



**NICK
OLDHAM**

A Henry Christie Novel

**JUDGEMENT
CALL**

"An action-filled, high-octane plot with plenty of crazy twists and turns"
Booklist on Fighting for the Dead

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JUDGEMENT CALL

A Detective Superintendent Henry Christie Novel

Nick Oldham



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Except where actual historical events and characters are being described for the storyline of this novel all situations in this publication are fictitious and any resemblance to living persons is purely coincidental.

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To my former partners in the pursuit of crime:
Dave Briggs (RIP), Ian Carney, Graham Street and Greg Plummer.

1982

‘Seriously, I don’t want much,’ Henry Christie mumbled to himself. ‘All I want is a job, one meas deployment ... anything’ll do ... sheep straying ... sheep-rustling ... sheep-shagging ... a murder even,’ he said hopefully. ‘Literally anything, please.’

He was at the wheel of the unmarked dark-blue Mark 1 Vauxhall Cavalier, one of the two crime cars that worked the Rossendale Valley, and he was alone, so no one heard his mutterings. His usual partner in pursuit of crime had reported in sick that morning – from over-indulgence, Henry knew – and twenty-three-year-old PC Henry Christie was out on solo patrol on the steep streets of the valley, one of Lancashire’s far-flung corners. And so far, over two hours into his shift, nothing of great interest had come his way. Unlike in Blackburn, that incredibly busy industrial town a few miles west where Henry had just had a short and bitter-sweet secondment as a CID aide, which was a place where every cop was run ragged from start of their shift to finish, whatever time of day. Here in the sleepy valley, by comparison, jobs were few and far between – or at least that’s how it seemed to Henry, who champed at the bit for something to get his teeth into.

And, to add insult to injury, he was back in uniform.

He’d been cruising the town centre and council estate streets of Rawtenstall and Haslingden covering the western half of the Rossendale Valley, the side he had been allocated to patrol that day with the call sign Hotel Romeo Seven – ‘HR7’. He’d come on duty at eight o’clock that morning and after having attended a couple of burglaries first thing, other than being roped into the fiasco that was the court run – escorting overnight and remand prisoners from the police station to Rossendale Magistrates’ Court – he’d had nothing. He’d been so bored that he’d randomly pulled two cars and issued the drivers with HORT1s – document ‘producers’ – requiring them to take their driving documents to a police station of their own choice within five days.

Both drivers had whinged and asked why they’d been stopped and the young PC had snarled ‘Because I can,’ a claim which in law was totally valid, though not really an excuse to stop/check people because of feeling mean. He had also stopped and checked a prolific valley criminal he spotted sauntering innocently along the main shopping street in Rawtenstall, got the man to empty his pockets and patted him down, but found nothing of interest. He did manage to wind the guy up a bit though, which was quite satisfying.

And now he found himself in the slipstream of a tatty flat-back Transit van, stacked with scrap household goods, driven by Lancashire rednecks, certain the only way he was going to uncover anything of interest that morning was by self-initiated work.

The van coughed out plumes of purple diesel exhaust as it dropped down a gear and the whole load on the back shifted dangerously.

Henry’s right forefinger slid into the key ring dangling just above the side window which was attached by a thin cable running underneath the roof lining to the ‘police-stop’ pop-up sign hinged face down along the back parcel shelf. A not very hi-tech contraption, requiring the driver to pull the key ring (which often, mysteriously, got stuck) and draw the stop sign upright, hook the key ring

around the protruding head of a screw that had been driven into the door stanchion, then flick the switch on the dashboard to, hopefully, illuminate the sign, which sometimes didn't work.

Henry pulled up the sign, looped the key ring around the screw head. His intention was to overtake the Transit van at an appropriate place, pull it and see what transpired. Vans and lorries carrying scrap were always worth a tug any time of night or day as theft of metal was still rife in the valley.

He waited for a break in the approaching traffic and eased the nose of the Cavalier out for a overtake ... at which moment the half-brick sized Burndept personal radio slung on a harness around his neck, tucked under the front of his tunic, came to life.

'Romeo Seven?' It was the communications room at Rawtenstall calling him up, using the abbreviated form of his call sign.

Henry eased off the gas, dropped back, and pressed the transmit button. 'Receiving.'

'You free to attend a job?'

He stifled a guffaw at the stupid question. 'Yes – go ahead.'

The house was on the largest council estate in Rawtenstall, within walking distance of the town centre. It wasn't the most notorious estate in the valley, though. In fact Henry thought most of the estates in Rossendale were pretty tame in comparison to the ones he had wistfully left behind on his short – and ultimately sour – secondment to the CID in Blackburn.

He found the address and pulled up outside. It was a well-constructed fifties semi-detached in a fairly pleasant setting on a hillside with great views across to the flat-topped hill that was Musber Tor, Rossendale's mini answer to Table Mountain. But the house had a kicked-down garden fence with the gate still standing uselessly, and a debris-strewn garden.

His mouth twisted sardonically.

He was four years into his police service and in that time had already visited numerous houses like this one, the stock in trade properties that cops regularly found themselves inside, or trying to enter. Henry was not fatigued by this because he was always curious as to what slice of humanity he might find behind the door.

He clambered out of the Cavalier and fitted his chequer-banded flat cap that somehow always seemed to tilt backwards on his head like a joke bus conductor's. He ensured his handcuffs were tucked into his waistband and that his trusty staff – which he'd hit only two people with so far, without much damage – was slotted down the specially sewn-in pocket running down the side of his right thigh, inside his uniform trousers.

So, fully kitted out and with one tug of the hem of his tunic, he walked up to the front door, which opened on his approach.

A young woman stood there, dressed in a baggy, low-cut T-shirt, equally loose-fitting shell-suit bottoms, huge fluffy slippers and nothing else. The usual fashion for young ladies of leisure on the estate. They often also sported black eyes – as did this lady. Hers was accompanied by a matching lip swollen like an inner tube sticking out of a split bicycle tyre.

'Sally Lee?' Henry asked, feeling a tremor of rage course through him at the sight of her injuries. Already he wanted to arrest the person responsible ... the *man* responsible.

She nodded and dropped her gaze, a bit shamefaced, Henry thought. She stepped aside, opened the door wider and flicked her fingers for Henry to enter the house. He did, removing his cap. She closed the door behind him then slid ahead and led him into the lounge, which was scattered with ball clothes, empty cups, overflowing ashtrays. There was a big-screen TV in the corner, a monstrosity of a thing, and a Betamax video-cassette player underneath it.

‘Sit down if you want.’

Henry moved aside a grey-hooded parka jacket and found space on a ragged armchair whilst Sally Lee sat on the settee amongst child’s clothing. It was only then that Henry spotted the actual baby lying camouflaged by the clothes, sleeping soundly, a dummy in its mouth. He couldn’t quite decide what sex it was, but it was very young, a matter of months at most. Henry’s eyes flickered to the woman’s face, assuming she was the mother – but not taking it for granted. Anything was possible on this estate.

‘You’ve been assaulted.’ He stated the obvious.

‘My boyfriend.’

‘And you want to make a complaint about it?’

Her eyes fell again. ‘Not just about him hitting me,’ she muttered.

‘What else?’

She swallowed. ‘He raped me, too.’ She eased her hand between two cushions in the settee and came out with a crumpled packet of cigarettes. She shuffled one out with a shaky hand, lit it with a throwaway lighter that she then inserted back into the pack.

‘Do you mind telling me what happened?’ Henry said softly. ‘Or if you prefer you can speak to a policewoman.’

‘You’ll do ... I don’t mind ... I’ve just had the kid – *his* kid – four months ago and you know what she said defiantly, ‘I don’t want sex. Don’t feel like it. It hurts. Just don’t want it ... but he does ... He just got angry with me, knocked seven bells out of me.’ She tilted her head so Henry could see what he’d already seen. Then her eyes did meet his. ‘And he raped me ... here, on the baby clothes ... in front of the kid, a kid he doesn’t give a monkey’s about, anyway.’

Henry nodded as she spoke.

‘You believe me, don’t you?’

‘Course I do,’ he said, puzzled by the question. He squinted. ‘Look, the best thing would be for you to come down to the nick so we can talk without any interruption. It’ll be better if there’s just you. Is there anyone who could look after the kiddie for you?’

‘Aaron? Uh, yeah, suppose so.’ She took a deep drag of the cigarette and exhaled. A cloud of smoke hung listlessly a few inches above the child’s sleeping face. Henry wondered if little Aaron would grow up psychologically damaged with the image of his mother’s rape permanently etched into his little brain, and with ravaged lungs from inhaling someone else’s smoke. The little guy’s future, he thought, was already bleak.

Henry thought he heard a noise at the back of the house. A click. A scrape. A creak. Maybe a soft footfall. He thought nothing of it.

‘Who is your boyfriend?’

‘Vladimir Kaminski ... you’ll have heard of him.’

He had. ‘Vlad the Impaler’ was his nickname. He was allegedly the cock of the town, a young man with a fearsome reputation as a very dirty fighter. No doubt he would have been christened the ‘Impaler’ anyway, but there was a certain truth to it. He had once impaled a lad’s hand onto an iron fence post. Henry had yet to come across him, but he knew it would only be a matter of time.

‘Real violent bastard, he is,’ Sally confirmed.

There was another creaking noise from the hallway, a definite sound of movement. This time Henry knew for certain there was someone else in the house. He went still, then turned his face slowly towards the closed living-room door. He saw a shadow move in the gap at floor level.

He glanced at Sally. The colour had drained from her already pale face, a look of fear in her eyes.

He placed a finger across his lips – *shhh* – and pointed to the door and mouthed, ‘Is that him?’

‘Think so,’ she mouthed back, nodding.

Henry stood up slowly, reaching his full height of six-two. He reached for the leather strap of his staff and looped it around his hand, ready to draw it if necessary.

Suddenly the door was booted open, clattering back on his hinges, crashing all the way to the wall.

Henry Christie was approaching his sporting prime. He was broad-shouldered, physically fit, sports fanatic. He played rugby for Lancashire Constabulary, swam for them too, played squash three times a week, seven-a-side football once. He lifted weights and ate like a horse that loved curries. He was pretty big and handy, his police lifestyle – rotten shifts, fast food, greasy pies, beer and little sleep – not yet having taken a toll on him, and he was proud of his physique.

However, the man who had just kicked open the door of Sally Lee’s living room, whilst about the same age as Henry, was wider, slightly smaller, but much stronger-looking – and he had a mean disposition that often resulted in violence, whereas Henry was quite mild-mannered and it took a lot to ignite him.

‘Vladimir Kaminski?’ Henry said unnecessarily.

‘Who wants to know?’ His beady eyes bore into Henry’s.

‘Me. My name is PC Christie,’ Henry said evenly, trying to work out how he was going to flatter this muscle man, because even before things had got going he knew it would come to a rough and tumble.

‘I don’ give a flying fuck who you is,’ Kaminski spat. His accent was an uncomfortable blend of East Europe and East Lancashire.

‘You’re under arrest on suspicion of rape and assault. You’re not obliged to say anything ...’ Henry began to recite the caution and took a step toward his prisoner to be.

‘You come near me, I kill you,’ he warned Henry and pulled his shirt sleeve right up to his bicep to reveal a huge arm with muscles like Popeye’s and an array of interlinking tattoos, instantly making Henry think, ‘Steroids.’ No one got muscles like that legitimately.

Henry gave him a lopsided ‘Sure you will’ grin. He was no fighter, but his strength was the ability to overpower people without the need to punch their lights out. But above all, he wasn’t afraid. ‘Like I said, you’re under arrest,’ Henry told him again. He didn’t bother mentioning the ‘easy way/hard way’ option. Everything emanating from this guy screamed, ‘Hard way!’

So be it.

Henry wrapped the truncheon strap tightly around his hand as he worked out the best place to whack Kaminski with his rather pathetic light wood stick. At training school he had been taught to go for the upper arm or leg, but he was already thinking, from the bulges under Kaminski’s clothing, this would be useless. It would be like hitting a side of beef. It was going to have to be a head shot, even though the guy’s skull looked pretty dense, too.

But then Kaminski did the last thing that Henry expected.

He turned and legged it.

Still gasping and gulping for breath, Henry repeated the word.

‘Rape.’

‘Excuse me?’ The bulky station sergeant blinked, took a carefully measured sip from his apparently endless steaming hot mug of tea, adjusted his pince-nez and his slightly bemused focus to examine the young, bedraggled constable standing on the opposite side of the charge-office desk. The PC was breathless, almost to the point of exhaustion. His uniform trousers were ripped, Doc Marten boots

sodden, he had lost his clip-on tie somewhere down the line – but to his credit, was still tightly gripping the arm of the prisoner, his prize, who was equally out of breath and knackered.

To the sergeant, the tale that this little scenario told was obvious.

During the course of the arrest, the prisoner had done a runner at some juncture ('juncture' being one of the sergeant's favourite words). The constable had given chase ('Ah, the eagerness of youth' the sergeant had thought patronizingly. He had not demeaned himself to run after anyone since the summer of 1962. So undignified, especially in uniform) and the foot pursuit had taken cop and fleeing felon through fields and puddles, maybe a farmyard, and had ended up in a messy rugby tackle and scrum.

'Yes,' Henry reiterated. 'I've arrested this man on suspicion of rape.' He drew breath.

The sergeant was correct. It had been a long chase on foot and at one point a nasty little well-determined Jack Russell terrier had appeared from nowhere, snapping ferociously at Henry's heels, complicating matters even further when it sank its fangs into Henry's trouser bottom and hung on for dear life. It had taken a well-aimed, brutal kick to send the little beast squealing and cartwheeling over a low wall.

'Rape,' the sergeant said, drawing out the word and lowering his jaw so his triple chins expanded like a toad.

'Yes, sarge,' Henry said respectfully.

'Mm.' The sergeant's lips rubbed together, but in opposite directions, like a loom. 'OK,' he said a length, and turned to the prisoner. 'Anything to say about that?'

'Not guilty.' Kaminski shook himself free from Henry's grip and sneered contemptuously at him. He had stony eyes and a pinched, rodent-like face, his cheeks pock-marked and pitted. Henry glared back with equal contempt, not fazed by the hard man, but aware it had been an uphill battle to subdue him and if the double-crewed section van hadn't turned up when it did, he might have had to admit defeat and let the bastard go.

'Circumstances?' The sergeant directed the word at Henry.

'Attended the report of a sexual assault, took the report – and this man is the alleged offender. Ran off when I told him he was under arrest.'

The sergeant pushed his half-glasses back up his bulbous, booze-reddened nose. 'You're sure about this?'

'Yes, sarge,' Henry answered, puzzled, wondering why he wouldn't be.

The sergeant's lips now tightened into a disapproving knot, but he reached under the desk and came out with a blank charge sheet which he placed with a flourish on the desktop. He extracted a torpedo-shaped fountain pen from his shirt pocket, unscrewed the lid and dipped the nib into the already open bottle of Quink and refilled the pen using the lever on its side. All the while he kept a beady eye on the two people in front of him. He tapped the tip of the nib on the rim of the ink bottle and was now ready to write and record details.

'Name,' he said to the prisoner, even though he already knew it.

'Vladimir Kaminski.'

Once the name, address and date of birth were recorded, then the prisoner's property, the sergeant instructed Henry to take him down to the cells and put him in number one. He could have used any of the cells that morning because they were all empty. It was a quiet morning at this end of the valley.

'This way,' Henry said. He placed a hand on Kaminski's huge right forearm to direct him to the cell corridor.

Kaminski spun fiercely. Henry reared back, expecting to be attacked as the prisoner bunched his

immense fists. 'Don' you fuckin' touch me again,' he growled.

Suddenly, behind Kaminski there was a blur of speed and power as the sergeant leaned over and smacked the prisoner across the ear with a grizzly bear-like, open-handed blow that sent him spinning across the tiled floor, up against the wall.

Henry knew what he had witnessed, knew he'd seen it, something he'd only ever heard whispered about before – but the stunning blow had been delivered so quickly and accurately and apparently effortlessly that it was almost impossible to actually say it had really happened, other than for the sound of the smack and the prisoner hitting the wall a moment later.

Sergeant Bill Ridgeson's legendary forehand smash.

Kaminski was bent over double, his hands clamped over his head like a protective helmet, glaring at the officers.

The sergeant hadn't moved from his position. Calmly he repositioned his glasses on the bridge of his nose, picked up his mug of tea and said, 'I do not allow any form of aggression in my police station ... except from me.' He took a slurp of tea, nodded at Henry. 'Cell one, please.'

'Yes, sarge.' He walked over to Kaminski. 'Up,' he said, jerking his thumb.

Scowling through a pain-ravaged face, hand cupping a throbbing ear, his head ringing like a church bell in a vestry, he rose and this time allowed Henry to steer him down to the cells and into number one, which was clean and ready for its first occupant of the day. Henry told him to remove his trainers and leave them in the corridor before entering the cell.

Henry slammed shut the self-locking steel door. Kaminski shoved his head at right angles into the inspection hatch.

'You make big mistake, cop,' he said, exaggerating his Eastern European accent for best effect.

'Vot you mean,' Henry mimicked him, 'Igor?'

'She vill not make a statement. She vill not take me to court. She knows she vill be dead if she does.'

'Now you shouldn't have said that. Threats to kill can put you away for ten years.' Henry crashed the up-sliding hatch into place and locked it.

'Ve'll see,' Kaminski's muted voice cried.

Henry jerked a middle digit up at the peephole in the cell door behind which he could see Kaminski's eye and returned to the charge office where Sergeant Ridgeson was inserting the form into the binder. He glanced at Henry, shook his head sadly and said, 'Why have you arrested him?'

'Rape. He raped his girlfriend. Beat her up, too.'

'Sally Lee, you mean? Sally "Jugs" Lee?' Ridgeson scoffed.

'Yes, that's her ...' A sudden lurch of dread gripped Henry's guts in a clawed hand.

The sergeant's head continued to shake pityingly. He blew out. 'You'll learn ... I took the liberty of calling the DI, just to let him know.'

'Why?'

'His patch, laddie. He likes to keep abreast of all serious arrests. What are you going to do now?'

'Get a statement from Miss Lee ... police surgeon and all that, Scenes of Crime ... Hopefully she should have landed at the front desk by now.'

'You'll be lucky if she has,' the sergeant muttered. 'Just don't let her jerk you around.'

At that moment a policewoman appeared at the charge office door. She looked at Henry. 'A Miss Lee at the desk for you,' she announced. She kept her eyes on him.

'Thanks ... be there in a moment, Jo.'

The policewoman gave him a slightly quirky half-smile, lowered her eyes coyly and returned to the

front office with just another almost imperceptible second glance at Henry, who didn't notice a thing. The sergeant did. He was one of this police station's fixtures and fittings, a font of all knowledge, professional and tittle-tattle, and he rarely missed a trick.

'What do you mean, sarge?' Henry asked, referring to Ridgeson's last remark.

'You'll come to realize,' he said patiently, leaning forwards, 'that there's two sides to every coin and everything is not as it seems. I suspect that Miss Lee simply wants Vlad the Impaler out of her hair for a while. Probably wants some other bugger to shag her without poor Vlad finding out, then when the deed is done, she'll drop the charges, or you won't be able to find her to get her to court and the next thing you know, it'll be all lovey-dovey ... until next time. You'll look like an unwiped arse and the prosecutions department will not be happy with you.'

'So you're saying we don't protect her?'

'Don't waste your time on her ... she howls wolf.'

'But he's beaten her up as well as raped her.'

Ridgeson shrugged. 'You'd be better off chasing the tail of that bonny police lass ... you'd get a better result there.'

'Uh?'

'Didn't you see the lustful, come-hither look she just gave you?'

'No.'

'Having said that, I hear you're courting.'

Henry grinned and reddened up. 'Wouldn't say courting.'

'Anyway ...' The sergeant waved him away. 'Get your statement if you must, but I'm telling you from experience ...'

'Waste of time?'

'And money and resources ... and by the way, before you appear in public again, get yourself sorted out. You look like you've been dragged through a hedge backwards.'

After a hasty swill, brush up and tie replacement, Henry walked to the front office of the police station. It was a fairly small room, consisting of a radio console, a telephone switchboard, a teleprinter machine tucked away behind a clear Perspex screen, a narrow public enquiry desk with the foyer beyond, and little else. Not much room to manoeuvre for such an important location – the communications hub for the whole of the Rossendale Valley. It was staffed by a civilian phone/radio operator and a station duty constable who was presently having his refreshment break – refs – in the first-floor dining room. His job was being covered by Jo, the policewoman, whose eyes widened, then narrowed momentarily, as Henry entered.

'I've sat her down in the waiting room,' she told him.

Henry eyed her discreetly, a once-over. 'How did she seem?'

'The usual.'

'She's a regular?'

'Oh, yeah, seen her a few times ... Is it true you flattened Vladimir?' Her gaze played rather obviously over Henry.

'Uh, sort of.'

'He's the cock of the town, you know?'

'Doesn't mean he doesn't get arrested,' Henry said brazenly. 'Maybe he needs locking up more often.' He grinned at her, sidled past, catching a faint aroma of pleasant perfume on her. At the front desk Henry stood aside to allow the station duty PC to enter the room. He was returning from his re-

having visited the staff toilet accessed through the secure doors on the other side of the public foyer. He winked conspiratorially at Henry, folding a *Daily Express* under his arm and refitting his clip-on tie. Henry knew this PC was a bit of a legend and it was one of his horrible habits to leave what he called a 'baby's arm' in the toilet bowl for the benefit – and horror – of the next user who, invariably (as this loo was a shared sex one), would be one of the young ladies from the admin office. Screams of disgust were regularly heard throughout the station in the mornings and had generated frequent memos from the superintendent, most of which ended up defaced and stuck on the toilet wall.

Henry ducked through the hatch and turned right into the waiting room. Out of the corner of his eye he caught sight of a ferocious red-faced man entering the front door of the station, carrying a dog on his arms. A Jack Russell terrier. Henry recognized the nasty little canine as the one he'd brutally kicked out of the way after it had attacked him whilst chasing Kaminski. The dog saw him, made eye contact, must have recognized him, as it bristled, snarled, baring its teeth, then started yapping. Henry quickly went into the waiting room before the owner jumped to any conclusions.

Miss Lee had taken a seat on which she perched with her hands clasped between her knees, her head drooping, tears streaming down her battered face. She glanced up as Henry came in, and gently wiped her swollen cheek dry with her fingertips. Henry noted that her nails were long, sharp and painted a bright red.

'How are you feeling?' He lowered himself onto the chair on the opposite side of the screwed-down table.

She looked broken-heartedly at him. 'Is he locked up?'

'Yes.'

The news had an instant effect on her. 'Brilliant.' She sat upright. She was still wearing the low-cut T-shirt exposing the upper half, or more, of her breasts. They wobbled whitely in a bra that was clearly a tight size too small for the job. Henry saw a tattoo on the right one: 'VLAD'. It looked horribly inflicted. There was also an evil-looking discoloured love bite on the right side of her neck.

'Will he go on remand?' she asked hopefully.

Henry pouted. 'That won't be my decision. I need to gather evidence first, then interview him. That's the way to see.'

'What do you mean, gather evidence?'

'A statement from you ... photos of your injuries ... you'll have to be examined by a police doctor ... that sort of thing.'

'Oooh – I don't know about that.' Her face scrunched up sourly at the thought.

The detective inspector pushed away the prosecution file he'd been checking. He stood up and walked over to the full-length mirror hung discreetly on the back of his office door and gave himself a once-over.

As befitting the man who exercised the most influence in the station – regardless of what the uniformed superintendent and chief inspector might think – he, the highest ranking detective in the valley, was, as always, dressed immaculately. The suit he wore, from Slater's menswear in Manchester, where good deals could be had by savvy detectives, was of a light-grey Italian cut, with wide lapels. His slightly ostentatious tie was fastened with a massive Windsor knot against a dark blue shirt, his highly polished black winkle-picker shoes had Cuban heels.

He looked the part.

His nostrils flared as he angled his face so that he looked down his nose at his reflection, a haughty smirk of superiority on his face. This was the look he gave most people, the ones he considered

underlings: the look of contempt. Of course it would have been better had he been taller. Five-eight was only just high enough for him to join the cops, but the heels on his winkle-pickers did notch him up an extra inch and a half. It would also have been more effective if he wasn't so chubby, weight being a constant battle for him. CID boozing and bad food didn't help matters: the detective lifestyle. A significant double jowl was also forming but he found that if he jutted his jawline out far enough, he could disguise it ... to an extent.

He smiled at himself because he knew that although appearance did matter, what was more important was attitude. You could look good but you needed that something more to carry it off – and this detective inspector had it bursting out all over, all the way up from his heel protectors hammered carefully into his Cuban heels (that clicked arrogantly as he strutted along the tiled corridors of the cop shop), right up to his meticulously trimmed moustache and nasal hairs, and the thick head of hair and long Dickensian sideboards curving down in front of his ears.

He looked the part, acted the part, but above all, and as far as he was concerned, was the real deal.

He shrugged himself into his jacket, pulled down his shirt cuffs to display the platinum cufflinks and stepped out of his office into the corridor.

It was time for DI Robert Fanshaw-Bayley to implement some clout and see what that jumped-up PC was up to. He tried to recall the lad's name but for the moment, couldn't.

'If you'd be more comfortable speaking to a WPC, I can arrange that,' Henry suggested again.

'No ... like I said, I like you. I don't mind talking to you,' Sally Lee said. 'You take me seriously. I don't mind you knowing intimate things about me.'

'OK,' Henry said.

Her bottom lip quivered.

'No need to cry, Miss Lee. We'll get this sorted.'

'Thanks. I'm really grateful,' she gulped. She had changed her mood again and now her handkerchief was damp with tear stains. Her mascara had run around her uninjured eye, adding to the mess her face had become, with the swollen, ugly-looking left eye and puffed-out lips that looked like fat earthworms.

'Could you manage a cup of tea?'

'That'd be good. Four sugars and milk, please, full fat if you've got it.'

Henry rose and Miss Lee gave him a contorted smile. 'Look ... Sally ... don't take this the wrong way, but I need to ask you something straight. Did Vladimir really rape you?'

'Yeah, course he did, the bastard,' she said, insulted. 'Last night.'

'He's done it before, I believe? And assaulted you before?'

Suddenly she wilted visibly, realizing where this might be leading. Henry squinted at her and lowered himself back into the chair.

'Don't you believe me?'

'Yes, I do, and I'll do everything I can to help you. That's a promise, but you have to know this is a two-way street.'

'Meaning?'

Henry chewed his bottom lip, wondering how to phrase the words, but before he could speak she said, 'I live in fear of him, OK? Y'know? He beats me up, regular like ... and rapes me ... one day I reckon he'll bloody well kill me.'

'Oh, boo-hoo-hoo!'

Henry and Sally jerked their faces around to the door which had opened so silently neither had

noticed, and where DI Fanshaw-Bayley now stood, pretending to rub away tears from his eyes with his knuckles. He had obviously heard and disbelieved every single word of her story. He dropped his hands to his sides and said callously, 'Boo-bloody-hoo!'

He jabbed a thick finger at Henry. 'My office.' Then he jerked his thumb over his shoulder to underline the instruction. He looked at Sally Lee. 'You stay here. I'll be back soon to talk to you, Miss Jugs.'

'Sit down,' the DI said whilst easing his bulk into his office chair behind his impeccably neat desk. Henry sat on the indicated chair which, he could have sworn, had an inch shaved off each leg.

Fanshaw-Bayley shuffled his backside comfortable, like he was settling into a nest, leaned forward and interlocked his fingers and gave Henry a tight, unpleasant smile.

'What's your name again?'

Slightly taken back – nay, offended – Henry said, 'PC Christie, Henry Christie.' His shock was because not very long before he had assisted the DI with a murder case and the two of them had had a lot of interaction – up to the point at which Henry had been cut adrift.

'Ahh, that's right. You gave me a chuck-up with that young lass who'd been murdered, didn't you?' the DI confirmed.

'Yeah, boss.'

The DI's eyes narrowed. 'Aren't you the one who's just come back from a CID aide secondment in Blackburn ... under a cloud?' Henry swallowed drily, said nothing. 'Something about locking people up you were told not to? Had a big fallout with one of the DIs?'

'Uh – sort of,' Henry acknowledged, but thought, 'There's two sides to every story,' only problem being that with the CID being the most powerful, most 'other sides' were squashed like bugs.

Fanshaw-Bayley nodded knowledgeably. 'You raised your fist at him, didn't you?' Henry stayed dumb. 'Bit of a loose cannon, a hot-head by all accounts. Lucky you're still in a job.'

'Not really,' Henry said.

'Mm,' the DI said dubiously. 'Anyway ... what you need to know now, lad, is that the Valley is my patch, yeah?'

'Yes, sir.'

'My patch. My way.' His eyes locked onto Henry's. 'So before we discuss what's going on here, let's just cover the rules of the game. If you want to thrive, there's a few things you need to have sorted up here.' He tapped the side of his own skull. 'First off, don't go thinking that just because I'm not the highest-ranking officer in this station, that I'm not in charge. In all matters of a criminal nature, I am. I,' he said forcefully, 'am God and the devil. What I say, goes.' He paused. Henry blinked. Fanshaw-Bayley took a breath, then said, 'And don't you forget it.'

Henry's time in Rossendale as a young cop had been one of learning, feeling his way, getting used to dealing with the public and working out which path his career might take. He had embraced everything and not shied away from any aspect of the job, but had gradually come to realize that what he enjoyed doing best, what gave him most pleasure, was locking people up. He had been prolific in terms of arrests, from drunks to thieves, and it had been his reputation and record that had got him a place on Task Force with only three and a half years' service. TF had been the traditional stepping stone to a career on CID, which was Henry's ultimate aim.

But Task Force had been disbanded almost as soon as Henry was on it and he'd found himself on the newly formed Operational Support Unit, OSU, which was a divisionally based resource. It was similar to TF in some ways, but with one big exception. It was controlled and operated at a local level.

whereas Task Force had been a force-wide resource, run from headquarters.

Henry had tried to get a transfer to Blackburn OSU because he thought it offered more scope for eventual career development, but was unsuccessful, though he did manage to get a secondment to the CID in Blackburn, which had ended dismally, with him landing on his backside back in the backwater that was Rossendale.

Up to then Henry hadn't had too much interaction with the DI. It had been more by luck than judgement that he'd helped out on the young girl's murder (the ramifications of which would come to haunt both men much later in their careers, although neither of them could realize that at the time). But now he sat meekly in front of a DI who professed to hardly know him, getting a sinking feeling about the way this man operated. 'My patch, my way,' he'd said ominously to Henry, who wondered just what that was supposed to mean when applied to that morning and the arrest of Vladimir Kaminski. Surely Henry had done nothing wrong by arresting an alleged rapist.

As if reading his thoughts, Fanshaw-Bayley said, 'Which brings me to this morning's debacle.'

'Debacle?'

'I think that fairly sums it up.'

'I'm not with you, boss. I'm investigating a rape.'

'And that very word – *rape* – should always ring warning bells with you.'

Henry's uncomfortable body language communicated that he did not understand.

'You don't go, willy-nilly, locking people up on claims of rape made by hysterical females.'

'I think you'd be hysterical if you'd been raped,' Henry countered and immediately wished he hadn't.

'I'll keep my cool, PC Christie,' the DI said formally, 'because that's the way I am, but don't you ever talk to me in that tone of voice again, do you understand?'

Henry swallowed. His throat was really dry now.

'You need to realize that you're embarking on a fruitless exercise here, because Miss Lee has a history of making allegations and then withdrawing them and we, as police officers, cannot be seen to be wasting our precious time on petty domestic disputes.'

Henry tugged his collar. 'So we don't do anything?'

'Not with people like her, PC Christie. She's a time-waster.'

'I think she's telling the truth.'

'PC Christie ... she's a slapper.'

'And?' Henry wasn't sure he was believing his ears. 'Even slappers get raped.'

'They bring it on themselves,' Fanshaw-Bayley said painfully, as if he was imparting some deep-rooted truth.

Henry's fists were now bunched by his sides. He was close to raising them to this DI now, thinking how much this situation mirrored his experience in Blackburn.

Fanshaw-Bayley glanced down, again seeming to read Henry's mind. 'And if you're thinking of raising them to me, you'd better think again. Now go and get a statement from her saying she is sorry for wasting our time and that she wasn't in fact raped, and then release Kaminski ... Actually, do it the other way around. Release him, then get her statement of retraction.'

'What if she won't make one?'

Fanshaw-Bayley looked at Henry as though he was a dim child. 'Oh, she will. Trust me.'

With Kaminski's bright blue and white Adidas trainers in his hand, Henry slid the key into the cell door and turned it hard, the mechanism grating rustily as the door unlocked. He pulled the heavy steel door open – outwards – as most cell doors were designed. One that opened inwards could lead to all sorts of problems with a non-compliant prisoner. Opening out gave the incumbent no hiding place.

This prisoner wasn't hiding.

He was sitting on the bench directly opposite the door and Henry could see him clearly. Henry stood on the threshold, framed by the door.

Kaminski looked coldly at him. 'What? You come to beat me up?'

Henry allowed a beat to pass. 'I wish,' he said, and even as he spoke he could feel a tremor throughout his body at the rage he was experiencing at the prospect of letting this man walk free. He didn't care that the prosecution against him might come to nothing. That was the way of the world. But he wanted to subject Kaminski to the process: interview, charge, remand in custody. Get him standing in front of a court. Let him know that the cops meant business, even if subsequently his girlfriend didn't have the will or courage to see it through. Henry wanted to interview him, throw the allegations at him, take his fingerprints and photograph, and do what he had promised for the girl whether or not she was lacking morals, he was certain had been raped. It was probably all part of his existence, but a crusading Henry wanted to show her that it didn't have to be like that.

Just to let the smug bastard have his liberty, to be able to do it again – and again – was screwing the young constable up. Tight.

Kaminski's face turned to a grin.

Henry took a step back into the cell corridor, made a sweeping 'after you' gesture with his right arm.

Kaminski got to his feet and walked, bare footed, up to Henry, so they were standing only inches away from each other. Kaminski was slightly shorter, maybe five-eleven, but he was broader, his muscles bigger and more defined from countless hours spent with weights and steroids. Henry realized he had done well to pin him down earlier and he could see why Kaminski was the so-called cock of the town. His physical presence aligned with a violent streak would be enough to intimidate and beat up anyone.

'I told you, you can't keep me.'

'Maybe not this time,' Henry said unsteadily. 'But I'll be back for you. And in the meantime, don't be surprised if your hard-man reputation gets a big fat dint in it.'

'How you mean?'

'Trust me ... people will find out that you're a rapist and that you beat up women.'

An expression of sheer ferocity filled Kaminski's face – one of those expressions Henry had seen often in disaffected young men like Vladimir. Intense, primal hatred. Henry wasn't fazed and he returned Kaminski a lovely smile. At the same time he imagined head-butting him to put him down. Not that Henry had ever head-butted anyone in his life. It was just a pleasant thought, that was all. He knew he would probably misjudge it anyway and end up breaking his own nose.

'It's incredible how such things can get out,' Henry said.

Kaminski's body relaxed. 'No one would care, anyway.'

‘The ladies might,’ Henry said. But he knew the truth. The level of Rossendale society in which Kaminski lived and operated would probably regard him as a hero.

Henry and Kaminski broke their deadlock glare and turned towards the station sergeant who had just entered the charge office, mug of tea in one hand. ‘I take it he’s en-route?’ the sergeant said of the prisoner.

‘Unfortunately,’ Henry said, a word that made Kaminski smile victoriously. He handed Kaminski the trainers, pushing the footwear roughly into his chest. The prisoner bent over and slid his feet into them.

His property was returned to him and he was released. Henry followed him to the back door, glaring at the tattoo etched across the back of his neck, then ensured he left the premises completely, including getting out of the rear yard and car park. Then he went back to the charge office.

‘Don’t worry, lad,’ Sergeant Ridgeson said. ‘He’ll come a cropper one day ... but just for the moment you’ll have to remember the bigger picture.’

‘What do you mean, sarge?’

‘Sometimes you need a sprat to catch a marlin, if you get my drift?’

Henry puckered his brow at the older, much more laid-back man. He reminded Henry of a genial Buddha, all seeing, all knowing, and full of bullshit philosophy. ‘All I know is that he raped his girlfriend and he’s walking away from it, sticking two fingers up at us as he does.’

Ridgeson sighed heavily. ‘Maybe I’m not explaining myself properly ... never mind.’ He gave the impression that Henry was a bit of a lost cause. He tapped his bulbous nose, making it wobble slightly obscenely. ‘Just forget him and concentrate on doing what young men of your age should be concentrating on – chasing tail – and make an older man vicariously very happy.’

‘I’m really sorry—’

Henry had been quickly rehearsing the words he was going to have to say to, he suspected, rightfully irate Sally Lee when he returned to the waiting room. He’d been concentrating on his little speech, but not to the exclusion of catching the eye, again, of the policewoman who was sitting in the front office by the radio unit. She swivelled slowly on an office chair and tracked his progress across the floor, as he mumbled angrily to himself.

Their eyes met and at the back of his brain, Henry registered the appraisal and half-smile she gave him.

But then he was at the door of the waiting room, about to jump in and offer an immediate apology to Sally for allowing her violent rapist boyfriend to walk free, but that it wasn’t his fault, that blah! blah! – but he was stopped dead in his tracks by the sight that greeted him on entering the room. He shut his mouth with a ‘pop’.

DI Fanshaw-Bayley was leaning across the table, his face only inches away from Sally’s. His left hand supported his weight whilst his right, forefinger pointed, was jabbing at her.

Sally looked at him horrified and distraught.

Fanshaw-Bayley stopped abruptly in mid-rant and his head rotated slowly towards Henry, then swivelled back to the young woman who was staring open-mouthed at him. The DI said, probably reinforcing his message, Henry assumed, slowly and quietly now, ‘So you don’t go wasting our time ... have you got that?’

Cowed, she nodded. A tear trickled down her cheek.

Fanshaw-Bayley stood upright and tugged his jacket straight, his point clearly having been made and understood. To Henry he said, ‘Take this little cow home.’

Henry drove her in the unmarked Cavalier, turning out of the back yard of Rawtenstall nick, then right onto Bacup Road and up to the traffic lights at the big roundabout that was Queen's Square. Much to his annoyance he saw Vladimir Kaminski standing at the bus station by the cinema, but Kaminski didn't clock Henry's car and seemed to be looking around for someone or something. He hadn't gone far from the police station and Henry was past him in an instant, glancing into his rear-view mirror. Kaminski sprinted across the road to a car pulling in opposite him.

By that time Henry was at the lights, which were on green, and his attention was pretty firmly fixed on the blubbing Sally Lee in the passenger seat alongside him, whose vision was blurred with her tears.

A couple of minutes later, Henry drew up outside her house on the estate.

'I'm sorry,' he said weakly.

'It's not your fault, it's not your fault,' she said, her face buried in the palms of her hands. She dragged it out, stretching her tear-stained features and smudging her heavily applied mascara even more.

'Look,' Henry began, feeling utterly useless.

'No,' she cut in, stifling a body-wracking sob. 'You can't do anything, you can't change anything, so don't bother trying ... it's just how it is.'

'Doesn't have to be,' Henry insisted.

'Just forget it,' she said hopelessly. 'I'm just a nuisance, I know. I just feel so ... fucking trapped.'

'Why don't you leave him?'

She snorted sarcastically. 'You have no idea, do you?'

'Try me.'

'I've got a babbie, I'm on benefits, my mum hates me, so I can't go there ... I have literally nowhere to go.'

'Tell him to leave,' Henry said, thinking it sounded reasonable.

She looked at him in hysterical disbelief. 'Ooh, that's a good idea, I never thought of that.'

'OK,' he relented, getting the message.

'You live in another world, mate. You come on duty and dip into my life and make judgements and interfere, but you haven't got a clue in hell what it's like. I'm fucking trapped,' she said again. 'I have no way out.'

Henry closed his mouth and swallowed, his eyes playing over her realizing she was feisty, very intelligent in a feral way – and, as she said, trapped.

'And it doesn't help that you think we're second-, no, third-class citizens without any rights. So go on, bog off, go and catch your burglars and maybe me for shoplifting, cos you'll do that, won't you? And guess what, I'll get hammered again and maybe I'll call the cops and maybe I won't. And he'll rape me again ... but let's just hope he doesn't kill me, eh? Then the shit would hit the fan, wouldn't it? Eh?' She sneered accusingly at the last syllable, opened the car door and without a backward glance stomped off towards her house.

Henry watched her, feeling empty and ineffective. He knew he was an integral part of the vicious circle of violence in the home. Like the DI had said, it was just too much like hard work where the police were concerned because most of the complaints were subsequently withdrawn. Henry had to ask himself why that was, but he knew the answer – because the cops and the social services and the justice system had allowed it to get that way. Their stance had never been firm enough and victims rarely had the support they needed. He also understood it was way more complicated than that, but he knew one thing for certain. Although he didn't have a lot of service in the cops – coming up to force

years – he had already developed a strong sense of justice and had come to realize how unfairly and indifferently victims and witnesses were treated and not just in relation to domestic violence, it was across the board. He also knew he couldn't change the world, but perhaps he could just chew away at his own little orbit of it.

He jumped out of the car. 'Sally,' he shouted.

She had reached her front door. She stopped, turned to watch him approach.

'That retraction statement I just took from you ... I'm going to rip it up. I want to come and get a proper one from you.'

'Why, what are you going to do?'

'Uh ... not completely certain, haven't quite figured that one out yet.'

She regarded him thoughtfully. 'OK.'

'And, look, don't be frightened to call in if anything else happens. In fact, you must.'

She shrugged.

'I'll come back soon and we'll sit down to get a statement, OK?'

Another unconvinced shrug.

His mind churning, Henry drove away. He headed straight back to the police station, where he made his way up to the DI's office, the door of which was closed.

He was glad of this. It gave time for one more run through things. He would have liked to have stormed in, but he reigned in his innate hot-headedness, knowing that such action would be counterproductive. He still wanted to be a detective and upsetting another DI was not the way to go about it because if the CID didn't like you, you didn't get in.

He tapped on the door.

And waited.

He'd heard that Fanshaw-Bayley never answered a knock on the door straight away. He was a 'One, two, three, four, someone's knocking at the door; five, six, seven, eight, I think I'll make 'em wait' kind of boss. So Henry counted and as predicted the 'Enter' order came and he stepped inside Fanshaw-Bayley's den.

He was sitting at the desk, looking at some paperwork. He did not even glance up, but gestured with a ripple of his fingers for whoever it was to take a seat. He signed the bottom of a report with a flourish of his fancy fountain pen – an affected trademark – which he then laid down with a hint of ceremony, and only then raised his eyes to Henry.

'Thought it would be you.'

'*Thought right, didn't you?*' Henry almost retorted, but didn't snap. He knew he was on precarious ground, had to tread carefully, so he just nodded affably, remembering how nasty the DI had been earlier.

'I'd just like to know why Kaminski walked, that's all.'

'The trouble with the uniform branch is that they're too ... touchy-feely ... always wanting explanations and reasons ... Those days may come, PC Christie, but not today, which is why you should simply accept what I tell you. He walks, end of story.'

Henry felt his heart rate increase dramatically. Fanshaw-Bayley was beginning to have that effect on him.

'You want to be a jack, don't you?'

'Y-yes, that's all I want.'

'Then learn to take orders, lad, and learn something from this. Man up, is what I say.'

'And I learn what?'

‘That you have to schmooze and weave.’ The DI began to move in his chair like a huge fat snake being charmed. ‘That sometimes you have to let things go, that it isn’t all black and white ... That the world of crime and villains is a murky fucking place and as a detective you occasionally have to cheat on your principles and sometimes they’re like swallowing a brick.’

‘She was raped.’

‘Quite probably,’ Fanshaw-Bayley said blandly.

‘That seems pretty black and white to me, and even if she eventually decides not to go through with a prosecution, we should at least go through the motions with Kaminski. Send him a warning shot across the bows at least. Grind him.’

Undaunted, the DI said, ‘And sometimes the bigger picture is more important than the suffering, albeit self-inflicted, of a slag like Sally Lee, PC Christie.’

Henry stood up. ‘Fuck the bigger picture,’ he snarled and stalked out of the office before he hurled his chair at Fanshaw-Bayley.

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