

## The Treatment

Born in Liverpool, Sarah Moorhead has told stories since childhood and uses writing as bubblegum for her over-active brain – to keep it out of trouble. Fascinated by meaning, motivation and mystery, she studied Theology at university. Over the last twenty five years, apart from teaching in secondary school, Sarah has attained a black belt in kickboxing, worked as a chaplain, established a Justice and Peace youth group, and written articles for newspapers and magazines about her work in education and religion.

# THE TREATMENT

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 CANELO

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I



*For my dad, Terry, who told me 'aim for the stars and you might  
land on the rooftops'*

*Love you always X*

*Is it better for a man to have chosen evil than to have good imposed upon him?*

Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*

## PROLOGUE

*Twenty-seven years ago*

Grace lay still for a moment, her small body curled up inside her mother's arms, her back against her mum's chest, almost as if she was still in the womb. The grey woollen blanket was scratchy against her skin. She lay half-asleep, thinking about playing in the caged yard later with the other kids. If they were good, they might get permission to go into the vegetable garden. Her seed might have started to grow, its green shoots reaching out of the black earth.

Soon Warden Kane would unlock their door, 'the swishy' as Grace called it, because of the sound it made. Usually her mother was up by now and making a cup of tea with the little kettle that Grace wasn't allowed to touch. When the steam came out of the spout and rose up towards the window, Grace imagined what it would be like to float up into the air, out of the unit, beyond the walls, to see what life was really like out there.

*Out There.* Too big, too scary, too many people on the other side of the wall. There would be men too. Did all men wear uniform Out There, like the male wardens did?

She could hear Lottie, Remy's mum, singing in the cell next door. She felt safe here with the women, even though they sometimes screamed and shouted, either at each other or at the kids. Sometimes they even fought. The kids could be mean. But not Remy. Remy was never mean.

He'd still be sprawled in the narrow bed next door but it wouldn't be long until they were in class. He'd try to make her

laugh and she would tell him to behave. She was only five but she already knew all her letters.

Remy was a year older. He'd be leaving soon. The rule was that if you had nowhere else to go, you could stay with your mother until your seventh birthday. Then they packed you off to state boarding school. But Lottie only had six months left of her sentence, so Remy wouldn't be separated from her.

Grace's mother had reassured her many times that they too would stay together. The idea of being parted from her mum, even for a night, terrified her. It had always been just the two of them. Thick as thieves, her mother would say, and laugh. Sometimes, what choice had they had but to steal? It wasn't wrong, it was survival.

Her mother never sang like Lottie did, but her laughter always made Grace feel happy, like everything was going to be okay.

But things didn't feel okay today. In fact, something felt odd. The room, the bed – everything felt so still.

Grace took a deep breath and turned around to face her mother.

People didn't sleep with their eyes open, did they? They looked weird, too much blue, the pupils tiny black dots.

'Mum...?'

She touched her mother's cheek with her finger and shuddered.

'Mummy, wake up.'

Grace turned to the door as it swished open.

'Morning, pet,' Warden Kane said before halting in her tracks. Without taking her eyes from Grace's mother, she called out 'Lottie!' with a strange lilt to her voice Grace had never heard before.

'Coming, Warden,' Lottie's singsong voice rang out in the corridor, before she turned into the room and stopped dead, her eyes widening.

'Take the child,' commanded Kane quietly.

‘Remy’s been asking for you,’ Lottie said, lifting Grace from the bed. Her mother’s arm flopped heavily onto the blanket.

But Grace knew that Remy always slept in.

‘He has something to show you,’ she said, wrapping Grace in her soft, fleshy embrace and moving towards the door. ‘It’s a spider, Gracie, the biggest one in the block, but you have to hurry or it’ll run away.’

Warden Kane began barking into her radio.

*Medics?* Weren’t they the ones who took Jai’s mum away when she’d been screaming all night?

Lottie set Grace down in her room and went back out again. Remy lifted his head up from the pillow, his hair ruffled, his face creased like the sheet he lay on.

‘What’s up?’ One of his eyes was still shut. He sat up on the bed with his back against the wall and pulled his knees up towards him.

The alarm was sounding, echoing Lottie’s wailing. Through the open door, Grace could see the women congregating in the corridor.

Remy rubbed his face and then patted the bed. Grace clambered up, snuggled next to him, and he wrapped his blanket around the pair of them.

It was when she felt the warmth of his body that it began to dawn on her.

She closed her eyes and tried to close her mind to her worries about her mother, the shouts of the women in the corridor, the silence that fell as the medics – more men in uniform – arrived on the scene.

Sometime later, Grace didn’t know if it had been minutes or hours, Lottie came back and knelt down in front of the two children huddling on the bed. ‘There’s nothing they could do, babe,’ she said tearfully. ‘Already gone. They couldn’t save her.’

Grace looked to Remy for an explanation, his grey eyes wise in his young face.

Instead he said, ‘I’ll look after you now, Gracie. I’ll never let anyone hurt you and you’ll never be on your own.’



But all Grace could hear was the words that burned deeply  
into her mind.

*Couldn't save her.*

## CHAPTER ONE

### *Present day*

This was not the way Brian Corrigan had expected to die.

For a long time, years possibly, at the back of his mind there had been the worry that he'd fade away in hospital from some awful cancer, with ineffective pain relief and pretty nurses who would remind him of what he was leaving behind.

There had once been the possibility that he might die peacefully at home in bed surrounded by his family. But that was never going to happen because Paula had gone before him – he'd been a widower for almost twenty years – and the kids never bloody bothered.

In fact, Brian Corrigan had had years to ponder his own demise. At his age, a ripe old ninety-three – *seven years off a century!* – who wouldn't have wondered how it was going to end? And, of course, after he lost his beloved Paula to heart failure – he could still remember the face of the doctor as he broke the news – death had been something never far from his mind. Something he might even *welcome*.

But not like this, so untidy, so... violent.

He briefly pondered how his body might be found and thought about the indignity of it all – on a blood-soaked pillow in his pale-blue striped pyjamas, the covers turned down on the opposite side of the bed, just like every night since his wedding day – *seventy years ago next year!* – as though Paula would wander up after her programme was finished and get in beside him like she used to, smelling of Shalimar perfume and Aquafresh.

How had it come to this? His failing hearing had not alerted him as the man had broken in, crept up the stairs, entered his bedroom. Brian had woken, confused and afraid, a figure looming over his bed.

How could it be that so suddenly, it seemed, he was no longer the strong young builder with the capacity to kick the fella's arse. Instead, here he was, a frail scarecrow, all that time and strength just drained away like sand in a glass timer.

These had been his thoughts as he'd offered the intruder money, held it out in his gnarled, liver-spotted fist. He always kept some under his mattress. He didn't trust those strange machines and automated bank clerks. Most people only used swipe cards and biochips these days. Surely cash was needed if someone wanted to buy drugs?

But the man wouldn't take the money.

'What do you want? What do you want?' Brian kept asking, until it became a bleating cry of fear. Initially buffered by shock, his musings finally gave way to panic.

'What do you want? I'm an old man! Don't hurt me!'

But the burglar didn't speak at all.

Brian could feel the tears wetting his crinkled cheeks, thankfully blurring the vision of the wooden bat moving towards him. He raised his shrivelled hands, impotent.

He'd found life tough the last few years, being in this frail body, and he'd been drifting with no real purpose since losing Paula. However, at this moment he found some deep instinct wanted to hold on, to grasp what little life he had left, even out of sheer stubbornness that this was not the way he wanted to go, at the hands of some no-mark.

'Why are you doing this? Please don't!'

As the bat hit home with the ease of a spoon crushing a delicate eggshell, Brian Corrigan heard the intruder laugh – a low, cruel chuckle.

It was at that moment that he knew what the man wanted. Just to watch him die.

## CENTRAL LONDON

11.32 a.m.

I'm outside the offender rehabilitation company, Janus Justice. Crowds of protestors have gathered here this morning angry at the government's decision to give the go-ahead for a controversial treatment called Aversion Therapy, in which criminals are given a taste of their own medicine.

It's been revealed that secret trials of this cutting-edge treatment have been carried out over the last two years, but protestors are riled because it has now become an official court sanction.

Here beside me is Conrad Becker, the founder and CEO of Janus Justice. So Mr Becker, what exactly is Aversion Therapy and why do you think people have an issue with it?

Becker: Well, Dan, let's say it's a way of helping offenders to experience the damage and upset they have caused to others but from their own perspective. Obviously, people are afraid of new technology, but this is a highly tested, highly effective treatment that will very quickly, and very cheaply, rehabilitate criminals, which is our aim at Janus Justice.

Dan: Do you think that people need a Third Tier, Mr Becker? Are Tiers One and Two not effective enough? Is that why you've had to bring in tougher measures?

Becker: No, Tiers One and Two are highly effective for what we designed them for. However, different people have different needs and different reasons to commit crime. For instance, someone might steal bread because they're hungry, or because they were traumatised by not having enough to eat as a child, or they want revenge on the baker for being rude to them. At Janus, we assess the causes of crime and then apply the correct treatment to 'cure' the offender, so to speak.

Dan: But your treatments don't always work and sometimes the criminals relapse, isn't that right, Mr Becker?

Becker: Assessment isn't always straightforward at Tier One and Tier Two. Offenders often straddle the two tiers, therefore from time to time we have an offender who returns to us if their needs weren't met initially. So, for example, at Tier One we deal with people who commit crimes because they lack the basic necessities – food, water, shelter...

Dan: Are you suggesting that the New London Vision – the government's flagship programme of cosy social housing, free schools, excellent healthcare, support for the elderly and infirm, and full employment – has failed? Surely if all these things are provided for people, then there's no reason for them to commit crimes?

Becker: Janus Justice works hand in hand with the New London Vision to provide for and rehabilitate offenders who have somehow managed to slip through the net.

Dan: And what about Tier Two? Do you have many reoffenders?

Becker: Well, let me finish. It may be that we rehabilitate someone at Tier One by meeting their physical needs, but there is the chance they might return to us at Tier Two if their offending is caused by mental health problems, trauma, addiction, or even intellectual capacity. We need to help these people to realise what's on offer for them and how this can transform their lives into one of non-offending.

Dan: And now you're expanding your treatments?

Becker: Offending has dropped over fifty per cent in the last seven years and the government are investing even more money over the next ten years. We're taking that money and creating something revolutionary.

Dan: And will there be reoffending after Tier Three, Mr Becker?

Becker: This treatment is effective and lasting. Once an offender has been through Aversion Therapy, they are cured. I guarantee it.

Dan: What about those protestors who say Aversion Therapy is merely a form of revenge?

Becker: An eye for an eye has been a form of justice for thousands of years, hasn't it? I don't see why people are taking exception to it now.

Dan: Thank you for your time, Mr Becker.

This is Dan Gunnarsson reporting for NewsFlex.

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# JANUS

Disappointment always loomed when an offender returned, not necessarily in the person, but in the circumstances that had brought them back.

Grace sat behind her desk in her bright consultation room overlooking the Thames on the twelfth floor of the Janus Justice building. Her name on the door – *Dr Grace Gunnarsson* in gold lettering, and her various certificates – MB ChB, MRCPsych – in gilt frames on the wall behind her desk embarrassed her sometimes. She worried that they intimidated her clients. No doubt her boss, Conrad, wanted it that way.

‘Nikki, you’re back.’ All four foot eleven of her. ‘You’ve been moved up to Tier Two because you’ve reoffended. You get that?’ Grace asked gently. ‘It means we didn’t quite get it right in Tier One.’ Grace herself had been moved up to Tier Two in a promotion eight years ago, when the managers wanted to put her psychiatry degree and medical training to better use. If there were still problems, the system had to dig deeper. And that was where Grace came in.

Nikki blinked at her, confused.

‘You know the way after your first offence we found you somewhere to live, when you were sent to Tier One? That obviously hasn’t worked out for some reason. So now we’re going to move you up to Tier Two and look at how to help you psychologically.’ There was still no recognition in the woman’s eyes. ‘You know, in your thoughts and your feelings,

to work out how we can make your rehab work this time.' Grace nodded, trying to show her that this was a good thing.

Nikki parroted the nod. 'Help me better.'

'Yes, that's right.'

There was suspicion in her eyes. Grace couldn't blame her.

The in-house nickname for the service users at Tier One was 'the Desperate'. Grace never used it, but she recognised its accuracy. These were the people who lived on the streets, who didn't know where the next meal was coming from, who didn't have access to running water or healthcare. Nikki had been desperate when she'd first arrived at Janus, not two miles away from the magistrates' court where she'd been convicted of squatting.

Nikki sat in a chair opposite her, the greasy hood of her coat still covering half her face, her red-raw hands picking at threadbare jeans, her trainers ripped and worn. Grace smoothed the cream linen of her trousers in an unconscious mirroring.

'They're not going to take them off me, are they?' Nikki whined like a sulky teenager, looking at Grace briefly before looking away again.

'The kids? No, I'll make sure they don't. But you're going to have to work with me.'

Grace remembered the police footage of junkies being hauled out of the squat six months previously, when they had found Nikki, the only non-addict in the building, huddled like a stray cat hiding her kittens away – two babies under a blanket. Her pathetic cries as she'd tried to protect her little ones from the intrusion had been heart-rending.

Grace swept her hand over the black glassy surface of her desk and immediately Nikki Paton's life lay in digital documents before her – her physical and psychological health reports, feedback from Tier One, the court documents, even her children's birth certificates. The diagrams from the automatic bio-scan as Nikki had entered the room were displayed also – her heart rate, body temperature, stress levels, and more.



Grace glanced over them, aware of Nikki's trembling lips. What would happen to her now if Grace couldn't solve her problems? Poor, gentle, simple, unlucky Nikki.

'Nikki, love, it's not the end of the world. It's only Tier Two. We're going to sort this out.'

Grace dabbed at her desk and turned up the ambient waves, the emotisonics, in the room in an attempt to soothe her client. Then she cast an assessing eye over her, trying to intuit things a scanner could never find. With her bleached blonde hair and big brown eyes, Nikki might have been pretty if she hadn't had such a haunted look.

'Are you the psycho woman?' Nikki asked tearfully.

Grace couldn't help but smile. 'I'm the psychiatrist, yes. I look at how your brain works and how you're feeling, so that I can help you figure out what you need, and we can get you on the straight and narrow.'

*What you need.* The nickname for Tier Two users – 'the Needy' – was equally appropriate. Grace assessed offenders and suggested solutions – albeit from a strict menu of government provisions. Her work in this Tier could take many forms, all of which took skills and knowledge to figure out the underlying problem. Already this week, she'd discovered brain damage from a childhood accident on the scan of a violent offender. She'd referred him to the surgery department. It might go some way to curing his violence. She hoped so.

'Let's get your bloods done, see if that gives us any more information.' Grace stood up, took a small metallic bracelet from a nearby cupboard and moved over to Nikki, who shrank back in her seat. 'It's not going to hurt. Only takes a second.'

When Nikki finally held out her arm, Grace placed the bracelet on her slim wrist and immediately it tightened. A second or so later, it released itself. Nikki handed it back and examined the small circle of red dots it had left.

Grace placed the bracelet into an analyser and a few minutes later, the results came up on her desk. She regularly screened her

clients for chemical and hormonal imbalances – norepinephrine, dopamine, serotonin, testosterone, for example, which could cause problems, the biological basis of some types of crime. But she suspected Nikki's criminogenic influences were rooted in deep emotional disturbances – neglect or trauma.

She'd seen this too often now. One of the saddest cases was a woman who'd been stealing medicine for her baby, a little boy who'd already been dead for two weeks, but the mother wouldn't let him go. The image never left Grace – the tiny body wrapped in a blue blanket.

If only Nikki Paton could peer beneath Grace's well-maintained facade to see how closely her life had once paralleled her clients' – would she trust her more?

But it was years since Lottie had died and Remy left, and Grace had kept the truth of her background from everyone, even her husband Dan.

Nikki was the lone carer of her children the way Grace's mother had been. But these days they didn't throw the kids into prison and punish them too. No doubt it had been well-intentioned back then, keeping the family unit together. Instead, Grace would send Nikki and her children to the Agrarian Compound, a 'holiday camp for the criminally afflicted' as Dan had described it in one of his more controversial articles for NewsFlex.

How different Grace's life would have been if her mother had been able to access the sort of help that was available now. But her past was also a blessing. Didn't it give her the instincts for knowing what people needed, the desire to analyse the people brought before her so that she could respond and help them to stop offending? *Prevention is better than cure*, Lottie used to say. It seemed the government agreed these days.

The New London Vision was so successful that ministers were prepared to invest billions to roll out similar programmes across the country, starting with Liverpool, Manchester and Newcastle. A huge initial expense that would lead to an exponential return.

Grace pushed the past away, tucked into the dark corner of her mind, and turned her attention to the documents on her screen-desk. *Court-ordered placement at her brother's home in Hackbridge ... however, biochip located Ms Paton in Tower Hamlets ... broken the conditions of ... police found her in another squat ... stolen cans of milk, nutripacks, sugar pods...*

'Why didn't you stick to the court order?' Grace asked, as gently as she could.

Nikki shook her head and pressed her lips together.

'Can you tell me why you left your brother's house?'

Maybe a session of hypnotherapy might help to get to the bottom of things.

'Nikki, I want to help, but you have to help yourself too.'

No response.

'You've already been through Tier One and this is probably your only shot at Tier Two. What's going to happen to the kids then, eh?'

Nikki looked up, a fierceness in her eyes.

'You're not taking my kids!'

'Of course I'm not going to take your kids. I'm saying if you don't cooperate, then—'

Nikki jumped up and shouted, 'You're not taking my kids! I'm not staying here! I want my kids now!'

Grace also stood up but spoke calmly. 'The kids are fine, Nikki. They're downstairs in the creche. But you have to cooperate if you're going to make things better... for all of you.'

The bio-scanner reactions burst into colour on Grace's desk as Nikki flew to the door.

'You're not going to take my children!' She pawed at the security panel, wailing, 'Felix! Angel!'

The door opened and a clinic porter blocked the exit – a large, strong-looking Black man in his late fifties. He fixed his hooded eyes on Grace, looking for direction as Nikki pounded futilely against his mass as she tried to exit.

‘Hold her,’ Grace commanded. In a matter of seconds George had Nikki in a secure grasp, holding her arms across her chest as she faced Grace, who had pulled a nasal sedative spray from a drawer.

‘No, don’t!’ Nikki cried as Grace moved closer. She kicked out with both feet, her dirty trainers making contact with Grace’s linen trousers, knocking her backwards. The spray fell from her hand and skittered across the floor.

‘Don’t worry, Doctor G,’ said George. ‘I’ve got one here somewhere.’ He kept one huge arm around Nikki and rummaged in his uniform pocket with his free hand. Grace stepped back as Nikki swiped at her.

‘Very useful,’ he said, smiling as he threw one to Grace, before taking Nikki firmly but gently by both arms again.

Grace applied the nasal spray, and moments later, Nikki stopped struggling and her legs began to give way.

George guided her gently back to the chair and sat her down. ‘You’ll be okay, honey,’ he soothed. ‘Doctor G here is the best. She looked after my sister Aleisha, so I know she’s going to make it all okay.’

Grace smiled at the memory. She winked at him and he lumbered out of the room.

She knelt down by Nikki, whose face was red, her breathing laboured.

It took a few minutes for her to calm down completely. Once the look in Nikki’s eyes had softened, Grace asked, ‘Why did you leave your brother’s house?’

‘He beat me, lots of times, like my dad used to,’ she said slowly. ‘I was afraid he’d turn on my kids.’

Grace felt her heart sink.

‘What did I do to deserve this? My dad, my ex, and then my brother...’

‘Oh, Nikki. Why didn’t you tell us this before? We could have changed your place of appointment.’

‘I was afraid my brother would say I lied. I didn’t think anyone would believe me.’ She leaned over and put her head in her hands. ‘I just can’t do this any more.’

‘Come on, you can’t give up now.’ Grace reached forward and patted her on the shoulder. ‘I’m not going to let you. I’m going to make sure you and the kids are okay. I promise.’

Nikki breathed a heavy sigh.

‘Take report,’ Grace said, and immediately a document opened up on her desk and began to transcribe her words. ‘Nikki Paton is to be sent to the Agrarian Compound for six months for treatment. Bringing two infants. Therapy and medication to be discussed after orientation. End.’

She rubbed Nikki’s back. ‘You’ll be safe there, plus your kids will love it. There are play areas and classrooms and you’ll be taught skills to help you get a job when you leave. I know the manager, Shannon. She’ll look after you and I’ll be visiting once a week, to see how you’re all getting on.’

Nikki’s shoulders slumped. She blinked slowly and then smiled at Grace. It changed her whole face.

‘Right, then, let’s go and fetch the kids from the creche and I’ll make the necessary arrangements to get you out there.’

Nikki stood up slowly and made her way to the door, leaning heavily on Grace. George was waiting outside to escort her. She was still an offender, after all.

‘Tonight, you’ll all have hot meals and clean beds. You’ll feel better in the morning, I promise.’

Nikki shuffled out and Grace returned to her desk to fill in various forms. As she did so, the Janus bulletin came up on her screen–desk, including one that caught her eye from the Department of Justice. A familiar name, albeit one she hadn’t seen for a long time.

Remy James Wilson.

*What the hell has he done now?*

What made one person go one way and another person go the other, even when they had the same – or similar –

upbringings? Grace, determined to crawl her way up, had chosen the light. Remy, it seemed, had chosen darkness.

Her finger hovered over the link.

Remy – her foster brother, her protector, her best friend – the love she had for Remy was the purest thing she'd had in her life.

Her thoughts shattered as her boss, Conrad Becker, barged in.

'Grace, I know you're busy but we're short today and it's all hands on deck,' he said, his American accent unchanged by his ten years in the UK.

She looked at him quizzically.

'I need you up on Tier Three.'

Her stomach dropped. 'Conrad, you know what I think of Tier Three. I've got lots of appointments booked here today. I don't think I can—'

'Sorry, Grace, but we need a psych in there, or we can't carry out the procedure. Myriam has called in sick and you're the only qualified person on site today.'

'Can't you reschedule?'

'No, I can't,' he said flatly.

Grace shook her head, staring at him in disbelief. 'I just can't...'

'You know the rules. We need a psych in clinic or the procedure will have to be called off. You don't actually have to do anything, you just have to be there. She's already in the witness room,' he hissed. 'I'm not telling her to come back another day. We can't let her suffer any longer.'

He kept his eyes locked on her until she finally stood up and made her way to the door, resenting him with every step.

Conrad knew Grace's Achilles heel.