

CHAPTER TWO

Sharp stepped closer to the barrier and whistled to the crime scene team below.

One of the white suit-clad figures straightened at the sound, then pointed to its right and up the bank.

‘Good. Harriet’s got a demarcated path set up at last.’

They pulled on overalls and booties from a

box of supplies left next to the barrier, the thin material flapping in the wind against their own clothes, and then Kay tied her hair back and followed Sharp down the slope, mindful of the fact that if she wasn't careful, she'd slide on the wet undergrowth and scoot down the rest of the way on her backside.

The floodlights provided enough light to move safely along the path, so Kay shone her torch to her right, tracking the path the vehicle had carved through the vegetation as it had plummeted to where it now lay.

She'd seen some bad road accidents in her time with the police service, and gave a low gasp as she cast her eyes over the destruction.

'It's a wonder he lived, isn't it?' said Sharp over his shoulder.

'Yeah. He must've been thrown around like

a rag doll.’

As they drew closer to the foot of the embankment, Kay noticed that a wire fence separated the Highway Agency land from that of a farmer’s field.

The landscape beyond the outer reaches of the floodlights appeared as though it had been abandoned since harvest time, the earth laid fallow and bare.

Kay shivered as a cold gust of wind buffeted her and rocked the gantries from side to side, then turned her attention to the crash site.

She could only imagine the mammoth task that faced Harriet’s team – it was only now the driver of the car was on his way to hospital that the investigators could do their job. Their task would be exacerbated by the fact that at least

twelve other people had traipsed through the now-cordoned-off area since the crash.

A tent had been erected over the back of the vehicle while she and Sharp had been talking at the top of the embankment, and as Kay drew closer she could see Harriet standing off to one side, calling out instructions to her team while they propped up a second tent over the driver's door of the car. A photographer moved from one side of the car to the other, the flash from his camera illuminating the scene in bursts of light that bounced off the trunks of nearby trees and cast silhouettes amongst his colleagues.

Harriet glanced over her shoulder when they approached the cordon, and then made her way towards them, her progress hampered by tree branches and thick vines that covered the

mud-strewn ground.

‘Evening, detectives.’

‘Harriet.’ Sharp jerked his chin towards the vehicle. ‘What’ve you got so far?’

The crime scene investigator pulled her paper mask down. ‘Female, mid-twenties by the look of it. Wrapped in a black plastic sheet that was taped together. Bruising to the face, which obviously wasn’t caused by the accident – not enough time has elapsed. I can’t see any bindings around her wrists. I’ll let Patrick finish the preliminary photographs, and then we’ll take a closer look.’

‘Thanks.’

Sharp fell silent as Harriet replaced her mask and returned to the small tent, her white suit covered in splatters of mud from the knees down.