



1

THE CALL UP

The atmosphere inside the office buzzed. General chatter filled the room, competing with the sound of typing and the monotonous hum of computer monitors. Jake Tanner was perusing through his inbox, avoiding his menial tasks for the day. Admin. The one part of the job he hated. The one part of the job he tried to put off for as long as possible. But it needed to be done; there were mouths to feed and bills to pay.

Jake was a Detective Constable in the Criminal Investigation Department of the London Metropolitan Police, and he absolutely loved his job. Protecting people from criminals. Catching them and removing them from the streets. It was his duty, and he had a real passion for it. He was devoted — much more than could be said for some of his colleagues.

Jake looked up from his screen. Ashley Rivers, one of the most recent additions to the department, walked towards him.

‘Morning,’ she said, placing her fingertips on the edge of his desk. ‘Darryl wants to know if you’ve got a case report for

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him? I don't know which one he's on about, but he said you'd know.'

Jake relaxed. The one pressing and most important task sat at the top of his To-Do List was completed. He fished through a pile of documents and passed Ashley a brown folder. 'Finished it last night,' he told her.

'Well aren't you just a superstar for doing what you're paid to do.' Ashley smiled sarcastically as she snatched the folder from Jake.

He watched her leave. Her long, flowing brown hair tied in a ponytail. Her blazer wrapped tightly around her body. Her walk that suggested she knew how to take control of herself in any situation.

After she rounded the corner, Jake returned his attention to his emails.

His phone vibrated on his desk. An image of Elizabeth, his wife, appeared on the screen. Her blue eyes and sun-kissed blonde hair stared back at him.

'Hi, Honey,' Jake said, answering the call.

'Hey, Jakey. How's work?' Elizabeth said, her voice delicate and soft. Her sweet tones brought a smile to his face. He was just as infatuated with her now as he was when they first met at university ten years ago.

'Not too bad, just doing the boring parts that nobody wants to do.' Jake hesitated. 'Is something wrong?'

'No, no.' She paused. 'Well, yes. Maisie's been sent home from school for bullying someone in her class. I've brought her back, and she's in her room at the moment. But I thought I'd let you know before you get home, so you can come up with a suitable punishment.' Maisie was their eldest daughter and their first "little miracle". For reasons unknown to medical professionals, Elizabeth was neither able to conceive nor carry a child, and when they found out she was pregnant, Jake – and the doctors – were overjoyed. Nine months later, Maisie, was born.

'Seems out of character for her. What did she do?' Jake asked.

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'Apparently, she's been calling a girl names. I don't know the full story – she wouldn't tell me – but it appears they got into a fight this morning. She's got a bruise on her lip.'

'What about the other girl? Did she get sent home, too?'

'Yes, she was worse off than Mais.'

That's my girl, Jake thought. He'd always taught his girls never to get into fights, but if such an occasion arose, then they should always throw the hardest punch. No matter the size difference. Ellie, his youngest daughter, and their second "little miracle", had made certain to test the theory out on Maisie when they were growing up. Two years separated them, but Ellie was always the more boisterous of the two, as she regularly bested her sister in play fights.

Before Jake could respond, the office door slammed open. DCI Darryl Hughes, Jake's manager, entered the room. In his hands he held his mobile phone, and two large folders, the contents of which Jake assumed to be his own handiwork.

'Listen, Liz – I've got to go. Darryl's just walked in. I don't think I'll be coming home on time tonight. Could be a big one. I'll keep you updated, though.'

'OK. Be safe.'

'I will. I'll deal with Maisie later, and I'll think of some form of punishment.'

'Good. Now, go and save the day my superhero. Don't get yourself killed.'

Jake told her he loved her and hung up the phone just as Darryl spoke to the office.

'Morning, team,' he began, standing at the head of the room. Everyone stopped and sat to attention. 'Reports are coming in of a triple homicide in the north London area. I'll be the SIO. Rivers, Tanner – I want you both to come with me. Carmichael, Dennon – I want you to set up shop in Incident Room 42.'

SIO stood for Senior Investigating Officer and meant that Darryl would oversee the entire investigation. Whatever Darryl says goes, and that was something Jake could never fully get to grips with, despite the numerous amount of cases

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he had worked on since his tenure with CID over six years ago. He always thought to himself, what if the SIO was wrong? What if they had overlooked a vital piece of information, but Jake hadn't? What if he wanted to follow a lead he knew would be the right one, but wasn't allowed because someone else's ego got in the way? It had happened before, and he didn't doubt for a second it wouldn't happen again.

'Is that going to be enough of us, Sir?' Ashley asked, already on her feet.

'It's all we can afford to use. We're stretched as it is. I'll send you both the address and I'll meet you there. You only need one car, so decide amongst yourselves who's driving,' Darryl said before leaving the room.

Jake looked to Ashley, who returned his gaze. She advanced towards him.

'Looks like it's our first time together, Jake. Don't look too scared – I don't bite. If you need me for support, then just let me know.'

'Is that emotional, physical, or mental?'

Ashley didn't respond; she shot him an evil glare that told him to stop at once. It was their first time working together, and Jake was excited. Not because of Ashley, but because it meant that he could get away from his administrative responsibilities.

'I'm driving,' Ashley said, picking up her keys. 'Shotgun.'

'Aren't I supposed to say that?'

'Only if you want me to run you over.'

Jake was beginning to like Ashley's fierce side; it meant she was easy to annoy and wind up. Someone he could have banter with was important.

Before departing the office, Jake grabbed his phone, wallet, and keys – his Holy Trinity. They headed downstairs to the underground car park at New Scotland Yard and jumped into Ashley's BMW X5. The engine roared beneath Jake's feet, and he wished he was the one behind the wheel, feeling the full force of the V8's ferocity.

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Both Jake and Ashley's phones vibrated at the same time. It was the location of the crime scene. Ashley looked at it, memorised it, and turned to Jake. 'Ready?'

Jake nodded, the adrenaline already surging through his body. 'Ready.'

Ashley floored the accelerator and ripped out of the underground car park, the flashing blue lights and siren parting the traffic with ease.



2

THE HOUSE

Ashley drove at a speed that felt like she was issued a death warrant for them both, and her main aim was to do it in style with as little collateral damage as possible. Colliding into a lamppost. Derailing off Westminster Bridge. Plummeting into a ditch somewhere. Despite his knuckles whitening as he gripped the leather upholstery, Jake admitted she drove well. Months of repetitive, but invaluable, driving training. The only problem was he valued his life too much to let go of his seat, and give in to her experience completely.

'How do you know where we're going?' Jake asked, looking for an onboard satellite navigation system.

'I've got a hippocampus the size of your balls. I'm the cabbie that got away. I don't need a computer to tell me where to go.' Ashley slammed the brakes hard, propelling Jake forward in his seat. His seatbelt dug into his shoulder.

'How long left?' Jake asked, closing his eyes as Ashley rounded a corner at a set of traffic lights.

Thirty seconds later, she responded. 'We're here.'

Somehow, in the space of only a few minutes, they had

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gone from the hubbub of a city centre to a quaint, residential street. Ashley pulled the car to a stop alongside the pavement. Flashing lights lit the surrounding area and men and women dressed in black vests and high-visibility jackets patrolled the road, keeping bystanders at a distance. They exited the car and walked towards a uniformed officer stood beside an ambulance. Police tape ran across the road, cordoning off the crime scene from members of the public, who eagerly tried to see into the victim's house.

Jake looked up and down the street, paying particular attention – and admiration – to the houses and stylish cars parked outside. The road was an advertisement for German engineering: Audis, Mercedes, BMWs, and Land Rovers littered the road like a giant, life-sized version of a child's Hot Wheels set. He couldn't help but feel envious of the homeowners that lived there. That sort of luxury lifestyle had always appealed to him for one moral reason: financial stability for his children. That was what he desired more than anything, and it was the main reason he worked so hard.

'DC Ashley Rivers and DC Jake Tanner – CID.' Ashley introduced them both to the officer standing in front. She flashed her ID card in the woman's face; Jake reached into his wallet and produced his.

'I'm Rebecca. DCI Hughes told me you'd be coming. He's inside all ready, waiting for you. I'll take you there now.' Rebecca was young and wore a worried, inexperienced expression on her face. Jake had seen that look before. It always meant that whatever lay on the other side of that tape, or behind a closed door, wasn't for the fainthearted.

The three of them entered through a large, white oak door into the hallway. It was immaculate. A stairwell on either side of the walls met in the middle on the second floor. Before them was a small table and on it an oversized vase. The plant looked as if it had been smuggled into the country. Above them, hanging from a ceiling was a chandelier that glistened and sparkled magnificently in the light.

Darryl was waiting for them by the kitchen doorway at

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the end of the hallway. As soon as they stepped foot in the house, he walked over to them, wearing latex gloves.

‘What do we have?’ Ashley asked.

‘Three bodies. All murdered with knife wounds, all in separate parts of the house.’

‘Are we looking at a domestic killing?’ Jake asked.

Darryl nodded. ‘Perimeter has been set up. And the entry and exit points are through the door you came through. We’re looking at a set of tyre marks outside the front, as well. Now that’s done, it’s time to do our jobs.’

Jake nodded, taking in the information. ‘Who found the victims?’

‘Neighbour. Elderly woman. Stumbled on them when the door was left open.’

‘Where are they?’

‘The bodies or the neighbour?’

‘The bodies.’

From the corner of his eye, Jake saw Rebecca swallow hard. It was only a minuscule movement in her neck, but Jake saw it, and he prepared himself for what he was about to see. At that moment, a forensic scientist, clad in protective clothing, appeared.

‘Which one do you want to look at first? You’ve got a choice of three,’ the man behind the white mask said. Jake couldn’t see his mouth, but he was sure he was smiling. It was a crude joke, but Jake appreciated the humour. Forensic scientists dealt with dead bodies all day, every day, so it was understandable they needed to see the funny side of their dark and disturbing job.

‘It doesn’t matter. Pick your favourite,’ Ashley said.

‘Right. Come with me.’

Jake turned to his left and followed everyone else into the living room. It was as large as his modest house – the entirety of it: kitchen, seating area, dining room. All in one. A fifty-inch plasma screen hung on the wall, images still flicking on and off. A reality TV programme played in the background. His eyes fell on the mantelpiece beneath the

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television. A fireplace as large as the chandelier in the foyer lay on the floor, dormant, as if waiting to combust at the opportune moment. In the right-hand corner of the room, another uniformed officer guarded an archway that connected the living and dining room together. Behind the man's shoulders, Jake observed a table and chairs. Extravagant and pretentious statues of elephants and other exotic relics from Indian and African cultures adorned the table's surface, making it look like the owner was a previous plantation owner who had never received the memo that slavery was abolished.

How the other half live.

They stopped in front of the sofa. Jake grimaced. A woman, who looked as if she were in her late thirties but still tried as hard as she could to look twenty-one, sank into the cream cushions. Her eyes stared vacantly into the ceiling, with her hands covering the wounds on her stomach and chest. Her once sky-blue dress had now been stained a dark red. Blood covered her whole body, and some had spread across the leather sofa in a crimson pool of death.

Jake made a quick count and noted eight separate entrance wounds. He gauged they were wounds as there were small slits in her dress that glimmered in the light from where the blood hadn't had enough time to dry and congeal.

'Jesus,' Jake said, feeling slightly sick in his stomach.

'Who is she?' Ashley asked.

'A positive ID of her driver's license confirms her as Karen Haversham,' Darryl said.

'Wife of the famous barrister, Rupert Haversham?' Jake asked.

Darryl nodded.

'Rupert who?' Ashley said. There was something in her voice that suggested to Jake she needed to know everything and didn't like it when others knew things she didn't.

'He's one of the best barristers in the city. Been doing it for years, and he's never lost a case. Ever. He always finds a way. Prosecution mostly, but sometimes defence. Some of the most

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dangerous criminals in the country ask for him, and he accepts.'

'If the price is right, I'm sure.'

'Exactly,' Jake said. 'Recently – only the other day, in fact – he acquitted Henry Matheson for everything the criminal justice system has been trying to get him for for years.'

'Wait,' Ashley held her hand towards Jake's chest. 'The Henry Matheson?'

Ashley was bewildered, and she had every right to be: for years, Henry Matheson had been one of the largest drug lords in central London, operating a highly structured ring of dealers, who would endorse and supply drugs to thousands of youths and addicts across the city. When things turned nasty, and there was an inexplicable "drug-related" homicide, Henry Matheson was usually responsible. But he had never been prosecuted for anything; his legal team and army of dealers was so large he had built an impenetrable force around himself. He was untouchable, and he wanted everyone to know it.

'That's the one,' Jake said, observing the body on the sofa again. 'Maybe Mr. Haversham had some unfriendly acquaintances.'

'Perhaps.' Ashley turned to Rebecca. 'Where's the next body?'

The forensic scientist raised his hand like an excitable child, told them he would show them way, led them through the archway, into the dining room, and then into the kitchen. Slumped atop the island in the middle of the kitchen was a man covered in more blood than his wife, with his overweight stomach hanging out the sides of his shirt. It was a wonder the body had stayed upright and not fallen to the floor.

Jake moved closer to the body and felt a slight chill prick the hairs on his arms. There was an ominous air in the room. He turned to the team. 'I'm assuming this is the man in question?'

Darryl nodded and joined Jake's side.

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'This one was a single entry laceration, with enough power to make sure the handle got stuck in and stayed put.'

Jake studied Rupert's body. For a man of perhaps forty years old, his hair and size resembled that of an elderly man's. The red pattern on Rupert's T M Lewin shirt reminded Jake of the ink pictures used in psychiatric meetings to determine someone's psyche – the ones he had seen countless times while studying and observing and understanding them at university.

Jake looked to the rest of the team. 'And the third?'

Saying nothing more, Darryl and Rebecca led Jake and Ashley upstairs into a small bedroom that looked out upon the road below. From the doorway, the flashing lights of the ambulance and police cars illuminated the lilac room.

As Jake filtered in behind Ashley, he froze mid-step.

A girl, of similar size and build to Ellie, lay crumpled in a pile on the floor by a large window. A fan of blood was sprayed all over the window and curtains, with a small puddle of red forming a deathly halo around her head.

The feeling of nausea and sickness returned. Jake's thoughts turned to Ellie – of how young she was, how precious she was, and how much she meant to him. Seeing a young girl of similar age to her filled Jake with shock and a pain in his gut that wouldn't dissipate. His children were his everything, and he would do anything to protect them from something like this happening to them.

'Her throat was cut from behind,' the forensic scientist said, bringing Jake's attention back to the present. 'She bled to death.'

'What's her name?' Ashley asked.

'Felicity Haversham. She's about ten years old,' Jake said. He knew exactly who she was; he had seen her appear on television alongside Rupert Haversham at the end of one of his high-profile lawsuits.

'Perhaps you might not need that support, after all,' Ashley said. 'Is there anything else we need to know?'

'Yes,' Darryl replied. He remained silent for a few

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moments before finishing his sentence. 'A second daughter, Erica, believed to be in college, has been kidnapped.'



3

SALLY

Fuck, Jake thought. Another one. Another child at the mercy of the same attacker. He continued to think of Ellie. And now Maisie. How would he react if either of them were kidnapped? Slaughtered in their own bedrooms? The thought made him shiver. He had a duty to the missing girl, and he would do everything he could to rescue her.

'What do we know so far?' he asked.

'We've got the only eyewitness waiting outside in the garden,' Darryl said.

'What are they doing out there?'

'She didn't want to wait inside.'

'Have you spoken to her?' Jake asked Darryl.

Darryl shook his head.

'OK. Come on.'

Jake started out of the room and down the stairs. Just as he reached the set of patio doors in the dining room, an elderly woman and a towering man entered the foyer to the house. The woman's hair looked messy and dishevelled. Her

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eyes were red, and cheeks swollen. In her hand she held a tissue, with another stuffed up her opposite sleeve.

'Sally Thompson, these are officers from the Criminal Investigation Department. They want to ask you a few questions about what you saw,' the officer accompanying her explained.

'Must I? I've just explained everything to this gentleman behind me,' Sally said. She spoke with an experience that can only come with age.

'I'm afraid not, madam. There are things we need to ask you that will help us with our own investigation. And there may be things you have remembered since.' Ashley spoke in a soft, understanding manner.

Sally nodded her approval, and Ashley began.

'How did you discover the victims?' she asked.

'I was walking my dog, moments from my front door when I heard a scream and a loud bang. I hadn't been paying much attention to where I was, you see, because Ryan's been ill, and I was more focused on him—'

'Ryan?' Ashley interrupted.

'My dog. We came to the end of my driveway when I heard a car door open with a loud swing. I saw a figure throw Erica into the rear of the car and then drive off. I came into the house afterwards to see if everything was OK, and then I... I found them... like this.' Sally spoke carefully and clearly.

'What time was this?'

'About 9:30.'

'And did you see the assailant at all? Could you see what they were wearing?' Ashley asked.

'No. They wore a black mask protecting their face. And black clothes. Almost covered from head to toe.'

'Did you see anything else worth noting? Even the tiniest bits of information might help us locate the attacker.'

'I'm sorry, but no. I can't think of anything.'

'Can you remember what car they drove away in?' Ashley asked. Jake noticed the sense of urgency and intolerance

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growing in her voice.

'It was a Mercedes AMG CLS.'

'Are you certain?'

'Of course, I'm bloody certain! How stupid do you think I am?' Sally gesticulated with her hands, using the tissue as a pointer. 'I've seen the same car day in, day out. It was Rupert's. He drove it to work every morning.'

Finally. A useful piece of information.

'Ashley – get on the phone to the DVLA, get the missing vehicle's registration number, and tell Carmichael to run it through the ANPR,' Darryl ordered.

Ashley nodded and made her way into the hallway.

'How well did you know the family and Mr. Haversham himself?' Jake continued after Ashley had gone.

'The girls I knew well, Erica and Felicity. I used to babysit them every so often when Rupert or Karen needed me to, but other than that I didn't speak to them much. Only the occasional, "Hello" and, "Good morning". The girls were lovely, though. Always polite and kind. Always asking me how I was. And they were well behaved, too. They had been raised correctly.'

'Is there anyone you can think of that might want to harm Mr. Haversham or his family?'

'I would imagine there are lots. Being one of the best barristers in the city means you make a lot of enemies, Detective. He's in the public eye, for both the right *and* wrong reasons,' Sally said.

Ashley returned, her small frame fitting through the door with acres of space around her. She confirmed the DVLA had given her the registration number, and that Carmichael would be back in touch as soon as he had something.

'Have you seen anything suspicious recently?' Jake asked, returning the conversation back to Sally. 'Anyone you've never seen before hanging around the streets, lingering outside the house?'

'This is a wealthy street. Cars drive up and down every day, looking inside our cars and houses, trying to get an

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insight into our lives. It would not have been anything unusual.' Sally's tone was much softer and sweeter when she spoke to Jake.

Jake turned to Darryl, satisfied with the answers she had given him.

'Thank you very much for your time, Ms. Thompson. Your responses have been valuable. Unfortunately, we will still need you to come down to the station with my colleagues here for further questioning,' Darryl said.

'Why?'

'Because—' Darryl began.

'That won't be necessary,' Jake said to Darryl, stepping in front of his manager.

'It's just a formality. It shouldn't be for too long.' Darryl pointed to the giant man in the background of the discussion. 'PC Dixon, please take this suspect to the nearest station. We will catch up with you both later.' The man entered the small circle and gestured Sally out of the house with a slight nudge on her back.

Darryl tapped Jake on the shoulder. 'A word.'

Regretting his actions already, Jake followed Darryl through the kitchen and into a door at the back. It led into a utilities room. The smell of laundry and chemicals hung in the air. A load of laundry was still in the washing machine, churning away as the filter systems hummed in the background.

'What do you think you're doing?' Darryl asked. 'You know the protocol. She's our number one suspect. We have to detain everyone and anyone for questioning.'

'She's an elderly woman,' Jake said. 'There's no way she could have slaughtered three people in the space of a few minutes. Besides, their wounds were too forceful; she is nowhere near strong enough to stab someone in the back like that.' Jake pointed into the kitchen. 'Anyway, if she had done it she would still be covered in blood. There was no time for her to make the kill, call the police and clean herself in time. It's impossible.'

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'Nothing is impossible, Jake. Never forget that. I am in charge of this operation, and you will not undermine me in front of potential suspects and other officers. This isn't the first time you've done something like this.' Darryl poked Jake's chest, knocking him off balance. There was a look of pure frustration in his eyes.

Heading outside of the utility room, Darryl shouldered past him and returned to Ashley, Rebecca, and the forensic scientist who were stood in the house's entrance.

'What next, Guv?' Ashley asked.

'There are camera crews and media outlets standing outside. They've got cameras and microphones,' Rebecca added.

'It was only a matter of time,' Darryl said. 'OK. Rebecca – we're strapped for people at the moment, so I need you to stand guard and keep those animals outside. Haversham is in the public eye, so this complicates matters. Just stall them for as long as possible. Understood?'

Rebecca nodded, turned, and walked tentatively out of the house.

'I'll get back to my job,' the forensic scientist said.

'Yeah. Thanks, Kevin.'

Jake moved from behind Darryl to stand beside Ashley.

'What about us? What do you need us to do?'