Jayden Hewlett. ‘Ever meet him there?’

Jessica looked, then shook her head.

‘His name’s Jayden or Jay Hewlett – Maita never mentioned him?’

‘Only guy I ever saw her with was her creepy bodyguard.’

‘Amos Chissano?’

Jessica nodded. ‘The way he used to stare at her… like he was peeling her skin off.’ She shuddered at the memory and lifted her glass again. ‘I should have asked – can I tempt you?’

‘I’m fine, thanks.’ Gish paused. ‘If I tell you something, can you keep it to yourself for now?’

‘Girl Guides’ honour.’

She took a further moment to make her mind up. ‘It was Amos Chissano in the Bentley,’ she said. ‘We suspect that Maita might have had something to do with it.’

Jessica’s eyes widened. ‘No fucking way.’ She left her mouth open, staring at Gish.

‘Probably aided by or abetting this man Jayden Hewlett. And now neither of them can be located.’

‘I don’t believe it. I mean… *Maita*?’

‘She’s a person of interest – and we’d really like to hear her side of the story.’

‘You and Netflix both!’

Gish held up a warning hand. ‘This has to remain confidential, Jessica. I can’t stress that enough.’

‘Understood. But I’m not sure I can help. She’s not been in touch, and this Hewlett man is news to me.’

‘I think you *can* help, though.’ Gish flicked through the photos on her phone until she found the right one. Again she held the screen up for the actress to see. ‘This was Maita’s flat yesterday. You see the gaps on the wall? Can you remember what photos were displayed there?’

Jessica’s brow furrowed. ‘Sorry, no.’ But then she had an idea and lifted her own phone. ‘I’ve a few selfies of me and Maita at her place… Hang on a sec till I find them.’

Gish got to her feet so she could stand next to her as she searched. There seemed to be hundreds upon hundreds to go through, most of them selfies showing the actress at parties, in bars and restaurants, on beaches or in high-end boutiques. She wore the same pouting expression in almost all of them.

‘I know, I’m such a tart,’ she said, as if reading Gish’s mind. ‘Hang on, I just passed one.’ She found the relevant shot. She was standing next to Maita in Maita’s apartment, the pair of them with cocktail glasses hoisted. Jessica had raised her phone above head height to take the selfie.

‘A little trick I learned,’ she told Gish.

Between the two women’s heads a section of a painting was visible, big enough to require two picture hooks. It looked fairly abstract; either that or made by a child. Jessica studied it, just as Gish was doing.

‘Don’t remember that,’ she said. Gish checked the date stamp – a full six months back. ‘I might have others.’ Jessica began scrolling again. And yes, there were other photos of her and Maita, but taken on the balcony, or in the room they were in right now. Gish asked if Jessica could AirDrop the first photo to her phone. This done, she zoomed in as best she could on the painting.

‘She took it with her?’ the actress guessed. ‘So it must be important to her. Maybe her mother or father painted it?’

Gish nodded, as if in agreement. ‘She never pointed it out to you, said what it was?’

‘No, sorry.’

‘Mind if I take a look through those photos for myself?’

Jessica handed her phone to Gish, who found the one she’d glimpsed earlier. It showed Maita on her balcony, flanked by Allan Franklyn and

Zafk. Maita and Franklyn were hoisting glasses of red wine while Zafk held what looked like an orange juice.

‘Special occasion?’ Gish enquired.

‘Every evening was a special occasion for Maita, until her father landed her with that bloody spy of his.’

‘Amos?’

‘He was supposed to rein in her behaviour *and* her spending. He’d hang around outside her door, if you can believe that, checking who was visiting and why.’

‘She can’t have liked that.’

‘You said it.’

Car horns suddenly blared on the street below, followed by a screech of tyres and brakes, then more horns. Both women walked to the window and peered down to where several unmarked cars and a couple of grey vans were manoeuvring into the turning circle.

‘Not again,’ Jessica groaned. Then to Gish, ‘Something you’re keeping from me, Detective?’

‘Nothing you need worry about.’ Gish started making her way to the door. ‘Good luck with your auditions – and remember: Girl Guides’ honour.’

‘Please tell me no one else has met a grisly end…’

Hopefully not, Gish said to herself as she made her exit.

When the lift doors opened, there was already a passenger inside – Allan Franklyn, dressed in a tailored polo shirt and cravat, but with only black Havaianas flip-flops on his feet. He was trying to get a signal on his phone, but stopped when he recognised Gish.

‘What in damnation is it now?’ he demanded to know. The light for the ground floor was illuminated. ‘Are you responsible for the out-of-action elevator?’

‘I’m glad I caught you,’ Gish said, ignoring his questions. She opened the photo on her phone and zoomed in on the painting. ‘Have you seen this before?’

He peered at the screen. ‘What is it?’ he asked.

‘A piece of art in Maita Macheso’s flat.’

‘Her suite,’ Franklyn corrected her. ‘And as I think I’ve told you, I’ve never been inside.’

‘You can scale walls, then? I just saw a photo of you and Zafk on her balcony.’

Gish watched as his brow furrowed. ‘You’re right, I forgot that one time. But I don’t recall there being anything on the walls apart from three coats of Farrow & Ball.’ He clamped his lips together for a moment before lifting his eyes to look her in the face. ‘Is it important?’

Gish didn’t answer this either, content to study Franklyn, who broke eye contact first. The lift doors opened, depositing them on the ground floor. A cordon had been erected around the second residents’ lift. Its doors stood open and the trolley was being dusted and photographed.

‘What the hell?’

Oliver Carlyle’s men – and they were all men – started ushering them away from the immediate vicinity. Milton came forward, taking Gish by the elbow.

‘I need DS Gish for a minute,’ he apologised to Franklyn, who was looking around the buzzing reception area in fresh bewilderment.

Milton led Gish to the reception desk, where one of the team stood waiting, ready to collect her prints. Gish did the necessary while Milton spoke in an undertone.

‘Every unit and chopper in the city is on the hunt.’ He gestured towards where Carlyle stood, arms folded, studying the scene. ‘Oliver’s cock-a-hoop that he now knows for certain Gallacher is back in town, but raging that he didn’t have boots on the ground. Proper surveillance would have had Eddie in custody by now.’

Gish waited for more, but Milton was done. ‘And has anyone,’ she said, adding ice to her voice, ‘considered Maeve in all of this? Wouldn’t you say she’s in danger?’

‘Oliver doesn’t think so. Eddie might want to give her a fright, but that’s all.’

‘Meaning?’

‘Either a tall building or a lock-up. Threaten to drop her or leave her there. How did it go with Jessica?’

Gish showed him the photo. ‘It’s a painting of some kind. Allan Franklyn says he doesn’t recognise it.’

‘It’s a pity the resident art dealer isn’t here.’ Milton had taken her phone from her, the better to study the picture.

‘That’s not a bad idea – who do we know who has an art history graduate in the family?’

‘You mean Mick’s Phoebe? She hasn’t exactly made a career of it.’

‘Premier League hospitality – yes, you said.’

‘I suppose I could ask. I’ll ping her the photo.’

‘Or I could talk to her?’

Milton made a face. ‘I’m practically family, Gillian. Might merit me a quicker response.’ He copied the photo to his phone and returned hers to her.

There was the sound of a muted scuffle behind them. Allan Franklyn was being manhandled back into the lift he’d just got out of.

‘I own this fucking building!’ he yelled as he tried to free himself. ‘I have every right to know what the hell’s happening!’ Milton walked over, his palms held up.

‘Let me,’ he said to the plain-clothes officer. He guided Franklyn to where Gish was standing. ‘Maeve’s husband seems to have taken her somewhere,’ he explained.

The blood drained from Franklyn’s face. ‘Eddie? *Here?*’

‘A long way from Dubai. I don’t suppose he was serving the nibbles at Mrs Gallacher’s party?’

‘What? No, of course not.’

‘Because you’d have recognised him,’ Gish interjected, ‘with him being one of your main investors and all.’ Franklyn took a moment before deciding not to deny it.

‘And from the look of fear on your face,’ Milton said, ‘I’m guessing his money might not be as safe as you and he would like.’

‘None of your damned business.’

‘I hear Jessica Forrester’s after a new place to live,’ Gish added, ‘and Zafk has already jumped ship, meaning Roddy Collins won’t be far behind. Anyone else heading for the lifeboats?’

‘Again, none of your business.’ Sweat was breaking out on Franklyn’s forehead. He turned his attention towards the windows and the outside world, as if he might find Eddie Gallacher or some other form of nemesis staring back at him. Instead, it was another member of Carlyle’s team who entered, reporting from the hotel. One of the kitchen staff had been threatened, clothes and accoutrements handed over.

‘He was promised a couple of hundred when Gallacher returned everything,’ he explained to his boss.

‘Like that was ever going to happen,’ Carlyle stated, unfolding his arms and pushing his hands into his pockets. Only then did he seem to notice Allan Franklyn. ‘Can someone escort this civilian anywhere but here?’

‘We’ll do it,’ Gish said. But when she looked at Milton, she realised she had lost him, at least for the moment. The only thing on his mind right now was Eddie Gallacher. So she guided Franklyn into the lift and accompanied him to his penthouse.

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Previously, Franklyn's duplex had looked ready for its close-up in a Sunday newspaper supplement; now it bore evidence of actual use. Empty wine bottles sat next to a filled and aromatic bin bag that hadn't as yet made its way to the bin store. There were traces of white powder on the glass coffee table, which Gish did her best to ignore. Alongside sat a programme from the most recent Arsenal home game, plus a boardroom lanyard. Newspapers had been perused and then scrunched into balls. Two phones sat on a charging pad, lighting up every few seconds with new messages and silenced calls. Rather than depend on the nearby ritzy hotel, it looked as though Franklyn had been resorting to takeaways. There were dishes in the sink and on the floor by one of the cream leather chairs, the seat of the chair dotted with spots of some kind of sauce.

Franklyn summoned up enough presence of mind to brush the coffee-table powder away with the palm of one hand. 'Place could be tidier,' he conceded.

Hidden speakers were playing classical music, but at a level that was only just audible. A pile of unopened mail sat on the breakfast bar and a suit jacket had been dropped to the floor rather than draped over one of the dining stools.

'You've got other things on your plate,' Gish said.

'Yes, you could say that.' He paused at the architectural drawing of the Heights 2, staring down at it. A third phone was buzzing. He drew it from his trouser pocket and held it in front of his lips.

'I'll call you back, Dad,' he said.

'You better had, you little—'

Franklyn ended the call and tucked the phone away.

'He blames me for all of it,' he confided.

‘He has money in the Heights?’

‘And its sibling. Not a vast amount, but he persuaded a few of his friends to jump in with him.’ Franklyn seemed to notice the stain on the leather chair. He rubbed at it with his thumb, making no difference. ‘I can’t allow myself to get sloppy,’ he said, more to himself than Gish. ‘Need to look the part…’ His eyes met hers. ‘Sorry, I’m rambling.’

‘You’d be surprised how quickly things can return to normal,’ Gish said, not believing a word of it.

‘Not in the world I inhabit,’ he replied, sitting down without getting comfortable, studying his surroundings. ‘It’s just glass and metal, isn’t it? The only thing that’s special is that it’s *here*. And that’s only special if you can persuade the buyers to agree with you.’ The phone in his pocket was vibrating again, joined by the two on the charging pad. Instead of answering, Franklyn rested his elbows on his knees and lowered his head into his hands, fingers in ears and eyes tightly closed.

Gish tried to find a bit more sympathy, maybe a few words of comfort, but her heart wasn’t in it. She was still wondering why he had lied about never having visited Maita’s flat. A bell sounded from the hallway, but Franklyn made no show of having registered it.

‘You’ve got a visitor,’ Gish told him. He gave a slow shake of the head in response. ‘I’ll tell them to come back later.’ She went to the door and opened it.

Lev Godunov was surprised to see her. He was flanked by his two bodyguards. They towered over both him and Gish, scowls on their faces.

‘Social visit, is it?’ Gish asked, stepping into the corridor and closing the door after her.

‘Allan has been ignoring my calls,’ Godunov explained.

‘Making you the rule rather than the exception.’

One of the bodyguards muttered something in Russian, Godunov answering from the side of his mouth.

‘You’re telling him I’m police?’ Gish surmised. ‘Maybe you could add that he needs to unclench those fists and stop giving me the death stare.’

‘Why have the National Crime Agency been summoned?’ Godunov asked.

‘What *I’d* like to know,’ Gish countered, ‘is why a law-abiding citizen such as yourself would know anything about the NCA? Unless that person

has had dealings with them, of course.'

Godunov ignored her, his eyes on the door. 'Allan can't hide in there for ever.'

'Do I need to post a sentry, or can I persuade you to bugger off?' Gish folded her arms, ready to stand her ground. Godunov fixed her with a look, then gave a smile.

'We can always come back,' he announced, before adding a few words of Russian, his men following him as he retreated to the lift. Gish waited for a few more minutes after the doors had closed on them, then let out a long exhalation, rolling her shoulders a few times to release the tension as she followed in Godunov's footsteps, summoning the lift and heading to the ground floor.

But there was no sign of Jack Milton or Oliver Carlyle.

'Possible sighting of Gallacher,' one of Carlyle's men told her.

'Where?'

He made a zipping motion across his lips.

'Cheers,' Gish muttered. She looked at her phone screen, but Milton hadn't messaged her. There seemed nothing for it but to return to base. She sent a text to Allan Franklyn, warning him that Godunov and his men were likely to pay another call, then took a moment to gather her thoughts before stepping outside, where the huddle of journalists begged her for news. She noticed that Zafk's superfan was standing at a slight distance, looking distraught.

'She's just heard,' one journalist explained. 'About Zafk moving out.'

Gish walked up to the young woman, getting her attention by patting her on the shoulder.

'Are you all right?'

'I don't know where his parents live,' the woman managed to say, blinking back tears. 'And *they* won't tell me.' She waved her arm in the direction of the media, then shifted her focus to Gish. 'Do *you* know? You are police – you must know!'

'I hate to let you down, but we don't always know everything.'

'You're a liar!' The fan's voice was rising.

'I'm just trying to help.' Gish risked a glance in the direction of the press pack, who were shaking their heads and sharing a quiet chuckle.

'Then tell me.'

Gish answered with a sigh.

‘Fine, don’t help me. But I’ll find out.’ The woman wiped a sleeve across her nose, nodding to herself, her confidence building. ‘I’ll find out…’ She began to walk away, phone held out in front of her, fingers tapping busily at its screen.

Gish got into her car and began driving away. As she passed Lewis Schofield, he gave her a wave of recognition. She waved back without adding a toot of her horn. But then she caught sight of Tom Simmons, jogging in the direction of the Heights. Noticing her, he began flapping his hands. She pulled over, ignoring the irritation of the motorists behind her, and wound her window down.

‘What gives?’ he managed to ask, breathless and perspiring.

‘How do you mean?’

‘Looks a lot like an NCA op – subtle as a brick, as usual. Does that mean Eddie Gallacher’s come up for air?’

‘Maybe.’

He peered up towards Maeve’s floor. ‘Is he still inside?’

‘I’ve already said too much, Tom.’

‘I don’t see Carlyle’s car.’ He turned his attention back towards her. ‘Eddie was here, but now he’s not – and Carlyle’s giving chase?’

‘Bye, Tom.’ Gish signalled to pull back into the slow stream of traffic.

‘You’re all heart, Gillian!’ he called as she slid the window back up.

Once she was back in the incident room, she called Marion while Emma Amberson, over by the kettle, lifted a mug for her inspection. Gish gave a brief nod.

‘I think I can manage to get home a bit earlier,’ she told Marion.

‘That’d be good – for the pair of you. She’s not at her best right now.’

‘Let me talk to her.’ Gish listened as the phone was handed over.

‘Hello, Gillian. This is me speaking.’ Jacqui’s speech was slightly slurred.

‘I was just telling Marion, I’m coming home a bit early today.’

‘Where is it you’ve been?’

‘At work, Mum.’

‘Oh.’ There was silence on the line. Gish could hear Marion explaining

about her job.

‘Well, it’s good that you’re working. Too many aren’t.’

‘I’ll see you soon, Mum. Take care of yourself. Can you put Marion back on?’

The phone was handed back.

‘Are you sure she’s taking her meds?’ Gish asked. ‘She’s good at tucking them into her cheeks and then hiding them down the side of the bed.’

‘I’m wise to her, Gillian. It’s not one of her better days, that’s all.’

‘Okay, Marion, thanks.’ Gish ended the call, feeling like the stuffing had been knocked out of her. Amberson arrived with her tea. It looked too strong, but she gave a smile of thanks anyway. She rubbed her phone against her chin. Milton was supposed to be getting Phoebe’s number from Mick Bentham, but she was pretty sure a car chase in the company of the National Crime Agency would have shunted the idea out of his head. The number for scene of crime was listed on the murder wall, so she tapped it into her phone. When somebody answered, she identified herself and asked to speak to Mick Bentham.

‘Hang on,’ she was told. The man started whistling as he made his way to wherever Bentham was. Gish could hear snatches of other voices and a few coughs, then a door creaking open and a less busy environment.

‘DS Gish,’ she heard the colleague say as he handed the phone over. Bentham cleared his throat noisily.

‘Gillian? What have we done to deserve the honour?’

‘I’m after a favour.’

‘When are you not?’

‘This is maybe a slightly odd one, though.’

‘Oh?’

‘I wondered if I could show your daughter a painting, see if she can identify it.’

There was silence on the line. ‘Phoebe, you mean?’

‘She studied art history, right?’

‘I don’t know if that makes her an expert. What sort of painting is it?’

‘It’s actually not the whole painting – just the bit that’s visible on a wall in a photograph.’

‘And which wall is this?’

‘Maita Macheso’s. You probably noticed the empty hooks?’

‘I hope you’re not suggesting one of my lot lifted something.’

‘God, no. I’m just wondering why she took it with her – *if* she took it.’

‘So this photograph…’

‘Was taken a while back, with the painting still *in situ*. I just thought, if I pinged it to you, maybe you could have Phoebe take a look?’

‘Let me get this straight. It wasn’t family photos she grabbed and packed when she was leaving? It was some sort of painting?’

‘Right.’

‘Well, I don’t suppose it can do any harm – I’ll see what Phoebe says.’ He gave Gish his mobile number.

‘I’ll send it right now,’ she said.

‘No promises,’ he warned her. She thanked him anyway. As he rang off, Gish noticed an incoming text from Tom Simmons.

Throw me a bone here!

She decided not to answer. Instead she forwarded the photo to Bentham, then grabbed her mug and walked over to Emma Amberson’s desk.

‘Up to much?’ she asked.

‘Still checking airlines – commercial and private – to see if those passports were used anywhere else.’ Amberson nodded towards Ben Boothroyd’s desk. ‘Ben decided to chuck Jayden Hewlett’s name into the mix, just to give us that bit of extra work to do.’ She manoeuvred her chewing gum into a corner of her mouth. ‘Fun and games at the Heights?’

‘Jack’s out there somewhere with NCA, pretending he’s young again.’

‘I refuse to believe Jack was ever young.’ Amberson thought for a moment. ‘The Gallachers don’t tie into our two cases, though, do they?’ Gish offered a shrug. ‘I heard you saying something about art…’

‘I forget how good your hearing is.’

‘Give us a butcher’s, then.’ Amberson tilted her head at the look Gish was giving her. ‘I love a bit of twentieth century.’

‘You’re full of surprises.’ Gish opened her phone and found the photo. Amberson used her thumb and forefinger to zoom in and then out again.

‘Pretty sure it’s Picasso. Blue Period. Could be Matisse at a pinch – I prefer Matisse, less of a swine in his personal life. But I think it’s Picasso. You could check by asking the Tate, or maybe an auction house.’

‘Do you think it’s an original?’

‘Would a copy be so important to her?’

‘How much would it fetch?’

‘Millions? Tens of millions? *If* it’s the real deal – plenty of fakes out there. Want me to make a few phone calls?’

‘That would be great.’

‘In between all my other chores, I mean,’ Amberson pretended to complain. Gish gave her a sympathetic pat on the shoulder and AirDropped the photo.

Back at her desk, she cracked and messaged Milton.

What’s going on?

When a call arrived, she thought it would be him, but it was Mark Hogarth.

‘Yes, Mark?’ she asked, one hand on the back of her neck, feeling the tension still there.

‘I’ve got an address for Jay if you still want it.’

‘I definitely do.’

‘But you didn’t get it from me, right?’

‘I’ve no problem with that.’

While he recited it, Gish copied it down.

‘It’s a mansion block in Kensington,’ he told her. ‘I ran it past Professor Google.’

‘Jay’s obviously going up in the world.’

‘Maybe a sugar mama’s paying his rent.’

‘Now there’s a thought. Listen, while I’ve got you…’

‘Christ, now what?’

‘I know there isn’t a date for the funeral yet…’

‘Because your lot can’t release the body.’

‘But when you do fix one, do you think the family would mind if I paid my respects?’

The line fell silent for a moment. ‘I don’t think we’d have a problem with that,’ he eventually said, voice thickening a little.

‘I appreciate that,’ Gish told him.

He gave a short grunt as he rang off.

Gish put in a request for a patrol car to pay a visit to Hewlett’s address.

‘You’re kidding, aren’t you?’ she was informed. ‘Every motor we’ve got has been commandeered.’

‘NCA, right?’

‘Right.’

She ended the call and sat for a moment staring at the address. Then, with a wave to Amberson, she left the office and returned to her car.

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She hadn’t been to Kensington in a while. It boasted the usual array of overpriced shops and eateries, the cars parked kerbside high-end models, mostly bearing diplomatic plates and some with liveried chauffeurs biding their time behind the wheel or buffing up the bodywork. The building she was looking for was a four-storey red-brick with leaded windows at ground level. Most of these had bars on them to deter intruders. A large gleaming brass panel to the right of the double doors bore flat numbers but no names. She pressed 11, the number she’d been given for Jayden Hewlett, and waited. When there was no answer, she tried 10 and 12, with the same lack of success. She noticed that high up in one corner of the doorway a small camera was pointed in her direction, so she held up her ID. A minute later, the doors were opened by a slim, shaven-headed man in an immaculate grey suit.

‘Can I be of assistance?’ he asked.

‘I was trying to reach the occupant of Flat 11,’ she explained.

He had taken her ID between thumb and forefinger and was scrutinising it, comparing Gish’s head shot with the woman standing in front of him. ‘Fakes these days are almost indistinguishable from the real thing,’ he explained.

‘Do you often get visitors posing as police officers?’

‘I’ve known journalists resort to the tactic. Our residents include politicians and foreign dignitaries.’ He fixed her with a look. ‘Matters of state are discussed within these walls.’

‘Not by Jayden, I wouldn’t think.’

He half smiled and handed back her ID. ‘I wish I could help, but Mr Hewlett is currently absent.’

‘When did you last see him?’

‘Maybe ten days ago?’

‘How long has he been a resident?’

‘Only a few months.’

‘Ever any trouble?’

‘That would not be permissible.’

‘That almost sounds like a yes.’

‘Loud music too late in the evening. He’s always accommodating when intervention is required.’

‘Since you’re using the present tense, I assume you’re expecting him back at some point?’

The man acknowledged as much with a slight bow of his head.

‘Does Maita Macheso pay for the flat?’

‘I wouldn’t know those details.’

‘You know who I mean, though?’

‘Ms Macheso is not unknown to me.’

‘Do they arrive together, or…?’

‘On the occasions when I’ve been privy to her arrival, she has always been dropped off by her chauffeur.’

Gish described Amos Chissano, watching the man give another of his bows. She got the feeling she could be doing a striptease in front of him and his demeanour wouldn’t change a jot.

‘The driver stayed with the Porsche?’

‘Let’s just say he loitered. The all-seeing eye would pick him up.’ He gestured towards the camera. ‘Often he just stared at the windows. I’m not sure he altogether approved of whatever he thought was happening within.’

‘Jealous, you mean? Did anyone else ever visit?’

‘I’ve already said more than I should.’

‘We can take this to my station if you’d prefer?’

He looked disappointed in her for resorting to threats.

‘Not many visitors,’ he conceded. ‘Mr Hewlett spends a good deal of his time elsewhere.’

‘But you wouldn’t know where?’

‘You are correct in that presumption.’

‘Can I give you my number? I’d appreciate knowing if and when you do see him.’ Gish wished – probably for the first time – that she’d shelled out for some printed cards. She got the feeling the man in front of her would

prefer one of those to an exchange of phone numbers. In fact, he reached into his breast pocket and plucked out a card of his own, which he handed to her.

‘My direct line,’ he said. ‘Send me a text and that will provide me with enough information.’

Gish looked at the card. His name was Dominic Impreza. Over his shoulder, she caught some of the mansion block’s 1930s interior – tiled floor like a marble chessboard; more brass and gilt; the sweeping curve of a staircase.

‘I’ve just come from the Heights,’ she informed him. For the first time Impreza showed emotion, wincing in an approximation of pain.

‘Ghastly,’ he said.

‘Murder always is.’

He gave her a look. ‘I meant the building, the absolute negation of taste.’

She had an incoming call from Milton. ‘I need to take this,’ she said. Impreza took the opportunity to give one final bow before retreating inside and closing the door. ‘Talk to me, Jack,’ she said, walking to her car, where, despite the police signage on the inside of the windscreen, a parking attendant was contemplating issuing a ticket. Gish wagged a finger at him and unlocked the doors.

‘We lost them,’ Milton was telling her. ‘That’s if we ever had them. Visual ID only – a big black Mercedes – but no licence plate visible for confirmation.’

‘So where are you?’

‘Muswell Hill. Three sightings we had to check – here, Camden and Tufnell Park.’ Gish could hear Oliver Carlyle barking some orders into his own phone.

‘Not a happy ship,’ she commented. Her handset vibrated: incoming text. It was from Mick Bentham: *Sorry, Phoebe’s drawn a blank*. ‘Huh,’ she said out loud.

‘What is it?’

‘I knew you were busy, so I got Mick to ask his daughter about the painting. She doesn’t recognise it.’

‘Always a long shot, Gillian.’

‘Except I showed it to Emma and she’s fairly sure it’s a Picasso.’

‘Emma?’

‘Knows a thing or two about art, apparently. Blue Period Picasso, whatever that means. Worth seven or eight figures if real.’

‘Presumably why she didn’t leave it behind.’ Milton sounded thoughtful. ‘So that’s one small piece of the jigsaw.’ There was another shout from Carlyle.

‘I hope he’s not driving,’ Gish cautioned. ‘Sounds like a coronary waiting to happen.’

‘Front passenger seat. I’m in the back. Seat belts were a fine invention.’ Milton broke off as a horn blared. Gish could swear she heard a squeal of tyres. ‘Red lights aren’t for everybody,’ he explained to her. ‘So what now?’

‘Emma’s going to rustle up an expert who might shed more light on the art. Maita seems to have installed her bit of rough in one of Kensington’s nicer streets. Not that he’s been seen there of late. I think I’m hitting a bit of a wall, to be honest. Might clock off and head home.’

‘You’re owed for the hours you’ve been putting in. Has Jeffries noticed I’ve been playing hooky?’

‘Not so far. What happens now with Gallacher and Maeve?’

‘Oliver’s not nearly ready to give up.’

‘Yes, I sense that. You plan to stick with him?’

‘I know I need to get back to Marylebone at some point.’

‘I hate to tell you this, but the team’s coping perfectly well in your absence – and in mine, come to that.’

‘Don’t start telling me we’re not irreplaceable, Gillian, it’s not good for my ego.’

‘You forgetting how close to retirement you are?’

‘Nice of you to remind me. Say hello to your mum from me. I’d like to come visit one of these days.’

‘She’d eat you up like strawberries and cream,’ Gish said with a smile. The parking attendant was still standing there, readying to stop giving her the benefit of the doubt. ‘Talk later,’ she said, ending the call and firing up the engine.

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Milton was seated in his armchair at home that evening when he heard the revving of an oversized engine outside. His first thought was kids. He'd been staring into space, a glass of red wine in one hand, just working stuff out in his head. His son, Adam, had been due to visit but had texted an apology along with the words *Better offer*. With just a little effort, and managing not to grunt, Milton got to his feet and approached the window. The passenger door of a large black saloon was open, Oliver Carlyle's face turned in Milton's direction.

He was smiling.

Milton grabbed his phone, keys and jacket and headed out. The car was already moving as he slid onto the back seat and yanked the door closed. The driver was scowling. Carlyle's eyes met Milton's in the rear-view mirror.

'Jim here reckons I'm wasting precious time bringing you along, but then he doesn't have the same long history with Eddie that you and I do.'

'You've traced the car?'

'Not too far from here, as it happens – just off Woolwich Common. Street cameras flagged up the Merc and our patrols did the rest. It's parked outside a three-storey terraced property.'

'That won't be where they are – Eddie's not that stupid.'

'They'll be close, though.'

'You've got surveillance in place?'

'A van at one end of the street, plus one officer who's a bit more mobile.'

'Eddie will clock anyone loitering.'

'Our boy's dressed as a delivery driver. Battery-powered bike and a backpack you'd swear was filled with food orders. He's been along the

street twice but not spotted anything.'

'You didn't fancy doorstepping the neighbours?'

'If we spook him, who knows what he's capable of.'

'On the other hand, the longer he's left with Maeve…'

'Like I said before, Jack, I doubt he'd get physical.'

'He's never been cheated on before, though, has he?'

Milton watched Carlyle give a slow nod. Both men were gripping their respective door handles as the car was flung around one corner after another, overtaking at speed despite the flashing headlights of oncoming traffic. Soon enough they were on Shooter's Hill Road and turning into Academy Road, the common on their left. Jim signalled right into a quieter suburban street.

'This is it,' he eventually said.

The houses were narrow, with only a single bay window on the ground and first storey, two smaller windows on the second. There were a few To Let and For Sale signs, and some of the small front gardens were tidier than others. They had pulled up alongside a telecoms van, inside which the driver and his mate – both in branded clothing – appeared to be on a break from an out-of-hours job. They nodded a brief greeting before getting back into character. Jim reversed into a space behind the van, blocking an overgrown driveway in the process. They no longer had a view of Maeve Gallacher's Mercedes, but that didn't matter. Carlyle was scanning the windows around them, wary of neighbours who might be curious. TV screens glowed behind blinds and curtains. Other than that, the street was dead.

'How long do we give it?' Milton asked into the silence. Ignoring him, Carlyle got busy on his phone, sending texts.

'Lot less conspicuous than police radios,' he explained.

'I'll tell you what's conspicuous,' Jim muttered, turning off the engine. 'Three men in a parked car.'

'Good point, Jim,' Carlyle pretended to agree as he typed. 'Maybe you should go sit in the van. Bound to be room in the back.'

Jim sniffed back any further complaint.

For want of anything else to do, Milton took out his own phone.

'Don't go sharing this,' Carlyle warned him.

'Nobody in my team is on the Gallachers' payroll.'

‘I’m sure you’d like to think so.’

The two men’s eyes met again in the mirror. Milton relented and slipped his phone back into his pocket.

Music could be heard coming closer, bass-heavy with muffled lyrics. Jim was focused on his wing mirror. ‘Food delivery,’ he announced. ‘The real thing rather than our boy.’

The rider passed them on the pavement, eyes on the phone clamped to his handlebars. He wore a safety helmet and high-vis jacket, the usual insulated delivery bag harnessed to his back. They heard his brakes squeal as he slowed to a stop. The music cut out. The van blocked him from their view, but Carlyle had his phone switched to speaker mode so they could hear the report from the surveillance vehicle.

‘He’s parked,’ a voice from the phone obliged. ‘Looks like just a single pizza coming out of the bag. He’s heading for the door.’ There was silence on the line for a few seconds. ‘Door’s opening – Rob, do you have eyes on whoever’s inside?’ They listened, unable to make out what was being said. ‘No visual ID,’ came the report. Then, ‘Door closing again, rider heading back to his bike.’

Carlyle cut the call and made another. ‘Martin, did you catch any of that? Okay, doesn’t matter. Get after the guy. We need a name and description for whoever he just delivered to, but don’t stop him until you’re clear of the street, understood?’ He ended the call and began tapping out a rhythm with his phone against the dashboard. A minute later, the device buzzed and he answered it, listening.

‘Regular customer,’ he recited. ‘Big shaven-headed guy by the name of Gallacher.’ Then, speaking to the caller, ‘That’s good enough for me. I want you in delivery mode, helmet on. You don’t have to be carrying anything. Give us two minutes to get ready. We all go in once he’s opened the door to you.’ He ended the call and made another. Jim had unclipped his seat belt and was reaching down to the floor, where his equipment sat: retractable baton, pepper spray, zip cuffs.

‘I want you two round the back in case he makes a run for it,’ Carlyle was saying into his phone. ‘Ideally we’d have a bigger crew, but best not to wait.’ He got out of the car and went to speak in person to the two men in the van. They emerged and began strapping holsters to their bodies, handguns having been removed from the locked box between the front

seats. Once they were snugly holstered, they zipped up their nylon jackets, doing little to disguise the obvious bulge.

‘Shit just got real,’ Jim said with a grin, getting out of the car. Milton followed suit. The officer disguised as a delivery rider was waiting for the thumbs-up from Carlyle, which duly arrived. He walked up the path to the front door, getting nice and close – visible from the spyhole but also blocking the view of whatever might be happening behind him. The bell chimed, though Milton only just heard it above the pounding in his ears.

By the time the door began to open, Carlyle and Jim were on the move.

‘Forgotten something?’ Eddie Gallacher was saying, mouth half filled with pizza. Too late, he saw what was happening and tried slamming the door shut again, but Martin and Jim were already pushing with their shoulders, giving him no chance. Gallacher turned, readying to run.

‘Place is surrounded, Eddie,’ Carlyle warned him, sounding cool and businesslike. ‘Don’t be a twat.’

Gallacher stopped and turned back to face him. He was dressed in a baggy grey T-shirt and joggers with an elasticated waist, his feet encased in new-looking trainers. There were traces of tomato paste around his lips. His small dark eyes drilled into Carlyle’s before turning their attention to Milton. He swallowed down the food in his mouth.

‘The clown posse’s all here,’ he drawled. ‘Just the four of you, eh? And there I was, thinking I was a bit special…’

He turned and led them into the living room, where Maeve Gallacher was seated on a straight-backed wooden chair that had been dragged over from the dining area and placed between two armchairs, on one of which sat the pizza, two slices missing. Eddie had presumably just finished eating one of them. The other lay on the floor at his wife’s feet, minus its topping, which was dripping down Maeve’s face. She had made no attempt to wipe herself clean. Her hands were clasped in front of her, her clothing spattered with melted cheese and tomato.

‘You okay?’ Milton asked. She ignored him, eyes on her husband.

‘Messy eater,’ Gallacher told the officers, lifting the pizza box and dropping it on top of the piled carcasses of four others. Then he settled himself on the chair, rubbing his lips clean with his thumb.

Carlyle pretended to be studying the room. The TV was the usual oversized flat-screen model. A long shelf, probably intended for books or

knick-knacks, housed half a dozen bottles of spirits, none of them full. A waste-paper bin was spilling crushed beer cans onto the carpet.

‘Been here a while, eh?’ he commented.

‘Just recently returned,’ Gallacher corrected him.

‘Every air- and seaport has you on their radar, Eddie. Funny we never got wind.’

Gallacher offered nothing more than a shrug. Carlyle took his time making sure the spare armchair was clean enough for him to grace it with his presence. He sat slowly, eyes never leaving Gallacher’s. But when he spoke, his words were aimed at Maeve.

‘What was he going to do to you?’

The only part of Maeve Gallacher that seemed to move was her chest, rising and falling with each shallow breath. She was still staring at her husband, who was doing his best to avoid eye contact.

‘Look at her,’ he said, gesticulating. ‘She’s fine.’

‘Was she going to get any more of that pizza?’ Milton asked. He tried handing Maeve his handkerchief, but she ignored the gesture.

‘Looks to me, Eddie,’ Carlyle said, ‘as if someone’s been telling you stories. We tried to get word to you ourselves – sorry about that, Maeve – but we weren’t sure you’d listen.’ He leaned forward, elbows on knees, making sure he had Eddie Gallacher’s attention. ‘You’d listen to a friend, though, a trusted associate…’

‘Ray Stanton.’ Maeve Gallacher spat the name out. ‘As if anyone could trust a word that snake ever said.’

Eddie angled his body towards her. ‘As soon as we locked eyes, though, I knew it was true.’

‘That’s why you had to kill the poor kid?’ Carlyle asked.

Gallacher snapped his head in Carlyle’s direction. ‘You thick or something? I only found out yesterday he’d been shagging her!’

‘And began to wonder if Maeve had something to do with his death?’ Milton guessed, earning a ferocious look.

‘You’re as bad as him! Any fucking story to see me put away!’

‘As if I’d do anything to hurt Dwayne,’ Maeve interrupted, speaking so softly they had to strain to hear her. ‘Stanton, on the other hand…’ She waited until she had her husband’s attention. ‘When Dwayne died, I knew where to point the finger. Your pal Ray didn’t like that, which is why he

came crying to you and pouring out his poison.'

'Doesn't mean it isn't true, though, darling. You and the sodding security guard. And here I am, all this time…' He swept an arm around his surroundings.

'Yeah, that's right, here you are.' Maeve's voice dripped equal parts sarcasm and spite. 'As faithful as the day is long? Not bloody likely – one of your floozies is installed not two streets away, same as it ever was. Don't think I don't have eyes and ears among your lot, Eddie – eyes and ears a damned sight sharper than your pal Ray.'

As the silence lengthened, Maeve looked around her, picking out Milton, gesturing to him that she would accept his handkerchief. She began wiping her face clean, flicking flecks of dough and cheese off her clothes and onto the carpet. Her husband, clenching and unclenching his fists, seemed in two minds what to say or do. He took in each copper's face in turn. The two in the back garden had their faces pressed to the window by the dining area.

'So what now?' he eventually asked.

'You know the drill,' Carlyle said. 'And after we're done with you, it'll be the taxman's turn – plenty of questions about unexplained wealth, all of that.'

'Yeah, well, you know the drill, too, Carlyle,' Gallacher sneered. 'What makes you think you'll have any more luck this time? My legal team will kick your arse up and down the courtroom – always supposing whatever case you concoct gets that far. It usually doesn't.' There was mischief in his eyes when they met Carlyle's.

Maeve got to her feet slowly and placed herself squarely in front of her seated husband.

'This time it's different, though,' she stated. 'This time they've got me to give my side of things.'

Eddie's face became stony. He glared up at her. 'You wouldn't bleeding dare.'

'I would. I will.'

He gave a humourless chuckle, shaking his head, shoulders jiggling, then settled for a moment before springing to his feet, rushing her. The two of them fell to the floor, his hands around her throat.

Jim leaped forward, grabbing Gallacher's wrists, while Carlyle put him

in a headlock and began to squeeze and Milton grabbed him by the feet, trying to drag him away. Jim had half Gallacher's heft but knew exactly what he was doing. Gallacher's hands were soon behind his back, Jim calling for Martin to take the zip cuffs from his pocket. The cyclist found them, and despite Gallacher's best efforts, the two men got the gangster into them. Having released his hold, Carlyle helped roll Gallacher off his wife onto his back. Eddie's curses were filling the room as Milton helped Maeve to her feet. The two firearms detectives arrived through the front door, guns drawn. Carlyle gestured for them to relax, though he himself looked wired to the mains.

'You okay?' Milton was asking Maeve. She met his eyes.

'Careful, or I might start to think you've taken a shine.' She was checking her throat for any injury. Her husband kicked out at her from the floor, missing the mark.

'Do his feet,' Oliver Carlyle ordered. Jim reached into his pocket, bringing out fresh zip cuffs, while Maeve staggered over to the armchairs, reaching down and picking something up. As she approached her husband, he looked ready to launch a barrage of saliva at her, until she slapped the slice of pizza over his face. Then she began walking towards the front door, turning her head to Milton.

'You coming?' she said.

'I'm coming,' Jack Milton replied.

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Seven

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Milton had phoned Gish the previous night to fill her in. This morning, the whole station knew and was declaring Eddie Gallacher's arrest a result. The chief had tempered their enthusiasm somewhat by reminding them of the two unsolved murders, and by 11 a.m. it was business as usual, the team busy on phones and computers. At quarter past, the curator from the Tate Gallery arrived. She was not what any of them had been expecting, still in her twenties, a short-sleeved dress showing arms decorated with intricate tattoos. Her wispy shoulder-length hair had been tinted pink, matching the lenses in her Lennon-style spectacles. Thick green tights covered her legs, and her footwear of choice was a pair of Doc Marten boots with multicoloured laces.

The chief had decided beforehand that she deserved a more salubrious location than the interview room so had offered up his office. He sat across from her, brow slightly furrowed, as if she might be likely to throw a can of soup at him or glue herself to the filing cabinet. Gish and Milton flanked her, but remained standing.

The curator's name was Elise Wharton. She had brought a backpack with her, manoeuvring it onto her lap and digging out some sheets of paper.

'I can't vouch for its authenticity, of course,' she said, 'but from the material you sent, this is the painting in its entirety.' She placed a photocopied page from a large book on the desk, turning it to face Chief Inspector Jeffries. 'It's called *Monaco* – we're not sure why, though Picasso did live for a time in Cannes and also in Vallauris, which is close to Antibes. He made a wonderful fresco there.'

'Our own expert says it's from his Blue Period,' Gish offered.

Wharton gave a thin smile. 'The colour scheme would suggest that – easy mistake to make – but *Monaco* is a later work, around 1919 or 1920.

Of course that's thirty years before he lived in Vallauris, so again the title is a bit of a mystery.'

'Say it is the original,' Jeffries asked, tapping a fingertip against the photocopy, 'how much would it be worth?'

Rather than answer, Wharton placed another sheet of paper on the desk. It was a black and white photograph of a well-dressed man in his sixties. 'This is Hans Becker,' she said. 'An industrialist. He made his fortune from the mines he owned across Africa. An avid collector of art and artefacts, he eventually settled in Zimbabwe. He began by specialising in African makers, but then moved on to those who had been influenced by the continent. He bought *Monaco* in the 1970s – I've no idea how much he would have paid for it. I took the liberty of contacting a colleague at the National Gallery in Harare. They confirmed that Becker used to own the painting.'

'Used to?' Gish echoed.

'The rumour is, he made a gift of it to a pastor called Charles Macheso. It was to be sold and the money used to further his ministry. Mr Becker had fallen big-time for the pastor and his mission.'

'But then Charles Macheso was accused of fraud and fled to Mozambique, where he's friends with the president,' Gish stated.

'Taking the painting with him before it could be sold,' Milton added. 'Fact that he then had it brought here by his daughter would seem to indicate he intended to hang onto it.'

'Or sell it to line his own pockets.' The chief was nodding slowly. 'And now the daughter is missing and so is the art.' He looked at the curator. 'Did this man Becker ever contact the authorities?'

Wharton gave a shrug. 'At the end of the day, it was a gift, I suppose.'

'Plus,' Gish added, 'Macheso had landed in a friendly country – they weren't about to extradite him.'

'But not so safe that he didn't want the painting elsewhere,' Milton commented.

'I rang around a few of the London auction houses and high-end galleries,' Wharton said. 'No one has tried selling them a hundred-million-pound Picasso.'

The furrows on Jeffries' forehead deepened. 'A hundred million?'

Wharton shrugged again. 'They all wanted to know why I was asking,

but I remained circumspect.'

Gish folded her arms, thinking. 'What about private buyers?'

'The usual oligarchs and tech billionaires.'

'Russians? Chinese?'

Wharton's eyes met Gish's. 'And the Americans and Saudis, of course. Picasso's *Buste de Femme* was stolen from a sheikh's yacht in 1999. It was eventually recovered. Funnily enough, the yacht was moored at Antibes.'

Jeffries was studying the painting again. 'Lot of money for a bit of canvas and some paint.'

'It's the element of genius they'd be buying,' Wharton corrected him. 'That and the cachet of ownership.' She looked at all three detectives in turn. 'So do you know who's currently in possession of the painting? It connects to the deaths at the Heights, yes?'

'We're not at liberty to say.'

She gave another thin smile. 'Of course not.'

'Do you know the Heights?' Gish enquired.

'I met its curator once. I can't say I was impressed.'

Jeffries looked confused, so Milton started to explain. 'All the art in the public areas, there's someone in charge of buying it.'

Gish's attention was on the seated woman. 'Why weren't you impressed?'

Wharton took a deep breath. 'No real breadth or depth of knowledge. Not every art history graduate slips into a role like his.' She paused. 'But then not every graduate has parents with such deep pockets and social connections.'

'Who are his parents, if you don't mind me asking?'

'I don't know the mother, but his father is a man called Toby Scully.'

'I thought they only had a daughter,' Gish said quietly. She looked at Milton, who gave a shrug: nobody had ever bothered to check.

The chief looked from one detective to the other. 'Something I should know?'

Milton gestured towards Elise Wharton. 'Would you mind waiting outside for a moment?'

She gave a little sniff as she gathered the papers back into her bag.

'Thank you,' Milton said, as she made her exit. Once the door was closed, he turned towards the chief. 'Toby Scully lives in the Heights,' he

reminded him.

‘Made a fortune during COVID,’ Gish added. ‘His daughter, Lu, was in Dwayne’s contacts list.’

Jeffries rubbed a hand across his chin. ‘So who lifted the Picasso – Ms Macheso or Dwayne’s attacker?’

‘It wasn’t Maita’s fob the attacker was after,’ Gish countered. ‘Money’s got to be on the painting still being in her possession.’

‘Another reason for her little deception with the flight?’ Milton speculated. ‘It wasn’t us she was throwing off the scent, it was her father?’

‘Does this get us any further forward?’ the chief wanted to know, aware that he owed the upper echelons an update.

‘Probably not,’ Milton stated.

But Gish wasn’t so sure about that.

Having escorted Wharton from the building, accompanied by profuse thanks and a warning to keep the contents of the meeting confidential, Milton reached into his desk drawer and tossed a Snickers bar for Gish to catch before producing another for himself.

‘Seems only fair,’ he said, ‘since you’re going to boil the kettle.’

She thanked him with a nod and took a bite, conscious that her diet was taking another hit.

‘What’s your thinking?’ he asked. A sliver of chocolate had fallen onto his keyboard, and he dabbed a finger against it, popping it onto his tongue.

‘I can understand why Maita would want the painting with her – not only insanely valuable, but also reasonably portable.’

‘You reckon she had plans to sell it?’

‘Say that’s what she was doing, there’s an art dealer right there in her building. Would she have asked Joseph Spalding’s advice, maybe even his help?’

‘And off he goes to New York, home of many a billionaire. Taking it with him?’

‘I’ve no idea, Jack.’

‘This painting, who else knows what it is? The boyfriend? The bodyguard? How about Maita’s bestie, Ms Forrester?’

‘Didn’t sound to me as if Jessica paid it the slightest attention. But Maita

had other friends in the building – Zafk for one, Allan Franklyn for another. Both had been in her living room.'

'How about Dwayne? Anyone with access to the right fob could be inside her flat in seconds.'

'Yet it was Jessica Forrester's fob that was taken on the night,' she reminded him.

'God help me, but I'm beginning to agree with Ames about that – it might have gone walkies at any point, no connection to what happened to Dwayne.'

Aware that they seemed to be entering yet another cul-de-sac, Milton paused to concentrate on his snack while Gish headed to the kettle. Slowly she became aware that Ben Boothroyd, seated at his computer, had one arm raised and was snapping his fingers. He had his phone tucked between cheek and shoulder, carrying on a conversation as the fingers of his left hand busied themselves on his keyboard and touchpad.

Other officers reached him before Milton and Gish, crowding around, trying to work out what the screen was telling them. An A4 pad of paper sat next to the scale-model Lamborghini to the right of the keyboard, but none of them could decipher the notes scrawled across it. When the call finished, Boothroyd flung the phone onto the pad and finished what he was typing.

'We've got all day, Ben,' Milton complained. Instead of answering, Boothroyd sprang to his feet and headed to the office printer, where sheets were beginning to churn out. A minute later, he was back, brandishing the topmost piece of A4.

'Jayden and the mystery woman flew to France on a private jet, but what did they do once they got there?' he began. 'If the idea was to throw us off the scent, job done. They either stuck around or they flew back. I started with private charters, and then checked with BA and the other carriers. To keep up the pretence that Maita and her bodyguard were abroad, Jayden wouldn't be using Amos Chissano's passport, and I wasn't sure he'd have access to anyone else's. *Et voilà.*' He held up one sheet for them to see, then swapped it for another, and another after that. 'Jayden Hewlett's passport, then Hewlett himself caught on camera at check-in, and again going through security and passport control at Charles de Gaulle. He was back here in England not twenty-four hours after leaving.'

'Nice work,' Ben,' Timpson piped up.

Gish saw the glow in Boothroyd's eyes. 'I'm not sure he's quite finished,' she commented.

'Gillian, I've hardly started. Because here's the thing – what's become of the mystery woman? Has he jettisoned her somewhere, having relieved her of Maita's passport? Maita would doubtless be expecting him to bring that back. But if he's returning on his own passport, maybe he wasn't alone. So if he was in seat 18A of the Paris–Heathrow flight, who was in the seat next to him?'

More sheets were held aloft: the woman who had flown out with Jayden, similarly photographed at check-in, security and passport control.

'You have her details?' Milton asked.

'You bet, Jack. Her name's Corinna Holt. She's twenty-seven years old and was born in Hackney Wick. Works as – anyone want to take a guess?' They shrugged and waited. 'Cloakroom attendant at Holli's nightclub, when not trying out for modelling jobs.'

'And Jayden has worked the door at the same club,' Lorimer piped up, exchanging a fist-bump with Timpson.

'I get the feeling the big finale is on its way,' Gish commented, eyes on Boothroyd. He obliged with a short bow before holding up one final sheet of paper.

'Her home address,' he announced to whistles and pats on the back. He was beaming with pride as his eyes met Milton's.

'Let's saddle up the horses, then,' Milton obliged.

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The flat was part of a quiet terrace between Covent Garden and Holborn. Ground level was a mix of boutiques, cafés and offices. Gish had wondered how a cloakroom attendant could afford the area, but a quick check had revealed that Holt came from money. The warrant had been organised with alacrity, but Milton was keen not to rush in. He stood alongside Gish, across the street and a dozen yards away from the door they were interested in. Boothroyd – having earned his place – was with Emma Amberson, the same distance away in the opposite direction. They had risked a walk-past, checking windows surreptitiously. Gish had called Amberson's phone and left the line open so they could communicate.

'It's all right for Jack,' Amberson told her. 'He's already had one good collar. The rest of us are starving.'

'It's on speakerphone, Emma,' Milton informed her. 'And I'm holding us back because I don't want to scare them into doing something stupid.'

'Like clambering out of a second-floor window? Reckon Maita can shin her way down a drainpipe?'

'She could bring the Mozambique high commission running.'

'After she's bumped off one of their own?'

Gish looked at Milton, her eyes telling him Amberson had a point.

'Hang on,' Boothroyd said suddenly. 'Who's this?'

They all watched the young Asian woman who had paused outside the gloss-black door and was rummaging in her shoulder bag. She produced a key ring with a Labubu doll attached to it.

'Let's go,' Milton decided.

All four converged on the woman as she slid her key into the lock. Gish got the feeling she was maybe a student. Her look of fear at their approach wasn't entirely eased by Gish's ID and her near-whispered utterance:

‘Police.’ Milton was asking the woman which floor was hers. She pointed upwards.

‘First floor?’ He held up his forefinger, watching her give a nod. Boothroyd was checking that the stairwell was empty. There was no sound, apart from the usual London street-clatter. The walls were freshly painted, the stairs wooden and varnished, the boards venerable-looking, possibly even original. Milton gestured for the young woman to precede them. Only one or two steps creaked as she made her way up them. The first landing was floored with ornate Victorian tiles. The woman placed a hand against one of two doors. Milton nodded. Her hand trembled as she fumbled to get her key into the lock and she closed the door after her with evident relief.

The four detectives waited in silence, ears straining, eyes fixed on the route up to the next floor. Milton took a final calming breath and led the way. Two more doors were awaiting them, but they knew it was Flat 5 they wanted. It boasted a numeral above its spyhole but no name there or beside the cheap-looking buzzer attached to the jamb. Milton’s finger was stretching out towards the buzzer when voices suddenly erupted from within.

‘And wine!’ a woman was stressing. ‘Not the cheap stuff either.’

‘Wine, pomegranates, celery – got it.’ This voice, also female, was closer than the first. Milton stepped back slightly, his colleagues following suit. They could hear a security chain being dislodged, the door handle beginning to turn.

Their IDs were out, held at face level so the woman who threw open the door was confronted by them. It was Corinna Holt. She had a folded carrier bag in one hand, phone in the other. She froze for a moment, eyes widening, mouth gaping.

‘Game’s up, Corinna,’ Milton said quietly, stepping over the threshold as she began to retreat. The others padded in after him, tensed but silent.

‘You’re letting a draught in!’ The female voice came from behind a closed door off the hallway. Milton placed a finger to his lips and approached the door, tapping with his knuckles.

‘What?’ This time it was a brusque male voice.

Milton turned the handle and pushed the door open. There wasn’t much in the room other than a couple of pieces of furniture and some strewn clothes. The bed consisted of a mattress on the floor, covered by a plain

white duvet, beneath which lay Maita Macheso and Jayden Hewlett, their heads resting against the wall, phones in front of them. Jayden's eyes closed slowly and momentarily, realisation dawning, as Milton identified himself and stated that they were both being arrested on suspicion of murder. He began to recite their rights and issue the usual caution while Gish did the same for Holt, albeit for the lesser offence of aiding and abetting. Maita had pulled the duvet over her face, as if to blot out everything that was about to happen, while Jayden flung his half of the duvet aside, revealing himself to be naked.

'Fuck,' he muttered as he clambered to his feet. He looked over to where Holt was sobbing, fists pressed to her eyes. 'You say nothing!' he bellowed, pointing at her, teeth showing. Then he leaned down and hauled the duvet from Maita's face. 'You say nothing,' he repeated, making it sound threat rather than counsel.

Gish, having left Amberson in charge of Corinna Holt, walked across the hallway and into the open-plan living area. There were kitchen units along one wall, separated by a breakfast bar from the rest of the room. No dining table, just a sofa and a couple of chairs, all arranged to face the TV console. The pictures on the walls – moody black and white landscapes – looked like they might have come with the flat. The other two doors off the hall led to a shower room and Holt's bedroom. By the time she'd finished her recce, both Jayden and Maita were dressed. Holt, still wiping away tears, was being led by Amberson into her own bedroom – probably to prevent Jayden from doing any further coaching. His eyes smouldered as he watched Milton arrange for three patrol cars, one per arrestee – again, so stories couldn't be agreed or tactics shared. Milton and Boothroyd were flanking Jayden, having zip-cuffed his hands behind him.

'I need to piss,' Jayden announced.

'Should have said earlier,' Milton informed him. 'But if you're really sure, DS Boothroyd here will hold your dick for you.'

Jayden's mouth twitched as he glanced towards Boothroyd. 'I get the feeling he'd enjoy it too much.'

'Good lad,' Milton said.

Gish had positioned herself in front of Maita, who held her hands out in readiness. 'I'm not sure we need to do that, do we?' Gish said softly. Then, making a show of looking around the room, 'Is there anything we should be

taking with us? Anything you don't want to leave behind?' She watched Maita shake her head. 'Sure about that?' This time Maita nodded. Gish was trying to make eye contact, but Maita kept her head bowed.

'I didn't do anything!' they heard Holt wail from the other bedroom.

'I told you to keep your mouth shut, bitch!' Jayden bellowed. Milton got in his face.

'Remember I told you about the right to remain silent? Did I forget to mention that aggressive language will count against you in court?' He studied Jayden from top to toe and back again. 'Besides, the stuff we've got on you, nothing anyone says or doesn't say is going to make the slightest scrap of difference. So if I were you, I'd start thinking about how to improve my chances – remember that when we get to the interview room.'

'I'm saying nothing and neither is Maita.' Jayden looked around, but Gish had already manoeuvred Maita out of the bedroom and across the hall into the living room, the door closing so he could no longer see her.

Boothroyd's eyes were on the screen of his phone.

'Cars are here,' he announced.

Gish was in the front car, seated next to Maita behind the uniformed driver.

'No blues and twos,' she told him, 'and no need to rush things.' She glanced out of the rear window and watched as Milton and Boothroyd loaded Jayden into car two, Amberson and Corinna Holt bringing up the rear. Satisfied, Gish turned her attention to Maita. She was a beauty, but stress had taken its toll, her whole demeanour lacking what Gish reckoned would be its usual poise and self-confidence. Her gilded life was ending and she knew it – had known it for some time.

'How are you doing?' Gish asked. Maita gave her a brief glance.

'I'll be okay,' she said, eyes returning to the traffic ahead of them.

'That sort of depends, though, doesn't it?' Gish continued. 'You have to concede, things look bad for you right now. We've identified the body in the car boot as your bodyguard, Amos Chissano. We know he was killed in your flat and that you plied him with drink.'

'It was an accident.'

Gish allowed the silence to linger, nodding slowly. 'Accidental manual strangulation? That'll be a difficult defence in a courtroom, Maita.'

The young woman thought again. ‘Jayden,’ she eventually stated.

‘Okay, I can see that. But under your instructions?’

Maita shook her head. ‘Amos was jealous of our relationship. He became maddened by it, actually. It was self-defence on Jayden’s part.’

‘Okay…’ Gish strung the word out. ‘I can envisage the two of you coming up with a story like that, and what happened afterwards was actually impressive. I mean, you had to think on your feet, right? Very little time. Your own car was too small to get rid of the body, but you’d heard that Godunov kept his nice big Bentley unlocked and hardly ever used it. Didn’t matter that the body was bound to be found and traced back to you – you’d be out of the country by then.’ She paused again, eyes seeking Maita’s. ‘But instead you only pretended to flee. There had to be a reason why you’d feel the need to stick around – I’m guessing the Picasso, right?’

It was as though a current had been passed through Maita’s body. Her shoulders flexed and she snapped her head around to face Gish, as though seeing her – really seeing her – for the first time.

‘You know about that?’ she said.

‘At first I thought you must have taken it. Now I know better. So where is it?’

Maita lowered her head, studying the backs of her hands, turning them to examine the palms. ‘Joseph,’ she eventually said.

‘Joseph Spalding?’ Gish checked. ‘Your neighbour the art dealer?’

‘I asked him to find a buyer.’

‘Behind your father’s back?’

Maita flinched. ‘Amos didn’t believe my story that it had gone to be restored. I knew he would tell my father, as punishment for Jayden.’

‘Spalding took the painting to New York?’

She shook her head. ‘It was too valuable for such a risk.’

‘So it’s in his flat at the Heights?’ Gish watched Maita shrug. ‘And you had to stick around to figure out a way to get it out of there? Does that explain why you phoned the concierges? You needed to know how clear the coast was?’ She swallowed and took a breath. ‘Maita…’

‘I know what you’re thinking,’ the young woman blurted out, ‘but I had nothing to do with Dwayne – nor did Jayden. But his death meant we couldn’t just walk into the building and smash through Joseph’s door.’ She was shaking her head slowly. ‘I’ve been trying to form a plan, but…’ She

continued to shake her head. ‘It was stupid to send Jayden and Corinna to France. We could have used that time to…’ She made an anguished sound. ‘If Jayden hadn’t complicated everything, we would have found a way.’

She arched her neck, staring at the roof of the car. ‘It was Jayden,’ she echoed. ‘He made me invite Amos for a drink, a chance to patch things up between us.’ She broke off; Gish could almost see the cogs turning behind those ever-calculating eyes. ‘No, that’s not right – it was not premeditated. *I* invited Amos… I’d always liked him. But he grew angry, and then Jayden arrived unannounced…’ She broke off again, sensing that this version was no more sustainable than any other. ‘I’d always liked Amos,’ she repeated as if trying to convince herself, weighing up the likely effect of the sentiment on a jury. ‘It was terrible what happened to him – his jealousy, his misplaced loyalty to my father.’ She took a deep breath. ‘Like my father, he wanted me caged. Women should not be caged in this day and age. We have agency. Our own destinies…’ The words wouldn’t come, her mind clogged with too many threads.

Gish’s mind was racing, too, though in an entirely different direction. A text arrived on her phone. It was the chief, congratulating her on a job well done. She texted him back immediately: *One loose end to tie up – need another search warrant, pretty please!* She almost smiled as she typed – wouldn’t Jack Milton be proud of her, toeing the line, following the rules? Well, maybe…

When she’d finished and turned her attention back to Maita, she saw that she was lost in thought, still trying to find the story that would serve her best, the one she could stick to, her mouth working silently on the same repeated phrase: *I’d always liked him.*

Gish could have told her: her story wouldn’t matter one way or the other. The evidence told its own tale and any prosecutor worth the candle would relish walking into a courtroom armed with it.

Maita Macheso, who had grown used to living like a queen, was about to exchange the Heights for a lengthy prison stretch.

Jack Milton kept craning his neck, trying to see past the driver’s headrest. He was squashed in between the door and Jayden. The driver had his seat pushed almost all the way back, despite Milton’s protestations. It didn’t

help that Jayden, no featherweight himself, had to sit with a leg either side of the hump on the car's floor, sandwiched as he was between Milton and Boothroyd. It was Boothroyd who had insisted on the arrangement – 'Less chance of any nonsense' – though Milton got the feeling it was also because Boothroyd considered Hewlett *his* catch, not without some justification, and was loath to be separated from him. Milton kept casting envious glances in the direction of the vacant front passenger seat.

To add further annoyance, their driver had allowed a Mini, nudging out of a side street, to join the procession, which meant Milton only had an occasional unobstructed view of Gish's car. But from the way she was leaning in towards Maita, head turned to face her, he knew they were talking, Gish asking all her questions, almost certainly coaxing answers from the prisoner. Jayden, on the other hand, had said the square root of zilch since leaving the flat, jaw set, mouth downturned, eyes staring straight ahead. Milton once more angled his head to catch a glimpse of Gish's car. The two women were still talking, nor was their driver in any particular hurry – doubtless on Gish's instructions.

Clever girl, he thought. But then you always were, Gillian… you always were. Almost too clever, some might say…

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After all three prisoners were processed in the custody suite, they were led to separate cells while the detectives congregated in the hallway to decide next steps. The chief had arrived from upstairs, patting backs and shaking hands. Gish hoped he wouldn't mention the search warrant in front of Milton, but he was too busy with congratulations and receiving calls and texts from further up the chain of command. Marylebone only had one fully equipped interview room, so turns would be needed.

'Holt is going to be the easiest to deal with,' Milton decided, 'so maybe take her first.' His eyes were on Gish. She nodded, but then gestured towards Boothroyd.

'This is all down to Ben. He deserves to be in the room.' Milton just stared at her. Gish offered a shrug. 'I really don't mind, Jack – the result's what matters.'

'You and Ben then,' he suggested.

Gish made a face. 'Come on, Jack. Someone with a bit of heft needs to lead this.'

Boothroyd and Amberson shared a look, wondering what was happening.

'Have it your way, Gillian,' Milton said eventually, adding a beat between each word.

'I can start writing up the arrest report,' Gish went on. 'Sooner it's done, the better.'

'Whatever you say.'

She nodded again, then turned and started to leave, knowing Jack's eyes were still on her as she made her retreat.

'Has anyone confessed?' the whole of the incident room wanted to know as Gish sat down at her computer.

‘Give it time,’ she responded, her fingers busy on the keyboard. She accessed the bodycam footage shot by Mick Bentham’s scene-of-crime team on the night of Dwayne’s murder, replaying it a couple of times and jotting down notes throughout, remembering those numerals on Jack Milton’s pad of paper. She tapped her pen against her cheek as she thought things through, pausing only long enough to send a text to Babs, checking Jacqui was okay.

Relax, Babs replied shortly afterwards.

‘As if,’ Gish muttered to herself. When she checked her emails, the fresh search warrant was waiting. She scooped up her bag and jacket and headed out.

There was no sign of Tom Simmons outside the Heights, just one lone photographer, looking bored and cold as he shuffled his feet. Across the street, Lewis Schofield was busy sending a text on his phone and had yet to register Gish’s arrival.

‘You know Zafk’s gone?’ she checked with the photographer.

‘Yes.’

‘So why keep hanging around?’

‘I might get lucky and snap the removal van,’ he stated.

‘You must love your work,’ Gish commented, heading for the main entrance.

The door clicked open as she approached, Magnus having recognised her. He had moved back to the main desk, away from the makeshift operation by the garish glass cactus, and was accompanied by a younger concierge, who was new to Gish. Before approaching the desk, Gish wandered over to the cactus and ran a hand across its surface.

‘We have to look at that thing every day,’ Magnus complained. Gish gave him a winning smile.

‘I need access to Joseph Spalding’s apartment.’ She held up her phone. ‘I’ve got the search warrant right here.’

‘Has he croaked?’ Magnus asked.

‘Not as far as I know.’ He got up and she followed him into the control room, where he tapped at the keypad on the lock box. He lifted the fob out and checked the tiny number stamped on the back. His eyes narrowed.

‘That can’t be right,’ he mumbled.

‘What is it?’ Gish asked.

‘Wrong fob,’ he explained. ‘This is Jessica’s.’

‘Jessica Forrester’s?’ Gish took the fob from him and studied the number. *Well, yes, of course*. She handed it back.

‘They must have got mixed up,’ he said, beginning to remove the fobs in turn, examining each one.

‘You won’t find it,’ Gish told him. ‘We need the master.’

‘That’s Mr Franklyn’s responsibility.’

‘So go summon him – I’ll wait.’ She returned to the reception area and seated herself on the uncomfortable sofa. She texted Timpson at the station, but Milton and the others hadn’t yet put in an appearance.

It only took Allan Franklyn five minutes to arrive from his office. He was trying to look professional, as if recent events hadn’t caused his world to implode. But there were signs: the tie slightly askew, a shirt that had been worn the previous day, patches of stubble that the morning razor had missed. When he held out his hand for Gish to shake, she noted that his previously manicured nails had been bitten and were now ragged.

‘DS Gish,’ he said, dredging up her name. ‘Do you have news?’

‘Nothing I can share just yet.’

His eyes became more focused. ‘So there *is* something?’

She ignored this. ‘You brought the master fob?’

He patted his breast pocket. ‘I’m told Jessica’s is on Joe’s hook?’ He watched Gish nod. ‘I’m not sure I understand.’ Again, she chose not to answer.

‘Shall we?’ she said instead.

In the lift, she asked how things were.

‘With Zafk gone and Jessica on the cusp, our celebrity quotient is rather depleted, which isn’t helping shift the empty units.’

‘The murders probably don’t help either.’

‘Most buyers shrug that sort of thing off. But when a building loses its cachet…’

‘You’ve found Jessica somewhere to move to?’

He nodded. ‘Not far from Zafk, as it happens. Roddy is looking to relocate, too.’

‘The same neck of the woods, no doubt.’

‘No doubt,’ he echoed.

‘And the Heights 2?’

His eyes flitted towards her. ‘Pronounced dead in the womb.’ He gave a prolonged sigh. ‘Will Maeve be coming back, do you think?’

‘Might not be safe. She’ll be in protective custody for a while.’

Franklyn realised immediately what that meant. ‘Followed by a new identity, a move to somewhere anonymous?’

‘Maybe,’ Gish conceded.

‘So you’ve got Eddie in custody and Maeve is talking?’ Gish watched as he tried to work out whether this was good news or not. Eventually he looked at her again.

‘Did Eddie kill Dwayne? And what the hell’s happened to Maita?’

The lift had arrived at Joe Spalding’s floor. Ignoring Franklyn’s questions, Gish exited and gestured for him to lead her to the correct door. Franklyn produced the fob, but then hesitated. ‘A search warrant was mentioned…’

Gish opened her phone and showed him the document. He took his time studying it, then gave a sniff and touched the fob to the door. It clicked open and he made to precede her into the flat. Gish placed her palm against his chest.

‘Wait here,’ she commanded, going in and closing the door.

The interior was surprisingly austere, the hallway’s grey-washed walls bare. Plenty of mail had accumulated, and Gish stepped over it. She dug a pair of nitrile gloves from her pocket and pulled them on. The living area was almost as spartan as the hall, hinting at an organised mind, a buttoned-up approach to life. But someone had been here, and they’d done their best to create mess. The cushions had been removed from the sofa and two armchairs, one of the chairs tipped on its side. There was an ornate antique writing desk, its drawers either left gaping or removed altogether and tossed halfway across the room. The Arabic-looking rug had been flipped over. There was something lying next to it, a large cardboard envelope marked with the branding of a delivery company but with no name or address. It was sealed, but felt empty when Gish lifted it. She replaced it in the exact same spot before heading to the kitchen area.

The drawers and cupboards in the kitchen had been rifled. Same went for the flat’s only bedroom. The wardrobe doors were open, clothes strewn,

bags searched, mattress upended. In the bathroom, the cabinets above the sink gaped. But Gish was more interested in the sink itself. A visored helmet sat there, discarded by the intruder, a pair of leather gloves stuffed into it. She could guess why. No, not even a guess – she *knew*. This flat had always been the assailant's destination, the fobs switched to throw the detectives off the scent. Gish could visualise it: a delivery rider, face muffled, toting a package. No one paid them any attention. You'd almost certainly open your door to them… even if you worked as security.

She snapped a few photos of the helmet, then returned to the living area and did the same for the delivery envelope. She stood in the centre of the room for a moment, weighing up her options. Then she phoned the office. Timpson answered.

'I have a job at the Heights for you and Lorimer,' she said. 'But it has to be kept hush-hush – need-to-know basis, and right now, only you, your partner and I need to know. There'll be a scene-of-crime team waiting at the flat belonging to Joseph Spalding. Whoever attacked Dwayne left some stuff there – a helmet and gloves plus a cardboard envelope. Place needs to be checked for trace evidence and those items taken away for examination. Got that?'

'Got it,' Timpson said.

'Quick as you can, then,' Gish said, ending the call. She looked at her contacts list and found *George* – SOCO. She waited for him to answer.

'Gillian,' he said, sounding his usual harassed self.

'Caught you at a busy time, George?'

'All thanks to you and yours. I'm at the lab, surrounded by bits and pieces from the murder scene.'

'The Macheso flat, you mean?'

'I do.' He took in a breath. 'So I hope this is a social call, though the history between us would suggest otherwise.'

Gish couldn't help smiling. 'One question, George: who's today's duty manager?'

'Lesley d'Oliveira.'

'Not Mick?'

'Day off. And now I *know* this is business rather than personal, so spit it out.'

'I need a team at the Heights.'

‘We’d be as well setting up shop there permanently,’ he sighed.

‘Two of my colleagues will meet you. Some evidence needs collecting from one of the flats – though I’d rather that news didn’t go any further right now than you and me.’

‘Sounds ominous.’

‘I promise I’ll explain later. One other thing – the night Dwayne Hogarth was killed, we were taking names at the door. Who’d have that list?’

‘Your lot rather than us.’

‘Thanks, George. I owe you.’

She ended the call and made her exit, ensuring the door was locked after her. Franklyn was pacing the hallway, arms folded.

‘Well?’ he said.

‘It was never about Jessica Forrester,’ Gish stated, gauging his reaction. ‘Someone bluffed their way in, got Dwayne to hand over Spalding’s fob, made him delete the security footage and disable the system, then coshed him. Probably not intending for him to die, but it happened anyway.’

‘But Joe doesn’t have anything worth stealing – he’s a dealer, not a collector. Anything of value would be in a vault.’

‘Apart from the Picasso he was selling on Maita’s behalf.’

Franklyn took half a step back. ‘The Picasso? The one on her wall?’ He looked past Gish’s shoulder towards the door. ‘It was in there all this time – until they stole it?’

‘Looks that way.’

‘They killed Dwayne to get to a painting?’

Gish shrugged, while Franklyn shook his head slowly, still staring at the closed door.

‘I’ve got officers on their way, plus forensics,’ Gish explained. ‘I know you were friends with Mr Spalding, so your DNA is likely to be inside. Other residents, too, maybe – certainly Maita Macheso, I’d think, but we already have the two of you in the system.’

‘You think it was a resident?’

She ignored the question. ‘I need to be elsewhere – can you wait downstairs to let in two of my colleagues and scene of crime?’

‘Of course.’

‘By the way, I don’t suppose there’s any more news of Mr Spalding?’

‘They tell me he’s making progress. Whether he’s up to answering any

questions, I've no idea.'

'It can wait for now. You must be relieved, though.'

Franklyn had to think before replying. 'Very,' he eventually said.

Gish gestured with her arm towards the lifts and Franklyn followed her there.

Milton had fetched chocolate for Gish, but she wasn't at her desk and her jacket and bag were gone. He asked around but received only shrugs. Settling himself at her computer, he used his thumb on the touchpad to wake it up. Her home screen gave few clues. Someone walking past congratulated him on that morning's collar. He just nodded and managed a smile. Oliver Carlyle had gone very quiet, Milton suddenly low on his list of priorities. Milton pulled open the desk's capacious drawer. Sitting on top of the usual detritus was a lined pad of paper. Indentations on the top sheet showed markings that were still legible. A row of straight lines. Gish had been doing some counting. He took a deep breath and rang her number, but she didn't answer, so he sent her a text.

Looks like Jayden and Maita are going to blame each other. Neither of them told Holt much. Where are you? I wanted to share!

He waited, realising after a few minutes that he had eaten both his own chocolate and Gish's. Someone asked him if he'd seen the Twins. He shook his head.

'They took a call, crept out straight after,' Ames explained to the questioner.

Milton's eyelids fluttered shut for a moment, his tongue finding fragments of peanut between his teeth. When he reopened his eyes, Gish's computer screen had gone back to sleep. Could she have been summoned home to another of her mother's scares? Or maybe catching up with her journalist pal?

Wishful thinking, Jack.

He knew where she'd be, either right now or very soon. He found the number he needed in his contacts list.

Made the call, but it too went unanswered, so he resorted to another text.

We need to talk. Game's up.

Nothing to do after that but wait.

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New Malden wasn't a part of south London Gish knew. Truth be told, she didn't travel south of the river, except when work demanded it. As a kid, she'd known older neighbours in Tottenham who'd lived in the city all their lives and never once crossed the Thames. Satnav was her friend today, even though she still kept Jacqui's trusty A–Z tucked away in the car's glovebox.

The street she was looking for comprised trim bungalows, some with leaded windows, others double-glazed, curtains closed. Most had expanded into the attic space, dormer windows like sentry boxes. Gish couldn't find anywhere to park in the immediate vicinity. She pulled into the first available space, got out and locked her car, but then stood there in the twilight, trying to bring her breathing back to normal. She puffed out her cheeks, exhaled, and slung her bag over her shoulder.

The metal gate gave a protracted squeal as she opened it. The front door, she saw, was already ajar. When the gap widened, Jack Milton was standing there, looking resigned to her arrival.

'Thought I'd be seeing you,' he said.

'Ditto,' Gish responded, mouth suddenly dry.

Milton led her inside. The living room was compact, the three-piece suite, dresser and bookcases leaving little room for manoeuvre. Milton eased himself into the vacant armchair. A moment later, Gish lowered herself onto the sofa. She was now facing both men, the fireplace between them. There were framed photos on the mantelpiece. The largest showed a young woman in a graduation gown, her hands curled around a decorated cardboard tube, face filled with happiness and hope.

'Phoebe?' Gish asked Mick Bentham. The man looked defeated, shoulders slumped, hands clasped. When he didn't answer, she turned to Milton. 'How long have you known?'

Milton's shrug was expansive. 'I knew something was up straight away. Mick was just that bit more agitated than usual.'

'He blamed his sweating on the male menopause,' Gish remembered.

'How about you?' Milton asked her, his face darkening a little. 'When did you work it out?'

'You've seemed a bit off throughout the whole case, Jack, like you were trying to stall or deflect. When you started checking the scene-of-crime footage, I knew there was something I wasn't seeing. I've mostly pieced it together, but there are gaps.' She looked at Bentham. 'It all comes back to Phoebe, right?'

Milton glanced in Bentham's direction, but the man wasn't quite ready to talk, so Milton answered for him. 'Phoebe works in the VIP lounge at Arsenal. Allan Franklyn is a regular. He'd tried chatting her up before, especially after a drink. But then he found out she has an art history degree, so he decided to impress her by telling her about all the art in the Heights.'

'Including a Picasso?'

'Just sitting there in a dealer's front room; worth tens of millions.' Milton paused, checking that his old friend didn't want to take up the story. 'Then Spalding's accident was reported online, and Phoebe told her dad he had to be the one with the painting.'

'That bastard Franklyn,' Bentham muttered, eyes finally meeting Gish's. 'Phoebe applied for the curator's job there, you know. Perfectly well qualified but didn't even make it to interview – they gave it to some posh kid instead.'

'Toby Scully's son.' Gish nodded her understanding. 'Whose father threw a chunk of seed money Franklyn's way…'

Milton shifted in his chair. 'When the Tate curator let that slip, it all clicked. I already knew Phoebe had a bit of history with the Heights and it hadn't ended well.'

Bentham's attention was on his daughter's graduation photograph. 'She ended up in hospitality instead,' he added, 'hating all those privileged bastards drooling over her.' He rose and fetched another photo from the mantelpiece. It showed a much younger Phoebe with her mother. He gazed at it as he sat back down again, eyes filling with tears.

Milton knew Gish had another question waiting, so he spoke again. 'It wasn't Mick, Gillian. Not on the night.'

‘I know that,’ she replied. ‘I checked the names the officer was taking at the front door. Then I ran the bodycam footage, same as you, and did some counting…’

‘One scene-of-crime officer too many?’

‘One too many,’ she echoed. ‘It was something the concierge said when Eddie Gallacher abducted Maeve – “Our job is to keep people out, not in.” The night of the killing, George told me Mick needed a spare set of overalls – one pair had been torn on the cactus. Unlikely, since the cactus has no sharp edges. There was someone trapped inside the building and he needed them out. Simplest way was to make them look like a member of the team. They were stuck in Joe Spalding’s flat, stuck with his fob. We’d have noticed straight off, so Mick had to switch another fob – didn’t matter whose.’ She broke off, turning her attention back to Bentham. ‘So who was it, Mick? Couldn’t have been Phoebe.’

‘Of course it wasn’t Phoebe!’ Bentham exploded. ‘Leave her out of this – it was all down to *me*, me getting some payback!’

Gish turned her attention back to Milton.

‘Your old chum Lenny Crowther,’ he obliged. ‘Always in trouble of one kind or another, you know that more than anyone. But you’ll remember what finally did for him?’

‘CCTV,’ Gish obliged. ‘Caught by a street camera having a go at a suspect.’

‘Met was glad to be rid of him. But him and Mick go back a long way, and Lenny’s always keen to pocket a few quid. It was supposed to be a quick in and out – get Dwayne to hand over the fob, neutralise him, go fetch the painting. Crowther was wearing a crash helmet – that should have been disguise enough, but when he remembered how he’d once been bitten by a surveillance camera, he decided Dwayne should wipe the recording and switch off the system.’

‘He seemed to know a lot about the set-up at the Heights.’

Milton gestured towards Bentham. ‘That was Mick. Lots of coverage in the media when it opened, puff pieces about the high-quality security, even a photo or two of the control room. Mick scoped the place out one night and saw that there was just the one guard.’

‘So what went wrong?’

‘Crowther had held onto his police baton. That’s what he used once he

had the fob. But he didn’t account for the marble desk connecting with Dwayne’s head as he fell. He’d no idea how much damage it had done, he was too busy getting himself up to Spalding’s flat. He then spent a bit too long there; Dwayne’s girlfriend arrived and phoned 999, and Crowther was stuck.’ Milton glanced in his friend’s direction. ‘Mick had made sure he was on call that night, just so he could keep an eye on things.’

‘Yes, George told me back at the start that shifts had been switched,’ Gish said.

Milton studied his old friend. ‘Mick got the shock of his life when he heard there’d been a fatality.’

‘Explaining why he wasn’t his usual self when we arrived,’ Gish commented.

‘Stupid, stupid, stupid,’ Bentham mumbled to himself, shaking his head. Gish didn’t know if he meant the scheme itself, his choice of accomplice or the way things had turned out.

‘So where’s Lenny now?’ she asked.

‘When the shit hit the fan, he wanted out of the country. Mick handed over a wedge of cash – more than they’d agreed. He promises me he has no idea where Crowther’s gone, though the man has contacts on the Costa del Sol. I don’t suppose you keep in touch with him?’

Gish shook her head and took a moment to digest everything she’d heard. ‘He spent too long in Spalding’s flat because there was no painting to find,’ she stated quietly.

‘Stupid, stupid, stupid,’ Bentham repeated, while Milton gave Gish an appraising look.

‘It would have made one heck of a dent in the overalls,’ she explained. ‘I looked and looked and didn’t see any sign that it had been spirited out of the building. Plus, Crowther spent a good long time in the flat, upending it – he was seeking but not finding.’

Milton nodded his approval. ‘You’ve been for a nosy? Well, of course you have.’

Gish studied him. ‘So what were you going to do, Jack? Mick’s an old pal, not far off retirement. Were you planning to cover up for him? Because that’s how it looks to me.’

‘Immaterial now, isn’t it?’ His eyes drilled into hers. ‘It’s what *you* want, Gillian. Ball’s very much in your court.’

‘A man died,’ she stressed. ‘Something’s got to happen. Mick’s your friend, you should be the one to bring him in.’ She turned towards Bentham. ‘You planned a simple burglary, Mick, but you didn’t kill anyone – the bigger judgement is hanging over Lenny Crowther. But you must know that none of this goes away until you turn yourself in. It’s in everyone’s interests.’ Her eyes moved to Milton. ‘Including yours, Jack.’

Milton’s face remained non-committal.

‘She’s right, Jack,’ Bentham eventually said. ‘Cover this up and everything you’ve done on the force turns to dust.’ He puffed out his cheeks and exhaled.

‘So how do we play this?’ Milton asked Gish.

‘Mick felt the net tightening and decided to confess everything to you,’ she suggested. ‘The two of you go to the station and he tells his story.’

‘And where will you be while all this is happening?’

‘One final bit of unfinished business, Jack.’

He studied her again, and a wistful smile spread across his face. ‘You know where it is,’ he stated.

Gish reached a hand up to pat her own shoulder. ‘Let’s just say I have a hunch.’ Then she asked him for the fob Allan Franklyn had given him.

‘You don’t trust me with it?’ Milton enquired.

When she gave no answer, he handed it over to her.

‘Take someone with you,’ he cautioned.

Gish nodded, but they both knew she would go to the Heights on her own.

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‘Who is it?’ Allan Franklyn bellowed from behind his door.

‘DS Gish. I’m holding up my ID.’

The door opened a fraction. ‘Doorbell cam’s stopped working, whole bloody building’s falling to pieces around me,’ he explained, his eyes searching over her shoulder.

‘Scared I was yet another irate resident?’ she enquired.

He fixed her with a look. ‘This really isn’t a good time.’

‘I can see that.’ Gish could smell the whisky on his breath. He was weaving slightly and his shirt was untucked, with too many buttons undone. ‘Nevertheless, I need to come in.’

‘Why?’

‘I have the update you wanted.’

‘On which case?’

‘Both.’ She paused. ‘Actually, all three.’

‘*Three?*’ As he stared at her, his eyes cleared a little. ‘Place is a shambles,’ he confessed.

‘Promise I won’t look.’

With a loud sigh, Franklyn turned and retreated, Gish following him inside. The first thing she noticed was that the architectural plans for the Heights 2 had been torn to ribbons and strewn around the floor. Additionally, the glass case had been removed from the maquette of the Heights itself and the model attacked, presumably with the hammer that sat next to it. There was a half-full bottle of Caol Ila on the glass coffee table, alongside its emptied twin. A blister pack of aspirin lay nearby, but no white powder.

‘Your doing?’ she asked, gesturing towards the hammer.

‘Lev,’ Franklyn answered, scooping up his iced tumbler. ‘Well, Lev’s

farm boys, to be more precise. He just stood back and watched – as per.' He gave a heavy sigh. 'Just assure me, for the love of God, that we can finally lay all of this to rest.' He tipped the glass to his lips.

'That really depends on you, Allan,' Gish answered.

Franklyn rolled the liquid around his mouth and swallowed, his eyes watching her over the rim of the glass.

'Me?' he said eventually.

Gish turned away from him towards the breakfast bar. Three open boxes sat there, filled with paperwork.

'Everything I've got on the various investors,' Franklyn explained, placing his empty tumbler on the counter. 'Lev and Eddie, my bloody dad and the rest – all thinking they can threaten me.' He swayed slightly as he spoke. Some papers had been removed and sat in an untidy pile. He nodded towards it. 'That's my insurance policy right there. But there's more to be sifted through, as soon as you're gone.'

Gish turned and headed towards the balcony doors, as if she had a sudden need to study the silhouetted skyline. There were tall cranes in the distance, their lights blinking a warning to low aircraft. There were always cranes, everywhere you went, the city constantly changing. She wondered if she even knew London at all. She had her back to Franklyn as she spoke, but she could see his reflection clearly enough.

'You told too many lies, Allan. Said you'd never visited Maita, then that you'd only been once or twice, then that you knew nothing about the Picasso. But you knew *exactly* what it was – your good friend Joe told you as much. Couldn't contain his excitement when Maita asked him to find a buyer for it. He was bursting to share the news with someone – someone who appreciated modern art. Then he flies off to New York and gets himself seriously injured.' She paused. 'A sceptical person might read something into that – might wonder if the hit-and-run really *was* an accident.'

'What are you suggesting?'

Gish turned around, taking a couple of steps towards him. 'Nothing I can prove right now. But the important thing is, I know you have that painting. Someone took it without needing to break in, someone with access to a master fob. You'll argue that it was an act of altruism. With Mr Spalding in hospital a continent away, it was risky to leave such a valuable artwork in a vacant flat…'

‘They’re called *suites*,’ Franklyn couldn’t help correcting her, teeth clenched.

‘They’re just boxes, same as any other overpriced box in this city.’ She paused and watched his jaw tense even further, hands curling into fists, but he said nothing.

‘Truth is,’ she continued, ‘you’re a man with money troubles, storey after storey of them. And they’re not far off collapsing and crushing you. Isn’t that the bottom line, Allan?’

‘I’m an honourable man.’

‘I’m sure your creditors are happy to hear it. And maybe you did take the painting for safe keeping, always intending to hand it back. But you kept quiet about it – has to be a reason you didn’t want us to know. Say Mr Spalding recovers and comes home. The painting isn’t where he left it. What then? Maybe Maita took it, or it was stolen on the night your concierge was killed. Fact is, it’s gone, and there’s not much Joe Spalding or Maita or anyone else can do about it, because no one can prove who took it or when or how.’ Gish’s face was only inches from Franklyn’s. There were beads of sweat on his forehead.

‘I don’t have it,’ he spluttered.

She shook her head slowly, as if disappointed in him. ‘You do, though. Too risky to spirit it out of the building with police coming and going and the media camped outside. You had to keep it safe and bide your time. So let’s go fetch it, eh?’

Franklyn lowered his chin as if in defeat, but then his hands flew up, gripping Gish by her jacket lapels, propelling her backwards until she was pressed against the glass. He started banging her head against the window, face contorted with anger. Gish fought back with one hand, the other scrabbling in her shoulder bag until her fingers closed around the retractable baton. She lifted it out and flicked it open, pulling her arm back ready to launch it. It struck the triple-glazed window, cracking it. A moment later, the whole pane shattered, showering both of them with glass. As Franklyn surveyed the damage, she thrust her knee between his legs, then hit the side of his face with the baton. He keeled over onto all fours, reminding her of one of the news photos she’d seen of his father back at the fag end of his boxing career.

‘Jesus,’ he gasped, his palms leaving bloody marks on the pale wooden

floor, the slivers of glass having done some damage.

‘Stay right there,’ Gish commanded, trying to regain her composure. Her free hand was trembling as she took out her phone and called for backup.

‘I’m cut,’ Franklyn complained, lifting one hand to check.

‘Just stay there.’

He had moved to a seated position on the floor and was panting hard as Gish finished her call. ‘Bloody windows are supposed to be shatterproof.’

‘Maybe try suing your builder.’

He gave a snort and a slow shake of the head. ‘I’m sorry,’ he told her. ‘I’m so very, very sorry.’

‘I bet you are.’

His eyes met hers and he angled his head towards the stairs. ‘It’s in the bedroom,’ he said. ‘I just wanted to look at it for a while. You won’t believe how stunning it is in reality. It’s beautiful in itself – the monetary value’s neither here nor there.’

‘I’m not sure all the villains you’re in hock to would agree.’

‘Go look. Bring it down. Please. Just one last time. I’m not going anywhere.’ He held up his bloodied palms.

‘No point running,’ Gish advised him.

‘I know that,’ he agreed with a nod. ‘If you can find someone like Eddie Gallacher, I don’t stand a cat in hell’s chance.’ He looked at her again. ‘Go fetch it,’ he said, his voice pleading.

Gish was only three steps up the staircase when she changed her mind, but Franklyn was already on his feet, making for the terrace. He’d flung the door open by the time she reached the bottom stair. Her last view was of his expensive leather shoes, their soles studded with shards of glass, sparkling like diamonds, as he launched himself over the glass railing.

Then he was gone, the wind whipping into her face, the outside world forcing its way into the building.

The screams Gish heard were not his. He made no sound at all as he plummeted.

She stood frozen for a moment, then turned and climbed the staircase once more, her steps slow and steady, coming down again a minute later with the painting tucked under her arm. She checked the cupboard beneath the sink, finding a roll of white Brabantia bin bags. She slid the Picasso into one of them, then paused, eyes on Franklyn’s insurance policy. The papers

went into a second bin bag – maybe she'd invite Tom Simmons to have a drink with her after all. She could feel the frame of the painting pressing against her. She hadn't yet really looked at it, didn't want it to start attaching itself to her.

After one final look around, she walked out of the penthouse and summoned the lift. The place was as quiet and impersonal as a bank vault. Images flitted through her mind: Milton and Carlyle, Eddie Gallacher and Maeve, Maita and Jayden and Mark and Dwayne Hogarth. Then her mother and everyone else waiting for her in the part of London she best understood, the city she could rely on.

The lift doors opened and she stepped inside. She was done with the Heights, and the building was done with her.

With thanks to Liz and Justin for the notebook…

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Further Reading

Serious Money by Caroline Knowles
Butler to the World by Oliver Bullough
Londongrad by Mark Hollingsworth and Stewart Lansley

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