



LEST YOU BE JUDGED

a novel by

DAVID HUTCHISON

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PROLOGUE

DEATH WAS THE LAST THING on Judge Pride's mind, but it was waiting for him patiently.

"Another brandy, judge?"

Replete, and lost in thought, the old judge said nothing, but gazed through the rain-streaked windows up to the illuminated castle, floating like a fairytale fort on an island in the night sky. He'd quite taken to having his evening meal at the Advocates Club. Despite semi-retirement, it kept him in touch with the gossip and chatter of his own kind, that select community of judges and lawyers, fellow practitioners in law.

Though no longer sitting in the High Court, his temporary bench suited him fine; he was still practising. And, even if the cases were not those grand ones he used to hear, he was still sitting in judgement over others, lesser people than himself. *His* voice, *his* take on the law, still carried weight. The extra money was to his liking too.

His plans for retirement had been well considered and, if those jumped-up fools in the City hadn't over-played their hand, well, he would be pottering in France now. He sighed. Who knew how life would turn out? Nobody ever knew for certain what was round the corner . . .

“Judge Pride?”

Leave me *alone*, was the first thought that came to mind; the man’s fussing – his very presence – was spoiling his thoughts, spoiling his evening. “No,” he snapped, “I’ll be heading home.”

Pushing away from the table, his fingers splayed against the heavy white linen, and he got to his feet unsteadily. One too many brandies.

As the server helped him into his coat, he looked out at the castle again. When had he been first taken by this splendid view, this symbol of the city’s power and authority? With a start he realised it must have been more than fifty years ago. He’d been a green lawyer then, devilling for Hector McKenzie, and the old man had proposed his membership.

McKenzie – an awful man with no *real* breeding, but a collection of select clients – had been of some use at the time. How time passes . . .

He became aware of the expectant server at his shoulder. “*What?*”

“I asked whether you wanted me to get you a taxi.”

“No . . . I’ll walk.”

“It’s a pretty rainy night, judge.”

He ignored him. Pretty, indeed; where on earth did the Club get these people? Glancing at the man by his side, he saw an obsequious nobody who would’ve been in short trousers when he’d first stood here, all those years ago.

Wrapped up, he left the club, stepping out into the sleety rain and noisy Friday night crowd on Princes Street. Strings of underdressed girls and packs of girlish boys whirled and whooped past him like jungle savages. Rain doesn’t seem to bother these common folk, he thought, it won’t bother me.

Reaching the corner, he headed up the gentle incline towards George Street.

The driver of the car double-parked on Frederick Street watched the judge pass, allowed him to get a distance ahead, then slowly followed, ignoring the horn blast from a car that had sped up at the rear and swerved past.

On George Street the judge took in the vulgar Christmas lights and milling young crowd that now frequented the bars of this once quiet, refined street and shivered. The mundane is taking over the world; all it takes is a little money for these little people to think they have a life.

As he stepped out to cross the street the car turned the corner. The driver flicked on the main beam and stamped hard on the accelerator. The needle of the rev counter briefly hit the red zone and, with the engine whining in complaint, the wide tyres spun on the wet road, then gripped.

Judge Pride was half-way across the street when the speeding car ploughed into him. His legs were broken before his head smashed off the bonnet and he was catapulted through the air, already dead when the heavy car crushed his body to the road.

With the accelerator now floored, the car fish-tailed in the wet before leaping forward, broad-siding a parked vehicle and almost hitting a young couple who were dancing in the street, a dangerous prelude to a night of youthful sexual adventure.

When the first patrol car arrived, the young policeman listened to the eye witnesses and radioed-in a hit and run. It was a damaged, large, dark blue, possibly black, Ford – then again, possibly a dark navy Nissan – headed west.

One thing people *were* sure of: the car had been going too fast; the old judge had never stood a chance.

ONE

STEEL TURNED INTO POLICE HEADQUARTERS at Fettes, feeling as if he’d never been away. Truth be told, time off meant nothing to him; he’d spent the Christmas break spinning his wheels. Now it was 2000, a new year, a new decade, a new century, and he glanced up at the building, looking for some kind of change. It, too, had been new once, but across the street Fettes College, “the Eton of the North” that preceded it by a hundred years, stood in lofty, permanent rebuke. It was Monday.

Stepping from the warmth of his car, he pulled his jacket tight against the bitter cold wind, and feeling sharp acid in

his stomach, reached deep into his pocket and found the comforting shape of a roll of Rennies.

A young policeman held the door for him. "Morning Chief Inspector."

Steel nodded; the constable looked no older than his son. He let the thought slide; he hadn't seen his son in years – he wouldn't look quite so young now.

Making his way along the corridor he saw the figure of Chief Superintendent Grieve approaching, balancing a coffee precariously on a pile of folders. Steel sighed; he wasn't five minutes in the door. It was impossible to avoid him, and in any case Grieve, who moved along the corridor like a slow earthmover, had him in his sights. "Morning Mike, well met. Happy New Year, eh? . . . Good break?" and without waiting for a reply, "My office. A word with you."

Allowing Grieve to pass, he followed him to his office. Apart from a potted plant on the window ledge which Grieve would fiddle with, and a framed photo of his daughter with her two sons, it was a spare room with three filing cabinets, a coat stand and nothing on the desk other than a computer screen, a sophisticated phone and an uncooperative Anglepoise which, Steel knew, exasperated Grieve every day. *He* would have broken it irretrievably to get a replacement.

"Now then," Grieve said, gingerly lowering the folders with their coffee on to his desk and settling his bulk into his seat, "sit down Mike. I'm glad you had a good break." He took a sip of coffee, pulled a face and shuffled through the folders. Finding the right one he looked up, "In your absence we found you a new bagman."

Steel said nothing and waited. He knew he'd lost a good Detective Sergeant in Brian when he had passed his exams and moved on. A replacement was necessary.

Grieve swivelled the folder round on the polished surface and slid it across the desk. "Robin Moss. Comes to us from Merseyside with good words."

Steel leaned in, flicked the folder open, and skimmed the front page. "What, a graduate on Accelerated Careers? I'm not going to be a mentor."

Grieve gave him a thin smile. "Like you have a choice, eh?"

"These rising stars are in and out, Bob. What's it now, under four years and they're off? There can't be any *real* learning in that time, and pretty soon they're on their way to a knighthood and you and me are saluting them."

"You're a dinosaur, Mike. Besides, Moss comes to us as a recent DS – Phase Two of the Development Programme, if you actually read anything that comes across your desk. There's already *been* real learning experience, and Merseyside isn't exactly soft experience either."

Steel sat back with a sigh. Brian had been a good Sergeant with plenty of years under his belt; now it was going to be uphill with a fast-track career policeman, having to show him the local ropes, wasting valuable time before real policing kicked in. He looked up to see Grieve containing his humour. "What?"

"Turn the page."

Steel flicked the page, and seeing the ID photo his head jerked up. "A *woman*? You're joking."

Grieve's laugh filled the room; Steel was making his morning. "As I said, a dinosaur. We employ women these days . . . I hear some of them have become doctors too."

Steel ignored the jibe. "Robin?"

"Ah, yes . . . I'll admit to being caught by that. Anyway, she comes to us very highly recommended. Leaving aside the graduate and Accelerated Career bits, she's apparently bright on the street, took part in a few important collars as a DC, speaks a couple of languages, knows Tai whatsit – "

"Aikido actually. A first kyu, I believe," huffily correcting him; he *did* read everything that came across the desk, if only with a brief glance.

Grieve held up a hand. "Whatever. Liverpool says she's a good copper and that's all we – you – need at this stage."

Steel took in the face filling the five by seven glossy before him. Apart from the open almond shaped grey-green eyes, which had met the photographer's lens evenly, he could read nothing there. She was easier on the eye than Brian, but, good copper? Time would tell. Hopefully, not *too* much time, for everyone's sake.

A knock at the door interrupted his thoughts.

Grieve glanced at his watch. "That'll be her now."

"Do I stand when she comes in?"

"Just behave yourself, that's all I ask – as a copper, if not as a human . . ." and he tailed off. "You need a bagman; Moss is it," and called out, "Come."

Steel stood to meet his new DS thinking, *Bagwoman*, surely.

The young officer entered and Steel gave her a quick appraisal. Slim, in her early thirties, with fringed chestnut hair cut round a strong featured face in a short, not unfashionable, style, and dressed in a dark blue trouser suit – work wear, not boardroom – over an off-white blouse, with a small gold cross at her neck. Attractive rather than pretty, he thought, and the Job hadn't etched any hard lines on her face. Yet. The only blemish he could see was the three inch scar that ran along her left jaw.

She leaned in to shake Grieve's extended hand, knowing she was being assessed. "Good morning sir. DS Moss reporting for duty."

"Morning Sergeant. You found us alright then," and with a small tilt of his chin, "This is your new DCI, Mike Steel."

Moss turned to him. Her handshake was firm and she made direct eye contact. "Pleased to meet you, sir. I'm looking forward to working with you."

Steel caught only the slightest trace of a Liverpudlian accent and thought she was presenting herself well. Then he remembered – the Accelerated Careers Development Programme carried several Leadership courses with it. She'd studied well.

"I've gone over your file at length Sergeant," Grieve said, "and I made a couple of calls. People down there speak well of you. You'll find Lothian and Borders a wee bit quieter than Merseyside . . . though, quiet's the way I like it."

As Moss knew, her file would comprise her performance at Hendon Police College in addition to her experience in Liverpool. She had learned fast, making Sergeant at the first attempt; her superiors would have made their notes in their own way, saying to Grieve what they wouldn't commit to paper. There would be no negatives with the positives, but file and comments were not for her eyes or ears. "I'm just hoping for the broadest experience sir."

The phone on Grieve's desk purred into life. Annoyed by the interruption, he stabbed a button. "Yes? What *is* it?"

"The Chief Constable on line three for you, sir."

Grieve picked up the handset. "Yes, sir . . . Well, I have DCI Steel with me, right now", then " *What?*" followed by "Very good, sir . . . of course, sir."

Replacing the handset with care, as if handling something incendiary, he looked up at Steel. "Get yourself to Barnton Meadows – Lord Mitchell of Warrender has been found murdered. And Mike, that was the Chief on the phone and I'll be reporting to him directly. You understand me. Tread gently – no heavy feet on this one, eh? – and let's see whether we can clear this up quickly."

Turning to Moss he said, "There's paperwork and a lot of *et cetera* we'll get to later. Stick close to Steel, amongst all else he's a good copper . . . hopefully you'll learn something in your time with him."

Moss, saying nothing, nodded and got to her feet.

TWO

THE DRIVE TO THE CRIME SCENE would be quick; a straight shot west on Ferry Road, through Davidson's Mains, north towards Cramond and then on to the other world of Barnton where, although it didn't exactly mix, Edinburgh's old money rubbed shoulders with the new.

While the newer housing clinging pretentiously to its outskirts had hijacked the name, Barnton itself was home to those – more often than not, generations of families – who owned, and ran, the city. It was a place of real wealth, real power but, in Edinburgh's way, its face was private; there was no show, no ostentation.

Steel saw Moss taking in the streets as they drove. "You'll find Edinburgh's quite different from Liverpool, you know."

Moss nodded. "Lord Mitchell . . . who and what was he?"

A High Court judge, which is going to make it difficult."

"How so?"

"You worked murder before?"

"No, sir."

Steel grunted. "Well, murder's a passionate crime and that, normally, makes it easy – we'd be looking for someone close whose passion has overflowed, has made them snap – someone slighted, a wife, a lover. Here we have decades of the judge's criminal cases and to add to that, we've got pressure from on high too."

“The Chief Constable?”

“Well, you heard. Grieve was certainly called by the Chief, but at this stage I don’t know whether someone had called *him*.”

“Sorry, I don’t follow.”

Steel gave her a quick mirthless smile. “You’re getting to move in rarefied air for your first day here, Moss. Me? I *try* to see every victim the same way – everyone was some mother’s child – but compared to an old down-and-out who dies after taking a kicking on a Friday night, this’ll be big . . . front page. And, who knows, maybe the Chief Constable and Lord Mitchell holidayed together, were in the same Lodge, or their wives played bridge together. Maybe all three, but I hope it’s none of them; it ends up as interference whichever way it arrives.”

Moss absorbed his words; more, she absorbed her DCI’s point of view. She was well aware crime may be democratic but policing it never was; thin resources would almost naturally flow to high-profile cases.

They reached the heart of Barnton, where most houses were set well back from the street, hidden from view. “This seems like a different world,” Moss said.

“In every way possible. If you haven’t got a soft touch, you’d better find it fast. In this area, we may not be dealing with someone who knows the Chief Constable, but you can be damned sure they’ll know someone who does. Think politics.”

Turning a corner they saw the judge’s house marked by two police cars at the gateway, their lights slowly flashing, and an Incident Command Vehicle already in place. As they drove up Moss saw, despite the stark winter trees, that this was one of those houses where you could barely see the roof from the street. Steel parked beside the ICV and they went inside.

The Sergeant working communications looked up. “Morning, sir.”

“Morning Ken. What do we have?”

“The body’s in an upstairs back bedroom, and the pathologist – it’s Knox – is in there now with the Crime Scene Examiners. I’ve sealed off the whole property to its perimeter and we’ll start going through the grounds for a fingertip search once the Examiners are satisfied with the house. So far there’s no sign of a break-in.”

“Who discovered the body?”

“Lady Mitchell,” and looking at his screen, “at eight twenty-five. She’d been visiting grandchildren in Crail over the weekend. Fife Constabulary is confirming.”

Steel nodded. “When did we get the treble nine?”

“O-nine hundred, sir.”

“Thirty-five minutes later? Anyone else in the house?”

“Living there? No, just Lord and Lady Mitchell.”

“Okay, thanks Ken. I’ll have a look,” and he reached for the mandatory coveralls. “By the way, this is DS Robin Moss, she comes to us from Merseyside.”

The Sergeant stood to shake her hand. “You’ll find it’s pretty awful over there I’m afraid, but welcome to Lothian and Borders, Robin.”

Steel and Moss crunched up the long gravel drive, taking in the house. It was a large, three storey, ivy-clad, honeyed sandstone house, built for a large family, with tall windows piercing the face and small windowed turrets at either end. “Mock Scots Baronial I believe,” said Steel. Moss glanced, but couldn’t tell whether he was being humorous or not.

Inside, they climbed a wide dark oak stairway which rose off the vast entrance hall, and at the first floor went down a panelled corridor, lined with heavy framed oil paintings of ancestors and hunts on the Scottish moors, and reached the bedroom. On entering, the first thing Steel noted was its size – it was at least three times the size of his living room – next, there was the smell: a combination of blood and faeces.

In silence, several Crime Scene Examiners were patiently taking stock of the room, checking all likely surfaces for fingerprints before retracing their steps for the unlikely ones and photographing every square foot. Their painstaking method reflected the cast-iron rule that every contact leaves a trace, and every time a crime scene was entered, *something* was left behind. Without doubt, somewhere in this room, there was evidence which would point directly to the killer.

Close to the bed the pathologist snapped his case shut and stood with difficulty, too overweight to be on his knees. Seeing Steel he peered over his glasses and called out theatrically, “Well, we meet again Stainless. Come in, come

close . . . come see Man's majestic handiwork."

He moved to one side and Steel and Moss saw the body. Or, the mess in which a body lay. As they moved towards the bed, the pathologist wheezed out, in an almost jocular tone, "Do you ever get the feeling Mondays should be banned Chief Inspector?"

Looking down, Steel felt a familiar jolt in his stomach and ignored it, but heard Moss's sharp intake of breath. Almost to the last inch, apart from where his bowels had evacuated, the sheets of the wide double bed were red with blood, and Lord Mitchell, his old body covered with cuts, lay red, naked and spread-eagled, wrists and ankles tied to the four bedposts.

"What can you tell me doctor?"

The pathologist gave him a grim smile. "Well, so far, I've counted eighteen *deep* wounds. There's more, but the body needs to be cleaned before I can be accurate. Most of the eighteen were deep enough to have him bleed to death – he would've died slowly – but," and he pointed to a deep gash in the neck, "this cut to the carotid was the killing one. You can be certain the killer was up to his armpits in blood at this point." He watched Steel absorb this, then continued, "Now, post mortem, there are these scores to the chest. All of which looks like they were made with a chisel or a sharpened screwdriver which, so far, your boys haven't found."

Steel and Moss peered into the chaos that had once been a High Court judge and could see two foot-high gouges scored deeply into the chest. "*Post mortem*?" asked Moss.

"That's what I said, my dear. Now, if you look at the penis, although it's difficult to see right now, there's a ligature tied tightly round it. When the body's clean I'll let the Examiners have pictures before I cut it off," and he smiled, "The cord that is. Right now I can't tell whether that was done before or after the killing blow but I can tell you he did have sex – or more precisely, he ejaculated – before he was killed; there's semen in the blood down there."

Steel was trying to organise his thoughts. "So, all this – the wrists and ankles tied, the ligature – was sexual?"

"*Steel*. How would *I* know? I can only tell you what I see, not how it came into being."

"I understand doctor. What I'm trying to determine is whether he knew his assailant or not."

Knox gave this a hollow laugh. "You mean there's a possibility the good judge had sex in this way and a third party did this?"

"A third party can be ruled out," Moss ventured, "if we can determine this was an activity which went wrong – it would be at the hands of someone Lord Mitchell actually knew."

"Again, I have no way of telling, although an assumption he knew his killer wouldn't be a wild one . . . but, I'll leave you to detect, Detective. Old as he was, he had sex – of some kind – and he was killed. I'll know more later."

"*When* was he killed?" asked Steel.

"Within the last twelve hours. Body temperature and progress of rigour suggests nine to ten. Look, I'll let you have my report as soon as . . . I know to you and me it's yet another body, statistic or whatever, but I do understand *who* this was. I'll be as quick as possible."

"Thanks, doctor."

The pathologist signalled to the mortuary attendants waiting patiently at the door, "I'm done here," and with a nod to Steel, he left.

Steel watched him go and turned to one of the Examiners. "Let me know if and when you find anything, right? Immediately – I don't want to wait on any paperwork."

Moss was looking down at the body, attempting to breathe deep, as Mitchell's vacant, sightless eyes stared past her to the ceiling. He seemed to have an angry look on his face. "There's something here sir; something I can't quite put a finger on . . . this is reminding me of something."

"Let's get out of here." With murder, Steel found that asking questions always acted as a shield from the awful truth before him. Now, with his appraisal of the *locus*, and initial questions asked, he needed to distance himself.

Moss resisted moving, although the way her heart was racing she was ready to run from the room. "Do these scores to the chest suggest anything?"

"No idea. Compared to the rest, they're very precise. They look like the start of noughts and crosses. Perhaps the killer got bored. Come on, let's go downstairs, we need to speak with Lady Mitchell."

"I can't imagine how she must have felt discovering this."

Steel looked at her; she would learn. "You could ask."

As they entered the high-ceilinged, thick-carpeted living room, with its dark, heavy antique furniture, polished surfaces, and the slow ticking of a clock, they were hit by a sense of stillness and, sitting at the heart of it, Lady Mitchell. The policewoman nodded at Steel and stood.

Coming into Lady Mitchell's vision Steel said, "Lady Mitchell, my name is Detective Chief Inspector Steel and this is Detective Sergeant Moss. I am sorry, but we need to ask you some questions."

Lady Mitchell, a slight bird-like woman, her face seemingly set in a permanent scowl, looked up, and Steel saw she was dry-eyed and very, very, still. "Please sit down Chief Inspector, Sergeant. Ask whatever you need."

"As I understand, you discovered Lord Mitchell this morning when you returned from Fife."

"Yes, that is correct."

"Can you remember at what time that was?"

"Yes, it was eight o'clock."

Steel glanced at Moss, "You're certain of that?"

"Yes, the car radio . . . Radio Four had just begun its news."

"I have a note you discovered Lord Mitchell at eight twenty-five and you called us at nine, Lady Mitchell." Moss heard softness in Steel's voice.

"You do? Yes, I'm sorry . . . I arrived home at eight and I discovered *that*, upstairs, later."

"And the twenty-five minutes?" Steel let his question hang in the stillness.

"I'm not sure Chief Inspector. Why?"

"Timings are important to us, that's all. So, when you discovered Lord Mitchell at eight twenty-five, you telephoned us at nine? Is that correct?"

"I don't remember."

"That's thirty-five minutes after you found Lord Mitchell."

"Well I'm sure you must be correct." There was a harshness to her voice now. "I *was* rather shocked to discover my husband murdered."

Steel changed tack. "I realise in your husband's position, he would have made many enemies over the years, but did you hear of anything recently? Anything unusual? Any threats your husband might have received?"

"Henry never discussed his work with me," and after a slight hesitation, "He never discussed *anything* with me; we had grown apart." She let the thought linger and Steel allowed the pause. "Yes, apart. I talked to him of divorce and he actually laughed at me." The stillness in the room had seemed to deepen. "He was a disgusting man . . . disgusting."

Steel said nothing, hoping for more, but she had retreated into self-contained silence. "We shall need to go through his papers Lady Mitchell, here and in his chambers. Now, is there anyone we should call? Someone who can be with you?"

"My daughter's coming for me. I shall spend some time with her in Crail until this . . . matter, is resolved."

Steel got to his feet. "Very well, Lady Mitchell. Please give the policewoman here a note of your address and a number where we can reach you. I *am* sorry for your loss."

Her head jerked up and she gave him a hard pitying stare. "Good Heavens, don't be *sorry* for me Chief Inspector – you may as well be sorry for a freed prisoner. I'm *glad* he's dead."

•

Steel and Moss walked slowly down the drive. He stopped and, popping a Rennie into his mouth, looked back at the house and the tall trees surrounding it and shook his head.

"Sir?"

"An eight-bedroomed house just for two people? *There's* a crime. Anyhow, what did you make of that?"

"A third party is a possibility."

Steel snorted. "What, he and Miss X are having sex, she comes home, finds him tied up and wreaks her revenge?"

"It's possible," Moss said, her voice dropping.

"Possible? Anything's *possible*, Moss. Where do you think Miss X is during all this – hiding in a cupboard, gone out for milk?"

"Could be *Mr. X*."

Steel laughed. "Good point, there's no telling, but I don't think there's a third party involved. Hopefully, Forensics will find something."

“Perhaps the sex play would’ve got him into a vulnerable position which would allow for a third party,” Moss persisted.

“A *set-up* for a killing? Come on Moss, Grieve told me you were bright. That’s *far* too convoluted . . .” he paused and looked back at the house, “. . . although, right now, it’s all a bit convoluted. I’d say the killer is male, although a female could inflict that sort of damage, especially as the weapon appears to be something of the sharp chisel variety and the victim is tied up, unable to defend himself. And that . . . is that a male female thing in itself? Was it even sexual – or does it just *look* that way? We could be looking for Mr. X. or perhaps we leave Miss X and Mr. X out of it entirely because we’ve just spoken with the killer.”

“She wasn’t exactly the grieving widow, but wouldn’t she visibly *be* the killer?”

Steel nodded; he was only thinking aloud, sounding out scenarios. “She called him disgusting, or was that what he was up to? I just don’t see her involving herself in whatever the hell was going on in there and then killing him. She didn’t have the time and I don’t think there’s enough hatred in her to do what we saw . . . she’s dispassionate rather than passionate, and what we saw was the result of *some* sort of passion.”

“Passion?”

Steel turned to her. “When you’re working with me, Moss, you’re going to have to pay attention. I *told* you, murder’s a passionate crime. We’re looking for someone who, in some manner, was close to the judge. There’s degrees to close of course, but ninety percent of the time the killer is known to the victim. That fits Lady Mitchell but only in that she was his wife. There was perhaps a time when she could’ve, but I don’t think now. And you’re right, it would be written all over her if she’d killed him.” He sighed. “Then again, there’s those timings of hers . . .”

As they continued down the drive, Steel glanced at his new Sergeant; fast-track cop or not, she *was* meant to be learning. “What was your take on the bedroom?”

“Take, sir?”

“Yes, *take*. What did you get from it?” He saw she had no idea what he was talking about. “You’ve got eyes Moss, but you’ve got to understand what it is you’re seeing.”

“Sir?”

“The bedroom was single occupancy . . . a double bed but only one set of pillows. Out of all the items in the room, there was nothing there that was Lady Mitchell’s. No jewellery, no items of clothing, no cosmetics. Nothing. A lot of couples have separate bedrooms but, *if* you’ve read the room properly, you’ll not be misled by a wife or husband claiming a loving relationship where none exists and have them coming on to you as the grieving spouse.

“I wasn’t exactly *expecting* the response we got from Lady Mitchell, but it fits. I doubt she spent *any* time there.” He saw she had, eventually, caught his meaning. “It’s not enough just to look Moss, you’ve got to learn *how* to look. You’re a detective – don’t take *anything* at face value.”

“Understood sir.”

Steel hoped she did. “This is not a time for sharp focus – Forensics’ll do that – at this stage you’ve got to take everything in, even things that appear to have no connection. Question everything, learn something– ”

“Answer nothing?”

“*What?*”

“Euripides, sir . . . a Greek dramatist . . .” and she faltered, feeling herself colouring.

Steel looked her in the eye; the very last thing he wanted was his new DS flaunting her university education. “I want you to *get* smart, not *be* smart, Sergeant.”

They’d reached the gateway, standing by the ICV to take off their coveralls, when they saw a large red Mercedes sports car leaving the driveway of a house further down the empty street. Seeing the police vehicles, the driver slowed and glanced their way. In a fleeting moment Steel caught the face and Moss caught his look. “Someone you know sir?”

“A nudge from somewhere certainly. Maybe nothing, and it doesn’t chime with Barnton. Anyhow, next step. Speak with Ken here and get a house-to-house started . . . d’you think you can manage that?”

Moss coloured and was about to respond, but bit her tongue.

“Grab as many bodies as you can. There’s no chance of twitching net curtains in this area – most houses can’t even see each other – but you never know, a neighbour *may* have seen something . . . dog walkers, joggers and the like. If Knox is right about the killer being up to his armpits in blood, then Forensics will either find he showered or had to make a very discreet exit. I’m going to see Grieve and keep him up to speed.

“One thing. There will be press – I’m surprised they’re not here already – but you can leave them to Ken; we have a good working relationship here. They’ll know you’re new, so when you’re asked, just say there will be a press conference later. Nothing else. Got it?”

“Of course, sir.”

He looked at her; a young officer in a new job with murder on her first day. Well, nothing in Accelerated Careers would help her now, she was in at the deep end and she’d sink or swim. “Any questions?”

“No sir . . . anything else?”

The judge’s old body floated into Steel’s vision. “Yes, if what’s in there *is* sexual, the tying thing – bondage – what’s all that about?”

Moss felt a small bubble of hysterical laughter rising and had to swallow the words, ‘but we’ve just met’. “I’m not sure what we saw is actually *bondage* – that’s S and M isn’t it? – more a game, I think. Being completely vulnerable sexually or having complete sexual control over another – it’s a turn-on . . . for some.”

Steel looked at his attractive new DS and resisted any further questions.

THREE

STEEL WAS SIFTING THROUGH the first photographs from Forensics when Moss returned from Barnton. “How did it go?”

“Well, there are very few houses on the street itself, *or* on the neighbouring ones, and you were right about nosey neighbours; even if they were that way inclined, each house is a little private island.”

Steel nodded. “Do you have a list of owners?”

“Ken printed out what we have so far. Uniform’s still moving outwards, just in case.”

Taking the sheet of paper from her he scanned its short length, “What’s this one . . . Priority Private Equity?”

“That’s where we saw the car leaving from earlier, sir. I did that one myself.”

Mentally, Steel gave her a plus. “And?”

“You understand I’ve only discovered Barnton . . .”

“Yes. What?”

“Well, there was a different type of occupant from the other houses there . . . not an owner and ever so slightly hostile, unlike the rest. Nothing I could put my finger on, just a feeling.”

Steel picked up the phone, “You got no other name?” and seeing Moss shake her head, he dialled. “Hello George, it’s Steel, give me anything you have on Priority Private Equity, owners of a house in Barnton, would you? Soon as,” and hung up. He turned back to Moss. “I’ve just been going through some of the pictures from the Crime Scene Examiners. Have a look.”

Taking her time, Moss spread out the glossy photographs. Here, what had once been a living human was now frozen and reduced to part of a mute crime record. She came to the full-length shot of the judge the photographer had taken from above. In a sea of red, he was seen with a limb at each corner and she got the same nagging thought of being reminded of something.

Watching her, Steel said, “What?”

“I don’t know sir . . . this just rings a bell.”

“Guesses count.”

“Sir?”

“Anything you can throw in counts Moss – there’s never anything stupid except not throwing it in. Forensics are annoyed . . . so far they’ve found nothing, but that’s science. For us, at *this* stage, a lot’s guesswork with a few what-ifs thrown in for luck – pieces of a jigsaw to form a picture. So, if you have an idea – about anything – spit it out.”

She shook her head. “Understood sir, but I can’t quite get it . . . it’ll come to me.”

Steel nodded. “Okay. Now, those timings of Lady Mitchell’s were bothering me so I twisted an arm and pulled her phone records. She made two calls before calling us.”

“She did?”

“Yes. The first, at eight ten – a ten minute call – was to Smith McKnight Hughes, her lawyers, and the second, at eight twenty-one, to her daughter in Fife – a three minute call.”

“She called us at nine.”

“Yes, there’s no telling what her movements in the house were, but she did say her daughter was coming for her from Crail. Her call to her daughter – her only call to her – was before eight twenty-five when she says she discovered Lord Mitchell, so why would her daughter – who she’d *just* spent a weekend with – be coming for her?”

“Are we going back?”

“Not right away, and it’ll probably mean a trip to Fife now, which reminds me, we haven’t heard from the Fife cops. Right now we need to see Dr. Knox, and there’s a press conference set for three.”

Moss got to her feet and as her eyes caught the full-length photo of the dead judge once more, she realised what had been nagging her. She turned to Steel and saw his half smile.

“You got it?”

“Yes, and sorry, it’s nothing . . . this looks a bit like the Vitruvian Man.”

“Say again.”

“The Vitruvian Man. Da Vinci drew it. A man with his arms outstretched, describing both a square and a circle. The circle’s how Mitchell was tied. As I said, it’s nothing – I was just nagged as having seen it before.”

“At this stage there’s no ‘nothing’ – just another jigsaw piece. Let’s get to the mortuary and you can tell me more about this drawing on the way.”

•

As they entered, the brutal glare from the strip lights bounced off the white tiles and burnt into their eyes. Moss caught a faint lemon scent: an ineffective distraction from the strong antiseptic smell that had permeated the room over the years.

Clad all in green, Knox looked up from the corpse before him on the dissecting table. “We’ve got to stop meeting like this Stainless – people will talk.”

As always, Steel ignored Knox’s attempts at humour; there was life, then there was death – his job was finding the killer and humour played no part in it. “What more can you give me on Lord Mitchell?”

“There’s a sheaf of photographs, but come, see for yourself,” and with his rubber boots squeaking on the wet floor, Knox led them to the refrigerated unit. He opened a door and pulled out one of the shelves. Looking down at the body lying there, its old, now purplish flesh sagging off its already skeletal frame, Steel could clearly see the mass of small cuts which covered it along with much deeper ones and those caused by the pathologist’s electric saws. He glanced at Moss and could tell she was having difficulty standing there.

“I was wrong in my count,” the pathologist continued, “it was nineteen deep wounds – he was assaulted anally – along with, as you can see, *countless* smaller ones.”

“Ideas?” Steel said, staring down at the body.

“Me?” asked the pathologist after a pause, “Or, are you addressing your Sergeant? Come closer my dear, your superior would like your input.” He had not missed her hesitancy.

“No, *you*,” Steel spat with some impatience; despite the fact this was all part of the job, he felt protective of Moss.

“Well, although there *may* have been some kind of ‘game’ at first, what you see is far from it. I think there may have been torture involved.”

“Torture?” Moss managed.

Knox smiled. “Yes, my dear, torture . . . I would say the smaller cuts built up towards the deeper ones and over quite some time – there’s chafing on the wrists and ankles. As you saw he wasn’t gagged so he was very possibly pleading with his assailant.”

“And the scores to his chest?” asked Steel.

“I have no idea. All I *can* say – affirm – is they were made post mortem.”

Breathing heavily, Moss peered at the gouges on the chest; unlike the other cuts, both slight and deep, they had been made with some precision and were very deep. “There has to be some significance to these, sir.”

“Yes. What are we looking at . . . eleven?”

“Maybe two, a Roman numerals thing? Or, two Is.”

“Like the coffee bar?” Knox grinned.

Steel ignored this. “The ligature on the penis?”

“Oh, it was there before he died – that’s all I can say. It could’ve been part of the game being played,” and with a wink, “or maybe the old judge suffered from erectile dysfunction.”

Steel sighed; perhaps it was just the job that gave the man his macabre take around death – *his* shield, perhaps. “Thank you doctor. We’ll take the photographs and go.”

“So soon?” Knox smiled, “I can’t tempt you with anything else?”

Moss stepped up to him. “Actually, there is something. Don’t *ever* call me ‘my dear’ again. I am Detective Sergeant Moss to you. I earned that.”

Steel gave her another plus. “Right, press conference,” and with a beaming smile for the pathologist, who now looked as pale as his charges, “Thanks again, doctor.”

•

They drove back towards Fettes in silence before Moss broke it. “I’m sorry for that, sir.”

“For what? I heard nothing for you to be sorry about.”

Moss nodded. “It was unprofessional of me, but I’ve had that ever since I joined the Force and it crawls right up my back.”

“What does?”

“The ‘my dear’ part. The ‘what’s a girl like you doing working in the police?’ part.”

For a few seconds Steel said nothing, remembering his outburst with Grieve earlier when he discovered he’d been given a woman as his bag carrier. He knew he wasn’t much different, and actually *believed* women would never make good police officers. “What made you join? I mean, what with the graduate part, there must’ve been real choice for you.”

“With respect sir, that’s the same thing. Why *shouldn’t* a graduate join the police?”

“Okay, call me old-fashioned or whatever, but the question stands.”

Moss paused for a moment, watching the snow now beginning to fall on the city’s streets, then said, “My father did.”

Steel glanced at her. “Your father was a cop?”

She shook her head. “No, he was a drunk – a bullying, abusive drunk. I’d like to say it was on a Friday night but it was more like every night. One night, I was fifteen at the time, he came home and cut me in front of my mother. In his twisted head, I was a point to be made.” Steel remembered her scar but said nothing. “A neighbour called the police . . . when they arrived I just remember the sense of restored order that came in through the door with them. It stuck with me . . . when I graduated, it seemed like a natural choice, that’s all.”

Inwardly, Steel was replaying drunken nights before his son. For a few chilling seconds he could feel the panic and hurt he must have caused in one so young, the invisible, and deeper, scars he had left on him.

“What about yourself, sir?”

Steel hated talking of himself and was thankful they were turning into Fettes. “That’ll have to wait Moss.”

•

Even if it hadn’t been a slow news day, the combination of the murder of one of the small select band of High Court judges, and a murder in Barnton, of all places, meant the press corps had turned out in full. Steel had been right – this was front page news.

Moss stood off to one side to watch. Sitting behind a long desk were Chief Superintendent Grieve with a scowling Steel at his side and, adding his weight to the seriousness with which Lothian and Borders were taking the murder, Chief Constable Sir David Thompson.

Slightly apart, a press liaison officer started the proceedings. “Ladies and gentlemen, if we could have silence, Chief Superintendent Robert Grieve will read a short statement.”

With a nod to Thompson, Grieve began, “At o-nine hundred hours, this morning, an emergency call was received at Force Communications Centre, Bilston Glen, from an occupant of number 69 Barnton Meadows, Edinburgh. Officers from Drylaw Mains Station were first to respond, arriving on scene at o-nine o-six hours, when the body of Lord Henry Mitchell of Warrender was discovered. This incident is being treated as one of murder and the Senior Investigating Officer is Detective Chief Inspector Michael Steel.” Looking up, he finished with, “We *are* early into this investigation, but DCI Steel will answer any questions you may have,” and sat back.

With that, the room erupted. Steel held up his hands, to be caught by several flashes from the stills photographers. "Please, one at a time," and spotting a face he knew from the Press Association, "Yes Andy."

"You say 'an occupant', could you be more specific?"

"At this moment, no."

"Was it Lady Mitchell?"

"I did say I could not be specific Andy . . . yes, Louise."

The pretty BBC Television reporter smiled her thanks. "Can you tell us *how* Lord Mitchell was murdered Chief Inspector?"

"Again, at this stage, we cannot say. What we *can* say is this was a particularly brutal crime, we are in the early stages of investigation and there are several areas which we are exploring."

Jim McEwan from the *Sun* asked, "Can the good folk of Barnton sleep soundly in their beds then, Chief Inspector?"

"Say again?"

"Well, you said it was a brutal crime. I was wondering whether residents should be warned to double-check their doors and windows."

Steel resisted a smile, doubting whether the *Sun* had a single reader in Barnton. "At this stage, there is no sign of forced entry, nor – again, at this stage – evidence of anything missing from the house." With a slight smile he added, "Though it wouldn't be a bad idea to remind your readership of home security, Jim."

A female voice asked, "Would it be fair to say you are far from an arrest Chief Inspector?"

Steel felt immediate heat and snapped, "Who was that?"

A reporter raised her hand. "Me."

"And me is?"

"Jay Johnstone. The *Scotsman*."

A face new to Steel, and he'd never seen a more beautiful woman. In her mid-thirties with long, waved, flame-red hair framing a strong face, she sat poised and, for Steel, exuded quiet sex appeal. "Well, *Ms. Johnstone*," – damn it, why did I emphasise that? – "that question has no merit. We were informed at nine a.m. and now, some six hours later, we are following several lines of enquiry. We are moving forward with our investigation and," he scanned the room, "if there are no more questions, I would like to *continue* moving forward." Steel had had enough and got to his feet.

Mary Cohen from the *Daily Mail* threw in, "Do you know whether a replacement for Lord Mitchell has been named?"

Another pointless question. "I *think* that's something to ask of the Lord Advocate's Office, Mary."

As he reached Moss, he saw her smiling slightly. "What?"

"Nothing sir. There were some odd questions, that's all."

"Some damn foolish ones – what did you make of that 'far from an arrest' one? Given the killer wasn't found at the *locus*, am I meant to answer, 'no, we're close', in the very same day?"

Just then, the reporter from the *Scotsman* materialised at their side. "Chief Inspector."

Steel turned; close up, she was even more beautiful. "Ah, *Ms. Johnstone*."

She offered her hand. "Please, it's JJ. I just wanted to apologise for asking a stupid question."

"They can slip out that way certainly." Steel was still annoyed.

She flashed him an open smile. "That's very forgiving of you. Again, I'm sorry. I interviewed Lord Mitchell recently – for a piece I'm writing."

"You did? When?"

"Just last week. Could I ask . . . was there any sexual aspect to the murder?" This blind-sided Steel, leaving him lost for words, and Johnstone gave him another smile, "Thank you Chief Inspector, you've been most helpful," and with that, she left them.

Now angry, Steel turned to Moss, "What *was* that? I feel like I was just ambushed."

Moss was watching Johnstone's elegant walk. Raising her eyebrows and shaking her head she said, "I'm not sure sir, but she must have something," adding lightly, "from her interview, that is."

"Come on," Steel snapped, "we've wasted enough time with this, let's get back to some *real* work."