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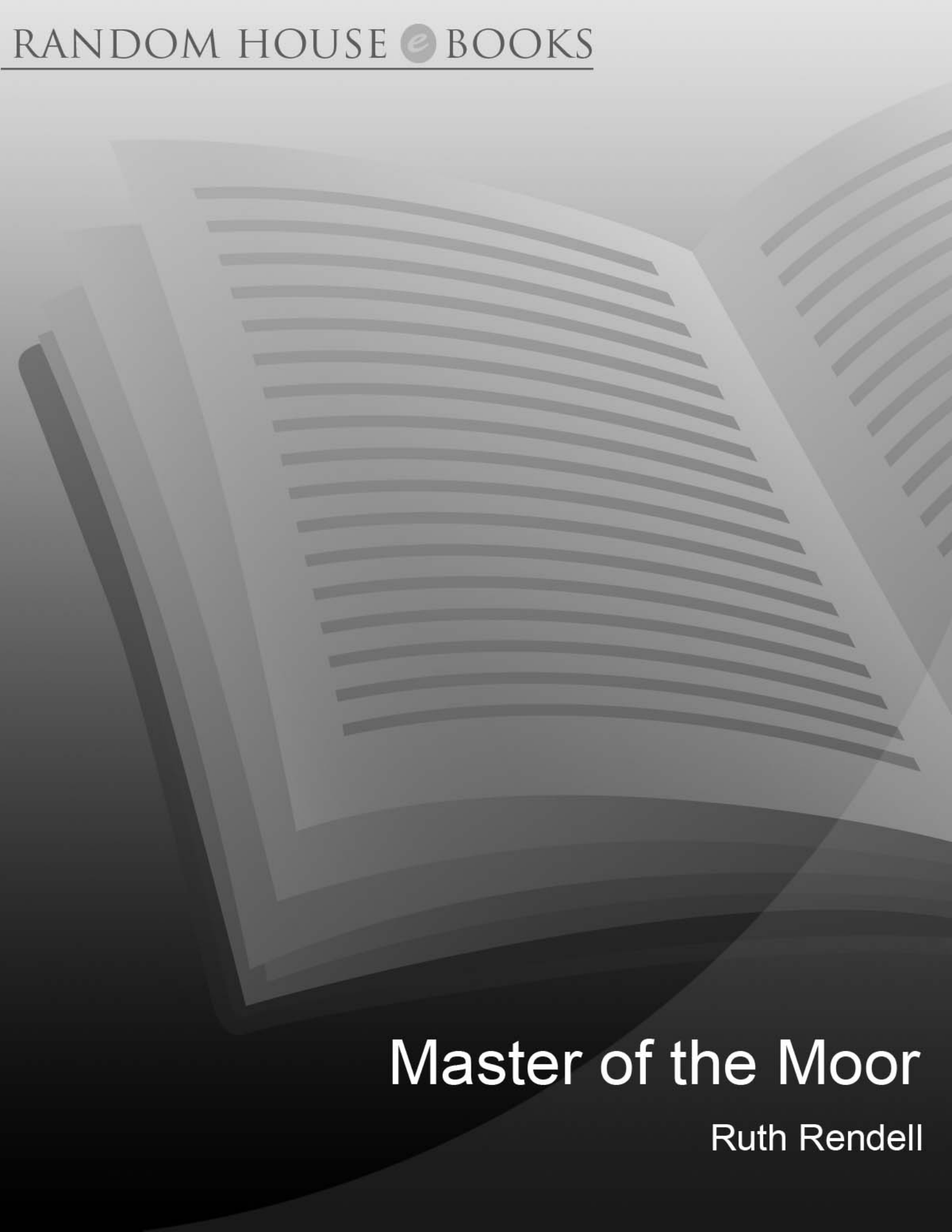

Master of the Moor

Ruth Rendell

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About the Author

Ruth Rendell was an exceptional crime writer, and will be remembered as a legend in her own lifetime. Her ground-breaking debut novel, *From Doon With Death*, was first published in 1964 and introduced readers to her enduring and popular detective, Inspector Reginald Wexford.

With worldwide sales of approximately 20 million copies, Rendell was a regular *Sunday Times* bestseller. Her sixty bestselling novels include police procedurals, some of which have been successfully adapted for TV, stand-alone psychological mysteries, and a third strand of crime novels under the pseudonym Barbara Vine.

Rendell won numerous awards, including the *Sunday Times* Literary Award in 1990. In 2013 she was awarded the Crime Writers' Association Cartier Diamond Dagger for sustained excellence in crime writing. In 1996 she was awarded the CBE, and in 1997 became a Life Peer.

Ruth Rendell died in May 2015.

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THE MOOR

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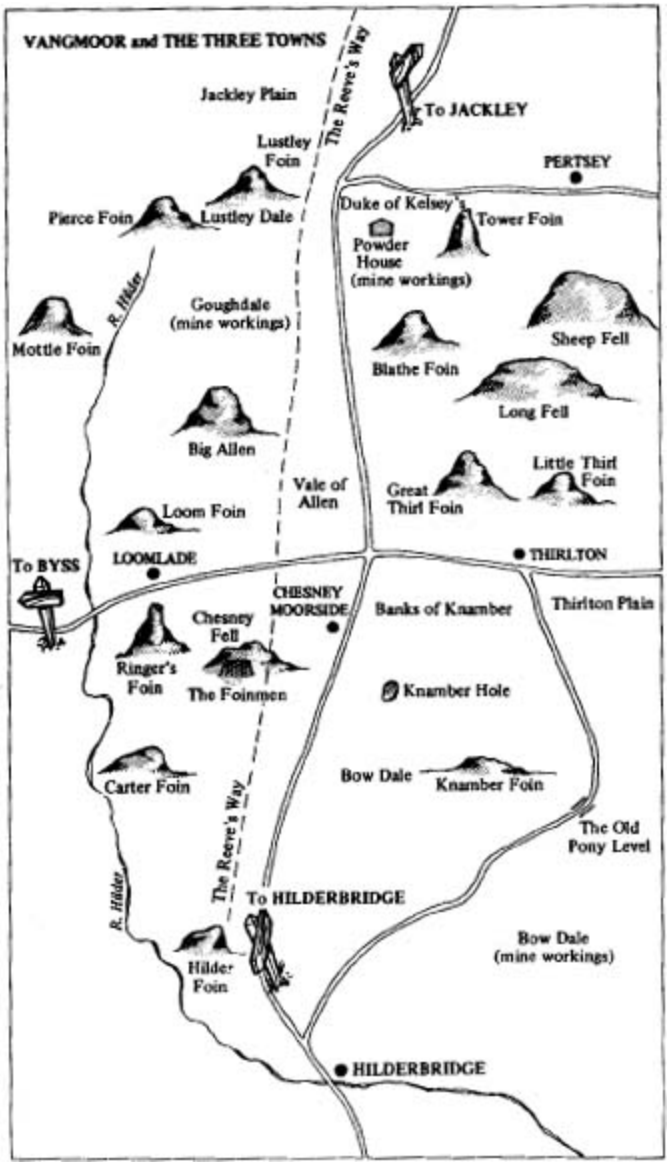
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HILDERBRIDGE

1

It was the first dead body he had ever seen. At first it had been a shock and had made his heart beat faster. Now he knelt down and looked at the dead girl curiously. Something unpleasant had happened to her face; it was swollen and a greyish-blue colour, and her eyes protruded under strained shiny eyelids. She had been very fair, a blonde, he could tell that by her pale brows and lashes, though not by her hair, for someone had clipped all that off very close to the scalp.

She lay on her back on the grass within the avenue made by the great standing stones, between the ninth and tenth of them on the northern side. It was still early in the morning, 8.30 or so, and he supposed she had lain there all night. The sun was shining and there was an east wind blowing which set the clouds tumbling and their shadows rushing across the shallow hills and the craggy outcroppings. The shadows of the perpendicular stones lay parallel to one another like the teeth of a giant’s comb. It was very cold, the biting brilliant cold of April in the middle of England. The girl was dressed in jeans, a thick sweater and a thick quilted jacket. She had been a slender, tallish, very young girl. He had known at once that she was dead. Now for the first time he touched her skin, the skin of her forehead, with his fingertips. It felt like marble, like the angel on the Tace tomb in Chesney churchyard, as cold and as unyielding.

His instinct was to lift her up and carry her down the hillside to the village. He was strong enough to do that without effort. But memories came to him of books he had read and films he had seen. She must be left there for the police, he must get the police. What a climax to a moorland walk! He had left home a little before eight, having put a

cup of tea on the bedside table next to Lyn, walked through the village and climbed the fell. An ordinary walk on the moor, such as he had taken two or three times a week for years and years. What had he been thinking about? A kitten, of all things. He had been thinking about buying Lyn a kitten for her birthday, and as he came up to the great dolmen, had paused to look at it for the thousandth time, he had seen the bundle on the ground. An incongruous coloured speck among the green and the grey. A patch of red and blue with the head of a damaged doll.

After a while he got up from his knees. He had a strange sensation that for many minutes he had been holding his breath, though he couldn't of course have been doing that. The girl's eyes were exactly like the turquoise blue marbles he and Peter Naulls had played with as children. He took in deep breaths of the clean, icy moorland air. High above him a hawk hung like a pendulum. The wind had torn open a rift in the clouds and the sky revealed was as blue as those dead eyes. He turned his back abruptly and walked away. He walked back the way he had come and let himself out by a gate in the railing where a metal notice planted in the earth read: *Department of the Environment. Ancient Monument. The Foinmen.* The hawk dropped to the ground, rose again in a flurry of striped feathers.

In those parts where they call hills foins and mineshafts soughs, the paths that ascend the hillsides in hairpin bends are crinkle-crankle paths. He made his way down the crinkle-crankle path that traversed Chesney Fell. He took long strides and he walked fast but he walked easily too and without great exertion. His body was a strong vigorous machine which the moor had developed and sustained. He wore an anorak over a wool sweater with a polo neck and he wore tough cord jeans and walking boots. He was twenty-nine but he looked younger because his hair was fine and very dark and his skin a fresh white and red. On the cold air as he made his way down his breath blew like smoke.

The clock on the tower of St Michael-in-the-Moor chimed nine as he came onto the road. The milkman's van was on the green; Mrs Southworth from the Hall was at the pillar box, posting a letter. He walked on away from the green and the houses up the bit of the Jackley road from which Tace Way turned off. The council houses, of fudge-coloured brick, stood in two rows and a horseshoe shape with a screen of Leyland's cypress hiding them from the village. The moor was all round the saucer in which Chesney lay but the best views of it were from his house, the last house before the road curved round.

Lyn's mother, still in a dressing gown, was watching from her downstairs window. She waved and he waved back. He waved too at Kevin Simpson who was getting his car out. He waved and grinned as if nothing had happened. The wind came whipping off the moor and bent the cypresses as if they were blades of grass.

Lyn heard his feet in the sideway and opened the back door to him. Though she was dressed, her long fair hair was still in pigtails, the way she wore it at night. She looked like a tall little girl.

'You weren't long.'

'I hadn't got far. Oh, Lord, darling, there's something pretty ghastly up there. A girl and she's dead. I found her lying among the Foinmen.'

It occurred to Lyn – fleetingly, to be gone in a moment – that most men would have broken such a thing more gently to their wives. She spoke steadily in her soft, low voice, 'What do you mean "dead", Stephen? Do you mean she's had an accident?'

He shook his head. 'Her face is all blue. And her hair's gone, someone's cut off all her hair.'

These days when Lyn had a shock it made her shake. No matter how controlled and calm she might sound, her hands would shake and sometimes her whole body. Her mother

said it was all nerves, but what had she to be nervy about? Her body began its trembling.

‘Oh, Stephen, no!’

‘Pretty frightful, isn’t it? She’s been murdered. Strangled, I should think. I’d be willing to bet she’s been strangled. Oh, Lord, now I’ve upset you.’

‘I’m all right,’ said Lyn. ‘Are you going to phone the police?’

‘I certainly am. Straightaway. I came back at once. I came back as fast as I could.’

‘Oh, Stephen . . .’

They were standing close, looking at each other. She put her arms round him and held him tightly. He allowed her to hold him but it was an effort, he was impatient to act, to get to the phone. She let him go.

‘Where?’ the man on the phone said.

It amazed Stephen how little local people knew of their countryside, their heritage really. Those Simpsons, for instance, who knew the Foinmen no better than they knew Stonehenge, Dadda who bragged he hadn’t been on Vangmoor these twenty years. ‘At the Foinmen,’ he repeated, ‘between the ninth and tenth stones on the north side.’

‘The best thing’ll be for you to show us, Mr Whalby. You stay where you are and we’ll come to you.’

Stephen wasn’t having that. ‘I’ll meet you on the green. I’ll be waiting for you on Chesney Green.’

While he was on the phone Lyn’s sister had come in, big-boned, yellow-haired Joanne, only nineteen and married six months. Her voice was as strident as Lyn’s was gentle.

‘I don’t reckon I ought to have shocks like that in my state of health.’

Lyn said worriedly, ‘I wish you hadn’t listened.’

‘Come on, love, don’t you know when I’m kidding? I’m going to dash back and tell Kev. Does Mum know?’

Stephen went out again. Joanne and her mother were talking on Joanne's doorstep. He didn't stop. He walked back down to the green and waited out of the wind on the churchyard side. Between the lychgate and St Michael's ancient oak door was the Tace tomb, white marble, black bronze and Giacometti's agonized angel with wings like fishbones. Stephen leaned over the gate, waiting for the police. The square tower of the church was built out of the dun-coloured limestone called foinstone and so were all the cottages and Chesney Hall itself. Long ago it had been quarried out of a deep pit called Knamber Hole. You could see Knamber Foin from here, a bleak mass of rubble rising out of a plain that was grey, smoky-looking with the leafless boughs of ten thousand little birch trees. Clouds shadowed densely those south-eastern parts, but the north and west were broadly lit by the sun, the higher hills gleamed in sunshine, and a flock of birds flew across the expanse of blue sky above Big Allen.

The wind was like a blade that just skims the skin. Stephen saw the police cars coming a long way off, three of them in a convoy coming up the white road from Hilderbridge. An army of police – well, enough to show they believed him. The cars parked one behind the other in a row on the road that crossed the green from the Hall to the church. Already there were a couple of people watching, Kevin Simpson's mother and an old man whose name Stephen didn't know, hungry for excitement on an empty April Saturday. He said to the police, 'This way. We have to go up over the fell.'

There was a detective inspector, a thickset man of about his own age, athletic-looking but red in the face and with reddish hair, and a detective sergeant, a bit younger, dark with a wedge-shaped rodent face, a beanpole of a man. Then there were officers with particular functions, one whose job it was to be at the scene of the crime before the body was touched or moved. Stephen took them up the zig-

zag track. If he had been on his own he would have gone straight up but he was more used to walking and climbing, no doubt, than these policemen. He fancied too that he felt the cold less than they did. They had stamped their feet and rubbed their hands while they were waiting about. The inspector said to him suddenly, ‘Are you the Stephen Whalby that writes that nature column for the *Echo*?’

‘ “Voice of Vangmoor?” Yes. Yes, I am.’ No one had ever asked him that before and Stephen felt pleased. It was seldom, of course, that he met people who didn’t already know. ‘Are you – ‘ he tried to speak as a real writer would ‘– one of my regular readers?’

‘On and off,’ said the inspector. Stephen now remembered he had said his name was Manciple. ‘You must know the moor like the back of your hand.’

‘I know it pretty well.’ Stephen couldn’t resist boasting a bit. ‘I daresay I’m actually the greatest living authority on Vangmoor.’

Stephen said this very seriously but for some reason it made the wedge-faced sergeant guffaw. He had an unpleasant grating laugh and Stephen felt anyway that it was unseemly to laugh in these circumstances. He compressed his lips in silent offence.

The inspector gave no sign of noticing. ‘You’ll be watching “Bleakland” on the telly, I expect. They say that chap Alfred Tace who wrote the books, he knew the moor inside out.’

‘Alfred *Osborn* Tace,’ Stephen corrected him, and said after a little hesitation, ‘He was my grandfather.’

They were both impressed now. ‘Is that a fact?’ said Manciple, and the sergeant said, ‘You’ll maybe be getting a bit of money out of this series, then?’

‘Good Lord, no!’ He wanted to laugh, though it would have been a bitter laugh. ‘Actually, it was through the female line,’ he began, wondering how much he meant to explain, but they had ceased to listen to him. They were at the top of the hill and Foinmen’s Plain had unrolled itself before them.

The wind scored shivering channels through the ling and bilberries, the growth of fine, dry grass. Against the bright, constantly changing sky the dolmen stood stark and black. ‘Look, over there.’ Stephen pointed.

They went forward slowly. They could all see it now, there was no need for hurry. The scene-of-crimes man stumbled as one of his feet went into a rabbit hole. Stephen liked to make a ceremony of his visits to the Foinmen, walking slowly the length of the avenue up to where the Giant stood, but there was none of this now. They didn’t even bother to use the gate but swung their legs over the low railing and walked straight in among the stones to where the girl was.

A small green insect with folded wings had settled on her forehead. They looked at her and for a time no one said anything. Then Manciple said, without touching her, without even bending down, ‘She’s dead all right.’

One of the men Stephen had taken for another policeman in plain clothes came closer, looked at the girl’s open blue eyes. The sergeant called him Doctor. ‘Of course she’s dead,’ the doctor said, and then, ‘A moors murder, my God. Sooner or later it had to be.’

A gust of wind roared across the plain and the insect, blown by it, took wing.

He was most of the day at Hilderbridge police station. Manciple disappeared and Stephen was questioned by a chief superintendent called Malm. Why had he been out on Vangmoor so early? Wasn’t it very cold to be out on the moor at that hour? Had he ever been to the Foinmen before? Dozens of times, maybe even, hundreds? Then why had he gone this particular morning?

It was impossible to make Malm see that one might love the moor, enjoy walking, have become accustomed to the cold. The sergeant, whose name was Troth, came back and sat next to Malm. They were perfectly polite, curious, baffled. After an hour or so of that Malm changed his tack

and wanted to know whom Stephen had met on that morning walk, everything he had seen.

‘I didn’t meet anyone. I hardly ever do.’ Stephen tried irony. ‘I saw a hare and after I’d found the body there was a sparrowhawk, a kestrel.’ He saw he had made Malm think him of unsound mind and he said quietly, earnestly, ‘There was nothing, nothing but what I’ve told you.’

After that they went back to why was he there and didn’t he mind the cold. They didn’t tell him the girl’s name or where she came from. He had to find that out from the television when he got home. Lyn jumped up when he came in.

‘That’s what you get for being public-spirited.’ Stephen forced a laugh. ‘They’re acting as if they think *I* did it.’

‘They can’t be, Stephen. It must be just their manner.’

‘I feel worn out, much more than I would if I’d been for miles on the moor. D’you know, that was the first dead body I’ve ever seen. It’s a strain on you. Have you ever seen a dead person?’

‘My grandmother, my mother’s mother. She just looked as if she was asleep. Would you like a drink, love? A proper drink or just tea? I’ve made supper, we can have it whenever you want.’

‘Put the box on, shall we? It’s time for “Bleakland”.’

Lyn brought tea in and then supper on two trays. She sat beside Stephen and held his hand. Vangmoor came up on the screen as if they were looking out of the window, but Vangmoor in summer without the wind and with leaves on the trees. Stephen had watched some of the film-making, the scenes they had shot in the Vale of Allen. It was a strange experience to see Lady Irene in her Edwardian dress, Alastair Thornhill in Norfolk jacket, Big Allen behind them, and then, when the romance was over, the episode ended, the real moor of today come onto the screen with the news. It was as if the moor were the whole world and there was nothing anywhere but the moor.

The announcer said that the dead girl had been called Marianne Price and that she was twenty. She had been stopped and killed while cycling home from Byss to Hilderbridge late on the previous night. A picture of her as she had been in life came up on the screen. A round face with a high forehead, blue eyes, short straight nose, a mantle of shining, fair hair. Stephen's name wasn't mentioned.

Police were searching for the missing bicycle, but the announcer said nothing about the missing hair. Stephen switched off the set. He went to the window and drew back the curtain. There was a bright, nearly full moon. The silhouette of Big Allen stood out densely black against a lustrous, opaque sky.

'When I was a child I used to imagine the moor belonged to me, that I was a young prince or the heir to an estate or something. It was after Mother left that I started thinking like that.'

'You needed something to make up for it,' Lyn said.

He shrugged. 'Yes – I suppose Freud and people like that would say I was compensating for losing my mother. I don't know. I used to think of the moor as all my property, my kingdom, I suppose, and I'd decide where I was going to build my capital city and where I was going to have my hunting forest. And the Reeve's Way, that was where I was going to march my army. You'll laugh, but I was going to have a coronation. I was going to be crowned at the Foinmen, standing on the Altar.'

Lyn didn't laugh. She had heard it all before but he always seemed to forget he had told her. His voice went up in pitch.

'Good grief, when I think of some creature coming onto the moor and doing a vile thing like this! It makes my blood boil, it's sacrilege!'

But Lyn said quietly, 'I wish it hadn't had to be you who found her.'

2

There were Sundays when Dadda didn’t come to lunch, when depression kept him from stirring out of doors. His depressions were an illness, not merely a feeling of lowness or irritability. They dragged him down into horrors he said no one could imagine. But between bouts, in a precarious euphoria that to others seemed like dourness, he drove up from Hilderbridge in Whalbys’ van.

The depression of last week had lifted like a fever passing when the patient sleeps or asks for food. Dadda looked shattered by it, though, bruised under the eyes. He wore his one good suit, grey with a white chalk stripe, and he had brought with him Lyn’s birthday present in an unwieldy brown paper parcel. He didn’t kiss Lyn, he never touched women, or men either for that matter, but he seemed to make a principle of shrinking from the touch of women.

Lyn unwrapped a small round table, high-polished, with curved legs and a top carved in a design of a chestnut leaf and cluster of spiny fruits.

‘It’s beautiful, Dadda. You are good to us.’

‘Don’t go ruining it with hot cups.’

‘What a lovely piece of work!’ Stephen exclaimed. ‘Early Victorian, isn’t it?’

‘Late,’ said Dadda. ‘You ought to be able to see that with half an eye. You’re supposed to be in bloody trade.’

Lyn’s parents and Joanne and Kevin always came over on Sunday afternoons. Mr Newman was a small quiet man, half the size of Dadda, probably literally half his weight. He ran a finger along the carving.

‘We shan’t be able to compete with that.’

‘It’s not a question of competing,’ said his wife. ‘Lyn knows she’s getting a cardigan, anyway. Have to wait till

Wednesday.’ She had brought two Sunday papers with her. Everyone had a paper except Dadda who never read anything. Mrs Newman’s face was round and healthy and high-coloured like Joanne’s. ‘It’s a funny thing,’ she said, ‘but in a place like this, a sort of open space, forest, moors, anywhere that’s National Trust, you always get killings. It’s a wonder we haven’t had them before.’

Joanne said, ‘What d’you mean “them”, Mum? There’s been one young girl killed so far as I know.’

‘So far. You get one now and another in a couple of weeks and folks are scared to go out or we women are. It’ll be one of those pathologicals.’

‘Psychopaths.’

‘Whatever they call them. Maniacs, we used to say.’

‘A proper ghoul, isn’t she, Tom?’ said Mr Newman.

Dadda didn’t answer but gave his awkward humourless grin. He sat with his huge shoulders hunched up. He was used to company but hopeless in it, he never improved. Many men are as tall as or taller than their fathers and Stephen was six feet, but Dadda still towered above him. He filled his armchair, all long, gaunt, bent limbs, that somehow suggested a cornered spider. All but he wanted to know how Stephen had got on with the police.

‘I’m their number one suspect. No, it’s a fact.’

‘He’s exaggerating,’ Lyn said.

Dadda spoke. ‘Beats me why he had to stick his neck out.’

‘Once I’d seen her,’ Stephen said, ‘I had to report it.’

‘I’d have shut me eyes and carried straight on. It all comes of this traipsing about the moor.’

‘Good grief, you sound just like the police! Can’t anyone understand a man can love the countryside? It’s a simple enough pleasure in all conscience, harmless enough, I’d have thought.’

Kevin winked. ‘I tell folks Lyn’s not a grass widow, she’s a moor widow.’

A grim smile moved Dadda’s mouth.

Mrs Newman said, ‘I should think this’d put you off anyway, Stephen. You won’t want to be up there with this maniac about. I don’t like that word widow, Kevin, that’s not very nice.’

Joanne and Kevin held hands on the sofa. ‘I knew that girl, that Marianne Price, Mum, did I tell you? Well, you must have known her, Stephen. She was in the cash desk at the Golden Chicken.’

‘The Market Burger House they call it now, Joanne.’

‘Whatever they call it. Don’t you get your lunch there, Mr Whalby?’

‘Me? I keep me feet under me own table. Stephen goes out for his dinner, he’s young.’

‘There you are, Stephen, like I said, you must have known her, you must have seen her hundreds of times.’

‘Good Lord, Joanne, how would I know? She’d have looked a bit different, I can tell, from what she was like lying up there with her hair all cut off.’

Joanne gave a little scream and put her hands up to her own abundant blonde hair.

‘She won’t be there tomorrow,’ said Mrs Newman. ‘I shouldn’t be surprised if they were to close tomorrow out of respect. I remember when you and your brother were little, Lyn, Joanne wasn’t born, old Mr Crane over at Loomlade got killed in his car and they closed the electric shop two days out of respect and the branch in Byss.’

But next day the Market Burger House was open for business as usual. Stephen took particular note of it after he had taken Lyn to the Mootwalk and parked the car in the market square. The restaurant was the only one in Hilderbridge, in the Three Towns probably, that served breakfast. People were breakfasting, some were just having coffee. An Indian girl in a blue sari was at the cash desk in Marianne Price’s place. Stephen went across the square to Whalbys.

Dadda lived alone in the three-storey house in King Street, a narrow foinstone house, one room deep and heated with oilstoves. The workshop was the coachhouse next door and the room above it. Over the double doors, painted dark brown, was a sign in gilt lettering that said: *Whalby and Son. Restorers of fine furniture.* The sign was peeling and you couldn't read it from the other side of the square but the Three Towns knew who Whalbys' were without that. A Whalby and his son had been there for as long as anyone could remember and Dadda used sometimes to boast on his good days that Alfred Osborn Tace had himself been a customer and that Whalbys had re-covered the seats of the Hepplewhite chairs at Chesney Hall.

Stephen said hallo to Dadda before going upstairs to start work on the three-piece suite they had brought in on Friday. Dadda was smoking. Between his nutcracker lips was one of the thin twisted little cigarettes he made himself. The frames of the furniture were sound, a lot better than the kind of stuff they manufactured nowadays. He began tearing off the old, almost ragged, tapestry and prising out tacks. The scent of tobacco was wafted up the stairs. Dadda only smoked when he was contented and then he would get through forty or fifty a day, bringing on a cough and staining his fingers yellow-brown. Dadda might have been a lot different, Stephen thought, if his wife hadn't deserted him. Or was it because he was the way he was that she had walked out one day when Dadda was at work and he at school, leaving a note on the kitchen table and the remains of the week's housekeeping money? He had been too young to read the note but he could still remember how that table had looked when he came in, its top at the time the height of his own shoulder. He could still remember the piece of folded exercise book paper, the three pound notes and the pile of coins at eye level.

Dadda never spoke of her directly. When, a long time ago now, Stephen had tried to call him Dad or Father and drop

the babyish name, he had shouted that Stephen was all he had in the world and couldn't he have a little bit of kindness and call him by the one name that meant something? And sometimes he had clasped Stephen to him, almost crushing the breath out of his body, muttering his tortured affection. It was only in such oblique ways that he referred to his state of deserted, now divorced, husband. There were no photographs of her in the house in King Street, and the photographs Stephen had seen he had wrested out of old Mrs Naulls. He guessed she had been named after Lady Irene Nevil's daughter in *Wrenwood.* She had Tace's colouring. She was slender and very fair with long golden hair and as unlike as possible any Naulls that had ever been.

The wind had dropped and a cold whitish mist from the river lingered in patches. Lyn walked across the cobbles and over the Old Town bridge. This morning the water was clear and silvery, chuckling a little as it lapped over the smooth, oval, brown stones. A pair of swans drifted down towards the town centre.

She was early for work as usual because Dadda liked Stephen to be in soon after nine. She whiled away time walking along the Mootwalk, an ancient wooden cloister that faced the Hilder and under which was a row of shops: an optician's, a hairdresser's, a wine shop, a jeans and sweater boutique, a newsagent, the pet shop. There was a pale green sweater in the window of Lorraine's she thought she might buy. That sort of green, a clear, pale, jade, was her colour. The newsagent's Sunday paper placard was still outside: 'Local Girl in Moors Murder'.

A few cars passed along the cobbles or parked, a few people on foot were on their way to work, not many. The great influx would be north of the river, the other side of town where Cartwright-Cageby's mill employed 60 per cent of the working population of Hilderbridge. Down here it was always quieter, it was older, it was peaceful. The ramparts