

DAVID FENNELL



**KILLERS
DON'T
FOLLOW
RULES**

**Violent
Heart**

**SO WHY
SHOULD
SHE?**

'Totally compelling' ARAMINTA HALL

Praise for

DAVID FENNELL

‘A truly extraordinary crime novel . . . a gritty, dark thriller with a serial killer of frightening proportions’

LYNDA LA PLANTE

‘I flew through it . . . Tense, gripping and brilliantly inventive’

SIMON LELIC

‘Layered story telling’

BRIAN MCGILLOWAY

‘Unsettling, fast-paced, suspenseful and gripping . . . Excellent’

WILL DEAN

‘A tense-as-hell, high-body count page turner, but a rarer thing too – one that’s also full of genuine warmth and humanity’

WILLIAM SHAW

‘Totally compelling’

ARAMINTA HALL

‘Fennell’s agenda here is the ratcheting up of suspense and that’s done with aplomb’

FINANCIAL TIMES

‘An unsettling and twisty ride’

HEAT

‘David Fennell more than earns his place at the crime fiction table with this superb exploration of a psychopath with the creepiest modus operandi I’ve read in a long time’

FIONA CUMMINS

‘A serial killer classic in the making . . . hooks you in and holds you tight, right up to the extremely satisfying final page’

SUSI HOLLIDAY

**A
Violent
Heart**

DAVID FENNELL

ZAFFRE

For my sister, Nicky, the light in all our lives.

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Mallory Jones Investigates: A Violent Heart

Podcast trailer

Mallory Jones (voiceover): In this series of *Mallory Jones Investigates*, I do a deep dive into the murders of women, victims of the so-called Bolt Gun Killer. I speak to friends, family, neighbours and the police to build a picture of who these women were. I ask why these murders, some stretching as far back as thirty years, have never had the investigation they deserved. Is insidious misogyny within the police force to blame? Did this prevent the capture of a killer who committed multiple murders? It took one person to step forward and take control. A name familiar to listeners of this show, a woman who sees the big picture, a detective with a heart that beats so violently she will stop at nothing until justice is served. Featured in our award-nominated series: *The Girl Who Lived*, *The @nonymous Murders*, *The See No Evil Murders*, and *The Silent Man*, Detective Inspector Grace Archer leads the charge.

MUSIC to fade

Mallory Jones (voiceover): They were women living on the fringes of society. Women living in poverty trying to get by during recessions and enforced austerity. They had rent and bills to pay. Some had mouths to feed. They were estranged from their families, alone and surviving the only way they could.

MUSIC EXTRACT to fade: The Smiths: 'Half a Person'.

Traffic sounds in the background.

Fiona Brooks: Sally and I were best mates. We lived on the same street and went to the same school. We did everything together back then.

Mallory Jones: What was she like?

Fiona Brooks: (laughs) It's nice that people ask that and not obsess about what happened to her. The detective asked me the same question. I liked that about her.

Mallory Jones: Detective Inspector Grace Archer?

Fiona Brooks: Yeah. That's her. I told her the same thing. Sally was funny, and a bit gobby (laughs). She was brave. Much braver than me. I always admired that about her. Oh, and she loved music, especially the Smiths. Which I never understood. They were so depressing (laughs). I was more a Wham! girl.

Mallory Jones: Why did she move to London?

Fiona Brooks: She had lost both her mum and dad in the space of two years. She was left with no one. No other family. The social worker told her she'd have to go into care. That was the last thing Sally wanted. That's what made her run away to London. Despite being only sixteen, she was fiercely independent. She disappeared with dreams of finding a new life in the big city. Poor Sally. I still can't get my head around what happened . . .

MUSIC to fade

Mallory Jones (voiceover): *A Violent Heart* is available to download now from wherever you get your podcasts.

EXIT MUSIC

Chapter 1

Elena

IN THE MOMENT THAT ELENA steps into the man's car she feels a flash of dizziness that disappears almost as soon as it had arrived. It was a strange sensation, like a sixth sense perhaps, or a 'shining' as Marianne might call it, just like the book. She's never read it, but they had watched the movie together, and it had terrified her. She blinks it away and turns to the client, resting her shoulder bag on her lap. He's wearing a PPE mask, which unsettles her. The pandemic has passed, the world is back to normal. Most people are glad to see the back of masks. Obviously, not everyone.

'I've been vaccinated,' she says.

'Best to be safe.'

Elena shifts in her chair, the strange turn playing on her mind.

'Are you OK?' he asks.

She swallows and composes herself. 'Yes,' she replies with a fixed smile.

'You have an accent,' he observes.

Her lips tighten. English people always love to point out that she has an accent as if it was something that made her an oddball. 'Everyone has accent. Even English people,' she says.

'I suppose that's true,' he says, turning on the ignition.

Elena looks ahead, hoping this will be quick. She feels his gaze lingering and turns away, her lips set. Something about this man she can't quite put her finger on. A moment passes and the car has not moved. She looks at him, her brow furrowed.

'Seatbelt,' he says.

She bites her tongue and pulls the belt over her sleeveless blouse.

'I like your necklace,' he says, glancing at the gold half of a heart hanging from the chain around her neck. He switches on the indicator, checks the

side mirror and pulls away from the kerb. Elena folds her arms and makes a silent prayer for this to be over soon. Leaving the quiet gloom of St Michael's Street, he turns left onto Praed Street. They pass McDonald's and an Angus Steakhouse, restaurants that she and Marianne would eat at depending on how much spare cash they had. Guilt ripples through her and she feels a creeping cloud of unease. She dips her head in an effort to not be recognised, and wrings her hands. But who would see her? Marianne is the only one that matters and she's at work. Perhaps one of Marianne's friends would spot her in the car and report back. Elena swallows. She couldn't bear to see the despair and disappointment on Marianne's face. Elena has already put her lover through enough. Marianne hated when Elena took to the streets. She especially hated when she got into strangers' cars.

'It's so dangerous, *chérie*! Please stop . . . please.'

They were both hot-headed and had argued, which Elena regretted horribly. But the truth of the matter is the cost-of-living crisis has hit them hard. They have no money for basics, never mind their crippling drug habit. She can't think about any of that right now. She sighs, dispelling the memory and thoughts from her mind in a rapid breath.

The car has become clammy and warm. The windows are closed, the air conditioning is off. Elena shifts uncomfortably on the vinyl seat, which feels a little tacky on her bare legs. It doesn't help she's wearing a short skirt.

'May I open a window?' she asks.

'I'd rather you didn't.'

'It's very warm.'

He frowns, and after a moment, takes one hand off the wheel and switches on the air conditioning.

They drive for ten minutes in a strained silence. Elena thinks about her 'shining' but pushes the thought from her head. Before stepping into the car the man had promised to pay her well. She needs money and this could be a good earner.

'Where are we going?' she asks.

'Somewhere quiet,' he responds, slyly glancing at her thighs.

'Not too far,' she replies. 'I have to get home, so let's be quick, please.'

'Where are you from?' he asks.

She sighs. 'Croatia.'

'Are your family there?'

'Yes.'

'You must miss them.'

Elena looks out the passenger window and doesn't respond. She did not sign up to getting personal with clients.

They stop at traffic lights. Elena has no idea where they are. She notices the man is looking at the track marks on her arms. She folds them over concealing them from view.

'You have a tattoo on your wrist,' he says, easing off the brakes.

'Yes.'

'It's nice.'

She feels her patience thinning, 'Can we just get this over with? I must get home.'

'We're nearly there,' he replies softly, pulling into a parking bay facing an expanse of darkness that she thinks might be a park. She hears pounding dance music and beyond a cluster of trees sees coloured lights flashing from the open window of a tower block flat. She hears voices, laughter too. A party. In this gloomy unfamiliar place, it gives her some comfort that she is not far from civilisation. Elena removes her seatbelt.

The man is looking through the window, no doubt checking that they're not being watched. Usual nervous client behaviour. Elena is eager to move fast. 'OK, let's do this.' She reaches for his zipper, but his hand grabs hers and squeezes hard, crushing her fingers. Icy pain shoots up her arm. She gasps and pulls away, but he is strong; his grip, vice like. Panic and adrenaline set in. With her free hand she reaches behind her and fumbles for the door handle. She pulls it, and cries once more as he yanks her towards him. Confusion clouds her and she does not see, but feels his fist connect with her nose. A horrible crunching sound. Her head slams against the passenger window, the door flies open, and she flops sideways out onto the stony tarmac, her legs still inside the car. Her breathing is rapid. Blood pours from her nose. White dots float in front of her. Her heart is pounding.

Run! She lets out a muffled cry of panic, kicks her way out of the car and scrambles onto all fours. *Trees nearby. Run to them. Hide.*

'Help!' she cries but her voice is swallowed by the thumping music.

She hears the thud of the car door closing and the slow tread of his footsteps approaching. She takes a breath. Trembling, she looks back. He is silhouetted in the gloom of the car park, a dark, malevolent presence. In his hand, he holds what looks like a thick baton just over a foot in length. *Oh my God!* She feels a wet warmth run down her legs.

'Oh dear, look at you,' he mocks.

'Please, don't hurt me . . . I . . . I won't say anything. I just want to go home.'

He is more shadow than man now, dark as night, and seems to grow in stature as he draws closer.

Elena thinks about her 'shining'. It had been a warning. She should have heeded it. She curses herself and inches back, stepping onto the soft grassy surface. Her life flashes in her mind, a compilation of heartache, loss and pain. All because of men. It seems her lot in life is to be at the receiving end of them and their grubby, ugly penises and fists. Spineless cowards. That's what they are.

He is closer now, his eyes empty of compassion. She sees only death in them. A surge of anger rises inside her, erupting into a fury. She spits saliva and blood on his masked face. The shock and disgust in his eyes give her a spurt of courage, and before he can do anything, she kicks him hard in the balls. He howls and doubles over. Lucky, she thinks, her confidence returning. Elena kicks off her heels, spins around and sprints towards a copse of trees, screaming without thinking where she is going. She keeps running, the dry, uneven surface biting into the soft soles of her bare feet. Glancing back, she sees him searching for her. Elena darts behind a tree and fumbles her phone from her bag, but her fingers are damp with sweat, and it slips through them, falling to the grass below. The screen lights up, illuminating the ground around her feet. She spots a thick broken branch nearby and grabs it, her phone too. The branch is heavy and unwieldy, but it will do as a weapon should he catch up with her. With her other hand, Elena uses facial recognition to unlock her phone. She wants to call Marianne, but hesitates . . . what could Marianne possibly do other than fret and worry? There is no time. She needs the police.

'Hello, which emergency service do you need?' says the operator.

'He's trying to kill me!' she blurts out.

'Madam, do you require the police? Are you in danger?'

She hears his thudding footfalls running. Looking across, she sees him charging towards the glow of her device. Mustering all of her strength, she swings the branch hard at his head but he manages to raise his arms and shield himself from the blow. She does not give up and strikes him three times with little impact. She must get away from him. Dropping the weapon, she bolts from the trees, running blindly into the dark.

'Help!' she screams, but her voice is drowned by the music. She's still holding the phone but the call has disconnected. 'Fuck!'

She hears him running behind her, panting, and at that moment, remembers the one person who changed her life for ever. The one person, other than Marianne, she has ever trusted. She holds the phone close to her face and feels herself slowing. 'Hello, Siri!' she says, tears filling in her eyes.

Her phone's digital assistant's cheery voice answers, 'Hello, Elena. How can I help you?'

But then the man has caught up with her and pushes her to the ground with such force that the phone slips from her grasp.

'Siri, call Grace Archer,' Elena shouts.

'Calling Grace Archer,' Siri responds.

Elena hears the phone ringing. She looks up at the man. He uses the baton to smash her phone. The glow extinguishes. Elena's heart sinks. He straddles her stomach and rips open her blouse. Tears pool in her eyes. He places the metal baton on her bare chest. She thinks of Marianne and the life they could have had together. 'I'm sorry, *chère*.' The baton has a trigger at the top. He squeezes it. She hears a loud cracking noise and feels something icy cold penetrate her body. She gasps and shudders as the world darkens for ever.

Chapter 2

RACE ARCHER KNEELS ON A newspaper by the graveside, bathed in morning sunshine, and with secateurs, trims the overgrown grass and weeds that had sprouted since her last visit four weeks ago. She tosses the detritus into a heap by her side and edges her way around the plot, focusing hard like a seasoned gardener, ensuring the surface is even and immaculate. Satisfied with her work, she scoops the cuttings into a compostable garden bag and sweeps up the remaining waste with a small brush. From her backpack she takes out a cloth, and a spray, which she uses to clean the dust and bird droppings from the gravestone. Rinsing the cloth with water from a bottle, she carefully cleans the gold engraving in the three names: Samuel Jacob Archer, Rosalie Mary Archer, Jacob Arthur Archer. A stirring of emotion ripples through her, a reminder that she is alone in the world. She feels an ache in her chest yet, at the same time, a sense of peace that comes with being at the final resting place of those you love. One of those odd dichotomies.

A shadow darkens her vision, pulling her from her thoughts. Her muscles coil, and she turns. A man carrying a posy of crimson carnations is walking by.

‘Morning,’ he says.

Archer relaxes and returns the greeting. She scans the graveyard as is her instinct every time she comes here. At the age of twelve, still grieving the loss of her murdered father, DI Sam Archer, she had bunked off school and come here only to be abducted by her father’s assassin, the child serial murderer, Bernard Morrice. Through tenacity, bravery, a burning rage and, let’s face it, a lot of luck, young Grace had escaped Morrice’s incarceration, charging at him and tumbling down the stairs alongside him in his home. Morrice’s neck had snapped in two. She had survived. Justice had been dealt. Still, despite

finding a measure of comfort in this holy ground, Morrice's foul presence seems to linger in the shadows.

She feels a vibration in her pocket. Her phone is still on silent mode. Removing her gloves, she takes out the device. It's a call from her partner, caustic Belfast man, Detective Sergeant Harry Quinn. She swipes and answers. 'Morning.'

'Hi, bestie,' says Quinn.

'Bestie?'

'Yeah, you know, like bezzie mates. Muckers.'

Archer smiles. 'Is that what we are?'

'It occurred to me this morning that in all the time we've been working together, we never talk about our muckers. Therefore, I concluded that like me, you're a little thin on the ground with besties. Hence, we must be besties-cum-muckers.'

'That's very presumptuous of you.'

'What can I say . . . Anyway, did you get the message about the emergency meeting at ten o'clock this morning?'

'One minute.' Archer checks her phone. There are no messages, only a missed call from an old friend late last night. 'Nope.'

'I had wondered. Deb from HR sent it. I didn't see your number on the list.'

'Debbie and I are not . . . muckers,' Archer says, mocking his accent.

Quinn chuckles. 'She is Dolores Umbridge to your Harry Potter.'

'Is she the evil one, dresses in pink and has a kitten fetish?'

'That's her.'

'Now that you say that . . . ' Archer laughs.

'Anyway, not sure what it's about, but Deb is in Clare's office with Chief Inspector Les Fletcher. Heard of him?'

Clare Pierce is Archer and Quinn's boss. Just over six months back she had been promoted from DCI to Chief Inspector. A dynamic, power-suited, no-nonsense straight talker, Pierce is a fierce governor who worked the system and got results for her team and the investigations she oversaw.

'No. Who is he?'

'Don't know. He's in uniform, pressed white shirt with a basketball-sized belly trying its best to break free. Has a disconcerting gammon complexion.'

'That narrows it down.'

'I'm going to ask around. Make a few calls. Oh . . . that's . . . weird.'

'What do you mean?'

'Flat pack cardboard boxes have just arrived outside Clare's office.'

'What's that about?'

‘No idea. Perhaps we’ll find out at the meeting. Can you make it?’

Archer checks her watch. ‘It’ll be tight. I’ll finish up what I’m doing and get there as soon as I can.’

‘Cool. I’ll request a delay from Clare on your behalf.’

‘Thanks.’

Archer clears up and deposits everything into a tote bag. She checks her phone and looks at the missed call from Elena. Something niggles at her. It had been two years since they’d spoken, but Archer knew Elena was in a better place and had moved in with Marianne. Everything seemed rosy from her social media posts. She bites her lip. When does social media ever reveal an accurate depiction of real life? She taps Elena’s number and calls her for the third time that morning. Once again it goes straight to voicemail. A twist in Archer’s stomach. ‘Hi, Elena, it’s Grace . . . just checking in. Call me back. Bye.’

It takes a slow thirty minutes in an Uber before Archer arrives at Charing Cross. Hurrying to the third floor, she notices a meeting is in progress in the conference room. Debbie from HR is smiling at a large man in his fifties with blotchy skin who is addressing the team. Quinn’s gammon-faced Chief Inspector Les Fletcher. Clare Pierce, a thin woman with short dark hair, sits at the table, eyes down, expression grim. As if sensing she has arrived, Pierce looks across to see Archer approaching. She holds Archer’s gaze for a moment. Something in her eyes.

Archer knocks on the door and enters. ‘Sorry I’m late.’

‘Chief Inspector Fletcher, this is DI Grace Archer,’ says Pierce.

Fletcher’s eyes fix on Archer. ‘The famous Grace Archer. Welcome,’ he says with a strong Yorkshire accent. He cracks a smile without sincerity or warmth. ‘Take a seat, DI Archer; I’m just updating the team on what I expect from them.’

‘What you expect from them?’ Archer asks.

‘Grace—’ Pierce begins.

Fletcher interrupts, ‘As of today, I will be taking over Chief Inspector Pierce’s responsibilities. You and everyone else will report to me. Those that have worked under me will tell you I run a tight ship and have little toleration for many things – sloppiness and timekeeping, to name a few.’ He glances at Archer.

She bristles and looks at Quinn. He meets her gaze, eyebrows raised. She notices her colleague, senior analyst and tech guru, Klara Clark, arms folded, a frown creasing on her high forehead.

Fletcher takes a breath, but Archer interrupts, ‘Excuse me, why are we only hearing about this now?’ Her eyes look from Fletcher to Pierce.

‘Something personal has come up, Grace,’ says Pierce.

‘If you’d have been here on time, you’d have heard Chief Inspector Pierce tell the room that she’s taking leave and may be gone for some time.’

Archer glances at HR Manager Debbie Dickson, who watches her with a tight grin.

Archer ignores her and turns to her governor. ‘Clare?’

‘We’ll talk after this,’ Pierce replies quietly.

‘I’d appreciate that,’ says Fletcher. ‘Unless there are any other questions, please, all of you, get back to work.’

‘Let’s go to my office,’ Pierce says to Archer.

Pierce closes the door behind Archer and leans on her desk.

‘What’s this about, Clare?’ Archer asks, narrowing her eyes at the flat pack cardboard boxes.

‘I . . . I’m taking time out. I had given notice yesterday. I told them I could work for another month, but they wanted me gone sooner. “They” being HR, who miraculously conscripted Fletcher to replace me. He jumped at the chance, apparently. Been waiting for the right opportunity for some time.’

‘They can’t just force you out like that.’

‘I could fight it, but I don’t have it in me right now.’

Pierce sits down on the small sofa opposite her desk, shoulders drooping. She looks defeated.

Archer perches beside her, her hands pressed together. ‘What’s going on?’

Pierce hesitates before answering, ‘It’s Richard. His Long Covid is getting worse. He needs round-the-clock attention.’

Richard is Pierce’s husband of thirty years. He’d been in hospital with Covid for six months during the pandemic. He’d been put into a coma and, to everyone’s relief, had come out better, yet like thousands of others, he had not made a full recovery.

‘Oh, Clare, I’m so sorry.’

‘He’s so pathetic looking. It breaks my heart.’

Pierce sits at her desk and rubs her arms, her forehead lined with worry. ‘They think it could be months. Or a few years. We’ve had our ups and downs like everyone, and Lord knows, I have been a shitty person sometimes but the thought of him . . . I just can’t . . .’

‘Is there anything I can do?’

Pierce shakes her head. ‘We should think about what I can do for you.’

Archer is uncertain what she means.

‘There’s not a lot I can do right now other than advise you to watch your back.’

‘My back?’

Pierce’s eyes slide across the office to the conference room where Fletcher and Debbie from HR are deep in conversation. ‘I’ve known him for a few years. Some might call him old school. I’d replace “old” with prehistoric. You didn’t hear this from me, obviously.’

Archer feels her stomach knotting.

‘There’s one expression I keep coming back to every time I have dealings with him.’ Pierce watches him, her eyes narrowed.

‘What’s that?’

Pierce turns to Archer and smiles. ‘A prize cunt. And that’s between us, too.’

A knock at the door. Quinn is looking in. Pierce gestures for him to enter.

‘Excuse my butting in. I need to talk to Grace.’

‘You two carry on,’ says Pierce.

Quinn steps towards Pierce. ‘Sorry about Richard, Clare.’

Pierce nods a thanks.

‘For what’s it worth, I’m going to miss your frank openness and unfaltering willingness to remind me how shit I am.’

‘Don’t mention it. Anyway, I have every intention of returning, so don’t give up on me just yet.’

Quinn grins and opens his arms. ‘Give me some sugar,’ he says, pulling her into an embrace.

Pierce stiffens. ‘Oh God. You know I’m not a hugger.’

‘Hush now. Just take the love.’

Pierce wriggles out of his arms and turns away. She takes a paper handkerchief from a box on her desk and dabs her eyes.

Archer and Quinn exchange a concerned look and leave the Chief Inspector to herself. Archer shoots an anxious look back in at Pierce, who is clearly broken. Outside the office the mood on the third floor is sombre, heads are down, buried in computers and phones.

She turns to Quinn. ‘What’s up?’

‘Dixy, the TikTok twat, has been posting videos again.’