

## HAWTHORN & CHILD

‘*Hawthorn & Child* has all the moody stuff of the detective genre, but no suspects, no clues, no resolution’ *London Review of Books*

‘Not only in its dialogue, but in its bawdy subversiveness, *Hawthorn and Child* is a thoroughly Irish affair. Samuel Beckett and Flann O’Brien come regularly to mind, although Ridgway’s blend of the grotesque and the absurd is all his own . . . An admirably conceived work of fiction’ *Times Literary Supplement*

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‘Like Nicholson Baker, Ridgway has the descriptive power to locate the sublime hidden inside mundane minutiae. And like Paul Auster, he knows how the accretion of ordinariness can be made to seem overwhelming and sinister to a bewildered narrator’ *Independent on Sunday*

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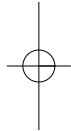




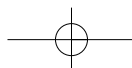
# HAWTHORN & CHILD



Keith Ridgway



GRANTA





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For Jasper

and with thanks to my family, especially my father  
W. J. Ridgway; Raj Sonecha; David Miller and  
Alex Goodwin; Philip Gwyn Jones; John Self;  
Cressida Leyshon; David Hayden;  
and Seán McGovern.





1934

He dreamed he was sleeping, and Child was driving. Driving but not moving. He was sleeping on the passenger seat and Child wrestled with the wheel, but the car was still. It was the city that was moving. It was dark. The city rushed past them like words on a screen, and he would have read them but they went too fast. He was filled with sorrow. It trickled through him and filled his eyes. He wept and he didn't know why, and he was embarrassed by it but he could not stop. He cried so much that his face disappeared. He dreamed that the siren was on, and it was so loud that it woke him.

He awoke. Child was driving. The city was still and they rushed through it. That was the difference. A finger across a page, taking corners not turning them, hopping little hills, drawing zigzag ciphers on the wide, empty intersections.

His shoulder was pressed into the door and pulled away from it and he touched his seat belt. He had an erection. He wiped at his eyes. Child was smiling at the road. He wouldn't drive like this at any other time of the day. He wouldn't be able to.

– Has he run?

KEITH RIDGWAY

As soon as he'd said it the stupidity of the idea roared back at him. Mishazzo. Running.

Child glanced at him and laughed.

– Shot fired off Seven Sisters, he shouted.

He didn't quite believe him, such was his grin and his mouthing of the corners, gleeful as a roller-coaster. He looked around for something to indicate official business, permission, and shook his head violently, trying to get the sleep to go. He sat up, and was pressed down again. He looked at his crotch. His chin was wet. He saw the radio, and only when he saw it did he hear it, feeding them information in short regular bursts, calm and close together. He couldn't understand them. Their pattern indicated some sort of emergency, declared, somewhere or other.

– What? he asked the radio.

Child said something that he couldn't hear. The streets were deserted. What time was it? There was next to no traffic. Why was the siren on? He switched it off.

– Someone needs to do bad before we can do good.

– Shot fired. That it?

– One male injured. Local unit just arrived. Ambulance arrived. Shot fired from car. Armed response imminent. Rivers raised from his bed. All hands on deck! Scramble! Scramble!

Child was cackling at the footpaths, leering at the kerbs.

– Finally we get to do something other than sit on our arses.



HAWTHORN & CHILD

He tried to manage his arms. They wanted to stretch but they were tensed up against the roll of the car. In his dream there had been ghosts as well, he thought. Around the car. Small dark ghosts with wings and muscles. Flapping. He became aware of a pain in his neck. And a headache. He opened the window an inch. Two inches. Ghosts like little birds, tough little tattooed birds. Bad things. His erection began to subside.

They turned a corner somewhere near Wood Green, into the cold canyon of the shopping street. Child punched the siren as they passed some taxis and a pedestrian crossing. He drove with his glasses slipped to the end of his nose and his head thrown back so that he could see through them.

– What?

Child was muttering.

– It's near where I used to live, he shouted. With Amy. When I lived with Amy.

– What is?

– Hampley Road.

– Hampley?

– Road. Scene of the crime. Stick your head out the window or something.

He stared at the clock and looked at his watch and fumbled in his pocket, and then couldn't remember what he was fumbling for. Five twenty-nine. 0529. 5.29 a.m. Shot fired, Hampley Road, Finsbury Park, man injured. He wasn't fumbling, he was fixing his cock.

KEITH RIDGWAY

– Why are we going this way?

Some people stepped away from a car as they passed. Three men, one woman, maybe more, young maybe, he couldn't see, scattering as they passed, and he turned in his seat and watched them re-form into a group in the middle of the road and stare after them, and he kept on looking backwards even after Child had turned another corner and there was nothing more to see because he liked the way the stretch in his back and his chest and his shoulders made him feel. It eased his headache and it pinched the pain in his neck. He yawned again and listened to the radio, monotone, scripted. You fire a gun in this city and certain things inevitably follow. Hampley Road. Armed response on scene. Ambulance off scene. Victim off scene.

He was awake.

– We're going the wrong way, he shouted. Child looked at him. The siren wasn't on. The shout had sounded insane.

– We're not going to Hampley Road, Hawthorn. We're going to the hospital.

He was in his twenties and his hands were slick with blood. Then a nurse was wiping them with a cloth and they became a faded pinking, stuck in the air, his arms bent at the elbow for no reason, flapping a little. For no reason. Not flapping. Turning at the wrist, like a sock-puppet show stripped naked and scalded, doing a little dumb show over the prone body on the table. He was a body on a table. Weight of flesh and bone.

HAWTHORN & CHILD

Wound and contusion. Half a dozen people gathered around him with what you would swear was ill intent, such was the way they shouted and darted and snapped. They poked and peered at the body. They tubed the body and they hooked it up. They shifted and bound the body. They cut and pressed and injected the body. They worked on it as if furious.

Hawthorn was sweating and cold.

– Lay your arms down, Daniel, that’s it, lay them down. Daniel? Daniel! Put your arms down for me darling, that’s it.

– Move please.

Early twenties, average build. He was moaning and shockingly alive, and his socks were still on his feet, and there were drops of blood, splatters, on his legs somehow, his bare legs, raw looking. His underpants too, still clinging to him, but halfway down his thighs, where they’d been pushed or pulled. His genitals looked out of place, as if they were the last thing you’d expect to find on a naked body. The rest of his clothes had been cut from him and lay in a sodden heap on a side table. All the attention was focused on his stomach, his abdomen, around there somewhere. Hawthorn tried not to see too much.

Child moved over to look at the clothes. Hawthorn stood off to the right, glancing at the discarded bloody things that littered the floor – bits of bandages and padding from the ambulance, yellow needle caps, little torn open packages.

– Move, please.

– Can’t get at it there.

KEITH RIDGWAY

– All right, Daniel. Don't move if you can.

– Move, please.

– Watch it. Clamp . . . pack here. Here.

He shrieked. Daniel. A short painful burst of non words, and his arms were up again, and Hawthorn found himself looking suddenly for his face.

– OK, Daniel, OK, easy. That's the worst of it. The pain will ease now. Daniel? You OK, Daniel?

His face was smeared in blood. His chest was covered in bits and pieces. They were using it as a table. His eyes were opening and closing. His mouth was making shapes.

– OK, he said. OK OK OK. OK.

Child reappeared.

– Can I ask him a few things?

– He's going straight to surgery.

– Hang on, said a nurse.

– Daniel? I'm police.

– Hang on, I said.

Hawthorn had his notebook in his hand. He looked at it. He rummaged for a pen. Child was leaning over the boy's head.

– Daniel, can you remember what happened? Can you tell us what happened?

– I was shot.

One of the nurses laughed.

– Do you know who shot you?

They were moving around him faster now, taping things to

HAWTHORN & CHILD

his arms, cleaning, wiping patches of his skin with pads and cloths. A nurse was cutting away his underpants. On his hips there was padding, bandages, a hand holding things in place. There was a smell of sweat and blood and piss. They covered his lower body with a sort of paper sheet.

- A car. Shot me.
- What kind of car?
- Old car.

His voice was full of hard breathing but it was clear. His hair was damp. One of his eyes was bloodshot. His skin was a horrible white. There was a dark bruise coming up on his left shoulder. He looked around them, around their heads and at the ceiling behind them. Then his eyes fixed on Hawthorn's eyes and stayed there.

- Daniel? What do you mean old? Like an old banger?
- No. Old-fashioned.

He looked at Hawthorn. As if he thought it was Hawthorn who was talking to him.

- Do you mean a vintage car?
- Vintage. Yeah. OK. Came along. Side me.
- Did you see who was driving?
- No.
- Did you see anyone in the car?
- No.

They took the brakes off the trolley.

– That's all I'm afraid. We have to get him to surgery. Right now.

KEITH RIDGWAY

– What colour was it, Daniel?

– Dark. Black or . . . dark. Sideboards. Not sideboards. At the side . . .

– Running boards?

– Running boards.

They began to move him. He looked straight up. At the ceiling and the lights.

– A beautiful old car came out of nowhere and shot me.

Hawthorn called in. Frank Lenton was running the office.

– A vintage car?

– With running boards. Dark. Possibly black. Dark, anyway.

– Number plate?

– No.

– Model?

– No.

– A black vintage car with running boards.

– There can't be very many driving around at 5 a.m. on a Monday morning, Frank. Don't sound so glum.

They had the place to themselves. Child had put on a pair of latex gloves. He opened the wallet that sat beside the clothes. Hawthorn held the phone out towards him.

– Credit card, Daniel Field. F-I-E-L-D. Debit card. Work photo ID. IFM Banking. City. 38 Cellar Street. Echo charlie 3. 4 yankee delta. Oyster card. Nectar card. Tesco Club card. Virgin Active gym card. Boots card. Café Out loyalty card. Tea Smith loyalty card. Two twenty-pound notes and one ten.

HAWTHORN & CHILD

Three first-class stamps. Business cards, various, blah blah, not his. No driver's licence. No address.

There was silence on the phone. Hawthorn put it on speaker and set it down on the table. Child was going through the clothes, shaking his head. Charcoal suit, white shirt, tie, light raincoat, black shoes.

– There's no phone here.

– No phone, Frank.

There was a pause, then a crackle.

– There's one at the scene.

– Whose scene?

– Rivers is on his way. Lowry and Clarke are there now.

Give me one of the numbers. The credit card.

Hawthorn leaned over the card and called out the numbers.

– Is he dead then?

– He's gone to surgery.

– Right. Daniel Field. 16 Nestor Lane, N-E-S-T-O-R. L-A-N-E. November 4, 4 echo alpha. D.O.B. twenty-eight, nine, nineteen eighty-seven.

Hawthorn wrote. A nurse came back into the room.

– Where do you want us, Frank?

– No idea. Hang on.

The nurse started cleaning up. She ignored them. Child looked at her.

– Will he make it?

She shook her head.

KEITH RIDGWAY

– Don't know. Depends what they find in him. How much blood he lost.

Hawthorn picked up his phone, took it off speaker, held it to his ear.

– Looked like he lost a lot.

– Nah. Internal bleeding will kill him, you know? But maybe. From the way he was talking, moving, that's a good sign. He was not very weak.

Frank crackled back in his ear.

– You were at the . . . Mishazzo thing. You on that?

– Yeah.

– Hang on.

– How long will he be in there?

– I don't know. A long time probably.

He looked at her hands.

– OK, Mishazzo is covered, said Frank. You stay there. Wait to hear from Rivers.

They went looking for the paramedics who had brought him in. They were mopping out the back of the ambulance.

– Did he say anything?

– He said 'What the fuck happened?' a couple of times. He kept on saying 'I've been shot' like he couldn't believe it. And he mentioned a car.

– Did he say what kind of car?

– No. I asked 'Who shot you?' and he said 'A car'.

– Nothing else?



HAWTHORN & CHILD

- Nope.
- Do you think he'll make it?
- Nope.

They went to the hospital café. It was too early apparently for anything hot to eat. They had cling-filmed sandwiches and risked the coffee. They sat against a wall, side by side, Child between tables with his legs crossed. He cleaned his glasses and watched Hawthorn.

- Sandwich is yesterday's. Dry.
- Try the coffee.

Hawthorn tried the coffee.

- It's all right.

Child took a sip and made a face.

- Café Out, he said.

– Yeah.

- Is that a gay thing?

– Yeah.

- So he's gay?

– It's a café. They do nice cakes. I wouldn't assume.

- Well, did that look like gay cock to you?

Hawthorn looked at Child seriously for a moment, and said nothing. Child chewed and looked back.

– Who drives vintage cars? he asked, firing crumbs at the air. I'll tell you who. Creepy old queens in cravats. Living in creepy old mansions in Hampstead. You know, with the dungeon.

KEITH RIDGWAY

Hawthorn smiled.

– Young Daniel’s broken someone’s heart, said Child.

– The dungeon?

– The dungeon.

Hawthorn shook his head.

They watched a man wipe tables. He wore his hair in a net.

– When he wakes up, Hawthorn said. He watched himself use his fork for emphasis. *If* he wakes up. We need to get a better description. We need to get an artist in. Do we have a car artist?

Child laughed.

– Do we have a car artist?

– Yeah.

– I don’t know. We’ll find that out. Tell Rivers we need a car artist.

Hawthorn yawned and his eyes filled up. He stopped. Stared at the table. He carefully closed his eyes. Opened them again. It was just the yawn. He thought. After a moment. He blinked a couple of times. Cleared his throat. Sipped the coffee. Child was talking.

– Rolls Royce Silver Shadow. An actor or something. Sixties pop star. I should have had juice. I feel like a bag of shit. You need to watch that eye rubbing thing. You already look like someone’s poked you with a pair of fingers. I want a bed. You think they have empty beds here somewhere? Unlikely, isn’t it? Unlikely.

\*

HAWTHORN & CHILD

Hawthorn called John Lowry.

– Do you have his phone?

– Yeah. What’s all this about a vintage car?

– Vintage car. It’s what he said. Old car. With running boards. Pulled up beside him. Shot him. That’s all he knows.

– Is he sober?

– He’s a banker. On his way to work. What’s it look like there?

Child was at the counter negotiating free coffee refills. Hawthorn watched him.

– Useless. It’s towards the end of the road, where it meets the main road. He’s been walking on the footpath, left hand side of the road, coming up to the crossroads, he’s passed the parked cars, into the clearway. There’s a bullet in the wall, they’re getting that now. Very small calibre, looks like. So we have . . . at least two shots. We have ear witnesses going up to five, but you know what that’s like. No eyes. He’s left a shoulder bag, with a computer and stuff in it. So, it’s no robbery. He’s dropped the phone as he fell, either out of his hand or his pocket. No weapon, no shell cases. Cold road. Looks light to me, apart from the bullet. A banker?

– Yeah.

– Well fuck knows then. CCTV is killing good policing. Rivers is here, talk later. Oh. Hang on.

Hawthorn looked at his phone. It was filthy, covered in a film of grease. Dirt clogged the sockets. A patch of some sticky unidentifiable substance adhered to its screen. Child

KEITH RIDGWAY

was coming back to the table with two coffees.

– Hawthorn?

– Yes.

– Rivers.

– Morning, sir.

– He’s tripping, isn’t he?

– I don’t think so.

– He’s in surgery now?

– Yes, sir. No one seems to know if he’ll make it.

– Did he actually say *vintage*?

– He said *old* and *old-fashioned*. Child offered him *vintage* and he took it, like it was the word he’d been looking for. He was specific about running boards, unprompted.

Rivers was quiet for a moment.

– There’s that Chrysler thing. It has sort of fake running boards. Well. OK. If that’s what we’ve got then that’s what we’ve got. The Good Samaritan who stopped and called it in is a Mr Jettters. I’m sending him to Highbury. Go down there and get a statement from him. Stay in touch with the hospital though. There’s a uniform on the way for presence, but I want you back there as soon as he’s out of surgery.

Alan Jettters was a thin man in his forties with blood on his shirt. They found him in reception, pacing. He was in a hurry, he said. He needed to get to work. But he was full of adrenaline and really he wanted to talk. Hawthorn apologized for keeping him, shook his hand, introduced Child, offered him

HAWTHORN & CHILD

tea. He didn't want tea. They found a room on the second floor. Child went off to the toilet. Hawthorn took off his jacket, glanced at the machine.

– We'll just wait for Detective Child to get back.

– Does he get a lot of ribbing?

– What's that?

– Child. Over his name.

– Oh, ribbing. A little. Yes. I suppose he does. I've stopped noticing really.

– That's not good for a policeman.

– No.

– To stop noticing.

– No.

Hawthorn sat at the table writing things in his notebook.

Child came back. Hawthorn fiddled with the machine, then moved out of the way to let Child do it. The building was overheated. He thought about bullets and cold and Daniel Field's red hands, pink hands, stuck in the air. He missed the cold.

– Is this going to take long? Jeters asked. I'm late for work.

– So is Daniel Field, said Child.

There was a silence, in which Child, turning away from the machine, shot Hawthorn a wink. Then they were all sitting, and the little lights were green.

– He died?

– No, not yet. He's in surgery. His condition is very serious.

– I didn't know his name. I asked him, but I couldn't make

KEITH RIDGWAY

out . . . Anyway. I'm happy to be of whatever help I can. Of course.

They got him to say his name, his address, his date of birth. They said their names.

– Can you just tell us, Hawthorn said, everything that happened, from the beginning?

He offered too much detail. He told them about his usual morning routine, about the slight differences there had been that morning. He told them his route to work, what was on the radio, what the weather was like, how he'd felt, what he was wearing. He was fascinated by the fact that he had guessed that the gunshot was a gunshot as soon as he'd heard it, even though he knew nothing about guns and had never been near one, apart from a go at clay pigeon shooting on a weekend away once, and he hadn't liked that, because he was no good at it, and found those sorts of organized work outings quite awkward. And so on.

Hawthorn wrote things down.

He had been approaching the turn from Almond Road on to Hampley Road when he'd heard it. The first thing he saw when he turned the corner was Daniel Field on the ground. He had driven over to him, pulled in and gone to help.

– He was writhing. Half shouting. Half shouting and half crying. He seemed in terrible pain. He was clutching his stomach, he had his hands pressed to his stomach, but there was blood seeping through his fingers.

HAWTHORN & CHILD

Hawthorn wrote down *seeping*. It occurred to him that it was the wrong word.

Jetters had taken off the scarf he'd been wearing and used it instead. Then he'd called 999.

– Did he say anything?

– He kept saying *fuck*. And not much more I'm afraid. A lot of groaning. He seemed to pass out for a moment – and when he opened his eyes he said *What happened?* but that was all.

– You talked to him.

– Yes. I jabbered. I don't know what I said. A lot of nonsense I imagine. *You'll be alright. Hold on. Ambulance is coming.* That kind of thing.

– Did he look at you?

– Yes. Yes he did. When I first arrived he looked me in the eye, and I think for a moment he wondered if I was . . . if I was there to do him harm. He looked scared of me. Perhaps he was just scared anyway. But when I made it clear that I was there to help he didn't look at me so much.

– Can you tell us anything, any half words, anything that sounded like words, that he said? That you can remember.

– Well. I asked what had happened. *What happened?* And he said *car*. And I asked, *Someone in a car?* and he nodded. It was only then that I thought of the possibility of them coming back. I mean, it was, I was . . . it's strange how the mind works. I had seen him, and I had known, somehow, that he had been shot, and I had stopped and gone to help without really thinking about it, and it was only when he said *car* that I

KEITH RIDGWAY

thought *uh-oh*, and I realized that they might come back – that someone had actually *shot* him, someone had tried to *kill* him, and that they might still be around, and that I was possibly in some sort of danger.

He shifted in his seat slightly, cleared his throat.

– No one came back, though?

– No. No one. I started to look over my shoulder a little, after that. I asked him what type of car. He said *ochre*.

– Ochre?

– Ochre.

– Are you sure?

– Yes.

Hawthorn looked at Child. He was grinning.

– Do you think he might have said *old car*?

– Old car?

– Old car.

Jeters shrugged.

– Yes, I suppose so. Old car, ochre. Yes. It could have been old car.

Hawthorn wrote for a while but Child kept silent.

– What else?

– What else did he say? I don't think he did say anything else, much. I'm not sure he was trying to say anything. Apart from the couple of questions I asked him, it was just groans and cries and squeals, if I can say that. Extreme pain I imagine. Lots of *Gods* and *Christs*. Though some of that may have been me. He was puffing and blowing. Shivering. He was terribly



HAWTHORN & CHILD

cold. It was cold there. Dark. Cold and damp and miserable really. I remember thinking that it would be a terrible place to die. I took off my jumper after a while. Partly to help with the pressure, but also because he was so cold.

– There are street lights there. Aren't there?

– It's shadowy, rather than dark, I suppose. There are lamp-posts, yes. He was about midway between lamp-posts. There are pools of light, pools of shadow.

Hawthorn wrote down *pools of light / pools of shadow*.

– When you turned into Hampley Road, did you see anything else?

Jettors coughed. Cleared his throat.

– There was a car. I didn't mention it earlier. It went out of my mind for some reason. And it's very vague now. It was at the junction with Plume Road, leaving Hampley Road. It was there, and I saw it, but I didn't really look at it, if you see what I mean. My attention was on him. On Mr Field. I saw lights I think. Brake lights perhaps, as if it paused at the junction, and then it was gone.

– Which way?

– I'm not entirely certain. I couldn't swear on it, but I have the impression now, I'm not sure why, that it turned to the right into Plume Road.

– North.

– Is it? Yes, you're right. North.

– How would you describe it?

– The car?

KEITH RIDGWAY

– The car, yes.

– Just a shape really. The back of a car. You know. The idea of a car. I think there were brake lights. But you know I'm not even sure of that. But some kind of light or lights. Tail lights or a registration plate light or something. Some kind of shape around that.

– You couldn't see a registration?

– No no. Nothing like that. Nothing so clear. I'm guessing. I don't really know. It was the suggestion of a car, you know. The idea of a car.

Hawthorn looked at Child again. But he just looked back.

– Were the lights high or low?

Jettors looked confused.

– Were they at the standard saloon car height, or were they raised, like on a four-wheel drive for example? Or low down like a sports car?

– Oh I see. I don't know. I don't even know if there were lights. Standard, I suppose. It didn't register. Not noticeably high or low.

– Square lights? Round? Oval?

He shrugged.

– As I say. I am even doubtful as to lights. Shapes of lights is beyond me. Sorry.

– That's OK. This is very helpful.

– Could you hear it? asked Child.

He paused.

– Yes. I think so. Yes, I could, of course. It accelerated off

HAWTHORN & CHILD

from the junction. It was loud. I heard the engine roar. Well, not roar perhaps. But I certainly heard the engine. It accelerated away. It sounded . . . well, louder, I suppose, than I'd . . . louder than you'd expect. I think. Maybe it was just because there was no other traffic around.

– Can you describe the sound? Smooth? Irregular? High pitched?

– It was a rumble, I think. Like a . . . I don't know. A low rumble. I can't quite recall.

They let him think about it for a while.

– Like?

– Oh I don't know. I really can't remember.

– Were there other cars? To the left of you for example, as you came out on to Hampley Road?

– There were parked cars.

– I mean moving cars.

– I didn't look to the left. I don't think. I don't recall looking to the left. I suppose I must have, when I turned the corner, instinctively, to check. But I don't remember. And I don't remember seeing any other cars. Not then.

– Were there other cars after that?

There were other cars after that. Some of them had made Alan Jettens nervous. None had stopped. One was a *very pale gold*.

– Though I suppose it could have been silver, reflecting my amber hazard lights.

– When did you put them on?

KEITH RIDGWAY

– When I stopped. When I pulled in. I actually don't remember doing it, but they were on all the time, I was aware of the flashing.

Another was dark, and had a radio playing loudly. Then there had been a van which he had mistaken at first for an ambulance. But it had not stopped either.

– What colour was the van?

– Off-white. Grey. Maybe just a dirty white.

Then there was a people carrier with dark windows.

That was it.

– OK, said Hawthorn. He looked at Child.

– The jumper, said Child. You were wearing the jumper?

– Yes. I usually drive with my jumper on and hang my suit jacket in the back. It's more comfortable.

– What colour is it?

– The jumper? It's taupe.

Child nodded. Hawthorn had to look down at his notebook. He wrote *tawp*, and threw an important looking circle around it.

– Did you drive yourself here from the scene?

– Yes. With a police officer. She came with me.

– Your car is parked out the back?

– Yes.

– What colour is it?

Jetters looked between the two of them suspiciously.

– It's . . . blue.

– What kind of blue?

HAWTHORN & CHILD

– Marine.

Child nodded, grinning. Hawthorn wrote it down.

Hawthorn called Frank Lenton.

No vintage cars could be seen on the CCTV footage they'd so far got their hands on from around Hampley Road. They were starting to examine film from earlier and later and further away. Nothing that could pass for vintage. Nothing older than an early 1990s Toyota.

Hawthorn gave Frank the possible car turning north on to Plume Road, and the rumbling engine. And he gave him the other cars and the off-white van.

Daniel Field was twenty-four, Frank told him. He lived in a house on Nestor Lane, a couple of streets away from Hampley Road, which he shared with a book editor and a post-graduate student at UCL. His parents were divorced. His father lived in Chicago, his mother in Cambridgeshire. Daniel worked in the IT department of a small French investment bank with an office near Liverpool Street. He had been due in early that morning – at 6 a.m. – for a pre-trading software update, something that happened irregularly every couple of months or so. He was gay and single. He had one younger sister who was a student in Reading. His sister and his mother were on their way to London. He had no criminal record. He had no arrest record. He did not appear on any intelligence watch list or database. He was a civilian.

Hawthorn called the hospital. Daniel Field was still in

KEITH RIDGWAY

surgery, but Hawthorn got hold of one of the nurses. Daniel would be fine. He had been hit once, in the right abdomen, the bullet ricocheting slightly off the top of his hip bone, and coming to rest close to his bladder. But it was a small bullet and had not left much damage in its wake. Surgery would take a while because they wanted it to be as unobtrusive as possible. He was generally healthy. He would make a full recovery.

Child had disappeared. Hawthorn dozed in the stuffy duty lounge of Highbury Station. He stretched out on an odd-smelling sofa with his hands on his stomach and his head turned towards the muted television. He was thinking about his father. There was a chat show on the screen, and everyone was smiling. He was not thinking anything specific about his father. He simply had him in mind. His face and voice and the grip of his hands and his smell and his eyes. His voice.

He could call him, he thought. And ask him about old cars. He remembered toys. Old toys. He remembered the carpet in the hallway, and the kitchen floor. He remembered lying down flat, with old toy cars in his hands.

He fell asleep.

He dreamed he was asleep in front of the television.

– We're getting some progress from a couple of sources in Tottenham. Pointing to a random pair of fun-gunners associated with a dealership, gone a little haywire.

HAWTHORN & CHILD

Hawthorn frowned. Rivers sounded upbeat. The case was elsewhere. The case was always elsewhere. Nevertheless, he frowned, and noticed that Child picked up on it and mirrored it, and took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes.

– In a vintage car?

– Yeah. A blue Hyundai Coupe. About two years old. Does he wear glasses?

– No. At least . . .

– Find out if he wears contacts. Maybe he's partial to a pre-work spliff. Did you ask the hospital what they'd pumped into him by the time he started talking to you?

– Nothing hallucinogenic. I don't know.

– I had an assault victim once who insisted that it was the Archbishop of Canterbury in full regalia who'd jumped her on a back street in Lambeth. You'll have to wait for him to come round. Assuming he comes round. Shock. Confusion. Drifting in and out of consciousness. Maybe he didn't see it at all and the brain has filled in for him. Who knows? Don't worry about it.

– I think he was pretty sure.

– Go and speak to the housemates. They've given statements. But I want to know if any of them have any links to this Tottenham crew. It's unlikely but you never know. Do they smoke a bit? A little coke for a party sometimes? Who do they get it from? Any trouble with them? Go gently, please. My money is on random.

– OK.

KEITH RIDGWAY

– And stay linked to the hospital. We'll need better than a vintage car from him.

He hung up.

– We are not at the centre of things, said Child.

Hampley Road was taped off from the crossroads down to the first junction, from where Jetters had come. Hawthorn closed his eyes. The sky was grey and flat and he liked it. There was a patch of black blood on the cold path. He opened his eyes. There was a patch of blood. But it was not quite black, and it was smaller and it was in a different place. People in baby-blue paper jumpsuits and white shoe-covers were wandering around with bags and brushes and pads and cameras.

– My place was about two streets away, said Child.

– Which way?

– The other way. Other side of Plume Road.

– It's not exactly murder mile is it?

– No. It's not.

– Is Amy still here?

– No. We sold the flat, remember?

– Where did she move to?

He didn't answer.

Hawthorn faced the junction with Plume Road. He tried to picture Daniel Field on the footpath.

– It must be someone very close.

– What?

– If it's not on CCTV then it's in a garage somewhere.



HAWTHORN & CHILD

– Oh fuck off.

– What?

– He didn't actually see a vintage car.

– Yes he did.

– A vintage car. With running boards?

– It's what he saw. It's what he said to Jetters. Before he had any painkillers or whatever they were giving him.

– He didn't say vintage to Jetters.

– He said *old*. He was looking for the word. As soon as you said *vintage* to him he agreed.

– He was bleeding to death. He was probably seeing his own funeral cortège.

Hawthorn looked at the silver shutters set into the side of the building that faced on to Plume Road. Just to their left was a little yellow flag affixed to the brick where the bullet had struck.

– What's in there? The shutters, I mean.

– Nothing.

– Nothing?

– It was a bakery. They used to have tiered wedding cakes in the window. Edible bride, edible groom.

– Was.

– Then it was a coffee shop. Now it's nothing. Hasn't been anything for about a year.

– Why would he say *old car*? For him to say *old car* . . . it means that *old* was the most obvious thing about it. Not a colour or a make or a shape or anything. *Old*. Old car.

KEITH RIDGWAY

– Maybe he said ochre.

They wandered along the road. A uniform tried to lift the tape for them. It snapped. Child laughed. There were a couple of hobby bobbies with clipboards waiting for passers-by. A car drove up Almond Road. They watched it. It was the way Jeters had come. Residential, quiet, speed bumps. It was a short cut, avoiding the junction at the top of Plume Road if you were coming from the north or north-east. Hawthorn wondered why Jeters felt the need for short cuts at that hour of the morning. One of the hobby bobbies stopped the car. Child walked a little down the road, on the right-hand side. He turned and walked back again slowly, looking to his right. He was trying to see what Jeters had seen. Hawthorn watched him, and looked at the walls of the houses, at the brick of the gables, at the paths. There was the ghost of some graffiti on the wall to his left, at the corner of the two roads. It had been painted over, or washed out, but a shape persisted, snaky, coming out of the side and weaving its way diagonally towards the ground. It came to the footpath where a tuft of weed climbed out of a crack. Hawthorn touched the weed with his shoe. There was a cigarette butt in there. A cigarette butt and a hair clip. Slightly to the left there was a tube ticket. A match. Two matches. There was a blacked-out smudge of old chewing gum. A little further away was a glob of pearly-green phlegm and spittle. He looked down to his feet, at the small, impossibly detailed space he occupied. His patch.

Child was back at his shoulder. They looked further up

HAWTHORN & CHILD

Hampley Road. In the distance they could see officers going door to door. They'd have to do that again in the evening, when people were home. The stopped car moved off again. It turned left into Hampley Road and hesitated for a moment, working out a way around the blockage. Hawthorn let Child get ahead of him and pretended to be looking at his notebook. He found a handkerchief in his back pocket and blew his nose and pressed it to his eyes and clenched them closed and cursed until he could continue.

Nestor Lane was a short terrace that faced another in the cold, with a line of cars parked on one side. It was very quiet. The houses were pre-war, three-storey, brick, fronted by tiny gardens. Most of the gardens had been paved over one way or another and were taken up now with wheelie bins, covered motorbikes, the occasional flowerbed or small tree. Above the ground floor windows a plain stone lintel ran through the brickwork, all the way down the terrace. Next door to Daniel Field's house, at what looked like the middle of the row, there was a date elegantly etched or carved – a year – the digits separated by tiny diamond shapes. Hawthorn wrote it in his notebook.

Child had gone ahead of him and was in the kitchen. A young woman stood at the sink, and a woman police officer sat at the table with a cup of something. She nodded at Hawthorn. The woman at the sink was talking. She had been talking all the time.

KEITH RIDGWAY

– And the kids, the kids sometimes come down the road in packs, little gangs, looking for trouble, making noise. Sometimes they'll kick a football around for a while or that kind of thing, and God help you if you shout at them to get lost. I made that mistake once. Your life is a misery then. They broke a window. Everyone knows not to shout at them, and they just get bored and go away. It's the older, quieter . . . oh hello, are you another detective? I think you're the sixth now, are you? I've lost track. We haven't had this many people in the house for I don't know how long.

She was in a dressing gown. She was washing cups.

– I'm Detective Hawthorn. You must be Ms Gayle?

– Alison, yes.

She shook his hand, leaving it wet.

– Are you the boss then?

– Not as such, no. Detective Chief Inspector Rivers is leading the investigation.

– Oh yes, someone said. Tea or coffee? I don't really know what a boss is in the police. No one looks very much like a detective to me. You're all too well dressed, too young. I don't know what I'm expecting. Helen Mirren I suppose, being rude to me. No one's even been rude to me. I am sorry, I'm babbling. I tend to babble. When things are . . . is there any word?

– About Daniel? He's . . . he's still in surgery as far as I know. But I spoke to one of the nurses a while ago. And . . . unofficially as it were, he's doing well. It's going well.

– Oh thank God.

HAWTHORN & CHILD

She slumped a little, closed her eyes for a moment.

– I'm sure, said Child, that you've been through all this at least a couple of times already. But if you don't mind. When was the last time you saw Daniel?

– Last night. In here. He wasn't looking forward to getting up early. He likes his sleep. He didn't know whether it was better to force himself to go to bed early or not. He was afraid he wouldn't sleep.

– Apart from that he was in a good mood?

– Yes, he was fine. He's always fine. He's very . . . he doesn't really do moods.

– You didn't hear him leave this morning?

– No. He's quiet in the mornings. He has his own floor, more or less. The top floor. Sometimes I hear him clumping around, but not this morning.

Her eyes had lost focus. She was calmer.

– Is Mr Andone still here? Hawthorn asked.

– He went to take a shower.

– Did you have a normal weekend? Child asked.

– Me? Yes.

– What about Daniel? Do you know if he was doing anything unusual this weekend?

– Not that I know of. I don't know. He was out late on Saturday. He slept late yesterday. But that's not unusual is it?

– Did he have anyone to stay?

– Not that I saw.

– Would you, typically, see people that Daniel had over?

KEITH RIDGWAY

– Sometimes, probably. On a weekend, yes, usually.

– Does he have a lot of people to stay?

She shrugged and smiled.

– What’s a lot? More than I do, that’s for sure.

– Anyone regular?

– Not lately, no.

– We’re not investigating anything other than Daniel’s shooting, but I need to ask you whether Daniel uses any drugs.

– How is that relevant?

She looked at Child, but she didn’t seem particularly surprised.

– Well it may not be. But most violent crime in this city is drug related.

She thought for a moment.

– He smokes the occasional joint. That’s all I know about. I’m sure that’s all he does.

– Where does he get it?

She hesitated, glanced at the door.

– Walter usually has some. He gets a little extra sometimes and Dan and I will have some.

– Does he get it locally?

– No, at uni I think. He knows someone. We haven’t had any in ages. Well, I haven’t. And I don’t think Dan has either.

Hawthorn cleared his throat.

– Do you know anyone who drives a vintage car?

Child looked at him.

HAWTHORN & CHILD

– No.

– Anyone who has an old car, or an unusual one? A kit car or anything?

– I don't know what a kit car is. I don't know anyone who has any kind of car. Except our neighbours. Some people at work I suppose. I don't really know anything about cars. Why?

He didn't feel able to tell her. He wasn't sure why. He shrugged.

– It's not important, said Child. Do you pay Walter for the extra that he gets?

– Yes. Or Dan does, usually. It's not very much. A fiver here and there.

– Would you mind, Hawthorn interrupted, if I had a look around?

– Go ahead.

Child closed his eyes briefly, gave a low sigh. Hawthorn smiled at Alison Gayle.

It was a warm, well-kept house. There were wooden floors, good rugs, framed prints on the walls. But there were pieces of old, solid furniture as well. The heavy, dark kitchen table. A dresser in the hallway. Bookcases in the living room that looked made for the space.

He stood in front of them. There was a large television and a games console. In the bookcases, as well as books, there were two shelves full of DVDs and some games. On

KEITH RIDGWAY

one shelf there were a lot of old black-and-white films – Ealing comedies, World War II movies, lots of Hitchcock. On the other, science fiction, including TV box sets of American shows that Hawthorn recognized. The games meant nothing to him.

There were three doors off the first floor landing. The bathroom door was open and a warm mist hung in its bright light. Hawthorn paused. He could hear a radio, he thought, behind one of the closed doors. He continued up the stairs. The top floor landing was slightly smaller than the one below it. Three doors again. Hawthorn opened them.

One was a cupboard with water tanks and wooden shelving and piles of towels and bedding. The other was a small bathroom. No bath, just a shower unit, sink and toilet. It looked recently installed. There was a small stack of magazines on the window sill. Everything was clean.

The bedroom was dark, the curtains drawn. He stood in the doorway and flicked the light switch and stepped in. He closed his eyes, briefly. He inhaled. He reached out and switched the light off again. Then he switched it on. He reached for his notebook.

The bed was unmade. A duvet was piled up at its centre as if picked up and thrown there. There was a large wicker laundry basket by the door, beside a wardrobe. There was a desk to the left of the bed. There were some cables sitting on it, for his laptop presumably. There was a hard drive. There was a phone charger. Hawthorn ducked and saw a large plug-



## HAWTHORN &amp; CHILD

board under the table, switched off at the socket, which was to the right, under the window. There was a bedside table – a little two-drawer locker – with a lamp, a clock radio and a glass of water sitting on it. On the other side of the bed there was a chest of drawers. A couple of jumpers sat neatly folded on top. There was a pair of jeans on the floor. There was a bookcase. It was full, mostly with books, though there were also some DVDs and CDs. There were two framed prints on the wall above the desk. One was an art deco poster advertising the tube. The other was a poster for a film, or perhaps a comic book, in French.

Hawthorn switched off the light again. The curtains were heavy. They excluded most of the day. The alarm clock had green digits. There was something glinting in the corner. He switched the light on. It was a tin on the lowest of the bookshelves. A metal box. A tin. A container. Little things were perched in front of the books all over the bookshelves. Little toy-like things. A ring. An old lighter. A London snow globe. There was an iPod box, a camera, a pair of gloves. There were a couple of photographs in frames. Some postcards.

Hawthorn went over and looked at the photographs. He assumed the mother, the sister. There was a family portrait a few years old. A younger Daniel, his hair longer, his mother and sister, a man with sunglasses, his arms folded. There were two postcards. One was signed *Dad*. It showed an old-fashioned space rocket standing upright against a blue sky. It

KEITH RIDGWAY

was from the NASA Space Centre in Houston. Hawthorn couldn't read the writing on the other one. It showed a view of Prague.

He walked to the door and looked out. He listened. He walked over to the stairs and looked down and listened. He could still hear the low sound of the radio on the floor below. Nothing else. He went back to the doorway of the bedroom. He turned the light off again.

He didn't move at all for a while. Then he walked quickly into the room, slipping off his jacket and kicking off his shoes. He took the duvet and spread it out properly. He looked at the door for a moment, and then he lifted the corner of the duvet and climbed into the bed.

He stared at the ceiling. The room was cold. He sniffed. He moved his legs. Then he shifted on to his left side, facing the bookcase. His left arm came out and draped itself across the pillows. He stayed like that for a couple of minutes, sniffing. Then he turned on to his right side, facing the little bedside table. He lay still for a while. Then he propped himself up on his elbow and turned on the bedside lamp.

The top drawer was full of socks and underwear. He rummaged a little and came up with two cufflink boxes, a tiepin and a pair of cheap flip-flops. In the lower drawer there were condoms, a bottle of poppers, various . . .

He heard a noise.

He switched off the lamp. Closed the drawer.

Nothing happened. He couldn't hear it now.

HAWTHORN & CHILD

Then he heard a creak, like a floorboard. A door closed. Below him somewhere. There was a small silence, and then the sound of someone trotting down the stairs. Or up the stairs. Up the stairs.

He lay back on the bed. He slid down so that his head was off the pillow, flat on the mattress. A figure appeared in the doorway. It seemed to pause. To look into the room. Hawthorn could see a silhouette only, and only the upper part of that. It looked like a little old man, hunched over, regarding him, tilting his head, considering Hawthorn. Sniffing. It sniffed. It seemed to stay still for a long time. Hawthorn did not breathe. He did not move his eyes. The silhouette reached out towards him. It seemed to. Then it was gone. There was the click of the airing-cupboard door opening. And a silence. Then the same click again. Closing. There were human noises – a half cough, a throat clearing, another sniff. Then feet, trotting down the stairs.

He got out of the bed and put on his shoes and his jacket and turned on the light and wrote down some of the book titles. There was a lot of history. He looked in the tin box, the container that had glinted in the dark. He struggled with the lid. It was empty.

– I'm not interested in anything other than the shooting. I'm not investigating Daniel.

– It sounds like you are.

– Really, I'm not.

KEITH RIDGWAY

– Walter, just tell him.

– It has nothing to do with anything.

– It probably doesn't. But I'm sure you'd want to be certain. For peace of mind. I'm not interested in some minor pot buying, believe me. Or selling.

– I know . . .

Hawthorn stepped into the kitchen.

– Who are you?

Walter Andone was small, muscular, clean-shaven, dark-haired. His accent was very lightly East European, or possibly Italian.

– I'm Detective Hawthorn.

– May I see some ID please?

– Oh, Walter, for Christ's sake.

– Of course.

Hawthorn rummaged for it, smiling. Alison Gayle looked apologetically at him.

– Did you find your way around all right? she asked.

– Thanks, yes.

– You were upstairs?

Hawthorn glanced at Child and Alison Gayle. He found his warrant card and held it out.

– Yes. You must be Mr Andone.

He snatched the card from Hawthorn's hand.

– Where were you? Doing what?

Hawthorn smiled at him.

– I was having a look in Daniel's room.

HAWTHORN & CHILD

Andone stared at him. Not at the card. He hadn't even looked at the card.

– Just now?

– Yes. I was in the living room as well. That's all. Who's the movie buff?

Andone continued to stare.

– You have a search warrant?

– No.

– I thought you needed a warrant to search anywhere.

– It's not a search, said Child. But in any case, when someone is the victim of a crime, the law allows us to assume consent in relation to their premises.

Child spoke genially. Andone nodded, his eyes on Hawthorn. He looked at the card and handed it back.

– What are you looking for?

– We're just trying to get an idea of who might have wanted to shoot Daniel.

It was Child who was talking, but Andone looked at Hawthorn.

– In his room?

– We don't have the benefit of knowing him. How long have you known him?

– A year. A little more.

Hawthorn said nothing.

– I am not telling you anything about any drugs. I am saying nothing about it whatsoever.

Child sighed.

KEITH RIDGWAY

– Well tell me this at least. Do you know any dealers who are local?

Andone turned his attention to Child.

– No. I can say that. No.

– Do you know any from Tottenham?

He considered this. Hawthorn stood by the wall.

– No. Not at all.

– Do you know, Hawthorn said, anyone who owns a vintage car?

Andone glared at him again.

– A vintage car? No.

– Tottenham, said Child. Do you have any connection with Tottenham? With anyone in Tottenham who is involved in selling drugs?

– From a vintage car?

– Forget the vintage car.

– No. I do not know anyone from Tottenham.

They all looked at each other. Hawthorn took out his notebook. The others watched him do that, as if they expected something to come of it.

Child coughed.

– OK, he said. OK. If you do think of any connection to Tottenham, please let us know. It could be very important.

As they walked back to the car Hawthorn looked through his notebook while Child talked. While Child complained. *Hunched . . . tin box . . . NASA.* He complained about Andone and Alison Gayle. *Marine . . . pools of light/pools of shadow*

HAWTHORN & CHILD

. . . *ribbing*. He complained about Hawthorn. *London, A Biography . . . Jewish London . . . The Man Who Knew Too Much*. He complained about the car.

Hawthorn read his notebook while he pretended to listen to Child. Or, he listened to Child while he pretended to read his notebook. He didn't know which it was.

Daniel Field was alive and would recover. He was heavily sedated and sleeping. A family liaison officer met them outside an intensive care waiting room. Through the small window in the door they could see Mrs Field pacing up and down, talking on the telephone while her daughter sat in a corner, her attention fixed on the mobile phone in her hand. They waited.

- Did he regain consciousness at all? Hawthorn asked.
- Briefly, yes, in recovery.
- And?
- And what?
- What did he say?
- Nothing. After four hours of surgery? Nothing at all.
- Who's she talking to?
- Her ex-husband. Any arrests yet?
- Last seen heading north, said Child. They think they're in Manchester. There's pictures of them all the way up the M6.
- In the Hyundai?
- In the Hyundai. Not the brightest, these boys.
- And crack high.

KEITH RIDGWAY

– This is the third of these in the last year.

– Third?

– One down in Peckham last summer. And the guy in Vauxhall.

– Vauxhall was a hit.

– Was it?

Hawthorn watched Mrs Field. She was about five foot eight tall in her heels, late forties, attractive, her grey hair cut short. She was dressed in a black business suit. She glanced up and caught his eye. He looked away.

She kept them waiting some time. When she came to the door she looked them over. She said nothing, and allowed Hawthorn then Child to introduce themselves. They went into the room. She introduced her daughter. Her face was marked by tears and she seemed very young. Mrs Field asked where Rivers was. Child told her about the boys from Tottenham and the trail that was being followed northwards. She nodded, rubbed at her eyes.

– Random is never really random, she said quietly.

– What do you mean? Hawthorn asked.

She looked up at him, a little surprised, and then she almost smiled.

– I don't mean that it wasn't random. I just mean that it doesn't feel random when it happens to your son. It feels very specific then. Very specific.

– When we spoke to Daniel this morning . . . Hawthorn began.



HAWTHORN & CHILD

– You spoke to him?

– Yes. We got here just as he did. We were able to speak to him very briefly in the emergency room.

– Oh. I didn't know. How was . . . I mean . . . was he in pain? Hawthorn lifted his shoulders a little.

– Well yes, he was in pain. Of course he was in pain.

– They were preparing him for surgery, said Child. He was given painkillers very quickly. They were looking after him very well.

– I know. Of course. It's just difficult for me to think about. Was he very frightened?

– He was actually quite alert, said Hawthorn. He seemed strong. It was a good sign. They said it was a good sign.

She pushed a smile towards her daughter. Nodded.

– When we spoke to him, Hawthorn went on, we asked him what had happened. He told us that a car had pulled up alongside him and shots had been fired. But he told us that it was an old car. An old-fashioned car. And when we asked did he mean a vintage car he said yes. A vintage car.

She frowned.

– But these boys . . . were they in a vintage car?

– No.

– The simple explanation, said Child, is that Daniel, in shock, perhaps coming under the influence of the first of the painkillers and what have you, imagined that he had seen a vintage car.

– Yes, she said quietly.

KEITH RIDGWAY

– But it’s a loose end, said Child. And my colleague is keen to tie it up.

– Do you know anyone with a vintage car? Have you heard Daniel mention knowing anyone with a vintage car?

She was quiet. She didn’t move. Then she shook her head slowly.

– Does a vintage car mean anything to you at all?

– No. Not really.

– Not really?

– Not at all. That I can think of.

– There are no . . . you don’t know anyone who drives, who owns, a vintage car?

She appeared to think about it for a moment.

– No.

Hawthorn nodded.

– Does Daniel own the house on Nestor Lane?

– Yes. He does. He inherited it from his grandfather. His father’s father.

– How long has it been in the family?

– I really don’t know. 1930s I think.

Daniel Field lay flat on his bed. His torso below the chest was bound in bandages. Various lines and tubes and cables came and went from his arms, and under the covers which lay on his lower body. There was dark bruising on his left shoulder. His face seemed slightly swollen. There was a scratch on his left cheek that Hawthorn didn’t remember from the morning.

HAWTHORN & CHILD

Mrs Field and her daughter had already spent twenty minutes with him before the daughter came out and told Hawthorn and Child to come in.

– Did he tell you anything about the shooting?

– Just what you said. An old car. Then Mum got him to stop and sent me to get you.

He was pale. Dull blue veins were scribbled across his skin. His hands were clean.

His mother touched his arm above his wrist. He opened his eyes. It seemed to take a moment for him to focus on her. She kissed his forehead.

– Go on, Daniel.

– What?

– Tell us what you remember.

He looked confused for a moment, and he looked around her, into the gloom. He looked at Child and Hawthorn, and his sister, then back at Hawthorn.

– Oh, he said. Yeah.

He closed his eyes, and Hawthorn thought that he'd drifted off. But his mother stroked his arm, and after a moment he started to speak softly.

– There was . . . a black car. Low down. With those running boards. And those old silver door handles. Like in a black-and-white film. The window was down. I couldn't see anyone. Just a flash. I don't remember a bang. A flash, and I didn't know . . . nothing happened. I thought it was a camera flash. I thought someone was taking my picture. The car was lovely.

KEITH RIDGWAY

Silent, low down. Sweeping. Then there was another . . . flash and . . . boof . . . I felt like I'd been . . . punched in the stomach. Then I was on the ground, and the pain came, and I felt like something really bad had happened in my stomach, or somewhere. Inside me. Something had exploded. But I heard no noise. No bang . . . nothing. Like the sound was down. I thought someone was taking my photograph while my insides were exploding, and I hoped they'd call an ambulance, but then they were gone and my hand was covered in blood, and I realized that I'd been shot. By the car.

He opened his eyes briefly and looked at Hawthorn, as if to check that he was still there. Then he closed them again.

– I thought it was the stupidest thing that could ever have happened.

Child shrugged in the corridors.

– You're not happy, are you? he said.

– He saw what he saw.

– He saw what he thought he saw.

– He's been completely consistent.

– And vague. A low dark car. With running boards. A lovely car.

– Silver door handles.

– Silver door handles.

– It's no more vague than descriptions we get from people who don't know cars. We explicate.

– We what?

HAWTHORN & CHILD

- Explicate?
- I don't think that's the right word, Hawthorn.
- We put them together.
- Extrapolate?
- Yeah.

– We work it out. But. You know. I'm not sure we have a model book that goes back to . . . whenever. If he insists on it the CPS will have a bit of a problem.

They wandered through the corridors. Hawthorn assumed Child knew where he was going.

– What it is, said Child, is that you don't want to go back to Mishazzo.

Hawthorn looked at him.

– What?

– It's a hallucination, or whatever. Rivers has it tied up. You want a loose thread so that we're not back following that idiot all day long. Looking at windows. Going slowly insane.

– It's not that.

– And Rivers is being a prick. I know that. It wasn't our fault we lost the driver. So I get it. Really. If there was anything believable about it I'd go along. But what do we do with a vague description of some sort of vintage car, when we've got CCTV of the Hyundai, and two crack-high idiots weaving their way north? I wouldn't put it past them to have just thrown the gun on the back seat.

– Still. We can't just decide things that don't fit are hallucinations.

KEITH RIDGWAY

– No. We usually don't decide anything about things that don't fit. They just don't fit. So we leave them out. Least with this there's an explanation why it doesn't fit.

He hunched his shoulders and took a turn without looking. Hawthorn glanced at a sign board. He saw nothing about an exit.

– It's like Jeters, Child said. He thought he heard *ochre*. We know he didn't. But he was convinced that's what he heard. So, should we start looking for an ochre-coloured car?

Hawthorn was hating this conversation now.

– It's different.

– No it's not. It's people imagining things. We start investigating what people imagine . . .

He trailed off, looked over his shoulder.

– Where the fuck are we?

Hawthorn shook his head. They turned another corner.

– It's not even plausible, Child went on. The vintage car. You know there was a camera pointing all the way up Plume Road? From down near the tube. Looking all the way back up. You can see the junction with Hampley Road. It's in the distance, but you can see it. This is a traffic camera so it's digital whatever. It has the timer on it, and it's clear. And at exactly the right time, the Hyundai comes around that corner. Nothing before. Nothing after. No vintage cars. Just the Hyundai. And no vintage cars.

Hawthorn looked at him. He hated it.

– You know what those things are like.

HAWTHORN & CHILD

Child laughed.

– No, I know what they're like when they don't fit. I know how suddenly when it's the wrong thing on the camera the timer mysteriously gets scrambled, or a bird shits on the lens, or somebody deletes the wrong file. But this is straightforward. It's simple. There are no other explanations.

Hawthorn looked at him.

– There are several other explanations.

– Such as?

– There are dozens.

They were near the café. They paused at the junction of three corridors and looked around.

– Name one.

– There are hundreds.

Hawthorn took the turning to the left, towards a flickering light.

– Do you know where we are? Child asked him.

– No, he said. There are millions of explanations. There's an infinite number of explanations.

Child sighed and pushed his glasses up the ramp of his nose.

– Well you can do the paperwork then.

Hawthorn went online. He looked up film titles, book titles. He tried to discover the history of the house on Nestor Lane, and of Nestor Lane itself. He looked at cars. At pictures of cars. He found some that seemed about right. He printed off the

KEITH RIDGWAY

photographs of seven of them. He tried to put all the photographs on one page but couldn't work the software.

Child had gone home. Two men had been arrested in Bolton and were on their way back to London. No sign of the gun. They denied everything. They knew nothing about any shooting, they said. But Rivers had put them in separate vans with someone to talk to.

Hawthorn asked Frank Lenton to show him the CCTV footage. Plume Road looked long; a strip of grey with white highlights and black shadows. It was still as a photograph. He watched the wrong junction the first time. Frank replayed it. A speck of something half bright crawled around the corner from Hampley Road. It looked low down to Hawthorn.

– That's it?

The car hesitated and then turned north, away from the camera, its rear lights like pinprick stars that faded as soon as he looked at them. He wasn't sure that they weren't just reflections.

– Yeah. They can zoom in on it.

– Can you?

– No. I don't have the gear.

They watched it a few times. Hawthorn squinted. He tried looking slightly to the side, to catch it out of the corner of his eye. He tried to stare at it directly. He tried to pretend he didn't know it was coming. But every time he saw it, it looked like nothing. It was formless. He could imagine it into any shape he thought of. He could make it disappear by imagining that



HAWTHORN & CHILD

it wasn't there at all – that he didn't see it. The road was empty and was not a road. He found himself looking at the smudged screen.

– Thank you, Frank.

The city fell apart into silence and darkness and cold, and Hawthorn took a bus to Finsbury Park and then walked up to Crouch End and ate pasta in the Italian place by the green. It was quiet. He tried to take his time. He tried to wait before each mouthful. He couldn't decide what to think about.

He called his brother. They talked about the weekend. They talked about their father. They talked about Tess's new computer. Hawthorn asked his brother what he knew about vintage cars.

– What kind of vintage?

– Pre-war. 1930s I think.

– What about them?

– Do you see many?

– Nah, I don't think so. If there's an event maybe. The London to Brighton, you see them then. There's a restored nineteen forty something cab I see around. I don't know the cabbie. I used to have a regular fare from Chelsea to Ealing, was a vintage car dealer I think. Driving ban. Why?

– Ealing?

– Yeah. Ealing. Why?

– Case.

– Theft?

KEITH RIDGWAY

– No, not really. I'll tell you about it at the weekend.

– You all right?

– Yeah, I'm fine.

He was on his second coffee. They were starting to close up.

– How's the thing?

– What thing?

– The crying.

Hawthorn made a face and looked out of the window.

– It's fine. Do you remember the models? Dad's models? Soldiers and cars and that?

– Yeah, I do. I remember the soldiers. Lead things. Painted. They were Granddad's, I think. Haven't seen them in years.

– There used to be cars too. Heavy. Solid. Were they lead?

– Lead paint. Cast iron. Probably be worth something now.

Did you not get into trouble about them?

– Yeah. I broke a few. I used to crash them together. Chipped them. Knocked wheels off and that.

– Violent little tyke, you were. You get a thrashing?

– No, I got a talk.

– Ah. A talk.

– I still remember it. Made me feel like a bastard.

– Which you were.

– Which I was.

– We should ask him about them. You going to come over on Saturday?

– Yeah, that's the plan.

HAWTHORN & CHILD

– All right. Tess says love, and the kids.

– Love back.

In the roads on the hill he looked at the city lights and the airplanes circling over south London like a lid closing on a jar. He stamped to keep his feet warm and tried to get lost. He took a bus to Muswell Hill and took a bus back again. He had another coffee in a tiny Turkish place and pretended to talk about football. He sent text messages that were vague. He thought about various people. He sat on a bench in Highgate with a view over everything and let himself cry a little. It wasn't so bad. It stopped after about ten minutes. He wondered why he didn't want to go home. It was not far. He could go home and have a shower.

He kept walking. He drank more coffee in an all-night McDonald's. He dozed off for a while. By the time the staff woke him up he was almost late. He started walking back towards Finsbury Park.

He stood outside the house on Nestor Lane. There was silence. The night was dark and the street lamps were like hoods. He looked up at the windows. He expected to see Walter Andone looking back at him, his face against the glass. Then he expected to see Walter Andone's silhouette. Reaching out to him. The windows were all curtained. The upstairs ones seemed frosted with condensation. The date sat in the corner of his eye, on the right, like a time stamp in a photograph. The house did not look that old. It did not look like shelter. It did

KEITH RIDGWAY

not look like a place where you might go to be warm, to sleep, to sit with loved ones and retreat from the day and from the city. It looked like something you would grit your teeth to enter. It looked like all the city surrounded it as an ante-chamber, a place to rest, and it was the building that contained all the work and the toil and the pain of things.

He walked. He walked with his hands in his pockets. He pretended that there was nothing in his mind.

Things come out of the past.

They had taken down the tape on Hampley Road and it was open to traffic. There was no traffic. There were incident boards. *Shooting. Witnesses. Serious injury. Please call.* He looked up towards Plume Road and paused. Cars in the distance sounded like other things, natural things. Waves on water. The wind in leaves. He walked along the path and listened to his footsteps.

He came to Daniel Field's blood, dried on the path like old chewing gum. There was a discarded swab stick in the gutter. At the foot of the wall lay the yellow marker, fallen from the place where the stray bullet had struck. He stared at the silver shutter. It was dull in the gloom. It was cold. He looked at his watch and retraced his steps a little. Then he pretended he was Daniel Field and walked as if on his way to the tube station. He imagined he was carrying a shoulder bag. His head naturally turned towards the ground. He looked at the little bit of London at his feet, at the smudges and marks, the scuffs and scratches, the tiny scraps of paper stuck to the stone. Tiredness

HAWTHORN & CHILD

allowed everything to flow into everything else. There was nothing distinct. A head full of condensation. He moved over the black marks of dropped liquids, cigarettes, spit, blood, dog shit, pollen and rain. In a thousand years this would all be buried. He halted at the stain. He heard a car come up behind him.

He didn't turn. He looked ahead. The car edged into his field of vision, slowly and smoothly, its wheels turning in the corner of his eye like a thought. It was dark. A dark car. But it was not black. There were no running boards. There were no silver handles.

– Detective. Hello there. Detective?

Hawthorn turned. He looked back up Hampley Road. It was empty. He looked towards Plume Road. Then he looked down at the car in front of him. He had to drop to his haunches to talk to the driver.

– Hello, Mr Jeters.

– How is he? Daniel, I mean.

– He's good. He'll be fine. He's expected to make a full recovery.

Jeters turned briefly and looked ahead. He smiled.

– That is great. That is great to hear.

– His mother, said Hawthorn. She asked if she could contact you. Do you mind if I give her your details?

– No, no. Not at all. I'd quite like to visit him I think.

Hawthorn nodded.

– And have you caught anyone?

KEITH RIDGWAY

- Arrests have been made. Can't say too much about that.
- Of course. Well. That's all very good news.
- Yeah. Yeah it is.
- What has you out here then?

Hawthorn shrugged.

– It would be good to have another witness. Someone who might walk this way in the mornings. That kind of thing.

Jetters nodded. He wished Hawthorn luck. He drove to Plume Road and turned left.

Hawthorn stood at the corner of Hampley Road and Plume Road, beside one of the incident boards. It was five minutes or more before anyone appeared. He showed his ID card. Then he showed the pictures. The pictures of the cars.

– Have you seen anything like this? Perhaps not exactly. But something like this. Or this one? Does that mean anything to you?

People shook their heads. Squinted. Took the pages from his hand and held them up to the light. People took out their reading glasses. They thought about it. They wanted to help. But none of them had seen anything like that.

– Or any sort of vintage car. Old car. 1930s probably. Like in the movies.

He stayed there an hour. It was cold. He was tired. He could not think. He lost count of the number of people he stopped. He wasn't sure. Afterwards he thought he had possibly been crying. With some of them. Not all of them.

HAWTHORN & CHILD

Some of them. Then he realized that it was getting busier and that there were too many – too many people. He was missing most of them, and he thought that he might look like he was crying. Because he was so tired. And no. No one had seen anything like that. And they'd remember, they said. They'd remember something like that.

He went home. He wept in his bed, out of tiredness, he thought. Merely tiredness. That was fine. He fell asleep.

He dreamed that he slept in a house that moved, and that was not his, and that was not now.