

#tag

David Wake

WATLEDGE BOOKS

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What hath god wrought!

First telegram, 1844

Samuel B. Morse

Mr Watson, come here, I want to see you.

First telephone call, 1876

Alexander Graham Bell

QWERTYUIOP or something similar

First email, 1971

Ray Tomlinson

Merry Christmas

First SMS text message, 1992

Neil Papworth

just setting up my twtr

First tweet, 2006

Oliver Dorsey

Woah, at@bill £bill #weird ah, ah, get it out, get it out!

First thought, 2018

Edwin Rallinson

WEEK ONE

SUNDAY

The riot shield's slippery and the bloody baton's awkward, Oliver thought, stupid kit, designed for gorillas.

Six of his colleagues liked this: *Gorillas, too right.*

Put it down then, you fascist, the woman opposite, Martha_556, thought back.

Cease and desist... but Oliver hummed the tune, not wanting to be trolled at this point: *pa-pah pa-pah pa-pah...*

Childish.

Oliver rolled forward on the balls of his feet, squeaking his combat boots. It was an irritating tune: *I don't want to get my head kicked in with this nonsense going round and round inside. And it was childish.*

Told you.

He felt hot under his stab vest.

Wasn't this all due to some Jay's thought stream?

Fascist Tepee.

Oliver glanced at the crowd facing him and tried to pick out the woman chiding him, but he couldn't. All their angry faces were directed at individual policemen, but they were probably flaming another cop entirely.

Why he was picking her out of the interminable stream, he didn't know, so he forced himself to focus, deliberately concentrating on one set of thoughts from the feed: *...bastards, bastards, bastards... fascist pig.* He'd slipped back to Martha_556 again, but then Target Four's mental chanting was god awfully tedious. The man must know they were after him. He was using a stooge to rethink his thoughts, after all.

God, I've had a thought-full of this.

The two sides kept their distance, just beyond the recognition range like armies of old staying two spear lengths apart. The rioters were mostly youths, but some of the police were even younger. It was a diversion, creating havoc so that others could loot the shops. Some of these had taken their turn already and they'd tucked all sorts of fashionable clothing under black coats and silver scarves. They looked like fat sports fans topped off with baseball caps. There were a few with tin foil hats showing a contingent from the nutter brigade, and all those grinning plastic masks were creepy.

The Sergeant actually shouted aloud: "Rip!"

Oliver ripped the paper seal off the notice taped to the back of his shield. A sound, like unzipping, went down the line.

'#96jf76tt' it said.

It took a moment for Oliver to follow the hashtag – *Hash 96jf76tt Alpha go left, Charlie go right, Foxtrot front.*

Foxtrot front, he thought. He couldn't help himself.

The rest of the snatch squad were already charging forward: Chen and Mox in the lead. They'd be beyond recognition range any moment if he didn't look lively himself.

Shit, thought Martha_556 opposite, *here they come!*

Bastards, bast- Scatter, thought Target Four – theirs. The delay was due to the stooge, some kid in foreign climes on pay-as-you-think, needing time to rethink. He was probably taken by surprise by the sudden change.

Oliver glanced through the Perspex visor at the colourful movement of rioters going left and right. One was Target Four, but which one was impossible to tell.

"Arrghh, phase two!" the Sergeant shouted, clearly overloaded by the trolling he was sustaining. He was the obvious target – they always went for the leader – but the

other Sergeant, who had kept his head down and his thoughts on other things, would take over now.

One of the constables to Oliver's left engaged, slamming his shield forward and up so that he could swipe low with his baton. The rioter yelled and went down as his leg twisted under the blow. Oliver held back, unused to this work and to uniform in general. With all the clamour and confusion, he could barely follow the thoughts of the Sergeant; others jumped out at him demanding his attention and he had the distracting flicker of recognition as the rioters came into range.

Bog.

Bog the fascists!

They're bogging.

"What?" Oliver said, more of a swear word than a question.

Damn jargon, Chen thought, all these code words are designed to confuse and—

Take this you bastard.

Hash 96jf76tt switch to squad hashtags.

Hash Foxtrot, phase three.

Something heavy went crump to his left and Oliver glanced up just in time to see something large arcing down towards him. He ducked behind his shield which took the impact, yanking his arm around.

A chant went up: "Pa-pah! Pa-pah!"

God, we're using the tune as a battle cry.

Battle, see. You fascist.

Tepee pig.

Hash Foxtrot, Point Alpha.

There was only '...run, run, run...' from Target Four.

Oliver jogged with his colleagues, who knew what was what and where was where. Point Alpha was a street corner.

You'll just be making up the numbers, Inspector Dartford had thought, *fill in to help uniform. Don't worry.*

Useful experience before your Sergeant's exam, Freya had added.

Welcome aboard, Mox had thought, when he thumped him on the back.

Strange how those giving the orders were never, ever actually present. *Mustn't think that... pa-pah, pa-pah! Too late.*

Just following orders were you, Martha_556 thought, *you fascist Tepee.*

Oliver ignored her: *Stay at the back, don't get drawn in,* he thought.

Coward.

That woman who'd zeroed him was really getting on his tits, but he refused to give her the satisfaction of knowing it: *Pa-pah, pa-pah... "Pa-pah!"*

He swung rather savagely at a rioter as his section charged past. He might have connected, or probably hit Chen's riot shield, but they all thundered on around the street corner.

Scatter!

That had been stooge's rethink; so Target Four was responding to their movements, which meant he had to be nearby.

Oliver took two steps to slow down so he could scan the area.

The street was full of dropped shoes taken from one of the looted shops. A few rioters saw them and fled up the High Street or along St. Thomas Street. Others came out of a newsagents, their feet kicking up the shattered glass as they came to a halt.

Target Four wouldn't be one of these, but he had responded to their arrival, so probably—

Chen thought so too: *Even go left, odd right.*

Hash Foxtrot, Oliver thought, what the hell is my number?

It was on the back of his borrowed riot jacket.

Oliver started running towards the High Street with Target Four's mental chant ironically driving him on: ...run, run, run...

Your other left, Ollie.

Sbit.

Oliver changed direction.

St. Thomas Street led to some abandoned shops internettted out of existence and now boarded up. There were cobbles between the pavements at the far end. This was where Chen and Oliver headed.

Fascist Tepee! Stop it! I have rights.

Martha_556 had obviously not identified him properly, so whoever she was venting her anger on was blissfully unaware of it. 'Tepee' was irritating: an insult on account of the conical helmet and the initials. Trying to follow the thoughts of the group he was chasing, while another group's intruded was confusing.

Oliver felt wrong footed.

You've got the wrong guy, Oliver thought.

You're not him, Martha_556 thought. Who's this Tepee then? Fucking Thought Police.

There were four men in the street: two City fans, a Goth and an orange balaclava, sidestepping to the pavements now the tarmac had run out. They clearly didn't want to turn an ankle on the uneven surface. Odds are Target Four had the mask.

"There, over there!" Chen shouted aloud, wobbling his shield towards the boarded up phone shop. There was a side alley: two youths went down that and Chen clearly wanted to cover all possibilities. Oliver was closer, so he followed, turned sideways to get his shield between the

alley wall and a large industrial refuse bin. His colleague, he'd no idea who, bumped him as they went through.

"Ow!"

Oliver recognised him as Mox.

At Ollie, are you all right?

It was his girlfriend, Jasmine, her thoughts coming clearer now that he was out of recognition range of everyone but Mox.

At Jasmine! I'm at work, Oliver thought frantically.

I've changed my status, Jasmine thought back.

The youths were already right down the end of the alley, and would have disappeared into the gloom had the fashion for silver scarves not been so prevalent. Oliver thumped his way down between the high walls, jumped a broken box and skidded to a halt at the far end.

They came out onto Tumney Row – disconcertingly. Oliver was lost. The very thought gave him his co-ordinates, but it didn't mean anything.

He saw a flash of white trainers disappearing over the wire fence opposite. The 'No Trespassing' sign flapped back and forth.

There's no way I can get over that, Oliver thought.

Ollie, you could pass the riot shield over after I've climbed it, Mox thought.

"You're kidding?" Oliver's voice echoed and his visor steamed up.

They both looked at the fence again, gauging its height.

Oliver noodled it: *This alley went several hundred metres and then out towards the train station,* he thought at Mox, *we'll never catch 'em.*

You're one of those desk jockeys, aren't you?

Detective Constable, Oliver thought, *yes.*

It's not them anyway, it'll be the man wearing the—

"Careful!"

Wearing the pa-pah, pa-pah, Mox thought, waving his hands over his riot helmet to signify the... pa-pah, pa-pah. *Pa-pah hat.*

Oliver laughed aloud and Mox joined in.

Oliver thought: *Let's find Chen.*

Mox nodded.

They jogged back down the alleyway.

“Oi!” Mox yelled.

By the time Oliver got clear of the refuse bin, the rioter had fled.

He went this way, Mox thought, already moving across the cobbles.

Oliver, bent double to get his breath back, straightened and followed, walking. There was no sign of Chen or the balaclava. He was sure the man was Target Four.

Further down, there was a crossroads as Old Tollgate crossed from Chedding to Portman Square. There was a group loitering, probably with intent, but they all had baseball caps or bare heads.

We could ask, Ollie thought.

One of the loiterers, close enough to recognise, gave them the finger: *Piss off.*

Mox jerked into a charge and they scattered.

“No pa-pah,” Mox said, coming to a halt.

Oliver thought at Chen: *I'm at... shit.*

“Point er... five!” said Mox.

“Point five...” *I mean,* he thought, *Hash Foxtrot, point five with Mox.*

Some wag thought: *Is that what we're calling point five now?*

Stay there, Chen thought, *he may double back, but he's... oh, to hell with this.*

A rethink: *Is that what we're calling point five now?*

Other thoughts followed.

To hell with what?

Pa-pah, pa-pah.

Point five is called 'shit' now.

Hash Foxtrot, Target Four is wearing an orange balaclava north of Old Tollgate, rethink.

Oliver took Chen's thought, rethinking it to his followers.

Target Four is wearing an orange balaclava, north of Old Tollgate, came Mox's rethink followed by all of Foxtrot squad doing the same.

At Jimmy, you're target four, came the woman who'd called him a fascist, Martha_556.

Someone sprinted from a doorway down towards the old Chedding Shopping Centre.

Not him, Mox thought, but then Oliver saw a flash of orange stuffed in the man's pocket.

Yes, yes, Oliver thought: *Chedding, Chedding! Hash Foxtrot. Rethink.*

Oliver flung his riot shield to one side and accelerated downhill, bringing his arms up and down.

His target quickened his pace too and stayed tantalizingly out of range. Once he was within recognition, the man's stooge would be pointless and they'd be able to pick him up any time, but Oliver couldn't quite close the gap. He felt the merest flicker in his brow, just as the man turned back towards the High Street.

Oliver stumbled, he'd not expected that change of direction: the man was trapped now. He'd been stupid because—

Damn, the door's forced, Oliver thought as he reached the huge, white building at the end.

What door?

Chedding, he's gone into Chedding Shopping Centre.

We're at 'Shit' moving up Old Tollgate now.

Don't be stupid, that's sealed up.

Not anymore, Oliver thought.

He burst through the steel door causing the heavy lock to fall to the ground. It had been sheared with bolt cutters. Concrete stairs led upwards and round, the stairwell making his footsteps, and those of Mox behind him, echo.

He reached a landing.

Up, he thought.

You take this one, Mox thought back.

Oliver tried the door: *Locked*.

Mox had already passed him and turned the corner.

Oliver started after him.

At Ollie, we're outside Chedding now, Chen thought, *where are you?*

Going up, Oliver thought back as he took two steps at a time.

Second is open, Mox thought, *I'll take it, you try three*.

Bloody stairs, Oliver thought, swinging around and continuing up.

The door on the third level was open, the concrete and plaster dust disturbed.

I think he's on my level, Mox thought; just as Oliver was about to think the same.

The floor tiles gave the deserted shopping centre a clinical feel and Oliver's combat boots squeaked as he came in.

I'm hiding, I'm hiding, Target Four's stooge rethought in a mantra beyond maddening. Why couldn't the kid just stop doing it, but then perhaps the stooge didn't even understand English? Back office must have correlated enough phrases to make a search by now.

Perhaps he doesn't know I'm chasing him, Oliver thought.

Filth, Teepee pig, scum, Target Four's stooge repeated. It was very old fashioned, trust the ringleader to have been traditionally educated.

Cleverer than you.

He's following me, Oliver thought. *The change meant he—*
Yea, I am, you scum.

What level?

Piss off.

Oliver only just caught the wisp amongst the chorus of his squad. Everyone had switched to 'pa-pah' to avoid giving anything away and the tune wormed its way firmly into the back of his mind, eclipsing everything else. The melody was supposed to prevent any thoughts leaking out, but counterproductive. Oliver couldn't hear himself think.

He glanced round to clear his head and distract himself from the insidious repetition.

I always liked it here, he thought. His Mum used to bring him here back in the day: *Burger for lunch, lollipop on the way back if I'd been good. Every good boy deserves chocolate. There were toilets on the third level.*

Not near any toilets.

Target Four was getting stressed, his mantra going pear shaped.

Not stressed, Teepee.

I'm leaking too, Oliver thought.

Too right.

Amazing how the man had managed to pick Oliver out of the cacophony of all the police. Oliver was focused now, picking out the man's rethought commentary and ignoring everything else. He went further in, almost on tip-toe, looking round at the whitewashed display windows and the boarded up doors. This had been a CD shop, over there was once a toy shop and that – *gosh* – a bookshop.

Target Four bolted from the information booth near the old bookshop. He was running on instinct, or Oliver had missed the thought in his rush to give chase. They sprinted down the length of the shopping centre to the far stairs.

Far stairs, Oliver thought as he clattered through the door. He was in a stairwell similar to the one he'd come up in.

Chen's thought was a distinct voice in amongst the maddening tune: *Far from what?*

Far from Old Tollgate.

Ollie, which end?

I don't know.

On your brow.

Oliver checked and rethought the result: *South.*

Hash Foxtrot, converge on the south end of Cbedding.

Target Four was nowhere to be seen, but Oliver ran down the stairs. He knew from his training that fugitives tended to run downwards, an instinct to get out of the trees perhaps.

I'm going up, I'm on level four, Target Four's stooge thought, but, even second hand, it included the hint of a basement.

Oliver flung himself around the awkward spiral, grabbing the metal rails for leverage. Without the daylight from the windows, it was dark below ground level. It frightened him, always had from childhood, but at least with his colleagues' thoughts in his head, he wasn't alone.

His eyes didn't adjust fast enough, or his heavy gasps fogged the riot helmet's visor, but he assumed the shape of the turns would be identical and the door to the sub-level in the same place. He got away with it, and he came out in a gloomy underground car park.

There were no cars. *No, wait! One car, there, and pillars holding up the ceiling and the entire abandoned shopping centre above.* Light streamed in weakly from the distant iron shutters.

“Give it up,” said Oliver, aloud. His voice echoed like a rethink.

He snapped his torch on and scanned the beam around to be rewarded by a scuffle.

Target Four’s thoughts were now distorted by fear with a strange echo. Oliver had him almost on recognition, which meant he must be close, and the stooge’s repetition came afterwards.

Perhaps he was behind the abandoned car?

Oliver bent over until he could see under the vehicle.

Or one of these pillars then?

Oliver began to move sideways, deliberately moving around the pillar in a clockwise direction before he flicked the torch’s beam off. He paused, waited for his eyes to adjust before moving around anti-clockwise. He thought he might catch the man moving to keep the pillar between them.

No way, came a thought.

Oliver took two strides back the way he’d come, flicked the torch on and jumped around the nearest pillar. Target Four’s wide eyes reflected back and Oliver recognised him, a clear signal now there wasn’t anything between them, and he knew he was Jimmy Scanlan.

Give it up, Oliver thought.

The man came for him: *Take this!*

Oliver’s reflexes took over, his training kicking in, and he flung his torch forward as a distraction. The metal tube bounced and clattered away, but caused something in the man’s right hand to glint silver.

Take this, came the stooge’s rethink.

Oliver blocked and then twisted so that the blade snagged on his stab vest. They went down, the man landing on top. Oliver was winded, his neck jarred when his helmet struck the concrete floor.

In your guts!

Oliver felt the man shift position, his arm going down to probe below his Kevlar protection.

The stooge: *In your guts!*

Jimmy! Don't!

Their eyes met, he smiled: *Any last request?*

Oliver head-butted him.

Ab! Bast-ak, @£\$%o, #mum... mummy...

Oliver did it again and was rewarded with a flaring shutdown.

Any last request... nah, he's toast, the man thought... no, his stooge had thought that. The kid, wherever he was, did know English after all.

For a moment Oliver didn't think, he just lay there, breathing, and glad to be alive.

Chen and the others arrived in a thundering stampede as Oliver pushed the unconscious man off.

Ollie, at Ollie, OK, OK? It was Chen checking.

Oliver undid the strap of his helmet and pulled it off. His head felt suddenly cold without the clammy padding and metal covering. Oliver held his thumb upwards. Chen liked this.

"Jimmy Scanlan," said Chen in a loud and clear voice. "I'm, like, arresting you—"

He's unconscious, Oliver thought, as he tried to swat the light away from his eyes. The others got the hint and pointed their torches downwards.

Which reminds me, Oliver thought, *where's my torch?*

A couple of the police moved their own torches to indicate where a beam of light shone from under the abandoned car.

Thanks.

He called for his Mummy when Ollie smacked him in the head.

Six others in the squad liked this.

Oliver wasn't sure which of them had thought that. They all looked the same in their visors, but he recognised them all from their signals.

You got 'im, Ollie, Mox thought.

Yea, Oliver thought back.

He had really connected with Target Four's forehead with obvious results. It would be a while before the man's iBrow settled and they got any straight thinking out of him. Jimmy Scanlan writhed on the floor as if he was having a fit, a sort of disconnected automaton, disturbingly inhuman due to the lack of thought.

I'd like to read his 'Mummy' thought out in court, thought someone, the idea as clear as day.

Straight away, everyone liked this.

Imagine reading the rest out in court: run, run, run...

Everyone laughed at that, their relief spilling out into the echoing subterranean chamber.

Hash Foxtrot, we deserve to go to the pub now, Chen thought.

Oliver got up and sauntered over to the vehicle, a red Tiger Fire. He reached first, but then had to go down on his hands and knees to retrieve his torch. When he stood up, he flicked it on and off to check it was working properly and, in doing so, shone the beam across the back seat of the car.

“Shit!”

There was a body, quite clearly very dead.

Chen came over: *Is he dead?*

Oliver realised he must have leaked a thought or two unconsciously. *She's seen better days*, he thought in reply.

Chen looked in the car: "Jeez, what a mess," he said. Sometimes thoughts weren't enough. Chen glanced at everyone in turn: *Who's senior officer?*

The others looked at each other, almost shuffling back to avoid volunteering.

Oliver raised his hand: *Detective Constable*, he thought.

Your show then, Chen thought.

Do we need one, Oliver thought.

Murder, Chen thought, *she can't have smashed her head in like that herself.*

Oliver nodded, OK, OK, and took charge: *Mox, you're scene of crime officer.*

When he received no reply, Oliver called out: "Mox!"

Mox looked startled: *Sorry, just updating my status.*

Secure the area until forensics gets here.

Mox saluted and stepped forward, holding out his hand to back everyone away from the car, even Oliver. He tilted his head, a sure sign he was noodling something.

It's 2:35pm, Mox thought, *and this is now officially a crime scene: Hash 83,648,819*

Given the situation, Oliver thought, *someone best stay with him.*

Riot's over.

No way.

Overtime?

Oliver considered for a moment, recognizing each of the identically dressed officers: *Tim.*

Ollie!!!

Two paramedics arrived to deal with the injured prisoner, Jimmy Scanlan, who was no longer Target Four but officially an 'alleged' riot jay.

The rest of them went outside.

Beyond the abandoned construction site, its steel reinforcing rods visible sticking up through the concrete dust, a police mini-bus was cruising past collecting the various groups: a clear sign that the flash mob's interest had waned.

Oliver noodled for a situation update and, sure enough, with the ring-leaders bagged and some celebrity event going viral, the streets had turned eerily quiet. There'd be a lot of glass to replace and items to recover, but that was it.

Chen came up beside him: *Can we get across that?*

Oliver checked the construction site: *No, we'll have to go round.*

OK.

Chen led the way to the steel shutters and they found a place where they could climb up to the vehicle access ramp. The mini-bus doubled back when the driver got their thoughts.

Oliver suddenly remembered: *Shield?*

What number?

Oliver tried to pull his police overall round to see the stencil, but he couldn't.

Fifty three, Chen thought.

Is it in the back?

Yes, here.

Here.

Oliver took the offered hand and jumped into the mini-bus with the others.

At Ollie, Jellicoe wants to see you, Freya thought.

Me?

Yes, in person.

Can he not brief me here, Oliver thought back.

No, he's in the Lamp.

He wants to talk to me in person!?

Yes. Then get the report on my desk about today's operation by 16:30 and one for this new crime, Hash 83,648,819.

Oliver sighed and held the bridge of his nose tightly.

I heard that.

That was from Freya, either she'd replied to someone else or she'd simply assumed he'd thought something sarcastic.

On the way back, Oliver noodled a list of the various interactions over the morning. This he sent to his ancient tablet, so that when he got back to the office and changed out of the riot gear, a rough draft of a report was waiting. He assigned names to thoughts, deleted a few idiotic asides and inserted some hooks for the wiki. It would have to do. He wasn't sure why they used this obsolete technology anyway. Why hot-desk when you can hot-foot? He emailed it to Freya.

The Lamp was the tavern of choice for the Senior Detectives. It was dark, secluded and ancient; their custom all that kept the place going. Oliver was a new breed of detective, he knew, and he wasn't going to end up in this throw-back to the last century. The decor came from an age before the iBrow or the internet even.

In person, honestly.

The pub was guarded by two elderly detectives smoking just outside the doorway. Oliver held his breath as he went past.

When he breathed in again, he smelt the hops and stale beer. Everyone was wearing corduroy and tweed. There was a babble of audible talking as you always had in pubs. Jellicoe was in the third booth along; alone, except for a tumbler of scotch.

I'm here, Sir, Oliver thought.

No reaction.

Sir?

Nothing.

Still nothing.

Oliver coughed deliberately.

Inspector Jellicoe looked up: “Ah, Oliver...” The man consulted a piece of paper. *Oh for... the man uses paper.* “Braddon.”

Sir.

“Cat got your tongue?”

“Sir?”

“Sit down, what would you like?”

“I’m fine,” Oliver said, squeezing into the booth. His mouth felt dry as it was unused to talking aloud, and he swallowed to relieve his throat.

“I insist.”

“Tonic water.”

“Just that?”

“I’m on duty.”

“So am I.”

“Oh. Right. Er... half a lager then.”

“Same again,” said Jellicoe, showing his glass to Oliver. “Her name’s Babs Lamp.”

At Babslamp... At Babs_lamp, Oliver thought, *could I have a half of Stella and whatever Jellicoe was having, please.*

Coming up.

Oliver sidled out again and walked to the bar, getting there just as the barmaid topped up the lager. Babs looked fifteen and Oliver wondered about checking her ID.

Gland problem.

Sorry, he thought back.

Oliver waited for the buzz – nine fifty – and reckoned with his bank.

Get me a lawyer, get me a fucking lawyer! Fucking Thought Police.

God, Oliver thought, *I'm still following Jimmy Scanlan and he's come round.* Oliver tweaked his settings as he negotiated his way back with the drinks.

Jellicoe took his glass with a grunt, swirled the neat liquid and then held it to the light: "Hello scotch," he said, "glad to meet you."

He took a sip.

This is going to take all day, Oliver thought.

Better not, Jasmine thought, *we've a date at six.*

Don't worry.

I do.

Thanks.

Booked and asked for our table.

We have a table?

Yes, Ollie, the one—

Jellicoe banged his glass down sharply, shocking Oliver back to the Lamp.

At Jasmine, got to concentrate here — sorry.

Later.

"This body of yours," the Inspector said.

"Not mine."

"It is now, you're assigned."

"Me?"

"You found it."

Jellicoe was old, crumpled, and his nose was marked with a fine tracery of red lines. He was borderline alcoholic: *No,* Oliver thought, *he is alcoholic.* Thin hair, grey and swept back. When the man frowned, the skin of his forehead furrowed to reveal the shape of the iBrow underneath. He represented everything that Oliver hoped never to be. The police force was modern now and didn't need these has-beens. The Inspector wore a uniform of tweed jacket and wrist watch. *Honestly — steampunk — or whatever — was what? Ten years ago, at least.*

“Get it sorted quick, we don’t want any hacking group picking it up and making this morning’s flash riot political,” said Jellicoe.

“It was nothing to do with the riot,” Oliver replied.

“Nothing?”

“We found it because Jimmy Scanlan tried to escape through Chedding Shopping Centre. The body was hidden in a car in the underground car park. We found it by pure chance.”

“You’re sure? Bit of a co-incidence – bodies don’t just turn up,” said Jellicoe. The Inspector fumbled in his pocket and brought out a bottle of tablets. He spilled three into his palm, took them and washed them down with his whiskey.

Oliver waited for him to finish and then said, “We’ll see when the pathologist reports back.”

“I’m having the pathologist rush through the autopsy tonight,” said Jellicoe. “I’d like you to investigate it now.”

“Oh, sure, as soon as the pathologist—”

“Now!”

What honestly was the point? All they had to do was wait for the code and they’d have a proper identification of the victim, otherwise it was endless searches.

Jellicoe’s expression brooked no argument.

“OK,” Oliver said.

Oliver noodled missing persons and was momentarily overwhelmed when he remembered the list of 158,912 missing persons worldwide. He narrowed the search both in the time parameters and geographically. Jellicoe sipped his scotch, so Oliver took a mouthful of his drink. It was refreshing, it had been a day of running about, and he needed it. All this actual talking had made his throat dry.

“Well?”

“I remember about 700 odd. I’ll narrow it once more people wake up or,” he added, pointedly, “sober up.”

“Hmmm... I’ve a gut feeling about this one,” said Jellicoe, continuing to talk aloud.

“Why don’t you use thinking, Sir?”

“I prefer my thoughts to be my own.”

“People only do that, Sir, if they’ve something to hide.”

“So the slogan says.”

“Forensics will tell me who she was, and then we’ll noodle her thoughts and know everything there is to know.”

“You shouldn’t rely on that all the time.”

“Why not?”

Jellicoe shrugged.

Oliver had the impression that there was more that Jellicoe wanted to say, but, without a proper chain of thought to follow, it was impossible to guess. Usually, once he’d parsed a chain, Oliver could pretty much predict the next few thoughts as, he knew, could everyone.

“Is that all, Sir?”

Jellicoe nodded and waited until Oliver had extracted himself from the booth, before calling him back: “Braddon, you could make a good detective.”

“I will Sir,” Oliver replied: *But not like you.*

The number of applicable missing persons was down to 451. This was from the official list. Anybody who wasn’t thinking was missing in a way: in any instant that was 16 billion, but as people thought every six seconds or so, that quickly dropped by around a billion every second, levelling off quickly. After a minute, that bottomed out at around 5 billion, those people asleep.

Why are you thinking about populations?

Sorry, Jas, work – it’s on my mind. I’ll be there in ten. If I can get a cab.

He checked up and down the street.

Hash cab, hash cab, he thought.

One pulled over and Oliver got in.

A Missing Person didn't become a police matter until there had been no thoughts for forty-eight hours. Hence the 441, reducing as more possibilities were eliminated, on the list.

The taxi driver pulled out into the passing traffic. Oliver recognised him and then thought at him about the Palatine Restaurant. They skirted the High Street where clean-up crews were working already, brushing away the shattered glass and hammering boards over the broken windows.

It was getting late: 6pm here was 10am in Los Angeles, so the whole of the Americas was awake now, so... this was stupid. Jellicoe had got him trying to second guess the pathologist. Tomorrow morning, first thing, they would get the iBrow code and then they'd know the registered owner – done. Unless the owner hadn't thought about her attacker in which case there'd be a lot of fiddly searches to find who was responsible. So, evening off, glass of wine, chance to unwind.

Too right... woo boo.

Jasmine's train of thought was breaking up. She must be having a drink while she waited. *And why not?* He would too. *Off duty was off call.*

By the time Oliver reached the restaurant, he was late, but luckily he had worried enough about arriving on time so his thoughts had mollified Jasmine. The Palatine was a classy Italian restaurant with a large open plan space, split into two levels by a step. Jasmine waved as Oliver tried to link with the waiter. Instead, seeing her, Oliver pointed and the waiter nodded.

"Hi," she said. They air-kissed.

Sorry, I'm late, Oliver thought.

“It’s OK.”

Work, you know.

“No problemo.”

Oliver fussed with the menu and realised that he hadn’t worked out who the waiter was. He tried to find the restaurant’s hashtag on the back, but Jasmine raised her arm and clicked her fingers. Her bangles clattered down her wrist.

A waitress came over.

I’d like... “I’d like a Stella... OK, that’s fine,” said Oliver.

Jasmine circled her wine glass with her finger and the waitress nodded. Oliver didn’t pick up any thought.

He glanced across the table: *Have you decided?*

“Yes, the pasta.”

Oliver checked the choices, and glanced up at the specials board, but all it had was the restaurant’s hashtag. He noodled their site and remembered the day’s specials. He picked the spaghetti bolognese.

“I ordered nibbles for starters,” Jasmine said.

Great.

The list was down to 112 and beginning to reduce as A&E staff thought about recent deaths, car accidents, heart attacks and so on. *Perhaps...* but Oliver’s drink arrived along with a large white wine for Jasmine.

Cheers.

“Bottoms up.”

He drank, a good gulp feeling he ought to be catching up. The fizz went down, slightly gassy and, along with the half of lager in the afternoon, the alcohol leached into his blood supply. A spreading prickling sensation, entirely psychosomatic he knew, told him that his inebriation safety had cut in.

“So,” he said aloud, “how was your day?”

“Ah, you know,” said Jasmine, casually.

He did know, of course, although he'd missed a lot of her thoughts because of the riot.

"Well?" she asked.

"Er..."

The waitress arrived and they ordered.

Oliver remembered that the search list was now 85.

"Can you not think about work?"

"I'm not thinking," Oliver replied.

Jasmine was angry: she didn't push her long black hair back behind her ear and instead let it gather like a storm cloud around her face. Even without a thought to underline it, it was a clear sign.

"I've every right to be," Jasmine said.

Oliver was thrown as he clearly hadn't thought that explicitly. Perhaps she'd read his body language or something involved female intuition.

"Sorry," Oliver said. He waved his drink in front of her. "I can't switch it off."

It was now 80.

"You have my full attention," said Oliver.

78.

"I'm not cross," Jasmine said, leaning forward, her long fingers pushing her hair back.

The pathologist was getting ready to do the autopsy and Oliver knew because he was following the case hashtag.

"What is it?" Oliver asked.

"I changed my status."

"Right, of course."

Oliver noodled her status changes and, perhaps because he was befuddled, he remembered all of them, but the pathologist's thoughts intruded: *...female, mid-thirties, extreme trauma to the face and head, signs of decomposition.*

Why was he doing the autopsy now? Ghoulish at this time of night. Ignore him, concentrate... and Oliver got a hint of a migraine shadow as his thoughts backed up due to the inebriation safety.

Jasmine flicked her finger back and forth between them: "We're in a relationship."

"Yes."

"I changed my status!"

"Oh, right."

The list was 37... 36.

Making the first incision, thought Doctor Ridge, *to examine the guts now.*

Oliver's spaghetti bolognese arrived, its strands curling in a rich red meaty sauce.

I'm not really that hungry, Oliver tried thinking, but his brow didn't respond.

He twirled his fork in the tomato covered intertwined strands.

"Oliver!"

He noodled her current status again and remembered that she was in a relationship with 'Oliver Braddon'.

Examining the heart now, Doctor Ridge thought.

Oliver felt lost, he always did when he was drinking. It wasn't the alcohol itself, he'd barely had any: it was because he wasn't able to trace the steps of his own thoughts and so make the next one. Perhaps he should write them down – *oh, what a ridiculous idea.* That did give him a migraine shadow.

"That's nice," he said, aloud.

Moving to the head, Doctor Ridge thought.

Jasmine glared, full on, but no thought came through.

Doctor Ridge's next thought was a removed expletive.

"Ollie," Jasmine insisted. "I changed my status!"

"Yes."

“And you haven’t.”

“Oh, well, I’ve been busy.”

As if on cue, he remembered that the list was now 23.

“Too busy for us,” she leaned forward and hissed: “My friends all know.”

“I don’t follow all your friends.”

“If you did, you know how people feel about someone who doesn’t update his relationship after his supposed girlfriend has updated hers.”

“Sorry, of course, I’ll—”

“It’s been six hours!”

“Yes.”

“My friends will think I’m some sort of slapper.”

This is a bombshell, Doctor Ridge thought, *a right mess – a definite Red Indian.*

What’s a Red Indian? These Doctors and their jargon.

Never you mind what a Red Indian is, Doctor Ridge thought.

Oliver hadn’t thought anything, so clearly others were following the autopsy. These Doctors must be specifically trained at medical school to substitute gibberish for medical jargon.

“You’ve still not done it!”

“Done what?”

It was something about her friends and he tried to remember: the list was 11.

Detective Constable Oliver Braddon – at Ollie, Doctor Ridge thought, *you’d better get down here.*

In person!? Migraine shadow. *Bloody drink*, he finished his drink and put the glass down.

Jasmine slapped him, hard across the face.

The restaurant’s audible hubbub of conversation stopped abruptly.

Oliver felt his face burning, he could almost feel everyone's attention turning to him, passing on the recognition to those further away and the riffling down of his, and Jasmine's, thoughts.

Now Ollie, Doctor Ridge insisted.

"I have to go," Oliver said, woodenly.

He stood up and without another word walked to the doorway. Irritatingly there were a few customers arriving, so he had to wait. As they came in, their eyes widened as they recognised him and then the salacious smile appeared as they realised this was the man who'd been slapped. A few stray thoughts flickered onto his stream as they swept in and out of recognition range.

She changed her status, he didn't.

Bastard.

Policeman.

Six hours and he did nothing.

Stupid Tepee.

Is she ugly?

Where is she?

The waiter caught him and showed him the Palatine Restaurant's teller machine. He waited for the buzz and opened a reckoning with his bank.

"Ollie! Don't walk away from me when I'm talking!"

It was cold outside, sharp on his slapped cheek, and he made his way down the road threading through the throng.

He thought about a cab, an error which affected his head.

It was a long walk back to the station. As he reached Old Tollgate, someone thought he was a wanker.

At Ollie, what did you say to Jasmine?

Men are such bastards.

Jasmine has talked to one of us and she's crying.

I hope you're happy Ollie, upsetting poor Jasmine like that.

No-one liked it.

“Shut up, shut up!” he said aloud.

Passers-by glanced at him and moved aside.

Oliver put his hand to his forehead, his fingers touching the skin a centimetre away from his iBrow. He let it wash over him, there was after all no choice.

You should apologise to Jasmine right away.

Sober up and think good thoughts.

The list dropped to zero – no missing people matched the description. That was impossible, so how much had he had to drink?

At Ollie, where are you? Now means now.

There was no way he could go in now.

Do you realise how upset she is, wanker?

Two-for-one on drinks with your next visit to the Palatine.

As soon as the coffee takes effect, Jasmine’s going to make you history.

Hasqueth Finest is the best – it tastes so good.

Jellicoe insists you get over to the pathologist in person.

Special thoughts, just a reckon away.

At Ollie, you are a wanker.

Hi, I’m Mithering: did you find a body in a car park?

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