

Chapter 1

Detective Inspector Keith Tremayne knew one thing: his idea of fun was not sitting on the grass on a balmy summer's night watching a rendition of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* acted out by the local dramatic society. He had to admit, though, that choosing the Anglo-Saxon fort of Old Sarum was as good a location as anywhere; not that much of it remained, just a few old stones here and there.

It had been six months since the events at nearby Avon Hill, and the village was supposedly half empty after ten of the men arrested were sent to prison for murder. The media had invaded the place for a few weeks after the revelations of pagan rituals and human sacrifices, but they had soon tired of it. Tremayne knew full well that what they really wanted was orgiastic rituals with a naked woman writhing in the centre of the old church while lecherous men ogled and took advantage. However, for worshippers of ancient gods, they had been a dreary group of people. There they were, a captive group of believers, and their idea of enjoyment was sacrificing some hapless individual whose only crime was believing in such nonsense.

Sitting there at Old Sarum, being bitten by mosquitoes and listening to amateur dramatics, was not the time to dwell on that case, especially as it was his sergeant's first week back at Bemerton Road Police Station, and he had agreed to accompany her to the play.

Personally, he would have preferred a quiet pint or two of beer, but Clare Yarwood, his sergeant, was definitely teetotal after the love of her life and her fiancé, Harry Holchester, the publican of the Deer's Head, his favourite pub, had turned out to be one of the elders of the pagan sect.

Tremayne could see that Yarwood was still not happy, even after several months of compassionate leave. He had never imagined that she would return, but there she had been several days earlier, standing in front of his desk on a Monday morning. 'Reporting for duty,' she had said.

It surprised him so much so that he had rushed round to her side of the desk and given her a big hug. The department had not been the same since she had leave, and the only murder in between her leaving and returning had been by the wife of a butcher who had caught her husband in bed with her best friend. By the time she had finished with the two of them, they could have been served up in the man's shop, skilled as she was in preparing a cow or pig carcass for sale.

Tremayne looked up at the stage, looked at Yarwood. She looked fine, he thought, but he was still concerned. After all, she had seen the man she loved plucked from the ground and pinned in a tree, branches stabbing his body, even heard his last gasping breath. On the way to Old Sarum, she had asked him not to drive down Minster Street, so as not to see Harry's pub, closed since he had died.

For someone uncommonly disaffectionate, he had grown fond of her; she was almost like the daughter he had never had. And now, she was back in Salisbury, and there was no way that she could avoid painful memories being reactivated as they moved around the city.

On the stage, or in this case a rise in the ground, a man dressed in a Roman tunic made his speech:

Cowards die many times before their deaths; The valiant never taste of death but once. Of all the wonders that I yet have heard, it seems to me most strange that men should fear; Seeing that death, a necessary end, will come when it will come.

Tremayne wondered why the man didn't speak plain English, but then he was a blunt man, not used to beating around the bush, which was what the man was doing up on the stage. It was the last place that he'd ever visit of a night time, but he owed it to his sergeant to at least show interest in what she liked. It had been the two of them who had been intimately involved with the pagans, although others had come and gone in the Homicide department during the investigation, especially Vic Oldfield, the young and keen constable who fancied Clare but who had never had a chance while Harry was alive. And Oldfield had then died, along with a self-confessed murderer, in a crash on the Wilton Road.

Tremayne touched the crucifix around his neck at the thought of it. It was nonsense, this talk of ancient gods, and being able to summon them from the depths of wherever, but he had seen things he couldn't explain, the same as Yarwood. He would never admit it to her, nor even to himself, but it was weird at the time. The memory still remained of that night up in Cuthbert's Wood where the two of them, along with a couple of uniforms, had nearly been sacrificed in a pagan ritual.

If it hadn't been for Harry Holchester freeing Clare first, and then the others, all four would have died. Tremayne noticed that Yarwood still touched her ring finger. He knew that idling her time in the office would do her no good, but then idling her time back at her parent's hotel in Norfolk had got to her in the end; she'd admitted that to him.

What she needed, what they both needed, was a good juicy murder to take their minds off the past, not a group of actors prancing around in Roman attire. The only problem was that there weren't any murders on the boil at the present time, although after the medals had been dished out for bravery above and beyond the call of duty that night in Avon Hill, any talk by Superintendent Moulton of his forced retirement was definitely off the agenda.

He'd accepted the award on Yarwood's behalf, said a few words for her, but she had not wanted to come. It would have inevitably led to further discussion about her dead fiancé and Avon Hill, and she wasn't up to that, not even now.

Tremayne fidgeted where he sat, and cramp was starting to affect one leg. Any other time he would have run a mile from such an event, but he could see that Yarwood was engrossed. 'The good bit's coming up,' she said.

'Act 3, scene 1,' Tremayne said, which surprised him considering the violence in it. He had thought that after the events in Avon Hill and Harry's violent death, she'd not want to see any more.

'You've seen it before?'

'I went to school, you know. The English teacher was mad for Shakespeare. He made us read it through, and then a test to check that we had.'

'And had you?'

'Only to save one of his detentions, writing out one hundred times:

*There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat;
And we must take the current when it serves,
Or lose our ventures.*

It made no more sense then than it does now.'

'It's beautiful,' Yarwood replied.

'At least one of us is enjoying the night out.'

'The production and watching you squirm are poetic. Thanks for coming anyway. I knew it wasn't your kind of entertainment, but I didn't want to come on my own.'

'Don't expect me to come the next time, will you?'

'I'll be okay in a few days. It's just that coming back to Salisbury is not easy.'

'I'm pleased you're here.'

'You've missed me?' Yarwood asked.

'No one else could make a cup of tea like you,' Tremayne said. The friendliness between the two was making him uncomfortable. He had preferred it when he had snarled at her, and she had given him the occasional smart comment.

'You can make your own from now on. And besides, I prefer you grumpy.'

'Tomorrow, I promise. For tonight we'll labour through this.'

Tremayne had to admit that the production was professional, even if it was only the local dramatic society. He looked around: a full crowd. Amongst those watching were some in their teens, who seemed more engrossed than him. Also a fair smattering of retirees. He looked back at Yarwood.

‘Don’t worry about me. I’m made of stronger stuff,’ Clare said. ‘Harry’s gone, life moves on, and I’m here.’

‘I had you down as the whimpering type.’

‘I was, but I’ve seen too much. I’d prefer him to be here, but he’s not. It’s no use dwelling on the past, is it?’

Tremayne had, that was the problem. The events in Avon Hill, the memories of his former wife, had made him phone her up. It had taken a few phone calls, a search on Facebook before he had traced her, and then it had been difficult.

They had met up: he, the set-in-his-ways detective inspector; she, the widowed mother of two.

‘You look well,’ she had said.

‘So do you,’ he had said, having to admit that she had fared better than him, but then, she hadn’t spent nights in a pub drinking beer or working exhausting hours on murder investigations.

For a couple who had once been so close, it had been an uncomfortable night, too much water under the bridge. They had parted, a kiss on the cheek, not sure that they would meet up again, and Tremayne had to admit, he did like being on his own.

Tremayne was surprised that Yarwood would want to watch a production where there was to be a frenzied attack on the play’s namesake, but for some reason it did not seem to affect her. As if the deaths of Harry, impaled by tree branches, and of an actor stabbed with fake retractable daggers and spilling red paint, were not similar.

He looked over at her as one of the major scenes in the play continued towards its crescendo. Up there on the stage were Caesar and the soothsayer.

CAESAR. *The ides of March are come.*

SOOTHSAYER. *Ay, Caesar; but not gone.*

Caesar, ignoring the advice, moving into the Senate and taking his seat. The plotting of Brutus and Cassius, the pleading of Metellus for his brother’s banishment to end.

*Is there no voice more worthy than my own
To sound more sweetly in great Caesar's ear
For the repealing of my banish'd brother?*

Casca stabbing first, then the others, Cassius, Cinna, Ligarius, Metellus, Decius Brutus, and finally 'Et tu, Brute!' as Brutus thrusts the final dagger in. Thirty-three times in total until the body lay at their feet.

Tremayne had to admit that it had been dramatic. The body of the actor covered in his robes, the blood oozing through, the conspirators with their bloodied hands, and then Brutus in the forum defending his and the conspirators' actions:

*Be patient till the last.
Romans, countrymen, and lovers! hear me for my cause; and be
silent, that you may hear: believe me for mine honour, and have
respect to mine honour; that you may believe: censure me in your
wisdom, and awake your senses, that you may the better judge.
If there be any in this assembly, any dear friend of Caesar's, to
him I say, that Brutus' love to Caesar was no less than his. If
then that friend demand why Brutus rose against Caesar, this is
my answer. Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome
more.*

And then, the arrival of Caesar's body and the rebuke by Mark Antony:

*Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears;
I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.
The evil that men do lives after them;
The good is oft interred with their bones;
So let it be with Caesar. The noble Brutus
Hath told you Caesar was ambitious:
If it were so, it was a grievous fault, ...*

Finally, the body was taken away, to a hearty round of applause from the audience, even Tremayne. Yarwood was moved to tears. 'Are you alright?' Tremayne asked.

'The realism. I thought I could deal with it, but it made me remember.'

‘Do you want to go?’

‘No. I’ll be fine. It’s an intermission. I’ll treat you to orange juice.’

‘I could do with a beer.’

‘After it’s finished, we’ll go to the Old Castle pub across the road,’ Yarwood said. She had wanted to say the Deer’s Head but corrected herself. That had been Harry’s pub, the memory still painful of how he had saved her, how he had renounced the pagans up in Cuthbert’s Wood and had come to her protection. She wanted to forget, but she could not.

‘Tremayne, have you got a minute?’

Tremayne looked up from where he and Yarwood were sitting. ‘Freestone, how are you? This is Sergeant Yarwood, Clare.’

‘Pleased to meet you,’ Clare said. She realised that he had been one of the actors on the stage, still dressed in his Roman tunic.

‘It’s around the back. We’ve called an ambulance and the police. I didn’t realise you were here.’

‘It’s Yarwood. She’s into this sort of thing.’

‘At least one of you is not a philistine. Please come, it’s serious.’

The two police officers got up from the grass and made their way around to the back of the stage, behind a cloth used as a backdrop.

‘It’s Gordon, he’s dead.’

‘Julius Caesar?’ Clare said.

‘They were meant to be fake knives. We’d purchased them especially.’

Tremayne knelt down, steadying himself on a chair to one side. He lifted the robe covering the man’s face. ‘You’ll need to make an announcement.’

‘That’s what I was preparing to do. It has to be an accident, doesn’t it?’ Freestone said.

‘That’s not for me to say. Yarwood, make sure no one leaves until we’ve got their details and a brief statement.’

‘The audience?’

‘They may have seen something.’