



THE FINAL ACT OF MISS TIDY

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The boy, who looked about sixteen, was clearly observing him. He was slim and gangly, at least six foot tall, and wore old-fashioned browline glasses under a raft of brown hair. He had taken up a position, first on one side of Janaway and then on the other, twenty yards away, and would stoop a little to size up his target, as if taking a photograph, before moving off again.

Presumably, at some point, he would introduce himself. He reminded Janaway of Stephen Hawking as a young man. He had the same wide mouth and the same kind of foal-like stance. It was difficult to explain, but Janaway instinctively took a shine to him. There was a certain innocence to his espionage activities. Evidently, he wasn't aware that his 'prey' was aware of what he was doing.

They were executing their *pas de deux* on Parker's Piece, an extensive square common that could be viewed from Janaway's third floor office. If there was any focus to the chief inspector's wanderings, it involved Reality Checkpoint, a huge four-headed lamppost, located in the middle of the common at the intersection of the common's two criss-crossing paths. Built in 1860, three years before the first game of Association football was played here, this landmark was at the edge of the 'bubble' of academic life in Cambridge and the 'reality' of the life of the locals beyond.

Janaway, at 6' 4" and powerfully built, could be considered somewhat of a landmark himself. He was sweltering in the sun, strolling about in a white shirt and blue tie, his jacket slung over his shoulder. Before the appearance of his admirer, he had been thinking about going away on a holiday. Last Christmas, his late wife's aunt, Polly Rodwell, had invited him to her place in Sydney, and he might just take her up on the offer.

Going for a walk at lunchtime was a recent habit of his. At times he quietly viewed other people sauntering about, but mostly he indulged in his own reflections. He had given up trying not to think about Josie and Sophie. Josie, his wife, had committed suicide 19 months earlier. She had been depressed over what had happened with Sophie, who had been born 29 weeks into Josie's pregnancy and who had died in her parents' arms an hour later.



Yesterday evening, his mother, Ludmila, had suggested, not for the first time, that he find another partner. This time, however, she had produced a new suggestion for how to go about doing so.

'Misha,' she said, employing the Russian form of his name, 'have you thought about joining a dating website?'

'Mum—'

'You're not getting any younger. You'll be forty in October.'

He imagined the smiles around Parkside Station if it were discovered that he had signed up to a site like UniformDating.com. His mother continued by saying that he was working too hard and that it was important – a point she had been making since his childhood – that he enjoyed a social life.

'Life is precious. You want to make the most of it.'

This fact was borne out later that night. Victor, his next-door neighbour from his previous house, called to say that his wife, Jean, had died four days earlier from a stroke, aged 67. Janaway passed on his condolences – Jean had been a lovely neighbour – but, after putting the phone down, his thoughts had turned again to Josie. She and Jean had sometimes gone shopping together.

And now, guiltily (although he had nothing to feel guilty about), his thoughts turned to a certain female colleague. It was ironic that his mother should talk about other women, as if she sensed that something was afoot. Thoughts along those lines had started a month ago when DC Laura Sutton had passed him on the stairs at Parkside Station with tears in her eyes.

'Are you OK?' he had asked.

Tentatively – very tentatively, for he was anything but a touchy-feely person – he had placed his hand on her shoulder.

'Come into my office,' he said. 'We'll have a cup of tea.'

It transpired in conversation that Laura's boyfriend had ended their 11-month relationship the previous evening. Alec was a property lawyer who earned a high salary and was nine years her senior.

'I thought we were ready to move in together.' She looked at him through glassy eyes. 'I'm sorry. I should get a grip on myself. It doesn't compare to what you've been through.'

On the contrary, he had been touched by her openness. Looking back, that meeting had been a turning point. She had talked about her hurt feelings and, for his part, he had admitted that he had felt



lonely after Josie's death. There had been an emotional connection – or at least there had been on his side. Ever since, he had looked forward to their conversations and felt disappointed if a day went by without seeing her.

And yet... well, the thought of them together was ridiculous! For one thing, there was the fact that they worked together which, although it didn't stop them from dating, might set tongues wagging. (And so what? he asked himself.) For another, there was the age difference. Laura was fifteen years younger than him. (And so what? he asked himself again.) But, most importantly, there was the feeling, even after this time, that he was betraying Josie. At present, he felt relatively happy with his life. Wouldn't it be putting that happiness at risk if he became involved with someone else?

In any case, he had no idea how Laura felt about him, despite his knowledge of body language...

'Woah!'

He had changed direction and nearly bumped into the boy with the lolloping gait.

'Sorry,' he said instinctively.

'You're... you're a policeman, aren't you?'

The boy was looking over Janaway's left shoulder. His thick glasses were not quite level with the bridge of his nose.

'I am, that's correct.'

'Pleased... pleased to meet you.'

It made a change for Janaway, who also felt embarrassed by eye contact on first meeting people, to look at the other's face. He was fascinated by the boy's mouth, which was very large and mobile and seemed unlikely to be able to frame words.

'Pleased to meet you as well.'

'I'm Stewart Hester, but everyone calls me Stewie. Are you the man in the paper?'

'Possibly.'

It was an unusual start to a conversation. The boy wore a black-and-white T-shirt, which depicted the number 23. His voice was louder than average and had a monotone quality.

'I think you are,' he said. 'You're Cambridge's Inspector Morse.'

He was quoting a headline in the *Cambridge News*. The article had come about because



Janaway had helped to solve a fraud involving a couple who had been ripping off old people, one of whom happened to be the reporter's mother.

'That was written three weeks ago,' he said. 'I'm surprised that you can remember it.'

'Miss Tidy was carrying a pile of newspapers. The article about you was on top. She... she said I was like you.'

'In what way?'

Miss Tidy, Janaway imagined, was an assistant in some sort of care home.

'You have an eye for detail. You like playing chess.'

The reporter, Sally Allsop, had presumably mentioned chess because even an interest in the game was perceived as evidence as intelligence. She had also dropped in the fact that he had studied at Cambridge, although, for some reason, had omitted that when he was younger he had nearly been admitted to a special needs school. (Perhaps she thought that that had sounded too improbable.) The article had shown him in a faultless light, something that hadn't gone unnoticed by Chief Superintendent Gray.

'Just shows you should never believe what you read in the papers,' he had said. 'There was one thing I did agree with, though.' He found the relevant section. "DCI Janaway gets involved in fieldwork more than the typical chief inspector." Well, ain't that the truth? Otherwise, there were times when I felt I could have been reading a fairy tale.'

He had nonetheless seemed pleased with the impression the article had given of one of his staff. Janaway felt, on the other hand, that there had been a certain amount of envy in other quarters. DS Mark Prosser, for example, had mentioned the article three times. The headline about 'Cambridge's Inspector Morse', it seemed, had especially struck a nerve.

'I do like playing chess,' he replied to Stewie's comment. 'Did you want to talk to me about anything in particular?'

Stewie gulped. 'Miss Tidy.'

'Oh, yes?'

'She... she's missing. No one has seen her since July the twenty-first.'

This was the Sunday just past. It was now Wednesday.



'She said that if something should happen to her,' Stewie continued, 'I should talk to you.'

'Were those her exact words? "If something should happen to me..."'

'I should talk to you. And she pointed to the picture in the paper.'

Janaway was about to ask why anything should happen to Miss Tidy, but Stewie carried on speaking.

'She was at work between eight and ten am on Sunday morning. On Monday, she was meant to come in between nine forty-five am and midnight. I... I heard Mrs Baker say the swear word beginning with s when she didn't turn up on that day. Yesterday, she was meant to come in between eight and ten am. And today she was meant to come in between nine forty-five am and midnight.'

'Those are very precise timings. There are days, then, when she works for two hours, and others when she works for fourteen hours and fifteen minutes?'

'Yes.'

'I'll note all of this down, if you don't mind.'

In spite of the baking hot weather, Janaway donned his jacket to free up his hands and removed a notebook from one of the pockets. His lunchtime stroll, when he was supposed to relieve his mind from work worries, had been interrupted, although, on the other hand, since his thoughts had drifted on to Josie and Sophie, perhaps it was a good thing. He, too, had suffered from a stammer when he was younger, and naturally warmed towards anyone who exhibited 'different' behaviour.

'It's important we establish a timeline,' he explained, writing the details down in front of his interested companion.

As it happened, he had attended a review of long-term missing cases that morning. When somebody went missing and was still unaccounted for, reviews took place every 28 days for the first three months, followed by further reviews at six-monthly and twelve-monthly intervals. Unfortunately, many of these cases came about because action to find the missing person had not been taken immediately. The 'golden hour' was crucial.

'Has Miss Tidy gone missing before?' he asked.

'Um... I don't think so.'

'Would she try to get in touch with you, do you think, to say what she was doing?'



'Yes, definitely.'

Upon further questioning, it turned out that Stewie was a resident at Coleridge Residential Home on Winslow Road. Miss Tidy, whose first name was Fiona and whom Stewie thought was about twenty-seven or twenty-eight, was his main care assistant. He had taken the bus to the city centre on his own – not apparently an unusual event – although on this occasion his intention had been to talk to Janaway. On his own initiative, he had looked up the address of the police station and, by chance, had noticed Janaway on his walk across Parker's Piece.

As these facts emerged, Janaway's respect for Stewie grew. He clearly cared a lot about Miss Tidy and was prepared to go out of his way to help her if she might be in danger. Tellingly, he, rather than the supervising adults at Coleridge Residential Home, appeared to be the most concerned about her welfare. It demonstrated empathy, even though Janaway had no doubt that, although high-functioning and able to lead a fairly independent life, Stewie had a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. Janaway himself was nearer the spectrum than most people, which was why, for example, he fought against the instinct to avoid looking people in the eye.

'Thank you for telling me this,' he said. 'You've done absolutely the right thing.'

Stewie looked very serious. These were grown-up affairs that they were discussing.

'They... they were thinking of calling the police,' he said.

'Who was thinking of calling the police?'

'Mrs Baker and Ruth.'

'The people in charge?'

'Miss Tidy told me that she was unhappy.'

Janaway gazed at Stewie's profile. He had very long eyelashes, which were on display as he blinked.

'What about, do you know?'

'Her boyfriend.'

'Go on.'

Stewie cocked his head on one side. 'She was crying. She... she said that he upset her.'

'What about?'



'I don't know.'

Were other people on Parker's Piece looking at them and wondering what they were talking about? It was interesting what constituted acceptable social behaviour. Stewie was standing almost at a right angle to him, still not looking at him in the face. Meanwhile, some thoughtless person in a car with the windows wide open had a radio that was blaring out rock music.

'What's her boyfriend's name?' Janaway asked.

'B.'

'B?'

'I... I don't like him.'

'His name is B?' Janaway confirmed. 'Is that a Christian name or a surname?'

'I don't know.'

'Why don't you like him, Stewie?'

The boy plainly found the conversation difficult. He was concentrating hard and biting his lip.
'He... he makes me feel funny inside. He scares me.'

'In what way?'

'His eyes.' Stewie paused for a full two seconds. 'They're strange. They show no feeling.'

Although it was true, in general, that autistic people found it harder to identify emotions in others, that was not to say, at the upper end of the spectrum, that they could not sense that something was amiss.

'Does he work at the home?' Janaway asked.

'No.'

'When did you last see him?'

'At Christmas. I also saw him in April and on the sixth of July.'

That was 18 days ago.

'You have an amazing memory,' Janaway remarked.

'He... he laughed at me. If he's done anything to Miss Tidy, I'll kill him.'

It was possible, of course, that Stewie had an obsession with Miss Tidy, which had prompted a fierce dislike for her boyfriend. Nevertheless, for the time being, Janaway was prepared to take his



account at face value.

'I promise to look into it, Stewie.'

'I trust you.'

The boy held out his hand for Janaway to shake. The formal gesture, which was quite unexpected, touched Janaway for some reason. They shook hands and their eyes met for an instant, forming a bond.

Janaway's mobile went off. It was Chief Superintendent Gray.

'Where are you?' Gray demanded.

'Reality Checkpoint.'

'Nice, is it?'

'As a matter of—'

'Stop!' Gray interjected. 'I know very well what it's like. The "reality checkpoint" I'm facing is that two young women have been murdered in the last six weeks. It'll be good if—'

But before he could finish the sentence, Janaway's mobile cut out. He looked at the screen to see it fade to black. The battery needed charging, a circumstance which, he imagined, wouldn't improve Gray's mood.

'I have to go now, Stewie.'

'The number of Coleridge is zero, one, two, two, three... six, six, seven... one, eight, nine.'

'OK.'

'Do... do you need to write it down?'

The first five numbers were the area code but, even if Janaway forgot the other six, it would be easy to look them up.

'I rarely forget a number,' he said. 'I wish, though, that I had your ability with faces.'

Stewie looked puzzled.

'You remembered mine from the newspaper,' Janaway added.