3RD PROOF

# THE LAST DANCE

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Mark Billingham has twice won the Theakston Old Peculier Award for Crime Novel of the Year, and has also won a Sherlock Award for the Best Detective created by a British writer. Each of the novels featuring Detective Inspector Tom Thorne has been a *Sunday Times* bestseller. *Sleepyhead* and *Scaredy Cat* were made into a hit TV series on Sky 1 starring David Morrissey as Thorne, and a series based on the novels *In the Dark* and *Time of Death* was broadcast on BBC1. Mark lives in north London with his wife and two children.

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# THE LAST DANCE

## MARK BILLINGHAM



SPHERE

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SPHERE

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*For Claire, remembering* our *first dance . . .*

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'You dance love, and you dance joy, and you dance dreams.'

GENE KELLY

'Almost nobody dances sober, unless they happen to be insane.'

H. P. LOVECRAFT

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The coloured lights from more than a million lamps seem to dance above the town's main street and their reflections shimmer on the surface of the black sea just beyond. On the street itself, a thousand neon signs dazzle and buzz and the slow-moving traffic has become a pulsating necklace of red and white beads. To the casual observer, gazing down from the top of the Tower perhaps, or from a penthouse apartment in one of the expensive blocks that have sprung up in recent years, this might be Las Vegas.

If that casual observer *really* squinted.

And had never been to Las Vegas.

A minicab pulls up on the Promenade and, once the passenger door has been opened for her, a glamorous-looking woman who could easily be a celebrity of some sort, but isn't, steps slowly out. She hands over a ten pound note, tells the driver to keep the change and walks up the steps to the entrance of the Sands Hotel.

The concierge opens the door for her and touches his dusty cap. The woman nods and hands over another ten pound note. The concierge palms it, touches his cap a second time and says how lovely it is to see her again.

'Likewise, I'm sure,' she says.

'Yeah, whatever,' the concierge mutters when she's gone.

She sashays across the lobby, heels click-clacking, and steps into an empty lift. She presses the button for the top floor and straightens her dress. She's checking her



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handbag to make sure she has everything she needs as the doors close.

All her bits and bobs.

A few minutes later, she's tapping lightly on the door of a room on the fifth floor. She takes out a compact mirror and quickly freshens her lipstick, then leans close to the spyhole. Sensing movement beyond the threshold and hearing a noisy, desperate breath, she turns on a smile to put any of those megawatt lightbulbs outside to shame. She blows a kiss and waits, knowing full well that the man she's here to see is watching her from the other side of the door.

An hour or so later, the only occupant of the hotel room still breathing steps out into the corridor and closes the door softly behind them.

A mobile phone is immediately produced and a number dialled. Almost done and feeling satisfied with a job perfectly executed, the owner of the phone, and of the gun, begins to walk quickly – but not too quickly – towards the lift.

Stops. Freezes, then slowly turns.

A phone has begun to ring behind them, close behind them.

The call is terminated fast, the number dialled a second time and, for reasons the caller is struggling desperately to fathom, that nearby phone begins to trill again.

A few steps back, an ear pressed to a door.

It makes no sense, but that hardly matters now and the situation will be sorted because it has to be. It is what it is and the fact is that a phone which should be ringing *anywhere* but there is now ringing behind the door of another room.



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# STEP ONE

# CHALLENGE POSITION



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# ONE

Miller stared at the rat and the rat stared right back.

'So, what's it to be, this morning?'

The rat raised itself up, bead-black eyes bright and whiskers quivering.

'A nice bit of kedgeree, maybe?' Miller waited, smacking his lips. 'Eggs Benedict or a cheeky full English?' He sighed and let his head drop so the furry little buggers would know just how disappointed he was, then shuffled forward on his knees and shook the plastic container. 'OK, if you want to be boring.' He opened the cage and took out the two food bowls, filled each one with the same old mix of cereal and oat flakes, then, before setting down their breakfast, he reached into the cage to take Ginger out. He held her on his lap and ran a finger gently across her head. 'You know you've always been my favourite, right?' He lifted her up and nodded towards her partner in the cage, whispering as she scrabbled for a few seconds then snuggled against his neck. 'For God's sake don't tell Fred,



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though. Nobody likes a sulky rodent.' He leaned back to look Ginger in the eye. 'Don't rat me out.'

He sat on the sofa after that and watched them eat. He'd brought a mug of coffee across, but fifteen minutes later, by the time he'd stopped worrying about the day ahead – the walking into the office and the strange looks he was very likely to get – and thinking about what he should say to people and what he definitely shouldn't and picking at the loose threads on his tatty old dressing gown and remembered that there was coffee, it was lukewarm, so Miller carried it back to the kitchen and poured it away.

He couldn't be arsed to make himself another.

He'd have one when he got to work.

He was pretty sure he'd need one.

Dressing slowly, like it was something he'd all but forgotten how to do, he listened to some irritating rent-a-gob sounding off about the state of the NHS on Capital Lancashire, so he argued with him, same as he always did. Muttering, or occasionally shouting, at the radio. It was a daft habit that had become a kind of ritual, whatever the host or caller or so-called expert happened to be pontificating about, and Miller always enjoyed it.

He put on pants and socks, then picked out a shirt.

*'. . . and you can't get an appointment to begin with, not unless you've got one leg hanging off, or you're an immigrant or something . . .'*

'You're an idiot, mate. On second thoughts, I take that back, because it's insulting to idiots.'

He stepped into itchy grey trousers and the shoes he'd polished the night before.

*'I mean, wasn't that why we voted for Brexit in the first place? That, and the fish . . .'*



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'This is drivel, mate. You're talking drivel.'

He put on his least offensive tie – which wasn't saying a lot because he had quite the collection of horrific neckwear – then immediately undid the top button of his shirt, because it felt like he couldn't breathe. 'I swear to God, I could eat a tin of Alphabetti Spaghetti and *shit* more sense than you're talking . . .'

As conversations went, Miller was fully aware that these chinwags were somewhat one-sided, but that wasn't the point. Along with the ratty chit-chat, it got his brain moving in the morning, or at least moving in the right direction, and it reminded him what his voice sounded like. He needed the kick of that and the distraction.

He needed the noise.

Truth be told, he also argued with the radio in the afternoons, and in the evening. Middle of the night, quite often.

But that wasn't the point.

A few minutes later, wearing a jacket that more or less matched the trousers, he stood in front of the large mirror next to the front door. He tried out a few expressions until what passed for a smile didn't seem too scary. He had a bash at a couple of casual nods and shrugs that he was hoping would do the trick. After the habitual brief skirmish with his hair, he settled for a draw and turned back towards the multi-level cage-cum-playpen that had cost him a small fortune and now took up most of the living room floor.

He gave the rats a twirl.

'So, what d'you reckon? I think it's going to have to do.'

Predictably, Fred and Ginger were otherwise occupied chasing each other from one end of the cage to the other. Miller tried not to take their lack of interest as a bad sign and



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turned to pick up Alex's mobile phone which was lying there where it always was; plugged in on a table by the door. That sparkly red case which looked nice enough, but – like he'd told her a hundred times – would have been totally useless if she ever dropped her phone. Not that she ever did drop the bloody thing, certainly not as often as Miller dropped his, because she was always careful.

But that wasn't the point.

He reached across and touched the screen, a picture of Alex and him. Some competition from a few years back. The pair of them looking pretty tasty, even if he did say so himself.

He grabbed his rucksack from the chair by the door and threw it over his shoulder. He bent down for the crash helmet that was underneath it, then stood and raised his eyes to the ceiling. Shouted up.

'Alex . . . I've fed Fred and Ginger, OK . . . ?'

He stood and listened. He stepped back across to the mirror and *watched* himself listen. The silence seemed to thicken and settle for those few long seconds before it was broken by the painful squeak of the rats' wheel; before Miller sucked in a fast breath and finally reached to open the door, like a brave soldier. Or a very stupid one.

Sofia Hadzic tied on her apron then stepped out, yawning, into the basement corridor, pushing the trolley she had spent the previous twenty minutes loading with fresh supplies. Bobbly towels with a faded letter *S* and sheets that might once have been white. The postage-stamp sized slivers of soap wrapped in plastic, the tiny bottles of shampoo that looked fancy enough but were filled up every few days from a huge plastic flagon of cheap stuff. The toilet roll that your fingers went through.



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The Sands was not a hotel she would choose to stay in herself.

She exchanged a nod with one of the other girls as she shunted the trolley into the lift. She didn't know the girl's name and seriously doubted that the girl knew hers, but it didn't much matter. She was only there to work and she wasn't looking to make new friends.

She put on her headphones then stabbed at the button for the top floor.

Sofia yawned again, nodding her head in time to an old Little Mix song she loved as the lift doors clattered shut.

The motorbike – a red and black Yamaha Tracer 9 with six-speed transmission and an 890cc liquid-cooled beast of an engine – roared along the seafront. It cut through the morning traffic like the cars and lorries were going backwards, the North Pier and the glowering Tower there and gone. It raced past the sea-life centre, the mini-golf course where Miller had once copped off with a girl called Sandra Bullimore, and innumerable arcades that were just blinking into life. It burned up the tarmac and swerved skilfully round the potholes, while away to its right the Irish Sea frothed and spat against the damp sand; the same colour as the coffee Miller had poured away and a damn sight colder.

Half a minute after the bike had turned towards town and stopped at traffic lights by the Morrisons, Miller pulled up next to it. The leather-clad biker glanced across and, even though his expression was hidden behind a dark visor, it was a fair bet that he was less than impressed by Miller's pale blue moped and high-vis tabard; those seventy pitiful ccs that he probably thought had sounded like a hairdryer behind him. Or maybe a wasp, trapped in his helmet.



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Miller stared back, watching as the biker revved his engine, keen to get moving. 'Race you,' he said.

The lights turned to amber and the biker just shook his head like Miller was an idiot. Miller winced when the light turned green and the Yamaha shot away; within seconds it was just a dot in the distance, though Miller could still hear the noise of that engine as he shouted after it. 'Yeah, off you go. Pussy . . .'

A few seconds later, some twonk behind him started leaning on his horn, indicating less than politely that it was time for Miller to move. Miller was in no hurry, though. He wasn't kidding himself that the day ahead was going to be easy, but right then he was in a pretty good mood.

He gave the twonk the finger anyway, because why not?

The carpet in the long straight corridor was ugly, with brown and yellow swirls. Sofia thought it looked like someone had been sick on it. Given the state of this place, of some of the guests she'd encountered, she guessed that plenty of people *had* been sick on it.

She pushed her trolley towards the far end, though it wasn't easy as one of the wheels was bent and she kept veering towards the wall. It was annoying, but what could she do? The whole of the top floor was hers, so starting with the room at the end and working back seemed like the best plan.

The first bedroom was nice and straightforward. Sheets changed, sink and shower scrubbed, tea and coffee making facilities replenished. In and out in ten minutes. The second room was closer to what she was expecting and took twice as long. Wet towels and dirty clothes all over the place, bins full of empty beer cans *and* it smelled like someone had been smoking in there.



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Some people were pigs.

She knew she should probably say something to the manager, but it wasn't her job to spy on anyone, so she just snapped on her rubber gloves turned up her Little Mix and got on with it.

She paused for a few seconds outside the door of her third bedroom, took out her phone and skipped a couple of tracks she wasn't fond of. Once she'd found the song she wanted, she leaned forward to slide her key card into the slot below the door handle. When the light flashed green she spun round and nudged the door open with her backside.

She heaved the trolley in from the corridor and turned as the door slammed shut behind her.

Initially, it struck her that the room wasn't in too terrible a state, certainly nothing like as bad as the last one. There wasn't a great deal of . . . mess, to speak of. Aside from the blood on the bed and the body it had come from, obviously.

Sofia's scream was loud enough to wake a dead man.

Not this one, though.



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# TWO

Miller wasn't sure how long he'd been standing there like a lemon waiting to go in, peering through the window of the incident room. Too long, probably. Long enough to clock several of the usual faces, anyway; the looks on a few of them when they noticed him. Like someone had slapped them in the gob with a wet fish or they'd spotted George Clooney in Tesco's. Like they'd coughed and followed through.

Eventually he just got fed up with himself and walked in.

*Breezed* in, like it was any other day and what was the big deal? It was a bit forced, maybe, but there was even a smattering of bantz as he sauntered across the office.

*Sauntered*, which was bloody ridiculous and only went to prove that he was brimming with misplaced confidence. Miller might have ambled now and again and may even have meandered on occasion, but he had never been one for sauntering anywhere.

He was more of a lolloper.



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'Oh . . . hey, Dec.'

'Hey yourself. That is a seriously brave haircut, by the way.'

'How's it going, Dec?'

'Mustn't grumble. Yourself . . . ?'

All fine and dandy until he reached his desk. What had been his desk, at any rate. Tony Clough – who was looking nice and comfy sitting behind it – was a decent enough bloke and a fair-to-middling DC, but he was a bit of a lump sometimes. Also, he'd turned up at the pub one night wearing a rugby shirt with the collar turned up, on top of which Miller had once heard him say *nucular*. So . . .

Clough finally realised Miller was standing there and looked suitably shamefaced.

'Well, this is me,' Miller said. 'At least it used to be me.'

Clough moved as fast as Miller had ever seen him. On his feet and gathering up his things like it was going-home time or someone had announced they were giving pies away.

'Sorry, Dec, here you go . . . I mean, nobody said, so we weren't . . . you know.'

Miller shrugged, like it wasn't a big deal. 'Jump in my grave as quick, would you, Tone?'

The blood drained from Clough's face and they just stared at each other for a few seconds, nodding like idiots. Miller felt a bit guilty, because he certainly could have said something that would have made the man feel less uncomfortable. Actually, he couldn't think of much that would have made him any *more* uncomfortable, but that's what had popped into Miller's head, so that's what came out of his mouth.

That's how it tended to be.

As Clough stalked away in search of a different desk, Miller made himself back at home. He shifted the computer screen



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round an inch or two and whistled for a bit. He adjusted the height of the chair, opened and closed a few drawers then noticed some godawful gonk thing that Clough had left behind and lobbed it into the bin.

He looked up to see DS Andrea Fuller hovering.

Miller reckoned that, himself aside, Fuller was probably the smartest copper on the team and, if she wasn't, she certainly had the shortest fuse. He knew her parents were knocking on a bit and that she had to take care of them on top of the Job, so it was understandable that she got somewhat ... frazzled sometimes. They once had an argument about whether wearing only socks counted as being naked and things had got a bit heated.

She'd been wrong, obviously.

'Boss wants a word,' she said.

Miller sat back and held out his arms, but he could see that a simple gesture of disbelief wasn't going to be enough. 'Andrea, you know when people use the word "literally" and you want to punch them, because they don't really mean literally?'

She just grunted and Miller could tell by the way she rolled her eyes how thrilled she was that he was back.

'Like, there were *literally* a million people in the pub. No, there almost certainly weren't. He was *literally* pissing himself laughing. No, I think you'll find he wasn't. Well, I have literally been here two minutes. *Literally.* So how the hell can I be in trouble already?'

Andrea grunted again and threw in a shrug for good measure. 'I think you've just got a gift.'

He knocked and bowled straight through DCI Susan Akers's door before she had a chance to say 'come in'. Using the same



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long-perfected tactic, he sat down before he was invited. He knew it would be fine, because even though Akers was his boss, they'd known each other a long time and were close. Well, as close as you could be to someone you were inordinately fond of, but who was also well capable of scaring you half to death whenever she fancied it.

Whenever you . . . whenever *he* messed up.

'Balloons would probably have been a bit much,' he said. 'I get that, but a cake would have been nice. Not a massive cake, I mean not the kind of cake someone could jump out of. Well, maybe a child or a very small person. That sort of size. I mean, now I think about it, any sort of cake was unlikely, bearing in mind nobody knew I was coming in. But there's still time, if anyone fancies making the gesture. That's all I'm saying. I promise I'll act surprised.'

He grinned at her, but Akers stayed stony-faced.

'Have you finished, Detective Sergeant?'

He pretended that he was thinking about it, then leaned forward to pluck a dead leaf from the potted plant on her desk. It looked nasty. 'Grey mould.' He shook his head to let her know just how nasty it was. 'You need to keep an eye on that.'

'What the hell are you doing here?'

'Oh my God. I must have missed it!'

'Missed what?'

He grabbed the newspaper that was sitting on her desk and began leafing quickly through it. 'You know, crime being . . . over. Is it in here somewhere? I didn't hear anything on the radio. I mean that's fantastic news, obviously. So what are you going to do, now none of us are needed any more? You and your missus will have plenty of time for the amateur dramatics now, and the golf, so it's a win-win when you think about it . . .'



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He stopped because, even though he was not always great at taking a hint, on this occasion Miller could see very clearly that she wasn't remotely charmed or amused. Best to cut his losses, he reckoned.

Best to tell the truth.

'I was bored, Susan. Fair enough?'

'It's only been six weeks.'

'I know exactly how long it's been.'

'That's not enough time. You were given twice that long.'

'Rattling around in that house—'

'That's not a good enough reason—'

'I need to work.' He looked at her, made sure she knew he meant it. 'I need to do something.'

He let his head drop back for a few seconds, and when he lifted it again the DCI was straightening papers on her desk. It was probably an effort to distract herself from wanting to throw something at him. He saw her look past him and he didn't need to turn round to know that people in the incident room were watching through the big window of her office.

'Look, don't get me wrong, Dec,' she said. 'Nobody's more delighted than I am to see you're doing better.'

'Me,' he said. 'I'm more delighted.'

'But it's still my job to see that this team runs efficiently and that means all officers doing their jobs properly. I know you think you're up to it, but . . .' She looked at him and he saw her eyes close for a second or two which was usually a sign that he was wearing her down. He tried not to do anything too obvious like cheer or punch the air. 'OK, but I'll need to re-jig things a bit.'

Unable to resist it, he turned to give the incident room audience a thumbs-up.



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'Clough and Fuller are a team now,' she said. 'So I'll have to find someone else to pair you up with. I could put you with the officer who came across to replace you, but that would be cruel and unusual punishment.' She left a beat, which he thought was impressive. 'For them, obviously.'

'Obviously,' he said.

'I'll have a word with DI Sullivan, see what he thinks.'

That pissed on Miller's chips, somewhat. 'Sullivan's a *DI*?'

'Came through last month.'

'Honestly, you turn your back for five minutes and everything turns to shit.' Tim Sullivan's promotion was genuinely bad news, but seeing Susan working to suppress a smile made him feel a little better.

'Leave it with me, Dec,' she said.

Miller stood up to leave but stopped at the door. 'I'm serious, by the way.' He pointed to her sorry-looking plant. 'Grey mould. *Botrytis*. Nasty if you don't sort it. Just remove the infected bits, do something about your ventilation and you'll be right as ninepence. See, Susan?'

Akers pulled a face, like she knew she'd regret asking. 'What?'

'Back on the job less than an hour and I've already saved a life. To be honest, I don't know how you've managed without me.'



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# THREE

It was true that Miller wanted to be busy, but he hadn't been counting on picking up such a big case on his first day back. That was the way things went, though. You were desperate for a day or two to catch your breath or even just looking to recharge your batteries after a major inquiry and someone decided to poison their husband or stab a passer-by because they didn't like their trainers.

People were so bloody inconsiderate, sometimes.

Before that though, before he'd caught the aforementioned case, he'd needed the rest of the team to know where he was at. He'd needed to lay down a marker and let everyone know that they could relax.

He was forced into it, really.

After his meeting with DCI Akers, he'd spent an hour or so at his computer, looking through the squad's open cases, trying to see if there was an inquiry he could easily slot into. It was hard to concentrate though, because every time he so



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much as glanced up or went to make himself tea, he was aware that he was still being . . . studied. He'd catch Tony Clough or one of the others staring and whenever he did, there was always that irritating, sickly smile or even worse the annoying slow nod.

It was tense and awkward and it was starting to get on Miller's nerves.

After one too many sympathetic cocks of the head, he'd had enough and found himself standing up and clambering a little awkwardly on to his desk, then clinking a spoon against an empty mug until he had everyone's attention.

*Found himself,* because that was the way it went a lot of the time. Impetuous was probably the polite word for it. He would do something or say something and five minutes later – if someone was to ask him why he'd done such and such or made that stupid/inappropriate/offensive comment – he wouldn't be able to come up with much beyond feeling strongly that it had been the right thing to do at the time. That was usually all he had. The right thing, despite all available evidence and expert opinion pointing to the fact that it was very much the wrong thing. Miller did not make any apologies for who he was. Well . . . sometimes he *had* to.

So, desk, mug, clink-clink with the spoon . . .

All heads turned and it went very quiet.

'OK, well . . . thank you all for coming.' He manufactured that smile he'd been practising in the mirror before leaving the house. 'I'll try to keep this brief because we've all got crimes to solve . . . alcohol habits to support, gambling debts to pay off, whatever. So, just to say, my wife Alex, who some of you knew, is dead. She's . . . dead. It's a pisser, but there you are.

'Obviously, if you knew her, you're well aware of the fact



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that she's dead and you might well have been at the funeral, so I could probably have skipped that bit . . . but I suppose what I really want to say is . . . I'm dealing with it and if *I* am, then you lot should.'

He stared down at the shocked faces and momentarily lost his thread a little.

'Also. Be dealing with it.'

Miller looked across and saw that Susan Akers had moved to the window of her office and was watching along with everyone else. He was trying to keep it light, which had become even more of a default position lately, and he'd thought he was doing a decent job of it.

Still, she looked upset.

'So, there's really no need to creep around or lower your voices or have that expression like I've got cancer, and *please* don't put your hand on my shoulder and give it a little squeeze of condolence. God, I hate that. If you do, I might well have to break a couple of your fingers and at the very least you'll get a nasty Chinese burn, so please don't say I didn't warn you . . .'

He paused and looked around to make sure everyone had got the message. There were a good many blank stares, but it wasn't like he'd been expecting a round of applause, so he decided they would have to do.

'I'm just saying, shit happens and we've all got jobs to do, so just . . . get over it. OK? Right then, thank you so much for your attention. As you were.'

There were a few long seconds of very stunned silence when he'd finished, before people began muttering and started to drift back to work and Miller tried to climb down off the desk.

It was a lot harder than climbing up.

When a hand reached up to help, he happily grabbed it,



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then, once he had both feet back on the floor, he stood staring at the woman to whom the hand belonged as it began shaking his.

'Thanks very much,' he said. 'Who the hell are you?'

She was somewhere in her early thirties, had short dark hair and was, he guessed, of Chinese descent. Guessed, because making a presumption about such things was always dodgy, not least because you could end up looking like someone who was not culturally sensitive.

Or just a pillock.

He glanced down at the ID on her lanyard, wondering if he should apologise for the Chinese burn thing, and he was about to have a bash at her surname when she saved him the trouble.

'I'm DS Sara Xiu.'

'Right, like . . . *jus*.'

She blinked then said her name again. They were still shaking hands.

'Like the stuff you get in fancy restaurants, you know? *Jus*. I mean, it's basically just posh gravy, if you ask me.' Miller smiled, pleased with it. 'Maybe I should call you "Posh Gravy".'

'Why would you do that?'

'I don't know.'

'Hmm.' She let go of his hand.

'It's just a daft nickname—'

'I'm your replacement,' she said. 'Well, I *was*.'

'Oh,' he said. 'Sorry about that.'

'It looks like we're going to be teaming up.'

'Even sorrier.'

She smiled. 'That's a joke, right?'

'Not really.'



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She carried on smiling and then she started nodding, which was when Tim Sullivan – now, sadly, *DI* Tim Sullivan – marched out of Akers's office and shouted across.

'Miller, Xiu, you're up . . .'

Miller looked at Xiu. 'What are you, cursed?'

They walked across to where Sullivan was still talking to someone on his phone. He paused his call to give them their instructions, the voice even more nasal and grating than Miller remembered.

'Suspicious death at the Sands Hotel, so get yourselves over there and see what's what. I'll be fifteen minutes behind you.'

'Sir,' Xiu said.

Miller's new partner was clearly raring to go and he watched her hurry across to a desk and gather up her things. He waited for her at the door, staring expectantly at a couple of his fellow officers as they wandered past. He held out his arms.

'So, definitely no cake, then?'

Nobody, least of all Miller himself, would have claimed he was the world's most natural driver.

He could do it when he needed to, obviously, and workwise he'd done the compulsory highspeed chase training and all the surveillance courses. With the day-to-day stuff, though, the getting from A to B, he was not always as confident as you needed to be behind the wheel. He could lack a little focus, sometimes, he was well aware of that, and was just as likely to be thinking about why a particular blood-spatter pattern looked like an elephant or how on earth Scotch eggs are made as he was about the lights changing up ahead or the driver in front of him slowing down. He was easily distracted. All



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in all, it was safer for him and a whole lot safer for everyone else for Miller to do as little driving as possible.

Which is why, when they got to the assigned pool car – a Honda something-or-other – and Xiu climbed into the driver's seat, he wasn't about to argue.

She started the car then turned to him.

'I'm sorry about your wife,' she said.

There was no sympathetic tilt of the head or soppy smile. She just said it quietly, like it was a statement of fact.

'Not as sorry as I am,' Miller said.

Xiu just stared at him, but Miller wasn't bothered because it happened a lot. He gave it a few more seconds, just to see if she had anything further to add, then nodded towards the car park exit. 'Come on, Posh, let's get a shift on. This murder isn't going to solve itself.'



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