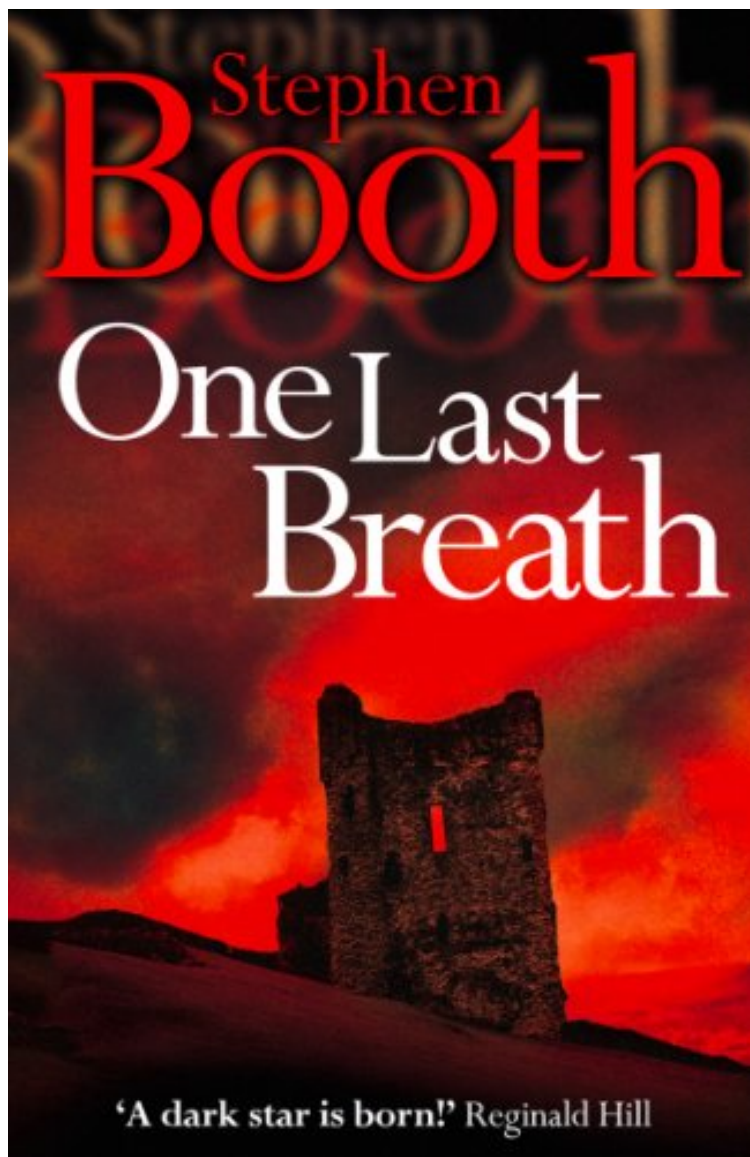


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# One Last Breath (Cooper and Fry Crime Series, Book 5)



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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurMajor new psychological Peak District thriller from the acclaimed author of Blood on the Tongue and Blind to the Bones.The vast labyrinth of caverns, passages and subterranean rivers beneath the Peak District are a major tourist attraction. But this summer not all the darkness is underground, and not all the devils are folk legends. Mingling with the holidaymakers is a convicted killer, bent on revenge.Fourteen years ago Mansell Quinn was sentenced to life imprisonment for stabbing his lover to death. Now he's out and within a matter of hours his ex-wife is found dead a new identity and a new home

no safeguard against murder. Looking to the original case files for clues to the fugitives whereabouts, detectives Diane Fry and Ben Cooper discover there may be other potential victims out there. And as the son of the officer responsible for putting Quinn behind bars, Ben realizes that his own name could be high on the list.

Extrait Chapter One Monday, 12 July 2004 Today was the day Detective Constable Ben Cooper was supposed to have died. For practical purposes, he was already dead. His feet and hands felt icily cold, as if death might be creeping up on him slowly, claiming his body inch by inch. For the past half hour, Cooper had been unable to move his arms or his legs, or even his head. Mud-stained rock filled his vision, every crack and protrusion glistening with dampness in the beams of light that swung across the passage. He could smell the mud and sweat around him, and hear the splashing of water as it echoed in the confined space. The rock was so close to his face that his breath condensed on it and fell back on him as mist. It filled his mouth with the sharp taste of stone. Cooper had never imagined that he'd feel so helpless. The roof seemed to be sinking closer towards him, pressing down to crush his skull. He could sense the mass of the hill poised overhead. One tiny movement of the earth's crust over Derbyshire, and millions of tons of rock would flatten him where he lay. He'd be squeezed to a juice, reduced to an inexplicable red smear for future geologists to find. "Only a few more minutes," said a voice in the darkness, "and we'll reach the Devil's Staircase." Then the light went off the roof, and Cooper could see nothing at all. For a moment, he thought the rock had already crushed him, and he began to panic. His lungs spasmed as if there were no oxygen left for him to breathe. Cooper felt himself tilted violently backwards, but he was strapped in too tightly to move. Looking up from this angle, he saw a cluster of yellow PVC overalls glowing in the sporadic light. Lamps created pools of luminescence around them and distorted their shadows on the roofs and walls. But there were no faces visible in the darkness. He was jolted again. He was sure the stretcher would turn over and tip him on to the floor of the passage, where he'd drown lying helpless in two feet of muddy water. And that would be the end of his career in Derbyshire CID. He'd never expected it to be like this. "I want to die in the daylight," he said. But no one was listening to him. As far as they were concerned, he was already dead.

Detective Sergeant Diane Fry stumbled in the middle of the floor and kicked out in irritation. She'd never thought of herself as a tidy person there were too many messy loose ends in her life for that. And God knew, her flat was a tip; she might have been competing with the students across the landing for the pigsty-of-the-year award. But the intrusion of someone else's untidiness was a different thing altogether. It made her grit her teeth every time she came home from a shift. She'd barely noticed the mess when it was her own clothes thrown on the bathroom floor, but finding a pair of black jeans halfway across the room from the laundry basket reminded her that she was no longer alone. Fry's pager was beeping. She checked the number, scooped up her phone from the edge of the bath, and dialed. "DS Fry here. Yes, sir?" Her boss at E Division, Detective Inspector Paul Hitchens, was at his desk early this morning. Yet he sounded far from alert. "Oh, Fry. Are you on your way in?" "Very shortly." "OK." Fry waited expectantly, but heard nothing except a metallic whirring in the background, as if Hitchens were having some construction work done on his office. "Was there something, sir?" "Oh, just . . . Does the name Quinn mean anything to you, Fry?" "Quinn?" "Mansell Quinn." "I'm sorry, it doesn't." "No. No, it wouldn't." Hitchens sounded as though his mind was on something else entirely. Fry pulled a face and gestured impatiently at the phone, as if she'd been reduced to using sign language to an idiot. "Well, make sure you come and see me before you do anything else, will you, Fry?" "Certainly, sir." Fry shrugged as she ended the call. It was probably nothing. Hitchens was just losing his grip, like everyone else around E Division. But she'd better not be late. There was no time now for clearing up someone else's clothes. Hold on, though. She looked more closely at the jeans on the floor. These weren't someone else's clothes they were hers, bought only a couple of weeks ago during a shopping trip to the Meadowhall Centre in Sheffield. Worse, they'd been a comfort purchase on a day when she'd been feeling particularly down. She hadn't even found a chance to wear them yet. "Angie!" There was no reply from the sitting room, where her sister lay wrapped in a duvet on the sofa. The fact that her sister was asleep irritated Fry even more. "Angie!" She heard a grunt, and a creaking of springs as her sister stirred and turned over. Fry looked at her watch: quarter past eight. She'd better pray the traffic wasn't too bad getting to West Street, or she'd be late. She called again, more loudly, then picked up the jeans and tried to fold them back into their proper shape before laying them on top of the overflowing laundry basket. They were creased and scuffed across the knees, as if Angie had been crawling around the floor in them. They were hardly worth wearing now, despite the money she'd lashed out for the sake of the designer label stitched to the back pocket. Cursing, Fry began to fuss about the bathroom, picking up more items of clothing and shoving them into the basket. She rescued a towel from the bottom of the bath and hung it on the rail. She straightened the curtains, swept up

an empty toothpaste tube and a Tampax wrapper and threw them into the pedal bin. She dampened a cloth and began wiping splashes of soap off the mirror. Then she caught sight of her own reflection, and stopped. She didn't like what she saw. "What's all the noise about?" Angie stood in the doorway wearing only a long T-shirt, scratching herself and peering at her sister through half-open eyes. Fry felt a rush of guilt at the sight of her sister's bare, thin legs. "Nothing." "What are you doing? I thought there must be a fire, or a burglar or something." "No. I'm sorry. You can go back to sleep, if you want." Angie coughed. "I'm awake now, I suppose. Are you going out, Sis?" "I'm on shift this morning." "Yeah. Well, I'll get myself a coffee. Do you want anything?" "I don't have time." "Tidying up? Just before you go to work? You want to slow down, Di. You'll be giving yourself a heart attack if you get so stressed." "Yeah, right." Angie looked at her, puzzled. "You were shouting at me though, weren't you? I'm sure you were. What did you want?" "Nothing," said Fry. "It doesn't matter. You go and get yourself that coffee." "I'm sure I heard you shouting me," Angie said, turning away. "You sounded just like Ma." Fry dropped the damp cloth and leaned on the washbasin for a moment. She listened to Angie shuffling away, her bare feet slapping on the worn tiles in the passage. Fry kept her head lowered. The one thing she didn't want to do was see herself in the mirror again. She didn't want the memories that had been visible for a brief moment in the reflection of her own eyes, in the hard line of her mouth and the frown marks etched into her forehead. Reluctantly, she looked at her watch. She had to go or she'd be late, and she couldn't afford to be late when she had to set an example for the likes of Ben Cooper and Gavin Murfin, who would go wandering off in their own directions in a second if she didn't keep an eye on them. Fry walked into her bedroom to fetch her jacket from behind the door. She was annoyed to see that her hand was shaking as she entered the kitchen. Angie was sitting at the table, staring at her fingernails. "Angie, just now, what did you mean . . . ?" "What?" "When you mentioned Ma. What did you mean?" Angie shrugged. "Nothing really." "But . . ." Fry stopped, defeated. "I've got to go." She went down the wide flight of stairs with its threadbare treads, and left the house by the back door. Number 12 Grosvenor Avenue was one of a series of detached Victorian villas in a tree-lined street, its front door nestling between mock porticos. It had space at the back for Fry to park her Peugeot, and she was glad to be able to get the car off the street, especially when she lay in bed at night listening to the passing drunks. Fry wound the windows down to let some air into the car. It might turn out to be one of the few days in the year when she wished she had air conditioning. She plugged her mobile phone into the cigarette lighter to make sure it would be fully charged by the time she got to West Street. Then she drove up to the corner of Castleton Road and waited for the traffic to clear. She looked at her watch again. Almost eight-thirty. She might not be too late, after all. There was plenty to do, as usual. Today's diary included a meeting to plan an operation against Class A drug misuse and a review of a long-running rape enquiry, as well as prioritizing whatever had happened in the last twenty-four hours. Fry frowned. She hated starting the day with irritations that she couldn't classify. And she had one already this morning, thanks to the call from her DI. What was the name Hitchens mentioned? Quinn? It still meant nothing to her. But she would have to know who the hell was Mansell Quinn? She looked at her phone. There was one person who was sure to know. She didn't really want to talk to him if she could avoid it, but it might be preferable to walking . . .

From Publishers Weekly  
British author Booth's fifth crime novel (after *Blind to the Bones*) is as dark and winding as the labyrinth of caves below its Derbyshire setting. In 1990, Det. Constable Ben Cooper's father arrests Mansell Quinn for the brutal murder of his lover. Thirteen years later, Quinn disappears upon his release from prison, his ex-wife is immediately slain, and another murder soon follows. Convinced they're facing a revenge spree, the police mount a manhunt, probing physical clues and the messy web of relationships that Quinn has not quite left behind. The deeper Cooper and his colleagues probe, the more convinced Cooper becomes that Quinn was innocent of the original crime, a belief that deepens his sense that as the son of the arresting officer, he's personally at risk. Though the pace and focus falter slightly toward the end, this is intelligent, suspenseful reading that should continue to build Booth's U.S. audience. A master of psychological suspense, Booth hauntingly evokes the ambiguities of place and the enduring complexity of human relationships. (Aug.) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.