

CHAPTER EIGHT

The following morning Fenwick pushed yet more reports to one side and went to find himself a cup of coffee. Somewhere between the broken vending machine and the staff restaurant he became lost in thought and found himself at the main entrance. He had his pass and a fiver in his pocket so decided to go out to buy a decent espresso. As he left the building he wondered whether it was what he'd intended all along.

It was still raining but there was a local Italian café close by and he ran there in less than two minutes. Inside, the atmosphere was warm and steamy, the coffee as excellent as always and he bought a second after the downing the first in one gulp.

Although the owner said his name was Giuseppe, Fenwick knew he was Polish and that his brother, who now called himself Leonardo and was an expert with the coffee machine, had done time for stealing cars. He didn't care though, as the man had served his sentence and now served the best coffee in Burgess Hill.

'Another, Chief Inspector?' Giuseppe insisted on using his rank and he'd given up asking him not to.

'I should be getting back.'

'On the house.' A small white cup and saucer appeared in front of him. 'And biscotti too; you look a little thin today.'

'Grazie, Giuseppe.' Fenwick laughed inwardly at himself for playing his part in their façade.

He was running out of time. The investigation into Malcolm's

death was making little progress. His team had compiled a list of members of the golf club in 1981 and were steadily interviewing those that were still alive, so far without any success. It was looking inevitable that he would have to cede the case to Harlden and concentrate again on the crumbs of evidence he'd been able to gather in following up the Choir Boy ring. He dunked the biscuit and forced his thoughts into a semblance of order.

Joseph Watkins hadn't appeared to put a foot wrong in all the time he'd been under surveillance. His acquaintance, Alec Ball, had now been watched for ten weeks, going about his life without a hint of suspicion. Fenwick pulled out his notebook and turned to a fresh page, forcing himself to recall the few details that had emerged from recent surveillance.

Alec Ball was sixty; a short square man who ran a market stall that sold old books, LPs and other bric-a-brac. He looked a bruiser, with his bald head and tattoos, but hadn't been in any trouble according to police records since he'd been a bouncer at a Brighton club where he was once arrested for GBH. The prosecution had collapsed when the key witness and victim withdrew their statement. It smelt nasty but had nothing to do with pimping or using young boys.

Joseph Watkins was a retired sports coach who still did occasional supply work. He lived well, in a house way beyond his salary, with his wife and a grown-up son who showed no sign of wanting to leave home. His only daughter had just made him a grandfather. So far, so innocent, but he and Ball had an unlikely friendship, even travelling abroad for weekends together despite their very different backgrounds. Joseph was a member of the club in Harlden, although his golf wasn't great and he played rarely.

The cost of watching these two men was horrendous. Finding the manpower to keep up the surveillance was also putting a strain on the MCS team, which was under strength because Fenwick had encouraged three officers to seek transfers when

they didn't live up to his exacting standards. Yet he didn't want to give up. If there were a paedophile ring here in West Sussex – and the FBI was convinced that they had evidence one existed – he was determined to find it. Ball and Watkins would become his only leads once he was forced to pass over Malcolm Eagleton's file. Fuelled by the coffee he decided that he would keep the Choir Boy team live for another week and then he'd be forced to decide whether to suspend further work.

The doorbell jangled and there was a rush of cold air as a boy about Chris's age ran in. In looks he was the opposite of Fenwick's son: tall, maybe as much as a stone heavier and very dark, with beautiful eyes that would devastate the girls in a few years. Billy, Guiseppe's son, was in Chris's class at school and a bit of a tearaway by all accounts. Fenwick stared at the boy's retreating back as he ducked under his uncle's outstretched arm and grabbed biscotti from the jar by the till.

'Hey!' his father called, then shrugged indulgently, including his customers in his conspiratorial smile. But Fenwick didn't notice.

Sight of the boy had triggered something in his memory and he felt an urgent need to return to his office and look again at the missing persons' files he kept as a constant reminder that there were real victims as a result of the Choir Boy ring, perhaps growing with each fruitless month that passed.

'*Arrivederci*, Chief Inspector,' Leonardo called out as he opened the door and turned up his jacket collar against the rain.

'*Domani*, Leonardo,' he replied and dashed outside.

He didn't spot the stationary green Peugeot until it was too late to avoid it. Blake Bowyer leapt out of the car and intercepted Fenwick before he could reach the station entrance. Oblivious to the rain that was soaking them both he put a restraining hand on Fenwick's arm, removing it quickly as he realised he had caused offence.

‘Chief Inspector, please...’ Bowyer stared at him, his eyes beseeching him for news, words of comfort, anything. It had been two weeks now since Sam’s disappearance.

Fenwick noticed that the car was parked on a double yellow line.

‘Let’s get out of the rain,’ he said and went towards it. At least this way if a traffic warden did brave the weather in search of a ticket Fenwick would be able to prevent a fine. Out of the rain he turned to the distraught father.

‘Mr Bowyer, I’m not the senior investigating officer on your son’s case, you know that. It’s being handled with every effort and care by a colleague of mine in Brighton. I came to see you in case there was a connection to another investigation, that’s all.’

‘And is there?’ Bowyer stared at him with eyes so red they looked as if they would bleed if he blinked.

Before he’d had his coffee Fenwick would have said no but the realisation that had come to him as Guiseppe’s son ran into the café made him pause. Bowyer noticed.

‘There is, isn’t there! You’re keeping something from me.’ He grabbed Fenwick’s arm, creasing his jacket where it was already a mess from the rain. Fenwick loosened the man’s fingers gently.

‘I’m not, Mr Bowyer, really. My case is complex, years old and there is absolutely no proven link to your son’s disappearance.’ He wondered if his qualification would be spotted but Bowyer was too devastated to notice.

‘It’s killing Jenny,’ he said. ‘She barely eats, won’t leave the house in case Sam comes home and...oh God!’ He buried his exhausted face in his hands. ‘I can’t talk to her but that’s all she does, talks and talks and talks about it all the time. What if she’d taken him to school; what if she’d given him an extra hug that morning; what if I hadn’t shouted at him not to tease the cat...it goes on and on. She’s reliving the last hour we had with him over and over again looking for a way we might have changed the

future; blaming us for letting him leave the house, blaming me for just watching him go.'

'Are you receiving any help – from the church or friends or family? I can recommend a very good victim support group—'

'WE'RE NOT FUCKING VICTIMS!' Bowyer wiped his face; his nails were bitten down to raw skin. 'We're *not* victims.' His anger subsided as suddenly as it had arrived and he added, in a voice that made Fenwick look away, 'not yet.'

He spent another half hour with the man, just listening. When a patrol car cruised by and stopped to order them on he waved his warrant card at them and, when they looked inclined to argue, told them to bugger off. They did. Bowyer didn't notice, barely interrupting his monologue. When he finished, Fenwick wanted to give him a lift home, worried that he was driving in his distressed state, but the man refused and he had no choice but to watch him drive off into the indifferent traffic, his own heart heavy with an echo of the man's sadness and guilty that he was unable to help him.

Back in his office, in no mood for small talk, in fact in no mood for company at all, Fenwick pulled out the photograph of Malcolm Eagleton and tacked it carefully to the cork board that covered half the wall opposite his desk, old-fashioned but effective. Then he picked up a copy of the *Brighton Argus* that he'd been keeping and cut out the picture of Sam Bowyer from the front page, pinning it next to Malcolm's. The resemblance was marked despite the difference in hairstyles caused by the passing of more than twenty-five years.

As he was backing away to take in the similarities Angela Marsh ambled into his room to collect his filing. A member of the civilian support staff on the team, she'd been nicknamed Jell-O as soon as she'd arrived, much to Fenwick's annoyance. He thought, given her complexion and build, it was too cruel but she seemed to like it so he'd kept quiet.

'Sorry, sir, thought you were still out. I'll come back later.'

'No, go ahead, you're not disturbing me.'

She gathered the papers from the casual bundle he'd left in the usual place and was about to leave when she noticed the new material on the board and stopped. Fenwick looked up, frowned and nodded her away but she didn't move.

'Strange,' she said, staring at the two boys. 'Very odd.'

'Thank you, Angela, that will be all for now.'

'Right.' She nodded but stayed where she was.

'Angela!' He was growing impatient.

'What? Oh, sorry, it's just that, seeing them there, I wondered why you hadn't put the other one up.'

'What are you talking about?' Fenwick asked, irritated by her intrusion into his thoughts.

'The other lad, the one who disappeared after Malcolm. I was only filing him away last night when they'd finished with the box.'

A chill spread over Fenwick's arms, raising the small hairs and it had nothing to do with his damp clothes.

'Get the file, would you, Angela,' he said softly, and waited.

She was back in less than a minute.

'You're lucky, I was about to send it down to archive. I know I shouldn't have been nosing in it,' she glanced at him anxiously but seeing his abstraction carried on, reassured, 'but I remembered the case, see. I was in the year above him at school. Didn't know him of course, didn't even notice him until he disappeared, but he was friends with a friend of mine, Wendy.'

Fenwick wasn't listening. He thanked her without noticing the words he used and she left. In the new silence of his office he noted the name on the cover of the file, leafed through it and pulled out a school photograph. Carefully, he pinned the picture of missing schoolboy Paul Hill squarely between that of Malcolm and Sam. It was as if he had found a missing link. Even in the

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garish technicolor of the old film, even when compared with the attractiveness of the other two boys, Paul Hill stood out with film-star beauty.

He combined the best of both boys: Malcolm's pale complexion; Sam's girlish neck; his own extraordinary eyes that seemed to invite the observer to share in a secret joke.

Fenwick sat down. There was a link, had to be. Someone somewhere had a predilection for pretty, pre-adolescent boys of a certain look and when he found them, they had a way of disappearing. He was suddenly very afraid for Sam Bowyer.