

FROM THE NO. 1 BESTSELLING AUTHOR

**TONY
PARSONS**

**Dead
time**



A DC MAX WOLFE SHORT STORY

Contents

About the Book

About the Author

Also by Tony Parsons

Epigraph

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

New Year's Day.

The Crime Museum

Sneak Preview

Copyright

About the Book

One am, Boxing Day. Snow falls, the city sleeps.

Not DC Max Wolfe. He is looking out of his loft apartment at the deserted streets below.

A van has just drawn up. Two men get out. Dressed in black and wearing ski-masks, they are dragging something.

It's a man. Half-naked. Half-dead. But still alive.

Not for much longer.

Soon Max Wolfe is hunting a gang of killers who decapitate their victims And this time it's personal ...

About the Author

Tony Parsons left school at sixteen and was working on the night shift at Gordon's Gin Distillery in Islington when he was offered his first job in journalism on the *New Musical Express*.

Since then he has become an award-winning journalist and bestselling novelist whose books have been translated into more than forty languages, most recently Vietnamese. His semi-autobiographical novel *Man and Boy* won the Book of the Year prize.

Other books by Tony Parsons

The Murder Bag

Babe of the Blessed Trinity,
Shall smile their steeds to see:
Herod and Pilate riding by,
And Judas, one of three.

Walter de la Mare, 'A
Ballad of Christmas'

1

There was something wrong with the night.

I slid from my bed, suddenly awake, and stood shivering in the darkness, trying to understand what had changed. But there was only the silence. I went into my daughter's bedroom.

Scout, my five-year-old, had kicked the duvet to the floor and our dog, a red spaniel called Stan, was curled up against the back of her legs. I pulled the duvet over the pair of them. Stan opened his huge round eyes and checked me out. Scout didn't stir. I quietly closed the door behind me.

Then I walked to the window and I saw what was different about the night. Snow had started to fall.

The sleeping city was already covered in a thick white blanket. Ahead of me, high above our loft, a billion snowflakes swirled around the great white dome of St Paul's Cathedral, sparkling in the moonlight. It was beautiful.

I glanced at the clock and smiled. One a.m. on 26 December. London had missed a White Christmas by about sixty minutes.

I turned away from the window and stopped dead, suddenly understanding that it was not the snow that had forced me from sleep.

Directly below me was the great London meat market of Smithfield and it should have been deserted. But there was a black Transit van parked directly in front of the main entrance, its engine running, clouds of diesel fumes billowing behind it.

I watched the van, hoping that it would drive away. But it didn't. The back doors opened and a man climbed out.

He was bundled up against the cold, his face covered by some kind of ski mask. And then somebody else got out. His face was also covered by a black ski mask, and I could not tell if it was to protect him from the cold or to protect his identity.

The dark figures began dragging something from the van. It took both of them to move the thing. It slowly emerged from the back of the vehicle.

White meat, streaked with red, the ribs clearly visible.

A side of beef.

They placed it on the snow-covered pavement outside the meat market.

No, not a side of beef.

A man. Naked. Half-dead. But still alive.

I could see his mouth opening and closing as they picked him up and carried him down Poultry Avenue, one of the three small roads that cross the meat market.

I quickly pulled on my jeans, my boots and my leather jacket and was halfway down the stairs before I stopped and went back up to triple lock our front door.

Then I went down to the street.

The snow was falling harder.

I took out my phone and called CCC - Central Communications Command, also known as Metcall, the largest Operation Command Unit at London's Metropolitan Police Service - my eyes never leaving the black van on the other side of Charterhouse Street. The engine was still running but there was nobody at the wheel.

'Immediate response detail required,' I told the First Contact Operator at CCC. 'Suspected murder in progress. Multiple assailants. Smithfield Market, Charterhouse Street, EC1. Over.'

A beat.