

A black and white photograph of a dense forest. Sunlight filters through the canopy, creating a dappled pattern of light and shadow on the ground and tree trunks. The trees are tall and slender, with their branches reaching upwards. The overall mood is serene and somewhat mysterious.

DAVID E BALAAM

NO ONE IS SACROSANCT

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by
David E Balaam

Other titles by the same author;

Columbus Day

The Letter
Nothing is Sacrosanct

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'I Hear Those Voices That Will Not Be Drowned'

Benjamin Britten

PART ONE

Chapter 1

Deep within us, there is a dormant, dark, embryo. An embryo containing another us - another *you*. Mostly, due to good parenting, a stoic education, peer assertiveness, and of course, in part for some, religious guilt, these dormant seeds never surface - and we lead good, normal healthy lives - that is, most of us do.

Ordinary people leading ordinary lives; neighbors, work colleagues, relatives. Also public figures; entertainers, politicians, clergymen, businessmen - all going about their lives, day in, day out. We pay them no heed. They pay us no heed. Invisible, yet recognizable. So what is it that changes a person's inner soul - releases the dark-matter? Makes them want to destroy life - a young life, without remorse, without shame or understanding for the wider grief they inflict - what makes them a sex predator - a paedophile.

Between 1969 and 1999 there was a man who took it upon himself to hand out retribution to those individuals who had escaped justice for heinous acts of abuse, rape, and even murder. The condemned men in question were 'low life', with little self-esteem, unemployed or in low-paid employment, usually centered around, or in close proximity to children. One of them, however, was in a different level of employment and trust - he was a Priest. Father Peter Dunfold was spared the indignity of his pursuer's usual reckoning - hanging by a rope and deprived of his genitalia - as he was arrested and sent to trial, receiving a life sentence based on video evidence. During the investigation in the mid-1990s, it was thought Dunfold and others were part of a wider circle of child abusers, but no other names were revealed by Dunfold during his interrogation. The only important evidence was a coded notebook found at Dunfold's house and sent to the investigating officer, DI

Christine Ling. The 'evidence' mysteriously disappeared when Chief Superintendent James Jarvis claimed he knew someone who could decipher it. The one entry in the notebook DI Ling remembered before it disappeared was *'Seek vital demon'*. The only two people outside the case to know this, was a crossword compiler, Graham King, who was asked to decipher it, and Mandy Silver, to whom he eventually gave the answer. Both have since died - he from a heart attack, and she in a hit and run car incident.

Chapter 2

2002

The small 16th century stone chapel in the Gloucestershire village of Pennsylvania was unusually quiet for a funeral. Just two elderly women mourners sat close together holding hands - heads bowed in respect. The organist was playing something by Mozart, not that Barbara would know the name of it, but she thought it very appropriate, him being from Austria as well.

She had tried to contact Isabel and Charlie but they were out of the country on a photo assignment - well, Isabel was, Charlie was probably along for the ride. Rosa wiped away another tear and rested her head on Barbara's shoulder. What will their lives be like now, with him gone, she thought. In truth, the two women had been without *him* for two years since his sudden departure to France, where he had found a new family - his son, with wife, and grandchildren. Marcus had requested to be cremated, quietly, without fuss, but Barbara and Rosa, against his wishes, had arranged a burial in the grounds of this small remote sanctuary. The women had talked at length about going against his wishes, but they could not live with the thought of him being burned - they wanted a grave - somewhere they could visit occasionally and reflect in quiet contemplation their past lives together.

Marcus's son, Henri, with his wife, had said their goodbyes in France where he had died and decided not to travel to England for the funeral. He had only known his father for a couple of years and was still confused about his relationship with his mother, Simone, who had died ten years previous of a broken heart.

The priest had finished the funeral rites and the pallbearers carried the coffin out into the bright sunshine where

they passed one other mourner, dressed soberly in black, head bowed and motionless. Barbara and Rosa followed the coffin to the burial plot unaware of the stranger who was now observing them from the shadows of the chapel entrance.

Standing over the sunken coffin Barbara and Rosa each dropped a red rose, taken from the cottage rose garden, on to the polished wood sarcophagus and wiped away another tear. "Goodbye, my love. Sleep in Peace. We will never forget." Barbara turned towards the chapel entrance.

"Did you see someone there, Rosa?"

"No," Rosa whispered. Barbara dismissed the thought immediately, but the stranger had left, having seemingly paid their respects and witnessing the passing of an old friend.

Chapter 3

2002

Chief Superintendent James Jarvis should have retired five years previously, but he was driven by greed, power and ambition. Few, if any of his subordinates could tolerate him, so when his death was announced a collective sigh of relief was apparent to even the casual observer. During the days following his death, two of the CID team at Bell Street were assigned to collect Jarvis's belongings and personal effects from his office and box them up and deliver them to his wife. "I'll drop these into Mrs Jarvis, Mike. It's on my way home."

. . .

2004

The news of Mandy Silver's death was a particular blow to Christine Ling. They had been friends for many years and it was Mandy who had, in a way, helped Christine to acclimatise to the metropolis which was Newcastle.

When Christine moved south to Slough and been promoted to DCI, they had vowed to meet at least once a year, no matter what, but that promise has now been annulled by her tragic and untimely death.

St Matthew's is a typical 1950's brick-built church which lacked history. The walls were white and clean, and Christine felt the atmosphere too sterile for her liking. Although she was raised a Christian she did not have any religious convictions of her own. She was also a little surprised to find that Mandy was to have a church funeral, as she knew very well that Mandy was not one to seek spiritual assistance, unless it was in a glass. It transpired that her parents had insisted on the local church, despite their daughter's lapse of faith. It was probably a good decision, as over a hundred

mourners filled the church pews – friends and family, work colleagues, old school friends and people she had helped over the years as a reporter.

A local hotel had been hired for the wake, and Christine was keen to mix and mingle with Mandy's colleagues to see if anything was worrying them about Mandy's *accident*. Holding a glass of white wine she slowly mingled with the subdued mourners, nodding politely here and there, until she spied a small group who seemed more jovial than others. Christine stopped and introduced herself.

"Hello, I'm Christine Ling. What was your connection with Mandy?" She asked politely. The taller and senior of the group nodded and offered his hand.

"I'm Lionel Lancaster, editor of the weekly Guardian. We were just recalling some silly antidotes about Mandy." Lionel was over six feet tall and Christine suspected he was a jovial and congenial man at any other time, and from what she remembered Mandy telling her, a great boss.

"That's what should happen at funerals; remembering the good times about a person," Christine said, looking at each of the others in turn.

"Sorry," Lionel said. Let me introduce you." And he promptly reeled off everyone's names. "This is even sadder for most of us. It's the second funeral we have been to this year, and its only May."

"I'm sorry," Christine said, somewhat surprised. "Was it for a work colleague?"

"Yes," Lionel answered gravely. "Not sure if you knew him . . . Graham King, our crossword wizard." Christine thought deeply. "Yes, of course. I'm so sorry, was he ill?"

"Heart attack, apparently," Lionel replied.

"Why apparently? Was he *not* ill? Christine inquired.

“Fitter than anyone I know. Did the Marathon every year. Cycled to work every day, regardless of the weather. Never had a day off sick in all the time I knew him, then suddenly, wham, he keels over.”

“It's not unheard of,” Christine ventured.

“True, but now this sad event with Mandy; it hit us all very hard. By the way, is there any news on the driver – did they get anywhere in finding the bastard?” He asked bitterly.

“I am sorry, Lionel, it's not my province any more, but I will look into it if I can. Can I come to the office before I leave tomorrow to talk some more?”

Lionel beamed. “It will be a pleasure to see you again. Anytime, but around lunchtime is always good.”

Christine excused herself and searched out Mr and Mrs Silver to say goodbye and pass on her sympathies, when she saw someone standing in the doorway, looking in her direction. At least she assumed he was looking at her.

Seeing Mr Silver not far from where the man was standing, she walked slowly over to him. “Mr Silver, I’m Christine Ling. I am so sorry . . .” but was interrupted by Mrs Silver who had joined them. “We know who you are. What we what to know is what are the police doing about catching the drunk driver that killed my darling Mandy . . .” and wept uncontrollably on her husband's shoulder.

“I’m sorry Christine. Its been very hard for her, for us both. Thank you for coming.” Mr Silver said, and walked slowly away with his wife clinging to his shoulder. Christine sneaked a casual glance to where the man had been standing, but he was not there. Looking around the room she could not see him anywhere. Letting her curiosity take the better of her, she left the room and looked around the reception area and even the carpark on her way out, but

she saw no one. Accepting she was being slightly paranoid, she took a taxi back to her city centre hotel.

The lights of the city were too bright so she closed the curtains; darkness was more conducive to her mood. She slipped off her coat letting it fall and fell backwards onto the bed. She lay staring at the white ceiling, her memory playing movies of the fun times she and Mandy had had over the years - ice skating at Whitley Bay Ice Rink - Mandy telling her off for being late, again, at the wine bar - feeding the penguins at the zoo - their last Easter weekend away at Edinburgh - getting tipsy at a friend's wedding and having to leave early because they could not stop laughing . . . Christine turned over and buried her head in the pillow, and let everything she had been bottling up come out. Sleep eventually came to her in the early hours of the morning, but she was in no hurry to wake up.

Loud knocking on the bedroom door eventually roused her. It was the maid, who she sent away, and ordered breakfast in her room. Having showered and devoured some tea and toast she plugged in her mobile, which had been left on all night so the battery was now flat. Checking it, she had three missed calls from Clive, her husband. "Hi, love. Sorry, but I was clean exhausted by the time I got back from the wake. How are the girls.?"

"They are fine and missing you, as am I." Neither spoke for a few moments. "I know funerals are shitty, love, especially when it's a friend . . ."

"But that's the strange part, Clive. It was like I was a stranger among so many people. I considered myself her best friend, but no one knew me and I knew no one. How could that be?"

"Hey, don't start reading into something that's not there. Remember you're retired now, and we need you."

"I know, but several people, including Mr and Mrs Silver, asked me about the hit and run driver, and if any progress had been made in finding him, so I thought I would look by the office before I catch the flight home, just to put their mind at rest." Christine could hear him smiling.

"Considering you know what I do for a living, you could have made up a better excuse, but hey, it's good. You may be able to give them some closure."

They finished with kisses for him and the girls. She had never been away from them before, and she was feeling the strain. She packed what little she had brought with her and checked out of the hotel. "Someone left a message for you, madam." The receptionist said, handing her an envelope.

Christine opened it thinking it was maybe from the Guardian newspaper cancelling their meeting, or from Mr Silver about his wife's outburst, but Christine stared at the typed note and read it twice;

Mandy knew the answer

She told an old friend by the sea. MH

"Are you OK, miss?" The receptionist asked, seeing Christine was about to faint.

"It can't be him . . . it can't be . . . he's dead."

Chapter 4

Lionel Lancaster poured Christine a large brandy. "Here my girl, get that down you. You look like you have had a nasty shock."

Christine could barely remember getting a taxi to the Guardian's offices and making her way up to the executive suite where Lionel Lancaster met her. His cheery greeting turned to one of concern as soon as he saw her. He sat her on the black leather sofa and poured her a drink. Christine took a sip, then another. "I don't usually drink this early, but thank you, I needed that."

Lionel sat opposite her but said nothing. He knew she would talk to him eventually. He suddenly rose and picked up a photo from his desk. "This is Mandy at her book launch. She said you deserved credit as well but you wouldn't take it for some reason."

Christine took the framed photo and smiled at her friend holding up a copy of *The Rope Killer*.

"I couldn't. Professional detachment." She said wearily, handing back the photograph.

"Lionel . . . I was sent a note at my hotel this morning which caught me unawares, to say the least." She sipped at the brandy. Lionel said nothing. "Did Mandy leave any notes about the Rope Killer here?"

"Yes, maybe. She did all her research on her office laptop, but she was not good at keeping written references. Something we often argued over."

Christine smiled. "I can imagine who won that argument."

Lionel nodded in agreement. "So, what is it you are looking for that the police don't know about?"

Christine opened her handbag and passed the envelope to Lionel. She knew fingerprinting it would be of no use, especially if it *was* Marcus Hartmann. Lionel read it, folded it neatly and handed it back. "If he died then you have an imposter. If he did not die, then you have a murderer still at large."

Christine had just heard aloud the very thoughts she dared not utter herself. Lionel could see she was hesitating. Wondering if she could trust him. "Christine. Anything you say in this room, I promise you, will remain confidential until you tell me otherwise. I do have a paper to run after all. What are you thinking?"

Christine stood and stretched. She paced the large office, looking for distractions, but although the room was filled with many objects and antiques, she could only focus on the obvious. "During the investigation, Mandy asked Graham King to try to decipher an anagram we found in a notebook belonging to Peter Dunfold. He said he could not make anything from it, and I had forgotten all about it. But what if he did solve it, and told Mandy." Lionel's eyes widened.

"I did not know that, Christine. There was no mention of it in the book."

"No, she couldn't use it. Even at the trial, we couldn't produce the notebook as Superintendent Jarvis had taken it."

"But if he did somehow find an answer and told Mandy, she also told someone else. Who is this friend by the sea?"

"That is the worrying aspect. He is my old boss DCI Crane. He had a stroke and is in a nursing home near Scarbrough. But if she *did* tell him, why didn't she tell me?"

"To protect you, I guess. But from what, or whom?" Lionel offered. "How long are you in the UK for? I will be

happy to help check anything out if you want me to.”

“That’s very kind of you, Lionel.” Christine said, reaching for her coat and handbag, “but I need to visit Bell Street and speak to some colleagues first. I promise to keep you updated with any developments, and thank you for the brandy, it helped a lot. In fact, coming here has helped a lot.” They shook hands and Lionel escorted her out of the building into a waiting taxi. “Bell Street Police station, please.”

Christine cleared security and was escorted to the fourth floor, her old office. “DCI Dallimore. It’s a pleasure to meet you, ma’am. We can talk in my office.” Christine was used to summing up people. He certainly looked the part; Thirtysomething, thick light brown hair neatly parted on the left, smartly dressed, sensible tie with Windsor knot, pale cream shirt, and showing just enough beard growth not to be taken as un-shaved. *Very ‘noughties’*.

“I imagine this was your office once,” Dallimore said, making small talk.

“Yes, it was, but I see nothing much has changed, except the staff,” Christine said, turning half round to scan the outer office for familiar faces.

“Is DS Flynn still here?”

“Yes, he is. He should be back soon.” Dallimore said, wanting to get on with the meeting, and wondering why an ex DCI was here. There's nothing for her here after all. “So, how can I help you, Christine?”

“Mandy Silver and Graham King were friends of mine and both were involved in the Rope Killer case. I find it more than a coincidence they have both died within a few months of each other, under suspicious circumstances, inspector.”

“Suspicious? In what way? Ms Silver, I believe, was a hit and run. Most unfortunate, but hardly suspicious, and Mr King I know nothing of his circumstances. Please enlighten me.”

At least Christine had his attention. It just remains to be seen how intuitive he is. “One unsolved aspect of the Rope Killer case . . .”

“Apart from Hartmann not being arrested, you mean.” Dallimore shot in.

Christine kept her cool. “. . . was the missing black notebook, and its contents. Before it disappeared, via Chief Superintendent Jarvis, I asked Ms Silver to see if Mr King could identify an anagram, the only one I managed to remember. Mr King was the Guardian’s crossword compiler. Unfortunately, he could not.”

“And . . .” Dallimore asked knowing there must be more.

She wasn't sure why, but she decided not to mention the note signed MH. Not yet, at least. “What if he *did* finally solve it and told Mandy . . . Ms Silver. His editor told me he had never taken a day off work and was the fittest man he knew, but died of a heart attack.”

Martin Dallimore leaned back in his chair, bemused, and slightly concerned a retired DCI wanted him to investigate a dead-end case.

“You want me to look at these deaths. See if there is anything suspicious?” Christine nodded silently. “It would give Mandy’s parents some closure as well.”

Dallimore smiled and nodded. “I will keep this just between us for now. How can I reach you?”

“Something else, please Martin. Do you have the address of where DCI Crane is? I would love to see him before I return home, for old time sake.”