

Chapter 4

'I want everything you've got on June Bradley. Previous, birth certificate, hospital records, doctor's appointments, the bloody lot. If you have a postcard signed from her, I want to see it on my desk before the end of the day!'

The sound of Howard's voice reverberated around the brown-painted walls of CID. The silence could be pricked with a pin as the unenthusiastic, slow-moving bodies of his colleagues infuriated him further.

'Chop, chop lads. Get a bloody move on!'

The DCI perched on his desk, wooden panels creaking under the heavy weight. He surveyed the room with an eagle eye, keen to rage at anybody willing to trial his aggression. All of a sudden, a cackle from the corridor caught his attention. Quickly, the DCI moved across the room, pulling open the iron office door and poking his head out into the dimly lit hallway. Two men stood before him, both of them with boyish grins slapped across their faces.

'DS Milton, DC Lewthwaite, what's happening out here?'

They looked at each other, a truce of silence forming in their gaze.

'Come on boys,' laughed Howard, stepping forward and letting the door close behind him. 'I can take a joke.'

Lewthwaite coughed, then his guilty smile returned.

'Look what Andy found on Brookes' desk sir,' he sniggered snatching something from behind Milton's back. Howard squinted as the DC held out a piece of paper. It was a photograph of a young woman. She was sitting in the corner of a bay window, cuddled up with a book, looking out into the street. She was slim, with dark curly hair falling to her shoulders, half tucked behind

her elven-like ears. Her small brown eyes matched the freckles that danced on her cheeks, illuminating the wide smile directed straight at the camera. Howard thought she looked happy.

‘It’s his bird!’ shouted Milton, stabbing a finger right into the centre of the polaroid. ‘The one he thinks we don’t know about.’

Howard pushed himself off of the wall.

‘You got a girl, Lewis?’ he asked, thick eyebrows furrowed.

‘Urm...well, yes? Sir,’ replied Lewthwaite.

‘Poor love.’

Unimpressed by their juvenile spying the DCI turned away, leaving them giggling like children in the hallway. Milton fiddled in his pocket and brought out a packet of Marlboros, offering one to the DC.

‘Cheers mate,’ Lewthwaite said, flicking his lighter. ‘Can’t believe he’s going with a bloody Paki!’

The words had barely left his mouth before the DCI was looming over him again.

‘What did you just say?’

Lewthwaite lit the cigarette and blew out a ring of smoke.

‘Want one, Sir?’ Milton asked.

Howard declined.

‘His bird,’ Lewthwaite continued. ‘She’s a Paki.’

Laughter lines wrinkled around his eyes as he inhaled again.

‘No wonder he’s keeping her a bloody secret, eh?’

Howard gritted his teeth, 'I don't like that word, Detective Constable.'

The DC's happy demeanour dropped in an instant. Milton chuckled, fiddling with the roll up between his forefinger and his thumb.

'You haven't got one hidden away at home have you, Sir?' he joked.

The noise of Howard's fist landing against the iron lockers was deafening.

'If I ever hear language like that in my department again, I will happily see you both back in uniform quicker than you can say 'demoted', do you understand me?'

Silence fell in the corridor.

'Do you?' Howard repeated, louder this time.

The men both nodded, cigarettes shaking in their hands.

'Right.'

Howard stepped away and straightened his tie.

'Milton,' he snapped. 'Give me that.'

DS Milton quickly deposited the photograph into the DCI's outstretched palm and scampered away down the corridor with the bewildered DC not far behind him. Howard turned the picture over, softly smoothing out the bent edges with the tips of his fingers. On the back of the polaroid in cursive writing, he noticed a caption.

'Rani, 17 Kingsdene Gardens, 1974,' he read aloud, flicking back to look at the young woman's face again.

'Sir?'

Howard quickly pocketed the photograph. He turned to see Brookes standing in the doorway of the station, car keys in hand.

‘Hrmm?’ Howard replied.

‘I brought Mrs Bradley in to see you,’ he said, removing his coat and hanging it over his arm.

‘She’s waiting in the canteen.’

Following him, Howard re-entered the office.

‘The canteen?’ he asked, picking up a file that had been left on his desk. ‘No interview rooms free?’

Brookes shook his head.

‘It’s not that, Sir,’ he explained, holding the door open for them both to pass into the south hallway. ‘She refused to come with me. I only managed to get her in the car because I promised she could have the last packet of custard creams.’

The two of them stopped just before the archway into the canteen.

‘Good thinking, Brookes,’ Howard said, fingering the paperwork in his arms. ‘We’ll do the interview in there.’

‘Right you are, Sir.’

Brookes went to walk on through, but Howard held him back by the scruff of his collar.

‘S-Sir?’ he spluttered.

The DCI reached into his pocket and reproduced the photograph. Brookes’ eyes widened whilst his cheeks flushed crimson.

‘Sir, how did you find...why have you got...what are you-’

‘She looks like a sweet girl,’ Howard remarked. ‘Look after her.’

He pressed the polaroid into Brookes’ hand and without another word, walked into the canteen.

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‘Mrs Bradley, it’s lovely to see you again.’

Howard pulled out a red plastic chair from underneath the grease stained table and sat down.

‘Oh, not bloody you again! I’ve had enough of this, I want to go home.’

Nana June huffed loudly, refusing to look at the DCI.

‘Come now June, don’t be like that,’ Howard soothed, rolling up his coat sleeves. ‘We even brought you a present.’

Brookes appeared at her side with a saucer in hand, piled high with a tower of yellow biscuits.

‘Oh,’ she mumbled, reaching out and snatching one before the DC had had the chance to put them down.

‘Now June, I just have a few questions,’ began Howard, opening up the paper folder in front of him.

‘What’s that?’ Nana June barked, jabbing her forefinger at the document.

She looked up and into Howard’s eyes. They were shining, a bright golden brown that matched the freckles all down his nose. She wasn’t impressed.

‘This, June, is a copy of your birth certificate.’

Howard’s matter-of-fact tone had Brookes stifling a silent laugh.

‘What the bloody ‘ell have you got that for?’ Nana June shouted, reaching across the table in a bid to seize it from the DCI’s hands. Howard was too quick, however, and pulled back.

‘We just wanted to have a little nosey through your history, that’s all. And there has been *quite* a history, isn’t that right June?’

‘Bugger off.’

‘Born in County Kerry, 1915 to Kiernan and Moira Doyle. You grew up on a farm estate, just outside the Bridia Valley, and moved to England in 1946 to have your first child, Peggy. Now presuming we know-’

‘She wasn’t my first.’

‘I’m sorry?’

Nana June fidgeted in her chair, ‘it’s bloody freezing in here.’

‘June.’ Howard leant a hand across the table.

Nana June rolled her eyes and sighed.

‘Don’t it say it in there? Margaret...Peggy, wasn’t...isn’t my first child. We had another. Six years before her.’

‘And does this child have a name?’ Howard asked, his ears pricking up.

Nana June glared at him, ‘Sebastian.’

Howard leapt up from the table, and jumped towards Brookes.

‘Go back to the records, get the lads in the office to look for a Sebastian Bradley. The maternal uncle is an easy suspect in a family-knit kidnapping. I want Sebastian found, I want his address, his family, his job, I want everything. Get on it, Brookes.’

With a swift nod Brookes jogged out of the canteen and down the south hallway again.

‘Right, thank you for that June. Now where were we?’

‘You won’t find him.’

Nana June’s croaky voice was hardly audible over the clinking of crockery and raucous conversations from the surrounding tables.

‘Will you lot keep it down!’ the DCI bellowed, standing on his chair and addressing the room.

‘We are trying to carry out an investigation over here.’

‘But we’re on our dinner break?’ piped up an anonymous voice from the crowd.

Howard’s stare turned to ice.

‘Eat on your own time. Go on, out of here, the lot of you!’

After a few angry whispers and disapproving looks, the canteen soon cleared out and Howard sat alone with Nana June.

‘Sorry June, say that again for me.’

Nana June looked up, an eerie smile playing at the corners of her biscuit-crumb coated mouth.

‘You. Won’t. Find. Him.’

‘Sebastian?’

Nana June nodded.

‘Or Christopher?’

The smile turned to disgust.

‘Sebastian,’ she snapped, throwing a custard cream down at the plate.

Howard nodded, leaning back in his chair and placing his hands behind his head.

‘I wouldn’t be so sure of that, June. This is CID. We get cases like this every week. You’d think finding long-lost family would be like looking for a needle in a haystack. Not here. We have

special ops on these incidents, highly trained to find exiled family members, so don't think you can hide him. We will find him, and soon.'

A heavy silence hung in the air as Nana June inhaled and exhaled loudly.

'Unless,' Howard started, 'unless you already know where he is?'

The DCI smiled at the old woman, he had her right where he wanted her.

'In which case, that would help us out.'

'I know where he is,' she said. Her squinting eyes burrowed deep into Howard's glare.

'Then won't you tell us? It'll move the case right along, and we can carry on giving Christopher our full attention.'

Nana June sighed and leant forward. She splayed her fingers out across the table, the long thin bones tapping against the wood surface. Her ivory coloured skin looked grey in the harsh lighting, and the thick wrinkles in her face were deep set, showing her age.

'June, I really think this would be for the best if-'

'He's at section 24, on the Finborough Road.'

Howard sat up, confusion clouding his mind.

'I don't understand. Is that a house, an office...?'

Nana June stared at him, her eyes red and watery.

'It's the Northampton Cemetery.'

A window in the far corner of the canteen shuddered in the wind. The single-glazed glass moved in its pane, fighting with the ferocious breeze outside that sourced the cold draft floating through

the station. Howard dropped his gaze from the old woman and began to shuffle through his papers again.

‘I see.’

Nana June sniffed hard.

‘I...I didn’t realise, June. I apologise.’

‘He were only three.’

Nana June’s voice had softened, and she stared into the distance as if addressing an old friend from the past. ‘Drowned. In the bath.’

Howard fidgeted in his seat.

‘I only left him with Harry for an afternoon, but he drank ya see, Harry did. So...well. You can imagine what happened.’

The echo of a heart-wrenching sob resonated around the room. Howard took a tartan handkerchief from his pocket and handed it to the old woman, who took it gratefully.

‘June...you’re here because I need to talk to you about Christopher,’ Howard said softly.

‘Oh hell, we’ve been through this, I-’

‘Think of Peggy, June. This is *her* little boy...’

Howard’s words punctured her like a pin in a balloon. She blew her nose loudly, then placed her hands in her lap and looked up.

‘What do you want to know?’

‘Okay so, we now know that Peggy works in The Fox and Goose Inn on Penfold Street, which is just a ten-minute walk from their house and, actually, only five minutes from the park where Christopher was last seen. Michael Walters, Christopher’s father, and Peggy are no longer together but are yet to be divorced. I asked June and she told me that Peggy had Christopher very young, at 17, so they’ve had a tough old time of it recently. Michael is no longer in the picture, but apparently, and this is what June said so we’ll have to fact check it, he put out a restraining order against Peggy in 1973, so two years ago, due to ‘uncontrollable and obsessive behaviour’.’

‘Peggy never mentioned that...’

‘Well, why would she Brookes? You wouldn’t go around announcing it. Anyway, June said that although Peggy has been refused the right to see Michael, she, June I mean, has been in contact with him for a few years now. It seems that Mr Walters is keen to keep up with Christopher, even though he can’t actually see him, and we know that because June has been taking money from Michael since Christopher was three years old. ‘Housekeeping’ she calls it, to keep up with the extra mouth to feed, clothes, shoes, and what not. Peggy doesn’t know this because June doesn’t want to upset her.’

Brookes held his hand in the air, as if a child in a classroom.

‘Yes?’ Howard said, exasperated.

‘Did you ask her about her whereabouts yesterday afternoon?’

Howard closed his eyes and took a deep breath.

‘Urm...no, Brookes. Didn’t get that far I’m afraid. Mrs Bradley...June, was rather upset by the end of our meeting so I let her go home.’

‘But we still don’t know anything more about that boy from the street?’ The DC mused, flicking through the notes he had made throughout Howard’s briefing.

‘Indeed we do not Brookes, but I intend to pull June in later this week and question her further. Now, I don’t think it was her. Little old lady can’t walk five minutes with that dodgy hip, that doesn’t mean she’s not involved though. Our best bet is to find Michael Walters and bring him in ASAP. He is our prime suspect.’

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ISABEL WYATT