

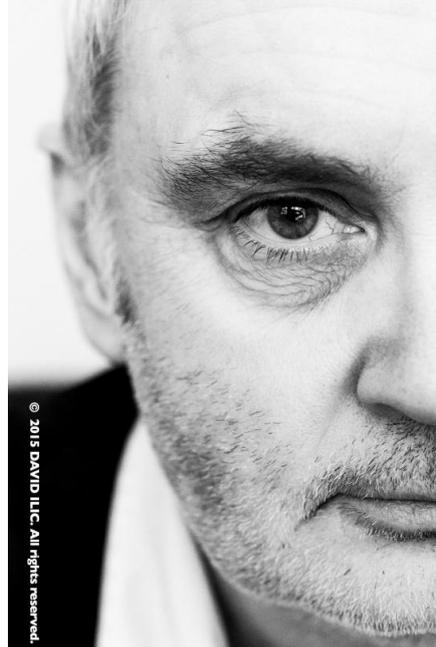
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Raymond Collins

by

Kerry J Donovan

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For my wife, Jan.

Despite everything, love you kid.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

CHAPTER 2

CHAPTER 3

#

Detective Chief Inspector David Jones studied each of the eight photos in turn. All showed the same scene, but taken as the cameraman drew closer. The park, trees, and pond, blended into subtle shades of green, grey, and blue. In the centre, a single patch of bright red arterial blood drew his eye.

The dead man, Jeremy Williams, half-seated, legs splayed, head canted back, facing the sky. The gash on his throat gaped. Blood oozed. The young man's muscular arms hung loose at his sides. Behind him, pinned by his body against the railings, the girl, face stippled in blood, hugged the dead man's chest. Eyes wide, her mouth open in a silent scream.

#

Chapter 1

A stroll in the park – Edgbaston, England

Ray Collins sat cross-legged on the park bench. He scratched behind his left ear, took a pull from a can of lager, and belched. ‘Pardon me, Mother!’ he said to no one.

“Manners, Raymond.”

He raised the can to his lips. After draining it in one long, gulping swig, he crushed the empty can, stamped it flat, and skimmed it into a mesh litter bin. The can clattered into the bin and landed on top of the other three.

“He shoots, he scores, never misses, never bores.” Ray punched a fist in the air to milk non-existent applause.

Wearing a contented smile, Ray reached into the plastic bag at his side, retrieved another can, and sighed. The last one. Breakfast nearly over, he belched again.

Ray glanced at his Rolex but didn’t have anywhere else to be.

On the next seat along the path, an old couple sat in silence, enjoying their own company, and the warmth of the early summer sun. The old dear smiled at him. That was the trouble with being so handsome, Ray observed. Women, even the wrinklies, always looked twice.

Young lads kicked a football in a muddy goal area fifty metres away. Their laughter made Ray sneer. Bastards, what right had they to be so happy? A cute mum with big tits and wide, swinging hips pushed a baby buggy around the playground, laughing into her mobile. More bloody happiness. In the distance, a young couple wandered through the trees.

Ray placed his hand on his chest. “Ah, young love.” He sprang up in a smooth, easy movement, and stood on the bench seat. In a booming voice, he called out:

*“How sweet the love that first blooms in youth,
It speaks not of heartbreak but unyielding truth.”*

He opened the final can and threw the ring-pull into the bin. With the beer hoisted above his head, Ray offered a salute to the oblivious lovers. He rolled into an expansive bow, belched again, and covered his mouth with a hand.

“Manners, Raymond. I won’t tell you again.”

“Sorry, Mother,” he mumbled.

Ray settled back on the bench and resumed his tuneless humming, pausing occasionally to suck on the beer.

The lovers continued their slow progress towards him. Ray’s gaze locked on the girl. A yellow blouse, tied at the waist, exposed a well-toned belly. Tight summer shorts smooth legs strong and tanned, thighs smooth and firm. She was, without doubt, the most beautiful creature Ray had seen for many a lonely day.

“Fucking gorgeous.”

“Raymond, mind your language you horrible boy.”

“Sorry, Mother.”

“I’m ready with the bar of soap for that foul mouth, Raymond. Remember that.”

“Yes, Mother.”

Ray stood, dropped the plastic bag in the bin, and strolled towards the girl.

The gap between Ray and the couple closed to thirty metres. The proximity showed her beauty undiminished. He half expected to find a blemish, an imperfection, but no. The girl’s inner glow radiated towards him on a beam of sunlight, straight through his heart.

“Poetic, Ray. Have to remember that.”

Beauty laughed at something her partner said and tilted her head back to reveal a silky smooth neck—flawless. She wore her long dark hair loose. Flecks of red flashed in the sun.

Ray’s throat and mouth dried. He sucked more beer.

The couple turned left, towards the duck pond. Ray closed the gap to ten metres. The girl’s rear

pleased Ray as much as her front. A firm, round arse stretched the fabric of her shorts. The youngsters shuffled close, bodies touched. The boy's left arm draped over her shoulder and her right arm bent around his waist, thumb hooked in the loop of his jeans.

They stopped. Ray stopped.

The boy leaned in. The girl's head tilted up. They kissed.

Ray ground his teeth. *Lucky bastard!* He threw the now empty can into one of the rhododendron bushes framing the path. It bounced off a thin branch and fell to the tarmac at his feet.

"Raymond, you litter lout! This really is the final straw."

"Sorry, Mother."

He crushed the can flat underfoot, picked it up, folded it in half, and stuffed it into his jacket pocket. He'd pass another bin in a minute.

The couple continued along the path, descending until they reached the duck pond where they stopped again and leaned on a wrought iron fence. They studied a pair of ducks bobbing for morsels. Ray stopped five metres from the girl. The boy stood on the other side, but in Ray's mind, he didn't exist.

Raymond Francis Collins was in love. No doubt about it.

Craning to hear the couple's conversation, he waited. The girl giggled at something the boy said about one of the ducks. Ray remembered a passage from a website, sidled closer, and fixed the girl with a winning, unbeatable smile.

"The males are drakes and females are hens," he said and pointed at the birds. "Drakes have the bright, colourful plumage. As you can see, hens have more subtle, dull feathers, to provide camouflage during the nesting season."

Staring deep into her eyes, Ray noted light orange flecks at the edges of her dark brown irises. Stunning. His heart fluttered when the girl smiled. Ray impressed her. It was obvious. The other guy meant nothing.

Ray beamed back. All he needed to do now was rid her of the irritating bloke at her side.

The guy cut between Ray and the girl. "Thanks for the info, Mr Attenborough, but if you don't mind, Ella and me want to be on us own. Okay?"

"Ella." Ray repeated the name, to try it out for size. "Ella. Nice."

It sounded like 'stellar'. A star to shine bright in the heavens.

With Ella partially obscured from his view, Ray finally turned his full attention to the young man. Up close, he was big. Massive shoulders. Heavily muscled arms protruded from the short sleeves of his slim-fit shirt. He looked strong, threatening—scary.

Taller than Ray by at least two centimetres and broader, he was also slow and unprepared.

"Watch him, Raymond. He's dangerous."

"Thank you, Mother."

"What's that?" Ella's bloke asked.

Ray pulled his hand from his jacket pocket to pre-empt the man's inevitable attack, and in one lightning movement, swept his hand upwards.

Metal glinted in the sun and bit into soft throat tissue.

Ella's bloke fell backwards.

The pair collapsed in a heap at the foot of the railings.

She screamed.

Ella's hair, now dishevelled, clung to the fence, a dark halo around her stunning face. Eyes widened in shock and terror, her scream continued.

Ray wanted to go to her, comfort her, and tell her she was okay now, safe, but all he saw was blood oozing through the man's fingers as he clutched at the gash in his throat.

"How the fuck did that happen?"

"Language, Raymond."

"Sorry, Mother."

The man's mouth opened and closed, gasping in silence, a fish drowning in air. The confused expression turned to fear, his legs jerked, and his back arched. Skin paled. Movements slowed.

Ray tore his gaze from the blood and stared at the screaming Ella.

Small sprays of arterial blood peppered her face and clothes. The furrowed brow and blotched

makeup spoiled her beauty, killed the mood.

“Stop it. Stop crying, bitch!” Ray shouted. “I did it for you, you ungrateful cow.”

Ray shook his head and frowned. He looked down at the object in his fist – the crushed beer can, bent double. A wicked point, where the crease had torn the metal, dripped red.

“What the hell?”

“Never mind, Raymond. Better be off home now. Need to change your clothes.”

“Yes, Mother. Did I do well?”

“Very well, my big brave soldier.”

“Thank you, Mother.” Ray turned his back on the distraught Ella. “Be back soon. Don’t go away.”

As Mother said, he needed to clean up before he could ask her out for a meal.

Chapter 2

Holton Police Station – Midlands Police Service

Detective Chief Inspector David Jones stared at the sheets of paper spewing slowly from the laser printer in the corner of his office. He wrinkled his nose. The high-pitched whine of the device was bad enough, but the tang of burning toner made the hairs inside his nose stick together. “Is that the Alby Pope paperwork?”

Jones’ bagman and heir apparent, Detective Sergeant Phil Cryer, nodded and his overlong blond hair bobbed. “Yes, Boss. Alex filed it this morning. Complete with post mortem report, DNA evidence, fingerprints, Pope’s semen on dead woman, and on the wall in the hall outside. Signed confession, too. The case file is ready to send to the DPP. You want to take a look first, I suppose?”

“How many pages?”

Phil threw him a crooked smile. “Including the interview notes and lab reports, two-hundred-and-fifty-two. Light bedtime reading, it isn’t. The murderous little creep will probably plead diminished responsibility, but he shouldn’t see freedom for a couple of decades if the prosecutor does his job properly.”

Jones sniffed. He’d been around long enough to see even the most solid case fall apart following the involvement of the Director of Public Prosecutions. “Believe it when I see it, Philip.”

He studied the growing pile of sheets in the printer hopper and sniffed again. He wouldn’t be able to bring himself to touch the pages until they had cooled and the smell of the toner had dissipated. As for reading the document from the screen, not a chance, so there’d be a delay in sending the file through, but that was the way things worked in David Jones’ world. He’d lived with his idiosyncrasies forever. A shame, but he wouldn’t— couldn’t change now. Anyway, with Alby Pope safely locked away in the hospital wing of the remand centre, there was no rush. Pope wasn’t going anywhere other than prison, or a high security ward in Broadmoor.

“Even if we do get a conviction,” Jones said, “there’s no telling what the psychiatrists will say when they get hold of him. Probably slap his wrists and send him home after a couple of weeks with a script for Mogadon.” Jones always felt gloomy at the end of a case as anti-climax dragged him low, but he normally hid his moods better.

“Cheer up, boss. And by the way, Mogadon is used to treat insomnia.” Phil closed his eyes and demonstrated his facility for total recall. He did it to annoy Jones, and it often worked.

“Mogadon tablets,” Phil continued, “contain the active ingredient nitrazepam, a type of benzodiazepine. Works by acting on the brain’s GABA receptors causing the release of the neurotransmitter, gamma-aminobutyric acid—GABA. It has other uses, of course,” he added, grinning. “I’m surprised you didn’t know that.” He stretched and a shirttail pulled from his trouser waistband and exposed a tubby belly. “I’ll fill the printer with paper and we can have a coffee while we wait. What do you say? My shout.”

Jones checked the time on the wall clock, 11:15, and nodded. “Suits me, I missed breakfast.”

“Again? What happened this time?”

“Fitting new radiators all weekend. The water’s back on now though, so things are looking up.”

Phil leaned back and tucked in the shirt. “Are you ever going to finish renovating that pile of rubble?”

“Hey, that’s my home you’re talking about,” Jones said, forcing a mock scowl, “and it’ll be done before I draw my pension.”

“So, you’re finishing in the next two years?” Phil’s arched eyebrow and dipped chin made it clear he didn’t believe it for one second.

“Twenty-eight months, not two years.” The thought of impending retirement made Jones’ gloom return, but with added darkness. “Don’t remind me.”

“That why you’re in a mood? Not still moping over Sean Freeman?”

Jones’ frown deepened. “Don’t mention that conman. Not ever.”

Phil smiled and raised his hands in surrender. “Whatever you say, boss. So, let me get this straight.

You've been working on that house since before I started here and reckon you'll finish it in time to retire?"

"Doesn't the fact that I'm putting in heating tell you something?"

Phil shrugged. "Er ..."

"Oh, for God's sake, call yourself a detective?" Jones shook his head and made his patient face. "I wouldn't be fitting central heating unless the place was nearing completion, now would I?"

"Bloody hell, you've moved on a bit since I was there last? When d'you have time to do that?"

"Don't need much sleep these days, and with these lighter summer evenings. Nothing better to do with my free time."

"That's great. Manda's looking forward to the housewarming party. Jamie and Paul too."

Jones smiled. "How are the little tykes?"

"Jamie's a fairy-story and Paul's ... still teething. You're not the only one losing sleep. Oh, and before I forget—"

"With your photographic memory, thought you never forgot anything." Jones couldn't resist the jibe.

"Eidetic, boss," Phil shot back without pause. They'd been through the same routine a few times in the six years that Phil had been part of Jones' Serious Crime Unit.

"Yes, right. Forgive me my ignorance."

"Photographic' doesn't cover it. I can remember sounds and smells as well as pictures."

Lucky sod.

"That's what I like about you, Philip," Jones said. "You're so damn humble. What do you need to remember?"

"Tomorrow's the second part of my inspector's exams. I'll be taking the day off."

"It's in my diary. Might just be able to cope without you for a day."

"Thanks. Now, what was that about the canteen? I hear a coffee and Danish calling."

"I thought Manda had you on a diet?"

Phil patted his belly. "What she doesn't know ...". He stood and grabbed his jacket from the back of his chair, but before Jones could follow, the phone rang with the double buzz of an internal call.

"Jones here ... Where?" He raised a hand to stop Phil leaving. "SOCOs on their way? ... Ah, I see ... What about search teams? How many uniforms can you spare? ... Is that all? ... Have you notified the patrol cars and the beat officers? ... Right, we're on our way."

"Trouble?" Phil asked.

"An attack in Edgbaston Park."

While Phil pulled on his jacket and checked his pockets for keys and warrant card, Jones waited until the oscillating fan rotated parallel with the edge of his desk before hitting the off switch. He tidied both stacks of paper, incoming and outgoing, and placed the ballpoint pen in its slot on the desk tidy. He shot a glance at Phil's clear desk and nodded, satisfied. Perhaps there was something to be said for the paperless office after all.

"Okay, let's go."

Jones collected his jacket from its hanger behind the door and dragged it on while Phil locked the door behind them.

Chapter 3

The Park

Phil Cryer had difficulty keeping up with the sprightly David Jones, as they jog-walked along the corridor to the stairway. His heart raced trying to match the boss' pace. Twenty years older, and pencil slim, Jones bounded down the stairs two at a time.

Bloody gazelle.

Cryer couldn't keep up without blowing hard. Sweat moistened his armpits and ran down the middle of his back. When they reached the ground floor, he hiked up his trousers, and tucked his shirttails into the waistband once more.

They punched through the double reception doors and jogged across the car park to Jones' ancient Rover. Seconds later, they careened along Bristol Street, blue lights flashing and two-tone horns wailing.

Cryer would normally feel uncomfortable during high-speed rides unless he was doing the driving, but Jones' calmness behind the wheel allowed him to relax enough to link his computer tablet to the station's database. "They've started uploading the crime scene data already, boss. First responders have pronounced the victim dead, and the killer's long gone, so there's no need to rush."

The old man flashed him a frowning glance. "Really?"

His right foot mashed the accelerator into the carpet.

"What else does your computer tell me to do?" he added, shouting above the noise of the sirens.

The dual carriageway merged into a single lane, two-way road, and traffic slowed to a crawl. David hammered on the horn, and his jaw muscles bunched.

"Aren't you going to slow down, boss? The attack happened half an hour ago. The killer's probably miles away by now."

"I'm more worried about the Scenes of Crime Officers screwing up again."

"Oh God, it's not Reg Prendergast, is it?"

The boss nodded and punched the horn hard again. "His team's the only one available."

Cryer felt the disappointment and understood David's urgency. "Christ, I thought he was on his way out?"

"Between the two of us, the FMO passed him as fit for active service, but recommended ongoing counselling." He pulled into the central lane to overtake a small pensioner driving a massive BMW.

Cryer closed his eyes and stamped on an imaginary brake pedal. "Steady boss, I need to be fit for the exam tomorrow, and my kiddies need a father."

David glanced in the nearside wing mirror before flicking the car into a tiny space between two trucks. "When we reach the scene, keep an eye on the SOCOs—just in case." He checked the rear-view mirror, clearly happy with his positioning, and remained in the lane. "One good thing, though. Bill Harrap and Pat Elliott are with him. A couple of jokers, but they know their stuff. Maybe Reg'll be okay with their support."

"Yeah, right," Cryer said, but didn't believe it for a second.

They turned right onto Priory Road, left into Church Lane, and left again into Edgbaston Park Road before the boss pulled the Rover to a juddering stop behind three patrol cars, the SOCO's Range Rover, and an ambulance.

Before the old man had time to remove his seatbelt, Cryer jumped out and strode to the back of the open ambulance. With tablet in hand, he was ready to begin the investigation. The boss, as usual, took his time to study the area, taking everything in, missing nothing.

Cryer had waited two years for his assignment to join David Jones, the most successful detective in the history of the Midlands Police. He wanted to learn from the best, and the boss was just that—the very best. The six years he'd spent studying the great man's methods had been filled with long days and short nights, and he'd enjoyed every enlightening second. Even Manda loved the irascible old sod, and treated him much the same way as she did her father, with patience and kindness. Jamie, Cryer's eight-year-old, loved her Uncle David. At three months and six days old, Paul was too young to make any decision other than when to scream for his milk.

Cryer reached the ambulance, taking out his unnecessary notepad—the boss insisted he kept copious notes.

#

Jones studied the scene, more to prepare himself for the sight of another dead body than to familiarise himself with an area he'd known for more than thirty-five years. Although he worked hard to present a professional demeanour, dead bodies—especially gory ones—still had the power to wheedle their way through his defences.

Easy, Jones. Soak in the sun before facing the darkness.

A grass verge separated the road from a tarmac pavement, and beyond that, the park spread out in a green blanket. Lush grass, courtesy of the wettest summer in recent memory, had been freshly mown, and looked vibrant in the bright sun. Mature oaks and chestnut trees cast dark, rippling shadows as a stiffening breeze ruffled the canopy. Couples and family groups, aware of the drama unfolding, stared at the flashing lights, probably wondering why the emergency services had disturbed their welcome respite from the interminable rain. The park was idyllic, or at least looked that way from his current position.

He made his way to the rear of the ambulance.

As usual, Phil had things under control, speaking to the paramedic dealing with a blood-spattered girl—late teens, long dark hair, pale skin, impossibly large brown eyes, pretty. She hugged a red blanket around her shoulders, and shivered despite the heat of the day.

Phil caught Jones' enquiring glance and shook his head. The poor lass would be of little help for a while.

"Excuse me, Chief Inspector."

Jones turned to face a young police officer. Slim arms poked through his short-sleeved uniform shirt, notebook held in his right hand. A leftie.

"Yes, Constable?"

The youngster snapped to attention smartly, but his skin matched the white of the girl in the ambulance. He swallowed hard. Jones thought he looked too young to be out on his own, let alone encounter a dead body.

"Parkin, sir."

"First on the scene?"

"Yes, sir."

"First death?"

Parkin swallowed again and nodded.

"Relax, Constable." The young man remained locked at attention, his arms, held stiff at the sides, shook with the strain. "This must have been quite a shock. Who are you here with?"

"My probationary training officer, Sergeant Doland, sir. He's keeping the area secure. Sent me here with the young woman"—Parkin relaxed enough to read from the notebook—"Ella Hughes. The Sarge ... I mean, Sergeant Doland, sent me here to look after Ms Hughes, and wait for you, sir."

And to give you a chance to recover from the shock, I expect.

Vic Doland was a good, solid beat officer. An excellent mentor, most of his cadets made the grade and those who didn't deserved his counsel.

"What have you done since your arrival, Constable?"

"Sergeant Doland checked the victim for a pulse, but we were too late. We didn't want to move him, but he was lying on top of Ms Hughes, so we had to alter the crime scene. I hope that's okay, sir. Ms Hughes was hysterical. Screaming and crying. In a terrible state. It was horrible, sir." Parkin's face crumpled and he looked ready to cry.

"Take a breath, son. You did well. Now, where's the body?"

Parkin pointed over Jones' shoulder. "Other side of the hill, sir. Near the railings surrounding the duck pond. The SOCOs have arrived and Sergeant Doland is organising the search.

Jones followed the line of Parkin's finger. Beyond the footpath, the grass rose into a small hillock before falling away, hiding the crime scene from view. Good. Less likely to attract the attention of passing drivers. The last thing they needed was idiot rubberneckers causing a road accident.

“Right you are, Constable. Stay with Ms Hughes all the way to the hospital. Don’t question her, but note down anything she says. I’ll get a victim support officer over there and have you back with Sergeant Doland in a couple of hours.” He clapped a hand on the young man’s shoulder and gave him an encouraging smile. “You did a good job here today, Parkin. Well done, lad.”

The young officer relaxed, but not by much. A timid smile cracked his face. He returned to the girl, while Phil approached.

“Nothing much from the girl, boss. Sounds like a random attack. The suspect is a white male, a little less than six feet. Slim. I’ve radioed the station and they’re relaying the information to the patrol cars. The only other thing the girl can say is the guy smiled a lot and had white teeth.”

“Not a vagrant then. Clothing?”

“I didn’t want to press her. Only seventeen, poor thing. And the victim, her boyfriend, Jeremy Williams, was nineteen.’

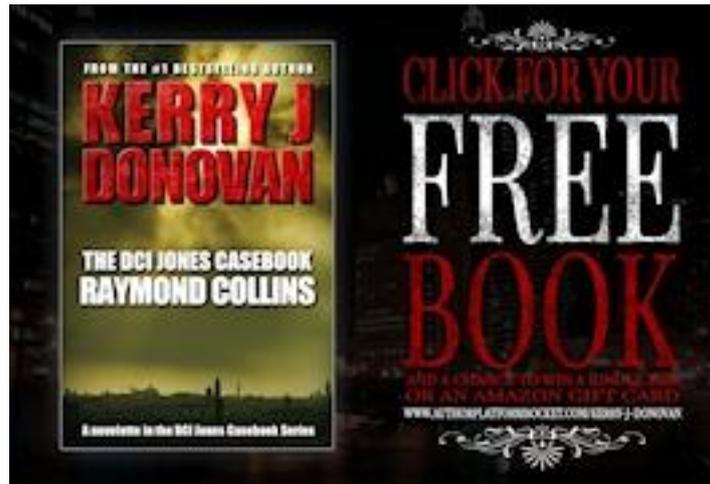
“Any other witnesses? Looks like there’s plenty of people in the park today.”

“Young family saw the whole thing. They’re being held near the scene but nobody’s taken a statement yet.”

Jones sighed, “Suppose we’d better go take a look.”

To read on [CLICK HERE](#).

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If you enjoyed reading this sample and would like to receive a **FREE COPY** of *THE DCI JONES CASEBOOK: RAYMOND COLLINS*—one of the books in Kerry’s crime thriller series—read on:

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Biography

Kerry J Donovan was born in Dublin. He spent most of his life in the UK, and now lives in the heart of rural Brittany with his wonderful and patient wife, Jan. They have three children and four grandchildren (so far), all of whom live in England. An absentee granddad, Kerry is hugely thankful for the advent of video calling.

The cottage is a pet free zone (apart from the field mice, moles, and red squirrels).

Kerry earned a first class honours degree in Human Biology, and has a PhD in Sport and Exercise Sciences. A former scientific advisor to The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, he helped UK emergency first-responders prepare for chemical attacks in the wake of 9/11. This background adds a scientific edge to his writing. He is also a former furniture designer/maker.

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Other Works

CRIME THRILLERS

The DCI Jones Casebook: Sean Freeman

Veteran cop, DCI David Jones, is tough and uncompromising. His Serious Crime Unit has the best arrest record the Midlands Police Service has ever seen and Jones wants to keep it that way.

Locksmith turned jewel thief, Sean Freeman, is the best cracksmith in the UK. He's never been caught—the police have never even come close. When Freeman's boss forces him to break into the Stafford Museum, the UK's most secure premises outside of the Bank of England he's in trouble—the Stafford is in the heart of David Jones' jurisdiction.

Someone's record is going to suffer.

The DCI Jones Casebook: Raymond Collins

A 70-page novelette to introduce Detective Chief Inspector David Jones: Birmingham, England, a sunny day in the city park. Children play, adults walk—and a man lies dead in a pool of blood. His terrified fiancé screams for help.

The assailant smiles, waves goodbye, and strolls away into the city.

DCI David Jones and his protégé, Detective Sergeant Phil Cryer, are called to investigate the most difficult of crimes—an apparently motiveless and random attack. Hampered by a lack of resources, Jones and Cryer have to act quickly to prevent a murder spree.

The DCI Jones Casebook: Ellis Flynn

When fourteen-year-old Hollie Jardine fails to return home from school, her terrified parents call the police.

It doesn't take DCI David Jones, head of the Midlands Police Serious Crime Unit, long to discover a link between Hollie and convicted sex-offender, Ellis Flynn.

With Hollie's chances of survival fading, Jones and his colleague Alex Olganski risk their careers when they ignore protocol to follow Flynn's trail across the Channel into France.

What they discover in an idyllic backwater will stretch Jones' detection skills to the limit, and Alex's loyalty to heartbreak.

ACTION ADVENTURE

On Lucky Shores

In an action-packed tale of secrets and lies in small town America, Chet Walker is a man forced to make decisions that will affect his future and the life of the woman he loves.

Witness to a car crash and in receipt of a cryptic message from a dying man, traveling musician, Chet Walker, reaches the picturesque lakeside town of Lucky Shores. He faces hostility and suspicion from the locals and learns that the information he carries could unlock an eight-year-old mystery—it could also get him killed.

Josephine Dolan, owner of the Lucky Shores diner, wants to bury her past. When Walker arrives with a message from her father, she doesn't want to hear it. She cuts him cold.

When his life is threatened, Chet Walker learns the truth behind the saying, “no good deed goes unpunished.”

FANTASY THRILLER

The Transition of Johnny Swift

Before the accident ...

Frank Brazier has the perfect life. A contract to drive for a Formula 1 team. A supportive family. A stunning girlfriend.

On the surface, everything is great, but Frank keeps a secret. On race days, Shadow-man visits. He sits on the nose cone of Frank's racing car, or floats above the grandstand, waving, taunting, distracting, eating away at his concentration. An accident in the making.

After the accident ...

Frank starts hearing voices. Strange voices. Impossible voices. He's losing his grip on reality and Paula, his sister, is dying. Doctors say she is brain dead. They want to pull the plug, but Frank knows she's still in there, fighting. He can hear her calls.

One day later...

Shadow-man speaks. He says Frank can save Paula, but can Frank pay the price?

SHORT STORIES

The Collection

The Collection includes over two dozen stories ranging in length from fifty word micro shorts to a full-blown novelette. Comedy, drama, crime thrillers, romance, true-life tales, gory horror, historical epic—you'll find samples of each.

The hauntingly evocative semi-autobiographical tale, *Sweet William*, and the poignant, *The Phone Call*, are stories to tug the heart and bring tears to the eye.

In *The Long Wait*, Ryan Chisholm has spent seventeen years waiting to avenge the death of his father.

A Father's Tale is a heart-warming story of family life told in short vignettes.

At over 7,000 words, *The Chamber* is the longest in the book, and perhaps Kerry's most gruesome tale. Psychopath Porter Robinson holds Robert Forbes captive in a cellar and tells him a tale from Porter's childhood. Will Forbes survive, or will he go the way of countless other victims? This is definitely not for the people of a timid disposition.

If you enjoy your fiction in short bites and read across many genres, *The Collection* is certain to delight.