



WHAT WOULD

WIMSEY

DO?

GUY FRASER·SAMPSON

A Mystery of the Not-Quite Golden Age



# Chapter One

Boyo was a border collie cross, which was how he had come by his name. The crackhead who had given him to his owner, Ben, as a puppy had been convinced that Boyo was a proper noun much in evidence among Welshmen, rather than an antiquated form of address. Not that Boyo himself was particularly worried one way or another, for two reasons. First, he was on the whole preoccupied with satisfying his pressing need to find something to eat. Second, as a dog he was incapable of abstract conceptual thought.

Ben was currently lying blind drunk on an old blanket in a shop doorway in Wood Green. Unlike Boyo, he *was* capable of abstract conceptual thought, but it was an intellectual ability that he rarely chose to indulge. For one thing, any rational assessment of his situation would have prompted deep depression and possible suicide. For another, he was frequently either drunk or drugged to the eyeballs, and occasionally both at the same time.

Having been awake for some time, Boyo had been viewing the corpse-like appearance of his master with stern disapproval. For some days now, since the last night they had

spent in a hostel, Ben had been smelling so strongly that even other humans had begun to notice. From the stertorous noises drifting towards him, Boyo knew that it would be impossible to wake Ben until he recovered consciousness of his own volition, and this fact was rapidly becoming most inconvenient, since his bladder was sending him urgent messages. He experimented with a few plaintiff yaps but found that, as expected, these produced no response.

He gave a little pull on his lead, and found to his surprise that it yielded slightly. Ben had forgotten to tie it around his wrist, as he usually did when bedding down for the night, but it was trapped beneath the snoring bulk of his sleeping body. Getting up, Boyo threw his weight onto his back legs, braced his front ones, and pulled mightily. Slowly but surely the old cord gradually emerged, and suddenly he was free. With the lead dragging along the ground behind him, he sped round the corner into a small alleyway, and urinated contentedly against the wall.

After answering the call of nature, he became aware that a woman was lying on the ground further back in the alley, shortly before it gave onto a service area behind the shops. He approached her and sniffed, cautiously at first but then more eagerly. It was apparent that this woman was just as immovable as his master. He licked her face, but this produced no response. He had a sudden instinct that something was wrong. Her eyes were open, and staring unblinkingly upwards towards the grey North London sky. He drew back and whimpered uncertainly. Then he trotted back to the entrance to the alley, sat on the pavement, and began to bark determinedly.



Arriving on the scene some time later, Detective Chief Inspector Tom Allen found that both the alleyway and a stretch of pavement on either side had been fenced off with blue and white police tape. He pushed his way through the inevitable small crowd of onlookers that always formed on these occasions.

Didn't these people have lives of their own to lead? Perhaps it was simply his persistent head cold that prompted this feeling of resentment, but in truth Tom Allen was a man who found little in the world of which he truly approved, and much towards which he was deeply antipathetic.

The young constable did not recognise him, but once he had peered at Allen's identification he lifted the tape to allow him to duck underneath it, and pointed to where a little knot of people, some in white boiler suits, had gathered around two or three vehicles that were parked ostentatiously on a double yellow line.

"Morning, Bob," he said as Detective Inspector Metcalfe saw him coming, and walked towards him. "What have we got?"

It was a private joke between them that they often resorted to clichés from old police films and television shows. A couple of years previously, a drug dealer whom they had pursued through the streets of Brixton had been surprised, as he lay prone on the pavement being cuffed, to hear Allen say, "Book him, Danno", at which Metcalfe had lent over him and said, in a passable imitation of John Thaw in *The Sweeney*, "Right, sunshine, you're nicked."

"SOCO thinks it's the same guy," Metcalfe replied, "but of course they won't commit to anything until they get the body back to the lab and do their stuff. Single head wound, no knickers, and he's pretty sure there are chloroform burns around the mouth."

"Sounds the same," Allen agreed. "Let's take a look."

Together they walked the few yards into the alley. Seeing the Chief Inspector, the group of people around the body parted and fell back. Allen was relieved to see that the duty pathologist was Brian Williams; he knew his job and, what's more, he had already worked on at least one of the previous victims.

"Morning, Brian. What do you think?"

"Morning, Tom. Officially, you'll have to wait for my report. Unofficially, I'm pretty certain it's the same killer. Same MO, anyway."

“Time of death?”

“Sometime after midnight, I’d say, and that’s good because it hasn’t rained, and nothing’s disturbed the body apart from the dog that found it, so this is our best chance yet of getting some good forensic samples.”

“It’s time we had a break,” said Allen dourly. He squatted down on his haunches to inspect the body. He saw an ordinary-looking brunette, body twisted, legs apart, eyes gazing sightlessly at nothing in particular. He knew without even having to look that there would be a savage hammer wound at the back of the head. Some poor sod’s daughter, he thought. Then he saw the rings; some poor sod’s wife.

He stood up. “On a night out, do you think?” he asked nobody in particular.

“Unlikely, I’d say,” said Williams. “She’s not wearing any make-up or perfume as far as I can tell without my lab equipment. More like a chance encounter, I’d say.”

“I agree, guv,” Metcalfe chipped in. “She’s wearing flat shoes, not heels, nothing fancy. Anyway, there are no bars in the immediate area.”

“Always assuming this is where she was killed,” countered Allen, “or met her killer, at any rate.”

“Again, I’ll need to examine her properly in the lab,” Williams said, “but for what it’s worth, Tom, I’d say she was killed here. There’s nothing I can see with the naked eye to suggest that she’s been moved after death. The position of the body’s all wrong for that, as well. I’d say that not only was she killed here, but raped here too.”

“Hmm,” said Allen. “That would be consistent with the others, anyway – rape, I mean.” He pulled a packet of throat lozenges out of his pocket and put one in his mouth absent-mindedly while he carried on looking at the body.

“Any ID?” he asked Metcalfe.

“Driving licence in her handbag, guv. Also credit cards.” He held up two or three sealed and tagged plastic bags. The Scene of the Crime officers had worked quickly. “Katherine

Barker, home address Lyndhurst Gardens in Hampstead. I had the station run a computer check – her husband tried to report her missing at 4 am.”

“Tried? Oh yes, of course.” Allen rubbed his eyes tiredly. Police procedures did not allow an adult to be treated as missing unless they had been unaccounted for over at least a twenty-four hour period.

“Got Mr Barker’s address?”

“Yes. It’s *Dr* Barker by the way. He’s part of a group practice in Belsize Park.”

Allen leaned back against the wall and wished for the thousandth time that he had never given up smoking. Sometimes the relentless grind of the job threatened to overwhelm him.

“Well, come on, Bob,” he said quietly. “Let’s go and give the good doctor the news.”

“Have you finished here, Tom?” Williams asked. “If so, can I take the body? We’ve finished with photos.”

“With pleasure,” Allen replied, as he blew his nose for the umpteenth time already that morning. “Let me have something as soon as you can.”



Colin Barker looked as though he had not slept for some considerable time. He also looked heavily hungover. Certainly he had not shaved, and the hand with which he had motioned them into the ground-floor flat after they had identified themselves at the front door was trembling perceptibly. They followed him into the living room and as he sat down so too did they, perching awkwardly on the edge of the sofa. Bob already had his notebook out.

“I presume,” said Barker, after the briefest of pauses, “that when two senior detectives come knocking on your door in these situations, it’s not good news.” He managed a grim smile.

“I am very sorry, sir,” Tom Allen began. “Very sorry indeed.” He stopped for a moment. It was funny how in these

situations he always found himself thinking about Mary. His colleague eyed him sympathetically. He was all too aware that Allen had never properly come to terms with his daughter's death. On a previous occasion during this very case Allen had been forced to leave the room briefly while breaking the news to another bereaved spouse.

"I am afraid to have to inform you, sir," Metcalfe said, cutting in smoothly as though Allen had simply stopped to allow his partner to pick up the story, "that we have discovered the body of a woman whom we have reason to believe is your wife."

Total silence greeted his announcement.

"Is there anyone we can call for you, Doctor?" asked Allen with a hint of desperation. "Anyone you would like to have with you?" God, how he hated these situations.

"No – no, thank you." Barker gazed at them dully. "Is that all you can tell me?"

"We still have a lot of enquiries to make," Allen temporised formally. "Until you've identified the body we cannot say for certain that it is your wife."

"Is there any doubt?" asked the doctor with sudden hope in his voice.

"It's unlikely, I'm afraid, sir. Not unless somebody stole her handbag and everything that was in it."

As he spoke, his eyes were moving around the room. As with so many small London flats, there was a curious sense of impermanence. There were chairs and a sofa; a mirror and some prints on the walls. Yet while they filled the room they somehow did not furnish it. It was as if the entire contents of the room, including the people, might be swept up into large cardboard boxes at any moment, ready to move to their next location. At last Allen found what he was looking for. He heaved himself off the sofa and picked up a framed photograph from a side table by the window.

"Is this your wife, Doctor?"

"Yes, that's Kathy."

Allen and Metcalfe looked at each other.

“Then I’m afraid there really is no hope, sir. The identification will only be a formality, for the coroner’s records.”

“Is this a recent photo, sir?” asked Metcalfe.

“Pretty recent – six months or so back, I think.”

“Do you mind if we keep it? You’ll get it back, of course.”

“Yes, do, if you think it will help.”

“Thank you, sir.” Metcalfe placed it carefully in a plastic wallet and slipped it underneath his open notebook on his knee.

“Now then, Doctor,” Allen said. “If you’re feeling up to it then there are some questions we need to ask. Only if you’re feeling up to it, mind. We can easily do this tomorrow if you prefer.”

“No, no, let’s do it now,” Barker replied at once. “By all means, let’s get it over with.”

“That’s the spirit,” Allen said encouragingly, “but might I suggest we let my colleague slip into the kitchen and make us all a cup of tea while you and I begin?”

This was a well-practised ploy that the pair had used before. Metcalfe would make a great noise about filling the kettle and then slip quietly upstairs for a look round.

“Yes, of course. By the way, how did she die? You never said.”

“No, we didn’t, did we?”

Another meaningful glance passed between the two detectives. They had both been wondering how long it would take him to ask. Failure to do so could be ascribed to shock, but sometimes had a more sinister explanation.

“We’re treating the case as one of murder, sir,” Allen said carefully. “I’m afraid I really can’t say any more then that at this stage. You’ll appreciate that our enquiries are only just beginning. Now, when did you last see your wife?”

“At about 11.30 last night. She went out at about that time.”

“Went out?” asked Allen blankly. He heard Metcalfe slip out of the room behind him and close the door. He opened his own notebook and started jotting things down. “Did she often go out so late? Did she work nightshifts?”



“No, nothing like that,” Barker said. He seemed embarrassed. “If you must know, we’d had a row.”

“Did you often have rows with your wife, sir?” Allen was careful to keep his voice non-committal.

“It’s happened before,” the doctor said drily. “You can check with her sister. She lives in Wood Green. Kathy usually goes to her when she storms out late at night. She must be getting pretty tired of it by now –,” he caught himself using the present tense and stopped.

“And yet you tried to report her missing at –” he consulted his notebook, “about 4am. Why was that?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, if you thought she was safe and sound at her sister’s, then why did you try to report her missing to the police?”

“I know it sounds strange, but I had a queer feeling that something was wrong, that something had happened to her. I can’t explain it; it was like an instinct or something. I tried phoning Angie – that’s her sister – but couldn’t get any reply.”

“Was that unusual?”

“Not really. She’s a nurse and has to work some strange hours. That’s why Karen has a key to her flat. It’s supposed to be if anything happens while Angie’s away, but really it’s so Kathy has a bolt hole available whenever she wants to get away from here.”

“Would Kathy have answered Angie’s phone?”

“I wasn’t sure. Certainly she’s done so before when I’ve called the flat and she’s been on her own.”

“So, having called, you were still worried?”

“Yes. I waited for a bit and brooded some more – I was, er, drinking actually. I’d had a few. Then about two I tried again. This time I let it ring twice and then rang off, then did the same thing again. That’s a sort of code we’ve used before, to let the other know that it’s you who’s calling. Then I let it ring quite a long time, but there was still no answer.”

“But that was two hours before you called the police.”

“I know. I tried to watch a film on TV after that, but I was getting more and more twitchy so eventually I phoned the police. They said they couldn’t do anything at this stage except log the call.”

“Yes, sir,” Allen said evenly. “Procedure I’m afraid. Had it been a child, it would have been different. Most adults turn up sooner or later, you see – and usually sooner.”

He looked up from his notebook. “Don’t take this the wrong way, Doctor, but do I take it from what you tell me that there isn’t anybody who could vouch for your movements between, say, 11pm last night and 7am this morning?”

“No, of course not. I was here alone after Kathy went out, like I told you. Why should I need an alibi? I’m not a suspect, am I?”

“Just routine, sir,” Allen said soothingly. “I’m sure you’ll appreciate that we have to ask these questions, if only to have something for the file.”

Bob Metcalfe came back into the room, pushing the door open with his elbow and holding a tray with three mugs of tea on it. He broke the awkward silence by saying “Here you are, sir” as he handed the doctor one.

“This is another difficult question,” Allen went on as Metcalfe flipped his own notebook open again, “but I’m afraid I have to ask. Were you aware of your wife seeing anybody else, another man, I mean?”

“No, not at all.” There was a short silence. “Not as far as I was aware, anyway.”

“Any family, other than the sister?”

“Her father died some years ago. Her mother lives in south London, but they’re not close. Hardly ever even speak, let alone see each other. So far as I know, Angie’s all there is. Certainly nobody else from her side came to the wedding, apart from a few girlfriends from work.”

“So she did work at one time, then?”

“Yes, but she gave it up when we got married a couple of years back.”

“What was it – her work, I mean?”

“She was a secretary with a firm of solicitors – a big one in the City. Or executive assistant, I should say. She was always very insistent about that. Executive assistant to one of the partners.”

“Did she miss not working?”

“She claimed not, but actually I’m pretty sure she did. She’d always liked the idea of being a ‘lady of leisure’ as she called it, but she was used to being busy at work all day, and when she was at home she didn’t have anything to take its place. I sometimes used to think that was part of her trouble – boredom, I mean. Sitting around at home all day with nothing to do, and then giving me a hard time when I got in.”

“Did she drink at all?”

“Not during the day, I don’t think. Unless perhaps she was meeting a girlfriend for lunch. But definitely a bit too much in the evenings. That’s when the rows usually start – started, I mean.”

“How would you describe your relationship with your wife, sir?” Metcalfe asked very politely.

“Very good,” Barker gave a quick snort of a laugh that turned into a gasp. “I suppose that must sound pretty funny coming after what I’ve just been saying, but we’ve always loved each other. It’s just that she has – had – a very quick temper, which has always been made much worse by booze. Every time she’s gone off at night, she’s always come back some time the next day, suitably apologetic.”

“But not this time”, murmured Allen, almost to himself.

“No,” said Barker flatly.

“I’m sorry, sir, I didn’t mean to distress you, nor with all these questions, neither. I think it’s time we left you in peace. Just a couple of points to go over with you first, though.”

He glanced at Metcalfe, who sat with a ballpoint poised in readiness.

“First, could you please let DI Metcalfe have your home and surgery phone numbers. As I said, we will have to arrange

a time for you to identify the body, but there's no hurry about that. Second, we'll also need your sister-in-law's address and telephone number so we can find out if your wife really did attempt to go there last night."

There was a pause while this information was found and recorded.

"Just one more thing, Doctor," Metcalfe said, with a glance at Allen. "Do you happen to know if your wife kept a diary? There wasn't one in her handbag."

"Yes, she did. I think it's in the kitchen."

"I thought as much, sir. To tell the truth, I came across it while I was making the tea. Would this be it?" He showed a blue pocket diary inside a plastic bag to Barker, who nodded.

"Do you mind if we hang onto it for the moment, sir? Again, you'll get it back."

"Yes, of course, no problem."

"Thank you, sir." Metcalfe slipped the bagged diary into an inside pocket of his jacket.

As they walked through the hall, Barker suddenly asked where his wife's body had been found.

"I'm not supposed to answer that question, really, sir," Allen replied. "But since it'll be all over the newspapers and the telly by lunchtime, I don't think there's any harm in you knowing. She was found in Wood Green, and, if my geography is correct, very close to her sister's flat. I should also tell you, since you'll find out anyway, that we believe she may have been the victim of a serial killer who we've been hunting for some time."

As he exited the flat through the front door, he thought sardonically that Metcalfe would have said "whom".



Lyndhurst Gardens was not far from the operations room at Hampstead police station. The location was a source of some inconvenience and much black humour, as the station was slated for closure under a raft of proposed economy measures,

and Allen was constantly being called to attend committee meetings, both within the police and at the local authority, to discuss if and when his team should be moved.

There was an obvious reluctance to disturb the team while in the middle of a serious case, and such a high-profile one into the bargain. Yet as the investigation had dragged on into its second year, voices began to be heard, both in seriousness within management, and in banter within the operations room, that if things looked like carrying on indefinitely then perhaps the move should be postponed no longer.

At the same time, there were those within the local authority and the wider community who opposed the closure of the station on principle and who seized on any excuse, including the ongoing murder inquiries, to delay the inevitable. Frequent demonstrations outside the station by local residents in support of the “no closure” lobby only complicated matters.. While Allen bitterly resented the time all this took up – time which he would far rather have spent on the investigation – he accepted reluctantly that such commitments were an inevitable part of modern policing.

There was an incongruous air of gaiety about the exterior of the police station, looking as it did like a perfect cardboard model in a toyshop window. The exterior, with its decorative brickwork, was almost too perfect. Inside the operations room, however, the mood was sombre. Morale was already close to rock bottom after nearly eighteen months of pursuing a serial killer with no real lead to go on. This new murder threatened to plunge the team to whole new depths of despair. Despite all their training, remaining detached and objective just wasn't possible when they felt powerless to stop this maniac loose on the streets, killing women seemingly at will. As far as they were concerned, this was personal, and they felt each new failure keenly. Had they been able to catch the killer already, this young woman would still have been alive today.

There was no need for Allen to call for silence. The room was still, and the dozen or so occupants sat waiting for him to

begin. He stood in front of a large whiteboard onto which the photos of the first four victims had been fixed.

“Well, you’ll all have heard the news, but yes, it looks like we could have victim number five. DI Metcalfe will brief you on what we know so far. Bob?”

“Our fifth victim is Katherine Barker, known to all as Kathy, married to a Dr Colin Barker, who lives right here in Hampstead, in Lyndhurst Gardens. Body found in an alleyway beside some shops in Wood Green early this morning by a passing workman, who was alerted by a dog barking. Dog belonged to a homeless guy, who has been interviewed but had nothing useful. He’d been sleeping round the corner all night, drunk and possibly on something as well.”

“Same MO?” came a voice from the back.

“As far as we can tell, yes, but as usual we need to wait for the formal forensic report before we come to any firm conclusions. Still, I think we can work on the assumption for the time being that this was indeed the work of our friend the Condom Killer.”

“Do we know what she was doing in Wood Green? Assuming she was killed there, that is?” Detective Constable Karen Willis had joined the team recently.

“The husband says that she left their flat after a row about 11.30pm last night, most likely to go to her sister’s flat in Wood Green to cool off. Apparently that was quite a common sequence of events. We have the sister’s details and obviously the first thing on the list is to interview her and find out whether she heard or saw anything of our victim last night. The husband believes she was out, probably working a nightshift, but that doesn’t explain why the victim was out on the streets, since she had a set of keys to her sister’s place.”

He picked up two plastic bags on the table.

“Two sets of keys found in her handbag. We checked one of them on the front door of Lyndhurst Gardens and they fitted. We assume the others are to the sister’s flat, but we’ll need to check that. Andrews and Desai, you can arrange to interview

the sister later today and check the keys at the same time.”

“As to the place of death,” cut in Allen, “the pathologist’s first impression is that she *was* probably killed at the scene, and that brings us to the next point. That alleyway leads down into a service area, which is behind a load of flats over the shops. There’s a good chance that someone saw or heard something, so I’m asking the local plod to lay on as many uniforms as possible for house-to-house enquiries, starting at four this afternoon. Apart from Andrews and Desai, we’ll leave one person here to man the phones, and the rest of you will get over there to join in. We need as many bodies on this as possible.”

There was no response to this. House-to-house enquiries were one of the most boring and frustrating aspects of police procedure, and for this reason usually left to the uniforms. Woodentops, but they all knew that it was necessary. Somebody out there might have witnessed the one little detail that could open up a new line of inquiry, without which they were dead in the water. All their previous ones had led them nowhere.

“We should also,” suggested Metcalfe, “check with the neighbours in Lyndhurst Gardens to see if anyone witnessed Kathy leaving home last night. It’s a quiet road, so someone may have heard something, particularly if they were shouting at each other – their upstairs neighbours, for a start.”

“Agreed,” said Allen. “But let’s go quietly on that one, Bob. After all, it’s not that we disbelieve what the doctor said, only that we need to have it confirmed if possible. A couple of plainclothes knocking discreetly on doors ought to do the job. But after we get Wood Green sorted; that’s our priority right now.”

“Excuse me, sir.” A uniform from the front desk put his head round the door. “Superintendent Collison from the Yard is downstairs. Wonders if he could have a word?”

“Oh, hell,” Allen replied resignedly. “OK you lot, off you go. If I’ve got to stay anyway I can just as easily man the phones as anyone. Report back here at 0900 tomorrow, got it?”

The team shuffled from the room, and Allen asked for his visitor to be brought up.



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