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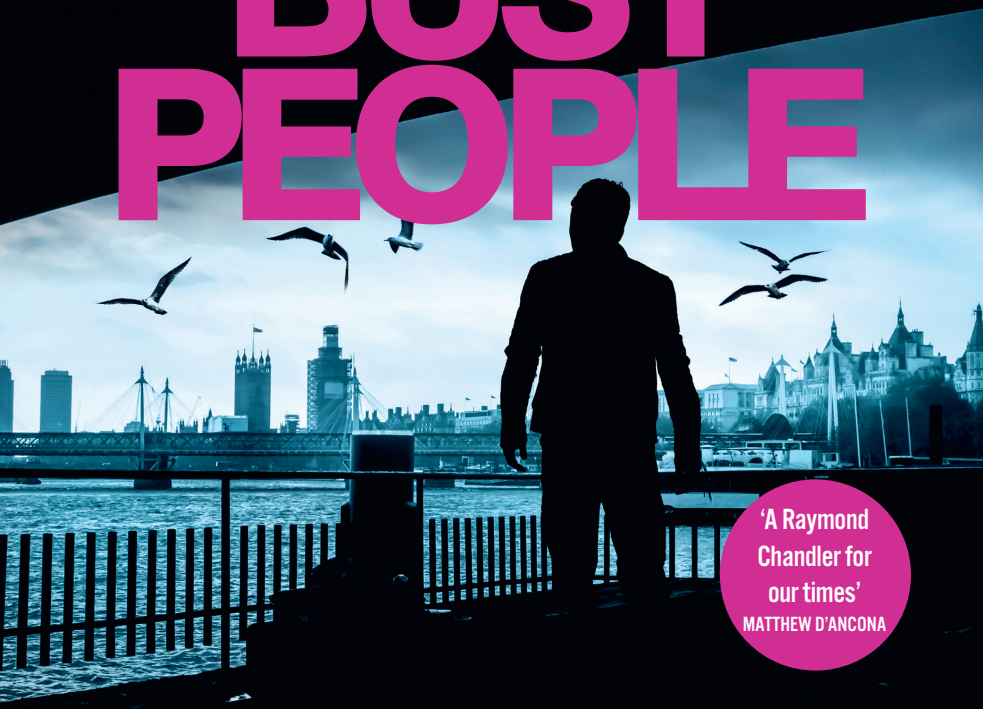

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TONY PARSONS

THE NUMBER ONE BESTSELLING AUTHOR

MURDER FOR BUSY PEOPLE

Tony Parsons is a bestselling novelist and an award-winning journalist.

His books have been published in over forty languages and his multimillion-selling novel *Man and Boy* won the Book of the Year prize in 2000. Most recently, he created the Max Wolfe crime series.

The Murder Bag, the first Max Wolfe book, went to number one on the *Sunday Times* bestseller list and in 2023 was voted one of the 100 best crimes books of all time by the readers of Dead Good Books.

Tony lives in London with his family.

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MURDER FOR BUSY PEOPLE

TONY PARSONS

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Yuriko

&

Jasmine

&

Stan

Born 27 November 2011, died 11 May 2024.

Nothing loved is ever lost.

PART ONE

Tea and biscuits at the Black Museum

1

Old dogs rise early, as if to make the most of the time that remains.

And so it was that Stan and I were already wandering Hampstead Heath when the sun came up and turned the string of ponds to molten gold.

It felt like the first day of spring. Light early, but the cold of the winter months clinging on. A day that could go either way, weather-wise. Once upon a time there would have been three of us on these walks, but somewhere along the line my daughter Scout, busy with the tricky business of growing up, had lost the habit. So now there was just us two, me and Stan, and as I watched him the old dog paused in the sparkling new daylight, as if remembering.

Or maybe not. Possibly Stan was just staring blankly into space, with not a single thought between his extravagant Cavalier ears.

Now that he was knocking on a bit, our old boy sometimes got distracted, and lost all sense of time and sight of me, even when I was standing next to him. But lifting that button nose – once as shiny and moist as a black

olive, now as parched and dry as a date – could also mean that he had picked up the scent of a rabbit or fox that had been late going home to its burrow. A dog's sense of smell is the last thing to go. And it was still so early that the night was not fully over yet on Hampstead Heath.

Then I saw the dog – the dog Stan had smelled – and I paused too. Because he was the kind of dog that would stop anyone, two or four-legged, dead in their tracks.

A big dog, a very big dog, unmoving in the treeline. A giant head of black and tan. And more than very big – massive. Even from this distance, he could only be one breed. Rottweiler.

He watched us without expression. A Rottweiler who is brought up well can be as calm as a Buddhist monk. There was no aggression in him, because there didn't need to be. He could summon all the aggression he would ever need, and more than you could ever handle, at will. For now he was as calm as the water on those golden ponds.

Stan, always a socially active dog, rashly trotted off to say hello.

I cursed, calling his name even though I knew he would not hear. A decline in his hearing was another of Stan's growing list of ailments.

So I slowly followed, looking around for the Rottweiler's owner. A lone runner in the distance was the only other sign of life. So I stopped to listen for someone calling out the name of their lost dog. But there was only birdsong.

And then, as Stan and I got closer to the Rottweiler, I saw why the owner was not calling for his dog.

There was a man on his back, unmoving, almost buried in the long grass, directly in front of the dog.

I edged closer, and closer still, then slowly knelt by his side.

The Rottweiler watched me all the way.

A green-and-gold Kennel Club tag glinted under his face. MY NAME IS BUDDY, it said.

'Good boy, Buddy,' I said. Buddy was unimpressed.

I watched Buddy and Buddy watched me as I leaned closer to his master and placed two fingers to the carotid pulse point on the side of his neck, just under the jaw and beside the windpipe. Nothing. Then I placed the same two fingers on his radial pulse, where his thumb met his wrist. Again nothing. His chest was not rising and falling. I listened for his breath for the standard ten seconds, but I already knew by now that I was never going to hear him draw breath.

This was not a young man. On his wrist was what looked like a no-brand smartphone with a white strap.

A heart-rate monitor.

I stood up, deciding it was his dodgy ticker that had killed him.

There was no sign of violence.

Murder was the last thing on my mind.

I stared at him, that pause that comes when the living contemplate the dead, and I tried hard to see the man he had been.

His thinning, silvery hair was shaved very short in what they once called a number one crop and he wore a green MA1 flying jacket with a vivid orange lining. There were Dr. Martens boots, muddy from the Heath, and his jeans were faded Levi 501s. The skin on his hands was so dry it resembled paper. He was a former Jack the Lad, a skinhead or a Mod back in the day, a tasty geezer who had lived long enough to collect his Freedom Pass.

And then I saw that he had a prison tattoo.

It was one of the classics: five dots, arranged like the face of a dice – a quincunx, they call it.

I have heard a dozen different interpretations of what the quincunx means but the one I always believed was that it represents one lonely human soul, surrounded by four high walls.

But whatever else it stood for, the tattoo meant that the dead man had done time. And what was unusual about this particular quincunx was that it was not on the dead man's hand between his thumb and index finger, which is where alumni of His Majesty's Prisons usually get their five-dots body art.

This one was engraved just below his right eye, staining his pale skin like five inky teardrops.

And it is possible that there are multiple old jailbirds out there who have made the rash decision to have the quincunx tattooed on their face. Perhaps there were prisons where having the five-dice inked on your face was once

all the rage. But I had only ever known of one old con with a quincunx tattooed under his right eye.

'I know you,' I said to the dead man. 'Don't I?'

And finally the Rottweiler lifted his handsome head and growled soft and low at me, as if to give me a warning.

2

When I got back that evening after work and gym, there were strange noises coming from my home.

Music. And things being broken. And more things being broken. And laughter.

And the funny thing – the thing that shook me up most of all – was that I didn't recognise the music.

That's a scary moment, when you realise the music is no longer being made for you. That's the moment you grow old. It is an even scarier moment when you realise that this strange music is coming from your home, and someone is breaking stuff in there.

I stood on the street four storeys below our flat as behind me Smithfield meat market stirred itself for the night shift ahead. And I suddenly understood what was waiting for me up there in my home.

You hear about these parties. Every parent hears about these parties.

When your child is growing up, these parties are a part of parental mythology. You can even understand how they happen: the happy absence of the old folk for a week, or a weekend, or a long day when the old man is

off to work and gym. An invitation to a few close friends that goes viral, and gets shared far too widely and recklessly in this hideously connected age. And then it's all fun and games and smashed heirlooms until the wrinklies come home or the neighbours call the cops.

Scout, my daughter, was not quite thirteen, and it felt a bit early for one of these parties.

But perhaps these kind of parties were starting earlier these days? Because here we undeniably were, and I could hear voices being raised to be heard above the unknown and unknowable music. There were shrieks, the sound of broken glass, and a pain right at the base of the spine that I thought I had stretched away at Fred's, my gym. The pain began pulsing like a toothache as I went up to the flat, still hot and clammy from Fred's, steeling myself for all those stoned and drunken teenage kids being sick in the sink and fighting among themselves and sexually experimenting.

But it wasn't that kind of party.

3

Our home – an open-plan loft that could do with a lick of paint, and a new boiler, and a fresh couple of sofas – was full of the homeless.

I recognised them from the neighbourhood. Most of them. There was the huge bearded man in camouflage kit who slept in the doorway of a boarded-up shop on the far side of the market, and who never asked for money and who never met your eye, his meagre belongings stored behind him with impeccable neatness. Some old soldier, I assumed.

And there were the two crack addicts, an improbable couple who were always together – a young man and a much older woman, a mother and son age gap – now huddled in a far corner of our loft, their heads bent together, conferring as they snacked on Lily's Kitchen Turkey & White Fish Bites for Senior Dogs as though they were a packet of cheese and onion crisps.

And the overweight kid who needed urgent psychiatric intervention who slept with his supermarket trolley in the doorway of the bookshop. And the elderly tramp forever lost in his own thoughts, his eyes staring out at the

streets of Smithfield but seeing somewhere else in some other time.

And then there was Suzanne. I knew Suzanne. In fact, Suzanne was the only one of them I actually knew, and the only one I had ever spoken to, and the only one I ever gave money to. Because how can you ever help all of them?

I knew my twelve-year-old daughter would have an answer.

But Scout was nowhere to be seen.

Suzanne was a young woman who sat on the pavement outside the supermarket and minded dogs. She was one of those people who – in my mind, at least – had everything go wrong in her life that could possibly go wrong. Wayward parents. Rotten boyfriend. Horrible drugs. And then in the end, or close to the end – nowhere to live. She was perhaps ten years older than my daughter – young, so young, with the pallor of advanced addiction, and the teeth of someone who had most of their life behind them. Yet there was a sweetness about her, a light in her eye, and a smile that came slowly, and there was a gentle quality about her.

She liked looking after dogs.

Suzanne habitually clutched a child's stuffed toy – a ragged rabbit she had told me was called Mr Flopsy. When I first saw her sitting on the pavement outside the supermarket minding a couple of Labradoodles and holding her stuffed rabbit, I had assumed it was some begging technique designed to elicit sympathy and tug at the heartstrings. But I didn't believe that anymore. She

seemed to genuinely find comfort in her pet stuffed rabbit. And I gave Suzanne money every time I saw her because I always thought there was a good chance it was going to be the last time I ever saw her. She looked that far gone. Suzanne was not built for a life on the streets. But then who is?

Suzanne was sitting cross-legged on the sofa by the TV with the remote in her hand. That's where the deafening music was coming from. One of those stations that lurk at the far end of the guide. Suzanne and I watched it together for a few moments. Young women in bathing suits were dancing on yachts while young men glared and gloated and contemptuously flicked banknotes at the camera.

And I wondered – *How can anyone enjoy this shit?*

You're getting old, Max.

No – already old.

You got old tonight.

I looked around the great wide-open expanse of our loft, desperately seeking Scout, my sigh of frustration coming like a punctured balloon. The boiler was wheezing like a geezer with emphysema. Our home was full of things that needed fixing.

Our guests were not all as sweet as Suzanne. My heart went out to her and to the neat old soldier and the kid who slept in the bookshop doorway. But I didn't care for the crack addicts, the odd couple who I would see late at night, leaning over their tin foil, sucking up the fumes, and trying the handles of parked cars, and I had seen the

tramp with the faraway stare projectile vomiting often enough to not relish him sitting at my kitchen island.

I looked around the room. I didn't doubt they all had their stories of hard luck and bad choices. But now I just wanted my daughter.

Scout was in the kitchen, making toast for her guests. She was small for her age, bright-eyed, and to her father's gaze, impossibly pretty. Physically quite fragile but with a fire in her eyes. She was ready for a flaming row if I thought I could handle it.

She looked at me with a kind of fierce-eyed defiance and I felt the base of my spine pulse with pain. Tonight had not come out of nowhere. There were precedents.

Over the last year Scout had taken to buying a meal for the homeless and I had felt mixed emotions. A parental pride at my caring daughter, and a worry that her kindness would be used against her in ways I could not imagine.

I didn't want to argue. I just wanted the party to be over. I just wanted everybody out and my home back.

'Shall we call it a night, Scout?'

Quitting while she was ahead, Scout began herding her guests to the door.

Only Suzanne said goodnight, Mr Flopsy clutched tight to her chest.

After everyone had gone, Scout and I looked at each other.

Then we looked at the flat.

The mess wasn't as bad as it might have been. Discarded plates of buttered toast were scattered everywhere. Stan, our ruby-coloured Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, was ignoring the senior dog treats that the crack addicts had left on the floor and was busy licking the butter from the chewed crusts of a rogue slice of toast. His priorities were impeccable. Buddy the Rottweiler, our house guest, watched him impassively. But of course clearing up the mess was the easy bit.

Talking to each other – that was the hard part.

Scout and I looked at each other again. She cleared her throat.

'Do you know how many homeless people there are in this country?'

Ooh, I knew this one.

'About three hundred thousand?'

'That's a *town*. That's a *city*. And they never sleep on side streets. They always sleep on main streets. Because it's too dangerous. And we all have so much. And they have so little.'

I nodded. Couldn't argue with any of that.

And I was proud of her for caring. But I would have preferred that she didn't do the caring inside my home. Is that hypocrisy or human nature, I wondered. Possibly a bit of both.

'You want to help me clear up, Scout? It's a bit of a mess. The flat, I mean – not the world!'

I attempted a smile.

It fell on stony ground.

Scout expertly loaded the dishwasher.

She had the brisk independence of a child raised in a single-parent household. We didn't look at each other. And we didn't say much. Because we didn't need to.

She thought the homeless were all sweethearts. And I knew they were not all sweethearts. And she would have told me – *It's not about anyone being a sweetheart*. So – no need to argue then. No need to say a bloody word. Agree to differ. These days I was aware that entire conversations seemed to go by with just a dishwasher door shut just a touch too firmly, and plates put away in eerie careful silence, and toast deftly dumped in with the food waste as the dishwasher hummed across our silence.

There was so much we could have said, but it was already bloody obvious, and so we didn't bother with chatter about school nights and the unfairness of the world.

It was all there in our silence, and our polite, practical exchanges, an understanding honed under the weight of our twelve years together, and all the things we never spoke about.

'Goodnight then,' Scout said when we had finally finished and she headed for her room.

'Night, Scout.'

She touched Stan on his head and she was gone. I could hear her brushing her teeth.

I went to the window and stared out at the bustle and lights of the meat market, where the night had hours still to go. And although I had tried to comfort myself with

the thought that my daughter's attempts to heal the world had precedents, I could not deny that tonight felt new.

Because having a child who is on the edge of thirteen changes everything.

You still love them, and just as much.

But they are emphatically their own person by now, and there is this bitter-sweet edge, as you realise this little nest where they have grown up will not hold them forever, or even much longer, because now you understand that time is running out.

You still love them when they are on the edge of thirteen.

You just don't recognise them anymore.

4

'There's not a lot on your dead man,' said Sergeant John Caine, keeper of the Black Museum. 'His name was Ray "Butch" Lewis. A bit player in one of the biggest robberies of the last fifty years. That's Butch's one and only claim to fame. And that's where you know him from, Max. Come and see.'

The Black Museum is where the Metropolitan Police remembers. The Black Museum remembers the Met's past, and the Met's dead, and two centuries of convicted criminals. It is cold, and it is dark, and the massed ranks of glass display cases make it feel like a car boot sale for long-dead villains and the police who pursued them. The Black Museum is history, and it is a bit of a mess, and although it serves as a teaching aid for young coppers about to make their way in the world, it is almost always totally silent and empty in there.

I followed John Caine to a distant corner, my gaze flicking over the glass cases.

Over the last 150 years or so, the museum has had multiple names and locations. It started out as the Central Prisoners Property Store a bit before the Jack the Ripper

case was an active murder investigation. When I first came here, it was called the Crime Museum but we knew it as the Black Museum and it was in Room 101 of New Scotland Yard, up on the first floor, when the Yard was across the street from Westminster Abbey in Horseferry Road. Today the Black Museum is in the basement of the Curtis Green Building, in the new New Scotland Yard, facing Waterloo across the river. But it felt unchanged from the first day I saw it. And Sergeant John Caine remained, older but also unchanged in all the ways that matter. John was a fit and hard old-school copper, his hair still thick and cut short, his build as lean as a butcher's dog.

We walked between the glass cases.

Many of the exhibits on display were used to kill, or to attempt to kill, members of the public or the police. There are bombs, knives, umbrellas that had doubled as swords, and firearms of every description, from derringers hidden in Victorian walking sticks to submachine guns.

There were the notebooks of the detectives who hunted Jack the Ripper, and the terrorists who tried to assassinate Queen Victoria, and the death masks of men and women who were hung before the huge cheering crowds at Newgate, and a glass case containing the portrait of every serving Met police officer killed in the line of duty over the last 150 years.

There were people I had served with among those smiling portraits of the dead, and there was a woman I had loved, and would always love. But I did not linger.

Today I was here to kickstart my memory of a man with a five-dot prison tattoo under his right eye.

'I know you remember the Hole in the Wall Gang,' John said.

'It's coming back to me. Two brothers were the top boys.'

'Terry and Mick Gatti. Anglo-Italian heritage, but as South London as – what's very South London? Pie and mash. The Elephant and Castle. Millwall FC. As South London as all of that. Terry was the brains and the bollocks, Mick the muscle and bone. They both grew fabulously rich on the proceeds of their sins and yet they never did a day inside. The dead man on the Heath – Ray "Butch" Lewis – was their driver.'

In a quiet corner, we stopped in front of a large upright glass case. Inside there was a rusting safe the size of a coffin. The safe door was ajar, hanging on strangely pristine hinges. The safe was empty. There was a framed front page of a long-defunct newspaper next to it, showing a fading photograph of a young uniformed policeman, hardly out of his teens, escorting a slim blonde woman whose hands were cuffed behind her back.

The young uniformed policeman was me.

HISTORY'S BIGGEST HEIST? said the dead newspaper's banner headline.

'They didn't blow the safe,' I said. 'I forgot they never blew the safe.'

Most stolen safes were opened with gelignite or some other form of explosive.

'They didn't need to blow it,' John said. 'They took it away to a nice quiet farm in the Cotswolds and the top Peterman in the country opened it. Without key, combination or any of the stuff that goes bang.'

'Peterman?'

'Safecracker. Peterman is the old-school term for a safecracker. The etymology is unclear. *Péter* is the French verb for to burst, to break, to crack – and to pass wind. And the Peterhead prison in Aberdeenshire was famous for housing a lot of safecrackers. The Peterman who opened this safe without blowing the door off was a safecracking superstar called Ian Doherty. And Butch Lewis was a top-of-the-range getaway driver back in the day, too.'

'A bunch of criminal masterminds, eh?'

'Not quite,' John said. 'Mick Gatti, Terry's older brother, was always as thick as mince. And they had some wild young kid along with them for the heavy lifting. His name escapes me but I remember they called him The Nutjob. So criminal masterminds is probably a bit of a stretch.'

'They didn't do time, did they?'

'None of them did.' John indicated the front page. 'Not for this job. Only her. Only the woman in the picture. Only Emma Moon.'

'Emma Moon,' I repeated, staring at the front page inside its glass case. 'I remember her.'

'Of course you do.'

'And I remember the house. I had never been inside

anywhere like it. This mansion in Belgrave Square. You could see the queen's back garden from the top floor. It was rented by some foreign billionaire looking to launder his loot in the London property market. As they do. The safe was gone by the time I got there. And nobody ever knew what was in it, did they?'

'There were rumours. Blood diamonds. Gold bars. Rolex galore. The purest cocaine this side of Bogotá. Stacks of new notes in a dozen different currencies. But there was also meant to be some prize they were not expecting.'

I waited.

John Caine stared thoughtfully at the rusting safe.

'I don't know what that was, Max. Nobody knows. But whatever was in that safe, it was enough to bankroll the good life for the top boys in the Hole in the Wall Gang. Which was not the guy who drove the car or the guy who cracked the safe. The Gatti brothers have dined out on the contents of that safe for nearly twenty years. I imagine that those further down the food chain – the driver, the Peterman – were on a flat fee.'

I looked at the safe, remembering.

'Men died that night,' I said. 'Two of them. I saw their bodies.'

'Yes – the chief of security. Stabbed multiple times. And a gardener who turned up later to deliver some plants, the poor bastard. Killed with a single blow to the head, as I recall.'

'And Butch Lewis was the wheel man. That's where I know him from.'

'He was arrested during the big round-up after the job – they all were – but it never even went to trial. Butch did time later – but not for this one, not for the big job, his greatest hit. Butch did time later for petty drug deals that went south. That's where the lovely tattoo came from.'

'And the Hole in the Wall Gang got away with their heist.'

'Not all of them,' John said. 'Not Emma Moon.'

I leaned in closer to look at the fading front page.

Emma Moon was tall, lean and blonde in the picture. I recalled that she had been a dancer of some sort. She was in her late twenties in the photograph, which put her in her forties now. The face of the young police officer who had her in handcuffs – my face – was white with tension.

John chuckled. 'Look how young you were, Max!' he said with wonder.

It did not feel like it was me. Just as there was an unbridgeable gap between my daughter today and the baby she had once been, so it was with me and the uniformed cop in the photograph. The passing of all that time was too big a gap to cross.

But I remembered Emma Moon. I remembered how she smelled of cigarettes and flowers.

'I was straight out of Hendon,' I said. 'I was only shaving once a week. And she talked to me. I remember. She

asked me – very calmly, very politely – to let her go. When I arrived at that big house and found only her and the two dead men, and the safe already gone, she knew she was going to be locked up for a long time. And she talked to me, John. She told me about her life.'

'She was a striking young thing,' John said. 'Apparently she got the crew into the house. Got them past security. She had struck up some kind of relationship with the security guard. Been working on it for months – so they say. And when romance was blossoming, someone stabbed him. The gardener was meant to be collateral damage, an unexpected visitor as the crew were on the way out with the safe. He got hit a bit too hard and his skull caved in. I don't think it was part of the masterplan. But the Gattis could not afford any witnesses. They were a serious crew who were always going to top anyone who got in their way or saw their faces.'

'Terry was the brains behind the business,' I said. 'And Mick was the blunt instrument.'

'Terry retired at thirty from the proceeds of whatever was in that safe. His less clever kid brother Mick has played flash Harry in Spain for nearly twenty years. But Terry was smart enough to get out after his big score and keep his head down. Terry never wanted to be famous. All he wanted was the lush life of a self-made criminal millionaire and the quiet joys of happy anonymity.'

'While his girlfriend did the time,' I said. 'Because Emma Moon cut no deals. She gave up no names. Not when I arrested her, and not when she was in custody,

and not at her trial, and not over the last sixteen years. Never. Emma never did what they almost always all do – offered co-operation in return for a lighter sentence. She spent the best years of her life behind bars because she wouldn't talk. That's loyalty. That's love.'

'Is it?' John said. 'Or is it stupidity? Maybe it is a bit of both, Max. Love and stupidity. That deadly combination. But everybody did very well out of that job. Apart from Emma Moon. '

'She got thirty years for armed robbery. Thirty years, John! That shocked me then. It shocks me now.'

'Joint enterprise,' John said. 'Emma Moon was a secondary offender – she might not have killed those two men or ever received a penny from what was inside that safe. Yet the court treated her as if she was as guilty as the men who did.'

There was a smaller newspaper clipping inside the glass case. It must have been printed some years after the front page of Emma Moon in my handcuffs, because it was white more than yellow. An opinion piece from one of the posh papers. *An Egregious Travesty of British Justice,* it said, next to a byline picture of a floppy-haired man.

Daniel Nevermore, it said.

'Lord Nevermore,' John said. 'He's been campaigning for years to get Emma Moon out. A bit sweet on her. Maybe totally besotted. He's Lord Longford to Emma's Myra Hindley.

'Except, unlike Hindley, Emma Moon never hurt anyone.'

'Arguable,' John said. 'I never bought Lord Nevermore's line that Emma Moon was some kind of innocent bystander. Two men died and some professional villains got very rich. Not your friend Butch – he was too far down the food chain. And not Ian Doherty, who opened the treasure chest. But the Gatti brothers, Terry and Mick – they won the lottery that night. And the law was made to look stupid. Crime was made to look like it paid – big time. And it did. Because whatever was in that safe was never recovered.'

'I can still hear her voice, John. You can't see it in that photograph, but Emma Moon never stopped talking to me until they put her in the back of the car and drove her away.'

'Then you were the only one she ever talked to,' John said.

We went out to his office, which served as the reception area to the Black Museum.

John got out a couple of mugs – one said THE BEST GRANDDAD IN THE WORLD and the other commemorated the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. He put the kettle on and took out a severely depleted pack of chocolate digestives. His tough old face frowned as he concentrated on preparing our tea and biscuits.

'Emma Moon told me she had a son,' I said. I struggled to recover his name. *'David,'* I remembered. 'His name was David. He must have been around the age that Scout is now. She must have been very young when she had him. That's why she wanted me to let her go. Because

of David. And she told me that the boy would not live if she went away. The kid had problems. I didn't listen. I wasn't interested. I didn't know what it meant – to have a child who totally relies on you. I was too young to understand.'

'What happened to her boy?'

'I don't know,' I said, and I knew I should have thought of Emma Moon's son before today. 'But the rest of the gang got away with it, didn't they? While she's doing time for all of them.'

'Not anymore,' John said. 'Because Emma Moon gets out tomorrow.'

5

The next morning I watched Emma Moon's release from prison on the Bar Italia TV where they usually showed the Italian football, and suddenly there she was – a woman I had not seen for sixteen years.

The gold in her hair had its first streaks of silver now and she had lost that effortless twenty-something sheen I had seen on the night I arrested her. But in many ways she seemed shockingly unchanged from the woman who I had handcuffed at the big house in Belgravia all those years ago. She had a cigarette on the go, and as she took a long drag she scrunched up her eyes, squinting as if the cigarette smoke was dazzling sunshine.

Our Murder Investigation Team had taken a break to watch her get out. There were four of us in the Bar Italia: my boss, DCI Pat Whitestone, compact, careful highlights, rimless glasses and a slow smile – more like a slightly racy librarian than a senior murder detective – and our two new recruits, the boy and the girl – man and woman doesn't really say it – Detective Constable Bear Groves and Detective Constable Sita Basu. They were two Direct Entry Detectives – meaning they had joined

the force straight from university rather than doing the traditional two-year minimum in uniform, the theory being that higher education was a far better preparation for modern policing than wrestling drunks in the gutter while wearing a scratchy uniform that was originally designed in the nineteenth century.

They were from the same Direct Entry intake, and although they were new recruits to our Murder Investigation Team, they were nearing the end of their two-year probation period.

They could hardly have been more different.

DC Bear Groves was a big, privately educated rugby player from Oxfordshire. DC Sita Basu was the petite, pretty daughter of a working-class family who had a small business in Wolverhampton. In his bulk and his black-rimmed spectacles, Bear was a dead ringer for Clark Kent. Sita Basu – spelled S-i-t-a B-a-s-u, she told Whitestone and me when she met us in MIR-1, as if she knew we were doddery old wrinklies who might struggle to remember her name – was small, intense, South-East Asian heritage, also in glasses, with a head girl quality about her.

'Who's called Bear in this world?' I heard Sita demanding on their first tea break.

'I am,' Bear said, blushing furiously.

They were from different worlds. But in their bewilderment, in their *what-have-I-let-myself-in-for?* demeanour, they could have been twins. It was their first day in Murder Investigation, and so far the only thing that had

happened was being shown where to get the best coffee in Soho.

And now we were watching TV.

I knocked back my triple espresso as up on the Bar Italia's screen the big steel doors of HMP Bronzefield closed behind her and Emma Moon walked briskly to where the press were waiting.

She still had the same lean, understated power of the dancer she had once been; she still had that loose-limbed leggy gait that she had when they took her away. I had not known she had once been a dancer until her trial. But you could see it now. Even after all the years of imprisonment, Emma Moon still had the easy grace of a woman who had moved her body for a living, right up until the time she met Terry Gatti. Her fair hair was pulled back into a loose ponytail. She looked like a beautiful woman who was getting older and who was done with caring too much about the way she looked. She was a striking-looking woman, and you had to look closely for her scars, for the wear and tear of prison. Most prisoners carry what they call a small props bag on their release – a bag that contains the personal property they had with them when they first checked in.

But Emma Moon did not carry one of those sad little bags. Instead she had an entourage, including a large, shaven-headed man to carry her props bag for her, and who hovered by Emma Moon's side like a guard dog.

'That's the screw who fell for Emma,' Whitestone

said. 'Luka-something. Luka the boyfriend. Luka the former warden who got sweet on Emma despite everything. You know – Luka being a prison officer, and married with children, and Emma Moon doing a long stretch, and all of that.'

DC Basu looked shocked. 'An ex-warden is her boyfriend?'

'A maybe-boyfriend. I don't know how much use she will have for him now she's out.'

When prisoners get out after a long stretch, their clothes invariably look like they are from a time capsule – the dead fashion choices of long ago. But Emma Moon wore some kind of white boiler suit, like a character from *A Clockwork Orange*, or as if she had some manual work to do, and it was impossible to tell if it was some kind of style statement or purely functional.

There were two women with her. A feral-looking girl with lank brown hair, wide-eyed and nervous, still childlike at maybe thirty, and a tall, thin beauty who looked as if she was having a bad day, or bad few years, who looked vaguely familiar from that time when it was all the rage for models to look as though they were unwell.

'Oh, I do love a bit of heroin chic,' Bear laughed, and Whitestone shot him a look, shutting him up.

'Emma's entourage,' she said. 'The *Vogue* model is Summer something. And the Artful Dodger is Roxy. I can't remember what they were inside for. But that's where they met Emma Moon.'

There was also a floppy-haired, red-faced man in his sixties, holding some notes, ready to say a few words.

'Who's the haircut?' Whitestone said. 'Is that Emma's pet peer?'

'Yes, that's Daniel Nevermore,' I said. 'Lord Nevermore.'

I recognised him from the byline picture in the clipping at the Black Museum, but with ten years on the clock.

The maybe-boyfriend, the three women, the peer – they all stayed half a step behind Emma Moon as she strode towards where the world was waiting for her. As the media pack shouted their questions, Emma Moon seemed to exhale with an infinite weariness, her pale-blue eyes moving across them with the special patience that only comes from hard time.

She turned to her entourage to confer, and I looked at our two new recruits and saw they were wondering what all the fuss was about, and if Whitestone and I were ever going to get around to investigating the odd murder.

Lord Nevermore stepped up to the forest of microphones.

'The case of Emma Moon represents the most egregious travesty of justice in recent memory,' he began, with the slow, heavy cadence of the practised public speaker.

Whitestone wrinkled her nose. 'Egregious?'

I shrugged. *Search me*. But I guessed it wasn't a compliment.

Bear and Sita exchanged a look.

'Egregious,' said Bear, and gave a small self-conscious cough. 'Conspicuously bad, flagrantly shocking.'

Whitestone and I watched the big Bar Italia TV in rapt silence. Our university-educated probationers exchanged another look that they were still too new and young and nervous to express.

Why the feeding frenzy about some old con who just got out?

'The criminal world hasn't had a lot to look up to in recent years,' Pat Whitestone said, never taking her eyes from the screen, answering their unspoken question. 'But a lot of people admire Emma Moon. Most villains would sell their old mum for a few years off their sentence. And Emma Moon's a hero to some because she stayed schtum. That old-school *omerta*. She's the last of the line. The honourable crook. The one who didn't talk. The one who didn't chuck the others under the bus for an easier life.' Pat Whitestone was a small, compact woman, and she smiled faintly as she nodded at the screen. 'Emma kept the code, and behaved with honour, and gave up the best years of her life.' She looked at our young detectives, as if they might learn something today. 'Because that's the way it's meant to be among the criminal fraternity, but very rarely is.'

Lord Nevermore was stepping back, a sign of the experienced public speaker. Be brief, be sincere, be seated. There were tears shining in his eyes.

Emma Moon stepped forward. The media pack surged

closer and the two women in her entourage, the skinny girl and fallen supermodel, instinctively put themselves between Emma Moon and the rest of the world.

She's more than admired, I thought. She's worshipped.

There was scuffling chaos and while we were waiting for order to be restored, the BBC cut away from the shambolic press conference to give the day some context.

But context for the crimes of Emma Moon was thin on the ground because they could not broadcast the faces or mention the names of Terry Gatti and his crew of armed robbers because they were all innocent men in the eyes of the law.

Instead we were shown the façade of the big house in Belgravia, and the faces of the two men who died on the night – the professional bodyguard, and the unlucky gardener.

And we saw archive footage of the safe the size of a coffin when it was discovered open and empty at a farm in the Cotswolds.

And then – inevitably – there was the old photograph of Emma Moon being arrested, and the serious face of the terrified young police officer who had put the cuffs on her.

'You were so young, Max.' Pat smiled.

Our two Direct Entry Detectives made no comment, for they did not seem to understand that the uniformed officer in that old photograph was me. The young are incapable of imaging just how fleeting youth is, I reflected philosophically, sipping my triple espresso.