

PROLOGUE

VINCE McNULTY SAT in the extra legroom window seat and felt the turbulence shake the passenger jet as it made its final approach to Manchester Airport. He looked out of the window but could only see brief snatches of ground through breaks in the clouds. The clouds looked dark and angry and a strong gust of wind tried to knock the Boeing 737 off course but the pilot held firm. Even though McNulty was almost back on English soil the ground seemed to be a long way down. He popped another mint in his mouth and sucked to ease the pressure in his ears. The plane was buffeted again. His ears refused to pop.

The overnight flight from Boston had been long and uneventful, the brief layover in New York being the only chance for McNulty to stretch his legs before being strapped into the long metal tube that had no right to defy gravity. The upgrade to extra legroom was a thank you from Larry Unger, the movie producer proving surprisingly understanding about losing his technical advisor right in the middle of Titanic Productions' latest shoot. McNulty had argued that he should only be away for a few days but even he didn't believe that.

The plane shook again. McNulty gripped the armrests, his knuckles showing white in the dull grey light. Northern England was still Northern England. Dull, wet and windy. The whine of the undercarriage being lowered was barely audible above the roar of the engines, the plane slowing some more as the giant wheels caught the air.

Final approach. Seven minutes according to the flight tracker on the seatback monitor in front of him. He distracted himself by playing a little police game even though he wasn't a policeman anymore. That had never stopped him before. Once a cop, always a cop. His favourite mantra. In his mind he set up an imaginary crime, say theft from somebody's cabin luggage, then scanned the passengers nearest his seat. He ticked off the three main elements that would make somebody a suspect. Means, motive and opportunity.

Means. Being physically able to reach into the bag and steal the item.

Motive. To sell the item, desire it or simply want to deprive the owner of it.

Opportunity. Being in the right place when the bag was left unattended.

If years of being a cop in Yorkshire, and for a shorter time in Savage, Maryland, had proved anything it was that cops didn't put much weight on motive. McNulty had lost count of how many crimes happened because some lowlife piece of shit thought it was a good idea to steal, assault or kill in a fit of passion, anger or boredom. Lowlife pieces of shit didn't need a reason. They didn't have a motive apart from being lowlife pieces of shit.

The plane hit an air pocket and suddenly dropped twenty feet like an elevator with its cables cut. There was a collective cry of panic from the passengers as the cabin lights briefly went out before the engines found air again and the Boeing settled on its final approach. The ground was rushing past beneath the window.

McNulty put another mint in his mouth. His ears popped and the cabin noise stopped being muted and became a roar. What if the crime was crashing a passenger jet? How would means, motive and opportunity work with that? Terrorism would probably be the motive. Or maybe hiding the death of one passenger amid the deaths of everyone else. McNulty shook his head. He'd been working for Larry Unger too long because that sounded like an overused movie plot.

He looked out of the window. Roads and hedgerows rushed by then there was a long expanse of grass verge and finally the oil-streaked tarmac of the runway. A gust of wind sideswiped the airplane and it was suddenly flying at a crazy angle. The cabin shook with the impact as the undercarriage hit hard then skidded sideways. A child was screaming. Some adults too.

McNulty touched the tattoo that ran up one side of his neck, the black branches of a dead tree that was a permanent reminder of Crag View Orphanage where he grew up. He wasn't thinking about growing up, he was wondering about his motives for being here? After surviving the Northern X massage chain, the snuff video gang in Quincy and that shit with Jim Grant in Colorado, was he really going to end his life splattered on the runway at Manchester Airport? He wasn't even back in Yorkshire yet. And why? What the fuck was he doing coming back to England after all these years?