

Mutilated

A British Crime Thriller

(Doc Powers & D.I. Carver Investigate #2)

by

Will Patching

Copyright 2016 Will Patching

The right of Will Patching to be identified as the Author of the Work has been asserted by him. All rights reserved.

This is a work of fiction.

Names, characters, and incidents in this publication are the product of the author's imagination. Real organisations, events and places are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Introduction

*'The past is never truly passed, but ever present.
Sometimes, it reaches out to destroy the future...'*

The Surgeon

Prologue

The old man's dog bounded in and out of the bushes as it sniffed its way round Clapham Common, searching for odours to savour and maybe some squirrels to worry. His owner, hobbling along behind, using a cane to aid progress hampered by his arthritic hips, heard his terrier as it started yapping and growling with excitement. It was a distinctive noise, one the man recognised — his curious mutt had discovered something out of the ordinary.

The dog was waiting for him, quivering, tail beating a steady rhythm, his head switching between the old man and the focus of his excitement. The yapping quietened to a throaty grumble punctuated by whimpering, as if the dog was asking his owner what it was he had found.

Although his eyesight was no longer good, particularly in the dawn half-light, Gerald Butler could make out the shape as he stepped tentatively through the sodden undergrowth, and at first, thought it looked like the top half of a clothes store mannequin. Alabaster white, with a hairless head perched atop a limbless torso, with ribs and collarbone in sharp relief.

The head was slumped onto the chest, looking down at him.

Or at least it would have been except it had none of the usual features, just two dark orifices where the nostrils should be, with the surface of the rest of the face smoothed over. No eyes, no mouth and no ears. As if the factory had made a cursory attempt at realism with the breathing holes but not bothered to finish the rest of the human facial form.

As the old man approached the figure, he began wondering who had hung it here, upright against the trunk of this towering oak tree, with supporting wires stretching from its rear to the branches above, and why they would do such a thing. It had been positioned close to the footpath but just out of sight, and now, as he began to distinguish more detail, he realised the object he was peering at was stranger still.

Although the body was also smooth, there appeared to be thick, livid pink lines at the truncations where the shoulder and hip joints should be, in distinct contrast to the unearthly luminous paleness of the abdomen. On closer inspection he could see more jagged pink stripes on the head. And the pudendum looked odd too, like the plastic had been badly welded where the crotch should be.

He shrugged and turned to go as he called Smudge to follow, but the terrier just kept growling and whining while standing on his hindquarters, front paws clawing at the tree, snuffling and sniffing at the thing, then appealing to his master, eyes alert, intelligent, trying to communicate something. But what?

Gerald had seen all manner of horrors in his long life, some terrible things still buried in the murky depths of his memory, brought out for inspection only on rare occasions these days. He never discussed his time in Kenya, serving the British Empire as its post-war sphere of influence waned and the locals fought bloody battles for their independence. He had been a good military man, fresh out of school, had followed orders, that was all.

Yes, he had helped intern the dissidents, had 'disciplined' the worst of them, had 're-educated' the Mau Mau thugs, castrating the men with fire and pincers. Had pierced some eardrums with a screwdriver. Had done rather more than merely witness dark-skinned limbs being hacked from screaming adult males...

But he knew he was a decent man at heart, a good soldier, a patriot, a caring grandfather, a kindly old soul — one who had no desire to rekindle those memories right here, right now.

Yet, as he turned back at Smudge's bidding, finally closing in on the hideous object to satisfy his own curiosity at his dog's behest, he felt his heart start to canter wildly and his breath shuddered a hoarse rasp from his throat. At first he doubted his own failing eyesight, but as he placed his hand on the pallid breast he knew he was not mistaken.

It was no mannequin, no tailor's dummy.

His fingers flew away at the touch of cool flesh and he realised he was staring at a dismembered body, desecrated and ruined beyond recognition, but definitely human. Of that, there was no doubt in Gerald's now fevered mind.

But his brain still scrambled to make some sense of what he was seeing, demanding to know who had placed these remains here, just a few metres from the footpath, the route of his and Smudge's regular pre-dawn walk. He immediately concluded that this was no coincidence — the disfigured body had been placed here, for him to find.

As the discovery catapulted him back to his long dormant past, conjuring in his mind's eye a world of screaming madness, of suffering and torment, he cursed the person who had done this to him.

Then, worse, much worse, was the sudden realisation that the thing seemed to be moving. Gerald once again reached out, this time with tentative trembling fingers, their tips sensing the unmistakable texture of human skin while simultaneously registering the evident movement. The chest was rising and falling, almost imperceptibly, but definitely breathing.

While his overwrought mind tumbled and twisted, he tried to process the enormity and implications of Smudge's discovery. Then he backed away, his cane tumbling to the undergrowth as he became unbalanced, the shock slamming his heart against his ribs, his mind spinning like a Catherine wheel.

The old man stumbled, then felt his hip crack against a prominent tree root, pain searing through his body as he collapsed to the ground. He groaned as Smudge bounded to him, nuzzling his face, barking softly, urging him to get up. As Gerald Butler tried to haul himself upright, fumbling with his cane and then putting weight on his legs, he screeched, unable to stifle the agony.

The grinding bone and torn nerves screamed at him, blinding him, ripping through the reawakened memories saturating his mind. Then he collapsed again as the refuge of unconsciousness enfolded him and Smudge's soft pink tongue washed his bristled cheek.
