

*When Tim Wallace finds a murdered corpse, his chief suspect is Nicole Carlisle. Tim starts falling for her, but when another body turns up, Nicole is implicated again. Tim's efforts to prove her innocence become a race to prevent her murder.*

## **THE WATERWAY MURDER**

By B. A. Reukema

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B. A. Reukema

# The Waterway *Murder*

A beach, a creek, and a canal are linked by death.



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# ONE

The dawn's first rays revealed an addition to the beach's typical debris. Among the clutter of plastic bottles lining the water's edge, a body lazily bumped along the shoreline pushed by the rhythm of the breaking waves. The corpse floated face down and seemed to be kissing the pebbled shore, even though its days of pleasure were long gone. The hungry seagulls circled overhead, shrieking the news that the body was as cold and grey as the incoming tide.

Detective Sergeant Timothy Wallace trudged across the small, rough stones that formed Hastings Beach. He was hunched over, walking straight into the strengthening, bone-chilling wind. To make matters worse, it had just started to rain. All in all, it was typical, late-March, English seaside weather.

There were no other holidaymakers on the beach, either because it was not yet seven o'clock in the morning, or because of the miserable weather. The wind blew Tim's red hair straight back. His dark blue windcheater was plastered against his body, and his jeans offered little defense against the falling temperature. Despite the conditions, he kept on walking, head down, trying to escape from his problems.

He had started off the day by climbing the twisting steps up to the headland that overlooked Hastings Beach. After tramping around the rusting, World War II gun emplacements, he wandered along the narrow path that ran parallel to the cliff's edge. From up there, the crowded shoreline, with its multitude of small fishing boats, looked inviting, so he loped down the steps three at a time. Now, however, as he felt the rain on his face, he was wondering what on earth had been the attraction of the crumbling pebbles, the beached boats, and the lumpy seaweed.

Ambling over to the shelter of one of the sailboats, he breathed in the sea air and then let the wind suck it out of his lungs. The odors of salt, seaweed, and dried fish dominated that part of the shore, but there was another smell, a cloying scent that Tim recognized. It had to be coming from somewhere close by to be that pungent.

Tim walked towards the water, pushing aside the piles of fishing nets and cardboard boxes with his boot. Finding nothing that could be the cause of the familiar odor, he strode down the slope towards the rocks that

formed the breakwater and peered over the top. The foul aroma the body exuded confirmed it was deceased. The corpse was dressed in frayed slacks and a torn jacket and stared face down as if it were too ashamed to acknowledge its audience.

Tim pulled out his mobile phone and rang the local police. Stationing himself at the corpse's head, he attempted to hide it from the view of any casual passer-by. But at that time, on a cold, wet, windy morning, no one was venturing onto Hastings Beach to be offended by the sight or smell of the bloated remains of someone who was no longer alive.

When the investigation team from the local station descended onto the beach, they looked hostile. Near the end of a peaceful, if boring, night shift, all of them just wanted to go home. Tim showed his warrant card, which did nothing to decrease their hostility but did increase their interest.

"What are you doing far from Leicester, and why is a copper from the Midlands interested in what washes up on my patch? And how come you're on the beach at this hour?" the detective in charge enquired without pausing for breath.

Tim described how he had followed the stench and discovered the body. He confessed he was on the beach so early because of a quarrel with his girlfriend the night before. And this morning, he had no desire to continue the argument. DS Wallace wondered how believable anyone sounded shouting into the wind. However, he need not have worried. To the investigating detectives who were not in a serious relationship, Tim's explanation seemed plausible. To the others, his story was all too familiar.

"We'll need you to come down to the station and make a statement," Detective Inspector Peter Collins told him. "When can you make it?"

With any luck, the routine procedure would keep him away from Doreen for at least another hour, so Tim replied, "How about now?"

DI Collins of the Hastings Police was in charge that morning and was trying his best to extend all courtesies due to a fellow police officer. On the other hand, if this visiting detective had not quarreled with his girlfriend, Pete Collins would be having breakfast with his wife.

"Are you familiar with dead bodies, DS Wallace?" Collins asked, covering up his annoyance.

"I've been on the murder squad for a couple of years, and so I've seen several floaters. I'd estimate that judging by the color and the bloated appearance, this one's been in the water for at least a month. When he's

turned over, I wouldn't be surprised to see that his shirt buttons have popped open. What do you think, sir?" Tim asked the older man respectfully.

"I agree with your general time frame. The body is very swollen, so I'm wondering why it stayed down so long. Perhaps it was weighted down somehow, and it's taken a fair bit for the decomposition gases to overcome the weight resistance. Whoever he was, he's surfaced like a six-foot submarine."

The on-call forensic pathologist arrived with an expression that conveyed neither shock nor surprise. Doctor Vincent Williams had worked with dead bodies for three decades, and he viewed a corpse as an entirely reasonable occurrence. It was no more out of the ordinary than a broken beer bottle on a front doorstep. Before the body was lifted onto a stretcher, he made a cursory examination of the hands, or rather what remained of them.

"I'm afraid the deceased was a fast-food snack for some marine creatures. Crabs, most likely. There's not enough flesh at the ends of his fingertips to rehydrate and get a fingerprint. Unless, for some reason, his DNA happens to be on file, you'll have to do this the old-fashioned way. You'll have to identify him through dental records. Sorry, lads, this one will keep you busy."

His examination ended, the doctor lit a cigarette and inhaled appreciatively. The charms and virtues of the bracing salt air appeared lost on him. A pathologist who smoked seemed out of place to Sergeant Wallace, for Williams, of all people, had to be aware of the health hazards.

Still curious about the corpse, Tim asked, "How long has he been in the water?"

"Hard to tell. If he went overboard in winter, it would be too cold for bacteria to produce the gases that inflate the abdominal cavities. Cold water is a pretty good preservative of dead bodies. The cadaver has to warm up to around forty degrees before the bacteria can do their thing. You could throw a body into water, which is so deep that it never heats up, and the corpse may never surface. But this one has.

"As to how long ago, if he went overboard at the beginning of winter and has surfaced only now, there wouldn't be this much flesh left. So, we're probably talking weeks rather than months. There's also the problem that once a corpse is exposed to the air, the rate of decay rapidly accelerates. What do you reckon? He couldn't have come up much before

ten last night, or someone strolling on the beach would've spotted him. I doubt if there was anyone out here after that time in this weather.

"He can't have washed ashore much more than eight hours ago, but that's quite some time as far as decomposition is concerned. I'll need to run the usual tests before I can give you a more precise answer."

Doctor Williams took another drag on his cigarette. Standing like a statue, he ignored the crash of the waves battering the end of the breakwater and the sea spray lashing his face. Unmoved by the agitated flapping of the seaweed twisted around the mooring ropes, he kept his back turned towards the town and exhaled in the direction of the English Channel.

"Early February is the suicide season," he mumbled, "not late March. I'd wager that he didn't enter the water voluntarily."

Tim took his time giving his statement at the Hastings Police Station, staying to finish the offered cup of tea. Finally, he had to admit that there was no reason for him to remain there any longer. He reluctantly left the oil-fired warmth and the fluorescent brightness. DS Wallace walked slowly and resignedly back to the Abbey Hotel. He was oblivious to the early morning hustle and bustle and the hosing down of walkways that make up a small seaside town's daily cleansing ritual.

Timothy Wallace's lean and tall frame stretched an inch over six feet, and he looked like a typical Scotsman with his blunt features, red hair, and steely, blue-grey eyes. His face was covered in freckles when he was a child, but these had faded, as had the acne scars that plagued his teenage years. When he smiled, he was good-looking, but Detective Sergeant Wallace rarely smiled. His mother died when Tim was six years old, and since that time, he had taken life very seriously.

Doing battle with the wind and rain, he thought, was more enjoyable than another verbal war with Doreen. Doreen Johnson was also a Detective Sergeant attached to Loworth Police Station. She was smart, ambitious, and on record as his "significant other."

Doreen had invited him back to her flat for a nightcap, made Irish coffee, and seduced him, accomplishing it all within the space of an hour. Tim had been interested in coffee and some intelligent conversation; he had no idea that evening that sex was also on the menu. However, in the wake of her conquest, he moved in with her and out of his dreary bed-sitter, and they had lived together for the past nine months.

## *The Waterway Murder*

The weekend in Hastings had been prompted by a comment from Tim's boss. Detective Chief Inspector Sylvia Baker told Tim that he looked stressed and could probably do with a short holiday. DCI Baker was the highest-ranking female detective in the County of Leicester, and she was also Doreen's mentor. Tim guessed that Doreen had told Sylvia all about his little problem and, no doubt, on Monday morning, DS Johnson would tell his boss and her mentor that the holiday had solved nothing. Therefore, despite the weather, Tim did not hurry back to the cozy hotel in the old part of town where Doreen would be wondering out loud where he was.

The radiators in the Abbey Hotel were working in overdrive to pump warmth into the small breakfast room. Still, their efforts could not dislodge the frosty expression on Doreen's face. Seated at a table by the bay window, she pretended not to notice Tim when he sat down.

DS Johnson was undeniably attractive. Almost as tall as Tim was, she had an athletic body that boasted an out-of-season tan. Doreen wore her blond hair short and her red fingernails long. Her green eyes commanded attention, but her most outstanding quality was her lack of sympathy for anyone she found breaking the law. Tim believed that Doreen Johnson would turn in her mother and father if she caught them drinking in a pub after hours. Not put off by her silently expressed anger, for he was used to it, Tim sat down opposite Doreen and brought her up to speed with the morning's events.

Doreen was more annoyed by his absence than impressed with his news. "You could have phoned and let me know," she grumbled into her bowl of muesli.

"Yes, you're right, I'm sorry," he replied contritely to avoid an argument. "What are your plans?"

"I thought I'd drive to the battlefield."

"I went there years ago on a school field trip. I passed a maritime museum on my way back from the beach. I think I'll pay it a visit."

"Suit yourself," Doreen snapped back.

Tim had walked around the site of the Battle of Hastings on a day of viciously fierce winds. The gale had leveled the thick grass on the battlefield. Tim wondered if it had been like that in 1066, for William the Conqueror and his Norman archers. As he fought his way uphill from the marshes to face King Harold and his Saxons with their two-headed axes, did William ever question whether it was all worthwhile? His confidence



that a toehold in England would compensate for the agony and bloodshed was either fanaticism or extreme optimism.

Tim knew that certainties existed in mathematics, but nothing was a sure bet in everyday life, especially on a battlefield. The only trivia Tim recalled about the battle was that William refused to give King Harold's body back to Edith, his wife.

"What a mean bastard!" he said out loud. "Even the sea gives back its dead."

Doreen was about to ask him if he was off his rocker but decided to let it pass, and they agreed to meet for dinner. Tim knew that there would be no attempt at sexual intercourse after the previous night's fiasco, but with a little luck, the evening might not end up in a shouting match.

"The local boys want to see you," he said. "I thought we'd pay them a visit tomorrow, on our way back to Leicester."

"Why do they want to talk to me?"

"They probably want you to verify why I was on the shoreline at seven in the morning, standing next to a dead body."

"What did you tell them?"

"I said we had an argument last night, and I was trying to avoid you."

"Isn't that the truth!" She gave him a cold stare. "It was so considerate of you to open a window into our personal life. If, of course, there's anything left of it."

## TWO

Sunday morning's dawn held the promise of a beautiful day. The night frost staged a disappearing act when the sun's intrusive rays set about their task of warming everything, including the engine of Tim's second-hand Audi. It spluttered into life with the first turn of the ignition key, which was always a good sign. By the time they reached the police station, Doreen had managed to work up some interest in the corpse, and she flirted with both the detectives and the pathologist. Tim's regard for the body also increased when he learned that the cause of death was two bullet wounds to the chest.

"Rules out suicide, that's for sure," Doctor Williams said gruffly. "I've never heard of someone shooting himself twice through the heart. He was dead before he hit the water. He didn't inhale a single drop of the ocean during his descent to the bottom."

Apart from a couple of faded tattoos, there was nothing visible to help with the identification of the body. The outline of a dagger on his left shoulder and a falcon on his right were popular designs. His clothing was ordinary, and the labels, what was left of them, were illegible.

The diving weights found in his jeans and jacket pockets were mass-produced, not the plastic-coated type, which protected against lead poisoning. The forensic pathologist suggested the deceased was lowered into the water feet first, to ensure the weights did not come out of his pockets. But as the corpse shifted and the ocean floor abraded his clothes, some lead blocks had fallen out and released their hold on the body.

DI Collins was hard-pressed to disguise his professional interest in the deceased and his personal interest in DS Johnson. "Nice girl," he said to Tim when the two of them were alone. "I wouldn't quarrel with her if I were in your shoes."

"I'm afraid she's not very impressed with my shoes."

Inspector Collins chuckled. "Give my regards to Sylvia Baker. I knew her when we were both twenty years younger. You could do worse for a boss."

"You obviously haven't worked for her lately," Tim muttered when he was out of earshot.

Pete Collins turned his team's attention to scuba equipment stores and businesses that offered diving lessons. Owners of the boats tied up on the

stony beach or moored in the nearby marina were questioned as to whether they had recently rented out their vessels. Vincent Williams had put the date of death at around a month earlier, so DI Collins also ran a check on all cars reported as abandoned in the last six weeks. If the deceased drove to his rendezvous, there must be an unclaimed vehicle somewhere.

The search was narrowed down to those cars dumped between three to six weeks earlier. Of these, eighteen vehicles were left within a mile of the coast. Seventeen of them were from Sussex County; one was registered to a Leicestershire address.

The eighteenth vehicle had been left in the old part of town. Thirty-two days earlier, a permit had been purchased from the ticket machine to cover overnight parking. But no one had moved it or bought another sticker, and, after three days, the car was towed and impounded. The Ministry of Transport's computer system coughed up a name and address. The name was Jerry Streeter; the address was in Market Harborough in Leicestershire. Detective Inspector Collins decided to contact his old friend DCI Sylvia Baker to ask her to lend a hand in tracking down the registered owner. After all, it was one of her lads who had discovered the body.

On Monday morning, as soon as he shed his raincoat, Tim was summoned to Detective Chief Inspector Baker's office. He took his coffee cup with him, although he knew this would irritate her. Bringing in a cup of coffee demonstrated a degree of informality, and informality was something that DCI Baker would love to eradicate in her police station.

Sylvia Baker was fifty-five years old, but she passed for forty with her well-toned, petite figure. When she was in the office, she kept her tinted brown hair in a French pleat, and always wore a dark, tailored suit with the hem of her skirt just below knee level. Anyone could easily mistake her for a corporate lawyer or a motivational speaker. Instead, she was a shrewd, intelligent woman who had gained her position by combining good police work with a penchant for sleeping with influential men.

"I hear from my old friend Pete Collins that you've been busy finding things," she said in a matter-of-fact tone.

The reference to DI Collins as an old friend made Tim suspect that Sylvia and Peter Collins had been lovers at some time and warned him that he should watch what he said about the Hastings Police.

"He hasn't had much luck identifying your corpse, but he has turned up an address on our turf," his boss informed Tim. "They found an

unclaimed car belonging to a Jerry Streeter, and guess what? This Jerry Streeter lives in a rented flat and lists his profession as a courier.”

Sylvia’s eyes always lit up at the thought of her favorite prey. She had an obsession with couriers, fueled by their audacity to set up their headquarters in her territory. Haywood House was where they met their contacts and received their assignments.

On paper, the business was strictly legitimate. Couriers carried things, usually small *objets d’art* and one-of-a-kind pieces of jewelry. All the required paperwork was always in order, and the export and import licenses bore the correct signatures. They put the treasures in their hand luggage, never let it out of their sight, and conveyed it wherever their clients requested.

Often a member of the client’s family or entourage would serve as a decoy and travel on the same aircraft or ferry. However, whereas the decoy’s hand baggage was always inspected and frequently stolen, the courier would deliver the goods as agreed. DCI Baker was convinced that this small-time transportation service was a front for old-fashioned smuggling. Big money lay in moving currency, drugs, and guns. Sylvia believed that all couriers crossed the line eventually and became mules for major organized crime. Her dearest wish was to catch one in the act, but so far, success and the mules had eluded her.

“I want you to visit this address. Inspector Collins emailed me a copy of the dental x-rays. If the floater is Jerry Streeter, he had some nice, private work done: three crowns and a bridge. See if you can find a match and don’t take all week about it.” She took a carefully folded piece of paper containing the address and handed it to DS Wallace as if it were radioactive.

As soon as Tim had left her office, Sylvia closed the door, taking care not to slam it. The last thing she needed this morning was to draw attention to herself. “That damn Jerry Streeter!” she swore. “If it is him, then the toe-rag is dead. He’s a rotten corpse washed up on Hastings Beach. He deserves it.”

Since receiving the news of the dead man’s identity, small, glistening beads of sweat had appeared on DCI Baker’s upper lip. Noted for maintaining her composure no matter what the circumstances, she knew she could not risk anyone seeing her like this. Leaning against the office door, she tried to analyze the situation as objectively as possible.

Tim hurried down the corridor to pick up a copy of the x-rays from the basement office of Loworth's pathologist. About the same age as Sylvia, the examiner of dead bodies looked much older. Doctor Richards was so pasty-faced he resembled a prisoner denied sunlight or one of the corpses on the stainless-steel examination tables. The forensic expert gave the impression that he was nervous; it was almost as if he expected the dead to sit up and challenge his procedures. Quivering slightly, Doctor Richards went over the subtler implications of the deceased's teeth with Tim.

"In the upper right quadrant, three teeth have root canals and crowns. Since the affected teeth are next to one another, I suspect that our victim, at some time, sustained a heavy blow to his mouth. There's also a bridge in the lower right quadrant. I'd have to say that this person knew his dentist quite well." And with that, the pathologist covered up the corpse and scuttled back to his microscope.

Before heading out to Jerry Streeter's address on the outskirts of Market Harborough, Tim looked for the stray dog that had been hanging around the station car park. He hoped he would not see the dog, for that would mean that someone had taken it home. The sociable canine, however, leaped out from behind one of the squad cars, wagging its tail at high speed. It was clearly glad to see someone who cared enough to feed it.

The dog was a mixture that mating a Russian wolfhound with a Great Dane might have generated. It boasted the athletic build of a wolfhound as well as an elongated head and a skinny tail that should have dragged on the ground, had it not curved up at the end. But, in place of the long, silky hair covering a purebred, the dog's coat consisted of short, brown hair, and the affectionate beast was best described as looking like a gigantic greyhound.

"Hello, young fellow. Are you hungry?"

Tim bent down and scratched the dog behind its ears, and it responded by licking Tim's face. When Tim first saw the homeless hound, he asked Doreen if it would be all right to bring the dog home. However, she curtly reminded him that no pets were allowed in the flats, for she did not like the idea of anything else having a claim on Tim's spare time.

Since then, Tim carried dog food and bottles of water in his car. This morning, as he had done every morning for the past three weeks, he poured fresh water into the plastic bowl stolen from Doreen's kitchen cupboard and constructed a pile of bone-shaped dog biscuits. The dog was hungry and ate rapidly.

*The Waterway Murder*

“Enjoy your breakfast. See you again tomorrow,” Tim said as he patted its sloping shoulders. He worried about the dog; there was always the danger that a vehicle would hit it as it played hide and seek in the car park. The best solution might be to take it to a shelter and hope that someone would adopt it. “But how many people,” Tim wondered out loud, “want an over-sized greyhound?”

The Leicestershire address was on the upper floor of a detached house on the main road that connected Market Harborough with the Motorway. The owner, George Stanton, was a recently retired electrician. He was happy to answer Detective Sergeant Wallace’s questions but protested that he did not have much information to share. Initially, Mr. Stanton had thought that his absent tenant was retired as well.

“Jerry moved in about six months ago, and for the first two months, he just pottered around,” George explained, “but then he went off for two weeks. I thought Jerry was having a bit of a holiday, but he told me that he’d been on an assignment when he showed up again. It was always an assignment, never a job. He developed this sort of pattern. He’d spend a month doing nothing in particular, followed by a couple of weeks on assignment.

“If Jerry thought he’d be away when the rent was due, he’d pay ahead before he left. It’s what happened last time. Jerry left two weeks before rent day and paid me for the coming month. This time he’s been gone for more than five weeks. This assignment is definitely longer than his usual ones. You don’t think he’s done a bunk, do you?”

Tim ignored the question, asking instead, “Did he always drive to assignments? Ever get a lift?”

“The car was always gone when he was gone.”

“Did he ever talk about where he went?”

“Just once. Jerry said he was going to Wales—North Wales. I asked him a few times about his trips, but he wouldn’t give me a straight answer, so I didn’t push him. He kept pretty much to himself. In fact, about the only time we talked was when he paid his rent.”

“Did he happen to mention where in North Wales he was headed?”

“He might have, but I don’t recall him doing so.”

“Did you notice him do anything unusual before he left the last time? Any new visitors?”

George scratched the blue stubble on his chin thoughtfully. The color of the stubble matched his cardigan, which, in turn, matched his twill trousers.

“He’d been staying out a bit on the late side. The upper flat has an entrance at the back, and he tried to be quiet when he came home. But a couple of times, I heard him lumbering up the stairs around two a.m.” The older man leaned towards Tim and added in a conspiratorial whisper, “He’d been somewhere wet because there were muddy footprints on the path.”

You’d make a great detective,” smiled Tim. “If you let me have a quick look upstairs, I’ll be out of your hair.” He had no way of enforcing this request, as he had not obtained a search warrant. But Jerry Streeter’s landlord obliged him by not contesting the intrusion or the lack of documentation.

The air in Jerry’s lodging was musty, although the pedal bin under the kitchen sink was empty. A casual inspection of the upstairs flat did not offer any clues as to the tenant’s disappearance. There was no calendar pinned to a corkboard, nor photos of Jerry or anyone else stuck on the fridge. His drawers did not contain any letters, and the bookcase held no books or DVDs. Bills from the milkman and paperboy lay on the dining table, but not a single receipt, not even from a petrol station or supermarket. There appeared to be nothing to indicate where or how Jerry Streeter spent his time between assignments.

“You wouldn’t know who his dentist is?” enquired Tim hopefully.

“Sorry, haven’t a clue.”

“What about relatives, girlfriends, or drinking mates?”

George shook his head. “I never saw any visitors when I was around. Why are you so interested in him?”

“We’re pursuing inquiries concerning a missing person. They’re just routine. Nothing for you to worry about. Thanks a lot for your help.”

It took Tim an hour with an online directory to contact all the private dentists in Leicestershire. Five had records on a client named Jerry Streeter. Two of these patients had visited their dentists within the past couple of weeks, which effectively eliminated them from Tim’s list.

The remaining three dental offices were more or less in a straight line from Loworth Police Station. Tim soon discovered that they were all very upmarket, with thick carpeting, coordinating window shades, and soothing music. There was barely a trace of the antiseptic smell that was the dominant feature of the dental office that Tim patronized on rare

occasions. The receptionists, without exception, had beautiful teeth, gleaming white and precisely even. Their smiles, however, were a carefully maintained facade, for it was made abundantly clear to Detective Sergeant Wallace that he was taking up valuable time.

The first two guardians of the front office were adamant that the x-rays did not match those of Mr. Streeter, who was a patient at that practice. The third receptionist disappeared into the back office with the x-rays of the corpse's teeth.

"Doctor Patel wants to know the reason for your inquiries?" she demanded haughtily on her return.

"It's a routine police matter." Tim recited the all-purpose explanation in a voice without inflection. "We do rely heavily on the public's help in routine matters."

He was unwilling to satisfy her curiosity, for she was too cold, too unfriendly, and he was tired of being treated like he was a pain in the rear end. She took her glacial presence into the examination room once more. When she appeared the second time, she confirmed that the dental x-rays Tim had handed her matched one of their patients.

"Was this his address?" Tim enquired, laying a now-crumpled piece of paper on top of her appointment book.

She scrutinized the note and grudgingly typed a code into her computer. "Yes, that's correct."

"When did you last have direct contact with Mr. Streeter?"

"Four months ago." She consulted her notes. "He completed his bridgework in November."

"Did he ever bring someone with him when he came here?" Tim asked, wanting to get a lead. Her response was an icy glare with a laser-like focus directed at him. He was definitely occupying too much of her time. Tim hoped that Jerry Streeter had not paid his dental bill.

"We don't record the details on companions or escorts unless required because the patient will undergo general anesthesia. The records do not indicate that that was ever the case with Mr. Streeter."

Tim thanked her for her time and the information. His mother had always told him to be polite to women. She had not mentioned if this applied to women who were obnoxious or stuck-up, but he gave them the benefit of the doubt. As he drove back to the station, Tim tried to gauge how pleased DCI Baker would be on finding that a courier had met with a premature and violent end.



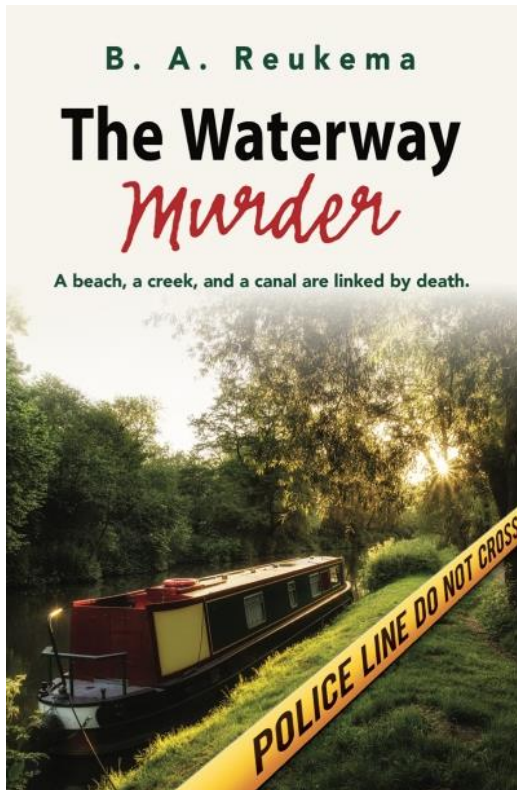
Sylvia Baker did not disappoint him with her reaction to his discovery.

“Brilliant! It doesn’t surprise me. Let’s get cracking, dig in the files, and see if we can produce any photos of the late Jerry Streeter. There must be a driving license image, but it would be better if the pictures show him with Haywood House couriers. Constable Bradley can check the computer for known associates. I’ll tell Pete Collins the good news, so his team can give Jerry’s car a thorough going-over.”

DCI Baker’s eyes were flashing as brightly as the diamonds in her S-shaped lapel brooch. No one at the station knew whether the “S” was meant to stand for Superwoman or her given name. As she strode out of her office, Sylvia exuded an air of confidence and determination. On the other hand, Tim was hungry and did not share her passion for rooting through dusty old records. He ordered a bacon, cheese, and tomato sandwich for delivery to the file room. It was going to be a slow afternoon.

Before starting on the files, he filled in Detective Constable Bradley on the details of the corpse on Hastings Beach. Scholarly and criminally shy, Mike Bradley was Tim’s best friend. Five years younger than Tim, Mike had a degree in chemistry, an eye for detail, and tackled research projects with enthusiasm and tenacity. However, when asked to interrogate someone, he was as tongue-tied as a virgin at an orgy. Tim liked taking Mike with him on interviews, for Tim did all the talking while Mike scoped out the place. They made a good team.

DC Bradley listened attentively to the tale of death and decomposition. His immediate comment on Tim’s weekend at the seaside was that throwing a body with lead-lined pockets into the ocean was not good for the environment. In the days of the tall sailing ships, burial at sea meant the deceased was sewn into a canvas shroud, which was weighted down with an iron cannonball. At least iron was eco-friendlier than lead. It would have been kinder to the ocean to shoot the victim and bury him inland. According to Mike, the perpetrator either embraced drama or did not give a toss about life in general. Or both.



*When Tim Wallace finds a murdered corpse, his chief suspect is Nicole Carlisle. Tim starts falling for her, but when another body turns up, Nicole is implicated again. Tim's efforts to prove her innocence become a race to prevent her murder.*

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