

Brass in Pocket

An Inspector Drake Mystery

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Prologue

He watched them leave the police station and drive away. He inched the stolen car out of the lay-by and followed them. An hour into their shift he watched them stop and question a speeding motorist. He knew the driver would get booked, even if he were just over the speed limit.

Soon, they were on the move again.

He could set his watch by their routine. He knew where they would be heading halfway through their shift. They parked on the grass verge of a junction on a long, straight section of road, waiting. From his vantage point, he could make out the driver pointing the speed gun towards the oncoming traffic.

When they drove away, empty handed, he heard them joking with Area Control on his radio scanner. He followed them. When he got too close, he fell back. Sometimes he parked a safe distance from them, listening to the messages.

Later, they stopped for petrol. He parked in the shadows, out of sight of the CCTV cameras on the forecourt. From the car he saw them laughing and joking with a girl behind the counter. An open-topped sports car drew up and a tall woman wearing a short skirt stepped out. He watched as they eyed her filling the car. Then they pulled off the forecourt; an indicator light pulsed as they stopped at the kerb. He saw the driver scanning for traffic, before driving away.

He lingered a few moments before firing the engine into life.

After the pubs closed, they drove on, past the boarded-up buildings and fish and chip shops, full of hungry customers, before parking and waiting for drunk drivers. He parked his

car as near as he dared. He sat patiently, counting down the time to his first telephone call. He could feel his pulse increasing with anticipation.

He picked up one of the mobiles sitting by the MP3 player on the passenger seat. On the scanner he heard a voice relaying a message and moments later they pulled away. It was dark now as he followed them over the long causeway and, fearful they might notice him, he slowed and watched as the taillights of their car moved away from him. To his left, through the darkness, he saw the moon's reflection on the surface of the estuary and on his right the dark shadow of the causeway wall.

After a few miles they pulled into a lay-by. When he passed them, he listened to their crackled speech on the scanner, complaining about the hoax.

He pulled into a junction and made another call.

He heard them receive the message from the Area Control Room. He drove on to the Crimea Pass through the narrow streets of the deserted town. The road out was clear. He sensed the presence of the mountains towering either side of him as he accelerated towards the top of the pass.

He parked and got out of the car, opened the boot and reached for the long coat, carefully threading his arms through the sleeves. He leant down again and moved a blanket to one side, before closing his fingers round the cold metal.

Far down the valley, he saw the lights of their vehicle approaching. Soon, very soon, they would arrive. His mouth was dry; his heart pounded.

As they approached, he knelt by the rear tyre, out of sight.

Their car slowed, the hazard lights flashed, and they parked exactly where he knew they would. He walked to the front of his car and then towards them.

Perfect.

Chapter 1

Tuesday 1st June

After the fourth ring Ian Drake hauled himself out of the warm bed and picked up the phone. He rubbed the sleep from his eyes, the night air chilling his skin. It must be a domestic, he thought.

‘Drake.’

‘Inspector Drake?’ He didn’t recognise the voice.

‘Area Control Room. We’ve got two officers down on the Crimea Pass.’

‘*What ...?*’

‘Two officers have been killed. Responding to a routine call.’

He glanced at the clock on the bedside table. It was a little after two and he had slept for barely an hour. Beside him Sian was stirring.

‘When did this happen?’

‘Call just came in, sir, from the local station.’

‘Who’s the senior officer on duty?’

‘Superintendent Price. He’s on his way.’

‘What are the details?’

‘Sir, I was just asked to call you.’

‘But you must have more details ...’

The news curled a knot in his stomach, but he knew that Area Control staff just made the calls; he would have to talk to Price.

‘There’s a car on its way, sir.’

The phone went dead.

Drake scrambled about the bedroom, dragging on clothes discarded earlier. He mistimed thrusting his leg into his trousers and fell to the floor. Sian moved as he sat on the side of the bed, struggling with his shoelaces.

‘What’s wrong?’ she mumbled.

‘I can’t believe it ...’

‘What’s happened?’

‘Two officers have been killed on the Crimea Pass.’

‘Policemen?’

Drake nodded.

His wife sat up, hair dishevelled, eyes wide. ‘It can’t be true.’

Before Drake could continue, the front doorbell rang, followed by a loud banging.

‘That’ll be the car,’ Drake said, as he ran for the stairs.

The young officer standing outside the front door – head shaven, high-visibility vest – looked tense and alert, his eye contact direct. He turned and Drake followed him down the drive to the white BMW idling on the road. Opening the rear door, he mumbled an acknowledgment to the driver before closing the door behind him. He listened to the first officer radioing confirmation of their location and as the light in the cabin dimmed, Drake saw the flickering lights of the dashboard and noticed, with approval, the clean, sanitised smell. On the A55, the main trunk road that crossed North Wales, the driver accelerated hard. Drake checked his safety belt as they passed the occasional lorry and slowing car, pulling over to let them past. He fumbled through his jacket, knowing he had calls to make.

Detective Sergeant Caren Waits woke moments before the alarm clock went off and reached out to silence it before the noise disturbed Alun, sleeping by her side. He had been up three

nights running and now it was her turn. Padding downstairs, she pulled on a pair of old boots and grabbed a torch before walking out over the fields. She drew the zip of her fleece up under her chin, thrust her hands into the warmth of the pockets and saw the outline of the shed against the moonlight. Then she saw the long necks of the alpacas moving slowly in front of her. The animals had not been well but were improving, and, once she had checked them, she would be back to the comfort of her bed. She ran her hand down each alpaca's warm, woolly back, the light from her torch reflecting in their eyes, before returning to the farmhouse, pleased that Alun could sleep on undisturbed.

Her BlackBerry rang as she closed the back door. The screen said *DI Drake*.

'Morning, sir.' She made a point of sounding wide awake.

'Oh ...'

'I was awake.'

'Two officers are dead on the Crimea Pass.'

'What? Oh my God ... Who?'

'I've just left Colwyn Bay. Super Price is en route.'

'Are they Traffic?'

'No details. Get ready. We'll be through Llanrwst in fifteen minutes.'

It looked like being another long day – longer than usual: most days she slept until seven. After washing in lukewarm water, she drew a brush through her hair before waking Mike.

'I've got to go to work.'

His voice slurred underneath the bedding. 'What time is it?'

'Just after two.'

He pushed his head above the duvet, his hair a tangled mess. 'What?'

'Drake's just called.'

‘And what did Mr Personality want at this time of the morning?’

‘Two officers have been killed.’

‘What ... I mean where – who?’

She brushed her lips against his cheek, his stubble rough against her skin. ‘I’ll call you later.’

The car turned off the A55 onto the narrow, deserted roads of the Conwy valley. The driver ignored the speed restrictions. Drake shifted uncomfortably in his seat.

‘Do you lads know any details about what’s happened?’ he asked.

The officer in the passenger seat answered.

‘Nothing yet, sir. Our orders were to get you there – fast.’

Drake sat back as the driver swept the car down the valley. He glimpsed the moonlight as it caught the surface of the river, casting long curves of light into the trees and hedges that lined the riverbank. The car slowed through the narrow streets of Llanrwst, eventually pulling to the kerb to collect Caren, standing on the pavement. The officers grunted an acknowledgment when she got into the car before the driver accelerated away.

‘What are the details, sir?’

‘Two officers responding to a routine call.’

‘When did it happen?’ Caren stared at Drake intensely. ‘Who are they? Are they Traffic or from the local station?’

‘Area Control sounded shocked when they spoke to me.’

‘Who would want to kill two cops? I can’t believe it.’

Drake sat back, averting his eyes from the heads-up display as he gathered his thoughts.

The deaths of two police officers would make international news. He shuddered when he recalled the media attention the deaths of other police officers had received but two officers killed together would mean intense press activity.

Drake had driven over the Crimea Pass once before and he knew the bleakness of the windswept terrain and the landscape disfigured by generations of slate mining. It was isolated and inhospitable: not the place for a drive-by killing or opportunistic attack. The implications sent a shiver through Drake.

He knew they were making good time. He peered out at the darkened houses and empty streets of the villages as they approached the Crimea. The radio message from the marked police car parked at the bottom of the pass was clear.

‘No vehicles ahead. You’re clear. Over.’

The driver threw a switch on the gear stick and the car accelerated hard. The heads-up display said one hundred and twenty miles an hour. Drake averted his eyes. The BMW’s headlights pierced the darkness as it raced to the top of the pass. Drake leant forward and saw, in the distance, the stark, blinding lights of the generators.

Chapter 2

Tuesday 1st June

The seat belt cut into Drake's shoulder as the car braked hard, stopping a few yards from the Scientific Support Vehicle. The yellow tape marking the inner perimeter of the crime scene flickered in the artificial light. After leaving the car they passed an Armed Response Vehicle, its boot open, empty of rifles. Drake looked towards the white police Volvo, the tailgate and passenger door open, the lights blazing.

The scene was eerie, almost unreal. Beyond the open tailgate of the Volvo, traffic cones and warning triangles were set out in no apparent order. Superintendent Wyndham Price stood with Mike Foulds, the crime scene manager, who was busy fastening the buttons of a white one-piece suit as Drake and Caren joined them. Price looked at Drake, his eyes hard.

'Ian, this is a nightmare, unbelievable ...' Price said.

'Who are they?' Drake asked.

'Paul Mathews and Danny Farrell,' Price replied. 'From Traffic.'

Drake looked over at the car. 'Let's get started.'

They walked over to the patrol car and gazed in at the officer sitting in the driver's seat, head thrown back, his body twisted to one side. A dark stain had spread over the white fabric of his shirt from a jagged wound in the centre of his chest.

Caren gasped when she noticed the face of the dead officer. The left eye socket was a mass of mangled tissue and bone. Blood had saturated the head restraint, drenched the officer's shoulder and covered the rear seat. Drake guessed he had been trying to escape when he was shot.

They moved round to the passenger side. The second officer was sitting on the tarmac, his back resting against the rear door. His stab jacket was open, the plastic tie hanging loose from one side of his collar. His shirt was a sodden, blackened mass of cloth and the right eye stared out blankly – the other eye socket was unrecognisable, blood drying sticky down his cheek. Drake knelt, but he could sense the bile gathering in his throat, so he straightened up and faced Price.

‘This is worse than I could imagine,’ Price said.

‘Who found the bodies?’ Drake asked Foulds.

‘Call from a passing motorist. Then a team from the local station responded.’

‘Where are those officers?’

‘In their car, over there.’ He motioned past the yellow tape. ‘Really cut up. One of them threw up all over the tarmac.’

A mobile rang and Price dug into the pocket of his jacket for his phone. He strode away, his voice loud. Drake looked down at the body on the tarmac, and then through into the car. It seemed like the car had been sprayed a deep crimson colour. The knot of anger returned. Two of their own.

Behind them two vans from the dog section drew to a halt. The handlers jumped out and hurried to the rear of their vehicles. Drake heard the yelping of the dogs as the doors opened and the animals bounded out onto the tarmac.

‘Get everyone over here,’ he said to Caren.

She passed the generators into the semi-darkness, emerging moments later with the two armed officers. Drake saw the light dancing off their shaven heads and they hefted their rifles, grimly scanning the darkness, although Drake knew that the killer had long since left. Perhaps they had passed him on their journey up the valley. He might have been parked, waiting for them to pass, before returning to the safety of his home. Drake considered his first

move. Someone with a reason to kill two traffic officers would mean trawling through the lives of both men. The possibility of a terrorist attack couldn't be excluded, but this was a killing on an isolated mountain pass.

Soon a crowd had gathered around Drake: the armed response officers, the dog handlers, pulling at leashes, straining to keep the animals in check, and the two officers who had driven Drake and Caren to the scene. Foulds stood with the CSIs behind him – Price was still talking into his phone. Drake scanned the faces before him; there were twitching jaw muscles and tired eyes and wide-legged postures, but everyone listened intently. Drake raised his voice above the noise from the generators.

'Let's get the dogs onto this first.' Drake pointed over at the car.

'We'll need the torches from the vans,' one of the officers said.

Drake glanced at his watch. 'My guess is that daybreak will be in an hour.'

Caren fiddled with her mobile and stared down at the dim light on the screen.

'Quarter to five this time of the year, sir,' Caren said, raising her head and sounding pleased with herself.

Drake muttered an acknowledgment and continued. 'We need to secure the scene fully before the press can get anywhere near.' He turned to Foulds. 'How long until you get the tent finished?'

'Twenty minutes.'

'And the pathologist?'

'Due any time.'

Caren twisted the top off a bottle of water and drank a mouthful, before offering it to Drake. He put the plastic bottle to his lips and drank half of it without stopping. He heard a vehicle pulling up beyond the perimeter tape and recognised the duty pathologist leaving the

patrol car. Dr Lee Kings, a small, thickset man with large glasses, marched over towards Drake.

‘Inspector Drake,’ he said formally. ‘Terrible business.’

‘I know, Lee. We need to get the results as soon as.’

‘Of course.’

They walked over towards the car and watched as the CSIs hauled a tarpaulin over the frame covering the vehicle. The pathologist knelt by the driver’s side as Caren and Drake looked on. They could still hear Price’s voice booming into his phone as he approached.

‘Could be terrorists, sir,’ Caren said, making sure no one else could hear her.

Drake grimaced. This was worse than the worst-case scenarios they were taught at management training sessions. He knew the standard operating procedures for a terrorist incident would mean Special Branch and the Secret Intelligence Services getting involved. There would be reports to write, liaison officers to keep informed, and everything would be dragged into paperwork ten feet thick.

Drake felt the chill of the night air on his face and a cold apprehension – almost fear – filled his mind, as the realisation that the Wales Police Service had lost two of its own hit him again.

‘Let’s get the forensics finished before we jump to any conclusions.’

The pathologist worked silently, moving his hands over the body until he exposed the narrow wound, drilled into pink flesh speckled with grey hairs. He straightened up and moved away from the car, pushing the glasses back up his nose.

‘Well, Lee?’ asked Drake.

Price suddenly materialised at Drake’s side. ‘We need to know how this maniac shot these officers. Was it a pistol?’

‘I ...’ Lee Kings paused.

‘Come on, we don’t have time to waste,’ Price pressed him.

‘I’m not certain—’

‘Of what?’ Price said, a note of incredulity in his voice.

‘Time of death?’ Drake suggested.

The pathologist drew breath and stood up. ‘No. Two hours maximum. And it wasn’t a gun.’

‘What do you mean?’ Drake this time.

‘It looks like a bolt of some sort ...’

Drake saw the intense expression on Kings’s face.

‘You must have some idea?’ Price asked.

‘Small piece of metal, like a dart. Never seen anything like it,’ Kings said. ‘The post mortem will give us a better idea.’

With the pathologist finished, the serious work could begin. Drake glanced at his watch. If Caren was right about the time of sunrise, then soon it would be first light and the generators could be turned off. The CSIs would have to search the car until every inch had been examined. He knew the painstaking fingertip search of the road would take hours. The first glimmer of morning sunshine climbed over the mountains as the silhouettes of the steep cliffs formed. A photographer adjusted the settings on his camera which was screwed down to the top of a tripod. Price finished his final call and came up to stand next to Drake and Caren.

‘This is the most serious crime I have ever dealt with,’ Price said, his voice matching the hard, cold surface of the tarmac. ‘We’ll commit everything we have,’ he continued. ‘Killing police officers is, well ...’ He struggled for the right words.

And he looked Drake straight in the eye.

‘It’s an attack on society itself.’

Drake nodded. Caren stood quite still hands thrust deep into her pockets listening to Price

They walked round the car, stepping over the kerb, avoiding getting too close.

‘This is a desolate place. Why here?’ Drake said, squinting into the darkness, noticing the tips of the mountains streaked orange.

Drake passed the CSI team photographing the vehicle from every angle, and he walked towards the cones and warning triangles set out for several metres behind the Volvo. The camber of the road banked from the centre and some of the cones had fallen over onto the tarmac.

The image of the dead officers wouldn’t leave his mind. The bodies appeared staged. His mind tried to process the thought as it developed. He walked past the cones, down the hill before turning to look back at the car. Something was out of place, he knew it. He motioned to Caren.

‘Who put these cones out?’

Caren looked blank.

He shouted to Foulds, who broke into a jog and joined Drake and Caren.

‘Get a photographer here. Now.’

‘The Traffic lads wouldn’t have done this,’ Caren said.

‘That’s what I’m thinking.’

Caren upended all the overturned cones as Drake directed the photographer. After a few seconds she stood back and called over to Drake.

‘Something you ought to see,’ she said, pointing at the surface of the tarmac.

Once all the cones and warning triangles were upright, the shape they formed was unmistakable.

The outline of the number four was clear.