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## Friday 11 January (eleven days earlier)

**A**LL BAR ONE NEAR WATERLOO STATION WAS BUSY, WITH nearly a hundred people shouting to make themselves heard above the music. Smoking has been banned in the UK's public places for years but something seemed to be hovering around these folk, thickening the air, turning the scene around me into an out-of-focus photograph taken on a cheap camera.

I knew instinctively he wasn't there.

No need to look at my watch to know I was sixteen minutes late. I'd timed it to the second. Too late would look rude, or as if I were trying to make a point; too close to the agreed time would seem eager. Calm and professional, that's what I was going to be. A little distant. Being a bit late was part of that. Except now he was the one who was late.

At the bar, I ordered my usual drink-for-difficult-occasions and stretched up on to a vacant bar stool. Sipping the colourless liquid, I could see my reflection in the mirrors behind the bar. I'd come straight from work. Somehow, I'd resisted the temptation to leave early and spend the better part of two hours showering, blow-drying my hair, putting on make-up and choosing clothes. I'd been determined not to look nice for Mark Joesbury.

I fished my laptop out of my bag and put it down on the bar –

not actually planning to work, just to make it look that way – and opened a presentation on the UK’s laws on pornography that I was due to give the following week to a group of new recruits at Hendon. I opened a slide at random – the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act. The recruits would be surprised to learn, because most people were, that possession of all non-child pornography was perfectly legal in the UK until the 2008 Act outlawed extreme pornographic images. Naturally, they’d want to know what qualified as extreme. Hence the main content of the slide I was looking at.

An extreme pornographic image depicts a sexual act that:

- threatens, or appears to threaten, a person’s life.
- results in serious injury to sexual organs.
- involves a human corpse.
- involves an animal

I changed a spelling mistake in the second bullet point and added a full stop to the fourth.

Joesbury hadn’t arrived. Not that I’d looked round. I would know the minute he walked through the door.

Twenty-four hours earlier I’d had a five-minute briefing with my DI at Southwark Police Station. SCD10, still colloquially known by everyone as SO10, the special crimes directorate of the Metropolitan Police that deals with covert operations, had requested my help with a case. Not just any young female detective constable but me specifically, and the lead officer on the case, DI Mark Joesbury, would meet me the following evening. ‘What case?’ I’d asked. DI Joesbury would fill me in, I was told. My DI had been tight-lipped and grumpy, probably on account of having his staff filched without being told why.

I checked my watch again. He was twenty-three minutes late, my drink was disappearing too quickly and at half past I was going home.

I couldn’t even remember what he looked like, I realized. Oh, I had a vague idea of height, build and colouring, and I remembered those turquoise eyes, but I couldn’t conjure up a picture of his face. Which was odd, really, given that he was never out of my head for a second.

'Lacey Flint, as I live and breathe,' said a voice directly behind me.

I took a deep breath and turned round slowly, to see Mark Joesbury, maybe just a fraction over six feet tall, strongly built, sun-tanned skin even in January, bright turquoise eyes. Wearing a thick, untidy, ginger wig.

'I'm undercover,' he said. And then he winked at me.