

LUCIENNE
BOYCE

*Bloodie
Bones*

A DAN FOSTER MYSTERY ONE

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To The Fair Land

The Dan Foster Mysteries:-

The Butcher's Block

Death Makes No Distinction

The Contraband Killings

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Non-Fiction

The Bristol Suffragettes

The Road to Representation: Essays on the Women's Suffrage Campaign

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About the Author

Lucienne Boyce writes historical fiction and non-fiction. After gaining an MA in English Literature with the Open University, specialising in eighteenth-century literature, she published her first historical novel, *To The Fair Land*, an eighteenth-century thriller set in London, Bristol and the South Seas.

The Dan Foster Mysteries follow the adventures of a Bow Street Runner at the end of the eighteenth century, and are set against a tumultuous background of war with France and unrest at home.

Her non-fiction books are *The Bristol Suffragettes*, and a collection of short essays, *The Road to Representation: Essays on the Women's Suffrage Campaign*.

She regularly gives talks on both her fiction and non-fiction work, and blogs about suffragettes, suffragists, the eighteenth century and books. She has been a local radio presenter, tutored a course on women's suffrage history, and run workshops on writing historical fiction.

Find out more at www.lucienneboyce.com

Chapter One

Dan Foster rolled from beneath the hedge, his breath puffing on the cool morning air. He jumped to his feet, wincing at the stiffness of his muscles. Uncomfortable place, the countryside. Uncomfortable and lonely. There was no traffic on the road beyond the hedge, where Doctor Russell had dropped him last night after showing him the corpse, though here and there he saw smoke rising from chimneys. In a field a long way off, a farm worker was walking purposefully towards a tree-topped ridge, a black and white dog running around him.

Dan was cold, damp and hungry – all useful states for a man in his disguise. He had a long walk back to Barcombe, but he did not want to arrive too early in the day. Plenty of time to do some stretches and running on the spot to get his limbs moving.

As he exercised he reviewed the events of the last twenty-four hours. At this time yesterday he had been in the gymnasium, sparring with Noah, when a messenger boy had come from the office to say the Chief Magistrate needed him urgently. It was perhaps just as well for Dan's pride – his wily old opponent was still nifty on his feet and handy with his punches, even with gloves on. There had been no time to go next door for a steam bath, and he had had to make do with a cold dousing in the shower before setting off from Cecil Street at a run, dodging the laden carts turning from the Strand down to the wharf.

He had reached Bow Street before any of the night patrols came in with their catch. Pre-rush, the gaoler lounged about, chatting with the cleaning woman. Dan went straight to Sir William Addington's room, where he found the jowly old man waiting for him with a stranger. The man was expensively though darkly dressed, and drenched in scent sufficient to overcome the musty smell of wormy wood, dusty carpet and heaps of yellowing papers.

"Ah, Foster, sit down," Sir William said. "This is Mr Garvey. He's here on behalf of his client, Lord Oldfield."

Dan moved a pile of pink-tied documents to the floor and sat in the ancient leather chair. "What's the story?"

Garvey frowned at his directness. "I represent Lord Adam Oldfield of Barcombe in Somerset." He had a deep, gravelly voice and drew out each word as if he were charging by the syllable. "His Lordship has recently entered into his inheritance at Oldfield Hall, a fine mansion set in an estate of some two thousand acres, which includes prime woodland. Like his father before him, he's plagued by poachers. One of his first in a series of planned improvements was to enclose the woodland and deny the encroachers access to it. Unfortunately, this has resulted in a spate of illegal protests – fence breaking and so on – and it has not put a stop to the thieving. If anything, it's better organised than of old. Now it seems they've gone one step further. Last evening I received the message that Lord Oldfield's gamekeeper was murdered by poachers on Wednesday night."

Today was Friday. "Two nights ago," Dan said. "Any witnesses?"

Another frown. Garvey did not like being questioned. "I know no more than that and so can give you no further information about the crime. However, His Lordship has instructed me to go down to Barcombe immediately and bring a Principal Officer with me." He glanced at the magistrate. "Sir William tells me that you are the man for the job."

Sir William nodded. "You're to go down with Mr Garvey and infiltrate the gang responsible for the outrage. His Lordship is the local magistrate, so there'll be no problem with obtaining warrants when you need them."

Garvey stood up. "My carriage is waiting at my chambers in Lincoln's Inn. When can you be ready?"

"I'll join you within the hour," Dan answered, rising.

Sir William came round from behind his desk to escort Garvey out. When they had gone, Dan hurried downstairs to the clerks' room. He unhooked a key from the wall and opened the cupboard where he kept an overnight bag packed ready for such emergencies. He checked his supply of ball and powder, then rifled one of the desks for pen and paper and scribbled half a dozen lines to Caroline, telling her he would be out of town for a few days. He added a reminder of where his will was kept – the only part likely to interest his wife.

He spent more time over a second note to his sister-in-law, Eleanor. Caroline had complained so often about the hours he worked and the nights he spent away from home that, as soon as he had been able to afford it, he had taken a house in Russell Street large enough for Eleanor and his mother-in-law to move in with them. It was one less worry knowing they were there to keep an eye on Caroline.

Dan called the office boy and sent him off with the notes, then pushed his way out to the street through the crowd of drunks and whores fighting and shouting around the gaoler's desk.

Garvey had had his private chaise brought up from his country house in Streatham, and four fresh horses were already in harness. The driver, a swaggering man in livery, was accompanied by a groom of sixteen. It was the lad's job to ride ahead and order a change of horses at each stage, and the man paid the turnpikes.

As soon as they were in the carriage, Garvey opened a case of documents and buried himself beneath a pile of deeds and maps, turning his papers over with crisp, irritable movements. The smell of his eau de cologne was cloying in the confined space. Dan pulled the glass down an inch or so until an angry 'tut' compelled him to raise it. A few miles outside London, Garvey told him to lift up his seat and take out the basket he would find there. They breakfasted on the contents, and very welcome they were: small beer, soft rolls, cheese, chicken, eggs, cake.

No expense was spared, since they were travelling out of Lord Oldfield's purse. They changed horses every few miles, and Garvey was always careful to ask for a receipt. They made good speed, but even so it was dark by the time they got to Barcombe, and Dan could make out very little of the country.

They drove through ornate iron gates and along a short drive to the front of Oldfield Hall. Lights glittered out of numerous windows. Dan put on his hat and pulled up his coat collar. A liveried butler led them into a small, green drawing room. It had curtains all the way to the floor, shiny wallpaper, and a pale carpet which Dan thought it a shame to walk on, but short of flying, there was nothing else for it. The room was full of furniture that did not seem up to the part: upholstered, spindly-legged chairs and fragile, polished tables covered with ornaments and vases of flowers. He glanced at the paintings on the walls, which were mostly of half-dressed men and women cavorting by unnatural-looking woods and lakes.

Lord Adam Oldfield sat alone, reading. He looked at Dan as he rose, letting his newspaper fall to the carpet. Dan recognised the latest issue of the *Sporting Magazine*, September 1796. It was open at the 'Champions of England' series. The article featured Tom Johnson. Dan had read it himself a day or two before. He stored the fact for the moment, in case it should be useful.

Lord Oldfield shook hands with Garvey. He motioned the lawyer to a chair. Dan was left standing, hat in hand.

"This is the Runner?" Lord Oldfield asked, resuming his seat.

"His name is Daniel Foster," Garvey replied.

Lord Oldfield acknowledged the information with a slight nod. Dan, reckoning his own age from the assumption that he had been thirteen when Noah had taken him in, put his client at three or four years younger than himself, which would make him twenty-five or six. He had a

slender, supple figure and a handsome face, full of pride, as was only to be expected in a man of his class. He was not at his ease, however. His pale blue eyes were troubled and his manner subdued. When Garvey invited him to describe recent events he hesitated, finding it difficult to begin his story.

“My gamekeeper, Josh Castle, was lured out of his cottage during the night and killed while a gang of poachers helped themselves to two of my deer. The animals were caught in nets, pole-axed, and butchered. We found nothing but the heads and skins. It was a professional job.”

“Who found Castle and when, My Lord?” asked Dan.

Lord Oldfield did not look at Dan, but directed his answer to Garvey. “The first underkeeper, Caleb Witt, went to his cottage early yesterday morning to get his orders for the day. He found the door open, a half-eaten meal on the table, and no sign of Josh. While he waited outside, thinking Josh might be close by, he heard a dog howling. He followed the sound and found Josh with his dog beside him.”

“Has the coroner been?”

“Yes, the inquest was here this morning. Unsurprisingly, he returned a verdict of murder,” Lord Oldfield snapped at the lawyer, who was innocent of making the query.

“How was Castle killed?”

“You can go and look at the body, can’t you?” Lord Oldfield said fiercely, raising his eyes to Dan’s face for the first time. Mastering himself, he turned back to Garvey. “He was beaten to death. I want the culprits hanged, Garvey. Do you think yon man can bring that about?”

“Sir William thinks so,” Garvey answered.

Dan had been called worse things than ‘yon man’, but he found it hard to control his irritation.

“Where is the body?”

“We put him in the ice house,” Lord Oldfield told the lawyer. “Doctor Russell will assist. He examined Josh and gave evidence at the inquest. He is with Mother at the moment. This upset has brought on one of her nervous headaches.”

He rose and rang the bell by the fireplace, rustling the newspaper with his foot.

“I saw Johnson’s first fight,” Dan said.

Lord Oldfield spun round, his face animated with sudden interest. “You did? Where? When?”

“It was at Blackheath in ’81, versus Stephen Oliver. Yes,” Dan added with a smile, “I saw Tom Johnson beat Death.”

Lord Oldfield smiled too, getting the joke. Death was Steevy Oliver’s nickname, given him on account of his pale face. “Do you recall anything of the fight?”

Dan had cause to remember that fight. He had been drawn to it by the crowds; the takings were always good from the Fancy. He had been trained by one of the best, a receiver called Weaver. The old devil sewed bells on his coat pockets, and the trick was to rob him without setting them off.

A bigger boy had taken exception to Dan encroaching on his territory and the two got into a fight. In keeping with the sporting occasion, a ring had formed around them while Dan took his beating. He would not cry quarter, though, even when the lout left him flat on his back. When he opened his good eye, there was a face grinning over him. Instinct had told him that was a moment to scramble and run, but the man pushed him back.

He dabbed painfully at the cut on Dan’s forehead with a wet handkerchief. “You’ve got bottom, lad, I’ll give you that. With a bit of training you could make a tasty fighter.”

Dan croaked, “What the fuck do you mean, *bottom*?”

The man laughed. “And a foul mouth for a young ’un! Bottom is staying power. Endurance. Never mind. I’ll explain another time. Can you stand up?”

And that was how Noah had lifted Dan out of the gutter, taken him to his boxing academy in Cecil Street, trained him to fight by scientific methods, and driven the savage out of him. But this was a tale Dan did not tell Lord Oldfield; a tale he did not tell many. Instead, he answered Lord Oldfield's question about Johnson's performance.

"It was touch and go at first, My Lord. That is, Death did the touching and made the claret flow, though a veteran. But age soon told on him. Tom's manoeuvres were marvellous to watch. He'd look out for his opponent's weaknesses and go straight for them, the head especially. He was nothing showy, though he was cool in a fight. He stalled off Death that day. I saw him a few years later fight Bristol man Bill Ward, in Berkshire."

"The championship fight!"

"It was not a good match. Ward took a doubler from Johnson in the first round, and realised he couldn't beat him except by tiring him out. So we were treated to a display of humbugging, with Ward dropping to his knees whenever Tom came near him. After an hour and a half of this, Ward cried foul and bolted."

Garvey gazed at the two men as if they were speaking in a foreign tongue, and an uncouth one at that. The butler, Ackland, came in for his orders and was sent to fetch Doctor Russell. He soon returned with the doctor, a lantern and a key.

Leaving Garvey and his client looking over the documents the lawyer had brought with him, Dan followed the doctor across the hall and down the service stairs to a wide, flagged corridor which led to the kitchen. Larders, washrooms and offices opened off on each side. The place smelt of plentiful supplies: game, bread, cheese, beer. Dan heard servants moving about in the kitchen, the murmur of voices and clatter of dishes.

He and the doctor moved quietly, taking care not to attract the servants' attention. They went through the open back door into a courtyard, and left this through a door in the wall. Doctor Russell pointed out the stable block to the left, on a rise a little above the house. Lights shone out through an archway with a clock above it as the stable lads went about feeding and settling the animals for the night. Dan and Doctor Russell crossed a dark stretch of lawn, passed through a gap cut in a yew hedge, and went down some steps to a small cylindrical building.

Russell opened the door with the huge key and they descended a wide stone staircase that followed the curve of the brickwork. The walls oozed icy water, and the iron railings felt cold enough to tear the skin off bare hands.

They reached the bottom of the building, which was several feet below the ground. The doctor opened his lantern and took a candle from a box on the wall. He used this to light the candles set in holders about the chamber. They hissed and fizzled reluctantly, burning feebly in the damp air.

A circular stone counter ran around the wall, with crates of ice stored on and beneath it. There were also dishes of frozen, flavoured cream, covered with muslin. In the middle of the room was a marble slab used for cutting up the ice, with lidded buckets for carrying it to the house stacked between its massive stone legs. Josh Castle lay under a sheet on the slab. Pale pink water flowed along a channel around its edge and drained into a stone vessel.

The doctor pulled back the sheet to expose the naked corpse. In spite of the keeper's wounds, Dan saw that he had been a handsome man, golden-skinned and dark haired, with a well-shaped mouth which must have produced an engaging smile. He had a fine figure, vigorous and muscular, as Dan would expect in his line of work. Such a man would not have been easy to overcome if his assailant had faced him. But his attacker had not. He had felled Castle with a blow to the back of the head and then administered a beating so severe the arms, legs and ribs were broken.

"The corpse is not stiff," Dan said, laying the head back on the slab after examining the smashed skull.

"No," said Doctor Russell. "The atmosphere of the ice house has delayed rigor mortis."

“Would the blow to his head have killed him?”

“Almost certainly.”

“And the beating was given after death?”

The doctor nodded.

“Was the weapon found?”

Doctor Russell crossed to the counter and came back with an iron bar. Dan took it from him. It was stained with a red that was not rust.

“It was torn from one of the gates on the edge of the estate,” Russell said, replacing it on the counter. “Such acts of vandalism have become frequent since the enclosure of Barcombe Wood. They also found this lying next to Castle.”

He pointed to a form stretched out beside the bar. At first Dan took it for a second body. Stepping closer, he saw it was a crude scarecrow made of sacks and straw, with a rope around its neck. White lines had been daubed across the front of it to make a rough representation of a skeleton. The skull was crudely drawn: white circles for eyes, a dab of nose, a grinning grid of teeth. There was a piece of paper pinned to its chest.

Dan removed it and held it close to the lantern. It had been torn from a larger sheet of thick, ivory-coloured letter paper, and misspelt words were scrawled on it in what looked like blood: “*Tirants Bwar Bloodie Bones*”.

The doctor had moved away and stood shivering at the feet of the corpse, his breath steaming.

Dan said, “Who, or what, is Bloodie Bones?”

“Bloodie Bones is a bogeyman, and the name the poachers use. Her Ladyship tells me that a few weeks ago a similar note, wrapped around a stone, was thrown through a window in Oldfield Hall. It threatened arson and bloodshed. Days later a hayrick on the estate farm was set alight.”

Dan picked up the noose. “The rope has been cleanly cut.”

“Yes. The other end was hanging from the tree beneath which they found Castle. He must have been cutting it down when he was attacked.”

“It must have looked like a hanging man in the dark.”

The doctor said nothing to this. He stared morosely at the body. Dan put the note in his pocket.

“Was Castle armed, do you know?”

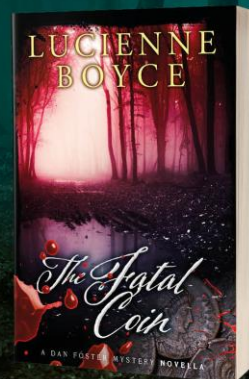
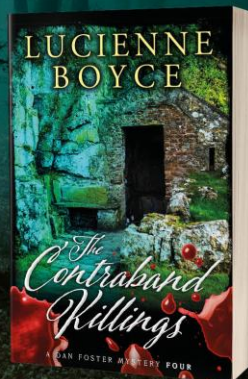
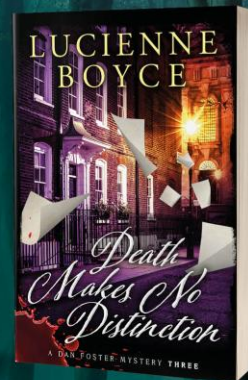
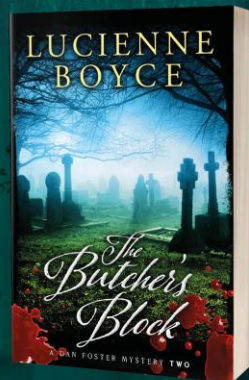
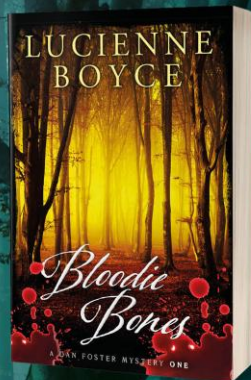
“His gun was brought in with the body. It had not been fired.”

“I’ve seen enough.”

Russell pulled the sheet over the gamekeeper. Between them they extinguished the candles, Russell took up the lantern, and they ascended the stone steps. The doctor carefully locked the building.

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THE DAN FOSTER MYSTERIES
"Gripping historical mysteries with twists and turns a-plenty."