

'History does not repeat itself, only man.'
– Voltaire

Chapter 1

'No more dead dogs and slashed swans for us,' whispered Dick Alderman, like this was good news –

It wasn't. It was Day 2:

9.30 a.m. –

Friday 13 May 1983:

Millgarth Police Station, Leeds –

Yorkshire:

Waiting in the wings –

I pushed open the side door, the Conference Room silent as I led this damned parade out:

Detective Superintendent Alderman and the father, a policewoman and the mother, Evans from Community Affairs and me –

The Owl:

Maurice Jobson; Detective Chief Superintendent Maurice Jobson.

We sat down behind the Formica tables, behind the microphones and the cups of water.

I took off my glasses. I rubbed my eyes –

No bed, no sleep, only this:

The Press Conference –

This same, familiar place again:

Hell.

I put my glasses back on, thick lenses and black frames. I sat and stared out at my audience –

This same, familiar audience:

These hundred hungry hounds, sweating under their TV lights and deadlines, under the cigarette smoke and last night's ale, their muscles taut and arses clean, tongues out and mouths watering, wanting bones –

Fresh bones.

I switched on the microphone. I reeled back from the inevitable wail.

I coughed once to clear my throat then said: 'Ladies and gentlemen, at approximately 4 p.m. yesterday evening, Hazel Atkins disappeared on her way home from Morley Grange Junior and Infants. Hazel was last seen walking up Rooms Lane towards her home in Bradstock Gardens.'

I took a sip from the warm, still water.

'When Hazel did not return from school, Mr and Mrs Atkins con-

tacted Morley Police and a search was launched early yesterday evening. As some of you are aware, the police were joined in this search by more than one hundred local people. Unfortunately last night's freak weather hampered the search, although it did resume at six o'clock this morning. Given the inclement and unseasonable weather and the fact that Hazel has never gone missing before, we are obviously concerned for her safety and whereabouts.'

Another sip from the warm, still water.

'Hazel is ten years old. She has medium-length dark brown hair and brown eyes. Last night she was wearing light blue corduroy trousers, a dark blue sweater embroidered with the letter *H*, and a red quilted sleeveless jacket. She was carrying a black drawstring gym bag, also embroidered with the letter *H*.'

I held up an enlarged colour print of a smiling brown-haired girl. I said: 'Copies of this recent school photograph are being distributed as I speak.'

Again a sip from the warm, still water.

I glanced down the table at Dick Alderman. He touched the father's arm. The father looked up then turned to me.

I nodded.

The father blinked.

I said: 'Mr Atkins would now like to read a short statement in the hope that any member of the public who may have seen Hazel after four o'clock yesterday evening, or who may have any information whatsoever regarding Hazel's whereabouts or her disappearance, will come forward and share this information with Mr and Mrs Atkins and ourselves.'

I slid the microphone down the table to Mr Atkins as the hounds edged in closer, panting and slavering, smelling bones –

His daughter's bones –

The scent strong here, near.

Mr Atkins looked at his wife, his four eyes red from tears and lack of sleep, a night's guilty stubble in clothes damp and crushed, and from out of this mess he stared at the hounds that waited and watched, waited and watched –

His bones.

Mr Atkins said, said with strength: 'I would like to appeal to anybody who knows where our Hazel is or who saw her after four o'clock yesterday to please telephone the police. Please, if you know anything, anything at all, please telephone the police. Please –'

Stop –

'Let her come home.'

Stop.

Silence.

Mrs Atkins in tears, shoulders shaking, WPC Martin holding her –
Her husband, Hazel's father, his fingers in his mouth –

He said: 'We miss her. I –'

Stop.

Silence –

Long, long silence.

I nodded at Dick. He passed the microphone back along the table.

I said: 'That is all the information we have at the moment but, if you would excuse Mr and Mrs Atkins, I will then try and answer any questions you might have.'

I stood up as WPC Martin and Dick took the mother and the father out through the side door, the dogs watching them go, still hungry –

Hungry for bones –

Mine.

Alone with Evans at the front, I said: 'Gentlemen?'

The stark forest of hands, from their whispers a two-word scream:

'Clare Kemplay . . .'

More bones –

'Coincidence,' I was saying, seeing –

Old bones.

'Coincidence,' I said again, knowing –

There is salvation in no-one else.

Upstairs, a cup of cold tea in one hand: 'Where are the parents?'

Dick Alderman: 'Jim's taken them back to Morley.'

'We should get back over there.'

Dick: 'Take my car?'

I nodded.

Dick put out his cigarette. He reached for his coat.

'Dick?'

He turned back round: 'Yeah?'

'Where is all the Kemplay stuff?'

'What?'

'The Clare Kemplay files.'

'It's a coincidence,' he sighed. 'You said it yourself. What else could it be?'

'Where's the fucking stuff, Dick?'

He shrugged: 'Wood Street, probably.'

'Thank you.'

The Dewsbury Road through Beeston and along the Elland Road until it became Victoria Road and Morley –

Dick driving, me with my eyes closed –

Just the sleet, the windscreen wipers, and the radio:

'Parliament dissolves amidst excitement and relief ahead of 9 June poll; search continues for missing Morley 10-year-old; body of a boy aged three found on Northampton tip; 18-year-old found hanged in police cell; Nilsen to be charged with more murders . . .'

'How many you think he did?' asked Dick –

'Not a clue,' I said, eyes still shut. 'Not a bloody one.'

It was snowing in the middle of May and Hazel Atkins had been missing nineteen hours –

Lost.

Morley Police Station –

Four o'clock –

The Incident Room:

Maps and a blackboard, markers and chalk, grids and times –

One photograph.

Lists of officers and their territories, lists of houses and their occupants –

Gaskins out in the fields, Ellis on the knocker –

Evans in and out with the press –

Dick Alderman and Jim Prentice sat waiting.

The chalk in my hand, the smudges on my suit –

The egg sandwiches covered in silver foil, uneaten.

I took off my glasses. I wiped them on my handkerchief.

There was nothing more to say:

Outside it was still snowing and Hazel Atkins was still missing –

Twenty-four hours.

Her parents back on a sofa in the cold front room of their dark home –

The curtains not drawn –

All of us lost.

There was a knock at the door –

I looked up.

Dick Alderman: 'Nightcap, boss?'

I shook my head. I closed the file, glasses off and on the desk.

'Clare Kemplay?' Dick said, looking at her file.

'Yep.'

'Evening Post mentioned it,' he mumbled.

'Kathryn Williams?'

He nodded.

'What did she say?'

'Nine years ago, same school,' he shrugged. 'Bit about Myshkin.'

'What about him?'

'The usual bollocks.'

I picked up my glasses. I put them back on, the thick lenses and the black frames. I sat and stared up into his eyes, thinking –

I am the Owl:

I am the Owl and I see from behind these lenses thick and frames black, see through everything –

Unblinking –

The usual bollocks –

Everything.

Chapter 2

New Hope for Britain:

Saturday 14 May 1983 –

D-26.

Fog and sleet from Wakefield to here:

Park Lane Special Hospital, Merseyside –

A *rotten*, un-fresh place.

You switch off the radio and the election debate and wind down your window.

'I'm here to see Michael Myshkin,' you say to the guard at the gate.

'And you are?'

'John Piggott.'

The guard looks down at the clipboard in his hands, tilting it towards him to keep the rain off: 'John Winston Piggott?'

You nod.

'His solicitor?'

You nod again, even less sure.

He hands you a plastic visitor's tag: 'Follow the road round to the main building and the car park. Report to reception inside. They'll take you from there.'

'Thank you.'

You drive up the black wet road to a low grey building, modern and barred. You park and get out into the dismal cold light, the sleet and the rain. You push a buzzer and wait outside the metal door to the main building. There is a loud click then the sound of an alarm. You pull open the door and step inside a steel cage. You show the plastic visitor's tag to the guard on the other side of the bars and tell him your name. He bangs twice on one of the bars with a black and shining truncheon. Another set of locks moves back. Another alarm sounds and you are through to the reception area. Another guard gives you a slip of paper with a number. He nods at a bench. You walk over and sit down between a couple of old people and a woman with a crying child.

You sit and you wait in the grey and damp room, grey and damp with the smell of people who have travelled hundreds of miles along grey and damp motorways to be told by overweight men in grey and damp uniforms with black and shining truncheons to wait on grey and damp government seats for nothing but more bad news, grey and damp, as the bolts and the locks slide back and forth and the alarms sound and the numbers are called and the old people stand up and sit

back down and the child cries and cries until a voice from a desk by the door shrieks: 'Twenty-seven'.

The child has stopped crying and its mother is looking at you.

'Twenty-seven!'

You stand up.

'Number twenty-seven!'

At the desk you say: 'John Piggott to see Michael Myshkin.'

A woman in a grey uniform runs her wet, bitten finger down a biro list, sniffs and says: 'Purpose of visit?'

'His mother asked me to come and see him.'

She sniffs again and looks up at you: 'Family?'

'No,' you say. 'I'm a solicitor.'

'Legal then?' she spits at you with sudden English hate, crisp and vicious.

You nod, vaguely afraid.

She hands you back your visitor's pass: 'First time?'

You nod again, her breath old and close.

'The patient will be brought to the visitors' room and a member of staff will be present throughout the visit. Visits are limited to forty-five minutes. You will both be seated at a table and are to remain seated throughout the course of the visit. You are to refrain from any physical contact and are not to pass anything directly to the patient. Anything you wish to give the patient must be done so through this office and can only be one of the items on this approved list,' she says and hands you a photocopied piece of A4.

'Thank you,' you smile.

'Return to your seat and wait for a member of staff to escort you to the visiting area.'

'Thank you,' you say again and do as you are told.

Thirty minutes and a paper swan later, a lanky guard with spots of blood upon his collar says: 'John Winston Piggott?'

You stand up.

'This way.'

You follow him to another door and another lock, another alarm and a ringing bell, through the door and up an overheated and overlit grey corridor.

At another set of double doors, he pauses and says: 'Know the drill?'

You nod.

'Keep seated, no physical contact, no passing of goods, ciggies, whatever,' he says anyway.

You nod again.

'I'll tell you when your time's up,' he says. 'If you've had enough, just say so.'

'Thank you.'

The guard then punches a code into a panel on the wall.

An alarm sounds and he pulls open the door: 'Ladies first.'

You step into a small room with a grey carpet and grey walls, two plastic tables each with two plastic chairs.

There are no windows, just one other door opposite –

No tea and biscuits here.

'Sit down,' says the guard.

You sit down in the grey plastic chair with your back to the grey door through which you've just come. You lean forward, arms on the marked plastic surface of the grey plastic table, eyes on the door opposite.

The guard takes a chair from the other table and sits down behind you.

You turn to ask him: 'What's he like then, Myshkin?'

The man looks over at the door then back at you and winks: 'Pervert, same as rest of them.'

'He violent, is he?'

'Only with his right hand,' he mimes.

You laugh and turn back round and there he is, right on cue –

As if by magick –

In a pair of grey overalls and grey shirt, enormous with a head twice as large:

Michael John Myshkin, murderer of children.

You've stopped laughing.

Michael Myshkin in the doorway, spittle on his chin.

'Hello,' you say.

'Hello,' Myshkin smiles, blinking.

His guard pushes him forwards into the grey plastic chair opposite you, then closes the door and takes the last chair to sit behind Myshkin.

Michael Myshkin looks up at you.

You stop staring.

Myshkin looks back down at the grey plastic table.

'My name is John Piggott,' you say. 'I used to live in Fitzwilliam, near you. I'm a solicitor now and your mother asked me to come and talk to you about an appeal.'

You pause.

Michael Myshkin is patting down his dirty yellow hair with his fat right hand, the hair thin and black with oil.

'An appeal is a very lengthy and costly procedure, involving a lot of time and different people,' you continue. 'So before any firm embarks upon such a course on behalf of a client, we have to be very sure that there are sufficient grounds for an appeal and that there is a great likelihood of success. And even this costs a lot of money.'

You pause again.

Myshkin looks up at you.

You ask him: 'Do you understand what I'm saying?'

He wipes his right hand on his overalls and smiles at you, his pale blue eyes blinking in the warm grey room.

'You do understand what I'm saying?'

Michael Myshkin nods once, still smiling, still blinking.

You turn to the guard sat behind you: 'Is it OK if I take some notes?'

He shrugs and you take a spiral notebook and biro from out of your carrier bag.

You flick open the pad and ask Myshkin: 'How old are you, Michael?'

He glances round at the guard sat behind him then back at you and whispers: 'Twenty-two.'

'Really?'

He blinks, smiles, and nods again.

'Your mother told me you were thirty.'

'Outside,' he whispers, the index finger of his left hand to his wet lips.

'How about inside?' you ask him. 'How long have you been in here?'

Michael Myshkin looks at you, not smiling, not blinking, and very slowly says: 'Seven years, four months, and twenty-six days.'

You sit back in your plastic chair, tapping your plastic pen on the plastic table.

You look across at him.

Myshkin is patting down his hair again.

'Michael,' you say.

He looks up at you.

'You know why you're in here?' you ask. 'In this place?'

He nods.

'Tell me,' you say. 'Tell me why you're in here?'

'Because of Clare,' he says.

'Clare who?'

'Clare Kemplay.'

'What about her?'

'They say I killed her.'