

## Chapter 3

Over the next 24 hours, the case of Rosemary's disappearance started to gather momentum. CCTV requests were made to the council, and the University granted access to Rosemary's University email account as well as providing the CCTV footage from the campus. Brooks was starting to organise the digital information, while Jane was going through the diary plus Barton and Brooks's notes from their meeting with Mrs Ives, plotting every entry and thought onto a time line and transcribing any notes into a master document. All the information once logged was then added to an incident board to collate and visualise what they knew so far.

As so often seemed to happen, as an investigation started to gather pace, Barton was due in court that afternoon as officer in charge for a previous case; frustrated by this intrusion, as he gathered his papers he said to Brooks, "We've got to get hold of Rosemary's mother, try and get her on the phone again."

Brooks was far less confident when dealing with people and would do anything to avoid awkward conversations. "Give me some code to read or write any day rather than this," he muttered to himself.

“Call me if you find out anything useful,” Barton shouted as he left the room.

Before he would allow himself to get absorbed in information coming in, Brooks knew he had to make this call. He dialled the landline number he had got from Rosemary’s University enrolment form. It rang twice. Then a click. Then nothing.

Answerphone again.

He hung up, sipped his coffee now, which was sadly now lukewarm.

He tried the number one last time. One ring. Two. Click.

“Hello?”

A woman’s voice, at once both flat and guarded, with a strong Welsh accent came down the line.

Brooks sat up straighter, surprised to have finally made contact. “Mrs Cope? My name is Detective Sergeant Saxon Brooks of Devon and Cornwall Police. Every year, we get notified by the University about students who have not been seen in tutorials or lectures, and have not replied to emails or phone calls. Usually, they have gone home, gone to stay with friends, or just decided University is not for them. I hope you don’t mind if I ask, have you heard from your daughter, Rosemary, lately?”

“Why?” Her voice cut in, sounding sharp and wary.

He hesitated, trying to think of the best way to break this to her gently. “Your daughter is Rosemary, she hasn’t been seen or heard from for nearly six months, since fresher’s week. Exeter University has attempted to contact you multiple times.” He knew that, when stressed or concentrating, he tended to speak in very short

staccato sentences but tried to make himself sound as approachable as he could. He longed to be able to hold easy conversations with strangers in difficult situations like Barton, who appeared to take it all in his stride.

"Six months and you are only contacting me now?" She challenged, aggressively.

"We only get contacted as a last resort, when all other attempts to communicate have failed to get a response," replied Brooks, feeling a bit defensive over how bad this must make the police look.

"I got the calls from the University," she huffed. "Didn't think it was anything important, she's nineteen, she can take care of herself."

Brooks chose his words with care because he wasn't finding Mrs Cope an easy person to deal with. "The University has asked us to look into the disappearance of your daughter. We're trying to establish if Rosemary is safe. If she might have returned home. Have you seen her recently?"

"No." She paused before she snapped, "...and she wouldn't come here anyway."

He blinked, startled by the hard edge that had come to her voice. "I hope you don't mind me asking, but why not?"

Caroline Cope gave a dry, humourless laugh. "Because she's better than us now, University girl, whole future ahead of her, she left and never looked back."

"You mean she hasn't contacted you at all?" Brooks checked he'd understood correctly because it didn't sound right.

"She hasn't contacted me since she left this house in

August last year, not one phone call. Nothing. She's always been self-sufficient; she'll come back when she needs something."

"Does this not worry you, Mrs Cope?" He didn't want to agitate her, but it seemed unusual that she seemed so remarkably unconcerned about her daughter's disappearance.

"I know what you're thinking. You think I don't love her; of course I do, I'm her Mum, but she's gone off before and come back. She can be very difficult to love, sometimes."

The bitterness came easily, raw and undiluted. Brooks didn't interrupt, hoping she might say more, which could help build a clearer picture.

"She wanted out," Caroline went on. "That was clear enough, thought she was too clever for this place." She added, sullenly, "...for the likes of me."

Brooks was getting frustrated with getting Caroline to understand the severity of the situation. He leaned forward slightly, as if it might transmit something of his intent down the line. "Mrs Cope, your daughter appears to have vanished. We've visited her flat; we have found out that she hasn't used her bank card in months. Her University email account is active, and she is still submitting her assignments. Her tutor has said they are very good, but she can't get hold of Rosemary at all. This isn't some girl who just skipped a lecture. We're very concerned as to her whereabouts."

There was silence; he could hear faint movement on the other end.

Caroline muttered indignantly. "None of this would've

happened if she'd just stayed."

Brooks frowned. "Stayed where?"

"Here, with me, I did everything for that girl... gave up everything, her father pissed off before I even knew I was pregnant. I worked nights cleaning hotels, gave her the only bedroom with a window, and made sure she had books, when I couldn't afford food for myself. And how does she thank me?"

Brooks was quiet; he let the storm roll on, knowing it would be foolish to interrupt, and maybe this was Mrs Cope's way of dealing with what was happening.

"She leaves," Caroline said flatly. "She applies to a University I can't even find on a bloody map, moves out without a goodbye, and sends one email saying thanks for the childhood and good luck with your own life."

Brooks inhaled slowly, "...and that's it?"

"No calls, no visits, not even a birthday card. She changed around her eighteenth birthday. She said she wanted to be someone new, and that didn't include me. Never explained."

"Do you know if she had any friends she might turn to? Extended family? Old school contacts?" He tried, although he suspected he knew what the answer would be.

"No family; only me. Her only close friend is Gwen next door, and they have known each other since they were babies," she explained, "other than that, she kept herself to herself, always with her nose in a book or staring at a screen. She'd come home, sit in silence, revise for three hours, and go to bed, used to say it was better not to get attached to people, because people always leave." She sneered.

"Is there anyone," he said slowly, "you think she might have reached out to if she were in trouble?"

"You could try Gwen, I suppose, but she'll be at work now." Suddenly, there was a change in her voice as if she were going to cry.

Then the phone was slammed down so hard that he nearly dropped his own phone in surprise. Startled by the abrupt end to the call, Brooks stared at the screen for a full five seconds. Then he placed his phone gently on his desk and started making notes about the call. He hated any form of confrontation, and Caroline Cope had been as confrontational as they come. He could still hear Caroline's voice in his head, bitter and resentful, drenched in her sense of betrayal and self-pity at being abandoned by her daughter going off to university. He jotted a few notes down: a mother cut adrift; a daughter condemned for reaching upward; a chasm between them so vast it seemed to have swallowed any affection whole.

When Barton got back to the station late that afternoon, Brooks was in his office and still trying to make sense of his call for the case file and note down anything that might be useful or warrant further investigation. The office had grown dark, and the only light in the room came from the low blue light of his monitors. Barton was walking past and stopped when he saw Saxon. He leaned against the door frame, watching his partner. He'd seen this look before.

"I didn't think you would still be here. How did it go with Mrs Cope?" He eyed him curiously.

Brooks nodded once, still shaken by Caroline's brutal frankness.

"She didn't know Rosemary was even missing."

"Surprised?"

Brooks didn't answer and just shook his head.

Barton crossed to the desk, settling into the opposite chair. "Tell me more."

Brooks gave a brief, clinical run-down: the phone call, Caroline's tone, her story of abandonment. He ended with the sharp hang-up, and his silence returned.

Barton said nothing for a long moment as he contemplated what he'd been told.

"Sometimes it's not the missing person who needs finding, it's the person they were trying to escape from that is more revealing; perhaps you have discovered why she left or even disappeared." He suggested.

Brooks gave a faint nod, seemingly unmoved by Barton's suggestion that he had still made progress despite it not going the way he had hoped. "She didn't even ask if Rosemary was okay."

"She will," Barton assured him. "I've seen this before, if the press get hold of it, if there's a body, if there's a story she can be part of, then she'll weep on camera and say her daughter was always bright, always kind."

"...And she'll believe it?" Asked Brooks.

"Of course she will."

Brooks exhaled slowly and turned to his monitor. "Oh, here's something just landed. I've got a trace on the bank account that paid the rent. It wasn't Rosemary's personal account."

Barton's eyes lit up at a potential lead.

"Name on the account is Rosalind Faulkner, he checked his notes. Jane thinks it could be a relation."

"The account's still active, I suppose it could be being used as a holding fund, by someone who wanted to keep their name a secret."

"Anonymous help?" Barton raised a brow, thinking that didn't add up, "from someone trying to hide their identity?"

Brooks didn't respond.

"What's the link?"

"No idea, but whoever made the deposit either knew Rosemary and wanted help to make her get away, or it could even be Rosemary herself who has access to it."

The silence settled between them again as they were both lost in thought.

Then Brooks added, almost reluctantly, "I've been thinking, when we saw her flat, it wasn't just empty, sir, it was sterile. Like it had never been lived in; do you think she left of her own choice?"

"I think she or someone else wanted her to disappear," Barton replied.

"Let's find out who had access to that bank account. Any luck with her phone records? Has that number been used for incoming or outgoing calls?"

"Jane managed to work out the phone provider, and they have confirmed the number is pay-as-you-go, so she is getting a Subject Access Request application sorted out," Brooks confirmed. "But without the handset, we won't get the same detail of the call history that we would with a contract phone. One thing I did find out today, if Rosemary was going to reach out to someone, I think it is unlikely it would be to her mother."

"No," Barton shook his head. "But if someone knew

she was vulnerable and caught her before she vanished, an old friend who is helping her lie low. Or, more worryingly, the wrong kind of listener. Has anyone looked at abductions in the area in the last year? Tomorrow, let's widen the net. I am beginning to have a bad feeling about all this and what could have happened to Rosemary."