1

The snow had started falling long before the first car departed. It fell in long, slanting lines, faint at first, then thickening. It gathered in corners and against the sides of buildings, funnelling between the broken brick and tile and rusted car parts that littered the back yards and paltry gardens. Covering everything. The sky a low, leaden grey, unrelenting.

By the time the cortège pulled away from the small terrace of houses, there was little to see in any direction, flakes adhering fast to the windows, all sound muffled, the dull glow of headlights fading into the surrounding whiteness.

Resnick was in the third car, sharing the rear seat with a solemn man in a threadbare suit he took to be one of Peter Waites' former colleagues from down the pit. In front of them sat an elderly, pinch-faced woman

he thought must be a relation – an aunt, perhaps, or cousin. Not the one surviving sister, who was riding in the first car with Waites' son, Jack. Jack home for the funeral from Australia with his teenage sons; his wife not having taken to her new father-in-law the one time they'd met and grateful for the ten thousand or so miles that kept them apart.

That last a confidence Jack Waites had imparted the night before, when he and Resnick had met for a pint to chew over old times, Jack once a young PC, stationed at Canning Circus under Resnick's command.

'He was never the easiest bloke to get on with,' Jack said, 'the best of times. My old man.'

Resnick nodded. 'Maybe not.'

They were drinking at the Black Bull in Bolsover, the local pub in Bledwell Vale long boarded up; the village itself now mostly derelict, deserted: only a few isolated buildings and the terrace of former Coal Board houses in which Peter Waites had spent most of his adult life still standing.

'You should've lived with him,' Jack Waites said. 'Then you'd know.'

'You didn't come out of it so bad.'

'No thanks to him.'

'That's harsh, lad. Now especially.'

Jack Waites shook his head. 'No sense burying truth. It was my old lady pushed me on, got me to raise my sights. God rest her soul. He'd've dragged me down

the pit the minute I got out of school, else. And then where'd I be? Out of work and drawing dole like every other poor bastard these parts. That or working in a call centre on some jerry-built industrial estate in the middle of bloody nowhere.'

Less than twenty-four hours back and you could hear the local accent resurfacing like rusted slippage in his voice.

No sense arguing, Resnick raised his glass and drank. There was truth, some, in what Jack Waites was saying, his father obdurate and unyielding as the coalface at which he'd laboured the best part of thirty years until, after strike action that had staggered proudly on for twelve months and come close to tearing the country apart, the pit had finally been closed down.

Resnick had first met Peter Waites in the early days of the strike, and somehow, despite their differences, they'd gone on to become friends. Waites' one of the strongest voices raised in favour of staying out, one of the loudest at the picket line, anger and venom directed towards those who would have gone back to work.

'Scab! Scab! Scab!'

'Out! Out! Out!'

Recently made up to inspector, Resnick had been running an intelligence gathering team, its function to obtain information about the principal movers and

shakers in the strike, assess the volume of local support, keep tabs, as far as possible, on any serious escalation. Right from the earliest days, the first walkouts, the Nottinghamshire pits had been the least militant, the most likely to drag their feet, and Peter Waites and a few others had shouted all the louder in an attempt to bring them into line.

Around them, tempers flared: fists were raised, windows broken, things were thrown. Resnick thought it was time he had a word.

'Bloody hell!' Waites had exclaimed when Resnick – battered trilby, raincoat belted tight; wet enough outside to launch the ark – had walked into his local and sought him out. 'Takin' a bit of a risk, aren't you?'

'Know who I am, then?'

'Not the only one wi' eyes in their backside.'

'Good to hear it.' Resnick stuck out his hand.

The men, five or six, who'd been standing with Waites by the bar, watched to see what he would do, only relaxing when he met that hand with his own.

'My shout then,' Resnick said.

'Shippos all round in that case,' said the man to Waites' left. 'Skint, us, you know. Out on strike. Or maybe you'd not heard?'

'Fair enough,' Resnick said.

One of the miners spat on the floor and walked away. The others stood their ground. Some banter, not all ill-humoured, and after another round bought and

paid for, Waites and Resnick moved to a table in the corner, all eyes watching.

'It'll not work, tha' knows.'

'What's that?'

'You and me, heads together. Makin' it look like I'm in your pocket. Some kind of blackleg bloody informer, pallin' up with a copper. That what this is about? Me losing face? 'Cause if it is, your money's gone to waste an' no mistake.'

Resnick shook his head. 'It's not that.'

'What then?'

'More a word of warning.'

'Warning!' Waites bristled. 'You've got the brazen balls . . .'

'The way things are going, more and more lads coming down from South Yorkshire, swelling your picket line . . .'

'Exercising their democratic right . . .'

'To what? Put bricks through folks' windows? Set cars alight?'

'That's not happened here.'

'No, maybe not yet. But it will.'

'Not while I've a say in things.'

'Listen.' Resnick put a hand on Waites' arm. 'Things escalate any more, pickets going from pithead to pithead mob-handed, what d'you think's going to happen? Think they're going to leave all that for us to deal with on our own? Local? Reinforcements enough from

outside already and either you back off some or they'll be shipping 'em in from all over. Devon and Cornwall. Hampshire. The Met.' He shook his head. 'The Met coming in, swinging a big stick – that what you want?'

Waites fixed him with a stare. 'It's one thing to walk in here, show your face – that I can bloody respect. But to come in here and start making threats . . .'

'No threat, Peter. Just the way things are.'

Light for a big man, Resnick was quick to his feet. Waites picked up his empty glass, turned it over and set it back down hard.

As Resnick walked to the door the curses fell upon him like rain.

The church interior was chilly and cold: distempered walls, threadbare hassocks and polished pews; a Christ figure above the altar with sinewed limbs, a crimped face and vacant, staring eyes. 'Abide with Me'. The vicar's words, extolling a man who had loved his community more than most, a husband and a father, fell hollow nonetheless. A niece, got up in her Sunday best, read, voice faltering into silence, a poem she had written at school. The former miner who'd ridden with Resnick in the car remembered himself and Peter Waites starting work the same day at the pit, callow and daft the pair of them, waiting for the cage to funnel them down into the dark.

Resnick had imagined Jack Waites would bring himself to speak but instead he remained resolutely seated, head down. With some shuffling of feet, the congregation stood to sing the final hymn and the pall-bearers moved into position.

As they stepped outside, following the coffin out into the air, it was the dead man's voice Resnick heard, an evening when they'd sat in his local, not so many years before, Waites snapping the filter from the end of his cigarette before stubbornly lighting up.

'Lungs buggered enough already, Charlie. This'll not make ha'porth of difference, no matter what anyone says. Besides, long as I live long enough to see the last of that bloody woman and dance on her grave, I don't give a toss.'

That bloody woman: Margaret Thatcher. The one person, in Peter Waites' eyes, most responsible for bringing the miners down. After the strike had been broken, he could never bring himself to say her name. Not even when he raised a glass in her hated memory the day she died.

'Says it all, eh, Charlie? Dead in her bed in the fuckin' Ritz.'

Resnick's feet, following the coffin, left heavy indentations in the snow.

A blackbird, unconcerned, pecked hopefully at the frozen ground close by the open grave. Out beyond the cemetery wall, the land offered no angles to the sky.

As the coffin was lowered, a small group of men who'd kept their own company since before the service began to unfold a banner, the red, black and gold of the NUM, the National Union of Mineworkers.

'What's all this?' Jack Waites said angrily. 'What the bloody hell d'you think you're doing?'

'What's it look like?' one of the men replied.

'You tell me.'

'Honouring a comrade.'

'Honouring be buggered! Not here, you're bloody not.'

'Dad,' Waites' eldest said, pulling at his sleeve. 'Dad, don't.'

Waites shrugged him off. 'Wanted to honour him, should've done it when he was still alive. Out of work thirty years near enough, poor bastard, after your union helped bring the industry to its bloody knees . . .'

'Don't talk so bloody daft.'

'Daft? Course you bloody did. You and Scargill, arrogant bastard that he was, delivering up the miners on a sodding plate and you were all too blind to see.'

'I'd watch my mouth if I were you,' another of the union men said, showing a fist.

'Yes? Where is he now, then, Scargill, tell me that? In the lap of luxury in some fancy flat in London while your union pays out more'n thirty thousand a year for his rent, and has done since God knows when. And my old man, all that time, scraightin' out a living

in some one-time Coal Board house as was fallin' apart round his ears. And you want to raise a fucking banner in his honour . . .'

'Jack,' Resnick said, moving towards him, 'let it be.'

'I can only thank Christ,' the union man said, spitting out his words, 'your father's in his grave, 'cause if he weren't, hearing you'd make him shrivel up and die of shame.'

'Fuck off!' Waites said, his voice shaking. 'Fuck right off, the lot of you!' There were tears in his eyes. Both his sons had turned aside.

The union men stood their ground before backing away and resting their banner against the cemetery wall, some small distance off; the snow falling only fitfully now, sad moultings curling slowly down.

Resnick weighed a handful of earth carefully against his palm, then opened his fingers and let it darkly fall.

2

Bledwell Vale, like a number of other villages across the north of Nottinghamshire, owed its existence to the spread of coal mining and the railways towards the end of the nineteenth century, rather than to any deeper history. In 1895, the company that owned the local pit bought a tract of land and wasted little time in building four facing rows of terraced houses, twelve to a row, each with gas lighting and running water and with earth middens and ash pits in their back yards. Soon enough after the miners and their families had moved in there was a Methodist chapel and a school. Allotments. A Miners' Welfare. A branch line to the colliery. A pub.

Between the wars, the earth toilets were replaced by water closets and gas lighting switched to the more modern electric. Then, when the industry was

nationalised after the Second World War, all the properties were taken over by the National Coal Board and modernised again, with indoor bathrooms and toilets.

Brave new world.

Although the most profitable of the Nottinghamshire pits were not on the initial list of closures that set off the Miners' Strike in March of 1984, Bledwell Vale colliery was deemed to be played out. Less than six months after the strike had grudgingly ended and the men had gone, still defiant, back to work, the colliery was closed down for good.

Or ill.

By the time of Peter Waites' death, only one of the initial terraces was still standing, the allotments long overgrown, the station platform so weeded over as to be virtually unrecognisable; both school and chapel had been plucked clean of any lead or solid timber that could be reused or sold. Unlike some other communities – Arkwright Town, for instance, close over the border into Derbyshire, where fifty or so new houses were built to replace those being knocked down, and people simply moved their belongings, lock, stock and barrel, to the other side of the main road – for Bledwell Vale there would be no rebirth, no new life, no second chance.

The earth was still dark and new on Peter Waites' grave, the flowers at his headstone not yet blown, when the first of the diggers and the bulldozers moved in.

And so it was, on the morning of the third day, clearing away the debris from the terrace end, the unsuspecting operator of the JCB discovered, buried beneath the rear extension, what, even to his untutored eye, were clearly human remains. A human skeleton, otherwise undisturbed.

Resnick padded out to the bathroom in bare feet; Dizzy, his one surviving cat, winding its way between his legs. The animal waiting then, patiently, until Resnick had stepped back out of the shower, rubbed himself dry, dressed, and made his way downstairs. Previously the fiercest, most persistent of hunters, who would return from a night prowling the nearby gardens with field mice, shrews, an occasional rat – once, a young rabbit – all of them deposited at Resnick's feet with pride, Dizzy had become domesticated, virtually housebound, slowed down by arthritis and following Resnick from room to room; whenever he was out, waiting for him to return.

'Happens to us all,' Resnick said, bending to stroke the cat behind the ears. 'Eh, you sad old bugger.'

Never much of a cinema-goer, early in his retirement Resnick had taken to watching films of an afternoon, careful to leave the room during the adverts for stair-lifts and health insurance, lest they cause his anger to run over; returning with a fresh cup of tea – coffee now more strictly rationed – to watch Columbo solve the

crime in the final reel, or John Wayne, in some aged western, walk heroically into the technicoloured sunset. His favourite of these – he had managed to watch it three times between Christmas and Easter – was *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, towards the end of which, Wayne, as Captain Nathan Brittles, is riding off into unwanted retirement when the army send a galloper after him, begging him to come back and take up a position as chief of scouts with the rank of lieutenant colonel.

Only in the movies.

For Resnick himself, resuscitation had been less glamorous.

A phone call that had come as he sat, sandwich lunch over, listening to Monk at the piano, prising every strange angle possible from the melody of 'Smoke Gets in Your Eyes'. An abrupt young HR person from force headquarters informing him that, following his previous enquiry, there was now a vacancy, part-time, for a civilian investigator based at divisional HQ – Central Police Station on North Church Street in Nottingham city centre. Which was where, for some months now – three days a week at first, then four, now practically full-time – Resnick had been busy interviewing witnesses, taking statements, processing paperwork, all the while forcing himself to remember he no longer had any real status, no authority, no powers of arrest.

From time to time, an officer pursuing an investigation would stop by and filch some fact or other from his memory, go so far as to ask his advice. For the rest, he kept his head down, got on with the task, however menial, in hand. Whatever kept the stairlifts at bay.

Currently, he was providing the underpinning to an incident in the city centre, a late-night fracas in which a twenty-two-year-old student had been seriously injured. Coming across a loud and potentially violent argument between a local man and his girlfriend, the student, asking the girl if she needed assistance, had attempted to intervene. Whereupon the pair of them had turned on him, and, joined by their mates, clubbed the student to the ground and given him a good kicking, with the result that he was currently in Queen's Medical Centre in a coma. So far, two men and one woman had been charged with inflicting grievous bodily harm, charges that could escalate if circumstances changed.

That day, Resnick was due to re-interview some of the dozen or so witnesses who had come forward, each with a slightly different view of what had happened, a different opinion as to who had been responsible.

Biting down into his second piece of toast, he looked at the clock. Another five minutes, ten at most, and he should be on his way. Unless the weather was truly dreadful, his habit now was to walk from where he

lived into the city centre, the twenty or so brisk minutes down the Woodborough Road enough to get the circulation going, perk up the old heart, keep his limbs in good working order.

'Exercise, Charlie, that's what you need,' a divisional commander had insisted, buttonholing Resnick at his retirement do, a Pints and Pies night in the Masson Suite at Notts County's ground on Meadow Lane. 'Mind and body . . .' Poking a finger against his chest. 'Body and bloody mind.'

Five years younger than Resnick, the poor bastard had dropped dead a short month later, a cerebral aneurysm cutting off the blood to his brain.

The clock now showing 8.07, Resnick paused in buffing his shoes to turn up the volume on the radio. Newly appointed, the local police commissioner was answering questions about the effects of a further twenty per cent cut in the force's budget.

'Isn't this going to leave the people of the county without adequate protection?' the interviewer asked. 'Make them more vulnerable? Lead to an increase in burglary and other crimes?'

'Not if I have my way,' huffed the commissioner.

'Which is?'

'Making more positive use of existing personnel, the resources at our disposal. Hoiking some of the time-servers out from behind their desks and putting them back on the front line.'

Good luck with that, Resnick thought.

Checking he had everything he needed – wallet, spare change, keys – he remembered he'd left his reading glasses upstairs beside the bed, a biography of Duke Ellington he'd been making his way through, a few pages each night before falling asleep.

Glasses recovered, he made sure the back door was locked and switched off the kitchen light; the radio he left on, deterrent against burglars, company for the cat. Stepping outside, he closed the front door firmly behind him and turned the key. Pulled his coat collar up against the wind. Rain forecast later, spreading from the west.

'Bit late this morning, Charlie, not like you.' Andy Dawson, the DS in charge of the investigation, was waiting just inside the main entrance, manila folder in hand. Resnick had stopped off at the coffee stall in the Victoria Centre Market for a double espresso and to hell with the consequences.

'New witness,' Dawson said, 'just come forward.'

'Took their time.'

'Holiday booked in Florida. More important than some poor sod on life support. Be here around ten.'

He passed the folder into Resnick's hand. An old-school copper who'd joined the force not so long after Resnick, he didn't trust anything unless it was committed to paper. Preferably in triplicate.

‘By the way, Charlie, Bledwell Vale – didn’t you used to have a pal up that way? Lad of his in the force for a spell?’

‘Used to is right. Why d’you ask?’

‘Knocking the whole place down, thought maybe you’d heard. Not before time, either. Any road, seems they found a body. Back o’ one of the houses. Poor bastard been down there a good while, they reckon, whoever it were.’ He shrugged. ‘Thought you might be interested, that’s all. Post-mortem’s set for tomorrow afternoon.’

Resnick nodded and pushed open the interview-room door. Dust and stale air. He opened the window out on to the street and sounds of traffic travelling too fast along Shakespeare Street towards the Mansfield Road.

Poor bastard been down there a good while, they reckon, whoever it were.

Too many dying, Resnick thought. Too many dead. There was a good chance he might know who this particular poor bastard might be.

3

All too aware that his short-term memory was going – he was quite capable of making the short journey to Tesco Metro and, by the time he'd arrived, forgetting what he had set out for thirty minutes earlier – as yet, Resnick's long-term memory still thrived. Without hesitation, he could call to mind the names and faces of every officer who'd worked with him at Canning Circus and after; every senior officer – good and bad – he'd served under from the morning he pulled on his first uniform until the moment he retired. He could reel off the cream of the Notts County side promoted to the top division under Neil Warnock in '91 – Steve Cherry, Charlie Palmer, Alan Paris, Craig and Chris Short, Don O'Riordan, Paul Harding, Phil Turner, Dave Regis, Mark Draper and Tommy Johnson – and, further back, the full personnel of the Duke Ellington

Orchestra he'd travelled across country to see and hear at the Free Trade Hall in Manchester in November 1969 – the same year, a raw recruit, he first started pounding the beat. And he could remember the name of the woman who'd gone missing at the heart of the Miners' Strike, 1984: Jenny Hardwick.

He recalled seeing her on two occasions, the first relatively early on in the strike, a community meeting at the local Miners' Welfare he'd attended in some vain hope of de-escalating an increasingly acrimonious and violent situation.

Tensions between striking miners and the police, between the families of men in villages like Bledwell Vale who continued, despite intimidation, to turn up to work and those who jeered and taunted them every step of the way, were stretched to breaking point and sometimes beyond. When Resnick attempted to speak at the meeting, he was shouted down, despite angry appeals from Peter Waites that he should be heard.

Waites had introduced him to Jenny afterwards, along with several others. It was Jenny who'd stood out. Dark haired, medium height, her features sharp rather than pretty – bright, quite intense, blue-grey eyes – she'd not been shy of giving Resnick a piece of her mind.

The second time was an open-air meeting in Blidworth, late enough in the year for her breath to be visible on the air when she spoke. Earlier there'd

been talk of hardship and want; cutting their losses and accepting, maybe, whatever deal the Coal Board was currently offering. But when Jenny Hardwick spoke she had little truck with conciliation: aiming her words at the wives and mothers present, telling them in no uncertain terms it was their duty as women to persuade any of their menfolk still working to down tools and join the strike.

Buoyed up by cheers of encouragement, she was just hitting her stride when one of the working miners, the dust from a day's shift still etched into his face, had lurched towards the platform, yelling at her to shut her bloody trap and get back home where she belonged.

'This is where I belong,' Jenny Hardwick had responded. 'And this is where I'll stay till this strike is over and the miners have won!'

Amongst jeers, head down, her heckler had limped away, leaving Jenny to relish the applause.

Resnick never set eyes on her again; scarcely heard tell of her until almost the year's end, when rumours came through from one of his undercover officers that she had disappeared. Done a runner, some reckoned, and perhaps no great surprise; she and her husband on opposite sides in the dispute and hardly speaking – at least that was what folk said. Eventually, when, after too long an interval, she was officially reported missing, an inquiry was launched, local, low-key.

There were other things more urgent, more pressing. Nothing was found. No sign.

Fucked off and good riddance, her husband is supposed to have said in the local pub. But he'd been well into his cups by then, not to be taken too seriously.

The kids, three of them, all under eleven, had stayed with their dad for a while, then gone to live with their nan on the North Sea coast near Mablethorpe: ice creams when they behaved, donkeys on the beach, fresh air; on a good day you could even glimpse the sea itself.

A few scattered sightings, none verified, aside, there was no clear indication of where Jenny might have gone, where she might be.

Until now? Resnick wondered. Until now?

He would keep his own counsel, keep shtum: wait and see.

The work at the autopsy was painstaking and slow: no matter. After all those years beneath the ground, no need to hurry now at all. From the size and shape of the hips and pelvic girdle, they assessed the gender; from the thigh bone, the height; from the shape and size of the skull, the ethnicity; from the incomplete fusing of the collarbone and the absence of any spikes around the edges of the vertebrae, they assessed the age.

According to the forensic pathologist's report, the skeleton was that of a female Caucasian between the ages of twenty-four and twenty-eight, approximately 1.65 metres or five feet, five inches tall: it had been beneath the ground in the region of twenty-five to thirty years.

There were signs of two separate fractures of the radius, the lower arm, the first of which had most likely taken place in childhood. Also, and more tellingly, there was evidence of considerable damage to the back of the skull, the pathologist confirming this to have occurred when the woman was still alive, rather than post-mortem, live bone breaking in a different way from dry.

A blunt-force injury, the pathologist concluded, most likely the result of being struck by a heavy object at least once, if not several times, and, in all probability, the cause of death.

Even so, supposition and circumstantial evidence aside, no clear identification was yet possible. Forensic examination of the teeth showed evidence of root canal treatment and a porcelain crown, but Jenny's dental records were hard to come by. Of the three dental surgeries in the immediate and surrounding area, one had closed down fifteen years before, the building now privately occupied, with no indication of whether any records had been placed in storage or destroyed; one had moved across the county to the other side of

Retford, their records, since the awkward process of transferral, only complete as far back as 1998; the third surgery was still operational, though now part of a wider consortium that welcomed private patients and promised, in a glossy brochure, teeth whitening, invisible braces and porcelain veneers, all the things that modern cosmetic enhancements can do to provide a perfect smile.

'Oh, no,' the receptionist said when asked. 'Thirty years ago? No, I shouldn't think so. All our records are computerised.' Anything that much older than herself, her expression suggested, was difficult to imagine.

One of the partners, Chinese, an impeccable accent, public school and then the University of Buckingham, was more accommodating. Everything relating to the previous practice had been boxed up and was in storage in the basement. Of course, there could be no guarantees . . .

After several hours of searching they found a faded file, smelling of mildew and damp to the touch: a set of dental records barely legible, amongst them an X-ray showing several fillings and some root canal treatment on the first molar in the right half of the lower dental arch.

A match.

The name and address at the top of the file in neat but badly faded ink: Jennifer Elizabeth Hardwick, 7 Station Row, Bledwell Vale, Notts.

Jennifer Hardwick.
Jenny.
Lost and then found.

It gave Resnick not one shred of pleasure to learn that his educated guess as to the identity of the body had been correct. Far rather Jenny Hardwick had followed the bright lights as some had suggested, fetched up in another town, another city – another country, even – with a new identity, new family perhaps, a new life.

Hauling his mind back to the task in hand, he double-checked the list of witnesses against the statements already processed; made a note of those he thought might usefully be seen again. The couple who'd been holidaying in Florida had provided what at first had seemed like positive identification, a brace of photographs taken from across the street on their mobile phone showing one of the accused kicking the student in the head as he lay against the kerb; the range and focus, however, were such that any competent barrister appearing for the defence would challenge them successfully in court. Meanwhile, the family were discussing with medical staff at the hospital the prospect of their son's life-support system being switched off.

Where Jenny Hardwick was concerned, the coroner would have been informed and arrangements made for an inquest to be opened and then adjourned while

an inquiry would be set up to investigate the circumstances of her death; that responsibility, Resnick imagined, passing either to the cold case unit based out near Hucknall, or the now regionalised Serious Organised Crime Unit, comprising officers from four counties – Notts, Leicestershire, Derby and Northants – its local headquarters a brisk walk away through Forest Fields and down into Hyson Green.

Either way, it was no concern of his.

4

Anxious not to wake him, Jenny started to squeeze slowly out from beneath the weight of her husband's arm. She was almost free when, with a grunt, he turned his face towards her, mouth open, the stink of beer stale on his breath. Lifting his arm quickly then, and sliding away to the edge of the bed, she pulled the T-shirt she wore as a nightgown briskly up over her head.

'Where you offta?' he asked blurrily.

'Nowhere. Go back to sleep.'

'Whatever time is it?'

'Five, somewhere round there. A quarter past.'

'Come on back, then. Come back to bed.'

'I can't. You sleep.'

Falling back with a grunt, he closed his eyes.

The boards were cold beneath her feet.

She pulled on jeans, sweaters, one over another, a pair of thick socks. She could hear footsteps passing by outside, muffled voices, the first of the men setting off for the pithead, the day's picket.

By the time she'd found her boots and pulled them on, her husband was beginning to snore. In the back room, all three kids were still fast off, the youngest, Brian, making small sucking sounds around his thumb; Mary, the girl, clinging to a ratty old bear by its one remaining ear. Colin lay on his back, mouth open, snoring lightly, a perfect version of his father in miniature.

Jenny went quickly down the stairs and out of the house.

Frost glistens on the tops of the cars parked further along the street. Her soft grey breath swirls on the air. Ahead of her a door opens and a man steps out, his face illuminated for a moment by the light from the hall – no one she knows. A dozen or more of the Yorkshire pickets have been billeted in the village for a week now, others in the villages around; some are camping out, it's said, in the fields close by. Since the police had begun blocking the roads and turning back vehicles heading south, the strategy had changed; stopping the movement of coke and coal, forcing the Notts pits to close, still a priority. Over fifty per cent of Nottinghamshire miners, closer to sixty, are as yet

refusing to support the strike, continuing going into work. Despite any arguments Jenny has so far been able to muster, her husband still one of them.

There are more bodies now, falling into step around her, men mostly but a good scattering of women; faces amongst them she recognises, local, faces she knows from evenings in the pub, the Welfare, the gates of the school.

A woman with a scarf wound close around her head veers in her direction, touches her arm.

'Jenny, that you?'

'Either that or me ghost.'

'Not seen you out before.'

'No, well, thought maybe it was time.'

'Your Barry . . .?'

'Don't ask.'

It is the best part of a mile from the village, the road winding gradually uphill; forty or fifty of them by now, others joining, stragglers; a few in cars, but mostly on foot. Up ahead, the pithead lights show clearly, and beneath them, in silhouette, a line of uniformed police stretched across the entrance, shoulder to shoulder, waiting.

Voices around Jenny rise louder the closer they come and she can feel the anger growing around her. Men calling out, laughing some of them, joking, laughing but angry all the same. One or two more she recognises clearly now; Peter Waites from the strike

committee raising both arms aloft, stepping out in front, leading.

'Maggie, Maggie, Maggie! Out, Out, Out!'

'Maggie, Maggie, Maggie! Out, Out, Out!'

They are almost up to the police line now and she can read the expressions in the officers' faces: wary, some of them, the younger ones, afraid almost – she hadn't realised they'd be so young, still wet behind the ears – others cocky, chock full of themselves, eager for it all to kick off; but most of them blank, staring out over the heads of whoever is confronting them as if they aren't there.

A shout goes up from the back, followed swiftly by another: the first of the buses carrying the men reporting for work is coming. As if at a signal, the line of police begins to move forward, pushing the crowd back, and for the first time Jenny realises just how many there are, how many reinforcements waiting behind.

'Hang on!' a woman standing close beside her says. 'Hang on to my arm!'

The front line of police divides, forcing them back to either side, making a passageway for the buses to pass through. People around her are pushing back, thrusting her forward, an elbow sharp in her side, and from somewhere the first stone.

To a great cheer, a policeman's helmet goes flying.

'Scab! Scab! Scab!'

‘Out! Out! Out!’

As the first bus draws near, fists pummelling against the windows and the shouting rising to a crescendo, spittle running down the glass, the faces of the men inside remain immobile, staring forward, her husband’s not one of them, not one she can see.

‘Judas! Fucking Judas!’

Three busloads altogether and nothing they can do to stop them.

‘Bastards! Blackleg fucking bastards!’

As soon as they pass through, the gates are closed behind them: the tension seeping slowly away, like water through muslin. A last stone, thrown in the direction of the retreating phalanx of policemen, falls nowhere near. All the energy draining from her body, Jenny turns aside. What have they achieved? They’ve achieved nothing.

She knows there is neither use nor ornament to that way of thinking.

‘Maggie, Maggie, Maggie . . .’

Back home, her children will be waking.