

HOWARD ROBINSON

KNOW

YOUR

OWN

D A R K N E S S



KNOW YOUR OWN DARKNESS

Howard Robinson



Published by Inspired Quill: November 2020

First Edition

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters and incidents are the product of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental. The publisher has no control over, and is not responsible for, any third-party websites or their contents.

This book contains references to depression, trauma, kidnapping and murder.

Know Your Own Darkness © 2020 by Howard Robinson

Contact the author through their website: www.howard-robinson.com

Chief Editor: Sara-Jayne Slack

Cover Design: Venetia Jackson

All Rights Reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-908600-83-7

eBook ISBN: 978-1-908600-84-4

PDF Edition

Inspired Quill Publishing, UK

Business Reg. No. 7592847

www.inspired-quill.com

Praise for Howard

Micah Seven Five leans much more towards Morse or Midsommer than towards the bleak, melancholy of Nordic noir or the urban grit of The Sweeney. There's considerable detail, following the police investigation while intimately reporting everyday reality. [...] At the end, it's satisfying to be surprised by the final page.

– R. Hoseason,
Murder, Mayhem and More

[Micah] is a very readable, extremely accessible police investigative novel. I enjoyed the way that the narrative flowed, picking up pace as it went along and keeping you engaged right through to the conclusion. The language is modern and there is good humour in the dialogue. I recommend this novel very highly. It should be excellent as a holiday page turner.

– S. Johnson,
reviewer

Howard's use of language [in the Sixth Republic] is both emotive and enticing. Drawing the reader into a world that is only just removed from the one we inhabit. A big thumbs up and 5 very well deserved gold stars for a beatifically crafted story. Highly topical, a little scary in its plausibility, and riveting.

– AC,
reviewer

In respectful memory of AJB, 1963-1973

PROLOGUE

IT WAS 1975, on a Sunday in early June and the sun, which beat down on a group of families relaxing by the outdoor swimming pool, gave this little corner of south east England a Mediterranean feel it scarcely deserved. Its powerful brightness played tricks with Matthew's eyes and made things he knew to be one colour appear to be another. He was sat, cross-legged, at the foot of his mother's sunbed, a sky-blue towel draped across his shoulders, eating an apple and feeling cool with a new pair of sunglasses resting on the top of his head.

The black transistor radio that had been entertaining their mothers all morning played *Never Can Say Goodbye*. Kevin's mum was doing her best Gloria Gaynor, much to her son's obvious discomfort. Despite the heat that warmed Matthew's skin, the temperature of the pool from which he'd only just emerged – at his mother's insistence – had provoked a shiver or two as his body adjusted, goose pimples appearing across his hairless torso. He traced them with his fingernail like a join-the-dot puzzle.

At ten years old Matt revelled in the freedom of the swimming pool; running, jumping and dive-bombing people,

most of whom didn't want to be bombed but went along with it anyway. He and three friends from school – Danny Carter and his twin brother Simon, and Kevin Simpson – had reluctantly given into the pleas of their parents and were eating a picnic on the grass alongside the sunbeds on which their mothers cultivated unlikely tans. Other children, only some of whom they knew, occupied themselves in a similar manner with their own families at different points around the pool's perimeter. Matthew, Danny, Simon and Kevin – and the twins' older brother Mark – played a game of Cluedo as they waited impatiently for their mothers to decree that their food had been properly digested. Occasionally the board, which was perched on the end of one of the beds, would topple off, scattering dice and pieces round and about. Despite the inconvenience, within an hour the boys had finally found Reverend Green guilty of the heinous crime, perpetrated with some lead piping in the library. Satisfied with their work, they placed everything back into the box and, parental approval given, returned to the pool.

MATTHEW WOULD COME to remember the morning as one of blithe independence and fun; in fact, the last of its kind. He would recall the afternoon, with hindsight, as the first black milestone in a hitherto bright young life and one that would cast a cool shadow over all of them in different ways as they transitioned from boys into men. Matthew's recollection of the exact sequence of events that followed would become a little shadier with the passage of time, but he would always remember with clarity the piercing scream of Kevin's mother. Not even Gloria Gaynor could have hit a high note like that. The discordant sound would become embedded in his mind, in much

the same way that it shattered the tranquillity of the late summer afternoon.

“Oh my God, it’s Danny.”

In the decades that followed, Matthew had re-heard it countless times in his quietest moments and revisited it himself when his eyes were shut and his head rested on a pillow. His mind’s eye would show him three men, two of them fully clothed and the third in swimming shorts, dive in to retrieve the young boy’s lifeless body from the bottom of pool. He could recall how it felt to be transfixed with horror as he watched them scoop Danny out of the water and lay him on the concrete beside the pool.

His heart rate always stepped up when he thought about it; tightness closed in across his chest. He could still see how the body of his young friend had taken on a bluish hue and could taste again the tension and the all-pervading terror in the back of his throat. So many years on, he experienced anew the panic of that once calm and carefree afternoon. He could remember the disbelief etched onto every face, recalled how his mother had turned him away so that he wouldn’t watch the futile attempts to breathe life into one that was now lifeless.

Danny was dead at eleven years old.

Suddenly and brutally the fun was over in the most profound and awful way. And that was as much as Matthew knew; then and now. But that was the moment when it all began.

He could barely recall the car journey home. He had witnessed death up close for the first time and it had been somebody he’d been playing with until moments before, somebody who had been vibrant and alive in every sense of the word; yet nobody had asked him then or since if he was okay. He

felt selfish even thinking about it. There had been no offer of counselling. Nobody enquired if he wanted to talk or had questions to ask. Nobody recognised his grief or his confusion. And yet at home and at school it enveloped him.

Now, more than thirty years on, Matthew knew that Danny's death had touched and disturbed him in a most profound way. Why had he survived and Danny not? How would people have reacted if it had been him instead of Danny? Why hadn't he been saved – he could only have been at the bottom of the pool for a matter of seconds; there had been plenty of people present. Surely, somebody should and could have been able to do something. In the years following, that day had eaten away at Matthew's sense of self; the damage had become not only irreversible but had also compounded every setback, little and large, that he had endured since. It had contributed to what he had come to consider a cancer of his soul.

CHAPTER ONE

JACK MUNDAY ROLLED a little to his right and in the half-light of the early morning studied the face of the woman lying next to him. To Jack, its soft youthfulness had a depth that reflected authentic life experience. It encapsulated everything that was beautiful about his world, or had been, once. It had been longer than he was proud of since he'd had sex so passionate, so unexpected and conducted with such abandon as last night. But that wasn't, ultimately, what had made it such a wonderful experience. The thrashing and the grinding and the moaning had been great, but it was the simple touch of skin against skin with somebody you loved, had always loved and cared so deeply for that shocked him a little.

Elaine slowly opened her eyes and smiled. It almost felt as if they had been estranged as long as they'd been married. Each day without her had felt like being forced to sit on the periphery of their world – hers and their son Connor's – being only able to observe it from a distance, like a stalker looking through a window into their lives. Each day without her was a reminder of the moment he had lost his mind and hit her. Until last night he'd always thought there might be no coming back.

“Good morning,” he whispered.

She smiled. “That was nice. Unexpected but really nice.”

They’d been for dinner to talk about Connor. Jack was buoyed by having put another murderer behind bars and for finally securing his promotion to DCI, even though there was no DCI job for him to move into. He hoped that putting on hold a promotion that required him to move away from them had been the right thing to do and that she would see it as his commitment towards rebuilding their family. He wanted it to be the last piece in the reconciliation jigsaw. Sure, he was frustrated that a new superintendent was being brought in above him, but his family was his priority so he would just suck it up for a while. After leaving the restaurant the previous night, they had found themselves in a hotel bar, drinking Bombay Sapphire and then tequila shots as if they were still in their twenties. On the cab journey home one thing had led to another and, well, suffice to say it’s how they came to be naked in bed together as dawn broke on a new day. All it needed now, Jack thought, was Barry White playing on the radio and the moment would be complete; cheesy but complete.

Elaine rolled onto her back, her left breast appearing above the top line of the duvet as she did so, and looked at the clock on her bedside table.

“Shit,” she screeched in a half shout, half whisper. “It’s six in the morning. You’ve got to go.”

“Calm down, it’s Saturday. I don’t need to be up for work. I thought I’d have a shower, make you breakfast in bed and then maybe we could go out for the day... or stay in... whichever takes your fancy.”

Elaine was already half out of bed, wrapping a bath robe around her body.

“Neither takes my fancy, Jack. You need to be up and out. Connor could be up soon, and he can’t see you here. You can shower at your place.”

Jack propped himself up in bed. “Slow down. What’s the problem? Why does it matter if Connor sees me here?”

“If Connor sees you, he’ll get the wrong idea. He’ll think we’re back together.”

“We were pretty together last night.”

“Don’t joke about this. Come on, get up and get dressed and do it quietly.”

Jack leant out of the side of the bed and tried to hook his boxer shorts off the floor with his middle finger. “So what was last night all about?”

“Last night was a shag, Jack. Don’t get me wrong it was a good one, not that your ego really needs a boost, but you don’t rebuild a relationship like ours on the back of drunken sex.”

“It seems a pretty good place to start to me.”

“That’s what makes us different. I don’t want to be a bitch about it but I was off my face. We both were. That’s not how this is going to happen, if it’s going to happen at all.”

Jack was up, boxers on, shirt on but unbuttoned, his trousers discarded in a heap near the bedroom door.

“Even taking that on board, why can’t I see Connor?”

“You know the answer to that. If he sees you in a bathrobe, sitting at the breakfast table playing happy families, he’ll get his hopes up that we’re getting back together and I don’t want to do that to him just now.”

“Because you don’t want us to get back together?”

“Because I don’t know what I want.”

Jack was dressed.

“I’m not saying last night wasn’t fun, I’m just saying I need time.”

“Can I grab a coffee before I get thrown out of my own home?”

“Get one from Starbucks on your way.”

Given the intimacy of the night they had just spent together, Jack thought Elaine’s goodbye peck on the cheek as she opened the door more than a little impersonal.

As he walked away from the house towards the high street and a much-needed caffeine injection, his phone beeped twice to signify an incoming text. He pulled the phone from the inside pocket of his black leather jacket, its battery level almost requiring intensive care, and opened the message. It was from his colleague Lesley Hilton; beautiful, curvaceous, flirty, sexy Lesley.

“It’s Saturday morning and I’m lying in alone. Want to come round and lie in with me?”

Jack read the message twice. Any other day, he thought, *any* other day and he probably would. He deleted the text and ordered a flat white instead.