

The logo consists of the lowercase letters 'aeb' in a white, elegant, cursive script font, positioned on a solid black rectangular background. A thin white horizontal line is drawn beneath the letters.

NOTHING ELSE
REMAINS

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CHAPTER ONE

He walked into the bank like he owned the place, past the queuing mums, pushchairs weighted down with shopping bags, the suits checking their watches, counting down lunch hours. Over to the personal banking desk, matching the man behind it smile for smile. Fresh out of college by the looks of it. Early twenties at a push. Hair scraped back from a shiny forehead, and last traces of acne like a faded join-the-dots. Daniel, according to his name badge.

He slid a passport and bank card across the desk, batted back small talk where he could. He could actually pinpoint the moment that Daniel clocked the balance in his account, eyes popping with a mix of surprise and envy. Fended off the valiant attempt to book him an appointment with one of their investment bankers.

He could practically smell the sweaty palms that pushed the signature slip his way. He scrawled his name across the dotted line, slid it across, and leant back in his chair.

‘Anything else you need from me?’

‘No, Mr Jackson, that should do it,’ said Daniel.

Gordon Jackson scraped back his chair, retreated before Daniel could offer a clammy handshake, exited through the main door and out onto George Lane. The glare of the sun hit him like a paparazzo’s flash, and he winced as he crossed the road, popping his top button and wiggling the knot of his tie down an inch. Summer had been late coming to London this year, but it meant business.

Quick push of the key fob in his pocket, and the lights winked on a Volvo parked opposite the branch. He slipped a laptop case out from under the passenger seat, fingers dancing over the keys, connecting to the weak Wi-Fi from a next-door Costa Coffee. One username and password later, he allowed himself a brief smile as he saw the balance in the account. A dozen keystrokes later, and it was off through the ether to a new home.

He powered down the laptop, stashed it back under the seat. Took out his wallet, removing the cards one by one. Driver’s licence, MasterCard, Visa. Dropped them into a plastic sandwich bag, to be burnt when he got back to the house. And just like that, Gordon Jackson ceased to exist. The man left in his place checked his mirrors, signalled to pull out, and disappeared into the midday traffic.

Careful. Always careful.

Max Brennan peered at his watch for what felt like the twentieth time in as many minutes, eyes following the lazy sweep of the second hand. Almost an hour late. No call. No message. He checked his phone again. Nothing. No sooner had he put it back on the table, it started to vibrate, creeping towards his coffee cup. He snatched at it, feeling guilty at the

disappointment he felt when he saw Jen's name, not his dad's.

'Hey babe, how did it go?'

'Could have been better,' he said.

'You didn't end up arguing, did you?'

'Not yet, but there's a pretty good chance we will if he ever turns up. To hell with him, I'm coming back. See you when I get home.'

Max clicked to end the call, then instantly felt bad for taking it out on Jen. He fired off an apologetic 'Sorry for being snappy' text, adding an extra 'x' on the end for good measure. It wasn't the waitress's fault his dad hadn't showed either, and he dropped a handful of coins in the tip jar on his way out. *Screw him, his loss*. Disappointment turned to frustration, frustration to anger. He'd been stood up by a few girls before, but never by a parent, and decided on a new destination before he even reached the car.

He slid into his Audi, cursing under his breath as his knee cracked against the steering column. It was half an hour's drive to his dad's street from here. Max made it in just shy of twenty-three minutes, running two debatable amber lights, and incurring the wrath of an old lady in a white Nissan that he'd cut off, who shocked him with her impressive arsenal of hand gestures. Woodside was as suburban as its name suggested. No 'Street' or 'Avenue' tagged on the end; just the one name, like the Adele or Madonna of town planning. Trees lined both sides of the road like a guard of honour. Canopies of green, flecked with the first burnt orange of autumn. A stone's throw away from Woodford Golf Club, all the houses were a variation on the same template; two-tone white cladding and exposed brick. The kind of street that made you feel underdressed when you came to visit.

Max rang the bell, following up with a knock even before the chimes had faded away. He could feel his fuse burning shorter with every second. No sign of life. He knocked again, leaning over to peer through the front window.

‘If you’re looking for Gordon, you’re two days too late.’

Max spun around to see an elderly man in a white cotton shirt and dark green corduroy trousers, shuffling along the path of the house next door.

‘What do you mean, two days too late?’

‘He was here on Wednesday morning. Least I’m pretty sure it was him, loading boxes into a car, and he’s not been back since. I’m assuming he’s moved, although I never saw a for sale sign. Didn’t really know him well enough to ask, mind you.’

‘He sold his house?’

‘Either that, or he’s just had one hell of a big clear-out.’ The old man wheezed a dry laugh at his own joke. ‘Sorry, I’m just kidding around, but yes, I’m pretty sure he has. Saw a young lady here twice last week, driving a car with some logo plastered on the side. Beacon something or other.’

‘Beacon Estates?’

Max had seen their slogan plastered on billboards and winced at their cheesy radio ads, promising to sell your property in record time, or you don’t pay a penny.

‘They’re the ones,’ said the old man, his smile making a web of creases spread outwards from his mouth, like ripples in a pond. ‘And I’m sorry, how rude of me. I’m Gerry. Gerry Whyte. And you are?’

‘I’m Max. Brennan.’

‘You and Gordon work together, or are you just a friend?’

Max let out a big sigh, like a balloon deflating. ‘I’m his son.’

‘His son?’ said Whyte, bushy eyebrows bouncing up like caterpillars on a trampoline. ‘I didn’t even know he had any family.’

‘Funny,’ said Max, ‘neither did he till three weeks ago.’

Jake Porter loved his job, or at least the ten per cent of it that felt like it made a difference; the buzz of making an arrest, of breaking a suspect’s

crappy alibi into pieces. The rest of it had far too much paperwork and waiting around for things to happen for his liking. That was the part they never showed you in *CSI* or *Line of Duty* type dramas on TV. The last three hours of his life fell into this latter category.

Andrew Patchett had disappeared into the Holiday Inn at Wembley Park almost three hours ago, according to a tip-off. The barman confirmed he'd served him around that time, and that he'd had a young lady with him. Porter scanned the rows of windows, wondering which one Patchett might be looking out of. It wasn't the prettiest of hotels and, without the green Holiday Inn branding, could have been just another high rise in any inner city. The seventies had a lot to answer for when it came to architecture.

Patchett was the last man standing of any significance in a corrupt organisation Porter had brought to its knees earlier in the year. It still stung Porter that the key figure behind it all, Alexander Locke, had been killed by a stray gunshot before he got a chance to arrest him. His second in command, a beast of a man called James Bolton, had met a similar fate. Not that Porter felt sorry for them. More that they'd never been called to account for their crimes. Patchett felt like a last chance to do something worthwhile. He'd been swept up in the arrests that followed Locke's death, but incredibly had managed to post bail thanks to an overpriced lawyer on retainer for Locke's company. He'd been released two days after Locke's death, and hadn't been seen since. Truth be told, the case against him was on the light side, mainly circumstantial. Patchett, being the fool that he was, turned to shooting his mouth off down his local that he was moving up in the world, filling the gap left by Locke and Bolton. Thankfully for Porter, his boasts about having some of his former employer's stash of drugs had been within earshot of Paddy Tiernan, a burnt-out ex-junkie who regularly played both sides, and called in with the tip. A search team hit a storage unit Patchett kept this morning and found three kilos of uncut cocaine. It was hardly on

a par with Pacino in *Scarface*, but it was enough to bring him back in.

He heard a squeak of leather and turned to see Nick Styles bringing his knees up towards his chest, lacing fingers around the top of his shins. Porter winced at the quick-fire *crack-crack* when they popped. Even with the seat pushed back, Styles and his six-foot-four frame still looked cramped.

‘You’ll give yourself arthritis if you keep doing that,’ Porter said, looking back towards the hotel entrance.

‘Yeah, yeah, and chewing gum clogs up your insides, and the wind changing direction makes your face stay that way. Thanks, Dad.’

Even though they weren’t that far apart age-wise, Porter only two years ahead at thirty-eight, he sometimes did feel like more of an adult. Styles had a comeback for everything, but he also knew when to switch from class clown to all business; most of the time anyway.

‘Bet you don’t give Emma as much backchat at home.’

Styles chuckled. ‘She slaps me back down if I try. I store all mine up for you instead, boss.’

‘Lucky me, eh?’ said Porter.

He froze as the hotel door swished open, but relaxed again when an elderly couple shuffled out, arm in arm and stepping in sync like a three-legged race. A soft muted click told him Styles was checking the time on his phone again, and Porter resolved to give it another half hour tops. He might not have anyone apart from Demetrious the cat waiting at home, but Styles had Emma. He had a life to go back to.

‘What if he’s holed up here till tomorrow?’ Styles asked.

‘Don’t worry, I’ll let you get your beauty sleep. Half an hour and we’ll call in reinforcements.’

‘I’m not complaining, guv, I . . .’

‘I know, I know. It’s fine. I’ve got stuff to do as well,’ he lied. A microwave dinner and an evening on the sofa was as exciting as it would get, but he didn’t want Styles to feel obliged to hang around

for a beer or, worse still, invite him to join him and Emma for dinner. Not that he wasn't grateful, and he did accept occasionally, but pride stopped him from saying yes every time. He was nobody's charity case. Not even Styles's.

Porter screwed his eyes closed. Felt the low bass drum of a headache starting to beat. What he'd give for eight hours' solid sleep. There was a time when he had to be forcibly evicted from bed on his days off. That was before it all happened. Before he lost Holly. Correction – not lost, she was forcibly taken from him. Nowadays he was content to call four hours a success. He dug his thumb and forefinger into the corners of his eyes, rubbing small circles. Trying and failing to massage away the gritty feeling, like grains of sand trapped under his lids.

'Here we go.'

Porter snapped his eyes open again, blinking away the fireflies, to see Andrew Patchett scurrying out of the hotel. Patchett stopped a few yards away and looked around, head tilted up a touch, as if he was sniffing the air. He seemed satisfied that nobody was waiting for him, and looked down at his own jacket, patting at his pockets. Porter didn't wait around to what he was looking for. He and Styles were out of their car and had covered half of the hundred or so yards to the entrance before Patchett looked up again.

'All units move in.' Porter spoke in a low voice so as not to alert Patchett that the net was closing.

Patchett was a runner by nature. He'd run when they'd taken down Locke and his crew, or had tried to anyway. Porter was ready for him to try the same again. Two officers in the hotel bar, posing as a couple, were coming up behind Patchett now. Another pair were just rounding the corner of the hotel in case he bolted for the safety of the shopping outlet. Patchett saw Porter, recognition in his exaggerated smile. He shot a quick glance left and right, then whirled around, back into the hotel, nearly colliding with the officer behind him.

Patchett lifted both arms, waving his hands at no one in particular.

‘Surrender, or jazz hands. You decide,’ he said, with somewhere between a smile and a snarl.

‘You’re a regular laugh a minute,’ said Porter, clocking the pair of officers who’d come from around the corner to help pen Patchett in. ‘Next stop *Britain’s Got Talent!*’

‘Officer Porter, what a coincidence, I was just coming to turn myself in.’

Porter didn’t bother to correct him on the rank. No sense rising to the bait. Give men like Patchett the slightest sense that you were niggled, they’d press it home. Patchett was forty-five but looked at least ten years older. Bald, with lines etched into his face, giving him a mouth that looked like it was on hinges, and he had the type of rough edges to his voice that only years of dedicated smoking can create.

‘Thought we’d save you the bus fare,’ said Porter. ‘Found your little nest egg this morning, Andrew.’

The smile stayed on Patchett’s face, and his tone was light enough, but Porter saw the hate in his eyes. ‘Don’t know what you mean, Officer.’

‘Right you are, mate,’ said Porter, the last word spat out with as much sarcasm as he could muster.

‘Wouldn’t want to be your mate, Officer Porter. Saw what happens to your mates, like that pretty lady.’ Patchett pretended to shudder. ‘Heard she’s still getting wheeled around.’

The lady in question was Detective Sergeant Eve Simmons. She’d had her head slammed against a wall by James Bolton and had come too close to not waking up for Porter’s liking. Porter’s fingers curled into fists but stayed by his side.

‘It’s Detective Inspector Porter, and you’re under arrest, Mr Patchett, for breaching the terms of your bail.’

Porter nodded to the young constable behind Patchett, Gus Tessier, half-French, half-Ghanaian, and a tank of a man, who grabbed one

wrist, then a second, snapping cuffs into place and reading Patchett his rights. Porter stepped closer, until he was only a few feet away.

‘You should have turned over a new leaf while you had the chance, Patchett. Got a nice job in a pub, or a bookies.’ Another step closer and he was only twelve inches from Patchett’s face, albeit looking down at it thanks to a six-inch height advantage, but the smaller man just stared at him, looking mildly amused.

‘Might apply to be the carer for that lady copper of yours. You know, wheel her around, empty the shit from her bag, that type of thing. No telling how grateful she might be.’ Patchett leant to the side, spitting on the ground, missing Porter’s shoe by less than an inch.

Porter’s hand shot up, grabbing Patchett, and Patchett’s lips squished up like a kid pulling a funny face. Hands pulled at him from all sides, dragging him away, back towards the car park, his fingers rasping off Patchett’s stubble as they slid off the smaller man’s cheeks.

‘Come on, guv.’ Styles spoke low and urgent. ‘He’s not worth it.’ Styles put an arm across Porter’s back, steering him off to one side.

‘You want to listen to your boy there. Wouldn’t want to do anything you regret.’

Patchett’s face split into an impossibly wide smile, flashing rows of greying teeth, and Porter knew he’d given Patchett exactly the reaction he was looking for. Porter’s cheeks burnt as if he’d been sitting too close to a radiator, and he sucked in a deep breath, kicking himself for letting Patchett get under his skin.

The pair of officers behind Patchett grabbed an elbow each and marched him towards one of the unmarked vehicles waiting in the car park. Patchett twisted his head around to look at Porter as he passed.

‘That’s assault, strictly speaking, Officer. Might let you off with it. Might not. I’ll let you know.’

‘Looked like resisting arrest to me, guv,’ said Tessier, steering Patchett at a fair rate of knots.

‘Eh?’ Patchett started to twist, doing his best to shrug Tessier’s hand away, but the constable’s fingers dug into Patchett’s arm hard enough to make him gasp out loud. ‘Watch it, lad. That’s police brutality right there as well. Rotten to the core, the lot of ya. Gerroffme.’

Porter kicked out at a cigarette butt, shoe scraping against the tarmac. He shrugged Styles’s hand away.

‘It’s OK. I’m fine.’

Styles said nothing, just raised both eyebrows and stared, waiting him out.

‘I’m fine,’ Porter said again, with a little more grit this time, feeling anything but. This was the first time he’d ever laid hands on a suspect like that, and it left a bad taste in his mouth. It’s not like he’d hit the guy, but that wasn’t the point. He’d let emotions cloud his judgement, and for what? It wasn’t even as if there was anything between him and Simmons to get worked up about. There’d been a hint that something *could* happen, if he wanted it to. More than once as well. But each time, it had seemed like even thinking about being with someone else felt as good as cheating on Holly. Even now, more than two years after her death, she was everywhere. From the choice of colours on the walls of their flat, to the only two designer-label shirts in his entire wardrobe. She was still the screensaver on his mobile, for God’s sake.

Sod it. Simmons was, is still, one of them, and that’s as good as family. If you can’t stick up for your family who can you stick up for?

‘Shit.’ Styles swore under his breath.

Porter looked at him, frowning. He realised Styles was looking beyond him, and he whipped his head around. Shit indeed. Two kids, teenagers by the looks of it, stood on the opposite side of Wembley Hill Road. They could have been clones of one another. Hoodies baggy enough to fit Snow White and all seven dwarves in, and jeans with the backside hanging down by their knees. Trainers so white they looked Tippexed.

Porter spotted what had caught Styles's eye. Teen One's mobile phone was held up at eye level, pointing straight at Porter. Teen Two's shoulders jiggled, arms crossed, as he laughed at whatever crap joke his pal had just cracked. Porter trotted towards the road, but before he'd even reached the kerb, Teen One lowered his phone and headed off up the road towards Wembley Park Tube station, with Teen Two in tow.

'Whoa, hang on there, lads. Can I have a word?' Porter called after them.

'Yeah, bruv,' Teen One shouted over the noise of the traffic that zipped past from both directions. 'I got a word for you . . .' But his voice mingled with the growl of a bus engine.

Porter wasn't sure if he'd heard right. Styles was up by his shoulder now, and Porter turned to him.

'Did he just say I was trendy?'

'Trending,' said Styles. 'As in online.'

Porter closed his eyes and swore softly. Patchett. The kid had seen the lot. Recorded it as well. Worse still, in ten minutes, half of London would have seen it too. Porter toyed with dodging the traffic, chasing after them, asking them to take the clip down, but he couldn't exactly force them to, and they had a healthy head start already. He turned to Styles, putting on his best *who gives a shit* face.

'It's fine. I barely touched him anyway. What's the worst that can happen?'

The electric motor of the garage door grumbled until the edge met the floor with a solid *clunk*. The man who used to be Gordon Jackson climbed out of the red Renault Clio he now drove, having sold the Volvo to a local dealer for cash. He slung the strap of the laptop case across his chest, and went through the adjoining utility room, and out onto the back yard. His clothes were different, too; suit swapped for faded jeans and a dark blue waterproof jacket. Hair that was once

immaculate had been ruffled somewhere along the line, as if he'd been walking into a strong wind.

He unlocked the shed with a key from his pocket and closed the door carefully behind him. It was beyond tidy in there. White shapes on the walls outlined where every tool belonged, like a series of mini crime scenes. He laid the laptop case on the bench and knelt down, sliding a small stack of cardboard boxes out from under the work surface. He felt, rather than saw, the edge of a floorboard at the back, the length of his forearm, nails scratching at the edge as he eased it out. A second board followed, and he put his hand into the new gap, fingers running over the lumpy earth below like he was reading Braille. They closed around something that crinkled and he pulled out a plastic sandwich bag, empty except for a black USB stick.

The laptop whirred into life and he plugged the memory stick into the side. A few quick clicks later and the only file on it, an Excel workbook, opened up. One long column of numbers. He scanned through them, running through a list in his head long since committed to memory, and clicked on the numbers that corresponded to Gordon Jackson. Two more clicks and the cell changed from white to green, like all those above it. Ran the numbers in the next cell down against the list in his head for a new name: Harold Mayes.

The corners of his mouth twitched, a hint of a smile swimming to the surface then sinking without a trace. It only took him a minute to reset the scene. Memory stick, floorboards and boxes were slid back into place. He bounced to his feet, closing his eyes, taking in a deep breath as if filling his lungs would help bring his latest incarnation to life. He held for a three count, opened his eyes and nodded to himself. And with that, Harold Mayes strode out of the shed and back towards the house.

Max lay with his head in Jen's lap, feet dangling over the edge of the mocha-coloured sofa. She wound her finger through a loop of his hair,

curling it in a tight little brown ringlet around her index finger.

‘Why even bother to arrange to meet up? That’s what I can’t understand. Fair enough, it was me looking for him. Me who found him. Made the first move. But he didn’t have to even acknowledge I existed if he didn’t want to.’

‘Call him,’ said Jen. ‘Put him on the spot and just ask him straight.’

‘That’s twice he’s skipped town and left me. Twice. The fact I wasn’t born the first time round is just circumstantial. Give me one good reason why I should give him the benefit of the doubt.’

‘He’s your dad, Max, and you can’t count the first time; he didn’t even know.’

‘Biologically, yeah, but that’s as far as it goes. If it’s all the same, I’d rather just let it go. I lasted over thirty years without him, so I’m sure I’ll cope. Part of me wishes I’d never found him in the first place.’

He swung his legs around and sat up, rotating his neck through a slow three-sixty, feeling something grind inside. He headed into the kitchen, smiling as he saw the picture on the fridge. A stick figure in a dress, a line of smaller figures stretched out behind it. Jen was a teacher at a local primary school, and a steady stream of artwork followed her home every week. She kept them all in a couple of shoe boxes upstairs, joking that if any of the kids became the next Damien Hirst, she could stick them on eBay.

‘Stir-fry OK for you?’ he called out.

‘Sounds good.’

She padded into the kitchen after him, bare feet shushing against the tiles, and pulled a half-empty bottle of Pinot Grigio from the fridge. Max came up behind her as she poured them each a glass, snaking his arms around her waist.

‘I know I can be a moody little shit at times, but you know I’m worth the hassle,’ he murmured, lips brushing against her ear.

‘Mm-hmm, you’ll do till Colin Farrell comes to his senses,’ she said,

wriggling around to face him. 'You know I'm behind you whatever you want to do, don't you?'

'I do,' he said, nodding slowly, pulling her close so that her head slotted neatly into the groove of his neck. Two pieces of a jigsaw. They stood like that for a few seconds, until Jen broke the silence.

'Can't smell the stir-fry yet.'

'Cheeky!'

She danced out of reach as he tried, and failed, to land a playful smack on her backside. To hell with his dad. He had all he needed right here in this kitchen.

The man watched Harold Mayes, the real Harold, making his way through the fruit and veg aisle. He made a show of rummaging in a tray of apples, watching from the corner of his eye, as Harold stopped by the Galia melons, giving one a quick squeeze to test its ripeness. He looked the other way as Harold came towards him, pretending to check through the items in his own basket even though they were just window dressing. Props to help him blend in.

A steady stream of shoppers criss-crossed the aisle between them. Most of them looked as if they were on autopilot, eyes glazed from a day in the office, leaning on their trolleys like they were a Zimmer frame. Eat, sleep, shave, repeat. He had been like that once upon a time, but he'd never go back now. He cruised the aisles, a shark circling a shoal, looking on as Harold walked over to a self-service checkout. No need to panic or speed up as he watched Harold scan his items from three back in the queue. No need to worry as Harold headed out into the twilight. He already knew where Harold lived. He'd already been inside. Tonight was just part of the preparation. Part of the ritual. Study. Learn. Plan. He collected his change from the tray under the checkout, and headed out into the night.