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THE BONE YARD

MARK SENNEN





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AVON

A division of HarperCollins*Publishers*
The News Building
1 London Bridge Street
London SE1 9GF
www.harpercollins.co.uk

A Paperback Original 2017

First published in Great Britain by
HarperCollins*Publishers* 2017

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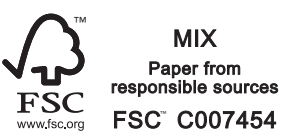
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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN-13: 978-0-00-758790-2

Set in Minion 11/14 pt by Palimpsest Book Production Limited, Falkirk, Stirlingshire

Printed and bound in Great Britain by (PRINTER)



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Acknowledgements

Book six in the DI Charlotte Savage series almost wrote itself. Once I had the charismatic Malcolm Kendwick, I knew the way the story would pan out. I simply had to watch as the words appeared on the page. Of course, once finished, others had to put in considerably more effort to lick the manuscript into shape. In short, the story couldn't have been told without the following people:

Editors Eloise Wood and Rachel Faulkner-Willcocks saw the book through from the messy first draft to the (hopefully) polished final copy. Thanks also to the unseen army at Avon/HarperCollins who work with little acknowledgement, but much dedication.

Claire Roberts, my agent, deals with matters of contracts, rights, and royalties. A world where knowledge of both the dark arts and higher mathematics is essential.

Talking shop with fellow authors Simon Kettlewell and Neil Vogler has led to an increased intensity (not to mention perversity) in my writing. Thanks guys!

The best line in the book was served up by Kate Campbell, Rob Longworth and their son, Sachin, over Sunday lunch. More, please! (Both lunches and lines.)

My wife and daughters gave their love and support. Writing is not a nine to five job and putting up with me

wittering on at all times requires endless patience (or earplugs).

Finally, thank you to all the readers of the series, from those who've been with Charlotte from the start, to those who've just climbed aboard. Many of you know her better than I do.

To Niamh and Morgan
In a sky filled with stars, you are the brightest

Prologue

She looks up at the trees. Huge, towering sequoias looming over her. Mist swirls in the canopy high above, a distant sky just visible through the dense tangle of leaves. Like ancient sentinels, the trees stand watching but taking no part in events. They've stood here for centuries, since long before the invaders with white skins came from the west and changed the continent forever. The oldest specimens were alive over two thousand years ago, when a man was nailed to two pieces of wood and left to die in order to save mere mortals. She reaches up, touches her neck and finds the slim silver chain. She runs her fingers down to the cross and then brings it to her mouth and kisses the figure of Jesus. He is her last hope.

She moves to one of the wider trunks, pushing herself up against the rough bark, sensing the patterns press through the thin material of her dress. She shivers, feeling vulnerable in the light summer frock because she's nothing else on. He made her remove her panties and bra and her shoes too. Part of his perverted game.

She peeks round the side of the tree, hoping she's lost him. For now, it looks as if she has. She shivers and then stares down at her feet where blood trickles from several gashes. There'd been rocks earlier and an area of scree leading down from the forestry track where he'd released her . . .

The trunk of the car had opened and she'd closed her eyes against the brightness.

'Get out,' he said. He held a pistol in his hand, the barrel pointing at her chest. 'Get out and then I want you to take everything off but your dress. And when I say everything, I mean everything, your underwear included.'

She clambered over the lip of the trunk and stood in front of him. Pleaded. He shook his head and waved the gun.

'Off or I'll shoot you in the leg.' For a moment he turned the gun away into the distance and then he fired, the retort echoing off a high bluff. 'Your choice.'

She took her time to remove her bra from beneath the dress and then she slipped her underwear down. He gestured at her sandals.

'Those too.'

She bent and removed her shoes and then stood before him.

'Now, you're going to run.' Once again he waved the gun, this time in the direction of the treeline some thirty paces from the track. 'I'll give you a hundred seconds head start and then I'm coming to find you. And when I do, you'll lie still and we'll have some fun, right?'

'You don't have to do this. You don't—'

'Oh, but I do.' The man smiled. 'And I'm going to start counting now. If I was you, I wouldn't waste a second. Not. A. Second. Of course, it's your choice. One, two, three . . .'

Which was when she'd scrambled down the scree at the side of the track, cutting her feet on the sharp stones, before disappearing into the shadows beneath the tall trees. She'd half expected to hear a shot, feel a bullet implant itself between her shoulder blades. But she'd reached the treeline unharmed, stumbling into the quiet of the forest, the only sounds that of her breathing and her feet rustling in the dead wood and leaves as she scampered away from him as fast as she could.

Now she's worn out, the huge tree not just something to hide behind, but something to cling to, to slump against as she tries to recover her breath. She doesn't know how far she's run, only that it's all been downhill. Twice she'd fallen and sprawled in the soft loam, tumbling over and over. The hundred seconds are long gone and now he must be coming after her. She wonders about heading off to the right or left and following the contours. Perhaps that might confuse him. At least the change of direction would give her a fifty-fifty chance.

She pushes herself away from the tree and bears off to the right. She trots along a narrow animal trail which weaves among the sequoias. At each trunk she pauses for a moment to listen. There's nothing. She moves on. She pauses again. Nothing.

Up ahead a gash of grey stone slices through the hillside. She walks forward to where a ravine blocks the trail. The sides are steep and the bare rock sharp. There's no way across. She has to turn left and forge her way downhill once more.

She catches her foot on a bare root and trips again, rolling in the dirt before pushing herself up and following the edge of the ravine towards the valley bottom. Down, down, down through the lines of trees until all of a sudden the rocks spill out onto a flat plateau. The trees are fewer here, but taller. And they're still watching. Watching over . . .

She shivers at the sight. Dozens of rusting automobiles lie scattered amongst the trees. Several trucks. A school bus with yellow paint peeling away from decaying panelling. An old sedan has a wide grille and empty holes where the headlamps have fallen out. Like the trees, the car is watching. Next to the sedan, a young sapling sprouts from the bed of a pickup. Where there are no vehicles, scrub creeps across the ground. Snaking through the scrub are pathways where the vegetation has been cut back. Someone comes here. Someone tends this place.

She steps forward, a glimmer of hope rising within. She reaches for the cross again. Perhaps her prayers have been answered. Perhaps this isn't the wilderness after all, but a park somewhere on the edge of a town. As if in answer to her thoughts, a figure steps from behind one of the metal husks. In the shade of the trees she can't make out his features, but he's not as tall as the man who kidnapped her. He's older, too. Her heart begins to pound, sensing a relief from her troubles.

'Help me!' she shouts out to her saviour. She begins to trot over towards the man, winding her way along one of the paths. The man nods, a smile forming on his lips. She realises she must be quite a sight. Her dress torn up the side and front, her body half smeared with mud and leaves. She crosses her arms, trying to cover herself. 'I've been attacked. Help me!'

'Sure, lass,' the man says, his accent strange and unfamiliar. His smile grows and she feels his eyes feasting on her exposed flesh. 'No problem.'

She slows as she reaches him. Hesitates now she's just a few steps away. She turns to look over her shoulder, but there's no sight of her pursuer. And when she turns back, the older man fades from view, stepping deep into the shade of a tree.

'Hello?' She slides forward on the grass. 'Please help me!'

'Found you!' The man who abducted her dodges up from behind an old Volkswagen Bug, his hands outstretched. He grins at her and laughs as he claws at her dress. The material falls away as another seam rips. Then she's screaming and hollering as he pushes her to the ground. He's on top of her now and his strength is frightening. She kicks and she scratches but it's no good. 'Keep still!' he shouts. 'Now you've run, I want you still!'

For a second she wonders about complying. Perhaps he won't harm her if she does what he says. Then, from the corner of her eye, she sees the older man again. He's walking over, a

large knife in his right hand. He kneels beside her, the knife poised. He reaches out with his left hand, the fingers brushing her face.

'Lovely,' he says. Then he grasps the chain round her neck and with a tug, wrenches it off and throws it away. 'But we don't need that getting in the way.'

She sees the cross spinning in the air, catching the light as it tumbles over and over and over, a glint from the silver figure on the cross mirrored by a flash from the knife as the man lowers the blade.

'Now then, the boy told you to be still,' he says as he slices at her neck, cutting deep into flesh and sinew. 'So you best be still, right?'

Chapter One

Near Bovisand, Plymouth. Saturday 15th April. 7.43 a.m.

Detective Inspector Charlotte Savage woke to an aroma of hot croissant and fresh coffee. A blinding glare too, along with a swish as the curtains swept open and sunlight came streaming in through the window. She shielded her eyes against the rays, squinting through her fingers.

'Surprise, Mummy!' said a small figure on the far side of the room. 'Breakfast in bed!'

A tray clicked down on the table beside her, the rattle of cutlery against crockery.

'Jamie,' Savage said, propping herself up on one elbow. 'Darling, how sweet.'

'It was his idea.' A taller figure stood next to the bed. Pete, Savage's husband. He removed a cup, plate and a cafetiére from the tray and then pressed down the handle on the coffee pot. 'But all my work. That's parenting, I guess.'

'There's a price to pay for everything.' Savage sat up and Pete plonked a couple of pillows behind her back. She looked at Jamie as he climbed up onto the bed and slipped beneath the duvet to give her a cuddle. He was seven years old but still as needy as a toddler. Not that Savage minded. She

ruffled his short, black hair and smiled at him. 'I think it's worth it, don't you?'

'That all depends on which one you're talking about.' Pete poured the coffee and handed Savage the cup. He nodded in the direction of the bedroom door. 'Samantha's in a right strop.'

Savage nodded. Samantha was her daughter. She'd just been dumped by her boyfriend and, being fifteen and full of hormones, the event had turned her world upside down. Pete and Savage were, unfathomably, largely to blame for all her woes.

'She'll get over him.' Savage followed Pete's gaze and then looked to the window. Outside, beyond their garden, she could see the waters of Plymouth Sound. A deep blue punctuated by the occasional snowflake of white sail, the early sun dancing on the gentle waves. 'It's a beautiful day, so why don't we all go into town and grab something for lunch? If there's any chance of a bit of shopping, especially with us paying, Sam will go for it. I'm sure that will cheer her up.'

An hour later, Savage regretted her suggestion. Detective Superintendent Conrad Hardin had phoned and lunch was most definitely off. She was wanted urgently at the station. She enquired as to what was pressing enough to require her presence on a Saturday. There hadn't been a murder or any other serious crime, had there?

'No, not yet,' Hardin said cryptically. 'And I can't tell you what this is about on the phone. This is strictly a need-to-know situation. I don't want anything getting out.'

Savage protested, exasperated at Hardin's notion of phone taps, conspiracy theories and leaks to the media. He ignored her and refused to divulge any more information.

'Oh,' he added at the end of the call. 'And pack for an

overnight stay. You're going on a little trip. You'll be back tomorrow afternoon.'

'Sir, tomorrow's Easter Day.'

'Off to church, are you, DI Savage? Seen the light?'

'No, but—'

'As I said, you'll be back tomorrow afternoon. If all goes well.'

'If all goes—?'

The DSupt ended the call, leaving Savage to apologise to her children and pack a few things into a bag.

'So?' Pete said. 'Going to fill me in?'

'I haven't a clue.' Savage shrugged as she stuffed some underwear into a side pocket on the bag. 'An essential training course, I shouldn't wonder. Probably some other lucky bugger has cried off and Hardin needs me to fill their shoes. Assuming, of course, that he isn't intent on taking me on a dirty weekend.'

'That's not even remotely funny.' Pete eyed a matching pair of black knickers and bra. 'Are those new?'

'Yes. I bought them especially for the DSupt. I'm calling them my promotion set.'

'Stop it.'

Savage continued to rib her husband until Samantha came into the room and started a raging argument about parents and broken promises and how life really couldn't get any worse. Savage tried to console her daughter, but the more she tried the more heated the conversation became. Eventually, she zipped up the bag, slung it on her shoulder and left Pete to bribe his way out of the situation.

The journey to the station was stop-start, the Saturday shopping traffic into Plymouth backing up across the Laira Bridge. Savage didn't mind. She'd taken her little MG, a classic car older than she was, and with the mid-April

morning being bright and warm, she'd put the hood down. She sat in the queue, enjoying the sun and watching the waterskiers on the expanse of estuary north of the bridge. Eventually, she cleared the traffic and headed up the A38 with the wind in her hair, arriving at Crownhill at a little after twelve.

After poking her head into the deserted crime suite, she went up to the DSupt's office. She knocked and entered, surprised to see Detective Sergeant Darius Riley seated on one side of the desk. Shocked, too, to find herself thinking about the black underwear. She immediately censored herself.

'Ma'am,' Riley said with a smile. Hardin was over the far side of the room pouring coffee into three grotty looking mugs. Riley made a silent theatrical sigh and shook his head. 'Hope you packed your toothbrush.'

Savage glanced down at Riley's feet where he'd parked a small rucksack. She unshouldered her own bag and dumped it on the floor, before taking a chair.

'Yes,' she said. 'Although I'm itching to know the destination for our little magical mystery tour.'

Riley nodded but said nothing more. He shifted in his seat and ran a finger up to his shirt collar where the bright white material met his black skin. The DS was, as usual, immaculately turned out, with his hair neat and short, his attire spotless. Savage had always figured that Riley had to go the extra mile to prove himself in a force which was overwhelmingly white. And prove himself he had. He'd been instrumental in the success of several operations including the capture of a multiple murderer which had nearly cost him his life. He'd also helped Savage track down the person who'd been involved in the hit-and-run which had killed her daughter, Samantha's twin sister, Clarissa. Riley had

become more than just a work colleague, he was a confidant and, she liked to think, a friend.

'Ah, Charlotte.' Hardin spun round, coffee slopping from the three cups as he tried to hold them in two hands. He squeezed his considerable bulk behind his desk and set the coffees down, before sinking into his chair. 'Ready for the off?'

'If I knew what the "off" was, it would be helpful, sir.'

'In good time. I was hoping DC Enders would be here by now, but we'll proceed without him. He's only your driver so it's not as if he needs to hear this briefing. You can fill him in later.'

'Our driver?' Savage glanced at Riley, but the DS only shrugged. He appeared to know little more than she did.

'Malcolm Kendwick,' Hardin said, rolling his eyes and shaking his head. Savage and Riley sat there in silence for a minute while Hardin shuffled through a load of papers on his desk. He pulled a stack of documents from a large FedEx envelope. Several of the documents bore a header with the graphic of an eagle. Below the eagle, large text with the words *US Department of Justice*, marched officially across the envelope. 'As I was saying, Malcolm Kendwick. Know who he is?'

Savage nodded. 'Yes. Sort of.'

'Sort of' meant she'd read the headlines in the tabloids, the longer pieces in the quality press. Malcolm Kendwick was, if you believed the paper who'd bought the rights to his story, an innocent British citizen abroad. Framed for the murder of several young women in the US, he had surely faced the death penalty until he'd been let off on a technicality. Several other newspapers naturally took the opposing viewpoint. For them, Kendwick was a serial killer who, with his good looks and charm, was following in the footsteps of

Ted Bundy. What's more, he was going to be deported from the States, which meant he'd be returning to the United Kingdom where he would undoubtedly wreak havoc. No female within fifty miles of wherever he ended up would be safe.

Hardin snorted. He picked up a sheaf of papers and waved them at Savage.

'Funny, isn't it, how when one of our own is in a foreign country they're innocent, and yet when a foreigner commits a crime over here they're guilty as sin.'

'Sir?' Savage was keen to get to the bottom of what Hardin was on about, why she and Riley had been called in.

'Well, Charlotte, according to this Kendwick *is* guilty.' Hardin waved the papers once more to emphasise his point. 'It's a transcript of the confession Kendwick gave to the cop. You've read the story, what was her name . . . ?'

'Janey. Janey Horton.' Savage hadn't cared much about the Kendwick case, but she had kept up with the news on Officer Horton. 'Tough cookie. Dedicated.'

'Trust you to know her name,' Hardin said. 'Five thousand miles but peas in a pod, hey?'

Officer Horton had been with the Fresno Police Department in California. Her daughter, Sara, had vanished, and Horton had become convinced that Malcolm Kendwick was responsible. Evidence – hard evidence – had been in short supply, but that hadn't stopped Horton. She'd kidnapped Kendwick and imprisoned him in the basement of her house. Over a period of several days she'd extracted a confession from him along with the location of her daughter's body. Leaving Kendwick tied up, she went out into the wilderness of the Sierra National Forest to find her daughter.

'She did what any parent would do, sir.' As she spoke, Savage was aware of Riley casting a glance in her direction.

‘Horton simply wanted the truth about what happened and justice for the man responsible.’

‘Well, she didn’t get it, did she?’

No, Savage thought, but not for want of trying.

Horton had spent two days searching, eventually discovering the corpse of a woman a good while dead, but definitely not her daughter. She returned to her house to find Kendwick had escaped. She hurried round to his apartment, but he’d fled from there too. Using contacts in the police department, she traced his credit card to a motel on the outskirts of Sacramento. She drove to the place intending to recapture Kendrick, but the owner of the motel grew suspicious when he saw her dragging Kendwick screaming from his room.

Local officers, responding to a 911 call from the owner, arrived and Kendwick pleaded innocence, claiming Horton was carrying out a vendetta against him. The officers were all for arresting Horton until she showed them a video on her phone. The video was the confession from Kendwick and once they’d seen it they arrested Kendwick instead. And that should have been that, the whole thing done and dusted. On the video, Kendwick admitted killing Horton’s daughter and several other girls. A forensic team hurried out into the wilderness and quickly located the remains of five women, including those of Sara Horton. All that remained was a lengthy trial and, hopefully, a minimal number of years on death row before Kendwick crapped himself as he was strapped to a gurney and given a lethal injection.

It wasn’t to be.

The evidence on the phone was inadmissible. No room for doubt. This wasn’t some obscure technicality which Kendwick’s lawyer had come up with. It was obvious. Horton had tortured Kendwick and filmed herself doing so. She’d sliced him with a knife and poured battery acid on his feet.

Held a gun to his head and threatened to kill him. Anything Kendwick had said in the video couldn't be used as evidence, couldn't even be used as a lead to point to other evidence. Kendwick was untouchable.

Still, Fresno detectives worked double shifts for no extra pay trying to sift through the material Horton had gathered in her initial search for her daughter. The material which had led her to Kendwick in the first place. The problem was much of the evidence was circumstantial: Kendwick had been spotted at a park where Sara Horton often hung out with friends. He'd been seen jogging past the clothing store where she worked. He had a membership at a gym where she once had a part-time job. None of which was particularly incriminating. It looked at first as if Officer Horton had followed a hunch, used a dollop of female intuition, perhaps consulted the grounds in her morning coffee. Then Horton told her fellow officers about a rucksack she'd found in Kendwick's car. Inside were handcuffs, a full-face balaclava and a pair of gloves, a roll of gaffer tape, some rope, a hammer and several trash bags. Kendwick claimed the items were nothing special, but Horton told the detectives they comprised a rape kit. It didn't matter. Horton's search of the car was ruled illegal and the evidence couldn't be used.

All hope of a conviction now rested on a scrunchy discovered in Kendwick's apartment, a single strand of blonde hair entangled in the shiny red material. A blonde hair which DNA analysis proved belonged to Sara Horton.

Kendwick was questioned about the scrunchy, but, as advised by his lawyer, said nothing more than he'd picked up the hairband in the park one day. Since Kendwick had long hair himself, which he kept tied back, the explanation was all too believable. Short of water boarding, which several detectives were keen to try, Kendwick was on the home

straight. There was just a matter of another four girls linked with Kendwick, but while he couldn't provide specific alibis, nor was there any direct evidence to suggest he'd been involved in their disappearances. After a year in limbo, the case against Kendwick was finally dropped on the provision that he wouldn't bring charges against Fresno Police or Janey Horton. His lawyers advised him to get out of the country pronto, before circumstances could change.

'That's why this is short notice, Charlotte.' Hardin was waving another piece of paper at Savage and Riley. This time Savage could see the initials NCA at the top. The National Crime Agency. The closest thing the UK had to the FBI. 'We've got to make arrangements. We don't want a media circus and we certainly don't want a lynch mob. On the other hand, Kendwick needs to know that we're watching him, that if he puts one foot out of line we'll have him.'

'Arrangements?' Savage didn't know where this was going. What could Malcolm Kendwick's affairs have to do with Devon and Cornwall Police?

'Yes.' Hardin had begun to gather the papers together again. He slipped them back into the FedEx envelope. 'The arrangements at Heathrow. Security on the journey back. What to do once the man is here.'

'I don't get it, sir.' Savage turned to Riley but he could only shrug his shoulders again. 'What do you mean, *here*?'

'There's no mystery, DI Savage. Here means here. Malcolm Kendwick is returning to the county of his birth. The fucker's coming to Devon.'

'Devon?'

'Yes.' Hardin stuck his tongue out over his bottom lip in consternation. 'And you, DS Riley and DC Enders are the lucky buggers who have to go and get him.'

* * *