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# Wayne

The SOCO (scenes of crime officer) walks into her office at 9 a.m. on the dot. I'd probably be more pleased to see her if I hadn't been waiting since 6.30 a.m. I'm a brand-new probationary constable and have been told to parade for early turn, so that's jolly well what I've done. Except today I'm supposed to be shadowing the SOCO, and they don't start until 9. *Basics*. Still, one of the main talents of a probationary police constable seems to be 'taking it on the chin', so I'm off to a good start. Plus, it's my birthday, and I'm actually really keen to witness the forensic experts in action. Mum's planned me a birthday tea for when I get home, which is usually around 4 p.m. on an early shift, and I'm looking forward to it. Six weeks after leaving Hendon and I'm loving every minute of my street duties course. Ten weeks of being paired with experienced officers, taking reports, searching suspects and plenty of shoplifters. Getting to grips with the radio and starting to learn your borough. Only two weeks before the puppy-walking ends and I'm placed on a response team for real. I feel a little jolt of excitement in my tummy just thinking about it. Real

999 calls, real policing. *But no street duties instructors to walk you through it.*

I jump up as she enters and introduce myself. *Always be keen.* She's warm and friendly, introduces herself as Michelle and asks me if I've been waiting long. Not at all, I answer with a smile. She tells me that we've got a list of crime scenes to go to and quickly packs up her kit. We're out in the yard just as fast and getting into her van. It's unmarked, white, with a very small Metropolitan Police emblem on the side. I look to the emergency response cars parked around me and grin as a bubble of anticipation pops in my stomach. *Soon.* As I settle into the front passenger seat I double-check that my radio is on the correct channel: BX1. I twist the volume dial and cock my head to listen as the current response team go about their calls. I love listening to what's going on, tuning into a channel previously unavailable to me and altogether unavailable to the public. I feel pride prickle in my chest as I consider the fact that I'm now part of this very exclusive club.

I run my finger over the various knobs and buttons, trying to remember the feel of them all without having to look. The tip of my index finger lingers on the soft rubber pad of the emergency button. It's bright orange and, without doubt, the most important button on your radio. Referred to as the 'emer' button, when pressed it triggers an alarm that sounds on every radio within your borough. Cutting across the airways so that your radio has priority over everyone else, even Control, it gives you ten seconds of airtime to ask for help. Everybody jumps when the emer

button sounds. It usually means one thing: your colleagues are in trouble and they need help. If you press the emer button you'll have every available police officer on their way to your location in seconds, discarding their lunch, dumping cups of tea and running to the yard. It's a reassuring button to have.

We pull out of the yard and Michelle starts making small talk. She's dressed in plain clothes with a Met vest, the kevlar body armour issued to all front-line Metropolitan police staff, over the top of her thin jumper. The sickly scent of her vanilla perfume wafts up my nose as we pull out of the yard and I reach into my pocket for some lip-gloss. I can feel my Met vest digging into me as Michelle weaves through the busy London traffic. It's a feeling I'm yet to get used to. It's tighter than normal as, unlike the usual thin cotton of my white shirt, today I'm wearing a red hoody underneath. I'm also in plain clothes, except for my kit-belt and Met vest, of course. It does feel good to be in jeans and trainers.

We soon arrive at the location of a burglary and head in to find the officers on scene. It's a small flat, basement level, with a front window that's completely obscured from the street. Someone could have worked away at that window for as long as they wanted without being disturbed, and they've obviously done just that. The uniformed officers direct us to some obvious evidence opportunities; the broken window and some clean shiny surfaces that may have been touched by the suspects. Michelle explains that clean and shiny is good for fingerprints. Then the officers

get called to a 'fight in progress' and leave us to it. I look longingly at their backs as they rush to their car, envying their sense of urgency. *They're needed.*

I soon forget them, however, as I'm fascinated by Michelle's job. We're encouraged by some small drops of blood on the broken window, the best evidence we're likely to find at a scene like this. She swabs it and seals it. She works quickly and efficiently, talking enthusiastically about everything she's doing. Before long we're packing up and I find myself hoping that we're heading to a grisly scene next. We head out to the car and are so busy chatting that we miss the fluorescent yellow metal at first. *Oh shit.* We've been clamped. The van looks forlorn sitting by the kerb with a penalty notice strapped to its windshield. Michelle turns red as she explains that she must have forgotten to display the log book in the window, and starts to make the necessary phone calls. I feel the rain start to spit, so we get into the car and wait for the clampers to come and remove their shackle.

Two hours later, and I'm stifling a yawn as Michelle launches into the story of 'boyfriend number three.' It's only 11 a.m. but it's four-and-a-half hours into my shift and I've been up since 4.30. I despair as I work out that half of my shift is gone already and I've hardly seen any forensic action. In an effort to keep myself amused, I'm listening to my police radio while grunting the occasional 'uh-huh' in response to Michelle's monologue. Listening to all the calls that I'm not on my way to, I lean my head back and close my eyes, thinking about the delicious meal ahead of me,

the presents and the now definitely ‘necessary’ drinks to celebrate my twenty-five years on this planet. The thought of a drink cheers me up and I straighten up as my attention gets drawn by something moving farther down the street.

It’s a car. A jeep, to be precise, and it’s moving fast. Straight towards us. It screeches up the road and blasts past, causing our van to shake in its wake. I see a flash of white face and a shaved head as the driver’s window is framed in mine for a less than a millisecond. Michelle’s shocked into a refreshing silence and I twist in my seat to try and catch the registration. I only catch the first half.

‘He’s going to wind up in a crash if he’s not careful,’ I mutter to Michelle as I crane around for a street sign. Being new to the borough has many disadvantages. I wipe my brow in the stuffy car as the voice of my reporting sergeant echoes through my mind. *Always make sure you know where you are.* I’m instantly annoyed with myself for not noting our address. Finally, I see it on the side of a house near the end of the street. *St Peter’s Crescent.* I’m just lifting my personal radio to my lips to circulate the speeding car when an emergency call broadcast stops me.

***‘Call on an “I grade” now to St Peter’s Crescent, road traffic accident, injured parties on scene, police assistance requested.’***

‘I grade’. *Immediate.* My heart skips a beat. I sit up and look at Michelle as I hear the location of the call. *That’s us. That’s where we are. Take the call!* Again I reach for my radio but a voice at the back of my mind is saying, *Wait.*

*You don't know what you're doing.* There's no experienced officer to give me advice. It's my decision and I'm on my own. I can feel Michelle watching me as I sit staring into space, expecting another unit to pipe up and answer the call. But it's been a busy early turn and the airwaves remain silent. What if someone's seriously hurt? The thought clears all the doubt from my mind and I press the button on the side of my PR (personal radio). I wait for the bleep and the echo that tells me I'm on the air.

'NI from 215NI.'

**'Go ahead, 215 . . .'**

The sound of my high-pitched and slightly shaky voice over the airwaves distracts me. I try not to think about the fact that every police officer in the borough, plus the entire control room, can hear everything I'm saying.

'I'm . . . um, I'm street duties and I'm on St Peter's Crescent now. I can go and take a look?' Hoping simultaneously to be told that I can't go on my own, while also quietly respected for my bravery, I hold my breath as another silent beat passes.

**'Street duties . . . received. Do we have another unit that can attend to assist 215?'**

Again the control room's request remains unanswered.

'Got to go.' I glance at Michelle, who is still staring blankly at me, and push open my door. The fresh April air feels cool on my clammy face as I look up the crescent. I can't see anything from where I'm standing, but I just

about hear it as I turn my head to look around. Someone's shouting. I start to jog in the direction of the noise. As I run into the curve, more and more of the road ahead opens up to me and suddenly I can see the crash. It's 20 metres away and I see fluorescent jackets, scattered traffic cones and the rear of the jeep, in the air, wheels spinning. I quicken my pace as the shouting gets louder. It's coming from a man who's lying on the floor. He's splayed on his side next to the jeep, and at either end of him burly-looking builders are kneeling. *Is he injured? Is a head injury making him lash out?* I run straight into the middle of the scene and have maybe half a second to grasp what has happened before everybody starts shouting at once. *At me.* They must have clocked the Met vest and cuffs then.

'He drove straight into the hole.'

'He's a fucking nutcase!'

'Lucky no one was hit.'

The words jumble together as I try and figure out what to do next. What to do first. The jeep's rear wheels are suspended in the air, still spinning. Its bonnet is pointing down into the road and obscured by the hole it's driven into. The driver's door hangs open, a few feet away from where he has wound up on the floor. There are red and white barriers scattered around and a number of shocked-looking residents have come out of their houses. I assume that the driver, the skinhead I saw before, has lost control and driven into a hole. I walk over as the builders look up at me. The look of disappointment is etched across their faces.

'Are you *it*?' the builder on the left asks, eyebrows raised. *Hold it together. You can do this.*

'I'm a police officer, yes,' I answer him and nod to the driver. 'Do you need an ambulance?'

This time it's the other builder who speaks. His hat is skewed sideways and he's panting like a dog. 'An ambulance?' he wheezes, as if it's the most ridiculous suggestion he's ever heard. 'Listen, love, the only thing you need is back-up!'

And it's only as he says it that I begin to fully comprehend the situation. The driver's not hurt, he's being prevented from running off. The builders are restraining him, not tending to his wounds. As my mind slows slightly from its whirring panic I can finally hear what the driver's saying. And it's not nice.

'You fucking Paki prick.' He spits the words out like venom, saliva bubbling at the corner of his mouth. 'Fucking let go of me, you fucking pricks.'

I bend over and take a proper look at him. He's about my age. His T-shirt is like a saggy tent around his torso and his tracksuit bottoms drape over thin legs. He's out of breath, but seriously agitated. I take my cuffs from their holster on my belt and motion to the builders to bring the suspect's wrists together. They achieve this easily and I breathe a secret sigh of relief as I manage to get the cuffs on without looking like a novice. And then it happens. The police are here. *They can deal with it now.* Both burly builders let go of the man and stand up, stepping away from him and brushing themselves down. *Now it's just me and him.* The

suspect has gone quiet and I stand there for a moment, holding him by the cuffs, him still on his side on the floor. He twists his head towards me and I can see grazes on the right side of his face, where it has been rubbed into the road.

'Can I stand up, miss? Please?' Later on in my service, the word 'miss' would have flashed as a warning that this suspect had been in prison. That's what the inmates call the female prison guards. But I wasn't late in my service. I was three weeks in.

*He's calmed down. He's skinny. Why not?*

'OK.' I pull on the cuffs and the suspect stands up. And before he's even reached his full height I realise my mistake. He may be slight, but he's tall. Really tall. Around 6 foot 7 to be precise. I look up at him as he towers over me. *Oh shit.*

My radio screeches to life and I can hear the control room calling my number.

### ***'215 receiving NI? Are you on scene?'***

I take one hand off of the cuffs to answer and the suspect sees his opportunity. He lunges towards the builders, lashing his head forwards as they jump out of the way.

'I'm gonna fucking have you. You messed with the wrong fucker today, blud.'

I've got both hands on the cuffs again as he starts to pull away from me. I can't get to my radio. It takes all of my strength to hold onto the cuffs, and as the suspect keeps pulling I try and dig the treads of my trainers into the

tarmac. The builders are back on the pavement and it's just me and the suspect in the middle of the road. The onlookers blur into streaks of colour as the suspect starts to pull me round in a circle.

'I'm not going back inside,' he shouts as he tries to yank his hands away from me.

With bright and brutal clarity I can now see the prison tattoos on the back of his neck. I can see the needle marks on his bare arms as they twist round his back into the cuffs. I can see a large scar twisting its way across his scalp. It looks like a knife wound. I realise that it's the rookie in me that stopped me seeing these details before. Globes of spit fly from his mouth as he shouts obscenities at anyone and everyone. He's pulling in every direction to get away. Again, the faint sound of the radio reaches my ringing ears.

**'215 from NI? . . . 215, are you receiving?'**

I can't get to it. Sweat is making my fingers slip on the cuffs. The soles of my trainers drag over the road surface as I lean away from the suspect and I wish I was wearing my boots. I'm trying with all my strength to stop him moving, but he's not giving in. *He knows you're weak. He can see right through you.* I push my self-doubt to the back of my mind and focus on his wrists in the cuffs. We twist in circles as he continues to pull and my hair streaks across my face as it starts to come loose from the bun I tied this morning. It sticks to my forehead and hazes my vision and I'm desperate to wipe it away. But I will not let go of these cuffs.

***'All units, all units now please to attend St Peter's Crescent, officer in need of urgent assistance.'***

I swipe my head to the left and see one of the builders. Phone pressed to his ear. Eyes glued to us. *Thank God.* There's no radio silence this time. I hear the call signs of the response units as they each answer in turn, responding to a colleague in need. I'm one of them now, and they look after their own. I close my eyes as relief runs through me. *They'll be here soon.* But the suspect has heard them too. I step backwards sharply as he stops pulling, and instead tries to twist round and face me.

'I'm not going back inside,' he growls at me through gritted teeth. He lashes round with his torso, trying again to break my grasp. *Thank God I put the cuffs up his back.* He can't face me because I get pulled around behind him every time he tries.

'If you weren't a fucking woman you'd be on the floor by now.'

My blood runs cold. *Please don't attack me.* The veins in his temples bulge against his fatless skin. His wrists have started to bleed and the metal scrapes at his raw skin each time he pulls away. Then I hear the sirens in the distance and for the first time in our struggle I find my voice, my strength. Back-up is on the way.

'Stop resisting,' I shout, full and loud.

I feel the fight go out of him as the sirens quickly get closer. He is still pulling away from me by the time three police cars screech onto the crescent, but it is half-hearted

at most. Two male PCs are with us seconds later. They take the man from me, like adults confiscating scissors from a child, and fold him over the front of a parked van, barking loud orders and pushing his head into the metal. I try not to look shaky as a sergeant approaches me. I straighten and bend my fingers as, for the first time, they start to ache. As the response team take over I feel like a toddler. A toddler who's just been rescued by the big boys.

'NI from 84.'

**'Go ahead, 84.'**

'I'm here with 215. She's fine.' I'm not sure if it's his tone or his thick Scottish accent that makes me think he's pissed off.

I explain what happened and am puppy-walked through taking an accident report, told what to arrest the suspect for. I mouth the caution with as much confidence as I can muster. The driver has suddenly developed a sore neck and we are forced to take him to hospital for a check-up before we can safely take him to custody. I stand with him for over four hours in A&E, where he is given a neck X-ray to rule out any fractures. He is handcuffed to his trolley the whole time. Bored of threatening and insulting me, he tells me that his name is Wayne and that he only has half a lung on one side, due to being stabbed. If it wasn't for that, he winks, he would've got away. He also says that I'm pretty fit for a copper, wonders if I'd like to go out for a drink. I politely decline. Eventually I am joined by a street duties instructor and, once Wayne has been given the all clear, we

transport him back to the custody suite in the marked police van.

I write out my statement, interview Wayne and complete the relevant case files. I take a look at his PNC (police national computer) record and find out that he is one of the borough's most prolific burglars, and is known for police assault and violence. He is released on bail and I walk him out of custody and through to the front office. He waves casually to me as he leaves, as if we were old friends who'd just caught up over a cup of coffee. I shake my head as I consider the drastic shift in his behaviour.

Once I've filed my paperwork I leave the station. It's 10.30 p.m. and I've got plenty of time before my last train. It's a Friday night and the tube is packed with revellers. I'm not envious, I just want my bed. I lean my head onto the vibrating Perspex that separates the doors from the seats and close my eyes. I listen as the rattle of the rails merges and transforms into the interference of my radio. I hear the muted tones of the control room and the echo of replies over the air, despite the fact that my radio is back in my locker at the police station. My mind assesses and reassesses the events of the day. *I could have done better.* I think about what the response officers must have thought of me. *Another useless Doris joins the force.* I think about telling the other new recruits, of explaining it all to my reporting sergeant. And I think about Wayne. I think about how two people of roughly the same age could be so different. Of how I would have turned out if I'd had his life, and vice versa.

I think about what he's taught me. *Assess the scene before you run in. Always err on the side of caution if you're on your own. If someone's already on the ground, just keep them there.* I stride from the tube to my train and from the station to my house and open the front door gently, careful not to wake my sleeping parents. No one has waited up for me, and nor would I want them to. A small pile of presents lies on the breakfast bar, with a note. I pick it up.

*Dinner's in the fridge. Shall we do your birthday tomorrow?*  
*Love, Mum xxx*