

A girl dies at an exclusive school. Fifteen years ago, the school's teenage gardener disappeared. As the body count rises, Detective Sergeant Timothy Wallace must discover why so many are dying in his village before he becomes a victim.

Reading, Writing, and Murder

By B. A. Reukema

Order the book from the publisher BookLocker.com

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/12568.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**

B. A. Reukema

Reading, Writing, and
Murder

A DETECTIVE TIM WALLACE MYSTERY



POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS

Copyright © 2023 B. A. Reukema

Print ISBN: 979-8-88531-179-3

Ebook ISBN: 979-8-88531-180-9

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Trenton, Georgia.

Printed on acid-free paper.

The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Reukema, B. A.

Reading, Writing, and Murder by B. A. Reukema

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022907669

BookLocker.com, Inc.

2023

Second Edition

Titles by B. A. REUKEMA

Reading, Writing, and Murder

The Waterway Murder

1

FRIDAY

The girl was gasping when she reached the top of the fire escape. She stopped long enough to catch her breath before warily transferring her weight to the sloping roof. The wind kept biting her face. On top of the building, it was far colder than she had anticipated, and her bare hands were numb. She flexed her fingers to restore some feeling to them, but it was not much help.

She would never admit to Jackie that she was afraid of heights, but the gusty conditions made her anxious. Crouching low, she turned her back to the edge and placed her hands on the weathered tiles. The girl slowly moved sideways along the roof, and when she reached the corner, she carefully pivoted to change direction. She continued her stealthy journey until she was almost at the far end of the roof. Cautiously stepping over a tennis ball lying in the gutter, the girl decided to leave it there because it would not fit into her pocket. And she feared dropping the ball if she held it in her hand.

After sitting down, she braced her trainers against the parapet, and sure enough, the girl could see into the greenhouse from her position. It had been a wise decision to bring her precious pocket radio to keep her company, and although she felt chilled to the bone, she waited for just the right moment.

2

SATURDAY

Detective Sergeant Timothy Wallace stared at the featureless ceiling. He was feeling sorry for himself, and there was not enough beer in the whole of England to fix the problem. Yesterday, the love of his life had left for Rome, so he was oblivious to the glorious landscape that spread out beneath his bedroom windows.

Black-faced sheep chewed on the lush grass while pudgy pigs squealed with swinish pleasure as they rolled in the mud. In the orchards, branches buckled with unpicked fruit and acres of wheat beckoned in the breeze. Warmed by the late September sun, the duck pond was crowded with squabbling birds. Tim's one-room flat occupied the upper level of a two-story addition to the farmhouse and commanded a panoramic view of rural Leicestershire. But, for all he cared, he could have lived in the worst London slum.

Nicole would be in Italy for three weeks, which meant the next twenty-one days would be as miserable as sin for the redheaded Scotsman. With his blue-grey eyes and blunt features, Timothy Wallace looked like a typical Scot. However, he had not inherited any trace of a Scottish accent from either of his parents. Tim's six-foot-one-inch, lean frame lay stretched out on his unmade bed as he contemplated his wretched fate.

His only consolation was that Bonaparte, Nicole's dog, was keeping him company. Tim had discovered Boney abandoned and hungry in the police station's car park. Since pets were not allowed where he was living at the time, DS Wallace had convinced Nicole to keep the dog. Boney now spent more time in her bedroom than Tim did.

The phone call came into Loworth Police Station at 9:55 a.m. and was immediately relayed to Tim's cell phone. The headmistress of a posh girls'

school had discovered one of her students lying dead on a brick path inside the school grounds. Although it was a Saturday, a child's body was an "all hands" situation for the detectives. Ten minutes later, Tim's aging Audi was reversing out of the farmyard at an unsafe speed.

The South Leicester University Training School (known to the lower classes as SLUTS) was located five miles east of Loworth. The impressive, grey stone building boasted a lofty porch supported by Corinthian columns. Above the porch, a marble frieze depicting a unique assortment of angels and charioteers graced the front entrance. Well-groomed flower and aromatic herb gardens, an ornate fountain, and life-size statues of fully clothed Greek and Roman gods and goddesses stood ready to greet pupils, teachers, and invited guests.

The structure was the love child of the Yorkshire Industrialist Christopher Chapelton. He made his fortune in coal and iron ore and gave most of it to charity. Had he lived two hundred years later, he would have been summoned to Buckingham Palace to be honored by the reigning monarch. But in the 1820s, the aristocracy viewed him as a mere tradesman. Christopher Chapelton, therefore, built his own palace in the heart of England, away from both the industrial grime of Huddersfield and the financial turmoil of London.

The estate was named Mary's Manor in honor of Christopher's wife. It passed down the family tree until Christopher's great-great-grandson decided he could no longer afford the taxes on his stately home. In 1950, the property was turned into a school for the daughters of those who could pay the upper-class fees.

By the time Tim reached the gilded metal gates, two police officers were guarding them. He flashed his warrant card at the closest one.

"Who's here?"

"The scene of crime officers arrived five minutes ago, and the forensic pathologist is on his way."

"Where's the action?"

"Down the path, far corner."

Detective Sergeant Wallace did not hurry. A dead child was the last thing he needed to see on a Saturday morning. He walked diagonally across the stretch

of wide, smooth tarmac in front of the school and turned right at a statue of Juno, the Roman goddess. According to myth, Juno protected the nation while keeping a careful watch over the women of Rome. It seemed fitting that she should take up residence at SLUTS.

Continuing along a red brick path that skirted the main house, the detective eventually arrived at one of the annexes to the original building. In the corner created where the front of the annex met the side of the main building, Tim noticed an iron ladder attached to the wall. Farther down the path, some distance past the end of the addition, a wooden bridge spanned a large pond filled with water plants. But the core of the tragic scene lay directly ahead of him, and DS Wallace stopped for a moment to take it in before becoming a part of it.

A tent had been erected over the brick path at the far corner of the annex and in front of what looked like a greenhouse. The scene-of-crime-officers were conferring at the entrance to the tent in their baggy white one-piece hazard suits. The unflattering outfits would help prevent hair, fibers, and skin cells from transferring from the SOCO squad to the crime scene and contaminating it. But, although their professional, detached expressions were firmly in place, their heads were bowed. And the squad's slumping shoulders gave proof they could not disguise their collective misery on that sunny Saturday morning.

Tim paused again before entering the tent. Looking toward the back gate to the school grounds, he saw Detective Constable Mike Bradley hurrying over the wooden bridge. Mike was one of the few people Tim regarded as somebody he could always depend on. DC Bradley was five years younger than Tim, who had turned thirty-seven at the end of April. Their approaches to living differed considerably; Tim was impatient and hot-tempered, while Mike was quiet and philosophical. This morning, however, they shared the same outlook on life.

"I hate this."

"Me too," Mike agreed.

"It's so bloody unfair. All those scumbags survive out there, and here's a kid who didn't make it to Sunday."

In a hasty attempt to shield the child from the elements, a tarpaulin had been thrown over the body before putting up the tent. Inside the tent, three police constables, one wearing examination gloves, were guarding the body. Typically, Detective Sergeant Wallace would have remarked that three constables protecting one body was excessive since there were no vampires residing in Loworth. But today was not the day for flippant remarks, and Tim quietly motioned for the young, gloved constable to uncover her.

The girl lay face down on the path. She wore dark blue jeans, a black anorak, grey socks, and grubby trainers. The headphones for a pink pocket radio lay bent and twisted on either side of her broken skull. The radio itself was about three feet from her outstretched right hand. Her blood had dried and now stained the brickwork surrounding her long, wavy brown hair.

“Is there any identification on her?” Tim asked.

“No, but the woman who found her and phoned the station recognized her,” one of the other constables replied.

Mike nodded. “According to the message from the dispatcher, it was the headmistress who discovered the body.”

The young constable, whose eyes were red from crying, covered up the body as soon as Tim turned his back. Once he was outside the tent, Detective Sergeant Wallace inhaled deeply.

“Damn this bloody job!” he swore.

Doctor Browning, the new on-call forensic pathologist for Loworth Police Station, walked toward them, carrying his examination toolkit. The former holder of the position had experienced a nervous breakdown and had taken early retirement. Detective Chief Inspector Sylvia Baker, Tim’s boss, was hoping that thirty years of studying the dead had hardened Dr. Browning to all of life’s tragedies. A young life snuffed out would be just one more puzzle that required a solution.

Tim paced impatiently outside the tent as he waited for the pathologist to complete his initial examination.

“Do you know anything about this school?” he asked Mike.

“Only that it costs way too much money,” Mike replied. “My dad’s sister, Aunt Constance, inquired about sending her daughter here. When my aunt

found out that the school fees for two years would purchase a really cool set of wheels—and I'm not referring to a motorcycle—she was glad that Pam didn't want to attend an all-girls school. At age eleven, my cousin Pam was a determined tomboy. And thank God for that! The cost of attending the school for seven years was completely out of the question.”

“I have no time for this type of place,” Tim retorted. “It makes kids think they're better than everyone else just because their parents have more money.”

“Your inverted snobbery is on display,” Mike reproached him. “Don't get your knickers in a twist because you're not rich or famous.”

Before Tim had time to answer back, the pathologist emerged from the tent and carefully removed his latex examination gloves.

“Rigor mortis is fully established, and usually that indicates the time of death was at least eight to twelve hours ago. But the timeline should be adjusted because it was miserably cold last night. If you factor in her liver temperature, she may have been dead for as long as fourteen hours. I'd put the estimated time of death sometime between half past eight last night and half past two this morning. The cause of death appears to be severe head trauma. My best guess is she came off the top of the building. But whether she jumped, fell, or was pushed, that's your department.

“There are a pair of abrasions on the palm of her left hand,” Dr. Browning added before closing his examination case. “These were sustained before she died. They could be defensive wounds, or she might have scratched herself on the roof or climbing up that ladder. I don't want to lose any trace evidence. This includes the most minute blood fleck, skin particle, strand of hair, or scrap of fiber that could have transferred from the perpetrator to the victim if a struggle occurred. Everyone must be meticulous. And be extremely careful when wrapping her hands and feet. There are clumps of soil and grass in the treads of her trainers, and she has something under her fingernails.” He stared reproachfully at some invisible presence and added, “Kids always have something under their fingernails.”

Doctor Browning turned to walk back to his car, then shook his head and looked over at Detective Wallace.

“This is one of the most exclusive schools in the country. There are bound to be connections to influential people reaching as far back as the Government. You need to do your job but try not to ruffle any unnecessary feathers.”

“Oh, wonderful,” Tim muttered. “That’s all I need. I’ll be interviewing people who have friends in high places. I should have stayed in bed.”

Tim’s boss, DCI Sylvia Baker, had gone down to London for the weekend. Because the Promotion Board had not yet settled on which of last year’s candidates would be elevated to the rank of Detective Inspector, Tim was currently the Senior Investigating Officer. It occurred to him that he had better start acting like he was in charge.

“The entire grounds will need searching for anything that looks out of place. But right now, put crime scene tape around this area because the annex and the brick path are our immediate concerns. Be certain you photograph everything within a hundred-yard radius,” he yelled at the nearest member of the SOCO team. “Have someone dust that fire escape ladder for prints and test for blood. Get up on top, locate all the damp patches, and see if there are any footprints. It looks like it could be a slate roof, so we might get lucky with the tiles for fingerprints. Don’t forget to double-check the parapet. I want a visual and a fingertip search for hair and snagged fibers. And make bloody sure no one falls off the roof.”

“It’s OK, Sergeant, you don’t have to teach us our job,” a female SOCO mumbled.

Tim knew he deserved the rebuke.

“I’m going to interview the headmistress since she’s the one who discovered the body. Anyone know her name?”

“It’s Ruth Fanning,” Mike informed him. “And you had better watch your manners with Ms. Fanning because she has very high standards.”

“How the hell do you know that?”

“Because that’s what the headmistress said to my aunt several times before telling Aunt Constance what the school’s annual fees would total. It was at that moment my aunt lost interest and didn’t even stay to have a cup of tea with Ms. Fanning.”

Tim decided he had better cool off before he insulted somebody else, in addition to everyone on the team who was involved with collecting evidence. In truth, his temper had a short fuse and had landed him in trouble on many occasions. He had a talent for rubbing people the wrong way, which was matched by his absence of social skills. But discovering the cause of the girl's death was what mattered, so he was determined his personal shortcomings would not get in the way. With this in mind, he decided a quick walk around the back of the main building would help him refocus on his priorities.

Viewed from the back, the structure was much larger than it appeared from the front gates. Two parallel annexes extended like the paws of the Sphinx from the corners of the original house. Between the annex buildings was a paved driveway edged with late-blooming flower beds. The driveway started at the foot of a wide staircase that rose majestically to an elaborate rear entrance on the upper floor of Mary's Manor. Ferocious-looking lions flanked the entryway; Tim could imagine them roaring at the servants. On either side of the steps, much humbler doorways gave access to the ground floor. A freshly lined parking area occupied the far end of the driveway.

Extensive landscaped grounds, complete with tree-lined pathways and the occasional gazebo, stretched away to the right of the buildings. Fields marked for various athletic activities occupied the area to the left; Tim recognized soccer, hockey, and lacrosse nets. Next to the car park, a tall wire fence surrounded eight tennis courts. He speculated whether the school's Board of Governors believed the secret to success was a healthy mind in an equally energetic body. Or perhaps they were trying to raise a tribe of Amazon women. He stopped wondering when he saw the smooth croquet lawns. Croquet was not the sport of choice for potential Amazons.

Tim retraced his steps along the brick path to the front of the school. DCI Sylvia Baker was an unashamed social climber and would have delighted in the prospect of interviewing the headmistress of an elitist girls' school. Tim's ex-girlfriend, on the other hand, had labeled Detective Sergeant Wallace a closet communist. DS Wallace was by no means that extreme in his views. Rather, he agreed with Oscar Wilde that, "Every saint has a past, every sinner has a future," which to Tim, if not to Mr. Wilde, made social status irrelevant.

Unfortunately, the interview was doomed to get off to a bad start. Tim knew that the person he was going to meet would not be impressed with his appearance. With the aid of an electric razor, he had managed to erase his red stubble while he drove. Otherwise, it would have covered his face the entire weekend. Without Nicole around, what was the point of shaving? However, there remained the issue of the dress code that DCI Baker was forcing on everyone. Sylvia insisted her detectives wore suits unless working undercover. Today was a scheduled day off for Tim, so he was wearing jeans and a tee-shirt plus a leather jacket he had thrown on when he received the phone call. Had he known what lay before him, he might have chosen his clothes with more care.

DS Wallace had only recently returned to work after taking two months off. The absence had given him plenty of time to think about more than just his wardrobe. He had suffered a partially torn tendon in his left leg when he tripped while running through the woods in the dark. Racing to prevent a drug dealer from committing murder, Tim saved a life that night, but at a cost. A man who was trying to help Tim died. It was not an outcome DS Wallace had predicted, but it could have been worse, and he had learned to live with the fallout.

He wore a cast on his injured leg for six weeks, and afterward, he walked with a cane and a limp. However, determined to avoid his colleagues permanently nicknaming him “Gimpy,” he used most of his free time to attend rigorous physical therapy sessions. The cost of the personal trainer and the therapy had paid off, and currently, his limp only reappeared at the end of a very long shift. During Tim’s time away from work, he had read a lot about child victims of crimes such as physical abuse, sex trafficking, and pornography. But he never imagined he would be the Senior Investigating Officer on a case involving the death of a Loworth schoolgirl.

As he walked between the thick, carved entrance doors, DS Wallace noticed that everything smelled of lemon wood polish. The spacious entry hall of the South Leicester University Training School possessed a patterned marble floor. Overhead, light bulbs glowed softly from a chandelier heavy enough to kill an elephant if it happened to drop on an unlucky pachyderm. The busts of a solemn-looking man and woman in Victorian clothing stood

next to each other on waist-high, stone pedestals. Nameplates identified them as Christopher and Mary Chapelton.

Three closed cherrywood doors led off the hall on one side. On the other side, a staircase with an ornamental banister ascended to the next level. A woman in a business suit was looking at him over the balcony. If the front of the balcony had consisted of a railing rather than solid wood, Tim would have been looking straight up her skirt.

“Are you the Senior Investigating Officer?” the woman demanded.

“Yes, ma’am, I am the SIO,” Tim replied, “I’m Detective Sergeant Wallace.”

“In that case, you had better come up, Sergeant Wallace.”

Her office appeared to Tim to be half the size of Loworth Police Station. Although only about twenty feet deep, it extended the full width of the building. Floor-to-ceiling, leaded glass windows were hung with heavy indigo curtains. The office was roomy enough to accommodate two traditional leather sofas and six matching armchairs.

A round carpet, the same shade of blue as the curtains, covered the center of the floor. The carpet’s border incorporated a tan background with intertwined golden vines and valiantly tried to combat the overall somber color scheme. Amber glass table lamps and a more modest version of the downstairs chandelier illuminated this Holy of Holies. Old-fashioned and stuffy was Tim’s assessment of the décor. Detective Sergeant Wallace waited to be invited to sit down, but the invitation was never issued.

“I was expecting to see Sylvia Baker.”

“Detective Chief Inspector Baker is out of town this weekend,” Tim said as pleasantly as he could manage, even though the headmistress was clearly questioning his competence. “Is it Mrs. or Miss Fanning?”

There was no visible wedding ring. What was visible was a tall, athletic-looking woman whose muscular shoulders were nearly disguised by her tailored, pinstriped suit. Her blouse concealed her cleavage, whereas her hemline exposed well-shaped calves and ankles. Her sandy blonde hair was shoulder-length, held in place by a wide hairband. Tim estimated she was in her late forties or early fifties. She would have been judged attractive were it not for the distinctive downward turn of her mouth at the corners. The

headmistress dressed as if she embraced authority more than style, and she was clearly not impressed by a policeman in jeans and a tee-shirt.

“It’s Ms. Fanning,” she replied tartly.

“I gather that you were the one who discovered the body.

“That is correct.”

“And what time was that?”

“About nine-thirty this morning.”

“Why are you here on a Saturday morning?”

Ruth Fanning shot him a contemptuous glance. Only the lower classes would be surprised that anyone would work willingly on the weekend.

“I frequently come here to work on a Saturday.”

Tim paused in his questioning and waited for her feathers to become unruffled.

“What exactly was it you were planning to work on today?”

“Staff performance reviews and writing fundraising letters. Look here, I don’t really see how any of this is relevant.”

He disregarded her suggestion that he was wasting her valuable time and continued, “And how did you come to be at that exact spot where the body was lying?”

“I parked in the staff car park and was going to walk up the driveway to the back staircase. But I noticed something on the brick path between the end of the gymnasium and the botanical laboratory.”

“The greenhouse?”

“The building is a botanical laboratory; it was never a greenhouse,” she corrected him. “As I approached, I thought the object was a sleeping homeless person. But on closer inspection, I realized it was a student. It was Annie Carter.”

“You’re absolutely sure that the body is that of Annie Carter?”

“Of course, I’m sure. I know all the pupils here at the school. She is...or perhaps I should say she was one of the scholarship girls. Her file indicates she was nearly twelve-and-a-half years old. Her birthday was on the eleventh of April.”

“Did you touch the body?”

“I felt for a pulse. There was none; she was stiff and cold, and there was all that blood around her head. I called the emergency services on my mobile.”

“You asked for the police, not an ambulance. Is that right?”

“It was evident that she was dead, but I didn’t leave the body alone. I used my remote control to open the front gates so the police could gain access to the grounds. I fail to see what else I could have done in the circumstances.”

Tim was not going to congratulate her on carrying out her civic duty. Instead, he walked over to one of the windows and moved the heavy curtain aside. From where he stood, it was impossible to see the path where it passed in front of the greenhouse, or the botanical laboratory, or whatever it was called. However, there was no particular reason to doubt the headmistress’s story.

“Does the gymnasium occupy the whole of the left-hand annex?”

“It does. The right-hand annex holds our new concert hall.”

“Do you have closed-circuit television cameras on the premises?”

“We certainly do. There are cameras on every door leading into the main building and the two annexes. However, we maintain a boundary between security and confidentiality. For example, we do not have surveillance equipment in regular classrooms because its presence would impede freedom of expression. And, obviously, no CCTV is permitted in staff offices for privacy considerations. But there are cameras in areas with accident potential, such as the gymnasium and the hallways. Regrettably, some students still insist on breaking the rules by running down the corridors.”

“How long do you keep the recordings?”

“At least a month, sometimes longer,” the headmistress replied, giving DS Wallace a look that dared him to interrupt again. “We broadcast performances from the concert hall, and our most valuable collections in the library are under the constant watch of electronic eyes. Outdoor cameras cover the playing fields and the front and back gates. Naturally, the sports field cameras are only operated during daylight hours since the girls do not use the fields when it is dark.” The last sentence was spoken slowly as if the headmistress doubted the detective’s powers of deduction.

Ignoring the insult, Tim persevered. “Is the section of the brick path between the gym and the botanical laboratory within range of any of these cameras?”

“I’m afraid not. The pathway beside the biological laboratory is not regarded as a high-risk locality.”

“Not until now,” Tim reminded her. “I’ll need the CCTV footage from all the cameras for the twenty-four-hour period ending at ten o’clock this morning.”

“I’ll arrange to have it delivered to Loworth Police Station. I cannot produce it instantly.”

Ms. Fanning was now glaring at him with unconcealed anger, so Detective Sergeant Wallace took a different tack.

“Tell me about scholarship girls.”

The headmistress spread her fingers and placed her hands, palms down, on her substantial, polished mahogany desk. Her body language suggested she was prepared to scold an exceptionally disruptive student.

“Look around you, Sergeant; consider this house; observe the grounds. Thirty years ago, people would say that the girls who attended this school were the daughters of cabinet ministers, ambassadors, and members of the aristocracy. Nowadays, my students will *become* cabinet ministers and ambassadors or, after a successful career, will marry into the ranks of the nobility. One of them might become our next prime minister. We develop young minds, we broaden their experience, and we mentor their expectations. I believe that we offer these girls a learning environment unsurpassed by any other school in England.

“Our geography department participates in tours of North Wales and the Lake District to view the effects of glaciers and the formation of caves. And sometimes, the Yorkshire Dales, with their limestone caverns, are also on the itinerary. In their final year, the girls travel to the Netherlands to learn about dikes, polders, land reclamation challenges, and living below sea level. We are currently planning an excursion to Iceland to study volcanoes and geysers. Did you know the word ‘geyser’ comes from The Great Geysir in the Haukadalur Valley?”

“Umm, vaguely,” Tim muttered. “When I went to school, we learned reading, writing, and arithmetic.”

“Quite so,” the headmistress continued, giving him a withering look. “Our students in the history department are not confined to visits to Stonehenge, Hadrian’s Wall, the Tower of London, and the Royal Observatory at Greenwich. They also journey to Rome and Athens. All our teachers have a mission to expose their charges to what the world, and not just South Leicester, has to offer. The school consistently records excellent results in the General Certificate of Education Advanced Level and the International Baccalaureate exams due to our approach to education.

“However, all this comes at a price. Our fees are not only fair but, might I add, represent a truly outstanding educational bargain. Regrettably, the parents of some exceptionally bright girls cannot afford the cost. Thus, in their infinite wisdom, the Board of Governors decreed six pupils are to be admitted to the school each year with their tuition and examination fees paid from an endowment fund. These girls are even provided with a mid-day meal at the school’s expense!

“Unfortunately, these girls hardly ever fit in. How could they? Their families do not interact with the families of the fee-paying students because they move in different social circles. I suppose the parents of the scholarship girls should not be relied upon to make an effort to network with the other parents, and they don’t even try.”

“Do the scholarship girls go on these overseas trips? Do they visit Italy, Greece, and the Netherlands?”

Ruth Fanning paused, but only for a moment. “If a family decides to make an investment in their daughter’s future, then that girl is welcome to join an excursion.”

DS Wallace translated this sentence as meaning the families of scholarship girls could never save up the money, and their daughters had no hope of traveling abroad with the study groups. Sadly, the generosity of the Board of Governors appeared to have its limits.

“So, how did Annie Carter become a Scholarship girl?”

“In the same way as all the others. She passed the entrance examination and provided an acceptable recommendation.”

“Who recommended her?”

“I believe it was Lord Francis Darwell.”

“The investment banker who recently became a life peer?” interjected Tim.

“Yes. Sir Francis is the owner of Darwell Grange and on the board of many organizations in the Leicestershire area.”

“Why did he recommend Annie?”

“Her mother was a cleaning lady at the Grange at one time.”

The headmistress managed not to roll her eyes, but the additional emphasis was not required. Her tone of voice had adequately conveyed the distaste she felt at having to admit the daughters of cleaning ladies to her academic establishment.

“Tell me about Annie?” Tim asked.

“She was skinny with bad acne, crooked teeth, and unruly long hair. Not what you would call an attractive child.”

“She would have outgrown her acne, and her teeth could have been straightened,” Tim reminded the headmistress.

He was becoming more and more irritated with Ms. Fanning. Boasting about her high-priced school’s achievements was one thing. Making harsh comments about the appearance of a dead child was quite another.

“What was she like as a person? Smart? Happy? Sad? Depressed?”

“She was clever enough to have passed the entrance exam but wasn’t popular with the teachers. I’ve been told that she was not helpful in the classroom and never volunteered to pass out papers or collect homework. She used to walk around the grounds with Jacqueline Delaney, one of the other scholarship girls. I can’t think of anyone else who was especially friendly with her. As to her state of mind, wouldn’t it be more helpful to ask her parents or the Delaney girl?”

“We try to gather as many opinions as we can,” Tim replied crisply.

It was now crystal clear to Tim that when the headmistress had said she knew all the students at the school, Ms. Fanning had only meant she could identify them. She did not mean she was acquainted with them. If the student was a scholarship girl, Ruth Fanning was not interested in her once the girl left the school grounds.

Three antique clocks on the marble mantelpiece chimed in unison.

“When will you remove the body? I noticed that there are bloodstains on the path. I’ll have to have those bricks replaced before the school opens on Monday,” she complained.

Detective Sergeant Wallace was becoming increasingly exasperated with her matter-of-fact attitude.

“Annie’s body cannot be moved until the scene of crime officers have finished gathering their forensic data,” he replied, as politely as possible. “Likewise, the pathway cannot be touched until everyone is satisfied that no more evidence can be gleaned from the location. If you would be kind enough to supply me with Annie’s address and that of her friend Jacqueline, I won’t take up any more of your time.”

Ruth Fanning put on her glasses and tapped out the required information on her keyboard. The computer, Tim noted, was the only modern touch in her office.

“Thank you,” he said civilly. Although he was well aware that he should not antagonize Ms. Fanning further, he could not resist. “Are you going to close the school for a day to honor Annie’s memory?”

“Don’t be absurd,” the headmistress retorted. “We nurture our students’ minds; we do not traumatize them. If somebody should ask why she is absent, the staff will be instructed to say that she is unwell. But to be brutally frank, Sergeant, I don’t think that she’ll be missed, and she’ll soon be forgotten.”

A dispirited Detective Sergeant Wallace walked back to where the tent was being dismantled. Annie Carter’s body was on its way to the mortuary. Since the SOCO team had no objections to him climbing up the fire escape, he donned a biohazard suit, pulled on a pair of examination gloves, and climbed onto the roof. He noted the weathered roughness of the old iron ladder. Was the ladder responsible for the scratches on Annie’s palm?

On reaching the roof, the mischievous breeze plucked playfully at his baggy outfit, so he was careful to lean away from the edge as he walked around the top of the building. He sat down at one of the corners and planted his feet firmly against the narrow parapet. Tim could see across the hockey and lacrosse fields to the metal railings that marked the boundary of the school

grounds. The public road was barely visible owing to the giant chestnut trees stationed along the perimeter. He wondered whether any of this could be seen after dark.

Mike Bradley was waiting for Tim by the statue of Juno.

“Are there any statues of male gods at the school?” Mike inquired.

“I haven’t seen any.”

“You’d think some would be allowed as long as they wore full battle armor.”

“Why do you care?”

“I don’t. I’m just trying to picture something other than that poor little girl. What did you make of the headmistress?”

“I’m willing to bet she has the mercy of an unmarked minefield,” replied Tim.

“Do you reckon that there’s any foul play involved?”

“Haven’t a clue. I’ll have a better idea when I’ve talked to the child’s parents. I think I’ll take Lulu along to break the news. If there were a death in my family, I’d want Lulu to break the news to me. She is so comforting. Oops! I’m sorry. I forgot she’s your girlfriend.”

Mike smiled. He never tired of hearing that they were considered an item because Mike Bradley was madly in love. In her early twenties, with long blonde hair and an angelic face, Lucinda Clements was so far out of Mike’s league that logic dictated he did not stand a chance with her. And yet, they had been dating for a few months.

Woman Police Constable Lucinda Clements had been engaged to a minor member of the aristocracy, The Honorable Kenneth Simmonds. During the time Lulu was betrothed, Mike Bradley had suffered the torments of unrequited love on a daily basis. However, when it became apparent that the opinions of Ken’s mother carried more weight with Ken than those of his fiancée, Lulu gave him back the engagement ring. On hearing the news, Tim had bullied the overly shy Mike into asking Lulu out. The rest, as they say, was history, and Michael Bradley paid no attention to the whispers that he had caught her on the rebound.

With a degree in chemistry and an eye for detail, Mike tackled research projects with enthusiasm. However, if asked to question anyone, he would rather be out and about looking for clues. Tim liked to take Mike along on interviews because Tim did the talking while Mike scoped out the place. They made a good team. Since Mike had started dating Lulu, Tim had to admit that he seemed to be growing more confident. And, instead of slouching against a wall trying to be invisible, Mike occasionally contributed to the morning briefings without being asked.

The only downside to cupid's victory was that Michael Bradley moved into the ground floor rental beneath Tim's flat. Because Lulu still lived with her family, Mike needed a place near work for their frequent trysts. Unfortunately for Tim, the soundproofing between the two apartments was totally inadequate.

Jillian and Colin Carter's house was surrounded by tall hedges. The small bungalow was in dire need of repainting, and the paved driveway was cracked. The front garden, however, contradicted the general air of neglect. Disciplined flower beds bordered a recently mown lawn. The last of the summer's red carnations, blue hydrangeas, and white lilacs made a patriotic display under the front windowsills. Rows of gold and bronze chrysanthemums jostled pink dahlias along a crowded wall.

In his mid-fifties, a man wearing a sweatshirt and tracksuit bottoms was standing on the front doorstep enjoying a cigarette. That struck Tim as a bit odd because the sweat stains suggested the man was a jogger, and runners do not usually smoke. Perhaps the perspiration marks were due to a hard morning's gardening.

"Mr. Colin Carter?" In response to the man's curt nod, Tim pulled out his warrant card. "I'm Detective Sergeant Wallace, and this is WPC Clements. May we come in?"

The living room was uncomfortably chilly. Tim guessed that the formidable hedges preserving the occupants' privacy also deprived them of sunshine. In the kitchen, Jillian Carter was busily making sandwiches. She had short tawny hair and large hazel eyes, and she wore a food-splattered

apron over a faded blouse and wrinkled slacks. Tim reckoned Jillian Carter would be quite attractive if she dressed up a bit.

“What’s this all about?” Colin said gruffly.

“Mrs. Carter, please come and sit down,” said Tim. “We’re here about Annie.”

“What’s that girl done now?” Jillian asked in an exasperated tone of voice while drying her hands on her Souvenir-of-Clovelly tea towel. “Colin, get her out of her room and bring her in here.”

Before Tim or Lulu could stop him, Annie Carter’s father had disappeared down the corridor. There was an awkward silence until he returned, looking puzzled.

“She’s not there. I didn’t see her go out this morning. Did you Jill?”

They had to know the truth, and there was no point in allowing them to continue with this guessing game.

“I’m very sorry to have to inform you that Annie is dead,” Tim interrupted.

“She’s what? She can’t be!” gasped her mother. “I saw her go to her bedroom last night after she’d cleared away the dishes.”

“Annie appears to have gone back to her school sometime between eight in the evening and three o’clock this morning. It seems she climbed onto the top of the gymnasium, and it looks like she fell off the roof. If it’s any consolation, I believe she died instantly and didn’t suffer.” Tim paused for the dreadful reality to sink in. “I’m terribly sorry for your loss. Would you like WPC Clements to telephone somebody, maybe a friend or family member, so they can come and stay with you?”

There was no answer. Jillian and Colin Carter just stared at one another.

“Mr. and Mrs. Carter, I realize how difficult this is, but I would like you to answer some questions about Annie. Do either of you feel ready to do that?”

Colin Carter moved his gaze from his wife’s face for a moment and nodded.

“Thank you. When was the last time you saw Annie?”

“After supper,” Colin answered. “It must have been about a quarter past seven or perhaps a bit later. She went into her room to do homework and listen

to her music. They get a lot of homework from that school—even on weekends.”

“Did you pop your head around the door to say goodnight?”

“No,” said Jillian. “She didn’t like that. Her room was hers, and she didn’t want us invading. Annie insisted that we kept out. She went so far as to vacuum and dust the room herself, and she changed her own sheets so we wouldn’t go in there.”

“Weren’t you surprised when you didn’t see her this morning, Mrs. Carter?”

“Not really. Annie often slipped out early to see her friend Jackie Delaney. They would go down to the canal. Annie always left a pink sticky note on the fridge saying, ‘With Jackie.’ There’s no note on the fridge door at the moment, but it sometimes falls off. Jackie’s a nice enough girl. She lives on the next street.”

“Was Annie unhappy over anything? I know how family squabbles can easily get blown out of proportion.”

Before glancing at his wife, Colin’s eyes flickered for just an instant.

“No, no, she’s just fine.” He rubbed his chin and then continued. “She is always going on about how much she hates her school, but all kids her age are like that. It’s a first-class school. She’s there on a full scholarship.” Colin Carter stopped talking abruptly as if he had just realized that he was using the present tense.

“The headmistress told me that Annie was very bright,” Tim lied. “Any reason why she would have gone back to school yesterday evening?”

“I really don’t know. What about you, Jill? Any ideas?”

Jillian Carter bit her lip and looked down. “I was never quite sure what she was thinking.”

“Is there anything else?” Colin asked irritably.

Tim understood the source of his anger. Bereaved parents were entitled to vent their frustration on anyone and everyone.

Trying to defuse the tension, Tim asked politely, “We’d like to have a rummage around in Annie’s room if that’s all right with you?”

The search of Annie Carter’s bedroom proved to be a miserable experience for both police officers. The stuffed animals, posters of pop

groups, pink pajamas tucked under her pillow, and a school uniform discarded on her bed were such intimate reminders of the young girl who now lay dead in the mortuary. Jillian Carter had confirmed that Annie did not possess a computer, a tablet, or a mobile phone, so her access to social media sites was limited. In addition, Annie's mother did not think that Annie had the self-discipline to keep any type of journal. Detective Wallace was hoping that there would be at least a scribbled note or drawing indicating what she had planned for the previous night. But Annie Carter had covered her trail well.

As he slowly closed the bedroom door after completing the search, he asked for the telephone number of Annie's doctor.

"It's purely a formality," DS Wallace added when Colin Carter seemed baffled. "I'm going to leave WPC Clements—Lucinda—here as your family liaison officer," Tim continued, "in case you should need help with anything. We will require that one of you formally identify Annie, but that doesn't have to be right away. When you feel up to it, we'll arrange for someone to drive you to Loworth Police Station."

Tim left Lulu in the kitchen making a cup of tea for the Carters. In all likelihood, she would be hugging them before long. As he headed down the drive, he reflected on how devastating it must be to find out that your child was dead. And in that case, why was it that neither Jillian nor Colin Carter was crying?

Annie's doctor belonged to a long-established group of General Practitioners, and Tim was in luck because it was her doctor's turn to hold a Saturday clinic. The waiting room was designed to calm the anxieties of younger patients, with walls painted in cheerful colors and toys strewn all over the carpet. Monique, the receptionist, hailed from the Caribbean and had a mass of grey curly hair, kind eyes, and a wide smile. She waved Tim through to the doctor's office as soon as there was a gap between patients. Doctor Henderson looked every inch the traditional country practitioner. His round gold-rimmed spectacles emphasized the twinkle in his eyes, and a basket of lollipops and photographs of his grandchildren cluttered his desk.

"That's terrible! That's absolutely dreadful!" the doctor exclaimed when Tim told him of Annie's death. "I really liked Annie. She was a feisty little

girl. She would sit in the examination room chatting away to me despite her mother's efforts to make her keep quiet. Annie always asked interesting questions. This really is appalling news!"

Dr. Henderson turned his back and took off his glasses. He took out a handkerchief to clean the lenses, but Detective Sergeant Timothy Wallace suspected that the handkerchief would also be used for wiping away tears.

"How are her parents coping?" the doctor inquired.

"They aren't showing much emotion at the moment," Tim replied. "They're probably in shock. It's always overwhelming for relatives when the police inform them of a death in the family. That's why I wanted to ask you, was Annie upset or depressed over anything?"

"Just the usual pre-teen angst. She suffered from moderately severe acne. I adjusted her medication just last week, but it takes at least a month to start to show results."

His voice trailed off, and he gazed out of the ground-floor window at the sunlit garden, just as a brown and white cow stuck its head over the hedge.

"I'd spoken to her mother," he continued, "about having Annie's teeth straightened. But Mrs. Carter said they couldn't afford it and that Annie would have to wait until she had a job and could pay for it herself. That's all moot now."

"Could Annie have been pregnant?"

"Good God! No! She was only twelve and went to an all-girls school. I hear the school assigns lots of homework. When would she have the time for messing around with boys? At last week's appointment, Annie complained of menstrual cramps. She'd started her period the day before. The abdominal examination revealed no unusual swelling. And she certainly didn't mention increased sensitivity in other areas or any fatigue, nausea, or vomiting."

"Any signs of a family history of depression?"

"I'm afraid I can't help you with that."

"Because it falls under the heading of doctor-patient privilege?"

"No, because it falls under the heading of incomplete adoption information."

"Annie was adopted?"

“Yes, father unknown, I’m afraid. The biological mother gave her up at birth and went home to Ireland.”

Tim looked surprised. “I always thought that adoption was a costly procedure, and the Carters don’t appear to be rolling in dough.”

“I don’t think I’m breaking any confidences if I tell you. After all, it’s a matter of public record. Lord Darwell helped to arrange the adoption. Have you heard of him?”

“Yes, that’s the second time today that his name has come up. I gather he wrote the letter of recommendation for Annie when she applied to the South Leicester School.”

“He’s noted for his philanthropy,” remarked the doctor. “And not just his charitable activities. He treats his staff exceptionally well. Jillian Carter used to work for him; she was Jillian Pryor in those days. Then, a few years after she married, she wanted to adopt, so Lord Darwell did all the paperwork and paid the fees.

“When the Carters first brought Annie here, I asked about her biological parents’ medical records, but to no avail. Needless to say, I had all the details from the hospital about her birth date and the immunizations she needed. And there was no problem with obtaining a National Health Service number for her. I saw the legal papers; everything was perfectly proper. The mother was Roman Catholic. She didn’t want a baby, but her religion prevented her from having an abortion, so she gave the child up for adoption.”

“Why did the Carters adopt? Can’t they have children?”

“That sort of information does fall under doctor-patient privilege.”

“Yes, yes, I get it. But, in your opinion, do you think there’s a chance that Annie Carter might have committed suicide?”

“I’m a general practitioner, not a psychiatrist. I wouldn’t think it likely, but I can’t completely rule out the possibility. Whatever the reason, her death is a darn shame!”

Tim took his time driving back to Loworth Police Station. He needed time to try and make sense of the tragedy but knew that it was far too early in the investigation to start tying up loose ends. He estimated that by now, the pathologist would have concluded whether Annie’s injuries were consistent

with falling from the roof of the building. If they were, it was Tim's first task to discover why she was there. If she was not there to end her life, then why was she on the roof on a cold, windy evening? More importantly, how had she fallen off the roof? If that were not enough unanswered questions, why had the Carters not said anything about Annie being adopted?

How he wished he could discuss everything with Nicole. She always untangled problems with logic, intelligence, and sensitivity. Detective Sergeant Wallace wanted to stare into her grey eyes and stroke her soft, shiny dark brown hair while she listened to him ramble. Mostly though, Tim wanted to take her to bed.

The light on the answering machine on his desk was blinking when he arrived back at the station. Because he had cleared out all his old messages, someone had tried to contact him at work on a Saturday, and that was highly unusual. However, the mystery was soon solved, for the blinking light resulted from a sharp rebuke left by Detective Chief Inspector Sylvia Baker. The message commanded him to either finish his examination of the pathway by eleven o'clock the following morning or remove the bricks and bring them to the police station's laboratory for analysis.

The headmistress had contracted with a builder to replace the affected bricks, and his bricklayer would be starting work at noon on Sunday. Detective Sergeant Wallace was ordered not to interfere or impede the building company's activities. Tim swore as he replaced the receiver. He had, without doubt, ruffled some high-flying feathers. Ms. Ruth Fanning had used her connections to undermine his authority and remind him of who was in charge at SLUTS.

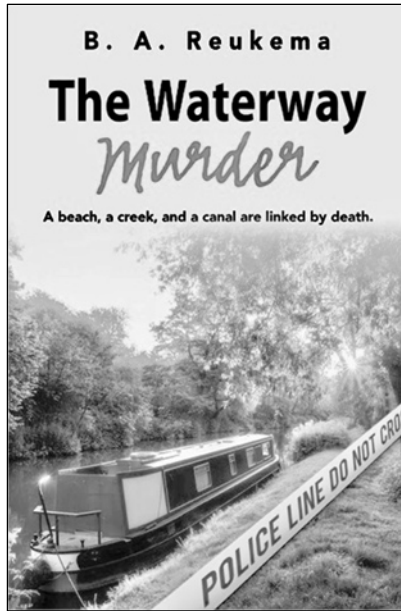
In a foul mood, Tim headed home. Tomorrow, he should interview Jillian and Colin Carter again and try and dig out some information on Annie's adoption. He thought about that for a while but ultimately chose to let it slide until Monday to give the Carters more time to identify her body. Instead, Detective Sergeant Wallace decided to talk to Annie's friend Jacqueline Delaney in the morning. As required by the department protocol, a female police officer would need to accompany him. DS Wallace hoped Lulu would soon be replaced at the Carters' home by a senior family liaison officer. And that would mean WPC Clements would be free to go with Tim to talk to the

Delaney family. Lulu's absence would ruin Mike Bradley's Sunday, but that was just too bad for Mike. Without Nicole, Tim's whole week was a washout.

READING, WRITING, AND MURDER
IS THE SEQUEL TO
THE WATERWAY MURDER

Detective Sergeant Timothy Wallace stumbles across a body washed ashore. When it looks like a murder, suspicion falls on Nicole Carlisle, an international courier. Tim's career is a mess. His boss is angry at his attempt to link the waterlogged corpse with her failure to arrest a drug dealer. Tim's personal life is just as chaotic, and his relationship with his girlfriend has hit a critical roadblock. Told to build a case against Nicole, Tim begins to fall for her. When another dead body turns up, and there is a connection to Nicole, he hopes it is a coincidence. However, when he is attacked near the local canal, the circumstances again point to Nicole's involvement. Tim's efforts to prove her innocence turn into a race against time to prevent Nicole from becoming a victim in the waterway murder.

TURN THE PAGE FOR AN EXCERPT >>



THE WATERWAY MURDER

Chapter 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 inquired 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.

The Waterway Murder

“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 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.

The Waterway Murder

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?"

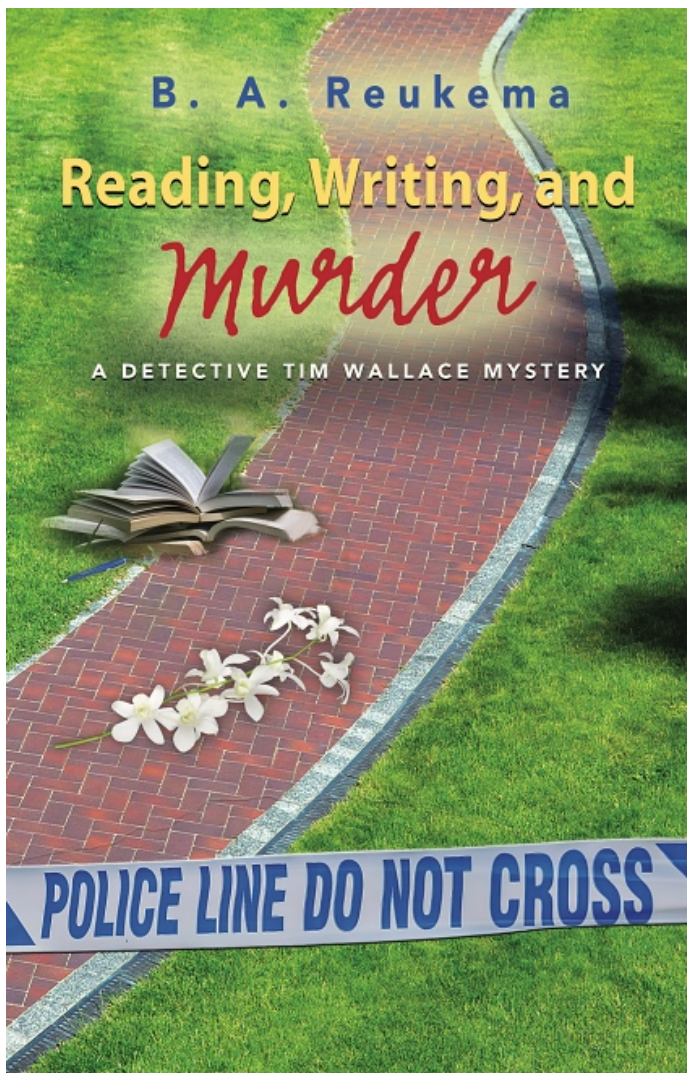
"They probably want you to verify why I was on the shoreline at seven in the morning, standing next to a dead body."

"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."

The Waterway Murder
is available from online booksellers.



A girl dies at an exclusive school. Fifteen years ago, the school's teenage gardener disappeared. As the body count rises, Detective Sergeant Timothy Wallace must discover why so many are dying in his village before he becomes a victim.

Reading, Writing, and Murder

By B. A. Reukema

Order the book from the publisher BookLocker.com

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/12568.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**