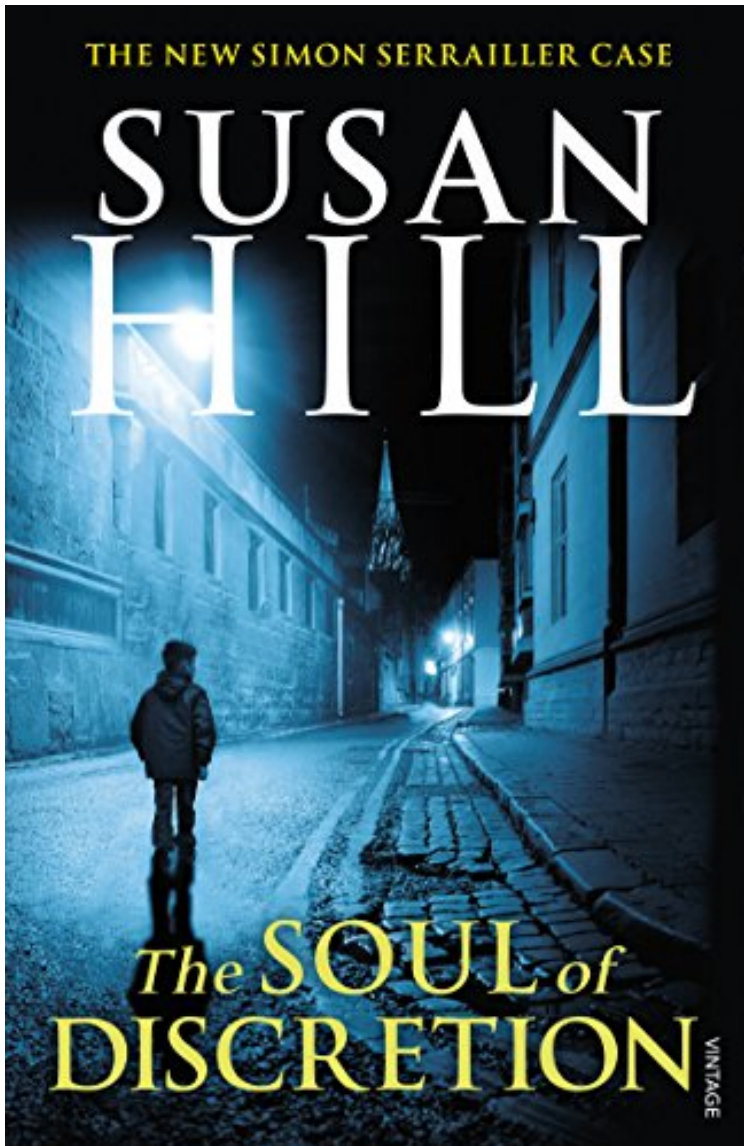


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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThe New Simon Serrailler Case from Susan Hill, the bestselling author of The Woman
in BlackSIMON SERRAILLER FACES HIS MOST DANGEROUS CHALLENGE YETGoing undercover,
he must leave town immediately, change his identity and sever all contact with friends and family.And, more
importantly, he must inhabit the mind of the worst kind of criminal.But can he do so without losing
everything?ExtraitBY THE SAME AUTHORTThe Simon Serrailler Crime NovelsTHE VARIOUS HAUNTS
OF MENTHE PURE IN HEARTTHE RISK OF DARKNESSTHE VOWS OF SILENCETHE SHADOWS

IN THE STREET THE BETRAYAL OF TRUST A QUESTION OF IDENTITY Fiction GENTLEMAN AND LADIES A CHANGE FOR THE BETTER IM THE KING OF THE CASTLE THE ALBATROSS AND OTHER STORIES STRANGE MEETING THE BIRD OF NIGHT A BIT OF SINGING AND DANCING IN THE SPRING TIME OF THE YEAR THE WOMAN IN BLACK MRS DE WINTER THE MIST IN THE MIRROR AIR AND ANGEL THE SERVICE OF CLOUDS THE BOY WHO TAUGHT THE BEEKEEPER TO READ THE MAN IN THE PICTURE THE BEACON THE SMALL HAND A KIND MAN BLACK SHEEP Non-Fiction THE MAGIC APPLE TREE FAMILY HOWARDS END IS ON THE LANDING For Children THE BATTLE FOR GULLY WITH THE GLASS ANGEL CAN IT BE

TRUE? Copyright To my friend Mrs Green (Candida Lycett Green 1942-2014) This novel is a work of fiction.

Names and characters are the product of the authors imagination and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental. PART ONE One APRIL 2007 Lafferton, and a night in early spring. After a week of frosts, the wind had swung to the west, bringing milder air. Snowdrops and crocuses were over, daffodils were flowering. Quiet, empty streets. No footsteps. Jeff Barclay and Robbie Freeman sat on a low wall near the bus stop in the square, finishing off a shared kebab. They only had enough money for one, and a tea. Robbie screwed up the greasy paper and lifted his arm to throw it into a nearby bin. But his arm froze in mid-air. What? Bloody hell. What? Jeff shoved him so that he almost fell off the wall. Robbie did not protest or shove back, he just stared at the entrance to the Lanes, the cobbled pedestrian-only street to their left. Shit, did you see that? Didnt see anything. What was it a ghost? Jeff snorted. No. Robbie said quietly, getting off the wall and walking towards the Lanes. I saw a kid. What sort of kid? A little kid. It had no clothes on. Youre taking the piss. I never saw any naked kid. Jeff levelled with him as they reached the top of the Lanes. There were old-fashioned lamps at either end and a couple of shops had lighted front windows.

The whole street was empty. Stupid. No. I saw it. There was a little kid, it sort of just ran and then it vanished. Yeah, right. Come on, lets see if theres anyone outside the Magpie. But Robbie was walking slowly away from him, looking closely to right and left. In the end, Jeff followed. How could there be a kid? I know what I saw. What are you on, Rob? You start seeing things, you got a problem. There was a passageway between the deli and a smart clothes shop, and as Robbie looked into it, he saw a quick movement something pale. He ran down, but he had to push past two wheelie bins, and by the time he had got through, if there had been anyone, theyd gone. Cat. No. Youre mad. No. Oh, for fucks sake! Im off home. It was another five minutes before Robbie followed him. They walked slowly along the kerb, thumbs out every time a vehicle went by. Not many did. Wanker. Jeff gave two fingers to a speeding car. Robbie said nothing. His head was full of what he knew he had seen not imagined, not hallucinated, seen. A child, maybe three or four years old, naked, slithering out of sight into the shadows, dodging down the alley and passageway. He couldnt get it out of his mind. A patrol car took the call at twenty to three. PC Bev Willet sighed. Wind-up, she said. Sounds like it. But just in case hold onto your hat. It had been a quiet night. Even a wind-up was better than trying to keep awake with more plastic coffee. The car raced up the bypass. How old did he say? Little kid, three or so. Couldnt say if it was a boy or girl. And naked? Naked. They piss me off, these hoaxers. Id have them dunked in the canal on a freezing night. Bev snorted as she pulled up at the entrance to the Lanes. One taxi was in the rank, the driver asleep with a copy of the Sun over his face. He didnt stir at the sound of the patrol car. Talk to him in a mo. Come on. Ten minutes later they had scoured the area, including every alley and passageway, every wheelie bin and recycling area. Diddly squat, Bev said. Pisses me off, this sort of thing. You said. Only why would he invent a naked child, for heavens sake? Guaranteed to make us move fast. Right. Just someones idea of a good laugh then. Better go and wake up our cabby. But their cabby had been out on jobs all evening and then fallen asleep. He was going home now. Hed keep an eye out. His face said it all. Wind-up. Wind-up. Jess Honeywells baby woke for a feed at four. She picked him up out of his crib and moved the curtain aside briefly to look out at the night. Starry, with a big moon. A front-bedroom light was on a few doors down. Another wakeful baby. She and Katie Green sometimes chanced to look out at the same time and then theyd wave, sharing the small hours of new babies. They had propped one another up through pregnancy and the first weeks and went on doing so now, meeting almost every day, walking their buggies together, swapping notes. It had made all the difference. St Lukes Road was in the grid of small Victorian terraced houses known as the Apostles, friendly, neighbourly, and near to the shops, coffee bars and restaurants of Laffertons centre. They were lucky, Jess thought as she dropped the curtain, even if the houses were small. She hated the idea of being stuck out in the sticks, even with bigger rooms and a garden, but no life nearby and needing a car to get you anywhere. They couldnt afford a car. Matt walked to work. The Green bedroom was in darkness, the moon shining on quiet pavements, but as she

turned, Jess thought she saw something move. Turned back and lifted the curtain again. No. Trick of the light. Nothing. And then her hand went to her mouth. Noah was grizzling himself back to sleep but she barely noticed. Matt was hard to wake and when he did, he stumbled out of bed assuming he had to pick up the baby and was almost able to do so in his sleep. He came awake fully as Jess shook his arm. What? Youve been dreaming NO. Matt, go down, go out there I was not dreaming. Youve got to go. Noah cried again as her voice rose. She picked him up and sat on the edge of the bed, putting him to the breast and gesturing to Matt to hurry. It was not that he refused to believe her, just that he was still not fully awake, and he felt foolish, standing half dressed and in slippers, looking up and down St Lukes Road and seeing nothing, Nothing at all. But she had been wide awake and he knew that she thought she had seen And then he saw. The child was squatting down behind the gate of a house opposite. Its OK, Matt said. Its all right, its all right. He went through the gate and stopped. Later, he said that he would never forget the childs face until his dying day. Later, he could not sleep because the face was in front of him. Later, he was haunted during his waking hours by sudden flashbacks to the childs face as it looked up at him. Its all right. Dear God. Listen, I wont hurt you. Im going to look after you, OK? But even as he spoke, gently, quietly, the child tried to shrink into a hedge, as if it might find a safe place among the rough bare twigs and earth. Very slowly, Matt inched his way, his hand out, talking softly in what he desperately hoped was a voice of reassurance. The child continued to shrink from him and now it turned its face away from him out of fear. It was a girl. She was perhaps four years old. She was filthy, she had smears of blood on her arms and legs. Her long, fine, fair hair was matted to her scalp. She was completely naked. There was silence and stillness and fear for long minutes before the child lurched forward, the hedge catching at her again as she moved and drawing fresh pinpoints of blood, and then she was clinging to Matt, climbing up him like a terrified small animal and pressing her little body to him. He put his arm round her carefully and edged backwards down the path. She did not move, only clung fast to him. Matt hurried across the road, back into the house, calling to Jess. But she had already seen him through the window and only seconds later, blue lights turning, the police car stopped outside.

Two MAY 2007 Year 2 at St Lukes Primary School had been talking about Things I Like and Things I Dont Like, as part of the weeks topic on food and drink. Sue Norwood had found it informative. Most of the likes were as expected sweet things, crisps, sometimes the odd grape and the dislikes she could have predicted milk, green vegetables, stew, runny egg. The next part of the topic would be more challenging why we should try the things we dont like again, in case we find we do like them after all. Why we shouldnt eat too many sweets, even if we like them very much. Why our bodies need a variety of foods, including green vegetables they would dutifully chant the dislikes list and promise to try them again, go home and forget all about it. They would still come to school each morning carrying a half-empty pack of sticky sweets and an egg would never pass their lips. Some of them had even picked up on the words wheat and dairy in the same breath as the words allergy and intolerance. But they were still one of the best classes she had ever taught, alert, funny, loyal to one another and relatively well behaved. One or two had problems, including the boy who still wore nappies and the girl who never spoke, problems which were not easy to solve, and ought to involve the parents. Sue sighed. She knew that the parents of the boy who still wore nappies would never come through the school gates, let alone come to see her. The silent child was sitting at the far end of the second table now, head bent to the paper so that her face was barely visible. Glory Dorfner. There were some colourful names in Years 1 and 2 but what parent called their child Glory? And why not? she asked herself smartly. Better than well, better than quite a few. The classroom was quiet, apart from the odd sniff, cough and shuffle. They were drawing and labelling with some glee six things they disliked to eat or drink. She stood behind Alfie Starman. His ears needed a wash, but his careful picture of a cabbage was very good indeed and she said so. Alfie glanced round, flushed with pride and pleasure. Rikki OMara kicked him in the shin. But, as Rikki would have said, if challenged, in a good way, Mrs Norwood. She had a soft spot for Rikki. Glory bent her head even further and her arm was curved across the paper to hide it. Sue waited a moment. She could feel the childs tension. May I see? Glory shook her head slightly. Shall I guess? The child was absolutely still. You dont like chips? Shouts from all sides, arms waving. Everyone liked chips. All right, I know. Chip pictures, all of you. Much giggling. But maybe Glory doesnt like chips. Silence. I think you dont like tea? Silence. Tomatoes? Sue did not continue. She waited a moment, went round three others, looking, admiring, querying. Then got a spare low chair and sat next to Glory. But the child was immovable. She said nothing. Would not lift her arm. It was early evening before she finally opened the big folder containing Year 2s work, setting the pile on the table next to a box of gold paper stars. Alice was marking Year 12 English essays, swearing from time to time. OFFS, Damian Cross, try reading the

text. Sue smiled, and turned over the next sheet. For a second, she thought it had ended up in her folder by mistake, except that she could not possibly imagine how. Glory could barely write and what she did manage was still in mirror-writing. Well, that would sort itself out, it always did. I don't like was in smudged dark pastel, large letters copied in almost violently. Sue felt her face flush as she looked at the drawing. Then she called Alice over. Police, Alice said almost immediately. What on earth can they do? Or family welfare officers NSPCC? I don't know, but you've got to show this to someone. Maybe Glory's parents Alice gave her a look. No, you're right. Take it to Eleanor first thing, cover your back. Let her decide. Alice went back to the essays on *To Kill a Mockingbird*, muttering as usual about wishing they could read a more challenging novel, vowing yet again to start them on *Great Expectations* the moment they were done with the set text. Glory's picture seemed to come in front of every one of the others that she looked at. She gave up. Turned on the news. I wonder if they've found out about that little girl yet? Alice just nodded, head down in her essays. Look at me, Sue said, hands on the table in front of her. Alice looked. I'm seriously worried about this child. I mean it, Al. I know, hon, I'm sorry. And so you should be. I'm going to the police station now. Want me to come with you? I can leave these. No, it could take half the night. I'll be fine. Finish those. I'll ring you. Three

SEPTEMBER 2007 It seemed such a little time ago. They'd often gone out, had a drink at the Ox, met friends for bingo, a walk to the Hill when the evenings were light, even a spin in the car to one of the village pubs. They'd gone to a film occasionally, had a fish-and-chip supper on the way back. Having no children, sorry though they both were, meant a bit more money for them to enjoy treats together. Tom had worked hard all his life, she'd had part-time work so that she could be in, with his tea on the table, when he got home. Jean Mason stood waiting for the kettle to boil. Such a little time ago. She remembered everything. And Tom remembered nothing. Most days now he didn't even remember her. Most days there seemed no point in even going to see him because it upset them both. He kept asking her who she was and why Jean hadn't been to visit him, she couldn't think of a thing to say to this man she no longer knew. This wasn't Tom, the Tom she'd known since they were both eleven, the person she'd shared her entire adult life with, day in, day out. So who was it? She poured boiling water into the teapot and took her tray through. They had never been a noisy couple, and the street had always been a quiet street, but now it was uncanny, the empty silence. They had lived in the flat above the shop for the last ten years, since their old street had been demolished. When they came, there had been a dozen shops in the row: launderette, baker, butcher, greengrocer, hardware, and then a Chinese take-away, a minicab office. Below them had been a wool shop, then a toy shop, then a cafe. One by one, they'd all closed. Now there was a charity shop at one end, a letting agency office at the other, and in between, nothing but windows boarded up. It was lonely and it was bleak and Tom had said they'd try and find somewhere else. But where else was there? So long as he'd been well she hadn't minded. She minded now. She started to watch a crime drama but it was too violent, turned over to a comedian who was too crude. The last ten minutes of a cookery programme was entertaining enough, but after that she switched off. She would go to bed with a book she'd bought from the charity shop. Travels with my Elephant she loved animals, she loved reading about places she would never see. Tom would have picked it up, smiled, teased her about it. Now, he had forgotten how to smile. A child was screaming. She went to the window but the street was empty and silent. She opened the window. Nothing. It had stopped. Maybe it was a cat. A fox. The foxes still came scavenging round. As she was getting into bed ten minutes later, she heard the scream again and this time it was in the street. This time, there were people a car, pulled up outside the boarded-up shop next door, two men, one of them pulling a small child by the hand. They were too far from the street lamp for her to see clearly and in a few seconds the child was pushed into the car, one of the men in the back with it, and the car was moving away, accelerating fast as it reached the corner. Then nothing. The street was silent, empty, dark. Jean wondered if she had been hallucinating, or was half-asleep, and somehow begun to dream while still awake. Did that happen? She went back to her bed but when she tried to read, the image of the child being pulled towards the car came between her and the words, and the sound of its cry seemed to echo again and again through her head. She wondered what she should do. She knew what she ought to do but her story sounded so fanciful that she could not bring herself to make the call. It was four nights later that the child screamed again. There was no car in the street; the sound came from somewhere nearby but indoors. And almost as soon as she had heard it, the noise stopped quite suddenly. Then nothing. Jean lay for a long time, listening, but the only sound she heard was the beat of her own heart. She had fallen deeply asleep by the time the car drove up the street, lights doused, and stopped outside the empty shop next door. She was asleep when the child, silent now, was carried out and driven away. There were no neighbours left to talk to. She was used to it by now. She had never been unfriendly, it

was just that she and Tom had been company enough for one another, but now she remembered the sounds she had heard, of the child screaming in the night, she needed someone to talk to just no one official, not the police or anyone else in authority. She had not been over to see Kath Latimer for months, partly because she found it hard to deal with questions about Tom, questions to which she didnt really have any answers, partly because it was either a long walk or hanging round waiting for one of the few buses that went anywhere near Spalding Green. But Kath and Dennis Latimer had been the closest to best friends that either she or Tom had ever had, all at school together, all living in and around Lafferton most of their lives. Dennis had died ten years earlier and then Kath had shut herself away, before moving to be near her sister in Bognor. It had been a disaster, they had fallen out and Kath had returned to a smaller house in her old road. I feel bad about you,

Jean said later that morning, sitting in Kath's tiny cluttered front room with a cup of milky coffee. The budgerigar hopped to and fro, to and fro, on the bar inside its cage until Jean had to look away, it irritated her so much. Does he never settle down? Kath glared. Hes perfectly happy. Im sure. Just seems a bit restless. Funny, Jean thought, how you forgot things. There had always been a budgie it was one of the things that had put her off visiting. Tom had never been able to stand them either. The only way they managed to stay friendly was if Dennis and Kath came to them, then halfway through an evening, Kath would say she was worried about Charlie or Pippy or some other silly thing, so they ought to get back. Kath got up and fiddled with a stick of millet on the side of the cage, pursed her lips and made a tweeting noise. The budgie hopped about madly, tweeting back. Peoples lives. Jean finished her coffee. Peoples narrow lives. They couldnt find anything to say. I suppose theres no real point in you visiting him, is there? As he doesnt know who you are. No point in troubling him. It doesnt trouble him, he likes me to go. Are you sure? Jean was not sure but would have cut out her tongue rather than say so. I wouldnt dream of not going. Well, I suppose if its a comfort to you, its worth it. Was it? A comfort? Worth it? Worth what? She had made a mistake in coming. Kath was the last person she could confide in about the sounds she had heard. In any case, sitting here in the hot room with the hopping budgerigar, she wondered if she had heard anything. Sometimes, you hovered about the edge of a dream, sure you were awake and heard a sound that was never there. Kath would have made her feel a fool. But she stayed for a second coffee, and a chocolate shortcake. It would have been rude not to when it was so long since shed made the effort. It was only when she was finally waiting for the bus into town that it occurred to her Kath could equally well have come over to see her. She never did. The sound of the childs scream, real or dreamed, stayed with her. She did some shopping in town, caught another bus, walked the last half-mile, and all the time, it was there, in her head, it kept repeating itself. It wasnt the sort of sound you forgot. If it had been a sound. Four JULY 2010 Kath never admitted to sleeping in the afternoon, but nevertheless, when the phone rang and rang on that Sunday, she did not hear it and it was almost half past five when she picked up the message. Kath? Are you there? Kath? Jeans voice sounded odd. Can you ring me please, Kath? I dont feel well There was no reply when she called back, and none fifteen minutes later. Kath panicked and called a taxi. The hospital said Mrs Mason was in intensive care and could have no visitors, unless Kath was next of kin. She waited for a couple of hours before she was told that Jeans condition was stable and that she could come back tomorrow. And, the woman said, do you have contact details for her next of kin? It seemed terrible to say that so far as she knew, there were none. No Tom any more. No parents, sisters, brothers, children, aunts, uncles. She had no idea about cousins. But Ive known her many years and Ive never heard her mention one. No next of kin. No relatives. No one. How could that be? On her way home Kath felt both exhausted and guilty. She and Dennis had been friends with Jean and Tom for a lifetime, yet there was nothing left to show for it. She was back at the hospital the next day. I want you to do something for me. It took a long time for her to form the words. In my bag Kath pulled the handbag out of the bedside cupboard. Jean had no movement in her arms. No, I dont like to rummage about it your bag. But Jean was so agitated, she opened it. Not much. Purse. Pension book. Compact, worn shiny, the words Love from Tom hardly visible any longer. Pen. Diary. A small red ruled notebook. Jean nodded. Take it home with you. Keep it. Where do you want me to keep it? Safe. Just safe. Dont throw it out. Jean closed her eyes and drifted off. Kath waited ten minutes longer but it was clear she wouldnt wake for a while. She put the handbag back into the cupboard, and the red notebook into her own. When she got home, she opened the notebook and glanced through. Dates. Times. A line or two in Jeans writing. Then she locked it into the bureau drawer, on top of her birth certificate and her will. Five OCTOBER 2010 The duty sergeant flipped through the red soft-covered notebook. Dates. Times. The entries had been made over the last three years, mostly two or three times a month. He began to read, but after a couple of pages, looked across at the woman sitting on the bench opposite his desk. Mrs Latimer? She got up. I think you should have a word

about this with someone from CID. Ill take you into an interview room and someone will come down. So I didnt do the wrong thing? You did absolutely the right thing. She only had to wait a few minutes. Mrs Latimer? Im DC Bethan Waites. Can I get you a tea? Coffee? They both had tea. Wise, the young woman said, sitting down on the small, uncomfortable sofa next to Kath. The coffees disgusting. Actually the best is the hot chocolate. How many times had she gone through this bit of beverage chit-chat to help settle the interviewee down? But oddly, it usually did. Shes young, was all Kath thought. Not pretty but nicely presented. Emerald-green jacket, dark skirt, plain blouse, hair neat. Do you ever wear a uniform? DC Waites smiled. Not any more. Very nice. It is. Now the duty sergeant filled me in briefly but Id like you to tell me about this notebook I didnt get the full story before he had to take a phone call. Not true. They never got the full story. Starting over was what CID did. Kath told it. That was in late July she never left the hospital. It was awful to watch her couldnt do anything for herself and then another stroke meant she lost her speech. It was a blessing when the next one came and carried her away. Im sorry. Always hard to lose an old friend just as hard as losing a relative sometimes. I wonder how many of either youve lost though, Kath thought, at your tender age? How do you know whats hardest? So Mrs Mason died when, exactly? The third of September early hours of the morning. I wish she hadnt been alone. I do wish that. Yes, indeed. But maybe she didnt know anything about it? Thats what I tell myself. You see Bethan was adept at getting them back on track without apparent rudeness or any sense of hurry. It was a useful skill. And its now the twelfth of October. Why didnt you bring the notebook in to us sooner? I just forgot all about it. Truth be told, Id forgotten about it more or less as soon as she gave it to me for safe keeping and I put it in that drawer. Did Mrs Mason give you any idea at all why she wanted you to have it and keep it safe for her? No. Did she give you anything else to look after? No. Did you read through the notebook? I glanced inside. None of it meant anything except well, some of the things she wrote down worried me thats why I brought it to you. These things about hearing children hearing them crying hearing a scream seeing I dont know. It upset me. Yes, the young woman said. Did Mrs Latimer ever write things stories or poems or that sort of thing? A lot of people do. I was wondering if these were notes for some sort of story. If she did she never mentioned it and I knew her for over sixty years. She wasnt like that. Like what? Well arty. Fanciful. Right. Did she keep any other sort of diary? Not that I know of. I shouldnt think so. She had a kitchen calendar, same one every year, from the Donkey Protection place she had it hanging up in the kitchen but that was just, you know, hairdresser, dentist sort of thing. And theres nothing else you can think of to explain this notebook? Anything about Mrs Mason that might help us? I just cant think of anything. Im sorry. Please dont be. Its only Kath fiddled with her coat button. I feel Ive let her down, somehow I dont know she gave it to me to keep safe and Ive looked into it, brought it here, shown it to you. I feel as if Ive let the DC put her hand briefly on Kath. No, she said quietly, you havent let her down, you havent betrayed her. You have done exactly what she would have done if she had been alive. Are you sure about that? Yes. The young woman held her gaze. I am. PART TWO Six 2013 Good morning, Superintendent. A Tuesday morning in late May and there were four others round the table in the meeting room at Bevham HQ. The only one already known to Serrailer was the Chief Constable, Kieron Bright. The man who had succeeded Paula Devenish was the youngest in the country ever to be appointed Chief, a fast-tracker who had swiftly worked his way up through the ranks and then served in a high-security special unit before being an ACC for under two years. He was impressive, taller than Simon, fit, shrewd, and he had hit the ground running. The force had felt the shock but responded to it well. Simon had expected not to like the man but he did like and respected. The only area of disagreement they had was over drugs ops, which the new Chief had pepped up and which Serrailer regarded as a waste of time and resources. They had agreed to differ. I respect your arguments, Simon, the Chief had said. Ive met them before and in quite high places. But theyre wrong. Its my mission to bring you over to my side. The mission was not yet accomplished because there was never time for the luxury of exhaustive debates. The Chief had called him in, without explanation, but Serrailer was fairly sure this was not going to be about drugs ops. Thank you for coming over. Im sorry I wasnt very forthcoming but this was not for any sort of communication other than face-to-face. Im only in for the first few minutes and then Ill leave you with the officers here to give you a full brief. I dont think youve met any of them before. Simon looked round again quickly. Blank and all unfamiliar faces. No, sir, Im sure not. Right. This meeting is to discuss a very sensitive covert operation. It isnt going to be an easy one. But I wanted to say that the operation has my full support, and that I suggested your involvement because youre not only one of the most experienced but also one of the most trusted officers Ive ever worked with. He looked straight at Serrailer. That isnt bullshit, he said. Sir. But in the same way that youve never met the people here before, I know youve never done anything like this op before. So

the Chief had been through his career file. Serrailier had done most things in his time, except terrorism ops. Right. The Chief left. Coffee was brought in. The room went still. Im DCS Lochie Craig. I work in the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre. DCI Linda Warren. Also from CEOP. DCS Harry Borling. He gave no more information. Not terrorism then. Child protection was something Serrailier had been involved in from time to time, as almost all police officers were, but as he had risen through the ranks he had left much of it to the specialists. He said so now. This is actually a side shoot from CEOP, Chief Superintendent. Simon. Thank you. And its Lochie. The other two nodded. Everyone relaxed slightly. First off, Id like you to look at some images. Three men. No names for the moment. He passed his laptop across the table. The older man in the photos was clearly related to one of the younger ones they were probably father and son, Simon thought. The older was in his late sixties or early seventies, with thick white hair, a strong jaw and a beaky nose. The younger man late thirties? had brown hair, worn slightly long, the same nose, softer jaw. Their eyes were exactly the same shape the family resemblance was strong. The third man looked rather less like the others but he had the same beaked nose as the first. Probably mid-forties. Simon looked hard at each of them for several minutes before passing the laptop back. Well, he said, Im certain Ive never seen any of them. My memory for names is OK, but for faces its extremely good. I dont recognise them at all. Good. Glad weve got that out of the way. Right, let me go into detail. Lochie Craig was a balding, burly man in his fifties. A measure of strain had become moulded onto his features but he spoke calmly enough. Lafferton, 2007. He had his laptop open. Hmm, 2007. That was the year of the serial murders here. I dont remember much else, though there must have been plenty of other stuff going on. There was. In April, a girl approximately four years old was found wandering the streets at night, naked and distressed. She was sighted twice before being brought into safety by a resident. She was initially taken to hospital, later into foster care and finally adopted. She had been physically abused, badly enough to need surgery. Her identity has never been discovered. No one came forward despite widespread appeals no parents, family, neighbours, no one. She suffered almost total blanking of the events and we could never even find out her name. She now lives in another part of the country and is settled with her adoptive family, but, inevitably, she is scarred in most senses and has educational and emotional problems. I was certainly aware of the case, Serrailier said. Even in the middle of very complex murder inquiries, it couldnt fail to be noted. Right, case two. A child called Glory Dorfner presented some artwork in her primary-school class. It depicted crudely drawn figures engaged in sexual activity. One was of a small girl apparently being buggered by a man. The other was of a small girl performing an oral sex act on a man the males sexual organ was made to appear much larger than the rest of the figure. The childs teacher came to Lafferton Police Station. Officers and members of the social services child-protection team visited Glorys house an hour after the teacher reported with the drawings. The child was asleep, but there was sufficient concern and a certain amount of evidence of her being sexually abused to warrant her being subject to an emergency court order and taken into care immediately. Her stepfather and her stepbrother were subsequently found guilty of sexual abuse, and computers and other material were taken from the home. These contained hundreds of images of child abuse. This case is being looked into again at the present time, because of certain new evidence and in spite of the fact that the two men are still serving sentences. He paused to pour himself a glass of water. Drank it. The faces of the other two were impassive. They had heard all this before, and far worse. They dealt with child abuse every day of their working lives and it was beyond Serrailier to know how they coped with it. The DCS looked at him. OK? Simon nodded. Right. Case three. Mrs Jean Mason of Plimmer Road, Lafferton, died in 2010, and while in hospital during her last illness she left a notebook in the safe keeping of her friend, Mrs Kathleen Latimer. Mrs Latimer looked at it and brought it into Lafferton Police Station. It took a little while to work out what the list of dates and times meant there were notes, but they were not very full. Do you know Plimmer Road? I do and I didnt realise anyone still lived there. Its been a derelict bit of Lafferton for a long time. Shops closed, didnt reopen, got boarded up, accommodation above them was usually empty. There was a plan for its redevelopment but once the recession bit every developer pulled out. I havent been along there for a while but I doubt if anything has changed. Mrs Mason had lived above one of the shops for upwards of thirty years. Her friend Mrs Latimer, who died last year, was interviewed several times and said that the Masons had never wanted to leave. When they first went there it was a bustling area of shops, offices and residential, and Mrs Mason had stuck it out while everything shut up round her. But according to the notebook, she started to hear sounds from the disused shop next door children crying, children screaming then she recorded seeing cars draw up and men get out with small children, and, twice, men coming out of the shop carrying a child. She knew the property was empty. Did she call us in? No. And

she didnt tell Mrs Latimer anything, just asked her to keep the notebook safe. What action was taken at the time? Ive a copy of the report here, if youd like to read it. He handed over a single sheet of paper. A routine patrol car had checked out 11 Plimmer Road, at 4 p.m. on 20 October. The shop had formerly been a bookmakers with living accommodation above but was boarded and padlocked. The garden behind was overgrown and needles and other drug paraphernalia were found, none recently used. Steps led from the back door down to a cellar which was also boarded, and bolted. The patrol reported all this and then left, but one of the patrol officers wasnt happy and reported to CID. It was over a week before anyone investigated low priority at a time when they were overwhelmed with a murder inquiry. Two officers went to the shop equipped with a rammer and broke down the cellar door. An outer room contained some old cardboard boxes and newspapers, but was otherwise empty. A door, slightly concealed by an old wooden chest, was then discovered and that led to an inner cellar. Here, a camera and other recording equipment were found, together with some rugs, a couch, a couple of upright chairs, plus cigarette butts, sandwich wrappers, empty plastic coffee cups and drinks cans. Unfortunately, no one had the presence of mind to make this inner room a crime scene. But all the items were removed, bagged and taken for forensic examination. Serrailier put the sheet down. Findings? DCS Lochie Craig looked at his laptop. There was a small amount of footage left on one of the camcorders probably test images, perhaps when the equipment appeared to have a fault. They were blurred and disconnected but there was enough to show us that children were being filmed during the course of sessions of sexual abuse. Nothing else except a feast of fingerprints they were obviously either planning to return or sure they were safe and undetected. Cups, recording equipment, chairs clear prints were taken from all of these. There was also some DNA on the rug, on the sofa taken from semen and saliva and also from blood. There was a pause. Their faces were still impassive, even that of the woman DCI. Serrailier felt anger and nausea bubble up into his throat. He suppressed them. Fingerprints lead anywhere? Only one set. A man called William always known as Will Fernley. Mean anything? No, nothing at all. He isnt local, is he? Not local to Lafferton, no the family live in Devon. William is the third son of Lord Fernley. Sorry, no, Ive never heard of him. Fine. The laptop lid was closed. Linda, would you like to take over at this point? Craig poured another glass of water and drank all of it. She was probably in her early forties and, until now, she had sat listening with that impassive expression. Now, though, she looked directly at him with a warm, open smile. This isnt an area youre very familiar with and I know it can be difficult. We deal with it every day, we get used to it, but we dont get hardened, Simon the minute that happens, its time for a transfer to another line of work. Not everyone can cope with it it takes its toll. On the other hand, it is so important, its vital and we owe it to the children to stick at it, so we find ways of coping and continuing. I want to say this now because if you do take on what were hoping you will, you need to understand that fully. Simon nodded. Do you have any questions at this stage, before we get down another layer? Did he? How the hell did you light on me for whatever it is? Why? Its something Ive steered clear of for the whole of my career, Im not well informed about CEOP, so why me? But whatever the answer and then whatever youre going to ask me to do, its no. No. He folded his arms. No, no questions, he said. Carry on. Seven. Yes, you are interrupting, and Im very glad about that. Cat Deerbon led Emma, manager of the Lafferton bookshop, into the kitchen. I brought you the Julian Barnes, Emma said, glancing down at a parcel on the table in packaging. And what did they send? Oh God, sorry. I needed a textbook quickly. And cheaply. Emma, I do try to be fair but that textbook would cost seventy-five pounds from you and I got it for less than half. I just cant afford not to. But Ive almost finished my thesis and then I wont need any more ridiculously expensive tomes. Coffee? Glass of wine? Slice of my humble pie? Dont be silly. Coffee would be good, thanks, Cat. Im sorry you didnt get to the book group. Are you feeling better? Fine. I swear I felt more sick than in my entire life, and that includes three pregnancies. Short but ugh. Judith didnt make it either. Cat looked at her sharply. Did she say why? Only that she wasnt well. It was probably the same bug. Cat did not reply, just scooped coffee into the cafetire. How are the young ones? Felix has the bug, hes in the den wrapped in a fleece with a bucket to hand. He missed school which he really minded. Hannah is rehearsing for The Sound of Music. Sam well, as Sam rarely speaks, only grunts, I cant be sure but he seems OK hes going to the under 18 county cricket trials tomorrow. Im impressed that and the hockey. No, his cricket isnt as good and hes only fifteen. He wont get in but itll be good experience for next time. I am sorry about , Emma you do understand? Emma sighed. I wish I didnt. How is business in general? So-so. Childrens books are doing well I could almost live off those sales, but not quite. But you have to stay open. Youve worked so hard at that bookshop, Lafferton couldnt do without you now. Emma made a face. Try telling that to the people who come in, browse for ages, make a list and go home to order online. She failed to keep the note of bitterness out of her voice. After Emma had gone,

Cat went to check on Felix, who was asleep under his fleece. She woke him and managed to get him to stumble upstairs and into bed, with only a quick wash. He had a little more colour in his cheeks so the bug was probably on the wane. Hed had a growth spurt but he was chunky, not a beanpole, like Sam. Like Simon. Chris would have loved him, of course, but been surprised by him too. He was a thoughtful, inward-looking boy, and a good musician. But he was also lacking in confidence, young for his age in some ways, and he clung to her as Sam and Hannah had never done. Cat loved his quiet company. She knew she needed to be on her guard against loving it too much and encouraging his clinginess. She went back to her desk and the expensive textbook and set it beside her laptop. She ought not to feel guilty, but she did. Emma had to make a living and her bookshop was not making much profit. On the other hand Cats anxiety about her finances came to haunt her every night. She sometimes dreamed of bank statements. When Chris died, he had left her a modest pension and the proceeds of a life insurance policy, whose value had declined steadily, and now it was worth less than half what it had been immediately after his death. They had never been a rich couple but hadnt had to worry about money either, and as a new widow Cat had found that financially things could continue more or less as before. Now, her income had slumped. The school fees were a drain, since she was no longer a regular GP and the hospice job had folded. Her private pension income from Chris had paid the bills. Now, it was in danger of not paying them. Molly, her medical student lodger, had qualified and left to work for a year in Vietnam, so her room was empty. She had lived at the farmhouse free in exchange for help with babysitting and some cooking but any replacement could simply pay rent. That would help but only a little. Locum work as a GP was quite well paid, but it was insecure as well as unrewarding, and her job as medical officer at Imogen House had more or less ended when the hospice had changed from being one with bedded wards to day care only. She had a small retainer the operative word being small. She had spent the past year working on her PhD, attached to the Cicely Saunders Institute at Kings in London, and she had found it absorbing, but that cost money, it did not generate any. She needed to talk to someone about her situation, but, other than the bank manager, who was there? Not her father, not Judith. Simon? But a member of the family might assume she was asking for a loan or a gift and Cat was emphatic that she would never do that, she just needed a listening ear and some suggestions. Yes, Si then. The problem was that he was either taken up with work, as ever, or with Rachel even more so now that she had moved in with him. Cat was anxious not to make any more demands on his time. She sat fiddling with a pencil, jotting down odd, rather unconnected sums on paper, getting nowhere. Chris. The loss of him overwhelmed her again in a way she had half forgotten. It was not linked to an anniversary or any physical reminder, just a pure sense of loss, a desperate longing and missing which seem to search every corner of her heart and mind, only to find them empty of him. After all this time, she thought, and it is still yesterday. So I know it will never be any different, I will never stop being knocked over by the force of this feeling. And Ill never forget him, I know that too. Immediately after her husbands death, she had been panic-stricken that in time the memory of him might actually fade away completely. It was a small comfort to be sure now that it would not. Eight They broke for ten minutes. More coffee came in. Serrailer returned a couple of calls. Then back. Linda Warren was working from written notes, not a laptop, but she did no more than glance at them occasionally. *Revue de presse* "This is modern crime writing with a dark, fierce edge and all the better for it" (Geoffrey Wansell Daily Mail) "Keeps the reader gripped until the last page" (Sunday Express) "Not all great novelists can write crime fiction but when Susan Hill does the result is stunning" (Ruth Rendell) "Exhilarating These books succeed in harnessing all the genres addictive power while maintaining a complexity and fascination entirely their own" (Independent) "All the ingredients for the perfect English crime novel are here" (Daily Mail)