

## CHAPTER ONE

It was barely light when the call came but Zigic was already up, trainers on, standing in the kitchen, stretching his hamstrings, seeing the frost sparkling across the gravelled driveway and the thin remnants of a freezing fog rolling slowly along the lane, drifting over from the lakes on Ferry Meadows.

He slipped his phone out of the holder strapped to his bicep, Ferreira's name on the screen, driving away the momentary flicker of relief he'd felt at having a good excuse to avoid this morning's hard slog around the village.

He'd been back at it for two weeks and it still wasn't getting any easier. His runner's high seeming to have deserted him, while all the old twinges and aches remained, hardened by neglect. The days when he'd do a swift 10k before work felt like a lifetime ago.

'What's up, Mel?' he asked, already kicking off his trainers.

'Murder,' she said, a caffeinated clip to her voice. 'Back end of Fletton, Phorpres Way. Young guy. All I know right now. Cordon's up. Forensics are on site.'

'Alright, I'm on my way.'

He dressed quickly and quietly in the hallway outside the bedroom, wanting to let Anna sleep; pulled on jeans and a T-shirt and a heavy woollen jumper against the November morning. He saw the light on in Milan's bedroom and knew he would be curled in the armchair in the corner, reading before school, his homework done and filed away in his bag, his uniform laid out at the foot of his bed ready. He'd taken to making his own packed lunch the evening before. It was a far cry from eighteen months ago, when every morning was a guilt-stricken fight to get him up

and dressed and breakfasted, while he complained of stomach aches and headaches, the manifestation of his unhappiness at his old school. He was like a different boy now. Or, rather, he was back to being the boy he was before the bullying started.

Zigic poked his head around the bedroom door to say good morning.

‘Are you going to work already?’ Milan asked.

‘Yep. Can you tell your mum when she wakes up?’

‘Sure,’ Milan said, eyes dropping back down to his book, not wanting to talk about it any further.

Zigic nodded. ‘Have a good day at school, buddy.’

‘I will.’

In the car, pulling out onto the narrow lane between the house and the allotments opposite, Zigic wondered if it was time to have a talk with Milan about his job. He’d been avoiding it. Was dreading it more than the birds and bees conversation they’d managed to get through with the minimum of embarrassment or awkward questions. Death should be easier, he thought. He guessed most parents would have taken the death talk over the sex one if they had an option.

But it wasn’t just about the fact of lives ending, which Milan already understood. This was about death that wasn’t innocent or peaceful, or the painful but inevitable end point of disease. He would have to explain to his kind-hearted, sensitive boy that some deaths were the result of rage or jealousy or contempt.

And, on some level, he was sure Milan knew this already. He read too many books not to understand. But it felt like Zigic needed to contextualise his own part in the aftermaths of these deaths. Explain that somebody needed to find the guilty and give those left behind justice and closure.

It was *that* he was dreading, he realised, as he turned onto the dual carriageway that ringed Peterborough city centre, where the earliest starters were already heading into work. He was dreading being asked what happened when you didn’t find the guilty person. He wanted Milan to have a few more years believing in the justness of the world and his father’s ability to make the bad things go away.



He drove fast through the sparse traffic on the Parkway, cutting between the sheer, blank faces of sprawling super-stores and warehouses and delivery hubs, their buildings brutal in scale despite the softening intentions of the landscaping. Everything was greener than it should have been at this time of year, nature unaware that it was winter. Across the roundabout and past the garden centre onto Phorpres Way where, between car dealerships and low-rise retail spaces, yards were beginning to fill as the workers arrived.

This was an area of the city that had been wasteland a few years ago but was now packed tight with businesses, all huddled in the lee of the Parkway that ran high along their backs.

As he turned onto London Road, he saw the crime scene.

One lane of traffic had already been blocked off. Council workers with stop/go signs were controlling the cars while two of their mates got the traffic lights up and running and a generator was rolled out of a van, a uniformed officer watching them. Zigic caught a glimpse of the white plastic forensics tent erected behind them and he strained to see more as he waited for the sign to spin.

He parked at the end of a line of familiar vehicles in front of the first in a row of red-brick houses that had been built for brickyard workers at the clay pits that used to dominate this part of the city. Now they sat slightly adrift from the rest of the homes further along London Road.

Potential witnesses, he thought, eyeing the distance between the houses' gable end windows and the crime scene tent as he got out of the car. The new estate a hundred yards north on the opposite side of the road might yield some too.

A place this open, with so many comings and goings, someone would have surely seen something.

The tent was set close to the flyover's ridged concrete wall, sitting unevenly where the land climbed to meet the road at a steep angle, the grass long and tussocky, a thicket overgrowing it. High and dense enough to conceal an attacker, he thought. He looked back along the road towards the town centre, imagining someone walking home along here, where the street lights got



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sparse and the rumble from the parkway overhead would mask the sound of quick footsteps rushing up behind you.

Judging by the area cordoned off at the centre of the footpath, there had been a scuffle. Serious enough to leave blood on the pavement. The victim dragged out of sight of the main road, into the undergrowth. Longer before they were found but more potential trace evidence.

He'd noticed Kate Jenkins's car, but there was no sign of the chief scene of crime officer, so he guessed she was already inside the tent. Two of her assistants were examining the ground around it, one of them halfway into the undergrowth.

DS Ferreira came over to him as he approached the cordon, black beanie pulled down to her brows and her hands punched into the pockets of a grey wool coat.

'You been in yet?' he asked.

'I was waiting for you.'

They suited up, Ferreira grumbling about having to take her hat and coat off to pull on the forensics suit.

'What have we got?' he asked.

'Victim's a Jordan Radley. His wallet was still on him, cards and everything still intact.' She drew her hair into a ponytail and tucked it away. 'Twenty-one. Lives on Hampton, so it looks like he was on his way home. There's a footpath around the corner that would have taken him under the parkway and straight to his front door.'

'Phone?' He zipped up his suit, swearing as his jumper snagged in the teeth.

'Gone,' she said. 'No sign of any house keys either.'

'Anything else on him?'

'Nothing.'

Zigic took a deep breath, steeling himself for the sight that awaited them, and stepped into the tent.

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