

PROLOGUE

2nd January 1986

Rebecca was late.

Rebecca was actually *very* late, and Marnie was starting to regret her second measure of vodka. *Top of the Pops* blared loudly from the corner of the living room, but John Peel's face hadn't quite been in focus since he'd said something about Bronski Beat a little while earlier.

Okay, so maybe Marnie was *also* starting to regret not eating anything since the poor excuse for a lunch she'd created from the measly leftovers in the fridge. At least her parents had gone straight to the Odeon after they'd finished work, so there was nobody around to witness her laughably low tolerance for spirits. She knew that she'd be fine in a minute or two, and as long as she remembered to top up the Smirnoff bottle from the tap before she went out, her mother would be none the wiser.

'I need water,' she announced to the empty room as she rolled off the sofa, leaving her high heels lying on the floor by the pouffe with a brief look of disdain. She was going to break her neck in those shoes, she was sure of it, but Rebecca had practically bullied her into trying them on in Kendals a few days earlier.

'Oh, come on,' Rebecca had said, swinging them by their gold straps, right in front of Marnie's face, 'these are *perfect*.'

'They're too expensive.' Marnie had shuddered when she'd seen the price. There was no way she could spend that much money on one pair of shoes.

Rebecca had just laughed. 'I'm sure Rex will buy them for you after lunch. He *did* tell you to pick out anything you wanted.'

'I don't need them, Rebecca.'

Marnie had plucked the shoes from her best friend's hand and wedged them back onto the display before any of the perky salesgirls thought that she might actually be interested in buying them. They'd been following her around for the whole hour they'd been in the shop, and she wasn't enjoying the attention at all.

'Don't you want to make Janine horribly jealous, though?' Rebecca had

whispered, grinning spitefully as she'd picked up the shoes again. 'She'd love these, you know she would. So, what better thing to wear to her stupid little party?'

Rebecca had then gleefully tapped the ring on Marnie's left hand. 'Well, not better than *that*, obviously.'

In the kitchen, Marnie spun the engagement ring self-consciously as she waited for the water to start running colder after rinsing out any dregs of vodka in the glass. On the occasions her younger self's imagination had drifted towards thoughts of engagement she'd always fancied something a little more subtle than the enormous diamond-flanked ruby she now wore, but, then again, Rex with his flash car and his never-ending parade of new suits didn't seem to understand subtlety at the best of times. He was kind, though, and funny, and Marnie could cope with a little bit of showing off if it meant getting to spend the rest of her life with a man like that.

Marnie held her glass over the sink and sighed. Why was she even going to Janine's birthday party anyway? They hadn't been close at school, and even though they'd both been working at Lewis's for the past couple of years, Marnie could count on one hand the number of times Janine had spoken to her before Rex had strolled into the Perfume Hall last May looking for a present for his older sister. Janine had been much friendlier to her since then, which Marnie appreciated, but Rebecca – always suspicious – was convinced that Janine was just waiting to make a move on Rex when Marnie's back was turned.

'Janine's going to throw herself in the canal when you turn up with a huge sparkler!' Rebecca had shrieked down the phone when Marnie had called her on Christmas Day to tell her that Rex had proposed. 'It *is* a massive diamond, right? Rex seems like the massive diamond type.'

'No,' Marnie had said, still staring in surprise at her left hand. 'I mean, it's a paperweight, yeah, but it's a great big ruby. He said it's an antique.'

The weight of it still felt odd to Marnie a week later, with the gold band tapping against the glass as it filled slowly. Her hands felt unbalanced, and her mother couldn't resist grabbing at Marnie's arm any time she passed by, just taking another second to marvel at the fact her only daughter was marrying so well.

Marnie was due back at work the next day, and she hadn't yet decided whether she was going to leave the ring at home. It was far too flashy for a

perfume girl, really. She sold bottles of *Beautiful* to women who wore jewellery like this every day, but she'd never thought she'd be one of those women herself.

Rex had told her that she wouldn't need to worry anymore, and that he'd make sure that her parents were taken care of if she wanted to hand in her notice, but Marnie enjoyed being out of the house and meeting new people every day. Rex hadn't seemed surprised when she'd told him that she was going to stick at the Estée Lauder counter for just a little bit longer. Instead, he'd only smiled as though he'd already known exactly what she was going to say, and then they'd carried on with their dinner date without either of them mentioning it again.

Shakin' Stevens was singing about Christmas for the umpteenth time on the TV, and Marnie knew every single word to that song now. She enjoyed December's joviality and the excuse for parties as much as the next person, but she was looking forward to something a bit less seasonal replacing the Christmas music that had been piped onto the shop floor since mid-November.

A brief flash of movement reflected in the window above the sink was the only warning Marnie had before something soft wrapped tightly around her throat.

Her eyes widened in surprise, and she dropped the glass of water when her hands came up to grapple with the material at her neck. The glass hit the lip of the sink, shattering into shards that rained down onto the tiled floor. The spray of water and slivers of glass that peppered Marnie's legs through her tights barely registered as she desperately clawed at the cord tightening around her neck; the fabric drawn taut enough to violently transform any delicacy of the fibres into unyielding steel.

Marnie struggled against the hold she was in, but the black spots dancing in front of her eyes were getting larger, derailing any efforts to escape with an eruption of sheer, unfathomable panic.

She had one final thought before her knees gave way beneath her and she tumbled heavily to the kitchen floor with a choked-off gasp of terror:

I would have made a beautiful bride.

ONE

3rd June 1986

Detective Inspector Andrew Joyce used to enjoy Mondays. He'd wake up just before his alarm clock rang, take a shower, eat breakfast, and still be in his car before anyone else on his street had even opened their front door to take the milk in.

But that had been in the time he now designated as *Before*.

He'd liked *Before*. *Before* had seen him steadily climbing the ranks at CID, exceeding everyone's expectations, and just being damn good at his job.

So, almost three months after he'd made Detective Inspector (at the age of thirty-three years and two days, thanks) Andrew had confidently assumed that DCI Chambers wanted to see him at the end of a fairly nondescript Monday because he was going to be commended for his exemplary case closure rate.

To be fair, Chambers had made it all *sound* like a reward.

'You'll be a good fit for the department,' Chambers had said from behind a cloud of blue-tinged smoke. 'Higson will appreciate your eye for detail.'

'A great fit where, sir?' Andrew had asked, because he'd had no idea who Higson was, or what department Chambers was referring to.

'DCI Higson's team,' Chambers had replied, as though that had helped in any way. 'The Case Re-examination Division.'

Andrew hadn't quite squawked in outrage as he realised what Chambers was talking about, but it was a near thing, 'The Graveyard?'

'I don't believe Higson likes that name very much,' Chambers replied nonchalantly. 'It was always known as 'the Ballroom' back in the day. I did a few years there myself in the sixties. It wasn't Higson then though; it was DCI Prentice. Now, *he* was a good man.'

Christ, Andrew had thought as Chambers had begun reminiscing about his time in Manchester City Police, *I'm finished. What the hell have I done to deserve this? Was I too smug about my exam results? Is this because I didn't stay late enough at the Christmas party last year? Oh God.*

'Sir!' Andrew had tried desperately to cut off Chambers' ramble

through his personal history. 'With all due respect, I'm happy in my role here at CID.'

Chambers' expression cooled rapidly. 'DI Joyce, might I remind you that my regard for your 'happiness' is irrelevant here. The CRD's success rate has declined over the past few years, and I owe DCI Higson a favour. A very big favour. That favour has now been called in, and you're just the man for the job. You report to Tib Street at nine am tomorrow.'

'Tomorrow?' Andrew *had* actually squawked that time. 'But-'

'You have no active cases here as of this afternoon,' Chambers had replied, cutting off any further protest with a pointed tilt of his head. 'I therefore see no reason for you to delay your transfer. All the paperwork you need is on your desk. Good afternoon, DI Joyce.'

'Sir.' Andrew's choked-out reply had been as respectful as possible under the circumstances, and he'd risen from his seat when Chambers turned away in obvious dismissal.

It's fine, Andrew had told himself as he'd closed Chambers' door behind him and headed for the break room. *It will all be fine. It'll just be for a few months. Yeah, it's obviously just a temporary secondment. It's fine. Totally fine.*

Andrew had been relieved to find the break room empty. For once, the coffee sitting in the percolator looked like it might not actually have been sitting there for ages, so he'd poured himself a mug and leaned his forehead against the window, not really seeing the car park below.

For just a second, Andrew had thought that maybe he could walk back into Chambers' office and talk his way out of the transfer. If he could just go and offer up another name as an alternative to his, Chambers might go for it, and Andrew had a list of people he would be very happy to never have to work with again, so he wasn't lacking in suggestions.

The problem - and Andrew instinctively knew this - was that Chambers was probably the most stubborn bastard he'd ever met. He also knew that Chambers wasn't the type to owe anyone a favour, so whatever this DCI Higson had done to earn one must have been pretty spectacular.

Andrew had first heard of the Case Re-examination Division when he'd been at Bramshill for a training course a few years earlier. When he'd

mentioned he was down from Manchester, another bloke at the lunch table – Jim, maybe? No, *Jez* - had asked if Tib Street was still standing. Andrew had shrugged, not knowing what that was supposed to mean, and Jez had laughed incredulously before launching into an explanation of the ‘secret’ department that had been running out of Manchester since the turn of the century. Andrew had given up trying to follow Jez’s meandering tale of jewel thieves and a pirate, and instead had concentrated on sawing through the rubbery meat on his plate even when everyone else had continued to stare at the storyteller in awe.

‘It’s like the black magic of police work,’ Jez had said as he’d shovelled cauliflower cheese into his mouth. He didn’t pause to chew. ‘They solve the cases that nobody else can solve.’

Andrew wasn’t sure why Jez hadn’t just led with that fact. ‘Have you been there then? To Tib Street?’

Jez had shaken his head, crumbs spewing out onto the table. ‘Nah. My uncle told me about it. He was in Salford for a couple of years.’

‘So, it’s not that much of a secret then, is it?’ Andrew had said, frowning down at the lack of progress he was making with his lunch. What the hell was he eating that his knife wouldn’t cut through it?

‘Well, *you* hadn’t heard of it,’ Jez had replied steadily. He’d still been smiling slightly, but there was an edge to his tone that had very strongly hinted that he wasn’t a man who liked to be questioned.

‘I suppose not,’ Andrew had said because *he* wasn’t a man who particularly enjoyed confrontation at lunchtime.

That had been the last Andrew had heard about Tib Street until he’d arrived at CID, and certainly nobody had ever mentioned it with the level of reverence that Jez had. Instead, there’d been comments about ‘The Graveyard’ where unsolved cases lay waiting until they were eventually filed away in the archives, still as unsolved as the day they’d been transferred to the RCD. Why there was still funding for such a department was anyone’s guess, but Andrew had just assumed that it served a purpose in providing a home for those who weren’t very good at their jobs in the traditional departments.

Except now Andrew was one of them. He’d banged his head against the window twice, letting loose a torrent of expletives that would have had his girlfriend covering her ears and calling for a priest.

Oh God, Kate.

Kate wasn't going to be happy at all when he told her. Andrew was fairly sure that his girlfriend was genuinely proud of his achievements at work, but he was absolutely certain that she mostly just enjoyed telling her friends about how clever Andrew was, how he was so brave at that robbery in Ancoats last month, and how he was a *Detective Inspector* now, hadn't you heard?

Couldn't Chambers have waited just a few months longer to do this to him? Now Andrew was going to have to sit through three wedding receptions over the summer and constantly correct Kate's friends and colleagues about just what his job was.

Maybe he should just quit in protest. He'd probably be able to get a job somewhere else. Not in the police, no – there was no way that Chambers would give him a recommendation if he sacked off this transfer – but maybe he could do something else instead. Kate had always said that he would have made a good teacher.

Andrew didn't want to be a teacher though. He just wanted to get on with his job and not have to relocate to central bloody Manchester. He groaned loudly at the window.

'Are you alright there, Joyce?'

Andrew had spun around in surprise, coffee sloshing over the side of the mug and soaking into the cuff of his shirt. 'Jesus Christ!'

DI Fallon had been smirking at him from the doorway, obnoxiously chewing something. 'I heard you're leaving us.'

Andrew had only heard five minutes ago, but if Fallon already knew, then *everybody* knew. *Great*. Andrew realised that he'd been ambushed. He'd opened his mouth to reply, but Fallon had just snorted with laughter and left Andrew alone to have his breakdown in peace.

And that had been the end of *Before*.

In the fourteen hours that had followed Chambers' pronouncement, Andrew had been shouted at twice; once by Kate over their takeaway, which had resulted in her storming out of his house without finishing her dumplings; and once by a little old lady who'd answered his hesitant knock on the door at Tib Street a few minutes ago, when he'd finally decided that the weathered plaque next to the equally weathered door really did say *Cheryl Richard Dance Studios*. Why it said this he didn't

know, but that was the address typed on the piece of paper in his hand, and so that was the door he'd knocked on.

"Oo are you?" the woman had asked with an expression that suggested that Andrew had wronged her terribly just by existing. She'd been holding a cigarette in her right hand, and a spray bottle in her left.

'I'm looking for DCI Higson,' Andrew had replied, automatically taking a step backwards just in case she tried to take a swipe at him. He fought the urge to nervously run a hand through his hair.

The woman's eyes had narrowed, pulling her obviously dyed jet-black fringe further over her wrinkled forehead. 'What do the likes of youse want with 'igson? 'Ow old are youse, anyways? Fifteen?'

Andrew had bristled. 'Excuse me, madam, but I—'

The woman had hooted with laughter. '*Madam!* Ha! Where the 'ell do youse think y'are?'

'Dolly, why on God's earth are you shrieking like a fishwife?' A woman called from inside the building. 'We can hear you upstairs!'

'This one 'ere is lookin' for 'igson,' the old lady – *Dolly* – replied as a smartly dressed, significantly younger woman appeared behind her, heels clacking on the tiles. Dolly crooked a wizened, yellowed finger towards Andrew as though the new arrival wouldn't see him otherwise.

'Oh!' The younger woman's face cleared, and she gently pushed Dolly out of the way with a hand on her shoulder. Andrew was surprised that this didn't end with Dolly immediately vaporising the woman for daring to touch her.

'You must be DI Joyce,' the woman said, smiling slightly even as Dolly scowled. 'Sorry, we weren't expecting you quite this early.'

'Traffic wasn't as bad as I thought it would be,' Andrew replied, which was only partially a lie. The truth was that he hadn't slept very well, and he'd actually got up at four when he'd heard the milkman outside and decided that it was probably close enough to breakfast time for a cup of tea. He'd then decided to drive into Manchester early for the lack of anything better to do, but that meant he'd arrived almost a whole hour before he'd originally intended to.

The woman nodded, accepting his explanation easily. 'I'm DS Cusack, sir. Follow me, I'll take you up.'

Andrew squeezed past Dolly, being very careful not to brush against

her lest she somehow bestow a curse on him – she looked the type. *Well*, she'd look the type if Andrew believed in such nonsense.

This close he could see that whilst she was significantly older than Andrew's own grandmother, her eyes were as sharp as flint, and whereas Nana Joyce always smelled gently of lavender, Dolly was a potent mixture of bleach and cigarette smoke.

'I'll be seein' youse,' Dolly murmured quietly to Andrew, before baring teeth even yellower than her fingernails and heading out the door onto Tib Street with her cigarette held above her head like she thought she was Marlene Dietrich. 'Ta-ra Jen, love.'

'Bye, Dolly,' DS Cusack called back, as though Dolly wasn't even remotely terrifying. She closed the door gently before turning back to Andrew. 'Sorry about Dolly. She pops in most days to clean. You get used to her eventually. She's harmless, really.'

Andrew didn't respond to that. He'd only just arrived, so he probably shouldn't insult the cleaning lady before they'd even reached the top of the stairs. 'Why all the secrecy?' he asked instead. 'With the sign outside? For the dance studio?'

DS Cusack laughed lightly as she led Andrew down a short corridor before heading up yet another staircase. 'Once upon a time, it *was* for secrecy. These days, I'm not entirely sure.'

Andrew waited, but when DS Cusack still hadn't added anything to her explanation by the time they reached the second floor, he had to accept that this was all he was going to get, at least for now.

'Welcome to the Ballroom,' DS Cusack said as they paused outside a set of ornate double doors. She shot Andrew another small smile before twisting the handles and pushing both doors open.

Andrew blinked in surprise at the room in front of him. Even with everyone calling it the Ballroom, and the reference to the dance studios outside, Andrew hadn't been expecting an *actual* ballroom with a polished wooden floor. He glanced up at the ceiling, and his mouth dropped open at the sight, counting six chandeliers evenly spaced across a fresco of something vaguely biblical. 'It's like the Sistine Chapel in here.'

'Michelangelo's cousin was from Hulme; didn't you know that?' A gruff, male voice came from the opposite side of the ballroom.

Andrew looked over to see a balding man with a wiry grey beard pushing himself out of his desk chair. Andrew could practically hear the man's joints cracking in protest.

'Sir,' Andrew said with a curt nod, assuming that the man now shambling slowly towards him was DCI Higson. 'Detective Inspector Andrew Joyce.'

'Joyce,' repeated Higson, holding out a hand so enormous Andrew felt like he was shaking hands with a bear. 'Good to have you here. Chambers has assured me that you'll be a good fit.' He paused, almost glaring at Andrew. 'Don't prove him wrong.'

Higson then smiled, shark-like, and Andrew only just resisted the urge to gulp loudly. Christ, he was supposed to be a DI - and thirty-three years old at that - he wasn't supposed to be intimidated. But there was definitely something wrong with these people, Andrew thought as Higson finally released his hand. First, there was that mad woman at the front door, and now it seemed like his boss had seen *The Godfather* one too many times.

'Sir,' Andrew repeated, not entirely sure what else he could say that wouldn't run the risk of him ending up at the bottom of the Manchester Ship Canal before the day was out.

'Where's Parker?' Higson asked DS Cusack.

'I think I heard the door a second ago,' she replied, gesturing for Andrew to take a seat at one of the desks crammed into the opposite corner of the room to Higson's. 'You know what the queue's like at this time.'

Andrew sat at the only desk that wasn't covered in paper and looked around the room. Did nobody else think this was weird? The ballroom was enormous, and yet all the desks, barring Higson's, were bunched together on one side of the room. Why did they need all the space? This place wasn't actually the Cheryl Richard Dance Studio, was it? Was it some sort of *shared space*? Andrew had visions of trying to work while pensioners did the foxtrot around him.

'You'll get used to it,' DS Cusack said with a knowing grin as she took a seat at the desk opposite Andrew. Holding her hand out over the desks she waited for Andrew to clasp it. 'Jennifer Cusack, but everyone calls me Jen.'

‘Andrew.’

Jen nodded. ‘DC Parker will be here in a minute. Lloyd.’

‘And that’s it?’ Andrew asked, still baffled by the enormous room. ‘Just the three of you?’

‘Four of us,’ Jen said, pointing at Andrew. ‘Our last DI left us a month ago.’

‘Transfer?’

Jen grimaced slightly. ‘Not exactly.’

There was something about the way that Jen looked away just a little bit too quickly that Andrew didn’t like. None of the paperwork Chambers had left on his desk had mentioned anything about a predecessor, and it wasn’t as though Andrew had been given time to ask.

‘They didn’t have any cheese and onion!’ Andrew heard before something flew through the air across the ballroom. He looked over just in time to see Higson catch a white paper bag in one hand.

‘Meat?’ Higson asked the man who was heading towards Andrew and Jen. ‘If this is vegetables again, Parker, I’ll make sure you’re in Ordsall nick by lunchtime.’

DC Parker smirked before he finally noticed that there was someone new in the room. ‘Oh, hiya,’ he said, grinning at Andrew. ‘You’re the new DI, yeah?’

Andrew nodded. ‘Andrew Joyce.’

‘Cool.’

Jen cleared her throat. When Parker stayed quiet she rolled her eyes. ‘DI Joyce, this is DC Lloyd Parker, who has apparently forgotten how to behave around adults.’

‘Right, yeah, sorry,’ Lloyd said, brushing his too-long hair off his face. ‘What she said, er, *sir*.’

‘Nice to meet you,’ Andrew replied, even though he didn’t think it was that nice at all. He’d been calculating the distance to the door while Parker had been talking. He didn’t think he’d be able to make a run for it before one of the others tackled him, but there was a pretty good-looking set of windows on the adjacent wall. The fall probably wouldn’t kill him, but it would definitely get him out of whatever fever dream he’d found himself in. Because this *had* to be a dream.

‘Right,’ huffed Higson, ‘if you’re all ready to stop gossiping and

actually do some work, get your arses over here. Cusack, bring your pick. Joyce, I'm expecting to be impressed.'

'Here we go,' said Jen encouragingly to Andrew as she picked up the file sitting atop the pile on her desk. 'Are you ready?'

Andrew shook his head. 'Impress him how? I have no idea what's going on. I was just told to show up this morning.'

'What?' Jen looked slightly taken aback. 'You didn't request a transfer here?'

Andrew shook his head. 'No, I was literally given this job last night.'

Jen's eyes bugged slightly, and she opened and closed her mouth a few times. She glanced quickly towards where Higson was inspecting his breakfast then ducked her head down and motioned for Andrew to move closer.

'Right, listen very carefully,' she hissed quickly. 'Higson has been looking for a suitable new DI, and so he called Chambers over at CID. A few days ago, Chambers called Higson back, to tell him that he'd had a request from someone in CID to move over here – that's you, obviously. Nobody *ever* requests a move to the Ballroom, so Higson probably thinks you're some kind of genius when it comes to difficult cases who's going to come in and seriously up our closure rate.'

Andrew made a noise somewhere between a question and a grunt of dissent.

'Are you some kind of genius when it comes to difficult cases?' Jen asked hopefully, waving the paper file towards him.

'I'm the youngest DI CID's ever had,' Andrew replied, although he managed to sound unsure about that fact, even as he knew it to be true. 'Does that help?'

Jen groaned quietly. 'I'm not sure what Higson will do if you don't go over there and say something useful.'

'Of course I'll say something useful.' Andrew bristled at the implication that he wasn't going to be good enough to work *here* of all places. 'I was at CID!'

'Yeah, CID, which is where *all* of the unsolved cases we get come from.' Jen rolled her eyes. 'Look, I don't know you at all, but I guess you must be a good copper, and I wouldn't want to see you thrown out of here on your first day. Higson really, *really* holds grudges, so you'd

probably never work in Manchester again.’

‘What am I supposed to do then?’

‘Higson is seriously old school in a lot of ways,’ Jen muttered as she pretended to look for something else on her desk. ‘But he’ll also listen if you have some sort of weird idea that might help. He loves weird ideas.’

‘How weird?’ Andrew asked, raising an eyebrow.

‘We once spent a whole day rolling dice to make decisions on how to proceed.’

Andrew snorted, then stopped abruptly when Jen looked at him sharply. ‘Christ, you’re serious, aren’t you?’

‘Sorry, am I interrupting your mothers’ meeting over there?’ Higson bellowed across the room. ‘This pasty’s getting cold.’

‘Sorry, sir,’ Jen called, snapping her lips together in a tight smile. ‘Just looking for a pen.’

Andrew trailed behind Jen and eventually found himself standing in front of Higson’s desk with her on his left, and Lloyd to his right. It felt horribly familiar. It felt like standing in the headmaster’s office at fourteen, waiting for him to dole out punishment for catching Andrew smoking on the playing fields with Paul and Mick.

‘Well?’ Higson asked, taking an enormous bite out of the pasty. Gravy coated his whiskers and slowly dribbled down his fingers.

‘Marnie Driscoll, sir.’ Jen said as she flipped open the file and placed it in front of Higson, just far enough away that he could read it, but without it immediately being endangered by any stray globules of grease.

‘Twenty-two years old, strangled in her kitchen back in January,’ Jen continued. ‘Alone in her parents’ house at the time, waiting for a friend to arrive before they were due to head onto a party together. No other injuries. The back door into the kitchen was forced open, and Marnie’s engagement ring was missing from her body.’

Andrew remembered this case coming into CID. He’d been working on the spate of Post Office robberies in Salford back in January, but he couldn’t avoid the Chester House gossip chain, not when the fiancé of the dead girl was Rex Hughes.

‘She was engaged to a local businessman,’ Andrew added, and Jen gave him a quick nod of approval. ‘Rex Hughes. I assume you’ve all heard of him.’