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Written by Tim Weaver

Published by Penguin Books

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Broken Heart

TIM WEAVER



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First published 2016
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Set in 12.5/14.75 pt Garamond MT Std
Typeset by Jouve (UK), Milton Keynes
Printed in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978–1–405–91782–7

www.greenpenguin.co.uk



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For Lucy

00:00:01

The camera pulls into focus.

Retired detective Ray Callson is seated in a chair in a nondescript office with pale walls and little in the way of furniture. There are blinds at the window, but they're ajar, the skyscrapers of downtown Los Angeles reduced to a petrol-blue fuzz in the background. Callson adjusts himself and takes the microphone that he's handed. Off camera, a small, stilted voice says, 'Just clip it to your shirt.'

Callson does as he's asked, then straightens himself, smoothing down his grey hair, which is parted arrow-straight at the side. He is in his early sixties, but still handsome. He's clean-shaven except for a moustache, and has bright green eyes, each one painted with a single blob of yellow – a reflection of the light attachment that's sitting close to the camera. As he waits, he clears his throat a couple of times and checks his watch.

'Are you ready?'

'Sure,' Callson responds.

A hum as the camera starts to roll.

'Can you begin by introducing yourself?'

Callson clears his throat again and says, 'My name's Raymond J. Callson. I was an officer with the Los Angeles Police Department for thirty-two years.'

'What sort of work did you do there?'

'I spent most of that time working homicides.'

'Did you enjoy it?'

'Enjoy?' He shrugs. 'I don't know if that's the right word.'

'Why not?'

'I'm not sure you go into police work, especially homicide cases, thinking you're going to enjoy it. I mean, you're dealing with people who have been raped, stabbed, shot . . . Does that sound like it's enjoyable to you?'

There's no response from behind the camera.

Callson shrugs again. 'You do what you have to do.'

'Did you ever want to be anything else?'

'What do you mean?'

'Did you ever want to do another job?'

Callson takes a long breath, as if he's asked himself the same question many times over and is still searching for the answer. 'Sure. There were times when you'd wonder, "What if?" My old man used to work for the county doing maintenance. There were days when I'd duck under that crime scene tape, see what one human being was capable of doing to another, and think, "What the hell am I doing this for? I'd be better off mowing the grass in MacArthur Park."' He smiles but it's humourless. 'Actually, there were a lot of days when I thought that.'

'But you never did.'

'Never did what?'

'You never ended up mowing the grass in MacArthur Park.'

'No,' he says, 'I just kept turning up to those crime scenes.'

'How many homicides do you estimate you worked?'

'In thirty-two years?' Callson blows out a jet of air. 'I don't know. Couldn't tell you. A thousand, two thousand – literally no idea. I'd probably just have to go with "a lot". LA was, is, a pretty violent place sometimes.'

'Are there any cases that have stuck with you?'

Callson seems to hear the question, but doesn't reply.

'Mr Callson?'

Again, he's silent.

'Mr Callson, are there any cases that have stuck with you?'

Very slowly, he starts to nod, his eyes on an empty space beyond the camera. 'Yeah,' he says. 'Yeah, I can think of one case right off the top of my head.'

PART ONE

I

The Queen of Hearts was a three-storey pub halfway along Seymour Place, south of Marylebone Tube station. The pub was finished in the same glazed terracotta tiles used on Underground stations all over the city, and the inside was marginally cooler than outside – but not by much. The weather had been sweltering for weeks, baking the veins and arteries of the city – all its buildings, all its pavements, rinsing every window with light – until finally, here at the end of August, it felt like there was no escape from it: inside the pub an air-conditioning unit was working overtime, extra fans were stationed on a long bar, and neither made any difference at all.

A waiter showed me to a table at the back, set for two, overlooking a well-kept residential garden, where I ordered a beer, grabbed my laptop from my bag and logged into the Wi-Fi. I'd only got as far as opening the browser when my phone suddenly burst into life. I expected it to be the woman I was having lunch with, Melanie Craw. Most of the time, if she was late – which she rarely was – and she called me after the time at which we'd agreed to meet, it was to tell me something had come up and she wouldn't be making it at all. But it wasn't Craw. It wasn't any of the other names I had logged in my address book. Even more bizarrely, it wasn't actually a UK number at all.

It was a call from the US.

My contact details were all over my website, and three

years ago a case had taken me to Nevada, so I'd established contacts in and around Las Vegas, even if I rarely spoke to them. But it wasn't a 702 area code, so it wasn't Vegas, and when I pulled my laptop towards me and put in a search for the number's 952 prefix, I found out it was a chunk of land in Minnesota, to the south-east of Minneapolis. Who did I know in Minneapolis?

Curious, I pushed Answer.

'David Raker.'

'Oh, Mr Raker.' A female voice. She sounded surprised that I'd answered. 'My name's Wendy Fisher. I hope I'm not disturbing you.'

Wendy Fisher. I cast my mind back through conversations I'd had over the past few weeks, trying to remember if her name had come up anywhere. I felt sure it hadn't. I didn't know her; I didn't know anyone in her part of the US.

'I'm real sorry for calling you out of the blue like this,' she said, 'but I was, uh . . . I was wondering if you could spare a few minutes of your time.' As if reading my thoughts, she then added, 'We've never spoken before. You don't know me.'

'Okay. What is it you think I can do for you, Wendy?'

'I, uh . . . I need . . . I was hoping . . .'

Straight away, I realized that the hesitation in her voice had nothing to do with surprise at me answering her call. The staccato nature of her sentences, the way they caught in her mouth: it was distress, it was helplessness. I'd heard those same emotions before, on repeat, in every missing person's case I'd ever taken on.

'Has someone gone missing?'

'Yes,' she said, and stopped for a moment. 'My sister, Lynda. She's been gone since last October. I don't know what to do . . . I don't know what else to do.'

As soon as she had mentioned her sister's name, her voice had started to fray. I gave her a moment, my eyes returning to the map of Minnesota.

'I see you're calling from the Midwest.'

'That's correct,' she said, taking a moment more to recover her poise. 'I'm in a place called Lakeville. It's about twenty-five miles south of Minneapolis.'

'Minneapolis is a long way from London, Wendy.'

'I know,' she said. 'I know it is.'

'That makes it hard to help you – if that's what you're calling about.'

Words caught in her throat, and then she simply said, 'Oh.'

'I know the States a little – I've lived and worked on the coasts – so maybe it would be different if you were in New York or Washington or LA. But Minneapolis – I don't know your area at all. You'd be better off with someone local.'

'My sister lives in England.'

I took that in. 'Okay.'

'Lynda has been in Europe most of her adult life.' She was finding her rhythm now, her confidence. 'I found your name on the Internet, and I googled you, and I read about some of the cases you've worked. Some of the people you've found. I saw a story about you on CNN, on Fox News. I saw what happened to you when you came out to Las Vegas. I saw something else about you on the BBC, about a case you worked on last year. I thought, "'This is the man that can help find Lyn."'

I didn't say anything.

'Will you help me find her, Mr Raker?'

'David.'

'David,' she said quietly. 'I feel so far away from what's happening there. I don't know what else to do. The police,

they've got nowhere with her case. Maybe for them it's just a number on a file, or some paperwork in a cabinet, but for me it's everything. No one's heard from her since last October, and I just . . . I miss her so much.' A pregnant pause, a sniff. 'I've got savings. I can pay you. Please help me.'

I looked towards the windows of the restaurant, where the sun beat a path through the glass. This was always the worst part: hearing the desperation in their voices, the way it forged a path through to money. I'll pay you whatever it takes. I'll give you all I've got.

Just find them.

What they never knew, or maybe didn't choose to find out, was that it was about more than that for me. I needed to pay the bills, just like everyone else, but I needed the cases for other, less obvious reasons as well. After I buried my wife six years ago, the cases became how I grieved for her. The missing became a lifeline.

Now they were my oxygen.

Yet I still felt a minor hesitation in taking Wendy Fisher's call, felt more than that as I considered the possible repercussions of accepting work from her. She was thousands of miles away, and so much of missing persons cases was about sitting down with people, about watching the subtleties of their expressions as they reacted to questions. Skype could never relay the delicacy of emotion, grief, pain. Lies.

'Mr Raker?'

I tuned back in. 'Yeah, I'm here.'

'Will you help me?' she asked.

'I don't know yet, Wendy.'

She remained silent, clearly knocked off balance.

'You said your sister's name is Lynda.'

'Yes,' she said softly, still a little bruised. 'With a *y*.'

'And her surname?'

'Korin. Lynda Korin.'

'And she lived here in the UK?'

'Yes. She's been over there since 1984. Before that, she was in Spain. She moved to Europe in the mid seventies and loved it so much that she decided to stay.'

'So how old is she now?'

'Sixty-two – almost sixty-three.'

'Okay. And she disappeared when?'

'Tuesday 28 October.'

Today was 26 August, so she'd been gone almost ten months.

'Where was she last seen?' I asked.

'Have you ever heard of Stoke Point?'

'No, I haven't.'

'I've never been there, obviously, but I've done a lot of research. I've seen pictures of it. It's some kind of beauty spot in the south-west of England. I think it's in Somerset, on the coast there, a few miles north of . . . uh . . .' She paused, and I heard papers being leafed through. 'Hold on a second. Uh . . . Weston-super-Mare.'

'Okay. I know Weston.'

'The police found Lynda's car there.'

'She'd abandoned it?'

'That's what it looked like. Her car was locked, Her purse and her cellphone were in the glove compartment. But her keys were in scrub nearby.'

'She'd thrown the keys clear of the car?'

'That's right. I don't know why.'

I didn't answer, unwilling to speculate in front of her – but one potential reason came to me right off the bat: *Korin wasn't the one who threw them away.*

'Did anyone see her on the day she disappeared?'

'No,' Wendy replied.

'There were no witnesses?'

'None.'

'What about security footage?'

'Nothing.'

'They didn't have cameras there?'

'They had *a* camera.'

'But it didn't pick her up?'

A momentary pause. 'That's the weird part.'

'What do you mean?'

'There's only one way in and out of that place.'

'Okay.'

'A security camera at the entrance showed her going in through the main gate – but Lyn never came back out again. She never exited. Not on foot, not in her car, not in anybody else's. Dead or alive, there's never been any trace of her. It's like the minute she passed through the gate to that place, she basically ceased to exist.'

2

All of a sudden, I became aware that I'd opened a new document on my laptop, doing it automatically, instinctively, creating it despite all the impracticalities of Wendy Fisher being in another time zone. I'd made notes as well: Lynda Korin's age, the date she went missing, the circumstances of her disappearance.

It was like she basically ceased to exist.

'No one's ever found any trace of Lynda?' I asked.

'No,' Wendy said. 'Nothing.'

'Who reported her missing?'

'I did. I filed a report on 2 November, after going five days without hearing from her, but your people over there never found the car till the tenth.'

'Who did you file the report with?'

'With Avon and Somerset Police. I stayed up all night so that I would be able to catch them as soon as they got in that morning. The name of the man I spoke to, the officer, was Stewart Wolstenholme. After that, the case got passed to someone else – a Detective Constable Raymond White. He was a bit better at his job than the other guy, Wolstenholme – a bit more senior, I guess, or more experienced, or whatever. But he couldn't find her either. And now she's just . . .' Her voice died away.

Forgotten. Lost.

'When was the last time you spoke to DC White?'

'Two, three months ago maybe. He called me and said

there was nothing new to report but that they were still looking for her. I'm not sure that was true.'

'What makes you say that?'

'I think it was empty talk. I had to leave about five messages before he even called me back. *I* was chasing *him*. He's always been very polite, but I could tell it was a low priority for him. You could just hear it in his voice.' She slowed to a halt, her words prickled with tears. 'I know they're busy. I know they have other cases. But this has been ten months of hell for me.'

Softly, I asked, 'Was Lynda in any sort of trouble?'

'No. Nothing like that. Financially, everything was up together. She has this house on the Mendips, but it doesn't have a mortgage on it any more. I've been there a few times. It's really beautiful. It overlooks this huge lake, lots of countryside. She has a good pension, she was still working a couple of days a week, looking after the accounts for some local businesses . . . Lyn was doing fine. She was happy.'

'Is that what she said?'

'What do you mean?'

'Did she tell you she was happy?'

'We texted each other every day. We spoke on Skype a few times a week. I never got the sense she was worried or upset about anything – and, if she was, I genuinely believe she'd have said something. Or I would have been able to tell.'

Maybe, I thought. *Or maybe not.*

'The place she disappeared from,' I said.

'Stoke Point.'

'Right. What do you know about it?'

I started googling it myself.

'Know about it?' she said, sucking air through her teeth. 'I'm no expert, I'm afraid. I've only seen satellite maps. Pictures. I can tell you what I've found out.'

'That's fine.'

'Well, it looks isolated. The parking lot is at the end of a two-mile coastal road – it's a dead end, so that's the only road back out – and then the peninsula is on the other side of the parking lot and sticks out into the sea for . . . I guess . . . half a mile or so. I don't believe it's a . . . you know, a place for . . . suicides.'

The last word was heavy in her mouth.

'I've read that the peninsula is only about fifteen feet above sea level, and on both sides there's another ten to fifteen feet of rocks, boulders and shingle before you even get to the water's edge.' She stopped, breathed out, the idea of what her sister may have been doing out there, the anguish of it, like glue in her throat. 'My point,' she said faintly, 'is that if someone did want to make a jump from the edge of the peninsula, the drop would only break a few bones – if that.'

'It doesn't sound like you thought Lynda was suicidal.'

'No. No way.'

'You said there was one security camera, at the entrance?'

'That's what I was told, yeah.'

'There definitely weren't any others?'

'I asked DC White that, and he told me that there weren't. He said the only camera was at the entrance. He emailed me some shots from the video: it's definitely Lyn entering the lot. It's her car. It's her in the front seat. It's Lyn.'

'But there's nothing after that?'

'No, nothing. She just vanishes.'

'She couldn't have exited anywhere else?'

'I don't think so. From what DC White has told me, and what I've managed to find myself online, the entrance to the Stoke Point car park is on the other side of a stone bridge

that connects the peninsula to the main coastal road. Even if she exited on foot, she still would have had to come back the same way she went in. She'd have been caught on camera, crossing the bridge, as she left.'

'What about once she got on to the peninsula? No one saw her getting into a boat the day she disappeared, or wading into the water to get to one?'

'Like I said, there were no witnesses.'

'So someone could have picked her up in a boat?'

'From what I read, I think it's unlikely. I don't know for sure, but anyone picking her up in a boat was taking a risk. According to the time code on the shots of the video, Lyn entered the car park at about nine in the morning. DC White told me that the tide would have been almost out at that time. He said, in that part of the world, all that's left then is mud that's like quicksand.'

She was right: due to its tidal range, great swathes of the Bristol Channel became mudflats at low tide. It not only made it an impossibility that someone could have guided a boat in, but it made it treacherous on foot too.

So where did Lynda Korin go?

'Did DC White send you any other information?'

'Some photographs. I've got a few emails from him.'

'That's it?'

She let out a long breath. 'That's it. All I know about Stoke Point is what I've read and what I've been told. I wish I knew more. I wish I could see it for myself. But leaving my husband, my kids, my grandkids, telling them I'll be gone for I don't know how long – I can't do it. I love my sister dearly, but I can't leave my family behind for months on end, pretending to be a detective . . .' She made a short, desperate noise, a sound that spoke of her heartache clearer than any

words could. 'The reality is, I wouldn't know where to start. I'm not a cop. I work as a nurse, for goodness' sake. It's why I decided to call you.'

I looked up from my laptop, and at the doors of the pub, backed by bright sunlight, I saw Melanie Craw.

'I will give you everything I have,' Wendy said, 'every dollar, every cent. I don't own much, I'm not worth much, but I will do it for Lyn. I will pour my heart and soul into helping you in whatever way I can, David. Please help me find her.'

I thought about it. But not for long.

'Have you got a scanner there, Wendy?'

She seemed momentarily thrown by the question.

'A computer scanner? Yeah, I've got one of those.'

'This is what I need you to do, then. Scan in anything physical you've collated that's directly related to Lynda's disappearance, and email that over to me, along with the stuff DC White sent you. I'll take a look at it all, and then call you back later on.'

'Oh, thank you,' she said, 'thank you so much.'

I heard her voice trip even before she'd finished her sentence, and by the time she went to say *thank you* again, there was no sound from her but her tears.