



**PAULINE
ROWSON**

Deadly Waters

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In memory of
Enid (Anne) Rowson

Author's Note

This novel is set in Portsmouth, Hampshire, on the south coast of England. Residents and visitors of Portsmouth must forgive the author for using her imagination and poetic licence in changing the names of places, streets and locations. This novel is entirely a work of fiction.

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One

Friday: 5.45 a.m.

‘Thought you might like this,’ Sergeant Cantelli said, placing a brown plastic beaker on Horton’s desk.

Horton stared at the frothy liquid that resembled dirty washing-up water and said, ‘Are you trying to poison me?’

‘It might help keep you awake.’

‘Doesn’t seem to be doing the trick with you.’ Horton thought Cantelli looked like something they’d exhumed from Milton Cemetery. ‘Sit down before you fall down.’

‘My bones ache, my head’s thumping and I think I’ve caught a cold.’ Cantelli sneezed just to prove it.

‘That’s about all we did catch,’ Horton replied with bitterness. All they had to show for over ninety minutes of surveillance, crouched in a fishing boat at Portsmouth’s Town Camber in the pouring rain, was a bag full of stolen antiques and Mickey Johnson, who had conveniently lost his voice.

‘Any joy finding out who Johnson’s victims are?’ Horton asked, spinning round in his chair and plucking his socks and trainers off the radiator where he had left them to dry after interviewing Mickey.

‘Nothing. We won’t know who he’s turned over until they report it or Mickey decides to confide in us.’

‘I could wring his scrawny neck.’ Horton slipped on his trainers and straightened up with a groan. Cantelli wasn’t the only one whose bones were protesting. ‘What about the boat?’

It certainly wasn’t Johnson’s unless social security benefit had just got a hell of a lot better. If it hadn’t been for that blessed drunk stumbling on to it by mistake then Horton would have caught both of their antiques thieves and not just Johnson.

He recalled with a stab of shame how he’d been poleaxed with cramp during the chase across the cathedral green after

Johnson's young accomplice. He'd given Uniform a description but it wasn't much to go on. It had been too dark and the lad had been wearing a hoodie.

Cantelli said, 'There was nothing on it to give us an ID. Sergeant Elkins says he'll try the Town Camber offices when they're open.'

'What bugs me is that antiques aren't usually Mickey's thing. DVDs, televisions, computers, jewellery and money, yes. But paintings? Mickey couldn't tell a valuable painting from a picture postcard and yet he stole some by William Wylie on that first job.'

'Perhaps the runaway youth is the brains behind the operation,' Cantelli ventured, yawning widely.

Somehow Horton couldn't see it. Pulling his sailing jacket off the radiator and draping it over the coat stand next to his leather bikers' jacket, he said, 'What else has come in?'

Clearly with an effort, Cantelli stirred himself to reply. 'There's been a break-in at the ex-forces club in Landport, and another at the Sir Wilberforce Cutler School. The steward at the club went to Accident and Emergency, but it was just a surface head wound. Some cigarettes and booze were stolen.'

'And the school?'

'Building material.'

'I'll send someone round in the morning.'

It was morning, almost six o'clock. He was ready for his bed and Cantelli looked as though he was about to fall asleep in the chair. He told Cantelli to get off home. He would do the same after putting the finishing touches to his report, but he had hardly got started when his phone rang. It was Sergeant Elkins of the marine unit.

'The Langstone harbour master's just radioed us, Inspector. A fisherman has reported seeing something on the mulberry and he thinks we should take a look.'

For a moment Horton couldn't think what the mulberry was, then his brain clicked into gear. He recalled that it had started life in the Second World War when it had been built as part of a floating harbour for the D-Day landings. Whilst it was being towed out of Langstone Harbour it had developed a fatal crack and was now listed on the charts as a concrete structure nestling on the edge of Sinah Sands.

Horton frowned, puzzled. Elkins was quite capable of investigating this himself, so why call him? 'Any idea what it is?' He was thinking of bed and a long sleep.

'No, but Ray was very insistent that I call *you*.'

Horton sat up at that. He'd known the harbour master for several years. Ray Tomsett was a practical man not given to flights of fancy or hysterics, so what had rattled him?

'I'll meet you at the landing stage, Portsmouth side, in ten minutes.' Horton consoled himself with the fact that Langstone was a stone's throw from his home, which was a boat in Southsea Marina, and if this turned out to be nothing he would be in his bunk in less than an hour.

The streets were quiet as he rode through them on the Harley; the rush hour hadn't begun and the late October sun had yet to rise. Horton's mind went back to the antiques robberies. Perhaps he was missing something crucial.

There had been four burglaries in as many weeks. All the burgled houses had alarm systems, which had been expertly disabled. They'd checked out the security companies that had supplied the alarms and there didn't seem to be any common factor between them. They weren't even installed by the same company, and no security firm in its right mind would employ Johnson. So how had Johnson and his mate known that the owners would be away or out for the night? On the previous robberies there had been no physical signs of breaking and entering, which meant that a key had been used. No key had been found on Johnson, so the youth must still have it. Damn his cramp and damn Mickey Johnson.

Horton turned on to the blustery seafront and headed east. A heavy drizzle was falling as he sped past his marina. He glanced at his boat, yearning for a hot shower, some breakfast and his bunk, and thought enviously of Cantelli who was probably already under a warm duvet.

The car park was deserted as he swung into it at the end of the road and, staring across the dark expanse of swirling sea, he picked out the black humped-back shape of the mulberry. He could see the harbour master's rib the other side of it and by the time Horton had locked his helmet on the Harley and ran down the pontoon, the police launch was coming along side. He leapt on board without Elkins having to moor up and, as PC Ripley pulled away, once again Horton's

thoughts turned to Cantelli. The sergeant had had a lucky escape; he got seasick on a paddleboat. It had taken all Horton's persuasive skills to get him on that fishing boat in the Camber.

'What have you found, Ray?' Horton shouted, as the police launch drew up in front of the mulberry.

'Not sure, Andy. I thought it best to leave it to you.'

Horton heard the wariness in the harbour master's voice and knew by the uncharacteristic grimness of his expression that whatever it was on the mulberry Ray Tomsett didn't much care for it. Horton was filled with foreboding. It was more than the chill of the morning that caused him to shiver. After eighteen years on the force he could smell trouble from a mile away and this was beginning to stink to high heaven. A cold creep of dread fingered its way up his spine and with it came the adrenaline surge that pre-heralded the possibility of a high-level incident. All his fatigue sloughed off him. Now he was wide-awake.

At first glance though, he could see nothing unusual. The seaweed-strewn lower slopes were covered with buoys, lobster pots, fishing nets, rusting anchor chains and a pile of crates. A couple of seagulls, which were perched on the top of the mulberry, turned north-west into the wind and glided away, squealing.

With a quickening heartbeat, he donned a life jacket and climbed off the police launch on to the mulberry. Sergeant Elkins followed whilst Ripley stayed at the helm. It was then that Horton saw what must have caught the fisherman's eye and what Ray had spotted: protruding from a bundle of dark ochre fishing nets was a pair of legs clothed in black trousers. His heart thudded against his chest. This wasn't some poor unfortunate fisherman who'd suffered a heart attack, not unless he'd taken to wearing high-heeled black court shoes.

'Torch,' he commanded. Sunrise was still about an hour away and the overcast weather was making it darker than usual, and yet that fisherman had seen this. How? Had he motored so close to the mulberry that he was able to discern the pair of legs without a torch or light from his boat? Horton doubted it. Or had he collected some of his fishing paraphernalia from the mulberry, spotted this and scampered away, not wanting to get involved? Losing a day's fishing meant losing a day's wage. That was more like it.

He steeled himself and switched on the powerful beam. The seagulls wheeled overhead, diving low over them, cawing loudly. Horton could hear the drone of the traffic from the dual carriageway to the north of the harbour.

He clicked his fingers, 'Gloves.'

Elkins handed him a pair and Horton stretched his fingers inside the tight latex, as Elkins did the same with his gloves.

'Ready?'

Elkins nodded, breathing heavily.

Slowly and carefully Horton lifted the fisherman's nets. A hundred tiny crabs shot out.

'Jesus!' Elkins exclaimed, jumping back and almost slipping over.

'Get a grip, Sergeant.'

'Sorry. Never did like the little buggers, not even in a sandwich.'

Horton's heart was beating rapidly. 'Give me a hand.'

Together they slowly peeled back the netting until the bright beam fell on a face. Elkins retched. Horton dashed his head away, took a deep breath and slowly let it out counting to ten. Then, steeling himself, his stomach clenched, he turned back to stare at the body.

It was a woman. Her shoulder-length black hair was curled on to her forehead and what remained of her cheeks. She was wearing an emerald green blouse, black trousers and enough gold jewellery to sell from a suitcase in the market, he thought. Robbery couldn't have been the motive. Tiny crabs covered her face; they were crawling in her mouth and over her eyes, over the soft rotting flesh. The right-hand side of her temple was a mess of dried blood, bone and sea life. Thank God the nets had covered her face, Horton thought, or the seagulls would have pecked at her eyes. He felt sick and very angry that someone could have killed her and just dumped her here, like rubbish.

Who was she? How had she got here? Who could have killed her and why? He wanted to be in on this investigation. He wanted to find out what kind of sick bastard could do such a thing, and why. And he wanted to bring that person to justice. That was if Detective Superintendent Uckfield appointed him to his newly formed major crime team. There was no reason he shouldn't. After all, hadn't Uckfield promised him that just

before going before the promotion board? It had been right after their last major murder case together: *'If I get the job, Andy, you'll be on my team.'* And yet, so far, there had been nothing from Uckfield, just an ominous silence.

Horton climbed back on to the police launch and took out his mobile. Uckfield would be at his desk by now. Horton could see the first set of early commuters queuing for the Hayling Ferry. Usually it was a short journey of a few minutes from one side of the harbour to the other, unless the ferry was picking up any fishermen, then it would come close to the mulberry, and Horton didn't want any sightseers.

Leaning over the side of the police launch he addressed the harbour master. 'Tell the ferryman to keep well away from here.' Ray nodded, grim-faced, and sped off. 'Steve, it's Andy,' Horton said, as Uckfield grunted a response. 'We've got a body, on the mulberry, in Langstone Harbour. Female, Caucasian. I'm there now with Sergeant Elkins.'

'I'm on my way. I'll notify Dr Price, you call in SOCO.' Horton made a second call and by the time he came off the phone the harbour master had returned.

'The ferryman says it's just a straight crossing this morning. Wanted to know what was going on. I said I wasn't sure.'

'Did you see anyone in the harbour last night?'

'In that weather you must be joking.'

'What about the dredgers?'

Horton peered northwards through the grey morning. Beyond the small islands, which were nature reserves with restricted access, he could see the lights on the cranes at Bedhampton Wharf. His eyes flicked to the west. There was also Kendall's Wharf. Both supported a busy trade in sea-dredged aggregates.

'No, nothing went out.'

Horton asked Ray to collect the scene of crime team from the Portsmouth side of the harbour and then clambered back on to the mulberry where Elkins had recovered his equilibrium.

'She must have been killed and left here at high tide last night,' Elkins said.

High tide had been just after three a.m., Horton calculated, when he'd been questioning Mickey Johnson in a stuffy interview room. Elkins was right. If she had been put here on the

previous high tide in mid-afternoon there wouldn't have been much left of her face. And to place her in daylight would have been too risky; someone might have witnessed it.

He scanned the handful of fishing boats and a couple of motorboats left in the harbour for the winter. Could one of them have been used for the purpose? Or perhaps the killer had come here on a boat out of the nearest marina, which was where Horton's boat was moored. Access in and out of that was via an automatic tidal flap gate, which meant the marina was only accessible three hours either side of high water. That could put the time anywhere between midnight and six a.m. Perhaps the victim had gone willingly on to a boat with her murderer. Or maybe the fisherman who had called up the harbour master had dumped her. Though if he had, then why report it?

And what about the residents either side of the harbour? Would they have seen anything? Horton doubted it. Too dark. He surveyed the area. To his right was the Hayling shore, which gave on to the Hayling Billy Coastal Path spanning the length of the western side of the small island, which was joined to the mainland at its northern end by a bridge. The shore curved round to the right leading to the grounds of the holiday centre known as Sinah Warren. Had anyone from there seen anything suspicious? It was worth asking. And they'd have to check with those people living in the chalet-style buildings to the right of Sinah Warren for any possible sightings.

His eyes swivelled to the left and the Portsmouth shore. There were a few large houses facing on to the harbour and behind them a tower block occupied by students of the University of Portsmouth. He doubted if any of them would have noticed anything untoward: too busy getting pissed, partying, studying or shagging.

He stared back at the body. It was a pretty strange place to dump it; did the mulberry have any significance? Was this woman's death connected with something that had happened during the Second World War? Surely not. She wouldn't have been born then, not for some time afterwards.

The throb of a powerful motorboat speeding towards them made him look up. It was another police launch and on it he could see the squat figure of Uckfield wrapped in an oversized camel overcoat. Beside him was the lanky, long-haired figure of Dr Price.

‘Any ID on her?’ Uckfield bellowed as soon as he was within hailing distance.

‘I didn’t want to disturb her. I thought the doctor could go through her pockets for us.’

Horton noted Price’s horrified expression as he stared at the mulberry.

‘You’re expecting me to climb on to that to examine her!’

‘She’s hardly likely to come to you,’ Horton retorted, feeling the usual stab of antagonism that Price always managed to engender in him. Whilst he didn’t think Price totally incompetent he nevertheless considered him mediocre and unprofessional mainly because of his drink problem. That must surely cloud his judgement. Horton thought that Superintendent Reine, Head of Operational Command, could find a better police doctor than Price. But either Reine was too lazy to do so, or he owed Price and didn’t wish to rock the boat. How long before Price retired he wondered, watching Price glare at the mulberry. Five years? Three?

Turning to Elkins, Horton said, ‘You and Ripley can get off duty. I’ll go back with Superintendent Uckfield or Ray.’

With a grateful glance Elkins climbed back on board his launch. Ripley started the engine and they pulled away, allowing Uckfield’s police launch to get nearer to the mulberry.

‘You’ll need a life jacket, doctor, and a scene suit. If you hang on a moment Phil’s just on his way over,’ Horton shouted.

He saw Phil Taylor and his team of three officers climb into the harbour master’s rib, and within a couple of minutes they were beside them. Grumbling, Dr Price shed his tatty Barbour and climbed into a scene suit and a life jacket. Horton helped him across to the mulberry. As Price staggered against him, Horton caught sight of the doctor’s bloodshot eyes and grey skin. It looked as though Price had had a rough night, though judging by the smell of his breath Horton thought he had been nursing a bottle of whisky rather than a sick patient.

‘Can’t you get these bloody crabs off her?’ Price growled.

Turning to Uckfield’s launch, Horton reached for the boat hook and extended the pole so that he could reach the face without having to step any closer to the body and compromise the scene. He didn’t need to do much to make the remaining crabs scuttle away, a gentle prod at a couple of them was enough. Horton handed back the boat hook and

briefed Uckfield while Price carried out his examination of the body.

‘How come you got called out to this?’ Uckfield asked, rubbing his fleshy nose and frowning.

‘I was just finishing off a surveillance operation,’ Horton answered, not wanting to go into too much detail and admitting to Uckfield that he’d let one get away.

Uckfield grunted. Horton thought he detected resentment. He eyed the big man curiously. Uckfield seemed uneasy and wouldn’t look directly at him. What was bothering him? Perhaps he had some trouble at home; if so Horton could sympathize with that, which made him recall he had a meeting with Catherine, his estranged wife, later. Their first meeting since she had thrown him out six months ago. He hoped they’d be able to come to some amicable agreement over Emma. It too had been six months since he’d seen his young daughter and that was far too long.

Dr Price was indicating that he wanted to return to the safety of the police launch. Horton helped him climb back on board and then joined him, nodding at Phil Taylor who instructed the videographer across to the mulberry.

‘She was hit violently over the head. Of course that might not be what killed her,’ Price said, divesting himself of his life jacket and scene suit. Horton noticed he was looking rather green around the gills and guessed it was being on water that fazed him rather than examining bodies, because he’d never seen Price turn a hair before at even the most grisly of deaths.

Price continued. ‘Rigor mortis and lividity are well established so I would say she’s been dead for about six to nine hours, though it’s a bugger to tell in these conditions. You’ll need to get her on the mortuary slab to check that.’

Horton said, ‘That would make it between ten p.m. and one a.m. Was there anything on her to give us an ID?’

‘Only this.’

Uckfield took the scrap of paper that Price held out and dropped it into a plastic evidence bag. He scrutinized it, frowned and then handed it to Horton. It was a betting slip, and it was blank. Horton turned it over. On the back was written in a long thin scrawl. ‘*Have you forgotten ME?*’

Had the victim written this note? Or had someone given it to her? Either way it didn’t give him any clue as to the victim’s

identity. It did, however, give him a starting point. He said, 'The betting shop is Vinnakers in Commercial Road.'

'Then you'd better get down there and start asking some questions,' Uckfield said crisply.

'I'm on the team then?' Horton's heart lifted.

'For now,' Uckfield replied coldly and looked away.

Those words and the slight nuance in tone made Horton tense. 'But not for good, is that what you're trying to say?'

'We've got a job to do here, Inspector.'

Horton knew then why Uckfield wouldn't look him in the eye. And why his manner was so hostile. 'You're appointing someone else as your DI,' he said calmly, though his guts were churning and he felt the bitter and sickening blow of disappointment.

Uckfield didn't answer. 'I'll take a look at her,' he said.

Horton watched the bulky figure climb on to the mulberry. He saw Uckfield stiffen as he gazed down on the corpse. Why had he had such a change of heart in the last seven weeks? Uckfield had spent much of that time, since his promotion to superintendent, on courses and conferences. What had made him break his promise? Who had got at him? Horton was guessing that he had been overlooked because of his past. And, although he had been completely exonerated of charges of rape, when you trod in shit it took a long time to get the stench from your shoes, and that smell around him obviously didn't suit Uckfield's ambitions. Well, sod him!

Uckfield returned to the launch, Horton noted, not without some difficulty. Once Uckfield had been as fit as him. They had worked out together in the gym. Not so long ago Uckfield would have vaulted over the side of the boat without any trouble. Perhaps that was what promotion and responsibility did for you, that and make you shed your loyalties to your friends.

He watched as Uckfield punched a digit on his mobile phone. The colour on his fleshy face was high; his grey eyes keen. Horton could feel the tension and excitement radiating from Uckfield at the prospect of heading his first major investigation since his appointment and he felt angry and betrayed.

Crisply Uckfield commanded the mobilization of the major incident suite at the station and the mobile units to the Portsmouth side of the Hayling Ferry, with instructions to ask DI Lorraine Bliss to get hers down to the Hayling side.

Dr Price interjected, 'If you don't mind I'd like to get back on terra firma.'

'The inspector and I will come with you. A car will collect us from the Portsmouth pontoon.' Uckfield left a parting shot for Taylor. 'I want a report on this one quick, understand?'

Taylor nodded, but Horton knew that whatever was said the thin and thorough Taylor would work at his own pace, steadily and methodically.

They returned to the shore in silence. The doctor sat on one of the boulders in the car park, trying, Horton guessed, to settle his stomach, and wishing for a brandy. Calculating he was out of earshot, Horton took his chance.

'I think you owe me an explanation, Steve,' he said quietly and firmly.

Uckfield kept his eyes on the road, scanning it for his car. 'We've got a murdered woman and you have an investigation to undertake,' he snapped.

'Vinnakers isn't open yet. There's time. We've known one another long enough to be honest. If you don't think I'm suitable for your team then I'd like to know why.'

Uckfield spun round. He was a policeman; he had been schooled in the art of not showing his feelings. Horton saw nothing, not even a trace of their friendship. It was as if the past between them had been obliterated, which was what Horton guessed Uckfield had mentally done.

'The appointment will be announced—'

'Who's got the job, Steve?' insisted Horton, now with an edge of steel to his voice.

'Tony Dennings.'

It felt like a slap in the face. 'He's only just been promoted to inspector!' Horton was hardly able to believe he'd been overlooked in preference for the man he had worked with on the undercover operation that had landed him with that rape charge.

'He will join the major crime team a week today,' Uckfield said curtly. 'If this case is still running you will hand it over to him. Now go home and take a shower, you smell worse than Billingsgate Fish Market. Get Sergeant Cantelli out of bed and find me a killer.'

Horton badly wanted to ask, 'Why Dennings?' He didn't bother. He was hardly likely to get the truth anyway. Besides,

Horton knew the answer. Dennings hadn't blotted his copy-book.

Horton held Uckfield's eyes for a moment longer before climbing on to his Harley. So that was the way Steve wanted to play it. So be it. Horton was used to betrayal and disappointment in his life, but that didn't mean to say he was hardened to it. Once he would have said that he could rely on Uckfield, and yet in the last two months he'd been given cause to doubt his friendship, first on their last major case together when Uckfield had believed him capable of murder, and now at his lack of openness and honesty.

Horton called Cantelli.

'I've only just got my pyjamas on,' the sergeant protested.

'Good, I'd hate to think that I'd woken you.'

Sleep would have to wait for both of them, and so too would Mickey Johnson and the antiques thefts. He had a killer to find before Dennings could get so much as a toe inside the major incident room, and the trail started at Vinnakers Betting Shop in Commercial Road.