

found her bedroom. She was in there, still asleep. I wanted to look for the letters, but I was afraid she might wake up and catch me.”

“Did she wake?”

“Not until I lifted the duvet over her face. She was lying on her back and I pulled it up to cover her eyes. I don’t think I would have killed her if she’d stayed asleep. She moved, and I pressed the duvet down. She struggled, but it was no good because her arms were trapped under the quilt. The more she struggled, the harder I pressed. I was kneeling on her. I was angry and frightened at the same time. I didn’t panic, exactly, only I didn’t want her to wake up and find me there, so I kept on pressing and pressing down on her face until she went still. I was even more scared then, when I knew what I’d done. I pulled the quilt down again and uncovered her face. I knew she was dead. I didn’t stop to look for the letters, or anything. I just ran out.”

“Caught the bus back to Bath?”

“Yes.”

“Later on, when you heard that the body had been found in the lake, you must have been amazed.”

“Yes.”

“What did you think had happened?”

“First, I thought Greg must have found her in the bedroom and moved her, to make it look as if she killed herself. Later, I believed my mother put her in the lake. They said her own car was used. I didn’t know what to do. If I owned up, I could get my ma into trouble. That day you came to our house and she tried to run away, and you caught her, I didn’t really have concussion. I thought you might have to release her if I was taken to hospital.”

Diamond gave a nod and said nothing.

“I’m sorry you lost your job because of me,” said Matthew.

“Forget it,” Diamond told him. “You probably saved my

life by getting help as quickly as you did after Andy Coventry brained me in the Baths. That could have been permanent. Eat up your fish and chips.”

In the silence, Diamond weighed the significance of what Matthew had told him. The Crown Prosecution Service would have a real problem deciding the sensible way to deal with this. In reality, it would save everyone a headache if Jackman and Dana flew off to America and took the boy with them. There was no extradition of minors.

As if he read the thought, Matthew said, “I want to own up properly. If I go to the police, would you come with me?”

“Sure.”

“First I want to tell Ma.”

“Okay.”

“What do you think she’ll do?”

“I don’t think she’ll be in any hurry to go to America.”

“And Greg?”

“It wouldn’t surprise me if he changes his plans when he hears what you have to say.”

They finished their lunch and got up to leave. Diamond rested a hand lightly on the boy’s shoulder. Ahead, the mist was starting to lift, and he could make out one of those stone angels on the lowest rung of the ladder, caught in the attitude of moving upwards.

Continue reading for a preview of the next
Peter Diamond investigation

DIAMOND SOLITAIRE

1

AN ALERT SHATTERED THE SILENCE in Harrods, a piercing, continuous note. The guard on duty in the security control room, Lionel Kenton, drew himself up in his chair. His hands went to his neck and tightened the knot in his tie. On the control panel in front of him, one of the light-emitting diodes, a red one, was blinking. If the system was functioning properly, someone—or something—had triggered a sensor on the seventh floor. He pressed a control that triggered the video surveillance for that floor. Nothing moved on the monitors.

Kenton was the senior security guard that night. He was so senior that he had a shelf above the radiator for his exclusive use. On it were framed photos of his wife, two daughters, the Pope and Catherine Deneuve; an ebony elephant; and a cassette rack of opera tapes. Puccini kept him alert through the night, he told anyone so philistine as to question opera in the control room. None shall sleep. Listening to music was more responsible than reading a paper or a paperback. His eyes were alert to anything on the panel and his ears to any sound that clashed with the music.

He silenced Puccini and touched the button that gave him a direct line to Knightsbridge Police Station. They must already have received the alert electronically. He identified himself and said, "Intruder alert. I'm getting a signal from the seventh floor. Furniture. Section nine. Nothing on screen."

“Message received 2247 hours.”

“Someone is coming?”

“It’s automatic.”

Of course it was. He was betraying some nervousness. He tried another survey of the seventh floor. Nothing untoward was visible, but then he hadn’t much faith in video surveillance. Every terrorist knows to keep out of range of a camera.

And he had to assume this was a terrorist.

Twenty-two night security officers were posted in various parts of the store. He put out a general alert and asked for a second check that all the elevators were switched off. The security doors between sections were already in position and had been since the cleaners left. In the business of counter-terrorism nothing can be taken for granted, but really it wasn’t feasible to break into Harrods. The intruder—if one was up there—must have hidden when the store closed and remained out of sight. If so, someone’s job was on the line. Someone who should have checked section nine. You weren’t allowed one mistake in this line of work.

His second-in-command that night, George Bullen, burst in. He’d been patrolling when the alert sounded.

“Where’s it from?”

“Seventh.”

“It bloody would be.”

The furniture department was high risk: a brute to patrol. Wardrobes, cupboards, chests of drawers and units of every description. The nightly check for devices was a wearisome chore. It was conceivable—but in no way excusable—that the guard on duty had been so bogged down opening cupboards and peering into drawers that he’d missed someone lurking out of sight behind the damned things.

Another light flashed on the console and one of the monitors showed headlights entering the delivery bay.

The police response couldn't be faulted. Kenton told Bullen to take over and went down to meet them.

Three patrol cars and two vans already. Marksmen and dog-handlers climbing out. More cars arriving, their flashing alarms giving an eerie, blue luminosity to the delivery bay. Kenton felt a flutter in his bowels. The police weren't going to vote him security man of the year if this emergency had been triggered by a blip in the system.

A plainclothes officer stepped out of a car and ran across to him. "You're?"

"Kenton."

"Senior man?"

He nodded.

"You put out the call?"

He admitted it, and his stomach lurched.

"Seventh floor?"

"Furniture department."

"Points of access?"

"Two sets of stairs."

"Only two?"

"The section is sealed off by security doors."

"No lifts?"

"Switched off."

"Any of your lads on the stairs?"

"Yes. That's routine. They'll be guarding the stairways above and below level seven."

"Lead the way, then."

Thirty or more uniformed officers, dog-handlers and men in plain clothes, several carrying guns, came with him as he set off at a run through the ground floor to the first stairway. A squad of a dozen or so peeled off and raced up that staircase while he led the remainder to the next.

Mounting seven floors was a fitness test for Lionel Kenton. He was relieved to be told to stop after six and a half,

and even more relieved to find four of his own security staff in position as he'd claimed they would be. Now he had a chance to recover normal breathing while radio contact was made with the party on the other stairs.

"What's the layout here?"

Essentially the police marksmen wanted to know how much cover they could rely on. One of Kenton's team, a burly ex-CID officer named Diamond, gave a rapid run-down of the furniture display positioned nearest to the stairs. Peter Diamond was the man responsible tonight for this section. You poor bugger, thought Kenton. You look more sick than I feel.

A team of three marksmen went up the final flight. Others took up positions on the stairs. The rest moved down to the landing below.

This was the worst—waiting for the unknown, while others went up to deal with it.

Someone offered Kenton some chewing gum and he took it gratefully.

Perhaps six nerve-racking minutes went by before there was a crackle on the senior policeman's radio and a voice reported, "Negative so far."

Two dogs and their handlers were sent up to help.

Another long interval of silence.

Security Officer Diamond was just to the left of Kenton. He had his hands clasped, the fingers interlaced as if in prayer, except that the fingernails were white with pressure.

The last dregs of Kenton's confidence were draining away when someone announced over the scratchy intercom, "We've got your intruder."

"Got him under restraint?" said the man in charge.

"Come and see."

"You're sure he's the only one?"

"Positive."

The tone was reassuring. Strangely so, as if the tension

had lifted altogether. Police and security staff dashed up the stairs.

The seventh floor lights were fully on. The marksmen had converged on a section where armchairs and settees were displayed. But they weren't in the attitude of gunmen. They were lounging about as if at a wine and cheese party. Two were seated on the arms of chairs. There was no sign of anyone under arrest.

Suddenly cold with his own sweat, Kenton went over with the others. "But you said you found someone?"

One of them flicked his eyes downwards, towards a sofa.

It was the kind of vast, black corduroy thing that an advertising executive would have in his outer office. At one end was a heap of scatter cushions, brilliant in color. The face looking out from under the cushions was that of a small girl, her hair black and fringed, her eyes Asian in shape. Nothing else of her was visible.

Kenton stared in bewilderment.

"Ah, so," said the senior policeman.

2

“YOU’RE SACKING ME.” PETER DIAMOND, the guard responsible for section nine on the night the child was found, spoke without rancor. “I know the score.”

The score was heavily against him. He wasn’t young. Forty-eight, according to his file. Married. Living in West Ken. No kids. An ex-policeman. He’d got to the rank of detective superintendent and then resigned from Avon and Somerset over some dispute with the Assistant Chief Constable. A misunderstanding, someone said, someone who knew someone. Diamond had been too proud to ask for his job back. After quitting the police, he’d taken a series of part-time jobs and finally moved to London and joined the Harrods team.

“I shouldn’t say this, Peter,” the security director told him, “but you’re blood unlucky. Your record here has been exemplary apart from this. You could have looked forward to a more senior post.”

“Rules are rules.”

“Unfortunately, yes. We’ll do the best we can in the way of a reference, but, er. . .”

“. . . security jobs are out, right?” said Diamond. He was inscrutable. Fat men—and he was fat—often have faces that seem on the point of turning angry or amused. The trick is to guess which.

The director didn’t mind exhibiting his own unease.

He shook his head and spread his hands in an attitude of helplessness. "Believe me, Peter, I feel sick to the stomach about this."

"Spare me that."

"I mean it. I'm not confident I would have spotted the kid myself. She was practically invisible under the cushions."

"I lifted the cushions," Diamond admitted.

"Oh?"

"She wasn't on that sofa when I did my round. I definitely checked. I always do. It's an obvious place to plant a device. The kid must have been somewhere else and got under them later."

"How could you have missed her?"

"I reckon I took her for one of the cleaners' kids. They bring them in sometimes. Some of them are Vietnamese."

"She's Japanese, I think."

Diamond snapped out of his defeated mood. "You *think*? Hasn't she been claimed?"

"Not yet."

"Doesn't she know her name?"

"Hasn't spoken a word since she was found. Over at the nick, they spent the whole of today with a string of interpreters trying to coax her to say something. Not a syllable."

"She isn't dumb, is she?"

"Apparently not, but she says nothing intelligible. There's almost no reaction from the child."

"Deaf?"

"No. She reacts to sound. It's a mystery."

"They'll have to go on TV with her. Someone will know her. A kid found in Harrods at night—it's just the sort of story the media pick up on."

"No doubt."

"You don't sound convinced."

"I'm convinced, Peter, all too easily convinced. But there are other considerations, not least our reputation. I don't

particularly want it broadcast that a little girl penetrated our security. If the press get on to you, I'd appreciate your not making any statements."

"About security? I wouldn't."

"Thank you."

"But you can't muzzle the police. They have no interest in keeping the story confidential. It's going to break somewhere, and soon."

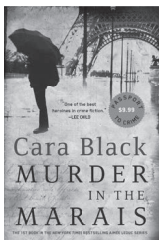
A sigh from the director, followed by an uncomfortable silence.

"So when do I clear my locker?" Diamond asked. "Right away?"

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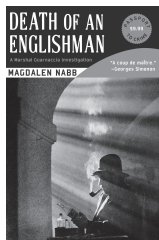


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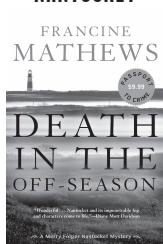
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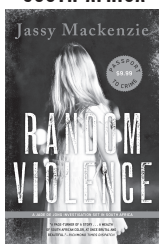
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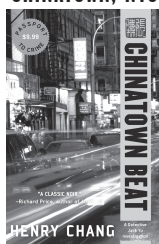
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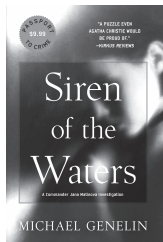
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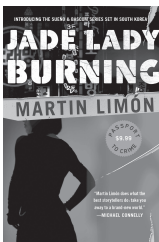
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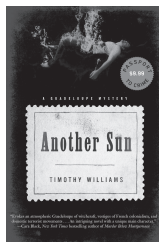
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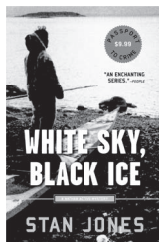
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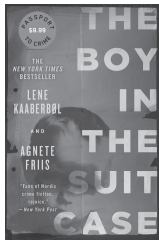
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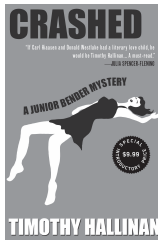
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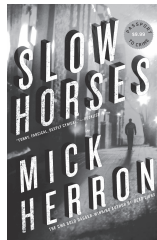
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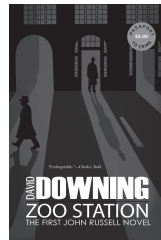
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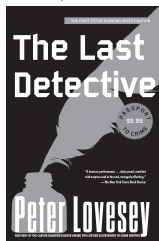
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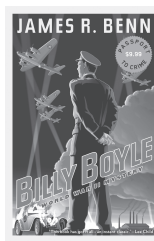
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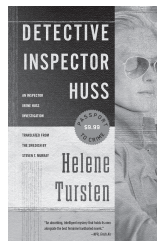
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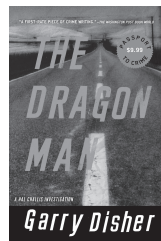
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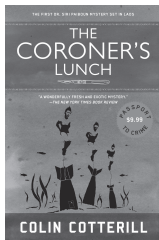
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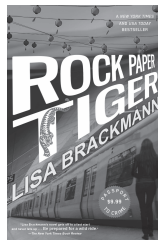
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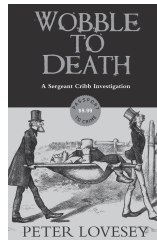
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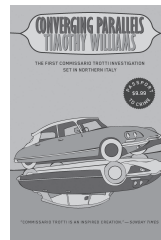
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