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GALLOWES VIEW

A NOVEL OF SUSPENSE

**PETER
ROBINSON**

GALLOWS VIEW

THE FIRST INSPECTOR BANKS MYSTERY

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PIECE OF MY HEART
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THE FIRST CUT
INNOCENT GRAVES
CLOSE TO HOME
HANGING VALLEY
AFTERMATH WEDNESDAY'S CHILD
COLD IS THE GRAVE
GALLOWS VIEW PAST REASON HATED
IN A DRY SEASON
BLOOD AT THE ROOT
A NECESSARY END
A DEDICATED MAN

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**For my father, Clifford Robinson,
and to the memory of my mother,
Miriam Robinson,
1922-1985**

"Now winter nights enlarge
The number of their houres,
And clouds their stormes discharge
Upon the ayrie towres;
Let now the chimneys blaze
And cups o'erflow with wine,
Let well-tun'd words amaze
With harmonie divine.
Now yellow waxen lights
Shall waite on hunny Love,
While youthfull Revels, Masks,
and Courtly sights,
Sleepes leaden spels remove."

Thomas Campion
The Third Booke of Ayres

Chapter ONE

I

The woman stepped into the circle of light and began to undress. Above her black, calf-length skirt she wore a silver blouse with dozens of little pearl buttons up the front. She tugged it free of the waistband and started undoing the buttons from the bottom very slowly, gazing into space as if she were recalling a distant memory. With a shrug, she slid the blouse off, pulling at the left sleeve, which stuck to her wrist with static, then lowered her head and stretched her arms behind her back like wings to unclasp her bra, raising one shoulder and then the other as she slipped off the thin straps. Her breasts were large and heavy, with dark, upturned nipples.

She unzipped her skirt down the left side and let it slide to the floor. Stepping out of it and bending from the waist, she picked it up and laid it neatly over the back of a chair. Next she rolled her tights down over her hips, buttocks and thighs, then sat down on the edge of the bed to extricate herself from each leg, one at a time, careful not to make runs. As she bent over, the taut skin folded in a dark crease across her stomach and her breasts hung so that each nipple touched each knee in turn. Standing again, she hooked her thumbs into the elastic of her black panties and bent forward as she eased them down. As she stepped out of them, she caught the waistband with her left foot and flicked them into the corner by the wardrobe.

At last, completely naked, she tossed back her wavy blond hair and walked toward the dresser.

It was then that she looked toward the chink in the curtains. His whole body tingled as he watched the shock register in her eyes. He couldn't move. She gasped and instinctively tried to cover her breasts with her hands, and he thought how funny and vulnerable she looked with the triangle of hair between her legs exposed....

As she grabbed for her dressing gown and dashed toward the window, he managed to drag himself away and run off, scraping his shin and almost falling as he jumped the low wall. He had disappeared into the night by the time she picked up the telephone.

II

"Where on earth did I put that sugar bowl?" Alice Matlock muttered to herself as she searched the cluttered room. It was a birthday present from Ethel Carstairs—a present for her eighty-seventh birthday three days ago. Now it had disappeared.

Alice was having trouble remembering little things like that these days. They said it happened when you got older. But why, then, should the past seem so vivid? Why, particularly, should that day in 1916, when Arnold marched off proudly to the trenches, seem so much clearer than yesterday? "What happened yesterday?" Alice asked herself, as a test, and she did remember little details like visiting the shop, polishing her silverware and listening to a play on the radio. But had she really done those things yesterday, the day before, or even last week? The memories were there, but the string of time that linked them like a pearl necklace was broken. All those years ago—that beautiful summer when the meadows were full of buttercups (none of those nasty new bungalows, then), the hedgerows bright with cow-parsley ("gypsy" she always called it, because her mother had told her that if she picked it the gypsies would take her) and her garden full of roses, chrysanthemums, clematis and lupins—Arnold had stood there, ready to go, his buttons reflecting the sunlight in dancing sparks on the whitewashed walls. He leaned against the doorway, that very same doorway, with his kitbag and that lopsided grin on his face—such a young face, one that had never even seen a razor—and off he marched, erect, graceful, to the station.

He never came back. Like so many others, he was destined to lie in a foreign grave. Alice knew this. She knew that he was dead. But hadn't she also been waiting for him all these years? Wasn't that why she had never married, even when that handsome shopkeeper Jack Wormald had proposed? Down on his knees, he was, by the falls at Rawley Force; got his knees wet, too, and that didn't half vex him. But she said no, kept the house on after her parents died, changed things as little as possible.

There had been another war, too, she vaguely remembered: ration books; urgent voices and martial anthems on the radio; faraway rumblings that could have been bombs. Arnold hadn't come back from that war either, though she could imagine him fighting in it like a Greek god, lithe and strong, with a stern face, a face that had never seen a razor.

Other wars followed, or so Alice had heard. Distant ones. Little wars. And he had fought in them all, an eternal soldier. She knew, deep down, that he would never come home, but she couldn't lose hope. Without hope, there would be nothing left.

"Where on earth did I put it?" she muttered to herself, down on her knees rummaging through the cupboard under the sink. "It must be somewhere. I'd forget my head if it was loose."

Then she heard someone running outside. Her eyes were not as good as they used to be, but she was proud of her hearing and often ticked off the shop-girls and bus conductors who assumed that they had to shout to make her hear them. After the sound of running came a gentle knock at her door. Puzzled, she stood up slowly, grasped the draining-board to keep her balance, and shuffled through to the living room. There was always a chance. She had to hope. And so she opened the door.

III

"Perverts, the lot of them," Detective Chief Inspector Alan Banks said, adjusting the treble on the stereo.

"Including me?" asked Sandra.

"For all I know."

"Since when has making artistic representations of the naked human form been a mark of perversion?"

"Since half of them don't even have films in their cameras."

"But I always have film in my camera."

"Yes," Banks said enthusiastically, "I've seen the results. Where on earth do you find those girls?"

"They're mostly students from the art college."

"Anyway," Banks went on, returning to his scotch, "I'm damn sure Jack Tatum doesn't have film in his camera. And Fred Barton wouldn't know a wide-angle lens from a putting iron. I wouldn't be at all surprised if they imagined you posing—a nice willowy blond."

Sandra laughed. "Me? Nonsense. And stop playing the yahoo, Alan. It doesn't suit you. You don't have a leg to stand on, acting the idiot over photography while you're inflicting this bloody opera on me."

"For someone who appreciates artistic representations of the naked human form, you're a proper philistine when it comes to music, you know."

"Music I can take. It's all this screeching gives me a headache."

"Screeching! Good lord, woman, this is the sound of the human spirit soaring: 'Vissi d'arte, vissi d'amore.'" Banks's soprano imitation made up in volume what it lacked in melody.

"Oh, put a sock in it," Sandra sighed, reaching for her drink.

It was always like this when he found a new interest. He would pursue it with a passion for anywhere between one and six months, then he would have a restless period, lose interest and move onto something else. Of course, the detritus would remain, and he would always profess to still be deeply interested—just too pushed for time. That was how the house had come to be so cluttered up with the novels of Charles Dickens, wine-making equipment, twenties jazz records, barely used jogging shoes, a collection of birds' eggs, and books on almost every subject under the sun—from Tudor history to how to fix your own plumbing.

He had become interested in opera after seeing, quite by chance, a version of Mozart's *Magic Flute* on television. It was always like that. Something piqued his curiosity and he wanted to know more. There was no order to it, neither in his mind nor in his filing system. He would plunge into a subject with cavalier disregard for its chronological development. And so it was with the opera craze: *Orfeo* rubbed shoulders with *Lulu*; *Peter Grimes* was *Tosca's* strange bedfellow; and *Madama Butterfly* shared shelf-space with *The Rake's Progress*. Much as she loved music, opera was driving Sandra crazy. Already, complaints from Brian and Tracy had resulted in the removal of the television to the spare room upstairs. And Sandra was forever tripping over the book-sized cassette boxes, which Banks preferred to records, as he liked to walk to work and listen to Purcell or Monteverdi on his Walkman; in the car, it was generally Puccini or Giuseppe Verdi, good old Joe Green.

They were both alike in their thirst for knowledge, Sandra reflected. Neither was an academic or intellectual, but both pursued self-education with an urgency often found in bright working-class people who hadn't had culture thrust down their throats from the cradle onward. If only, she wished, he would take up something quiet and peaceful, like beekeeping or stamp collecting.

The soprano reached a crescendo which sent involuntary shivers up Sandra's spine.

"You're surely not serious about some people in the Camera Club being perverts, are you?" she asked.

"I shouldn't be surprised if one or two of them got more than an artistic kick out of it, that's all."

"You could be right, you know," Sandra agreed. "They're not only women, the models. We had a very nice Rastafarian the other week. Lovely pector—"

The phone rang.

"Damn and blast it." Banks cursed and hurried over to pick up the offending instrument. Sandra took the opportunity to turn down the volume on *Tosca* surreptitiously.

"Seems that someone's been taking unasked-for peeks at the naked human form again," said Banks when he sat down again a few minutes later.

"Another of those Peeping Tom incidents?"

"Yes."

"You don't have to go in, do you?"

"No. It'll wait till morning. Nobody's been hurt. She's more angry than anything else. Young Richmond is taking her statement."

"What happened?"

"Woman by the name of Carol Ellis. Know her?"

"No."

"Seems, she came back from a quiet evening at the pub, got undressed for bed and noticed someone watching her through a gap in the curtains. He took off as soon as he realized he'd been spotted. It was on that new estate, Leaview, those ugly bungalows down by the Gallows View

cottages. Great places for voyeurs, bungalows. They don't even need to shin up the drainpipe." Banks paused and lit a Benson and Hedges Special Mild. "This one's taken a few risks in the past, though. Last time it was a second-floor maisonette."

"It makes my skin crawl," Sandra said, hugging herself. "The thought of someone watching when you think you're alone."

"I suppose it would," Banks agreed. "But what worries me now is that we'll have that bloody feminist group down on us again. They really seem to think we haven't bothered trying to catch him because we secretly approve. They believe all men are closet rapists. According to them, our secret hero is Jack the Ripper. They think we've got pin-ups on the station walls."

"You do. I've seen them. Not in your office, maybe, but downstairs."

"I mean pin-ups of Jack the Ripper." Sandra laughed. "That's going a bit far, I agree."

"Do you know how difficult it is to catch a peeper?" Banks asked. "All the bugger does is look and run away into the night. No fingerprints, no sightings, nothing. The best we can hope for is to catch him in the act, and we've had extra men and women walking the beat in the most likely areas for weeks now. Still nothing. Anyway," Banks said, reaching out for her, "all this talk about naked bodies is exciting me. Time for bed?"

"Sorry," answered Sandra, turning off the stereo. "Not tonight, dear, I've got a headache."

Chapter TWO

I

"And where the bloody hell do you think you were till all hours last night?" Graham Sharp roared at his son over the breakfast table.

Trevor glowered into his cornflakes. "Out."

"I know you were bloody out. Out with that good-for-nothing Mick Webster, I'll bet?"

"What if I was? It's my business who I hang out with."

"He's a bad 'un, Trevor. Like his brother and his father before him. A rotten apple."

"Mick's all right."

"I didn't raise you all these years with my own hands just so you could hang about with hooligans and get into trouble."

"Well, if you weren't such a bleeding little Hitler my mum might not have run off."

"Never mind that," Graham said quietly. "You don't know nothing about it, you was only a kid. I just want you to do well for yourself," he pleaded. "Look, I've not done much. Never had the opportunity. But you're a bright lad. If you work hard you can go to university, get yourself a good education."

"What's the point? There's no jobs anyway."

"It's not always going to be like this, Trevor. I know the country's going through a bad time right now. You don't need to tell me that. But look to the future, lad. It'll be five or six years by the time you've done your 'A' Levels and your degree. Things can change a lot in that time. All you need to do is stay in a bit more and do your homework. You never found it hard, you know you can do it."

"It's boring."

"Look what happened to Mick, then," Graham went on, his voice rising with anger again. "Left school a year ago and still on the bloody dole. Sharing a hovel with that layabout brother of his, father run off God knows where and his mother never home to take care of him."

"Lenny's not a layabout. He had a job in London. Just got made redundant, that's all. It wasn't his fault."

"I'm not going to argue with you, Trevor. I want you to stay in more and spend some time on your schoolwork. I might not have made much out of my life, but you can— and you're bloody well going to, even if it kills me."

Trevor stood up and reached for his satchel. "Better be off," he said. "Wouldn't want to be late for school, would I?"

After the door slammed, Graham Sharp put his head in his hands and sighed. He knew that Trevor was at a difficult age—he'd been a bit of a lad himself at fifteen—but if only he could persuade him that he had so much to lose. Life was hard enough these days without making it worse for yourself. Since Maureen had walked out ten years ago, Graham had devoted himself to their only child. He would have sent Trevor to a public school if he'd had enough money, but had to settle for the local comprehensive. Even there, despite all the drawbacks, the boy had always done well—top of the class, prizes every Speech Day—until last year, when he took up with Mick Webster.

Graham's hands shook as he picked up the breakfast dishes and carried them to the sink. Soon it would be opening time. At least since he'd stopped doing morning papers he got a bit of a lie-in. In the old days, when Maureen was around, he'd had to get up at six o'clock, and he'd kept it going as long as he could. Now he couldn't afford to employ a flock of paper-carriers, nor could he manage to pay the assistant he would need to deal with other business. As things were, he could just about handle it all himself—orders, accounts, stock checks, shelf arrangements—and usually still manage to come up with a smile and a hello for the customers.

His real worry was Trevor, and he didn't know if he was going about things the right way or not. He knew he had a bit of a temper and went on at the lad too much. Maybe it was better to leave him alone, wait till he passed through the phase himself. But perhaps then it would be too late.

Graham stacked the dishes in the drainer, checked his watch, and walked through to the shop. Five minutes late. He turned the sign to read OPEN and unlocked the door. Grouchy old Ted Croft was