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Blood Ties

Written by Jenny Francis

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BLOOD TIES

JENNY FRANCIS



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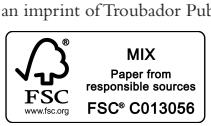
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Dedicated to the fight to stop the bullies.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Blood Ties is the second Detective Inspector Charlie Moon novel. Like the first, The Silent Passage, it is set in Birmingham at the time of the millennium. Team Penda is a fictional creation and the story of how it came into being following the disbanding of the West Midlands Serious Crimes Squad in 1989 is told in an appendix at the end of the book.

Moon is back on the scene two years on from his suspension from duty for breaking house rules but the feeling is still there his superiors are out to get him.

Jenny Francis
2016

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PRELUDE

Waiting for Mum and Dad to come back

It was always the same when Mum and Dad went out. They were gone for hours and she was left on her own watching the clock go round waiting for them to come back. This time it was shopping or so Mum said as she buttoned up her coat. Just popping to Tesco's and perhaps we'll stop off and have a cup of tea with Aunty Lil and Uncle Ted on the way home. Shan't be long, that was at ten to three. Shan't be long, now it was half past five and getting dark outside.

She went over to the front window and saw the streetlights were coming on and a coal tit performing somersaults on the bird feeder in next door's garden. She watched it for a while. She wondered what Mum and Dad would say when they walked through the door. Sorry, luvvie, we've been gone longer than we thought. Still not to worry, eh, we'll soon have some tea on the table once we've got the shopping put away. Not cross with us, are you? Not going to spend the rest of the night with a sulky look on your face?

A woman with a child in a pushchair went by then, on the other side of the street, a boy carrying a football. She turned to Tilly. Tilly was sitting on the sofa where she always sat with her legs splayed out and her back up against a cushion. Tilly needed a new frock. One of Tilly's arms needed stitching back on but, as usual, Tilly said nothing.

What Mum and Dad didn't know though were the thoughts that went through her head when she was on her own, thoughts she shared with no one not even Tilly. Mum and Dad growing old. Mum and Dad not there anymore and home, a room in a place that smelled like a hospital.

Tilly was asleep now, curled up on the cushion. She went back to looking out of the window. Waiting for Mum and Dad to come back and hoping they wouldn't be long.

CHAPTER ONE

The Body in the Woods

FEBRUARY 2001

It had been a good start to the day for Detective Inspector Charlie Moon. First came the news that his boss Willoughby had gone down with laryngitis forcing him to take to his sick bed and robbing him temporarily of his power of speech. It meant there'd be no Willoughby on the phone every minute of the day and night and Moon would have chance to get on with the job without the Team Penda Commander breathing down his neck all the time.

Then, best of all, the discovery back at base that the IT systems had gone down. No email and Willoughby's one remaining line of communication taken away; the irony being the internet and email system had been Willoughby's pet project from the beginning.

And, just when he thought things couldn't get any better, the phone call earlier on to say a body had been discovered in woodland on the rural fringes of the West Midlands offering the rare chance of a pleasant drive out into the country. All in the line of duty, of course.

It wasn't long before he left the sprawl of the towns

behind. In front the road stretched ahead crossing hill and dale with hedgerows on either side either neatly trimmed or wild and ragged with festoons of travellers' joy and trailers of bright red bryony berries. Redwings and mistle thrushes flew up and overhead a pale watery sun did its best to peep through the clouds. He slipped on a CD of scratchy Tommy Johnson recordings from the late 1920s – one he hadn't listened to for a while – and let his thoughts drift off to nowhere in particular. Few cars on the road. No one bothering him. Time to sit back and enjoy the simple things in life.

A turn to the right, he almost missed it, then along a narrow twisting lane for half a mile until he came to the place where police cars and vans were pulled over on the verge. A uniformed constable stepped out to check his ID then directed him to a field gateway where there was just enough room to park. Moon noticed at once the crime scene tapes sectioning off an area of trees bordering the left hand side of the lane. He checked his watch. Ten past two. He got out of the car and retrieved his overcoat from the back seat. A familiar figure was coming towards him: Detective Sergeant Dave Thompson sticking out like a sore thumb in his bright yellow all weather coat that had gone a bit grubby at the cuffs and needed a visit to the dry cleaners.

'You'll need a pair of these,' said Thompson pointing to the wellingtons on his feet.

Moon nodded and went round to the boot of the car where he kept a whole range of items he might need when called on as now to inspect a crime scene in the middle of nowhere. As soon as he'd changed out of his shoes he

rejoined Thompson standing in the middle of the lane taking in all the activity going on in front of them. The body had been found two days earlier by a man walking his dog. The decision to bring in serious crimes officers from Team Penda had been taken twenty four hours later when it was discovered the body belonged to someone who came from outside the area and had connections in the criminal world.

'Local CID felt it was out of their league,' Thompson explained. Thompson had been despatched to the scene at the crack of dawn with a brief to find out what was going on.

'Is this someone passing the buck?' said Moon who'd been caught out before by detectives taking the easy way out with cases that called for more than the standard level of effort.

'Could be,' Thompson shrugged but any further discussion of the subject was curtailed by the approach of one of the Crime Scene Officers who had detached himself from the group standing in a huddle further down the lane.

'We've finished what we need to do,' he said after an exchange of introductions then explained that he and his colleagues had been over the area of trees and adjoining land with a fine toothcomb. 'All we've come across is a rusty horseshoe, a dead owl and three used condoms looking like they'd been there since before Christmas.'

'Do we have any more on the cause of death?' Moon directed his question at both of them. Thompson answered. 'They carried out a preliminary examination of the cadaver before they bagged it up. Gunshot wounds to

the head and chest. A shotgun fired at close range.' The Crime Scene Officer nodded. 'Not a pretty sight. Not what I'd want to be looking at before breakfast.'

'What about spent cartridges?' Moon asked making a mental note to have another word with Thompson about referring to dead bodies as cadavers.

The Crime Scene Officer shook his head. 'Whoever did it must have taken them away. Our people have been up and down the lane and searched the ditches and hedgerows on both sides just in case someone threw them out of a car window.'

'Or maybe the shooting took place somewhere else and the body was just dumped here.'

Again the officer shook his head. 'We've found bits of bone and brains splattered all over the place. Not to mention the pieces of shot we've dug out of the trunks of the trees. No, here was where it happened all right. No doubts on that score.'

The Crime Scene Officer drifted off to rejoin the rest of his party who were busy packing up to go. Moon and Thompson meanwhile pushed their way through a gap in the hedge that separated the trees from the lane. There was a path of sorts passing between a dense undergrowth of ferns and brambles flattened down here and there by the Crime Scene Officers going about their work. The trees, Moon noticed, were a mix of ancient oak and silver birch. About fifty yards into the woodland they came to a small clearing.

'This is where the body was found' said Thompson pointing to an area of ground thick in leaf mould and showing signs of scuff marks made by the comings and goings of officers' heavy boots.

'What do we know about him so far?' Moon said casting his eyes around.

'A man in his late twenties named Sean Mattox. They identified him pretty quickly from his fingerprints.'

'Not a local?'

'No, from Hereford,' Thompson replied. 'At least that was his last known address.'

'What's his form?'

'Apart from regularly being caught driving without tax and insurance, most of the trouble he's been in stems from handling stolen goods. Short terms in prison, the most recent being eighteen months ago.'

'Have you checked this out?'

Thompson nodded. 'I spoke to a Sergeant Kite in Hereford who has felt his collar a few times. It seems he operated as a go-between. You want a new telly or a hi-fi and the word on the street was ask Sean. Fancied himself as a bit of a wheeler-dealer.'

'Drugs?'

'Found once with some cannabis in his pockets. Nothing to suggest he was supplying the stuff.'

Thompson brought out a small camera from his coat pocket and started taking photographs. Moon meanwhile carried on looking round trying to get a mental picture of what had taken place here. When Thompson finished they carried on walking following the footpath as it wound through the trees until they came to a fence line separating the woods from a ploughed field that stretched off into the distance. Here they stopped, Moon noticing the sun getting lower in the sky and a reminder it was still winter.

'Any thoughts Dave?'

Thompson looked at him. 'Your guess is as good as mine. What do people get up to in the middle of a wood? Poaching? Looking for mushrooms? Dogging perhaps?'

'Doggers don't usually go round armed with shotguns.'

'No Guv.'

'And they say nothing ever happens in the country,' said Moon turning away and transferring his attention to a flock of wood pigeons picking around among the ridges and furrows halfway across the field.

Back at Moon's car they noticed the police presence in the lane had thinned down. Just a handful of uniformed officers standing around ready to see off any members of the public who took it into their heads to come and check out what was going on before it got dark.

★★★

It was on the dot of ten next morning when Moon put his head round the door of Doctor Lionel Moet's office.

'Charlie,' said Moet getting up to shake his hand. Moet, better known as Nell to his associates, had been the A to Z of forensic pathology in the West Midlands for more years than anybody could remember. 'You old dog, how's life treating you these days?'

'Could be better, could be worse,' said Moon casting his eyes around the untidy piles of paper and general disarray in which Nell chose to work. Rumour had it the eminent pathologist, who shared names with a leading brand of champagne, had been told to cut down on his alcohol intake but no one was sure whether this was on

medical advice or an instruction from higher authority. Certainly there was no sign of the bottle of single malt that usually came out when senior police officers came calling. Instead Nell led Moon through to a small kitchen where a coffee machine was bubbling in the corner.

'How do you take this stuff?' said Nell pouring coffee into a plastic cup.

'Black, no sugar' Moon replied.

Moon then followed Nell along a corridor steeling himself for what was coming next. Time to take a look at the victim or what remained of him and the part of the job Moon with his ticklish stomach looked forward to least.

'Down at the end,' said Nell as they passed through a set of double doors into a large open area where two members of his team were working. Moon's normal tactic at this point was to avert his eyes from what was going on, concentrating instead on not spilling his coffee.

'Here's your boy,' said Nell flicking on a set of high-powered lamps over the furthest in a row of post-mortem examination tables where the body of a slightly-built man of medium height lay.

Moon blinked. Although he had a good idea what to expect, most victims of shootings that came his way were gangland killings where the murder weapon was nothing bigger than a handgun. In contrast Mattox had a massive chest wound through which all sorts of viscera were poking out. Even worse was the man's head of which little remained apart from the back of his skull. The whole of his face had been shot away.

'You're dripping coffee down your sleeve,' said Nell looking across at him.

'Not all the damage you see was done by the shooting,' Nell explained after a pause to adjust his half-moon spectacles so he could examine the man's naked torso more closely. 'There is evidence animals have been at work here, here and here.'

'Animals?'

'Foxes, rodents and corvids such as rooks and magpies: they've all had a nibble at him at some point. Consistent with our friend's body being exposed out in the open for a few days.'

'Time of death?'

Nell pursed his lips. 'I'd say middle to end of last week judging from the general state of the body. We might be able to get a more accurate idea when we've done the full PM.'

'Anything else we need to know before we start investigating?'

Nell smiled. 'I'm not sure if it's relevant but take a look at this.' He was pointing to the man's genitals. 'He's got a dose of the clap. Good old-fashioned gonorrhoea by the looks of it. Still, that's the least of his worries now.'

The queasy feeling in Moon's insides started to wear off as soon as they got back into Nell's office.

'Am I getting the right picture here?' Moon began when they were both seated. 'Someone shot him once in the chest and then again in the face. We don't know why but one theory could be someone wanted to make sure he was dead.'

Nell put his feet up on the desk. 'You could be right Charlie. Ballistics think the shot to the head was fired at a closer range and from a different angle consistent with our

friend going down with the chest wound then someone having another pot at him when he was on the ground just to finish him off.'

'The chest wound would have been fatal?'

'Without a doubt but, as you suggest, perhaps someone wanted to be certain he didn't live to tell the tale. Or another thought I had was an amateurish attempt to make it harder to identify him. No face and no teeth, if you see what I mean.'

'A double-barrelled shotgun?'

'A reasonably safe assumption. Bang, one trigger, then two steps forward and bang again. Has anybody told you about the way he was dressed?'

'Not so far.'

'Light cotton short-sleeved shirt, chinos and a fancy pair of trainers. Not what you'd expect someone to be wearing out of doors in the middle of winter. All a bit odd if you ask me.'

***

Moon's drive back to the office took him through busy inner city backstreets lined with cars parked along both sides. As was his usual habit, he kept his eyes on the rear-view mirror checking who was behind and never putting it past Willoughby and his pals to have someone tailing him in the way they'd done before. In truth the last two years had witnessed an uneasy truce between Moon and the top brass of Team Penda. The feeling his every move was being watched had never gone away. Moon, for his part, had done his best to keep his head down, putting on

a big show of going along with everything, yet knowing in his heart of hearts Willoughby was no fool.

However, the first sight that greeted Moon when he arrived at HQ brought a smile to his lips. Boffins from IT walking round with frowns on their faces signalling to him the problems with the server still hadn't been fixed. He made his way through to the small conference room where Thompson was already in the process of bringing Detective Constables Scott and Tamberlin up to speed. Taped to the whiteboard on the wall, along with a selection of photographs from the crime scene, was a 1:25000 series Ordnance Survey map of the area which Thompson had acquired from somewhere.

Scott was speaking as Moon walked in and pulled up a chair. 'It would help if we knew what Mattox was doing up in this part of the world. If he had connections locally someone must know something.'

Thompson grinned. 'Thanks Scotty. I'll put you down for going round knocking on doors. I know how much you like the fresh air.'

Before Scott had chance to reply Moon butted in and gave them a quick run-down on his visit to the mortuary.

'This geezer's not had a lot of luck,' Tamberlin commented. 'First someone gives him the pox then he ends up having most of his head shot off. It doesn't get much worse when you think about it.'

'Try working here,' Scott muttered gloomily.

Moon turned to Thompson. 'Any more from Hereford Dave?'

'Not a lot Guv. Sergeant Kite reckons Mattox hasn't been seen down there since before Christmas. The flat where he

lived has been repossessed. The landlord is furious because a load of the fixtures and fittings have gone missing.'

'Like what?'

'Bathroom taps, door knobs, even two of the radiators have been taken off the walls.'

'What about family, known associates?'

'Sergeant Kite thinks there's a brother living in Cardiff but, as far as he knows, they haven't spoken to one another for years. The people he knocked round with in Hereford know nothing or they say they know nothing although a few of them mentioned he was shacked up with a woman but they don't know where.'

'Sarge.' It was Tamberlin who spoke. 'Shouldn't we be investigating the poaching angle? It seems the most likely explanation for what he was doing wandering round in a wood.'

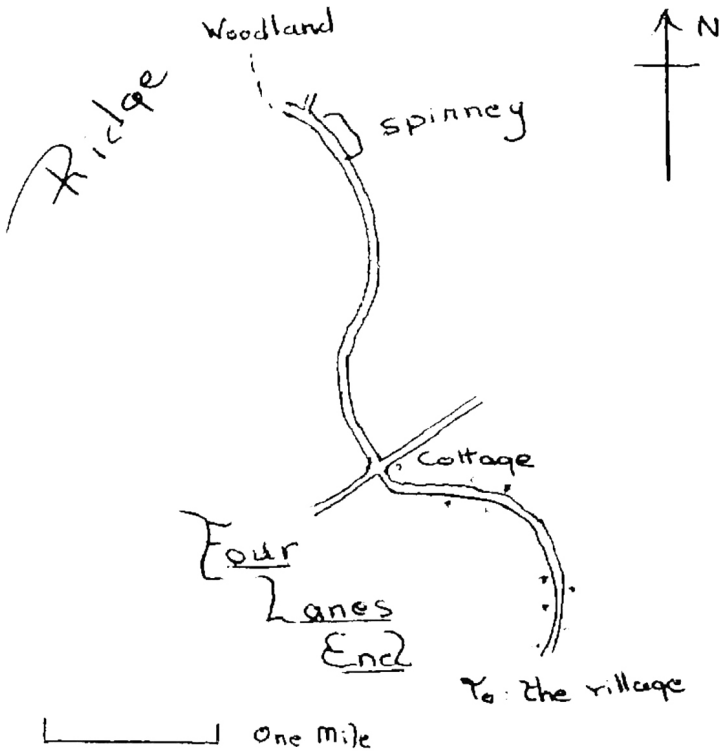
Thompson nodded. 'I put that suggestion to Sergeant Kite. Was Mattox into fixing people up with a brace of pheasants? His reply was he wouldn't put it past Mattox to be involved in anything that would earn him a few quid. His form though was for the kind of stuff that comes off the back of trucks: electrical goods, bottles of spirits, cigarettes, that kind of thing.'

'Well,' said Moon. 'Unless anyone's got anything else to say I suggest we start by getting together a list of licensed shotgun owners. We can start off with a five mile radius of the crime scene and work outwards if we have to. Dave, can I leave that with you? Tambo you team up with Scotty and see what you can find out from talking to the locals. Gossip, anything that will give us some clues about what goes on up these quiet country lanes that would interest

the likes of Mattox. Talk to the postman, the bin men, the nosy parkers. See if they've seen anything unusual going on and, if necessary, jog their memories.'

Doing a detour to check his emails and finding to his relief that his inbox was still empty Moon decided to make his next port of call the sandwich shop two blocks away where he'd been a regular customer since the day it opened six months ago. On his way out he spotted DI Millership driving in through the gates. Next to Willoughby, Millership topped the list of the people Moon least wished to see. According to the jokers on the team Millership was in line for the Police Medal for brown-nosing and an invitation to Buckingham Palace in the not too distant future. Millership, however, had earned his place next to the throne in Team Penda by acting as Willoughby's eyes and ears not just licking his boots. Charlie Moon was in no doubt Millership had seen him nipping off and would be noting it down so he could feed it back to Willoughby the next time he saw him.

After purchasing a ham salad baguette from the sandwich shop he drove the half mile or so to a piece of derelict land overlooking one of the railway lines into the city. Here he relived boyhood memories of watching trains go by although he no longer wrote down their numbers. When he'd finished the baguette he reached over to the glove compartment where he kept a packet of wet wipes. There his eyes fell on a box set of CDs he'd bought for two pounds in a charity shop just before Christmas. The early recordings of Lowell Fulson, intended as a present for someone he'd not seen for a long time but someone he'd be seeing again sooner than he thought.


Woodland
Ridge
spinney
N
Cottage
Four
Lanes
End
To the village
One Mile