



VINTAGE

**THE LONG SUIT**  
PHILIP DAVISON

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## About the Book

On the second green of a Long Island golf-course there are three golf balls and a corpse with a bullet-hole in his forehead. The call goes out for Harry Fielding to come in from the cold. With a new suit and a new partner, Harry is back where he least wants to be: playing the deadly games of MI5. Always a triangular peg in a square hole, Harry has never felt easy with the protocol, the procedure and the need-to-know principles of the British secret service. And it doesn't help that his apprentice, Johnny Weeks, is a troublemaker. Going back to the work he hates but does so well, all Harry really wants is to rekindle his relationships with his ailing, amnesiac father and his ex-wife - who appears to be sleeping with his boss. Will this be his last chance: the fresh start that will restore moral equilibrium to a crooked man who wants to go straight?

## About the Author

Philip Davison was born in 1957 in Dublin, where he now lives. He has written five previous novels - *The Book-Thief's Heartbeat*, *Twist and Shout*, *The Illustrator*, *The Crooked Man* and *McKenzie's Friend*. He has also written television dramas. His play, *The Invisible Mending Company*, was performed on the Abbey Theatre's Peacock stage.

The television dramatisation of *The Crooked Man*, the first of Philip Davison's Harry Fielding novels, will be screened in spring 2003.

*by the same author*

THE BOOK-THIEF'S HEARTBEAT  
TWIST AND SHOUT  
THE ILLUSTRATOR  
THE CROOKED MAN  
McKENZIE'S FRIEND

For Alison  
with her light

# **THE LONG SUIT**

Philip Davison



Jonathan Cape  
London



Grateful thanks to my editor, Robin Robertson;  
also to Jonathan Sissons and Tristan Jones

What of the night?

The watchman said, The morning cometh,  
and also the night.

ISAIAH, 21:11-12

**LONG SUIT** A thing at which one excels.

*The Concise Oxford Dictionary*

## CHAPTER 1

I had my own troubles, some of which I had addressed. When they lifted me my plan had been to go to ground, let time pass and be vigilant. Like a Druid, I had come to count nights instead of days.

I watched Clements talking to somebody at the end of the corridor. He was loud, but I couldn't make out the words. The lower jaw seemed to have just the one spring action. He was like a thirsty dog drinking from a water pistol.

I knew that he was fully aware of my presence. When he came my way it was clear he was going to pass and ignore me, so I stood up to present myself. He was a bad judge of human movement - that was another of his animal traits. He lurched past with exaggerated politeness.

Another new start, and against my better judgement. A new start in the same murky pool from which I thought I had finally escaped. I knew from the outset that something was not right. I had seen this clumsy civil servant act before. All my fears are old fears.

When Clements entered an office further down the corridor and left the door open I knew that my name had not been struck off the unwritten list of bob-a-job men, known among these people as understrappers. Not that you are ever formally given the title. Nor are you aware that you are going to be made an understrapper. You are altogether more ambitious.

To get you started some snivelling little minion meets you in some dive at an inconvenient time, gives you a verbal brief and a few quid up front. He'll tell you that usually the payment for the first job comes in the form of bank notes torn in half - you get the second half when the job is done. But he likes you, he tells you. He thinks you can be trusted, so he gives you a proper advance.

Another myth he'll sell you is that your breaking into a solicitor's office or your money-laundering activities or your unofficial surveillance work is special rather than routine, and that a good understrapper lives like the animals that occupy the tree canopy and rarely walk the earth.

As a rule, you don't get invited to walk down these corridors. I looked at the open door. They must have something special planned for me, I thought.

I waited to be called. There was no immediate summons. This was one of two offices. Clements had another in Whitehall.

There might be some hand-wringing, I thought, behaving like a monk with his mistress. That would be part of the act. What unsavoury thing would he drag out into the light?

Eventually, a thin, handsome man by the name of Jack Bradley stuck his head around the door frame. He was wearing a tailored suit which had been made for him a long time ago, and a pair of shoes that had been stitched by a gorilla. 'Right,' he said. He gave me a round of his novelty cough, which was a rasp spliced to an owl hoot. He had arranged the meeting.

It was interesting that the cough was not a polite interruption, but came after he had spoken. It was a conspicuous assertion of a hard-pressed professional's busy schedule.

I didn't like his tone, the forced freshness. There are Bradley's kind in most organisations. Fiercely ambitious people stuck in middle management. They compete at all levels. They compete for parking spaces.

Let me make it absolutely clear - I didn't like Bradley, and there were other reasons.

I rose to my feet and followed Bradley through the open door. There were hard chairs on the near side of the desk, and one easy chair against the wall. Clements was sitting on a hard chair behind the desk that wasn't part of the set. He was very proud of his self-assembly reproduction

Bodleian chair. It was made of English elm, had a broad, contoured seat and a cage back. He had bought the kit in Oxford and assembled it in his garage in Richmond. Bradley had already briefed me on the importance of the chair and the vanity it had come to represent. It was one of those casual intimacies that came your way in the firm from time to time. The kind of gossip those who prided themselves on being realists liked to trade.

'I see you like this chair,' Clements said.

It was a leading remark. No, I didn't like it, but nor did I dislike it.

'I put it together myself.'

I got a little charge of satisfaction from having intelligence about the man's chair, but quickly decided that Clements probably did this sort of thing all the time; that is to say, he knew Bradley told everybody about the chair. I had to play along.

'You did? That must give you genuine satisfaction.'

'It does,' he said, going into a slouch. He was on to me immediately. A little chill crept into his tone.

'Four hundred and ninety-five quid, it cost,' Bradley had told me. He didn't know whether or not that included the glue.

'You're a practical chap, I hear.'

'No good with the D.I.Y., but otherwise . . .'

To be fair to him, it wasn't a bad effort. The chair was probably quite comfortable to sit in and would last. I just didn't want to get cozy with Clements, or Bradley for that matter.

Clements turned away to gaze out of the window into the fog, affecting a sudden lack of interest. Bradley stood with a hunch that made me think the coat-hanger was still in his jacket.

It had been nice moving through the city in the fog. I had imagined aeroplanes taxiing along the streets. People getting to places they had to be.

Clements was being inscrutable. There was a popular notion in the firm that if you stayed around long enough you'd go simple, but, given the nature of the job, who would be able to identify the simpletons? Age wasn't always a reliable measure.

Bradley indicated that I should sit. He was going to stand. He was going to force the pace.

Upper management like his sort. They can rely on their ruthlessness. They know that these people will not allow professional or personal relationships to impede their work. They get frustrated with lack of promotion, but simply try harder. Occasionally, they explode and somebody has to go after them with a net. Ask Clements about the Bradleys of this world and he will tell you they are created, not born, and therefore are prone to stalling.

'We know all about you, Harry,' Bradley said. His innocent act was different from that of Clements. It was laced with a variable knowingness that purportedly stretched back into the mists of time.

'You must be very tired from doing your homework, Mr Bradley,' I replied. Clements turned from the window with a grimace fixed on his face. I thought he was going to say something about the fog.

'We know what you've been up to,' he said, looking to Bradley. 'Isn't that what you mean, Jack?' If I had dinner in Mr Clements's house I would get an apple for dessert.

Bradley knew he didn't need to reply directly. 'I told my Chaps not to bother you until you were finished with what you were at. They didn't bother you, did they?' Chaps are vicious public school twits with pensionable jobs. The security mob. One of these monkeys had used Bradley's phrase: he had told me that he knew all about me.

I looked about the room. There was a clutter of heavy furniture surrounding the hard chairs. It was an animal den full of obstacles that doubled as hides and perches.

If these men didn't get what they wanted they would soon be leaping from one lump to another, all the while carrying on with the same corporate coyness. My tongue was thick. My hands were cold. I didn't belong here. None of us belonged. That was the way it worked.

Misfits together. None of us belonging.

'We know about the killing,' Clements said.

'Call a policeman.' I said.

'You disappear without telling us and then you do this.'

'Not good on procedure?' Bradley chimed in.

'Harry, you can't be doing this sort of thing,' said Clements mildly. 'Bad news. Bad for everybody.'

'Sorry.'

I gave him the set jaw. The fixed gaze. I was trying to remember every detail when I should have been concentrating solely on what was important.

'You had good reason, I'm sure,' continued Clements, 'but was it protecting life and limb, we ask? We're a bit hazy on that one.'

Bradley leaned over towards me. 'Protecting the innocent,' he echoed, with an encouraging nod of his head. 'That's what I've been telling Mr Clements. Harry's a good man.'

Clements wet his lips and gave Bradley an indulgent look. I could tell Clements was happy sending memos reprimanding the dead. 'No doubt,' he said.

'We just might have something for you,' Bradley continued.

'I don't want any trouble,' I said.

'Of course you don't, Harry,' Clements boomed merrily. 'You're a killer.'

'It was me who told Mr Clements you're a killer,' Bradley added helpfully.

They were both still managing to sound coy. My head began to fill with black mud. Now I had to play games. I



had to pretend this utterance was a compliment and, accordingly, I responded with a lolling of my head.

I was told that there was a situation developing. That was the description. It doesn't get more vague than that.

I could have run earlier but I hadn't. There must come a moment when you say no to this. Had it just passed? Was it here and now?

There was more sinister flattery. More lolling of the head. Had they told me a lot of sky was needed to build an airport I would have made the same lolling motions.

I should have spoken up. I should have told them that my day had been run through with small reversals. A recurrent thought telegraphed that if I could just speak in the right key they would accept that I was the wrong man for the job. I would settle for something more menial. I wanted to be an understrapper again.

I left the building and turned my face to the fresh breeze that was coming up the river. I felt their eyes on my back. That was normal, of course. How could it be any other way?

As I began to walk I was conscious of shading my misgivings from those penetrating eyes. They'd had enough information from me.

When you're an understrapper they don't want to know, but if they take you into the fold it's another story. They ask about your partner, your family, your previous relationships, your friends. The security mob dig and don't tell, so you don't know what they have when you're being interviewed by Personnel. They don't stop prying; they don't stop digging. That's what they would have you believe.

Then, they suddenly stop asking questions, and that's quite effective.

Vetting is never finished - that's what they have you thinking. Never finished until everything is right in the head, and everything is never right in the head.

'Bring the shoebox,' Personnel tell you. They like a friendly rummage, in case one day you dirty your bib or go to the bad.

Their sudden silence is to tell you that they are ever vigilant, and to make it clear they think it's entirely credible that you will turn out to be 'a disappointment' - the technical term applied in such cases.

## CHAPTER 2

I had a mental picture of Cecil, my old man - the elderly widower talking to himself alone in his house, narrating his life in short bursts as he made his way from the kitchen to his bedroom. I tried to keep that picture in mind as I drove to his house in Muswell Hill. There were changes I was making in his life as well as my own, and these were the result of some hard thinking. He had become frail - it seemed to me quite suddenly, though it couldn't have been so. He had taken a heavy fall from which he had recovered after a long spell with the help of Rita, an undeclared companion who was both kind and entirely unreliable. In the absence of Rita he and I had talked and together had made a practical decision.

I found him sitting at the kitchen table wearing his heavy coat and his hat. He was staring at a bowl of oranges in front of him. He scarcely glanced up at me when I entered. He was sitting upright, not slouching. He had his spine snug against the back of the hard chair. He was trying to be kind to his skeleton. To a stranger's eyes it would have appeared that his spirit had collapsed - had caved in. I knew this was not so. Behind his sad gaze he was still alert to any sudden possibility.

He had prepared himself for a long journey; an impossible journey forced upon him because, like everyone else, he had been unable to live a life without mistakes.

I told him he was looking well. He told me he was thirsty.

'Have one of those,' I said, pointing to the oranges.

He looked at me curiously.

'Or would you prefer a glass of water? I'll get you a glass of water.'

He reached out and picked up an orange and bit into it whole. The juice squirted from the corners of his mouth,

dribbled down his chin, dropped on to the table.

‘Have one yourself,’ he said.

I didn’t know whether I wanted to laugh or cry.

I patted him on the shoulder. ‘We could go to the pub, if you want.’

‘Have we time?’ he asked.

‘Yes. We’ve time.’

‘You could do with a drink,’ he said, and took another lunging bite.

We must have been charged by the fresh, sweet smell of orange because quite suddenly the next step was clear to us both.

He rose to his feet as quickly as he could manage. He didn’t want assistance.

I can’t speak of my feelings as I left him in the home. I can only say that he made it as easy as he could for me.

I had written the number for my mobile phone on an index card and given it to him. I had made sure that he understood he could call me any time, no matter where I was. I made it a joke – I lied and told him that I had given my number to Aunt Kate; that she had asked how she might contact me when she never knew where I was.

I caught a glimpse of my index card when he pulled out the contents of his pockets in his new room. I saw that the number, with ‘Harry’s mobile’ written in my hand, had been supplemented. He had scrawled our surname under my given name.

Why had he done this, I wondered? There was no other Harry in his life. Then I realised he had added the surname because he thought some stranger might find him in a heap somewhere and go through his pockets. They would want a surname if they were to make a call.

‘Come on,’ he said, ‘don’t be hanging around here. You have work to do. Earn some money, for a change.’

He was forcing a smile.

I rang his sister-in-law, my promiscuous aunt Kate, in Dublin. I wanted to show him that the lines of communication were indeed open.

Ringling her, however, didn't please him. He started to pace up and down, allowing himself the shortest of tethers.

'Kate,' I said, 'it's Harry.'

'Harry. Have you found a woman? I have one for you.'

'Never mind that now.'

'But I do. I worry. It's not right. It's not healthy.'

'I'm on the case.'

'You're still with your friend's wife. Well, I suppose that's something.'

'We'll talk about me later. I'm here with Cecil.'

'Don't tell me he wants to talk to me, because I know you'd be lying, son. Put him on.'

I handed the phone to my father. Aunt Kate spoke loudly. I could hear what she was saying.

'Hello?' my father barked. There was no disputing that he was putting a question.

'Hello, Cecil. How are you, dear?'

'What's that supposed to mean?'

'You're keeping well?'

'Are you over here or over there?'

'I'm in Dublin. But I think I should come and visit.'

'Christ. You bloody Quakers.'

'Is it a nice place or is it a dump?'

'It's a dump.'

'Cecil . . .' I protested, but he waved me down.

'I'll have to visit.'

'It won't do either of us any good.'

'Never mind, dear. Never mind.'

'I don't need a visit, Kate. I don't need you poking your nose in.'

I could see he was touched by her concern.

'Did you hear me?' he asked. He didn't know which was his best ear for a mobile phone. He switched several times.

'I did, Cecil. What would you like me to bring? I've just had a win.'

'Harry,' he said to me, 'you talk to her. You tell her.'

What was I to tell her? That he had spent too much time on his own, and that he was now in decline? That he had been lost all these years without his wife? That Kate's voice was too much like her sister's for it not to upset him? That he had forgotten others judged him by his behaviour, not by his unshared thoughts?

She knew all of this.

'No,' I said. I didn't take the phone from him, though he held it at arm's length in my direction. He wanted to hang up but didn't know how.

'Goodbye,' he called into the apparatus at the end of his extended arm. 'I'm going now.' He put it to his ear again and repeated that he was going. 'I've things to do.'

'I'll be over and you can show me everything is all right,' Kate said.

'I'm perfectly all right on my own. Don't bother me. Don't upset yourself.'

'A gansey and a bottle of Jameson. How does that sound?'

'Goodbye.'

'Goodbye, dear. I'll be talking to Harold. He said he'd meet me at the airport. He'll take me straight there.'

'Christ,' he said, glaring at me with firewater eyes. He handed me the phone. This time he pressed it into my hand. 'Tell her to stay where she is,' he barked, 'then turn her off.'

He marched over to the door, where he waited impatiently for me to finish.

'A big win, was it?' I asked Kate.

'It was, son.'

'I'll ring you again soon,' I told her.

'I've seen a lovely gansey,' she said. 'It's one with buttons down the shoulder.'

‘Most of us cave in when we get old,’ Cecil advised me when the telephone conversation was finally terminated. ‘Your aunt Kate will explode. They’ll be scraping bits of her off the walls. They’ll be trying to piece her back together – as they do with crashed aeroplanes. I’ll be able to tell them what they want to know. I’ll be able to tell them why your aunt Kate burst. But they won’t listen. And if they *do* listen, they won’t believe me. When they have her bits in the plastic bag and they’re none the wiser, I’ll tell them she was burning the wrong fuel entirely. Too many fancy men. Too rich a mixture.’

Cecil saw me to the front door of the home, and I went to work with the old man’s blessing.

There was the broader picture to take in. This was how the scenario was described to me. I’ve added a little colour to compensate for Bradley’s dryness and for his overzealous application of the need-to-know principle. Bradley and his kind are afraid of being caught out. They want you to believe that their imaginations function only when speculating on margins and degrees. This gives them an air of wisdom. A wisdom that says I should get out more and see my friends, but then who will mind the shop? Who will be responsible?

Conservatism laced with false modesty and a prickly reserve. His sort are happier turning down an opportunity than taking a chance. So he would have you believe.

I was to learn otherwise.

It is difficult to counter that brand of wisdom. Difficult to counsel that it is worth taking a chance, because, for the most part, their caution is justified. Fundamentally, the Service is about containment.

Then, of course, when the Bradleys of this world do sanction action, everybody jumps. Everybody says a wise man has spoken and they set about their task.

Dealing with Bradley put you permanently on a slow, dangerous bend. He was not a field man, but he was a true professional. He knew the field and was a master of manipulation. When it suited him he could speak in one continuous sentence and all the words would be connected in such a way that they could be reeled back and repeated and still be the perfect mask through which, apparently, a divine perspective has been delivered.

That was my reading of Bradley's personality at that time.

'Harry,' he said as we drove in his car on that first day of work, 'I'm going to tell you a shocking story.'

His story took us to a golf course about twenty miles out of New York City. I start the picture with Captain Delaney of the New York City Police Department -

Captain Delaney saw the man in the soiled suit trying to throw up in the middle of the road ahead. Saw him sway madly and perform some dry retching but manage to stay rooted to the one spot. The captain maintained a steady speed. He was determined to be on the first tee by six a.m.

It was Saturday. He had had a clear run from his house in New Jersey through the Lincoln Tunnel, across midtown Manhattan, and over the Queensboro Bridge, and he wasn't about to stop for this sad klutz.

At that hour of the morning there was room to swing wide. He put on his indicator to give ample warning of his intention. If the drunk was going to lurch he would lurch towards the sidewalk. That was the reasonable assumption, but by no means a certainty.

The captain put on a spurt. If this guy was looking to get run over he wanted to wrong-foot him. There was no way he was stopping the car. Early morning was the only time that he and the others could get in a clean round of golf. He had the best part of twenty miles to drive and he was running a little late because his car wouldn't start. This



was his wife's car he was driving. It was Japanese. He didn't like Japanese cars. He didn't like the way they handled. He didn't think it was right buying an import. It was bad for American auto-workers. He had tried to dissuade her from buying it but she had insisted it was exactly what she needed, and now he was forced to drive it to the golf club. This guy in the road had picked the wrong driver to make a drama with if that was his game.

Having given up on his own car the captain had been delayed a further ten minutes persuading his bleary-eyed wife that she could do without her car until late morning.

Usually he left the house before he was awake. His own car could get to the golf course by itself if there wasn't some idiot standing in the middle of the road. This kind of behaviour disgusted him. Sad people shouldn't be sad in the middle of the highway.

He was going to wind down the window and show his contempt by throwing the contents of his wife's ashtray in the guy's face, but then something in the way the man was shifting his weight on his hips made the captain change his mind and focus entirely on the main event. The drunk seemed to be making ready to jump right in his path.

At the last moment there was a little screech of tyres as the captain put his foot down on the gas and sped past on the inside.

The drunk made a wailing sound as the captain passed by in an instant. Only when the car was well clear did this guy cross his ankles and trip over himself and fall on his face. The captain saw him hit the ground in his rear-view mirror and hoped that it hurt.

The car climbed over a rise and he momentarily caught sight of the Manhattan skyline. This Japanese auto mirror was altogether too small, he decided. The city was partially shrouded in mist. The early morning sun blasted what was visible and Captain Delaney sighed with satisfaction. There was a screech of rubber from the car behind, but he made a