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Susan Hill

The Betrayal of Trust

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A SIMON SERRAILLER CASE

SUSAN HILL

Susan Hill has been a professional writer for over sixty years. Her books have won awards and prizes including the Whitbread, the John Llewellyn Rhys and the Somerset Maugham, and have been shortlisted for the Booker. Her novels include *Strange Meeting*, *I'm the King of the Castle*, *In the Springtime of the Year* and *The Mist in the Mirror*. She has also published autobiographical works and collections of short stories, as well as the Simon Serrailer series of crime novels. The play of her ghost story *The Woman in Black* is one of the longest-running in the history of London's West End. In 2020 she was awarded a damehood (DBE) for services to literature. She has two adult daughters and lives in north Norfolk.

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ALSO BY SUSAN HILL

THE SIMON SERRAILLER CASES

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NON-FICTION

- The Magic Apple Tree*
Family
Howards End is on the Landing

FOR CHILDREN

- Can It be True?*
The Glass Angels
The Battle for Gullywith

SUSAN HILL

The Betrayal of Trust

A Simon Serrailer Case

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To the carers of this world

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One

SEVERE WEATHER WARNING

The Met Office has issued a severe weather warning for much of south-west England from noon today. Storms will affect the whole region. There will be torrential rain and high winds, reaching gale force at times, with gusts reaching 80 miles per hour in exposed places. There is a risk of flash flooding in many areas and drivers are warned to take extra care. Flood alerts are now in place for the following rivers in the south and south-western region . . .

The rain had been steady all afternoon as Simon Serrailer drove home from Wales and the wedding of an old friend. Now, as he poured himself a whisky, it was lashing against the tall windows of his flat and the gale was roaring up between the houses of the Cathedral Close. The frames rattled.

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He had spread out some of his recent drawings on the long table, to begin the careful business of selection for his next exhibition. The living room was a serene, secure refuge, the lamps casting soft shadows onto the walls and elm floor. Simon was no lover of weddings but he had known Harry Blades since university, after which their paths had diverged, Harry to go into the army, Simon to Hendon, but they had kept in touch, tried to meet every year, and he had been happy to play best man on the previous day. He was even happier to be home in his own calm space, sketchbooks open, drink in hand. For his last birthday his stepmother had bought him the Everyman hardback of Evelyn Waugh's *Sword of Honour* trilogy and later, after making an omelette, he was going to settle down on the sofa with it, plus a second whisky.

The storm blew louder and a couple of times made him jump as a burst of hail spattered against the glass and a razor blade of lightning sliced down the sky at the same time as thunder crashed directly overhead.

'Spare a thought for those who have to be out in it,' his mother would have said. He spared one, for police on patrol, the fire and rescue services, the rough sleepers.

It was not a night to let a cat out.

In the Deerbon farmhouse, the cat Mephisto slept on the kitchen sofa, head to tail-tip and deep in the cushion, with no intention of venturing out of his flap into the howling night.

Cat pulled back the curtain but it was impossible to see anything beyond the water coursing down the

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window. Sam was in bed reading, Hannah was writing her secret diary, Felix asleep. It was not her children but her lodger Cat was worried about. Molly Lucas, final-year medical student at Bevham General, had come to live with them five months ago and slotted straight into their lives so easily that it was hard to imagine the place without her. She was out during the day but always glad to look after the children any evening, was tidy, quiet, cheerful and anxious to learn as much from Cat as she could in the run-up to her exams. She relaxed by baking bread and cakes so that there was usually a warm loaf on the table and the tins were full. The children had taken to Molly from the start. She played chess with Sam and shared a mystifying taste in pop music with Hannah. Felix was in love with her. It had taken Cat a while to feel happy about inviting someone into the house. Even just having a lodger felt like too big a change. She knew she was afraid that somehow it would move her on yet another step from the old life with Chris. But once Molly had arrived she realised, not for the first time, that when something new came about, the old was not therefore obliterated. Less importantly, she no longer had to rely on her father and Judith to look after the children if she was on call or at choir practice. Once or twice recently, she had also accepted invitations to supper with old friends. Going out was not only good for her spirits but a different kind of freedom for the children – she had clung to them and it had been a long time after Chris’s death before she had stopped waking in terror that one of them was going to die too.

It was after nine and she was worried. Molly had

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been working in the med. school library. She biked to and from the hospital, a well-equipped, fast and efficient cyclist, but this was no storm to be out in on two wheels and the severe weather warning had gone up a grade since the last time Cat had tuned in to Radio Bevhams. She had rung Molly's mobile but it was switched off, tried the hospital but the library closed at six on Sundays.

She went upstairs. Hannah was asleep, her diary with its little gilt lock put away in the top drawer of her chest, its key on a chain round her neck. Cat remembered the need of an eleven-year-old to keep a diary private, and the fury she had felt when her father had mocked her about her own. How much it had mattered.

The wind sent something crashing. Rain was coming in through the cracks around two of the bedroom window frames and the ledges were full of water.

The storm seemed to be trapped in the roof space and roaring to be let out. Thunder cracked, startling Felix, who shouted out but barely woke and was easily settled again.

'This is how the world will end,' Sam said casually, looking up from *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* as she went past.

'Possibly, but not tonight.' Cat did not wait for him to ask how she knew that, nor did she tell him to put his light out. He would debate until dawn if she let him and she had no need to worry about the reading – when he was tired, he simply fell asleep, lamp on, book in hand, and either she or Molly sorted him out when they went upstairs.

Molly.

Cat picked up the phone again.

* * *

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Just after midnight the river burst its banks. The car park of the supermarket on the Bevham Road was underwater within minutes, the streets and the lanes around the cathedral filled up, and in the grid of roads known as the Apostles water roared up through back gardens and pushed its way under doors into the terraced houses. The fire services were out but could do little in the dark, and it was too dangerous to try installing floodlights in the high wind. The storm washed a ton of debris down from the Moor onto the road below, causing a lorry to overturn. The road that skirted the Hill was impassable and the houses nearby now at risk.

‘Si, were you asleep?’

‘You’re joking. Are you OK?’

‘We are, but Molly isn’t back and she’s not answering her phone.’

‘Which way does she usually come?’

‘Depends . . . at this time of night probably the bypass – it’s quiet and it’s quicker. What should I do? I rang the hospital but they don’t think she’s there.’

‘Could she have gone home with a friend rather than risk it on her bike?’

‘She’d have rung me.’

‘Right, I’ll put in a call . . . there’s a red alert now and there’ll be plenty of people around. If she’s had an accident they’ll find her.’

‘Thanks, I’d be grateful. Molly’s so reliable, she’d always let me know. How was the wedding?’

‘Fine.’

‘How did she look?’

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'Who?'

'The *bride*, duh.'

'Oh God, I don't know . . . fine, I guess, beautiful, all that sort of thing.'

'Not going to ask what she was wearing.'

'No, no, I can tell you that. It was white. Now go to bed – I'll ring if I hear anything.'

But she would lie awake until she had news. She made tea and settled down next to Mephisto, who had not stirred for several hours. The rain was still drumming on the roof. She had been reading a book about the lives of women in oppressive regimes, but after a couple of pages set it aside and got a battered paperback of a favourite Nancy Mitford novel from the shelf. Reading that was like eating porridge and cream, and slipped down in a similarly comforting way.

Ten minutes later, Molly fell through the door, soaked and exhausted, having waded through flooded roads and then been blown off her bike. She had a badly cut hand and was shaken, but Cat gathered from her usual grin that it would take more even than this to crush her spirit.

Jocelyn Forbes turned on her radio hoping to find some light music but it had given way to alarming weather updates, and she only needed to listen to the storm to know all she needed. She clicked on the bedside lamp and reached over to turn the dial. She tried for several minutes before giving up in frustration. It had happened again. Yesterday she could not twist open a bottle top, now this. Arthritis, like her mother, like her aunt. Age brings arthritis.

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She lay back on the high pillows.

Her bedroom curtains were always left slightly open and she could see lights in the windows of the two houses opposite. People would be awake tonight, up making tea, checking windows, hoping there were no slipped tiles on the roof.

But it was not the rain and wind that troubled her. She wished she could pick up the phone and talk to someone. There was no one. Penny would be asleep, her alarm set for six thirty. Her daughter liked plenty of time to get ready in the mornings, to eat a proper breakfast and dress with care, whether she was in court or chambers. There were a few friends but no one close enough to telephone after midnight, except in an emergency. Was this an emergency? No, though the thoughts she had were as urgent as anything that could come to disturb her from outside.

She had never worried about ageing. It took something minor, like not being able to turn the radio dial, to make her see what it might be like to become incapacitated and need care, to lose independence, have to move, to . . .

She told herself to snap out of it. It was the middle of the night, when everything blew up out of proportion, it was stormy, the news was terrible. Stop it.

The thoughts came back. They were not thoughts about pain or the loss of consciousness, nor even frightening or confused thoughts. They were clear, calm, rational. Jocelyn Forbes was a calm and rational woman. But it would have been pleasant to talk to someone now, not about the thoughts and where they had led, but about

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a programme watched or a bit of gossip, a crossword clue that was defeating her, an exhibition worth seeing. The small cogs in the wheel. Things she had been able to talk to Tony about, even if he had only grunted, half asleep. Things she used to ring her sister to share. She could always ring Carol any time. Carol had only been twenty miles away and would cheerfully have driven over here at two in the morning if she thought Jocelyn needed her. Or just chat on the phone for half an hour. Carol. It was almost three years.

The rain was steady on the roof though the wind had died down a bit.

Rain.

Rain.

The wind got up again, banging a gate.

Rain.

But doctors could help with arthritis now, they had all sorts of tricks up their sleeves. New medicines meant that people were not crippled so soon or so much. Crippled. It would be a long time before she needed to use the word about herself. All the same . . .

She wished there was someone to talk to.

Thunder rumbled but in the distance.

Rain.

Sleep.

The storm water was still rushing off the Moor and now it was bringing stones, soil and branches along with it, washing earth away from the outcrops of rock and exposing the tree roots that clung to the slope. The outspread hands of giants had gouged the surface and

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hurled it down, gathering speed, rumbling like an underground train as it went. With nothing in its path it slipped and slithered on until it hit the road below and spread out over the tarmac, leaving a silt of branches, earth, boulders, mulch and more.

Two

'Guv?'

Serrailler's watch said six twenty. He hadn't got to sleep until after two.

'Morning.'

'Sorry, sir. We're sending a boat.'

'You're . . . ?'

'Town centre's underwater . . .'

'Right.'

'Can't say exactly when – the fire brigade and our diving lot are out now and the lifeboats are deploying a team . . . we're among the worst hit. They're evacuating as many people as they can and one of the dinghies will divert to you. Thought you'd want to be up and waiting, guv.'

'You read my mind.'

Simon went through to the sitting room and looked out of the window, but even before he did so, took in the strangeness of the light on the white walls and ceiling,

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silver-pale and wavering in the reflection of the water below. It was like being transported to Venice. The Cathedral Close, as far as the gate at the end, was underwater, but the wind had died down now, so that there was a strange calm and stillness about the scene. The cathedral rose above the water, the tower reflected in it and seeming to sway slightly. No one was in sight.

The dinghy arrived soon afterwards and then there came the most surreal half-hour of his life, sailing down the centre of the Cathedral Close and out under the arch into the water-filled streets of Lafferton. Other orange inflatables with outboard motors were carrying the elderly, children, dogs, even a budgerigar in a cage; firemen on turntables were being swung up onto rooftops. The whole of the area in and around the Lanes was so deeply underwater that the shops were only two-thirds visible. It was not until they reached the outer roads beyond the town centre that it was possible to get out and wade through the shallows. The station yard was crowded with rescue vehicles and press wagons. Doors were banging to and fro as more people came on duty and others went out wearing waterproof gear.

'I take it the interviews are cancelled?'

'Right, gov. Rescheduling for Friday.'

The station had been in a state of upheaval for several months after the suspension of two CID officers and the resignation of the DCI. Morale was at rock bottom, no one felt like trusting anyone and the Chief Constable had been threatening serious reprisals. None of it was Serrailleur's fault, but he still felt to blame. If there were

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bad apples in the barrel he should have spotted them and got rid of them.

But things had calmed down, those who remained had pulled together well and worked overtime, and today the interviews for a new DCI had been scheduled. Serrailer was not involved; the Assistant Chief Constable, the Superintendent from Bevham and two officers from outside were the panel.

He would be relieved when there was an appointment. The shortlist was said to be a strong one with several good applicants from other forces. They needed fresh input.

But that, like every other routine matter, had been put to one side.

It was barely seven thirty but as he headed along the corridor to his office DS Stuart Mattingley was coming out of it.

'Looking for me?'

'Guv. It's bones.'

'Bones.'

'The storm brought half the Moor down onto the bypass. Couple of JCBs just got started clearing when one of the drivers spotted remains, guv.'

'They'll be animal. Plenty of foxes and badgers up there, sheep -'

'Apparently they don't look animal, only no one can get out there until the water goes down a bit. Soon as there's a chance forensics will send someone, do a recce.'

'Meanwhile . . .'

'There's been a report that a couple of youths in a canoe are looting shops in the Lanes and they've found

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a body in a bedroom on St Paul's Road. Old lady. Forensics on way.'

'By coracle?'

The DS looked blank.

None of it had much to do with Serrailer directly unless the death turned out to be suspicious. He headed for the canteen and his first coffee of the morning, wondering as he went whether he would get a lift home by dinghy later.

So far as the rest of Lafferton was concerned, the day was written off. Schools were closed, shops shut, traffic non-existent. The skies cleared as the storm moved away and shafts of sunlight touched the flood waters. The rescue boats went on ferrying people from their water-filled houses. Television cameras shot the scene from helicopters.

Simon caught up on a backlog of admin until shortly after eleven when a head came round his door.

'The bones, gov. Definitely human. There's a skull as well.'

'Have they started clearing again?'

'No.'

'Don't let them. We don't know whether there are any more remains, where they came from, how old they are. This will be a slow job, sifting through a few tons of embankment.'

'Problem is, if they can't reopen the bypass and traffic can't get through the town . . .'

'You said it. Any chance I can get out there?'

'You'll have to wade to the main road, get picked up there and dropped off by the roundabout. Walk along

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the bypass from there. The landslip is about half a mile down. Forensics are out there now and they'll get a couple of small diggers to start shifting the debris bucket by bucket. Move it to the other side, check, then scoop it away if there's nothing in it.'

'Slow job.'

'And too many bods are still tied up in the rescue and clear-up op.'

'I need boots.'

'You need waders and a hard hat, sir.'

He went down the concrete stairs to the basement and the equipment store. An hour later he was standing on the empty bypass looking at a small hill of soil and rubble, beside which tarpaulins had been laid out. Two forensics in their white jumpsuits were bending over some pale grey bones, dirty with earth.

'What have we got?'

'Most of a body – that's limbs, skull, ribcage . . . there was some damage as it all tipped down. We're missing a foot, pelvis –'

'Same person?'

'At a guess. But until we get it all onto the table and fitted together we won't know for sure.'

'Roman soldier?'

The young woman shook her head. She was pretty, short dark hair, nice smile. Shelley Churcher. Simon knew her well from many a crime scene over the last five or six years. She had once told him she had wanted to do this job since she was twelve and watched an American detective series every Saturday night.

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'No,' she said quietly. 'Much more recent.'

'How much more?'

'Can't tell you that yet. But categorically not your Roman soldier.' She looked down at the bones.

How appalling, Serrailier thought, to have what remained of someone who had been flesh and blood, life and breath and laughter, finally spread out on a tarpaulin under the sky. To have been pitched down from some hole or ditch or grave along with tons of earth in a howling storm and then to lie being scrutinised by strangers, waiting to be fitted back into something that once again resembled a human body. It seemed wrong simply to stare at the bones, wrong to see what should never be seen, wrong and lacking in all respect and sensitivity – though forensics, he knew, always treated the dead as respectfully as they could, even while doing their job with medical detachment.

'Cause of death?'

'Come on, sir, you know better than that.'

'How long has he been dead then? Can you give me anything?'

'No,' Shelley said. 'Not yet. Nothing at all.'

They both stood for a moment longer. On the empty bypass, the diggers were still. Clearing the mounds of earth and debris would now have to be done slowly and carefully, everything sifted in case there were any further remains. The road would not reopen for several days, adding to the traffic chaos around Lafferton in the aftermath of the storm.

But the logistics of all that were someone else's job.

Simon glanced down again at the skeleton, laid out on the tarpaulin.

'Poor bloke.'

Shelley shook her head. 'That's one thing I *can* tell you,' she said. 'This is a female.'

From the *Bevham Gazette*, 21 August 1995

FEARS GROW FOR MISSING HARRIET

Fears are growing for the safety of 15-year-old Lafferton schoolgirl Harriet Lowther who went missing last Friday afternoon after playing tennis at the house of a friend. Harriet left the house of Katie Cadsden, in Lea Close, at around four o'clock and was last seen walking towards the bus stop on Parkside Drive. She was due to catch a bus into Lafferton and meet her mother, Lady (Eve) Lowther, at La Belle hair salon. She never arrived.

Police are conducting house-to-house enquiries and are also combing undergrowth and woodland, a playing field close to Parkside Drive, together with nearby allotments and towpaths, and divers are searching the river.

Drivers and regular dog walkers and joggers in

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the area are being handed leaflets and asked if they remember seeing Harriet, who is a pupil at Freshfield College for Girls.

'Her disappearance is completely out of character,' Sir John Lowther said.

He stressed that there was no reason why Harriet, an only child, would not have wanted to meet her mother or return home. 'We are a close-knit family and there have been no arguments or problems. Harriet is sensible and she would never fail to come back on time or to let us know if she was in any trouble.'

Harriet, who is five feet four and very slim with blonde hair, was wearing shorts and a white T-shirt with a pale blue sweatshirt over it, and carrying her racket in a navy zipped bag.

Lafferton Police are continuing searches. Detective Inspector June Whybrow, who is leading the investigation, said: 'We remain hopeful that Harriet will return home safely. We are following all lines of inquiry and are keeping an open mind at this stage.'

From the *Bevham Gazette*, 26 August 1995

SEARCH GOES ON FOR HARRIET

Lafferton residents joined forces with more than 100 police officers this week as the search for missing 15-year-old schoolgirl Harriet Lowther intensified.

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Police and firefighters from across the county were joined by volunteers as they scoured wasteland, woods and playing fields in a bid to find the daughter of prominent local businessman Sir John Lowther and his wife, Eve, of Up Starly near Lafferton. Harriet disappeared after leaving the house of a friend, to catch a bus on Parkside Drive.

Officers have also carried out extensive searches of the towpath and river areas and police helicopters have circled the region.

Detective Inspector June Whybrow of Lafferton Police said: 'We're still hopeful that we may find Harriet but as each day passes the search becomes more difficult and frustrating.'

Members of the public who think they may have seen Harriet in the vicinity of Parkside Drive, Lafferton, at the bus stop, on the 73 bus or who have any other information that might be of help are asked to call the dedicated line at Lafferton Police HQ or to contact any police station.

From the *Bevham Gazette*, 19 September 1995

Lafferton Police today confirmed that a 37-year-old local man has been arrested in connection with the disappearance of 15-year-old schoolgirl Harriet Lowther, daughter of Sir John and Lady Lowther. Harriet has been missing since leaving the house of a friend on the afternoon of 18 August . . .

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From the *Bevham Gazette*, 22 September 1995

Police in Lafferton said that earlier today they released a 37-year-old local man, without charge. Neil Marshall was arrested on 19 September in connection with the disappearance of 15-year-old Harriet Lowther . . .

From the *Bevham Gazette*, 18 November 1995

Police today confirmed that the body found in Lafferton Canal, close to the town centre on Monday morning, was not that of 15-year-old schoolgirl Harriet Lowther, who has now been missing since August . . .

Three

It was four days before Jocelyn could get an appointment, partly because of the floods and their aftermath, partly because Dr Deerbon now only took two surgeries a week and as she was still very popular these booked up well in advance. But the receptionists and Cat had an understanding that patients she was concerned about, anyone with a serious condition or who just sounded more worried than seemed normal should be given one of what the practice manager called the 'secret slots'.

There had been no more rain, the water was going down quickly and the flood alert had been lifted, though the bypass was still closed and the town centre was filthy with the silt and rubbish left as the water receded. The shops which had been flooded out were mostly still closed as proprietors tried to clean up.

For a couple of days after the storm Jocelyn had been too busy helping Penny, whose ground-floor flat had suffered water damage. Penny had a big case about to

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start at Bevham Crown Court and little time to organise anything, which meant that Jocelyn had had no space in which to worry about herself. She had made the doctor's appointment and now felt foolish. She shouldn't be taking up surgery time. Her panic about being incapacitated had only come on because she was alone, it was two in the morning and the storm had seemed to be heralding the end of the world.

She would have cancelled the GP appointment if she had not let slip to Penny that she had one. That had been that of course. Penny was insistent, Penny the competent one, Penny the barrister, Penny who took charge and was irritated that she had had to leave her mother to sort out the flat.

'I don't think I'll bother, Pen. Someone else needs the appointment more than I do.'

'How do you know that?'

'It's obvious. I'm perfectly fit.'

'You must have made it for a reason, Mother.'

'Yes, well.'

'What are you frightened of?'

That goaded her, as Penny had known it would.

'I am not frightened of anything.' She met her daughter's eye. 'Fine, fine, I'll go, waste Dr Deerbon's time.'

'It's what she's paid for.'

Now Jocelyn sat in the waiting room looking at a magazine for young women under thirty and feeling pleased that she had no need to starve herself or binge drink or worry about unfaithful men or wear skirts no wider than a hairband. By the time she was called she felt extremely cheerful and even more of a fraud.

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Four

'Makes a change,' Gordon Lyman said. The pathologist stood at the head of the dissecting table looking down at a sheet of heavy-duty plastic on which the set of bones was assembled into an almost complete skeleton. Serrailier had a momentary shock at not seeing a dead body, whole and entire.

'Let me show you why I've got you in.'

Like most of the pathologists Simon had known, this one managed to combine efficiency and enthusiasm with a laid-back air.

'It's been surprisingly straightforward actually. Pity. I don't often get a build-your-own-skeleton kit to play with.'

'They seem to have sifted everything out of half a hillside pretty quickly.'

'Thing was, it had pretty much stayed together – clods of damp earth formed a protective mould around it.'

'How long has it been there?'

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'Well, sixteen years, give or take. These are the remains of Harriet Lowther.'

'Right. No doubts?'

Gordon shook his head. 'Firstly, we know Harriet wore a brace on her front teeth, even without accessing her dental records, and these braces always fit pretty snugly. It's still there . . . see?'

Simon leaned over and looked at the jaw. The brace, discoloured but undamaged, was still firmly fixed to the upper front teeth.

'But we have her dental records as well. Perfect match. One other thing is the clincher . . . Harriet only had four toes on her left foot. Congenital thing.' He pointed again. 'Everything else fits – height and so on.'

'One hundred per cent sure?'

Gordon shook his head. 'With a skeleton there always has to be a sliver of doubt, but what are the chances of the body of a girl of fifteen with a tooth brace, and only four toes who disappeared near the burial spot sixteen years ago –'

'I get it. Right, thanks for the heads-up. The press are already panting at the door but we can let them pant a bit longer. There's enough here for me to alert the Chief and reopen the case.'

He looked round the cold-tiled room under its blue-white light. Harriet Lowther had been found but it would be some time before she could be laid to rest in a place of her family's choice, not of someone else's.

It was still well before nine o'clock when he slipped the Audi into his parking space. The pathologist had been

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on the ball in alerting him, as they always were. It was a fascinating job, he thought, going up the stairs two at a time, he could see its attraction. You needed to have a certain detachment, an eye for minute detail, an orderly and meticulous nature with a flair for interpretation, the ability to solve puzzles logically yet allow for the occasional flash of understanding or enlightenment – inspiration even. If he had become yet another doctor in the Serrailer line, he could see that the career might well have suited him.

The Chief Constable, Paula Devenish, was on sick leave following an emergency appendectomy and a post-operative infection, so he had to put in his call about the identification to the ACC.

‘Thanks, Simon. All systems go then. I’ll authorise the reopening of the case now. You head it up, get a team together.’

‘Sir. The first thing is for Harriet’s family to be informed. I’ll do that myself this morning.’

‘Parents live in Lafferton, don’t they?’

‘Nearby, but only the father, Sir John Lowther. Her mother died about four years ago and there were no other children. I’ve met him a couple of times – family connections.’

‘Helpful. These things are never easy. And the interview board meets today to appoint your new DCI so you’ll have another pair of hands, make it easier for you to focus on the case.’

Simon wondered about taking DS Ben Vanek with him but in the end decided it would be better to go alone.

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The Lowther house was in a village four miles out of Lafferton and to reach it he would drive past Hallam House. A word with his father might be useful – Lowther was in the same Masonic Lodge and Simon thought they had also been on a hospital committee together. Lowther had made a fortune in pharmaceuticals, and both before and even more since his retirement had given a lot of time and business expertise as well as money to Lafferton. He and his wife had retreated from the public eye after their daughter's disappearance, but John Lowther had thrown himself back into the swim after being widowed and become involved in a number of causes.

There was a broken-down vehicle holding up traffic and Simon was about to turn round and make a detour when his phone rang.

'Serrailier.'

'Guv – Dave Keys. The station said you were out and about. You anywhere near us?'

Dave was heading up the search team that had sifted through the debris on the bypass. Everything had now been put back and the road reopened; the team was clearing up and should be leaving by the end of the day.

'I wasn't but there's a traffic block so I'm making a detour.'

'Better come over.'

Simon had pulled off to take the call but now he sped towards the bypass, wondering as he did so about the new DCI. The internal candidate who had made the shortlist was not strong and he prayed it wouldn't go to him, but he knew nothing about the rest. While he

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was going to be occupied full-time on the Lowther case – and who knew for how long – the ACC was right, he needed someone at the station to head up CID who would hit the ground running and keep the team and its still fragile morale together. Before she had been taken ill, the Chief had talked to Simon about it. He was sure that she would be gunning for a woman in the job. There were too few in senior positions in the force and Simon, who knew Paula Devenish well and liked her, was fully aware that she sometimes felt beleaguered. Although she herself was based at Bevham HQ, she would appreciate a woman DCI on her side in Lafferton. Did he mind either way? There were two women on the team in CID but both sergeants and the DI were men. Uniform had a bigger female complement. If the DCI was to be a woman, so long as it was one with a strong personality as well as all the other necessary qualities, Simon would be happy, and he knew that to balance his own liking for working alone – not to mention being a maverick occasionally – the new DCI needed to be a team player. It wasn't going to be the easiest job to come into.

He turned into what was left of the car park at the bottom of the lower slopes, found a space near the forensic vans and got his rubber boots out. The team was on a temporary ledge above him, one of their green tents erected over a section of ground. A couple of them were moving a huge tree branch out of the way, another was stamping the earth down to pack it hard. The usual scene, but he had not expected so many of them still to be there.

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Dave Keys watched him climb the last few yards. The ground was very wet and it was not easy to get a proper foothold.

‘What’s that?’ Serrailier nodded at the tent.

Dave shook his head. ‘Take a look. Mind your feet.’

He held one side of the nylon tent up for Simon to duck under. There was barely room for his six foot four and he had to stoop but there was enough light for him to see a hollowed-out area some seven or eight feet long, shallow and marked out with the forensics’ small metal stakes and flags.

It was a grave and it held a skeletal body, entire this time and pushed slightly to one side, the left leg bent.

He stared at it for a moment before backing out again and stretching upright.

‘That wasn’t opened by the force of the storm.’

‘You’re right. A tree root had come up like a tooth out of a socket and when we were checking over this part the corner of the grave was just visible. We almost missed it, but then Lyn Pearson went back – she had a hunch something looked not quite right. Only took a bit of careful scraping away.’

‘Could Harriet Lowther’s body have been buried in it as well? Looks to be a bit of room.’

‘No. Harriet came down with the landslip. She must have been further over there.’ He indicated the gouged-out area of hillside fifty yards or so away to the left.

‘This one might be our Roman soldier then.’

Dave looked blank.

‘It’s OK, I had this theory.’

‘You wouldn’t find Roman remains as near to the

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surface as this. They sink a long way over time. Often find them when a farmer does some deep ploughing.'

'Pity.'

'You an archaeology buff then, sir?'

'Nope. Just thinking how much less hassle there'd be if it was a thousand years old, that's all.'

'Cold case then.'

'Stone. But probably still not cold enough. Thanks, Dave. You moving it?'

'When Lyman's had his turn. He's on the way.'

'We can't close up here now. Any sense of how wide an area you might have to start trawling through?'

'We can't dig up the whole Moor, if that's what you're thinking. But in point of fact, this is a pretty self-contained section. Off this level area and you've a steep climb for quite a way – nobody's going to have dug a grave on that incline. We'll cordon off around here and take it inch by inch, but my guess is there may well not be anything else.'

'I hope to God you're right,' Serrailer said, turning and almost slithering backwards on the churned-up ground.

Dave Keys made a grab for his arm and hauled him up. 'It's the rubber soles,' he said with disapproval.

'If I'd known I was coming mountaineering I'd have brought my climbing boots.'

He left forensics to their job and drove away. It was just after eleven and he needed to see Sir John Lowther. No one working on the Moor would have alerted the press – it was more than their jobs were worth – but in

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Serrailler's experience everyone in the media on crime desks had a sixth sense for this sort of news. Once he had spoken to Lowther, he would call a press conference – always give them something, always keep them in the loop, always be one step ahead of them and never the other way round. Those were his rules when dealing with the media and he had a good relationship with the press office, who mostly went along with him.

He had not been out to Up Starly for a long time. It was one of the most unspoilt of the villages in the countryside around Lafferton, with a pub, the Oak, which his mother had liked. Meriel Serrailler had not been a natural pubgoer, or indeed someone who had had much time for lunch outings of any kind, but she had occasionally come out here with Simon – and Simon only, never Richard, never any friends. It hadn't been more than two or three times a year but he had loved spending the time with her, loved to have her to himself, away from his father's sarcastic and often disapproving company. Simon had not been since her death. He did not think he would want to again, but as he turned out of the lane into the village, he saw that the pub, on the other side of the green, was a pub no longer. Its signs had gone and what had been the entrance was now the front door of a private house.

He slowed down. The Oak was now Greenview. A picture came vividly to mind of Meriel, turning round to say something to him over her shoulder as they went in through the pub door. Smiling slightly. She had been wearing a violet-coloured pashmina over her left shoulder. Beautiful.

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The pub was no longer there, and yet it was still there.

He felt as if some final link with her had been roughly cut off, a link he had not even realised still existed.

He wound down the window and took a deep breath of the mild, damp air. He was not here to remember his mother fondly, or to think about himself and the past. He was here for the job.

The village was compact, the small houses and cottages spread out around the green and down two lanes leading off to east and west. There was a close of pebble-dash council houses and behind them a recreation ground with football posts in place.

A woman walking her dog slowed to peer at him. If he had been a potential burglar, she would have remembered everything about him. He stuck his head out of the window and asked for the Old Mill.

'I'm . . . not sure.'

She was sure. He pulled his warrant card out of his inside pocket and flicked it open.

'Ah, the police. I see. You go down that lane, Binders Lane, to the far end, and it's on the left. Concealed entrance. I won't say you can't miss it because you can.'

She stood watching him until he turned.

How long was it since police had regularly called at the Lowther house? Years. The village must have changed – people had died or moved away, others had arrived, the pub had closed – but Harriet's disappearance would not have been forgotten and the arrival of the police, even a solitary detective in an unmarked car, must be of interest. It would be round the village by lunchtime.

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The Old Mill was exactly that. The fast-flowing stream ran through the garden and under the house. The water rushed towards the old wheel and paddles before emerging at the back of the house, which overlooked the wide mill pool. Simon got out of the car and went over. The recent floods had given a great surge to the stream and the noise it made was like the sound of an incoming tide. He wondered if it ever stopped, and how anyone in the house ever slept.

But the main door was on the other side, and as he went round to it, the noise faded to an agreeable, silky sound. A dark blue Jaguar was parked on the drive. An uneven lawn sloped away from a terrace and a flight of stone steps. The windows were closed and, in the upstairs ones, two or three blinds were half down.

He took a couple of deep breaths. It was a long time since he had been the official bringer of bad news but his stomach had the old knot of apprehension. He had been here so often in his past, as a young constable with the Met and then a uniformed sergeant. You never forgot. They crowded into his mind now. The Jamaican woman in her barricaded tiny ghetto of a flat in a tower block, opening her arms, throwing back her head and letting out a long wail of anguish when he told her about her son who had been stabbed. The Polish family, sitting in white-faced silence, until the grandmother went to a stoop of holy water placed before a picture of the Virgin and crossed herself with it. The woman with a toddler clutching her leg and a couple of boys, huge-eyed, standing behind her on the stairs, who had told Simon, and loudly enough for them to hear every word, that

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she was glad her waste-of-space husband was dead, he deserved anything he got, serve him right, we're better off without him, and no, I won't come and identify him, I never want to see him again, and now bugger off. The man who had walked out of the farmhouse kitchen in which he and his wife, Serrailleur and a fellow officer had been standing while the news of his murdered daughter was broken, and had shot himself a few minutes later, for them all to hear and Simon to be the first to reach his body.

That had been the last time. Now this. Before, the news he had brought had always been of a recent death. This was very different. Yet he wondered if, essentially, it would be any different at all.

'They always know,' his army friend Harry had once said. He had several times been to the homes of men killed in action in Iraq and Afghanistan. 'They know the minute they open the door to you – no, before that, the minute they see your shadow through the glass. They always know.'

Simon rang the bell of the Old Mill, wondering if Sir John Lowther would see him and know.

But it was a middle-aged woman who opened the door. The housekeeper. He gave his name and stepped into a large, rather dark hall. There was an empty feel about the house, as if it were somehow hollow inside. It smelled of polished furniture and cleanliness.

He only waited a moment.

'Simon – how nice to see you . . . but I hope nothing is wrong with your sister?'

'My . . . ?'

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'Cat – we've a hospice trustees meeting at two o'clock. Is she all right?'

'Ah . . . yes, thank you, Cat's fine. I'm sure she'll be there.'

'That's a relief. I have a lot of time for Dr Deerbon. Please, follow me.'

He was a tall man, stooped, with thinning grey hair and anxious, deep-set eyes.

He led the way into his study, a long room overlooking the side of the garden away from the mill. The desk was set about with papers in neatly ordered piles, an open laptop, a small Georgian clock.

'Can I offer you a cup of coffee? Mrs Mangan will be making some for me any moment.'

He was oblivious to the reason for Serrailier's visit. They did not always know.

'Thank you.' Sitting down with coffee might help.

He watched Lowther leave the room and, as he did so, caught sight of two photographs on the bureau. One was of a pretty woman with hair coiled up behind her head, marked eyebrows, a pleasing smile. The other, next to it, was of a young girl of fourteen or fifteen, with the same eyebrows, a high forehead, smiling slightly but with her lips firmly together. Because, Simon thought, she was self-conscious about the brace on her teeth.

Sir John came back, talking about coffee as he did so, but although Simon had looked away he had not done so quite quickly enough. Lowther followed his gaze. And then, as he glanced between the photograph of his daughter and Simon, he knew – the split second *when* he knew was clear on his face. It was as if a curtain had

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dropped down over his welcoming expression, replacing it with a terrible blankness and he seemed to go not pale, but grey, the lines around his mouth and at the corners of his eyes deepened, the flesh sagged. A brisk man in his early seventies had been replaced by an old one.

'You've found something,' he said.

'Yes, I'm afraid so.'

Lowther sat down slowly in the desk chair. For a moment he stared ahead of him, but then straightened his back and turned. As he did so, the door opened on the housekeeper bringing their coffee, so that they had to wait until she had set it down, though as she did so, Simon saw her glance at Lowther with a flash of concern. But she said nothing.

'Tell me, please.'

The coffee pot and cups stood untouched on the desk between them.

Simon told him. Lowther did not interrupt, and did not look at him, but at a point somewhere above the fireplace. It was quickly said and then there was silence.

Simon poured coffee for them both. Handed Lowther his. He took it, but did not speak until he had drunk half the cup quickly. Then he said, 'I'm grateful to you for speaking directly, Simon. For telling the full story.'

'There is never any point in not doing so.'

'No. I won't ask if you are absolutely certain because you have indicated that you are and you would not be here -'

'I have to be guided by the pathologist. He has no doubts at all.'

For a second, Lowther's face crumpled, and as he

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bent his head, Simon thought he was going to cry. He always felt helpless in the face of other people's tears. But, instead, the man walked across to the bureau and looked not at Harriet's photograph but at that of his wife.

'I never thought I would thank God that Eve died. But at this moment I do.'

'I understand you.'

'She could not have borne this.'

'But the not knowing . . .'

Lowther turned to face him. 'Yes. It was terrible. Unthinkable. After several years one lives with it but hope never quite fades and . . . well. One lives with it. She lived with it. She hoped. I always knew deep down that something like this would happen. I don't think my own hope was alive after – what? – a year, perhaps less. But Eve hoped. This would have killed her.'

Serrailier drank his coffee. It was best to let Lowther talk.

'Is there any chance you'll find out more, do you suppose, or is that hopeless too?'

'Absolutely not. The case has been formally reopened and I am the senior investigating officer. I'll get a small team together and we'll start from the beginning – but now we have rather more to help us.'

'Harriet's skeleton. Yes. We can hardly call it a body. I presume she won't be able to rest in peace for some time?'

'I hope it won't be too long. You need that. I'll press the pathologist to find out everything he can and see if we can have her handed over for a funeral – and burial.'

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'Thank you, Simon.' He shook his head vigorously as if to shake off water after a shower.

'I must get back,' Simon said. 'And get on. I'm sure it's what you want me to do. We can provide a family liaison officer, someone from uniform – they'd come and stay here, listen to you, support you in whatever way . . .' He trailed off.

'I think not. Thank you.'

'I had to ask.'

'But perhaps – you yourself would keep me informed if there is any progress?'

'Of course. It goes without saying.'

'I have a meeting of the hospice trust this afternoon . . .'

'You'd like me to cancel it for you? I'll ring my sister.'

'No, no, naturally I will go. Life cannot stop. I will not let this – this person – this – I will not let them do any more.' Lowther clenched his fists briefly. But his eyes showed already that he had accepted the truth. Shock was there, and grief, and there would be more of the same to leave their mark. 'I wonder though – will they know? When will people find out?'

'I have a press conference later today. We've kept the media away from it until now, but I must tell them, otherwise there will just be wild rumour and speculation.'

'Do you think reporters will come here?'

'Almost certainly. But you don't have to see them and you have absolutely no obligation to comment. If you do want to say anything you can issue a statement through our press office. Or if you feel you want to be

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interviewed, let them guide you on that too . . . some papers would be fine, others not so fine.'

'I would prefer not.'

'I'll tell the press office – and if anyone comes here, just turn them away.'

'Thank you. Thank you for coming, Simon.' He hesitated. How little it takes, Serrailer thought, to etch fresh lines onto a man's face, to add a hundred years. But it was not 'little', this news that he had had to bring Lowther. 'I think,' he said now, 'that before long this will prove to be a relief. Sixteen years is a long time to wait and not to know. Anything is better than that. At least, I hope it is.'

Simon put a hand on Lowther's arm. Perhaps it was the last straw. He could not tell. But as he walked to his car he saw the man turn away, unable to hold back his tears.

Five

'Just lift up your right arm, will you?'

Jocelyn did so.

'And the left. Fine. Now, stretch both arms out and rest them on my desk, hands spread.' Cat looked carefully. Turned Jocelyn's hands over one by one, and back. Touched her forefinger to the knuckles. The joints were not swollen or reddened.

'Where is it most painful? Hands? Knees?'

'No, no, my knees are fine.'

'Have you had any mobility problems at all? Going upstairs?'

'I can do that.'

'Walking – stretching and bending?'

Jocelyn hesitated. Cat Deerbon was being so thorough, so careful, but she didn't know how much was relevant, whether to bother about . . .

She said, 'I – this is going to sound weird.'

'No, go on.'

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'I sometimes feel as if I'm walking a bit sideways . . . or even shuffling. I sometimes feel – it's as if I'm drunk. But I almost never drink. I had a gin the other night, at a friend's house. I can't remember the time before that. Glass of wine at Sunday lunch? Really.'

Cat smiled. 'Don't worry. Can you just walk over to the door and back again? Slowly.'

Jocelyn got up. Walked there. Walked back.

'Again. Do you mind?'

She did not.

'Tell me what happened with the radio knob. Here – try this.' Cat held out a small tablet bottle. 'No childproof top, you just twist it.'

Jocelyn took it. She knew what she wanted to do, was trying to do, but her hand wouldn't cooperate.

Cat watched. 'Does it hurt when you try to do that?'

'No. My hand just doesn't work.'

Cat asked about her general health.

'I get tired. But I'm seventy-three. I'm bound to get tired, aren't I? I remember my mother being tired when she had arthritis.'

Cat stopped herself from looking at her computer screen. It was too easy a way out. 'Look at your patient.' She had had it dinned into her by a consultant on her first ward rounds. 'Look at your patient, listen to your patient. They'll tell you what you need to know.'

She looked at her patient. 'You don't have arthritis,' she said. 'You're not in pain; your joints aren't swollen or tender to touch.'

'Oh. All right,' Jocelyn said. 'Both my mother and my aunt had arthritis.'

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