

## PROLOGUE

Detective Chief Inspector Colin Sinclair was dog tired. Sleep had been a stranger to him since early Tuesday morning, when the girl's body had been found. Victim, he corrected himself. She was still alive, although the first officer on the scene had not thought so. Young and inexperienced, he'd seen the blood and the pasty white skin of her nude body and had concluded that the young woman rolled up in the rug was dead. Never checked. Fortunately his supervising officer had not been deterred by her condition or the squalor in the alley off Liverpool Road. He had lifted her out of the rubbish in the skip and found a very faint pulse.

At that point things had begun to happen very quickly. An ambulance had arrived. Islington was his borough, and he had been called. He and his sergeant, David Andrews, had gone first to the alley to view the deposition site and then to University College Hospital's casualty department and operating theatre. The ambulance, a crime scene now, had been isolated. A forensic doctor had worked with the UCH staff to supervise the collection of evidence from the victim—also considered a crime scene—a delicate procedure since it was of paramount importance not to endanger her life.

He ran his hand through his hair. At first the doctors wouldn't give him any odds on her survival. They were brusque. "It's too soon for a diagnosis," he'd been told. "We'll know more in seventy-two hours." When he'd heard the catalogue of her injuries, he understood why. The only things she had going for her were her age and a strong heart. She was unconscious and heavily sedated. It had taken all his considerable powers of persuasion to convince Doctor Walsh to let them see her.

The doctor's face had registered his displeasure, but he hadn't wanted Sinclair's arguments to deplete his time any further. He had donned a surgical mask and given Sinclair and Andrews masks as well before taking them onto the intensive care ward, each bed with just a curtain for privacy. The only sounds came from life support and

other medical equipment. “She was bleeding internally,” Walsh said in response to their surprise at the masks. “Her spleen had ruptured. We had to remove it. As a result her immune system has been compromised. If she lives, she’ll be more susceptible to infection the rest of her life.”

Dr. Walsh’s movements were smooth and precise. He pulled back her hospital gown with slim, gloved fingers and described the injuries covered by surgical dressings. One of the victim’s arms was in a cast. “She was also severely dehydrated when she was admitted. She has several cracked and bruised ribs. Broken ribs—here and here—punctured her lung and caused bleeding in her chest. We’re draining that.” He pointed to a tube stitched to the skin beneath and to the side of her left breast, and Sinclair winced.

“She’s not breathing on her own,” the doctor added, gesturing to another tube which ran from her mouth to a machine on the floor. “We sutured multiple lacerations. There are too many contusions to name. The worst, aside from those on her abdomen, are on her right shoulder and left thigh. If haematoma develops in the thigh—blood collecting in the tissues—we’ll have to open it and drain it surgically. The leg is elevated to reduce the danger of a clot. The man who did this didn’t hold back his rage, and he didn’t miss much.”

It was always difficult for Sinclair to see the damage done by brutal men to innocent women. This young woman was clinging to life. If she regained consciousness, at some point she’d know that others had seen her without her permission. It struck him that that would be another assault, an assault on her soul.

Walsh was still speaking. “Her liver was bleeding and needed repair, and there are some unusual marks on her thighs.” He lifted one of her legs slightly to show them. “Her concussion wasn’t severe, but there’s something else you need to know: She was a virgin when this bloody attack took place. The complete details will appear in her medical record.” The anger in his voice had been unexpected. “I have a daughter,” Walsh explained. “It’s not possible to be equally objective with all patients.” He covered her, removed his latex gloves, and led them into the corridor.

“When can we speak with her?” Sinclair asked.

Walsh looked as tired as Sinclair felt. “It’s Tuesday. We won’t begin to ease up on the sedation until Friday. She should regain consciousness later that day, assuming no complications develop. She won’t be able to talk to you, though. We won’t start weaning her from the respirator until Saturday, and the endotracheal tube will have to remain in place until we do.”

“I understand,” Sinclair said, but Walsh gave a further warning.

“It’s going to be difficult. Even after the tube comes out, she’ll be in significant pain for some time. Your sessions will have to be very brief.” He’d given Sinclair a sharp nod of dismissal and moved quickly toward the nurses’ station.

So Sinclair had waited, visiting the hospital regularly. Each day the

nurses reported no change, but Sinclair still spent a few minutes by her bed, brooding over her broken, battered, and ravaged body. It was hard to imagine this frail, still form having a life, laughing, loving. The end of a life usually meant, for him, the beginning of an investigation. This life-in-stasis meant that he could not advance. He had never been one for marking time, always preferring forward motion with reason dictating each step.

Their lack of progress on the case ate at him. They still didn't know who she was. A missing persons report had been filed by a central London hotel and was being investigated, but no determination had been made. According to the hotel manager, a white female, American, had not returned to her room. She was described as short and slim, with dark hair and eyes, probably in her early twenties. Police had spoken to her family briefly to inquire about her possible movements. Did she have a friend she might be visiting? Was she planning to travel somewhere outside London during this time? Had they heard from her? A photograph had been requested but not yet received. The unidentified female in hospital had not been mentioned.

This young woman had not been the first victim; six others had preceded her. When London's Metropolitan Police had realised they were dealing with a serial killer, the pressure to get things done had escalated exponentially, and the Special Homicide Squad had been created at New Scotland Yard. It stood to reason: They had the space to accommodate all the personnel and specialist functions required by a major investigation.

Sinclair and his sergeant had just recently been seconded to the squad. Andrews had rearranged the letters and called it, SSH, the Library Squad, and Sinclair appreciated his sense of humour. He was surprised, however, that the summons had come so quickly, before forensic evidence had been processed that would establish substantive links to the other crimes. It was an indication, he supposed, of the Yard's desire to commit their full resources to solving the case. Crimes committed by strangers were the most difficult to solve. Evidence collected in this woman's case could provide new avenues of investigation for the others. "Operation No Mercy," it was called, and indeed the villain who had murdered six women and nearly killed a seventh had shown none and deserved none.

It was now Friday, and the first newspaper story—"Newest Victim of Carpet Killer?"—had appeared two days earlier. The man who had tried to kill this girl knew he had not been successful. He also knew where she was, hence the uniformed officer assigned to guard her. She looked tiny and completely defenceless in the big hospital bed. She had a straight nose, arched brows over long lashes and a small mouth, still closed over the tube that helped her breathe. A bandage covered one cheek. Her skin—where it wasn't bruised—was unnaturally pale, and it made her short brown hair look particularly dark against the pillow.

He wanted very much to speak with her. Would she be coherent? What would she be able to tell them about her attacker? If her memory

were intact, she would awaken to a nightmare. The injuries to her body were appalling, and he knew from experience that her mind had been raped as well. At the moment she was blissfully unaware of the challenges that lay before her. Soon, he hoped, she'd be reassured by the sheer number of people working on her case. The Yard was like a huge lion, crouching in the shadows and ready to spring upon the monster who had caused such heartache to so many. All they needed was a description, and they would find him and sink their teeth into him.

PART ONE  
SEPTEMBER, 1998

Truth will come to light;  
murder cannot be hid long.

— William Shakespeare



## CHAPTER 1

The room was dim, but the pain was not. The woman without a name remembered the pain, and she felt it now, as sharp, constant, and deep as her fear, commanding her attention and making it difficult to think. My God, there was something in her throat! She reached for it, her shoulder throbbing, and heard a man's voice say, "That must be uncomfortable, but you need it just now." She wanted to scream, but she couldn't even make a sound. She struggled against the firm hand restraining her weak, slow one. When he moved into her field of view, she saw a wide face drawn in fatigue. The eyes above the mask were startlingly blue.

"Don't be afraid," he said. "You're in hospital."

Curtains instead of walls. Sheets covering her. Light pulsing across a screen. She could hear the bleep of a monitor. Other buzzes and clicks. Was he a doctor? He had dark brown hair, mussed as if he had run his hand through it one time too many, but—a tweed coat? Was he a minister? Was she dying?

"You're safe now."

She would never be safe.

"I'm a policeman. I'm here to help. Are you in pain?"

She dipped her chin. Even that motion hurt, and tears she couldn't wipe welled up.

He took her hand. "I'm Colin Sinclair. I want very much to know your name." He put a pen in her fingers and held a small notebook against them.

She wrote *Jenny* before her grip weakened and the pen fell. She closed her eyes.

Very quietly he retrieved his pen. She knew who she was, so she had memory. That was positive for the investigation but perhaps not merciful for her. On his way out he reported her brief period of consciousness to the nurses.

## CHAPTER 2

Saturday morning a nurse woke Jenny. She'd just received her pain medication when a doctor came in, holding her chin still while he shone his light in her eyes. Then he suctioned her mouth and the tube in her throat. A second nurse pushed her upright, causing a stabbing pain in her ribs. The first nurse said something, but her accent was thick, and Jenny couldn't understand her. Her heart pounded.

"Breathe out," the doctor said.

It hurt to do that! Didn't they know?

"Harder!" the nurse behind her said.

The tube was long, and its movement made her gag.

"All done now," the doctor said briskly.

Jenny coughed, the pain from her ribs making her dizzy. One of the nurses slipped an oxygen mask over her nose briefly.

"Hurts," Jenny said in a voice so raspy that she didn't recognize it.

"Silly cow," the nurse said, not unkindly. "Sore throat's normal after extubation. Some water will soothe it and your dry mouth. You can rest then."

-----

On Saturday evening, Sinclair checked in at the nurses' station before heading to Jenny's space. "She had a rough time today," he was told. "She's breathing on her own now, but it's painful, and she's exhausted. You'll have better luck tomorrow if you want to have a word with her." Still, he felt compelled to look in. Her breathing was laboured and shallow without the help of the ventilator, but he was relieved to see that the tube had been removed from her throat. He couldn't imagine how helpless and frightened she must have felt, with something foreign inside her body. Tonight only the light on the headboard was illuminated; subdued light for a subdued spirit. He took her hand and squeezed gently, but unlike the cinema, she did not squeeze back. Taking the nurse's advice, he headed home.

When he arrived at the hospital on Sunday afternoon, a nurse was holding Jenny in a sitting position. Jenny's right arm was around the



nurse's shoulders, and her legs were dangling over the edge of the bed. Her head was bowed, and tears were streaming down her cheeks. He found himself unable to watch, so he waited outside with the officer on duty until the nurse finished.

"Jenny," he said, "I'm a detective with New Scotland Yard. Colin Sinclair." He opened a black leather-bound folder and held out his warrant card.

He was tall, lanky. Sans the accent, he could have been a Texan. She gripped the blanket, trying to regulate her breathing to control the pain.

"I need to know your full name."

She breathed out slowly. Her hoarse whisper was weak. "Jennifer Catherine Jeffries."

The young woman reported missing by the Hotel La Place—they had insisted that they knew their guests, and they had been correct. He'd send a policewoman round to collect her things. "You're an American?"

"Yes. Texas."

Her fist was still clenched. Perhaps if he used a more formal form of address, she'd relax a bit. "Miss Jeffries, I know this is hard. Can you give me just a few more minutes? Do you know what happened to you?"

She made a writing motion in the air with her fingers. He took out his notebook and pen and held them for her.

*Hurting. Stop.*

Respecting a victim's wishes was critically important. Further questions would have to wait. "Sorry," he said. "I'll let you rest."

When he came back in the evening, he used a gentler approach. "I want to have a word with you, but I'll stop whenever you want me to do. I need to notify your next of kin. Can you write the information down for me?" He handed her his notebook and pen.

*Bill and Peggy Jeffries*, he read. *Houston, Texas*. There was a series of numbers. "Your parents?"

She nodded.

"Thank you. I'll ring them tonight." He wanted desperately to know the Who, What, When, and Where, but he was constrained by the lack of privacy in the intensive care unit. He tried to keep the frustration out of his voice. "Miss Jeffries, why were you in London? Were you on holiday?"

*Graduate school*, she wrote.

"Are you a student?"

*Not yet*, she penned.

"How old are you?"

23.

"No more questions for now. You've done very well. I want you to know that you're safe here. We have a PC just outside."

Her brows furrowed.

"A police constable," he explained. "Round the clock. You don't have to be afraid. Do you have any questions for me?"

*How did I get here?*

He waited until she looked up at him. “By ambulance. You were found in an alley, wrapped in a rug.”

Her face crumpled, and her penmanship deteriorated. *He threw me away*

“Who, Miss Jeffries? Can you tell me who did that to you?”

Tears came, but they were silent, and she was still. She had learnt to cry without moving. It made him angry that she couldn’t even cry without pain.

“Sorry,” he said. “I’m meant to be answering your questions.” He collected his notebook. “You’re going to be all right, you know. It will take some time, but you’re going to be all right. I’ll tell your parents that when I speak with them.”

“Wait—”

Her voice was so faint he wasn’t certain she’d spoken.

“Don’t—tell—”

“What don’t you want them to know?”

“Not—”

He followed the direction of her eyes. “I understand. I won’t mention the sexual assault.”

He went back to the Yard to bring his partner up to date. Perhaps if he waited until later in the evening to ring the Jeffries, he’d find the words he needed. He dreaded the news he’d have to give them, but Jenny was lucky: She was alive.