



DEAD A SCOTT AND BAILEY NOVEL TOME

CATH STAINCLIFFE

About the Book

A daughter's death

A teenage girl is found brutally murdered in her squalid flat.

A mother's love

Her mother is devastated. She gave her child up to the care system, only to lose her again, and is convinced that the low-life boyfriend is to blame.

Two ordinary women, one extraordinary job

DC Rachel Bailey has dragged herself up from a deprived childhood and joined the Manchester Police. Rachel's boss thinks her new recruit has bags of raw talent but straight-laced DC Janet Scott, her reluctant partner, has her doubts.

Together Scott and Bailey must hunt a killer, but a life fighting crime can be no life at all ...

Contents

Cover
About the Book
Title Page
Dedication

Chapter 1
Chapter 2
Chapter 3
Chapter 4
Chapter 5
Chapter 6
Chapter 7
Chapter 8
Chapter 9
Chapter 10
Chapter 11
Chapter 12
Chapter 13
Chapter 14
Chapter 15
Chapter 16
Chapter 17
Chapter 18
Chapter 19
Chapter 20
Chapter 21
Chapter 22
Chapter 23
Chapter 24
Chapter 25

Chapter 26
Chapter 27
Chapter 28
Chapter 29
Chapter 30
Chapter 31
Chapter 32
Chapter 33
Chapter 34
Chapter 35
Chapter 36
Chapter 37
Chapter 38
Chapter 39
Chapter 40
Chapter 41
Chapter 42
Chapter 43
Chapter 44
Chapter 45
Chapter 46
Chapter 47
Chapter 48

Acknowledgements
About the Author
Copyright

DEAD TO ME

Cath Staincliffe

For Tim – who made it possible

1

RACHEL BAILEY STOOD, freezing her tits off, on a crime-scene cordon in north Manchester. From her vantage point, at the edge of the recreation ground, she had a view across the rows of rooftops that rippled down the hillside, punctuated here and there by the bulk of a mill rising from the streets built in the same red brick as everything else. One she could see had its name picked out in white brick on the square mill tower: Heron. Rachel had been brought up in streets like this; well, dragged herself up, more like. A couple of miles to the west. Sunny Langley. Manchester didn't really stop, Rachel thought; there were boundaries of course, but you couldn't see the join. The city bled into the satellite towns that ringed the plain: Oldham, Rochdale, Ashton and on to even higher ground. The houses gradually changing from these brick mill terraces to stone-built weaver's cottages, getting smaller and sparser as the developments petered out on the foothills of the Pennines. The place looked tired and mucky this time of year, the brick dull, trees bare, the grass on the field yellow and scrubby.

Rachel shivered and stamped one foot then another. Sparrow's fart, November and she could see her breath, the same colour as the mist that hovered over the recreation ground, rising and floating a couple of feet above the grass. A special effect from a horror movie, but this was real life, her life. Nowhere else she'd rather be.

Manchester city centre lay on the far horizon, muffled in cloud, the Hilton tower breaking through, a tall, straight line. Nick's flat was near there. He would be down at the

station now, Piccadilly to Euston. He was opening for the defence at the Old Bailey tomorrow. She couldn't help grinning as she remembered his excitement last night; his chambers were really backing him, a rising star. Impossible to know how long he'd be away for. But that was the score. My hotshot barrister, she thought, not bad for a kid from the wrong side of the tracks.

She narrowed her eyes as a car drew up and parked on the edge of the outer cordon. Her role, until uniform arrived and took over, was to make sure no one gained entry who didn't need to be there. *Protect and secure the scene, preserve and recover evidence*. One stray person could ruin everything. Today Rachel was an intelligent guard dog. She only knew the basics at this stage: dead body, white male.

Nowhere else she'd rather be. Not strictly true - she'd rather be inside the cordon than guarding the periphery. She'd rather be in an MIT syndicate some day. Major Incidents: running a team, catching killers. But there was no shortcut. She had to work her way up, build her portfolio. And she was on track, she allowed herself a little pat on the back. Five years in uniform, nearly five in Sex Crimes. Stepping stones, foundations for the bigger stuff. Rachel did another shuffle, waved her arms to get the circulation going. Times like these she made the best use of, alert to what was required of her, but in the lulls when no one was entering or leaving the scene she practised her definitions. Knowing the law, criminal law, inside out, upside down; because anyone who had to enforce the law needed to understand it. She was practising homicide, murder or manslaughter now. That's where she wanted next. It was a big jump and they were queuing round the block for opportunities. She just needed a chance, an opening, and she needed to spot it before her competitors.

Rachel glanced behind her where the CSIs were still busying about, the tent now up, protecting the scene. She

wanted to pee, but it could be hours. They never put that in the job description. *Candidates must be able to demonstrate significant bladder capacity.*

In the valley, a train sounded its hooter, taking people into work. Greater Manchester conurbation, home to 2.6 million people. In the police service over 8,000 cops, and Rachel was one of them, the only job she'd ever wanted. She could see the arterial roads filling up with commuters, too. The dual carriageways funnelling traffic to the M60 and the M62. *Manslaughter: voluntary and involuntary. Voluntary manslaughter - due to ... diminished responsibility, loss of control ...*

She watched the new arrival, suited, booted, carrying a face mask and gloves, cross the grass to meet her. 'Constable,' the woman said, barely glancing at Rachel, and made to pass through the cordon.

'Identification,' Rachel said bluntly, blocking her way.

The woman sighed, patted at her sides, then shoved a hand down the front of her disposable jumpsuit. 'Fuck,' she barked.

Rachel blinked, waited.

'DCI Gill Murray,' the woman rattled off, 'SIO.'

Shitshitshit. Gill Murray. And Rachel hadn't even recognized her. Blame the protective suit. Golden girl Gill. Though the gold had tarnished a bit since all the stuff with her husband. Rachel swallowed. 'I still need formal identification. "The preservation of the scene is a primary responsibility",' she quoted. '"No exceptions".'

The DCI threw up her hands, bawled, 'No exceptions, *ma'am!*'

'Right, ma'am.' Rachel should have automatically added a term of respect, either boss or ma'am or chief inspector. Failing to do so gave an impression of insubordination. You never knew with bosses what they'd favour: some wanted rank and only rank, others were on first-name terms with everyone. Rachel had decided when she got to fling her

weight around she'd want to be called boss. Not ma'am like some minor royalty, an old trout in a tiara.

Gill Murray flailed her hands again, turned round on the spot, first one way then the other, as if she was doing some weird robotic dance, then stalked off back across the grass.

Rachel had imagined she'd be taller, tall and slim like Rachel herself. But Murray was more petite. Looked good for her age; must have fifteen years on Rachel. Perhaps she'd had some 'work' done.

Inside her jacket, Rachel could feel a prickle of sweat under her arms. Stuff her, she told herself, if I'd let her through without ID, I'd have been in for a bollocking by the crime-scene manager. 'Procedure is there for a reason,' the instructor had drilled into them at training, 'because it works. Brains far mightier than yours have spent years identifying how we detect and prosecute crimes. You prat about, missing a step, trying to take a shortcut and nine times out of ten you're handing our offender a get-off-scot-free card. Do it. Do it how it should be done. Do it right.'

The DCI arrived back, her mouth screwed up tight, thrust a lanyard with her warrant card at Rachel. Painted nails, Rachel noticed, scarlet talons. There was something birdlike about the woman. Hawkish, attractive, cheekbones like scalpels, but hawkish all the same.

'DCI Gill Murray,' the woman said, her eyes flashing. Or reptilian, Rachel thought: lizard, velociraptor.

'Thank you,' Rachel said. She pulled off one of her thermal gloves and made a note in the log.

'And your name, Constable?' Gill Murray said brusquely, pulling on her disposable gloves with a snap-snap.

Rachel took a breath. Oh God I am such a dick. She's gonna what ... report me for doing my job? 'DC Rachel Bailey.'

'Working out of ...?' Nose wrinkled, as if Rachel was something she'd found on her shoe.

'Sex Crimes, boss.'

‘Line manager?’

‘John Sutton.’ Sutton the Glutton.

‘Right,’ the DCI said, a sharp jerk of her head and she stepped through to the crime scene.

Rachel put her glove back on, her fingertips stung with cold. She wanted a fag now; a fag, a pee and a bacon-and-egg sandwich. And a hole in the ground to hide in while Gilly-knickers dreamt up her punishment.

They told us there were no superior officers, Rachel thought; senior, but not superior. Reflecting a more democratic force. You weren’t supposed to say force any more either – too many connotations of police brutality and deaths in custody, riot gear. A service not a force, partnership with the people. Seemed they’d forgotten to tell Gill Murray she was no longer superior, treating Rachel like a kid who’d wet herself in assembly. I don’t care, Rachel told herself, screw her. Godzilla. But she did care really. She really, really cared, because Gill Murray – well, she’d been the one Rachel wanted to be. The one Rachel followed in the news, the one everybody agreed was a superb detective, an inspired strategist, a charismatic leader. Clever and forward-thinking. The one who had broken through the glass ceiling without a scratch to show for it. And hadn’t hauled the ladder up after her. Rachel had dreamed of meeting her, working with her someday. But now? She shook her head, annoyed, stamped her feet. The clouds were darkening, heavy and slate-coloured, blotting out the horizon. Sleet on the way. A kid on a bike circled at the edge of the outer cordon, stared over at her for a moment, then spat on the floor and swooped off.

Tosser, Rachel thought. *Infanticide ... killing by any wilful act or omission of a child under twelve months old ...*

The call came three weeks later. Rachel was processing papers for an indecency hearing. She’d got a head cold and it felt as though all the cavities in her skull were filled with

heavy-duty glue and her throat with sand. She was still in work. Never took a sickie: she might miss something.

Her phone rang and she picked it up. 'DC Bailey.' Checked the time, pen poised over her daybook.

'Rachel - Gill Murray.' Clipped, bossy.

Rachel waited for the blow to land. Drew a noose in her notebook.

'I want you in my syndicate, week on Monday, Chadderton. Shift starts at eight.'

2

'RACHEL BAILEY.'

She said it like a threat, thought Janet, studying the woman who slammed her bag down on the desk facing hers and looked about as if disgruntled at what she found.

'DC,' Rachel Bailey added, and message delivered, gave a nod. Sat down.

'Janet Scott,' Janet said.

'Yeah, she said she wanted to put me with you.'

Oh, joy. Janet kept her expression open, pleasant, as she wondered what on earth Gill was playing at. They were already carrying Kevin, a knob who did knobby things, as a favour to Gill's mate on one of the other syndicates. And now she pitches up with a kid who has far too much attitude, a half-sneer on her face, and should have gone into modelling or lap-dancing, got the looks for it, and dumps her on Janet.

Janet went back to her screen, checking through her emails, clearing her actions completed, getting up to speed on work in progress.

'So - you been here long?' Rachel Bailey asked.

Janet was reminded of playground interrogations - *what's your name, where d'you live?* All front and nerves shredding underneath.

'Thirteen years, twenty-five on the job.'

Rachel froze, looked at her. 'Straight up?'

Why would I lie? 'Yeah.'

'Never gone for promotion?' Rachel said.

'Yeah.' Shaking her head slightly, *tragic or what?* Janet wasn't bothered. She knew she was good at her job. She'd done a shedload of courses and got all the accreditations to

prove it. She'd not the slightest interest in climbing the greasy pole. For what? Ulcers and politics and even more pressure? Promotion was a route away from the coalface, from the hands-on, face-to-face, stink-in-your-nose reality of catching killers. Gill Murray never got to so much as interview a suspect or a witness any more. She went to the scene and the post-mortem and she coordinated each investigation, managing her team, thinking about loopholes and implications, complications. Assessing evidence as they delivered it to her: was it robust enough for the CPS? Would it stand up in Crown Court? At appeal, in Europe? None of that pushed any buttons for Janet. She wanted to be eyeball-to-eyeball with the people who had done it, the people who had seen what was done. Making them sing.

'Not long till retirement,' Rachel observed, pegging Janet for Mrs Average, time-server. The girl clicked her mouse, began to peer at her monitor. 'Kids?' Rachel asked.

'Two,' Janet said, a little echo of sadness inside. Happy for the newcomer to pigeonhole her: working mum, not fully committed either way, never gone for promotion, not had the drive, the vision, the brains. Mediocre. Just hanging on for her pension. Shoot me now.

The girl gave her a pitying look, then, losing interest, swivelled in her chair, scoping the room again. No one else in yet. Quarter to eight. The kid sighed, pulled her hair – glossy brown and waved (an effect that would take Janet's eldest, Elise, all morning to achieve) – up into a ponytail, let it drop.

'What about you?' Janet kept it civil.

'God no. Not the maternal type.'

She sounded almost like a teenager, that practised disdain, but she must be in her late twenties, Janet guessed. 'Where were you before?' Teeth not quite gritted.

'Sex Crimes, with Sutton,' Rachel said.

'John Sutton?'

Rachel nodded, glanced at her watch. 'I need a fag. Is there ...' She whirled a finger in the air, asking for directions.

Janet toyed with the idea of sending her the wrong way, but only because the girl had got her back up. She'd never be that petty. 'Along the corridor, down the stairs, side door on the ground floor.'

Rachel snatched her bag and swung herself to her feet.

Janet watched her go. Took a breath, lowered her shoulders and returned to her inbox.

The office was open-plan, not a large space, desks crammed together in pairs, each with its computer terminal and phone. There was a bigger meeting room off it, which they used for briefings. Gill had a room to herself, roughly two and a half paces from Janet's desk. She was generally visible through the glass partition, unless she closed her blinds. It was a bad sign when the blinds went down. The team would wait, people trying to work more quietly, waiting to see who was in for a bollocking.

Gill was in before the others and Rachel was still off having her nicotine fix so Janet went straight into Gill's office.

The DCI had barely got her coat off when Janet jumped in: 'Why me?'

Gill froze, tilted her head to one side. 'It's an interesting philosophical question, kid, but you're going to have to give me a bit more ...'

'Rachel Bailey.'

'She's here?' Gill beamed.

'I don't want her,' Janet said.

'Reason?'

'I've already got one teenager at home, and her sister's in a permanent state of revolution, I can do without it at work. Why put her with me? Put her with Mitch.'

‘What’s she done to you?’ Gill was shifting through paperwork on her desk now, easing into her chair. ‘She’s only been here five minutes.’

‘Five minutes too long. Who sent her?’

‘I picked her.’

‘You picked her,’ Janet said, appalled. ‘Can’t you unpick her?’

‘She’s a bit rough around the edges,’ Gill allowed.

‘Dog rough,’ said Janet. A pit bull bitch, she thought but that seemed too harsh. Rude. ‘Give her to Pete or Lee, or any of them.’

Gill took her glasses from her case, set them down and stared at Janet for a moment, then slapped her palms on her desk. ‘She stays with you. That’s how I want it.’

‘Gill,’ Janet groaned.

‘End of.’ Gill held up her hands, brooking no further discussion.

‘Six weeks,’ Janet tried. ‘If I still feel the same ...’

‘We’ll see.’

‘We’ll see!’ Janet mocked, laughing. ‘We’ll see? That’s what I say to the girls: “We’ll see.” It usually means, *No, but I haven’t got the energy to argue with you now.*’

‘You’ll be good for her.’ Gill slid her glasses on and began to open files on her computer.

‘Sounds like a parasitic relationship,’ Janet said.

‘Symbiotic – she’ll bring a bit of life into the place, shake the dust off.’

‘What are you saying?’ Was Gill implying she’d grown stale?

At that point, Rachel strode back into the outer room, distracted but altering her demeanour, straightening her spine, as she caught sight of Gill through the glass.

‘Welcome,’ Gill shouted, waved a hand but didn’t get to her feet. ‘Team meeting in ten. Pack drill then.’

Rachel nodded. ‘Great.’ She sat back at her desk.

Janet waited for a second longer, but Gill, already devouring the information on the screen, pointed a finger towards the door. Dismissed.

As Janet sat down, Rachel leaned forward and whispered, 'What's she like? Bit of a dragon?' signalling with an upward flick of her eyes that she meant Gill in the office behind her.

'Gill?' Janet moved closer, eyes narrowing, sneaky and confidential. 'She's fucking brilliant!'

3

GILL DROVE OVER to Collyhurst, the furthest southern corner of their patch. The neighbourhood was spitting distance from Manchester city centre, nudging up to the Northern Quarter, where redevelopment had seen the decaying rag-trade warehouses converted into flats and most of the old porn shops transformed into bijou cafés and boutiques. Collyhurst was still a poor place, even with the splurge for the Commonwealth Games back in 2002 and the building of the new stadium nearby and the Velodrome. Whatever all the 'new jobs' were, it didn't seem as though many of the long-term unemployed in Collyhurst had got a look in. Pick a side road, any side road, and you'd soon spot the poverty. And Gill, like any copper with half a brain knew that poverty and crime were dancing partners. Plenty of families round here where thieving or domestic violence was passed on in the genes, imbibed with the baby formula and the rusks. Handy for prison visiting, though: if your nearest and dearest were doing time in Strangeways you could see the prison from the rise on Rochdale Road across the railway lines.

By the time Gill was a beat bobby, drugs had arrived, and the mad mobsters had moved in. Hard men from Salford and Eccles who saw an opportunity to make a shitload of money. The burglary and brawling of the earlier years were replaced by turf wars and outbreaks of astonishing violence by the gangsters, accompanied by a spate of muggings and petty thefts by junkies needing a fix. When Gill moved into MIT in the 1990s everyone had come to the party: gangs in Cheetham, Longsight, Moss Side,

links to Birmingham and Liverpool. The bloodbath peaked in 1999, over two hundred and forty shots fired, forty-three injured, seven dead and not a witness on the face of the earth. Gill had worked a few of those. Even got a conviction or two, against all the odds. Then they set up the special squad to tackle the scourge. Developed inter-agency strategies. Things had changed since then. Quieter now, a combination of prevention programmes and good detection, a rigorous support service for vulnerable and intimidated witnesses, weapons amnesties. As recently as 2008 they'd taken a whole load of drug scumbags off the streets, seriously weakening the gangs. The drugs were still out there, the dealers still busy and the related crimes went on, but it didn't feel quite the same lawless frontier country, Gunchester, of the 1990s.

Gill checked the address, Fairland Avenue, and took a left into the estate.

I've already got one teenager, Janet had complained. She wasn't far wrong; there was something bratty about Rachel Bailey. Gill knew next to nothing about her background, but she could tell it wasn't silver spoon and skiing holidays. Local girl, she'd a wild edge to her, something simmering beneath the cover girl looks and the shrewd expression. And she was hungry for a chance. Gill could sense that. Drinking everything in at the morning's induction yet impatient to get on with the real work, the dirty work. Like me, Gill thought, the raw ambition.

Gill parked in the last remaining place on the pavement. The short street was cluttered with vans and cars. She got out and stood, took a moment first, considering the location. Only one route into the cul-de-sac, which forked off Gargrave Street, the main thoroughfare of the estate. Twenty houses in all, a turning circle at the far end. A gaggle of neighbours had gathered there, uniforms keeping them behind the tape. Victim's house, second on the right from the junction, number 3A. The houses opposite would

have a clear view of anyone coming and going if they were peering out of their windows. It would be getting dark soon, the CSIs were making the most of the fading light, photographing and scouring the area immediately outside the house.

She put on her protective clothes and drew up her hood. Andy Pandy, ready to go and introduce herself to the CSM.

The houses were divided into flats, separate entrances, maisonettes really. 'It's the downstairs flat,' the uniform on the cordon told her as he logged her in.

Gill raised her hands, almost a surrender pose, though her palms faced her ears not forward. Looked daft. Some people chose to stuff their hands in their pockets, or laced their fingers together, got a bit sweaty in the gloves like that. All tricks to safeguard against mucking everything up by smearing fingerprints or other trace evidence: spittle, dandruff, cosmetics, snot, blood, that lurked waiting for detection and recovery. Door frames, handles – all would be examined. Gill's very first dead body on MIT, she'd leaned against a door-jamb and got a four-star bollocking from her boss. Since then she'd used the hands-up technique; she didn't want her hands in her pockets because she needed her hands to think, to analyse, to communicate.

'You're like a bloody windmill,' Janet once told her, 'or someone on the tote, at the races.'

One Christmas the team bought her a pair of white cotton gloves, the kind a magician wore. Gill had got very pissed at the works party and waxed lyrical about how what they did *was* magic of a sort. Dark magic, maybe, solving the sordid little details of the crime, turning a tragedy into an achievement.

'For who?' Andy had objected, winking at Janet. 'We've still got a dead body. Someone's still lost a family member.'

'But they know how, why. And that's all we can do for them,' she had said, taking another swig of vodka. 'Give them the story, the facts, the name, the face ... At least we

can do that.' She had sliced at one hand with the other for emphasis, and Janet had laughed and shaken her head. 'Without that they are in bloody limbo for ever,' Gill said. They all knew that. Lee and Mitch had nodded, muttering in agreement.

She had drunk way too much that night; it wasn't long after Dave had gone walkabout, and she'd ended up curled over a bog in the Ladies, with Janet holding her hair out of the way and saying, 'Time for bed, Houdini. Got you a cab.'

Gill walked through the tiny porch on the stepping plates that had been laid down and turned ninety degrees into the narrow hallway, noting the bathroom immediately to the right. Straight ahead, a bedroom. The door ajar. Gill took in the mattress on the floor, the carpet littered with clothes and scraps of paper, cigarette papers, DVD cases, burn marks on the carpet. Someone had once attempted to redecorate the far wall either side of the window. It was painted a muddy ginger shade, reminding Gill of parkin, the cake they ate round Bonfire Night. But they'd obviously lost heart and the edge near the ceiling still showed the cream woodchip paper underneath. Gill could smell damp in the room mixing with the rank stench of stale fag ends and, peering carefully round the door, saw an area in the corner there mottled with mildew. She didn't go in, it had yet to be examined. The next ninety-degree turn took her past a storage cupboard on the right and into the living room at the end. The smell was different here, unpleasantly metallic.

'Hello,' Gill greeted them all.

The girl was under a duvet, face partly visible, wedged between a sofa and a squat, dark-coloured coffee table. The table was slightly askew and tilted, one leg broken. The technicians would already have filmed and photographed the room before anyone else was allowed in, creating a record of the scene as close as possible to how it had been

found. Phil Sweet, the CSM, was logging details and supervising everyone. Gill had worked with him maybe half-a-dozen times. He raised a gloved hand in acknowledgement. 'Go round that way.'

Gill did as Phil said; using the stepping plates she skirted around the easy chair that stood near the kitchen door, close to where two markers indicated drops of blood, and past the coffee table to get closer to the victim.

She stared at the body, at the girl's head angled slightly back and to the right, touching the base of the sofa. There was a slick of blood on the carpet beneath her, some dark stains on the edge of the duvet. Gill didn't need a second opinion, this was a homicide. She straightened up and got out her phone to ring the coroner. The body legally belonged to the coroner and their authorization would be needed to order a post-mortem.

'Who called us?' she asked Phil as she selected the contact number.

'Boyfriend; came in and found her like this.'

Gill nodded. Because he had been at the scene, the boyfriend would have to submit his clothes for examination as potential evidence and give a witness statement to assist the police.

'Hello, Mr Minchin, Gill Murray here from MIT,' she identified herself to the coroner. 'I'm out at a job in Collyhurst: young, white, adult female. I'm thinking we've got ID, not formal as yet, looking like a stab wound. I'm after doing a forensic post-mortem?'

'Be my guest. I'll take the details.'

Gill told him the rudiments: the address and the apparent name of the victim: Lisa Finn. Her next call was to the pathologist, Ranjeet Lateesh. No one would touch the body or disturb anything at the scene until he'd arrived and been able to examine the body in situ.

She watched one of the CSIs start work with his fingerprint kit on the doorway and door handles into the

room. The silver sooty powder he was smothering over the surfaces would be a bugger to clean off again afterwards.

'Shoulder bag in the kitchen, bus ticket in there shows her on the bus at half-ten this morning. But we didn't find her phone,' Phil Sweet told them.

Gill groaned. The phone was a rich mine of information in any inquiry; traffic to and from helped them build not only a timeline but a network of contacts, and the content of texts would sometimes flag up animosity or threats. They'd have to approach the provider, who would be able to give them a log of incoming and outgoing calls and texts, but not the content of any texts, and not the pictures or music or videos or address book on the handset. With a little more time, the provider would also be able to give them the cell site location data and pinpoint where the phone was when calls were received and made. In effect, a tracking device.

'They covered her up,' Gill said. Wondering about that, whether it was a question of a perverted sense of respect or plain fear. It's an instinctive response to hide a body, hide and run. There hadn't been a duvet on the bed. Did the killer stop to fetch it? Wasting precious moments? No cover on the duvet. Gill could see patches of blood where it had soaked into the fabric along the top edge; there were older stains too, and the polycotton material was bobbled with use. Didn't look as though the thing had ever been washed. She could see the pieces of foil under the coffee table, the small plastic tube, the lighter. Knew laundry wasn't high on the priority list for a druggie.

When Ranjeet arrived he began by making an assessment of the scene as he found it. And agreed with Phil Sweet and Gill that the duvet should be tape-lifted for any potential forensic evidence before it was removed. Once that had been done and everybody was satisfied that they had thoroughly documented the scene as it was found, it was time to lift the bedding. A CSI took each end, aiming

to remove the article as carefully as possible and cause minimum disruption. A CSI provided a large evidence sack for the duvet, sealed it and allocated a reference number.

Gill got her first good look at their victim. She wore an open, kimono-type housecoat, which was rucked up beneath her. A bloody incision marked her left breast close to her sternum and ribbons of blood had flowed from there down her side on to the floor. Blood on her right hand too, which lay on her belly. Nails bitten down. The housecoat was a floral design: white background with blowsy vivid pink-and-green flowers on. No knickers. She didn't have much pubic hair. Not shaved, Gill thought, just immature – a teenager. Her hair was two-tone, partly covering the left side of her face, a bad bleach job growing out. Her mouth and nose were peppered with pimples. A row of silver-coloured earrings edged each of her ears; they made Gill think of the clasps they put on paint tins to keep the lids on. Her left arm was twisted at a peculiar angle, the hand forced under the forearm and pressed up against the strut at the base of the coffee table. Gill thought she'd probably hit the table as she'd fallen.

Ranjeet made notes in his smart phone and the CSIs got busy with the cameras.

'Penetrating wound between the ribs,' Ranjeet said, 'massive blood loss. I suggest we tape-lift the body and swab in situ, then undress the body; rest post-mortem. We can move the table now.'

Gill stepped away, went to the window, looking out at the back, a tiny yard walled by broad, horizontal planks for fencing. Perfect climbing territory for a house burglar, but this girl had nothing worth taking. Unless somebody came to steal drugs. The telly in the corner by the window wasn't a flat screen but an old monster, impossible to move without transport.

As they moved the table, the victim's left arm slumped, gravity pulling it down, unfolding. 'No sign of rigor,' Gill

said. If the body was still pliable and there were no obvious signs of decomposition, it meant the time of death was recent. Rigor came on a few hours after death and lasted for between one and three days, depending on the external conditions.

Ranjeet continued his examination. 'Wound to the left arm,' he pointed out, 'probably defensive.'

Gill squatted down, careful not to get her feet in the puddle of blood congealing around the girl's torso. The cut was a couple of inches below her wrist, along the edge of the bone. 'The weapon?' Gill asked.

'No sign,' said one of the CSI guys. Gill looked at the cut and at the tattoo that braceleted the girl's wrist in gothic script. 'Who's Sean?' she said.

'Boyfriend,' Phil supplied.

Ranjeet took the body temperature. He nodded at the result. 'Thirty-five point nine, still warm.' A CSI began the process of placing and removing tape on the girl's body and then taking swabs from the mouth, nose and vagina.

Gill and Phil discussed what further actions should be taken to retrieve crime-scene evidence, among them recovering the remaining bed linen from the bedroom.

'Undress her now.' A large plastic sheet was placed to the side of the dead girl and then the body was lifted as carefully as possible and laid on it. The CSIs removed the housecoat, the back of it drenched in blood, and put it in an evidence bag.

'We'll be ready to lift her soon,' Ranjeet said. The stretcher and the body bag were prepared. Any further examination of the body would be done at the mortuary as part of the post-mortem; they wouldn't turn her over here and risk destroying evidence.

So, Lisa Finn, thought Gill as she prepared to leave, what the hell happened to you?

4

THERE WAS ALWAYS that buzz when they picked up a job. A spurt of something in the gut, a kick-start to the heart. 'You're a ghoul, Janet,' Ade had said to her one time.

'I'm a detective,' Janet said, 'this is what I do, this is what I'm good at. We find the bastards, we get them sent down.'

The DCI had asked Janet to do the death message and to take Rachel with her. The worst thing about delivering the bad news was the sheer unpredictability of the reaction you got. One woman laughed, another threw up. Some people simply refused to believe you, arguing the toss, insisting that so-and-so was fine, they had seen them last night, they'd spoken to them on the phone. You had to sit them down and spell it out in big fat letters: D.E.A.D. Repeat it until they stopped blethering on: *she was going on holiday, he's only twenty-two, she's got an operation next week, she's got children*. As if these facts – mundane, domestic, particular – could gainsay the truth. As if death could be reversed because *he'd got an interview for Morrisons tomorrow*.

Other people went numb, they listened and they nodded and didn't utter a peep. They were polite and cooperative, but when you looked in their eyes there was no one home. They were absent, hiding. Then there were the ones that shot the messenger, tried to shut the door on them, and if they couldn't do that in time, told them to fuck off, even lashed out, pinching, slapping, shoving.

Janet once had a cup of tea flung at her. A woman whose son had been killed in a homophobic attack. Five of them

kicked him to death. When Janet broke the news, the woman had flinched, twisting her head to and fro as if trying to escape the facts she'd just heard, then reached for her mug and hurled the contents at Janet. The tea was hot but not boiling. Though she reared back, Janet had not cried out. She had simply wiped at her face and repeated her condolences, then assured the woman that they would find the people who had done it and put them in prison for life. And the woman had sat, shaking uncontrollably, the sound of her teeth chattering clear and loud in the stuffy room.

Where the victim was embroiled in violent crime already, the next of kin often knew before you said a word. *He's dead, isn't he? The stupid fucking bastard.* And behind the ruptured words all the years of effort and loving and arguing and fighting and the bitter knowledge that this was how it would end and now it had. *I told him. Never listened - silly sod wouldn't have it.*

Most were shocked, bewildered, sometimes tearful. It was important to keep things simple, straightforward, to give the minimum amount of information possible, because at that point in time *dead, murdered*, was all they needed to know. That in itself was overload. The torrent of whys and hows and whens and who and *why, why, why* came later.

'I'll do it, if you like,' Rachel said, in the car. 'I've done a couple.' It was pitch-dark now, the temperature dropping; there'd be freezing fog on the hills.

Janet glanced at her. 'No, you're fine,' she said, after a pause.

Rachel considered whether to argue for it. She wondered if Janet was going to be one of those greedy gits who kept all the good stuff for herself so it would take Rachel twice as long to get the experience she needed. Women were still a minority in the service, especially at

higher ranks, and most of the ones Rachel had worked with were good teachers, making sure other women coming after them had the same bite of the cherry as their male colleagues, encouraging them to specialize, to set their sights on moving up. There was a lot of mentoring went on. But Janet Scott? Maybe Rachel was a threat? Rachel considered asking her to stop so she could have a fag, but what if she said no? She'd have one after they'd informed the family, Janet could hardly drive off and leave her there without proving herself to be a right cow.

Denise Finn lived in Harpurhey, a short bus ride from Lisa's, a two-up, two-down. Garden terraces, the estate agents called them, flying in the face of all the evidence. They had no gardens, only titchy backyards that originally housed the outside bog.

The street was still, quiet when they got out of the car, people tucked in, keeping warm. Here and there, where the curtains hadn't been drawn at upper windows, the neon blue of televisions and computers flickered and swam. The windows at Denise's were dark, but the hall light was on and the diamond of glass in the front door glowed yellow.

There was no bell or knocker, so Janet rattled the letter box.

Rachel looked up; no stars in the sky, just the blanket of fog. They heard movement in the house. Then a shadow rippled behind the glass in the door.

'Denise Finn?' Janet said when the door opened. 'I'm DC Janet Scott, Manchester Metropolitan Police, and this is DC Rachel Bailey. May we come in?'

'Why?' the woman asked. She looked to be in her fifties, her face lined, nose and cheeks criss-crossed with broken veins, jawline softening, grey hair mixed with the brown. Her hair was frizzy, brittle. Her glasses magnified her eyes. She wore a black sweater that had seen better days and navy joggers. *10 Years Younger*, thought Rachel, prime

candidate. Ten years older once she's heard what we've got to tell her.

'We'd like to come in,' Janet said, moving forward, giving the woman no choice but to back away and turn, taking them through the front room, past the open stairs and into the back where the television was showing *Emmerdale*. The house smelled of cigarettes and chip fat and some floral chemical, air freshener perhaps, that made Rachel want to gag.

Denise stood there. 'What's going on?' She picked up the remote, muted the television. 'Is it our Lisa? Is she in bother again?'

'Please, Mrs Finn, sit down,' Janet said.

The woman frowned, opened her mouth, then closed it. Sat on the sofa; Janet sat beside her. The woman still held the remote, gripped tight in both hands.

Rachel parked herself in the only armchair. Looked about. The television occupied one alcove at the far side of the chimney breast, in the other recess were shelves with knick-knacks and photos. Lisa as a toddler and older. One of her on a merry-go-round horse at the fair, another, an early teenager at some do, dressed up in skin-tight clothes: white skirt, silver boob tube and hoop earrings. There was a boy in other photos, and one of the two children together, a school photo, be about eleven or twelve, Rachel guessed. The boy looked older, but not by much. They shared the same snub nose and rosebud mouth. In every picture his hair was cropped close, his ears stuck out like jug handles.

'I am sorry, I've got some very sad news,' Janet spoke steadily, slowly.

Rachel waited, studying her own hands.

'Your daughter, Lisa, was found at her flat this afternoon with fatal injuries.'

Rachel glanced over. Denise froze, the room was pin-drop quiet and Rachel could hear Denise's breath, a suck of sorts, a gulping sound, choking on the truth.

'Lisa is dead,' Janet added, lest there be any misunderstanding, in case *fatal* wasn't enough.

'Injuries?' Denise said dully, putting the remote on the arm of the sofa.

'Yes, we think she was attacked.'

Denise Finn gave a muffled shriek. And her feet shifted on the carpet as if they wanted to carry her away.

'I am very sorry, Mrs Finn. We will be trying to find out who did this to Lisa. A colleague of ours will be acting as your family liaison officer, they will support you and let you know how our inquiries are going. They're on their way now.'

Denise's hand clutched at the neck of her sweater. From outside, Rachel heard the thump of a car door and the cough of an engine, then the car horn, *toot-toot-toot*, a jolly farewell blast before the car moved off.

Denise Finn's eyes filled with tears. She took a cigarette from the packet on the side table and Rachel felt her own cravings kick in.

'Are you sure?' Denise said. The lunge for hope making her twist in her seat towards Janet.

Sure she's dead? Sure it's Lisa? Rachel could imagine all the chinks of light tempting the woman, a futile, last-ditch attempt to make the nightmare go away.

'We still need you to formally identify the body, but as she was found in Lisa's flat by Lisa's boyfriend Sean, who called the police, we are pretty certain that it is your daughter Lisa.'

Trembling, Denise lit her cigarette, the snick of the lighter, the first scent of burning tobacco, triggering saliva in Rachel's mouth. She breathed steadily in, happy to do a little passive smoking until she could get to the real thing.

'The post-mortem is being conducted this evening,' Janet said. 'We expect it will confirm the cause of death, and then we'd like you to come to the mortuary, probably tomorrow morning, to make the formal identification. The family