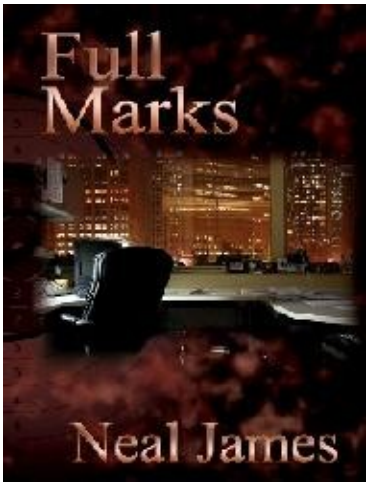
Full Marks

By : Phil Neale 1952

There's a score to settle - when the hunter becomes the hunted... Dennis Marks thought he had seen it all. That was before Solomon Goldblum crossed his path â after that, things were never the same again. The trauma which the old Jew had inflicted upon him had brought about a near psychological collapse. That the DCI had been able to conceal the fragility of his mental state from the shrink whom the Met had forced him to see had been down to his sheer determination. Now, all of that effort was about to be challenged by one of the most daunting figures at New Scotland Yard â Superintendent Eric Staines. The Independent Police Complaints Commission were about to take Marksâ life apart, professionally and personally, and Staines, as one of its fiercest inquisitors, was not a man inclined to show mercy. A month was all that the DCI had to prove his innocence of a range of charges dating back to his days as a detective sergeant. A career spent putting away the dregs of Londonâ s criminal world was to hang in the balance, and he was, he believed, for the first time...alone.



Published on
Booksie

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Friday, 17th March 2006

Dennis Marksâ world was about to fall apart. Today had, so far, been one of those run-of-the-mill episodes in the life of the typical Detective Chief Inspector in the Metropolitan Police.

Now in his mid-fifties, married for thirty years, and back at the top of his game, he had just about seen and done it all in his career. From the verge of a nervous breakdown in the not too distant past, he had recovered to be a much more pragmatic and open-minded individual.

He was five feet ten, of medium build, and for a man of his years took pride in the fact that he could still run a mile in under eight minutes. The glasses, which he wore for effect in meetings, though they were strictly for reading only, lent him an air of authority which younger officers deferred to without question. He had progressed through the Met in the old way of pounding the beat, and earning promotion by virtue of deed rather than word.

All of that was about to change with the arrival of the man now making his way down the office. Like the Red Sea before Moses, those officers present stood aside. Marks never saw him coming.

Eric Staines â a name to strike fear into any copper operating within the Metropolitan Police. With the rank of Superintendent, he ran his own Professional Standards Department within the Independent Police Complaints Commission with an iron fist forged in the controversies of The Birmingham Six in 1991, and The Guildford Four in 1989. As an inspector in his mid-thirties at the time of both scandals, he had been involved at a senior level, and his name had become synonymous down the years with a determination to root out corruption whatever the cost. A number of senior officers had suffered the ultimate penalty as a result of his work.

He had read the file on Dennis Marks, and although the DCI seemed, on the face of it, to be a typical hard-working copper, there was no room for sentiment. A number of issues had been raised, and there were some inconsistencies in the manâ s record. It would not be the first time that a top-ranking detective had fallen foul of the rules.

He walked into Marksâ office unannounced â it was always the best way.

â Detective Chief Inspector Marks.â He flashed the dreaded ID card before The DCIâ s face. â Eric Staines - IPCC.â

It was customary for anyone approaching a private office to at least knock before entering, but not these boys. Staines was held in a combination of awe and fear by anyone operating at New Scotland Yard. Since the days of the Birmingham Six in 1975, police forces up and down the country had operated under the shadow of anti-corruption squads from within. The Stephen Lawrence Enquiry of 1998 had laid a charge of institutional racism right at the Metâ s door, forcing radical changes to operations. Marks could not prevent the involuntary shudder which ran up and down his spine. He tried to outstare the man â he failed.

â Yes, sir. What can I do for you?â The DCIâ s tone was brusque and businesslike. It was always advisable to be upfront with IPCC investigations. Anything else was apt to be treated as a weakness, and thus be seen as suspicious.

â Your warrant card will do for the moment. You are suspended from all duties with immediate effect, pending an enquiry into your record.â

The flat, impersonal statement hit Marks like a dagger to the heart. He had known of colleagues falling foul of the internal discipline routine in the past, and even those coming out of it exonerated were never the same coppers as before.

â Suspended? What are you talking about? What is it that you think Iâ ve done?â

â Just the card for now, Chief Inspector. Any charges will be notified to you through he usual channels. You will be escorted from the premises and driven home, but do not attempt to leave the area. You will be sent for as we need you, but I would advise that you contact the police union, and get yourself a good solicitor.â

Behind Staines stood Marksâ boss, Superintendent Gordon Davies; he was shaking his head almost imperceptibly, and nodded in the direction of the office door. The look on the manâ s face told the DCI that there was more to this than met the eye. They had been colleagues for a number of years, and the body language was a clear indication that more information than Staines was revealing would be divulged in private. Picking up his coat, and ramming the warrant card down the desk, he walked out.

Back at home, Marks slammed the front door behind him and threw his coat over the newel post at the bottom of the stairs. June, his wife, heard the noise and came from the kitchen to see her husband, in a state of ill-concealed despair, sitting with head in hands on the hall chair.

â Dennis, whatâ s the matter?â

â The bastards! Theyâ ve suspended me!â

â Suspended? What for? What have you done?â

â If I knew that, June, Iâ d be as wise as they are!â He saw the hurt on his wifeâ s face at the last remark. â Sorry, love, they dropped it on me suddenly, and I havenâ t a clue whatâ s behind it.â

They were interrupted by a knock at the front door, and the grave face of George Groves greeted June as she opened it.

â Where is he?â

â In the lounge, George, youâ d better come in.â She closed the door, and returned from the kitchen with a bottle of wine and three glasses.

â Dennis, I just heard. What the hellâ s wrong with them?â

â You could be in trouble just for being here, George, I donâ t think anyoneâ s supposed to be taking to me while the suspensionâ s in operation.â

â Doesnâ t affect me.â He shook his head. â I work for the Home Office, not the Met. Have they told you why youâ re on garden leave?â

â No. I probably wonâ t find out until tomorrow. All theyâ ve said is that Iâ ll be sent for. Iâ m going to ring the Federation Rep today, and find myself a good solicitor. No-oneâ s doing this to me.â

â If thereâ s anything I can do, you only have to ask.â

â I know that, George, but until I can see whatâ s behind it all and whatâ s been said, it would probably better for you to remain on the sidelines.â

Marks was acutely aware that, by the very reason of their close working relationship, whatever allegations had been made against him could also have a serious effect on Grovesâ reputation. Not only that, all of those officers in the CID team might also suffer the same penalties meted out to him, should those allegations be substantiated.

â Thereâ s no way they can find any case to answer against you. Iâ ve never come across a straighter copper in the Met. This is an absolute disgrace!â

â Steady, George, itâ s my neck on the block. Donâ t be in too much of a hurry to join it. You said yourself, you work for the Home Office. Internal Investigations canâ t touch you unless you stick your neck out for me. Iâ ve got to sort out a meeting with the Police Federation representative and my solicitor on Monday; letâ s leave it until then."

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