

IT'S NOT THE MISSING WHO ARE IN DANGER,  
BUT THOSE LEFT BEHIND.

THE  
**LOST**

THE FIRST  
JONAH COLLEY  
THRILLER

SIMON  
BECKETT

INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER

## *Chapter 1*

It was when he smelled the blood that Jonah realised he was in trouble.

The quayside was pitch-black. None of the streetlights were working, leaving the crumbling warehouses in darkness, abandoned relics from a different era. In the old Saab's headlights, the scene resembled an industrial ghost town. Staring out through the windscreen, Jonah was reminded that, even though he'd lived in London most of his life, there were still corners of it he didn't know existed. And didn't want to know, if this place was anything to go by.

The quayside hadn't been easy to find. It was part of a desolate stretch of the Thames, an undeveloped area of riverbank that wasn't even shown on his phone's map. The directions he'd been given were vague, and several times he'd been forced to backtrack when some rutted road proved to be a dead end. Now he was parked on a patch of weed-choked wasteland, facing a long brick wall. Across the river, the sparkling lights of high-end apartments, bars and restaurants were strung out like jewels. Here, though, all was darkness. The sprawling redevelopment that had engulfed the rest of the Docklands had, for some reason, bypassed this watery cul-de-sac. Although that wasn't surprising, given its name. Jonah had thought it

must be a joke, but no. The proof was right there in front of him, a rusted street sign:

*Slaughter Quay.*

A couple of hours earlier, he'd been sitting outside a pub with a few others from his team, enjoying the late-summer evening after a handgun training session. His phone had rung while he was at the bar waiting to be served. He didn't recognise the number, and almost didn't bother taking it. But there were still people waiting their turn ahead of him, so after a moment he'd answered.

'Jonah? It's me.' And then, in case he might have forgotten: 'Gavin.'

Even though it had been the best part of a decade since he'd heard the voice, the years seemed to fall away in an instant. So did the pit of his stomach.

'You there?'

Jonah moved to a quieter part of the bar, the drinks forgotten. 'What do you want?'

'I need your help.'

No 'How's it going?' or 'Long time no see'. Jonah felt his jaw muscles clench.

'Why would you need my help?'

'Because you're the only one I can trust.'

Surprise momentarily silenced Jonah. 'You're going to have to give me more than that.'

A silence came down the line. 'I screwed up. I got it all wrong. Everything . . .'

'What are you talking about?'

'I'll explain when you get here.'

'Jesus, you can't just expect me to —'

'There's an old warehouse on the South Bank, a place called Slaughter Quay,' Gavin went on in a rush. 'You won't find

it on your satnav but I'll text you directions from the closest postcode. It's the last warehouse on the quayside. I'll be waiting for you outside at midnight.'

'*Midnight?* Are you *serious?*'

'You'll understand when you get here.' And then Gavin had said a word Jonah had never heard in all the time they'd been friends. 'Please.'

The line went dead. *Shit.*

'You all right?'

It was Khan, another sergeant from SCO19, the Metropolitan Police's firearms unit. The big man's shoulders and neck were thick with muscle, and his arms and chest threatened to burst the white T-shirt. Jonah had once seen him kick a door and the knifeman standing behind it, halfway across a room. But, off-duty, he was a family man, the person anyone in the unit with a problem would go to.

Putting away his phone, Jonah nodded. 'Just someone I hadn't heard from in a while.'

'Problems?'

Jonah wasn't sure how to answer that. 'It's probably nothing. But he sounded -'

He broke off as someone gave him a push from behind. 'I thought you were going to the bar? Fuck's sake, I could brew them faster than you get served.'

Jonah looked round at the compact woman scowling up at him. Nolan did that a lot. The policewoman was several inches shorter than him and barely reached Khan's shoulder, but he wouldn't have given much for either of their chances if push came to shove. Even less, if it was your turn to get a round in.

'We're having a conversation,' Khan told her, giving her his sergeant's look.

‘Right.’ She considered. ‘Give me the money and I’ll get them.’  
Jonah had to laugh. ‘It’s OK, I’ll go.’

‘You sure?’ Khan asked.

‘Yeah, it’s fine.’ Jonah gave a shrug. ‘Probably nothing anyway.’

He’d tried to convince himself of that as he’d gone to the bar. Whatever mess Gavin had got himself into, he could sort it out on his own. Jonah didn’t owe him anything. Not one damn thing.

Yet the call had got under his skin. Even as he’d taken the drinks over to the table, he’d kept coming back to one thing Gavin had said.

*There’s no one else I can trust.*

That might have held true once. Time was Jonah might have said the same thing. He’d known Gavin forever. Best friends at school, joined the Met and gone through training together and then been posted to the same borough. Gavin had always been more outgoing, with an easy attitude and ready grin that disguised a fiercely competitive nature. They’d shared a flat, even after Gavin passed his detective’s exam and joined what was then the Specialist Crime Directorate, investigating human exploitation and organised crime. For a while Jonah had considered becoming a detective as well. He’d been told he had the aptitude by his superior officers, who’d urged him to sign up for the trainee detective programme. But for some reason – maybe because he didn’t like to feel pushed – he’d chosen a different path. Surprising even himself, he’d taken the rigorous training required to be accepted onto SCO19, the Met’s elite firearms unit. Gavin had mocked the decision, calling him an adrenaline junkie. Yet they’d stayed friends. And when Jonah started seeing Chrissie and Gavin hooked up with Marie, the four of them became a close-knit group. Nights out, holidays together. Good times.

But that had been years ago. Another life. So why was Gavin crawling out of the woodwork now, asking for Jonah's help? Two things Gavin had never lacked were confidence and friends. He'd have to be desperate to call Jonah, and in the end that was what decided it. Because, no matter how much Jonah wanted to dismiss it, he kept coming back to the same thing.

Gavin had sounded *scared*.

So, making his excuses, Jonah had left the pub and gone back to his car.

Now here he was, at a derelict quayside in the middle of nowhere. Switching off the engine, he took a torch from the Saab's glove compartment and climbed out. An Audi he guessed must be Gavin's was parked nearby, but other than that there was no sign of life. An overgrown path led to the dark hulks of empty warehouses and industrial buildings, beyond which could be glimpsed the river, silvered by the sickle moon. Switching on his torch, Jonah set off towards them.

The path took him to a narrow lane that ran between boarded-up buildings. On one of them the ghost of ancient signage was still visible on the gable wall: Jolley's Tannery. Fine Hides and Skins. Others identified themselves as wholesale butchers or meat processing companies, while a huge, hanger-like structure declared itself to be an abattoir. Slaughter Quay had been aptly named.

It was an unsettling place to be at night. Jonah wasn't normally bothered by the dark, but he found himself listening for any footsteps beside his own as he walked down the narrow lane. He was glad when he reached the end of it and emerged onto the quayside. The lapping of water was louder here. Broken cobblestones showed through disintegrating asphalt, and the air was dank, smelling of salt water, rotting weeds and oil. A

cluster of barges were moored together on the tar-black water, bobbing in unsynchronised rhythm. The quiet was broken by low bumps and creaks as they rubbed against each other. A larger boat was tethered slightly apart, and as Jonah walked past it there was a sudden hiss. Startled, he swung the torch, then relaxed as its beam caught a reflected glint of a cat's eyes. The dirty-looking creature was crouched in the shadow of a hatchway, hunched protectively over a part-eaten burger. One eye was half closed with injury or infection. The other glared malevolently as it gave a warning yowl.

'It's OK, it's all yours,' Jonah murmured, turning away. As he did, the torch beam fell on ornate lettering painted on the boat's bow: *The Oracle*. It was partly obscured by a rubber tyre tied to the side as a fender, but as Jonah shone the torch on it, another hiss from the cat reminded him he'd overstayed his welcome.

'I'm going, I'm going.'

The ground was muddy, squelching underfoot as he continued. Up ahead he could see where the quay ended at a lone warehouse that backed onto water on two sides. It was half hidden behind a framework of scaffolding, over which hung ragged sheets of translucent polythene. A sagging wire-mesh fence surrounded it, preventing Jonah from going any further.

There was no one else there.

Jonah swore and checked the time. Almost ten-past midnight. He was late but not by much. He wondered if Gavin could have given up and left, but then he remembered the Audi parked by the quayside. He'd only assumed it was Gavin's, but it was hard to imagine anyone else being out there at that time of night.

So where was he?

He shone the torch around, but the quayside remained stubbornly dark and still. As the minutes passed, tension began to

form a knot in Jonah's gut. When it got to twenty past, he called the number Gavin had called from. Pick up, Gavin, he thought, when the number began to ring. Then, as he listened, he became aware of another ringing, this one much fainter. Behind him.

Coming from the warehouse.

Jonah turned to stare through the mesh fencing. When his call went to voicemail, there was one last chime from the unlit building, followed by silence. The knot in his stomach grew tighter as Jonah re-dialled. The lonely ringing started again, and this time there was no doubting that it was inside the warehouse.

*Oh, shit . . .*

Ending the call, Jonah stared at the dark building through the cross-linked fencing. Underneath the scaffolding, the warehouse was an indistinct hulk, all hard angles and shadows. He debated calling it in, but if Gavin was injured, it would take too long for any back up to get there. And there was still a chance this could be a false alarm. It didn't feel that way, though, and Jonah realised he didn't have a choice.

He was going to have to go in.

'Jesus, Gavin . . .' he muttered.

There was a large metal gate set in the middle of the wire fence. It was secured by a rusted but sturdy-looking padlock, but further along Jonah found a gap in the fence big enough to squeeze through. Crossing the broken asphalt to the warehouse, he pushed through the polythene sheets to a pair of huge, hanger-like doors. They were locked but to one side of them was another door. When he tried it, it swung inwards with a creak of stiff hinges.

Jonah shone his torch through the open doorway. The light disappeared into a cavernous space, broken by girder-like iron pillars that disappeared up to a high ceiling.

‘Gavin, you in there?’

His voice rang out before being swallowed. The air in the warehouse was cold and dank, heavy with a church-like silence as he stepped inside. Taking out his phone, he called Gavin’s number. The answering ring from the darkness seemed shockingly loud. It came from further inside the warehouse. Going towards it, he saw a faint glow behind one of the iron pillars. The phone was lying on the ground behind it, Jonah’s name illuminated on the screen. It winked out when he rang off.

*Christ, Gavin, what the hell have you got yourself into? And me?*

He shone the torch around. Rough-cut timber, bags of lime and cement, and rolls of translucent polythene were stacked haphazardly at one side, but there was no sign of Gavin. Then the torch beam caught something else lying on the floor. A police warrant card, lying face-up to display a tiny photograph next to the owner’s name and rank.

Gavin McKinney, Detective Sergeant.

There was a dark smudge of something on it, and Jonah felt something turn over in him as he realised what it was. It was then he noticed the dark splashes on the stone-flags nearby. They glistened like oil, but Jonah knew it wasn’t. He could smell it now, only faint but unmistakable.

The coppery tang of blood.

The black spatters formed a trail that vanished into the shadows. Heart thumping, he began to follow it. The splashes ended at a set of double doors set in a bare brick wall. A sign reading *Loading Bay* was stencilled onto the peeling paintwork of one of them. It stood slightly open, a large, unfastened padlock hanging loosely from a hasp. Jonah hesitated. The smart thing to do would be to go back, to call for a blue-light response and let uniformed officers and paramedics find out what was on the other side of the door.

But by then Gavin could be dead.

He gave the door a soft push. It swung open with a groan, and he quickly stepped through, tensed for an attack as he fanned the beam around. None came. The light from his torch showed he was in a long, narrow room. Heavy chains hung down from a rusted winch fixed to a rail in the ceiling. Behind them was a huge, sliding door made from old timbers and black metal brackets. Jonah guessed it would open onto the quayside, where boats would have come to load or unload.

‘Gavin?’

Water dripped somewhere in the darkness with a musical *plink*, but there was no answer. The smell of blood was stronger in here, mixed with something else. A cloying, animal reek. Jonah aimed the torch at the floor to see where the blood splashes led. Its beam passed over lengths of scaffolding poles and a pile of wadded-up polythene before coming to rest on something else.

A pair of legs.

*Oh, Christ . . .* Jonah rushed over, then stopped. In the torch beam, a man’s body was lying face down on a large square of polythene sheeting. His arms had been fastened behind his back with a plastic tie, and another bound his feet at the ankles. Jonah couldn’t see his face, but even after ten years he recognised the lean build and curly dark hair. Hair that was now matted with blood. Black in the torchlight, a viscous pool of it had spilled over the translucent sheet and onto the stone flags, fanning out like a dark halo.

Jonah found his voice. ‘Gavin . . .?’

Nothing. Gavin’s body had an eloquent stillness. Pale shards of bone and pulped tissue were visible in the dark hair, but Jonah could see that the blood was no longer flowing. It had begun to set on the polythene sheet and flagstones. Even so,

he had to make sure. Careful to avoid the blood, he bent down and felt the side of Gavin's throat, below his jaw. The skin was cold and flaccid, bristly with a day or two's growth of whiskers but unmoved by any pulse.

Feeling numb, Jonah straightened and stepped away. A sound made him wheel round. There was no one there, and a moment later the *plink* of dripping water came again. He breathed out. There was no longer any question of what to do. This was a murder scene. He needed to get out of there and call it in without contaminating it any more than he had already.

Trying to close his mind to what was lying on the ground, he tried his phone. There was no reception. Gavin's phone had rung in the main warehouse, so the loading bay's thick internal wall must be blocking the signal. He'd started back for the door when another noise stopped him. It was too faint to place, but this time he was sure it wasn't dripping water. He stood, listening. At first all he could hear was the blood pulsing in his ears, then the sound came again. Clearer, this time.

A rustle of plastic.

The hairs on Jonah's arms rose as he turned towards the mound of wadded-up polythene sheeting lying a few yards away. It wasn't a single mound, he saw now, but three large, distinct bundles. They could have been building waste, but as the torch beam fell on them they reminded him of something else.

Cocoons.

As though hypnotised, Jonah felt himself drawn closer. The bundles were each five or six feet in length, bound up with black gaffer tape. They were dusty, coated with white powder that made it impossible to see inside, but now Jonah realised where the rank, animal odour he'd noticed earlier was coming from.

Gavin's body wasn't the only one down there.

*Get out. Now!* Jonah began to back away, but then the same noise came again. A silky, crinkling whisper. He saw that a corner of sheeting had come loose on the topmost polythene bundle. Reaching down, he eased the plastic aside. Below it, blurred beneath more polythene, was a face.

As Jonah stared, the mouth opened and the polythene was sucked tight.

He stumbled backwards. The urge to run overwhelmed him before reason asserted itself. At least one of these people was still alive.

But not for much longer.

'It's OK, I'm going to get you out,' Jonah said, fumbling at the polythene. There were multiple layers, wound round and round and held in place with long strips of gaffer. He wrenched and tore at both, trying to find an edge he could grip, but it was bound too tightly. The translucent covering made the blurred features look as though they were underwater, drawing in over them before slowly filling out again. But each time was weaker than the last. Pulling out his car keys, he tried to pierce the plastic with a sharp corner. It resisted, then gave way with a soft *pop*. Jonah tore at the hole with his fingers, until with a sibilant crackle, the polythene parted as though it had been unzipped.

Now the lower half of a face was revealed. The mouth was partly open but there was no movement or response. *Come on, please breathe*, Jonah willed, trying to tear more of the sheeting.

Suddenly, the mouth coughed and opened wider, spasming as it sucked in air. The polythene ripped, exposing a head topped with thick black curls. It was a young woman. Not much more than a girl, Jonah thought, although it was hard to be sure. Her skin was dark, crusted with dried blood. In places it was livid and blistered, caked with the same white dust that coated

the sheeting. Her face was contorted with pain and fear, but neither that nor the darkness could disguise a striking beauty that made the sight of her now all the more grotesque. Wishing he had some water to give her, Jonah continued ripping at the polythene, ignoring the human stench that came from the fouled plastic. He started talking as she coughed and fought for breath.

'You're safe now. I'm a police officer, I'm going to get you out, OK?'

She made a thin keening sound in her throat, then said something in a language Jonah didn't recognise. It sounded like it could be Arabic.

'I'm sorry, I don't understand. Just try to lie still so I can get you out.'

'... *hurts* ...'

'I know, I'll be as fast as I can,' he told her. *Keep her talking.* 'What's your name?'

She murmured something he didn't catch. Christ, she was slipping away.

'... Na - Nadine ...'

'Hi, Nadine. I'm Jonah.'

He spoke with a calmness he didn't feel, but now another sensation was beginning to filter through the urgency. His hands had begun to burn, and he noticed how the skin was smeared with the powder from the polythene sheet. It looked blotched and angry, and remembering the bags of building supplies outside he realised what it was.

Quicklime.

*Oh, Christ.* Jonah tried to think. The caustic powder could eat away skin and flesh down to the bone, and the woman was covered in it. She must be in agony, and Jonah knew she needed more help than he could give her. He checked the

signal bars on his phone and saw there was still no reception. Much as he hated it, he knew what he had to do.

‘Nadine, I’m going to have to go outside to call for help,’ he said, though he wasn’t sure if she could understand. ‘I’ll be back as quick as I can, OK? I’ll leave you the torch.’

He set it down on the floor; he couldn’t leave the young woman alone down here in the dark. She moaned again, becoming more agitated. Jonah wondered if she was delirious, but the reddened eyes were lucid and terrified as she stared up at him. No, not at him, he realised.

Behind him.

He heard the soft footstep as he spun around, bringing up his arms in a block. Too late. Something knocked them aside and smashed into his head. There was a burst of light and pain, followed by a weightlessness like falling.

And then nothing.

## Chapter 2

There was the chink of rusted chains in the dark, like an uncoiled child's swing. It had an irregular, ragged rhythm that beat at Jonah's head. He tried to retreat back into the blackness, away from the awful sound and the knowledge it carried with it. But that led to an empty tube, filled with dead leaves. *No, no, no.* Now he could feel someone else with him, a familiar presence. *Gavin.* His voice was a whisper from the darkness.

*Once you lose something, you never find it again.*

The rhythm of the chains was pounding in his head. Jonah felt dizzy and sick, as though he were spinning. Christ, why did his head hurt so much? Something sticky was in his eyes, gumming them shut. It took him several attempts to open them. When he did, he still couldn't see. Everything was black. The chains had stopped, but the hard surface he was lying on crackled when he moved. He tried to sit up. He couldn't. His arms were pinioned behind him, and his legs were tied together as well.

Panicking, Jonah began to struggle. It made his head throb even more and he slumped back as a wave of nausea rushed over him. He wondered if he'd gone blind. Gradually, other discomforts began to filter into his awareness. Thirst. Cold. His hands were burning and he was shivering, aching all over. There

was a foul smell in the dank air, and now memory began to return. The warehouse. A young woman, coated with quicklime and half suffocated, wrapped in polythene along with two other bodies. And Gavin.

Gavin.

Realisation came to him then. Someone had knocked him unconscious and blood from the wound had stuck his eyes together. And now he was bound hand and foot, lying on – oh, Jesus – lying on a sheet of polythene.

He began to slow his breathing, focusing on his diaphragm as he took long, steadying breaths. Gradually, the panic receded. Opening his eyes, he realised that the dark wasn't as absolute as he'd thought. He was able to detect depth, maybe even shapes in the blackness. Turning his head – gingerly, every motion threatened to split it – he could make out a pale, vertical line of light. It was a partly open doorway, probably the way he'd come. And then he realised the light was growing stronger, accompanied by something else.

Footsteps.

Jonah shut his eyes as the door opened and the torch beam picked him out. He lay still, barely daring to breathe as the footsteps came closer. They halted next to him. Through his eyelids, the torch beam was filtered to a blood-red glow as it was shone directly onto his face.

Then it was gone, leaving miniature suns flaring behind his eyes. The footsteps continued past him before stopping again. There were more sounds: a grunt of exertion and the rustling of thick plastic. Opening his eyes to slits, Jonah saw the torch beam aimed at something on the ground. Silhouetted against it, little more than a shadow, was a bulky figure. It was stooping over something, but it was only when the crinkle of plastic came again that he understood what it was.

The figure was wrapping Gavin's body in the polythene sheet.

A helpless fury rose up in Jonah. He strained at the bonds fastening his hands and feet, then froze as the polythene he was lying on crackled. It was only soft, but the silhouette reacted. Jonah closed his eyes again as the torch beam swung back to him. He lay immobile, as though this were a nightmarish game of statues. *Don't come over. Please.*

Then the light went from his face.

He could feel himself shaking as the sounds of Gavin's body being wrapped up restarted. He tried to stay still, not daring to move in case the treacherous polythene gave him away again. Careful not to disturb it, he tested his bindings. Whatever was fastening his ankles was on top of his jeans and socks, but he could feel something smooth and thin digging into his wrists. A nylon tie, the same as Gavin had been tied with. Jonah tried to quash the despair he felt. The slender bands looked flimsy but were virtually unbreakable. Impossible to loosen, once they'd been ratcheted tight.

A noise came from where the shadowy figure was working. Through half-open eyes, Jonah saw it cut another length of polythene from a roll and spread it on the floor. Backlit by the torch beam, the shadow's broad back blocked his view as it heaved at the polythene-wrapped shape on the floor. There was the sound of tape being unpeeled from a roll, followed by more grunts of exertion.

Then the figure was standing. The moving torch beam allowed only glimpses as it began dragging Gavin's covered body, slithering it across the stone flags to the sliding door in the far wall. Letting it thump back onto the ground, the figure set the torch down beside it, then stepped into the shadows beyond its beam. There was the ratchet of chains being pulled, followed by a heavy metallic grating as the door slid open on its track.

From where he lay, Jonah could see a paler rectangle of night sky through the gap, and he heard the soft lapping of water. Then the figure was dragging Gavin's body outside. There was a heavy, hollow thump, as though it had been dropped into a boat, before the figure returned. Chains chinked and rasped as the sliding door was closed. The figure bent to retrieve the torch, and Jonah shut his eyes as the beam swung towards him.

Then the footsteps came over to where he was lying.

Heavy breathing came from above him. Even through closed eyelids, the torch was bright on his face. Something hard shoved against his shoulder. He allowed himself to flop loosely as a foot prodded him. *Don't move, don't breathe, don't think.*

Then the light was gone and the figure was walking away.

*Oh, Jesus . . .* Jonah opened his eyes a crack, in time to see the torch beam bobbing towards the door. Against it, he caught sight of a tall shadow before it stepped out through the doorway.

And then all was darkness again.

Jonah didn't know what had happened to his own torch, but that didn't matter. Only now daring to breathe, he began tugging at the tie binding his wrists. He tried to ignore the pain in his head, knowing that if he didn't break free now he never would. The tie resisted, and in frustration he gave his wrists an angry jerk.

He felt the tie give.

Jonah stopped, not trusting what he'd just felt. When he strained against the tie again nothing happened. But when he tried twisting his wrists, applying torque as well as tension . . .

The thin strip loosened another few millimetres.

He repeated the pressure and was rewarded with even more give. The tie was either damaged or faulty. Wrenching with the full strength of his arms, Jonah felt it sliding looser and looser.

Then, with a last twist, his hands came free.

His head was hammering as he pushed himself upright and reached for the tie binding his ankles. He felt a crushing disappointment when it didn't loosen in the same way. But whoever had bound him had been in a hurry. They'd rushed it, fastening the restraint over his jeans instead of around his bare ankles. Jonah tugged the denim out from under it but the slender noose was still too tight. Pulling off his trainers and socks, he tried again. The tie slid so far then jammed on the bone. *No, you bastard!* In desperation, listening for footsteps coming back, he tried to force it. It sliced into him like a potato peeler, but the blood acted as a lubricant. With a last effort that scraped away another layer of skin, he got it over his feet.

Jonah stood up, and almost collapsed as dizziness threatened to overwhelm him. He bent over, lowering his head as it throbbed in time with his heart. When he was sure he wasn't going to throw up or pass out, he straightened. The darkness was absolute. He tried to make out where the young woman, Nadine, and the other two polythene-wrapped victims were, but he couldn't see anything. And he daren't risk calling out. He hated the thought of what he had to do, but knew he'd no choice. If any of them was going to survive this, Jonah had to get out and get help.

Feeling around with his bare feet, he found his trainers and jammed them back on. He only had a vague idea where the door he'd come through was, but once he reached the wall he'd be able to find it. Arms outstretched, he began to edge forward and almost immediately kicked something.

He stopped dead as it skittered across the floor. But the noise hadn't been loud enough for anyone outside to hear, and Jonah felt a prickle of excitement. *Please. Please be what I think.* Kneeling down, he groped on the floor for the object.

A blue glow lit up the darkness.

Jonah could have wept. It was his own phone, probably dropped when he was attacked. There was no still signal, and he daren't risk the flashlight being seen, but the backlit screen alone seemed like a beacon after so long in the dark. Jonah held it up and the room around him emerged dimly from the shadows. His euphoria died when he saw Gavin's blood pooled on the flagstones, straight edges showing where it had overrun the polythene sheet. Just visible in the shadows beyond it were the cocoon-like shapes of the other victims, ghostly pale in the blackness. Now he had light, Jonah started over to check on the young woman, and as he did so he heard footsteps outside.

Someone was coming.

Shit, *shit!* Jonah looked around for something he could use as a weapon, but there was nothing. And he was already out of time. Hurrying to the doorway, he pressed himself flat against the wall next to it. As he reached it, his phone screen went out, plunging the room into blackness again. The footsteps were closer now. Jonah took a deep breath, trying to calm himself. *You can do this. It's just like an op.* Except that it wasn't. There was no team to watch his back, no one to call on for help. He was on his own. *Don't think about that. Go in hard and fast and forget everything else.* He took a deep breath, readying himself as the footsteps reached the doorway.

And stopped.

Jonah felt deafened by his own heartbeat. Each pulse threatened to split his head as he waited. There was a creak as the door swung further open. A wedge of light from a torch spread across the floor, outlining the edges of the door.

Adenoidal breathing came from outside. Jonah felt a feathering of disturbed air on his skin, then there was the sound of someone stepping over the threshold. But they didn't emerge

from behind the open door. Jonah saw the torch beam begin to fan around the loading bay, and before it could show the empty sheet of polythene where he'd been tied, Jonah threw all his weight against the door.

Whoever was on the other side was big. The impact jolted Jonah's teeth and hurt his head, but there was a *whuf* of escaping breath. The torch clattered onto the floor, breaking the darkness with crazed swathes of light as it rolled back and forth. Flinging back the door, Jonah launched a kick at the figure but made only a glancing contact. Then the air was driven from his lungs as a shoulder rammed into him. He slammed into the wall, breathing in a sour, vinegary smell of old sweat. Heavy blows pummelled at him from the darkness. Jonah took most of them on his raised forearms, but something caught him on the side of his head. He managed to swing an elbow and felt it hit bone, bringing his knee up as the man in front of him jerked away. It thudded into a meaty thigh rather than groin, but still caused his opponent to stumble back. Through blurred vision Jonah saw him double over, and for an instant thought he was falling. Then he heard the scrape of metal on stone as the shadowy figure snatched up a length of scaffolding pole from the ground. In desperation he kicked out before the other man could swing it and felt the flat of his foot sink into a heavy gut. There was a gasp of pain.

Then Jonah's kneecap exploded.

He cried out, but as he fell he grabbed the other man and dragged him down as well. They crashed onto the stone floor. His opponent was bigger and heavier, and there was a *thock* as his head struck the stone floor. Jonah clawed for a flailing arm and managed to lock it under him. He tried to clamp his legs around the man's middle but his left one refused to work. Gritting his teeth, Jonah used the pain as a goad, squirming

around and partly pinning the bigger man. He bucked like a fish but Jonah clung to him. A fist clubbed at his head. He held on, close to passing out. The man's breath was coming in choked whistles now, his struggles becoming more frantic. *Hold on. Just a little longer. Hold on.* It became like a mantra, repeating again and again as Jonah rode out his captive's attempts to break free.

At some point he realised the thrashing had stopped.

For a while he didn't let go. Couldn't. His body felt locked, clenched in place. Even when he tried, his limbs wouldn't obey. Eventually, he forced them to loosen their hold. The man slumped and lay still. Jonah flopped over onto his back, muscles quivering as he sucked in air. Pain threatened to carry him away. There was a humming noise in his ears and a fluttering, like wings beating behind his eyes. The darkness seemed to take on depth. He felt himself sinking into it.

*Come on! Move!*

Jonah rolled over, and promptly threw up. Retching, he took a moment to recover, then he groped on the floor for the torch and shone it on his attacker. The man lay crumpled on his side, one arm draped over his face as though to shield his eyes from the light. His head was hidden by the dirty jacket that had rucked up around it during the struggle. Tensing, Jonah reached out and prodded him in the back.

The man lolled, but there was no other reaction.

Jonah sagged. He couldn't tell if the man was breathing or not, and the possibility that he might have killed him flitted through his mind before being drowned out by the need to get help. He started to push himself to his feet, only to cry out as his knee gave way and dumped him back on the floor. He lay gasping, then turned the torch onto his injured knee.

*Oh, fuck . . .*

His jeans were soaked with blood. The knee beneath them was misshapen and visibly swelling already, and Jonah knew that he wouldn't be walking out of there. Pushing himself until he was sitting upright, he checked his phone. Still no signal. Stifling his anxiety and fear, he shone the torch across at the plastic-shrouded victims.

'Nadine, can you hear me?' Jonah called, making his head throb even more. There was no answer. 'I'm going for help . . . Just hold on, OK?'

He held the light on the polythene bundles, hoping to see some sign of life. There was nothing, and Jonah knew he couldn't wait any longer. Gripping the torch in one hand, he pushed himself over to the wall and tried to climb to his feet. Dizziness and nausea washed over him. His knee wouldn't hold him up, and he slid back down the damp wall to the floor.

*OK, so much for that idea.* He looked over at the door leading into the main warehouse. The fight had carried them back into the loading bay, but the doorway wasn't far away. Jonah told himself all he had to do was make it into the other side of the warehouse, away from these thick stone walls, and he'd be able to get a signal. A few metres, that was all. *Nothing to it.*

With the torch in one hand, he began crawling towards the doorway, trailing his injured leg behind him. Each movement sent a jolt of agony from his knee. It had swollen so much that it felt constricted by his jeans, and the throbbing in his head was almost blinding him. He felt crushed between the twin centres of pain, dwarfed by them. The few metres to the door seemed endless. He had to stop repeatedly, fighting not to throw up as he waited for the pounding to subside. His progress was agonisingly slow, and it was only when his hand struck something hard that he realised he'd reached the door. Pawing it open, he dragged himself through, then fumbled to try his phone again.

No signal.

*Oh, come on . . .* Jonah rested his head on the stone floor. It was cold and soothing, smelling of dirt and mould. It wouldn't be such a bad thing to stay there, he thought, closing his eyes. *Just a few minutes. Just to rest . . .*

He jerked awake, convinced he'd heard a noise behind him. In a panic, he shone the torch back through the doorway, expecting to see the tall figure lurching towards him. There was no one there, and the loading bay was still and quiet. Turning away, Jonah started crawling again. He fixed his eyes on a pillar ahead of him, willing himself to reach it. *Only a few more metres, you can do that.*

But he couldn't. After a few more attempts he realised he couldn't go any further. He tried to think what he was supposed to do next. *Get help, that's right . . .* The phone screen swam in front of him, but his vision was too blurred to see if there were any signal bars or to make out the numbers to dial. He stabbed at the screen with dead fingers, mumbling in case anyone could hear. *Please. I need help.* He was losing it now, a rushing in his head drowning out everything else. As awareness slid away only a sense of urgency remained.

Then blackness closed in around him.