

## PART ONE: FRIDAY NIGHT

23:41

“What do you mean he’s gone, Dawson?” Detective Chief Inspector John C. Wayne had not been expecting a call from Detective Sergeant Michael Dawson, only a text message to confirm his subject was in bed. And he was not expecting that for at least another hour. Wayne had hoped to be asleep before it came.

“Gone. From the opera,” Dawson panted. “Professor Veda, and Kaia. He— they’re gone, sir.”

Wayne could tell that Dawson wasn’t his normal self but somewhere between confused and exasperated. Or drunk.

“All right, Dawson,” said Wayne. He kept his voice low and even out of habit, as the calm voice of reason. “No need to panic. They probably left early, before the fat lady sang. Purcell isn’t for everyone.” Or anyone, really, he thought.

“All right, Dawson. What happened?”

Dawson sounded slow, but even. “I fell asleep, sir. I believe I was drugged.”

“You believe?” Wayne caught his voice and offered an excuse. “It’s Purcell, Dawson.” He wanted to believe the easy explanations. But the worst-case scenario kept needling him.

“Yes, sir it was. But...”

Wayne let the silence hang as he walked back to his office, phone in hand. He put it on the desk next to his touch pad.

Wayne tapped the pad and dragged his finger diagonally to pull a 16x16 grid of camera feeds onto the left-hand screen. Each image had a small dialogue window below it with an abbreviated address and the camera’s GPS coordinates. Wayne could see the last opera-goers still filing out of the Opera House.

He sent the link in a message to Special Analyst James Tully’s phone as he continued to scan the viewers:

You up? Need you on this. More to follow. Show it to HOLMES.

Wayne knew Tully’s expertise with the Home Office Large Major Enquiry System would come in handy one day. He hadn’t expected it to be today. He drew a deep breath and let it out slowly as he continued to toggle round the camera feeds. Each highlighted image bulged out of the grid in a 3D effect as he zoomed in on his target.

Wayne saw the block of feeds from the car park off Drury Lane and highlighted and dragged it over to the right-hand screen. He watched as life played in three-second clips on each of the fourteen cameras in-and-around the three-storey car park.

He could see Dawson, dressed in a tuxedo standing next to the Peugeot assigned for ferrying Dr Veda and his date to the Royal Opera House. Wayne noticed the passenger door was slightly ajar.

“Did you open the door?”

“No sir. It was open just like this when I came up here.”

This was a crime scene now, and Wayne went into management mode. The Home Secretary had given him Dr Veda exactly thirty-five days earlier when Veda had arrived in London from Oxford University. Wayne had no idea who Veda was before he got the call, and he said so. She explained that Dr Veda was doing important work for the Health Ministry, and his personal safety was of the highest importance.

The Home Secretary expressed concern that Veda might have difficulty adapting

to life in London, so it was decided that he would have a plainclothes officer as his driver for an undetermined short-term transition period. Wayne accepted the Home Secretary's explanation before considering whether the professor had value to anyone or faced any threats.

Wayne had assigned Michael Dawson to the first official posting of the MCU2. Dawson's file was one of the first few dozen files Wayne had culled from his initial candidate search of the Met's personnel database. One phone call to Dawson's superior in the Intelligence Command had put him on Wayne's short list. Still in his twenties, Michael Dawson was one of the youngest officers to earn the rank of detective. But Wayne was most intrigued by Dawson's two failed attempts to join MI6. They met once, and Wayne revealed little about the task force he was creating before Dawson volunteered to request the transfer himself. He accepted his first assignment with few questions, and Wayne appreciated that. But it wasn't a babysitting job anymore.

"Well, you did look, right Dawson?" Wayne didn't wait for Dawson to reply. "What did you touch?"

"I pulled it open by the latch, but I didn't get in. Just looked. No contamination, sir," Dawson asserted.

"But you looked," Wayne repeated without reproach. He was curious. "Well? Anything?"

"Yes sir. Looks to be two small drops, on the inside of the door next to the lock button. Right here." Dawson held his phone at an angle and focused the camera on the pair of droplets.

"Looks like blood, sir."

He used his free hand to point at them from outside the window, flexing his index finger and bending his thumb to pinpoint the spots and the small gap between. Dawson held steady and waited for the inspector to respond to his find. Wayne glanced at the screen on his phone. His eyes were busy as he pulled up a map of Greater London on the main viewer on his desk.

"Have you got a photo of them?"

"The blood stains?" asked Dawson.

"No, Veda and..."

"Kaia? Yes sir. A few," said Dawson. "From tonight," he added. "Shall I share them, sir?"

"Well, yes. Ms Rebane," Wayne tapped his desk. "Send me the best one with both. Now," he said. "I'll send it out A-S-A-P." He always spelled it out, like Duke Wayne would have done in one of his classic war films. Wayne disliked the way too many people had made the acronym into a single word.

He had already dragged and dropped the file photo of Dr Veda onto the centre screen and was preparing to send it out with an alert, but a photo of both of them together would make more sense. Besides, Wayne realised he hadn't any photos of the girlfriend, despite her seeming to take up more and more space in Veda's world since they first met a few weeks earlier.

Dawson's message arrived and Wayne smiled at the attachment's title as he opened it, but didn't laugh at the irony until he saw the image of the couple standing in front of a phone box around the corner from the main entrance to the Royal Opera House.

"Dr Who, indeed," Wayne wondered aloud.

"Sir?" asked Dawson. "Didn't it come through?"

"It did, Dawson. I was referring to the caption you wrote. Dr Who?"

“Oh, that,” Dawson breathed heavily. “It was a joke. The lady at the box office asked Dr Veda to repeat his name when we were picking up the tickets. I took the photo just after.”

Wayne had a dossier on the young scientist. Now he regretted not performing due diligence on the woman when Dawson had first informed him about the budding romance in Veda’s life. But he had no reason to be suspicious before tonight.

After all, according to the memo from the Home Office Dr Nicholas Veda was a relatively unknown scientist from Oxford, working on a cure for typhoid or some such disease, and of little interest to anyone outside the Health Ministry.

Wayne had read the good doctor’s bio and was quietly happy to hear that spring had finally arrived for Veda when Ms Rebane entered his life.

But suspicion rang like a fire bell in Wayne’s ear as soon as he saw the photo of the stunningly beautiful Ms Rebane standing next to the meek and humble scientist. He knew full well it didn’t only happen in the movies.

“No, it’s fine, Dawson.” Wayne cornered his dubiety in the back of his mind and went on cordially, “Well, stand by, secure the scene, and I’ll get a team over there.”

“Yessir!” Dawson exclaimed, sounding relieved.

Wayne rang off, then opened his directory. He paused, his thumb hovering over the screen. His first instinct had been to request the Home Office to call in extra military, double or triple the street patrols in the vicinity of the Opera House and give them the order to detain Veda and his date on sight.

In a moment he could send out an alert to every level of the Metropolitan Police Service, have the photo in the phones of every uniform in the Greater London area, including transit and airports, through the Met’s COMS system. And have thousands of eyes scanning the city for the well-dressed scientist and the knockout that must be accompanying him.

If he was sure there was foul play involved, he had to act. But he wasn’t.

Wayne’s unit had been officially active for almost three months but in fact had yet to engage in any official action. At the administrative level of the Met, all the commanding officers had received a directive to cooperate in any way requested if called upon by the Unit and DCI Wayne.

Despite being active, the unit was far from operational. No need had arisen to engage any other branch of the Metropolitan Police to date. Wayne had his core of First Officers in place but had deliberately kept the unit offline at the Met, and had remained on standby with the Home Office since St Valentine’s Day, awaiting a direct order.

The directive to supply a security escort for the Health Ministry’s virologist had appeared to be an excuse to be logging active hours until Major Crimes Unit 2 went operational. Wayne grimaced at his phone and scanned his directory for his contact in the HO. He read the time.

“Almost midnight.” He put the phone down and sighed. But the grimace refused to loosen as his eyes roamed the map.

Wayne wasn’t ready to call the Home Office until he was certain that the two young lovers hadn’t simply slipped out of the Opera House for a little snogging. Even now they might be thinking about calling Dawson to pick them up. He was hoping the blood at the scene was somebody else’s—preferably nobody’s.

Either way, putting the Met Police ground forces and surveillance branches on it seemed prudent. He quickly typed a draft alert on his desktop.

Getting his team engaged and up to speed came first, he reasoned, if only by a few seconds. Wayne dragged their mobile numbers into the address box on the

message pane. Then he paused to consider exactly who else needed to see the alert. How high, and how wide do I wave this flag?

His gut told him he was facing the Unit's Inaugural Event, but his head reminded him of the potential for political disaster.