



# TIM A DS CROSS SHORT STORY SULLIVAN

'Exceptional'  
*BOOKBAG*

'Clever and taut'  
*TELEGRAPH*

'Intriguing'  
*THE TIMES*

'A perfect  
detective'  
**STEPHEN  
FRY**

# The EX-WIFE

## **Also by Tim Sullivan**

*The Dentist*  
*The Cyclist*  
*The Patient*  
*The Politician*  
*The Monk*

# THE EX-WIFE

**Tim Sullivan**



*An Aries Book*

An Aries book

[www.headofzeus.com](http://www.headofzeus.com)

First published in the UK in 2023 by Head of Zeus, part of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

Copyright © Tim Sullivan, 2023

The moral right of Tim Sullivan to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act of 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of both the copyright owner and the above publisher of this book.

This is a work of fiction. All characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

9 7 5 3 1 2 4 6 8

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN (E): 9781803289250

Cover design: Matt Bray

Head of Zeus  
First Floor East  
5–8 Hardwick Street  
London EC1R 4RG

[WWW.HEADOFZEUS.COM](http://WWW.HEADOFZEUS.COM)

# Contents

Welcome Page

Copyright

The Ex-Wife

Did you love The Ex-Wife?

About the Author

An Invitation from the Publisher

The discovery of a dead body, after a couple of weeks in water, is always grim. Adipocere, or grave wax, would have formed. Skin most likely degloved, particularly from the hands. Limbs would have disarticulated, beginning with the head, the heaviest body part. All in all, it is invariably unpleasant. There were several other factors that made the recovery of Tricia Cooper's body additionally gruesome. She had been found in the cesspit at the back of her property; beside her, the corpse of her beloved pet dog Bugsy. What was particularly galling was the fact that the dog had been thrown down there while still alive. It had been left by the killer to die next to the dead body of its owner. Everyone from the press to the prosecution was rightly appalled at this inhumane, barbaric act of cruelty. What made it possibly even worse was the fact that the killer was her fiancé, David North.

North was duly arrested, convicted of murder and sentenced to life with a minimum term of thirty-four years before he could be considered for parole. He had drugged his fiancée over a period of time, then suffocated her. It was premeditated and coldly calculated. There was no doubt in the light of all the evidence that the man was guilty. This result would have been enough for most murder investigation teams. But not one that had DS George Cross in its number. His boss, DCI Ben Carson, had a well-known predilection for going to the CPS to charge suspects as soon as possible. This might have pleased his superiors, but it had led – on several occasions – to failure in court. It rarely happened with a case Cross had worked, as he was incapable of letting things go until he was absolutely convinced that all the evidence had been gathered, properly curated and presented in such an orderly way that a guilty verdict was inevitable.

He felt something had been missed with David North. That certain circumstances indicated North was guilty of another, separate crime. His wife, the mother of their two boys, had died six years before. This immediately made Cross suspicious. Two partners dead within six years of each other couldn't be a coincidence. The first death hadn't been investigated by the police as his wife had a history of epilepsy and the cause of death had been recorded as SUDEP – sudden unexpected death in epilepsy. But now North had killed his fiancée.

On the way back to the car from court, his partner DS Josie Ottey noticed Cross seemed preoccupied.

'What's troubling you, George?' she asked.

He told her what he was thinking.

‘I think you might be right. Did you see the way he smiled at us when he was led down?’ she replied.

‘No,’ he said. He’d watched him being led down, but hadn’t registered the smile, unsurprisingly.

‘He looked over at us and smiled. The man has just been convicted and yet he’s behaving as if he’s won,’ she remarked.

‘Why would he do that?’ asked Cross.

‘Because he thinks he’s got one over on us.’

‘It was the dog that did it for me,’ came a voice from behind them. It was police staffer Alice Mackenzie who was following them to the car. ‘No one does that unless they get a kick out of it. No normal person does that.’

‘No normal person kills his fiancée and chucks her body down a cesspit,’ observed Ottey.

‘He did it to make sense of his claim that she had disappeared when out on a walk with said dog,’ explained Cross.

‘That’s as may be. But the dog was alive when he threw it down there. The guy’s a psychopath, so odds are he killed his wife as well,’ replied Mackenzie.

As they reached Ottey’s car, two middle-aged women approached them. Cross recognised them as having been in the public gallery on all the days he’d attended court.

‘You’re the detectives from the North case,’ one of them said.

He always wondered why people started conversations like this: telling him who he was, when he was perfectly aware of it.

‘We are,’ replied Ottey, unnecessarily in his opinion.

‘My name’s Linda, and this is Sarah,’ said the woman.

‘You were in court,’ Cross observed.

‘Every day,’ Sarah said proudly.

‘Did you know Tricia?’ asked Ottey.

‘No,’ admitted Linda.

‘But we knew Emma,’ said Sarah.

‘North’s wife,’ Linda explained.

‘So why were you in court?’ asked Cross.

‘To see if justice would finally be done,’ said Sarah.

‘That bastard killed our friend and got away with it,’ Linda informed him.

‘We wanted to make sure it didn’t happen again,’ Sarah told them.

‘And how were you going to do that?’ asked Cross, who was genuinely interested.

‘We’d’ve made a right old song and dance if he’d got off,’ insisted Linda.

‘And gone to the media,’ said Sarah.

‘That’s the press,’ explained Linda in case the two police officers were unsure what ‘media’ meant.

‘Well, he didn’t get away with it,’ Ottey pointed out.

‘I know, thanks to you.’

‘We were saying how we wish you’d been around when he killed Emma,’ said Sarah.

‘Might’ve been a different story then,’ Linda explained.

‘Funny thing is we thought we’d feel a bit different if he was found guilty this time. But we don’t.’

‘It doesn’t seem enough,’ explained Linda.

‘Not fair on Emma,’ said Sarah.

‘You really think North killed Emma?’ asked Ottey.

‘We know it,’ replied Linda.

‘Why don’t you give me your contact details and we’ll arrange to come and see you for a more detailed chat,’ said Ottey.

\*

This made the detectives’ minds up for them. They were going to look into the wife’s death. When they got back to the Major Crime Unit they went to tell DCI Carson.

‘What?’ was his initial, disbelieving response. ‘It’s a coincidence that’s all,’ he continued, going against every murder detective’s innate instinct that, when it came to murder, no such thing existed.

‘Really?’ asked Ottey.

‘Coincidence does exist in life, Josie, no matter what “Detecting 101” has told you. Hence the very existence of the word and need for it in our vocabulary,’ he said with such pomposity that he obviously felt this was irrefutable. Ottey couldn’t believe what she was hearing. Cross, on the other hand, thought he had a point. About the general need for the word, that is.

‘What DS Ottey is trying to say is that coincidence is a rare commodity when it comes to crime,’ Cross volunteered.

‘North has gone down. I don’t see what the problem is,’ replied Carson.

‘He could come out at some point,’ said Cross.

‘If he did kill his wife and we can prove it, he will inevitably get a whole-life order,’ Ottey pointed out.

‘Which means he will never get out of prison,’ Cross added.

‘I am well aware of what a whole-life order means, George,’ said Carson.

‘Oh good. I just wanted to make sure.’

Carson ignored this comment. But he knew the expression on Cross’s face and generally fell in line with whatever suggestion accompanied it. He had learned that Cross only wore it when he was convinced something was either factually or statistically anomalous and, more often than not, he was right. As annoying and frustrating as this new development was, Carson was already thinking of the kudos to be gained upstairs – his main preoccupation at work it had to be said – when George was proved right, and he, Carson, was able to tell his superiors that he had decided to reopen the investigation into North’s wife’s death himself. He would come across as the instinctive and thorough DCI that he actually believed he was.

\*

It was only a few months after his wife’s death that David North started frequenting websites for the bereaved. He portrayed himself as an inconsolable widower who was struggling to cope with life after the death of his wife. He had two young sons who he said he was doing his best to console but was finding it increasingly difficult to keep his grief from them.

Cross and Mackenzie discovered that, perhaps unsurprisingly, a lot of people met new partners on these grief-strewn websites. Presumably they had a lot in common, namely a profound sadness and understanding of each other’s despair. They had all heard in court how North had gone on dates with a number of women, most of whom had been interviewed by the police. A couple of them instinctively didn’t like him. They both said he’d been strangely interested in their current financial situation, even asking how they managed for money. Had their husbands provided for them properly? It had felt prying and inappropriate. Others just never heard from

him again after the date. Cross wondered whether North simply decided they weren't wealthy enough.

When North came across Tricia, he started grooming her, initially by making various comments on posts she'd made on the website, agreeing with her about some topics, trying to make a connection. He talked about how her expressions of grief were completely in line with the way he felt. That it was uncanny. She ignored these to begin with. An examination of his laptop by Mackenzie showed that he'd also done a lot of internet searches into Cooper prior to leaving the posts. This was clearly a well-researched campaign to groom her.

He'd discovered that her husband had been incredibly successful in the City and had left her a wealthy woman. She was very open about her profound disappointment at not being able to have children. She'd given a lot of money to infertility research after her husband's death. Mackenzie was shocked when she found a thread on the grief website where North told her about his sons. But he lied about them being younger than they were in the hope that this might be more alluring to her. He said they missed their mother horribly and needed another woman in their lives. He began posting about his boys and how raw young grief was, but how it sometimes just disappeared, and they behaved as if nothing was wrong. He found this so difficult, even though he knew he shouldn't. They were just kids after all. He posted photographs of them that were years out of date.

Tricia started responding to these comments, her heart touched by the plight of these motherless boys. Which was exactly the kind of response North was hoping to elicit from her. But it was when she expressed her interest in the afterlife that North finally hooked her. She was really interested in life beyond the grave and spirituality. He lied about a medium putting him in touch with Emma, who told him he needed to move on with his life and find someone, not just for him but for his two sons. Tricia was very taken with this and made the fateful decision to meet with him.

They dated for a while, then she met the boys. She obviously chose to ignore the fact that they were in their teens, not younger as he'd led her to believe. They hit it off straight away. The kids loved her. They became a family unit, even went on holidays together.

‘She never tried to be our mum,’ Robert North, now twenty-two, had told Cross and Ottey when they interviewed the two brothers.

‘Didn’t pretend she was going to replace her,’ added Colin the younger, nineteen-year-old sibling.

‘She paid for my college fees, so I don’t have nearly as much student debt as I would’ve done otherwise,’ said Robert.

‘She didn’t have to do that,’ Colin explained.

‘And she was fun. Even though she was in a similar situation to Dad, having lost Michael—’

‘That was her husband who died,’ said Colin.

‘Yeah,’ replied Robert, giving his brother a weary look that said being constantly interrupted by him was something he’d reluctantly had to get used to over the years. ‘Even though she was really sad, she never dwelled on it in front of us.’

‘Then we all moved into her house. It was huge,’ said Colin.

‘Dad sold ours,’ Robert informed them.

‘She let us do whatever we wanted in our rooms.’

‘He means decorating, not, well, anything else,’ Robert qualified.

‘Not like Dad. We couldn’t even put up posters in our old house.’

‘So, all in all, she was really good to you?’ Ottey commented.

‘Yes,’ replied Colin, who immediately started to cry. Robert put his arm round him.

‘She took us shopping for clothes but never told us what to buy,’ Colin went on through his tears.

‘It felt like she was interested in us and loved us as much she did Dad,’ said Robert.

‘Did he resent that?’ asked Cross.

‘No,’ replied Colin. ‘He used to joke about it, saying she was only after him for his kids.’

‘I can’t believe what he did to Buggy. Who would do that to a dog? Is it true he was alive?’ Robert asked.

‘Yes,’ replied Cross.

‘Does that make him a psychopath?’ asked Colin.

‘He watches too much true crime on TV,’ said Robert.

‘Possibly,’ replied Cross. ‘Not my area of expertise.’

‘We were a family again,’ Colin said to himself. ‘Why would he do this?’

‘How was your dad before this happened? Did he seem happy?’ asked Ottey.

‘Yes,’ replied Colin.

‘Relieved, almost,’ added Robert.

‘Relieved about what?’ asked Cross.

‘That he’d found someone. He’s a worrier, our dad.’

‘Quite gloomy,’ said Colin.

‘Mum made up for it,’ Robert went on. ‘She always saw the best in people and everything, really. Whenever we got in trouble with Dad and he didn’t believe us, she’d say, “Give them the benefit of the doubt.”’ Colin joined his brother in this familiar refrain. They smiled at each other.

‘She was an optimist, him a pessimist,’ concluded Robert.

‘Glass half empty,’ added Colin. ‘Mum said she was a glass half full, so they complemented each other. When you joined them together, they were a full glass.’

‘Does that actually make sense when you think about it?’ his brother asked.

‘I don’t know.’

‘It does,’ Cross said. ‘They both have the same amount of liquid in them, they are just viewed differently by the two people. So, yes, pour one into the other you have a full glass.’

‘How did your parents get on?’ Ottey asked.

‘Good. I mean they had rows but doesn’t everyone?’ said Robert.

‘Did your dad ever seem unhappy with the marriage? Did they ever separate?’

‘No. Dad could be gloomy but that was his nature. She was really good with him and I think he appreciated it.’

‘Were you aware of your mother’s epilepsy?’ asked Cross.

‘Yes, but it seemed to have been sorted out years before we came along, with her medication.’

‘After she died Dad told us she had trialled coming off the meds once but it just ended up in her having a fit,’ said Robert.

‘Did you ever see her have a fit?’

‘No,’ the boys answered together.

‘Was she on her medication when she died?’ asked Ottey.

‘Pretty sure she was. She was really organised about her repeat prescriptions,’ replied Robert.

‘It seems odd to have had such a massive, fatal fit when you’re on medication, which seems to have solved the problem,’ Cross pointed out.

‘It was just bad luck her consultant said,’ replied Colin.

‘What’s this all about? Do you think Dad might have killed our mum?’ asked Robert, suddenly alarmed.

‘I’m afraid we are looking into that possibility, yes,’ said Ottey as gently and quickly as she could to prevent Cross giving a characteristically bald affirmation.

\*

‘Those boys had another mother figure in their lives, at last, with Tricia,’ said Ottey in the car on the way back to the MCU. ‘And he took that away from them. Why would he do that? Not just rob them of her but put them through another huge loss so soon after losing their mother?’

\*

Cross got hold of the original coroner’s report into the wife’s death in 2010. Emma North had a history of epilepsy, and the coroner had given a verdict of a death by natural causes. More specifically SUDEP. He noticed that it was an assistant coroner who had given the verdict. He wondered whether this might mean he would find fault in the report. Everyone had to start somewhere and, in his experience, could make mistakes at the outset of their career. In Emma’s report he discovered how a non-forensic post-mortem examination recommended epilepsy as a cause of death, if ‘no toxicological or anatomical cause’ could be identified.

\*

‘It’s the same guy? Are you serious?’ asked Jamie Trotts.

‘Perfectly,’ replied Cross. He and Ottey were sitting in an office at an ambulance base in North Somerset. Trotts was the paramedic who, according to the police report at the time, had attended Emma North when she died years before.

‘Did the scene strike you as consistent with the manner of her death?’ asked Cross.

‘No,’ Trotts replied, hesitantly.

‘Why do you have such a clear recollection? You must’ve been to many DOA scenes since then,’ asked Cross.

Trotts paused for a moment as if this was something that had weighed on him. ‘Because I felt there was something wrong at the time and it’s stayed with me.’

‘Why didn’t you point it out to the police?’

‘I did, but they thought it was an obvious case of someone having a fit.’

‘Did you attend the coroner’s hearing?’ asked Ottey.

‘Wasn’t asked.’

‘So, tell me what happened that day,’ Ottey went on.

‘When I arrived at the scene Emma was on the patio at the rear of the house. I remember it was a lovely day. There were drinks on the garden table for the two of them. Early evening cocktails. She was lying on her back. There was no pulse. We tried to revive her, but it was useless. She’d gone. But I remember she was very grey,’ Trotts explained.

‘She was dead,’ Cross pointed out unhelpfully.

‘Yes, but if she’d had the fit when he said she had and if he was doing CPR, as he told the operator he was, I’d’ve expected her to have a little more colour than she did. Particularly with compressions. She looked like she’d been gone for at least an hour. She was cold. Very cold.’

‘How was the husband?’ Ottey asked.

Trotts thought for a moment.

‘Well, he was obviously distraught. It’s quite a strenuous thing doing CPR, particularly for as long as he claimed to have done, but I remember thinking he didn’t look as tired or worn out by it as I would normally have expected. I put it down to adrenaline at the time. Most people, once they’ve stopped, realise how much energy they’ve just exerted, though. And when someone has been given CPR, you’d expect there to be froth around the patient’s mouth. But there wasn’t any.’

‘Anything else?’ Ottey asked.

‘Like I said he was upset, which was unsurprising in the circumstances. He was really worried about his two boys,’ Trotts remembered.

‘Who were at their grandparents’ house for the weekend,’ Ottey said.

‘Just as well,’ Trotts remarked.

‘Why do you say that?’ asked Cross.

‘Because they weren’t there to see it,’ he replied.

This had occurred to Cross and Ottey when they were discussing it. It seemed particularly convenient and therefore gave weight to the idea that it might have been premeditated.

‘What did you tell the police?’

‘The way I saw it was that if she’d had this massive, fatal fit she would’ve fallen to the ground with some force. No arms out to protect her, she would’ve just gone down like a sack of potatoes and banged her head. It was a concrete patio. Her head had to have been injured. But there was no injury to her face or the back of her head. That was weird,’ said Trotts.

‘Had she been moved?’ asked Cross.

‘Apparently not. I asked the husband and he said she was where she fell. Did he really kill his fiancée?’ he suddenly asked.

‘He did,’ replied Ottey.

‘Anything else?’ asked Cross.

‘Her tongue. She hadn’t bitten her tongue. With a fit of this magnitude, I would’ve expected her to have,’ Trotts elaborated.

‘Isn’t it possible the husband might’ve moved her tongue?’ asked Ottey.

‘Sure, but not quickly enough to have prevented her biting down on it. I would’ve expected it to be bleeding. With a fit like that I’d expect her jaw to have locked down as well, so it would’ve been very difficult to move it,’ said Trotts. ‘He also told the emergency operator that she’d been sick when he described what happened, for some reason, but there was no sign of vomit anywhere near the body.’

Ottey thought the poor man was reeling from the realisation that he might have actually been at a crime scene. A murder scene, even.

‘I should’ve made more fuss about it at the time,’ said Trotts.

‘Undoubtedly,’ replied Cross.

‘Nonsense,’ interjected Ottey. ‘You did your job. It was the police who didn’t do theirs.’

‘But if I’d done more, maybe his fiancée would still be alive.’

Cross was about to say something. Probably to agree with him, thought Ottey.

‘George,’ she said, indicating they should leave before he said anything else.

\*

A few days later, Ottey was looking at a framed photograph of Emma Childs – as she then was – arm in arm with her friends Sarah and Linda, the women they'd met outside court. They were sixteen at the time of the photograph, with the whole world ahead of them. Their smiles seemed to proclaim that anything was possible, as long as they stuck together. They were dressed in a school uniform of blue tartan skirt, white shirt, blue tie and blue cardigan. Ottey thought the girls managed to wear this identical uniform in completely different ways, which probably said a little about them. It gave them an element of individuality – presumably the point.

Emma seemed to have something of the rebel about her. Her uniform looked like it was tolerated by her, rather than actually worn. The tie was shortened in a Windsor knot, her long white socks pulled down round her ankles. She was also wearing a liberally applied amount of makeup. It had a defiance about its application, which, Ottey assumed, meant it had to be against school rules. The other two were completely makeup-free.

She turned to the two women sitting on the sofa opposite her. Cross was next to her, having said nothing thus far. The women were now in their fifties but were still, unmistakably, the girls in the photograph. Linda put it back on a shelf, which Ottey realised was a shrine to their dead friend.

'He killed her,' Sarah began.

'We always suspected that,' added Linda.

'We told the police, but they wouldn't listen.' Sarah sighed. 'Said we were just two grieving friends.'

'And now look what's happened. He's done it again but got caught this time.' Linda shook her head.

'It wouldn't have happened though, if they'd listened to us after Emma died,' added Sarah.

Cross wondered where Emma had fitted into this trinity. The three of them had been through school together, maybe further education, first jobs, relationships, marriages, children. Forming a bond that had been broken by Emma's death. This explained the ever-present sense of injustice. He felt the conversation had a tone of resignation about it. Not so much from an acceptance of what had happened to their friend, but the innumerable times they'd had the same conversation about it, over the years.

'Have you spoken to the neighbours?' Sarah asked.

‘Tricia’s neighbours,’ Linda clarified.

‘Not yet,’ Ottey replied.

‘They thought he was strange. Said so at the trial.’

‘We went.’

‘Every day.’

‘Didn’t miss a single one.’

‘They thought he was weird, and none of them even knew about Emma at the time.’

‘One of them told the police about the cesspit, which is where they found her body.’

‘It was him that reported her missing, though. Well, they often do, don’t they?’ said Sarah.

‘That’s true, and offer to help,’ added Linda.

‘It’s always the ones at the press conferences, appealing for information from the public, with their crocodile tears.’

‘How did Emma manage her epilepsy?’ asked Cross, determined to wrest back control of the conversation.

‘She hadn’t had a fit in donkey’s years,’ Sarah replied.

‘Are you sure?’ asked Cross.

‘Hundred per cent. She had them loads when we were kids,’ said Sarah.

‘All the time. We became quite expert at dealing with them.’

‘Moving her tongue, so she didn’t bite it.’

‘It got to the point where we could tell when she was about to have one, before even she knew,’ Linda said proudly, raising her eyebrows at Ottey, as if to imply she knew that she’d find that extraordinary.

‘We were like them dogs that can tell when their owner’s going to have a fit. What are they called? Assistance dogs.’

‘That’s right,’ agreed Linda. They laughed fondly, even though it was such a painful memory.

‘But then she changed her meds,’ Sarah went on.

‘That’s right.’

‘It was unbelievable. The fits stopped almost overnight. Well, within a couple of weeks.’

‘How old was she then?’ asked Ottey.

‘Around about twenty-one.’

‘That’s right.’

‘And her fits stopped?’ Cross clarified.

‘Yep.’

‘Which means she hadn’t had one in over twenty years,’ Cross said, thinking aloud.

\*

‘Why hadn’t the lack of fits been brought up at the inquest? No fits for almost two decades then, out of the blue, a fatal one? It just doesn’t make any sense,’ Ottey said to Cross on the way back to the unit. She found herself feeling quite angry about it and she knew why. Crimes of domestic violence and domestic homicide, particularly against women, really touched a nerve with her. These kinds of crimes so often went undetected. It weighed heavily on Ottey and a lot of her colleagues in the police. Maybe she and Cross could get posthumous justice for Emma. She, for one, was determined to.

\*

‘Come to gloat?’ David North began by saying as he took a seat opposite them in an interview room. He was still in HMP Bristol before being shipped off to his place of long-term incarceration.

‘About what?’ asked Ottey, her dislike for him immediately resurfacing despite her best efforts to repress it.

‘That you got the result you wanted and didn’t let the truth stand in your way,’ North replied.

‘I think the evidence in court ensured the truth came out. The fact it isn’t your version of the truth is neither here nor there,’ Ottey answered.

‘You do know I’m appealing.’

‘We didn’t, but it doesn’t surprise me. After all, if you didn’t it would be tantamount to an admission of guilt, wouldn’t you say?’

‘Exactly right, on top of which I’m innocent,’ he refuted.

‘We’re not here about your conviction nor any appeal,’ said Cross speaking for the first time.

‘Then what’s this all about?’ asked North indifferently.

‘We want to talk to you about your wife.’

There was a pause as North thought about this for a moment.

‘Really?’ he said, finally. It seemed to intrigue him, to almost pick him up as if their visit suddenly interested him.

‘Tell us how she died,’ Ottey said.

‘You already know that.’

‘We’re interested in the detail. How it actually happened,’ Cross elaborated.

North considered this for a moment, which prompted Ottey to say, ‘Oh, come on, it’s not as if you’ve got other pressing matters today taking up your time.’

‘We were on our own. The boys had gone to Emma’s parents for the weekend, which meant we could have a little time together, alone,’ North began.

‘How was the marriage?’ asked Cross.

‘Fine. No, better than fine. Great in fact. We had our kids, the house. Finances were a little tight. We’d decided to educate the boys privately. But we were coping.’

Cross made a note of this.

‘We would’ve gone away for the weekend; just as well we didn’t. Emma didn’t like going away without the boys. She felt we should spend our money on family holidays, always going on about making memories. Which is tragic when you think about it. She said we wouldn’t have the boys for that long and we should make the most of it,’ North explained.

‘Well, she was right about that,’ Ottey pointed out.

‘Yes, but not for the reasons she said it, sadly,’ North answered quietly.

‘The night of her death,’ prompted Cross.

‘I’d just made us drinks. G & T’s. We used to try different British brands of gin, small producers, and see if we could tell the difference. I had to go to the shops to get ice, which just goes to show how long it had been since we’d had drinks together at the house. We were looking at the garden just as the sun was setting. It was quite beautiful.’

‘They call it the “blink” in the film industry, apparently. The moment just before the sun disappears,’ added Cross.

‘Is that right? Anyway, I remember thinking it was idyllic, even for the suburbs, when Em just dropped to the ground like a stone.’

‘On the patio,’ Cross affirmed.

‘Yes, we were on the patio.’

‘It was concrete. Is that correct?’ asked Cross.

‘Yes. I realised she was having a fit, which was a real shock.’

‘Why?’ asked Cross.

‘Well, she hadn’t had one in years. It was all under control with her meds. So, it was a real shock coming out of the blue like that,’ North reflected.

‘What happened then?’ asked Ottey.

‘I called 999.’

‘How did you manage that?’ she went on.

‘How do you mean?’

‘You told the operator you were giving your wife CPR,’ she said.

‘Not at the beginning.’

‘Why not?’

‘Well, she was still breathing so there was no need. It was while I was on the phone she stopped breathing,’ he explained.

This didn’t tally with Trotts’ version of events, which he’d secured directly from the operator. As it hadn’t been a criminal investigation at the time, unfortunately for Cross and Ottey, neither the transcript nor a recording of the call existed. So, it was difficult to challenge North on this point.

‘How exactly did she fall?’ asked Cross.

‘She just went down. Her legs crumpled beneath her,’ said North.

‘And yet she didn’t injure her head,’ Cross pointed out.

‘Didn’t she? I didn’t notice,’ North replied. It was the most unconvincing thing he’d said yet.

‘The head is the heaviest part of the body. You’d expect quite an impact in the event of such a collapse as it hit the ground – in this case concrete. Either on her face or the back of her head. There were neither, nor any cuts or bruises on her knees or arms, consistent with a fall,’ Cross told him.

‘Maybe she fell on a patch of moss or something,’ said North. Cross couldn’t tell whether he was being facetious or not.

‘Was there moss on your patio, Mr North?’ he asked.

‘Probably. Why all these questions?’

Ottey noticed that North’s confident veneer seemed to be slipping. He was beginning to get a little agitated.

‘From our point of view, when looked at objectively, there seem to be a good deal of inconsistencies in your account and the facts as we know them. Starting with the lack of any injury sustained to your late wife’s head,’ Cross explained.

North didn't respond.

'Did you administer mouth-to-mouth resuscitation as well as CPR?' asked Ottey.

'Of course,' replied North. 'What exactly are you trying to get at?'

'I would have thought our very presence here and these questions would have made what we are trying to get at perfectly obvious,' replied Cross.

North said nothing.

'We think Emma's death is suspicious,' Ottey informed him.

'You're kidding.' He laughed. 'And how have you come to that conclusion?'

'Your wife hadn't had an epileptic fit in decades, was taking her medication. According to her friends her epilepsy was pretty much a thing of the past,' said Ottey.

'Linda and Sarah?' scoffed North. 'Well, there's a surprise.'

'Why do you say that?' asked Ottey.

North checked himself. 'No reason,' he replied unconvincingly.

'No injury to the back of her head or face, as my colleague has said. You told the 999 operator that she'd vomited. Not unusual in such cases. But there was no sign of vomit at the scene, either on her or on the ground. No evidence around her mouth of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation,' Ottey went on.

'Who told you that?'

'The paramedic who attended the scene. He thought she'd been dead for at least an hour,' she told him.

'Forensic pathologist, is he?' North asked scornfully.

Cross noted a definite change in his tone.

'On top of which is the fact that you killed your fiancée,' Cross said.

'Allegedly,' replied North.

'You've been convicted, Mr North,' Cross pointed out.

'Well let's wait and see what happens with the appeal,' North said.

'How have your children taken the conviction?' Cross asked, hoping to touch a nerve.

'I don't know. I haven't seen them since,' said North.

'I think perhaps they're a little confused,' Ottey said.

'Have you seen them?' North asked, suddenly more interested in the conversation.

'We have,' Ottey replied.

‘How were they?’ he asked urgently.

‘Like I said, confused, upset. Having a hard time socially. It’s difficult for them with the whole world knowing that their father is a killer,’ Ottey said.

‘They can’t believe that,’ refuted North.

‘If a jury can, why shouldn’t they?’ said Cross.

‘Wait a minute. Why did you see them?’ asked North, suddenly concerned.

‘We wanted to talk to them about their mother,’ said Cross.

‘What? Why? What did you say to them?’

‘I can’t imagine how they’re going to feel if it turns out you murdered their mother as well,’ added Cross.

‘What did you tell them? You had no right,’ North spluttered.

‘We didn’t tell them anything. Although they struck me as intelligent boys. I should imagine they might put two and two together, our asking about their mother and you, after you’ve just been convicted of killing Tricia,’ said Cross. This seemed to throw North.

‘Did your wife have life insurance, Mr North?’ asked Ottey.

‘I don’t remember,’ he replied.

‘I find that hard to believe. Particularly as you’ve just told us you were a bit strapped financially,’ said Ottey. He didn’t reply. ‘Oldest motive in the book,’ she went on.

‘I didn’t kill her for the life insurance.’

There was a silence after this. He realised how this sounded.

‘I didn’t kill my wife at all.’

‘Here’s what I think. I can’t speak for my colleague. He has an aversion to theoretical thinking when it comes to crime. You make a hundred grand, maybe more, from your wife’s death. You obviously enjoyed the money. You bought a Mercedes sports car. Hardly practical for a single father with two children, I would’ve thought. Maybe you were so bewildered with grief you made odd decisions. I don’t know. But people felt sorry for you. You were the centre of attention and you thought: *this is great*. There’s money to be made in murder, if you can get away with it. Which, in the case of your wife, it appeared you had.’

‘Bullshit,’ came the reply.

‘Then you met Tricia,’ said Cross.

‘When you say it like that, DS Cross, you make it sound like a fortuitous accident. But we know it wasn’t, Mr North. You sought her out. A wealthy,

childless widow. Perfect project. You both changed your wills. Murder 2.0,' Ottey concluded.

'I didn't kill Emma,' said North.

'Well, we intend to find out,' said Cross.

'Really? And how exactly do you intend to go about that, Sergeant?' North asked confidently.

'We'll do what we always do. What should have been done in the first place. We'll investigate the evidence,' Cross informed him.

'Really,' he replied. 'Well, good luck with that.'

'What does that mean?' asked Ottey.

'My dear late wife was cremated, Sergeant. That's what that means. So, what exactly you intend to investigate, what evidence you expect to unearth, excuse the pun, is beyond me.' North smirked. That same expression he'd aimed at them in court. Now it made even more sense to Ottey. North got up, went to the door and knocked. The interview was over.

\*

Whenever they made what Cross considered to be a fundamental mistake, or an oversight such as this, he was absolutely furious. Not with anyone else. Just with himself. For a master of detail, this kind of basic omission was absolute anathema. He hated simple errors. It wasn't that he felt shown up, he just felt disappointed.

'Well, that's that,' was Carson's immediate reaction. He couldn't help adding, with relish, 'Always check the basics, people. A good rule of thumb in my book. Still, at least you didn't waste too much time on it.'

\*

Ottey decided they needed to tell Linda and Sarah in person. Cross had no intention of going with her until she pointed out that the more practice he got in these situations, the better he might become with them, hopefully. He thought for a moment and had to agree that she had a point.

'So, I suppose that's that?' Sarah said, back in Linda's front room.

'I'm afraid so,' Ottey replied.

‘It’s no consolation he’s behind bars now. Another woman died. She didn’t have to. It’s awful,’ said Linda.

‘Yep,’ Ottey agreed quietly.

‘Well, time to move on, as I said to Linda. If you told us there’s no way of proving he did it, then we’re done.’

‘He’s such a bastard,’ added Linda.

‘I know,’ agreed Ottey.

‘You know the worst thing? He still messed with her after she was dead. Couldn’t let her have her own way,’ Sarah went on.

‘What do you mean by that?’ asked Cross.

‘He had her cremated,’ Linda explained.

‘We know,’ Ottey replied.

‘Well, she had a donor card. She wouldn’t have wanted that.’

‘Really?’ Ottey said politely.

‘A donor card? Are you sure?’ Cross asked.

‘Had one since she was eighteen. Made Linda and me get one too. She was passionate about it,’ Sarah continued.

But Cross was already heading for the door. He turned when he reached it. ‘DS Ottey, we need to leave,’ he announced and disappeared.

‘Is he all right?’ asked Linda.

‘I’m not sure, but I’d better go,’ Ottey said, following.

\*

‘Care to elaborate, George?’ asked Ottey as she looked over her shoulder in the car, to make sure she could safely pull out.

‘She had a donor card,’ he said as if it were obvious.

‘But she was cremated, which makes that somewhat irrelevant,’ she pointed out.

‘Except that she died supposedly from SUDEP. There’s a chance medical research would have been interested in her case, isn’t there?’ Cross said hopefully.

Ottey thought for a moment. ‘Do you mean her brain?’

‘That’s exactly what I mean.’

They had their answer just three days later. Emma may have been cremated but, because of her donor card, North had indeed been asked if he

would let her brain be preserved for science. The idea had initially come from Emma's sister. North had said yes. Probably because he thought saying no might arouse suspicion, Cross thought. But the fact was, Emma's brain had been preserved for medical research into epilepsy. Further analysis, which hadn't been deemed necessary in the first instance, could confirm how she died, one way or another.

Which is how, a year later, David North found himself being rearrested by Cross and Ottey and put on trial for the murder of his wife Emma. He of course protested his innocence. They interviewed him at length and went over the enormous discrepancies in his account. He claimed to have found Emma unconscious and unresponsive. He said he gave her CPR while on the phone to the emergency services. But the paramedic, Jamie Trotts, who attended the scene, contradicted this with his evidence.

But it was the medical consultants the prosecution called as expert witnesses who proved fatal to North's defence. A consultant neurologist who specialised in epilepsy declared that the chances of Emma, with her medical history, having a fatal seizure were one in a hundred thousand. Another eminent consultant neuropathologist from King's London, who'd had the chance to examine Emma's preserved brain tissues, found exactly what Cross had hoped might manifest itself. He discovered ischaemic changes in part of the brain – the hippocampus – as well as finding the presence of 'red and dead' neurones. This ischaemia only occurs in the brain when blood flow and oxygen are restricted. This was critical.

The medical findings were consistent with Emma having had her oxygen restricted, by a third party, for up to thirty minutes before she died. It was suggested by the prosecution that she had either been suffocated with a bag placed over her head, or by a 'sleeper hold' being applied to her neck. North had murdered his wife.

It took the jury only a matter of hours to return a guilty verdict. When it came to sentencing, the judge said that what he had found particularly shocking was the fact that North pretended to perform CPR, when he obviously knew he had just killed her. But in the end, it was his wife who was to have the last word in this tragic matter. Her preserved brain was the key to everything. Emma had convicted him from beyond the grave.

'I am satisfied that the seriousness of your offending is so exceptionally high that just punishment requires that you *will* be kept in prison for the remainder of your life. In the circumstances of your offending, a whole-life

order is not only justified, it is the just punishment for your callous and chilling murder of two separate women who had the misfortune to be in an intimate relationship with you, and any other sentence would not exhaust the requirements of retribution and deterrence. I accordingly make a whole-life order. Take him down.'

North turned to the two detectives. Ottey was tempted to smile at him, the way he'd smiled at them in the first trial. But she managed to resist.

\*

A grateful Sarah and Linda hugged Ottey outside the court. Cross managed to distance himself before they got the chance to inflict their grateful embrace on him.

'I can't believe it's all over!' said Sarah.

'Well, it is,' Cross replied.

'Thank you so much,' said a tearful Linda.

'It's so weird. It doesn't feel like a victory,' Sarah continued.

'How can it? Nothing will bring her back,' said Linda.

'Maybe we can just get on with stuff now, though, eh?' said Sarah.

'Yeah,' Linda reflected. 'At least she got the bastard in the end. She'd be well chuffed with that.'

At this point Robert and Colin, North's two sons, walked down the steps of the court. They looked devastated and glanced over at Cross and Ottey with that familiar look – to her at least – of shock but also slight accusation. Ottey felt for them, but knew from experience there was no point in going over to talk to them. This was so often the most difficult part of the job. Uncovering brutal truths about the accused that their close family couldn't, and probably never would, come to terms with.

*This short story is very firmly based on the case of Ian Stewart, who was convicted of killing his fiancée in 2017. In 2022, he was convicted of killing his wife in 2010. He was given a whole-life sentence, but the Court of Appeal quashed this in July 2022 and said the appropriate sentence was thirty-five years. This judgement can be read here: [www.judiciary.uk/judgments/r-v-monaghan/](http://www.judiciary.uk/judgments/r-v-monaghan/)*

## **Did you love *The Ex-Wife*?**

Then don't miss DS George Cross's next case.



# TIM A DS CROSS THRILLER SULLIVAN

'Exceptional'  
**BOOKBAG**

'Clever and taut'  
**TELEGRAPH**

'Intriguing'  
**THE TIMES**

'A perfect  
detective'  
**STEPHEN  
FRY**

# The Monk

**TO FIND A MURDERER, YOU NEED A MOTIVE**

A man with no past.

A case with no leads.

A crime with no motive.

**COMING APRIL 2023**



## About the Author

TIM SULLIVAN is a crime writer, screenwriter and director, who has worked on major feature films such as the fourth *Shrek*, *Flushed Away*, *Letters to Juliet*, *A Handful of Dust*, *Jack and Sarah* and the TV series *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.co.uk](http://TimSullivan.co.uk).

# An Invitation from the Publisher

We hope you enjoyed this book. We are an independent publisher dedicated to discovering brilliant books, new authors and great storytelling. Please join us at [www.headofzeus.com](http://www.headofzeus.com) and become part of our community of book-lovers.

We will keep you up to date with our latest books, author blogs, special previews, tempting offers, chances to win signed editions and much more.

Get in touch: [hello@headofzeus.com](mailto:hello@headofzeus.com)

