



AG *Barnett*

MYSTERY SINGLES



NAYLOR AND CRANE

—◆—
Short Measure

1970s

CASE No.2

AG BARNETT

Short Measure

The Crown Inn had not been open for three hours and already it was the busiest it had been in months. Unfortunately, everyone in it was a policeman.

Jackie Naylor sat on the bonnet of her Cortina in the pub car park and ate a packet of cheese and onion crisps. The car was mustard yellow, the crisps were Smith's, and neither was doing anything to improve the mood of the uniformed constable who had told her twice to move along.

"I'm waiting for the landlord," she said.

"The landlord is dead, miss."

"Well, that's put a dent in my morning."

She'd driven up from the Fleece in Harton, where she'd stayed the night after calling on three pubs in Swaledale. The Crown wasn't hers. Bernard Ilkley had been a Tadcaster & North Riding man for twenty years and would no sooner switch to Whitworth's than he'd serve lager in a wine glass. But Jackie always stopped at the Crown when she was in Netherdale, because Bernard did chips, and because one day he might see sense.

He wouldn't now.

Netherdale was the kind of village that made you check whether your watch had stopped. Fifty houses, one pub,

one church, one shop that sold everything from paraffin to pork pies. Stone walls the colour of old honey. A beck running through the middle. The long drought summer had finally broken, and the first autumn rains had turned the verges to mud and the air to something you could taste. October in the Dales.

The village shop was across the green from the Crown, and its door hadn't stopped opening since the police car arrived. Jackie finished her crisps, balled up the packet, dropped it in the footwell with the others, and crossed the road.

The shop bell rang. Three women looked up from the counter with expressions that said she was very welcome, but also about to be interrogated.

"Morning," Jackie said. "I'm from Whitworth's brewery. I had an appointment with Mr Ilkley."

"Had being the word," said the woman behind the counter, who turned out to be Mrs Gledhill, and Jackie immediately clocked to be the sort of person who knew everything about everyone. Bernard had been found at the bottom of his cellar steps by his barmaid, Maureen Douthwaite, at quarter past seven this morning. Dead. Head wound. Broken glass everywhere. The police thought he'd fallen.

"Terrible," said the woman next to Jackie. "Though I did say to Alan, the state of those steps. Stone. Steep. No handrail."

"Mind you," said Mrs Gledhill, and leaned forward,

"Maureen said she could kill him. In this shop. Two weeks ago. Those words exactly."

The three women looked at each other with meaning.

"I wish I'd been in the pub last night, now," said the third woman, who had been quiet until this point. "I'd have seen if anything was off. But I stayed in and watched The Great Escape on Yorkshire. Can't miss Steve McQueen."

"You and your Steve McQueen," said Mrs Gledhill. "You'd watch that man read the telephone directory."

"I would, and I wouldn't apologise for it."

Jackie smiled and left them to it.

* * *

The detective arrived at half ten in a dark blue Rover that was cleaner than anything in the village, including the church. He unfolded himself from the driver's seat one limb at a time. Tall, thin, dark suit. The suit fit. Jackie noticed this because suits never fit the reps she worked with and so it was noticeable when one did. He straightened his tie in the wing mirror and walked towards the pub without looking at the car park, the crowd, or Jackie.

She followed him.

"Excuse me. Who's in charge?"

He stopped. Turned. Pale grey eyes in a long, composed face. The face gave away absolutely nothing, which Jackie

found annoying and interesting in roughly equal measure.

"I am," he said. "Detective Chief Inspector Crane, county CID. And you are?"

"Jackie Naylor, Whitworth's brewery. I had a meeting with Bernard this morning. I know this pub. I know the cellar, the stock, the layout. I know Maureen, I know the delivery schedule, and I know who Tadcaster send as their area rep. If you want, I can save your lads about two days of asking around."

He looked at her for a long moment. The red hair, the red lipstick, another pack of crisps bought in the shop in her hand, the Cortina behind her in the car park. She could see him filing all of it and arriving at a conclusion he didn't like.

"That won't be necessary, Miss Naylor."

"Ms."

He blinked. It was small, but she caught it.

"Ms," she said again. "Not Miss."

"Ms Naylor." He said it carefully, like a man picking up an unfamiliar tool. "Thank you for your offer. We'll take your statement inside." He turned and walked into the pub.

Jackie watched him go. "You're welcome," she said, to no one.

* * *

Inside, the Crown smelled of last night's beer and something sharper underneath. The cellar door was open. A constable stood beside it looking like he wished he'd joined the fire brigade.

Jackie gave her statement to a detective sergeant called Crabtree, who wrote slowly and asked her nothing useful. She answered his questions, then asked her own.

"Where's Maureen?"

"Kitchen. She found him."

Jackie nodded. She looked at the bar. Bernard's stock book was open beside the till, a pencil lying across the page. The handwriting was Bernard's. Large, blunt, the writing of a man who ran a pub and not a library. She could see figures, columns, cross-references. She couldn't read the detail from here.

"Was he doing his accounts?"

"It appears so."

"On a Sunday night?"

Crabtree shrugged. Jackie let it go. She walked to the kitchen, where Maureen Douthwaite was sitting at the table with a cup of tea she hadn't touched.

Maureen was thirty-four, blonde, tired-looking. She'd been crying. Jackie had met her a dozen times on sales calls, enough to know that Maureen ran the Crown while Bernard took the credit, and that without her the place would have closed years ago.

"I'm sorry, love," Jackie said, and sat down.

Maureen shook her head. "I found him. Bottom of the steps. The light was off. I turned it on and he was just..." She stopped. "There was glass everywhere. One of the soda syphons. The big ones, behind the bar."

"The cellar light was off?"

"The switch is at the top. He'd never go down without it. Those steps are lethal in the dark."

Jackie looked at her. "When did you leave last night?"

"Quarter to eleven. He was at the bar, doing his accounts. I said goodnight. He didn't look up." She paused. "We'd had words in the car park at closing. About my shifts. He wanted me in Saturday lunchtimes and I'd said no."

"That's what you argued about? Shifts?"

"What else would it be?"

Jackie said nothing. She knew about the affair. Everyone on the rep circuit knew. Bernard had ended it in the summer and taken up with someone in Harton. Maureen's face said she knew that Jackie knew.

"His briefcase was behind the bar," Maureen said. "Keith Palliser's. He'd left it when he came for the accounts yesterday. It was there when I left."

"And this morning?"

Maureen frowned. "I don't know. I didn't look. I found Bernard and I ran."

* * *

Jackie found Frank Dinsdale in the pub car park, standing by the fence and smoking his pipe with a slow, deliberate rhythm.

"Terrible thing," he said.

"It is."

"I was the last out. Half ten. He was in a foul mood all night. Wouldn't say why."

Frank was sixty-two, square, weathered. Retired dairy farmer. He and Bernard had fallen out over a boundary dispute. Six feet of car park fence, as far as Jackie could tell, and they'd turned it into a war.

"You two still not speaking?"

"We spoke. We just didn't agree." He tapped his pipe against the wall. "I'll tell you this for nothing. If anyone asks, I walked straight home. I stopped on the bridge for a smoke, same as every night, but I was home by ten to eleven. Margaret was asleep."

"Nobody's asked you, Frank."

"They will."

She left him to his pipe and crossed the car park. Keith Palliser was standing by a silver Cortina, talking to one of Crane's constables. He'd arrived while Jackie was in the kitchen. He was thirty-eight, neat, pleasant. Sandy hair, tie, clean shoes. The kind of man who blended into a room like wallpaper. Jackie had seen him at brewery

events, nodded across car parks, exchanged the minimal courtesies of rival reps covering the same patch.

He finished with the constable and turned. "Jackie Naylor, isn't it? Whitworth's?"

"That's me. Terrible business."

"Terrible." He shook his head. "I was here yesterday afternoon. Monthly accounts. I keep thinking if I'd stayed longer, maybe..." He trailed off with the appropriate expression.

"You weren't here last night?"

"No, I drove back to the Fleece about five. Quiet evening." He smiled faintly. "Watched that Doris Day film on Yorkshire Telly. Not exactly gripping, but Mrs Barker doesn't run to a second channel."

Crane appeared in the pub doorway. "Mr Palliser? We'd like a word inside, if you don't mind."

Palliser straightened his tie. "Of course. Anything I can do." He followed Crane in. Helpful. Calm. A man with nothing to hide and all the time in the world.

Jackie watched them go and noticed the ground. The soft earth of the car park held every mark after the rain. She looked at the lane that ran past the Crown towards Harton. Fifty yards up, on the grass verge, she could see tyre tracks. Two neat ruts where a car had pulled off the road and parked.

She looked back at the pub car park. Then at the verge

again.

Why would someone park fifty yards away from a pub with a perfectly good car park?

* * *

She drove to the Fleece after lunch. She had a reason to be there. The Fleece was a Whitworth's pub, one of hers. She was checking stock. She was absolutely not driving three miles to poke around in someone else's investigation.

Mrs Barker was behind the bar, a solid woman in her sixties who ran the Fleece and everyone in it. Jackie ordered a lemonade and asked after the October order.

"While I'm here," Jackie said, "Keith Palliser's staying with you, isn't he? The Tadcaster rep."

"Room three. Been here since Saturday. Quiet man. No trouble."

"Was he in last night?"

"In the lounge at nine. I saw him myself. Went up to bed about quarter to eleven."

"Early night."

"Well, there's nothing to do here on a Sunday, is there?"

Jackie drank her lemonade. She thought about the briefcase. Maureen said it was behind the bar when she left at quarter to eleven. Palliser said he'd planned to collect it this morning. But had the police found it?

She thought about Bernard's stock book, open on the bar. Accounts on a Sunday night. A man checking his figures because something didn't add up.

She thought about the tyre tracks on the verge.

She thought about none of these things with any particular urgency, because she had stock to check and three more pubs to call on before dark. She finished the lemonade, settled the order with Mrs Barker, and drove south.

* * *

It nagged at her on the road between Harton and Leyburn, somewhere past the cattle grid where the moor opened up.

She wasn't thinking about the Crown. She was thinking about a jingle for the new Whitworth's bitter and whether it was too late to talk them out of it. And then, without invitation, the woman in the shop walked into her head.

I stayed in and watched The Great Escape.

Sunday night. The Great Escape. Steve McQueen.

And Palliser, standing in the car park that morning: *Watched that Doris Day film on the telly.*

Jackie eased off the accelerator. Something didn't fit.

She'd been at the Fleece on Saturday night herself, in the residents' lounge, going through her order book.

Yorkshire Television had been on in the corner and Doris

Day had been singing at someone. She remembered because Mrs Barker had turned the volume up.

Saturday. Not Sunday.

She pulled over. The Cortina's handbrake groaned. The moor stretched out on both sides, brown and empty, and the rain was coming back.

Maureen's fingerprints were on the soda syphon because she handled them every shift. Frank left at half ten and was home by ten to. The briefcase was behind the bar when Maureen left, and gone by morning. The tyre tracks on the verge. The stock book open on the bar. Bernard in a foul mood all evening.

Three suspects. Two with loud motives and thin alibis. One with no apparent motive at all, a solid alibi at the Fleece, and a quiet evening watching the wrong film on the wrong night.

Jackie Naylor sat in her mustard Cortina on the edge of the moor and stared at the rain beginning to spot the windscreen.

Something was very wrong, and she didn't yet know what .

* * *

She rang from a phone box on the Leyburn road. The receiver smelled of cigarettes and someone else's aftershave. She asked for county CID and got a desk sergeant who took her name, her number at the Fleece,

and a message for DCI Crane.

Crane rang back at six. The conversation lasted forty minutes, which was thirty-nine minutes longer than either of them had expected.

Two days later, Jackie sat on a bar stool in the empty Crown with her coat on and a cup of tea she'd made herself, because nobody else was going to. The heating hadn't been on since Sunday and the stone walls had remembered what they were made of.

Crane stood by the cellar door with his notebook open.

"The pathologist confirms the wound is to the right temple," he said. "But the steps descend to the left, with a stone wall on the right. If he'd fallen, the injuries would be to the left side of the head, or the forehead, or the back of the skull. Not the right temple."

"So someone hit him first and put him on the steps after."

"The cellar light was off. The switch is at the top. Nobody walks down steep stone steps in the dark. Someone turned the light off to make it look as though he'd stumbled."

"Staged," Jackie said.

"Staged." He turned a page.

"Maureen Douthwaite," Jackie said.

"Cleared. Her fingerprints are on the soda syphon fragments, but she handles those bottles every shift. The argument in the car park was about shift scheduling. She

has the motive of a woman whose lover dropped her, and the words she said in Mrs Gledhill's shop were the words of someone angry, not someone planning a murder. She left at quarter to eleven. The pathologist puts death after eleven."

"Frank Dinsdale."

"The boundary dispute amounts to six feet of car park fence. He left at half past ten, stopped on the bridge for a pipe, and was home by ten to eleven. His wife was asleep, but the timing is too tight. The murder was committed at least half an hour after he left the pub."

Jackie set down her tea. "Keith Palliser."

Crane nodded. "Mrs Barker at the Fleece confirms Palliser told her he was going to bed at quarter to eleven. She didn't hear him leave. She didn't hear him come back. His room is above the side entrance."

"The tyre tracks on the verge," Jackie said. "Fifty yards from the pub. Soft ground after the rain. He parked where nobody would see the car."

"The tread width is consistent with a Ford Cortina Mark III. Which is what Palliser drives."

"Same as mine," Jackie said.

"I noticed."

"Mine's prettier."

Crane almost smiled. The corner of his mouth moved a quarter of an inch, then thought better of it. Jackie saw it

anyway.

"Bernard's stock book was open on the bar," she said.

"He'd been cross-referencing delivery invoices against his cellar stock. His notes say Palliser's figures were four barrels short since June. He wrote 'Ring head office Mon.' in the margin."

"Palliser has been falsifying delivery records," Crane said.

"Recording more barrels delivered than were actually sent. Skimming the difference. We've found the same pattern at three other pubs on his round. He was taking roughly forty pounds a month."

"Bernard found it. Told Palliser on Sunday afternoon. Said he'd ring head office Monday morning."

"And Palliser left his briefcase behind the bar."

Jackie nodded. "Maureen saw it there when she left at quarter to eleven. It was gone Monday morning. Palliser said he planned to collect it Monday. But someone collected it Sunday night."

"He left the briefcase deliberately," Crane said. "It gave him a reason to come back. Bernard had told him the back door would be on the latch. He drove back from Harton, parked on the verge, came in through the yard gate. Found Bernard at the bar. Hit him with the soda syphon, dragged the body to the cellar steps, smashed the glass to scatter it, turned off the light, collected the briefcase, and drove back to the Fleece."

"All to stop a phone call."

"All to stop a phone call."

They sat for a moment. The pub was silent. The pumps were off and the taps were dry and the cellar where Bernard had been found was sealed with police tape. Outside, someone walked past the window without looking in. Netherdale was already learning to walk past the Crown without looking.

"How did you know?" Crane said. "About the television."

"A woman in the shop mentioned The Great Escape was on Yorkshire on Sunday night. I'd been at the Fleece on Saturday and Doris Day was on then. Same channel, same lounge, same Mrs Barker with the volume up. When Palliser said Doris Day was Sunday, it didn't sit right. Took me half a day to work out why."

He looked at her. She looked back. The red lipstick, the pale skin, the bright hair under the bad pub lighting. The mustard Cortina parked outside next to his dark blue Rover like a shout beside a whisper.

"Thank you, Ms Naylor," he said. "Your information was useful."

"Jackie."

A pause. Slight. Controlled.

"Jackie."

She picked up her tea and drank it, and didn't smile, though it cost her something.

* * *

Keith Palliser was arrested on Tuesday 5th October 1976 at the Fleece Inn, Harton. He was charged with the murder of Bernard Ilkley and with fraud against Tadcaster & North Riding Ales. The Yorkshire Television schedule for Sunday 3rd October was entered into evidence. Maureen Douthwaite applied for the tenancy of the Crown Inn and was granted it the following spring. She never served Whitworth's.