

You loved your last book...but what
are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, Love**reading** will help you find new books to keep you inspired and entertained.

Opening Extract from...

The First Rule of Survival

Written by Paul Mendelson

Published by C&R Crime

All text is copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

Constable & Robinson Ltd
55-56 Russell Square
London WC1B 4HP
www.constablerobinson.com

First published in the UK by C&R Crime,
an imprint of Constable & Robinson Ltd, 2014

Copyright © Paul Mendelson 2014

The right of Paul Mendelson to be identified as the
author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance
with the Copyright, Designs & Patents Act 1988

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are either
the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any
resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or to actual events or
locales is entirely coincidental

All rights reserved. This book is sold subject to the condition
that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold,
hired out or otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover
other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition
including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser

A copy of the British Library Cataloguing in Publication
Data is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-47211-135-7 (trade paperback)
ISBN 978-1-47211-136-4 (B-format PB)
ISBN 978-1-47211-139-5 (ebook)

Printed and bound in the UK

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Across the gravelled car park of MacNeil's Cape farm-stall, Colonel Vaughn de Vries strides towards him. Don February starts talking the moment he is in range.

'Two bodies, both Caucasian, probably teenagers, looks like they have been shot, possibly in the last forty-eight hours. Dog found them at the bottom of a skip outside the kitchens at the back. Scene sealed as soon as we got here.'

'Good. Trouble from the locals?' De Vries doesn't break step.

'The officer on call is a friend of mine, Ritesh. When he saw what it was, he put the call through to our department immediately. He told me what he saw and then he left. They all knew we were coming.'

'They knew I was coming,' de Vries chuckles. 'I only used to piss off one single department, now I can fuck them over the entire province.'

Warrant Officer February waits for him to finish, then continues, 'I did the paperwork with him. They have a heavy workload already. He seemed relieved.'

'I don't care either way.'

'No, sir.'

'He stamp about the place, touching everything?'

'I doubt it. We were at the Academy together. He is a sound officer.'

'Well, I'd better not find his big feet all over my crime scene.'

Don February looks up at de Vries, almost half a metre taller,

looks at his mouth, wonders whether he should wait for more, or continue his report. De Vries looks down at him.

'Everyone present is in the farm-stall shop,' Warrant Officer February resumes. 'We will check details, ask the basic questions.'

De Vries jerks a thumb at the lines of parked cars as he moves towards the scene. 'Looks like there'll be a lot of them.'

'There are – and the chances are that none of them have any idea about two bodies. They could have been dumped in that skip any time, but we got lucky, sir: I checked with the owner and it only gets swapped weekly. The last took place yesterday morning, approximately eight a.m.'

'So we have a definite window?'

Warrant Officer February does not look at de Vries again, eyes never leaving his notepad.

'Close to. The owner did not check the skip, but he says that the drivers would have seen what was in it, and they said nothing. In any case, there is a load of material under the bodies, so that would suggest they were dumped after it started being filled again by the kitchens here.'

'Check with the skip company.'

Don February makes a note, then looks at him, concludes: 'I think we can place the arrival of the two bodies between eight a.m. yesterday morning and seven a.m. this morning: twenty-three hours.'

'Good,' de Vries tells him. 'We got enough men on this?'

'The moment you were assigned, I called for the full team.'

De Vries nods smugly. 'Serious crime. Two murders.'

Don February stops. 'Two *white* boys murdered is a serious crime. Yes, sir. Seems for that, the mountain really does come to Mohammed.'

De Vries moves on, shouts behind him, 'Why do you think I'm here?' He waits until his Warrant Officer has caught up with him. 'The locals think I screw them right up the arse, but that's what we're here for.'

He looks at Don February, wonders how the younger man can cope in the dry autumn heat in his thick baggy suit, loose on his skinny frame. It makes him feel claustrophobic, just to look at him. He loosens his tie and unbuttons his collar.

‘What use am I investigating another drug murder in a fucking squatter-camp shebeen? I’m a middle-class white guy; I understand white crime. Let it be politically incorrect – we’ll get the job done better.’

Don looks pretty disgusted.

De Vries tells him, conspiratorially, ‘You’re a fucking find, Don. But don’t forget who saved you from the jaws of the Internal Investigation Bureau and that nice David Wertner.’ Don laughs. This is not an original routine. ‘That’s why we cut you a little slack and let you have one moment, every day, for . . . propaganda. And today, Warrant Officer, you’ve just had it.’ Colonel de Vries is only half joking.

They walk to the far edge of the low buildings, turn the corner, face the yard. De Vries stands stock still, listens to the near-silence in the rectangular space ahead of him; hears the low hum of an extractor fan, cars accelerating across the plain at the top of Sir Lowry’s Pass, the corrugated-tin roof crack in the heat of the morning sun. He traces the boundaries of the crime scene with his eyes, in his head marking everything off into sections, studying their contents. He stares at the battered yellow skip in what is his twenty-fourth section, turns back and puts the scene into the context of the entire farm-stall complex.

Don February stands silently at his side. This is what de Vries likes about this man: he has stillness, the capacity to discriminate between a time to act and talk, and a time to think. He has never known a black police officer like him.

‘Lab guys still not here?’

‘Nothing yet.’

‘That’s bad. Scene’s deteriorating by the minute in this heat. Tell them to hurry. And then, Don, go over to that farm-stall and take

charge. Get the people processed and on their way – but keep your eyes open. You never know.’

Don February bows almost imperceptibly, backs up a few steps, then turns and ambles away. De Vries calls over an officer to give him plastic gloves; stops the officer putting on his own gloves.

‘I want no more contamination of this scene by any other officer, do you understand? Only me. When the lab guys arrive, they have to take prints of everyone who’s been in there.’

The officer looks mildly embarrassed, struggling to get the right-hand glove off his fingers. He looks up and sees de Vries watching him, mumbles: ‘Yes, sir.’

De Vries takes off his suit jacket, hands it to the officer, tucks his tie inside his shirt, pushes up his sleeves. He looks down at the ground and takes a breath.

He starts to walk slowly around the boundary of the scene, scanning the ground, looking above, in vain, for a security camera. He stares at the back wall of the farm-stall, where he knows the kitchen is located. There are two extractor outlets, but only one long narrow window, high up on the wall, and de Vries estimates that no one could see out of it. He calls to the officer.

‘These two doors. Do they both lead to the kitchen?’

The officer calls back from behind the tape he himself has put in place.

‘The left-hand door leads into the kitchen utility area. The right-hand door is for a storeroom, no access. I checked it: just spare gas bottles for the stoves.’

De Vries realizes that no one would see onto this yard unless they were in it themselves. He looks back to the corner of the farm-stall, around which the bodies must have been carried, or driven, to reach the skip, under the dark overhang of the wind-blown trees.

When de Vries reaches the skip, he is aware that his senses are at their peak, attuned to anything that might correspond with his training, research and twenty years as a detective.

He knows immediately that it will be almost impossible to find anything of use in the surroundings of the skip. It is an area of heavy traffic: delivery and refuse vehicles, and people running from the kitchen to the four different coloured recycling bins. The skip itself, however, might yield something. He approaches it carefully, climbs the grassy bank at its far side and, holding his breath, he peers in. Amidst the piles of plastic packaging and cardboard the two naked bodies lie twisted, wrapped in thin layers of polythene. Aside from blotches of blood red, the bodies seem very white, very thin. De Vries shudders. One is clearly male, but it is impossible to tell much about the other, and he wonders how Don February knew that he was also a teenage boy.

He turns his back on the skip, lets out his breath, and walks smartly away. He begins to breathe again, but the smell of decay is lodged in his nostrils; it both stimulates and repels him.

The Scene of Crime team arrive and he beckons them through the tape. As they hurry past him, he notes that the team-leader is a man he knows and trusts to do a thorough job. They nod at each other wordlessly; each is moving along his own path and neither hesitates.

De Vries walks slowly from the yard behind the buildings, around the corner to the car park; beyond it, the vista of endless fruit trees, straight lines leading to dark rolling mountains. He imagines a process in reverse: the bodies brought up onto the mountain plain via one of the passes at either end, the drive through thick forest and verdant farmland, and turning into the farm-stall, down the approach track and through the car park; the car driving from a previous point to this place . . . what might have happened there; what led to their deaths. He knows that it is a journey that he will take until he reaches the source.

He walks briskly around the end of the low thatched building to the entrance of the farm-stall, climbs the wide brick steps. There is still a crowd of people, but there is a semblance of order; a cooler, shaded calm. He finds Don February, turns him away

from the people, says quietly, 'Good work, Don. I think it's worthless 'cos those bodies have been in there for hours, at least. Looks like condensation inside the wrapping, so that suggests overnight.'

'We are trying to keep it brief.'

'Good. Next, who told you that the two bodies were both boys?'

Don is concerned. 'The owner. Is he wrong?'

'Probably not, but he would have had to move stuff to know. Did he tell you he'd touched them?'

'No. But I was waiting for an official interview. I did not ask much. He is in his office back there.'

De Vries nods quickly and trots towards the door at the end of the food counter. He knocks, enters immediately.

A broad, ginger-haired man is on his cellphone. The moment he sees de Vries he hangs up, stands, wipes his hands on his check shirt and offers his right hand.

'Tom MacNeil. It's my place.'

Vaughn introduces himself, asks: 'Did you touch the bodies, or get into the skip to identify them?'

MacNeil hesitates.

De Vries says: 'Whatever you did, it doesn't matter. I just have to know.'

MacNeil sits back down and looks up at de Vries.

'I was an idiot. I saw them. I know I should just have called you guys – but I thought, If I'm wrong, if this isn't what it seems . . . Anyway, one of them was at the top, almost clear of all that shit, and the other was half in. So I pulled him out by his arm, and then . . . then I could see. I knew . . .'

De Vries can't imagine why anyone would do this, but he's satisfied that MacNeil is telling him the truth – that he's stupid, not involved.

'Why did you look in the skip this morning, Mr MacNeil?'

The owner seems relieved that he has not been chastised; uncrosses his arms, his legs.

‘My dog just went mad. She was in there, and she just barked and barked. I had to go and see what it was about.’

‘So your dog was in the skip?’

He swallows. ‘Yes, in the skip. I called her out immediately though.’

De Vries is trying to stay calm. There is a knock at the door. He spins around and opens it. It is one of his men.

‘Sir, the lab guys want to move the bodies. They’re checking in with you.’

‘All right, tell them to wait until I’m there just now.’

The officer leaves and de Vries turns to MacNeil. ‘How busy is that yard during the day?’

‘Not very.’ MacNeil shrugs. ‘When we’ve unpacked stock we might go out there to the recycling, cardboard and stuff . . . and mid-afternoon, when we’re emptying the kitchen bins after lunch, but we’re not back and forth.’

‘What about the door to the kitchen. Is it ever left open?’

‘Nah. There’d be flies everywhere, and it’s a matter of security too.’

‘Locked?’

‘From the outside, yes. It’s a fire exit – with a bar, you know? You push to release it.’

‘And the gas cylinders. How often are they changed?’

‘I dunno.’ He thinks about it. ‘Probably one each week. We have three cooking areas here. Something like that.’

‘So, it’s quiet out there. Anybody ever park there?’

‘Maybe a few delivery vans, but they’d be early in the morning. People use it to turn round if the car park’s busy. Otherwise, no.’

‘One more thing. When you close, is your car park still open?’

‘The gate should be closed. I usually do it myself. First in, last out. You know how it is.’

‘You lock it last night?’

MacNeil takes a breath, squeezes his eyes shut. De Vries looks

at the wide freckled face on a thick neck, knows that these gestures are only for show.

‘Ja. I think so.’

‘How often don’t you lock it, Mr MacNeil? Let’s be quite clear here.’

MacNeil avoids de Vries’ eye.

‘I locked up last night,’ he mutters. ‘For sure.’

De Vries stares at him. The expression on MacNeil’s face is open: the man apparently believes what he has just said. Everything sounds right; nothing is helping.

‘Stay here. My Warrant Officer will be with you now.’

MacNeil asks him plaintively, ‘My business. When will I be able to open again?’

Two dead kids.

‘Maybe tomorrow,’ de Vries answers bitterly.

‘Tomorrow?’

‘Maybe.’

London is dark and grey, the Thames cow-dung dirty. The entire city is blurred through the dense misty rain. John Marantz turns away from the porthole; the view makes him feel depressed. He has been airborne for eleven hours and has another six hours to wait before the next half of his journey. It will be the first time he has been back on native soil for five years.

In the airport lounge, his cellphone rings and a number he has almost forgotten appears on the screen. On answering, the voice is just as he remembers it.

‘You don’t look well.’

‘See me on the cameras?’

‘Saw you in Vegas. We can see anyone, any time. Are you drinking?’

‘Not for three years.’

‘What are you on?’