

AN ANDY HORTON MARINE MYSTERY

# TIDE OF DEATH



PAULINE  
ROWSON

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First published in 2006 by Fathom

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ISBN: 0 955098203

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Printed in Great Britain by Cox and Wyman

Fathom is an imprint of Rowmark Limited

## **PAULINE ROWSON**

Pauline Rowson was raised in Portsmouth; the setting for her crime novels featuring DI Andy Horton and DS Barney Cantelli. For many years she ran her own marketing and public relations agency and is a professional conference speaker. She is the author of several marketing, self-help and motivational books. She lives in Hampshire and can never be far from the sea for any length of time without suffering withdrawal symptoms.

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## **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. The names, characters, businesses, locations and incidents portrayed in it are entirely the work of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or locations is entirely coincidental.

## CHAPTER 1

*Wednesday morning: 7am*

Andy Horton stared at the body. The face was almost obliterated. Blood had seeped on to the pebbled beach, dark red, staining the stones around the man's head. Bottle-green seaweed was wrapped around his ankles and he was naked; his arms were outstretched, the palms facing upward, fingers curled.

Horton averted his eyes and lowered his head over his torso, trying to catch his breath from his run. His stomach churned at the shock of such a gruesome discovery. It wasn't that he had

never seen a dead body before, or a violent death; on the contrary in his job they were all too plentiful. No, it was the unexpectedness of running into one that temporarily unnerved him. He usually arrived after some other poor sod had found it. And he'd got out of practice; eight months away from the sharp end had softened him.

He straightened up, wiping the sweat from his face, and stared around but all he could see was fog and all he could hear was the mournful boom of the foghorns in the Solent calling to one another like long lost giants.

He punched a number into his mobile. Why did this have to happen today of all days, only his second day back on duty after his suspension? But sod's law always prevailed; either that or God had a wicked sense of humour, and if He did then He couldn't be God, could He? But maybe he should be grateful to the corpse. This would give him a chance to show his colleagues that he hadn't lost his touch.

'DI Horton, is the DCI in?'

'No sir, he's at the hospital?'

'He's ill?' Horton asked surprised.

'No, sir, it's PC Evans. He was stabbed last night.'

‘Christ! Is he all right?’ Poor Evans, the station joker, only two months away from retirement and counting the days.

‘He’s in intensive care. But they think he’ll pull through.’

‘Well thank God for that,’ Horton replied with feeling, picturing poor Maureen Evans’ face.

He quickly relayed the news of his discovery on Portsmouth’s beach and settled down to wait. He knew it wouldn’t be long. He took another look at the body. Who was he? What had he done to warrant such a violent death? Over the next couple of days they’d begin to find out. The team would be assembled, people questioned, statements taken and, hopefully, the victim identified. The investigative machine would swiftly gear itself into action and he was determined to play a central role in it. He was still a good cop despite the Lucy Richardson episode, which had cost him his position in the Special Investigations Department and earned him an eight-month suspension.

Impatiently he glanced at his watch and as he did four uniformed officers emerged from the fog armed with tape and bollards. He instructed two of them to seal off the beach to the east by

the cruising association slipway and the other two to cordon off the area to the west below the old gunnery site. He looked up to see DCI Uckfield ploughing across the stones towards him. Horton pulled himself up. He couldn't afford to foul up on this one.

'You're out of condition, Steve.' He smiled at the man who had helped him get back into CID. 'Too much time sitting behind that desk.'

'Tell me about it. You look disgustingly fit.'

'Well I've had the time,' Horton replied caustically. They'd joined the force together eighteen years ago and had been good friends since but for the last three years, whilst on secondment to SID, Horton had seen little of Uckfield. They began walking towards the body.

Horton said, 'How's Evans?'

'Holding his own. Fortunately the knife just missed the main arteries. I was visiting the scene of crime, a house in Hemmings Road, just off the seafront, when I got the call saying you'd found a body.'

'What happened?'

'Evans and Kate Somerfield got called out by neighbours who were complaining about the noise. Somerfield went inside to tell the kids to

turn the volume down and Evans went round the back of the house. She didn't know he'd been stabbed until a few minutes later.'

'Did they get him?'

'Who said it was a him?'

'Usually is.'

Uckfield sniffed and retrieved a wooden toothpick from the depths of his jacket pocket. 'The little scumbag got away but we'll get him. You can bet your pension on that.'

I don't think my pension's the safest thing to bet on, Horton thought, given his history.

Uckfield manipulated the toothpick in his mouth and stared down at the body just the other side of the blue and white tape. Horton had seen quite enough already but he looked again. The grey hairs on the slender frame and the slackness of the skin told him their victim was middle aged, probably late fifties. He was a tall man, about six foot two.

'The body is oddly...'

'Positioned?' offered Horton.

'Why like that as if he's on a crucifix? Can't have been washed up in that position.'

'No. And he's been placed, or was killed, just above the tide line, see?' Horton pointed to the

line of seaweed that delineated the height of the last tide. 'He's not wet and there's no decomposition so he can't have been here long. This isn't a popular spot for sunbathers though it is sometimes used by nudists.'

'He's in good company then.' Uckfield stared down at the body. 'Could he be one of them?'

'A nudist sunbather, you mean?' Horton shrugged. 'No idea but if he was then where are his clothes? They should be beside him along with his other belongings like his wallet and watch.'

'Perhaps he left them in his car?'

'In the car park? A couple of hundred yards away? He'd have to be some kind of pervert to walk here in the nude.'

'It's been known,' Uckfield said cynically, replacing the toothpick in his pocket.

'Did you see a car parked?'

'OK, so the killer stripped him and took away the poor bugger's clothes after smashing his face to a pulp. It's obvious why.'

'To delay identification.'

'Then thank God he didn't hack off the hands.'

Yes, and for DNA, Horton thought. 'His face could have been beaten by the killer in an act of

fury rather than deliberately to delay identification, and the clothes taken away as an afterthought.'

Uckfield lifted one shoulder in a semi shrug. 'Possible.'

'I can't see a weapon unless our killer used a large stone to batter him. It could be any one of those around his head.'

'We'll get a search going but my guess is it won't do much good. If our killer's got any sense then whatever he used it will be way out there somewhere.' Uckfield pointed in the direction of the sea. 'When was high tide?'

'Just before midnight.'

Uckfield rubbed his nose and looked thoughtful. 'Could he have been brought in by boat?'

'In last night's fog? If he was then whoever did it would have to be a good sailor.'

'But it's not impossible, is it, with GPS and a tender?'

Uckfield was a competent sailor like him but Horton wouldn't like to have done it. 'No, just bloody difficult.'

More officers had appeared and Uckfield stepped away from the body as a large polythene

tent was erected over it. Horton fell into step beside him as they moved down to the water's edge. The fog obscured the shores of Hayling Island across the narrow entrance to Langstone harbour. Horton could hear the slow beat of the waves as they washed gently on to the shore. As the sun grew in strength it would burn off the fog to reveal another stifling hot August day. It would be difficult keeping the area sealed off; the sooner they could move the body and get SOCO in, the better. He felt his pulse quicken at the thought of the intense activity ahead. The clock had begun ticking and the race was on to find a killer before the trail grew cold. This was what he had missed.

Uckfield broke through his thoughts. 'Any idea who he is?'

'No. Why do you ask?' Horton was instantly on guard. What did Uckfield mean? He tensed, scrutinising his friend's face but Uckfield's expression gave nothing away. Horton forced himself to relax, but his fists were tightly balled. 'You can't think I've got anything to do with this?'

'Of course not.'

Horton didn't like the slight pause he'd left before answering, nor the fact that he wouldn't

look him in the eye. Perhaps he was being over sensitive. 'Look, I found a body, by accident. It happens.'

'I know.' Uckfield held up his hands in capitulation. 'It's just awkward your finding it, after that business with Lucy Richardson. Do you always run this way?' His casual manner didn't fool Horton.

'Not always,' he replied, tight lipped. Uckfield nodded and fell silent.

Horton took a deep breath and tried to get his emotions under control. 'I couldn't sleep,' he said, tersely. 'I decided to run the length of the seafront to Old Portsmouth and back again. I saw what I thought was a shop dummy on the beach and ran up to take a closer look. I found him.' Slowly finger-by-finger he unfurled his fists, mentally counting them off as he did. Would everyone always regard him with suspicion?

Uckfield nodded. 'OK, get off home and change before the media come sticking their noses in the trough. Ask Sergeant Trueman to run a check on missing persons and then deal with Evans' stabbing. I've left the file on your desk.'

It was clear that Uckfield didn't trust him. It

hurt and stung him to resentment. Horton wanted to protest but could see from the DCI's expression that it wouldn't do any good. His own expression must have betrayed his feelings though, because Uckfield said:

'I'm doing you a favour.'

'It doesn't feel like it.'

'You're still on the team, Andy, but it's best if you get away now and stay clear until the media interest dies down. You know what they're like.'

He did all too well. 'OK,' he reluctantly agreed.

Uckfield turned away to talk to the head of SOCO making it perfectly clear their conversation was over. His fury tainted with disappointment, Horton jogged eastwards along the beach, barely acknowledging the officers who passed him. He felt an outsider in an organisation that had once been the only family he had until Catherine and Emma. And now he'd lost them.

His mind returned to that surveillance operation as it often did. He'd been working in the Special Investigations Department, on a joint operation with the Vice Squad, watching Alpha One, a prestigious men only health club and gym at Oyster Quays, a popular waterfront development of offices and shops overlooking

the entrance to Portsmouth Harbour. Its owner, Colin Jarrett, was suspected of running a prostitution ring and escort agency and using the club as a centre for distributing pornography to members for gain. Membership was by invitation only and the list highly secret. There was no point raiding the place because they needed proof and to know how the stuff was getting into the country. Horton had been designated to get close to one of the girls working there, Lucy Richardson, and find a way inside.

It had been easy arranging to bump into her coming out of Alpha One and to ask her for a drink - too easy looking back on it. He had been too keen and too impatient to get a result. A drink had led to a meal and then to a rendezvous at the Holiday Inn Express. He hadn't believed then that she had known he was a copper, but now he realised he had been too blind and stupid to see he was being set up. Until then he had always thought of himself as a good policeman, but it just showed how wrong he could be.

The car park was cordoned off and almost overflowing with police cars. The mobile incident unit was being manoeuvred into place. Uckfield may be shutting him out physically but

that didn't mean he couldn't think about the body on the beach and contribute his ideas. He'd make them heard whether Uckfield liked it or not.

There were no houses here, just the marina opposite where he lived on his boat. The cruising association clubhouse was to his right. To his left was the wide grassy expanse of Fort Cumberland. It was fenced off. It was a good spot to murder someone or plant a body.

A car tooted and a dark blue Vauxhall swept through the small crowd of commuters from the Hayling ferry who had gathered to see what all the excitement was about. Soon the cream of the south's journalists would be breaking out all over the place like a nasty rash. Uckfield was right, though Horton was reluctant to admit it. He couldn't face them dressed in his running gear.

He waited for DC Walters to heave himself out of the car and waddle towards him. His ill-fitting suit was crumpled and shiny with wear and his appearance was in such sharp contrast to the trim DC Marsden that it made Horton think of Laurel and Hardy. Only this was no laughing matter.

Walters took a large handkerchief from his trouser pocket and wiped the beads of

perspiration from his forehead. Horton couldn't mistake the contempt in his eyes.

'Where's Sergeant Cantelli?' he asked.

'Overslept, inspector. Phoned in to say he'd be late.'

That wasn't like Cantelli. Horton had known him almost as long as he'd known Steve Uckfield and he had worked with Cantelli in CID for twelve years. In all that time Cantelli had never been late for work.

How long would Uckfield keep him away from the investigation? If he was only going to be allowed to work on routine stuff – not that the Evans stabbing was routine – then there was surely no point in staying in the force, except for one thing. Only by being on the inside could he hope to find out who had set him up and why. With that came the chance of salvaging his reputation as a police officer and detective, and the chance of resuscitating his failed marriage.

As he punched in the pontoon security number a voice hailed him.

'What's going on?' Eddie, one of the marina staff, jerked his head in the direction of the beach.

Horton told him briefly. 'I don't suppose you saw or heard anything unusual last night?'

Eddie shook his head. 'Only the foghorns.'

'What time did you come on duty?'

'Eight o'clock.'

'Any cars in the car park then?'

The little man's bronzed, wrinkled face puckered up with concentration. 'I didn't really look.'

'Never mind.' Horton made to turn away.

'Oh, Andy, I nearly forgot in all the excitement. Post for you?'

Horton took the envelope with some trepidation. His stomach tightened at the sight of the red franking ink that bore the name of Catherine's solicitors. He had been dreading this. He knew it might come but he hadn't wanted to believe it. There was still time, he told himself, just like he had been telling himself for eight months. Time for him and Catherine to be reunited. But the record had got stuck and he'd done nothing about it. And now this. His fingers gripped the envelope. If he ripped it up... if he pretended it had never arrived...

He flung it on to the bunk, collected his towel and toilet bag and headed for the marina showers. The letter was still there when he returned – no good fairy had spirited it away. He stuffed it into

the pocket of his trousers along with a tie and glanced in the small mirror hanging beside his berth. Christ! He looked awful. Why would Catherine still want him? There were bags under his eyes the size of suitcases and the tiny lines stretching from their edges made him look at least twenty years older than his thirty-eight.

He unpinned the photograph of Emma beside the mirror. Her impish grin and big brown eyes stared out at him. Dressed proudly in her school uniform she looked younger than her eight years and so vulnerable. A pain stabbed at his heart; his arms longed to hold her, to feel her little hands clasped around the back of his neck, to hear her giggle. His stomach tensed and it was all he could do to breath.

His mobile phone rang. It was Cantelli.

‘The DCI wants us to follow up on Evans’ stabbing. You know about that? Bloody tough, on poor Brian.’ Cantelli’s usually bright tone softened. ‘I’ll come and collect you.’

Horton put Emma’s photograph back where it belonged, locked up *Nutmeg* and was waiting at the entrance to the marina when Cantelli showed up ten minutes later. The sergeant looked as tired as him. His almost black eyes were

bloodshot and as if to confirm Horton's diagnosis he yawned.

'Kids keeping you awake?' Horton grunted. He had to take his anger and frustration out on someone and neither Uckfield, nor Colin bloody Jarrett, the man he held responsible for his wrecked marriage, was there.

'You could say that.' Cantelli indicated right. 'I see we're not invited to the party then?'

'I know why I'm on the outside but what about you?'

Cantelli shrugged. A couple of minutes later he pulled up at the traffic lights and reached for a packet of chewing gum in the space by the hand brake. He offered the packet across to Horton but Horton declined. The lights changed. They turned right and headed away from the case.

'So tell me about Evans,' Horton said, trying to shake off his disgruntled mood. It wasn't easy, but neither was it Cantelli's fault so he shouldn't take it out on him.

'The boy who was holding the party was brought in for questioning but he's a juvenile, fifteen, and he was pilled up to his eyeballs so they didn't get anything out of him last night. His parents are on holiday, they've been

contacted and they're on their way back. They fly in from Spain later this morning. The drug squad are involved. Some kids gave their names but most were too out of it and others quickly scarpered.'

'So when can we interview this boy?'

'John Westover. This afternoon, one o'clock. Brian's still unconscious.'

'So not much point going to the hospital.'

'No. I've got a PC there who will call us the moment he comes round.'

Cantelli was heading out of the city. Horton was surprised. They were going in the wrong direction for the station and they'd already passed Hemmings Road, the scene of Evans' stabbing.

'Where are we going?'

'To see a lady.'

Horton raised his eyebrows. 'What lady?'

'One who thinks the body you tripped over this morning is her husband.'

Horton's heart gave a lift. A shiver of excitement ran through him. He couldn't be this lucky, or could he? 'Go on,' he said, hardly daring to hope.

'She hasn't seen him since Friday when he went out on his boat,' Cantelli explained, as they

crawled their way through the rush hour traffic. The fog was billowing off the shore to their right making the driving more hazardous than normal and the traffic slower.

‘That’s five days ago; it’s taken her a long time to report him missing. Who is he?’

‘Roger Thurlow, runs a marketing and public relations agency, at Oyster Quays.’

Cantelli gave him a swift glance, which Horton interpreted as a warning, but a friendly one. Stay away from Alpha One. From Barney Cantelli, Horton could take it. He was the only one who had believed him when he said he hadn’t slept with Lucy Richardson let alone raped her. And that wasn’t just out of gratitude for keeping Barney’s nephew out of prison five years ago. Barney knew how much his family meant to him and that he would never have risked losing them.

‘Why do you think it’s him?’

‘The description Mrs Thurlow gave fits: late fifties, slim build, greying hair, on the tall side,’ Cantelli counted off, stabbing his fingers on the steering wheel. ‘And, just before she phoned, I took a call from the Marine Support Unit. They were called out to a deserted motorboat this

morning stranded on the East Winner bank. And guess who the owner is?

Horton didn't need to but he said it just to please Cantelli. 'Roger Thurlow.'

'Yep.'

Horton stared out of the insect-spattered window with a smile of satisfaction. Uckfield couldn't stop him now. He'd been given a lead and he was damn sure he was going to follow it up. 'How come you put the two together so quickly?'

Cantelli shrugged and said casually, 'I was walking through reception and heard the desk clerk take the call.'

'Uckfield doesn't know we're going to see her?' He gave a silent crow of victory.

Cantelli must have heard the thrill in his voice. He smiled and there was a smug look on his lean, dark face. It was good to be working with Cantelli again.

'I'm not sure if the desk clerk heard me say I was on my way and tell the DCI we might have an ID.'

'Then I'd better tell him-'.  
'

'Before you do, Andy, there's something else you ought to know.'

There always was with Cantelli. 'Yes?'

'Thurlow lives at Briarly House, on the outskirts of Redvins.'

Well, well! That was where Uckfield lived. Redvins was a small village eight miles to the east of Portsmouth and four miles to the north of the coastal village of Emsworth. Horton recalled Uckfield's words, 'Do you know who he is?' *He* didn't but the DCI might. He called Uckfield, feeling fired up. God had smiled on him and given him a chance, or rather Cantelli had. He wasn't going to let this slip through his fingers. He quickly explained the situation; Uckfield didn't sound too happy about it but there wasn't much he could do.

'I'm waiting for the pathologist to arrive,' Uckfield growled. 'Call me as soon as you've finished interviewing Mrs Thurlow. I've got to brief the Super and I'm giving a press statement at ten.'

Horton switched off and grinned. 'Seems like we just gate crashed the party, Barney.'