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**Chapter Twelve: 3pm (pps110-115)**

*Toni gives Steve a final briefing*

EF: With Stanley not being a POV character, I think we're missing some background.

- What was Stanley's first success?
- What's his love life like now?
- His feelings about his kids? Toni? Sacking Kit?

Could we get this info from Miranda thinking about her Dad?

# 3 p.m.

The Kremlin looked pretty. Snow clung to its gargoyles and crochets, doorcases and windowledges, outlining the Victorian ornamentation in white. Toni parked and went inside. The place was quiet: most people had gone home, for fear of getting caught in the snow—not that people needed much of an excuse to leave early on Christmas Eve.

She was <sup>almost overjoyed</sup> pleased with the way things had turned out, but all the same a worry nagged her. Stanley's words repeated in her brain: "We'd be right back in trouble if we lost another rabbit." It was true. Another incident of that kind would bring the story back to life but ten times worse. No amount of public relations work could <sup>then</sup> keep the lid on it.

"That's not going to happen," she had told him, and now she was going to make sure of it.

She went to the control room, sat at a work station and used the computer to page Steve Tremlett, the guard supervisor.

She had taken a chance with Steve. He had been a pal of Ronnie Sutherland, the former head of security who had conspired with Kit Oxenford to rob the company. There was no evidence Steve had known about the fraud. But Toni had feared he might resent her for firing his friend. She had decided to give him the benefit of the doubt, and had made him supervisor. He had rewarded her trust with loyalty and efficiency.

Could there be an example?

He arrived within a couple of minutes. He was a small, neat man of thirty-five with receding fair hair cut in the brutally short style that was fashionable. He carried a cardboard folder. Toni pointed to a chair and he sat down.

"We still don't know whether Mark Ross was working alone or with others," she said.

"Were there any clues on his computer?" Steve knew Toni had uploaded Mark's entire hard disk.

"Nothing obvious. It'll take me a few days to go through all the data. The police will do the same work but it will take them even longer. So, for now, we have to assume he had accomplices, and they may strike again.? And do what?

"We're ready for them."

"Let's just make doubly sure of that. You have the duty roster there?"

Steve handed over a sheet of paper. Normally there were three security guards on duty overnight and on weekends and holidays. One sat in the gatehouse, one in reception, and one in the control room. In case they needed to step away from their stations, they carried phones that were cordless extensions to the house network. Every hour, the guard from reception made a tour of the main building, and the guard from the gatehouse walked around the outside. At first Toni had thought three was too few for such a high-security operation, but the sophisticated technology was the real security system, and the human beings merely backup. All the same, she had doubled the guard for this Christmas holiday, so that there would be two people at each of the three stations, and they would patrol every half hour.

She hesitated before handing the sheet back to Steve. The six names on tonight's roster included Steve himself, four other men and a woman. Something struck her about the list, but for a moment she could not think what it was. Then she realised. "Apart from

yourself, all five of tonight's guards are people who have joined us in the last few months."

"Are they?" He took the list from her outstretched hand and looked at it. "No. Rob McKinnon has been here a year. Does it matter?"

She frowned. "I would have preferred an experienced team tonight."

"It was really a case of who was willing to work over the holiday."

"We're paying a huge bonus."

"I think the younger people need the money more."

"All right," she said. "Let me check your emergency call list."

Steve passed her a laminated sheet from the folder. It listed the agencies he was to phone in case of fire, flood, power cut, computer crash, phone system faults, and other problems. "I want you to ring each of these in the next hour. Ask them if the number will be operational over Christmas."

"Okay."

She handed back the sheet. "Don't hesitate to call regional police headquarters at Harbourmouth if you're in the least worried about anything."

He nodded. "My brother-in-law brother is duty sergeant tonight, as it happens. My missus has taken the children over to their place for Christmas."

"You don't happen to know who's acting chief, do you?"

"Yes. It's Frank." Steve's voice was carefully neutral. He knew Toni's ex, and nervously avoided speaking of him.

Toni passed over that. "I'll have my mobile phone on all day and all night, and I don't expect to be anywhere out of range. I want you to call me the minute anything unusual happens, regardless of the time, okay?"

*In she still uneasy?  
Feeling more so or less so?*

"Of course."

"I don't mind being woken up in the middle of the night." She would be sleeping alone, but she did not say that to Steve, who might have considered it an embarrassing confidence.

"I understand," he said, and perhaps he did.

She stood up. "I'll be leaving in a few minutes." She checked her watch. It was almost four. "Happy Christmas, Steve."

"You too."

She returned to her office. Chris Carter was waiting. "Mark Ross didn't have many friends," she said. "I've spoken to most of them, and I've talked to friends of the three I couldn't reach directly. I don't think he saw anyone in the last fortnight."

*Remind us who he is.*

"What did the animal rights people say?"

Chris grinned. "They were very suspicious at first, but I think I scared them into action. I just called to find out how they're getting on. They say they've emailed their entire membership and phoned every member resident in Scotland. None of them had ever met Mark."

"That's a relief. Thanks, Chris—good job. Get Frank on the phone, then go home."

"Okay."

A minute later her phone rang. She picked up and heard Chris say: "Here's Frank."

"Thanks, Chris. Have a good Christmas."

"You too." There was a click, and Toni said: "Frank? It's Toni. We don't think Mark saw anyone in the last fortnight."

"How do you know?"

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EF: A warmer relationship between Toni and Odette

She told him what calls Chris had made.

"It doesn't sound a hundred per cent."

"I know," she said wearily. "But we've put out a general appeal in the media, and I can't think of anything else we can do."

He grunted. It seemed he couldn't either.

Toni said: "What did you find out about Animals Are Free?"

"What do you mean?"

"Are they peaceful protestors, or could they have encouraged Mark to do what he did?"

"I haven't had time to check them out."

"For God's sake, Frank! This could be important."

"Don't tell me how to do my job."

"Forget it. I'll do your job for you." She hung up without saying goodbye. "Hell," she said to herself. Frank could always make her mad.

She dialled a London number and asked for Odette Cressy. She had met Odette on a course at Hendon Police College, and they had stayed in touch. Now Odette worked in the Intelligence department of Special Branch, the political police. "I saw you on the news," Odette said. She had a Yorkshire accent.

"How did I look?"

"Authoritative." Odette giggled. "Like you would *never* go to a nightclub in a see-through dress. But I know better."

"Just don't tell anyone the truth. Listen, Mark Ross, the boy who died, belonged to a group called Animals Are Free. Do you know anything about them?"

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AZ: Toni's unease would be more telling if it had a focus. One could be Stanley. What might happen to him? A second might be her job, her livelihood. Will she be forced to give up her home and live with her sister? She should feel almost under siege.



"No, but I can look them up right here on my screen. Just a minute...Here they are. No suspicion of criminal activity, it says. They're just peaceful protestors."

"That's a relief. It probably means we don't have to fear another incident."

"All the same...."

"I've doubled the guards."

"Sounds like you've got it under control. Why am I not surprised?"

"Listen, Odette, I've got to go. I'll call you after Christmas and catch up."

"Great."

They hung up.

Darkness had fallen, and Toni could see her own reflection in the window. She looked weary and rumped. She closed down her computer and locked her filing cabinet.

She needed to get going. She had to return home and change, then drive to the spa, which was fifty miles away. The sooner she hit the road, the better: the forecast said the weather would not get worse, but forecasts could be wrong.

She was reluctant to leave the Fort. Its security was her job. She had taken every precaution she could think of, but she hated to hand over responsibility.

She forced herself to stand up. Her job was facilities director, not security guard. If she had done everything possible to safeguard the place, she could leave. If not, she was incompetent and should resign.

She shouldered her bag and left the building.

The snow was falling more heavily.

Her uneasiness could be move telling with some focus. One could be Stanley. What might happen to him? A second be her job, her livelihood, maybe forced to give up her home, have to live with her sister. She should feel almost under seige.