

SEVERAL WEEKS BEFORE IT ALL BEGAN

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“I don’t expect you to spy on DCI Webber, not as such, I just want to hear about any... unusual behaviour.”

“What sort of behaviour?”

Superintendent Steven Bruce hesitated, looking down at his manicured hands, clasped together on the desk.

“You’ll know it when you see it, Sergeant.”

DS Natasha Keeler squirmed uncomfortably on the fabric covered office chair, intimidated by the Divisional Superintendent’s imposing frame behind his desk. The proud smile she had brought into the office quickly faded into an uncertain frown.

“I applied to be assigned to DCI Webber because of his reputation and experience, sir, and I am very grateful to have been made up to Detective Sergeant so quickly, but I... er... feel very uncomfortable about this.”

Bruce inhaled, deeply and slowly, then smiled, like a salesman.

“Henry Webber is Scotland Yard’s most successful Inspector, a brilliant man with a fantastic record.” He paused.

“Did you know that he’s an active member of Mensa – the organisation for people with exceptionally high IQs?”

“No, sir.”

Bruce leaned back in his creaking desk chair, studying Natasha’s fresh, lightly freckled face.

“I don’t know if I can do this, sir,” she said apologetically.

Bruce pressed the fingertips of each hand together meticulously in front of his face.

“Look, I need someone to... to win his confidence and get to know him... to get inside his head.”

“There must be more experienced officers for this, sir.”

“There are, but Henry, er DCI Webber, is a very closed person.”

Natasha sat back and sighed, folding her hands in her lap.

“You want me to play the dumb blonde?”

Bruce raised his eyebrows in a non-committal way.

“I have every confidence in your abilities. That’s why you’re now our youngest Detective Sergeant, congratulations.” Bruce smiled. “Let’s keep it very informal, shall we? Anything... out of the ordinary, just give me a call, OK?”

It is from the midst of this putrid sewer that the greatest river of human industry springs up.

Here it is that humanity achieves for itself both perfection and brutalization.

Alexis de Tocqueville 1835

ONE

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London, August 2011

It should have been a straightforward murder case for any senior CID officer worthy of his stripes. After all, how could Senior Investigating Officer Henry Webber ever have known that the victim, a greying man in his late forties, neatly dressed in a blue, crushed velvet jacket with contrasting bow tie, found in Greenwich Park with a single gunshot wound to his forehead, would expose the Nazi blood that flowed unwillingly through his own veins.

The unfortunate victim, discovered barely thirty yards away from the Greenwich Meridian beneath a towering old Turkey oak tree would ultimately reveal one of the best kept and darkest secrets of the twentieth century; something that would have made Charles Darwin turn in his grave; something that would change Henry's life irrevocably.

"Don't you think he looks... different?" Henry Webber said, inclining his head slightly to one side as he studied the body's pose against the gnarled trunk of the mighty tree through narrowed eyes.

Henry stood over six feet tall and wore his tousled mane of dark brown hair long and bushy on his prominent head, though it was now stuffed into the constraints of a hooded

forensic suit. His peacock-blue eyes darted about within a sharply-hewn face.

“Do you mean the velvet jacket, the orange bow tie, or the hole in his head?” Natasha Keeler asked.

Natasha’s elegant frame craned over the victim, studying him closely with her gloved hands clasped behind her slim waist, ensuring that she did not touch anything. Even in a bloated, pale blue forensic suit, Natasha managed to look alluring.

“Watch where you stand, Sergeant, you’re straying off the CAP!” the duty crime scene manager said sharply, watching protectively over his crime scene as Natasha bobbed around the body. “Get back!”

Natasha spun round to face him, embarrassed.

“I’m sorry, it’s my first murder scene,” she said.

“I know,” Henry said, leaning towards her discreetly. “We must all tread the exact same common approach path to the body, as described by the person who found it, to minimize forensic contamination of the scene, you see.”

Natasha was Henry’s first female Sergeant, something he was still adjusting to, perhaps evoking within him the urge to shield her from CSM Danny Burman’s brusqueness. Together, they retreated to the edge of the taped cordon.

Natasha glanced around at the feverish activity of the blue-suited SOCOs. One was crouched over a tripod, like a hunchback, diligently photographing and videoing the entire crime scene. Others brushed for trace evidence, searching every square inch around the body. Burman, still glaring malevolently at Natasha, turned and approached Henry.

“The cordon is now enforced and the entire park is closed,” he said, his jowly, pock-marked cheeks wobbling like jelly

behind the surgical face mask within his hooded suit. He turned back to face the body. “Looks like the shot was fired at close range.”

“Yep,” Henry agreed. “Gunpowder and scorch marks clearly visible on his skin. Ballistics coming?”

Burman nodded. Overhead, singing skylarks frolicked in an almost faultless blue sky as the spicy scent emanating from a nearby hedge of Honey Perfume roses freshened the crisp morning air. Trudging up slowly from the Naval College was the blue, forensic-suited figure of a short, dumpy person, gender indeterminate from such a distance, carrying an aluminium flight case that reflected the sunlight rhythmically with each laboured footstep.

“DCI Webber?” said the man once he had arrived, his eyes flitting uncertainly from Burman’s pocked face to the wrinkled, textured skin that Henry wore. “Are you the SIO?”

“That would be me,” Henry said extending a hand. The two men shook hands through double layers of squeaking latex gloves.

“I’m Dr Longstaff, Home Office pathologist. We’ve not met before. May I?”

Henry held his arms out wide in a welcoming gesture and nodded. Natasha backed away slightly as she watched Longstaff approach the body.

“Why isn’t the forensic tent up yet?” Longstaff barked, his accusatory eyes seeking out the crime scene manager.

“They’re coming,” Burman said, contrite.

In contrast to his name, Longstaff was short and stocky with a round, marshmallow face that peered out from within the forensic hood.

“I would hazard that, given the poor man’s great big beard

and velvet jacket, we should have a good chance of finding some trace evidence left behind by his assailant. I believe passionately in Locard,” Longstaff said, without looking up.

Natasha glanced at Henry.

“Locard was a French forensic scientist who elegantly described the principle that everyone entering a crime scene will both leave something incriminating behind, and take something incriminating away with them. It is simply up to forensics to find that evidence,” Henry explained. “Which is why Burman doesn’t want you anywhere near the body,” he whispered in her ear.

“What do we know?” Longstaff said, diligently taking samples for DNA analysis from the victim’s neck before combing the beard.

Henry drew a deep breath, uncomfortable in the hot, plasticized paper suit.

“He was found at six am by a passer-by walking a dog, slumped as you see him against the trunk of this oak. Presence of dew on clothing and beard suggests he has been here since yesterday evening, probably not earlier than eleven, though, as it rained before that and his clothing is not soaking wet through,” Henry replied, rubbing his nose through the mask.

Longstaff nodded as he worked.

“Very good, Inspector,” he said looking up at the tree. “My goodness, did you know that this is a Turkish and not an English oak? Give me a hand here, please.”

Longstaff was trying to manoeuvre the body so that he could measure the temperature of the liver, a reliable way of determining core temperature in a recently dead body. Henry stepped forward and with his large muscular hands helped Longstaff and Burman to roll the body onto its back. The initial stiffness of rigor mortis was already setting in, making the body feel wooden beneath

Henry's hands as it turned over awkwardly, like a mannequin, arms and legs splayed at hideous angles. Bits of bark and grass dripped off the velvet jacket as a crusted mass of blood, hair and brain revealed a gaping hole at the rear of the victim's head.

"You are correct, Doctor: *Quercus cerris* is actually native to southern Europe and Asia, but also happens to be plentiful here at Greenwich," Henry said. He glanced at the tree's languid branches extending high above him.

Longstaff said nothing, registering only unexpected surprise in his eyes, and inserted the thermometer through the victim's skin, like pushing a skewer into a leg of pork.

"Have you established his identity yet?" Longstaff asked.

"No," Henry said.

"Here you go then," Longstaff said triumphantly, as he produced a brown leather wallet from within the victim's jacket.

Natasha took it in her gloved hands and opened it, flicking through the compartments.

"Sixty-odd pounds in cash, three credit cards, a return tube ticket for zones one and two, dated yesterday, and a driver's licence. Professor Jeremy Haysbrook, forty-nine... no eight."

Henry shifted his weight to one leg, bending the other slightly at the knee.

"So, it wasn't a mugging. Professor of what?"

Longstaff provided the answer as he held aloft a staff card found in another pocket.

"London School of Economics."

It was nearing nine and the park was getting warmer. Flies began to buzz around the body, attracted by the ripe odours of death.

"I think we should get the forensic tent up and lock down

the scene now, don't you?" Longstaff muttered irritably, flicking away a fly which had settled on his brow.

"What do you think is different about him?" Natasha asked.

"Don't you see it?" Henry pointed towards the dead man. "Look at the size of his head."

Longstaff straightened and looked at the victim's head. Burman, too, studied Professor Haysbrook's broken skull. Natasha knitted her eyebrows.

"It's a pretty big head," Burman grunted.

"That is an above average-sized cranium all right," Longstaff said, nodding in agreement, "Probably why he is a Professor at LSE."

"Was," Henry said, turning away from the body and Longstaff's hunched blue profile. He stroked his chin, thinking aloud. "He met someone here last night. Look how much closer to the Royal Observatory he is than the Naval College down below. They were probably walking through the park together. He could not have felt threatened, so he most likely either knew, or certainly trusted, his killer."

"Could he have been killed elsewhere and moved here?" Natasha suggested.

Henry pursed his lips thoughtfully.

"Possibly, and cannot be excluded until we see the pattern of lividity on his body, though there is quite a lot of blood on the grass around the tree, suggesting he was shot here, plus I see no drag marks on his shoes or trousers that might indicate the body had been moved."

Henry craned his neck to look past Longstaff, double-checking the points he was making.

"I see no sign of the bullet on the bark of the tree, though," he added.

“Me neither,” Burman concurred as he closely examined the gnarled bark of the Turkey oak. “SOCOs will continue to search.”

Longstaff extracted the thermometer that he had inserted into Haysbrook’s liver. He stared at it and made mental calculations wordlessly, his round face framed like a nun’s by the forensic suit.

“A rough approximation, assuming last night was not any colder than ten degrees and calculating loss of core temperature at one degree per hour, would put time of death at eight to ten hours ago. Picking up on your last point, Inspector, from what I can see of his post mortem lividity, I would say he died pretty much in the position in which we found him.”

“Suicide?” Natasha ventured.

“Without a note, or a weapon, with an entrance wound smack bang in the middle of his forehead – you try that with your hand holding a pistol,” Henry said.

Natasha strained her wrist around to the front of her head, allowing space to accommodate a weapon. It was very awkward, but just possible.

“In any case, why come out here with a return tube ticket?” Henry said, looking into the distance. “Dr Longstaff will check his hands for gunpowder residue anyway, standard procedure, just to be sure.”

He placed his hands on his hips and looked about the park from the Royal Observatory up on the hill down to the Thames end where Christopher Wren’s imposing white Naval College buildings flanked the great expanse of green. Trees lined every pathway and both The Avenue and Croom’s Hill Road, just beyond the park boundary, would have offered sanctuary for

Haysbrook's killer. Henry's keen eyes missed little as his gaze flicked from one point of focus to another.

"I'll see you at the post mortem, Doc, if I may?" Henry said.

"Yes, you're welcome. Tomorrow morning. King's College."

Henry peeled the forensic hood off his head as he and Natasha walked away.

"I hope you don't mind me asking," Henry said, glancing at her.

She looked up at him.

"I hear that you're recently divorced."

Natasha flushed and looked away momentarily.

"Yes."

He hesitated, meeting the determined look in her disarming eyes. "All I need to know... is your mind firmly on the job?"

She frowned. "Of course, sir."

Henry seemed satisfied and smiled warmly while Natasha squirmed.

"Good, because your first task as my new Detective Sergeant is to track down every bit of CCTV footage you can find. Then I want you to come to the post mortem with me. I'm really intrigued to know what's inside that great big head of his."

TWO

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South Bank Genealogy Services
Bevington Street
Bermondsey
London

Henry Webber
Flat 352, Howland Quay
Salter Road
Docklands

Dear Mr Webber,

According to your instructions, we have been researching your lineage using both the information which you provided and our own investigative work. We pride ourselves in being able, in most cases, to trace the ancestry of individuals back at least three to four generations, often considerably more.

Therefore it is most frustrating to report that we have been unable to trace even one generation of your ancestry. We have tried using several variations of your surname 'Webber': the English derivatives are 'Webb',

‘Webster’ and ‘Weaver’. Though English Webbers can be traced back on these isles to the thirteenth century, we are unable to make any connections in this regard for you. Other variations of Webber include ‘Weber’, ‘Webar’, ‘Webor’ and ‘Webermann’ – which, as you may know, are German in origin.

You had indicated that you believe your childhood days to have been spent around London, with your earliest memory being a visit to Brighton Pier when you were about six years old. Despite this we have been unable to trace your parents, foster parents, or guardians, whose records appear to have been erased. This is most unusual.

The first record we have found of your existence is enrolment in a primary school in Hammersmith under the name ‘Heinrich Weber’, which does lend some weight to the possibility of German origins, as mentioned above. After two terms your name was changed to ‘Henry Webber’, when you were moved to a small and exclusive school in Durham, some two hundred miles north. I don’t mind admitting that we are extremely proud to have uncovered that information, Mr Webber, as your past is more than a little shrouded in mystery.

As you are in possession of a British passport, which was obtained for you when you were only five years old, you will be aware of the formal entries detailing date and place of birth, et cetera. We have tried to trace your records back to your registered birth town but without success. Many births registered between 1935 and 1946 in that area were either destroyed or lost at the end of

the war. Even though you were born in 1961, that regional birth registry took some time to recover, making it difficult for us to interpret our failure to locate evidence of your birth and registering parents.

As we are in the business of uncovering people's ancestral backgrounds, we understand how distressing and unsettling this unsatisfactory outcome must be for you. Please rest assured that we will continue to be on the lookout for clues and, should anything come to light, we will be in contact immediately.

I can only wish you the best of luck in finding what you are looking for.

Yours sincerely,

AR Duckworth (Director)

Henry cast his mind back to Brighton Pier, willing back that distant memory that had become for him one of those awful uncertainties: did he remember it because it was his earliest memory, or simply because it had become ingrained in him as his first memory?

What he could recollect was the warm sun on his face, the pebbled beach underfoot, laughter, happiness in the company of adults whose faces and identities he could no longer recall. A mother figure, no, not clearly. A father figure, again no. Ice cream, yes, he recalled ice cream, dripping down his hands beside the twinkling bells and organ music of brightly lit fairground rides on the pier, stretching out, it seemed to him, an awfully long way into the sea. He almost imagined he could smell candy floss and something smoky, rubbery.

Then, something unpleasant happened. He could see two

men, smiling, jovial. He remembered them holding hands, approaching him and offering a napkin to wipe the ice cream that dripped off his elbow on to his knees and sandaled feet. They seemed friendly, kind, yet he recalled the adults who were with him yelling at them and chasing them away, then pulling the ice cream off him roughly and telling him how bad those men were.

Men do not hold hands, he was told.

He did not understand. He wanted his ice cream back. What had he done? What had the two friendly men done?