

# ONE

*11th March 1987*

Detective Inspector Andrew Joyce had somewhat naïvely assumed that by the time his mid-thirties rolled around he'd be settled into a comfortable, straightforward period of his life.

For years, it had seemed like everything was heading in the direction he'd expected it to; he'd been promoted to Detective Inspector at thirty-three, owned his own house and a very sensible car, and he'd even managed to have a couple of serious girlfriends in his late twenties.

So, it did take him a little by surprise that at almost midnight on the eve of turning thirty-four, he found himself neither surrounded by family at home, nor in the pub with friends, but instead hauling himself out of the Rochdale Canal and onto a freezing towpath in Ancoats.

Andrew swore loudly as his fingers scabbled uselessly on the uneven surface in the dark, until he found enough purchase to be able to drag his legs out of the water, cursing the day he'd decided to become a police officer.

'Andrew!'

'Sir!'

'Oh good, an audience,' Andrew griped as he struggled to his feet, canal water draining out from his suit and shoes until he was standing in a large puddle.

The two women who'd been calling his name were running up the towpath towards him. The weak moonlight was just enough for Andrew to pick out their silhouettes, and the sound of their shoes slapping against the ground was almost obscenely loud in the otherwise still night.

Peggy Swan reached him first, hair flying out wildly behind her before she skidded to a halt a couple of feet from

where Andrew stood.

Detective Sergeant Jen Cusack arrived only a second later, already reaching for her radio as she frowned in concern at the sodden figure before her.

‘Lloyd, it’s Jen,’ she said into the radio. ‘Can you bring the car further down Henry Street, please?’

Andrew missed whatever Lloyd said in reply because Peggy was doing that thing again; that thing where she looked like she was staring intently at an empty patch of air, but at any moment would launch into what sounded like a one-sided conversation. It had been nine months since he’d had to somewhat grudgingly accept that Peggy could have conversations with ghosts, but Andrew still wasn’t entirely sure that he’d ever be completely comfortable with the concept.

‘Sir?’ Jen said. ‘Lloyd will be here in five minutes.’

‘He only parked at the other end of the road,’ Andrew grumbled in annoyance, keeping one eye on where Peggy’s frown was deepening. ‘What’s taking so long?’

‘He says he went for chips, sir,’ Jen replied sheepishly.

‘Chips,’ Andrew repeated, almost devoid of any emotion.

‘Chips,’ Jen confirmed. ‘He was at the front of the queue. If it helps, he did say he’d get enough for everyone.’

It was in moments like this that Andrew was forced to stop and consider what his life might have been like if he’d just stayed at CID. If he *had* stayed, it was unlikely that he’d now be dripping wet, and equally unlikely that he’d probably just contracted a water-borne parasitic disease while waiting for his DC to finish getting a takeaway.

‘So, DI Joyce ending up in the canal had absolutely nothing to do with you?’ Peggy asked the patch of nothingness, shaking her head in disbelief. ‘*Really?*’

She turned to face Andrew a few seconds later and grimaced apologetically. ‘Arthur says he’s very sorry. He got a bit carried away with running after you. The nudge was accidental.’

Andrew tried to glare in the direction of wherever the elusive - and very dead - Arthur Havers, was standing. 'Nudge? He hit me hard enough to nearly end up on the other side of the canal!'

Peggy held up her hands in a silent reminder that it wasn't her fault.

'You said he wasn't strong enough to physically do anything,' Andrew added, feeling, that despite Peggy's assertion to the contrary, this actually was at least a little bit her fault. 'I'd say trying to drown me is proof otherwise.'

Peggy rolled her eyes, and Andrew felt overwhelmingly like he was being judged.

'He wasn't trying to drown you, Andrew. Anyway, Arthur says that it's all a bit clearer to him now.'

'Oh, *does* Arthur?' Andrew replied, gritting his teeth.

He was still fairly convinced that ex-convict and notorious thief Havers was playing silly buggers. This was the third night that they'd spent on this very stretch of the towpath, and each time, Havers had eventually announced that he apparently couldn't quite remember where the final hoard of stolen diamonds had been stashed. According to Peggy, Andrew should be showing Havers a little more patience, given that minutes after the diamonds had originally been hidden, Havers had been brutally killed by a former associate only a few hundred yards up the road.

'He says that you'll find the box behind the wall on the edge of the towpath, just in line with the lock,' Peggy added, overlooking Andrew's frustration. 'You'll need to go over the bridge first.'

'A whole case of stolen jewellery is just hidden behind a wall?' Andrew shook his head in incredulity. 'And nobody's happened upon it in the ten years since it was put there?'

'It's bolted down, and it should be well covered by plants,' Peggy replied, gesturing towards the empty space next to Andrew again. 'Can you not shoot the messenger, please? I'm only repeating what Arthur's said.'

‘Fine, I’ll go and have a look,’ Andrew said, running a hand through his hair and grimacing as his fingers collected a combination of what felt like grit and slime. He was glad that it was far too dark to see it in any detail. ‘Can you ask your little friend to stay away from me this time though?’

For just a second, Andrew thought that Peggy was going to say something snappish, but instead, she just took a deep breath through her nose and shot him a sardonic smile. ‘As you wish, Detective Inspector.’

*Ugh*, Andrew hated it when Peggy got all prim, because it usually meant that he’d said something to really irritate her, and he could look forward to pursed lips and pointed silence. In his defence, he’d just been dunked in the Rochdale Canal in the dead of night, on the eve of his birthday.

He decided that it would probably be best to stay quiet, and instead of commenting further he slowly made his way up the towpath and over the red-panelled footbridge towards the lock, keeping his head held as high as it was possible to do so when every single step he took resulted in a terrible squelching sound.

True to Peggy’s description, there was a low brick wall jutting out onto the towpath in line with the lock gate. He could hear Jen’s footsteps just behind him, which meant that Peggy and whatever remained of Arthur Havers probably weren’t too far away either. If Havers was taking the piss about the location of the jewellery, Andrew was going to work out exactly who he needed to speak to about arranging an exorcism.

‘DS Cusack, would you like to do the honours?’ Andrew asked tightly as he tried to rid his cold hands of cramp by repeatedly clenching his fingers into fists.

‘Sir,’ Jen said with a short nod before she knelt down on the tow path and switched on her torch.

‘Here, let me hold that for you,’ Peggy said, brushing past Andrew to take Jen’s torch and hold it high enough that the vegetation growing behind the wall was bathed in light.

‘Thanks, Peggy.’ Jen reached down to tug at the long grass-like planting until it came free from the soil and then laid the remains next to her.

Andrew hoped that the wall wasn’t a popular dumping ground for the kind of questionable, and sometimes dangerous, detritus that covered the edges of the towpath all the way through the city, but he knew that Jen would be careful to protect her hands as best she could.

When Jen had pulled out enough plant debris to create a small pile at her side, she looked up at her companions in surprise. ‘It feels like there’s a metal box in here. Just as Havers said, sir.’

Andrew knew that he probably looked like he’d just swallowed a whole net of lemons. ‘Alright, very good, Jen. Take some photos before we do anything else.’

Jen nodded her assent and reached into the large bag she’d been carrying all evening as they’d traipsed up and down the towpath.

Andrew was relieved that he’d be able to tell Higson that they’d finally used the camera. He’d spent almost a month practically begging his DCI to pay for it out of the minuscule Ballroom budget, and even when Higson had finally relented, he hadn’t seemed entirely convinced by any of Andrew’s arguments for why the department needed a camera in the first place. Hopefully seeing photos of the stolen jewels in situ would mollify him, at least a bit.

Once she’d taken a couple of photographs, Jen looked back over at Andrew, ‘How do you intend on getting it out of here if it’s bolted to the wall, sir?’

‘Well, if *someone* had told us about this little detail before we came down here, we’d have come prepared,’ Andrew replied, being careful not to catch Peggy’s eye. Andrew was happy to continue making snippy comments, but he’d be less happy if he ended up in the canal again.

‘Arthur says there should be a combination lock on the side of the case,’ Peggy said to Jen, patently ignoring Andrew.

‘He’s just trying to remember what the combination is.’

Any retort Andrew had balancing on the tip of his tongue was swallowed quickly when he heard hurried footsteps behind him. He spun around, ready to face whoever thought they had any business being down here at this time of night, and then relaxed almost immediately when he came face-to-face with his wayward DC.

‘Sorry, sir!’ Lloyd called, jogging towards them, white paper-wrapped parcels held tightly in his arms. ‘Thought I’d bring the chips down.’

Andrew knew that he should berate Lloyd for bringing food to a crime scene, but the smell of salt and vinegar drenched oil made him pause, almost unconsciously. Lunchtime seemed so very far away.

‘Hang on, wait for me! I’ve got Lilt for everyone!’

Andrew’s mouth dropped open as another familiar figure appeared on the Kitty Bridge. He whirled back round to glare at Peggy. ‘What the bloody hell is your brother doing here?’

‘I’m not his secretary, Andrew,’ Peggy replied firmly, wrinkling her nose at her brother’s approaching figure. ‘I have no idea. I haven’t seen him all day.’

‘Bugger!’ Charlie Swan yelped as he displaced the stack of cans in his arms and the topmost one plummeted heavily onto the towpath before rolling straight into the canal.

‘Whoops!’ he added, as he adjusted the four cans he was still holding. ‘Sorry, chaps, two of you will have to share. Bagsy not me, I’m parched. Peg, you’ll share with Joycie, won’t you?’

Andrew glared at Lloyd. ‘Explain!’

Lloyd pulled one side of his mouth down in a show of contrition. ‘Sorry, sir. Charlie was in front of me in the queue in the chippy. He’s been out with some friends.’

Andrew closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose.

‘Joyce, why on earth do you look like a drowned rat?’ Charlie laughed as he placed the remaining cans of Lilt by his

feet.

‘Charlie!’ Peggy snapped warningly, and Andrew almost thanked her for that.

‘Sir?’ Jen asked loudly, trying to get everyone to focus on the reason they were all huddled on a dark towpath even as she shot a longing look at Lloyd’s stack of chips. ‘What do you want to do? Come back tomorrow?’

Andrew shook his head. ‘Not a chance. We end this tonight, or we close the case unsolved. We’re not wasting any more time on this. Havers is obviously a dead end.’

‘One-seven-eight-three,’ Peggy said suddenly.

‘Sorry, what?’ Andrew asked, blinking in surprise.

‘Try that for the lock,’ Peggy clarified. ‘One-seven-eight-three.’

Andrew nodded at Jen, and he watched as she carefully moved yet more planting out of the way when Peggy held the torch a little closer to the wall.

‘What have I missed?’ Charlie asked, noisily popping open a can as he wobbled slightly on his feet.

‘You’re not even supposed to be here,’ Andrew said for what felt like the hundredth time in their acquaintance.

Whereas Peggy’s presence was officially sanctioned by Higson on what now seemed to be an almost-weekly basis – whether the case really required her or not – Charlie just made it his business to appear on investigations whenever the mood struck him. Higson didn’t seem to care at all, which just made Andrew feel even more put-out.

‘He’s right, Charlie,’ Peggy added. ‘You’re not supposed to be here.’

If there was only one thing that Andrew could always count on, it was for Peggy to back him up when Charlie was behaving like a particularly annoying arse; he could continue to count on this even when Andrew himself was being a particularly annoying arse.

Charlie just grinned as he always did and took another gulp of fizzy drink. ‘I was bored!’

‘Sir!’ Jen exclaimed in surprise. ‘It’s opened.’

Andrew hurried over to crouch next to Jen as she awkwardly forced the lid open, metal scraping against metal noisily as the slightly deformed box protested at being disturbed after so long.

The crooked lid tilted back far enough for the light of Peggy’s torch to catch on something that sparkled so obnoxiously that Andrew immediately had no doubt that they’d found what they’d been looking for.

‘Photos, Jen, please,’ Andrew instructed firmly. ‘I want photos of the scene as it is now, and I want every single piece of jewellery categorised separately, both here and then again back at the Ballroom.’

Jen complied, taking a few photos before she laid some evidence bags on the ground and gingerly started removing the jewellery from the box, one item at a time.

‘If you wouldn’t mind, Peggy,’ Lloyd said, thrusting the stack of wrapped chips at her as he took the torch from her hand. ‘I’ll make a list of everything we’ve got.’

‘I think we might be here a while, sir,’ Jen said dejectedly as Lloyd passed her the torch and she looked down into the illuminated box. ‘There’s loads of tiny things in here.’

Andrew sighed. Well, there went any chance of getting home soon. He wouldn’t leave until they had a record of everything though, no matter how long it took. News of the recovered diamonds would get back to CID quickly enough, and since Andrew had spent the last nine months living with the deeply paranoid sense that his former colleagues would eventually try to use the Ballroom’s upped success rate against him, he wanted to ensure that everything was done by the book. He needed everyone on Higson’s team to be above reproach if their own re-investigations were scrutinised at any point in the future.

‘Alright,’ Andrew sighed tiredly, and he shivered as a light breeze caught his wet clothes. ‘Jen, Lloyd, hold it there for a second. Let’s eat first, and then get back to cataloguing

everything.'

He turned his attention to Peggy, who seemed to be having a hushed conversation with Havers.

'Thank you for your help this week, Peggy. You can take your brother home now,' Andrew said, and winced at how formal he sounded. He really hadn't got any better at swallowing his pride.

'Arthur says he can tell you where everything came from,' Peggy said, waving away the stilted gratitude. 'Would that help?'

Andrew wanted to say 'no' because that would mean that Peggy would have to leave, and Andrew could momentarily go back to pretending that a significant number of the cases they'd closed recently had been down to careful policework and excellent deductive reasoning, rather than because of their resident ghost expert. He wouldn't say 'no' though, because at the end of the day he still took an enormous amount of pride in his job, whether ghosts helped the success rate or not.

'Alright, yes, that would help,' Andrew agreed, and Peggy looked surprised, as though she'd been waiting for an argument.

'Charlie!' Andrew then snapped. 'If you want to be useful, you can go and get coffees for everyone.'

Charlie saluted with a hiccup, sloshing fizzy pop all over his hand as he walked backwards.

'Jesus Christ, get yourself at least two,' Andrew replied disdainfully, turning away with an eye roll.

'Can we have the chips now, sir?' Lloyd asked hopefully. 'Please?'

'Yeah, alright.' Andrew looked down at his fingers and wondered whether it was actually safe to put them anywhere near food right now.

'Oh, come on, you won't die,' Peggy said as she caught Andrew staring at his hands. 'Probably.'

'Thanks, that's really reassuring!' Andrew shook his head

and reached for a portion of chips anyway.

Peggy glanced at her watch and smiled. 'Oh, hey, it's gone twelve. Happy birthday!'

'Thanks.' Andrew paused, chip halfway to his mouth. 'Oh God, you're not going to sing, are you?'

Peggy snorted. 'No, but I can't promise that Charlie won't try when he gets back.'

'Can't wait for that then.'

Andrew looked up at the sky and thought about how his Nana Joyce used to loudly encourage him to make wishes when he blew out his birthday candles. He doubted there would be any cake and candles for him this year, so instead he picked a random star and stared at it intently. Surely stars worked just as well as candles did.

All he really wanted was a year that went a bit more smoothly than the last one had.

That wasn't too much to ask for, right?