

A person with an umbrella is walking away from the viewer through a large, arched stone gateway at night. The scene is illuminated by streetlights, creating a moody atmosphere. The archway is part of a larger structure, possibly a bridge or a tunnel entrance. The overall color palette is dominated by dark blues and greys, with highlights from the lights.

THE CROSS CHRONICLES

**THE
LOST BOYS
TIM SULLIVAN**

**A DS
CROSS
SHORT
STORY**

THE LOST BOYS

ALSO BY TIM SULLIVAN

The Dentist

The Cyclist

The Patient

THE LOST BOYS

Tim Sullivan



An Aris Book

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The excavation of a suspected burial site for human remains was always a sombre and grim occasion, even if the case was historic, possibly decades old. But an excavation for children's remains was on another level of emotional distress altogether for any forensic team.

The situation DS George Cross was faced with that morning came about because of his father, who was back in the care home where he'd recovered a while back from his hip replacement. He didn't need to be there for any medical reason and referred to these return visits as 'respite care' and in some respects it was. It was a respite from his everyday life, from living on his own. He enjoyed the company the home afforded him, having his bed made and three meals a day cooked for him. 'I'm a voluntary inmate,' he would jokingly inform anyone who asked.

Cross had been called into the home by his father. It had sounded quite urgent. It wasn't a Wednesday or a Sunday, the days of their regular meetings, so Cross knew it had to be important. This was Raymond's third spell at the home after his recuperation. Over the course of those visits he had made himself incredibly useful there, 'just this side of indispensable,' he informed his son. He not only occupied himself with repairing and servicing the residents' wheelchairs, but he'd also taught himself to be something of a computer wizard. It was only relatively recently that

Raymond had revised his opinion of the internet from it being a cesspit filled with pornography and abusive trolls to something that could be of enormous benefit to mankind if used in the most appropriate way. He understood how invaluable, even life-changing, it could be for the elderly. They could communicate and see their families on a regular basis with ease, although some of the residents still treated their families to an extended look at their ear as they didn't understand the concept of FaceTime. Raymond showed them how to email, WhatsApp, watch streamed performances of a grandchild's nativity play, weddings they couldn't get to. The list went on and on. It seemed to be a never-ending source of possibilities. Raymond had become their silver tech guru and quasi digital communications director.

'He does so much for the residents I sometimes think we shouldn't be charging him to stay at all,' the manager had joked to Cross.

'I can see your point. Perhaps you should give some thought to the matter,' Cross had replied, which wasn't the response she'd been expecting.

Raymond was waiting eagerly for Cross in reception when he arrived, which was uncharacteristic.

'There you are,' he said, taking his son by the elbow.

'Am I late?' Cross asked.

'No of course not. Follow me.'

He guided his son down a corridor to an area of the home that Cross hadn't seen before. He noticed the doors had numerical code security locks on them.

'This is where the patients who need more care live,'

Raymond explained. ‘Quite a few of the patients have dementia in various forms and at different stages. Some of them need twenty-four-hour nursing. Sad really, but the staff here are so lovely, so caring. Above and beyond they are.’

They walked into an office where a young woman in her late thirties sat behind a desk. She wore a long skirt with dark, burgundy-coloured woollen tights and a white shirt and cardigan. It was quite a homely, comforting look Cross thought, probably to put the patients at their ease. The room was suffused with the strong citrus aroma of her perfume, which she was possibly guilty of over-applying.

‘Deborah, this is my son the detective – George Cross,’ said Raymond.

‘Gosh that was quick,’ she replied, standing up and offering Cross her hand, which he ignored but acknowledged with a curt nod.

‘Well he knows it’s important,’ Raymond replied. Cross thought to himself that he knew no such thing. He didn’t even know what *it* was.

‘It’s a rather unusual situation, a little delicate,’ Deborah continued. ‘We have a resident here, Arthur Turnbull. He’s seventy-five with fairly advanced dementia. He’s a gentle soul but has no family around. His wife died a few years back, which was terrible as she was his primary carer. She died with a heart full of worry about what would happen to him. Their son lives in Australia and is very good at staying in touch. He wanted to move Arthur out there but in the end we all thought him being here was the best option. He FaceTimes his father once a week and even though Arthur doesn’t know who he is, he tells him about the family and his week. But he’s such a long way away.’

‘I’m still unsure as to why I’m here,’ said Cross.

‘Of course. Just recently we had a new resident arrive. Late sixties with various health issues that required professional care. He took one look at Arthur and shouted, “It’s him! That’s the man who killed my father. He killed my dad.”’

‘You see?’ said Raymond, trying to impress upon his son the gravity of the situation.

‘He insisted on us calling the police. They looked into it and they said the case had been investigated at the time and resolved in court.’

Cross said nothing, simply processed what was being said to him.

‘Peter, the new resident, became greatly distressed and wouldn’t stop going on about it, upsetting a lot of the other residents in the process. You can imagine the gossip that goes on in this place at the best of times.’

‘The fact is they’re not happy they might have a killer in their midst,’ Raymond explained.

‘If he is a killer, or was when younger,’ said Cross. ‘It could be a fabrication of this Peter’s or a case of mistaken identity.’

‘Of course, but that doesn’t solve the immediate problem. The other residents want something to be done about it. They’ve even started a petition. They’re insisting either he goes or they do,’ added Deborah.

‘The home obviously can’t ask him to leave, given the condition he’s in,’ said Raymond. ‘I told Deborah that you’d look into the case, George. You’re bound to get to the bottom of it. Find out what, if anything, really happened and then we can sort the situation out.’

‘What if I discover that Arthur did in fact kill this man’s father? What will you do then?’

‘We’ll cross that bridge when we come to it. Something tells me Arthur didn’t do this,’ replied Deborah.

‘My gut says that too, George.’

Had this been the Major Crimes Unit, and Raymond a police officer, he would’ve been subjected to a lecture on how people’s gut feelings and instincts on a case were for the most part irrelevant. But Cross let it go.

‘Let me see what I can do,’ Cross replied and left. He hoped it was something he could get to the bottom of quickly. It wasn’t as if he didn’t have enough on his plate as it was. But he never refused to do anything his father asked of him, partly because he knew the old man wouldn’t ask unless it was really important to him. Also because he felt a great sense of debt to his father. He’d sacrificed a lot to bring up his son on his own, so it was only right that Cross repaid him when and where he could.

DS Ottey, Cross’s partner at work, noticed that something was bothering her colleague. He had the look of intense, frustrated concentration that normally inhabited his face when they were in the middle of a particularly perplexing case. But the fact was, they weren’t.

‘What’s up?’ she asked, which only succeeded in confusing him. ‘What’s on your mind?’ she elaborated. ‘Something’s going on in there.’

Cross explained the situation at the care home and the accusation against Arthur.

She thought for a moment. ‘How do you even know there was a murder in the first place? How do you know Arthur was even there?’ she asked.

‘Two considerations that are currently playing on my mind.’

‘We’ll help,’ she said finally. ‘Alice and I.’

‘You can’t, it’s not an official case.’

‘We can still do a bit here and there. Besides it could be murder, which would make it police work the last time I looked. You never know what we might find.’

‘But as you pointed out so saliently, it could all be about nothing.’

‘If it is, then the quicker we find that out the better for Arthur, the home and Raymond.’

The first thing they needed to do was find out whether in fact there had been a murder in St Benedict’s home for boys – where Peter alleged the crime had taken place – decades earlier. The problem was Cross had no idea of the year it might have happened. So he decided his first port of call would be to visit Peter, the man claiming his father had been murdered by Arthur. He had refused to stay in the same home as his “father’s killer” and moved. Not before he caused a huge amount of unrest, though, it had to be said. Cross rang the man’s new care home to enquire whether it was possible to visit. Peter was more than happy to see Cross. He was thrilled that the police were taking an interest in this. It was his duty to get justice for his father and he would do anything to obtain it.

‘He may be an old man with dementia but don’t let looks deceive you,’ Peter began.

‘Are you saying he’s putting it on? His dementia?’ Cross asked.

‘Well no. I mean maybe. He’s a killer and who knows what he’s capable of.’

‘When did your father die?’

‘In 1955.’

Cross thought for a moment. This was the first thing of interest for him. No one was entirely sure of Arthur’s real age as he had no birth certificate, something that had been an administrative nightmare for him throughout his life. But the thinking was he was between seventy-three and seventy-five. This meant that Arthur was either six or eight at the time of the murder.

‘Do you have any photographs of your father?’ asked Cross.

‘I do,’ said the old man as if he was pleased the detective wanted to share these family memories with him. He went over to a chest of drawers and brought out an old shoebox. He then showed Cross a succession of photographs, together with some old yellowing newspaper cuttings. Peter’s father was an imposing man, bald with an oval face. He always seemed to be wearing a suit and one of the thin ties that were fashionable at the time. He also had a penchant for hats, which Cross approved of. Compared to the majority of other people in the photographs he appeared to be quite a tall man. There was a photo of him holding an OBE outside Buckingham Palace.

‘He got that for his work,’ Peter said proudly.

‘He was quite tall,’ Cross observed.

‘Six foot two my mother always told me. In my case the genes obviously skipped a generation.’ He laughed.

‘He looks like someone who could handle himself in any situation.’

‘Funny you should say that. He was a champion boxer in the RAF.’

‘That would make sense. He’s very well turned out and bears himself like a military man.’

‘You can take the man out of the RAF as the saying goes,’ said Peter.

‘I would imagine he was one for order and discipline in life.’

Peter actually laughed at this. ‘I’m amazed you got that out of a photograph. But yes, you could say that. He was quite the disciplinarian.’

‘In what way?’

‘He was tough. Tough but fair. I mean you had to be running a place like St Benedict’s. There were a lot of troubled boys there and he had to instil discipline otherwise it would’ve been impossible. As it were a lot of them ended up in prison.’

‘How was the school funded?’

‘It was a charity. There was some money from the local council, some money from the church, but he was quite the fundraiser was my dad,’ he said with pride then showed Cross a newspaper clipping of his father with the mayor of Bristol and other worthies at what appeared to be a charity event.

‘Why do you think someone would want to kill him? He sounds like an admirable man, devoting his life to the care of young boys.’

‘I know, right? You tell me?’

‘And by all accounts a child. Why would a child want to kill your father?’

‘I don’t know. Because he’s a psycho? He probably tortured animals as well. Whatever the reason, it happened.’

‘Was there a court case?’ asked Cross.

‘Of course there was. My dad was murdered, for God’s sake.’

‘What was the outcome of the trial?’

‘What do you mean, what was the outcome?’ he said as if talking to someone he was only just realising in the moment was obviously stupid. ‘He killed him. He was found guilty.’

‘And presumably sentenced for his crime which he then served.’

‘What’s your point?’

‘I feel I should ask you the same question. He was caught, went to trial and was convicted. What are you hoping to achieve by raking all this up at the care home? Justice has been served.’

‘He’s a killer. They should know. It’s bad enough he’s out of prison at all. They need to know what they’re dealing with.’

Cross considered this for a moment, then continued.

‘So you say your father could handle himself.’

‘You actually said that.’

‘True, but you concurred.’

‘I told you he was a boxer in the services.’

‘Exactly. Here’s my question. How would a seven- or nine-year-old manage to kill someone twice his size? Was your father asleep in bed perhaps? Is that how it happened?’

‘No.’

‘Do you know?’

‘It was in his study. My father was about to discipline him.’

‘Discipline him how exactly?’

‘With the cane of course.’

‘He was in the habit of beating the boys in his charge, was he?’

‘It was a different time.’

‘So he’s about to give Arthur six of the best, then what happened?’

‘He killed him. Stabbed him multiple times.’

‘With what?’

‘My father’s letter opener. It had been given to him by the Rotary Club.’

‘So he’s about to be given six of the best, this boy of six or eight, when he grabs a letter knife off the table and stabs your father? A man three times his size, who was quite well built and could look after himself.’

Peter said nothing. But Cross had made his point and so without another word, left.

The next thing Cross did was go through Arthur’s meagre belongings in his room. Arthur had been taken to the living room to give Cross the opportunity. It was odd going through the life of someone still living, rather than that of a murder victim or a missing person. Then it occurred to him that Arthur was in many ways exactly that. Missing. Most of Arthur’s things were to do with his adult life. Pictures of his wife and son, their house, holidays together. A few favourite books whose pages would never again be turned by their owner. But nothing about his childhood. As Cross was putting everything back he came across a scrap of linen. It looked like it might have been a name tag at some point for a piece of clothing. It had the name *BOYES* written on

it alongside the numbers 117. A life reduced to such a small pile of detritus.

The next morning he FaceTimed Robert Turnbull, Arthur's son, in Perth, Western Australia. Robert was a happy-looking man in his mid-forties with a thick head of hair and a moustache that was so bushy it looked like the sheer weight of it was pushing his top lip downwards. He had a good tan and a slight Australian twang to his accent. Their conversation was constantly interrupted by the chaos wreaked by several children running round playing behind Robert and screaming at considerable volume. His wife was making valiant efforts to try and corral them into some kind of order, though without much success. But it was a loving chaos and Cross thought it was a cruel contrast to the way Arthur was living his life. Their home was full of laughter as well as the screaming.

'Excuse the chaos,' said Robert.

'How many children do you have?' asked Cross.

'Five. How's my dad?' he immediately asked.

'It's difficult for me to have an opinion on that. His Alzheimer's, as you know, is quite far advanced.'

'Did he seem unhappy at all when you last saw him?'

'Not to me. He was clean, shaved, the place is warm and also clean. The staff seem to be considerate and kind.'

'I feel so helpless this far away.'

'Nine thousand and sixty-seven miles,' Cross announced.

'What's that?'

'The distance from Bristol to Perth.'

'Is that right?'

'It interested me so I looked it up,' replied Cross not

wanting to give the false impression that it was something he already knew. 'Have the staff at the home told you about the current issue with your father and another resident who was staying there briefly?'

'They have. The man's obviously a nutter.'

'Whether that is the case or not the allegation has been made and the issue needs resolving.'

'Sorry, that was out of line. I just find the whole thing so upsetting. For my old man, that is.'

'Hopefully he's not aware of it in his condition. Do you know anything about your father's childhood?' Cross asked.

'Not much. As you probably know he lost his parents very young. Went through the system. At a boys' home for a while, then various foster families before he landed at the Turnbells.'

'So Turnbull isn't your family name?'

'Well it is now!' He laughed as a child thrust a toy rocket in his face.

'Do you know what his original surname was?'

'Sorry, mate, I don't.'

'Does your father have any siblings that you're aware of?'

'Again, not that I know of. Sorry, mate.'

'What do you know about this home Peter Osborne's father ran and claims your father was at?'

'It's all news to me. He never mentioned the place.'

'Did he talk about his childhood at all?'

'Only from the time after he was at the Turnbells. It was as if his life only started there. They were so good to him. Looked after him like one of their own. That's why he took their name.'

‘He wasn’t adopted then?’

‘No, but they may as well have adopted him. He thought of them as his parents. Such good people. He was in touch right up till when they died. They were proper family. The nearest thing to grandparents any child could hope for,’ he said with a wistful, nostalgic smile.

‘So you’re not even sure he was actually in a home at all?’

‘No. I don’t even know what happened to my real grandparents, or why my dad ended up in care. Look, it’s a bit like those guys who were in the war and don’t talk about it. His life pre-Turnbulls is a black hole.’

None of this was proving as helpful as Cross had hoped it would before he made the call. If anything, it made him wonder if it was an indication of how difficult this was going to be to resolve. Before they ended the call Robert asked Cross a favour.

‘Could you buy the old man a couple of those really large Toblerone bars? You know the giant ones? And a couple of bottles of Lucozade? He’s a sucker for that stuff. I can do a bank transfer.’

‘Of course, but that won’t be necessary,’ Cross replied.

Furnished with the year of the murder – Peter could be no more specific than the year – Alice Mackenzie, a police staff officer, paid a visit to the Bristol Central Library near College Green. She scoured the microfiche files of the *Bristol Evening Post* for the year in question. It took a good few hours as there was no index system. She didn’t mind though, as she thought it was proper investigative work. How advanced microfiche much have seemed when it was first developed

with its ability to store vast swathes of information on such a small piece of acetate, she thought. Compared to modern digital searches it was positively prehistoric, a cumbersome beast, but an initial search on her laptop had come up with nothing.

She eventually found an article about the murder, followed a few months later by the trial. It had even made the national press. Well it would, she thought. An orphaned boy killing the head of his home was newsworthy in anyone's language. The tone of the reporting at the time was very much biased against the perpetrator. An ungrateful youth who had turned on the very hand that provided him with food, succour and shelter. No one seemed to have asked the question "why?" What had driven this child to such a desperate act? The boy's identity was kept anonymous; he was simply referred to as "Boy A" and newspaper reporting of the later court case was restricted. He was found guilty and sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment.

Someone called Lord Pakenham (later to become the Earl of Longford) had stepped up and not only questioned the sentence, asking what purpose it would serve, but also pointing out that no one had really asked what had led this child – "for that is what we are really dealing with here" – to take such a drastic course of action. He really was ahead of his time, this Pakenham, Mackenzie thought.

'Well, there you are,' said Ottey with a mischievous smile. 'Told you this would be wrapped up quickly with our invaluable help.'

'Aside from the fact that I think it's a stretch to call

Mackenzie's visit to the library "invaluable", I'm also trying to call to mind how you helped exactly.' Before she could reply he went on. 'This information is far from conclusive. The child is referred to as "Boy A" so we don't know whether it was in fact Arthur Turnbull or someone else altogether. It's more than possible it wasn't actually Arthur in the first place or that Peter is mistaken in identifying him as the perpetrator.'

Deborah at the care home and Raymond were both disappointed at Cross's findings, despite his own doubts about their validity.

'It's completely inconclusive,' he kept repeating. But they weren't having it. The mere existence of the court case was enough for them.

'I knew you'd get to the bottom of this, George,' said his father gratefully. This just added fuel to Cross's resolve to get to the actual truth of the matter. It simply didn't stack up for him on many counts but mostly on the physical facts. Arthur didn't look like he'd ever been anything other than a slight man. How on earth would he have managed to stab a large, powerful man like Peter's father to death and at such a young age? It didn't really make any sense to him. The problem may have been solved for everyone else but it was just the beginning for Cross.

St Benedict's home for boys was shut down in 1956, soon after Osborne's death. A large Victorian building in Stoke Bishop, it had been a low-rent conference hotel for a couple

of decades before a property developer saw its potential for profit and developed it as a number of luxury flats, which was still its present-day function. Cross wanted to find out more about it when it was a boys' home.

That expression reminded him of the Spencer Tracy and Mickey Rooney movie *Boys Town* in which a priest had set up a home for orphaned boys, believing there to be good in all of them. It portrayed an idealised view of such places and the ethos of how to run them – look after those in your charge and give them hope. Sadly history would show how many became centres of abuse the world over. He found himself thinking of the notorious boys' home, Bindoon, near Perth, Australia. It probably came into his mind because of his conversation with Robert Turnbull a few days earlier. Many British child migrants who had been sent to Australia, supposedly to good homes, found themselves victims of appalling abuse by the Christian Brothers – a misnomer if ever there was one – who ran it.

He made a note of the neighbouring streets around St Benedict's, then looked up the 1961 and 2021 censuses and compared them. He found three names at the same addresses in both so got on his bicycle to pay them a visit.

Two of these addresses were less than fruitful. The occupant of the first had died six months before. The second had had a stroke and could no longer speak. She was cared for at home by her daughter. But the little old lady who answered the door at the third address was sprightly and alert for her age, which Cross knew for a fact, from the census, was ninety-three. Abigail Croft was her name. Abby to her friends apparently. She immediately invited Cross into her house with the alacrity of someone who didn't get

the chance to talk to people much. Although it then turned out that she had quite a network of carers who came in and out of the house every day. Cross and she made slow progress through the short hallway into the house as she was walking with the aid of a four-legged walker.

‘Oh yes, I knew St Benedict’s,’ she began in a thick Bristol accent when Cross asked her about the home. ‘We used to call it Benny’s. I remember all the little boys in their grey shorts and shirts being marched down the road every Sunday. That was the only time you ever saw them unless of course you worked there.’

‘Marched?’ Cross asked.

‘Yes. Like they were in the army. Left right, left right, arms swinging back and forth at their sides with Mr Osborne walking beside them.’

‘Did you know him? Mr Osborne?’

‘Sadly yes,’ she answered quietly.

‘Why sadly?’

‘Oh he was a terrible man,’ she said quietly as if it were a confidence she didn’t want anyone else to hear. ‘I worked there for a summer when I was sixteen. As a maid. Luckily I got another job and moved on.’

‘Why was he a terrible man?’

‘He was a bully.’

‘To the boys?’

‘Mostly, but to everyone really. He was a dreadful man. Everyone thought he was marvellous at the time, some sort of saviour for those poor scraps. But he was awful. You know they gave him an OBE?’

‘I do.’

‘An absolute disgrace we all thought round here. But

who'd listen to us? A lot of people made complaints but nothing was done. There was even a report, I believe, but nothing happened. Those poor boys completely at his mercy. It makes me shudder even now when I think about it. He ran it worse than those places for bad boys. What do they call them?

'Detention centres?' Cross suggested.

'No not that,' she retorted with the immediate sharpness that was the preserve and privilege of her great age.

'Borstals?'

'That's the one.'

'The word actually comes from an old prison in Borstal, near Rochester, Kent, interestingly,' said Cross. 'The name of the town derives from the Old English "berth", meaning hill, and "stigel", meaning stile. The Borstal system, as it later became known, was set up in 1902 by Sir Alexander Paterson.'

'Oh listen to you,' she said, clearly impressed. 'A right old mine of information.'

'Indeed,' he replied, pleased that the sharing of his knowledge had found a welcome home for once.

'Anyway, anyone would've thought these boys had done something really wrong. That they were young criminals or something, all of them. But their only crime was to be born in the wrong circumstances, poor little blighters.'

'What do you know about his death?' asked Cross.

'Well one of them snapped, didn't he?'

'One of the boys in his charge?'

'Well sort of.'

'What exactly do you mean by that?'

‘Way I heard it, it was a boy come back to visit his brother.’

‘A boy who’d been staying there before?’

‘Yes. They say he was so unhappy he ran away.’

‘Do you know how old he was?’

‘When he ran away or when he came back?’

A fair question, Cross thought. He was impressed by her need for accurate questions at her age. ‘When he came back,’ he replied.

‘I think he was about fifteen or sixteen. He can’t have been much older as he went on trial as a minor.’

‘Did you follow the case?’

‘Not particularly. I just felt sorry for him.’

‘Mr Osborne?’

‘No, the boy. What must that man have done to him to make him do that? You have to wonder, don’t you?’

‘Do you know anything about the circumstances of the murder?’

‘You talk very old-fashioned if you don’t mind me saying.’

‘I don’t,’ he replied.

‘You do!’ she protested and laughed.

‘I meant I don’t mind you saying,’ Cross replied.

‘Well my sister Bess – no longer with us, bless her soul – was friendly with one of the junior matrons there. That was another thing. That man went through matrons like no one’s business.’

‘Why?’

‘Because of the way he treated those boys and leaving it to those young women to patch them up all the time. He was brutal, that man. They couldn’t stand it for long and left. It

was too upsetting for them. A lot of them complained but it did no good. No one wanted to know. Everyone thought he was such a good man.'

'So what did this junior matron tell your sister?'

'She remembered the day of the murder well because she'd just been treating the boy's brother when he arrived back. He found that Osborne had beaten the little thing so badly he'd broken the skin on his backside and blood was dripping down the backs of his thighs. The older boy was that angry he just marched into the old man's study with the boy to show him what he'd done. There was a terrible row, which ended with the older lad attacking Osborne and, in the end, stabbing him. He stabbed him dozens of times apparently. That's how angry he was.'

As she went on to describe how the older boy hadn't even run after killing Osborne but waited patiently for the police, to make sure his little brother didn't get into trouble, Cross was thinking that this all meant there was a realistic possibility the killer hadn't been Arthur Turnbull. If he'd had an older brother, it might explain Peter Osborne's initial reaction to seeing Arthur – a familial resemblance. It still wasn't conclusive, however. But it was the final thing the old woman said, as she insisted on slowly showing him to the door, politely refuting his insistence that she needn't go to all the effort, that remained with Cross.

'Then there's the two boys that went missing. Never found. People said the old man had killed them and buried them in the gardens of the home. But no one was going to miss them, so who was going to ask questions?'

This was exactly the kind of thing that especially motivated Cross in his work. The lost cause, the neglected,

refused any notion of justice as a direct result of that neglect. It may be a rumour embellished over time in the old lady's mind, but he would find out for certain.

Ottey assembled "Team Arthur", as she now called the three of them, a few days later. The truth was she was busy on other matters and hadn't done much to help Cross, but she wanted him to know he had their support. She knew him well enough now to realise that the problem at Raymond's care home was preoccupying him in much the same way as a case of theirs at work and that he wouldn't let go of it until he'd uncovered the truth, however hard it was to find it. Not especially easy with a case that was over sixty years old with the only participant known to them being lost in the dense fog of dementia. She also knew that even though he didn't deal in hypotheses and never discussed theories when it came to a case, recently he had been less precipitate in closing down others in the unit when they did so. She realised that he must glean some benefit from listening to speculation, despite his frequent protestations against it.

'So,' she began. 'We know that Arthur Turnbull had an older brother.'

'We *know* no such thing,' insisted Cross.

'We know the murder occurred,' she continued, ignoring him. 'We also know for a fact a murder was committed in St Benedict's home for boys and that the victim was Peter Osborne's father.'

'Who we also know was a complete bastard despite appearances to the contrary,' added Mackenzie, earning her a disapproving look from Cross, which she also ignored.

‘There are no court transcripts, which would at least have corroborated the presence of the two boys at the scene of the crime,’ Cross thought aloud.

‘We need to ascertain the identity of those two boys so how are we going to do that?’ said Ottey.

‘I could look online and see if there any social media groups to do with the home? Like the boarding school survivors’ one?’ suggested Mackenzie.

‘Feels like the wrong generation to me. Would people that age have a page like that?’ asked Ottey.

‘Maybe not, but I think it’s worth a look, no?’

‘Yes,’ replied Cross who thought at this point in any investigation everything was worth looking into.

‘Okay, Alice, you get onto that. George, what about me?’ Ottey asked.

‘The old lady said something about a report on the home, which was commissioned the year before the murder occurred but that never saw the light of day.’

‘I can try and dig it out. I’ll issue a freedom of information request,’ Ottey said.

‘Then there’s the question of the two missing boys she mentioned,’ Cross reminded them.

‘But couldn’t that just be an old rumour?’ asked Mackenzie.

‘It could, but then again it might not be. I don’t think we can walk away until we’ve determined which it is and what we then do about it.’

‘If it’s true that’s horrific,’ Mackenzie observed, immediately feeling she was stating the obvious. ‘Do you really think it could be true?’

‘Different times,’ said Ottey. ‘Which isn’t it to excuse it, by the way. It’s just that places like that so often went unchecked. Different rules.’

‘No rules more like,’ Mackenzie interjected.

‘It wasn’t just in children’s homes,’ Ottey continued. ‘Terrible things went on in public schools back then. Parents paying for their children to be physically and sometimes sexually abused. I read someone calling boarding schools back then “paedophiles’ playgrounds”. Some kids were sent away as early as seven.’

‘It begs the question why bother having children if you’re going to send them away and have someone else bring them up?’ said Mackenzie.

‘Children’s homes must have had records,’ said Cross who had completely zoned out of the two women’s conversation. ‘Accounts, a register of the children in their care. Where would they be found?’

‘I could check with my contact in social services,’ Ottey suggested. ‘But as I keep saying, it was a long time ago.’

On reflection Cross was happy that Ottey had got them together to discuss this as though it was a real case. His concern about their working on it during police hours was now allayed by the possibility of another, as yet undetected, crime to be solved. It felt good to have the support of his colleagues taking the situation seriously. The story of the two boys could be exactly that: an apocryphal local horror story that had become truth simply by mere repetition. But he needed to find out which it was.

He knew the idea of talking to Arthur was probably pointless but on his regular weekly visit to his father, Chinese

takeaway in hand, he decided to give it a go. Raymond was confused as to why he and now Ottey were still looking into it at all. The court case and the press coverage had surely confirmed that Peter was right and Arthur was indeed a killer. At Cross's insistence neither he nor Deborah had revealed the existence of the trial to the other residents in the home, just informing them that Raymond's son, the detective, was still investigating the matter.

Cross and Raymond sat with Arthur as he gazed lovingly at one of the large bars of Toblerone Cross had just given him, occasionally muttering nonsensical whimsy to himself but with real authority. The staff were very fond of him because when he first went into the home he was still occasionally lucid. But none of them remembered him talking about a brother. He'd spoken dotingly about his late wife and with loving pride about his son who they'd met when he'd flown over from Australia to settle him into the home. Cross reflected how well this man had done in his life. To get past his disadvantaged and – by the sounds of it – traumatic start to build a life of his own and create a family. How sad it was that the beginning of his life was mostly spent in an institutional home and now his life was to end in one.

Arthur Turnbull didn't react when Raymond, at Cross's request, asked him if he had a brother. Not even the smallest flicker of recognition. So instead, Raymond asked Cross what he'd discovered so far in his investigation. Cross talked his father step by step through his findings. The old lady who'd lived nearby and worked there one summer and told him that Osborne was not at all what he seemed. Their search for the independent report on the home. None of this

elicited any reaction from Arthur who just sat there lost in his own world, or possibly no world at all. Cross refrained from telling his father about the woman's allegation of the two missing boys. Then he remembered the name tag and got it from Arthur's drawer of mementoes and showed it to his father.

'I found this name tag. I think it must've been sewn into his clothes at the home.'

Raymond examined it. 'It's a laundry tag. But they didn't sew them into the clothes. They had an adhesive on the back, which was heat-activated. So they'd iron them on. Much easier than sewing, less work.'

'I was wondering if Arthur might recognise the name.'

'Boyes? Do you think that was his birth name?' Raymond asked.

'Unless the label belonged to someone else.'

'Then why would he still have it after all these years?'

'You make a good point,' said Cross, which pleased his father.

Throughout this exchange Arthur's gaze had moved from the middle distance to the name tag in Raymond's hand. He looked confused for a moment. Cross saw this and took it from his father and showed it to Arthur. Arthur suddenly recoiled in his chair, kicking his legs out violently. He was extremely agitated and began to moan. His eyes were wide open, as if he was terrified.

'Put it away, son. Quickly. Put it back,' Raymond said.

Cross did so but it did nothing to pacify Arthur who got increasingly noisy and distressed.

Raymond got up and went over to the door. 'Pat? Pat, can you help us?' he shouted.

A large male nurse – probably a Pacific Islander, Cross thought – came into the room calmly and seeing the state Arthur was in said, ‘Hello, Arthur. What is it, old friend?’

His quiet, gentle approach seemed in diametric contrast to the size of the man. He put his enormous hands on Arthur’s shoulders and held him reassuringly. Arthur continued to rage. The nurse turned to the other two men and said politely, ‘I think you should leave if you don’t mind.’

‘Of course,’ Raymond replied. Outside the room Cross heard Pat’s soothing voice calm the old man down. He then picked him up effortlessly, like he was a small child and laid him on his bed.

‘I’ve never seen him like that. He was terrified. Something really awful must’ve happened to him at that place,’ said Raymond. Cross was already thinking he might know what that was and it was far worse than his father could have begun to imagine.

Ottey had drawn a blank in her attempts to find the report on the home. Then help came from a completely unexpected quarter. DCI Carson’s nose for something going on in his department that he was hitherto unaware of was legendary and it led him directly to the three members of Team Arthur one day. He’d noticed their frequent, surreptitious meetings, and the increased activity at their desks that immediately followed these meetings, which could mean only one thing. They were up to something and he needed to know what that was. He liked to think of himself as something of an expert manager. Indeed he had been on every course in management that the human resources

department of the Avon and Somerset police force had sent his way. But he had, of course, gone the extra mile any potential future chief constable – which was how he liked to think of himself – would have, and he had done several online management courses in the privacy of his office and on weekends at home. While he may not have perfected all the suggested techniques, he definitely had a firm grip on the management-speak required. He had several of these buzzwords and motivational bon mots down to a fine art.

With the three members of staff in question that day he knew before he'd even crossed the department how he was going to approach the thorny topic of their covert activity. There was no point in asking staffer Mackenzie because she was too loyal to her superior officers and wouldn't tell him anything. A good quality it had to be said, annoyingly, but no use to him in the present circumstances. DS Ottey would just lie her way out of it without batting an eyelid and because of their combative relationship would likely enjoy getting one over on her boss. He wasn't about to needlessly furnish her with that opportunity. This left Cross who was a perfect target because he had a real problem with lying. It wasn't just that he disapproved of it in principle, he was crap at it. Absolute crap. He could detect it in others with enviable ease but he simply couldn't do it himself. He was a hopeless liar and knew it. It also wasn't just that he disliked it as a means of miscommunication. He knew that you would be found out eventually and up until that point would have to maintain the falsehood whenever near those people you had foisted it on. Something he simply couldn't do.

'What's going on, George?' was Carson's opening gambit.

'I don't understand the question,' came the reply.

Ah, thought Carson, a new tactic perhaps. Obfuscation. Interesting. So he laid the question out as clearly as if he were talking to a child. ‘What are you and your friends working on at the moment?’

‘I don’t have any friends here.’

‘Well that hurts,’ said Ottey playfully.

‘Yep, I felt that too,’ Mackenzie added.

‘You, Ottey and Mackenzie. What are you working on that I am not aware of? Which, if it’s not a department case, would – as I’m sure you’re well aware, George – constitute it as a misuse of police time and money, making it a legitimate concern for me.’

This touched a nerve with Cross. He’d pointed out this possibility to Ottey just a few days earlier. So Cross told him everything. In detail. Step by step in chronological order. Carson listened patiently and when Cross had finished a good ten minutes later, Carson looked thoughtful.

‘I think I can help,’ he said, which wasn’t the response any of them had been expecting. ‘With the report. My grandfather was a civil servant back in the day, probably a junior one around 1956. Became quite a senior one later on as it happens,’ he said with pride but also a certain air of confidence that was meant to tell them this obviously shouldn’t, and probably didn’t, come as any surprise. ‘He’s still in touch with a lot of his colleagues from all sorts of government departments. He loves this kind of problem. Let me look into it,’ he said and left them, having done something he never usually managed to do when he tried. He’d silenced them.

Miraculously, a week later a Manila envelope appeared on Cross's desk. He opened it to find a copy of the report inside. It had been typed on an old manual typewriter but was completely legible and, as Cross soon discovered, detailed and thorough.

It really was a report of its time with formal, almost institutional language. It turned out to be not quite a whitewash – if the things the old lady had told him were true – but not far off it. It found that the pastoral care provided by the matrons was excellent. The boys' health was described as “generally good” with regular visits from a local doctor and district nurse. It described Osborne's regime as “idiosyncratic” and disciplined. The only negative was that the food was described as “poor” and needing “nutritional supplementation”. There were some interviews with staff, which came over as suspiciously rigid. Was this merely a reflection of the times again or were they fearful of their employer? Perhaps Osborne had even sat in on the interviews. But there was nothing in it that gave substance to the old lady's claims of abuse and neglect by Osborne.

One small detail did stand out, however. It was noted that a couple of boys had run away in the previous year. But it was the way two members of staff had initially phrased it that sounded odd to Cross. They both said the boys had gone “missing” and that it was “assumed” they'd run away. One of them even said that she'd told Osborne they should inform the police but he said no. He didn't want to waste their valuable time. The other thing that stood out for Cross was a stamp on the title page of the report that said “archived” but it was the date that struck him as odd. It was just three months after Osborne's murder. This report

had been buried. Cross wondered why. There was ostensibly nothing in it that would have worried the church, or indeed the authorities, enough to have warranted a cover-up.

It wasn't long before Carson appeared. Not in the hope of an expression of gratitude from Cross for the report – he knew him well enough by now. He just needed to be in the know.

'Anything useful in it?' he began.

'I think so,' replied Cross.

'Care to share?' Carson said.

Cross looked at him blankly.

'Was there anything helpful in it?' Carson went on by way of explanation. Cross then told him about the two missing boys.

Carson thought for a moment, his face suddenly serious. Ottey, who was watching the exchange, had noticed in the past that he seemed to be focused in a different way when it came to cases involving children. Focused in a way that you could be forgiven for thinking was personal. He was always very solicitous and regular in his enquiries about her own children. Had made a note of their birthdays and always bought them small gifts, which weren't solely from him but from him and his wife Gaby. It was kind and thoughtful, not in any way creepy or intrusive. Since he'd taken over the department, he'd also arranged Christmas lunches for the unit's families and children. He said it was to repay them for all the time he'd taken their partners and parents away from them over the year. She even forgave him for the self-aggrandising use of the word "I" instead of the department, the unit or simply "we". She wondered whether it was because he and his wife didn't have children of their own.

They were still young enough but she did wonder if there was a problem there.

‘How old were these boys? Do we know?’ Carson asked.

‘We don’t,’ replied Cross.

Carson got up and left the room saying, ‘Keep me informed.’

‘We still have no proof,’ said Cross to Mackenzie and Ottey. ‘Even another corroboration of the rumour would make me feel a little more confident.’

‘In what?’ asked Mackenzie.

‘In the possibility of it,’ he replied.

They sat there for a while in silence before Ottey spoke.

‘Alice has something.’

‘Yes. I did find a Facebook group but not for people who’d been in St Benedict’s. It’s called “The Extended Turnbull Family”. It turns out that George and Maude Turnbull fostered hundreds of kids like Arthur over their lifetime. A lot of them stayed in touch after the Turnbells’ funeral.’

‘Funeral?’ asked Cross, picking up on the singular.

‘They died within a couple of days of each other apparently. She had been ill for a long time. He was her full-time carer and died a couple of days after her. They say it was from a broken heart. Quite romantic really.’

Cross found himself thinking he’d never heard the word “romantic” in connection with death before, but made no comment.

‘After their deaths, the former foster kids created a Facebook page. There are currently over seventy members.’

‘Good work, Alice,’ Ottey commented, nodding at Cross for him to do likewise. He just nodded back at her.

‘I also found a woman whose time with the Turnbells

overlapped with Arthur's just before he left them,' Alice added.

Cathy Montgomery was a very youthful-looking woman in her mid-seventies. She talked in glowing terms about the "saintly" Turnbulls and their life of self-sacrifice and devotion to the young children they cared for.

'He was a nice boy, Arthur. No trouble. Very quiet. Adored the Turnbulls. As you know, he even took their name and they seemed especially close to him; protective, as it were. But no surprise there, really.'

'Why do you say that?'

'Well he was very damaged, withdrawn I suppose you'd say, when he first went there. He'd really come out of his shell by the time I knew him.'

'How do you know that?'

'I talked to Ma after he'd left them.'

'You called her Ma?' Cross observed.

'Ma and Pa, yes. It's just what the children did. They were happy to be called George and Maude but after a while all the children seemed to do it. It felt very natural and looking back on it as an adult I suppose it must've been very comforting for us.'

So what did Mrs Turnbull say? About Arthur?'

'Arthur was in a home before he came to the Turnbulls. The same as another man I've subsequently met who actually does talk about it, unlike Arthur. Ma said she'd taken in a few boys after the home closed but also before. The man in charge liked to move some of them on at thirteen if they were trouble. They'd all said what a terrible

place it was. I suppose a lot of them were back then but this one seemed particularly draconian. The man in charge was abusive according to Sid...'

'That's this other boy from the home?'

'Yes. This man Osborne sounds like he was an alcoholic. The older boys could tell when he had been drinking and tried to avoid him, but the younger boys didn't know any better and got into trouble. Sid said there were mornings when you could smell the alcohol on his breath. Awful to think that someone like that was put in charge of such vulnerable children, all alone in the world. It wouldn't happen nowadays.' Then she corrected herself: 'Well maybe not so much.'

'Did Mrs Turnbull tell you why Arthur in particular was so affected by what happened there?'

'Something terrible happened but she wouldn't go into any details.'

'Do you have Sid's contact details?'

Sid was a year or two older than Arthur. He was on his way to a Bristol City game resplendent in a City beanie and red and white scarf, when Cross called in on him. He too was full of praise for the Turnbells. He and Cross talked as they walked, gradually becoming part of a mass wave of red and white heading for the football ground at Ashton Gate.

'They gave me, gave all of us, a loving start in life, an emotional foundation. Lovely couple.'

'Not at all like St Benedict's?' asked Cross. The old man gave him a look that seemed to ask if Cross was making a

bad joke and didn't answer him. 'Did you know Arthur at the time?' Cross went on.

'Of course.'

'Why of course? There were a hundred boys there.'

'Because of what happened.'

'Which was?'

Again no answer. They walked on in silence. Cross reached into his pocket and brought out his book of "Otteyisms". This was where he had noted appropriate responses in certain situations he'd told her about. He found the page he was looking for, scanned it, then put the book away. 'I know this might be difficult for you so please take your time,' he began, immediately satisfied he'd put it the right way. 'The fact is that I think a crime may well have been committed back at that home sixty years ago, which was never resolved. If that's true I would like to resolve it. The age of the crime, the intervening time, matters not to me,' Cross explained.

'It was resolved. Harry was put away. Whether he should've been is another question,' Sid said finally.

'Who's Harry?'

'The boy who killed Osborne.'

'I was told Arthur killed him.'

'Arthur? No, he was just a baby. It was his brother. Arthur's older brother.'

'I see. Are you sure he was Arthur's brother?'

'Yep,' he replied curtly.

'Do you know what happened to him?'

'Did his time, then was given a new identity they say.'

'Did you know Harry?'

'Of course. Everyone knew Harry. He was that word

everyone says. What is it? Oh yes, even at fifteen he was *charismatic*. That was it. He was the leader. Looked after us. Even took beatings for some of the little ones. It's wrong what happened to him.'

'But he killed a man,' Cross pointed out.

'No one ever deserved what happened to them more than Osborne.'

Cross thought for a moment then showed Sid a photograph on his phone. It was of the laundry name tag.

'Do you recognise this?' he asked.

'Is that Arthur's?' Sid asked with the faintest hint of a smile.

'I think so. I found it in his belongings.'

'He's not dead, is he?'

'No. He's in a home but he has dementia.'

'Poor old Arthur. But he had an all right life, I think, despite everything. I saw him at the funeral.'

'The Turnbulls?'

'Yep.' He looked back at Cross's phone.

'That was their name. Boyes. The Boyes Boys everyone called them,' he said laughing. He then reached into his pocket for his wallet and produced an identical worn tag with the name *FORSHAW* and the numbers *126* on it. 'We all decided to keep them when the place closed, to remind us to never forget.'

'Your time there?'

Again silence. Cross looked at the old man and realised that his shoulders had tensed, and his mouth had become tight-lipped. He was trying to stop himself sobbing. He'd seen this in victims of abuse throughout his career. Involuntary shoulder-shuddering, compulsive spasms of

weeping. He'd seen it in children as well as grown men and women. There was something different here though. Something darker haunting this man.

'Would you like to stop for a moment?' Cross suggested, spotting a nearby bench.

'No,' Sid replied in between sobs. 'I'll be late for the game.' He eventually calmed down, breathing deeply. 'It was to remember those boys. Danny and Chris. Them poor boys.' He shook his head as he remembered them, then started weeping again.

'It was like we counted for nothing. He could do that to them and no one would do anything. It didn't matter. We didn't matter. Who cared if we lived or died? No one did anything about it. Is that right? Is that fair? That's why he killed the bastard. That's why he did it. For them two boys. For all of us.' He was sobbing so uncontrollably that some other football supporters stopped to see if everything was all right. Cross assured them it was and walked Sid to the football ground. He then left, determined to get hold of Carson despite it being the weekend. These children had waited long enough.

The excavation in the grounds of the home took place a few days later. There had been the usual outcry from the residents of the apartments now contained in the old St Benedict's building. But these soon abated when they were informed of the nature of the suspected crime. It was now a fully formed and manned police investigation, fraught with tension and apprehension.

It hadn't been easy to locate potential grave sites in the

area. The RAG (red, amber, and green) system normally used in situations like this was of no use to them. Any indications of a burial site such as changes in vegetation or shallow depressions had not only disappeared over the intervening years but also the gardens had been fully landscaped when the apartment development was done. There was a full team out that morning. Forensic archaeologists, crime-scene supervisors, a PolSA – police search advisor – and even a police media officer to deal with all the press attention they felt this emotive case would inevitably attract.

Cross had surveyed the gardens with Michael Swift, a forensic anthropologist and general forensics obsessive.

But then Sid appeared. He walked into the grounds for the first time since he was a child. The fear he must have felt then seemed to envelop him. Cross thought he looked so much older, stooped, weighed down by the past perhaps. He walked slowly across the garden and pointed to an area he was sure was the burial site.

‘How can you be so sure?’ Cross asked.

Sid broke down. Swift went over to comfort him but was gently rebuffed.

‘Because it was me and Billy that dug the grave and buried them. He made us. Said he’d tell the police we’d killed them and who were they going to believe? I’m so sorry. So sorry,’ he was almost whispering towards the end.

Cross and Swift said nothing at this additional horror. This poor man. He’d had to live with this his whole life. When he’d recovered some, Sid told them had never told anyone, not even his family, till this point. Billy had committed suicide in his early twenties. Sid was convinced it was because he’d never got over it. Yet another victim in this tragic event.

They began to dig carefully and a couple of hours later the gruesome discovery was made.

Cross, Swift, Ottey, Mackenzie and Carson – who had come out late morning – looked down at the two sets of bones four feet beneath them. Swift carefully clambered down and measured some of the bones with a tape measurer.

‘Children, two of them, aged between eight and eleven, both male,’ he pronounced solemnly. It was a profoundly depressing moment as the reality of what had occurred here sixty years earlier hit them.

As soon as the first bone had been uncovered, Ottey had called Cross’s friend, the priest, Stephen, as it wouldn’t have occurred to Cross to do so. Once he arrived, they all stopped for a moment as he said a prayer.

There was, of course, a huge public outcry and reaction to the discovery. There were reports in the press and TV, both locally and nationally. Senior figures in the church were asked for their opinion. Questions were asked in parliament. Cross attracted an enormous amount of unwelcome attention as the detective who had uncovered this atrocity on his own time. Several other elderly men who had been in the home came forward to give evidence at the coroner’s court about the nature of life at St Benedict’s and the abuse they suffered at the hands of Osborne. Two of them claimed to have witnessed the killings themselves. In the lobby of the home there had been a big main staircase at the top of which was a balcony. The two boys – Danny and Chris – had been having an argument with Osborne

that night. He was drunk. It ended with Osborne pushing them over the balcony to their deaths.

‘It was just a game to him. He looked over and laughed at them lying there,’ one of the witnesses said.

‘It was nothing more than drowning puppies for him,’ said the other.

Uniforms were sent to inform a disbelieving Peter Osborne. Cross had no interest in being there to tell him that not only was he wrong about Arthur Turnbull but also about the true nature of his father. That the man he still revered was no more than a child abuser and killer. A public campaign started to have Osborne’s OBE posthumously struck off, but it never came to anything. The boys’ names were finally confirmed and released to the press and a funeral took place at St Mary’s Redcliffe. Over two hundred members of the public attended including the local MP, members of the social services department of the council and senior-ranking police officers.

When the service was over a man came over and introduced himself to Cross. He was in his eighties and wore a smart suit with a brown mackintosh. He was bald and Cross felt there was a vague familiarity about him.

‘DS Cross?’ he asked.

‘Yes.’

‘I recognised you from the papers. My name’s Alastair Metcalfe.’

‘I see,’ said Cross thinking the name meant nothing to him.

‘I was born Harry Boyes.’

It was Arthur’s brother.



Cross and his father Raymond accompanied Harry to Arthur's care home, explaining who he was to a delighted Deborah. They then took Arthur into the room to meet his brother for the first time in over sixty years. Harry's eyes filled with tears as he looked at his younger brother, now an old man much lost to the world, gazing vacantly at nothing. He didn't react when they came into the room. Then Harry stepped forward, knelt down and took his brother's hand.

'Arty, it's me. Harry. Arty?'

A hint of recognition at his childhood nickname flickered across Arthur's face. He turned to look more carefully at the man holding his hand.

'Hello, Arty my old mate,' Harry said.

The old man smiled for a second then muttered almost inaudibly, 'Harry.'

He looked at his brother closely for a few seconds, raised his hand slowly to Harry's cheek and stroked it. He then turned away and disappeared into the bottomless well of his dementia and didn't look up again.

Some stories don't have completely happy endings, thought Cross, as he left them with each other.

If you enjoyed this short story, **THE LOST BOYS**, you're going to love the DS George Cross novel series by Tim Sullivan.

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About the Author

TIM SULLIVAN is a crime writer, screenwriter and director, whose film credits include *A Handful of Dust*, *Jack and Sarah*, and *Cold Feet*. His crime series featuring the socially awkward but brilliantly persistent DS George Cross has topped the book charts and been widely acclaimed. Tim lives in North London with his wife Rachel, the Emmy award-winning producer of *The Barefoot Contessa* and *Pioneer Woman*. To find out more about the author, please visit TimSullivan.uk

