

DCI Warren Jones:

A Middlesbury Summer's Nightmare

Paul Gitsham

STRAW
 **HAT**
CRIME

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About The Author

Paul Gitsham started his career as a biologist, working in laboratories in Manchester and Toronto, before retraining as a secondary school science teacher.

He now tutors in science and writes crime fiction.

Paul always wanted to be a writer, and his final report on leaving primary school predicted he'd be the next Roald Dahl! For the sake of balance it should be pointed out that it also said "he'll never get anywhere in life if his handwriting doesn't improve".

Decades later and his handwriting is even worse, and unless Mr Dahl also wrote crime fiction under a pseudonym, he has failed on both counts!

Paul lives in the West Midlands with his wife, in a house with more books than shelf space.

Also by Paul Gitsham

DCI Warren Jones Series

The Last Straw

No Smoke Without Fire

Blood Is Thicker Than Water (Novella)

Silent As The Grave

A Case Gone Cold (Novella)

The Common Enemy

A Deadly Lesson (Novella)

Forgive Me Father

At First Glance (Novella)

A Price To Pay

Out Of Sight

Time To Kill

Web Of Lies

Standalone

The Aftermath

Prologue

“RE MIND ME WHY WE’RE here,” muttered DCI Warren Jones, taking his seat. Middlesbury Common was abuzz with anticipation. A few discordant notes arose from the side of the stage as the musicians tweaked and tuned their instruments. “I hadn’t envisaged our first night without Niall as a school production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.”

“*A Middlesbury Summer’s Nightmare*,” corrected Susan, passing over the programme. “And from what I hear, no bad pun has been left out. Half of my form group are involved in some capacity. And there was a three-line whip from the sixth form pastoral team.”

Warren grunted as he squinted at the programme. He’d studied Shakespeare’s original play at university, and he recognised the various plays on the character names.

“Buttock? Really?” he whispered.

“It was originally ‘Arse’, but the Head of Sixth Form vetoed that. A shame really, the original name fits the student playing the role to a T,” she said. “Anyway, it’ll be over by nine at the latest, and we have the babysitter until eleven, so we can still go for a drink.”

“At least the weather held out,” he said. Midsummer’s eve was still pleasantly warm, and mercifully dry. The stage area and the orchestra erected at the far end of the common was covered by a marquee, but the audience was in the open, expected to dress appropriately for the weather. At least they were on the opposite

side of the common to where the bodies of Reggie Williamson and his dog were found all those years ago. Warren didn't need memories of that ruining his evening.

Warren glanced at his watch. Seven p.m. It should be starting any moment now. The show, written and devised by Riverview Academy drama students, was something of an extravaganza. Conceived as part of Middlesbury town's nine-hundredth anniversary celebrations, Susan's school had been planning the performance for almost two years. Although Susan was a biology teacher, she taught many sixth formers and had a senior-school form group, so her attendance was all but mandatory.

Finally, the audience quietened as the orchestra started and the curtain on the stage rose.

Susan hadn't been kidding. The play was a very loose interpretation of the Shakespearean classic, with the notion of a play within a play kept intact, a complex love triangle and a wedding. Most of the characters had survived, but 'Buttock' was only the most obvious pun on the original name with a 'Champagne Flute' and 'Hernia' joining them. Warren resigned himself to a painful evening. Mercifully, according to the programme, there was an interval scheduled for the end of Act Two.

It was shortly after 'Plucky' administered love potion to 'Lysander' that a scream rang out off-stage.

Any illusions that this was a part of the performance were shattered when a teenage girl dressed in a black T-shirt and leggings, rather than period costume, raced onto the wooden stage.

"Help, she's dead. She's dead."

Warren jumped to his feet. It looked as though he'd be earning his keep tonight.

Chapter One

“THE VICTIM WAS ONE of the school’s assistant heads,” said Warren to DI Tony Sutton. “Geraldine McCormack, forty-two years old. She was relatively new to the school, starting this academic year.”

Susan had helped identify the woman laid out on the grass in the marquee that served as a green room of sorts for the production.

“Why was she back here?” asked Sutton. “The show was in full flow. Why wasn’t she either backstage or in the audience?”

“Good question,” said Warren. He was dressed in a white paper scene suit, retrieved from the boot of his car. Sutton was similarly clad, and both men stood on metal stepping plates. Crime Scene Manager Andy Harrison was supervising the young technician in charge of photographing the scene.

Warren thought back to some of the gossip that Susan had shared with him over the past year.

“Geraldine was rather ambitious and shoe-horned herself into the production. She was a maths specialist, but apparently she was also a very keen member of the amateur dramatic scene. The production was already at an advanced stage when she joined the school in September, but she inserted herself and started treading on a few toes. She butted heads repeatedly with Micky Grady the head of drama and Hilda Brown the head of music. They felt she was straying out of her lane, but she used her contacts with the local drama community to borrow equipment and costumes. Su-

san reckons the production wouldn't have been half as ambitious if Geraldine hadn't pulled so many strings."

"Sounds as though we need alibis for those two ASAP," said Sutton. "Any more staff room gossip to get us started? Difficulties with other teachers, pupils or parents?"

"I know Susan wasn't a fan, but she was with me all night, so I'll vouch for her." Warren gave a grim smile. "Geraldine was keen to make a name for herself. She pissed off some colleagues when she was rather blunt after lesson observations, but if that was enough to mark someone for murder there wouldn't be a senior teacher left in the land. As for parents and students, Geraldine had oversight of sixth form, so any serious issues would have been escalated to her. Most of the school's senior leadership team are here, dealing with crowd control, so we should be able to interview them tonight. Any word from the boss yet?"

"DSI Roehampton is on her way back from holiday," said Sutton. "She'll be here in a few hours."

Warren looked at his watch. "Looks like we'll be paying the babysitter overtime," he grumbled.

"OK, first order of business is to try and figure out when Geraldine McCormack was killed. Then we need to start whittling-down suspects. A search team is currently looking at the perimeter of the field to determine if an outsider could have accessed the backstage area, or if we're looking at a member of the production."

Warren had wheeled a pair of dry-wipe boards into the main briefing room. Detective Superintendent Ashley Roehampton was currently en route, so Warren was Senior Investigating Officer. It felt strange to be addressing his team whilst dressed in a T-shirt and

shorts, but he'd come straight from the common. It was now ten p.m.

DC Moray Ruskin raised a hand. The burly Scotsman had his pocket book to hand. Unlike Warren, he was wearing a light-grey suit, with a purple silk tie.

"I have a confirmed sighting of Mrs McCormack roughly fifteen minutes before curtain up. The cast and crew's bags and personal belongings were in that marquee. She was in there taking a turn making sure nothing was pinched."

"Did anyone return to the marquee between then and her body being found?" asked Warren.

"Not that anyone is admitting," said Ruskin. "Apparently the cast was either on stage or waiting in the wings, the crew was busy, and the other members of staff were floating around the rear of the stage."

"Why did the young woman who found the body return to the marquee?" asked DS Rachel Pymm, the team's Officer In The Case. She'd be entering evidence, statements and other exhibits into the HOLMES2 case management system.

This time DS Karen Hardwick answered. "Aisha Farley had nipped back there at roughly seven-fifty to fetch one of the cast's asthma inhaler."

"Obviously, at this moment in time, this Ms Farley is a potential suspect," said Warren. "You've done a preliminary statement and supervised the collection of her clothing, what is your impression?"

Hardwick looked at her notes. "Her story is that Kieron, the actor feeling breathless, described his bag to her and she went straight down there. The marquee was a short distance from the back of the stage, to minimise sound disrupting the performance. She doesn't recall seeing anyone else hanging around the other tents and marquees that were used for storing costumes, musical instruments and the diesel-powered generator. She entered the marquee by the single door flap and saw a pair of legs protruding from behind a table. She went around there and saw Geraldine on the grass. She

checked her pulse and breathing, but it was clear she was dead. She then ran back to the stage area for help. She got disoriented, which is why she ended up running on stage mid-performance. She could be a good actor, of course, but she struck me as frightened and bewildered.”

“Do we have any timings?” asked Warren.

“Kieron was so stressed he isn’t certain how long it was between asking for his inhaler and her racing on stage and raising the alarm,” said Hardwick.

“OK, prioritise working out if she could realistically have killed the victim in that time window. The post-mortem is scheduled for tomorrow; hopefully that’ll tell us if Geraldine had been dead for more than a couple of minutes or if she could have been murdered by Farley. Hutch, can you supervise the questioning of the cast, crew and other staff? There is a minibus full of extra bodies coming up from HQ tomorrow morning to help out, but if you can arrange for statements to be taken from key players tonight, that would be ideal.”

DS Hutchinson nodded.

Warren turned back to the rest of the team.

“We don’t know yet that Geraldine wasn’t killed by a total stranger who somehow accessed that area, but statistically it’s unlikely. So we’ll want motives and whereabouts. At present, the window of opportunity is from six-forty-five to seven-fifty when Farley raised the alarm. Hopefully we’ll narrow that down.”

There came a knock at the door. A support worker poked her head in.

“You wanted to know when Mrs McCormack’s husband was ready to be spoken to.”

Warren thanked her and turned back to the team.

“Right folks, it’s going to be a long night, but we’re still within the Golden Twenty-Four Hours, let’s not waste it. Tony, you’re with me. Karen, Moray, you take Micky Grady, then Hilda Brown.

Preliminary interview; I want alibis and a feel for how they felt about the deceased. Then we'll start picking things apart.”

Chapter Two

“**H**OW DID SHE DIE?”

Stephen McCormack was in his forties, with a neatly trimmed black beard. His complexion was pale and his hands hadn't stopped shaking from the moment he'd been informed of his wife's death.

Warren recognised him from earlier that evening. He'd been seated towards the rear of the audience, drinking from a can of pre-mixed gin. Warren had only noticed him because Susan had pointed him out as they arrived. After someone had realised who the deceased was, the deputy head had grabbed him and taken him backstage.

Now sitting in an interview suite, McCormack was wearing a custody tracksuit. He'd been fully compliant when one of the forensic team had asked him to remove his clothes for routine testing and taken his fingerprints and DNA for elimination purposes. He'd then spent the next hours staring into space.

“We'll need to wait for the pathologist's conclusions,” Warren said. “But it appears to have been a stabbing. I appreciate that this must be a difficult time for you, but can you think of anybody who might have had a grudge against your wife, or wished her harm?”

McCormack shook his head. “No, as far as I know, she was well-liked. She was Senior Leadership, so obviously she rubbed some people up the wrong way. And I imagine there were a few

kids and parents who weren't her greatest fans, but that's just par for the course."

"What about her previous school? I understand she only joined Riverview Academy this academic year?"

McCormack shook his head. "No, they were very sad to see her go. Besides she left almost twelve-months ago, why would they wait so long? Plus, her old school was north of Cambridge. It's fifty-odd miles away and in an entirely different county. I can't imagine some pissed-off kid travelling all the way down here, a year later, to settle some perceived grievance."

Warren suspected he was right, but decided to have someone call the school anyway. If her attacker had mental health issues, time and distance mightn't be a significant factor. They would also need to check her social media to see if she had maintained any friendships or relationships from her previous employment.

"What about outside school? In her private life?"

Again, McCormack looked lost. "I don't know of anyone. She gets ... got on well with her family. We have a small group of close friends, but there have been no disagreements. We even like our neighbours."

"I understand you and Geraldine met at university," said Sutton.

"Yeah, that's right. We both did maths. We hooked up in the second year, started living together after graduation, then got married. Geri went on to do teacher training. I went into accountancy."

"Can I ask how your relationship was?" Sutton asked.

McCormack frowned. "Wait, do you think I had something to do with this?"

"It's just routine," said Warren. "This early in the investigation we have a list of questions that we need answered. Most won't even be relevant, but it's easier to ask them now than in follow-up interviews."

"Our marriage was fine," said McCormack firmly, before wiping his eyes. "I loved her so much. She was my soul mate, and I was hers."

“Of course,” said Warren. “I fully understand. But we have to ask these things. Going back to what you said earlier, you said that Geraldine was a member of SLT and so she may have rubbed colleagues or even some pupils up the wrong way. Can you elaborate on that?”

McCormack shrugged. “Just the usual. Geri could be rather forthright sometimes, and she had very high standards for both her students and her colleagues. I know that one or two people were a little taken aback by her criticisms in lesson observations. And she took a firm line on discipline, especially with sixth formers.

“The thing is, I don’t think people realised that Geri hated upsetting people; she used to fret about it all the time. But she firmly believed that if you didn’t speak up when you witnessed poor practise or bad behaviour, you weren’t doing anyone any favours. You need to give people the tools to improve.”

“What about this big production?” said Sutton. “I understand that Geraldine threw herself into it, volunteering her experience in amateur dramatics, even though it was already at an advanced stage. Might she have upset those already involved?”

McCormack’s eyes narrowed and he ignored Sutton, fixing his look on Warren.

“I’m assuming that you are the senior police officer married to the science teacher? Susan Jones isn’t it?”

“Yes that’s right,” said Warren.

“So I’m guessing she’s been filling you in on the gossip?”

Warren said nothing, curious to see where this was going.

“You’re right. Geri and Micky Grady, the head of drama, didn’t see eye-to-eye. But it wasn’t a case of Geri pushing her own agenda. The show was supposed to be a student-led production. Some of the pupils were getting concerned that Micky’s vision was crowding out their ideas. Geri was trying to get him to reign in his own ambition and let the students sink or swim. I think he was also jealous because Geri was able to borrow equipment from some of her Am Dram friends that he’d never have been able to source. She

was also able to persuade the council to allow the school to use the common, which the pupils were keen to do, but Micky dismissed as impractical.”

“And that led to friction?” asked Warren.

“Yeah, but he’s hardly going to kill her over that, is he?”

Warren said nothing.

“When was the last time you spoke to your wife?” asked Sutton.

“The last time I actually spoke to her was about lunchtime. There was an all-day rehearsal. She rang me briefly to tell me how things were going. But we exchanged a few texts during the day. In fact the last time she texted me was during the performance. She was getting a bit bored babysitting the green room.”

Warren and Sutton exchanged glances. If she had texted him after the show had started, that further narrowed down the time of death.

Seeing their look, he licked his lips. “I’ve given my PIN code to the officer who took my phone. And the code for Geri’s handset. Do you think it might be useful?”

“It’s a little early to say,” said Warren. “But the more information we have the better.”

He looked over at Sutton and gave a slight nod.

“Just one more thing, Stephen,” said the inspector. “You left your seat for several minutes during the performance. Can you tell me why?”

“Stephen McCormack’s story is that he left to use the portaloos,” said Warren.

“For fifteen minutes?” DSI Ashley Roehampton had driven back from Devon and looked exhausted. Warren was sympathetic; she’d barely had any time off since she’d taken over as the head of

Middlesbury CID. Unfortunately, the murder of a schoolteacher during a public production was the very definition of a 'high profile incident'. Had Roehampton taken her vacation abroad, she'd currently be in an airport somewhere frantically trying to book a flight home.

"He claims he had a dodgy tummy," said Sutton.

"And we're certain this video is definitely of him?" asked Roehampton.

Warren nodded. "The grandparent that shot it was trying to be discreet, standing at the back, but she captured Stephen's face as he turned around when he left his seat. When it became obvious that Stephen was connected to all of this, she thought she'd better say something."

"So, we think that he could have left his seat, travelled to the backstage, killed his wife and then returned?" Roehampton asked.

"Doable with planning," was all Warren would allow.

"The timestamp on the video shows him leave his seat at 19:20," said Sutton. "He then returned at roughly 19:35h. That's fifteen minutes before Aisha Farley raced on stage. The footage doesn't show where he goes, but if he walked out the rear of the seating area, the portaloos are hidden behind some temporary fencing covered with a black drop-cloth, on the left of the audience. You could walk between the fencing and the portaloos right up to the edge of the stage and continue around to the rear, where the support tents are pitched. With everyone's attention focused on the stage, I'd say you could do it without being seen."

"Stephen McCormack is familiar with the layout of all the tents, and the timings of the play," said Warren. "He would know when the action on stage and the music were loud. And he was here over the weekend helping to set up. Apparently, he was something of an Am Dram fan himself. It's partly how he and Geraldine met at university."

"What about a motive?" asked Roehampton. "You know how juries love them."

“Too early to say,” admitted Warren.

“Where is he now?” she asked. “Have you arrested him?”

“He’s downstairs still, and no I haven’t arrested him,” said Warren. “He’s cooperating fully. All we’ve got so far is that he was absent during the time period when we believe she was murdered. Let’s see what Forensics and our first round of witness statements throw up first; it’s never a good look when you arrest a grieving spouse and then have to release them with No Further Action.”

Roehampton’s lips twitched. “Very politically astute, Warren. We’ll make a superintendent out of you yet.”

Chapter Three

“THEY’VE FOUND THE MURDER weapon and a blood-soaked jacket.”

Rachel Pymm called across the CID office as soon as Warren and Sutton exited Roehampton’s office. They jogged over to her desk.

“Andy Harrison just phoned,” she said. “He’s sent photos.”

She opened her email.

The first image appeared to be a kitchen knife. The blade was stained with blood, glistening wetly in the camera phone’s flash. Harrison had included a ruler for scale; the non-serrated blade was just shy of six-inches.

“It went in practically to the hilt, by the looks of it,” said Warren. “The handle is smeared, zoom in.”

Pymm manipulated her mouse.

“I’d say the killer was wearing gloves,” commented Sutton. “You can see the shape of fingers, but it doesn’t look like there are prints.”

“Let’s see the jacket,” said Warren.

The next image was of a light-coloured sports coat. The cuffs and the lower sleeves were stained bright red.

“It doesn’t look as though there is anything on the front of the coat,” said Warren. “Which I’d expect if the killer was standing in front of her.”

“So they stood behind her?” suggested Sutton. He picked a pen off Pymm’s desk and moved behind Warren. Reaching around his friend, as if to give him a bear hug, he held the pen in both

hands and directed the nib towards Warren's sternum. "Maybe the positioning of the finger marks will show how the killer held the knife? And we should ask the pathologist to check the angle of the blade, it might indicate the height of the killer."

"Where were they found?" asked Warren.

"In a wheelie bin just outside the marquee," said Pymm. "They were hidden underneath some rubbish, but otherwise a pretty poor effort at concealing them."

"What about gloves?" asked Sutton.

"Nothing yet."

"I suppose they could have sneaked up behind her, but my gut says it suggests a degree of familiarity with the killer," mused Warren.

"Like a friend," said Sutton, darkly. "Or her husband."

Micky Grady was a forty-something, clean-shaven man. Originally dressed in a bright yellow shirt, ripped jeans and a flamboyant waistcoat, he'd paled when he'd been asked to change into a grey T-shirt and tracksuit bottoms. He'd paled even further when asked for a DNA sample and fingerprints.

"Is this really necessary?" he'd finally asked when Moray Ruskin had requested his mobile phone and PIN code.

"Just routine," the Scotsman had assured him, although his tone had brooked no argument. "The sooner we can eliminate everyone at the scene the better."

"Where were you whilst the show was on?" Hardwick asked. Grady wasn't under arrest, but he had been cautioned that the interview was being recorded, and that he could leave or request a solicitor at any time.

Grady swallowed. "I was hanging around backstage. Once the show has started, it's out of my hands."

"I'd have thought the director would be waiting in the wings, just in case?" said Ruskin.

Grady shook his head. "I wasn't the director. A very talented young man, Yusuf, was the director. I guess you could say I was the producer. The whole production was written and devised by our sixth form drama society." A proud smile crossed his face. "It was wonderful to see such an amazing event. The A level drama students were the driving force behind the show, but almost half the sixth form were involved in some capacity. The script, music, costumes, sets, even the lighting and sound, were all written, designed or made by our pupils. The teaching staff were only there for guidance, really. An incredible team effort." The smile faded. "And for it all to end in such a way ..."

"I understand that Geraldine joined the production about halfway through," said Hardwick.

"Yes, she only started at the school this year. By September, the design of the show was already well underway and the casting took place in the first few weeks of the autumn term. Geri was a keen member of the local drama scene and was very generous with her time and expertise, and her local contacts. Strictly speaking, it wasn't a school production, and although Riverview Academy was very supportive, those involved weren't given any timetable space. Everything was done after school or at weekends; everyone was a volunteer. The kids raised money through sponsored events and a funding pitch to the Rotary Club."

"How would you say Geraldine was viewed by the cast and crew?" asked Hardwick.

"Everyone was very grateful for her skills and the hard work she put in," he said.

"Was she liked?" asked Ruskin.

"Yes, I'd say so," said Grady. His eye twitched.

“What about you, Mr Grady?” asked Ruskin. “You didn’t feel — usurped, shall we say?”

Grady swallowed. “I don’t know what you mean.”

“You are the show’s producer. As Head of Drama, you were the person initially approached by the sixth form committee. You helped pitch the idea to the school’s Senior Leadership Team and Governing Body. You supervised the project for almost twelve months. Then, when Geraldine joined, she increased the scale of the project. I believe it was her idea to move the production to Middlesbury Common, rather than staging it in the school hall, as originally planned, and actually hold it on Midsummer’s night?”

Hardwick made a show of looking at her notes. “I understand that you objected to that, citing concerns with logistics and weather.”

Grady shifted in his seat. “Look, I admit that I was sceptical at first. We have a very good school hall, with lighting and sound equipment, proper changing rooms and toilets. Not to mention it doesn’t matter if it rains. Not only that, Midsummer overlaps the end of the exam period. Some kids were unavailable, because they’re sitting an exam tomorrow!”

“But it went ahead anyway?” said Hardwick. “That must have stung.”

Grady shrugged. “In the end, it came down to money. Geri was able to get permission from Middlesbury Council to use the Common on that date and managed to borrow the lighting and outdoor equipment for free. Seating capacity was almost twice that of the school hall, so there was more ticket revenue, and she persuaded the governors that if the bulk of the rehearsals etc were done before study leave, and strict limits placed on how long students spent rehearsing during the exam period, it would be no more disruptive than holding it before the exams started.” He snorted. “She even persuaded them that a break from their revision to do something different would be good for their mental health and well-being. In the end, you choose your battles.

“But in answer to your implied accusation, no I didn’t harbour any ill-feeling towards Geri. In fact, I rather enjoyed working with her. It reminded me ...” he broke off, and shook his head, tears starting to prick in the corner of his eyes.

After a brief pause to allow him to regain his composure, Hardwick asked him if anyone was with him when he was backstage.

After a moment’s hesitation, he shook his head.

“No, daft as it sounds, I hate watching opening night. The students knew where I was in case they needed me, obviously, but I prefer to sit on my own. The first I knew that anything was wrong was when the music stopped as Aisha ran on stage.”

“When did you last see Geraldine?” asked Ruskin.

“A few minutes before curtain up. Everyone gathered for a group selfie.”

“And where was that?”

“In the green room,” his voice thickened. “The marquee where she was found.”

“How did she seem to you?” asked Hardwick.

Grady shrugged. “She seemed fine. I know she wasn’t thrilled at being stuck in the green room, but somebody had to be,” he gave a mirthless smile. “You know what kids are like these days. There were probably enough mobile phones in students’ bags and coats to stock a branch of Carphone Warehouse. There would have been all hell to pay if someone got in there and nicked them.”

“And you didn’t speak to her again?” asked Hardwick.

“No,” he said quietly.

“OK, Mr Grady, thank you for your time,” said Hardwick.

After escorting him back to reception, where he agreed to remain for the time being, she and Ruskin headed back to CID.

“We’ve just been fed a pack of lies,” she told Warren.

Chapter Four

“HE CLAIMS HE WAS hiding backstage because he was too nervous to watch the performance,” said Hardwick.

“Bollocks,” said Ruskin. “You’re telling me a drama teacher can’t watch the performance that they just spent months helping rehearse? Come on, most drama teachers are frustrated actors — give them half a chance and they’d push all the kids off stage and perform all the parts themselves.”

“I’m with you there,” said Susan. “The Micky Grady I know loves to perform. When it’s his turn to do assembly, it always over-runs.”

Susan’s presence was highly irregular, but her insight into the school and staff made her invaluable. Roehampton had agreed that she could be a consultant, as long as she kept everything confidential. It was now very late, but the babysitter had been delighted to earn double money. Niall was apparently sound asleep.

“So at this moment in time, neither Stephen McCormack nor Micky Grady have verifiable alibis for when Geraldine was killed,” said Warren.

“We can potentially add Hilda Brown to that list as well,” said Hutchinson. “I’ve been going through the witness statements and it seems that no one saw her either.”

“What do you mean?” asked Warren. “I thought she was the musical director?”

“She was. She helped write a couple of songs and worked with the sixth formers to arrange the musical cues, but she wasn’t the conductor, that was another teacher. She was supposed to be backstage. But no one can recall actually seeing her.”

“Didn’t she and Geraldine McCormack have a falling out?” asked Warren.

Susan frowned. “That was my understanding. I was never quite sure why. All I know is that she and Geri were always very frosty towards one another. I’ve no idea if it has anything to do with the production. I didn’t think Geri really got involved with the music side of things.”

“In that case, it’s time to speak to Ms Brown,” said Warren.

“On it,” said Hardwick.

“No comment.”

Hilda Brown wasn’t under arrest, nor did she have a solicitor present. Nevertheless, she had said nothing more than her name and address for the record.

A short woman with jet black hair, freckles and a broad Northern Irish accent, Hardwick would be interested to hear the pathologist’s opinion as to whether Brown was tall enough to have killed her late colleague from behind.

She decided to move on from Brown’s whereabouts during the performance.

“Your relationship with Geraldine has been described as ‘frosty’ by some,” said Hardwick. “Why was that?”

Again, Brown refused to comment.

“Did the falling out extend as far back as university?” asked Ruskin.

Brown flinched. “How did you ... no comment,” she amended quickly.

“We’ve interviewed several of your colleagues, who mentioned in passing that you knew each other before Geraldine started at Riverview Academy,” Hardwick replied.

“Different courses, obviously,” said Ruskin. “But you’re a music specialist, and Geraldine was a keen member of the drama society, so it’s not difficult to imagine that your paths crossed.”

“No comment,” said Brown, but she was clearly shaken.

“Were you and Geraldine friends at university? Did you have a falling out?” asked Hardwick.

“No comment,” she said, a response she repeated for the next thirty-minutes.

“OK, that’ll do for now,” said Hardwick, eventually. “We’d appreciate it if you stick around for a bit. I know it’s late, but we may have some more questions for you.”

“Am I under arrest?” she asked. Beneath the tough facade, there was a trace of fear.

“No,” said Hardwick, before adding, “not at this time.”

Chapter Five

“**Y**OU NEED TO SEE this, Boss.”

Rachel Pymm was waving at Warren across the room.

“Stephen McCormack gave us the PIN codes to both his and his wife’s handsets. Digital Forensics are going through them as we speak, but they’ve sent over transcripts for the past week’s worth of messages to be getting on with.”

“What am I looking at here?” he asked. On one of her three screens were two identical text messages, side-by-side.

“This message was sent from Geraldine’s phone to her husband’s,” she said.

‘I am so bored. I can hear what’s going on out there, but I’m stuck here playing on my phone. Can’t wait to swap with someone during the interval. No point coming back here then, but all hands on deck after we finish. Sooner we square everything away, the sooner we can go to the pub. Don’t care if it’s a school night! XX’

“Look at when it was sent,” said Pymm.

“19:46,” said Warren. “That’s after McCormack returned from his toilet break. There’s no way he could have killed his wife.”

“There’s more,” said Pymm. “She also used WhatsApp.” She switched screens to show a series of WhatsApp messages.

“This is her final WhatsApp, sent immediately after the text. Two blue ticks, so the recipient saw it.”

'I am so fucking bored and horny. Meet me by the generator tent in about twenty minutes, I reckon we've got just enough time before the interval.'

"What are those emojis?" asked Warren.

"A licky face, an aubergine and an explosion," said Pymm. She paused. "You have literally no idea what that means do you?"

"Spicy moussaka?" suggested Warren, tentatively.

"Not exactly. But still quite a mouthful. Put it this way, the recipient of this WhatsApp was in for a treat. Assuming there wasn't a powercut and somebody went to check the diesel generators whilst they were busy." She smirked. "I see from your glowing cheeks that the penny's just dropped."

"So who was the recipient?" asked Warren.

"The owner of that blood-stained jacket," said Pymm.

Micky Grady was still in a police-issue tracksuit when Hardwick and Ruskin interviewed him again. By now he had engaged the services of the duty solicitor.

"When did your affair start with Geraldine McComack?" asked Hardwick.

Grady opened his mouth, before closing it again.

"Was it when she started at Riverview Academy, or was it already ongoing?" asked Ruskin. "The WhatsApp messages we've found on yours and her handsets only go back as far as Christmas."

"No comment."

"Or perhaps, it was more of a rekindling?" said Hardwick. "You know, from university days?"

This time Grady gave a visible start.

"We already know that Hilda Brown and Geraldine knew each other from their University of Warwick days, and obviously

Stephen was around then,” said Ruskin. “But when we looked at your CV, we saw that whilst you did a Master’s degree in theatre and education down in London before doing teacher training, that was somewhat later in your career. Your first degree was actually in maths, at Warwick. In the same cohort as Geraldine and Stephen. I’m going to assume that you were also a member of the drama society?”

“Why didn’t you mention that you already knew Geraldine earlier, when we interviewed you?” asked Hardwick. “Some might suggest you had something to hide.”

“I’d remind you that my client is not under arrest,” interjected the solicitor. “If you have any specific accusations, you need to state them clearly.”

Hardwick and Ruskin ignored him.

“You told us that you hid backstage as you were too nervous to watch the show.” Hardwick shook her head. “I’ll be honest, I’m finding that hard to believe. I’ve spoken to some of your colleagues and they agree that would be out of character.”

“No comment,” said Grady.

Ruskin turned his laptop so that the screen was visible.

“This is a group photo, taken on your phone by an obliging parent, just before the show started. Is that you?”

“No comm—,” he broke off at Ruskin’s raised eyebrow. Nobody else in the picture was wearing a fluorescent shirt and waistcoat. “Yes,” he amended quietly.

“The jacket that you are wearing,” said Hardwick. “Where is it now?”

Grady frowned. “I’m not sure. I guess it’s still hanging up in the green room.”

“Is this it?” asked Ruskin.

He switched to the next photo and Grady let out a gasp.

“Oh, Jesus. No way. I never killed her. Somebody else must have been wearing a similar jacket.”

“Where were you really, Micky?” asked Hardwick. “Hiding backstage isn’t going to cut it. Nobody saw you.”

“I don’t know ...”

“Why did you do it, Micky? Why did you kill Geraldine?” asked Ruskin.

“I didn’t, I swear.”

“What went wrong for you to kill your lover and university friend?”

“I never killed Geri. I wouldn’t. I loved her. I wanted to be with her.”

“I would advise you not to make any further comment,” said his solicitor.

“Michael John Grady, I am arresting you on suspicion of murder ...” said Hardwick.

Chapter Six

"GOOD WORK, YOU TWO," said Warren after Micky Grady had been booked in. It was now into the early hours. Grady would be shown to a cell and allowed some sleep, which was not yet on the cards for Warren.

"You get yourself home for a few hours, he's not going anywhere. Forensics are still processing the scene and even fast-track won't get us DNA and fingerprints before tomorrow afternoon at the earliest. Could one of you drop Susan off on your way back?"

"I'll do it," Ruskin volunteered.

"You know I can't believe that Micky Grady was having an affair with Geri," said Susan.

"He and Geraldine were supposedly at loggerheads over the production," said Warren. "Could that have been a smoke-screen to deflect attention from their relationship?"

"He said that he loved Geraldine and wanted to be with her," said Ruskin. "Might she have rejected his advances?"

"That filthy WhatsApp message she sent him suggested otherwise," said Pymm.

"Maybe he wanted a bit more than that?" said Sutton.

"The timings still bother me," said Warren. "There is a very small window of time between her sending that text message to her husband and Aisha Farley discovering her body."

“I wonder if she actually sent that message?” said Pymm. “If Micky Grady knew her PIN, could he have sent it? After he killed her?”

“Possible,” said Warren. “She WhatsApped him that invitation to meet twenty minutes before her body was discovered. Maybe he went straight down there, rather than waiting?”

“I’ll get Forensics to check her handset for traces of Grady’s DNA or fingerprints,” said Sutton. “Although if they were lovers, that could easily be explained away.”

“If he had access to her phone, it seems a bit careless not to have deleted that WhatsApp,” said Pymm. “It’s like a big red flag to us.”

“I wonder if Stephen McCormack knew of their affair?” said Sutton. “And, if Grady was also on the same university course as the McCormacks, why didn’t Stephen mention it either?”

Before Warren could answer, he heard his office phone start ringing.

“You are never going to believe this, Susan,” he said, when he returned. “It seems that Geraldine wasn’t the only female member of staff that Micky Grady was having an affair with.”

“The silly bastard was trying to protect me,” said Hilda Brown. She held a tissue in her hand. “And I was so angry with him, I was prepared to say nothing. Let him sweat a bit, I thought. But then you arrested him and I realised he really could go to jail over this.”

“Please, start at the beginning,” said Warren. He’d sent Hardwick and Ruskin home for a few hours sleep.

“Micky was backstage with me,” she said. “I knew that he and Geri were having an affair. It wasn’t unexpected. We were all at university in the nineties; members of the drama society. Steve McCormack was my first real boyfriend. We got together half-way

through the first year. Geri, on the other hand was more ‘free with her affections’. She and Micky were ‘friends with benefits’, I’d guess you’d say these days.”

She sighed. “Geri and I were best mates, until she got her claws into Steve. I never really forgave her. Of course she and Micky still hooked up now and again; I wasn’t daft. Even if Steve never figured it out, I lived in the same block of flats as Geri and saw Micky coming and going.”

“So then what happened?” asked Warren.

“We all went our separate ways. Obviously Geri and Steve got married. Micky headed down to London to become a banker, and I eventually trained as a music teacher. I moved to Middlesbury when I got a job at Riverview Academy about ten years ago. That was when I met my fiancé, Carl Burridge.”

“That’s why Micky was protecting you,” said Warren. “You’re engaged to the deputy head at the school you work at. Cheating on him could be career-limiting for both you and Micky, not to mention awkward.”

“Yeah, in a nutshell,” she wiped her eyes. “Micky started at the school four years ago. At first it was lovely to see an old university friend. That was all it was. But about eighteen months ago, Carl and I weren’t in a great place. I was getting frustrated that he kept on avoiding committing to a date for the wedding. Micky was a shoulder to cry on. Eventually, things got out of hand one night ... I love Micky, really I do. In fact, I’ve decided to leave Carl. I’m going to tell him over the summer. I’ve secured a job at a school in Suffolk; I start there in January. I haven’t given my notice yet and I won’t tell Carl about me and Micky, as it will only make things difficult. Micky is looking for another school near where I’ll be living, so he can make a clean break.”

She sniffed. “Or at least that was the plan.”

“Geraldine?” asked Warren gently.

“Yeah. She started last September. I hadn’t heard anything from her. I was amazed that she and Steve were still together, but I figured

let it go. It was twenty-years ago. Micky hadn't seen either of them for almost that long either. He was as amazed at the coincidence as I was. Two decades later and all three of us are teaching in Middlesbury."

"Then what happened?" asked Warren.

"Geri got her claws into Micky," Brown stated. "Simple as that. I don't know if she's just bored of Steve and fancied a fling with an old flame, or she genuinely wants to be with him." She wiped her eyes with the heel of her palm. "Either way, it was just like university all over again. Geri stealing my man from me again. Bitch."

"So what happened tonight?" asked Warren.

"Micky had promised me it was over. It was just a stupid fling. He still wanted to be with me," she gave a bitter chuckle. "I was such a bloody fool. Tonight, he left his phone with me whilst he went around the side of the stage to check that everyone was in position for the next act. It pinged with a WhatsApp. I don't know why I looked, but I know his PIN code and I couldn't help myself. You must have seen that disgusting message. I was furious. I found him, and dragged him off to one of the tents where the musicians stored their equipment. I was still laying into him when Aisha ran onto stage.

"So you see, there's no way he could have killed Geri. He was with me."

Chapter Seven

"THEY ARE EACH OTHER'S alibi," said Roehampton. "Hilda Brown has given us the perfect motive for killing Geraldine McCormack, and now Micky Grady is also claiming they were together."

"What about the blood-stained jacket?" asked Warren, stifling a yawn. Midsummer's Eve was well and truly over. Now it was well into Midsummer's Day. He'd snatched a few hours sleep, before heading back into work.

"It could have been worn by Hilda Brown, I suppose," said Sutton. "Grady reckons he left it in the green room. DNA should tell us either way."

"So you think she's framing him?" said Roehampton. "In which case, he's actually supplying her with an alibi. Which is ironic."

"Could be joint enterprise," said Warren.

"If so, we need to rethink their motive," said Roehampton. "Hilda Brown has plenty of reasons to kill Geraldine McCormack, but why would Micky Grady? And why would Hilda wear Grady's jacket to frame him, if the whole point was to win him back?"

They fell into silence.

Roehampton's desk phone warbled.

"That was Rachel, she needs to speak to us."

Pymm was seated at her desk, radiating excitement.

"Feel free to send fulsome accolades and chocolate my way. I think I've got proof of who did it."

Chapter Eight

“**W**HY DID YOU DO it?” asked Warren.

“No comment.”

“Was it revenge? Anger at her betrayal? Or something else?”

“I have to hand it to you,” said Tony Sutton. “You came pretty close to successfully pinning it on Micky Grady. Wearing his jacket, so that it was blood-stained was very clever. But as our colleagues in Forensics are so very fond of saying, ‘every contact leaves a trace’. I’m pretty sure they’ll find your DNA on the collar. Am I right?”

“No comment.”

“This is very speculative,” said the solicitor. “The results aren’t yet back.”

“They will be,” said Sutton. “Along with the ones from the latex gloves that you wore. It was a pretty grim job fishing them out of the portaloos, but DNA testing is so sensitive these days, I’m certain they’ll be able to work out who wore them.”

The suspect swallowed.

“Your cleverness let you down in the end though,” said Warren. “Our exhibits officer, DS Pymm, has been on loads of courses about using mobile phones to investigate crime. She says that sometimes you can learn a lot from the apps that are installed. Particularly ones that are buried away where the owner of the phone won’t even notice them. Such as third-party apps that allow text messages to be sent with a delay.”

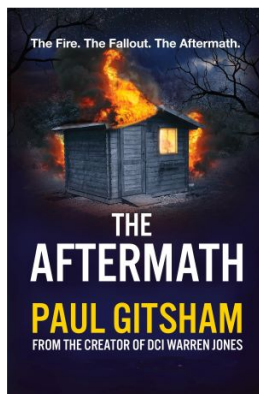
“You were so keen to point us towards your carefully crafted alibi,” said Sutton, “that you actually gave us the handset’s PIN code. So we know you could have installed the app,” said Sutton. “That text message you supposedly received at 19:46, proving Geraldine was still alive after you returned from the toilet, was actually sent at 19:31, I imagine just after you killed her. As was the WhatsApp message to Micky Grady, which would have had him hiding in the generator tent and thus having no alibi.”

“But you didn’t count on somebody else finding her body, just four minutes after that text was received,” continued Warren. “Nor the fact that it wasn’t Micky Grady who picked up that racy WhatsApp you sent. That was your old friend Hilda Brown; the jealous woman who told you of Geraldine and Micky’s affair in the hope you would insist Geraldine end it and she could have Micky to herself. To quote the Bard himself, *‘though she be but little, she is fierce.’* Nobody saw where Hilda and Micky disappeared to, but they certainly remember her appearing ‘with a face like thunder’ and dragging him away, which corroborates their story.”

Across the table, McCormack slumped with his head in his hands.

“Stephen McCormack, you are under arrest for the murder of Geraldine McCormack ...”.

Read on for a preview of
The Aftermath.
The standalone thriller coming October 2024.



Available for pre-order.

The Fire. The Fallout. The Aftermath.

Seamus Monaghan is still haunted by the unexplained fire that killed his vibrant but troubled wife, Carole, three years ago. Why was she taken from him in such a horrific way?

Dominic has protected his brother, Seamus, since they were orphaned as young boys. But is that bond strong enough to survive the fallout from the fire?

Andrea loves her fiancé Seamus, but will the fire's aftermath destroy their future together?

*Time moves on, but can the embers of the past ever
be truly extinguished?*

Prologue

Primary Fire. Serious risk to life and property.

The shed was fully ablaze as Crew Manager Matt Brown burst through the kitchen doors and out into the garden. He caught the familiar odours as he pulled his breathing mask across his face. Wood smoke, burning roof felt, and something no firefighter ever wanted to smell.

To the left of the shed, a man in a shirt and trousers was on his hands and knees retching. Beside him a garden hose pumped water ineffectually onto the path. The water pressure this far from town was crap; they'd have to pull their hoses through the house and use the appliance's water pumps to douse the inferno.

"I can't get the door open," the man wheezed. "I can't get in." A series of coughs wracked his body, and he threw up on the lawn.

Behind him, Brown heard the thud of boots as his colleagues followed him.

Pausing to size up the challenge ahead, he hefted the crowbar in his hand, then approached the conflagration.

The wooden outbuilding was completely alight, flames licking its roof.

Deliberate, he thought. Treated wooden sheds didn't just spontaneously catch fire.

The shed door was reinforced with a high-security lock and two padlocks, one at the top and one at the bottom. They were both hanging from their hasps.

He reached for the handle with his insulated gloves and gave it a firm twist. Nothing, it was locked.

"I can't find the keys," the man gasped, before coughing again.

“Come with me mate, it’s not safe.” Brown heard his crewmate’s soothing voice behind him. Even through his protective suit, the heat was fearsome.

He inserted the crowbar between the lock and the door jamb and levered it back. With a splintering crunch, the door opened.

Behind him he heard scuffling and a surprised grunt from his colleague. “Woah mate, stay with me.”

Turning, Brown blocked the entrance to the burning shed and grabbed the flailing homeowner.

“No mate, no mate, you don’t want to see in there,” he said, struggling to stop the man from going any further.

One glance and years of experience had told him that once seen, the inside of the shed could never be unseen.

The man let out a shrieking scream. “Carole!”

Now

Three Years After The Fire

Chapter One

Dominic Monaghan tapped the side of his champagne flute with a fork and stood. Raising his voice above the howling wind and pounding rain outside, he lifted his glass.

“Ladies and gentlemen, a moment of your time, please.”

“I thought the speeches were supposed to be at the end of the meal?” someone called out.

“And give you the opportunity to sneak out early to relieve the babysitter? I’m wise to that one, Pete.”

Seamus Monaghan gave a mock groan and placed his head in his hands. Beside him his fiancée, Andrea, laughed and settled back in her seat. Dominic was an entertaining and witty public speaker; she looked forward to what he had to say. She looked forward even more to the small glass of champagne she was allowing herself. Seamus reached for his red wine and finished it in one gulp.

Andrea squeezed his hand in support. Where Dominic was loud and outgoing, happy to be the centre of attention, Seamus was more quiet; shy even.

Seamus reached for the bottle and refilled his glass. “I think I’m going to need this,” he muttered. The dozen or so friends gathered around the table chuckled at his discomfort.

“Grin and bear it sweetheart,” she whispered in his ear. “He’s picking up the tab, remember.”

Seamus took a large swallow of his wine.

“Today we are gathered to celebrate my little brother,” said Dominic. “Thirty years old and he doesn’t look a day over forty.”

“Piss off,” said Seamus, as he emptied his glass. “Unlike some people here, I don’t dye my hair.”

“I think the grey makes you look sexy, Dom,” piped up Anton. “I’ve always had a thing for silver foxes.”

“You have a thing for anything with a pulse,” said Dominic.

Anton gave a good-natured shrug. “There is that.”

Seamus reached for the wine bottle again, and Andrea buried a twinge of jealousy. It was his birthday; if not tonight, then when? For months, he had abstained from drinking in the house. Their fridge was filled with alcohol-free beers and the spirit collection had been banished to the garage. It was a silent sign of support that reminded her why she loved him so much.

“Anyway, as I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted,” continued Dominic, “tonight, we are here to celebrate my little brother reaching another milestone,” his voice took on a mock wistful air. “Why, it seems like only yesterday, I was teaching him how to shave and talk to girls,”

“Oh, so that’s your fault?” called out Andrea. “You and I need a chat.” She kissed Seamus on the cheek. “No offence, sweetie.”

“The bathroom looked like a murder scene,” said Seamus. His voice was slurred, but he wore a sloppy smile. “I must have ended up with half a loo roll stuck to my face.”

“Manual dexterity never was your thing,” said Dominic, over the laughter. He spoke in a mock stage whisper. “It’s why he’s never beaten me at FIFA.”

There was a chorus of “ooh”s, from around the table.

“Oh, that’s a low blow,” Andrea said.

Dominic gave an exaggerated shrug. “All I’m saying is that you should leave it to Uncle Dom to teach the bump how to play video games, change a tyre, wire a plug ...”

Seamus’ retort was drowned out by a deafening crack of thunder. A moment later, the restaurant was plunged into darkness.

There was a collective gasp from the assembled diners and a squeal of surprise from one of the servers. After a few seconds the emergency lights above the fire exit blinked on, the flickering tealights the only other source of illumination.

Dominic stepped over to the full-length windows and peered through the glass.

“Looks like that took out the whole hillside,” he said.

A low hubbub started amongst the other guests. Eventually Francesco, the restaurant owner, emerged from the kitchen, a torch in his hand.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I am so sorry,” he said loudly. “We have completely lost power, along with the rest of the area. I’m afraid we are going to have to close for the night.”

“What about the rest of our meal?” demanded a middle-aged man in a suit and tie. “Don’t you have a back-up generator?”

“I’m sorry, but it only powers the emergency lights and keeps the freezers running,” Francesco said.

“Don’t you cook on gas?” asked the man’s wife.

“Yes, but it isn’t safe for my staff to work without proper lighting,” Francesco said.

As the harried restaurant owner tried to placate the irate customers and stave off the one-star reviews, Seamus stretched his back.

“Spared by a divine act,” he said to his brother.

“Don’t worry, I’ll save it for team briefing,” Dominic said, clapping him on the back as he headed for the young waitress who had been serving them.

“I take it the tills are down?” he said.

“Yes,” she said. She nodded anxiously.

“Don’t worry,” Dominic said. “Frankie’s a mate. I’ll pop back later in the week and settle up for the wine we’ve drunk.”

He opened his wallet and took out a twenty-pound note. “Stick this in the tip jar, it’s not your fault the weather’s so bad.”

Back at the table, the rest of the party were getting their coats and saying their goodbyes. Andrea grabbed a couple of handfuls of bread from the baskets on the table; it was already an hour past the time she and Seamus usually ate, and she was ravenous.

She looked at her champagne flute, before deciding she’d earned it.

“You stay here,” Dominic said, materialising at her side. “I’ll bring the car around.”

“No rush,” she said patting her swollen belly. “Bump needs a wee.”

Maurice Seacombe peered through the windscreen of his elderly Subaru, the headlights barely cutting through the pounding rain. Another flash of lightning left coloured spots dancing in his vision. Beside him, his wife shifted in her seat.

“Slow down, Maurice,” she said. He ignored her, concentrating on the road ahead. His daughter had offered them her spare room for the night, but Winnie was hosting tomorrow’s Macmillan coffee morning and she wanted to get up early to do some more baking. He should have put his foot down and insisted they stay. But after forty years of marriage, he’d learned to pick his battles.

“You’re going too fast,” she said, as if a lifetime of knitting in the passenger seat had somehow made her an authority.

“Do you want to drive?” he asked, glaring at her.

“Look out!”

Snapping his attention back to the road, he hit the brakes, feeling the wheels lock and the car start to slide.

He caught a brief glimpse of the woman's face as she tumbled down the embankment, and then she was gone.

Wrestling with the wheel, he felt the drumming through the brake pedal as the car's ABS fought for grip on the slick tarmac, before they finally came to a scraping, juddering halt, resting against the crash barrier.

He let out a deep breath.

"Are you OK?" he asked, turning to his wife.

She pointed at the huge crack in the windscreen, her voice a whisper. "I think you hit someone."

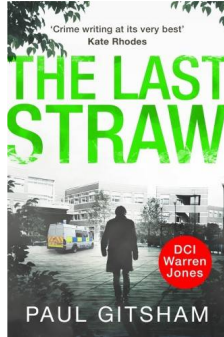
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Other Writing By Paul Gitsham

DCI Warren Jones: The Last Straw



When Professor Alan Tunbridge is discovered in his office with his throat slashed, the suspects start queuing up. The brilliant but unpleasant microbiologist had a genius for making enemies. For Warren Jones, newly appointed Detective Chief Inspector to the Middlesbury force, a high-profile murder is the ideal opportunity. He's determined to run a thorough and professional investigation but political pressure to resolve the case quickly and tensions in the office and at home make life anything but easy.

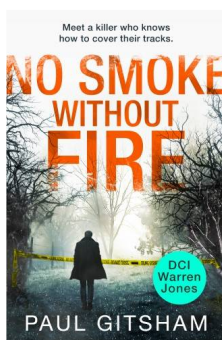
Everything seems to point to one vengeful man but the financial potential of the professor's pioneering research takes the inquiry in an intriguing and, for Jones and his team, dangerous direction.

"Crime Writing at its very best."

Kate Rhodes, author of *Cross Bones Yard* and the *Alice Quentin* series.

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DCI Warren Jones: No Smoke Without Fire



Meet a killer who knows how to cover their tracks ...

DCI Warren Jones has a bad feeling when the body of a young woman turns up in Beaconsfield Woods. She's been raped and strangled but the murderer has been careful to leave no DNA evidence. There are, of course, suspects - boyfriend, father - to check out but, worryingly, it looks more and more like a stranger murder.

Warren's worst fears are confirmed when another young woman is killed in the same way.

The MO fits that of Richard Cameron who served twelve years for rape. But Cameron never killed his victims and he has a cast-iron alibi.

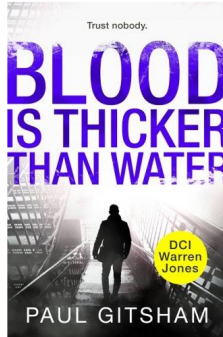
Then personal tragedy intervenes and Warren is off the case. But the pressure is mounting and another woman goes missing. Warren is back but will the break he desperately needs come before there's another victim?

"Excellent! Best read in years and I have read A LOT of crime fiction!"

Amazon Reviewer

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DCI Warren Jones: Blood Is Thicker Than Water (Novella)



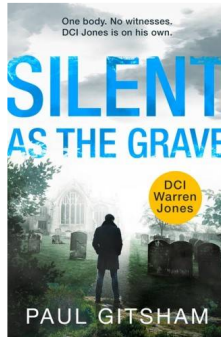
It all seems straightforward. There's been a tragic accident: the old man fell asleep in his chair, woke up in the dark, fell and hit his head on the mantelpiece. But the Crime Scene Manager isn't happy. There are just too many details that aren't quite right and Charles Michaelson's accident becomes a suspicious death. And, as DCI Warren Jones investigates, he and his team discover that all is not as it appears to be in the dead man's caring family when his son-in-law disappears. Then they uncover some dark secrets in Michaelson's past and a motive for murder.

"Brilliant read full of twists and turns."

Amazon Reviewer

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DCI Warren Jones: Silent As The Grave



It's DCI Warren Jones' coldest case yet ...

The body of Reginald Williamson had been well concealed under a bush in Middlesbury Common and the murder efficiently carried out – a single stab wound to the chest. Reggie's dog had been killed just as efficiently. With no clues or obvious motive, the case is going nowhere. Then Warren gets a break.

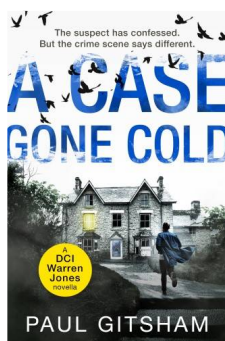
Warren's instincts tell him that the informant is dodgy – a former police officer under investigation. But when Warren hears the incredible story he has to tell, he's glad to have given him a chance to speak. Suddenly, a wide criminal conspiracy, involving high-level police corruption, a gangster and a trained killer, is blown wide open...and Warren finds that this time, it's not just his career under threat, but his family – and his life.

"I completely devoured this book."

NetGalley Reviewer

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DCI Warren Jones: A Case Gone Cold (Novella)



When an open-and-shut burglary case lands on DCI Warren Jones' desk, he suspects it's come to the wrong detective – until he learns a tantalizing detail. Despite the suspect having admitted to the crime after being found with the stolen goods, DNA found at the scene does not match the man currently on bail – but is a match to an unsolved, violent rape case dating back to 1992.

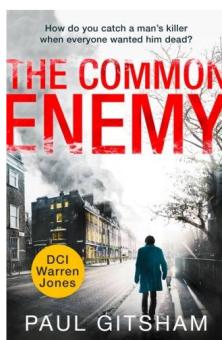
With their man in custody refusing to talk, Warren must embark on a manhunt for the mystery accomplice. And so begins a game of cat and mouse that will test Warren's rawest instincts and resolve – and throw up a shocking twist.

"Short but a winner."

Amazon Reviewer

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DCI Warren Jones: The Common Enemy



How do you catch a man's killer when everyone wanted him dead?

In Middlesbury, a rally is being held by the British Allegiance Party – a far-right group protesting against the opening of a new Mosque.

When the crowd disperses, a body is found in an alleyway. Tommy Meegan, the loud-mouthed leader of the group, has been stabbed through the heart.

Across town, a Muslim community centre catches fire in a clear act of arson, leaving a small child in a critical condition. And the tension which has been building in the town for years boils over.

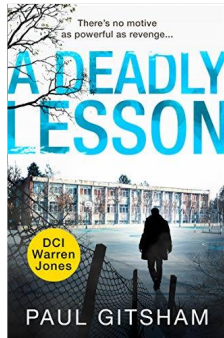
DCI Warren Jones knows he can't afford to take sides – and must solve both cases before further acts of violent revenge take place. But, in a town at war with itself, and investigating the brutal killing of one of the country's most-hated men, where does he begin?

"Highly recommend... a book that you will struggle to put down."

Reader Review

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DCI Warren Jones: A Deadly Lesson (Novella)



When Jillian Gwinnet is found dead – strangled in her office – it's a shocking and perplexing case for DCI Warren Jones.

She was a trusted and respected member of the community. Deputy Head of Sacred Heart Catholic Academy, she had an unblemished record and had been a formidable force in the school for years.

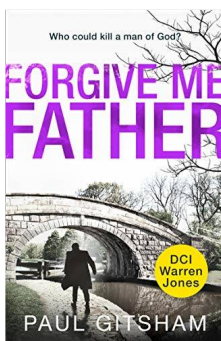
Who would kill this woman – a woman who had dedicated her life to supporting others? The deeper Warren delves, the darker the possible motives become...

"Couldn't put it down but didn't want to finish it."

Amazon Reviewer

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DCI Warren Jones: Forgive Me Father



Who could kill a man of God?

A fire breaks out in a chapel, and DCI Warren Jones is alarmed by what is discovered at the scene. Curled up in the ash and debris is a body – and it's soon clear that the chapel doors were locked from the inside.

The disappearance of a local priest, Father Nolan, and a cryptic note left in his room, point to an unusually violent suicide. But when further evidence confuses the picture, Warren begins to suspect foul play – and murder. Clearly, someone wanted this seemingly innocent man to suffer.

And when a discovery on a quiet riverbank sends the investigation reeling, Warren knows he must act quickly to discover who is behind this spate of grisly deaths – before another man of God is found dead.

"Highly Recommended! This was an amazing discovery, one of those that makes you go and buy quite a number of the previous books in the series."

Amazon Reviewer

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DCI Warren Jones: At First Glance (Novella)



When a small-time drug dealer is found with his throat cut, a trail of blood leading to the weapon and killer, DCI Warren Jones looks forward to a fast resolution. But what seemed like an open-and-shut case quickly becomes a twisted trap: an innocent man set up to take the fall.

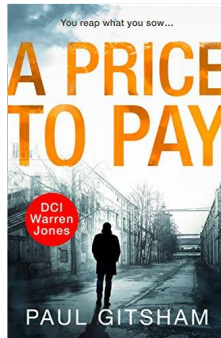
Everybody knew the victim, but witnesses are sparse – no one wants to get involved in a turf war. The one detail Warren has to go on is a mystery accomplice seen with the victim before his death: a man called Madman. A man who doesn't seem to exist...

"A gritty story with... a tight and twisting plot... You'll want to read more."

NetGalley Reviewer

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DCI Warren Jones: A Price To Pay



If you play with fire, you're going to get burned ...

It should be an easy solve: a murder in broad daylight with two eyewitnesses. But the victim is the son of a notorious local crime family who has a habit of hitting on other men's wives; the witnesses are Serbian nationals who speak limited English.

For DCI Warren Jones, this is his most challenging case yet. As the suspects pile up, the victim's family work to protect their son's memory by destroying any evidence that could betray his criminal past – or might have led to his killer.

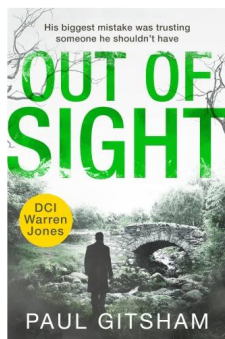
Somehow Warren must uncover the truth about the murder – but there are secrets at the heart of the case more dangerous than anyone could have imagined, and the fallout could tear Warren's team apart...

"Rollercoaster of a read where the action never stops... An excellent addition to the series... Definitely recommended."

NetGalley Reviewer

Follow The Link To Buy.

DCI Warren Jones: Out Of Sight



His biggest mistake was trusting someone he shouldn't have

...

When a body is found abandoned under a bridge, teeth and fingerprints removed, DCI Warren Jones and his team have little to go on. And once they finally identify the victim, the case doesn't get any easier.

Estranged from his family but desperate to reconnect, the victim led a solitary life – apart from secretive liaisons with a series of partners he met online. Could one of them be guilty of his murder? Or does the truth lie closer to home?

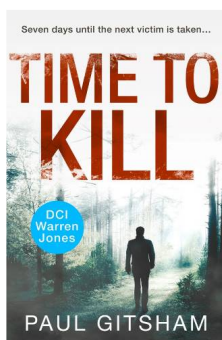
The more Warren digs, the murkier the picture becomes – re-written family wills, sabotaged CCTV footage and black-market deals are just the beginning. Only one thing is for sure: whoever was behind the brutal murder, they carefully won the trust of their victim before ending his life...

'A cracker of a page-turner... Highly recommended'

Neil Lancaster, bestselling author of *Dead Man's Grave*

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DCI Warren Jones: Time To Kill



Seven days until the killer strikes again – but who is next?

DCI Warren Jones is deep into the investigation into an apparent murder-suicide when another case is thrust onto his desk. Winnie Palmer, missing for two months, has been found dead, her body stripped and propped against a tree in the woods.

Two cases are more than enough to handle – but things get even harder for the team when they realise the cases might be linked. And when a third suspicious death is added to the pile, it raises a horrible question. Is there a serial killer on the loose?

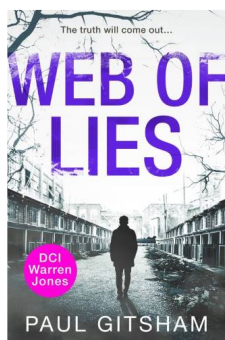
With all the murders taking place on Sundays, it's a race against time to find the killer before they strike again. As the days tick by Warren desperately searches for a link between the victims – but the only thing he knows for sure is that absolutely anyone could be next...

"A smart and exciting crime thriller that'll keep you second guessing from start to finish... Full of cleverly plotted misdirections and a riveting chase that barrels towards a shocking conclusion."

Karin Nordin, author of *Where Ravens Roost*

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DCI Warren Jones: Web Of Lies



The Truth Will Come Out ...

When mother-of-two Louisa doesn't return home from work one night, her husband raises the alarm. Investigating the workshop where she ran her mail-order business reveals signs she was taken by force – and DCI Warren Jones is put on the case.

As Warren and his team begin to dig into the missing woman's life, a complex network of relationships emerges. Who is Louisa's husband talking to on his second, secret phone? What's the truth about her relationship with the convicted criminal who works next door? And what happened to Louisa's university housemate a decade ago?

Can the team break through the lies and get to the truth?

"A complex and tangled web of deceit, secrets and lies... Tense and compelling... I read into the wee hours."

Liz Mistry, author of the Detective Nikki Parekh series

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