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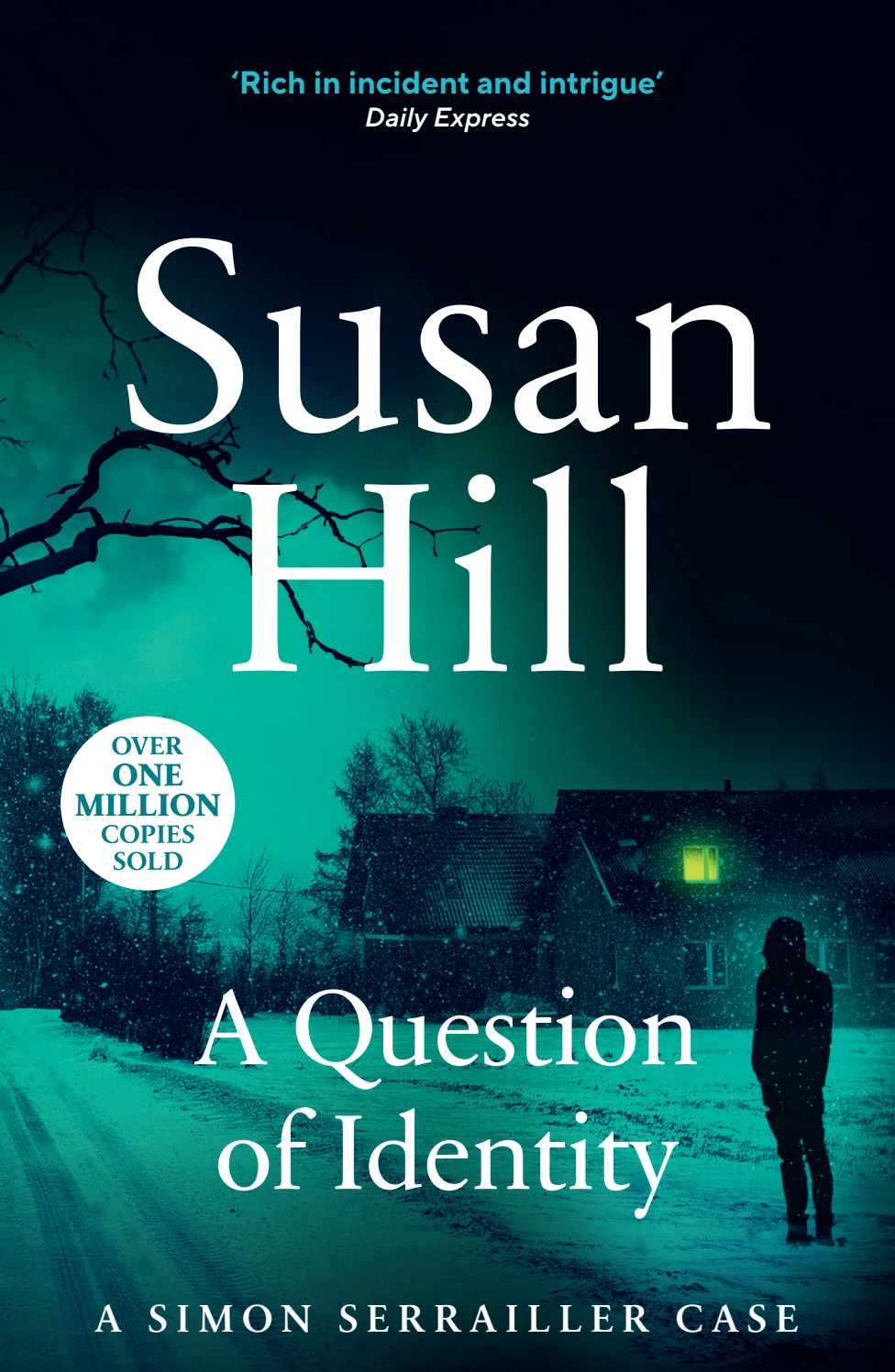

A Question of Identity

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 Serrailler 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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SUSAN HILL

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For LGHR
30 May 2012

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PART ONE

YORKSHIRE, 2002

It's like your brain's bursting. It doesn't happen all at once, it builds up. And then your brain's going to burst until you do something about it. You do it. You have to do it. Then it's all right again for a bit, 'til it starts again.

One

20 MAY, 2002

'Members of the jury, the defendant has answered an indictment containing three counts. On count one he is charged with murder. The particulars of the offence are that on or before the seventeenth day of July 2001, he murdered Carrie Millicent Gage. On count two he is charged with murder. The particulars of the offence are that on or before the thirtieth of July 2001, he murdered Sarah Pearce. On count three he is charged with murder. The particulars of the offence are that on the fourth of August 2001 he murdered Angela Daphne Kavanagh.

'To each count he has pleaded "Not guilty", and it is your duty, having heard the evidence, to say, in respect of each count, whether he is guilty or not.

'Would the defendant please stand?'

Alan Frederick Keyes, thirty-two, a self-employed builder of 33 Westway Road, Crofton – wearing dark trousers and a blue open-necked shirt – stood.

23 MAY, 2002

'Would the next witness please take the stand?'

A small woman. Brown coat, beige felt hat. She looked frail, walked slowly, as if in some pain, eyes huge in a bony little face darting about the court, skin the colour of an old candle.

'Will you please state your name?'

She leaned on the wooden ledge of the witness box, eyes still fearful, catching her breath.

'When you're ready.'

Silence. She looked down in panic at the clerk.

'Are you feeling unwell?'

His Honour Judge Malcolm Palmer, notoriously kind to witnesses, relatives, court attendants, women and babies. Notoriously harsh to prosecution or defence not on top of their game, cocky police officers, unprepared expert witnesses and members of the press.

But she pulled herself up. Shook her head, looking anxiously at the judge, who gave her his best encouraging smile. Satisfied that she was ready to attest, he nodded at the clerk.

'Will you please state your name?'

'Gwendolyn Violet Phipps. Mrs.'

'You must speak up a little so that the jury can hear you. Would you mind saying it again?'

'I'm sorry, I'm . . .'

'That's quite all right. Just once again, please.'

Pause. She cleared her throat. Spoke up loudly. 'My name is Gwendolyn Violet Phipps. Mrs.'

'Thank you, Mrs Phipps, that was perfect.'

Mr Anthony Elrod, for the Prosecution: 'Mrs Phipps, would you tell the court please where you were on the night of 17 July last year – 2001?'

'Well, I was at home . . .'

'And your home is?'

'Number 8 Meadow View Close – the bungalows. I was in bed, only then . . . I heard something . . . and I got up.'

'Can you explain to the court where exactly your bungalow, number 8, Meadow View Close is, in relation to the bungalow in which Mrs Carrie Gage lived?'

'Opposite. Right opposite, across the grass.'

'So you have an unobstructed view of number 20?'

'Oh yes. Very clear. I could see Carrie – Mrs Gage – when she was alive . . . I could see her going in and out or if she was at her front window . . . and she could see me. The same.'

'Quite. Now, on the night of 17 July, you say you were awakened by a noise?'

'No, I didn't say that. No. I said I heard something . . . I didn't say it was a noise, or that I was asleep.'

'Well, whatever it was, what did you do?'

'I got up. I knew it wouldn't do any good just lying there. I got up to make a cup of tea.'

'Did you put a light on straight away?'

'No, I went to my bedroom window and looked out.'

'Why was that? Wouldn't the first thing anyone would do would be to switch –'

Mr Jeremy Brockyear, for the Defence, getting to his feet: 'Your Honour –'

Judge Palmer: 'Yes. Mr Elrod, this is very elementary you know, you are trying to ascertain what the witness and only the witness would do, she cannot know what "anyone" else would have done.'

'I beg your pardon, Your Honour. Mrs Phipps, why didn't you put a light on immediately?'

'I must have wondered what had disturbed me and gone to look out first . . . if there had been someone out there, I always think it's safer to see and not be seen, if you follow. If I'd switched on a light whoever it was could have seen me and then what?'

'So you were disturbed by a person making some sort of noise?'

'I must have been. Well, obviously, after I saw him, I realised that, didn't I?'

'"After I saw him"? Who or what was it you did see, Mrs Phipps?'

'The man.'

'One man?'

'Yes, one. Only one.'

'Will you describe the man for us please?'

'Well, it was the man I saw in that line of them, the one I pointed to.'

'That would be in the identification parade at the police station?'

Judge Palmer: 'A step too far ahead, Mr Elrod.'

'Yes, Your Honour. Mrs Phipps, just let's go back to the night on which you say you saw a man outside number 20 Meadow View Close . . . Was it a dark night? Was there a moon?'

'It was dark, but there's a security light, that came on. They come on when anyone moves, only sometimes it's a nuisance, a stray cat or those bloomin' foxes run past and it goes on.'

'Did you see a cat or a fox?'

'No.'

'But you saw a man.'

'Yes, I definitely did.'

'Did you recognise him?'

'Well, I said before, it was the one I –'

'We'll come to that in a moment, Mrs Phipps. Did you recognise him when you looked out of the window that night and saw him? Was it someone you knew?'

'I don't think I knew him. No, I didn't.'

'Are you quite sure?'

'I think I am, yes. Only it was dark of course.'

'Except for the security light that came on, and in which you could see the figure of a man?'

'Yes.'

'Thank you. So now let us move on to the afternoon of 14 October when you attended Crofton Central Police Station. You were shown photographs of a number of men.'

'A lot of photographs. It was quite confusing actually.'

'Did you recognise any of them as being the man you saw that night, outside Mrs Gage's bungalow?'

'Not really. They were photographs of faces close up and I didn't see him like that.'

'Quite. You saw him across the grass from your own window. Let us now move on to 4 November, when you went to Crofton Central Police Station again, and this time you looked at an identity line-up of eight men. You saw them standing, not just their faces. Now did you recognise any of them as being the man you saw on that night from your window?'

'Oh yes. I recognised him.'

'You recognised the defendant?'

'Yes.'

'You're quite sure about that?'

'I was . . . I thought it was him. The others weren't anything like him. Well, not much anyway. No, it must have been him.'

'Thank you, Mrs Phipps. No more questions, Your Honour.'

Mr Jeremy Brockyear, for the Defence: 'Mrs Phipps, do you wear glasses?'

'Yes. For reading and sewing.'

'So, you're long-sighted. You have no problems with distance vision?'

'No. I'm very fortunate in that regard.'

'How far can you see clearly without any blurring of vision? Ten yards? Twenty-five yards? One hundred –'

Mr Anthony Elrod: 'Objection, Your Honour – the witness can hardly be expected to know the exact measurements of how far she can see.'

Judge Palmer: 'Point taken but most people have a general idea of their visual extent.'

Mr Jeremy Brockyear: 'Do you drive a car, Mrs Phipps?'

'I did, only I gave it up when I moved into Meadow View.'

'Because you could no longer see clearly?'

'No, because I could no longer afford the running of it.'

'Well, the distance it is necessary to read a number plate clearly, in order to pass the driving test is 25 yards, with glasses if worn. How long is it exactly since you last possessed a driving licence?'

'Seven . . . no, nearly eight years.'

'And do you think you could still see well enough to pass the driving test?'

Mr Anthony Elrod: 'Your Honour . . .'

Judge Palmer: 'Yes. Mr Brockyear, you cannot ask the witness to speculate in that way.'

'Mrs Phipps, will you please tell the court, in as much detail as you can, what or who you saw exactly when you looked out of your window that night?'

'A man. It was definitely a man. That man.'

'How can you be so sure of that?'

'I . . . well, I think . . . no, I mean, I just know. It wasn't quite dark and it isn't far across the grass. I might have seen his reflection in the window.'

'In which window?'

'The one opposite mine, number 20. Carrie's window.'

'Are you saying you definitely did see this man's reflection?'

'I think I might have, yes.'

'But you cannot be absolutely sure? Mrs Phipps?'

'I don't know . . . I'm saying . . . well, I don't know how else I'd have seen him, is what I'm saying.'

'Might you have been mistaken?'

'No. I saw something.'

'Something or someone? Something, as in an animal, or even a shadow – perhaps a tree threw its shadow across the grass?'

Judge Palmer: 'Take your time, Mrs Phipps. Remember you are under oath. You must be sure about what you remember and if you aren't sure you must say so. Do you understand?'

'I do, but it's – it's quite confusing.'

Mr Jeremy Brockyear: 'Mrs Palmer, did you see a man standing in the garden on that night?'

'Yes.'

'You are quite sure.'

'I was sure.'

'You *were* sure or you *are* sure? You see, what I think happened is that you saw something . . . and possibly it was indeed someone. Possibly it was a man . . . but a few minutes ago you said it was almost dark. You're quite correct. There was indeed no moon that night. There was heavy cloud. Behind it, the moon was only one day from new. It would not have been visible behind such cloud. So in fact it was pretty dark in the garden when you looked out, wasn't it?'

'Yes, but I saw someone. I definitely saw – well, I saw something, anyway.'

'But you're not sure it was a person at all, let alone a man?'

'You're making me think I'm not. But the light came on. The security light.'

'You're sure it did?'

'It must have done, mustn't it? It always comes on when something moves and I saw the man, so he must have moved and then the light came on.'

'Now I think we are all confused. Mrs Phipps, I'm trying to get

you to be absolutely sure, and it seems to me that the more you think about this extremely important incident, the less sure you are. But let's leave the garden and move on to the identity parade at the police station. At this parade you picked out one man as being the man you are certain you saw that night, didn't you?'

'I suppose I did.'

'Did you or didn't you?'

'I feel . . . I don't know. I just don't know anything, you've confused me so much.'

'I'm sorry if that's how you see it because I am not trying to confuse you in any way. On the contrary, I am trying to get at the truth. I am trying to be clear and to make sure you yourself are clear, about what or who you saw that night. And you're not sure, are you? About what you saw –'

'I am sure about that. I was and I am. It was a man. I saw a man.'

'So now let us again move to the identity parade at the police station.'

'They confused me there too.'

'Who confused you?'

'The detective. The policeman. One of them, maybe the other . . . the woman detective.'

'Mrs Phipps, we need to be absolutely sure about this. Are you saying that one or possibly two members of the police "confused" you during the identity parade? How exactly did you feel they were confusing you?'

'It wasn't confusing me so much as . . . I don't know . . . pushing me. Making me say it was him.'

'The defendant?'

'Yes. I looked at them all and at first I didn't recognise any of them, I'd never seen any of them before. But then I looked again and I really did think it was him – the one in the . . . that man. And they sort of hurried me . . . I felt they . . . oh, I don't know. I'm sorry.'

Judge Palmer: 'Mrs Phipps, would you like some water? It's very important that you finish answering the defence questions but you should take as long as you need.'

'I'm all right, thank you. Thank you, Your Honour.'

Mr Jeremy Brockyear: 'When you were viewing the identity line-up, what made you hesitate and then look again at the accused?'

'I just recognised something about him . . . maybe the way he was standing and his – well, his shape.'

'His shape?'

'People have a shape, don't they?'

'Was his shape the shape of the man you saw in the garden?'

'I think it was, yes.'

'So was there something unusual about his shape?'

'Not really . . . only it was . . . I recognised it.'

'You will have to do better than that, Mrs Phipps.'

Mr Anthony Elrod: 'Your Honour . . .'

Judge Palmer: 'Indeed, Mr Elrod.'

Mr Jeremy Brockyear: 'I'm sorry, I withdraw that remark, Your Honour. Mrs Phipps, look at the accused now. Look at him carefully.'

Judge Palmer, to the accused: 'Will you please stand?'

Mr Jeremy Brockyear: 'Mrs Phipps?'

'Yes. He's got a – a sort of particular shape. It's up here – his shoulders. They slope.'

'So, solely on the basis of his shape – the way his shoulders slope – you identified the accused as the man you saw in the garden that night. You positively identified him as the same man, is that correct?'

'I suppose it is. Only I'm still telling you that they pushed me . . . the detectives. They persuaded me I was doing the right thing.'

24 MAY, 2002

'Will the next witness take the stand please?'

A thin woman, early thirties, worn-looking. Hair tied back, blonde with streaks. Strong black eyeliner.

Clerk to the court: 'Will you please state your name?'

'Lynne Margaret Keyes.'

Mr Anthony Elrod: 'You are the wife of the defendant, are you not?'

'Yes.'

Eyes on anyone, anything, but not once on him.

'Will you please tell the court where you were on the night of 17 July 2001 between the hours of midnight and 6 a.m.?'

'At home in bed.'

'Do you know where the defendant was at the same time?'

'I've said to the police. It's in my statement. He was at home in bed with me.'

'So the defendant's alibi for the night of 17 July was that he was at home, in bed, with you? Do you also confirm that you were at home in bed with the defendant on the nights of 30 July and 4 August 2001 between midnight and 6 a.m.?'

'Yes.'

'Do you and your husband share a bed?'

'Of course we do.'

'Always?'

'What do you mean, always?'

'Sometimes married couples have a spare room and one of them may sleep there if, say, they are ill or returning home very late? It's not uncommon.'

'I wouldn't know.'

'Are you a sound sleeper, Mrs Keyes? Or do you wake in the night sometimes?'

'No. I work hard. I'm shattered. I never wake up.'

'What work do you do?'

'I work in a dry cleaner's.'

'I suppose the fumes from the cleaning machines are likely to make you sleepy, aren't they?'

Mr Jeremy Brockyear: 'Your Honour, I object strongly to the implication behind this question which is completely irrelevant to –'

Judge Palmer: 'I agree. Mr Elrod, please stick to facts not speculation about fumes and machines.'

Mr Anthony Elrod: 'Is the defendant a good sleeper as well?'

'Yes. Never stirs.'

'How can you be sure? If you sleep so soundly yourself, as you have just told us, how do you know that he's doing the same? How can you be sure he hasn't got up and made himself a cup of tea?'

'Oh, I'm sure of that all right. If he wanted tea he'd wake me up and ask me to get it.'

'And would you?'

'Of course I would.'

'Isn't that a bit unusual these days? For a wife to get up in the middle of the night and make tea for her husband if he wants it, even though she has just been sound asleep? Wouldn't most men these days get their own tea?'

'He's not most men.'

'Can you explain what you mean by that?'

'Your Honour, I object –'

'Wait a moment, Mr Brockyear. Mr Elrod, I hope this line of questioning has a relevant point because it sounds dangerously like vague speculation about the nature of the population at large.'

'I'm coming to the point now, Your Honour.'

'Then please do so.'

'Mrs Keyes, have you ever refused to make tea when your husband demanded it – in the middle of the night?'

'No.'

'Has he demanded it?'

'No. I said. He sleeps as good as I do.'

'Does your husband snore?'

'Yes, like bloody roadworks.'

'How do you know?'

'I can hear him in my sleep.'

'I see. Would you be aware of it if he got out of bed in the middle of the night and went to the bathroom?'

'I don't know. No, I probably wouldn't unless he put the light on.'

'And would he do that? Put the light on?'

'Shouldn't think so.'

'So he could get out of bed, leave your bedroom, go to the bathroom, come back, get into bed again – and you would never know it?'

'I probably wouldn't, no.'

'You probably wouldn't know that he had been up? Have you ever woken because he'd gone in and out of the room?'

'Not – if I have it's not for years. I told you, I'm –'

'. . . a very deep sleeper. Yes. So if he were not only to get out of bed and leave the room in the middle of the night, but go downstairs, open the door and leave the house altogether, you wouldn't be aware of that either?'

'No. I –'

'I put it to you that in fact he did exactly that three times, on the nights in question, when you have stated that the accused was at home in bed with you. He got up and left the house and went out to commit three terrible murders of three innocent elderly women. He left you sound asleep and he returned later, got back into bed and you were still asleep – because you sleep well, as you have told us. You knew nothing else. Because you were undisturbed by his comings and goings. Isn't that why your evidence is flawed? Why there has to be considerable doubt about its reliability? I am not accusing you of giving false evidence, Mrs Keyes. You are under oath and you know it. No, your evidence is not reliable and the alibi you have given to the accused is not reliable because when he left the house and returned on those nights, you were sound asleep. Isn't this the case?'

'I don't know.'

'Mrs Keyes, will you look at the accused please?'

'Your Honour, I . . .'

Judge Palmer: 'Do you have a good reason for that request, Mr Elrod?'

'I do, Your Honour, if you will allow me.'

Judge Palmer: 'Objection overruled. There is no reason why the witness should not be asked to look at the accused. He is her husband, after all.'

'Thank you, Your Honour. Mrs Keyes, will you please look at the accused? No, not a swift glance. Please look at him steadily. You seem nervous. Are you? Are you afraid of your husband, Mrs Keyes?'

'Your Hon–'

Judge Palmer: 'No, Mr Brockyear, sit down. Carry on, Mr Elrod.'

'Mrs Keyes, you obviously have difficulty answering that question, just as you had difficulty looking steadily at the

accused. I put it to you that you are afraid of him – very afraid. That you have been afraid of him for a long time and that if you had not given him an alibi for the nights of 17 July, 30 July and 4 August 2001, you were afraid – terrified – of his reaction. He told you what to say and you said it. You know perfectly well that he got up and went out on those nights. You didn't know why but you would never ask. You covered for the accused because you were and you are afraid of what he would do to you if you did not. Isn't that the truth, Mrs Keyes? You are quite safe. You can say yes without looking at him now. Isn't that the truth?'

'Yes.'

'I'm sorry, I can barely hear you, Mrs Keyes, and I doubt if the rest of the court, and especially the jury, could either. Will you please speak up and answer again?'

A long hesitation.

'Yes.'

From the *Daily Telegraph*, 28 May, 2002

Alan Frederick Keyes is alleged to have slipped out late at night, leaving his wife asleep, and made his way on foot and without use of a torch to the complex of sheltered bungalows collectively known as Meadow View Close which lies about a mile and a half from his home at 33 Westway Road, Crofton. He was familiar with the bungalows because he had worked there several times as a builder, and has occasionally been called out to them at weekends and bank holidays to do urgent repairs.

Keyes is charged with the murders of Carrie Millicent Gage (88), Sara Pearce (76) and Angela Daphne Kavanagh (80), all of whom lived near to one another in the complex. Mr Anthony Elrod QC, prosecuting, said that Keyes had known precisely where to go, how to gain entrance to the bungalows, and how to cover his tracks and destroy any traces of his presence on the three nights. He had entered the bedrooms of Carrie Gage and Angela Kavanagh and strangled them. Sara Pearce was suffering from a chest cold and had been finding it difficult to sleep lying down and Keyes had found her sitting in an armchair in the living room.

Keyes overpowered these elderly ladies without any difficulty, but there was evidence that Angela Kavanagh had fought for her life and Keyes had to use some force to kill her.

Mr Elrod said: 'You deliberately and callously, and with meticulous planning, went out to the bungalows belonging to these elderly women who, although they all lived alone, thought they were safe in their beds in a secure environment. You used previous knowledge of the layouts to enter each one and find each of the victims. You then strangled them without reason, motive or remorse, and left them to be discovered by their traumatised neighbours the next or on a subsequent day. You took care to destroy all evidence of your presence and left the complex to walk back through the dark and deserted streets to your own house. There you let yourself in, and went back to bed beside your still-sleeping wife. These are terrible, wicked acts of which you are accused. But you have lied consistently during every questioning, you have shown not only no remorse but, unbelievably, barely any interest in these events. You ostentatiously yawned your way through at least one cross-examination, and at several points, on hearing the details of these dreadful murders which you had so calmly committed, you smiled. I hope the minds of the jury are concentrating hard upon that, as well as upon all the other facts because they beggar belief.'

The trial continues.

The best one was the one in the chair. The one who was already awake. That was the best, no question.

29 MAY, 2002

'What do you reckon?'

It was warm outside, sun, blue sky. The trees round the perimeter of the Crown Court building were bright fresh green.

Charlie Vogt and Rod Hawkins sat on a low wall out of the press of people near the main doors, with plastic cups of coffee and Hawkins with his usual hand-rolled. Charlie was local, Rod Hawkins senior crime reporter for the *Mail*. They went back a decade, to the dilapidated old Crown Court building in Barnsley Square and several high-profile murder trials, but this was the biggest here for some years. Television, radio, every national paper as well as the agencies and the regional press were represented, a couple were doing updates as the trial had rolled on. They were nearing the end now, prosecution and defence had put their cases, the judge had summed up and instructed the jury, who had gone out the previous afternoon, and were still out. It was twenty minutes to three.

Charlie swigged his coffee. 'I reckon the same as you reckon, don't I?'

'I reckon you do.'

'Felt sorry for the defence – but then you always do in these open-and-shut jobs. Hiding to nothing.'

'Didn't think he was that strong actually.'

'Oh come on, he saw the forensics woman off a treat. Love it when they pull bloody experts apart.'

'"Dr Culshaw, would you please tell the court on what basis you and your expert colleagues have decided that the odds of the DNA from samples from the accused and the cat is one in two hundred million? How many feline DNA samples have been tested?"'

'"Members of the jury, can you be certain, beyond all reasonable doubt, that you can rely on this new, emerging and so far unproven and previously untested type of evidence? If you cannot then you are under a duty to acquit."'

Rod dragged on the last of his disintegrating roll-up. 'Right, that was a good left hook on one dodgy expert . . . come on.'

'Oh I know, I know. He's guilty as hell, I just like it when I see a defence come out fighting. He had her in a corner.'

'Bugger it though, Charlie . . . you got any elderly rellies?'

'Nah. My mum died ten years ago, breast cancer, Dad remarried, lives in Tenerife. You?'

'Too right I have, my mum is eighty-one, her sisters are, what, eighty and eighty-three, something like that, and they're looking to sheltered housing, got their names on lists. We've encouraged it – there are some smashing places not far from Pete and me, we'd make sure Mum and Aunt Lil were all right – the other's up in Liverpool. But now what? The old girls are out of their minds with fretting about all this and I don't blame them. Think about it. Locked and bolted, alarm by the bed, all tucked up and he slides in through the bedroom window, not a peep . . .'

'What do you reckon about the wife?'

'Shitting herself, what else?'

'I bet there's a record somewhere – she rang the emergencies when he'd been having a go. She's terrified of him.'

'Weasely little bugger as well.'

'Not sure I agree . . . Easy to read something into how they look when you know they've murdered old ladies but he's not that bad-looking actually. He's not stupid either.'

'Psychopaths aren't stupid.'

'Is he one?'

'Murdering three defenceless old women in their beds

without any motive other than his own sick enjoyment? Not a psychopath?'

'Take your point. I wonder how it started? Where do these things start? Nothing – then three in a row. Come on! Got to be more to it.'

'Something back then. Always is. He had a witch for a gran. That's what he'll come up with, on appeal.'

'No chance.'

'None. You know, doing this job, you get a bit blasé.'

Rod shook his head. 'There's always one though.'

'That's what I mean. You get blasé until someone like Keyes comes along and you get the creeps just looking at him, knowing what he's done, hearing it all. You never get used to the worst of them.'

'My dad did this job. Sat through the whole Moors murderers trial for the *News and Star*. It did for him. He said he knew he'd never get it out of his head. He used to brood about it. Really did for him.'

'I bet. Jeez.'

'They're going back in . . .'

Rod crushed his plastic cup and threw it in a bin as they walked towards the steps. People were pushing back through the doors, relatives of the dead women easily picked out by the way they hung back in separate little groups, by the dead look in their eyes, the way it had left its marks on their faces. Grey-suited CID, having a last quick drag on a cigarette. The press pack, trying to stay near the back, ready to exit fast and phone in the verdict when it came.

Charlie Vogt held the door open to let in a woman he knew from CID. She nodded to the defendant who had just come back into the dock and made a face. Alan Frederick Keyes. Not bad-looking. Charlie wanted to ask her for a woman's opinion but there was no chance, she'd gone along the benches. Besides, was it relevant? He had the blood of three elderly women victims on his hands. What else mattered except that he'd be leaving that dock and going down for life? Charlie felt a spurt of bile come into his mouth. Once in a while, anger and loathing turned your stomach.

The door bumped to immediately behind him, deadening the murmur from outside, where the news that the jury was back had filtered out. The TV cameras were getting ready, furry mikes swaying on their extension rods. Beyond them, the crowd had filled out, the news having travelled like magic to those who had just been waiting to hear and then shout, punch the air, call Keyes every filthy name they knew. The murders of little children and old ladies – it brought the mass hatred out and roaring like nothing else.

In the street beyond, cars slowed, even a bus, faces peered out before the lights went green again. Police stood about, arms folded, watching, waiting to hold back the rush when the prison van emerged later, Alan Keyes in the back, cowering as fists thudded on the metal sides.

I read about this Russian. He was fine but then when there was a full moon – or maybe it was a new moon? – no, a full moon, definitely – when that came, he went mad inside, he had to do it, that was when his head was bursting.

The court was full to overflowing, the public benches packed. Charlie and Rod stood pressed against the doors poised like greyhounds in the slips.

You never got over it, Charlie thought, your blood pressure went up with the tension and the excitement. Better than any film, better than any book. There was just nothing to beat it, watching the drama of the court, eyes on the face of the accused when the word rang out. Guilty. The look of the relatives, as they flushed with joy, relief, exhaustion. And then the tears. These were the final moments when he knew why he was in his job. Every time.

Alan Keyes stood, face pale, eyes down, his police minder impassive.

Charlie's throat constricted suddenly as he looked at him, looked at his hands on the rail. Normal hands. Nothing ugly, nothing out of the ordinary. Not a strangler's hands, whatever they were supposed to look like. But the hands, resting on the rail, hands like his own, one beside the other resting on the rail, resting on the . . . those hands had . . . Charlie did not think of himself as hard-boiled but you did get accustomed. But nothing prepared you for the first time you saw the man in front of you, ordinary, innocent until proved guilty, however clear his guilt was, nothing prepared you for the sight of a man like Keyes, there in the flesh, a man who had strangled three elderly women. Nothing. He couldn't actually look at Keyes at all now.

The lawyers sat together, shuffling papers, fiddling with box lids, not looking at one another, not murmuring. Just waiting.

And then the door opened and they were filing back, concentrating on taking their seats, faces showing the strain, or else blank and showing nothing at all. Seven women, five men. Charlie was struck by the expression on the face of the first woman, young with dark hair pulled tightly back, bright red scarf round her neck. She looked desperate – desperate to get out? Desperate because she was afraid? Desperate not to catch the eye of the man in the dock, the ordinary-looking man with the unremarkable hands who had strangled three old women? Charlie watched as she sat down and stared straight ahead of her, glazed, tired. What had she done to deserve the past nine days, hearing appalling things, looking at terrible images? Been a citizen. Nothing else. He had often wondered how people like her coped when it had all been forgotten, but the images and the accounts wouldn't leave their heads. Once you knew something you couldn't un-know it. His Dad had tried to un-know what he'd learned about Hindley and Brady for years afterwards.

'All rise.'

The court murmured; the murmur faded. Everything went still. Every eye focused on the jury benches.

In the centre of the public benches a knot of elderly women sat together. Two had their hands on one another's arms. Even across the room, Charlie Vogt could see a pulse jumping in the neck of one, the pallor of her neighbour. Behind them, two middle-aged couples, one with a young woman. He knew relatives when he saw them, very quiet, very still, desperate for this to be over, to see justice being done. Hang in there, he willed them, a few minutes and then you walk away, to try and put your lives back together.

Schoolteacher, he thought, as the foreman of the jury stood. Bit young, no more than early thirties. Several of them looked even younger. When he'd done jury service himself, several years ago now, there had only been two women and the men had all been late-middle-aged.

'Have you reached a verdict on all three counts?'

'Yes.'

'On the first count, do you find the accused guilty or not guilty?' The first murder, of Carrie Gage.

Charlie realised that he was clenching his hand, digging his nails into the palm.

'Not guilty.'

The intake of breath was like a sigh round the room.

'Is this a unanimous verdict?'

'Yes.'

'On the second count of murder, do you find the accused guilty or not guilty?' Sarah Pearce.

'Not guilty.'

The murmur was faint, like a tide coming in. Charlie glanced at the faces of the legal teams. Impassive except for the junior barrister of the defence who had put her hand briefly to her mouth.

'Is this verdict unanimous?'

'Yes.'

'On the third count, do you find the accused guilty or not guilty?'

His Honour Judge Palmer was sitting very straight, hands out of sight, expression unreadable.

'Not guilty.'

'Is –'

The gavel came down hard on the bench and the judge's voice roared out: 'Order. There must be silence for the clerk to finish his question to the foreman of the jury and for him to reply. If there is not I will clear this court immediately.' Judge Palmer's eye glittered. 'These are the gravest moments of the entire trial and the court *must* remain silent. Will the clerk now please ask his final question and the foreman give his reply?'

'Is this verdict unanimous?'

The foreman had been composed. Now, briefly, he looked terrified. 'Yes.'

The court erupted.

Charlie caught Rod Hawkins's eye as they both made for the doors through the crowd, trying to beat the rest of the press pack to it. By the time they were outside, the news was ahead of them, the corridors and front lobby of the building seething with people relaying the verdict. The few police on duty outside

were calling for backup and getting into position to restrain the crowd and prevent them surging into the front area.

Charlie Vogt stood on the steps listening to the sound of anger that was growing, becoming a roar, like a tide racing in towards the court building.

Rod was beside him. 'What the fuck . . . That lot are baying for blood. What's going on in there?'

Without consulting one another, they headed back down the corridor, weaving and dodging through the crowd coming out, others standing about the hall in stunned groups, briefs charging past, gowns flying.

By the time they reached the doors of Court Number 1 the mass of people had left, driven out by the officials. Alan Keyes stood in the centre of a knot of police and clerks, his defence counsel and the rest of the team behind.

'You can't stop me,' Keyes was shouting, his eyes swerving round the group, to the clerk, to the uniforms, to anyone who could hear him. 'I'm a free man, didn't you bloody hear? Not guilty, not guilty, not guilty. He said so.' He pointed to the empty jury benches, then round to the judge's chair. 'Not guilty. I'm a free man and I'm going out there to tell them so, I'm walking out those gates, I'm discharged, and you can't hold me in here.'

The police stood conferring. The barristers looked troubled.

Charlie and Rod stood by the doorway, their presence not noticed in the scrum.

'He's right,' Charlie said.

'If he goes out through those doors he'll get torn apart.'

'Get the fuck out of my way, clod.' Keyes lurched forward and took a swing at the copper. The blow made no contact, but within seconds Keyes's hands were behind his back and cuffed. In the middle of yells and curses of protest, he was cautioned by one officer and restrained by two others.

'Gotcha,' Rod said. 'Though they can't hold him for a fist that didn't connect.'

But Charlie Vogt was already sprinting for the doors.

She had sandals on with a mended strap which came apart as she ran so that she tripped and almost fell on her face, but didn't

quite, recovered, ran on. She had never moved so fast; she felt like a rugby player dodging this one coming towards her, then that one, then a knot of them together. She ducked and dived, banged her arm against the corridor wall, dodged again, almost pushing over a man carrying a pile of boxes, hearing them crash to the floor as she went on, through a pair of swing doors, down a long corridor where there were fewer people, right to the end, down a short flight of steps. Then there was only the sound of her own running footsteps, the broken sandal slapping unevenly on the tiled floor. She had no idea where she was going but somehow she'd get out, even if it was much later, when they'd all gone. When he'd gone. She'd find an empty room and stay there until the place went quiet, people had all left for home, then try. Nobody would notice her.

Two doors. It reminded her of a corridor at school with classrooms on either side. Both were locked. She stopped to get her breath. From a window high up in the wall, she could hear a muffled sound, like the sea murmuring. A siren, then another came wailing towards the building.

The corridor smelled of chemical cleaner, making her sneeze, and the sneeze seemed to crash around the walls and down the corridor, echoing and re-echoing. She froze, pressing herself against the wall. Nobody came. It was quiet again.

Then, a corner and another door and when she pushed against it, it swung open. She almost fell inside with relief and leaned on the other side, catching her breath in gulps, shaking. And all she could think of was his face when the words were said.

Not guilty.

And again.

Not guilty.

Not guilty.

As they were spoken, and a second before the whole courtroom exploded, he had half turned his head and looked straight at her and the expression on his face, in his eyes, had frozen her to ice.

Now, the ice was thawing and melting, water ran through her body, and she felt herself sliding slowly down until she was a pool on the floor.

You feel as if the top of your head will blow off. Two minutes after you've done it you can do anything. You're, like, the most powerful person in the universe. You're God.

'You can't keep me here. I'm a free man, you heard, "not guilty". So I should be walking out there not in here with you. And I want my brief.'

'Listen –'

'No, you listen, dickhead –'

'You can have what you want, Keyes – tea, coffee, something to eat – you can't have your brief because he's gone home, and you don't need your brief because you're not charged with anything.'

'You cuffed me, you dragged me down here, I'm not guilty, you heard.'

'Yes,' the DI said, 'I heard.' He didn't keep the contempt out of his voice. 'You attacked a police officer –'

'I missed. Didn't get near him. You saw.'

'Right.'

They were in a small holding room in the basement of the court building. It had a metal table and two chairs. Alan Keyes sat in one, the DI in the other. A uniformed constable stood outside the door.

Alan Keyes stood up and pushed the chair over as the door opened and two more men came in.

'DCS Granger. Sit down, Keyes –'

'Mr Keyes to you.'

'Sit down,' the Superintendent said, not looking at Keyes.

The other man, who was tall and upright and had a thin

moustache, stood beside him. Said nothing. Did not give his name.

'Now listen –'

'I want to walk out of this fucking building, I have every right to walk out of –'

'I said listen. There is no way I can let you walk out. No way. Why do you think you were cuffed and brought down here?'

'I didn't bloody touch him, I missed, I only swung at him, it wasn't –'

'It had nothing to do with you taking a swing at a police officer – we cuffed you and brought you down here and are keeping you in custody *for your own safety*.'

'Piss off.'

'Because if we'd let you strut out of that court you probably wouldn't have made it a dozen yards down the corridor, you would have been set upon, battered to death – my guess is you would have lasted three minutes. You've got no idea, have you? There's several hundred angry people out there, and there'd be more arriving if we hadn't closed the road. You know why, *Mr* Keyes? That's right, you can look terrified.'

Keyes twisted his expression back into defiance.

'I'd be terrified if I was in your shoes. You still want to walk out there? You're not under arrest, as you say, and I've no power to stop you, but it's my duty to advise you that you should remain under police protection.'

'You'll get rid of them, won't you? Clear the street. Tear gas, water cannon, they'll bugger off.' Keyes smiled. 'I'm an innocent man.'

'Yes, Mr Keyes. Which won't prevent the public forming its own judgement and acting accordingly. So I'm advising you to accept police protection . . .'

'What's that mean? You put me up in a nice hotel?'

'We do not.'

'I'm not going back inside that fu–'

'Nor in prison custody. You'll be taken to a place of safety and then we'll discuss the choices you might have.'

'What choices? I'm going back home, aren't I? You can't stop me, a man's home is his castle, a man's –'