

Shelley Burr

Murder Town


HODDER &
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PROLOGUE

THE LOCKED SHOP door rattled, startling Gemma out of her focus. She'd closed up hours ago, but had the light on so she could count skeins of wool for the taxman. That didn't mean she was trying to invite midnight visitors. It was a man, huddled inside a large black jacket. For an awful moment she thought it was Vincent, until she remembered, as she had so many times in the past weeks, that Vincent would never knock at her door again.

'We're closed!' she hollered. What kind of absolute twit expected a town like Rainier to have a twenty-four-hour teashop? She felt bad for him, with no sign of a scarf or hat in this cold, but she wasn't opening the door in the middle of the night.

It was amazing how much things had changed in only a handful of months. Back in April, she'd have gone up to the door and told him to jog on. But after the police found the second body, that poor woman, Gemma's mother had sat her down and told

her to forget polite. Forget kind. Forget helpful. The only rule that mattered now was to stay safe. She'd given her a copy of Ann Rule's book on Ted Bundy, with passages highlighted about how he'd lured victims with plays for sympathy and requests for help.

The man pounded on the glass with his open palm. He swayed, and leaned against the window with one shoulder. He was three sheets to the wind, and she hoped it was only booze affecting his balance. He kept slapping the glass with his other hand.

Her irritation inched closer to fear.

He stepped back and then stumbled forwards, hitting the door with his full weight so it shook in the frame.

She dropped her clipboard and backed as far into the shop as she could, terrified he was going to smash the glass. Scuttling sideways to the kitchen door, she slipped inside. She secured the door behind her, but it was just a hollow sliding door with a little hook and eye latch at the top, so that would do nothing. She grabbed the cordless phone from the wall and dialled with one hand, resting the other on the handle of her grandmother's cast-iron teapot. She knew she could swing that, if it came to it.

To her relief Constable Hugh Guillory answered the station phone. Detective Mick Seabrooke, the shit-hot asshole transferred from Sydney when the murders started, made her nervous. Besides, she'd heard he barely answered the phone on night shifts, and brushed off everything short of murder as 'hardly police business'.

'Are you there alone?' Guillory asked. The genuine worry in his voice did nothing to help her anxiety.

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The banging had faded to a meek tapping, which was more unnerving in a way. The man didn't sound angry anymore, but he hadn't given up.

'Yeah, it's just me,' she said. 'My parents had to take Nan to the hospital again. I'm nineteen.' She added the last part a little more sharply than she'd intended. Even when Nan was at home, it was usually just Gemma downstairs in the shop. Her grandmother's health was failing rapidly, and her parents were exhausted from her care. Somewhere along the way they had stopped asking Gemma to help out running the business and just started assuming she would take care of it. That was fine by her, but it meant she wasn't going to stand for Guillory, who was barely a few years older than her, treating her like a frightened kid left home alone.

'Yeah, I know who you are, mate. Can you get upstairs and lock the door?'

She peered through the kitchen window at the dark of the walled back courtyard. Getting upstairs meant unbolting the back door, running up the back steps, using her key to open the house door and then locking it behind her again. A long time to be out there and exposed.

The courtyard gate stood open, and she could swear she saw a flicker of movement in the alley beyond. But it could be her racing mind playing with her.

'No.'

'One of Christian's customers probably had a few too many,' Guillory said, but there was nothing dismissive in his voice. He was

calm, and soothing, and warm. 'I'll do a drive-by and move him along if he's still there.'

'Thank you,' Gemma said. 'You could stop in for a cuppa. I'll put the kettle on.'

'Yeah, ta,' Guillory said.

It only took a few minutes for the police cruiser to pull up, the engine distinct on the otherwise silent street. The man stopped his banging, and Gemma felt like she could breathe again.

'Gemma!' Guillory shouted, and the tone of his voice knocked the calm right back out of her. He wasn't calling her because he wanted his cup of tea. 'Gemma, open the door!'

She ran for the door and unlocked it, pulling up the bolt at the bottom. The door struck her shoulder as Guillory pushed it open. The man was draped against him, one arm over his shoulders. Gemma had no idea who he was – if he was a Rainier local, he hadn't been for long.

'I've called an ambulance,' Guillory said.

Guillory half-dragged, half-walked the man to the chair in the craft section, the one Nan had put out for husbands to sit in while her customers chatted and pawed through the displays. The man leaned back into it and his unbuttoned jacket gaped open, revealing the shreds of his once-white tank top, now soaked with red.

'You're okay,' Guillory said. 'We've got you, mate. The ambos are coming, they'll have you right as rain.' He seemed to be talking to himself more than the man, blathering clichés as he waddled

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up a handful of crocheted tea towels and pressed them to the man's chest.

Gemma hovered behind him, trying to remember what the St John's Ambulance volunteer had said about stab wounds when she and Aubrey took a one-day first-aid course. She'd got one hundred per cent on the quiz, but she was good at tests. She couldn't remember if they had given any advice on what to do if you knew all the right steps but couldn't make yourself move from a spot two feet away from the victim.

The man blinked woozily at her.

'I'm Hugh, and the pretty lady you're eyeing is Gemma,' Guillory said with forced jolliness. 'Can you give us a name, mate?'

'Dean,' he whispered, sounding sad.

Gemma glanced at the open door. She wanted to race over and lock it, but the ambulance crew would be on site at any moment – they were only coming from the station on Edgeworth Street – and she didn't want to slow them down.

It wouldn't have mattered, as it turned out. No matter how many tea towels Guillory pressed into service, Dean's blood continued to escape. Less than thirty seconds after she opened the door, and two minutes before the whoop of the ambulance sounded in the street, Dean took his last breath.

And Earl Grey's Yarn and Teashop became the last stop on the Rainier Ripper walking tour.

LEWIS & CO.

TOUR COMPANY

RAINIER RIPPER TRIAL TOUR - VIP LIST

POLICE

Detective Mick Seabrook (arresting officer)
Sergeant Hugh Guillory (young constable at the time, worked on the case)

VICTIM FAMILIES


Jaylene and Antoine Tjibaou (parents of Vincent): Jaylene only confirmed as attending
Marcus Shadwell (brother of Dean): not local, unconfirmed if attending


SURVIVOR

Tamara Fleischer: unconfirmed if attending

LOCAL RESIDENTS AND BUSINESS OWNERS

Gemma Guillory (nee Grey) - Earl Grey's Yarn and Teashop owner
Aubrey Seabrook (nee Dillon) - local farming family
Christian Holst - Pub Owner, engaged to Ruth Tanner, also a long-time local
Dr Tim Nicholls - town GP, married to Magistrate Lotte Nicholls - both on council!

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ONE

'SO. UH, AS you would have seen from the map provided ahead of time, our planned route is circular. We would start and end here at the fountain. Part of what makes this such a, uh, compelling site for a tour, in my opinion, is that all of the points of interest are close together.'

Lochlan Lewis was a small man trying to look bigger, with his shoulders drawn back and his head up in a way that really just drew attention to how rapidly he was breathing. He wore a brand-new blue polo fleece, with the name of his tour company, *Lewis and Co.*, embroidered in gold across his chest.

The group was gathered beside the stone fountain that marked the precise midpoint between Melbourne and Sydney. Rainier was built around two parallel roads, both leading back to the old highway. One road took drivers south, to the on-ramp for Albury and Melbourne. The other took them north, to the

on-ramp for Gundagai, Canberra and Sydney. On maps, both roads were labelled *Federation Road*, but for as long as Gemma could remember they had always referred to them as Melbourne Road and Sydney Road.

In between the two roads was the long, narrow Fountain Park. In Rainier's heyday it had been a busy picnic spot, shielded from the traffic by a curtain of pine trees. Now people avoided the area, and it was little more than an oversized pedestrian island.

'So you plan to start the tour with Vincent, not Eva?' Mick Seabrooke asked.

Hearing Mick speak their names so plainly made this whole idea suddenly, terribly real. Gemma sucked in a breath. Hugh grabbed her hand, and she resisted the impulse to pull away.

'We're, uh, still workshopping how best to begin the story, given that the first victim to be found was in fact the second to be killed, or at least the second of the known victims. We could kick off from the parkland beside the church, where police found the body of the first victim, the unidentified female –'

'Woman.'

Gemma didn't recognise the voice of the speaker, meaning that she must have been one of the 'interested parties' who had come from out of town to see the tour demonstration. Gemma resisted the urge to turn around and look. She could feel the tension in the gathered group, and didn't want any sidelong glances to be misinterpreted.

'Right. The unidentified woman now referred to as Eva Nováková.'

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Gemma felt a little sorry for Lochlan. He was obviously nervous, slipping back and forth between stilted, clearly scripted lines and more off-the-cuff statements. Even if you set aside the open hostility from some quarters, it had to be painfully awkward to stand in front of an audience and recite the details of their own lives to them.

‘If we start from Eva’s burial site, we could then proceed to the other side of the church and the tour could follow the likely path Vincent Tjibaou took from his home to the fountain where his body was discov—’

‘You are not going to include our home in this monstrosity,’ Jaylene Tjibaou interrupted. She was nearly invisible under a slouchy knitted hat and high-collared coat, but there was still no mistaking her. Jaylene was the mother of Vincent Tjibaou, the first victim to be found.

‘I assure you, the script would be extremely cautious and would certainly never point out your specific house or the fact that you still live there. But our research has found that the ability to walk in the path of the victims, to see what they saw, imagine feeling what they felt, is a major draw for potential tour customers. That opportunity for empathy.’

‘Empathy,’ Jaylene muttered under her breath, and a few people around her tittered uncomfortably.

‘But the, uh, because the discovery of Eva’s body was a result of the investigation into Vincent’s murder, starting with Eva creates quite a confusing narrative. We’re leaning towards a Vincent–Eva–Dean sequence. Beginning and ending here, which

also emphasises how closely linked the murder sites are, their positioning right in the centre of town. One of the many unsolved mysteries surrounding the Ripper slayings is what drew the Ripper to this precise site. Tour customers will be invited to ask themselves that question as they view the area.'

'What about the service centre?' Mick asked. 'The story actually ends there, right?'

Of course Mick wanted the site of the Rainier Ripper's capture included in the tour. As soon as Hugh had called in the murder of Dean Shadwell, the police closed the roads in and out of Rainier. Within an hour and a half, a handful of officers, led by Mick, closed in on the Ripper at the service centre on the highway. The Ripper, a trucker named Jan Henning-Klosner, had a woman named Tamara Fleischer bailed up against a wall. The CCTV footage of Mick tackling the Ripper became one of the defining images of the case.

'That is true,' Lochlan said. 'It would be fantastic to include the dramatic end of the story in the tour.'

Beside her Hugh huffed, almost inaudibly. Gemma squeezed his hand.

'However,' Lochlan continued, 'the service centre is privately owned land, and the owners have declined to be involved. Not to mention the service centre isn't within walking distance, so we would need to change from a walking tour to a bus tour to include it, which would significantly increase our costs.'

'I had a question about that, actually,' Lotte Nicholls piped up. 'I'm not sure I understand how you expect to attract enough

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tour customers to cover your expenses. Your primary business runs in Melbourne, correct? So to run this tour you would need to cover six hours of travel and at least one night's accommodation. At thirty dollars a ticket you're not breaking even with less than twenty guests.'

Lochlan blinked rapidly, but smiled. 'That's a really great question, thank you. Obviously at the end of the day the, er, business and profits aspect are our concern, as we're not seeking any financial input from the town –'

'But you are asking us to risk our reputation,' Dr Nicholls, Lotte's husband, put in. 'The tour needs to be successful to make it worth the trade-off. You want to put up posters in Sydney and Melbourne advertising a tour that links our town name to its most terrible events.'

'It's already linked. Most people only know this town exists because of the Ripper murders,' Christian pointed out.

'It will fade away with time, if we let it,' Dr Nicholls said, his voice soft. 'This only gives it more oxygen.'

'The town will fade first,' Christian snapped.

This was the central argument the town had been having for months, since Lewis and Co. had first brought their proposal to the town council.

Rainier had once made a comfortable living as a pretty lunch stop for travellers on their way between Melbourne and Sydney. A few cute little restaurants, an art gallery, the teashop, the pub and even a winery and farm-to-table spot. Then the Rainier Ripper had arrived, and nobody heard the word 'Rainier' and thought of

cute little restaurants and a lovely park for a picnic. They thought of bodies, and blood, and terror. A few years later a bypass shaved half an hour off the Melbourne–Sydney drive and cut Rainier off entirely, and now the only people who bothered with the Rainier exit did it for one reason: to take a selfie in front of one of the infamous places where someone lost their life.

Why not make it formal? Why not scrape a little bit of a living back from the horror they'd all endured?

The uncomfortable truth was that the town couldn't actually stop the tour from going ahead, if Lewis and Co. were determined to run it as planned. All the spots of interest were public parks and footpaths, and they didn't need permission to bring people through. However, the town could make life difficult for them if they wanted to. They could drag Lewis and Co.'s reputation through the mud, they could protest against the tours, they could refuse to serve any customers the tour brought to town. But there were a lot of businesses in town that wanted those customers.

To end the impasse, Lewis and Co. had offered a deal: they would present their tour to the community, the survivors, and the friends and family of the victims, and the council would then put it to a vote.

'To circle back to your question, which was two questions really, we are confident that we can get the interest we need to make this tour a go. Traffic into town may have slowed in recent years, but thousands of cars pass by every day, travelling between Sydney and Melbourne.' Lochlan pointed east, to the distant freeway. 'We don't need to convince them to drive all the way

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here – we just have to offer them something interesting enough to make a detour. And once they're here, they'll need fuel. A pub lunch. A cup of tea.'

He flashed a smile at Gemma, which she found faintly insulting.

'Interest in true crime is growing constantly. But it's always been a human fascination. There were tourists at the site of the Villisca axe murders within days. Whitechapel has dined out on interest in Jack the Ripper for more than a century. My tours in Sydney and Melbourne consistently book out. And Rainier offers something that I can't give tour-goers there – immediacy. In Sydney I can take a tour to the precise spot of a razor gang killing, but half the time the site has been knocked down and rebuilt a dozen times over. I have to give my spiel outside a Liquorland. Here, the park, the church, the fountain, the teashop are all perfectly preserved, almost exactly as they looked at the time.'

That got him a mix of murmured agreement and scoffing. Gemma found it unsettling, the idea that the same stagnation that made them willing to consider this was the only reason it was even possible.

'As for the costs, once the tour is up and running I plan to step back. My company can take bookings and do the admin from Melbourne, and we'll train someone local to run the tour. Which generates employment here.'

'If the tour runs monthly, you're talking about twelve hours of work a year,' Lotte said.

‘That would make it perfect for a young person,’ Lochlan said, swiftly enough that he had probably jotted this argument down ahead of time. ‘It’s flexible enough to fit around school-work, while also offering valuable experience. They’d have a leg-up applying for tour work if they went to university in one of the major cities. And of course, Lewis and Co. would gladly transfer them to a position in any of the cities we operate in.’

Smart, Gemma thought, considering how many of the people in attendance had teenage children, herself included. But of course, the Nicholls’ daughter, Fawn, would never have to worry about getting her foot in the door for a job. As the daughter of the town’s magistrate and its only general practitioner, she was destined for a university career filled with prestige internships and prepaid meal plans.

Not that Gemma was bitter about it; that was just a fact.

And, of course, Jac Tjibaou, as the child of one of the victims, could never take a job like that.

She wondered briefly if she was the target of this particular inducement – her daughter, Violet, was the right age, but even if Gemma was willing to let her take the job, which she wasn’t, Hugh would hit the roof.

Still, those three were far from the only young people in town.

‘Are we ready to begin?’ Lochlan asked. He cleared his throat. ‘While the area has been inhabited since the mid-nineteenth century –’

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‘It was inhabited long before that,’ the same woman as before interrupted. This time Gemma did turn and look. With a start, she realised the speaker was Tamara Fleischer. The survivor.

‘Are you going to open with an acknowledgement of country?’ Tamara continued.

Gemma noticed that Christian and Ruth both sighed and rolled their eyes. She expected Mick to as well, but he remained stoic.

‘Ah, yes. Thank you. That’s an excellent suggestion. We’ll work on that for the final version. Uh, the majority of homes and businesses were built in 1952, when the Bennett Dam was expanded, flooding the town now called Old Rainier. This gave the town a distinctive, mid-century feel that made it an attractive lunch spot for travellers on their way between the capitals. Rainier was the kind of town where everyone knew everyone. A friendly town. A safe town. Until . . .’

Again, Gemma felt a pang of sympathy for him. The idea of talking about people like that, when they were right in front of you, made her cringe.

She deliberately tuned out as he described Christian Holst’s discovery of Vincent’s body in the fountain early one morning. She looked down at her boots, focusing on the spot where the leather was starting to wear away over her left big toe. The world had fallen off its axis that day. There had been murders dotted through Rainier’s history, but they had been domestic tragedies, bar fights that got out of hand or robberies gone wrong. At first, everyone had assumed that Vincent had met one of those three

ends too. Secretly, Gemma had wondered if Aubrey's cousins were to blame, perhaps taking 'if you hurt her, we'll kill you' too literally.

The idea that they were all being stalked by a psychopath was the last thing anyone considered.

'Then a crime scene technician decided to take her lunch break in the beautiful gardens beside the church,' Lochlan said, gesturing with his arm for them to follow him across the park.

The spot where Eva Nováková's body had first been buried was not marked in any way, but Gemma knew exactly where to go. She suspected most people in town did. Even after the barriers had been removed, the tape cleared away, the surface relevelled and seeded with grass, she always looked at it every time she passed. How many times had she unknowingly passed it in those weeks Eva was down there? Perhaps she had even walked over it, cutting through the church gardens on her way to pop in at the Tjibaou house.

'The tech, a keen gardener in her spare time, noticed a patch where the shrubs and flowers seemed to be struggling more than those around them, and an unusual amount of weeds – the sort that flourish in disturbed soil.'

Lochlan hesitated, piquing Gemma's interest. This was a tricky spot in the retelling – the local Rainier police, already out of their depth with Vincent's murder investigation, hadn't been quick to respond to the tech's report. They just hadn't had the resources to follow up on something so tenuous.

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But explaining that meant criticising the local police – including Hugh.

‘To confirm her suspicion, the tech asked a friend on scene with the dog unit to take a look, and the dog’s reaction kicked everyone into high alert.’

Ah. So the plan was to skim right over it. Smart.

‘When the area was excavated, police found the remains of a young woman wrapped in a yellow knitted blanket. Inside the blanket was her severed right hand, placed over her heart. The post-mortem concluded two things: that Eva’s hand was cut off prior to her death and that she had been heavily pregnant. The baby’s remains have never been found, despite extensive searches of the area.’

Beside her, Hugh let out a shuddering breath. At the time he had been a newbie police officer and had escorted a number of people into the morgue to view Eva’s body in hopes of identifying her. Gemma knew that he still had nightmares about it.

‘This gruesome discovery changed everything. There was a psychopath on the loose, one who had killed two people within the space of a few months and who could strike again at any time. Overnight, the friendly town of Rainier became a fortress. Within hours, the local hardware store sold out of deadbolts. Shops closed early so employees wouldn’t have to walk home in the dark. The streets were empty by sundown – ironically, making conditions perfect for the Ripper’s third and final murder.’

‘Is that all you’re going to say about Eva?’ Tamara asked. ‘You’re just going to narrow her down to nothing more than the moment of her death?’

‘Steady on,’ Christian said. ‘We don’t know anything about her, and you get pretty damn mad when anyone speculates.’

‘You could find out more,’ Tamara said, ignoring this last barb. ‘Investigation techniques have changed a lot in the last fifteen, twenty years. We can learn incredible things from DNA samples now. We could know more about her race, her ethnicity, maybe even find living relatives. If someone is willing to foot the bill.’ She gave Lochlan a significant look. ‘You’re looking to make money from Eva’s pain, why not pay something back?’

That obviously hadn’t been on any of Lochlan’s prep notes. ‘Uh,’ he said, then cleared his throat. ‘I mean, that’s an interesting idea, but that sort of DNA analysis can be prohibitively expensive, and any remaining samples are with the police.’

‘You’d find us very cooperative,’ Mick said. ‘It’s something we’ve looked into, but the backlog is long and, with limited funding, priority has to go to unsolved murders.’

‘Oh.’ Lochlan put his salesman smile back on. ‘Thank you, Ms Fleischer – that’s something we hadn’t considered, but I’d love to discuss it with you at a later date.’

Gemma’s heart fluttered painfully. If Tamara now had a reason to vote in favour of the tour, then this might really be happening.

‘Uh, if we’re ready to proceed, then we’ll walk from here back to the fountain.’ Lochlan shifted back into his ‘reading from a

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script' voice. 'It's not known precisely where the Ripper attacked his final victim, but the blood trail shows that the victim was in the park, then crossed the road and sought help at Earl Grey's Yarn and Teashop.'

Gemma felt sick, and found she could barely hear him over the ringing in her ears. Hugh tried to pull her closer to him, but she stepped away, following the group towards her home. Hugh trailed after her.

'The victim was identified by Constable Hugh Guillory as Mr Dean Shadwell, based on a driver's licence and Medicare card found in his pockets that matched the first name he had introduced himself with. The identification was later confirmed by Mr Shadwell's brother.'

'Are you going to call him that?' a man's voice interrupted. He was leaning against a parked BMW, his arms crossed over his chest.

Gemma's chest leapt like she'd seen a ghost. He had the same dark hair and sharp nose as the man who had died in her shop, a distinct family resemblance.

'It's his name,' Lochlan said, smirking in a way that Gemma assumed was a result of discomfort rather than genuine smarm.

'His name was Dean. If you'll forgive the cliché, Mr Shadwell was our father.'

That made him Dean's older brother, Marcus Shadwell. She'd seen his name on the email list. Gemma relaxed, although the effects of the adrenaline spike hadn't faded, especially when she'd already felt off.

‘Of course,’ Lochlan said. ‘I’ll make a note of that. It’s important to us that the wishes of the families are taken into account.’

‘Ha!’ Jaylene muttered.

Marcus opened the car door and pulled out a smart canvas satchel. He unzipped the top and pulled out a pair of expensive-looking leather gloves and a black beanie.

The group waited politely as he rugged up against the nippy evening weather, and then Christian approached with a broad smile.

‘We’re so glad you could make it,’ he said, holding out a hand for the other man to shake. ‘We weren’t sure you were coming.’

Marcus looked down at his hand for an odd beat before grasping it firmly. Christian tried to give him the usual posturing mid-handshake back slap he did, but the satchel was in the way and he ended up just fumbling awkwardly. He stepped away, looking abashed.

Lochlan resumed his spiel. ‘While Dean had no opportunity to identify his killer, the fact that he made it to the shop to summon help meant the police were on the scene within minutes. They were able to close the roads leading in and out of Rainier, and Jan Henning-Klosner was captured at the truck stop at the edge of town a little more than an hour and a half after Mr – after Dean’s death.’

‘Is that the end, then?’ Christian asked. ‘What about the trial? You could wind it up at the courthouse.’

‘And deposit them all in front of your pub in time for lunch, right, Holst?’ Dr Nicholls retorted.

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‘It’s across the street,’ Christian snapped back. ‘It’s not going to make any difference to anyone’s lunch plans.’

‘Gentlemen,’ Hugh said mildly. His tone of voice was enough to convey a head tilt in the direction of the victims’ family members.

The two men fell silent.

‘Er, there was discussion on the subject of delving into those aspects,’ Lochlan said. ‘But we’ve found that, in our research into where people stop when guiding themselves through Rainier, the courthouse is of little interest. Most are interested in the, uh . . .’

‘The juicy bits,’ Jaylene said. ‘A fountain full of blood. Dismembered limbs and a stolen baby.’

‘We stick to the facts,’ Lochlan said. ‘You’ve heard the script. There’s no embroidering.’

‘We’ve heard the script you want us to vote on,’ Jaylene retorted. ‘You think there isn’t going to be any editorialising once the money starts flowing, and you don’t have to look into our eyes while you tell it? Are you going to tell them how much pain my son would have been in? Will you tell them how, according to that man, he called out for me when –’

‘Okay.’ Hugh dropped Gemma’s hand to squeeze Jaylene’s shoulder. ‘We’ve all seen the presentation now and have a lot to think about. Gemma has been working hard on a spread in the teashop, which Lewis and Co. have provided free of charge. It’s Saturday night, you can take your time, have something to eat, talk it out, and then we can all go away and make our own decisions.’

The street was quiet, as the shops had closed for the day, and the pub had closed early to allow Christian and his fiancée Ruth Tanner to attend the tour run-through. As a result, the group didn't have to worry too much about cars as they drifted across the street towards the Earl Grey.

Gemma tipped her head to the side to accept a ritual cheek kiss from Hugh before she turned to lead the group across the road. It had been decided a few weeks ago that Hugh would be the one on shift today, so that Mick Seabrooke, who had always been more comfortable playing the role of Rainier hero cop, could attend the dinner.

It wasn't the way Gemma would have preferred it. Of the two officers, Hugh was better at smoothing ruffled feathers and calming people down. But she understood, and kept her worries to herself.