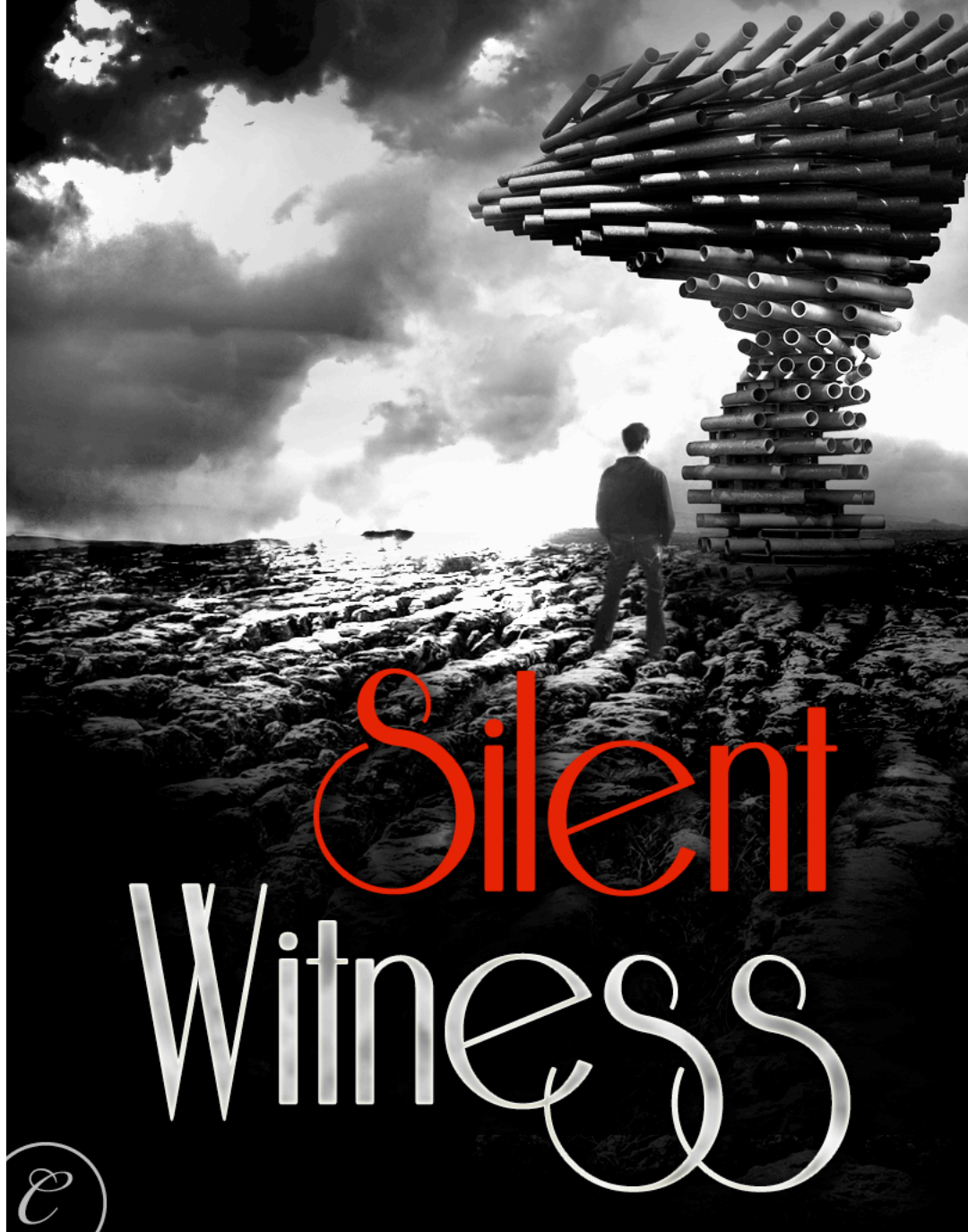


SHIRLEY WELLS

A DYLAN SCOTT MYSTERY



This is an extended excerpt of Silent Witness by Shirley Wells, provided courtesy of Carina Press. To purchase the book, please visit www.carinapress.com



Silent Witness
By Shirley Wells

After his ex-wife bled to death in a bathtub covered in his fingerprints, the case against Aleksander Kaminski seemed open and shut. Though sentenced to life in prison, he swears he's innocent, a claim supported by his current wife.

Private investigator Dylan Scott finds himself drawn back to dreary Lancashire in a search for justice. The evidence against Kaminski is damning, but having been unjustly jailed himself, Dylan is compelled to pursue the case; if there's even a small chance the man is innocent, he has to help. The other obvious suspect—the victim's second husband—has a watertight alibi. But Dylan has a strong hunch that as usual, there's more going on than meets the eye in Dawson's Clough.

The deeper Dylan digs, the more secrets he unearths. The question remains: If Kaminski didn't murder his childhood sweetheart, who did?

87,000 words

Dear Reader,

It's hard to get excited about the month of March. The weather in this part of the world isn't quite spring, and if it's still cold, can make a long winter feel even longer. There are no fun holidays to look forward to except the green beer, corned beef and cabbage of St. Patrick's Day, and the school season is at a point where the kids are starting to whine about having to wake up in the morning and go.

That's why I'm excited about our 2012 March releases at Carina Press. The variety and excellence of the stories give us a reason to anticipate and enjoy the month of March! The rich diversity of these books promises a fantastic reading month at Carina.

Kicking off the month is mystery author Shirley Wells, returning with her popular Dylan Scott Mystery series. Joining her book *Silent Witness* at the beginning of March is BDSM erotic romance *Forbidden Fantasies* by Jodie Griffin; Christine Danse's paranormal romance *Beauty in the Beast*; and a romantic steampunk gothic horror that's like no steampunk you've ever read, *Heart of Perdition* by Selah March.

Later in the month, fans of Cindy Spencer Pape will be glad to see her return with another paranormal romance installment, *Motor City Mage*, while Janis Susan May returns with another creepy gothic mystery, *Inheritance of Shadows*. Historical romance lovers will be more than pleased with *A Kiss in the Wind*, Jennifer Bray-Weber's inaugural Carina Press release.

I expect new Carina Press authors Joan Kilby, Gillian Archer and Nicole Luiken will gain faithful followings with their books: *Gentlemen Prefer Nerds*, an entertaining contemporary romance; *Wicked Weekend*, a sexy and sweet BDSM erotic romance; and *Gate to Kandriith*, the first of a fantasy duology that features wonderful world-building. Meanwhile, returning Carina authors Robert Appleton and Carol Stephenson do what they do best: continue to capture readers' imaginations. Grab a copy of science-fiction space opera *Alien Velocity* and hot romantic suspense *Her Dark Protector*.

Rounding out the month, we have an entire week of releases from some of today's hottest authors in m/m romance, as well as some newcomers to the genre. Ava March kicks off her entertaining and hot m/m historical romance trilogy with *Brooke Street: Thief*. Look for the other two books in the trilogy, *Brooke Street: Fortune Hunter* and *Brooke Street: Rogue*, in April and May 2012. Erastes, who can always be counted on to deliver a compelling, well-researched historical, gives us m/m paranormal historical romance *A Brush with Darkness*, and science-fiction author Kim Knox makes her debut in the m/m genre with her sci-fi romance *Bitter Harvest*. KC Burn gives us the stunning m/m contemporary romance *First Time, Forever*. Joining them are new Carina Press authors Dev Bentham, with a sweet, heartfelt m/m romance, *Moving in Rhythm*, and Larry Benjamin with his terrific debut novel, m/m romance *What Binds Us*.

As you can see, March comes in like a lion but will not go out like a lamb. All month long we offer powerful stories from our talented authors. I hope you enjoy them as much as we have!

We love to hear from readers, and you can email us your thoughts, comments and questions to generalinquiries@carinapress.com. You can also interact with Carina Press staff and authors on our blog, Twitter stream and Facebook fan page.

Happy reading!
~Angela James

Executive Editor, Carina Press
www.carinapress.com
www.twitter.com/carinapress
www.facebook.com/carinapress

Dedication

For Kate, Joe and Elle
Love you.

Acknowledgements

Many people have helped bring this story to you and although I take the credit (and the blame for any errors), I'd like to thank the amazing team at Carina Press for their hard work, commitment and professionalism. Special thanks go to my fantastic editor, Deborah Nemeth, who puts the commas in the right place, has faith in my writing and is great fun to work with.

As always, I'm grateful to Nick. His love, support and willingness to cook makes anything possible.

Chapter One

Dylan liked dogs. Most dogs, at least. The sort he didn't like were Rottweilers weighing in excess of a hundred and fifty pounds. Like the one showing him yellow sharklike teeth right now.

"Okay, Sunshine, we're keeping this gate between us." Dylan tried to speak with authority, to show it who was master here.

The dog already knew who was controlling the standoff and it wasn't Dylan. Mud puddled around the creature's enormous feet as it emitted a menacing growl that shook its well-muscled body.

"Right. I can stand here all day," Dylan said.

The evil-eyed creature came a step closer. Still growling. Still putting Dylan at the top of the day's breakfast menu.

Dylan couldn't really stand here all day. Rain was soaking through his jeans, and a force eight was threatening to knock him off his feet.

The house he was trying to reach looked like something from a child's painting. Square and built of red brick, it had four symmetrical windows, two on the ground floor and two above. The front door was in the middle of the windows, and a chimney was dead centre in a red-tiled roof. A curl of smoke twisting skyward completed the picture.

That front door was about twenty yards from the gate. Dylan wondered if he could find a stone to throw at the door and alert the occupant's attention. Another thought came—

"Right, Sunshine." Dylan wandered into a lane where a vehicle had churned up deep ruts in the mud. He picked up a stone and hurled it the length of the garden at the side of the house. "Fetch!"

The dog simply curled its lip and gave a warning growl.

"Fallen for that one before, have you?" Dylan asked.

A large blue-and-white painted sign told him he was outside the Pennine View Rescue Centre so he couldn't even hope he had the wrong property. Another sign begged for donations. Anything from blankets to pet food and cash was welcomed.

"Hello!" Dylan called as a figure, it was impossible to guess the gender, came into view at the corner of the house.

"Trudy, are you up to your old tricks? Come here, sweetheart." It was female, and she walked up the path, laughing at Dylan's plight. "Don't worry about Trudy. She only wants to play."

Who in hell's name would christen the evil creature *Trudy*? Probably the same person who thought Dylan was daft enough to open the gate.

"It looks like she'd rather have breakfast than play," he said.

"Nonsense. She'd play all day." The woman fondled Trudy's ears. "Wouldn't you, sweetheart?"

"I'm looking for Mrs. Kaminski," Dylan said as the woman reached for the gate.

"Oh, my—" A shocked hand went to her mouth. "You must be Mr. Scott. You're early. Thank you. I mean, thank you for being early. Thank you for coming at all. Sorry, I'm Mrs. Kaminski. Sue."

She thrust out a hand. The closed gate was still between them, the way Dylan would like to keep it.

"Good to meet you, Sue. I'm Dylan." He shook her hand.

She nodded at his car, a 1956 Morgan in Daytona Yellow. "Is that what the best private investigators are driving?"

"It's what *I'm* driving."

"Aw, isn't it pretty?"

He was about to explain that under no stretch of the imagination could his pride and joy be described as *pretty* when she yanked open the gate. The dog lunged. Dylan sucked in his breath, waiting for the crunch of teeth on bone, but the dog merely sniffed at his sleeve and wagged its vast backside in greeting.

"You see?" Sue said. "You're friends already. Come into the house, Mr. Scott. Dylan. This rain's getting heavier. We'll be soaked through."

Dylan, the dog trotting at his side, followed her along a path littered with rope toys, balls and bones that had been well chewed.

"I wanted to keep myself busy until you arrived," Sue said, "so I've been painting one of the kennels. You know what they say about a watched clock. Still, you're here now. And I'm so pleased to see you. I was too excited to sleep last night."

"Oh, I really don't think—"

She was striding on ahead and Dylan's words were lost to the wind.

He followed her around the side of the house to the back. Here, the garden looked like a mini show-jumping arena. There were small red-and-white painted jumps, a long plastic tunnel and a see-saw. Beyond that was an untidy range of mostly wooden outbuildings. Kennels, Dylan assumed. From what he knew of Sue Kaminski, which wasn't much, she devoted all her time, energy and money to caring for the area's stray dogs and cats.

She pushed open a door and led him into a small porch crammed with several pairs of Wellington boots, more dog toys and several waterproof jackets for humans. She yanked off her boots and added them to the pile.

"Come in," she said. Another door led to a large square kitchen. "It's nice and warm in here."

"So it is." Dylan made for the large cream-coloured Aga that was throwing out the heat. Several towels hung from its rail to dry.

"Here." Sue handed him a towel. "It's clean. You can at least dry your hair."

"Thanks." He rubbed at his hair but his jeans were uncomfortably damp.

"Sit down and I'll make us a drink."

Dylan sat at a pine table, making sure he was close to the Aga. The dog, bored with Dylan, thank God, stretched out on the floor in front of the heat source.

Sue pulled off a blue knitted hat, black gloves, red-and-white scarf, dirty blue anorak and thick black sweater, dumping each item on a chair. Dylan had thought the outdoor clothing was responsible for adding inches to her size, but he was wrong. She wasn't fat, but she was quite tall and certainly stocky. Her short fair hair was cut with a view to easy management rather than any thought of fashion.

Her chunky sweater looked hand-knitted and, given the rainbow of colours, Dylan wouldn't have been surprised to learn that she'd used up scrap wool. Black jeans were plastered in mud and her feet were clad in scarlet woollen socks. The only visible jewellery was a scratched band of gold on the third finger of her left hand.

"I'm so excited to see you," she said.

"I don't know what you've been told, but I haven't agreed to take on the case yet." And probably wouldn't. "Unless something convinces me that your husband is innocent—"

"But he is."

"Maybe he is," Dylan said, "but the police and jury thought otherwise. Nothing convinced them he was innocent. Maybe nothing will convince me."

"You're visiting him tomorrow, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Then you'll see for yourself. Once you've talked with him, you'll know he's innocent."

Such belief was touching, but it meant nothing. Having been a respected member of the police force, Dylan knew that men weren't convicted of murder without good reason. On the other hand, a spell in prison had taught him about the flaws in the judicial system.

"Right, let me make you that drink. Tea or coffee?"

"Whatever you're making. Either would be welcome. Thanks."

"Coffee okay then?" she asked, and he nodded.

"Thanks."

While she filled the kettle and took mugs from a cupboard, Dylan looked around the kitchen. Cluttered didn't begin to describe it. A total of three calendars, two showing pictures of dogs and one adorned with cute kittens, hung from the wall. The sink held around a dozen mugs and a plate waiting to be washed. A pile of mail sat on the table. One envelope contained a red final warning notice from her electricity supplier. Two jackets hung from the backs of chairs. Three plastic dog beds of different sizes were vacant. A vase of wilting daffodils sat on the window sill and blocked the light.

The room was untidy—or perhaps lived in was a better description—but it had a certain homely appeal. Although the surfaces were clean, the floor was speckled with muddy paw and boot prints. Dirty marks on the doorframe showed the height of resident dogs.

“There you go,” she said. “Here’s the sugar.”

“Thanks.” Coffee came in a thick blue pottery mug. Dylan stirred in a couple of spoonfuls of sugar and cradled the mug in his hands for extra warmth.

The door opened and closed, letting in a blast of cold wind and a tall, rangy man.

“Hi, Jamie,” Sue greeted the stranger. “Sorry, but you’ll have to make do with Anne today. I’m tied up for the moment.”

Jamie was early thirties, and he had to be at least six feet tall. He wore his sand-coloured hair short. Rimless glasses gave him a geek look. Beneath a green wax coat he wore a canary-yellow jumper. His trousers looked as if they’d quarrelled with his shoes and weren’t going within four inches of them.

Trudy roused herself to inspect the visitor. He was presumably known to her, judging by the way her rump wriggled as he stroked her ears. Losing interest in him and spying Dylan’s briefcase, the dog picked that up and began to circle the room. Dylan wasn’t about to argue with a Rottweiler, especially this one, but he didn’t want his briefcase decorated with bite marks.

Sue smiled indulgently, removed it from the dog’s jaw and put it on the table out of harm’s way.

Jamie was too busy looking miffed with his rejection to notice. “Anne’s nowhere to be seen.”

“She’s definitely here. I expect she’s walking one of the dogs.” Sue reached for a mobile phone, searched for a number, hit a button and held it to her ear. “Hi, Anne. How far away are you? Jamie’s here. Can you deal with him? Yeah? Great. Okay, I’ll send him down.”

“I’ll go and find her then, shall I?” Jamie asked.

“Yes, she’s only out in the field,” Sue said. “Give me a shout if there are any problems.”

He nodded and, with the colour high in his cheeks, left them alone.

“That’s Jamie, our vet,” Sue explained. “He comes regularly to check out the animals, but I’m sure there’s nothing Anne can’t cope with.” She pulled a chair closer to Dylan, was about to sit and said, “Sorry, I haven’t offered you anything to eat. I forgot you’d had such a long journey.”

“I’m fine, thanks. I stopped at a service station on the way.”

Satisfied, she sat down. “How long are you staying up here?”

“That depends.” He was booked into a hotel in Dawson’s Clough, and was due to visit her husband, Aleksander Kaminski, at two o’clock tomorrow afternoon. Unless anything interesting was said, he’d drive straight back to London after that meeting. “As yet, I don’t know much about the case. I’m only here as a favour to my mother really. And to Aleksander’s parents. My mother used to live in Birmingham and knew Aleksander’s parents quite well.”

She’d know all that, just as she’d know that Aleksander’s mother had tried to get other people interested in her son’s case. They’d all turned her down. Dylan probably would too.

“At least you’re here,” she said. “At least you’re willing to see Alek.”

“Yes, but it’s only as a favour.”

That wasn’t strictly accurate. He had two reasons for coming to Lancashire and neither had any bearing whatsoever on Aleksander’s innocence or guilt.

First, Dylan was broke and this was the first offer of real work he’d had for months. That alone wouldn’t have convinced him to make the long journey north though. From the little he knew about Aleksander Kaminski’s case, it had been cut and dried. There had been no doubt from either police or jury that he was a cold-blooded killer.

“Have you left family behind in London?” she asked.

“Yes. A wife and two children.”

A wife and two children. It was the first time he’d said that. Ever.

It was also the second reason he’d been persuaded to come to Lancashire. His house had become a never-ending discussion of baby’s feeding times and bowel movements.

“I’ve got a thirteen-year-old son, Luke,” he said, “and a daughter, Freya. Freya is six days old.”

Sue had taken a sip of coffee and she almost choked on it. “Six days?”

“Yeah.”

“Oh, my God. Well, congratulations!”

What she probably meant was what the hell was he doing in Lancashire when his wife needed him. That was more or less what Bev had wanted to know.

"Thanks," he said.

"And your wife doesn't mind you coming here?"

Dylan wouldn't go that far. "It's fine."

No point telling her that Bev had thrown a vase of flowers at him, complete with water, and called him the most selfish, self-centred bastard she'd ever met.

"Right then," he said. "Perhaps you can begin by telling me why you believe your husband is innocent."

She smiled at that. "Alek couldn't hurt a fly."

How many mass murderers had been bestowed with that particular compliment? Not that Kaminski was a mass murderer. As far as Dylan knew.

"You'd be surprised how few people really know the person they live with." Dylan sometimes had his doubts about Bev. "Okay, tell me all you know about the case. What happened? How did Alek come to be suspect number one?"

She nodded at his briefcase. Surprisingly, there were no teeth marks on it. "Don't you want to record this or make notes?"

"No. Just tell me your story."

"Right." She tugged on the sleeves of her sweater. A scarlet-sock-clad foot strayed to the Rottweiler's back and she ran it back and forth. "Carly Walsingham, Alek's first wife, was murdered in her own home one afternoon. It's eight months ago now. The third of August to be precise. We saw it on the news that evening. We were in here, in this very room." She nodded at a small TV on the counter in the far corner of the kitchen.

"We? You and Alek?"

"Yes." She stood and crossed the room to a notice board where she jabbed a finger at a photo pinned there. "This was taken the same day."

She took the photo from the board and handed it to Dylan. It showed Sue with an elderly lady. They were celebrating a birthday, judging by the candle in the centre of a decorated cake.

"It was a happy day," Sue said. "I always visit my great-aunt, that's my dad's aunt, on Wednesdays, have done since she went into the care home a couple of years ago, and it was her ninetieth birthday that day. I'd baked the cake and made up little bags of chocolates for the staff. They're really kind to her so, on her birthday and at Christmas, I like to bake a cake and give out small gifts. It was a good day, and I was telling Alek all about it when the news of Carly Walsingham's murder came on TV."

"How did you both feel?" Dylan asked.

Her foot resumed its work, stroking the dog's ear. "Horrified, naturally. Not that we had much time to feel anything. Poor Alek was still reeling from the shock when the police arrived and took him off for questioning."

"What made them think he had anything to do with it?"

A wave of colour flooded Sue's face until it matched her socks. She ran her fingers through her short hair. "He'd been there. With her."

"He'd been in Mrs. Walsingham's home? That afternoon?"

Sue nodded, her gaze resting on her socks and her dog.

"Why?" Dylan asked.

She was taking so long to answer that Dylan lost patience. "Okay," he said, "perhaps we should start at the beginning. How long was Alek married to Mrs. Walsingham? How long have you known him? Give me a history lesson, will you?"

Sue took a breath. "Alek, as you probably know, was born in Poland. His dad was offered work on a big building site in Birmingham and the family moved there when he was three. Alek met Carly there. Of course, she was plain Carly Smith then. They were married in 1992 and divorced in 2005."

Perhaps, after all, Dylan should be making notes. Remembering dates was never his strong point. So far this year, and they were only into April, he'd forgotten Bev's birthday, Valentine's Day and their wedding anniversary. Not that it seemed to matter as she'd bought herself jolly nice—and highly expensive—presents before the events.

Dates weren't too important, though. Carly Walsingham, formerly Carly Kaminski, formerly Carly Smith, had married Aleksander Kaminski twenty years ago and been divorced from him for seven years.

"What brought them both to Lancashire?" he asked.

"Her job. She trained as a radiologist and got a job at the hospital in the Clough. Alek's a builder, like his dad, so he can work anywhere. He's self-employed and works mainly on extensions, conservatories, that sort of thing."

"I see." Dylan was making plenty of mental notes. "So they divorced seven years ago. Any reason? Did she meet someone else? Did he? Was it his relationship with you that—?"

"Oh, no. He'd been divorced for a couple of years before I met him."

"So what were the grounds for the divorce?"

"It's difficult to say." The words came grudgingly. "I do know that she wanted children. Nothing was happening though, so she insisted they both go for tests. They found out Alek can't have children. That didn't suit her and soon after they found out, she told him she wanted a divorce. Alek's loyal, he would have stayed with her, but she wanted out. Within a very short time, though, she was married to Dr. Walsingham so, if you ask me, she'd already been seeing him behind Alek's back."

Dylan really should be making notes. He forgot that people led such complicated lives.

"What about you, Sue? How did you meet Alek?"

"He came here to adopt a dog." Her face took on a dreamy expression. "We got talking as we filled in the paperwork, and he came back a couple of times to let us know how Charlie was doing. Sometimes I'd meet up with him when I was out with the dogs."

"I see."

"He was divorced and I—I was a widow."

"Oh?"

She nodded. "My husband Keith died twelve years ago. A pileup on the motorway. He was only twenty-six."

"I'm sorry, I didn't realise."

"We'd only been married for four years. Still, there's nothing we can do about it, is there? I wasn't the only person to lose someone that day. Five others lost their lives and there were a lot of injuries."

Dylan shivered, despite the warmth of the kitchen.

"Life goes on," she said, brightening, "and a few years later, I met Alek."

"Love at first sight?" Dylan smiled.

"More or less, yes. I was wary at first because Alek's twelve years older than me, but love doesn't care about age, does it?"

"No."

Alek was forty-eight, which meant Sue was thirty-six. Dylan had thought she was younger.

Her phone rang and as she spoke to her caller, she was frowning in Dylan's direction. "That's okay," she said finally. "I'm on my way."

She finished the call and looked at Dylan. "I need to walk a dog. Sorry, but it has a skin complaint and we need to keep it moving to stop it licking off ointment. It's a Yorkshire terrier who can't wear a head collar."

Dylan was happy enough to wait. He'd make himself another coffee and enjoy the warmth. So long as she took the Rottweiler with her.

"We can talk while we walk," she said. "I've got spare wellies and coat. Socks too."

Dylan's gaze flew to the window. He looked beyond the daffodils and saw that it had stopped raining. "Okay," he said, reluctantly getting to his feet.

True to her word, she found a pair of huge grey socks, a pair of Wellington boots and a cavernous black anorak.

"We always keep plenty of spares around," she said.

They walked across the back garden, past the ramshackle kennels to a brick building. A corridor ran through the centre of it. One side housed half a dozen dogs, all leaping up at their doors to see what was going on and all barking at the disturbance. On the other side was a small office and, further on, an examination room where Jamie and a girl Dylan assumed was Anne were inspecting a small Yorkshire terrier.

Jamie smiled at Sue. "I'm really pleased with her. She's looking great. Another week or so and I think she'll be ready to leave."

"Great. So all I have to do is find a home for her." She stroked the dog. "You're a little sweetie though, aren't you, Sophie? I'm sure we'll soon find somewhere nice for you. You'd like a warm bed of your own, wouldn't you? Lots of cuddles too? Maybe a fire to curl up in front of?"

It drove Dylan mad to hear dogs being treated like babies. Come to that, it drove him mad to hear babies being treated like babies. What was it that turned grown women into cooing, dribbling idiots?

"Half an hour should do it," Jamie said.

"Great. Thanks, Jamie."

Sue put a pink collar around the dog's small neck, attached a pink leash and turned to Dylan. "Let's go then."

Once they were outside in the damp air and howling gale, Sue nodded back at the building. "Alek built that."

"It's nice."

"It's perfect. He's so clever." She strode to the front of the house and into the lane where Dylan's car sat—*pretty*, indeed—and on down a muddy lane overhung with dark, dripping trees. The dog pranced along, oblivious to the mud.

"To get back to Mrs. Walsingham," Dylan said, "you said you and Alek heard about her murder on the TV news?"

"That's right. We were sitting in the kitchen and the news was on. I was telling him about Aunt Joyce's birthday party so we weren't paying attention until we heard her name mentioned."

"What happened after that?"

"The police came to question Alek the next day. They'd been asking questions in her street, and a neighbour claimed to have seen someone who looked like him leaving the house. And, um, they found his fingerprints there."

"He was definitely there that afternoon?" Dylan asked.

"He was, yes." She kicked out at a stone, startling the tiny dog. "I don't know much about it because Alek doesn't like to talk about it. Obviously he doesn't. I mean, he wouldn't want to upset me, would he? Alek's trouble is that he's too kind for his own good. If she said she wanted to see him, he'd go. Not because she had any hold over him, but because he's good like that. He likes to help people, you see. But—" She cleared her throat and tried again. "But he went to see her. He would have felt obliged. And she—she managed to get him into bed with her. There. It's said."

It certainly was and Dylan knew exactly what it had cost to say it. "He—" It was difficult to put his question into words. "Did they make love the afternoon she was murdered?"

The answer was a long time coming. "They had sex, yes."

Sue was walking so quickly now that Dylan was struggling to keep up. The Yorkshire terrier had broken into a gallop.

"When did you find out that he'd—seen her?" Dylan asked.

"I was eventually allowed to see him. They were holding him in custody, but I was allowed a short visit. He told me then." She stopped walking so abruptly that the dog was yanked off its feet. "He's ashamed, of course, but I know it meant nothing. It was just sex. Men will be men, won't they? All Alek wanted was to be rid of her."

Not the best choice of words. "He got his wish then, didn't he?"

"No!" Her eyes showed signs of moisture. "Not like that. I told you, he couldn't harm a fly. No, he would have just wanted her to stay out of his life."

So he'd silenced her for good?

Not for the first time, Dylan wondered what the hell he was doing in Lancashire. Police had gathered enough evidence to put Aleksander Kaminski behind bars for life. The jury had been happy to put him there. What did people expect him to do about it?

"Was that the only time he visited her?"

Sue shook her head. "He saw her a couple of times, I gather."

"And they—had intercourse?"

She nodded, and bit on her bottom lip.

"Is there anything else you can tell me?" he asked.

"No."

"I used to be in the police force, Sue, and—"

"A policeman? You?"

“Is it so surprising?” He smiled. “I was trying to arrest a known criminal—well, to cut a long story short, the criminal accused me of using excessive force and I found myself on an assault charge. I spent time in prison and lost my job.”

“Really?” She carried on walking at a more sensible pace.

“Yes. Anyway, as I was saying, I’m seeing an old colleague of mine this evening. He’s retired from the force now, but still has plenty of contacts. He’s going to introduce me to the senior investigating officer on Alek’s case.”

She nodded, but didn’t comment.

“So if there’s anything else you can tell me before I see him, I’d be grateful.”

“There’s nothing else. Alek was there the day Carly was murdered and the police found evidence of that. Not that he would have denied it. He had nothing to hide. Anyway, from that, they decided he must have killed her.”

“I see.”

“You must believe me, Dylan. Alek is innocent.” Her voice dropped to a whisper. “You have to get him out of there. You have to.”

Chapter Two

Jamie Tinsley was still at the kennels when Sue returned with a muddy Sophie. He'd made sure of that.

"Everything okay?" he asked.

"Fine, thanks. She's a bit dirty, but at least the ointment's had chance to work."

Jamie was giving a new dog, a shaggy collie cross, a thorough checkup. The animal was probably eight or nine years old, but he was in good shape.

"How did this one come to be here?" he asked.

Sue stroked the dog's ears. "He was tied to the gatepost. I saw him when I woke up yesterday morning. The poor thing must have been there all night because he was soaked right through to the skin. He was starving too, poor baby."

People's cruelty made Jamie wild. He would love to catch the humans responsible and tie them to a gatepost during a long, cold and wet night. He'd like to frighten them and make them go without food and water.

"He's all right though, isn't he?" she asked.

"Yes. Yes, he's fine. He's in good shape so someone must have been looking after him before they dumped him."

"Money's short, Jamie." Sue continued to stroke the dog. "People are losing jobs, they can't pay rent or mortgages, and I suppose even the price of dog food becomes a burden. At least they left him where they knew he'd be well cared for."

Sue saw nothing but good in people. No matter the cruelty she witnessed, and there was plenty, she could come up with excuses. Jamie wondered if that was why everyone loved her.

"His coat's matted in places, but other than that, I can give him a clean bill of health." He helped the dog jump down from the examination table before handing him a meaty treat.

The dog reminded him of Ben. He too had been a shaggy collie crossbreed. He'd had the same huge brown eyes, the long feathery tail that never stopped wagging, and the grey muzzle. Jamie and Ben had been constant companions from the moment they met when Jamie was nine. They'd only had five years together, but Jamie would never forget his special friend. Many dogs had come to him and been helped since then, but not one had touched his heart like Ben.

Jamie leaned against the table, arms folded. "So how are things going? Is everything set up for Monday?"

Sue had been working toward Monday's event for months. She'd breathed a sigh of relief when the Christmas fundraiser went well and then started making plans for this Easter one.

She gave him a rueful smile. "As set up as it ever will be. I just hope the weather improves a bit. No one will turn up if it's like this."

"Oh, I don't know. The weather wasn't great at Christmas but you had a good turnout. Besides, people like to get out on Easter Monday."

"I hope you're right. Well, I won't keep you, Jamie."

"That's okay. I'm not rushing off anywhere." He was due to take the evening's surgery but that didn't start till five o'clock. "Who was your visitor? Someone wanting to adopt an animal?"

"No."

He thought that was all she intended to say on the matter, and that her silence was a polite way of telling him to mind his own business.

"He's a private investigator," she said at last. "Honestly, Jamie, I've been too excited to sleep or even think straight. He hasn't actually agreed to take on Alek's case yet, but I'm sure he will. He's going to the prison to visit him tomorrow."

Her words shocked him to the core. He'd assumed Kaminski would fester behind bars until he was an old man. Why the hell did she have to rake it all over again?

"Really? I didn't know you were thinking of employing someone. I didn't think you could afford to—with this place to worry about, I mean. Still, why not, eh?"

"It isn't costing me a penny," she said. "I would pay. God, I'd give every penny I had, borrow as much as I could. I'd do anything if I thought it would bring Alek home. But no, this is all thanks to Alek's parents. They used to live near Dylan's mother. That's the investigator's name, Dylan Scott. He says that's why he's come up to see Alek, as a favour to his mother and to Alek's parents."

"That's handy then. As they say, it's not what you know, it's who you know."

"Quite." She chewed on her bottom lip. "I daren't even think about it. If I start to imagine Alek coming home—God, I'll die if it all comes to nothing."

"Don't be ridiculous. Of course you won't." He smiled to take the sting from his words. "You're tough, Sue. Strong and brave."

She laughed that off. "I wish. Anyway, I'd better get on."

"Me, too." He checked that he'd put everything in his bag and reached for his coat. "I'll see you on Monday, if not before."

She grinned at him. "Don't forget to bring your wallet."

"I won't."

Sue led the dog to its kennel and, with no excuse to linger, Jamie walked back to his car. The sky was grey, the land wet and dreary. It suited his mood.

Sue had said this private investigator hadn't agreed to take on the case. Hopefully, he wouldn't. Jamie felt sure it would come to nothing but, all the same, he didn't want Dylan Scott or whatever his name was poking his nose where it wasn't wanted.

He'd put a stop to it if he had to.

Chapter Three

Despite the coat and socks Sue Kaminski had loaned him, Dylan had been chilled all day. Now, finally, he was thawing out. After leaving Pennine View Rescue Centre, he'd checked into his hotel and spent the afternoon on the internet, finding out as much as he could about Aleksander Kaminski and the ex-wife he may or may not have butchered. He searched for information on Sue Kaminski and her animal rescue centre, as well as Dr. Walsingham, the victim's husband. Nothing of interest had come to light, nothing he hadn't already known.

He was meeting ex-DCI Frank Willoughby and ex-DI Lewis Cameron at seven-thirty. Dylan was half an hour early but that was okay. On previous visits to Dawson's Clough, the Dog and Fox had become one of his favourite pubs. Passing time in the company of a pint of good beer was no hardship.

This corner of east Lancashire, with its stunning views and hardworking, close-knit community, had grown on him. He found the tall chimneys, relics of a long-dead cotton industry, strangely romantic. Some of the old mills had been left to take their chances with the elements, but others had been turned into luxury apartments. The area was a mix of old and new, and he liked it.

He'd chosen a table at the far end of the pub's lounge, one close to a crackling log fire. A gale still raged outside, hauling rain clouds across a threatening sky, and the fire provided cheer as well as warmth.

A few customers crowded round the bar but, other than that, the place was quiet. From experience, he guessed more people would call in later.

He'd settled down with his second pint when Frank and a man Dylan assumed was Lewis Cameron came in. With a wave of his hand, Dylan indicated that he didn't need another drink.

He wondered if anyone else was watching the two men at the bar and thinking they both looked like coppers. Dylan didn't know what it was, perhaps the erect carriage or the well-polished black shoes, but they oozed policeman from every pore.

Unlike Dylan, who'd been kicked off the force in disgrace—not that he was bitter, or not *too* bitter—these men had retired with commendations. A heart attack had forced Frank to retire, whereas Lewis Cameron had decided to spend more time with his family after years of excellent service.

Ex-DCI Frank Willoughby was sixty and, thanks to a stringent diet and exercise regime, looked good. His hair was short, thick and dark, his back and shoulders straight. Ex-DI Lewis Cameron was a couple of years younger, not as tall as Frank, and about twenty pounds heavier. Dylan wondered if he kept his hair slightly longer to conceal the fact that he was going bald.

"Well, Dylan." Frank gave him a hearty pat on the back. "Long time no see. This is Lewis Cameron. Lewis, Dylan Scott."

Once the handshaking was out of the way, they took their seats around the table.

"So how's life treating you, Dylan?" Frank asked. "Congratulations, by the way. How's the new baby?"

"Life's good, thanks, mate." Dylan couldn't resist. He reached for his wallet and took out the small photo of his daughter. "The new baby is gorgeous. Here. We've called her Freya."

"Freya?"

"Yeah. Apparently, it comes from Norse mythology. I think Freya was the goddess of fertility as well as being the most beautiful of the goddesses."

Lewis Cameron smiled as he looked at the photo. "She's lovely."

"She is." Dylan returned the photo to his wallet. "It just goes to show that not all babies look like Winston Churchill."

"How's Bev?" Frank asked. "Is she okay with you coming up here when you should be helping with the new addition?"

“Okay isn’t quite how I’d describe it.” Dylan took a swig of beer. “She hasn’t forgiven me for missing the birth yet so everything I do is wrong at the moment.”

“How come you missed it?” Frank asked.

Dylan had asked himself that same question a dozen times and he still found it hard to answer. “In my defence, Freya was a couple of days early. She was born Wednesday night, when Arsenal were playing Chelsea at home. I had my phone with me, of course, but there’s a lot of noise when Arsenal play Chelsea and I didn’t hear it ring. I came out of the ground, checked my messages and raced to the hospital. It was all done and dusted by that time. The birth was short and quick, and my mother was there to take charge of everything. Bev was in hospital less than forty-eight hours so it’s all okay.”

“You like to live dangerously.” Frank shook his head and added for Lewis’s benefit, “Dylan’s wife chucked him out. She went the whole way—even found him a flat of his own. It took months for him to worm his way back into her good books. If he’s not careful, he’ll be back in that flat again.”

“Don’t.” Dylan shuddered at the thought.

He hadn’t been in “that flat” above five minutes when his mother moved in, and if there was anything worse than living with his mother, Dylan hadn’t yet stumbled across it. He loved his mother, God knows why, but he couldn’t live with her.

He often thought that if Bev hadn’t got drunk that night nine months ago, and if that night hadn’t resulted in her falling pregnant, he’d still be living in that shoebox the bastard of a landlord chose to call a studio flat. The whys and wherefores didn’t matter though. He was back in the marital home and, God willing, he’d stay there.

He made a mental note to keep on the right side of Bev. He’d take flowers when he went home.

“What about you, Lewis?” he asked. “You’re obviously married. Any children?”

“Two boys. One’s in Scotland and the other’s in Canada. Why obviously? You said I was obviously married.” He glanced down at his left hand as if he expected to see a shining band of gold on his finger. It was bare. “How can you tell?”

“You winced. When I was explaining how I missed Freya’s birth because of the Arsenal game, you winced.”

“Christ, you must be a direct descendent of Sherlock Holmes.” He laughed loudly at his own joke.

Dylan smiled, but they clearly didn’t share the same sense of humour. “How are you liking retirement? Do you manage to fill your days?”

He knew a lot of coppers who were totally lost without the job.

“Easily.” Lewis tapped the side of his nose. “I do some consultancy work. Security, you know? It has its perks.”

“Lewis’s just back from a fortnight in New York,” Frank explained. “All expenses paid and a decent bonus.”

Dylan tried to look suitably impressed. And failed.

“I had a chat with Sue Kaminski this morning,” he said, keen to get to more important matters. “She’s adamant that as soon as I see her husband, I’ll know he’s innocent. Is that likely?”

“No.” Lewis was firm on that. “Kaminski will tell you he’s innocent, but even he doesn’t sound terribly convincing. It was one of the most straightforward cases I’ve ever worked on.”

“Tell me about it.” Dylan sat back, glass in hand.

“Carly Walsingham was supposed to collect her children from school. They’re five years old. Twins.” Lewis pulled a face. “William and Harry.”

“After the royal princes?” Frank asked.

“Yes. Apparently, Carly was a huge fan of Princess Di. She even had the same hairstyle. She was obviously an impressionable teenager when Diana married her Prince.”

“Wait a minute,” Dylan said. “How come the kids were at school? It was August.”

“There was a series of activity days for anyone interested. It was supposed to benefit the working mothers but anyone could pay a fiver to dump their kids there. A poet visited, a drama society put on a show, that sort of stuff. Anyway, when Carly didn’t turn up to collect them, a teacher tried phoning the house. There was no response so she tried Carly’s and then Neil Walsingham’s mobile phones. She got hold of Neil and, as he couldn’t raise a response from his wife either, he left work, collected the children and took them home. He found her in a bath of blood. Her throat had been slit.”

Dylan hated this. Instead of hearing stories second or third-hand, he liked to be at the scene. Failing that, he liked to see photographs. Cameras didn’t miss things.

“Okay. No sign of a break-in?”

“Nothing. The front door was locked but the back door wasn’t. She’d go to the garden via the back door and her husband said they rarely locked it when they were at home.”

She’d been killed in early August when the warm weather tempted people into their gardens. “Did you find the murder weapon?”

“No. And believe me, we searched every inch of the surrounding area. Fingertip search. Dogs. The lot.” Lewis ran a finger around the rim of his glass as if bringing the murder scene to mind. “She was in the bath. Her attacker had come at her from behind and put a pillow over her face. There was a large bruise on one wrist and, from that, we were able to get a print.” He looked incredibly pleased with himself. “Her other wrist had been cut, but not fatally. The same weapon—small, sharp and precise, like a surgical blade—cut into her carotid artery. She would have died in seconds.”

At times like this, Dylan wished he was still a member of the police force. No officer, regardless of the number of years he’d served, liked seeing a body. Especially a body in a bath of blood. If Dylan was still on the force, though, he would have been able to see the bathroom with all its clues.

“Where was the pillow?” he asked.

“On the floor by the side of the bath,” Lewis said.

“Why cut her then? Why not just put the pillow over her face and drown her? It would have been a lot less messy.”

“It takes a long time,” Lewis said. “Carly was young and fit, and would have put up a fight. It would have taken too long, possibly ten minutes.”

Dylan supposed he was right. Also, if the killer was angry, drowning her wouldn’t satisfy him. He’d have to slash, to hurt, to make her bleed.

He drew a mental picture of the bathroom that was probably totally inaccurate. There was no probably about it. The room could be fourteen feet square or a cramped six by six.

“Anything else odd in the room?” he asked.

“Nothing.” Perhaps Lewis knew that Dylan wanted to visualise the room. “The Walsinghams’ house is large, spacious and worth a fortune. The bathroom is attached to the main bedroom by the only door. When you open that door, you see a huge bath in the centre of the room. Anyone lying in that bath would have their back to the door, as Carly did. To the right is a large walk-in shower. There are plenty of cupboards filled with white towels. More cupboards crammed with expensive toiletries. Electric toothbrushes for Mr. and Mrs. Walsingham only, as the children used the family bathroom.”

The room had made a strong impression on Lewis Cameron. It would, though. Even the longest-serving detectives rarely saw a body in a bath of blood.

“There were fingerprints everywhere,” Lewis said, “so that was easy enough. We were soon able to eliminate the victim’s prints, her husband’s and the cleaner’s.”

“I assume her husband had a watertight alibi?” Frank voiced the question Dylan wanted answering.

“He’d been at the hospital since eight o’clock that morning.” Lewis emptied his glass and Dylan supposed he ought to show willing.

“Are we ready for another?”

They were, so Dylan walked up the bar and waited to be served. He’d been right in that trade would soon pick up. The pub was becoming more crowded as the evening wore on. He wasn’t surprised. The Dog and Fox offered clean, warm, convivial surroundings, service that was quick and friendly, and, most important, good beer. There were no televisions, no loud music blaring out and no slot machines. Several pubs were closer to his hotel, but the Dog and Fox made forking out for a taxi worthwhile.

Dylan carried their drinks back to the table and retook his seat.

“So,” he said, “you had your murder scene with its array of prints. What next?”

For some reason he couldn’t fathom, he was becoming intrigued by this case. It was madness, surely? Lewis Cameron was an experienced detective and, as senior investigating officer, would have handpicked an equally experienced team. There was no way Kaminski could be innocent, despite what his wife claimed.

Dylan would do well to remember that he’d only come to Lancashire to escape the madhouse that was currently his home. That, and as a favour to his mother and her old friends. Getting involved in this case on anything more than a superficial level was absurd. There was no mileage in it.

“We started on the usual house-to-house questioning,” Lewis explained. “A neighbour had seen a man leaving the house around a quarter to four that afternoon. He left through the back garden. Because she was up

a ladder, hosing leaves off her conservatory roof, she had the perfect view of him. If she'd been standing in her garden, she wouldn't have seen a thing. No one would."

"Her description matched that of Kaminski, I take it?" Dylan said.

"It was a good description, yes."

"He must have been walking away from her though. She couldn't have seen his face, could she?"

Lewis smiled at that. "She saw a man wearing black jeans and a grey hoody striding down the garden. We checked with some CCTV of Kaminski that day and he was wearing black jeans."

"And a grey hoody?"

"We didn't find that on CCTV, no, but it was a warm day. He would only have pulled that on to try and hide his head and hair as he left the house."

"So the neighbour saw a man in black jeans?" He glanced down at his own black jeans. "That description would fit about forty percent of the population. And isn't it a bit odd? Not volunteering the information until your officers went knocking on doors, I mean. Didn't it occur to her that something might be wrong?"

"No. She said she assumed it was a tradesman. The houses have large gardens, and gates in the fences at the back of those gardens lead onto Peebles Road. There are shops there and, sometimes, tradesmen nip out the back way to buy sandwiches or newspapers."

"Right," Dylan said. "So the shops on Peebles Road must have cameras?"

"Unfortunately, there's very little CCTV in the area, but we checked with all nearby shops, offices and garages to see what they had. Kaminski had gone into a newsagent's and bought a packet of cigarettes. That's how we caught him on film. Better still, the newsagent knew him. Kaminski's a builder and he'd done some work for him."

As Dylan took a swallow of his beer, he was shocked to realise how badly he wanted to find a hole in Lewis's reasoning. Perhaps he was more bitter and twisted about his dismissal from the force than he'd believed. No, surely not. While he couldn't find a good thing to say about those at the top—those who, for purely political reasons, had him banged up on an assault charge on the say of a habitual criminal—he'd always admired and respected the hardworking detectives.

Frank wasn't saying a lot, he noticed. Perhaps, like Dylan, he was trying to find arguments in the case.

"There's more," Lewis said. "Neil Walsingham told us how his wife had been on the phone the night before. He came home from work and heard her talking to someone. She was agitated and upset, apparently, and was telling the person on the other end to stop threatening her. When she realised Walsingham was in the house, she cut the connection and, when he questioned her, she said it was a salesman trying to force her to buy health insurance. Walsingham didn't believe her."

"And?" Dylan asked.

"It was easy enough to check the phone records and there was only one outgoing call made from the Walsinghams' house that day. Mrs. Walsingham had phoned Aleksander Kaminski's mobile. It was Kaminski who was threatening her." Lewis took a long appreciative swig of beer. "In less than twenty-four hours, we were able to pick up Kaminski and get his prints checked. A perfect match. Not only were his prints all over that bathroom, including the edge of the bath, his thumb was also responsible for the bruise on Mrs. Walsingham's wrist."

Lewis didn't so much look pleased as smug.

"Prints on skin," Dylan said. "They don't last long, do they?"

"An hour and a half maximum on living flesh," Frank said. "Is that right, Lewis?"

"Yes. A little longer on a corpse. We were lucky with that print. No doubt about it."

If Dylan hadn't been drinking, he would have saved Kaminski's parents the cost of a hotel room and driven straight back to London. The case was cut and dried. Dylan was wasting everyone's time.

"What was Kaminski's story?" he asked.

"He claimed he'd been seeing his ex-wife a couple of times a week for months."

Which wasn't what Sue Kaminski believed. According to her, he'd only visited Carly Walsingham a couple of times because he was a good man who liked to help people.

"Did Walsingham know his wife was seeing her ex-husband?" Dylan asked.

"There was nothing to know," Lewis said. "He was aware that Kaminski had phoned his wife a few times, but that was all. Apparently, Kaminski wouldn't let her go. He couldn't accept their marriage was over."

"How does Walsingham know she wasn't seeing Kaminski?" Dylan asked. "After all, the spouse is always the last to know about these things."

"She wasn't interested." Lewis was adamant about that.

"So why did she phone him? Surely, if he was the one making a nuisance of himself and threatening her, *he* would have phoned *her*."

"We'll never know," Lewis said. "We know from Walsingham that Kaminski used to phone her. He used to follow her too. We can only assume she phoned to try and get through to him, once and for all, that it was over."

"Yet Kaminski claims they had sex regularly?"

"All lies. When asked about the bruise, Kaminski claimed she liked rough sex. Walsingham maintained he had a good sex life with his wife, and that there was nothing rough about it."

"Hmm. Did Kaminski admit to being in the bathroom?" Dylan asked.

"Yes, but he had little choice given that his prints were over everything. He claims that, when he left, she was still enjoying a nice hot soak."

"Your house-to-house inquiries," Frank said. "They didn't bring up anything else at all?"

"Nothing."

One of the bar staff came to put logs on the fire. Talk turned to the weather, how spring was supposed to have arrived and how the forecasters were predicting gales and heavy rain for the next couple of days. Dylan wasn't paying attention. He was more interested in the murder of Carly Walsingham.

Having dealt with the fire and satisfied himself that the logs were sufficient, the young man left them alone.

"Tell me," Dylan said, "why would Aleksander Kaminski use a surgical blade to murder someone?"

Lewis shrugged. "Why not?"

"If I were a builder," Dylan said, "I'd use a hammer or a saw—"

"Or something equally easy to slip in a pocket." Lewis grinned and Dylan supposed he had a valid point.

"I know what you mean, Dylan," Frank said, "and I'd expect a builder to use one of the tools of his trade. Surgical blades, scalpels, small sharp knives—they're common enough in the building business though."

"I suppose so." Dylan's mind flitted to something else. "Am I to assume then that Kaminski is a bit dim, a sandwich short of a picnic?"

Lewis frowned. "Not especially. What makes you ask?"

"The fact that he had a surgical blade with him hints that the murder was premeditated," Dylan said. "Given that, you'd think anyone but a moron would wear gloves. Even the least clued-up on forensics know about fingerprints. Perhaps some people don't know about getting prints from flesh, but everyone knows you can lift them off doors and furniture. If I was murdering someone, I'd either wear gloves or, if that was impossible because I fancied sex with the victim first, I'd wipe the place clean afterwards."

Smiling, Lewis shook his head. "Anyone can plan a murder. Carrying it out takes a lot of balls. Hanging around with a corpse and cleaning up the evidence takes even more balls. He will have panicked and got the hell away."

Dylan tried to put himself inside the killer's mind. And failed. If he, Dylan, was planning on murdering a woman, he knew damn well he wouldn't be able to have sex with her first.

"A doctor would use a surgical blade," he said.

"I used a scalpel at the weekend to trim some wallpaper," Frank said.

"And Dr. Walsingham was at the hospital at the time of the murder," Lewis said.

"Says who?" Dylan asked.

"I can't remember but, trust me, his alibi was watertight."

Dylan knew all about watertight alibis. During his time on the force, he'd poked and prodded at them until they leaked like sieves.

"You'll see Kaminski for yourself tomorrow." Lewis's smile was wry. "I'm surprised he managed to convince his own mother that he's innocent."

Chapter Four

Dylan was still pondering Lewis Cameron's words when he joined the queue of visitors at Strangeways. Or, to give the building its correct name, HM Prison Manchester. They could call it what they liked but, to most people, and certainly to the people who saw its tall tower on the skyline every day, it would always be Strangeways.

Built in the late 1800s, it was an impressive building. A tour, preferably when empty of inmates, would be great. An overnight stay would be bearable. Just. A life sentence behind walls that were rumoured to be sixteen feet thick in places would be one of the worst things imaginable.

Dylan had arrived early because he knew how long it took to process all visitors, especially first-timers, but he was still surprised by the length of the queue. Eventually, it was his turn to hand over his visiting order and be subjected to a surprisingly thorough search.

It was the first time Dylan had been inside a prison since his own stint behind bars and the experience sent shudders down his spine. He'd never suffered from claustrophobia, but he was getting close. He'd thought he'd be okay. He wasn't. His plan had been to drive straight home to London after this visit but, sod it, he'd return to his hotel, treat himself to several stiff drinks and drive home in the morning.

With the preliminaries over, Dylan soon found himself sitting at a table opposite Aleksander Kaminski. Despite the width of the table, designed to keep prisoner and visitor apart, the man was too close. Dylan needed space.

He hadn't known what to expect but Kaminski came as a surprise. He was tall, thin and gaunt, and was wearing jeans a couple of sizes too big and a sweatshirt of indeterminable colour. He had dark hair and his eyes were like chips of ebony. Dylan would bet he was one of those men Bev would class as sexy. Bev liked her men "weathered," as she put it, with faces that looked "lived in." "Every woman fancies a bit of rough," she'd say. Which rather begged a question Dylan didn't feel like answering.

It wasn't Kaminski's appearance that took him by surprise though, more the expression of boredom he wore. Or perhaps it wasn't boredom. Perhaps it was despair.

"How's life in here?" Dylan asked.

Kaminski shrugged. "Room service is a bit slack but the rates are reasonable."

It wasn't boredom but Kaminski was showing a distinct lack of interest in Dylan's presence.

Dylan decided to get to the point. "Did you murder Carly Walsingham?"

There wasn't so much as a flicker. "No."

Dylan was finding it difficult to sit still. He wanted to push back his red plastic chair but it was attached to the table. Kaminski, on the other hand, was calm and still. CCTV cameras captured their every gesture. Prison warders watched on. They'd be extremely interested in Dylan because, try as he might, he couldn't stop putting his hands in his pockets and taking them out again. Despite the search he'd been subjected to, warders must think he was trying to pass drugs to Kaminski.

"Look, Mr. Scott, I appreciate you coming to see me but really, there's no need. I keep trying to tell my mother that we just have to put up with it, but—" He left the sentence unfinished.

"Mothers aren't very good at putting up with things." Dylan leaned back in his seat but still couldn't settle comfortably. "My mother visited me when I was in prison." He saw a touch of surprise on Kaminski's face and ignored it. It amazed Dylan, too. First that he'd ended up behind bars and second that his mother had been allowed to visit. She usually carried enough marijuana to keep every inmate happy for a month. "She liked to tell everyone who'd listen that I was innocent. It didn't help. In fact, it was downright embarrassing. Once a judge has spoken, there's little that can be done."

Kaminski didn't comment and Dylan thought again of Lewis Cameron's words. Lewis was right in that Kaminski would have a hard job convincing his own mother of his innocence. He'd managed that, though.

Dylan wanted to escape this place, get back to his hotel, enjoy a few drinks and a good night's sleep before driving away from Lancashire. There was no point getting involved. There was especially no point when the man sitting opposite looked as if he couldn't care less.

The cameras watched on and Dylan supposed he should go through the motions.

"Tell me about Mrs. Walsingham then," he said. "You married her when you both lived in Birmingham. Is that right?"

"You're wasting your time, mate."

"Not at all. Your parents are paying me well so I should give them their money's worth."

Kaminski looked at him for long moments and Dylan thought he could easily be a murderer. He'd bet those dark eyes were no strangers to anger.

"Okay," Kaminski said. "Yes, I married Carly when we lived in Birmingham. I thought we'd live happily ever after, but we didn't. We moved up to Dawson's Clough, realised I couldn't have kids, started fighting and got divorced. Then she married her doctor and had the kids she wanted."

Kaminski spoke in an offhand way yet he couldn't quite conceal a depth of feeling that surprised Dylan.

"She was happy presumably?" Dylan asked.

"Not really, no. She loved the kids but felt nothing for her husband. He bored her. Just as I knew he would."

"Was she easily bored then?"

Kaminski thought about that and chose his words with care. "No, but she wasn't the type to be content with a role as a doctor's wife either. She had her own life and liked to live it to the full."

"I see."

"She loved the kids, though," Kaminski added. "Idolised them."

"How long had you been having an affair with her?"

Kaminski smiled at that, a wry painful smile. "It seems like all my life."

"That sounds a bit dramatic." To put it mildly.

"Our whole relationship was a bit dramatic. Okay, we met at secondary school. I was fourteen, Carly was eleven. We hung out together and started seeing each other seriously when she was sixteen and I was nineteen."

"Childhood sweethearts."

"Yes."

"Yet she divorced you," Dylan said. "Why?"

"She wanted kids and I couldn't have them."

"Hadn't she heard of adoption?"

"She'd heard of it."

"But she wanted a child of her own?"

"Yes, and she refused to go through all the adoption rigmarole and spend years waiting, possibly in vain because age was creeping up on her."

"Okay." Dylan supposed it was feasible. "So you divorced. Carly married her doctor and you married Sue."

"You've got it."

Dylan wondered why he didn't just leave him to it. If Kaminski wasn't bothered about any of it, why the hell should anyone else care? If Kaminski was happy to rot behind these sixteen feet thick walls, why not let him?

"So how did you suddenly end up in her bed again?"

"After we got divorced, she refused to see me, but she'd phone me all the time to tell me she was dating Neil, marrying Neil, having Neil's baby. I met Sue and thought we could move on. We couldn't though. A month or so after I married Sue, Carly suggested we meet up. We went for a coffee, then back to her place."

"Wait a minute. You'd been seeing her that long?"

"Yes."

"But Sue said you'd only seen her a couple of times."

"Christ, what else was I going to tell her? It was bad enough as it was. They let her visit me when I was in custody and, despite the fact that it had been splashed across the front page of the local rag, she wouldn't believe I'd seen Carly." He expelled a long breath. "It was bloody difficult convincing her it was true. I could hardly pile on more grief by telling her I'd been seeing her for years, could I?"

"She really had no idea? You see another woman for years and Sue doesn't once ask where you've been and what you've been up to?"

"No. I used to visit Carly's house and that's it. Her husband assumed she was flicking a duster round or cleaning windows, and my wife thought I was working. My job made it easy. I'd spend two days working on a porch for someone, a day fitting a door for someone else, then a week erecting a conservatory for yet another customer. Sue would have no need to know where I was working. I used to finish work early, go to Carly, and then return to Sue. I was never late home, I never spent the night or a weekend with Carly. There were no meals out or any of the usual romantic crap."

If Kaminski was telling the truth, and Dylan had heard so many conflicting stories it was difficult to tell truth from fiction, it was possible that Carly Walsingham was using him. Presumably, she enjoyed her children and life as the doctor's wife but liked to play games with her old childhood sweetheart. She wouldn't let him move on. She didn't want him, but she didn't want anyone else to have him either. No man would appreciate being used as a plaything.

Would they dislike it enough to commit murder? They might. Dead women don't play mind games.

"How often did you visit her?" Dylan asked.

"A couple of times a week. Every Monday and Thursday."

"I thought she was murdered on a Wednesday."

"She was. She'd phoned me the night before, the Tuesday, and said she'd arranged to meet up with an old friend on Thursday. She suggested I go round the following afternoon instead."

"Tell me about that phone call." Dylan tried to give the air of being calm and relaxed. He was neither. This place was freaking him out.

"There's not a lot to tell." Kaminski's tone was dry. "She phoned, explained she'd arranged to meet up with her friend Kirsten, and told me to go round the following afternoon instead. We were having a laugh, joking about not being able to wait, and then she dropped her voice and told me she had company. I assumed she meant her husband was home. We finished the call abruptly."

"You didn't threaten her?"

"No."

"Her husband claims you did. He also said she was upset. Agitated. That's why the police checked the phone records to see who she'd been speaking to."

"He's lying."

Was he? Dylan found it impossible to tell. That lie, if it was a lie, had helped put Kaminski in this hell-hole. Yet Kaminski didn't seem bothered one way or the other.

"Why would he lie?" Dylan asked.

"I've no idea."

"Where did you meet up?" Dylan asked. "Was it always at her place?"

"Yes."

"Wasn't that a bit risky? Wouldn't the neighbours get suspicious if they saw you turning up all the time?"

"You haven't seen her house, have you?"

"No. Why?"

"There are trees in front of it," Kaminski said. "Tall, thick evergreens. On the other side of the road, there are more trees. If you stand in Carly's driveway, you can't see the houses opposite because of those trees. Alternatively, if you stand on the other side of the road, you can't see Carly's house."

"Yet a neighbour saw you leaving on the afternoon she was murdered. Or saw someone who looked like you."

"No. The neighbour saw someone walking down the back garden. I'm talking about the front of the house."

"Wait a minute. You used the front door?"

Another of those grim smiles. "Yes. Like I said, the front is far more private."

"You didn't use the back door?"

"No."

"Then your fingerprints—"

"Weren't anywhere near the back door. That's right. We went over and over that, and the police decided I'd left by the front door, walked along the side of the house and cut across the back garden."

For all Dylan knew, Kaminski could have done exactly that. Dylan liked to think he was a good judge of character. He was also a firm believer in gut instinct. With Kaminski, he felt nothing. Kaminski could be innocent. He could just as easily be as guilty as hell.

"You claim Mrs. Walsingham was in the bath when you left her," Dylan said.

"She usually was. It doesn't do to meet your children or your husband when you smell of another man, does it?"

He sounded bitter. He'd hated to think of her with her husband.

"How's your relationship with your wife?" Dylan asked.

"Sue? It's okay."

"Only okay?"

"It's no better and no worse than most marriages." Kaminski leaned toward Dylan. "Look, mate, you're wasting your time. Whoever killed her is long gone. You can't bring her back."

"It's not a question of bringing *her* back though, is it?" Dylan said. "The idea is to get *your* life back?"

Kaminski didn't bother to comment. He looked as if escaping these thick walls was of no interest to him whatsoever. Dylan didn't know whether to admire him or shake him until his teeth rattled.

"Tell me what you did the day she was murdered," he said.

Kaminski sighed, like a man who was tired of telling the same story over and over. "I did a morning's work. I was putting up a conservatory for a couple in Dawson's Clough. I finished at lunchtime and drove out to see Carly. I parked in my usual spot on a side street, Hilltop Avenue, and walked the half mile to her house. I stopped at the newsagent's for a pack of cigarettes but, other than that, I didn't see anyone to speak to. I got to her house, rang the bell and she let me in. I had a shower—she used to get off on the idea of me showering in his bathroom—and then we went to bed. She had a collection of sex toys and we messed around with those. She liked rough sex. It was always the missionary position with her husband, and that bored her. Anyway, at about three o'clock, it was time for me to leave so I ran her a bath and left her in it. I walked back to my car and drove home. I began preparing dinner and then Sue came home. It was her aunt's birthday and she was busy telling me about that. She visits her aunt—her great-aunt in a care home—every Wednesday and it was the old dear's ninetieth birthday that day. Sue was full of that. The next thing I knew, Carly's face was plastered all over the TV and they said she was dead. Murdered."

He might pretend to be in control of his emotions but the colour had slowly ebbed from his face with every word. His sickly pallor made those dark eyes even more startling.

If—and it was a big *if*—he was telling the truth, it was a shocking story. Reliving it would make anyone queasy.

"Her collection of sex toys. Describe them to me."

Dark eyebrows rose at the request. "She had handcuffs, a whip, a huge red vibrator—"

"Okay. And who knew you were seeing her?" Dylan asked.

"Apart from the lying doctor? No one."

"What do you mean? Are you saying Walsingham knew about it?"

"Me and Carly thought so. I don't know how he could have found out, but we were pretty sure he knew. Or at least suspected."

Walsingham knew that Kaminski had been phoning his wife. Stalking her. Could he have known they were having an affair? If, of course, they *were* having an affair.

"As far as I'm aware," Kaminski said, "no one else knew. I don't see how they could have. Carly liked to live dangerously, that's why she wanted me in his bed, why she insisted on my taking a shower in his bathroom, but she wouldn't have told anyone. She wasn't *that* crazy."

"Was she seeing anyone else?"

"No."

"Are you sure?" Dylan asked again.

"Yes."

"Were *you* seeing anyone else?"

Kaminski smiled that half-smile again. "No."

It was almost time to go and Dylan was more than ready.

"Okay," he said, "I'll think about everything you've told me."

"Please yourself," Kaminski said.

“What I can’t understand is your attitude.” Again, Dylan felt an almost overwhelming urge to shake the bloke. “You don’t seem to care whether you get out of here or not. Are you really prepared to rot in this hellhole?”

Kaminski leaned in until he was inches from Dylan’s face. “Tell you what, Mr. Scott, why don’t you go home and put the television on? Catch the local news and imagine they’re saying *your* wife’s been butchered. Forget they’re talking about yet another murder or a senseless stabbing in another anonymous city. Imagine it’s *your* wife. Picture *your* wife lying in a bath of blood. See what you care about after that.”

It was time to go and Dylan got to his feet.

“It’s not the same though, is it? Mrs. Walsingham wasn’t *your* wife.”

Kaminski nodded slowly, looked as if he was about to argue and then couldn’t be bothered. “No. She wasn’t my wife.”

Dylan really didn’t know what to make of Kaminski.

“So,” he said, “who do you think killed her?”

“I’ve no idea.”

“What? None at all? You’ve been here all this time, with nothing to do but think, and yet you haven’t come up with a single suspect?”

“I didn’t say that.” Kaminski was totally unruffled. “I said I had no idea who killed her. It could have been anyone. I’d start with her husband.”

“What makes you say that?”

Kaminski shrugged. “It could as easily have been him as anyone else. Carly wasn’t the only one looking elsewhere.”

“How do you know?” Dylan asked.

Kaminski was standing. Time was up. “That he was seeing other women? Carly told me.”

“He has an alibi.”

“Yeah, I know. A nurse he was shagging vowed he was at the hospital when Carly was killed.” Kaminski’s smile was bitter. “Life’s full of surprises, isn’t it?”

Chapter Five

Bev pulled her fingers through her hair. She was quite probably going insane. So far today, she'd burst into tears three times for no apparent reason. And now—

God, now the TV was loud enough to split eardrums, Freya was screaming at the top of her exceptionally healthy lungs, Luke was yelling "Freya's screaming" above the noise, and the bloody phone was ringing.

Bev Scott, this is your life.

She snatched at the phone. "Yes?"

Although she hadn't bothered to look at the display, the surprised silence on the other end told her who was calling.

"Everything all right?" Dylan asked.

"Bloody hell, Dylan. Does it sound all right?"

"I've called at a bad time, haven't I? You get on with whatever you were doing and I'll call back later, okay?"

"Good idea, Dylan. You go and put your feet up. Have a drink, watch a film, enjoy yourself. Meanwhile, I'll deal with *your* family, shall I?"

"Bev, I'm only trying to—"

"Shut up." She bit back on her temper. "Have a chat with Luke while I try to stop Freya screaming. Then again, I might just join her." She held the phone at arm's length and called to Luke. "Your dad's on the phone."

Luke was smiling for the first time that day as he grabbed the phone, and Bev's mood softened slightly. It couldn't be easy for Luke either. As soon as she'd settled Freya and spoken to Dylan, she'd spend some quality time with him. Perhaps they could watch a DVD together.

That was assuming she could stay awake because, right now, exhausted didn't even hint at how she felt. Dylan's mum had been a gem and would have been here now if Bev hadn't sent her away until the morning, but Bev didn't want to take advantage.

This was no joke though. Even climbing the stairs took effort.

When she reached Freya's room, she was tempted to sit in the middle of the floor and howl. It wasn't only that Freya enjoyed exercising her lungs constantly, it was the lack of—something. Wasn't she supposed to experience a huge gut-wrenching rush of love when she saw her daughter? She felt nothing.

She couldn't remember how she'd felt when Luke was born, but she knew she hadn't been this empty.

"Okay, madam, what can we do for you?" She reached into the cot and lifted Freya out. Her baby's face was red from screaming, but there were no pointers as to what she might want. She'd been fed and changed less than twenty minutes ago.

Bev carried her round the room, rocking her in an instinctive manner and, gradually, the screams subsided to sobs. With the noise level bearable, Bev carried her downstairs and kept rocking her as she waited for Luke to finish talking to his dad.

Her baby was stunningly beautiful. She had huge eyes and a thick tuft of dark hair. Perhaps if she wasn't so noisy, so demanding, Bev would feel that overwhelming rush of love she kept waiting for.

Luke handed over the phone, grabbed an apple and went to the relative safety of the sitting room. Bev sat at the kitchen table, baby in one hand, phone in the other. She felt more like bursting into tears than talking.

"So what's it like to have peace, quiet and room service?" she asked.

"I'd rather be at home."

"Tell you what then, let's swap. You come home and I'll bugger off to Lancashire for weeks at a time." Even as she spoke, she knew there was no point taking everything out on Dylan. Who else was there, though?

“Bev, if you want me to come home, just say the word.”

Really, when she stopped to think about it, all she had to do was cope with one small child. It wasn't as if Luke made huge demands on her. He was a sensible kid, old enough to be fairly independent, and even quite helpful when he put his mind to it. All she had to do was cope with a baby. She'd done it before. All over the world, women were coping. Some were doing all sorts of amazing things at the same time. Bev was on maternity leave so all she had to think about was one small child. It wasn't rocket science.

“Your mum's been,” she said, “and she's coming round tomorrow. It's fine.”

“Good.”

“So,” she said, “did you see Aleksander today? Can you prove his innocence?”

She didn't really care one way or the other, but even she was tired of her constant whining.

“You've been talking to Mum. Her friends—friends she hasn't seen for ages, I might add—believe their son is innocent. Therefore, Mum believes he's innocent. For all I know, he could have butchered dozens of people in his time.”

“You think he might be guilty?”

“Of course he might be.” She heard amusement in his voice. “The police thought him guilty, the jury decided he was guilty—”

“Well, yes, but what do *you* think?”

He was a long time answering. “I don't know. I truly don't know.”

“So what are you going to do?”

Bev was torn. Half of her wanted him at home to share the responsibility. On the other hand, she liked him better when he was working. Added to that, babies were unbelievably expensive. They needed the money.

“I'm going to do a bit of digging around,” he said. “According to Kaminski, Carly Walsingham's husband was having affairs and one of his women provided his alibi. I want to look into that, see what I can find out.”

“You'll be home at the weekend though, won't you? It's Easter.”

“Of course I will. Meanwhile, make good use of my mother. She's desperate to help, you know she is. She'd be more than happy to spend the night and—”

“I can cope.” It was only one baby, she reminded herself.

“I know, but you may as well make the most of her. God, there has to be some advantage to my having her for a mother.”

Bev had to smile. She knew how much Dylan loved his mother. She also knew that the woman drove him to distraction and he longed for what he called a *normal* mother.

Bev adored her mother-in-law. Yes, she still wore beads and flowers in her hair, a relic from the sixties, and she smoked marijuana like some people drank coffee, but she was fun. True, the ideas she came up with, like the camel-trekking holiday they'd survived in the summer, were a tad off the wall, but life was never boring around Vicky Scott.

Life was an exciting adventure as far as Vicky was concerned. No way would she let one small child turn her life and her emotions upside down. Bev could learn a lot from her.

“It's fine,” she said. “Truly. Do what you have to do and I'll see you at the weekend.”

As soon as she replaced the receiver, she took her sleeping baby upstairs.

Then she sat on the floor and burst into tears.

Chapter Six

Alek lay on his mattress and stared at the ceiling. The quick and no doubt cheap paint job was already failing. A crack in the shape of a V was getting bigger. Perhaps, in ten years, the ceiling would crash down on top of him.

He didn't have to be in his cell for another hour, but it was where he preferred to be. In an hour, at lights out, he'd have a peace of sorts. The constant talking—or, more often, shouting—would cease for a few hours and all would be as quiet as it got in this place. Meanwhile, he concentrated on blocking out the noise.

An unread letter from Sue scowled at him from the desk. It had arrived this morning—at least one arrived every morning—but he hadn't been in the mood to read it. He wasn't now.

It would be filled with the same old crap that was of no interest to him. She always started and ended her letters by telling him how much she missed him. The middle would be taken up with the minute details of her day, like *10:50 Jamie called and I spent an hour with him before taking Fido for a walk, 2:15 I nipped into town for groceries*. Always, hidden among the six or so pages, would be something along the lines of *Don't worry about writing to me, I know your time's taken up with stuff*. That always made him smile. If there was one thing he did have, the only thing he had, it was time. Days stretched endlessly toward the night and sometimes, he was convinced time had stopped. It was inclination he lacked, not time.

He received almost as many letters from his mother, but those weren't too bad. His mother wasn't as needy or as clingy as his wife. He could write his mother half a page about how well he was doing, and she'd be content. Not content enough to give up on him without a fight though.

Dylan Scott was the third private investigator she'd spoken to. The first one had been a stiff, formal man who, after speaking to Alek, wrote to his parents saying that, regrettably, he felt unable to take on the case. The second hadn't even bothered speaking to him.

It didn't matter. Alek couldn't complain of being lonely because he had plenty of guilt to keep him company.

Guilt was another reason, possibly the real reason he couldn't bring himself to read Sue's letter. He'd lived with shame because, no matter how hard he tried, he'd never been able to love Sue. That was why he'd been so careful. He and Carly had never enjoyed nights together or romantic meals for two so he'd never had the usual adulterer's slip-ups to worry about, but he'd always made doubly sure there were no stray hairs on his jacket or lipstick smears on his collar. Although he'd never loved Sue, he'd cared about her enough to make sure she never knew about him and Carly.

Having to tell her he'd been screwing his ex-wife while she'd been visiting her great-aunt was one of the hardest things he'd ever done. It would have been easier perhaps if she'd walked out on him. But no. Shock and hurt had been there for all the world to see, yet there had been no recriminations.

Before this nightmare started, they hadn't been worrying unduly about finances. They'd had to stretch their money and make cutbacks, though. Thanks to the recession, people were panicking about their jobs and putting any plans they'd had to add extensions or conservatories to their homes on the back burner until the economy picked up. Now, Sue would be finding it almost impossible to cope without his income. She'd go without food herself rather than let the strays starve. She had a roof over her head at the moment, but for how long?

And still there were no recriminations. Still she loved him. Still the letters arrived.

His parents didn't deserve this either. They were proud people who'd worked hard all their lives. The shame of having a son forever branded a killer would be more than they should have to bear.

The noise around him built to a crescendo. Voices were raised, heavy metal doors were slammed shut, locks were checked and double-checked. At last, a restless, uneasy quiet descended on the cells.

Alek didn't move. He knew from experience that, eventually, he'd drift off to sleep for a couple of hours, maybe even four or five. It was the dreams he dreaded. Some people, Sue for one, could sleep for eight hours solid without having a single dream. Alek envied her. He would love to sleep and wake up slowly feeling relaxed and refreshed. When he slept, he invariably woke bathed in sweat with his heart doing its best to leap out of his ribcage.

He'd never been a great fan of reading or watching television, but he'd done a lot of both in Strangeways. Biographies were his reading choice and he was halfway through Kirk Douglas's life story.

Many people thought it wrong that prisoners had televisions in their cells. They said prison was more luxury holiday than punishment. The argument was that the punishment was being relieved of freedom and that, if men were treated like animals, they came out fighting. Alek didn't know who was right or wrong. Nor did he know if he'd go out fighting when he'd served his life sentence.

"And that's another thing," the moaning brigade would cry. "Life should mean life."

In Alek's case, life meant at least twelve years. It would be long enough.

He closed his eyes but knew sleep was a long way off. He didn't mind. If he slept, he would dream, and the dream was always the same. He would hear Carly calling to him above the sound of running water. He'd watch that water turn red.

Sometimes, in his dreams, the hot red water swallowed them both.

Chapter Seven

Early the next morning, Dylan called Dr. Neil Walsingham's home phone. Receiving no reply, he called the hospital and was soon thanking God it wasn't an emergency. The phone rang out for a full two minutes before Dylan gave up and redialled. Again, it rang out unanswered. He ordered himself a coffee in the hotel's lounge, carried it to a table near the window, and tried the number again. This time it rang out for just over a minute.

"Dawson's Clough General Hospital. How may I help you?"

Dylan decided that "by answering the damn phone more quickly" wasn't a suitable response.

"I'd like to speak to Dr. Walsingham, please," he said.

"Just a minute." Papers rustled. "He's on duty in Accident and Emergency at the moment. I can leave a message for him if you like."

"Will you ask him to call me? My name's Dylan Scott. I'm a private investigator." He gave her his number and, because she didn't inspire confidence, he made her read it back to him.

"I'll pass on the message," she said.

"I'd be grateful. It's important. What time will he be off duty?"

"Six o'clock this evening."

Dylan thanked her and, as he drank his coffee, he wondered how to spend time until Walsingham called.

He still wasn't sure what to make of Aleksander Kaminski. It was impossible to know if he was innocent or guilty, or why he was so damned unconcerned about spending years of his life locked up like an animal.

Assuming he was innocent—Dylan's mantra was *Never Assume*—but assuming he was, the finger of guilt might point toward Walsingham. If he was having affairs, as Kaminski claimed, he'd be more or less guaranteed an alibi, and if he wanted his wife out of the way, he'd be a man with plenty of surgical blades at his disposal. How many people knew that severing the carotid artery would have a victim bleeding out in seconds? How many people even knew what or where the carotid artery was?

Or maybe the killer simply slashed and got lucky. Or unlucky. Maybe a burglar hadn't realised she was in the house, panicked, intended to cut her as a warning and watched her bleed out in record time.

Or maybe, and this was far more likely, Kaminski had tired of her games and decided it was time to stop them once and for all.

His coffee cup empty, Dylan returned to his room and switched on his newly acquired laptop. He was getting to be quite a whiz on the machine, even if he did say so himself. Admittedly, he had a good teacher in Luke.

He conducted another online search for Dr. Neil Walsingham. There were several mentions of him working at Dawson's Clough hospital. He also considered himself something of an artist and a couple of his works—awful, childlike daubs of red and blue paint—were showcased on a website promoting local artists' work. Dr. Walsingham was also on the committee of the local camera club. A head-and-shoulders shot showed a smiling slim man with fair hair flopping across his forehead. Another picture showed him with a medal round his neck after completing a marathon and raising over two thousand pounds for a children's charity.

Still he didn't return Dylan's call.

Dylan hunted out ex-DI Cameron's phone number. There were a couple of questions he wanted to ask him.

Here, at least, was someone willing to answer their phone.

"Lewis? It's Dylan."

"Hi. Are you back in London? You saw Kaminski, I assume?"

"I'm still in Lancashire but yes, I did see him. That's why I'm calling. I wondered if you'd clarify a couple of points."

"You surely didn't fall for his story, did you?"

"I'm keeping an open mind."

Dylan neither believed Kaminski's story nor disbelieved it. If there was a possibility that the man was innocent, though, it was up to Dylan to get him out of Strangeways. He knew only too well what wrongful imprisonment felt like.

"You've been off the force too long, mate."

Dylan didn't suppose there was any malice in his words, but he still resented them.

"Maybe. Right, first off, Kaminski claims that he left Mrs. Walsingham's property at about three o'clock. Now, your witness says she saw him, or someone else, leaving at around three forty-five. Is that right?"

"That's right." Lewis chuckled down the phone. "He says he left about three o'clock. About. That could mean anything from half past two to half past three. The neighbour says she saw someone at about a quarter to four. That little word *about* again."

He spoke as if he were trying to explain the theory of relativity to a four-year-old.

"What else do you want to know?" Lewis asked.

"Dr. Walsingham's alibi. Who verified it?"

"I can't remember offhand, but several people confirmed it. I tell you, his alibi's watertight."

Call me a bluff old cynic, Dylan thought, but all alibis were watertight until someone punched a hole in them.

"Hmm. What about motive?" he asked. "What was Kaminski's motive for killing her, Lewis?"

"Who knows? Maybe Carly had threatened to tell his wife he kept pestering her."

Dylan wasn't convinced. "Was there any money in it? Did anyone gain financially from her death?"

"Nope. The money was all the doctor's." He laughed, but it was a tight, humourless sound. "I don't know how much evidence the elite southern police forces need but, up north, we find phone calls, witnesses and fingerprints pretty convincing."

Dylan didn't miss the sarcasm. Or the resentment. Lewis Cameron didn't appreciate people looking for holes in his casework.

They chatted for a few more minutes, but Dylan was no wiser when he ended the call than he'd been at the start.

Either Kaminski was lying or confused about the time he left, the witness was mistaken about the time, or someone else left the house that day. Or, as Lewis Cameron would say, all timings were approximate. In Dylan's book, approximate equalled meaningless.

Dylan called the hospital again and was told, again, that a message would be passed on to Dr. Walsingham.

"He knows you want to speak to him," the receptionist said, "so I'm sure he'll call you back when he has a free moment. He's a very busy man, you know."

To pass time more than anything else, Dylan drove to Lakeside Drive and found number two, home of Dr. Walsingham and his sons.

Kaminski was probably right in that the front of the property was more private than the back. Dylan would guess that the twelve houses making up Lakeside Drive had been built between ten and twenty years ago. They sat on the edge of a road that circled a manmade lake. Each was large, detached and sat within its own good-sized garden. Each was different too.

To see the front of the Walsinghams' home, Dylan had to park the Morgan at the bottom of their driveway. Tall evergreen trees shielded the building from prying eyes. As Kaminski had said, it was impossible to see the properties on the other side of the small lake. They were a fair distance away too.

Property prices in this northern mill town were lower than most in the UK but—thanks to a good motorway network that gave the town easy access to Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Preston and Glasgow—were increasing. These properties had five bedrooms minimum, double garages, large gardens and, more sought-after than anything else, privacy. A Lakeside Drive address wouldn't come cheap.

Dylan left his car blocking the driveway and walked a circle round the lake. Each home boasted a sophisticated alarm system. He supposed that meant very little though. People tended to activate alarms when they went to bed at night and when they left the property. If they were at home during the day, alarms were often ignored.

Feeling aimless, he returned to his car and drove into the centre of Dawson's Clough. At least the weather was better today. The wind had died down a little and, although the sky was still a menacing battleship grey, it wasn't raining.

He walked past the indoor market, bought himself a newspaper and headed to Starbucks. The coffee bar was busy, tables taken mostly by female shoppers, but he got a coffee and carried it to the one free table in the corner.

Still Walsingham didn't return his call.

It was unlikely that the doctor would tell him anything he didn't already know. With or without talking to him, Dylan needed to make up his mind. Did he take this case or not? The money would be more than useful and he had nothing else to do. On the other hand, Kaminski's parents weren't wealthy and he didn't like the idea of wasting their life savings.

He'd talk to Walsingham and then make up his mind.

First and foremost, he wanted to hear more about that phone call. Walsingham had said his wife was being threatened, and Kaminski claimed that all they'd done was arrange to meet the following day. Who was lying?

A harassed-looking woman at the next table balanced several carrier bags on a chair before ticking items off on a shopping list. She peered inside one of bags and counted the number of chocolate eggs she'd bought. Dylan mentally thanked her for the reminder.

It was Easter which meant that flowers for Bev wouldn't be considered an unexpected treat, they were a necessity. Experience had taught him that he needed to buy her a card, flowers and a huge beribboned egg if he wanted to keep on the right side of her.

Luke was the child in the house, but he'd be content with any old egg. Madness.

As he drank his coffee, he wondered how much the various celebrations cost over the course of the year. Christmas, birthdays, wedding anniversaries, Valentine's Day, Easter—the expense was vast. He'd just spent a fortune to celebrate Freya's birth too.

He made another mental note. He must stop being such a grumpy bastard. He had a wonderful family, the best.

With his coffee drunk, he went on a shopping spree. The flowers would wait until he was on the way home, but he soon had a suitably romantic card, two sickly chocolate eggs for Luke, a fluffy Easter bunny for Freya and the biggest, most expensive egg in the shop for Bev. Sorted.

He stowed his purchases in the Morgan and set off in a more determined mood for Dawson's Clough General Hospital.

The building was new and several people stood puffing on cigarettes outside glass automatic doors. Inside, there was less activity. He walked up to the deserted reception desk. The phone rang out. Unbelievable.

A dark-haired woman in her thirties eventually strolled over, nodded at Dylan, and answered the phone.

Dylan gave the hospital the benefit of the doubt. No emergency calls would come through on this number, and staff would be too busy dealing with patients to worry too much about people phoning with general enquiries. Presumably relatives enquiring about patients would call the specific wards.

The call ended and she looked at Dylan. "Can I help?"

"I hope so." Dylan gave her his best smile. "I'd like to speak to Dr. Neil Walsingham."

"You phoned earlier. You're the private investigator, right?"

"That's right."

Unimpressed, she turned away and flicked through charts on a clipboard. "Just a minute."

She lifted a phone, and tapped in two numbers. "Is Dr. Walsingham there?"

After a lengthy conversation, she ended the call. "Sorry, but he's not on duty. He finished at twelve."

"Really?" It was almost two o'clock. "I was told he'd be here till six."

She shrugged in a that's-your-problem way.

"I've tried his landline," he said, "but he's not home, and I seem to have lost his mobile number. I don't suppose you'd give me that, would you?"

"Sorry, I'm not allowed to do that."

"Ah, yes. Very sensible. You couldn't do me a huge favour and phone his mobile and ask him to give me a call, could you?"

"Well—"

"Thanks. My name's Dylan Scott and if you could give him my number again, just in case he's lost it, that would be great." He took his phone from his pocket and pretended to search for his own number. "I always forget it—ah, here we are."

He wrote it down for her.

Still reluctant, but probably eager to get rid of him, she turned to her side and called Walsingham's number. Dylan made a careful note of the number she tapped in on his own phone.

The receptionist's call was answered immediately and she passed on the message. Looking pleased with herself, she finished the call.

"He's going to call you straightaway, Mr. Scott."

"Thanks so much. Right, I'll leave you to it. Thanks again."

Dylan ambled across the car park to the Morgan and waited for his mobile to trill into life. It didn't. Dr. Walsingham was annoyingly slow at returning calls. Either that or he didn't want to talk to a private investigator.

Dylan decided that another trip to Lakeside Drive was in order.

Once again, he parked in the Walsinghams' driveway. This time, he strode up to the front door and rang a bell. A loud irritating tune played inside but no one responded. Dylan walked round to the back of the house. The garden was large with a couple of apple trees, a greenhouse and a wooden summerhouse. Off to the right, above a wooden fence dividing the two properties, he could see the roof of the neighbours' conservatory. Presumably, the witness who claimed to have seen Kaminski had been washing leaves off that roof. One of the Walsinghams' apple trees was probably the culprit.

Anyone who knew the Walsinghams' property, anyone who wanted to remain hidden from prying eyes, would use the front entrance. Only someone who assumed, as is usually the case, that the back was more private would make his escape this way. And that someone would have to walk the considerable length of the garden to reach the gate in the fence that led to a road at the back of the properties.

Dylan returned to the front of the house and prodded the doorbell again.

A car horn sounded. Dylan turned round and saw that a man with fair hair flopping over his forehead was leaning on the horn of a blue Mercedes.

"Sorry." Dylan waved his arm and dashed back to his car. He moved the Morgan five yards, allowing the man access to the drive.

The Mercedes slid into the left side of a double garage and Dylan had the feeling that the door would have been closed if he hadn't called out.

"Dr. Walsingham?"

"Yes." He came toward Dylan.

"Dylan Scott." He offered his hand.

"Ah yes, the private investigator." He looked Dylan up and down, his gaze lingering on Dylan's scuffed shoes before returning to his face. "What would a private investigator want with me?"

"I'm working for Aleksander Kaminski," Dylan explained. Walsingham didn't even blink. "I'm sorry for your loss, Dr. Walsingham, truly sorry, but I wondered if I might ask you a few questions."

"No. I'm sorry, but I don't have the time." Walsingham was broader across the shoulders than was evident from the photos Dylan had seen. His dark suit looked handmade. A gold watch, slim and expensive-looking, peeped out from a crisp white shirt cuff.

"I could come back later. Six o'clock? Seven?"

"No. Sorry."

"Tomorrow?"

"No. Look, Mr.—"

"Scott. Dylan Scott."

"Mr. Scott, I'm sorry but I have nothing to say to you or to anyone else. As you can imagine, it's all been very difficult. For my sons, too. We had reporters camped out on our doorstep for months. We're slowly starting to move on and get our lives back together and we don't want it all dragged up again. No. I'm sorry, but it's too distressing."

"I can appreciate that, and I promise it'll only take a couple of minutes. Five minutes tops."

"No. Sorry." Walsingham strode back to his car, took a sports bag from the passenger seat and headed for the front door. "I'm sorry you've had a wasted journey, Mr. Scott. Goodbye."

The front door that had once been covered with Aleksander Kaminski's fingerprints opened and closed. Dylan was left standing in the middle of the driveway.

It irked him that he'd learned nothing from Dr. Walsingham, but something, and he had no idea what, had convinced him to take this case.

For all he knew, Kaminski could have planned Carly Walsingham's murder for months and carried it out in a calm, cold-blooded, exacting manner. On the other hand, Dylan wasn't convinced and, so long as that albeit small element of doubt remained, he wouldn't rest.

One way or another, he had to learn the truth. He had to prove Kaminski's innocence or his guilt.

This is an extended excerpt of *Silent Witness* by Shirley Wells, provided courtesy of Carina Press. To purchase the book, please visit www.carinapress.com

For further adventures with our stalwart sleuth, check out the first two Dylan Scott mysteries, available now.

Presumed Dead

Dylan Scott has problems. Dismissed from the police force for assaulting a suspect, he has no job, his wife has thrown him out and—worse luck—his mother has moved in. So when Holly Champion begs him to investigate her mother's disappearance from the dreary Lancashire town of Dawson's Clough, he can't say no. Dylan's inquiries turn up plenty of potential suspects—and he soon finds that one sleepy town can keep a lot of secrets.



Dead Silent

Ten months ago, Samantha Hunt set off for work...and was never seen again. Dylan Scott wants to believe the young woman's alive—and her father, his client, is desperate to find his missing daughter before he dies of cancer. But as usual not everything is as it seems in sleepy Dawson's Clough.



www.carinapress.com

www.facebook.com/carinapress

www.twitter.com/carinapress

About the Author

Shirley was born and raised in the Cotswolds, where her headmaster wrote on her school report—*Shirley is content to dream her life away*.

Years later—as an adult living in Cyprus—it dawned on her that this wasn't necessarily a bad thing and that fellow dreamers, in the guise of fiction writers, had been getting away with it for centuries.

A move to the Orkney island of Hoy followed and, during the twelve years she spent there, she wrote short stories as well as full-length romantic fiction for UK women's magazines.

She's now settled in Lancashire, where the Pennines provide the inspiration and setting for her popular mystery novels. She and her husband share their home with an ever-changing selection of deranged pets, who often insist on cameo roles in Shirley's novels.

When she isn't writing, Shirley loves reading (anything and everything), listening to live music, watching TV, eating chocolate and drinking whisky—though not necessarily at the same time. She's also a season ticket holder at Burnley Football Club and can often be seen in the biting wind and pouring rain cheering on her favourite team.

And she's still content to dream her life away.



Where no great story goes untold.

The variety you want to read, the stories authors have always wanted to write.
With new releases every week, your next great read is just a download away!

Keep in touch with Carina Press:

Read our blog: www.CarinaPress.com/blog

Follow us on Twitter: www.twitter.com/CarinaPress

Become a fan on Facebook: www.facebook.com/CarinaPress



ISBN: 978-14268-9334-6

Copyright © 2012 by Shirley Wells

All rights reserved. By payment of the required fees, you have been granted the non-exclusive, non-transferable right to access and read the text of this e-book on-screen. No part of this text may be reproduced, transmitted, down-loaded, decompiled, reverse engineered, or stored in or introduced into any information storage and retrieval system, in any form or by any means, whether electronic or mechanical, now known or hereinafter invented, without the express written permission of publisher, Harlequin Enterprises Limited, 225 Duncan Mill Road, Don Mills, Ontario, Canada M3B 3K9.

All characters in this book have no existence outside the imagination of the author and have no relation whatsoever to anyone bearing the same name or names. They are not even distantly inspired by any individual known or unknown to the author, and all incidents are pure invention.

This edition published by arrangement with Harlequin Books S.A.

® and ™ are trademarks of the publisher. Trademarks indicated with ® are registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office, the Canadian Trade Marks Office and in other countries.

www.CarinaPress.com