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# Angels Passing

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Extract

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# *One*

FRIDAY, 9 FEBRUARY, *early morning*

For months afterwards, awake and asleep, Faraday dwelt on that final second and a half. He'd measured it by eye, standing on the pavement in the chilly dawn, trying to imagine something solid falling from the roof above. A rock, a parcel of some kind, flesh and blood, it made no difference. You got to the edge, you let go, and gravity did the rest. Was it true that your heart stopped the moment your plunge began? Did God have a way of sparing you the onrushing pavement below? He rather doubted it.

The impact had split the back of her skull wide open, spilling brain matter onto the wet paving slab, florets of thick grey jelly pinked with blood and matted with hair. More blood had trickled from her ears, pooling blackly amongst the tufts of grass growing between the slabs. She'd been wearing jeans and a green cotton sweatshirt, far too skimpy for the middle of winter, and her thin, outstretched wrist was circled with a silver bracelet hung with tiny charms. Her eyes, oddly, were still open in her unmarked face. Lovely eyes. Green. Ignore the wreckage at the back of her head and she might just have woken up.

While Scenes of Crime wrestled a heavy plastic screen into position around the body, Faraday took the lift to the twenty-third floor and then found the stairs that led up to the roof. The warden, a blonde woman in her fifties, was talking to the PC standing guard at the open door. Faraday stepped carefully past them and out onto the roof, ducking to avoid the lattice of washing lines that criss-crossed the drying area. The roof space was big and walled on all four sides: brickwork up to chest level and

then a metal grille to let in the views. Above the grille there was another four feet or so of bricks but corners and crevices offered a purchase for hands and legs, and to a certain kind of youngster the challenge of the climb would have been irresistible.

The girl lay on the pavement towards the western corner of the building and Faraday began to haul himself up towards the parapet above her, curious to put the climb to the test. He wasn't good with heights, never had been, but there was something in the girl's face that obliged him to try, and he finally managed it, standing cautiously upright on top of the encircling wall before peering down.

The sheerness of the drop dizzied him. Even the undertaker's van, backing slowly towards the cluster of tiny figures at the kerbside, seemed too dinky to be real, and as his stomach churned he had to find something else to look at. Several floors below him, infinitely bigger, a pair of black-headed gulls were chasing a third. His eye followed them as they banked and soared on the chill February wind and he found himself wondering whether the girl, too, might have glimpsed some bird or other in the darkness as she gazed down. Had she met this terrible death on purpose, garnishing her final moments with a swallow dive? Had she spread her arms, taking one last lungful of air, standing there? To the alarm of the warden, Faraday tried it himself, arms out wide, chin up, ignoring the drop, recognising at once where the image led.

A bird on the wing, he thought. Or the figure on the cross, betrayed and crucified.

Even half asleep, DC Paul Winter knew he couldn't do it. The plane left Gatwick around noon. Cathy had arranged for some local woman to meet him at Faro and drive him to Albufeira or wherever her mate's place was. The snaps Catty had sent across in the internal mail showed the view from the balcony of the apartment block. There was a harbour, fishing boats, the chance to lie around in that gorgeous Portuguese sunshine. Even in February, the

temperature could be way up in the sixties, and he knew that for sure because Cathy had phoned him last night and told him so. Pack your bathers, she'd said, and plenty of Factor 15. Yet he still couldn't do it. Not with two long weeks yawning in front of him and nothing to think about but the emptiness of the bed he slept in.

The kettle took forever to boil and Winter filled the silence with his usual hit of early morning news from the gloom merchants on Radio Four. A couple of minutes of this, he always thought, and the day could only get better. Eighty flood warnings across the south as yet another frontal system swept in from the Atlantic. Scientists warning of unexpected problems with GM food. Major car bomb in Jerusalem. And – if you were still around to enjoy them – designer babies within the next thirty years.

Winter ignored it all, gazing out at the bareness of the back garden, wondering quite how he would put it to Cathy. Her kindness had touched him, no question, and he'd almost believed her when she'd insisted he needed a decent break. It was true he was working all the overtime he could screw out of Faraday. And it was true, as well, that most nights he dog-legged home via a series of pubs. But who wouldn't in his position? What was so cosy about drawn curtains and a night in with *Peak Practice*?

He splashed hot water onto the single tea bag and left it to brew while he broke the news to Cathy. She'd very definitely be pissed off but he'd simply have to be upfront about it. He was too young for retirement and too old for make-believe. Whatever fantasies she might be having about holiday romances and getting away from it all were strictly for the birds. He was forty-seven, overweight, and far too particular about other people's company to leave anything to chance. End of story.

Lifting the handset in the lounge, he noticed a call waiting on his nearby mobile. He picked it up, keying the message as he did so. The call had come in at 02.37. It was a voice he didn't recognise – gruff, male, slightly slurred – and he knew at once that it belonged to a grass. Not one of his regular gang, not one of the registered

informers he'd nursed so carefully through the traumas of the last year or so, but someone new, someone who'd been enterprising enough to get hold of his number and had decided that the time was ripe for a confidence or two.

The message was brief and Winter replayed it twice. 'Bastard's gonna do Brennan's tonight,' the voice said. 'Check it out. There's shitloads of gear there. He's just gonna help himself.'

Bastard? Brennan's? Winter peered at the line of digits on his mobile, feeling the warmth flooding his body. Later he'd make some enquiries but odds-on the call had come from a local BT box, somewhere discreet and untraceable. The bloke, whoever he was, had a grudge, wanted to get a poke or two in. Winter glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece and reached for his phone. Cathy normally left home at around half seven. By now, she'd be sitting in a jam on the M275. Perfect.

She answered his summons on the second ring.

'Cath? It's me.' Winter beamed at the mobile. 'Something's just come up.'

Faraday was debating whether to chase up one or two of the door-to-door enquiries when the Crime Scene Manager beckoned him in from the rain. He was standing in the entrance to the block of flats, a clipboard in one hand and a tape measure in the other. Uniforms had chocked the main door open as they came and went, spreading slowly upwards towards the twenty-third floor.

'Can't we do anything about the punters?' The CSM nodded at the growing crowd beyond the blue and white tape. In the swirling rain, at least half a dozen of the women were on the phone to friends, doubtless speculating on what lay within the plastic screen.

Faraday shrugged. There was always an unspoken tussle about crime scenes like these, about who should take responsibility, and this morning's CSM didn't make it any easier. Faraday, as the Detective Inspector on site, was Senior Investigating Officer, but the CSM was charged with the collection of evidence at the scene of

crime and obviously believed in playing it by the book. He was young and ambitious, and rather too cautious for his own good. At this rate, they wouldn't be clear by lunch time.

'The kids'll be coming to school next.' Faraday nodded towards the nearby comprehensive. 'Might be nice to move it along.'

'You want to give me that in writing?'

'No.'

Faraday's mobile began to ring. He stepped back into the rain, turning his back on the CSM.

'It's Cathy. I've had Winter on.'

Cathy Lamb was one of Faraday's DSs, back in the Southsea CID office. Paul Winter was a cross that everyone had to bear, but Cathy always seemed to carry the burden more lightly than others. Until now. She explained about the information on Brennan's. She sounded extremely angry.

'I thought Winter was off to Portugal?'

'He was. He just cancelled. Seems to think he's better off back in the office.'

'And Brennan's? Winter's sourced this information?'

'No. He says he's never heard the voice before. Guy called in the early morning, left a message.'

'And we believe it?'

'Believe it? Brennan's? That's hardly the point, sir, is it?'

Faraday permitted himself a weary smile. Cathy was right. Ray Brennan was a one-time builder and decorator who now ran a huge DIY cash-and-carry operation on an industrial estate in the north of the city. His generosity towards the police currently extended to a brand-new Ford Escort carefully badged with the Brennan's logo, 'Helping Build a Better Tomorrow', plus smaller contributions towards a couple of public awareness events. In situations like these, that kind of support earned him the benefit of the doubt.

Cathy was asking about tonight. If they went for the full stake-out, how many bodies would be required? Faraday didn't answer. Brennan's was a big site if his

memory served him right; there were access roads on three sides. Say ten men and an area car – a mix of CID and uniforms – and the overtime implications would be substantial. That would mean a head-to-head over the duty roster and a conversation with the Ops Superintendent, two good reasons for hoping to God that Winter had it right.

'I'll sort it when I get back,' Faraday said at last. 'Give me an hour.'

The Scenes of Crime photographer had emerged from the screened area around the body. He was a tall, thin civilian with deep-set eyes and a wardrobe of pink shirts. His job exposed him to the worst that human beings could do to each other and Faraday had often marvelled at the way he seemed to survive all those hideous images. On this occasion though he looked ashen, and when he caught Faraday's eye he offered a tiny shake of the head. Not just me, Faraday thought. Him too.

Cathy wanted to know about the girl. What had happened?

'Too early to tell. She obviously came off the roof. Might be a jumper. Might not.'

The girl's body had been found by the milkman around half five in the morning. The patrol Sergeant and a PC from Central had attended and the duty DC had been called out. He, in turn, had alerted Scenes of Crime and roused Faraday from his bed. By then it was nearly seven.

'The girl was stiff by the time I got here. It's ballpark but I think we're talking one, two in the morning.'

'You've got a name?'

'Not yet. There's no ID on the body and the duty DC checked overnight Mispers.'

Mispers was police-speak for Missing Persons. The current tally was running at nearly ten a day, mainly teenagers, but none of them answered to the broken body at the foot of Chuzzlewit House.

'CCTV?'

'Still checking. The set-up's run from a control room over the way. They cover five council blocks from a

central point. There's a load of cameras on a matrix so it's going to take a while.'

'You want me to run with that?'

Faraday and Cathy discussed availability. A couple of DCs could come down right away. More later, if required.

'Who have we got?'

'Ellis and Yates.'

Faraday grunted assent. Dawn Ellis was perfect. Bev Yates too.

'These flats are full of old people,' Faraday said. 'No kids allowed. Uniform's doing a trawl on the door-to-doors but my guess is we'll end up with a short list. That'll need patience, as well as time.'

He paused, looking up at the flats. The area was called Somerstown. It figured prominently in all the social indices that increasingly governed his working life – poverty, domestic violence, family breakdown – and the very look of the place seemed to mirror the brutality of life on the streets. Chuzzlewit House towered above him, one of a cluster of sixties blocks, a looming, malevolent presence curtained with rain. The yellow panels beneath each window might lift the spirits on a sunny day but just now they simply underscored the bleakness of the scene.

A girl had died here. She looked no more than fifteen. She might have been drunk or out of her head on some drug or other, or just desperate. The post-mortem would resolve the substance issue but as far as Faraday knew there was no known test for despair. Had she really been a jumper? Was it as simple – and complex – as that?

Earlier, the Crime Scene Manager had been talking about fall parameters, a phrase that had done nothing for Faraday's peace of mind. Bodies tipping face first off a roof begin to tumble, turned upside down by the weight of the head. The girl had hit the pavement on her back – hence the lack of damage to her face – and in the measured view of the young CSM it was probable that the girl had been facing outwards when she fell. That wasn't the point, though. The question wasn't how but

why. Why do it? Why make this terrible pact with gravity?

Faraday wiped the rain from his eyes. He could see the body plunging towards him now, the flailing limbs, the outstretched hands, and when Cathy asked him for the second time whether to send Winter up to Brennan's for a recce and a chat, he found it difficult to frame a coherent answer.

'Why not?' he said in the end.

The last time Winter had been to Brennan's Superstore was a couple of years ago. He'd bought a flat-pack garden shed, an episode which ended with Joannie calling in a friend's son to dismantle Winter's handiwork, sort out the plot he'd neglected to level, and start all over again. So much for his talent for DIY.

Now, Winter parked his Subaru beside a rain-soaked collection of bird tables and set off on a private tour of the site, heartened by the huge yellow banners announcing unbeatable price cuts. The early spring sale was due to start tomorrow, an event which presumably sucked in mountains of extra stock. Winter's new friend had clearly done his homework.

Minutes later, the geography of the place clear in his mind, Winter went in search of the management. Ray Brennan ran the superstore from a chaotic suite of offices in two Portakabins on the other side of the car park. He was a big, broad, sandy-haired Irishman with a solid marriage, umpteen kids and extraordinarily few enemies. Winter had known Brennan since his early days as a jobbing builder and had always wondered what really lay behind the bone-crushing handshake and the big smile. No one could be that cheerful. Even with a business this successful to his credit.

Winter wanted to know about security. Brennan's had grown like topsy: first a builders' merchant, then a timber centre, and now a retail operation that jigsawed everything for the home and garden onto the three-acre site. What happened out of hours? Where were the cameras placed?

'Cameras?'

'You haven't got CCTV?'

Brennan looked briefly pained, then dismissed the thought with a wave of his huge hand. His brother, Vic, had been banging on about cameras for years, but himself, he'd never seen the point. Most of the stuff that got nicked went out of the yard in the backs of builders' vans and he had a trusted old boy on the gate to check every load against the paperwork. CCTV, on the other hand, was aggressive. People wanted to enjoy themselves when they shopped. What kind of welcome was a camera in your face?

For a moment Winter thought he was taking the piss but there were clues in this cluttered little office that suggested otherwise. One of them was a wall calender from the Church of Our Lady, a big Catholic pile up near the top of the city. Another was a colour photograph of Brennan presenting a cheque to the Lord Mayor. Clearly Ray's generosity extended well beyond the police force.

Winter changed tack. He wanted to know about tomorrow's sale. Did the discounts apply to the pricier stuff?

'Sure.'

'Like what?'

'Like the top-of-the-line goods you don't have to plug in. Like cordless drills and sanders. Like Workmates. Like brushes and paint. Like whatever you want. We're talking up to thirty per cent off here.'

'So how much? For a cordless drill?'

'£116 today. £89 tomorrow. Believe me, that's a steal.'

The word brought a smile to Winter's face. He was already convinced that tonight's visitors would be targeting high-value items with a ready market on the dodgier housing estates, and tomorrow's sale would offer the richest of pickings. Even if you lost a big whack when you fenced the stuff, a vanful of cordless drills would keep you in lagers for at least a week.

Winter leaned forward, explaining about the information received, about the likelihood of some kind of break-in, and about the traps he was planning to set. The site

was a nightmare – he'd counted five potential exits – and doing the job properly would call for some serious manpower. Might he take a look at the retail stockroom?

Brennan, more thoughtful now, led the way back across the car park. The rain was lashing down and by the time they made it to the Retail Centre both men were soaked. Items for the weekend's bonanza were in the warehouse area at the back and the moment Winter saw the Black and Decker boxes piled high on trolleys he knew he'd called it exactly right. In Paulsgrove and Wecock Farm, estates up on the mainland, this lot would go in seconds. Easy, easy money.

'What's this?'

Winter was standing beside the biggest of the trolleys. Brennan followed his pointing finger.

'Security systems. It's self-fit. You take a screwdriver to the detector thing, and door contacts and one or two other bits and pieces, and then stick that big yellow box over the front door. An hour, max. Can't fail.'

'Price? Normal retail?'

'£99.99. But cheaper tomorrow.'

Winter was beaming. He knew dozens of criminals, Pompey's finest, who'd lift gear like this by the truckload. They'd hit cities along the coast – Chichester, Brighton, Bournemouth – and target people who didn't know better, old people especially. For a cut-price five hundred pounds or so they'd offer to install the security system of your dreams – total peace of mind – and the scam would be even sweeter if the gear was itself nicked. Winter could hear them screaming with laughter on the way home. Five hundred quid for an hour's work and every last penny theirs for the taking? No expenses? No guarantees? No comeback? Fucking re-sult.

Winter beckoned Brennan into a corner of the warehouse, away from the staff. Strictly speaking he should have the rest of this conversation back in the office but time was moving on.

'How many work in this section?'

'Couple of lads. Off the New Deal.'

'I'll need their names. Plus everyone else on the payroll.'

'Why?'

'Because someone's been speaking out of turn.' He nodded towards the towering piles of merchandise. 'I'll run the names through the computer just in case they've got previous. Beyond that we're talking association. Tonight's the easy bit' – he patted Brennan on the arm – 'believe me.'

It was one of the uniforms, a WPC from Central, who alerted Faraday about a call from the school across the road. A teacher had taken a smashed mobile from one of the kids. He'd been doing a paper round at the flats, almost an hour after Scenes of Crime had arrived, and he'd come across the mobile on the other side of the block. It was lying in the road there, just asking to be nicked, and now she was bringing it over in case it was important.

Faraday intercepted the teacher as she rounded the corner of the flats. The Crime Scene Manager watched him from a distance, intensely curious, then walked over. The rain had stopped again but Faraday sensed it was only a truce.

The CSM produced a plastic evidence bag. He held it open beneath the mobile.

Faraday was looking at the teacher. It was by no means certain that the phone had any connection with the dead girl but he was grateful that she'd spared the time to bring it over.

'How many other kids touched this?'

'I've no idea. He's a popular lad. Half a dozen? That's a guess.'

The mobile was a neat little Nokia, purple with a glitter effect. The plastic case was shattered beyond repair but – intact – it was all too easy to imagine it pressed to the ear of the girl behind the screen.

The CSM still had the bag open and was visibly losing patience. This wasn't about evidence any more, it was about ownership. His crime scene. His shout.

'It's useless,' Faraday pointed out. 'Useless as a phone and useless forensically. I suggest we see what the sim card tells us.'

Without waiting for an answer, he shook the little wafer of silicon out of the Nokia and slipped it into his own mobile. The last call had gone to a local number and Faraday made a note before keying up the stored contacts list. There were dozens and dozens of names, ports of call in a busy, busy social life: Katie, Tazz, Anna, Jordan, Peaches, Billy, Azul. He scrolled slowly through them, looking for an obvious lead. Then he glanced up at the teacher, struck by the obvious thought. There were lots of secondary schools in the city but this one might be a good place to start.

'You keep a daily register?' he asked.

The teacher was looking at the screen around the body.

'Of course.'

'How many absentees this morning?'

'For my class? Four.'

'What kind of age?'

'Year Eleven. Fifteen to sixteen.'

'We're not talking flu here?' Faraday suggested drily. 'The weather we've been having?'

The teacher favoured him with a brief, cold smile.

'I doubt it.'

Her gaze returned to the screen. The heavy plastic was billowing in the wind and every now and again a gust lifted the bottom of the structure, permitting a moment's glimpse of wet denim. Finally, Faraday asked the inevitable question.

'It's a question of ID.' He nodded towards the body. 'If you'd prefer not, I'd quite understand.'

The teacher bit her lip, saying nothing. Then she nodded and Faraday took her by the arm, stepping carefully around the Crime Scene Manager. A flap at the back of the screen permitted a view of the body. The teacher stood motionless for a while, staring down at the dead girl's face. Finally, she looked up at Faraday.

'Do you know her?'

'No.'

'Would you know her?'

'That age? In school? Definitely.'

She glanced down again, one last look, then brushed away a tear. It was an abrupt gesture, anger as well as sadness, and she didn't say another word until Faraday had escorted her back to the corner of the building. Faraday had his mobile out again. There was an issue over whether circumstances warranted calling in a Home Office pathologist and he knew he owed his Detective Chief Inspector a call.

The teacher accepted his outstretched hand. She hoped the Nokia would be a help.

'I'd phone her mum if I were you,' she muttered. 'They normally store the number under "M".'

She ducked her head and then turned and hurried away. The DCI was engaged, so Faraday scrolled through to 'M' on the Nokia's contact list and found an eight-digit number under 'Ma'. He wrote the number down, then put a call through to the force control room at Netley. They kept a reverse phone book on computer and, within seconds, Faraday was scribbling in his pocketbook again. Mrs Jane Bassam. 27, Little Normandy. Old Portsmouth.

Old Portsmouth?

Faraday frowned, looking up at the roof. Old Portsmouth, while barely a mile distant, was a middle-class enclave for professional couples and wealthy retired folk, light years away from the violence and chaos that passed for life on this estate. Kids from Somerstown were into organised shoplifting before they left primary school. Kids from Old Portsmouth took piano lessons and sailed dinghies. If he was right about the mobile, if it really had belonged to the girl behind the screen, then what on earth was she doing here?