

A photograph of a white marble statue of a saint on the left and a black winged figure on the right, with text overlaid. The statue is of a man with a halo, holding a staff. The winged figure is in a black robe, seen from behind, standing on a set of stairs. The background is a light-colored wall.

HB

SORRY...
WRONG CHOICE!

David C Jaundrell

These books are dedicated to
Banner
(Wendy Mansell)

Acknowledgements

For their continual patience

Adrian Frost	Grosvenor Casinos (Rank Group)
Chris Purnell	Attachment Theory
Clive Miller	Ex BSAC Advanced Scuba Instructor
Gavin Smith	Fight Tech
Jerome Hamilton	Consultant – Night Club Security
Kenneth KK Downing	Guitarist – Judas Priest (H6)
Liam Bell	Head Gamekeeper – Millichope Park
Mark Corbett (Dr)	Molecular Biologist
Mickey Wernick	Professional poker player and gambler
Neil Channing	Professional poker player and gambler
Roger Higgins	Ladbrokes
Roger Tucker	Ex Prison Governor
Steve Hindley	And the creatures in his dining room

And

Bank of England
Bell Helicopters
Christie's
Ferrari Dealer
Israeli Embassy

Landowners Association

Lear Corporation

Mercedes Dealer

Natural History Museum

Sotheby's

Telford Crematorium

US Treasury

Main Characters

Adrian	Casino Manager
Allan (Scotty) Scott	Operations Manager for H
Andy Pandy	Supplies muscle for 'dirty work'
Angel of Death	Killer
Mr Arnold	Stanley's brother
Arthur	Friend of H
Arvi	Israeli Intelligence
Benshima Reyes (James)	Wife of H. Daughter of old money wealthy Colombian business family
Bernie Shipman	Runs Andy Pandy's taxi businesses
Biggles	Ex RAF Tornado pilot, freelance
Bingo	Pimp
Bob and Pat Watkins	Business owners
Cecilia Everitt nee Johnson	The Bishop's wife
Cerberus	H's poker name
Cleggy Jenkins	Ex gambling industry executive. Adviser to H
Sir Dennis Pothole	Industrialist
Douglas	Hospital Consultant
Edith	Bookkeeper at C&P Holdings
Estelle Romero	Friend of Benshima's

Fiona	Employee of Packster Europe
François-Henri Pinault	Chairman and CEO of PPR
Frida Giannini	Head of Design at Gucci
The Gardener	For the Bishop
Giles Fordyce	Employee of Packster Europe
Harry Cohen	Head of family empire of nightclubs
Henry Johnson	Bishop
J J Group Ltd	Holding company for James companies
James James (H)	Owner of Night Clubs, betting shops, Casino, Secure Security Ltd.
Senor Jesus Serrano	Bank Manager, Colombian Bank
Joey Finstein	Solicitor
John	Kylie's boyfriend
John Skipton	MD C&P Skip Hire
Jon Dewey	Mugger
Jonathon England	Famous footballer
Kylie Rogers	Young mother
Liam Luteene	Head Game Keeper for Sir Dennis
Martin (legals) Gwen	H's Commercial Solicitor
Marty	Night Club Manager
Mary and Charles James	James parents
The Meter Reader	Electricity meter reader

The Middle Man	Middleman
Miguel Carmena	Head of International Investment – Colombian Bank
Norm (the numbers) Phillips	H's accountant
Pamela	Nurse in a hospital
Randolph 'Randy' Zeigler	Head of Packster Europe
Rogan Subramani	Abattoir owner
Samantha Bennet-Coleridge	Friend of Benshima's
Schlomo	Israeli mercenary
Stanley Arnold	
Susie Maguire	Prostitute
Thomas, Richard and Harry Phillips	Brothers and University students
Toby	Senior Manager at H's clubs
Toby Williams	Runaway child

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Chapter 1

A o D

She knew *what* he had done.....the papers told her.

She sort of knew *how* he had done it.....the Court case exposed a little of that.

But *why* had he done it.....?

.....It was dark, and he felt wonderful. It was three days before Christmas and, as he had for several years, he was going to get a woman. He limited himself, with women, to the Holy Days around Christmas in December, Ash Wednesday in February, Good Friday in April, Ascension Day in May and then a long time to get back to Christmas. Such a long time. But the command from God and a solemn vow of obedience cannot be taken lightly and dismissed on a whim. A vow is a VOW.....

He saw a woman standing at the end of the badly lit road under a dim street light. Slowing down he looked up at the ceiling in the car and made sure there was no glow from his halo and moved around in his seat to make his wings more comfortable under his jacket. Stopping by the woman he wound down the window. 'Do you use your mouth?'

'Eh?'

'You know.....?'

'You mean a blow job?' Asked the twenty-one year old who looked fifty, with bruises up her arm from the needle that entered far too often. In the gloom of his car, she did not see his face turn red, or the anxiety invade it as he felt his wings shudder. Blow job? Blow job? Disgust filled his being. He

looked at the ceiling and knew the glow from his halo had dimmed from the obscenity that stood outside the car door.

‘Yes...’

‘That all you want?’

‘Yes,’ he said quietly.

‘Nothing else?’

‘No.’

‘Here?’

‘Somewhere a bit more private if you don’t mind. I’m a bit.....shy.’

‘Where?’

‘I don’t mind. We’ll just drive down there a bit and pull over somewhere. I don’t mind.’

‘It’s fifty,’ she said. It was usually twenty for a blow job, but he looked desperate and so was she for another fix.

‘Ok.’

‘Half when I get in, half when I’ve finished.’

‘Ok.’

‘No more than fifteen minutes.’

‘Ok.’

She got in; he fished half the money out of his pocket, gave it to her and pulled away. When he came to a quiet and deserted spot, he pulled over and said, ‘I have to go for a pee. I won’t be a minute.’

He reached over to the back seat, clicked something in a holdall, got out of the car and went into the darkness. The hissing from the back seat confused her but crack cocaine had dulled her mind, and it was far too late when she realised there was a problem. At that point, the gas from the canister had rendered her unconscious...

He left it a few minutes, watching nearby to see if she moved, but she was out like a light. Going back to the car he opened the doors for a few moments to clear the gas, got in and drove off.

In his head 'The Sisters of Mercy' by Leonard Cohen was going around, but he had changed the lyrics.

*Oh the Angel of Death
He has not departed or gone
He is waiting for you
When you thought it was safe to go on
He'll bring you comfort
As he gave me the words to this song
I do hope you meet him
I know you've been waiting so long.....*

*Oh.....the Angel of Death knows
You have been waiting.....so.....long.....*

He drove thirty miles to a dark, desolate and now deserted old industrial area and parked in the shadows. Dragged her out and across twenty yards of wet ground, her heels leaving tracks, he dropped her with a soft thud.

Going back to the car he took out a child's carry cot and placed it by her. Patting down the earth with his feet to make sure it was stable and didn't rock he went back for the butchers' carving knife and several small trinkets.

Seeing her take a larger intake of air he knew she was close to coming round, so he grabbed her hair and started hacking at her neck. Blood spurted as her heart continued to pump and he felt its warmth over his face. God had told him this ritual cleansed their blood and the demons within it would be

made safe and harnessed within him to further the Lord's aims. He continued cutting, her body convulsing, until her head was completely severed then he placed it meticulously in the carrycot, bringing the warm blanket up to just over her neck and put the trinkets each side of the head.

Moving away a little he knelt down and started to pray. After several minutes he got up, his trouser knees wet and with the knife carved the initials A o D in the earth.

They had worked out a long time ago that it stood for *Angel of Death* but had missed the main point, that of Anno Domini, the coming of Our Lord. And in a few days, it was The Coming of our Lord.....

And he, like the Three Wise Men, had given the Lord a Christmas present.

As the Lord would have wanted...

He found his twenty-five pounds in the pocket of the still warm corpse, went back to the car and circuitously and within the speed limits drove home.

Chapter 2

The Christmas Party

Allan Scott got back from his sojourn at Beachy Head, and he was knackered. It was hard work gearing yourself up for suicide, getting interrupted, going through the process again and getting interrupted again. Then having to think it through again..... And then not do it... Can't a man die in peace for Christ's sake?

I am, thought The Pope as the Cardinals walked in to a meeting he had forgotten and saw him up the nun's arse, well and truly fucked...

He liked his little one liners and made them up whenever he needed a comparison with regard to 'fucked up' or doing something he didn't really want to do but was going to end up having to.....or when he was a bit anxious.....or when he just felt like it.

He was quite startled by what he found at home. Nothing! Nothing had changed! Somehow he thought it would all have been different, but he remembered that he had just decided, on the spur of the moment really, to emulate a lemming and hadn't left notes, done the washing up, hoovered or anything.....

And so here we are again...he hummed, Happy as could be. All good friends. And jolly good company. Boom! Boom!

Feeling cold he turned up the central heating, put on the gas fire and made himself a cup of hot tea. He pulled up a chair in front of the fire, put his wireless laptop on his lap and found

the email from the boss.

Later that day, Christmas Day, he presented himself at the James apartment and, shown in by Benshima, couldn't believe how big it was. Jesus! He suddenly realised that although he knew what the boss's companies made, they were just numbers on a piece of paper. Big numbers certainly, but they had no life. They represented nothing other than figures. But this space, bloody hell, this space must represent millions! Looking around he was now uncertain whether he should have come back from Beachy Head!? Jesus! If that was to make him feel good, with all the wealth and all the accoutrement, what the hell would the boss do to make him feel bad? Take him to Abramovich? Jesus. How the other half lived.....

His lack of success reared its ugly head, and he took a deep breath. Beachy Head?

I am, thought the Virgin Mary as she felt a tiny kick in her tummy, well and truly fucked.

It was still a holiday tomorrow..... If at first, you don't succeed.....

H came over with another man in tow and grabbed Allan's hand.

'Good to see you, Allan,' said H, 'this is Ray Clowes, who owns a large group of companies. We're both in the Ferrari club, and I was telling Ray what a whiz you were with figures and comparative data, and how you found out about the guy who was scamming our internet site. Just from data. Bloody impressive.'

'Thank you, boss.'

‘Ray would like to have a word with you about that. Ray doesn’t have anyone like you in his organisation, and by the way, I’ve told him that if he tries to lure you away, his Ferrari will be in a lake somewhere, so he’d like to have a word with you later. That ok?’

‘Sure, boss, whatever I can do to help.’

I am, thought David Attenborough as he saw the glint of lust in the great ape’s eyes, completely fucked.....

‘I’ve also told Ray that I can’t afford to lose you at the moment, but later this year, if there’s time, we could always hire you to them for a while at one or two days a week. We’ll see. Anyway, talk to Ray later.’

‘Ok, boss.’

‘Good to meet you, Allan,’ said Ray, ‘catch up with you later,’ and he wandered off.

‘I’ll talk to you later about the Casino,’ said H, ‘did you get time to look at what I sent you?’

‘Yes, boss.’

‘You don’t have to call me boss, you know.’

‘I know, but I’m ok with that if you are.’

‘If you’re comfortable with it?’

‘Yes. I know where I stand.....’

H smiled. ‘Ok.’

He turned as Benny called him, ‘Excuse me, Allan.’

Allan made his way over to the buffet food and grabbed a couple of sandwiches. He was starving but decided that filling his face wasn’t the thing to do so he wandered off to a corner, ate them, and slowly, circuitously, wandered back for another lot. He put more food on his plate then one of the ladies who had been hired for the night came round serving red wine,

white wine or champagne. Allan looked at the label on the champagne and saw Louis Roederer.

Shit! Cristal Champagne! He had heard about it and knew it was called that because the bottle was made from lead crystal to make it stronger which allowed it to have a flat bottom, but he had never drunk any. He had never had expensive champagne in his life. The nearest he came to it was when Tesco had a deal from £36 to £20, and he bought two. Two! For a special occasion. He remembered they were still in the fridge.....

Balancing his plate of goodies in one hand, he reached over to get a glass of champagne in the other and watched as the sandwiches started to slide off. He quickly tilted his hand the other way, but he also did it with his other hand which tipped some of the drink over the lady. Would it ever end, he thought to himself? Beachy Head here I come.

‘I’m ever so sorry.....I’m just a cretin.’

She smiled nicely at him. ‘I’m sure you’re not...’

‘Believe me...I am. That’s just a minor demonstration of my cretinous powers. I could be a superhero...Cretin Man! Look there’s Cretin Man flying into another wall! There’s Cretin Man downing another plane. There’s Cretin Man sinking another luxury liner..... We’re going to die, let’s call for Cretin Man! No, better to die this way.....’

She giggled. ‘No harm done,’ she said softly.

He was still mumbling to himself and looking at the floor when the tone in her voice permeated his brain. He looked down, in a roundabout kind of way, at her hand and whether there was a wedding ring.

‘I’m not married,’ she said, ‘are you?’

‘No.....a long time ago yes, but Cretin Man....you know... Why are you working today?’

‘I’m helping out a friend, and the money comes in handy.’

He nodded. Taking a deep breath, he blurted out, ‘At the risk of saying something that comes out ridiculous would you consider joining me for a drink or something.....one evening? Pictures.....?’ He tailed off, his voice getting quieter.

‘That’s fine. I’ll give you my number before I go,’ and she started to turn round.

‘Before you go.....I don’t have anything like.....’ he said apologetically and held out his arms to encompass the room, catching a large yucca with one arm and dropping his sandwiches. He despaired.

I am, thought John Glenn as he heard a tiny pssst in his helmet, well and truly fucked.

She smiled. ‘That’s fine....See you later,’ and off she went to dab at her wet tunic and serve more drinks.

Jesus! Thought Scotty, Santa Claus had friggin arrived! He then realised he didn’t know her name and she hadn’t asked his.....? *Quite the Lothario aren’t you*, he said sarcastically to himself.

Chapter 3

The Meter Reader

The meter reader arrived at the house which was obviously deserted. It didn't look deserted, but in his job, he knew deserted when he saw it. It was like going home to an empty house. You *know* it's empty as soon as you step through the door. Everything about it is *empty*. It has no life, no soul, no welcome. It just sits there and ignores you... In this particular instance, he knew there was no one there as he had read the report in the paper about a Mister Arnold who had vanished into thin air and hadn't been seen for several weeks.

He was a few minutes early, and then he saw the car pull up. Arnold's brother had a spare key to let him get in to read the meter. They went in and while the brother made sure everything was as it was when he checked three days ago he went to the cupboard under the stairs. Peering in, he looked at the meter and became puzzled.

'Mr Arnold,' he shouted.

'Yes?'

'What appliances are on in the house at the moment?'

'Other than the lights, none that I'm aware of at the moment. Why?'

'The meter's spinning round. Something is using electricity, and a reasonable amount.'

Arnold joined him, and they watched the meter spin round. Grown men watching a little dial spin round...

'Is there anything on in the garage?'

‘No. I was in there the other day, and there’s just his car and some golf clubs.’

‘They don’t use much power,’ said the meter reader.

‘You’ve obviously seen him hit a golf ball.’

‘Good one.’

The conversation was taking on a surreal slant.

‘Something’s definitely on somewhere. That’s a fair current usage.’

‘I may have missed something. Shall we have a look around?’

‘Ok.’

‘What are we looking for?’

‘I don’t know, but a fire, or several kettles, or several freezers...’

‘That much current?’

‘Oh yes...’

They searched the house, garage and shed but found nothing.

‘I’m just popping to the van for a minute,’ Meter Reader said and off he went, returning a few minutes later with a small handheld device.

‘Checks for circuits in walls; mainly so you don’t drill there, but this should find something. With luck.’

He thought for a moment.

‘If we start in the kitchen it may be they’ve taken a spur off there as the kitchen tends to hold the biggest current users.’

He wandered around the kitchen putting the detector by wall sockets. ‘Here! This one’s using current.’

He moved the detector in a circle around the socket until he found the cable that was taking the current. It travelled downwards, in the wall, behind the kitchen cabinets, then down farther.

‘Is there a basement?’

‘I don’t think so.’

‘You may be wrong.....’ He said in a concerned voice.

He had no idea why he felt concerned, but he did. It was a bit like the empty house. You *knew*. They looked at all the floors, but there was nothing; then in the hall, Arnold moved the rug and saw the trap door. For some reason, the meter reader put his hand to his mouth as though to suppress something. Whether it was the meter reader’s unease permeating him or whether something else Arnold didn’t really want to open the trap door. He didn’t really want to do it... He looked at the meter reader.

‘What do you think?’

‘I don’t know. I really don’t know. This doesn’t feel good at all to me but....’

‘Should we call the police?’

‘Well, this may sound cowardly, but I’d like to. This isn’t right,’ said the meter reader. ‘Shall I?’ He nodded to the phone but then thought a long thought. ‘How about we just take one peek as we’re going to look like real prunes if he’s left a model train set running.’

They grinned. That was better. They could cope with a model train set.

They knelt down by the trap door. Arnold pulled up the inset handle and slowly opened the door. The room glowed from the bulb that provided light, was warm from the small electric fire that provided heat, had quiet voices from the tele that provided company and stunk from the diarrhoea that had covered the bed when he was too weak to move. They put their heads at floor height to better see in and then they saw the skeletal figure of the child.

'Now I'll call the police,' said Arnold, but dreading the world knowing what this was all about and what his brother had been up to.

He knew he had always had a thing for little children, but Stanley had always said it was because he had never married and had missed out on bringing his own son up.

It would seem that may have been a touch disingenuous and he sensed this was going to turn out to be very, very bad for the family.

Chapter 4

B & P

Robert and Patricia, brother and sister, better known as Bob and Pat, loving father and mother; or bastards, or arseholes, or thugs depending on what your relationship was with them, had a very successful company. Well, several actually, but their main contributor was the security company. The security company had been their first foray into business, and from there they had bought other enterprises and done very well in the Canaries, buying a few apartments with the cash they got on the side.

The security company was an obvious starting place for them in adult life as they had been operating the same type of company at school. Pat would go to the 'contracted' kids and take the money and Bob would leave them alone. Contracts were for a term and worked well. Non-contracted kids got beaten up, and then they also became contracted. Bob and Pat learned early on that it was better to take a percentage of everybody's money rather than all of it. The braver ones kicked up about that and told a teacher or a parent, so they scaled it down so that they took enough to fund their lifestyle but not enough so that the unfortunates that were funding it complained.

As a business model, it worked well.....

So when they left school and started their respective jobs, it wasn't long before they were deciding to do something 'on their own' and not be told what to do by someone else. That

went against the grain....just a touch.

Not far from their run down housing estate a new, private development was being constructed but, as was usual, also used as a playground cum battleground at night which caused a fair amount of damage. Bob went to the local builder and talked to him about the damage and although the builder had little confidence in the well-built youth before him, they agreed a deal. So Bob went to work doing what he did best. Intimidation!

He stayed there every night for two weeks, and after that, there was no need as every vandal had either been verbally persuaded to go away and never come back or half beaten to death. Bob also found out that if you did the latter first, the former was self-explanatory.

It became a sort of unofficial company logo. Hurt first; talk second. Bob had found his metier. Indeed, even now one of Bob's favourite pastimes was walking alone around a deprived, rough, tough area of Liverpool at night and hoping, *hoping*, someone had a go at him. Maybe even two or three. Now *that* was fun!

He went from site to site and got work. Where sites were not being vandalised, he arranged it and then went back again to sort it out; which wasn't too difficult.

The business and profits grew in B & P Security. He was the muscle and Pat the strategic brains. He knew how much pressure to exert, how much intimidation to undertake. She knew how much to squeeze them for, looked after the money and made sure it worked for them by putting it into anything else that made money.

One was council houses. When the Tories allowed the sale of council houses, Pat arranged for a team of people to knock on doors and persuade them to buy their house off the Council at a massive discount, take a lump sum of money off Pat and move out. Then Pat would rent it out and buy it after the three years 'no sell' period was up. Pat also arranged the finance via B & P Mortgages for the people and inserted a clause that said if they ever missed a payment the house would be owned by the Lender. As it was Pat that was covering the mortgage payments, there was always a missing payment.....

And so they grew. They acquired more security work and what they didn't get with quotes they got by muscling the company off the site that did get the business. Where a construction company refused to have external security, Bob would persuade them. Torching a partially built house if necessary..... That tended to do it.

And Pat would expand by buying out other, smaller, weaker companies. 'Buying out' was a relative term and certainly, money would change hands, but it was explained quite clearly that if the miserly offer were not accepted the owner wouldn't have any hands to accept anything with.....

In due course, like the rest of the industry, they had to get a National Security Inspectorate Certificate to BS 9001. A visit from the Inspector and the subsequent inspections all went well, and they received the Award and the legitimacy that it theoretically brought. The inspector got his £5000 in used 50's.

And as a spin-off from the construction site security, they moved into waste removal. Over the years they built up a large and successful business hauling waste away in skips or ro-ro containers; theoretically to landfill sites but in reality to valleys in fields owned by dodgy farmers, or lakes, or streams or just about anywhere there was no tipping fee involved. Legally, actually, illegally, this was known as 'fly-tipping'. Fly tipping was defined by the authorities as the 'illegal deposit of waste onto any land', but the definition that B & P Skip Hire used was 'the illegal deposit of waste onto any land that resulted in considerably more profit than would have been if legally deposited'.

And so from their base in Liverpool, they had, over the years, moved south and now had a large organisation that provided security dotted around England. Though not big they were certainly profitable. Pat knew that their main area was construction and with the possible meltdown of that industry due to the Northern Rock debacle they needed other income streams but within the same industry. She knew that protection for clubs, events, celebs, etc. was one of those streams, so she cast her eyes about for a company to acquire.

There was one, part of a Group owned by one man, that included bookies and casinos and while he may be doing very well, he would more than likely not put up too much of a fight just for this one company.

She sat down with Bob, and they talked about it, and Pat agreed she should arrange to meet with Mister James James.

Chapter 5

Andy Pandy reads the paper

Andy Pandy sat in his office at the taxi company that he owned but only visited occasionally. Surprisingly it was a very successful company run by a manager who had been with Andy from the early days as a driver. It had been quite obvious early on that although Andy needed a business front to hide his other activities he was no manager. Andy was more from the Genghis Khan School of Management; *do as you're told, or you die.....*however as killing every useless taxi driver was a touch impractical it tended to be, *do as you're told or fuck off!*

Labour laws, shortage of skilled drivers and his poor office skills led Andy Pandy to believe there was a better way. He needed a business....*he had a business....*it wasn't doing very well.....*he was a poor manager....*but he had other.....skills..... that could help the business flourish in relation to the competition.

Ergo....find a good manager, take a back seat and just make sure that it went in the right direction and made money.

Bernie Shipman had become a taxi driver because he was pissed off working for idiots and this allowed him to wander about without people asking him stupid questions and demanding stupid things. Other than the passengers that was, who asked the most ridiculous of things.

He was once asked by two young girls where they could get an abortion? A fucking abortion! Why were they asking him? Maybe they knew about the toolbox in the boot and the fact that, at home with the wife, he could push and wriggle his long, slim fingers up her pussy and by making his hand as small as possible, he could get his whole hand inside her and up to his wrist. Then he would open up his hand in the shape of a fist so that it squeezed against the walls of her vagina and it would take her breath away.....and her orgasm gushed. The problem came when he had to take it out. Sometimes it was a touch tight and once they had to wait nearly two hours until her vagina was relaxed enough to get his hand out. Two hours! How many men had been stuck in a woman's pussy for two hours? Two minutes was a long time..... Shit! And it had been so uncomfortable... After nearly an hour she said what he hoped and prayed she wouldn't, 'I have to pee....' Shit!

So he did have the qualifications to do the job, plus a toolbox with a rusty screwdriver and odds and sods in the boot, plus the ability to get on up there but Anyhow, he hadn't got a clue where you got an abortion, and by the look of them they were still in infant school.....they shouldn't even know what a prick was at that age let alone have one up them. Shit! Ah well...

And he was once asked, by an American couple, to take them to Edinburgh Castle. Eh?

We want to see Edinburgh Castle.....

He was in south London for fuck's sake. Edinburgh must be about four or five hundred miles away? How would he know he had never been....? But they insisted, and he squared it with Andy who demanded an upfront deposit of roughly the

cost of the trip and off they went. As they passed the Midlands, they saw the signs for The Lake District, and off they detoured. They were delighted with the Lake District and thought it magical in an *English* way but the lakes....? Lakes? They were a little like ponds.

From there he took them to Gretna Green which they had read about and where they stood outside the Blacksmiths shop and remarried with Bernie as the best man. They knew that the ancient tradition of the 'handfasting' ceremony for marrying couples over the age of sixteen was a quirk that had existed since 1754 up until the 1940's when Lord Hardwicke introduced the Marriage Act in England which prescribed an age of consent of 21, and you had to be married in a church. This was mostly designed to make sure that the daughters of the wealthy did not fall into the hands of unscrupulous gold diggers.

Scotland refused to adopt this law and once couples discovered this loophole they, in turn, were quick to take advantage and eloped to marry over the border. Gretna Green was the nearest point and soon became a haven for fleeing couples. The simple civil ceremony enabled couples over the age of 16 to marry by declaring in front of two witnesses their wish to be husband and wife and they were legally bound. At the Blacksmiths Shop, the canny Blacksmith soon downed his tools and took up the role of 'Blacksmith Priest'. For nearly 200 years the Blacksmiths at Gretna Green continued to marry couples over the now famous Marriage Anvil.

And then up to Edinburgh castle which they enjoyed but still thought it a little small. Nice.....but small. They had seen the estate of Randolph Hearst in California which nestled in the hills of San Simeon between Los Angeles and San Francisco and if just a rich American could build that then why couldn't the Kings and Queens of England, once the most powerful country in the world, build something a touch larger and grander than this?

But it was quaint.....

In due course, they arrived back at Andy's taxi company and settled the bill which was more than Bernie earned in a year. They also gave Bernie a tip which was equal to a year's salary and thanked him profusely for all his time and effort.....and if ever he wanted to visit.....?

And Andy Pandy now had six taxi companies within a thirty-mile radius and run by Bernie. Andy had given Bernie a third of the shares and was not involved in any day to day activities. When he was there, it was either because he was bored and he read his paper and bellowed through to one of the girls to get him coffee, or he had meetings to agree on strategy with Bernie. There were two strategic areas where Andy got involved; expansion and contraction. The first, expansion, involved them agreeing to widen their geographic or office network based on Bernie's analysis of current business trends and opportunities. The second, contraction, involved them agreeing that a new competitor would be closed down using whatever method Andy's analysis of the situation merited.

It worked well and was capitalism personified.

Today was a boring day. Andy shouted through to the main office, 'Janet!'

He could have just picked up the phone, but old habits die hard. Janet bustled in. 'Coffee?'

'Does a duck bark? Does a pig sing? Does the pope like little boys?'

'Coffee then...'

Andy paused for a moment. 'I think I'll have a change...'

She stood, waiting.

'Have we still got the gin in the fridge?'

'Yes.'

'Tonic?'

'Yes.'

'Fresh lemon?'

'Yes.'

'That'll do me,' said Andy.

Several minutes later when she came back with his coffee, she found him with his feet up on the desk reading the paper.

'Thanks, Jan.'

'Just shout when you want another, Andy,' she smiled back at him. It was nice, she thought, as she closed his door, not to have a boss who groped your tits and arse...

It was nestled on the sixth page of The Guardian, and he nearly missed it. In fact, he read it cursorily and carried on, but three pages later he stopped, and went back and reread it. And read it again and wondered what to do....?

Should he tell H? H had a paper anyhow so he would know soon. Better if H read it for himself? Preferably.

What if he missed it?.....then he missed it....

But he would want to know?.....true.

It will piss him off....*so fucking true*.

Could any blame be attached to Andy?.....no.

To H?....not really, although he won't see it that way.

Bite the bullet, Andrew..... As he reached for the phone it rang so he automatically picked it up. 'Yes?' said Andy.

As a potential customer on the other end of the phone started talking the door burst open and Janet rushed in.

'Andy!' she said sternly.

Andy looked sheepish and said into the phone, 'I'm just transferring you,' and pressed the hold button.

'Grrrrrrrr,' she growled at him with a cheeky smile on her face.

'Sorry,' said Andy, 'I was just going for the phone and it went off, and I picked it up and.....'

'Grrrrrrrr,' she grrrrred again.

'Sorry,' said Andy meekly as she went out again.

'Fucking sorry,' he said sarcastically but very quietly to himself as the door closed behind her.

A long time ago Andy answered the phone, but nowadays he was banned. And as far as Andy was concerned it was a travesty of justice, and he was really the innocent party.....

It had all started when a fare wanted picking up, and a cab had broken down on its way and Andy, good soul that he was, a veritable Francis of Assisi, had taken a spare cab and did it himself. The fare was a woman in her forties; overweight, with layers of flesh, bright red leotard leggings and a plunging top showing her heaving bosom. With her was a young obese child. She pointed the direction to go, and after a hundred yards she said, 'Tesco.'

'Shop there a lot do you?' enquired Andy.

'Quite a lot. Why?'

'Well, you're not exactly slim, are you?'

'Pardon?!' she exploded.

‘It looks like you stayed there overnight and your kid helped you finish off the chocolate.’

‘How dare you!’ she screamed, ‘she is not overweight, and I am certainly not more than a few pounds over and anyhow my husband likes me this way.’

‘Is he blind or old or something?’

‘How dare you!’ She screamed again, ‘Let me out! Let me out this minute!’

Andy did as he was told and told her how much the fare was but she just pointed menacingly at him. ‘You will hear more about this...’ and, dragging the child, stormed off.

Early that evening Andy was sitting at his desk when a call came through which he took. ‘Can I help you?’ he said politely.

‘The Manager, please,’ said the man.

‘Can I ask who’s calling or what it’s about?’

‘Tell him my name is Thomas, and I want to complain about the treatment my wife received today, and I also want compensation for the trauma she went through.’

‘Just hold a minute please, I’ll get him.’

Two or three minutes later Andy came back on the phone, ‘Manager here.’

‘I have a complaint,’ said the man.

‘I’m sorry, sir, but you have the wrong number. We’re a taxi company, not the doctors....’

‘No, you idiot, I want to complain about the treatment my wife received today from an employee of your firm.’

‘I think I know something about that, sir. Would that be the fat bitch with the flesh spilling over her leggings, big flabby tits and obese kid?’

Andy heard nothing for a moment, and then the line went dead. Thirty minutes later his office door was thrown open, and a man rushed in. He was about five foot six and no more than eleven stone.

Andy looked at him. Fucking hell. What women did to men..... Egging on this poor little bastard to come and sort them out. Poor little fucker. Any smaller and Andy could have stamped on him.

‘Whoa, whoa, little feller,’ said Andy, ‘I’m a bit bigger than you so calm down.’

‘You insulted my wife,’ he shouted.

‘Pal, if you had done a bit more of that yourself, she’d be half the size she is now, and we wouldn’t be about to have a fight which you’re gonna lose.....’

The man stopped dead still and looked at the floor. His shoulders sagged, and he suddenly deflated. ‘Can I sit down?’ he asked quietly.

‘Sure,’ said Andy. ‘Tea?’

‘Yes, please.’

Andy arranged it.

‘She’s very difficult, you know.’

‘I bet.’

‘Very difficult.....’

‘Big fat cows usually are...’

‘You don’t have to keep insulting her...’

‘Sorry.’

‘What can I do?’

‘Turn the udder cheek.....?’

‘That’s not funny!’

‘Sorry.’

Andy could have suggested he go home and smack her about a bit, but that was tantamount to giving him a death sentence.

‘What can I do?’ he wailed.

‘Can’t help you there, mate....’

He stayed for half an hour drinking tea and blubbering, and Andy wished he’d never seen him. He really wasn’t into men dominated by women.....

The next day Bernie told Andy he could no longer do fares or take calls. Just leave it all to him and pick up the cheque at the end of the month, ok?

Andy wasn’t really into being told what to do by men either but it was Bernie and Bernie knew best. Andy was a firm believer in the ‘you don’t keep a dog and bark yourself’ school of thought.

Ah, fuck it.

Andy picked up the phone and rang H.....

Chapter 6

Kylie

Kylie Rogers was pretty, but her face was drawn and tired; the result of too many lives and too much time spent trying to get them to exist with each other. Not so much with each other, more not knowing about each other. She was a single mom, University student, engaged and, to help ends meet, part-time prostitute. Of course the last bit, the prostitute bit, was the bit that tended to be hidden. That was the life that existed but did not exist. Sometimes even to her.

It wasn't a life she liked, but somehow, when she was a young mother, it had presented itself, and it had been a way out. And initially, it hadn't been that bad. They had been fooling around in the pub, and someone had said, jokingly, sort of.... 'I'll give you a fiver for a hand job,' and everybody laughed, but later she made a fiver. So initially it was just hand jobs for a fiver; then she had it in her mouth but didn't swallow for an extra fiver. Then a fuck for twenty, then someone persuaded her to let him stick it up her arse but gave her a hundred. Then one night someone held her head, and she had to swallow..... so the price increased!

It was easy money really. It was what you did for nothing with people you liked... It wasn't so much that she disliked the people who bought her, in fact, most were ok, but it was the fact that there was no choice... They were all shapes and sizes; different colours, different smells, different skin textures, different degrees of masculinity. And how could you

like them all? Be comfortable with them all? How could you? So you turned off and *did*.

And while she, or they, were *doing*, her mind went over what she had learned at Uni that week; and she tried to make more sense of it, or memorise more of it or start composing her homework in her head. What she never did, was thinking of the man who she loved and who loved her. She couldn't square getting fucked by strangers and then getting fucked by a kind, gentle man who loved her and cared for her little daughter, so when she was with the strangers she shut off..... They could have been anybody. She would more than likely remember their face if she saw them again but if she was asked to describe them.....no chance. But soon this life would be over. Just twelve more months to get through Uni, then a job, independence and then they could get married. Just twelve months....actually less than ten.

Chapter 7

Messin' about on the river

On his drive up to the casino the 5.5 litre S-Class Merc swished up the motorway, its seven-speed automatic box invisibly doing the work, when the onboard computer very kindly told him he was getting low on fuel. He pulled into the next service station, put a hundred pounds in, bought The Times and wandered into the loo. Putting on the cold tap, he cupped his hands and had a drink of water. He could have bought a bottle from the shop but a pound for water? No way.....

He had Radio Four on as usual. Melvin Bragg had his team of experts discussing something that H's brain struggled to comprehend, but it was good listening. He had listened to everything from 'Wittgenstein – a philosophy of linguistics' to 'Zoroastrianism – was the religion of the Persian Empire the first monotheism?' to 'Paganism in the Renaissance' to, etc. etc.

This morning he had tried to get to grips with the concept of 'multi-universes'; not just one universe which in itself takes some grasping but loads of them! How the hell could there be more than one? How could there even be one? And how could it all have emanated from something the size of a pin head in the Big Bang? It was all logical on the 'reductio ad absurdum' principle but...totally illogical.

At least to him.

On Desert Island Discs someone whose name he missed had asked for 'Messin' about on the River' from Wind in the Willows. I'm always messin' about on the river, thought H. Bastards always get you on the river! He listened intently as the Harman Kardon fourteen speaker sound system oared and splashed out the song.....

His brain went into creative mode.

Da da da da da dah, Da da da da da dah..... Messing about on the river...

About half past ten, me and the men

Go messin' about on the river

Da da da da dah.....

An hour later he got to the Casino to be met by the Manager who was deputising for Ade who was on a long deserved holiday. 'Good morning, James.'

'Morning, Mike. Going to my office and don't want to be disturbed for an hour, ok?'

The Manager nodded. 'You want tea sending up?'

'Every fifteen minutes.'

And he ran up the stairs. Sitting at his desk, he took out a pad and one of his £1 fountain pens from his pack of 12. He turned on the computer, went into Word, googled the song by Tony Hatch, copied the words to use for tempo and then racked his brains. If he could write a poem for Benshima about the moon in June, he could certainly do one about poker.....

Almost certainly..... More than likely.....

About half past ten, me and the men go messin' about on the river

Da da da da da dah.....

Every fifteen minutes a mug of tea arrived. H looked up from the monitor, blinked to focus, said, 'Thank you,' and was lost again.

'It must be very important,' said the girl to the Manager. 'Very.....'

Two hours later he sat back and stared at the screen. Done! His baby had arrived! He read it over.

The Poker Song

(to the tune 'Messin' about on the River' – thank you, Tony Hatch)

About half past ten, me and the men
Go messin' about on the river
To the pub or the club, wherever there's grub
We're messin' about on the river
There are Aces and Kings and all sorts of pairs
Straights, trips and quads that you may get there
With shades on your face, there's no finer place
While messin' about on the river

You're beat by ten three, and that shouldn't be
They've caught you again on the river
And if you get in a race with your Seven and Ace
You'll be messin' about on the river
Raises and calls and lay downs and guts
Your opponents get cards referred to as *the nuts*
With bullets in your hand, you just hadn't planned
To be messin' about on the river

*The River, the river
You'll get me on the river*

*I may be winning now
But you'll get me in the end.....*

I've got a small pair, trips could be there
I'll call you right up to the river
And with two suited cards, it can't be that hard
To get a flush by the river
High cards and low cards and sevens you play
When it comes to the flop, you don't have a say
And when someone's bluffing, and you go with Ace, King
You're likely to lose on the river

I go on the net but all that I get
Is messing about on the river
My Ace Ace should sing but a five and a king
Becomes a full house on the river
I've bought some software that gives you odds
But it has no formula for playing stupid sods
It shows positive EV, but what do I see?
His twos are a flush by the river

So I play the cheap games, but it's just the same
Messin' about on the river
And when I pull it off, they type in f... off
For messin' about on the river
I'm put next to someone, all-in every hand
I know I have to just make a stand
So I get Ace Ace and stick that in his face
He gets three twos on the river

*The River, the river
You'll get me on the river*

*I may be winning now
But you'll get me in the end.....*

Group one is mine, I'm called by Group nine
I'm beaten again on the river
I do the sums when I play with the bums
But they still wipe me out on the river
I know that a flush is one eighteen to one,
I've played thousands of hands but never got one
Stick the odds up your arse I think they're a farce
Odds are I'll get screwed on the river

xxxxxx

Negreaunu and Chan and Brunson, the man
Try and steer clear of the river
They work out the odds, fleecing the clods
Who hope for a card on the river
I play just like Ivey so what's going on?
I still don't know where they're coming from
Anyhow..... leave me alone, I'm not going home
I'm messin' about on the river.....

*The River, the river
You'll get me on the river
I may be winning now
But you'll get me in the end.....*

Now that was a man's poem! Not a sissy *moon in June* poem like Benshima *made* him do! He read it several times then emailed it to all his poker playing mates....and anyone else he could think of. Maybe Elton John would like to sing it? Possibly.....? Wonder if he plays poker?

And then he had a thought, looked on the net for the website of Tony Hatch and sent him a copy saying he hoped he liked it and maybe he could put it to music as the world needed a good poker song...

He got no immediate reply from Tony Hatch offering a song collaboration contract, so he got up from his chair and went downstairs to find Mike. After a few minutes asking questions, H knew he was in no mood for business. And he missed Ade. Ade had all the knowledge, all the stats, all the answers. Mike was a manager, but Ade *managed*. It occurred to H how many people he had met who were called *Managers* but couldn't manage anything. Scary! H knew instinctively that to manage meant to *lead*. And to manage you needed to want to *control*. You needed to want to control your own destiny. You wanted people to do what you said, not the other way round. If those things were not in your makeup, you couldn't manage. That style of management was proactive, the other reactive.....

He went back to his office and asked for another tea. Leaning back on his executive chair with his feet on his expensive, highly polished desk he felt a bit irritated. He had achieved nothing at all today except wasting a lot of petrol, and he realised he felt a bit guilty.

A poker song and not much else....a good one nevertheless as no doubt *Tony* would realise. Maybe he'd just ring with an offer?

He picked up the phone and rang Scotty. After the initial 'Morning, boss' from Scotty, H said, 'Scotty, it's time we did an appraisal of our little empire. Can you put it together for me....very simply....for next Thursday? Okay....see you then, Scotty.'

Chapter 8

The hospital

‘Wake up little fella....wake up little fella.....come on....come on.....wake up little fella.....come on....wake up now.....come on.....’

Toby’s brain had been quite happy putting lights on the Christmas tree and getting a new bike and riding it down the road, so it was a bit miffed to be interrupted. Where it was, it was peaceful and happy and safe, and it had no wish to leave.

‘Wake up little fella....wake up little fella.....come on....come on.....wake up little fella.....come on.....wake up now....come on.....’

The lady’s voice permeated farther in to the point where his brain turned off the Christmas tree lights, stopped riding the bike and gave her his attention...

He opened his eyes to see a lady in white bending over him. When she saw his eyes open, she moved back slightly and said gently, ‘Hello....did you enjoy your sleep?’

It had been touch and go, and they weren’t sure whether he would live.....another day and definitely not.

The police had arrived just before the ambulance, and after it had left they had sealed the house and grounds with their ‘*don’t you dare go past here*’ tape.

They already had a ‘missing person’ on the owner of the house, and now they had kidnap and possible murder. This was more like it. This was what made policing fun. This made

it worth being a copper. This made the news and got the coppers on it. This was the oxygen to the fire of self-aggrandizement and promotion. No longer were written bulletins read out, now the detective would give his 'opinion'. He would say how they 'felt' for the child and their 'thoughts' were for the family that must have been haunted by his absence. It was all bollocks, of course, they actually didn't give a fuck, but it was good tele and now it was almost expected that a copper would give a stomach churning soliloquy that not only showed them in a caring light but also advanced promotion amazingly.

It wasn't what you *did* as a force; it was how you *presented* it. Or not..... One well-presented murder enquiry, even if it failed, would offset all the bad publicity of the muggings and fights and burglaries and stabbings that they did little about..... Although it was certainly true that, in all those categories, the levels were down in the current year. They had found a better way of fighting crime.....they didn't record it. If there was a crime with an obvious suspect you recorded it. One solved!

If it was going to be a pain in the arse crime, one few cared about except the man or woman who had been mugged you left it until tomorrow. And when tomorrow came, and the shift changed, well.....that's just one of those admin errors that occur occasionally. And if it didn't exist on paper then it couldn't be solved. And if it didn't exist and couldn't be solved it increased the percentages of those that were recorded and were solved, and showed them as an efficient police force doing the best they could for the community.....

The little boy had suffered from the effects of starvation with a large reduction in muscle mass, chronic diarrhoea, anaemia, swelling due to fluid under the skin and he was very cold. Very cold. But the hospital was amazed that his little body battled away to survive and responded rapidly to the intravenous food and drugs that were administered when he was unconscious. They had used a well tried and tested formula consisting of 42% dried skim milk, 32% edible oil, and 25% sucrose plus electrolyte, mineral, and vitamin supplements to start his journey back to health.

She seemed a nice lady. She smiled, and that meant he wasn't going to get hit.

'You all right, little fella?'

A weak grin creased his face, and he nodded a fraction.

'You've been poorly,' she said kindly.

He nodded again. She still showed no signs of hitting him, so he relaxed a little more. Sometimes they smiled *and still hit him*.....

'I'm just going to take your temperature, and then you can go back to sleep if you want. Ok?'

He nodded. She put the electronic gauge in his ear, waited a moment then took it out and looked at it. Not bad. Almost normal. She was about to say something else but realised he had already gone back to sleep...

Chapter 9

Kylie works.....

It was dark, and he felt wonderful.

It was three days before Ash Wednesday, and he was driving forty miles north. He always varied his killing grounds so there would be no pattern. Indeed, such was his cleverness and guile he had numbered all the areas where he would go, which was roughly thirty, and then constructed a little random number generator on his computer to give him numbers between one and thirty. That way random was random, and no-one could find any pattern anywhere. It was The Lord who had suggested the random number generator...

In his early life, he had wanted to follow the example of Saint Anthony and lead a monastic, if not reclusive, existence but The Lord had shown him the true path. And a command from God and a solemn vow of obedience cannot be taken lightly and dismissed on a whim. A vow is a vow.....

He saw a woman standing at the end of the badly lit road under a dim street light. Slowing down he looked up at the ceiling in the car and made sure there was no glow from his halo and moved around in his seat to make his wings more comfortable under his jacket. Stopping by the woman he wound down the window. 'Do you use your mouth?'

'Eh?'

'You know.....'

‘You mean you want your dick sucking?’ asked Kylie who, in a past time, would have been embarrassed at saying such a thing to a stranger, but not now.

In the gloom of his car, she did not see his face turn red or the anxiety in his face as he felt his wings shudder. Dick sucking? Dick sucking? Disgust filled his being. He looked at the ceiling and knew the glow from his halo had dimmed from the obscenity that stood outside the car door.

‘Yes...’

‘That all you want?’

‘Yes,’ he said quietly.

‘Nothing else?’

‘No.’

‘Here?’

‘Somewhere a bit more private if you don’t mind. I’m a bit.....shy.’

‘Where?’

‘I don’t mind. We’ll just drive down there a bit and pull over somewhere; I don’t mind.’

‘It’s fifty,’ she said. It was usually twenty for sucking a dick, but he looked desperate, and she had a text book she needed to buy.

‘Ok.’

‘Half when I get in, half when I’ve finished.’

‘Ok.’

‘No more than fifteen minutes.’

‘Ok.’

As she got in, she took a dainty handkerchief out of her pocket and blew her nose. ‘Sorry, I’ve got a bit of a cold, but I can still suck,’ she said quickly.

She got in; he fished half the money out of his pocket, gave it to her and pulled away. As he came to a quiet and deserted spot he pulled over. 'I have to go for a pee. I won't be a minute.'

He reached over to the back seat, clicked something in a holdall, then got out of the car and went into the darkness. As he wandered off, she wound down the window a bit to help clear her blocked nose, and she hardly noticed the hissing from the back seat as she blew her nose again. He left it a few minutes, watching nearby to see if she moved but she was out like a light. Going back to the car he opened the doors for a few moments to clear the gas, got in and drove off. In his head 'The Sisters of Mercy' rang out.

*Oh the Angel of Death
He has not departed or gone
He is waiting for you
When you thought it was safe to go on
He'll bring you comfort
As he gave me the words to this song
I do hope you meet him
I know you've been waiting so long.....*

*Oh.....the Angel of Death knows
You have been waiting.....so.....long.....*

He drove five miles to a dark country lane where he found the field with an old gate half off its hinges. He drove in and parked in the shadows of the hedge. He dragged her out and across twenty yards of damp ground, her heels leaving tracks, and dropped her with a soft thud.

Going back to the car he took out the butcher's knife and a simple wooden cross which he would use to adorn the body and to recall Jesus' words to 'become as one's teacher' and which is one of the main dictums in Christian discipline and therefore appropriate in this period of fasting and self-denial. When he turned to go back to kill her, he saw that she was upright but swaying. She was conscious! He didn't know what to do? This had never happened before! He hid the knife behind his back and started to walk over to her.

Through the fog of her drugged brain, which was clearing rapidly, she saw him approach, and everything within her that was designed for fight or flight kicked off. She started to scream as loud as possible, she shouted rape, and then scrambled away as fast as she could go.

He didn't know what to do? If he followed her to kill her, he might be caught by some idiot who had heard the screaming. And what if he followed her but for some reason, he didn't kill her, but he got hurt? What would happen then?

Would she recognise him again? Unlikely.

The options understood he went back to the car and left as quickly as he could.

When she heard the car start, she stopped running and looked back, seeing the tail lights leave the field and disappear behind the hedge and then the odd splash of red as they disappeared into the distance. She sank to the floor on her knees and took large gasps of air and then started to sob. Half terrified, half relieved.

After nearly fifteen minutes she walked to the road and started walking back; although she wasn't quite sure where back was.

She flagged down a passing car and persuaded the man to take her to a police station where she told her story. She didn't really want to tell anybody anything, and she certainly didn't want anyone to know she was a prostitute, but she knew she had been very lucky and that it may have been the Angel of Death, and she felt honour bound to at least try and protect the other women who sold their bodies and their lives, from this maniac.

Initially, she was interviewed by a detective who had seen too many television cop shows and looked at her tits far too often. He was, she thought, about as empathetic as the bastard that was going to kill her. She refused to say any more until a female police officer arrived and then she told her story as best she could.

A doctor appeared and she breathed into a container which would be analysed for traces of the sleep-inducing gas that they had found in the lungs of the others. That would be the proof they needed that this woman had actually been abducted by The Angel of Death and they could get a clearer picture of him and his methods.....

She tried to give them a clear description of him but other than about six feet, medium build, etc. etc. she was vague although she thought she would recognise him in 'a line up'. She promised that she would do anything else to help if they wouldn't disclose her identity which they couldn't promise but assured her they would do their best.

Well, she thought, if all you're going to do is *your best*, and based on the Neanderthal that first interviewed me, then I am screwed!

Goodbye nice man.....

Goodbye marriage...

Chapter 10

H reads the paper

The mobile went, and H looked at the screen. 'Hi, Andy, how are you doing?'

He was sitting in his study at home, his feet in highly polished shoes, up on the desk, reading *The Times*. He listened to Andy. '.....I haven't seen anything about a kid, but I've only just started reading. Just a sec....'

He turned over several pages then came to the article about the child that had been found in a cellar. It wasn't in quite the same terms as Andy's paper whose headline screamed:

Dying infant found in prison cellar
of missing paedophile

He started reading about the little boy and then came to the name *Stanley Arnold*, and he froze. For several moments he didn't move, and then he cried..... At the enormity of what he had done, or hadn't done; his body racked as pain swept in waves through him. He had nearly killed a child! An innocent child!

Everything he cherished; innocence, freedom, safety, protection, he had nearly killed. As greater and greater anguish and a complete sense of loss enveloped him, he felt faint. His heart was beating so hard and erratically he thought he was going to have a heart attack and then through the mists, he heard 'H.....H.....you ok, H?'

He realised the phone was lying on the desk and Andy was still hanging on. Trying hard to control his voice he picked up the phone and said, 'Ok, thanks, Andy, I'll ring you back,' and quickly clicked off the connection.

He looked at the article and started sobbing again. It shouldn't have been like that....it shouldn't have been like that. He tried very hard to keep control, but his mind and body couldn't cope with the parallels with his own young life. H was struggling with the fact that Toby Williams had nearly died through starvation over several weeks, but a part of his hidden mind was struggling with the memories of a tiny James James nearly dying through extreme violence and abuse over many years!

He couldn't cope, and for nearly an hour he struggled desperately with his own sense of loss of childhood and the fact that he had nearly, so very nearly, deprived Toby Williams of his.

He had nearly been responsible for a child's life!

The death of a child!

The death of an innocent child!

The utter guilt of it made him walk out to the balcony and peer down. Is this what he would have done if the child had died? How could he have lived with himself if the child had died?

It was another hour before he managed to get himself together and put it into some kind of perspective.

An hour after that he had resolved to do two things at least, but he also decided that he would do nothing until the next day to make sure that what he wanted to do had been thought through properly.....this time.

Chapter 11

H assesses his empire

Scotty had everything ready and, as H had wanted, presented very simply. On a 10 x 5 nobo board that dominated a wall of his office, he had structured the businesses.

Putting them into Groups i.e. Clubs, Betting shops and Casinos, with their combined turnovers, profits, return on capital employed (roic) etc. H could see at a glance what was happening.

Scotty had also sent H a detailed report of each component of his 'empire' which was great, but H wanted a strategic 'overview' so that he could, quite simply, see what was happening.

J J Group comprised;

Profit (pre tax) £M

J J Casinos Ltd (2) 1.5

J J Internet Poker Ltd (1) 0.25

J J Nightclubs Ltd (9) 2.8

J J Betting Shops Ltd (30) 3.0

J J Security Ltd (1) 0.9

8.45

Everything was profitable. The income from the casinos had suffered due to the smoking ban, but Ade had increased customers which had partially helped to offset it.

The internet casino had been given to Scotty to oversee, and he had changed the site layout to make it more user-friendly and introduced bonuses and all manner of things to make it

more fun for the punters and so turnover had gone up. It would never compete with the big boys like Party Poker et al, but it would always be a steady earner.

The betting shops had not suffered from the smoking ban to any meaningful amount and H had hired a General Manager to run the lot which had resulted in some capital outlay to refurb them and put in new Fixed Odds Betting Terminals etc. They had also spent time training the staff to actually make the punters feel welcome, and the turnover of them all had increased.

The same position had been taken with the nightclubs. He had bought in a new General Manager to run them all and also bought a few more that had become available.

The Security Company was doing well but.....but had somehow been left behind. It had indeed grown, but H was becoming aware that it was still one company and he had not expanded it like the others.

‘What are your thoughts, Scotty?’

‘In what direction, boss?’

‘In any direction, Scotty. Go demented....’

‘Boss, you have a good little Group. It makes good money, is quite well managed and gives you very few problems other than the ones any company has on a day to day basis.’

‘Your point is....?’

‘What do *you* want, boss? I can’t give you any strategic input unless I know what *you* want?’

Good old Scotty, thought H, worth every friggin penny. ‘What do I want?’ replied H, allowing Scotty to continue.

‘Yes. As I said you are doing fine but *what do you want*? Do you want this until you retire? Do you want to sell and retire? Do you want to grow? What do you want, boss? This Group

can only reflect you, boss. It *is you*, and so it will give you what you want. What do you want?’

Good old Scotty, thought H yet again. No fucking about...hit the nail on the head. What indeed? But wasn't that why he was there? Wasn't that why he had asked Scotty to set this up? Wasn't he just a touch lost? Life was good. He made good money, had a good lifestyle, good home life, money in the bank although, true, not necessarily in the UK. So what was the problem?

There were no problems.

Maybe that was the problem.....

Life was so good it was dull. There had been no capers, no fights, no takeovers of any note, no problems.....nothing to fight for. In his very early life, he had prayed for this degree of 'peace', and it was nice, but it didn't provide the stimulus he needed.

‘What would happen if I wanted to expand, Scotty?’

‘Depends on how much, boss. Currently, we have good profits as we compete in some areas with competitors that have to pay for their quite large Head Office expenses. We don't have that problem as we're lean and mean; we also don't have several layers of management that have to be consulted before a decision is taken. We just ring you.....and you either say yes or no. On top of that, we have no overdraft. While technically we still owe the Bank about six mill our cash flow from operations where the punter pays now and we pay our suppliers in two or three months gives us excellent cash flow and mitigates the o d..... Shall I get us some tea, boss?’

‘Good idea.’

Scotty picked up the phone and requested the sustenance. 'However, times are changing. The Northern Rock debacle is going to change everything. The subprime problem with the Collateralised Loan Obligation balls up is going to starve the financial systems. On top of that, there is more to come with the companies that have guaranteed those loans. That means credit is going to be squeezed. Thousands of people are going to have their credit cards taken off them, and new loans are going to be refused. Houses are going to be repossessed, and house prices are going to tumble.....'

'Been having a bad day, Scotty....?' asked H.

Scotty grinned. 'And the Lord God he did smite....' quoth Scotty doing a bad impersonation of the Lord God.

'Who was that, Scotty, Michael Jackson?'

Scotty laughed. 'Anyhow, you pay me for the truth.....'

H looked at a Japanese print on the wall. 'True, Scotty, quite true.'

'And we're, the British economy that is, are in for a rough time. So there are two schools of thought in these circumstances; you batten down the hatches and weather the storm, or you expand. Although we don't know how badly our sectors are going to be affected ... Currently, our betting shops are doing well. The casinos are down, and the security hasn't moved.

'The betting shops have actually improved slightly since the Legislation change last year allowed us to open in the winter evening up to ten o'clock and we can now open on Bank holidays but not Christmas. The smoking ban hasn't affected us as we have canopies outside, where we can, to protect them from the weather if they want a fag. And now, of course,

if we want to open more betting shops we can as we no longer have to 'prove demand'.

'On top of that, all financial indicators over the years have shown that betting shops show no appreciable downturn even when the economy does.

'The casinos are struggling but still provide a good return on capital employed. I think with the casinos we should all sit down and see if there is anything, anything at all, that is completely different to how everyone else does it that could help us as we can't get round the smoking ban. We need something, *something*, as an offsetter.

'Going out from our businesses there are going to be bargains. Mainly in property but also in business.

'If you have access to cheap money, somewhere, we can take the opportunity to pick up cheap bargains....obviously while trimming our operations to make sure they continue giving you reasonable margins....'

A huge grin swept over Scotty's face. 'And The Lord did finish his sermon to the masses and lo, he saw that they were hungry, and so he opened the first of his MacJesus's and did a roaring trade in loaves and fishes.....'

H smiled. 'Do a brief report on what we should look for and how much it's likely to cost.'

Scotty nodded. Good old Scotty, thought H. All he needs is a pat on the back, and he's happy. Aren't we all?

The phone went, and Allan picked it up. 'It's for you, boss, a lady called Pat Watkins to speak to you.'

'Don't know the name, so it's more than likely bloody Yellow Pages or Yell or somebody. Ask them what they want, and if it's anything like that tell 'em I'm dead.'

Scotty spoke for a moment. 'She says she wants to buy our security company.....'

'Tell her it's not for sale.'

He talked for a few more moments. 'She says it's still worth a chat.'

Why not, thought H, why not? This may be the next path we go down.....?

'Next Tuesday at the Birmingham casino?' H nodded.

'Ten am?' He nodded again.

Scotty put down the phone. 'There you go, boss. We agree the way ahead is expansion and someone rings up with a view to making us smaller. Funny old world, eh?'

H smiled. The phone went again. 'It's a gentleman named Harry Cohen for you, boss.'

H took the phone. 'Morning, Harry, long time no hear...'

He listened for a few moments. 'Ok, Harry, see you then for lunch.....'

Chapter 12

Who are B & P?

H had looked up B & P on Google and found their website. Not particularly professional, to say the least, but it did at least tell him a bit about them and their interests in security and waste management. He wondered why he had never heard of them but why would he? There were millions of security companies all over the land. Friggin millions.

H smiled to himself. It was the one about 'I've told you a million times not to exaggerate' which always made him smile. The old ones were certainly the best. No doubt Scotty had used it.

And from their site it was obvious they were mainly in construction. So that's why they're talking to me, he thought, they want to get into other markets. Well, they can make me an offer if they want but I want a multiple of ten which makes it about fifteen mill.

Would I sell it for fifteen million? Would I? That's like doing nothing for ten years less tax, but we could more than likely roll the profits over into something else. Must ask numbers Norm ... Although ten years less tax after Herr Brown got at you was more than likely now measured in months.....

Anyhow fifteen million would, with a little topping up, get three more casinos and while it really wasn't the industry to be in for the big boys anymore, there was certainly an argument that H should be in it. Up to his neck!

H met many security people on the odd Association dinner that he went to and had made several friends, so he rang one of them. After initial pleasantries, he asked, 'Heard of B & P Security by any chance?'

'Who hasn't?'

'Me.'

'Lucky you.'

'Why lucky me?'

'It means they haven't tried to steal your clients, or buy you out or shut you down. And when I say 'buy' I'm being just a touch charitable. You'd get more if you went into liquidation!'

'They sound nice....'

'In our industry, there is a technical word that covers them, it's.....cunts!'

'So they're much loved by all.'

'Saints. Why are you suddenly interested in them, James?'

'Guess.'

He paused for a moment. 'No.....surely not. They don't want to buy you out?'

'Yep.'

'Do they know who you are?'

'Doubt it.'

'James, I know you can be a touch.....er.....hard, but these people are animals. If anything she's worse than him. She's the brains, and he's the muscle. And that's not saying he's thick because he isn't, but she's the strategic one. If you say 'no' there's no knowing what will happen next. It could be like World War Three.'

H grinned. 'I doubt it. If they offer me enough I'll debate it, if not they just have to go elsewhere.'

‘James, it isn’t like that. They will offer you one year’s profits, paid out of ensuing years’ profits. It’s usually a ten-year deal that never happens.’

‘Then why do people sell?’

‘They want to keep out of the hospital and they don’t want their companies torched. Don’t forget these are small companies run by relatively decent people. Quite often mom and pop companies. They don’t have what it takes to stand up to this lot.’

‘Ah well. Thanks for that, we’ll see what dear Patricia has to say. Shall I tell her I spoke to you?’ he said impishly.

‘Only if you don’t like me.’

‘Take care, Peter, and thanks a lot.’

‘My pleasure, James. Let me know how you get on. And if they kill you try and get a message to me from the other side.....’

‘Good one. Now bugger off.’

H picked up the phone and rang Paul, an old friend with a skip hire business. Paul was one of the cleverer ones who had no trucks or skips at all but acted as a national conduit for large customers who wanted to deal with just one company no matter where they were working in the UK. All Paul had was a highly trained team armed with computers and phones and a reputation for service. Wonderfully efficient business model!

‘Paul, it’s H.’

‘I know, you pillock, you’re ringing my mobile.’

‘Waste industry still full of diplomats then...?’

‘Dearest H, how wonderful of you to take the time to give me a ring. Delightful. Charmed.....’

‘Shall we start again?’

‘Ok.’

‘Paul, it’s H.’

‘H, good to hear from you. How are you doing?’

‘Now wasn’t that better?’ asked H. ‘Didn’t that help the conversation flow?’

‘H, I’m in the waste industry. Everything flows...’

‘True.’

‘How can I help you, H?’

‘What can you tell me about B & P Skip Hire?’

‘Aaaaahhh, dear Bob and Pat. Used to use them when we wanted stuff doing in that area but no more. They used to feel that overcharging for stuff they did or even charging for stuff they didn’t do was quite legit, so we kicked them into touch. Talking of kicking, want to go to Twickenham with us next weekend?’

‘No thanks.’

‘Don’t know why I bother asking. You’re not very *manly*, are you?’

‘Not really. Prefer to sit at home and make curtains for the neighbours.’

‘Yes, I can see that.’

‘What else can you tell me?’

‘Essentially they’re just crooks who are in the waste business along, I may add, with much of the rest of them. That’s a point, H, why aren’t you in it?’

H ignored the question.

‘Ok...well they just use any scam they can to make money. They tip in lakes, rivers, ponds, canals, fields, anywhere they don’t have to pay landfill tax. They bribe people on weighbridges to overweigh going in and underweigh going out. Their service is not too good but nobody is going to

complain, and they have an army of thugs working for them under the guise of their security company. There is a technical word for them in this industry, which has many technical terms, but this one is quite apt....'

'Does it start with a 'c'?'

'How did you know?'

'Just a good guess.'

'Why are you asking, H?'

H explained.

'Ah well, best of luck but if I can help with any other information let me know. And if you go to war can I watch? In fact, can I help?'

'I'll keep you informed,' and after a bit more joshing Paul went back to his computer to try and find a nearly new Ferrari. He would have preferred a new one but the savings on a six month old one were just too tempting.....

Chapter 13

Kylie talks to John

Kylie knew what she had to do but she didn't want to do it at all but, knowing she had to do it, she didn't quite know how to do it. She arranged for little Tracey Anne to go to her mom's for the evening which gave her the night alone with her man. She arranged the tiny table in the tiny kitchen. On it, she put her best crockery, her only crockery, with her best cutlery, her only cutlery, with pretty napkins and three tall candles. Two wine glasses ready for the white, dry sparkling wine and a corned beef pie in the oven she had prepared herself with an array of fresh veg from the market.

All this wouldn't have been a problem if the plod hadn't told the papers about her the next day. They hadn't exactly given out her name, but somebody should be able to work it out. Not now perhaps but at some time...and when it did it wasn't fair that her man should suffer.

Better he walks away now.....

She had also stopped walking the streets. It had been a very close call, and she was extremely aware that not only could she now be dead but Tracey Anne would have no parents as her dad had buggered off long ago. Anyhow, although she had little money they would manage somehow.

John arrived at seven on the dot, being late wasn't something he did and kissed her lovingly as she let him in.

'What's the occasion?'

'I want to talk to you.'

‘What about?’

‘I’ll tell you when we have our meal.’

‘Where’s Trace?’

‘At mom’s.’

‘*Really?*’ he said suggestively.

‘Really.’

‘Really.....’ he said again, savouring the thought of uninterrupted sex. She dished up the lovely smelling corned beef savoury pie, John’s favourite, and they ate and chatted.

‘Ok then,’ he said, ‘what are you going to tell me?’

She wanted to say she loved him very much and whatever she was about to say would he *please* not hold it against her. *Please*. She was just trying to survive.....

‘You know the story about the lady in the paper who was nearly killed by The Angel of Death?’

‘Yeah. The prossie.’

Her heart sank. Well, we know where we stand now..... ‘Yes. Well, I know who it was.’

‘Really?’

‘Yes.’

He had known her too long and loved her too much. He knew from the way she said it she was not going to trot off a name at random.

‘Do I know this lady?’

She nodded. She watched his face and waited. And waited..... And waited.....

‘I think I have to go,’ he said eventually.

‘I know,’ she said quietly. ‘I’m sorry.’

He didn’t move, going back into himself for a while. ‘Why did you do it?’

‘Money.’

'I would have given you money.'

'I know you would, but I don't want to be kept. I don't want to be beholden to anyone.'

'How often did you do it?'

'Do what?'

'Go out? Walk the streets?' his voice rose. 'Get fucked?'

She wanted to leave. She wanted this to end. But how can you act the hurt damsel when you get paid for sucking dicks and have just destroyed the man who means everything to you?

'Two nights a week. Just enough to make sure me and Tracey Anne could eat well and I could afford the University costs.'

'How could you jeopardise us?'

'I couldn't find a better way,' she whispered.

His shoulders sagged, and he looked very old and very tired.

'I wish you had,' he said as tears rolled slowly down his cheeks. 'I wish you had.'

John stood up, walked to the door, took his coat off the hook on the back and left.

She put her face in her hands and wept.....

Chapter 14

The middle man

The man took the call.

'Hello, my friend, how are you?.....no problem at all. I was just working out how to get a large shipment of.....things....to my friends who need the things. I hope that's not too technical for you.....yes, quite right, cabbages.'

He smiled. His friend had a weird sense of humour which he enjoyed although they spoke rarely. 'What can I do for you this fine Monegasque day?'

The man explained his problem.

'I'm not sure they will wear that. From what I remember they were quite happy with the merchandise.....I can try but it may take a few days, if not a lot longer, and I tend to think the response will be negative.'

He listened some more as the man explained what he needed.

'Ok...ok...but what shall I offer as compensation? Ten? Twenty?.....Are you sure?.....ok ok....take care.'

Chapter 15

B & P meet JJ

By coincidence, he was standing by his window when her Jaguar arrived in the car park. He watched her get out. She wasn't too tall, well dressed, a bit dumpy which he thought must have been genetic otherwise her money would have seen it gone and even from where he was standing he guessed she had paid for a boob job. Not bad legs but overall not for him... H smiled. Why did men always check over a woman to see if she was sexually attractive? Realising his error, he changed it to why do 'I' always etc. etc.

Because I do.....

It was one of the life's pleasures to see a beautiful woman or pretty young girl or any female that, for whatever reason, you found attractive. It didn't mean you were going to rush out and fuck them, it was just.....nice. When he had to go to one of the clubs he passed a Girls High School. Shit! All the physical attributes of a woman with the apparent wide-eyed innocence of a child. It was so.....arousing. Exciting even. These pretty young things who a man H's age could fantasise about and who some spotty young sixteen-year old was quite happily fucking. And this pretty young thing had more than likely been fucked for years..... The fantasy would start dissolving before his eyes.....

She was shown into his office, and he stood up and shook her hand.

'Morning, Patricia.'

'Morning, James.'

‘Tea, coffee...?’

‘Just warm water if that’s ok.’

‘That’s ok.’

He arranged it.

‘Nice office.’

He shrugged. ‘I’m sure the boss of BP or whoever has one ten times bigger but it’s ok for me.’

H’s milky coffee and her warm water came in, and she sipped at it.

‘Is it too weak?’ he asked.

‘It’s fine, thank you,’ she replied, missing his little whimsy.

‘So how can I help you, Patricia? As I explained, our security company isn’t up for sale unless you’re offering at least ten times.’

‘I think we would regard that as a touch high.’

He studied her face. Expertly made up but it was still a hard face. And her eyes..... Her eyes were hard. They reminded him of a slate quarry in Wales on a dull, wet and depressing day. Hard, miserable, uninviting... He realised he was taking a dislike to her and he checked himself. He hated hard women; loveless women; unemotional women. And he knew why.....

‘What multiple were you thinking of?’

‘We don’t think in multiples, we think more of an exit formula that suits both parties.’

‘What kind of exit formula?’

‘We take it over, come in and build it up and the previous owner shares in the extra wealth.’

H thought for a moment. ‘Tell me if I’m wrong but that means you don’t pay me before you buy but give me something afterwards.’

‘Something like that....’

‘And where do you find these owners.....Psychiatric Wards?’

H’s dislike was taking hold. What a cow! And this cow was in here dictating terms to him. To me!

‘Pardon?’

‘Why would anyone do that?’

‘Because they see the benefit in doing so.’

‘And if they don’t see the benefit?’

‘Then we have explained it wrongly so we put our offer in another form that they can understand.’

H got up and stood by the window. ‘Nice car.’

‘How do you know which is mine?’

‘I saw you arrive.’

‘I love it. Always bought Jaguars from the first day we could afford them. They’re...subtle but with a hint of aggression, don’t you think? Like the cat they portray.’

‘No. I think they’ve got stuck in a time warp and their time has gone. They’re old fashioned.’

He turned from the window. ‘Patricia, I can’t help you, and so I won’t take any more of your time. Thank you for taking the trouble, but I think you are going to have to find another security company to buy.’

She didn’t move. ‘Yours would fit in with our organisation very well.’

‘It fits in mine fine.’

‘Does it? How does it fit in with clubs and betting shops and casinos? It’s different worlds...’

H was just about to answer when he realised he was being drawn in. She had a point. A debatable point but a point. But why should he justify his company structure to her? He was getting irritated. Why doesn’t she just fuck off!

‘As I said, I have no wish to sell.’

She still didn't move. 'But if we look at this....'

'I don't want to look at anything....'

'But it won't hurt to look at it, will it? You may gain from it.'

He was lost in a world that he didn't want to be in. He had somebody in his office who wouldn't go away. A woman! If it had been a man, he would have thrown him out. Physically. But a woman? He felt powerless... His agitation started to engulf him and old, buried feelings began to invade.

'Could you hold on?' he asked as calmly as he could. He left the office, went to the cafeteria and had a coffee. Calmed, he went back. 'Sorry about that.'

'It's ok.'

'Patricia, I have given you my answer, and it's the final one, so I think we have to call it a day.'

'I've got lots of time so let's try for a bit longer to see if we can have a meeting of minds.'

'No. This is finished, and you have to go. Now.'

She didn't move. 'Do you think I could have some more water?'

'No.'

'Never mind, I can get something after we've finished. Now, where were we? Oh yes, I was going to explain the advantages....'

He wanted to grab her by the throat and throw her out of his office. He wanted to kill her! This immovable obstacle! This remorseless attack hidden behind a charade of femininity. How cowardly...

'Would you mind hanging on again...?'

'Ok.'

After nearly half an hour she ventured out of his office, went down the corridor and went into another office. 'Have you seen Mr James?'

A girl looked up from her computer. 'I think he's gone. Was he expecting you?'

'Gone. What do you mean, gone?'

The girl got up from her desk and moved to the window. 'Yes, gone. His car's gone. He went about twenty minutes ago.'

'Where?'

'I don't know that.'

'What a fucking ignorant bastard,' she spat out.

No one said anything. She slammed the door and was gone. He watched the car park from the girl's office..... *Behind a charade of femininity.....* He felt a bit of a coward at the way he had played it but what else can you do? You can't thump a woman.....

As she stopped to put her token in the automated barrier, she looked up at the offices and saw him standing there. For a moment the mask slipped and her face contorted with rage and she stuck up her middle finger.

He smiled in return. And up yours too, he thought, although I doubt whether anyone ever does.....unless it's to mine slate.

Chapter 16

John rethinks

He left Kylie's little housing association flat with tears streaming from his eyes, and he wanted to kill. Not her, not himself, not anyone. It was just an *expression*. But it was an expression of the incredible agony he felt and wanted to be rid of.

John was twenty-four, Deputy Manager at the local Somerfields store and not thick. From the local council estate, he had worked hard at school and managed to be taken on at the store where he also worked hard, and his energy and dedication were paying off.

One day he knew he would run a large store, but it wouldn't be at Somerfields. That was just a stepping stone. He wanted to go to one of the better brands like M&S or Waitrose. If he was going to work his arse off, he wanted to be somewhere where they would pay! And where he could say, with a degree of pride, 'I am the Manager at'. No, not *at*, of. Yes, *of*. I am The Manager *OF*.....i.e. they work for *me*.

He walked to the local park and sat on a bench. A multitude of thoughts and feelings assailed him, and they were all contradictory.

How dare she sell herself to other men?

Why shouldn't she? He didn't own her.

He had offered to give her money.

How was that different?

But *he* wasn't asking anything in return...

Really? Not loyalty and fidelity and a sort of 'booking your ticket to marriage in advance'? Prepaid. Book now, get one free. Book Kylie, get Trace free?

His lost, spinning mind wandered off for a while to what it did understand. Man U played a good game; Rooney played superbly while the opposing fans chanted 'Shrek'; the weather wasn't bad; it would be nice to get away somewhere hot this year.....

But she had let men fuck her!

Who didn't have a woman who had already been fucked by somebody? Sometimes lots of somebodies.

But she didn't know them...

He had once fucked somebody in an alley after a dance. She was out of her skull with booze but went like a train. Even managed to get it up her arse although it had been a mistake as he had missed and she was too pissed to notice. No idea who she was.....?

His head started pounding with the hurt; and the complexities, contradictions and distorted values of sitting in judgement.

Let he who has not sinned.....

Was she a slut?

Or was she a loving mom doing what she could?

Was he a wronged man?

Or was he a hypocritical prick.....?

That was a good one..... *A hypocritical prick.* Almost profound in its summing up of the male race when it came to sex. Hypocritical pricks! Perhaps just a good summing up of males generally.....?

A collective noun for the male species?

It could be in the pub quizzes.

What is the collective noun for a gathering of men?

Table one got it wrong with 'arseholes'.

Table two got it wrong with 'drunkards'.

Table three got it wrong with 'liars'.

Table four got it wrong with 'exaggerators'.

Table five go through to the next round at The Swan and Cygnet by one point by getting 'hypocritical pricks'.

He grinned to himself.....

Chapter 17

H meets Harry?

Three days later H left one of the clubs to meet Harry. He parked in one of the feeder car parks for Hyde Park and started to walk towards the Serpentine and The Dell; their meeting place. Several things were on his mind, and he was glad of the decent walk, the fresh air and the space in which to think...

Firstly there was Harry. What had Harry got lined up? What was it worth? What were the risks going to be?

H was getting more and more aware that as his businesses became more successful the need for him to get into anything too risky became less. Not only that, as his wealth grew, especially as he still had many millions sitting in a Bank in Colombia, not only did the risk factor have to go down, but the possible proceeds had to go up. It was an inverse risk/reward ratio.

If the job was five mill less expenses, he would have to refuse. Why have risk for that? He smiled when he remembered that Arthur had given him £500 as a start in his life. £500! And now he was peering down his nose at five mil. How times had changed. The thought of Arthur prompted him to fish out his mobile and ring him but he wasn't in, and so he left a message saying hello and how were they?

Then there was Jose. He had invited H and Benshima over for a couple of weeks and although H didn't really have the time a holiday would do him and Benshima a lot of good.

However, and this was the worrying bit, Jose 'wanted to talk something over'. As there was nothing other than one subject that they could not have discussed on the phone it meant only one thing; Cocaine!

Ten to one says he wants me in the family business in one form or another..... Cocaine! If it was cocaine H was sure that he would refuse any offer to become involved. He realised that there were huge profits to be made, and he could more than likely earn tens of millions a year but who needs it?

He was fine as he was and if ever he got caught he would never see the light of day again. Who needs that? Or maybe Jose just wanted to talk about the general situation which H knew was deteriorating rapidly; with Venezuela and Ecuador moving troops to the Colombian border primarily as they saw Colombia becoming the Israel of Latin America due to Colombia's close ties with the USA. To emphasise the point Colombia had murdered a Marxist guerrilla just inside Ecuadorian territory which was of itself extremely inflammatory. Hugo Chavez, the Venezuelan President, had predicted the 'start of war in South America'. For good measure, Fidel Castro had also stirred up the protagonists with speeches about the 'genocidal plans of the Yankee empire'.....

Or maybe it was something else entirely.....?

And then there was B & P. He had heard nothing else in the nearly a week since he had seen *slatey* and so he assumed that was it. He had thought about it, and he could see no way any kind of aggression would help them. He wasn't a mom and pop operation, and he doubted they had the organisation or ability to upset him in a business sense, so all they had left was violence. But how could that work with him? What the

hell could they do other than beat him up and try and persuade him to sell?

It may work in the films, or on a one man band, but not in this instance. So why bother? Did they just expect him to roll over, paws in the air and invite him in? Surely they weren't that stupid?

Slatey didn't appear to be.

So it must just have been an opportunistic punt that if it worked bingo, and if not then nothing ventured.....

His mind was going back to Harry when the unscrewed butt end of a snooker cue caught him round the back of the head, and he went down to his knees. The three men who had followed him for the last three days waiting for their chance now took it. One rained blows on his head while the other, the one with the gloved hand for holding the sharpened chain off a chainsaw, lashed his back and legs.

H went down on the floor and tried to curl up but he passed out and the third then continually kicked him with his steel capped boots.....

As the chainsaw blade ate into his flesh, gripping his skin, the man would then draw it along his back so that it created a furrow of ripped flesh and unimaginable agony.....

It didn't take long, and they had been told not to hurt him too much..... The problem was the definition of 'too much'.....

Chapter 18

The Hospital

The ambulance hurtled through the streets with its sirens screaming on its way to the A and E. When it arrived he was immediately met by a team of staff who had been forewarned that he had serious head injuries, a broken arm, multiple lacerations resulting in massive blood loss and possible eye damage.

Initial exploratory surgery showed blood clots, and then they found the large one and getting bigger, that was creating intracranial pressure. The clot created a dilemma as they would have preferred to have left it and brought it down through the use of drugs, but it was exerting such a pressure on his brain that they knew he may die if they didn't operate immediately.

An operating theatre was seconded, the person destined for it could wait a few more hours, this one couldn't, and they immediately set to work. It took four hours to complete the operation, and at one point H's blood pressure dropped alarmingly, and they thought they were going to lose him, but they injected straight into his heart, and it rose, and they managed to stabilise it enough to get through.

The rest of his problems were, relatively, minor. His back and legs were a mess and had been cut to shreds, but they would mend although he may end up with a few, perhaps more than a few, scars. The eye damage was not actually damage but the blood that had seeped into the eye from his damaged head and looked much worse than it was. His elbow was

fractured from the metal toe cap, and he had several fractured ribs from the same piece of metal.

He was lucky to be alive.

Not that they had tried to kill him, they hadn't, they were there to warn him, to frighten him, to show him to listen when he was talked to; not to kill him.

But they were incompetent, and enthusiastic.....and nearly did too good a job.

Chapter 19

The Bishop

They sat around the large kitchen table and, as was his wont, he said Grace; his wife and two children closed their eyes and bowed their heads. After a moment it was over, he arranged his cassock and said to the seven and eight-year-olds sitting before him:

‘What’s on the agenda today, kids?’

They weren’t kids, they were adults who, coincidentally, had both been in the vicinity and had stayed overnight. And he wasn’t really asking what was on the agenda, but it was what he had always done when they were children before they went off to school and it was what he still did whenever they infrequently visited. Good kids, he thought.

They finished the meal, and the ‘kids’ went off back into their own world, and they sat back down to enjoy the remainder of their cup of tea together.

‘Have you checked the post?’ she asked in a ‘who cares less’ kind of way.

‘No. But don’t worry, everything’s fine.’

He was reassuring, but everything wasn’t fine...

Henry Johnson, her beloved husband and father of her two lovely children, was a Bishop within the Church of England; a loved and loving man who at times allowed his compassion and charity to impair the occasional need for caution and circumspection.

Several weeks ago a man had knocked on their door asking for food and money. A man in his thirties who was unshaven, with tatty clothes and in need of a bath. And her husband, being the man that he was, had brought him in, given him a hot bath and food and talked and counselled him at great length. Then he suggested he stay for a few days and earn some money by tending the large gardens that they were lucky to have which the man quickly agreed.

After a few days, it was evident it was not going to work out. He did little in the garden except sit and smoke and in the house it was realised the odd little item was missing. When Henry had taken the man to one side to ask him about these things he was met with a torrent of abuse and a vitriolic attack on the 'disgustingly wealthy and decadent Church' that he represented.

He was told to leave, but he refused and so the police had to be called, but he left before they arrived.

Two weeks later they received a parcel from miles away full of dog.....poo. Two weeks after that it was a dead, decomposing rat. And then a threatening letter. Henry gave it to the police but what could they do? One helpful officer said, 'If you see him coming with a knife or something, ring us.'

Henry thought that may be leaving it a touch late.....

What his wife couldn't understand was the logic? You help somebody, and they abuse your trust and steal off you and yet....it was you at fault! You were to blame for their situation. To use a modern idiom her children trotted out.....*how does that work then?*

Chapter 20

H

Everything was black; perhaps not black black, but black enough. Very, very scary. He had been left there while his mother went to the shop and he knew that the cockroaches would come out from behind the old grate that sat unlit in the cold lounge. They would come and make scraping noises..... He shivered.

It was only four in the afternoon, but it was dark as the cold, clouded over, snow-laden winter night enveloped the tiny house which meant he couldn't go out to play.

Trapped.

Every so often he heard footsteps walk past outside and he trembled, not knowing whether it was her coming back to accuse him of something or his father coming home to hurt him.

Tears rolled down his cheeks.

Thirty minutes later she returned and found him trembling under a chair. 'What are you doing, you stupid child?' she screamed at him.

He huddled farther back under the chair and against the wall. 'It's all your fault, you know,' she said. 'I keep telling you it's your fault and nothing changes. Why do you rile him? Why do you make him angry? Why were you born?'

Little James James had no answer to those questions as he hardly knew what they meant; merely that he had done something wrong again. Again.

He started to cry so she screamed abuse at him and went over, picked up the chair, threw it to one side and picked him up roughly. She put his tiny face next to hers. 'Shut up!' she screamed. 'For Christ's sake shut up!'

Carrying him over to a chair she dropped him in it. Pointing an angry finger at him, 'You sit there and if you so much as move your father will hear what a bad boy you've been.'

He understood that, and his face became enveloped in anguish, and he started to cry again.

'Shut up!' she screamed. 'Shut up, you stupid boy!'

She walked out of the tiny lounge into the hardly existent kitchen and started to get her husband's tea ready. It was white fish with potatoes and a white parsley sauce which she gave him quite often as he suffered from a stomach that didn't like anything that wasn't bland. In many ways, it was just as well as she couldn't cook to save her life. As she was mixing the sauce, she became aware that little James was standing by her, watching her. It startled her, and she bumped her hand and the container she was mixing the sauce in fell to the floor.

'Look what you've done,' she screamed at him, 'this is all your fault. Just you wait till your dad comes home!'

The little boy shook his head and backed away, tears again rolling down his cheeks. She moved after him and grabbed his collar and dragged him to the chair again and threw him on it.

'Stay there!' she screamed and went back to the kitchen.

Her husband, his father, came home an hour later and she told him how the child had knocked the sauce off the work surface. He rushed in, grabbed the trembling child, turned him

over and started to hit his backside with hard slaps of his hand. After several minutes he shouted, 'Right, up those stairs and no tea for you. Go!'

Little James ran for the stairs as his father took the cane off the wall at the bottom of the stairs so that he could get the child on his exposed legs as he scrambled up. He tried to go up the stairs as fast as he could, but the cane lashed into his bare legs and ate into his young flesh.

He screamed with pain.

His father followed him up, whipping the cane over the child's legs as he went until he got to the small landing where the child's tiny bed waited. Little James stood by his bed, trembling with fear, not knowing whether to get in clothed or get undressed and expose more flesh. What was he supposed to do?

'Get undressed!'

Now he knew what he was supposed to do. He took off his shirt, and as he dropped his short trousers and underpants in one go, the cane sliced through the air and across his buttocks. He scrambled into bed and went straight down to the bottom. He felt the cane thrash into the blankets several times and heard the oaths, and then it stopped, and there were receding footsteps on the stairs.

His body and his mind were racked with pain, and he sobbed silent tears for many minutes. Then he did what he had accidentally found to be an escape from the world he had been given. Staying underneath the bedclothes, at the bottom of the bed, he put his face in the mattress, put his little arms around his face to make a seal and as the oxygen became less and the carbon dioxide increased he lost consciousness. He wouldn't die, although given the choice he would have

chosen it; just slip in and out of consciousness for as long as he could to escape everything and everyone around him.....

‘Mister James...Mister James....are you alright?.....Mister James?’

James came back from the world that he had long ago left but had never left him. Sweat was pouring out of his body, and his eyes were huge, fear filled saucers. It took a few moments for him to realise he was in the hospital bed and a nurse was standing over him...

A week later Harry Cohen visited him in the hospital. H was lying on his stomach, looking down the bed, as his lacerated and gouged back was covered with scabs of differing levels of healing and had to be protected from any pressure.

Harry pulled up a chair. ‘Is life ever uncomplicated with you?’ he asked with a friendly smile.

‘It’s not me. I don’t do anything. People pick on me....’

‘Of course they do.’

‘They do....’

‘And what are they picking on you for this time?’ he said as though to a child.

And H, in the same vein, replied, ‘They want to take my security company.’

‘No?’

‘Yes!’

‘Well, that’s naughty of them, isn’t it.’

‘Very naughty.’

‘And you said no?’

‘I said no.’

‘And they grabbed you in the park and hit you?’

‘They did.’

He was going to carry on with the charade and say he had then run home to mommy but that wouldn't have been a charade, it would have been a complete waste of time. She or he would just have finished the job.....

'And what are you going to do now, little H?'

H smiled. '*Destroy them.....*'

Harry patted him very, very lightly on his bandaged head.

'That's my boy.....'

They both grinned and grown up talk returned.

'We didn't get to talk...' said H, 'something interesting?'

'I think so.'

'How soon?'

'As it happens as and when we choose.'

'What?'

'Paintings.'

'Paintings? Harry, why do you keep doing this? First, it's a frigging ship, and now it's the National Gallery. Couldn't you find something simple with money in it like the Royal Mint or Fort Knox?'

'And where would be the fun in that, H? This stretches your mind and your ingenuity. Why be dull?'

H sighed. 'Where are they?'

'Scotland.'

'Scotland? What the hell do I know about Scotland? Do they *have* paintings in Scotland?'

Harry grinned. H thought for a moment. 'This isn't a public place, is it?.....This is one of your more well-heeled punters, isn't it?'

'Could be.....'

'Whatever happened to business client relationship?'

Harry shrugged.

‘Don’t tell me it’s in a bloody castle?’

Harry grinned again. ‘Not quite but you’re close. It’s in the 65,000 acre estate of one of the nation’s more colourful industrialists which he uses as and when and from where he and his friends go grouse shooting, salmon fishing and anything else that takes their fancy...’

‘Women?’

‘Possibly but not necessarily so. They can all afford women, but they can’t all afford 65,000 acres of prime Scottish land so I would think they would be there to primarily enjoy what’s on offer.’

‘But why paintings?’

‘Because our famous Sir Dennis Pothole has a vast collection, most on display, quite a few not. And the ones hidden from view and only shown to his closest friends and other favoured collectors are not necessarily his.’

‘Nicked?’

‘He would say acquired through a third party.’

‘And so he can hardly call the law?’

‘He has to call the law, but of course, he really wouldn’t want the criminals caught. Although against his firm financial principles he is better off taking a bath on those and getting the insurance for the others than the law finding a load of ‘third party’ treasure trove.’

‘Well, well,’ said H slowly. ‘You are well connected....’

‘Very.....’

‘And what do you think this is all worth? Pre-fire sale of the friggig stuff?’

‘Around a hundred million pounds plus.’

‘Again?’

‘About a hundred million pounds....plus.’

‘That’s a lot of money.’

‘No, it isn’t money at all, that’s the value of the paintings.’

‘Why plus?’

‘Because I’m not quite sure how many illicit paintings he’s got.’

‘And what would we get for them?’

‘H, do I have to do everything for you? That’s your job.’

‘Even at twenty per cent that’s twenty mill.’

‘I’m glad to see the knock on the head hasn’t got rid of your facility for complicated mathematics.’

H laughed and his ribs hurt. ‘I think it was Stephen Hawking that summed it up with his famous formula ‘sarcasm times negative wit divided by two short planks squared equals a load of bollocks’.

They both grinned.

‘What do you think?’

H grinned again.

‘Good,’ said Harry and held out his hand. ‘Give me a ring when you feel better, and we’ll have lunch and see where we go next.’

‘Ok. Before you go, Harry, I want a favour.’

‘What’s that, H?’

H explained.

‘That may be a bit out of my power, H. I’m not sure I can help with that.’

‘I’ll go there. No risk. And I would be ‘a friend’.

Harry thought for a moment and then said, ‘I’ll ask, but I think it’s unlikely.’

‘Use your charm, Harry, use your charm.’

They shook hands and Harry left.....

As H lay there, he decided that as soon as he got out of hospital they would go to Jose for a week or two and he would rest, and his body would have time to heal. B & P had sent their message, and nothing would happen until he returned. They needed him to do a deal, and no one else could do that.....they would wait for him to return. In fact, if he was lucky they may even think he was running away. He made a note to ring them to emphasise the fact..... But they beat him to it. His mobile rang, and it was Bob. 'Hear you've had a bit of an accident?'

'That's right.'

'Shame that, how these things just come out of the blue like that.'

'Yes.'

'So when do you want to get together to do the deal?'

'I will be in here for a week or two, and then we have to go abroad to see my in-laws and go to a wedding and so it will be just over a month.'

'Good....see you in a month.'

Half an hour later he had a knock, and Scotty peered round the door of his private room.

'Just the man,' said H, 'my own little Beaver....no, change that to mole.'

'Morning, boss. You ok?'

'Ok, Scotty. A touch sore, a touch tired and a touch pissed off.' Scotty looked at him and marvelled. If they had done that to him he would now be dead, or having a nervous breakdown, or be in a monastery, but here was the boss just raring to get back in there. No wonder I work for him....and no one works for me.

Since Scotty had been employed by H, he had become more and more comfortable being a 'number 2'; looking after H with facts and figures and advice. Somewhere he had lost the absolute need to 'be someone', to be looked up to. For some reason, he had found his 'home', and he was ok with that.

'Scotty, I want your help.'

'Yes, boss.'

'I want you to find out everything you can about B & P and their owners. Everything....ok? And ask Sammy the search to do the same, ok?'

'Ok, boss.'

'Give me a ring when you have enough for us to talk about.'

'Ok, boss.'

Scotty shook his hand and left. Going to the car park Scotty was just a touch tearful. He had never had a close relationship with anyone in his life, and now he had a lovely woman and H, in a way, took care of him. Maybe he didn't, but it felt like he did. That was nice.

Please let it last.....

H picked up his mobile and rang Jose. After how are you's and pleasantries H said, 'Jose, I need your help. Would it be possible to do this for me.....?'

After that conversation, he rang his accountant, Norm. After how are you's and pleasantries H said, 'Norm, I need your help. I want you to do this for me.....'

Chapter 21

Bogota

Four weeks after his 'accident' H and Benshima were on a BA flight to Colombia. Jose had offered to send the Gulfstream but it would have been a one off journey and would have cost a bomb, so H declined. However, it had still cost nearly £5000 each to go first class in a cabin with beds so that H could lie on his stomach if he wanted as his back was still healing.

In the departure lounge, he had rung Patricia but got Bob. 'This is James James.'

'Oh yes, the man who can't stand up to women.'

'Yes, I'm sorry about that, she's a bit scary. Give her my apologies, please.'

'You fucking tell her yourself.'

'I've thought about it, and I need a better deal than you're offering. It doesn't have to be fantastic....just better.'

'You know the deal we do. One year, paid out of profits, over time.'

'That's not enough. I can't do it at that. Give me something that allows me to do it.....anything.'

Bob thought for a moment. What a prick! How they fucking gave in so quickly.... 'Ok, I'll go to two years, and that's it.'

'I can do that....that makes it do-able.'

'Good. I'll get our solicitor to draw everything up ready.'

'When he's done it could he send it to Joseph Finstein,' he gave the address, 'he's my solicitor, and he will check it over.....no, no I don't mean check it over as

such.....no....no.....sorry.....and I'll sign it as soon as I get back.....ok.....and again please give my apologies to Patricia.'

They hung up, and Bob grinned from ear to ear. What a prick... Two years' profits.

As if....

It didn't matter what went on the contract, one year or twenty, it made no difference. He wouldn't get fuck all! The company would soon show a loss making situation and would be sold on to another company for a pittance which would be taken by the preferential creditors which happened to be.....Bob and Pat. And the clever bit, the really clever bit, which Pat had come up with and was hidden somewhere in the small print, was the fact that the seller had to make good any loss of profits if they didn't materialise. And so they went back and demanded more money from a man who hadn't been paid for his business anyhow..... How fucking magic was that....? And so this fucking pathetic snivelling arsehole with a stupid name, the big man who was a fucking girl, was taking himself into even bigger losses.....right on!

Bob felt like a God....so unbelievably fucking *powerful*.....he could rule the fucking world!

They were met at the airport by the customary three car convoy with armed drivers. Was there anywhere on this earth that danger didn't wait? As they left the suburbs, H noticed two more cars join them and realised, since the assassination attempt on Benshima's mother Maria, Jose was taking no chances. Even though the person that had planned that was now dead.

He found it ironic that his father in law was, perhaps, one of the most powerful and violent on earth and yet he didn't see him like that, and he wondered why? Perhaps it was because, somehow, H saw what Jose did as justified? Producing cocaine in large quantities was justified? Hardly. What then? What made this man's violence acceptable and his father's unacceptable?

Quite simple. It was not directed at him. And on top of that H knew that the violence would be used to protect him and the family if needed.

H grinned to himself.

He knew what he also quite liked was the thought of 'power', when power was on your side. And in his mind, Jose, unlike his father, was on his side...

Made a change.....

Chapter 22

The footballer

Jonathon England was one of those rare beasts who, had Benshima been describing him, would have been 'an intelligent footballer'. He was gifted and in many areas.

Born into a well-off family, his father a respected and wealthy stockbroker and his mother an eminent barrister. Unlike many born into those circles, they made time for him and gave him love and attention. An intelligent, eloquent and engaging child he started at the private Chafyn Grove School to be close to the family home and from there he was destined to go to Marlborough and follow his father and his father's father.

At Chafyn it became evident that not only was he extremely bright academically but he was superb at sports. He excelled not only at football but cricket, rugby and swimming.

When he was nine two men watched him play another school and stood taking notes. Two weeks later his parents received a letter from the coaching staff of Manchester United explaining how their scouts had been impressed by his skills and athletic presence and how they would like to 'take him under their wing' with his parents' permission.

A family meeting was held, and it was agreed that the Man U representatives would be invited down and the situation discussed which it duly was and it was informally agreed that, as long as he wanted to do it, he would go to them once a month and meet the players and do some training. And in his holiday he was welcome to join their youth squad, which started at age fourteen and play with them.

Man U watched him carefully and knew that he was special. He was talented, strong, quick, agile and with an excellent strategic brain. To see all that in one so young was exceedingly rare. He was a captain. Not in the making but literally now! Amazing.....

He only had one flaw. It was minor, but it was a flaw, and they wondered why it didn't show up anywhere else in his character?

He could be vicious!

Some of his tackles were not just meant to take the ball but also the man and they were laden with intimidation. If he wanted the ball, he would get it. One way or the other. Skill or kill...

He was also pursued by other clubs, but when he was fourteen, he registered with Man U as a youth and joined them two nights a week, met the first team players and generally became part of the 'family' as a prelude to being part of the family.

At sixteen he was offered an apprenticeship and immediately on his seventeenth birthday he was offered a contract. It was the largest sum ever offered to a seventeen year old and they wanted a seven-year contract. Jonathon's father suggested five but Jonathon, showing a financial astuteness even then, insisted on a five year deal with a three year break clause should he want to move.

Man U resisted and suggested he get an Agent as it may be easier for both parties to negotiate through a third party who had a better and broader understanding of the market. His father thought that was acceptable, but Jonathon said no. Deal with him, or he went elsewhere.....

Man U thought they should go elsewhere, thanked him for his time and shook his hand.

‘Not a problem,’ said Jonathon. ‘I’ll ring Liverpool.’

The Man U representatives smiled and left. Two minutes later there was a knock on the door. His mother brought them back in.

‘We agree, but we’d prefer it if the break clause wasn’t public at the moment. Indeed wasn’t public at all. It would cause us too many problems....’

He nodded and shook their hands. He immediately joined the first team as a substitute and over the next six months, his time in the games became longer until he became a permanent first team player. One year later he became the youngest ever captain and highest paid player.....

Before the end of his third year, he told them he was leaving and rang Joan Laporta the Barcelona President to see if they would give him a good deal. Wouldn’t they just.....

He got another three-year deal, and before that was up, he rang the President of Inter Milan and started negotiations with them. Before they were concluded representatives of Chelsea rang him to see if they could interest him in going there? He didn’t think so as Inter were offering a very good deal.....

‘And if Chelsea offered a better deal?’

He wasn’t sure...

‘What if Mister Abramovich rang you direct?’ they asked.

Now you’re catching on.....

And so he came back to England with the highest salary ever paid to a British footballer. Jonathon England was captain of Chelsea, Captain of England and on top of the world.....

England for England.....hooray!

And so the handsome twenty-three year old superstar had everything. Vast amounts of money from his playing and advertising endorsements, a superb home in the Surrey stockbroker belt, a huge seafront villa in Portugal, eight fast and expensive cars, a beautiful wife, an expensive gambling habit and a penchant for rough sex with prostitutes, groupies or anyone else who would, or at times wouldn't, accommodate him.

The gambling was hardly unusual for a footballer and was of no concern to anyone. It was what footballers with too much money did.

The other hobby he kept to himself as best he could. Occasionally he went just a touch too far with his need to hurt and ended up paying out a few thousand just to keep somebody quiet. In fact, in Barcelona, she nearly died, and it cost him half a million.....

Chapter 23

Jose and H

H was only going to be in Colombia a week as he had another place to go after that, and there was a part of him that thought it was a long way to go for a week, but he needed time to think things out properly. And then he was going to Harry's friends, and so it was ok. It got him legitimately out of Britain, and he needed that.

On the third night, Jose and H went out into the moonlit garden and sat on a large patio area. It was only just over 7 degrees C so a brazier had been lit and they sat in its warm embrace.

'James,' said Jose, 'we are encountering a few problems in Europe. Not insurmountable problems....just problems, and I wondered whether you would like to talk it through with me.'

'I take it this has little to do with oil or cement?'

'No.'

'Jose, I know absolutely nothing about the drugs trade. I've never done it, my men are thrown out if any are users and it's something I have kept away from so I'm not sure if I'm the right man to talk to....?'

'Right, wrong.....we're just talking.....'

'Ok,' said H and sat back, cradling his brandy in his hands.

'We supply the USA through Mexican distributors, Europe through Italy, Russia through Moscow, the Far East through China and the Pacific Rim through Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam. These are the top level deals, and they filter it throughout those regions. On top of that, there are lower level deals

whereby countries such as Britain, being an Island and a big user are also supplied directly. These do not affect the high-level deals and these transactions are transparent, so there are no wars. Occasionally a high level will decide that they want to service a lower level area and a negotiation follows. That negotiation will usually involve a degree of compensation from the high level to the lower.....'

'It all sounds very civilised.'

'Usually, it is. While a high could destroy a low, it can be very messy, and history has shown us that it is not economic to have a war to sort these things out and so, usually, we try and sort it out ourselves. Also, occasionally, as we are businessmen we, that is the family, will also add an amount to sweeten the pot. As I said, it is more efficient and profitable than war. Although these people are some of the most violent on earth, they still understand what's best regarding profit.'

H listened and thought; please don't go where I think you're going to go.

'In Italy currently, there is a sea change in relation to the organisation you would know as the Mafia. For a long time, they have run all crime in that area and because they are highly efficient and ruthless, a lot of European crime as well. And so they are naturally suited to play the part of the supplier of first choice for any producer of drugs. However, as I mentioned there is a sea change happening, and the Italian police and army are now cracking down heavily.

'In the past, they were relatively immune as many ministers were on their payroll and those that weren't lived in fear of their lives if they even intimated that the Mafia should be cracked down on. And, as you may know, even the law enforcement people or judiciary were killed if their enquiries

became too zealous. People like Cesare Terranova, Rocco Chinnici, Emanuele Basile and Giuseppe Montana to name just a few.

‘Then came Giovanni Falcone. He was different. He realised that to beat the Mafia was not just about pursuing them for breaking the law, he had to make it into a social issue. He had to involve the public...’

He looked at James and his glass. ‘Another drink, James?’ James looked down to see that he still had half left. ‘I’m ok, thanks.’

‘When you’re ready.’ Jose took a puff of his cigar.

‘And so,’ he continued, ‘Judge Falcone pursued the Mafia socially and legally until, in 1992 I think it was, Falcone with his wife Francesca Morvilio, also a magistrate, and his escort were driving through an underpass, and a massive bomb killed them all. The message was clear and well understood. ‘We can kill anyone. Leave us alone.’

He took another puff on his cigar and H noticed he did not inhale. We’re getting close to *All In* time, thought H.

‘And so it returned to what it was. But now times are different. Technology is different. The police are better organised and have vast amounts of money and systems that are more efficient. They track calls, phones, cars, boats, planes. And the Mafia struggles. It is now socially acceptable to destroy the Mafia, and so their head is continually above the parapet, and they know it is going to get shot off.....’

He shivered a little. ‘Are you warm enough, James? We can go indoors if you wish?’

‘I’m fine but if you are uncomfortable...?’

Jose shook his head, got up and went to a bench, lifted the seat and took out a blanket. He sat down and draped it over him. 'That's better. I like being under the stars.'

He poured more brandy for himself and topped James up.

'And so they come to me, and they say, 'Jose, it is getting too difficult to distribute across borders for us, can you get someone else and we will go down a level?' Of course when these people come and say that you know they have a real problem. But as I said, they are businessmen and not idiots and so a little less profit and your life is better than no life to spend your money on, don't you think, James?'

'I'll go with that.'

'And so.....' He looked at James.

So we're here, at last, thought James, here at last. *All in!*

'And so.....?'

'And so there would appear to be an opening for someone to organise our distribution business in Europe.'

'And that someone would be me?'

'Why not?'

'Why? As I said before, I know nothing of drugs and in all honesty, don't want to know anything about them. They don't sit comfortably with me. The thought of kids or mothers with habits I find uncomfortable, and I don't want to be the source of their misery.'

'It's just business, James. They have a choice. They can use or not use. It's up to them.'

'Isn't that simplistic?' said James. 'There are frequent newspaper reports in Britain of young girls who are injected and then made to prostitute themselves to pay for their habit. Where was their choice?'

'It is true that drugs are certainly a persuader; but so is violence, so is fear, so indeed is love. It's just another weapon in a vast armoury of persuasion and, sometimes, need.'

James became quiet. That last sentence had struck a chord, and he knew exactly what Jose was saying. Jose may not have known, it may just have been an intellectual validation of his business, but James did. Violence and love as persuaders. How true. And somehow, instantly, cocaine became less important. When you know the misery that parents can inflict on their own children, every day, everywhere, and how that can ruin a child forever, then coke was different.

At least, with most people, it was a choice. Risky, true, but a choice. Violent, sexually abusive, manipulative parents were not a choice. They were a curse!

'When do you need a decision?'

'There is no rush. This is essentially a strategic review to find answers to a problem. I would wish that the problem is solved within six months.'

'Let me get my little problem out of the way first, and I will consider it although I have to say, Jose, it is likely my answer will still be no.'

'It can be whatever you want it to be, James, and I will respect whatever it is.'

He smiled paternally, and H felt more than a little moved.

'On another subject,' said Jose, 'Benshima tells me you are flying on to Europe when you go back?'

'Mmm.'

'We are going to Rome the week after. Would you like to stay an extra week and come with us in the Gulfstream?'

‘That would have been great, but I have an arranged meeting, and I am reluctant to change it.’

‘Just a minute...’

Jose got up and went into the house, the rug still enveloping him. After a few moments, he came back and sat down. ‘We are going to Rome a week earlier.’

‘You sure?’

He nodded. ‘Maria, and of course Benshima, like Italian clothes and cuisine, so it’s fine.’

H grinned. It seemed Benshima was also going to Rome...

‘Why are you going to Rome?’

‘We have an audience with the Pope,’ he said with no gravitas at all.

‘An audience with the Pope?’ repeated H. ‘You mean you are going to join in that melee with a hundred thousand others when he gives his address?’

Jose looked slightly insulted. ‘No. Just me, Maria and the Pope.’

‘Really?’ asked H in amazement.

‘Well, maybe a Cardinal or two as well. They tend to hang around.’

‘Bloody hell. The Pope and the cocaine producer. Beauty and the beast. Which one is which and does he do a line or two while you’re there?’

Jose smiled at the thought. He couldn’t quite see the eighty-one year old Pope Benedict XVI, who he had known for many years as Cardinal Ratzinger or Joseph if they were alone, snorting coke...

‘You must have a lot to confess if it demands an audience with *The Holy Father*?’

‘Did I detect sarcasm in there?’

‘A touch.’

‘It’s not so much pen - itence as self - defence,’ he made it rhyme, ‘the Vatican and its allies are very powerful, and so one donates a small sum to help them feed the starving, shelter the homeless, carry on their good works.....’

H grinned.

‘It’s the official line.’

‘I bet it is.’

‘A small sum....?’

‘Relatively.’

‘To....?’

‘Someone with a lot of money.’

‘This must have cost you a lot over the years?’

Jose nodded.

‘A bigger sum....?’

‘Relatively.’

‘To....?’

‘Someone with even more money.....’

For several minutes they said nothing and enjoyed the heavens above.

‘Still don’t understand it.’

‘What?’

‘That lot.....’ and he continued looking up.

‘Who does...?’

They looked for several more minutes, Jose drawing on his cigar and sipping his brandy.

‘Do you know,’ asked H, ‘anyone that would be interested in some Old Masters?’

‘What is the definition of an Old Master? Nothing to do with school I assume?’

‘Touche. No, they’re exactly that. From what I gather some are the crème de la crème.’

‘Really? You’re sure?’

‘No, I’m not sure, but I am, as they say, very reliably informed. I won’t actually know until they arrive....so to speak.’

‘Do you know much about the private collectors in this world, James?’

‘Not a damn thing.’

Jose grinned. Honest to the core... He thought for a moment.

‘James, without any disrespect, let me educate you a little... Firstly you have to understand something that is more than likely a general public misconception; there is more fine art held in private hands than there is on show to the public.’

‘Really?’ queried H, ‘really?’

‘James, there are many people in this world with lots of money. Many are, like us, totally invisible. There are the visible ones like Gates, Buffett, Ellison, the Waltons, the Gettys, the Mellons, Helu in Mexico, Mittal who now lives in London and many others; and then the likes of the Westminsters, your landed gentry, the Russian Oligarchs or any number of fabulously wealthy people and families. Of course, there are also the Sheiks, the Kings, the Dictators, the drugs Barons. And there are the new Chinese.....

‘Some are relatively new to wealth and others made it in the 1900’s and have used it to acquire vast assets and wealth today. These people, like all people, have weaknesses. Some of them are highly cultured. They go to the opera, the ballet and give a few dollars to museums and galleries. Some prefer to stay at home and look at their treasures there.....’

‘You say that as though it’s commonplace.’

‘No, it’s not commonplace; it just isn’t quite isolated either.’

‘Most of these people can afford almost anything. In fact, they *can* afford anything. A couple of hundred million invested in works of art, whether they be paintings, carvings, statues...anything; they can afford to buy it and take it home and look at it and enjoy it. On their own....’

‘Just like that?’ asked H incredulously.

‘Of course, James. They own the world; they are used to having what they want and, for some of them, its provenance is of no importance. It is the perceived benefit to their lives that they see as of paramount importance.’

‘And you know some of these people?’

‘Of course.’

‘You never cease to amaze me.’

‘And I doubt I ever will.....’ Jose smiled modestly.

H was lost for a little while. This was not a world he knew. He made his few quid each year and was doing ok but these people.....? Shit!

‘Could you find an an....interested party?’

‘If they are Old Masters as you believe then that is not a problem. Anything less is of no interest to them.’

‘Let’s hope,’ said H grinning, ‘they don’t end up being school teachers.’

Jose smiled and held up his glass. ‘To old school teachers.’

‘Who have matured with age.’

Jose looked James straight in the eyes.

‘What are you thinking, Jose?’

‘We would make a good team, you and me.’

‘You can be quite persuasive....’

‘I have to be. We live in a strife-riven country housed in a strife-riven world. Persuasion allows you to change someone’s mind for a satisfactory conclusion; persuasion

also lets you negotiate with someone long enough to find their weakness to enable you to destroy them. Sometimes you have to be persuasive to survive.....'

'To persuasion,' said H.

'Salut.....'

Chapter 24

A back door opens

H got off the Gulfstream, waving Benshima, Maria and Jose goodbye as they carried on to Rome and the heat hit him. It was different kind of heat to Bogota, a drier more dusty heat. He went through customs and into the arrivals lounge. Doing as instructed, he went out into the hot noon sun and hailed a taxi. As one was stopping a man put a hand on his shoulder. 'It's ok, Mister James, you can come with me.'

He shook his head at the taxi driver who was about to complain but saw the sunglasses, short hair, athletic build and the just perceptible bulge under his jacket and decided against it.

The man guided him to another nondescript car. After thirty minutes they reached a large anonymous looking building, and after producing ID cards, the barrier lifted. They parked and took H to a waiting room. After a few minutes, a man came in, and H stood up and smiled a greeting.

'Hello, Schlomo.'

'Hello, H. Yada'ata she hatayas mezayen et ishtecha?'

H held up his arms in exasperation. 'That sounds like what you said before when we first met, but I can't actually remember what it means other than a sort of 'hello...''

'Right,' said code name Schlomo, happy again that H knew no Hebrew. H had wondered if he would try that again and was ready. 'So you want a little help?' asked Schlomo.

'A little.'

'My masters were reluctant to help you.'

'I can understand that.'

'Do you know why they agreed?'

'Harry Cohen?'

He nodded. 'Harry is a good friend of Israel.'

'It seems Israel is a good friend of Harry.'

'It is....all the way. And of course,' he said pointedly, 'Israel expects their friends to look after Israel in return....'

'That is the least you should expect.'

'As long as you understand that. We would be unhappy if we helped you, but you did not help us when we needed it.'

'Unhappy is a good word. I would not like to make you unhappy.' After some general chat H said, 'Why are you here, Schlomo? By the way, is that your real name?'

'I'm here to make sure we can trust you. I am the only one that has met you, and I want to be sure you are the James James that I met.'

'Who else would I be?'

Schlomo shrugged. 'Who was Kim Philby?'

Satisfied, about H knew not what, Schlomo told him that he would be put up at a hotel for the evening and then taken to meet Arvi. Arvi would help him. In this particular field, Arvi was the man!

'I will try and meet up with you before you go back, H,' said Schlomo as he left the room. A second later he returned. 'I forgot to ask you. Can I see your back, please?'

'My back?' Schlomo nodded.

'Really? My back?' He nodded again. H took off his jacket and shirt and showed Schlomo his heavily gouged back.

'Pretty. For obvious reasons, we are highly skilled at the reparation of wounds here. It has been arranged that you will be seen before you go to see if there is any way we can help

with the healing process.'

'Thank you, but I think it's fine.'

'We'll take a look anyhow.'

And then he was gone. Harry must have mentioned it.....

The next day he was taken to another anonymous building festooned with aerials, microwave dishes, a massive security presence and in due course he met Arvi.

Arvi was a child..... Well, maybe not a child but not much more. It transpired he was twenty-three but looked sixteen. A bit of Peter Pan meets Harry Potter..... Arvi took him down three flights of stairs to a room humming with people, computers and monitors. Arvi's face had the look of a child going into a sweet shop... Going through the room he went to a large glass panelled wall, through a door and into a large office.

'My office. From here I can see everything....and everybody.'

'Do they all work for you?'

'Yes.'

H was astounded.

'Don't be surprised, Mister James. This is a meritocracy. If you're good enough, you're old enough.'

'Obviously..... Wow,' said H, at a loss for words.

'Let's get to it. I have limited time that I can spare you. Hamas are not sitting idle while I do this....'

H sat down, and Arvi sat opposite. 'What is the end result you require, Mr James.....?'

Chapter 25

A O D

It was dark, and he felt wonderful.

It was Good Friday. The day our Lord was crucified.

Of all his killing days he liked Good Friday the best. He felt it, more than the others, allowed a portrayal of what he was trying to achieve. There was something quite Holy about leaving a headless corpse in the crucifix position. It demonstrated the message succinctly, and not even an idiot would fail to see its relevance. He saw a woman standing at the end of the badly lit road under a dim street light. Slowing down he looked up at the ceiling in the car and made sure there was no glow from his halo and moved around in his seat to make his wings more comfortable under his jacket. Stopping by the woman he wound down the window. 'Do you use your mouth?'

'Eh?'

'You know.....'

'You want head?' asked the seventeen year old, who looked fifty, with bruises on her back from the pimp who felt that she wasn't working hard enough or long enough to satisfy his ever increasing need for bling. In the gloom of his car, she did not see his face turn red, or the anxiety invade it as he felt his wings shudder. Head? Head? Did he want head? Disgust filled his being.

He looked at the ceiling and knew the glow from his halo had dimmed from the obscenity that stood outside the car door. And then a presence entered him and made him calm, and he

realised what she had just said. 'I said,' she repeated, as though on cue, 'Do you want head?'

I do my dear, he thought, I want yours..... 'Yes...'

'That all you want?'

'Yes,' he said quietly.

'Nothing else?'

'No.'

'Here?'

'Somewhere a bit more private if you don't mind. I'm a bit.....shy.'

'Where?'

'I don't mind. We'll just drive down there a bit and pull over somewhere; I don't mind.'

'It's fifty.' It was usually twenty for a blow job, but he looked desperate and so was she to please the pimp.

'Ok.'

'Half when I get in, half when I've finished.'

'Ok.'

'No more than fifteen minutes.'

'Ok.'

She got in; he fished half the money out of his pocket, gave it to her and pulled away. When he came to a quiet and deserted spot, he pulled over and said, 'I have to go for a pee. I won't be a minute.'

He reached over to the backseat, clicked something in a holdall, then got out of the car and went into the darkness. She heard the hissing, but the world passed her by nowadays. Get out there, get fucked, sleep, and start again... What world....? He left it a few minutes, watching nearby, to see if she moved but she was out like a light. Going back to

the car he opened the doors for a few moments to clear the gas, got in and drove off.

*Oh the Angel of Death
He has not departed or gone
He is waiting for you
When you thought it was safe to go on
He'll bring you comfort
As he gave me the words to this song
I do hope you meet him
I know you've been waiting so long.....*

*Oh.....the Angel of Death knows
You have been waiting.....so.....long.....*

He drove to a dark, desolate area and parked in the shadows. Dragged her out he pulled her across twenty yards of wet ground, her heels leaving tracks and dropped her with a soft thud. Going back to the car he took out the butchers' carving knife. There was something, he thought, quite.....what was the word?....for what he was going to do. Clinical came to mind, but it wasn't quite right. He concentrated harder. Yes! Sacrificial..... That was the word. He grabbed her hair and hacked off her head as her body twitched and blood erupted from her neck. He had an overwhelming urge to drink it, but The Lord had said no. Satan would have drunk down the blood; The Lord would purify through physical association. When he was finished, he arranged her body in the shape of a cross. Her arms horizontal and her legs pointing downwards but slightly open. He put her head between her ankles. Moving back several feet he surveyed his work then moved her head down an inch. That looked better. It had to be right.

In the earth he cut A o D. He took the twenty-five pounds out of her pocket and headed home...

Chapter 26

B & P Group

While B & P companies were relatively crude affairs the accounts weren't. Each one had a computer dedicated to the accounts which they were currently doing in Sage. After the end of each day, the accounts were uploaded to an office manned full time by two women, a fully trained bookkeeper and an assistant, who then collated all the figures and put them into a form that Bob and Pat could understand.

Each company was shown and the combined results. It was simple and effective and Pat had instinctively done what many large Groups don't. She had the figures presented in a way that showed who was making the money and who wasn't. It wasn't subtle as it didn't make any allowances for variables, as Scotty's models would have, but it was good enough.

At 5 pm on Friday, it was time to go, and the Bookkeeper and the assistant started to pack up. They had spent the last hour ringing round the companies to make sure they exported the data via email and then imported it into their Sage system. They left on their computers in the week and turned them off at the weekend, but the server stayed on to receive incoming emails and do any internal maintenance and updates that it needed.

Arvi went in through their website which hadn't taken much doing. When people weren't aware of what could be done, until it was done, they took few precautions. Generally, people

had absolutely no idea what it was possible to do with their systems and why would they? There was usually no reason to infiltrate a company that sold car parts or cleaning solutions. True, the occasional amateur hacker came up with a Trojan or Worm that cascaded down from system to system, but they were non-selective. They screwed everything up in their path!

B & P had employed a web designer who wasn't very good at designing sites and only appeared to have a limited knowledge of the Linux platform. And what a hacker really liked was Linux!

Arvi found the address that someone used to get into the server, more than likely the Directors from home, and he also found the address that the programmer had used when he wanted to make changes from offsite and then upload them. From the site, he went down to the server and probed its defences. The usual firewall software and that was about it. Stop most off the shelf stuff but no good whatsoever against someone with specific targeting or the abilities of Mossad. Bypassing the firewall, he went through the open port and shut off the antivirus programme. Although of little use it would pick up something every so often and so it would be a nuisance.

The next step was the download of all the data. They had about 2 gig of specific data which would take a bit of time, about 80 or ninety minutes or so. It was longer than Arvi would have wanted and in the past, he would have sent down a compression tool to speed things up, but Sage data was already compressed, so Arvi left it to do its thing while he did his. He set his computer to text his phone when it had completed the download and took H to the cafe for a

coffee...where he then left him with a newspaper and some magazines.

In the *oversight* meeting, seventy-three minutes later Arvi's watch beeped, he looked at it and said, 'Time to go.'

He collected H, and back at the office he peered at his screen. 'That's all the data, now for the fun bit.....'

H watched as his fingers flew over the keyboard but with a remarkable gentility. When H typed, you could hear the keyboard in the next room, but Arvi treated it as though a lover. His hands brushed over the keys, gently touching them and they responded instantly as a lover would.

He looked down at the notes on a pad. Going back into his machine he looked for the file убийца which was Russian for *killer*. They much preferred using a Russian name for files when it was going into the public domain. He changed its name to a standard Microsoft looking file name then placed it, unnoticed, in the Server's main program files.

Opening the address box in Outlook, he copied the email addresses of all companies with a B & P suffix and pasted them into a subroutine of the killer program and then dispatched them. The servers or computers the other end would not recognise the routine and as soon as they let it in it would send all their data to a predetermined address and then destroy all their files. Going back into the finance program he found the Bank account codes and asked H for the information. H gave him the Panama Bank account number, and Arvi sent a series of instructions that would, over two days, send out another series of instructions.

Back in the main B & P Server he put the B & P emails out of the way into a subroutine then opened the killer file and changed one line of code to tell the program to start deleting all the data files early on the following Monday morning. When he had done that he inserted another program that would immediately destroy the data on any other backup media that they used to try and restore the data. To all intents and purposes the system was operative in that it still had all its programs, less data, on Monday, but it would still reply to any B & P emails that the system had, for whatever reason, not got in its address book, and quite happily send out the killer in response.

He also put in a standard response to any other email saying, in effect, 'B & P have gone into liquidation. You will not get paid. Do not contact us. B Watkins MD.'

'That's about it,' said Arvi.

'Thank you, Arvi. Most impressive.'

'It wasn't. A good kid could have done it just as well....'

H looked at him.

'A ten year old,' said Arvi sarcastically.

'If that was easy. Could you get into my Bank and get rid of my loans?'

'Yes, I could, but we do nothing illegal. It's against our guiding principles.'

H smiled. 'You have principles.....?'

'In theory.'

They both smiled. Arvi left his office and came back a few moments later with a pen drive and gave it to H. H looked at him quizzically. 'Just put it in your computer, and you can use all the data we, that is you, recovered.'

'Thanks.'

‘Mister James,’ said Arvi, ‘It was nice meeting you, but I have other things.....’

‘Arvi, I appreciate your help. By the way, is that your real name?’

Arvi smiled. ‘Oh, and by the way, Mister James.....’

‘Yes?’

‘You owe us.....’

H nodded. ‘I’m aware of that, Arvi.’

They shook hands and Arvi took him out of the office and gave him to someone else to dispose of. It was a technical term...

He was driven back to his hotel and told that he would be collected the next day and taken to the Hadassah Hospital; one of the best in Israel and internationally renowned.

At 9 am on the dot, the car arrived, and he was whisked to the hospital’s Mount Scopus Emergency Department which dealt with wounds and wound trauma.....

Chapter 27

Hospital 2

He was now much more stable. All his vital indicators were going in the right direction, and he was putting on weight. Still sleeping a lot but that was only to be expected; his body needed time to adjust. After nearly ten days a detective was allowed to question him, in the presence of a trained hospital nurse, who had come up through the NSPCC and knew about children such as he, but the detective got nowhere. Toby knew nothing...

What could he know?

But you had to ask.....

And it would allow him to give his latest pronouncement on the local evening news. 'I'll come back in a day or two,' he said in a serious tone. 'He may just have remembered something by then.'

Another pronouncement. The wife would be so proud.....

A few days later the Consultant and his entourage visited Toby. The Consultant explained what had happened and asked his junior colleagues for their opinions on different aspects of his symptoms due to his incarceration. The nurse watched silently. Asked one question by the Consultant, a junior doctor, recently released from medical school, moved over to Toby and sat on the bed.

'Hello, Toby,' he said kindly. 'How are you today?'

Toby smiled and nodded.

'Don't say much, eh?'

‘Can I just look at your arm?’ and he picked up Toby’s tiny arm and held his wrist. He gently smoothed his hand up it to feel the muscle content within. Trying to work something out he did it again. Toby opened his mouth wide and made a grunting sound.

‘What’s that, Toby?’ said the Doctor. ‘What do you want?’

Toby grunted again. The nurse moved in quickly and said, smiling, to the Doctor, ‘Move away, Doctor.’

‘Why?’

Through another smile, she said, ‘Because it’s important that you do and I will explain in a minute.’

The Consultant started to say something, but her glance shut him up. ‘It’s time for some more sleep for you, little fella,’ she said softly and tucked his arm in and caressed his cheek. Toby nodded and fell instantly to sleep.

‘What was that all about?’ demanded the Consultant.

‘Not here,’ said the nurse. She walked to a spare room, and they followed. Inside, the Consultant said, ‘I am not used to following nurses around. It’s usually quite the opposite.’

The nurse was about to say something but held her tongue.

‘Now, what’s going on?’ demanded the Consultant.

‘You don’t know?’

‘If I did why would I ask?’ he said sarcastically.

‘You know why Toby is in here?’ He said nothing. ‘He is in because he was held by a paedophile for many months against his will.’

She looked at him, waiting for him to say ‘So....?’ but he didn’t. ‘In those months Toby has been ‘trained’. In other words, he knows when x happens y will follow. When the doctor stroked his arm, he opened his mouth.....’

The junior doctor had still missed it. 'I'm sorry, I still don't understand...?'

She thought for a moment. 'When you take your girlfriend out for a meal she knows she will more than likely get *fucked* later. The difference is that your girlfriend also wants the same thing.'

'You mean.....you mean.....you.....that Toby.....' and his voice tailed off.

'Go back to the Ward,' said the Consultant to his aides. 'You stay here,' he said to the nurse who ignored him and started to troop out. 'I asked you to stay here,' he repeated.

'I don't work for you, and I have to say I'm quite pleased about that.'

Her defiance shook him. In this hospital, in any hospital, he was a God and people didn't talk to him like that. 'Let's start again,' he said, 'would you kindly stay here and talk to me for a moment?'

With the door closed behind them, he said, 'I think there are several things I have to point out. One, I am a Consultant. I have spent many years training to get to this position.....'

He looked at her face and saw contempt creep on to it.

'Two, because of my position when I ask for things to be done they are done.....'

He tried to work out how close she was to leaving?

'Three, I do not know everything although my junior colleagues may think I do and, at times, I think I do.

'Four, I am appalled, appalled....' Her eyes lit with rebellious fire... 'that I allowed what happened, to happen and that I had absolutely no prior understanding of what little Toby may have gone through. Fifth, that I spoke to you cursorily when you

were actually the only one there that had the knowledge to understand what was going on and rescue him.....again.

‘And sixth, for all those and other reasons, I apologise.’

She looked at him in amazement. She had geared herself up for a ‘I don’t care what you think, you pompous bastard’ sort of confrontation and now she gets an apology. ‘Thank you,’ she said, her voice softening.

He nodded.

‘You know,’ she said, ‘that what you have just done I appreciate and respect but do you know when you will have really entered the human race?’

He wasn’t quite sure what she meant. ‘No, when?’

‘When you can apologise in front of your junior staff, and they can learn from it too.....so *they* don’t go on to become pompous prats.....’

Part of it stung, but he also grinned to himself. What a woman! He went quiet. ‘Stay here...please.’

A few minutes later he came back with his entourage. ‘I want to explain something to you all.....’ and looked at the nurse.

‘What’s your name, by the way?’

‘Pamela.’

‘Pamela has pointed certain things out to me, and it is my responsibility to point them out to you...’

When he had finished explaining what had happened and how he had erred and how one should always learn he said, ‘Are there other things we should look for? Other signs, other signals...?’

‘Not really. The thing to remember is that Toby will do things because he thinks he has to. As an example a few days ago a male nurse was moving back his hair and Toby tried to undo his zip.....’

There were gasps.

‘Remember, this is a six or seven year old child, and he has been taught to suck penises and remove them from trousers, and God knows what else? And he has been taught to do this for affection. For affection!’ she said in a raised voice. ‘So Toby now thinks that if he sucks a penis or whatever that equates to affection....horrendous,’ she said sadly. ‘The other point about the zip episode is that the nurse grabbed his hand and said ‘No’ sternly. That was obviously a mistake, and it terrified Toby who thought he had done something wrong. When they got me Toby was crying his eyes out and shaking with fear but, and this tells a story, he was not making a sound. He was terrified and crying and not making a sound. Poor little thing can’t win, you see..... If he makes a sound he gets hit; if he doesn’t, he is, in an emotional sense, abandoned. And this is the tragedy of abused children. They don’t know the rules. They don’t know what’s right and what’s wrong, so they get very frustrated or angry as nothing works for them. And they end up as delinquents or, if they miss that, they can’t form a relationship because there is no understanding of love and sharing as you and I may know it. So, in essence.....just be kind to him. Be truthful, be genuine. Let him learn that he can have care and affection without strings. Be unconditional.....’

One of the young doctors was crying softly, and another was trying hard not to. They had no idea.....just a tiny child. Her talk had been brutal, and they felt assaulted by its brutality. She knew what they were thinking.

‘Just think how he felt.....’

Other than the police Toby had no visitors. His mother had not bothered and, it was found out, only reported him missing one week after he had gone. One week!

Then one day his mother's estranged sister arrived with her husband to see him. It was not a formality that anyone could see him as he was still within police protection but after they had satisfied all and sundry as to their identification they were allowed in, escorted by Pamela, the lady that had battled for little Toby.

She watched very carefully as they approached his bed but when he saw his aunt his little face lit up. 'Aunty.'

Pamela relaxed. Thank God; we may have actually found someone who doesn't hurt him...

Chapter 28

B & P on Monday

Bob Watkins was happy playing in shit, and quite often he would get up early, go to their skip company, and get his hands dirty. He understood that. It meant something. Pat could play with the numbers, but when he was 'on the ground', he *felt* the numbers. He knew by the tempo of the wagons coming and going, the landfill tickets, the punctured tyres..... He knew how they were doing. At 8:30 the main office staff arrived, and an hour later the office manager came out to see him.

'Bob, we've got a problem.'

'What kind of problem?'

'The computers appear to have lost their data.'

'What the fuck are you telling me for? You're the fucking manager, you sort it.'

'I've tried, Bob. I've got the company in who have a service contract for our equipment, and they say all the data has gone...'

'How can it....go?' he asked menacingly.

'Bob, I don't know. It was obviously there last week when we left, and now there's nothing....'

'Some fucking manager you are,' he shouted in his face and stormed into the office and the two techies waiting for their orders. 'You useless cunts,' screamed Bob Watkins, MD and bastard. 'You've fucked it up!'

'We haven't done anything, Mister Watkins. The first we knew about it was when Ron rang us.'

His mobile rang, and he looked down and saw it was Pat. 'Pat, the fucking computers have lost their data. Do you know why?'

'No, but it may be the same reason that we've got no money in our Bank accounts!'

'Sorry, Pat, you were breaking up a bit there, I must have misheard you. Say it again, please.'

'I said our Bank accounts have been cleaned out. I had the Bank Manager on to me a minute ago wanting to know what was going on?'

'That's a fucking bad joke, Pat.'

'It's not a joke!'

Bob was stunned. He couldn't get to grips with what she was saying. What did she mean 'bank accounts cleared out'? How can you clear a bank account out? You can't just clean a fucking bank account out... No way! No fucking way! There was obviously some kind of computer error going on which had affected their computer and the Bank's when they last talked to each other. The Bank's computer had infected theirs, or vice versa, and the account numbers had been corrupted, and the bank was looking in the wrong place.

That must be it. Stupid fuckers!

He started to explain his theory to Pat who interrupted. 'Bob, it's all gone. Listen to me when I tell you something! From every account! Our money, customers' money, money waiting to pay creditors, VAT accrual account money, Tax accrual account money. Money out of every fucking account!' She was now getting hysterical. 'It's gone!'

'Where's it gone?.....where?.....Panama? Why's it gone there?'

'Bob, how the fuck do I know?' she bit back instantly.

The office manager took a phone call and called over to Bob, 'Bob, it's Jason from RYI Shopfitters. They say they've sent us an email to change a skip and had a reply that says we've gone bust.'

'What? What? Did you hear that, Pat? No? Someone is sending out emails that say we've gone bust! What the fuck is going on? ok.....ok.'

He hung up and pointed a menacing finger at the techies. 'Get us up and running,' and then remembering he carried on, 'why haven't you put in the Back-up?'

'We did, and the computer wiped that as well.'

His fist smashed down on the nearest desk then he wheeled around and left; his shiny black 5 litre, 500 hp, £80,000 Porsche Cayenne, currently on monthly contract hire and with the next payment due in a week, ripping up the gravel as he departed...

Chapter 29

Susie Maguire

Susie sat on her bed and looked at her watch. Nearly time to go; just half an hour and then.....

Susie would tell people that she was a PA, which she was, once, but currently in between jobs, which she was, once. In actual fact, she had a full-time job as a heroin addict and a part time job, well full time really, lying on her back or kneeling one way or another, to pay for it.

Half an hour.....

It shouldn't have been like this. A good upbringing with good parents and then.....?

She could hardly remember what had happened, but if her brain could clear long enough to remember it would have said; 'Well, you were a PA, in fact quite a good, well paid one, but the club scene, and E, and then trying a bit more of this and that and then on to horse which produced a wonderful euphoria. As these euphoric highs reduced, the doses increased, as did the frequency of the needle insertions. And then somehow the financial needs of the addiction started to outstrip her income, and she began to use her credit cards. More and more. Then she maxed them out, so she needed another source of cash and saw the opportunity one day when the village she lived in had a freakish downpour of water, and many homes were a foot deep in water.

Her claim looked reasonable to her befuddled, needy mind, but not to her insurers. cursory checks by them established very quickly that she had added at least ten thousand to the

total, so they refused to pay for anything and cancelled her insurance.

Within days she had lost her job due to her lack of organisation and increasing time off which meant the mortgage which she had paid sporadically would no longer be paid at all. Bought at the top of a rising market and now in the throes of a declining one, she found herself with negative equity so she just rang a friend to see if she could stay there a while, then walked into the high street branch of the Building Society, gave them the keys and walked off.

It had been, if that was possible, all downhill from there. She needed money for her habit, and her friend introduced her to a friend who introduced her to another friend who had introduced her to a lady friend who was also an addict.

The woman explained that she made money by catering for men, which horrified Susie, but the way it was explained to her, it was no big deal. You gave them a bit of sex, and they gave you money which she gave to her friend Bingo. Bingo rented a flat for her and made sure she had money to live and was looked after.

‘It was easy. She should give it a try....?’

Put that way it didn’t sound so bad and if you didn’t have to do much for it....and she quite liked sex....and she did need the money.....and she was desperate for a fix.

In fact, she was so desperate, she didn’t think to ask why her new friend was wearing a polo neck sweater in summer? Which saved her new friend having to lie instead of explaining it was to hide the bruises on her neck where Bingo had half strangled her a few nights ago for some minor infringement or other.....

And so she met Bingo, and he was ok. He gave her some Charlie as she was confused and asked for cocaine rather than heroin but anything was good. To help get her introduced gradually, he told her to give him a hand job which, surprisingly, she did with little trepidation, and it went from there. Hand, mouth, cunt, arse. Bingo was a master of persuasion; with just a little help from a syringe which he kept close by.

That had been nearly two years ago, and now here she was making a good living.....for Bingo; but at least she was fed and housed, given Charlie and Horse and even coped with the occasional beating when she didn't bring in enough money.

It was almost, she thought, like the Devadasi women of India who were 'married' to the Hindu religion and as part of that marriage, they had to provide sexual favours to its adherents. In some states, until recently, a girl from each family was volunteered.....

Who said it wasn't a man's world? A man! Send us your young girls to fuck. It's spiritual... It's uplifting. It's a good legitimate fuck! Unfortunately, she had read, more than sixty percent died of Aids before they were twenty-four years old. Twenty four.....

The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away...

The thought of catching Aids terrified her, so she quickly jammed it into a box in her mind, shut the lid and securely locked it.

And she had got used to the men, or whatever some of them were. Christ! Men?

They were all shapes and sizes, and that was just their pricks! She had one, so to speak, no more than two inches long. Erect! Fucking erect! What was she supposed to do with that? But she said all the right things, and he thought she meant it, and she sucked him off, and he gave her a huge tip which she hid from Bingo. Unfortunately, he worked it out and found it and beat the shit out of her which stopped her working for a week, and then he deducted what she would have earned from subsequent earnings. Quite a businessman was Bingo. Should have been a Captain of Industry. The Bill Gates of prostitution. Here's some more software.....make it hardware! And some of the men were vile. They were fat, or they sweat, or they smelled....but they still wanted a fuck. Bastards! And some were women haters who swore at you and called you bitch, or slut, or whore as they came. Bastards! And the east Europeans who were aggressive and grabbed your hair and made you beg for mercy. Bastards! And the Muslims who were not allowed to have sex outside of marriage and were filled with so much guilt and contempt that they would quite happily punch you in the face as they left and then grab the money. Or try to. With the Muslims, Bingo would be close by and if she shouted 'Bingo' he would grab the man, retrieve the stolen money and take everything else as well. One day he stripped the man entirely and booted him out into the street. Fuck 'em. Fuck the lot of 'em! Bastards! But there were redeeming features, she thought. No there weren't.....

She turned off the tele and video.

Why couldn't she be like Julia Roberts? She had watched Pretty Woman for the umpteenth time, and it still made her cry.

She wanted a Richard Gere.

Why hadn't she got a Richard Gere?

Where was her knight in shining armour who would love her and take her away to an obscenely expensive jewellery store? He must be out there somewhere?

It would happen. She was sure it would happen. One day a man would come along, and she would never have to do this again..... That would be wonderful. Her own White Knight...

It had been a fairly quiet night. Bloody football matches! Whoever thought up bloody football matches at night wanted his balls removing. All she had was one hand job, a blow job, a fucking, and a pathetic creature who paid her to talk as 'his wife didn't understand him'. Susie didn't understand him either, but she didn't have to.

A car stopped close to her. The window purred down, and she looked in, but it wasn't Richard Gere. Fuck!

One day. One day..... One day a man would come, and all this would be over. One day.....

'Do you use your mouth?' he asked.

'You mean a blow job?'.....

Chapter 30

Pat's home

The Cayenne nearly knocked out her electric gates when he didn't give them enough time to open. 'Fuckin move,' he screamed at the slowly opening gates, 'fuckin speed up, you useless cunts!' With an inch either side, he roared through and parked outside the front door. As he was about to thump on it, *fuck the bell*, it opened, and she let him in.

'What the fuck's going on?' he demanded.

'I don't know, but I can make a guess.'

'And what would that be?'

'The only thing that's happened recently is James James.'

'You think he did this? Are you fucking mad? He hasn't got the fuckin brains to do this for Christ's sake. He's just an oversize pile of shit....'

'Why don't you ask him?' she said pointedly, 'you who know so much about the workings of the human mind...'

He put a finger in her face. 'I'm not in the mood for your fuckin sarcasm.'

He took the mobile out of his pocket. 'What do I say? I can hardly ask him if he's nicked our money?'

He started to dial. 'What the fuck am I doing? If there's one man who can get us out of this shit, it's him. He has a company that he's going to give to us which must have money in it. We need it now. Right fuckin now! And then we have a bit of room for manoeuvre. And if he's nicked our money he won't be selling it, right? So let's find out.....?'

He dialled the number. 'It's Bob Watkins,' he said, managing to calm his voice, 'we want to tie up the deal tomorrow.....I know It's a bit quicker, but I'm sure you won't mind....' The tone in his voice suggested the implied threat if he did mind, 'good, good.....an hour then.'

'He'll be back within the hour to sort out a time and place. No sweat..... So it ain't him who's fucked us about.'

'Then who is it?'

He shrugged. 'It ain't easy to clean out Bank accounts, you know. The likes of James James can't do it. I bet we're not the only ones that have been hit. I bet the Bank has a few of these. A concerted attack or something by someone in the.....I don't know....East Europe or somewhere? Why don't you ring the Bank and see what we can do and if they are prepared to make good the loss as it wasn't our fault. Like they would with credit card theft....?'

She looked at him and couldn't work out whether he actually was her brother or someone who had been stolen from an asylum at birth. 'Bob, I've been on the phone to them continually. What do you think I've been doing?'

'How do I know what you've been doing?' he replied sarcastically.

'Let me explain again. Only our money has gone. They have taken our money using our account information and transferring money as though it was us. No one has got into the Bank's accounts, only in ours. What we have to work out is who?'

'Edith?' he asked, 'she has access to everything.'

'She does, but it's unlikely and anyway she's at work today, and she seems as usual. No, I don't think our sixty-year old bookkeeper is the one.....'

‘The accountant? He’s got all the info and the brains to do it.’
‘Possibly....’ She became exasperated. ‘I don’t know who did it...I just don’t know.’

He looked at her. ‘It wasn’t you, was it, Patsy? You’re not trying to pull one?’

‘Oh, for fuck’s sake, Bob, get a grip. I’m making some tea.....’
And she went to the kitchen.

‘Just asking.....’ he shouted after her, ‘you’ve got the brains.....and the accounts.....and the passwords.....’
He thought for a moment. ‘Remember it was you that took my football boots and you said you hadn’t.....’

‘Grow up,’ she shouted from the kitchen and then he heard a piece of crockery smash against something hard....like a wall.
Then another then another.....

‘And you want *me* to grow up?’ he shouted to her, ‘you used to do that after I pulled your hair.....’

Half an hour later H rang back to arrange the details. ‘It’s all arranged,’ he said, ‘and we can do it tomorrow or if you prefer we can do it later today.....’

‘Hang on....’ He put his hand over the phone and turned to Pat who was still sulking. ‘He says he can do it later today if that’s better? We should because then it gives us access to money which we fucking well need.....?’

She nodded.

‘We can do that...’

‘Ok,’ said H, ‘I am going to struggle a bit to come to you but if you could come part way down I can meet you at a lay-by, and I have a friend with a hotel nearby, and we can use one of the rooms to do the signing.....?’

Bob repeated it to Pat who nodded enthusiastically. H told them where to find the lay-by and, as it would be dark by the time they got there, he would put on his hazards so they would see him...

It was nearly nine o'clock when Bob and Pat arrived at the meeting point. He stopped the big SUV in the lay-by, got out, stretched and went over to where H was sitting in the Merc. As he tapped on the window, it rolled down, and he looked into the barrel of a sawn-off shotgun.

'If you move you die,' and two men who had been low in the shadows of the back seat opened their doors and got out.

'Pat,' screamed Bob, 'get out of here! Go!'

But Pat was also looking at two sawn-off shotguns that had been produced by two men who had come out of the bushes nearby. Bob was smacked in the face by the butt of a gun then dragged into the back of the Merc where his hands and feet were restrained with plastic ties, and he was made to lie on the floor. Pat was already in the back of the Cayenne in roughly the same position where one of them put a hand in her blouse and had a feel of her tits.

'He made a good job of them, love. Did he tighten up your pussy as well? We'll find out later, eh?'

Chapter 31

The taxi

Benshima, Samantha Bennet-Coleridge and Estelle Romero had had a good day. They had been to Harvey Nics, Harrods, Hobbs, Armani, Liberty and Uncle Tom Cobley and all, which Benny had heard James say, and repeated to her friends, but couldn't remember that he had also said it was about a man who borrowed a horse off his friend Tom Pearce to take lots of his friends to Widecombe Fair....

And as Sam was American and Estelle Colombian Uncle Tom Cobley was also a mystery to them.

The previous week they had gone to Gucci in Bond Street and spent two and half thousand pounds each on a unique Gucci-F1 bag. They had all had a bet that they could persuade their partners to pay because of the Ferrari tie up and each had managed it. Amazingly all their men had told them not to drive it too fast on the way home. How they laughed.....the men were sooooo witty.

So now they each had a unique Gucci bag, different models and different colours but all paid for by their men and each bag having special F1 powers. How cool was that? And now they were doing the Gucci jokes.

'I think I'll park it here...' 'I think I'll forget it there....' 'Excuse me, chappy, you with the ringed sweater and dark glasses and a bag over your back with 'swag' on it, would you like to purloin my very expensive Gucci bag....?'

'Maybe if we walked through the East End...?'

Other than several expensive cups of coffee and salmon and cucumber sandwiches they had bought nothing. Nothing! It was like the end of the world. It was actually the end of the month, and it was a rule that the end of each month was designated a locked purse day. To the women, it was like saying Prada was a trainer! But, disciplined women that they were, they had declined all invitations to treat. Luckily they hadn't actually seen anything that they really, really, *really* wanted to treat themselves to.... Damn!

The girls enjoyed it when one of them saw something she really, really, *really* wanted, especially when it was on offer, but it was a locked purse day. How they suffered. How the others teased.

Later they went to the Artesian Cocktail Bar at the Langham Hotel where they all had Tiger prawns, and vegetable tempura with spicy Caribbean dip washed down with a rum cocktail. Actually two... And then to the cinema to watch P2 about a businesswoman held hostage but they walked out half way through as it was too much of a downer and this was, after all, girls' day out.

From there they went to Sketch in Conduit Street, Mayfair where they sat and chatted and giggled and did what you were supposed to do on girls' night out. Relax and have fun.

In real life, Estelle was a childhood friend of Benny's who had moved to London after meeting and marrying an English aristocrat she had met in Gstaad and Sam was from an old money American family who had also married an Englishman whose ancestry was steeped in literature. At the end of the evening, going in opposite directions they each called a cab and set on their way. Estelle was staying at the Dorchester overnight and would be back at the stately pile the next day,

Sam was on her way to Notting Hill, and Benny was going back to her tiny bedsit.

Well, that was the standing joke.....

Sam gave her address to the mini cab driver who said, 'Thank you, madam,' politely and pulled away. After a few minutes, Sam saw the notice that said she had to wear her seat belt and she tried to put it on, but it was stuck. The driver, a Somali refugee who had lived in England for eight years, saw her struggle.

'Just give me one moment, Madam.' He pulled over on the side of the road, got out of the cab, opened her door, leaned over and thumped her in the side of the face. She slumped to the floor of the cab, he took a hood and some rope from one of the door pockets, trussed her up and left her on the floor. Getting back in the cab he turned it around and headed in the opposite direction.

He pulled his mobile out of the side pocket on his trousers and dialled a man who had a Halal slaughterhouse and paid a considerable amount of *shillings* for meat this fresh.

Chapter 32

Out of the way....

It was an out of the way place that Andy Pandy had bought as an out of the way place. He used it himself if he needed to but also made a tidy packet out of friends and friends of friends who needed an out of the way place so they could be.....out of the way.

This could mean a place to stash loot for a while, a place to hide up for a while, a place to fuck somebody while the missus thought you were doing business (which you were), a place to have a party or just simply a place to take someone when you were going to hurt them, and you didn't want busybody neighbours asking what the blood-curdling screams were?

So Pat and Bob were pushed into Andy's place, and Andy thanked fuck there were no neighbours because these two cunts had really pissed H off and he was quite sure H hadn't hired his little hideaway for a party. There were enough for a party; H, Andy and his three men, Bob and Pat. Andy smiled to himself; *it may not be a party, but I bet it's going to be mighty fucking entertaining.*

They were taken into a large room, made to sit down in the middle, and then secured to the chairs with rope. The room had been enlarged by knocking two other rooms into it. Andy said you could hardly swing a cat in it and to prove it he went out and got a cat. As it happened, there was more than enough room to swing a cat, and so he thanked the cat and let it out of the door. But they still knocked down the walls as

he still needed room to swing whatever it was he felt the need to swing....

H pulled up a chair, the wrong way round, and a small table which he placed by the chair and sat opposite them about twelve feet away. He nodded to Andy, and he and his men left to brew up, and then he took an envelope out of his inside pocket and put the contents on the table. 'This Board Meeting is now in progress.'

'Fuck off,' snarled Bob, his chin caked with blood.

'The first item on the Agenda is your signatures on these documents selling your Holding Company to me.'

'As fucking if, you stupid twat!'

H looked at the document. 'I see you've already signed.' He got up and walked over to them. 'Your signatures, I think?'

They both looked and saw an exact copy of their signatures.

'That'll never hold up,' hissed Pat.

H went back and sat down. 'The next documents are your resignations as Directors; I see you have kindly signed these as well.'

He looked at them and smiled. 'How convenient.....'

'Oh, for fuck's sake,' said Bob, 'you're a fucking joke, mate. You're just a prick living in a fucking dream world.'

'That may be the case, but I am also the prick that has all your money...'

'You haven't got the brains to take our money!'

'I think that was one of your first mistakes. You thought I'd just roll over and take it. Your men beat the fuck out of me and did this,' he stood up, took off his jacket, opened his shirt then turned round to show the replica of Euston Station on his back. Pat took in a sharp intake of breath and H fastened

everything back up. 'Not a pretty sight, eh, Patricia? Don't get involved in the rough stuff? Leave it to the Neanderthal, eh?'

'I'll fucking have you,' screamed Bob and tried to get up but he was too securely tied, and no amount of effort would do it. Unfortunately, thought H, unfortunately. *Patience, Jimmy boy, patience.....*

'So I now have your companies, I have your money....what else do I have?'

'You'll have a big fucking problem when I come back for you,' screamed Bob, 'a problem like you've never fucking seen, you asshole.'

'Ah yes,' said H softly, 'I have *you*.....'

'Oh please,' said Bob derisively, 'you're just a fucking idiot who got lucky and took us unawares and now you think you're fucking God. Just piss off!'

H sat and smiled. And then his grin widened.

'I want you so fuckin bad, you cunt,' screamed Bob, 'you and me, mate, just you and fuckin me....?'

H sat there for ten minutes listening to Bob as his tirade became more and more hysterical and more and louder.

'And you Pat, what do you think? You're supposed to be the brains behind this and from what I've seen of your brother a mollusc has more.'

Another tirade from Bob ripped through the room.

'Shut up, Bob,' she commanded. 'What do you want from us?' she asked in a businesslike way.

'I'm pretty sure you actually have nothing to give me. You're broke!'

He paused for a moment. 'Actually you can give me the names and addresses of the three men that took a liking to me in the park...'

‘Fuck off!’ Yelled Bob.

‘Tell him.’

‘I’m not fucking telling him!’

‘Tell him!’ she said in a raised voice. ‘I don’t think now is a good time to protect your hoodlums!’

‘Hoodlums now, are they? They weren’t fucking hoodlums when they were doing the job. They were fucking loyal employees then, you stupid cow!’

‘Tell him!’ she screamed, ‘while we still can…….’

‘Very astute,’ said H.

Grudgingly he gave their names and addresses which H made a note of.

‘Patricia, do you know a man called Tim Benn?’

She nodded. ‘He sold us his company.’

‘He did indeed and like me he was persuaded to do so. And do you know where he is now?’

‘Why would I?’

H smiled and shook his head slowly. ‘Why indeed. Well, our Mister Benn is dead. After you took his company he lost his house, his wife left, taking the kids and he hung himself.’

‘What’s that to do with me?’

‘Do you know Anthony Potter?’

‘You know we do…’

‘Well, Anthony Potter also lost his home as he couldn’t pay the mortgage and now sweeps the roads for the Council.’

‘That’s fuckin business, mate,’ spat Bob, ‘you win some you lose some!’

‘You do indeed……and to illustrate that point to you, Bob, I am going to leave you for a few minutes, and you can watch, first hand, as that principle unfolds before you….’

He got up and walked out, and several minutes later Andy's men walked in.....

Chapter 33

The Industrialist

Sixty-three year old Sir Dennis Pothole, which he insisted was pronounced *potole-ee* in the manner of Ndabaningi Sithole who founded Zanu the Zimbabwe African National Union that opposed the government of Rhodesia. Not that Sir Dennis would have wanted any comparison to a black militant he merely liked the way the emphasis changed his name...

His hero as a young entrepreneur was James Goldsmith whose father had changed their name from Goldschmidt which was not half as bad as Pothole. Bloody Pothole! It was like the Johnny Cash song 'A boy named Sue'. The kids at school had loved that, and he quite often went home with bruises from defending his name.

Why couldn't it have been Getty or Westminster or Harlech or Or.....

But that was a long time ago, and now his name was a lot less important than his wealth. From an early age, he had been a wheeler-dealer, finding things cheap here and selling them for a profit there. In his late teens, he was at a printers getting some printing done and talked to the owner of the small company who was struggling. Dennis offered to take care of his worries for a share of the company. The owner, who was close to a nervous breakdown, offered 25% but Dennis said no and walked away leaving the magic words 'Shame, you'll be bust soon.'

The man rang that evening, and they agreed 50%.

Dennis knew what needed to be done. The printers were too cheap. The owner had no regard for his own skill value, and his prices reflected that to get business. Dennis knew what he had to do was increase prices and get more customers, but first, there was one small problem. After a week he collared his partner and screamed and shouted at him in a meeting. 'You've conned me,' he accused, 'this place is in a much bigger mess than you led me to believe and we'll be lucky to last the week. How could you do this?'

The man could take no more. His house was on the line, and his health was suffering, and he was shaking with stress..... He had no reply to the accusations, not being a man who stuck up for himself. He was just a printer. A good printer. Someone who had worked for others and decided to do it himself. A printer; not a businessman; not a hustler; not a fighter....just a printer.

In the end, the man agreed to let Dennis have 75% of the company and Dennis agreed to put some money in so that the company could be saved. They did the share transfer, and Dennis took control, executing his part of the deal by putting in £1.

Having done the deal, Dennis then did something that he would do throughout his business life; he turned round the company and looked after the man he had deposed. Dennis wasn't a printer, the man was. Dennis didn't want to spend his life at a printers, the man did. And the man, in one of those quirks that define human beings, was grateful. Dennis had, intuitively, allowed him to go back to what he was; a printer, with a good salary, a nice car, good holidays and few worries.

The printers gave Dennis a financial platform and credibility with the Bank Manager which allowed him to go out and about and find other underperforming companies and business opportunities.

And he did, and he realised that not only was he good at buying companies he was also good at selling. Buy them at the bottom, build them up and, if earnings were likely to plateau, sell them at the top. Spot the trends.....watch the economic indicators.....what's coming up...what's going down.....?

Again his hero, Goldsmith, showed him the way and Pothole read anything about him avidly. Goldsmith had been a raider, but one thing he realised was that, in American accounting, companies with vast amounts of timberland had them on their balance sheet at \$1 due to years of depreciation write-down and so he would raid the companies and acquire vast amounts of timberland that had cost nothing!

Dennis was approached by an old school friend who was a bit of a geek and wanted to get into computers. It was still the days of the BBC B, and Amstrad and Dennis didn't really understand it, and so he read what he could and got his friend to show him how a BBC B could be programmed and then a light went on in his head.

These things were not *now*, but in due course, they would be the *future*! He didn't quite know how but he was quite certain. And so he started a new company with his friend as Manager selling computers and simple games. He knew it wouldn't make much money, but this was the long game. And he could watch, and wait.....he had lots of other things going on and making him money.

And he did, and he saw how computers could be integrated into all walks of life, and so he built up a chain of distributors and then became a major importer. Buy low, sell high. And then he realised that soon there would be too many manufacturers and that the only differentiation would be price... The hardware was being supplanted by the software, and that meant shifting boxes..... Low margin box shifting. And so he sold the lot for a massive sum to a major Group that hadn't got the brains to see the trends.

When he was twenty-five, he was a millionaire.

When he was thirty, he was a multi-millionaire.

When he was fifty, he was a billionaire.

Not bad for a boy called *potole-ee nee* Pothole.....

And even now his foresight had stood him in good stead. He saw the credit crunch coming as a friendly Banker had told him about the subprime problem that would, one day, perhaps one day soon, bite everybody's arse. That's how he had put it; it would bite *everybody's* arse, and so Dennis had sat in his office for a whole week and thought it through.

He rang everyone and read everything to get a balanced view. He knew shares were too high. He knew property values were too high and so he decided, where he could, to liquidate. He sold every share he had, all eight hundred million pounds of it. He sold his property portfolio en bloc for another three hundred million. He then went through the companies he personally owned and sold any of them that he thought would be affected and they brought in another two hundred million. He then distributed it in Banks throughout the world, but only in Countries that he thought would not be affected by the approaching storm. His appetite was whetted

at the bargains that would be available soon for anyone with cash...

He was also proud to have emulated Jimmy Goldsmith who did exactly the same thing in the mid-80's.

And with his wealth came the trappings of wealth. His main home was in Monaco with others in Kensington, London, Gstaad with his famous film star neighbours and his estate in Scotland which, unfortunately, was only available to him for part of the year due to the onerous and, he would say, punitive tax requirements of the Inland Revenue.

The Scottish estate was beautiful, and he enjoyed it so much he was currently negotiating with the Inland Revenue to see if they would accept a one payment per year, like the *Non-Domiciled*, to allow him to spend whatever time he wanted in Britain without actually flaunting it.

On his estate were superb stocks of salmon and trout, deer, grouse, partridge and pheasant and he and chosen friends hunted them. He imposed a strict quota on the numbers that could be hunted as, for him, it was a sport and not an opportunity for slaughter which he had seen far too often on the estate of others who tended to need the money from such activities to help defray the running costs of the estate. He didn't have those worries.

There were three things in his life that he was passionate about; his Scottish estate, his joint interest in his Formula 1 team and his paintings.

The Formula 1 team he had acquired a few years ago when it was struggling and needed a backer. He bought the lot then went around getting other sponsors and with his vast contacts, they came thick and fast. He told them it wouldn't

win anything, at least in the short term, but they would get lots of publicity; and they did. One way or another the *Team Speed* outfit seemed to always be a talking point and centre of interest. Dennis paid a lot of money to the PR people to make sure it was so. And the F1 Team cost him nothing to run as the costs were completely covered by the sponsors. In due course, he sold 50% to a car manufacturer which left him neatly on the sidelines and with a full wallet.

He came into paintings late in life when one of his lady friends, he wasn't married, from an aristocratic family introduced him to art. He had no idea such pleasure could be derived from paintings, but when she, an accomplished sculptor, had taken him through the meaning of what he was looking at, as against what he thought he was looking at; its form, texture, symbolism, intensity, colour, tone, rhythm and intellectual and spiritual value, he was awakened. This awakening allowed him to derive pleasure from a painting, sculpture, photograph or anything else that was 'art'.

Amazing!

Constable's 'The Hay Wain' was no longer a simpleton on a horse and cart in a stream but had a life and history although, she explained, when it was first exhibited in 1821 at the Royal Academy it failed to find a buyer! So he wasn't the only pillock!

In the houses around the world he could show off his collection, but in his Scottish domain, with its vast cellar, he kept his own personal collection. There were more paintings and artefacts in there than in all his residences combined. In the air conditioned and temperature controlled environment where the temperature remained a constant 70 degrees and humidity 50% and the special diffused lighting situated the

required distance from the paintings, he could admire his 'collection'.

Some were stolen from private collections, others the result of the Nazi lootings of the last war, more from Art Galleries around the world. Of course, he tended to overlook from whence they came. Only that they had arrived and were now his to look at in wonder....

Chapter 34

Middle Man – end man

It was several days before the middle man could get hold of the people he needed to speak to and another six weeks before the person who had the authority to do a deal with him rang him back.

It was not in the nature of doing deals that someone rang you back quickly.

The Middle Man explained his needs and asked whether the other party could accommodate him?

‘No.’

It was no deal!

Of course, it was no deal that’s how you did a deal.

A week later he rang again, and it was still no deal.

Of course, it was no deal that’s how you did a deal.

A week later he rang again, and it was still no deal.

Of course, it was no deal that’s how you did a deal.

A week later he rang again, and they started talking.

A week later it was no deal again.

Of course, it was no deal that’s how you did a deal.

A week later they were within a few thousand of each other and then it was no deal.

Of course, it was no deal that’s how you did a deal.

A week after that they had an agreement.

A deal.

The middle man was a touch surprised that they would do the deal but at the end of the day most things had a price.....and this had been quite a high price.

Plus his ten per cent of course.....

Chapter 35

Still out of the way

They walked over to Patricia, and one started to drop his zip. 'What the fuck's going on?' screamed Bob.

One of them changed direction and was about to smash him in the mouth when another said, 'No! Don't give him any excuse not to look while we fuck his sister,' putting as much emphasis on 'fuck his sister' as he could. He knew what to do, they knew what to do; H had been quite explicit.

Bob made strangled, gargling sounds and writhed in his chair to try and escape his bonds.

'Don't you dare touch me,' spat Patricia but they had their instructions, so he slapped her face so hard it rocked her chair.

'Open up, girly,' he said, but she made no effort to comply through her sobbing tears, so he smacked her again then one grabbed her hair while another grabbed her nose. 'Open your mouth, girly....'

And when she took a deep breath he put his dick in. 'And if you try and bite me, girly, I will knock your fucking teeth out, and then I'll start again. Got it!'

As he started pumping another started to undo her restraining ropes, and then he ripped her blouse and bra off.

'Not bad,' he said, 'as though we care....'

He had both hands behind her head and kept pumping until he came. She gagged and gasped for breath, but he stayed in until he had finished... Bob was screaming obscenities but was powerless to do anything. He writhed and tore at his

restraints, but they moved not one bit, and so his only power was speech. 'I'll fucking have you,' he screamed at the top of his voice, 'we'll hunt you fucking down and destroy you.' One turned and said as though to a child, 'Oh, just shut the fuck up.'

Pat was nearly unconscious from the trauma, but that didn't stop them. They ripped the rest of her clothes off and put her on the table. One went up her and another back in her mouth. She tried to stop them but had neither the strength or the will... After they'd both come, they turned her over and took turns up her arse..... Bob had tried not to look, but they had turned his chair when they had put her on the table. Make him watch, H had said... When they finished, she slid, unconscious, onto the floor.

Bob started to sob. 'I'll fucking have you....' he sobbed. 'I'll have you, you cunts.'

They walked over to Bob who waited for his turn, but they started to untie him. 'If you as much as move until we leave this room I'll fuckin kill you. Ok?!'

Bob didn't move. They untied him and as they left one said, 'And don't get any funny ideas. The next person in will have a shooter. Got it? And if you fuck about you'll have an extra orifice...'

As Bob went to his naked and bleeding sister, they went into the next room where H and Andy Pandy were drinking tea and locked the door behind them.

'Ok?' asked Andy.

'We are. She may be a bit sore though.'

'Ok,' said Andy, 'our work here is literally done. We're going to make sure they understand the score, and then we'll drop them off. So you can get back. Ok?'

‘Can we have a brew first, Andy? Rape and pillage are thirsty work.’

Andy looked at H who did not respond. Andy chuckled a twenty at them. ‘Get a drink on the way back.’

They nodded and left. A few minutes later H heard the Range Rover pull away and went to the curtain to see the tail lights go off into the distance.

‘We got time for a brew, H?’ asked Andy.

H nodded, and Andy went to the kitchen to make a cup of tea. The kitchen was stocked with every type of liquor, but H didn’t allow it. Andy sighed. Tea it was. Hoo fuckin ray. Fifteen minutes later Andy unlocked the door and went in with his sawn-off shotgun...

Chapter 36

Gucci meets F1

François-Henri Pinault, The Chairman and CEO of PPR the huge luxury brands Group, had been invited by Ferrari to the Italian Grand Prix as their guest. Unfortunately, business commitments on the other side of the world on that day meant he had to decline, but his assistant had pointed out that he could spare a few hours two days earlier and so he asked if he could go to a testing day? Of course!

The man who now ran PPR, the son of the billionaire François Pinault who had built up Pinault-Printemps-Redoute as it was originally called, to become a French trail blazer and one of the world's foremost suppliers of luxury brands, was hardly going to be refused. Even if he was French and home to the mighty Renault who had won with Alonso, gone downhill when he had moved to McLaren where coincidentally Alonso had gone downhill and now Alonso had returned they were making a slow comeback. The slower, the better....about a second a lap would be fine.

Francois Henri walked through the pits and marvelled at the technology which interested him more than the actual F1 racing which he felt was little more than a bore. But the technology. Wow! It was a boy's dream, all these gadgets and sensors and information. Magic. He had been told by McLaren that they had 'hundreds and hundreds' of sensors in their F1 cars and lots more than that in the test cars. They tracked everything from.....well everything. At the end of the morning after saying his goodbyes, he was walking back to

the helicopter taking him home to Paris when he stopped, thought for a moment, and headed back to the pits and found Stefano Domenicali, the Ferrari Sporting Director.

'I have an idea,' said Francois Henri, 'tell me what you think?'

Four weeks later the Head of Design at Gucci arrived at the Ferrari factory in Modena.....

Chapter 37

Could we.....?

Several weeks later the Consultant saw Pamela, Toby's nurse, on one of the wards and approached her. 'Pamela,' he said, 'it's good to see you again.'

'Is it?'

He looked into her eyes. 'Yes, it is,' and the affection was visible.

'It's good to see you,' she said, softening, 'what have you been doing the last few weeks? Annoying people?'

He smiled. 'It goes with the job.'

They talked for several minutes about everything and nothing, and then he said, 'Would you consider having dinner with me?'

'No.'

He didn't expect a yes, but the abrupt *no* stung him. 'I'm not even worth considering?'

'No.'

She saw the pain briefly in his eyes and then it went.

'Could I ask why it was such an easy decision?'

'You're married.'

He nodded. 'I am,' he sighed, 'that's true.'

'I don't 'do' in any way, shape or form married men.'

'My wife and I split up several months ago.....and we are currently adding to the pension pot of several in the legal profession. So yes, technically I am married but.....'

'No.'

'Still no? Because I'm married although I'm not with my wife?'

‘Yes.’

‘I don’t understand why that is such a barrier.’

She looked into his eyes. ‘You’re a highly paid, highly qualified consultant. You work it out.’

She smiled. ‘Got to go. Take care…….’

As he watched her walk away, his heart pounded... She had to walk the whole length of the hospital corridor, and he watched her all the way. There she was, now gone, back again, lost again as the different people, staff, visitors, patients got in his line of vision, reminded him of a cork bobbing up and down on a choppy pond until she wheeled into a ward at the far end and was gone.

Chapter 38

A chance to leave.....?

Bob's legs were stiff with cramp, so he crawled to his sister and apprehensively cradled her naked body. She sobbed silently into his shoulder.

'It'll be ok, sis, it must be nearly over now. I think they've made their point.'

He moved away and grabbed her strewn clothes and gave them to her but she was too traumatised to do anything. 'Put them on, sis, for both our sakes, or we've got no chance.'

He helped her on with them, trying hard not to touch her naked flesh, and as he did so, he was working out a plan. If they were coming in with a gun, then he would have to take the gun. It was that simple. If he could get the gun they were out of here. If he couldn't, well, not a lot had changed...

'Come on, sis, finish dressing. I think we can get out of here...'

He heard the key turn in the lock, and as Andy entered with the sawn-off shotgun, he pushed his sister to one side, momentarily distracting Andy, then lunged and tore the gun from Andy's grip. Backing up he levelled the gun at Andy's head.

'Come in, mister fucking James James,' he said to H who was halfway through the door. 'Come in, or I'll blow your fucking mate's head off.'

H walked in and stood there.

'Where are the others?'

'They've gone,' said Andy, 'you heard them drive away.'

‘So there’s just you two?’ Andy nodded.

‘Well, fuck me,’ said Bob, ‘Just you two, me and a sawn off shooter.....’ his voice raised, ‘Right fuckin on!’ He pointed the gun head high. ‘Sit down!’

H and Andy did nothing.

‘I told you to sit down,’ hissed Bob, ‘unless one of you wants to die now?’

They didn’t move. He put the muzzle against Andy’s head. ‘I’ll count to three and then your brains, if you have any, coat the wall.’

They both just stood there and looked at him. ‘You think I won’t do it?’ he screamed hysterically. ‘You think I won’t do it after what happened to her?’ He nodded in the direction of his sister who was still huddled in a heap on the floor by the wall. ‘One.....two.....three.....I fuckin warned you,’ and he pulled the trigger. The click filled the room. He pulled the trigger again. Another click. He repeatedly pulled the trigger to the sound of ever more clicks. Before his perplexity left him, Andy grabbed the gun and H smashed him in the face. They dragged him to his chair and tied him up again. His head lolled to one side as he drifted in and out of consciousness. They went over and dragged a whimpering Pat and secured her again. Andy looked at H who beckoned to the door, and Andy retreated. H slapped Bob across the face to stir him then went and sat opposite them. He watched Bob’s face as he readjusted to the new situation and saw hopelessness spread over it. He had taken a shot, tried to, and it hadn’t worked.....

Hope is such a cruel weapon, thought H. *Such a fucking cruel weapon....*

‘Well, here we are again, happy as can be....’ He ignored the ‘all good friends, etc.’ as being inappropriate for the occasion. ‘So what’s it like then? The boot on the other foot so to speak? What do you reckon, Pat.....a bit of customer research? Find out how your potential sellers feel when Bobby boy here sends in the goons. Eye opener, eh, Pat? Or what you told him to do?’

She started crying again.

‘Pat, you’re beginning to be tiresome. If you can’t take it why did you get involved in it? Surely you knew that one day you would meet someone who wouldn’t roll over? And you did. It was me.....’

She stopped crying and looked at him. ‘Let us go now,’ she said in a voice he could hardly hear. ‘We’ve nothing left....I’ve nothing left.’

‘You see, this sort of brings us back to Mister Tim Benn who we mentioned before and is now dead. By comparison to him, you do have something. Your life.’

‘You ain’t gonna take our lives, mate,’ said Bob, ‘so you might as well let us go and we’ll agree not to come after you in the future.’

‘You’ll agree not to come after me? That’s very kind of you. And how could I stop you....once the scars and memories have healed?’

‘He won’t,’ said Pat, ‘you have my word.’

H grinned. ‘That’s alright then....your word I’m sure is quite adequate for a binding agreement, as many have found out to their cost.’

‘It will be this time,’ she said slowly.

‘Oh, for fuck’s sake,’ spat Bob, ‘we agree laa de fuckin daa now let us go so we can get on with putting our lives back in order.’

H just sat and stared at him.

‘Oh, for fuck’s sake,’ Bob repeated, ‘just fucking get on with it.’

H thought for a moment then left the room. When he came back, he had an iron bar about two feet long in his right hand.

‘So you don’t think I can kill?’ he asked Bob.

‘Nah, mate, or it would have already happened. You may be the man but you ain’t a killing man...’

‘Watch this, Bob....’

H stood up and went over to Pat. He raised the bar shoulder high and brought it across, in a wide arc, as hard as he could. It carried on down to her face, went in front of her face, missing it by a fraction of an inch and H let it carry on its arc and then turned slightly so that its trajectory was the side of Bob’s head. It hit him just above his left ear and buried itself three inches in his skull! Blood and brains spilled out, and Pat looked on in horror as her brother’s life left him.....

It was a little while before she regained consciousness and then the horror swept through her, and she slipped away again.

H just sat and watched her.....

He hated this woman. She represented everything that he didn’t want a woman to be. She sent her brother to destroy businesses and families so that they could make more money. They didn’t expand through efficiency or better margins or good cash flow or being better than their competitors; they did it through fear...and violence.

But he knew it was more than that. This was not about business; she was not about business. This was about being a woman and what, from his point of view, a woman should represent. A woman should be like Benshima. Benshima who cared, who showed her love and affection; who let him live and understood his fears. Who didn't shout, wasn't violent, didn't blackmail him emotionally. Benshima....who kept him safe.

And then there was this cow. This hard bitch who was the antithesis of 'safe'.

Unsafe.....

Who you would always have to be wary of.....who would destroy you for her own ends, whatever they were, at that point in time.

She started to stir again. H looked at his watch and was surprised that he had been watching her and not watching her for nearly twenty minutes. He stood up. 'Andy....'

Andy came in.

'Ready?'

Andy nodded and looked at the pair. She looked a bit rough, but the man looked a touch worse with an iron bar embedded in his head which had lolled over his shoulder as the blow had broken his neck.

'Didn't like him, H?'

H smiled. 'Nah.....evil bastard.'

Andy thought for a moment. 'And that makes you.....?'

H grinned. 'Happy.'

H went across to Patricia and untied her. He picked her up gently and walked to the door. 'It's time you slept,' but there was no reply. Going into the next room and through to the hall he lifted her as high as he could, and Andy slipped the noose

over her head that had been secured from several of the bannisters. H slowly let her drop until the noose tightened and left her dangling a foot above the floor.

‘Pony on fifteen?’ Asked Andy.

H couldn’t see it. Fifteen? She was far too weak...she wouldn’t last fifteen minutes.....

‘Five.’

‘Nearest to?’

H nodded. They checked their watches.....

‘Thirty seconds either way?’ asked Andy.

‘Sixty?’

‘Forty-five.’

‘Forty-five,’ concurred H.

After a few moments, her eyes flew open, and she stared ahead but saw nothing. She started wriggling and squirming and making guttural noises. Her hands clutched the rope above her head, and she pulled as hard as she could to release the throttling around her throat. Doing so made her swing around and she saw H and Andy sitting and watching. Clutching the rope with one hand, she extended her arm towards them. Unintelligible noises came from her wide open mouth. Pleading noises..... pitiful noises..... dying noises.

Andy looked at his watch and saw four minutes had gone by.

Go, girl, he thought, fight for your life.

For another.....he looked at his watch again.....six minutes.

Six would make him nearest to. And get the pony.

Even though she had nothing left her embedded need for life gave her strength but the more she struggled, the tighter the noose became and the more extended her neck. For some reason, H remembered a quote he had read many years ago

by Ovid the poet in the time of the early Roman Empire, who said, *'pleasure is sweetest when 'tis paid for by another's pain.'*

So true.....

H's mind wandered on another tangent, and he thought again about power. What was it? Why was it?

Only a day or two ago she and her brother were 'powerful'. True, in a limited way, but all power had some limitations unless you were a solitary God. But they weren't Gods.

And then they have their power taken away. Pffft. Gone! Like the illusionist and the woman in the box. So where was the power if it could be taken so easily?

Power was illusory!

You only had power if others thought you had!

It was no different in poker when you bluffed a hand. You made the others think you were strong when you were actually weak. He remembered seeing Jamie Gold talk someone into folding an Ace straight because there were two aces on the table and he convinced them he had a full house. He talked someone into folding an ace straight by making them believe he had a full house and putting all his money in the middle to emphasise the fact he had the nuts and couldn't lose! He only had 6 4 off, and all the cards on the table were Aces and pictures! And he managed to persuade his opponent he had strength!

And he had nothing. Nothing! And what he was saying, with all his actions, was 'if you call this hand you will lose'. I am more powerful than you, you will lose. Better if you give up now...

Illusory power.....

Subjugation through illusion.....

And the theory attached itself to everything. The Government was, appeared to be, strong, but what would it do if everyone refused to pay taxes? What could it do? It had no power any more...

If the Army refused to go to war? Who could make them?

And H, who owned several companies and expected his instructions to be acted on; what would happen if they all said 'Get fucked!' Well, H would be fucked. Well and truly! No power.....

So once you had power how did you keep it? You fought battles you could win. You kept enough allies in your camp so that any rebellion could always be thwarted.

You kept power by keeping control.....

It was what every Dictator had done, but most somehow cocked up. Not enough allies, too many battles.....maybe megalomania had set in, and they thought they were invincible. Remember that, Jimmy boy....don't bite off more than you can chew. And also remember you're not invincible, especially with the plod..... He thought again and realised that his self-analysis of power was hardly Machiavelli's *The Prince* or Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*; both of which he had at home but to his shame had never managed to get to the end of either.....but it would do.

Andy nudged his arm and nodded towards her. Her face was blue, her eyes were becoming marked from the burst blood vessels, and her tongue lolled out of her mouth.

'Soon.'

When she took her last breath at ten minutes, they shook hands and declared a draw.

‘Dead on ten minutes. Get it, H?’

‘Got it.’

‘She could at least have hung in there for another forty-six seconds, and I’d have had a pony. Get it, H? Hung in there? Get it?’

‘Got it, Andy. Good one....’

Andy giggled hysterically at his joke. ‘Hung in there.....fuck me, that was good. Have to tell the men about that one.’

He suddenly remembered and looked quickly at H. ‘They’re supposed to be alive?’

‘Flown to warmer climes.’

‘What’s that saying, H? When hell is the favourable option? Where do you reckon these fuckers are?’

H shrugged. He really didn’t care...

They decided to have a brew and H rang Biggles who was waiting to add a little protein to a fish’s diet. As H was making the call, Andy shouted, ‘Oh for fuck sake....’

H smelt the foul odour as she let go of her bowels and it stuck in her restraining pants and tights.

Half an hour later Biggles, piloting a small two-seater helicopter, landed outside the house and Bob and Pat were dumped on the passenger floor.

H and Andy went back into the house, and Andy went into the room the brother and sister had been in.

‘Why do you always leave me with such a fucking mess, H?’ he shouted through.

‘Dirty work always leaves a mess, Andy, you know that.....’

True, thought Andy, and pays very well.....

Chapter 39

Toby's new toy

Toby Williams had told the police all he knew which was basically nothing and the social workers had tried to persuade his mother to take him back which she wouldn't what with having a new boyfriend and all and so he went to live with his aunt and uncle.

They looked after him, calmed him down, played with him, got him back into school and made sure he ate well and went to bed early. Just about everything, he had never experienced.....and he quite liked it.

He knew where he stood. It allowed him to understand the difference between right and wrong. You did it right, and you were rewarded one way or another; perhaps a smile, an enthusiastic compliment, a hug, maybe even an ice cream. And if you did it wrong they explained why it was wrong. Verbally.

One day a large Mercedes pulled up outside the semi when Toby was playing in the garden. A man and a woman got out and stood outside the gate.

'Are you Toby?' asked the smiling woman.

He looked at her suspiciously, moved a little nearer towards the house and then nodded.

'Toby, my name's Benshima and this is James. Is your Aunt or Uncle in, Toby?'

Reluctantly he nodded again.

‘Could you go and get them for us, Toby? Bring them out here?’

He pondered for a moment then went to the door where he stopped and looked back.

‘It’s ok,’ said James softly, ‘it’s ok.’

A few minutes later they came out. Suspicion clouded their faces. ‘Toby said you wanted to see us.....?’

‘Yes,’ said H, ‘and please don’t be alarmed. My name is James James, and this is my wife, Benshima. We read about Toby and realised that he had been a victim of a man who also tried the same thing with the child of a friend of ours. In that instance the child was lucky and no damage.....was done.’

‘What’s that to do with us....and also how did you find us?’

‘In a way, it has more to do with me than with you. When I was young, I also suffered in like vein, and so I know what he went through. To say the least. And I live with the consequences of that every day of my life. And so I wanted to do something. Maybe for Toby or maybe for me.’

He put his hand in his pocket, and the Merc boot rose noiselessly. He went to it and pulled out a brand new bike.

‘This is for Toby. If it isn’t what he wants in relation to colour or whatever he can change it here...’ he held out a piece of paper, but no-one moved forward to take it.

H realised there was still a gulf between them. Indeed there was still the garden gate between them.

‘Look, I realise you don’t know Benshima and me from Adam..... and Eve, and you’re quite right, in the light of what he’s been through, to be suspicious....which at least means he may be protected here.....’

‘You haven’t told us how you found us?’ the man asked.

'It was quite easy. We just asked the right people.....'

'And who would they be....?'

H said nothing.

'Mister.....Maddox?' Asked Benshima.

It was his turn to say nothing.

'Mister Maddox, we cannot convince you of anything, and that's fair enough, but perhaps you could give us the benefit of the doubt until we give reason otherwise. You have our names; you have our car number plate....' She fished in her Chanel bag for a card, 'and here is our home address and also...' she turned to James and held out her hand. He went to the car and reached in a glove box and handed her a card, 'this is my husband's business address. If you want any more proof then just ring the police and ask them to check us out.'

No, thought H, please don't.....thanks, Benny.

No one said anything for a moment, and then a small voice intervened. 'Whose is that bike?'

She looked at her husband..... 'My name,' said the Aunty, 'is Rosie. This is Malcolm. Would you like a cup of tea.....?'

H breathed a hidden sigh of relief.

'We'd love one, Rosie,' said Benshima. 'Thank you.....'

Chapter 40

The Takeover

As I am sure you are aware J J Group Ltd acquired the businesses within the B & P Group last week. We will contact you shortly about what we want you to do. In the meantime would each MD please ring me to discuss how the handover will be executed.

The email went to all the companies and the B & P 'Head Office'. The computers each sent back a 'gone bust' reply. Within minutes the MD of the skip hire company rang H.

'You can't own us,' he said straight away. 'I would have known. There must be some mistake.'

'I can assure you we do and I can fax you the Agreement to prove it and, on top of that, I can show you where the four million left our account to pay for it.'

'But.....'

'And on the subject of mistakes why are your companies sending, essentially, 'we've gone bust' email replies?'

'Because we are.'

'What do you mean, 'we are'?''

'All of our accounts have been cleaned out. All our money has gone and our computers wiped.'

'You'd better be pulling my leg,' said H, his voice now concerned.

'I wish I was.'

'Do you know where Bob and Pat are?'

'Nobody's seen them.'

'I bet they haven't. Your money gone and mine as well, I bet.'

'How do we pay our bills and the wages?' asked the MD.

'I have absolutely no idea. What's your name?'

'John Skipton....and I've heard all the jokes.'

'John, let's keep this simple for now; what are your monthly costs?'

'About seven hundred...'

'John, I don't do 'abouts'. What is it *exactly*?'

'Hang on a sec....'

'Our average monthly cost is seven eighteen.'

'Good. And what do you make?'

A pause. 'Our average profit is fifty.'

'Knowing the trade, you're in is that actual or book profit?'

A long pause. 'Thereabouts...it's only about as Bob sorts it out...did sort it out...about another ten.'

'John, as you obviously realise we are in deep shit. According to you, there is no money in the companies, and I am several million down which I don't appreciate. I only have two options. One is just let them go into Receivership and lose my money. The other is to finance them until I get my money back and start again.'

'We have a good business here,' cut in the MD, 'it would be a tragedy to let it go for nothing in a fire sale....'

And lose your salary as well, thought H. 'I need time to try and sort things out. That being the case would you ring the MDs of the other companies, explain the situation to them and, by the way, see if you can get any idea of where the former owners are, and then give me a ring at four this afternoon. OK, John?'

'Ok.'

H put down the phone and smiled. Step 1. Set the scene, Jimmy boy, set the scene.

He looked at the clock. Too early to ring Jose.

Getting up he wandered out of his office, down the corridor and asked for someone to get him a coffee and then he ambled back.

He found a number and rang B & P's Head Office.

'Good morning, can I speak to the person in charge, please....good. My name is James James, I am the new owner of.....ah right, that saves me going through it again.....thank you, I think we'll need all the help we can get. Now, have you heard anything from Bob or Pat? They didn't seem the sort who would defraud me of several million, so I'm sure there must be a mistake somewhere.....ok, well, if they ring please get them to ring me immediately....good.' He listened for a few moments. '.....but why Panama? Why would it go to Panama? You obviously wouldn't know this, Edith, but my money for the companies was paid into a Panama account. On their request.....I have no idea what's going on, Edith.....are you sure there's nothing there? I know it's difficult to erase everything from a computer especially if the hard drive hasn't been formatted so what I want you to do is get Parcel Express or someone like that to send your computer to me. I will arrange for a specialist company to see if they can retrieve the data.....good, good.....anything we can do to help, Edith...of course.....what I'm going to do is send one of my colleagues up to you, and he will help sort out the mess...Don't worry, we will do whatever we can to help you.....thank you.....thank you.....don't worry, Edith, with your and the rest of the staff's help we may be able to save the companies, and then your mortgage can be paid, and you're

safe... Ring me if you get any information on Bob and Pat, Edith.....ok.....bye.'

Step 2. Hearts and minds, Jimmy boy, hearts and minds...

He rang the Colombian Bank that Jose had got him into, asked for Senor Serrano and after a few moments' wait was put through. 'Senor Serrano, Jesus, how are you?'

'I'm fine, James, how is everything with you?'

'I'm good, Benshima is good, and in fact, she did mention that we really should do dinner again soon...'

'We would like that...'

'Jesus, this is just to tell you that I will be using our overdraft facility for a while. We have had a bit of a problem in that I bought a couple of companies for four million.....'

'I saw the transaction go through to Panama?'

'Yes, that's right, and it would appear not only my money but all the companies' money has gone with them.....quite..... so I can either wind them up or cover their cash flow requirements. They're profitable, so I would prefer to do that.....thank you, Jesus...As soon as possible I will let you have all the documentation you need, and they can use your Bank for their day to day transactions..... thank you again, Jesus. See you soon.'

He rang Norm, his accountant, and explained the situation.

'So let me get this straight,' said Norm, 'you've bought some companies for four million, the companies have been stripped before you get there and I haven't known anything about it?'

'I'm in the gambling business, Norm. I took a punt.'

'Did you H? Did you really.....?'

‘Anyhow, Norm, as soon as I get all the information to you I want to know exactly the situation I have and if that means sending someone up there so be it.....thanks, Norm.’

He rang Martin Gwen, his solicitor.

‘So let me get this straight,’ said Martin, ‘you’ve bought some companies for four million, the companies have been stripped before you get there and I haven’t known anything about it?’

‘I think Norm just said something like that. He work for you now? Keeps the books straight, eh, Martin?.....alright, alright.....Joey Finstein did the legals for it.....who’s Joey Finstein?.....he’s someone I use in an emergency *when you’re on holiday*.....anyhow I want you to help me sort out the legals and I want you to tell me whether I should go to the police or what I should do?’

This was the tricky bit.....the police. They wouldn’t care too much as long as there wasn’t a load of interested parties that were left broke by the scam. Or put another way if H picked up the tab.....

‘Martin, could you have a preliminary word with them as I am working my arse off to save the situation...I know it’s not what you usually do...I know you’ll have to charge.....I know..... thanks, Martin.’

He rang Joey. ‘Hi, Joey, it’s H.....good, you?.....you remember exactly what to say, Joey?.....just send the bill for the legals to me, Joey..... ..yeah, good one, for the illegals then.....see you, Joey.’

Step 3. Organise the main actors.

He rang Allan Scott. 'Scotty, how are you doing?..... I've got a little job for you.....nothing to a man of your calibre... I've got a bit of a problem with some companies I've bought yes.....it was a bit of an opportunistic punt.....and I want you to sort it out.....yes, you.....'

Step 4. Send in the agent provocateur and wait and watch...

He looked at the clock, did the subtraction and picked up the phone.

'Senor Reyes, please,' he said to the receptionist on the switchboard of the oil company where Jose usually was on a Monday. 'Senor James.....'

He was immediately put through, and Jose said in a fatherly way, which made James feel.....wanted; part of something..... 'James, how are you?'

'Good, Jose, you?'

'Of course.'

'How can I help you?'

'A minor blip on the business radar and I have spoken to Jesus and told him we are going to have to use our overdraft for a while. Would you mind if we borrowed some from your funds to put in there as you tend to charge us less than he does?.....Thank you, Jose, I really appreciate it. I'll send you an email explaining the situation and confirming our arrangement.....'

They went on to discuss family matters and then Jose had to take a Group conference call and had to go. As he went from his large office down the corridor to the Board Room, he smiled to himself.

He liked James. James James.

This boy from the back streets who had married his daughter, not knowing who she was and indeed caring less. And even though he now knew of the family's vast wealth he had never asked for one penny to help his businesses. He was fiercely independent, and Jose liked that. He had a childlike innocence and loyalty coupled with an ability to fight to a ferocious end. And he was cunning.....his cunning was almost simplistic, but it was only simplistic because he thought it through first.

What had Benshima called him? Oh yes, 'an intelligent thug'. That didn't do him justice; he was more subtle than that...

And this 'loan'. How wonderful.

True, in the overall scheme of things it was only pennies but, as they say in Britain, pennies make pounds. James pays four million for some companies that are not for sale, and he sends the money to a Panamanian Bank. He fakes the sale and purchase agreement and then moves all the companies' money to the same Panamanian Bank. Then he kills the owners...

Just like that.....

And then Senor Jose Reyes arranges for an Englishman and woman to go to the Panamanian Bank and take out all the money in several Bankers Drafts. And it is deposited again... and split and moved again...and again.....until it all arrives in an account controlled by Senor Reyes and he lends some of the money back to his son in law. And so James gets several companies, for nothing, and his own money back.....plus all the money from the companies' accounts out of Britain and away from the tax authorities.

And all that because someone decided to beat him up.....

Jose Reyes was quite proud of his son in law, but he knew he was wasted. His talents should be used in bigger and better ways...

As he went into the Board Room and they all stood he knew, for the family dynasty to continue, James James had to join the family business...

Chapter 41

Scotty goes to Liverpool

Scotty caught the train to Liverpool to visit B & P Skip Hire and while he had the time he settled back and read and thought. On the train, the more industrious of his travellers were beavering away at laptops or ripping off instructions into mobile phones, but that wasn't Scotty's way. Trains were to be enjoyed, assuming you weren't sitting by a moron who had an iPod stuck in his ear that was rattling his teeth. In his copy of The Times, he saw an article which summed up just about everything he thought about politicians:

Sports Minister Gerry Sutcliffe has told the licensee trade magazine the *Morning Advertiser* that Alistair Darling was wrong to raise beer in the budget and "I think the industry's right to be upset. We, and I speak as a champion of the pub trade, want the Chancellor to change his mind."

Unsurprisingly after a period of reflection, officials say Mr Sutcliffe has changed his mind.

"His comments do not reflect his views."

His comments do not reflect his views. It should be put on the headstone of every politician, thought Scotty. *His comments did not reflect his views – he would say anything to be elected and stay elected.* And the plaque above it would have an image of a large Wessex Saddleback with its nose in a trough..... Arseholes!

No, that wasn't fair...fucking arseholes!

And what to do with B & P Skip Hire? The boss had said 'do what you like'.

'What does that mean, boss? Do what you like?'

'Scotty, go up there and assess the situation. If things need changing, change them.'

'They already have an MD, boss.'

'They do indeed, but he doesn't own it. I do. I know you did two years in that industry and so from today it is your responsibility to make sure it is ok unless you tell me you don't want to do it and until we decide what to do with it as I know sod all about waste management and so I may sell it.'

'He may not appreciate it, boss.'

'It's all yours, Scotty....' and wheeled and walked out of Scotty's office with a hidden grin on his face.

'Boss,' Scotty shouted after him. He stuck his head back in the room. 'I want one or two things off you, please.....'

He was met at the station by the B & P rep and taken out of the city to the office and yard. On the way, Scotty tried to make conversation with him but it was no use, someone had apparently told him to keep his mouth firmly shut! It was a newish red brick building with lots of glass and had the Union Jack flying on top, but the rep didn't stop at the car park but took him up to the yard and parked there.

'Give you a chance to see what's here,' he said as he indicated to get out.

Scotty looked at the mud strewn yard and his shiny shoes. 'I think we should get out at the car park.' The rep shrugged and got out, taking his keys with him, leaving Scotty sitting there.

He got out of the car and started walking towards the office. A skip wagon went close to him and splashed his suit and then, as he continued, a skip was dropped causing a loud bang that made him jump, and his heart rate shot up. He turned round to see the driver of the vehicle grinning. B & P three, Scotty nil.....

It would seem that his presence would be tolerated, but the help would be minimal as this little show of menace had illustrated. From his office John Skipton watched the humiliation of Scotty and knew this nonentity would be no problem; he'd be gone in an hour....or less. He took his fingers out of the pants of the girl who was standing by him. 'Go and make a cup of tea.'

'Just one?'

'Just one.'

She rearranged her pants, left the room, and he took a tissue from his drawer and wiped his wet hand. He got up to have a wash but decided against it when he realised it was his right hand that had been in her pants.

At fifty-four he was a big man, overweight, from too many meals and too much booze out of his reasonable pay packet but also the cash he managed to get on the side. He was married with no kids. A serial womaniser it was no coincidence that almost all the administration staff were women. He had an instinct, when he was interviewing them, as to who would let him 'take liberties'. And most of them did, even the young ones. He felt their tits, got fingers in their pussies and occasionally got sucked off by the last one to leave in the evening. If there was an Association dinner, he would arrange for one of them to join him, and they would stay overnight.

Scotty was shown to the large office of John Skipton and shown in. Skipton didn't get up.

'Pull up a chair,' he said, which Scotty did. 'You've come to have a look at us for your boss.'

'No.'

'Why's that? Why are you here then?'

'Well, I've seen lots so far and so I actually only have one decision to make.'

'What's that then?'

'Whether to sack you....?'

'You....' He said, 'sack me.....? I'm afraid, Sonny, that if it came to a choice between me and you your boss would have you out in two fucking seconds. You're just a snivelling little twat.'

Scotty said nothing.

'I run this place, Sonny, and it would fail without me. And even if I left, every customer, and I mean every fucking customer, would come with me. So why don't you fuck off back and let us get on with what we do and you go and do what you do which I bet is making tea and licking arse.'

Scotty thought for a moment. 'Could you arrange a cup of tea, please?'

'Piss off.'

Scotty got up and went into the next office and as he did so the phone went. 'Could someone get me a cup of tea, please?' asked Scotty.

One of the women started to get up, but the woman put down the phone and said, 'Sorry, we don't have time,' and the other woman looked at her and sat down again. He went back into Skipton's office and saw the superior grin on his face.

'It would seem we have a bit of a problem,' said Scotty.

‘Not we mate, you.’

‘Actually, it’s not me, *mate*, it’s you,’ repeated Scotty. He picked up his briefcase, opened it and took out some papers.

‘According to your so called Head Office, all the people here are on standard employment contracts, including you.’

He looked at Skipton who was making an elaborate display of cleaning his nails.

‘And you have been here five years which means if you are made redundant you get.....let’s see, you’re on forty thousand a year and you would get one and a half weeks’ pay for each year, so that’s about four grand.’

‘You know you can’t get rid of me. Why don’t you just piss off and send the organ grinder up to talk?’

‘Of course, the four grand would be tax-free, so that will help you.’

‘Piss off.’

‘Look,’ said Scotty, ‘we’ve started off on the wrong foot. Why don’t we start again?’

‘You’ll get a foot up your arse if you don’t fuck off.’

Scotty nodded slowly and took a deep breath. ‘Ok.’

‘Good, and don’t come back.’

Scotty looked down at his papers and went through them.

‘Just so we know where we stand, this,’ he held up a sheet of paper, ‘is Minutes of a Meeting where the Board of Directors have sacked you as MD. You may want a copy....’ He leaned over and put it on his desk. ‘This,’ he continued, ‘is another Minute showing my appointment as MD.’ He put that on his desk. ‘And this is your Redundancy Notice as from today.’ He put that one there as well. ‘The last is a bit debatable legally, but as you have admitted to running a company illegally by defrauding the Inland Revenue and as my boss has a

recording of that which he will quite happily give to the police I think you may overlook that.'

Skipton looked stunned. 'You can't do that!' he snarled.

'I have.'

'I bet your boss knows fuck all about this you little prat.'

Scotty sat and looked at him.

'I'll ring him,' said Skipton.

'He's a busy man, it would be better if he wasn't involved.'

'Better for you.'

He turned some sheets on a pad and started ringing the number.

'There's no need to bother the boss.'

Skipton grinned. *Got you.....!*

'James?' said Skipton. 'John Skipton here....good, thank you, how are you?.....good, good.....I've got whatsisname here out of your Admin I think and he's causing a bit of a problem.....sure...' He pushed the button to put it on speaker phone.

'Hi, Scotty, how's it going?'

'A touch difficult, boss, but I've sorted it out.'

'Fine, so you don't need me then?'

'No thanks, boss, everything's fine.'

'Hang on,' jumped in Skipton, 'this little runt.....'

Scotty, who was six feet, wondered why he kept calling him *little*? '.....says that I am no longer the MD and also redundant. He didn't mention that a minute ago, did he?'

'Is that right, Scotty?'

'Yes, boss.'

'Ok,' said H. 'Is there anything else you wanted to discuss before you leave, John?'

Skipton's jaw dropped. 'Didn't you hear me?' he shouted. 'Didn't you hear what I said?'

'Yes. Scotty has sacked you and made you redundant; if that isn't a contradiction in terms?'

'You can't do that!'

'From what I gather Scotty already has. Anyhow....Scotty, you don't need me in this conversation, and I have things to do. Sorry it didn't work out, John.....' and he was gone.

Skipton was devastated. His mind was desperately trying to work out what had gone wrong. Five minutes ago he had a salary, people to do his bidding, girls to feel and next week he would be...on the dole. His mind veered between rage and killing the little bastard sitting opposite or grovelling to stay.

'If you wouldn't mind?'

'Eh?' and saw Scotty standing by his chair.....

Scotty wasn't really good at this, but he knew that when someone was down, you had to keep them down. Show strength. That's what H had said.

.....but it took a moment for Skipton to understand and then he slowly stood up. Scotty nodded to the other chair, and he shuffled over and sat down.

Scotty watched him. Let him feel the isolation and the loss of power and then see what you have left..... That's what H had said.....

.....Scotty remembered ten or more years earlier when he had got a job as General Manager of a skip hire company. It made money but was poorly organised with people holding meetings every ten minutes, and there were lots of offices where people hid. It already had a manager who, Scotty found out, spent most of his time watching porn and the woman who ran the accounts ran the show; primarily

by withholding information and was, therefore, the gate for the whole company information flow. And the owner, a weed of a man called David Hixon, was terrified of her. Scotty had a meeting with the Manager and explained that he wanted a meeting with him every day so that he could explain what he had done. After three days he resigned.

In the second week, Scotty reorganised and put everyone in one open plan office, and the woman who ran the accounts was directly in his line of sight. He took all her acquired powers off her and made her sweat by demanding accounts days, if not weeks, quicker than usual. Six weeks later she left.

Meetings were abolished, and he introduced 'responsibility and accountability' for the employees. Profits and morale went up, and everything was rosy.....ish. David Hixon was a tormented man. Although not able to run it himself he couldn't cope with the fact that someone else could. He had signs put all over the building pointing to 'To the Managing Director's office' and on his door 'David Hixon, Managing Director' and on his desk 'Managing Director'.

If Scotty went out to meet customers, he would ring them later to find out whether he had been? Scotty would have a few minutes out by taking the cheques to the Bank and Hixon would time him.

And when Scotty should have got his agreed bonus it was refused and so relations between them, never exactly good, soured.

They weren't helped when Hixon had the website changed. He had a big picture of himself put on it and underneath it said 'I guarantee to beat any price.'

Scotty went spare. His whole strategy had been built around excellent service and good margins, and now this prick was saying the opposite. They had a row, and Scotty had it changed back. Several weeks later he was commanded to go the Managing Director's office where Hixon had a consultant sitting by him.

'It seems we have a problem, Allan,' said the consultant.

'We? Me and you?'

'No, you and Mr Hixon.'

'Has he lost his voice? Is he ill? Should he be in bed? Is that a cardboard cut-out?' said Scotty sarcastically.

'It seems,' said the Consultant, 'that you were heard saying you think Mr Hixon is poor at marketing?'

'That wouldn't be correct.'

'So you didn't say you thought Mr Hixon was poor at marketing?'

'No.'

'But you were heard to say that.'

'No, I wasn't.'

'You were.'

'I wasn't.'

'Are you suggesting they are lying?'

'Are you suggesting I am?'

'Shall I send for them?'

'I don't think you have the authority to send for anyone.'

The consultant looked at Hixon who looked very ill at ease. Confrontation was not what he did face to face, and this wasn't going to plan.

'Perhaps I can help explain this mix up,' said Scotty amiably.

'If you could,' said the Consultant.

‘I would never, ever, say that I thought David knew very little about marketing.....’

The Consultant felt an inner glee as he waited for this man, who had taken a lot of lucrative work from him, to grovel.

‘..... I fucking *know* he doesn’t!’

.....Scotty looked at Skipton. Should he keep him on as a Manager, as he certainly didn’t want the job, or get him gone and start again? Why hadn’t the pillock been amiable and then there wouldn’t be this mess?

But if he stayed he would see it as weakness and revert to cash jobs and fly tipping, and they didn’t need that. Perhaps better to have someone new and get him straight into H’s way of working?

Scotty’s nose itched, so he brushed it with his hand and smelt.....? What was that smell? It smelt like fish? Fish? Skipton had fish and chips in here? His mind made an association.....pussy? Pussy? He looked at Skipton who was looking down at the floor and then he looked at the arms of his chair and saw that one was discoloured. Oh, fuck! He’s had his hand up somebody’s pussy just before I arrived, thought Scotty. Oh, fuck!

Ah well, QED.

He got up and went over to Skipton.

‘We’ll sort out all your money etcetera later today and have it transferred to you tomorrow. I’ll also sort out a reference, but it won’t be glowing. If you decide when you get home to get an Industrial Tribunal involved I will call the police and have you for theft. Your company car stays here. Do you have any credit cards, petrol cards....?’

Skipton nodded. Scotty held out his hand, and Skipton took them out of his wallet and handed them over.

‘Laptop?’

Skipton shook his head. ‘Just the pc,’ he said forlornly and nodded towards his desk.

‘Car keys...’

Skipton looked at him as though he had asked for an arm.....

‘I should also point out that if you do anything to jeopardise the economic well-being of this company in any way we will sue you personally for any loss.’

Scotty went to the door and opened it. Skipton left the office, was about to speak to the staff, but Scotty stopped him and indicated the door. He watched him walk through the gate then went back inside to tell everyone about the new arrangements...

Chapter 42

Cleggy hears a rumour

H took the call from Cleggy. 'Cleggy, my man,' said H warmly, 'how are you?'

'Good, H, and you?'

'Always good Cleggy, always good. How many have you got up and running now Cleggy? Eight, twelve, fifty? How many teams are scamming the internet punters now?'

'Just the twelve, H. You know me, I'm not greedy.'

'From what I remember, Cleggy, four made about nineteen hundred an hour and so twelve....?'

Cleggy let out a little giggle. 'It's not as good as it should be but about five an hour.'

'A grand an hour for being a criminal mastermind, eh, Cleggy?' He heard another giggle. H smiled. He still paid Cleggy a yearly retainer, and he hadn't heard from him for while so what was this to be? 'Anyhow, my little criminal mastermind, you called me...?'

'Yes, H, I am, as usual, here to help you spend money.'

'How much money?'

'Not sure exactly....yet, but I would think between about forty and a hundred.'

'Thousand?'

'Million.....'

'I'm not the friggin Bank of England, Cleggy.'

'I know that, but I also know you're a businessman who can take advantage of a good deal.'

'Go on...'

‘You know Packster Capital?’

‘Yeah, the big American Venture Capitalists. Bought out Glamour Leisure for a massive sum about, oh I don’t know, two or three years ago?’

‘That’s them.’

‘Cleggy, to buy them would cost me a touch more than a hundred million.’

‘True, but not if you just buy the casinos.....’

‘The casinos are up for sale?’

‘Not officially but a little bird tells me that they are struggling, and the shareholders want some liquidity back in the company just in case everything starts to dive, and they’re doing a review to see what they can sell.’

‘And the casinos would go?’

‘Certainly some and perhaps all. As I said they are struggling, and business hasn’t picked back up since the smoking ban.’

‘Chance of good deals?’

‘I would think so. It’s not exactly a seller’s market, and the other big boys are going to have a problem selling the idea of buying struggling casinos to their shareholders who also want their own Groups to conserve cash.’

‘What kind of discount do you think we can get in relation to pre-smoking prices?’

‘Difficult to say but I think for the profitable ones you’re still looking at ten times and for the ones that are difficult to price I would think we’re looking at a third off what we’d pay in usual times.’

‘And how many are there?’

‘Ten. But they may want to keep the two in London.’

‘Cleggy, I need a few minutes to think this through; can I ring you back in a while?’

‘Sure, H.’

‘Back soon, thanks, Cleggy.’

H put down the phone and rang Adrian, the General Manager of his two casinos.

‘Hi, Ade....and you...Ade, I’ve just had Cleggy on, and he thinks a few casinos may be coming on to the market. What are your thoughts on us having a look at some of them?.....ok.....ok.....ok..... Well, if that’s the case we’ll have a meeting in my office as soon as I can get Cleggy up here. Talk to you later with a date and time.....well, if that’s the case you can cancel it if it conflicts....ok.’

He rang Cleggy back.....

Chapter 43

Should we.....?

Several weeks later and three weeks after the consultant had 'worked it out' he saw Pamela on one of the wards and approached her.

'Pamela, it's good to see you again.'

'Is it?'

He looked into her eyes. 'Yes, it is,' and the affection was visible.

'It's good to see you,' she said, softening, 'what have you been doing the last few weeks? Annoying people?'

He smiled. 'It goes with the job.'

'Pamela, would you consider having dinner with me one evening?'

'No.'

'I'm not even worth considering?'

'No.'

'The marriage thing?'

'Yes.'

He reached into the inside top pocket of his suit jacket and took out an envelope. From that, he took a document and waved it in front of her. 'My divorce,' he said triumphantly.

'Lucky you.'

'Not lucky. An expensive tragedy but life is made up of those one way or another.'

She nodded.

'So may I,' he continued, 'invite you out to dinner now I am a divorced impoverished consultant?'

‘Yes.’

His heart immediately started pumping faster. ‘You’re a woman of few words.’

‘How many do you need?’

He smiled. What a woman..... He put her telephone number in his phone and they arranged to talk the following evening.

The same evening Doug went to his club. It wasn’t a posh, upper-class club but one he had been a member of for years in a small town close to his home. It had a snooker room with four snooker tables, a separate bar area, a television room and a reading room where every periodical you could wish to read was there. From golf to gardening, to National Geographic, to motoring to snooker to..... Every weekly or monthly was there to be read...every week or month. Plus all the daily papers.

It was a magical place for several reasons. The first there were no women. Not that he had anything against women, but men changed when there were women present, and this took away that potential explosive mixture. Secondly, it was by invite only, and so a member had to propose you which meant you tended to be accepted if you ‘fit in’. Thirdly there was no background music. Ever! And last but not least you had a key, and you could come and go as you pleased between 8 am and 12 midnight.

It was a second home...but much more relaxing.

On a Thursday, when he could fit it in which wasn’t often, he went and had a game of poker and maybe a game of snooker. He was knocked out of the poker early on when he called a raise with K J and lost to A K. The snooker wasn’t much better...

He bought a pint of cider from the bar and sat and thought about Pamela. His heart pounded again, and he knew he was in love with someone he didn't know and could be the biggest cow in the whole world. Even bigger than his ex-wife! Nah, that wasn't possible.

How could you fall in love with a mystery?

Did it need to be a mystery to fall in love?

What happened when it was no longer a mystery? Was God an Astronaut? Is Gordon Brown gay? His mind wandered to all the imponderables in the Universe then came back to Pamela. His heart pounded again. He made a quick decision, got up and went to the car park where he took out his mobile and rang her number.

'It's Doug.....I know I said I'd ring you tomorrow but I wanted to talk to you tonight. Tomorrow seems a long way away...I know.....How are you?.....I know you haven't been unwell but.....'

He was floundering, and even to his own ears, he sounded like a little schoolboy with a crush. He even thought he felt himself blushing. Blustering on, in the end, he found some equilibrium and a reasonable conversation ensued. Half an hour later they hung up.....

He wandered to the bar, replenished his cider and decided to wait for the poker game to end and the second one to begin....and to concentrate. He gate crashed a discussion on the housing market slump between an estate agent, a supermarket manager and two retired bods and decided getting divorced at this time was not financially conducive.

There again, nor had marrying in the first place.....

Chapter 44

H goes to B & P Security

H had given Scotty the job to sort out the Skip Hire Company as he had some prior experience and it would also be an opportunity to see what Scotty did. So far Scotty had excelled in the job of providing information and advice to him and the Managers. Somehow Scotty had not made them feel threatened by his input and suggestions and never took the credit when his ideas were used in the different businesses.

It had worked well.

But let's see how he manages? As H had a use for Scotty soon.....maybe. And although the MD of the company was a bit rough and ready, it was a skip hire company for Christ's sake. H didn't get the feeling that he would physically harm Scotty and so let's see how Scotty does.....

But B & P Security was a different kettle of fish. H had talked to its MD, and he was less than helpful. In fact quite the opposite. He insisted that he still worked for the Walkers until they told him otherwise and that H's presence wouldn't be welcome until that day, if it ever came, which he doubted. He insisted they were fine, although they had no money, so H knew he wasn't exactly talking to a financial genius. He knew, he said, that there would be a good reason why Bob and Pat were not around and as soon as they wanted to they would be back and sort it out.

What a prick!

However, H had persuaded him to let them come to the company and have a meeting, and so he was on his way with Brian Thomas who was the MD of JJ Security nee Secure Security.

When H and Brian joined him in his office two other men were also in there. Their ages were difficult to judge, but H reckoned the Neanderthal period would be about right. They were given coffee but little else in the form of a welcome, so they settled down, and H patiently explained what had happened, when he had bought the business, what it had cost etc.....but it made little difference.

‘The point is,’ said H, ‘that I am the owner and you will have to make the changes that I want.’

‘Pal,’ said the MD whose age could have dated just a touch farther back but who couldn’t be entirely thick to do the job, whatever the job was that he did, ‘You ain’t doing nothing here. I told you. I don’t give a fuck what you show me, I want to hear it from Bob and Pat. Ok?’

‘But how will you manage unless I inject cash in here?’

‘We’ll manage, mate. That’s my problem, not yours...’

H wondered what he could do? He could hardly smash his head in and take over as it was unlikely that Health and Safety would allow it.

‘Ok, we’ll do it your way. I would have preferred it my way, but you’re the boss here and if that’s what you would prefer I suppose I can go along with that for a while.’

‘You ain’t got any option, pal.’

‘Well, before we go back could we just have another coffee?’

‘Sure.’

One of the men left to organise it.

'I must show you this,' said H and went round to the other side of the desk and stood by the MD. 'It's a magic trick.'

'Eh?' said the MD.

'A magic trick. I do the odd magic trick, and I quite like this one.'

Eh? Thought Brian, H does magic tricks? H took out his neatly folded white handkerchief and laid it on the desk, in a square, in front of the MD.

'It's a great trick; it's a *change* trick. We change something into something else. Now if you put your hands on your knees...?'

The MD looked confused but did as he was told.

'That's it, but have them completely relaxed.'

The MD flapped his arms and hands a little to relax them.

'Even more relaxed if you can.'

He flapped again.

'That's it. Now just look at the handkerchief.....concentrate on the handkerchief.....Now in a moment, keep concentrating on the handkerchief, you will see it change from white to.....'

H grabbed the hair at the back of his head and slammed his face into the handkerchief on the desk as hard as he could.

And again. And again. '.....red.'

And before the other man, who was motionless, gawping in disbelief, had time to think H had got to him and grabbed his throat. 'Don't fucking move,' he snarled, 'unless you want the same.'

The man tried to get up, so H smashed him in the face, and he went down. When he hit the floor H went down and grabbed his throat again. 'More?'

The man spat in his face and H smashed him three more times in the face until he stopped moving. He then took his arm and wrenched it against the joint and Brian heard it break. Brian couldn't believe it and found himself shaking. He wanted to say something but didn't know what and so he just watched as H dragged the unconscious, bleeding MD to the corner of the room and then stacked his mate by him.

'And you'll pay to have this carpet cleaned. *And* I want a new handkerchief,' said H, pointing at them.

The other man came in with a tray and saw H sitting in the MD's chair. There was blood on the desk and little whitish things, but he couldn't work out what they were. He looked around the room and saw his unconscious colleagues in the corner and the tray tilted, and the cups fell off. His colleague was in a dreadful state, and the MD, whose nose was flat and face covered in blood had his mouth open with missing teeth..... He looked again at the desk. Oh shit..... He wasn't a big man although he could be an aggressive man but he became wary. Very wary.....

'You want to have a go?' asked H softly.

To his credit, he did give it a thought, but self-preservation overrode his loyalty, which was getting more tenuous by the second, so he decided to decline the invitation. He shook his head slowly, put down the tray and held up his hands. 'I just work here.'

'Ok,' said H, 'as I said previously, I am the owner of this place, and we're going to make a few changes.....now, what's your name?'

'Ken Morris.'

'And what do you do here, Ken?'

‘I’m assistant manager in charge of sites. I’m...’ he nodded over to the bodies, ‘his assistant.’

‘Ken, I want to explain something to you, and I want you to tell it to everybody else. You have new management. We have legally bought Bob and Pat’s companies, and we will run them our way. Also, tell them that without our money this company is bust and you all lose your jobs. Your MD here no longer works for us and for the time being Brian here will stay and sort things out. Tell them all if they have any problems with that they can either resign or talk to me..... You got that?’

‘Yes.’

‘And something else...’

‘Yes?’

‘Do you realise how lucky you have been today?’

Ken’s eyes flicked to the corner and back. He nodded slowly.

‘Good. Now go and spread the word. Tomorrow Brian will talk to the people that matter and decide, dependent on the cooperation he thinks we’re going to get, whether we put our money in or just walk away. Ok?’

‘Yes.’

‘Get all the managers or people who have authority in here at eight thirty tomorrow for the meeting. Ok?’

‘Yes.’

‘Good. You can go now and arrange to take these two out of Toby’s office.’

He nodded and moved quickly out of the office. Brian started to say something, but H shook his head. A few minutes later there was a soft knock on the door, H bade them enter, and several men came in and dragged the bloody mess out. A moment later there was another knock on the door, and a lady’s face peered round. ‘Would you like tea, coffee.....?’

‘We would appreciate that,’ said H softly, and they gave their order. ‘Before you go, what’s your name?’

‘Trixie.’

‘Trixie, would you please tell the others that the company has changed hands and Brian here is now running the show. We’ll meet you all tomorrow and, assuming we think we are going to get cooperation off everybody concerned, then their jobs and wages are safe...’

‘Oh, thank you, we were so worried.....’

‘No need to worry anymore. As long as we get *everybody’s cooperation*, everything will be okay.....’

The message was quite clear.

‘I’m sure we’ll all do everything we can to help.’

‘Good. It will be more than appreciated.’

Hearts and minds, thought H, *hearts and minds*.

When the door closed, H winked at Brian. ‘Cracked it.....’ he said with a grin.

Magic, thought Brian.

Chapter 45

The casinos?

Cleggy travelled up from his home on the South Coast, Adrian caught a train from Snow Hill down to Euston to be met by a waiting Scotty with a car, and they all assembled in an office over one of the clubs. After coffee and the usual anecdotes from the different enterprises and Cleggy's nefarious scams they sat around a glass coffee table on casual lounge chairs and H started the meeting.

'To reiterate, Cleggy has heard there may be an opportunity to buy some casinos from Packster and it would be remiss if we didn't look to see whether this is an opportunity for investment or whether we should keep out. That is, of course, on the assumption we can even afford them which may be beyond our means. Ade, give me the current situation in ours and how you think this may, or may not, fit in.'

Ade took a swig from the large mug of latte and started his summary.

'Obviously much of what I am going to say you already know..... In spite of the smoking ban we are doing quite well in Birmingham, in fact much better than the other casinos, for several reasons. The first is we decided not to chase smokers to persuade them to come back and to concentrate on looking after the non-smokers and get more of them to bring their mates. Secondly, we upped our advertising spend. Thirdly we have a reputation as a friendly casino, which means you can come to us and no matter how much you spend you get treated well. We won't put up with any crap from so-called

high rollers who lose a few quid and start ranting and raving. If you do that you either stop or you go, so to speak....'

'The old 'stop and go' move, eh, Ade?' said H.

Ade grinned at the poker reference.

'As I can't remember what number I was at I'll just carry on,' said Ade. 'We have also been lucky in that we had few Section 21 machines in and so when the law was changed recently that affected us very little. A major change has been the introduction of 'loyalty cards'. You can put money in any of our machines and if you win or lose it gives you a loyalty card. If you win the card is credited, and you can use it anywhere else. Although our machines aren't Bally, we have done a deal with them, and they are supplying the card readers, etc. As I said, they are loyalty cards which means you get a credit based on the amount you play and the stakes you play. It rewards you for playing with us, and that's exactly what we want. The final innovation which has, as you will know, only just become legal, is that we have changed the front of one of the casinos so that people on the road can see in through large plate glass windows. I should emphasise that this is only a small part of the casino and for people who have no objection to being seen by Joe Public. Many of our customers do not want to be seen gambling for religious and other reasons, and so they are catered for in the old way.....'

He stopped and sipped from his cup. 'Yuk,' he said, 'it's cold.'

'You shouldn't spend so much time talking,' said H, picked up a phone and asked for more coffees.

'About buying more casinos, we obviously want to achieve certain things,' he looked at Cleggy and grinned. 'Jump in if I miss something.'

'Ok,' said Cleggy.

‘Firstly we obviously want a good price. The better the price, the less we are restricted by large interest payments. Secondly, it would help considerably if they had two casinos for sale in the same town. That allows us to mix and match staff as, as you know, one of the vagaries of casinos is they can have different busy nights and that way we can make more efficient use of staff. And thirdly we need a critical mass. We need more casinos to cover overheads that are non-specific to a casino and can be used anywhere. Such as me, Health and Safety Officers, HR, PR, Advertising, Gambling Commission Reporting, Governance, etc. These costs or people can be shared throughout the Casino Group, and we save money.’

He looked at Cleggy. ‘How am I doing?’

‘I’m impressed.’

‘What areas would we prefer?’ asked H.

‘Excluding London, the obvious ones are Birmingham, Manchester, Glasgow, Bristol....places like that.’

H picked up the phone and dialled internally. ‘A large container of hot coffee, please, with more milk and sugar.’

‘Magic,’ said Cleggy, ‘but how about a bacon and egg butty?’

‘You want one?’

‘Love one.’

‘What about you, Ade?’

‘Haven’t had one in ages as the missus keeps me on the straight on narrow so I’m going to have to decli.....say yes.’

‘No point asking you, eh, Scotty? The usual?’

‘Please, boss.’

In the past, Ade blanched when Scotty called H ‘boss’ as he saw it as arse licking but he now realised it wasn’t that. It was something to do with boundaries and loyalty, and Ade knew

from past experience when he had a 'disagreement' over some statistics with Scotty that he had absolutely no reluctance whatsoever to fight his corner with Ade or H or anyone else if he thought he was right. When they brought in the new coffee H sent them out for the hot sandwiches.

'You always had style,' said Cleggy.

Ade poured out the coffee and held up his mug. 'To style.....'

And they clinked away.....

The break over, H said, 'What's this going to cost? You first, Cleggy.'

'It's fairly simple, H, and I think Ade will agree here. It's still going to be ten times, but for the weak ones there is going to be a bit of room for manoeuvre; however, there could be more leeway if we're offering to take them all.'

'And they have seven?' asked H.

Cleggy nodded.

'And how much is that, pray?'

'At the moment we don't know, but let's assume we exclude the one in London and pick up the others. Let's assume they're making on average....'

He looked at Ade. 'Five?'

Ade shrugged then looked a smidge dubious. 'Perhaps a touch more?'

Cleggy looked at Scotty who nodded.

'Ok,' said Cleggy, 'let's assume six. That's six times ten, times six hundred thousand which is thirty-six million.....less any negotiating we can do.'

'But why,' asked H, 'would they sell if they're covering costs, paying some to the Group and still making ten percent?'

‘Fear,’ said Cleggy, ‘they don’t know how bad it’s going to get and don’t forget these guys are enormous and have all manner of pulls on their purse from many directions. They just may not see these as a way of making money, especially when what they want is companies that offer them an exit strategy to make a profit on. They’re better off putting it into something else in which they see a profitable in and out strategy.’

‘And we can do something with these, Ade, to add to their profit?’

‘I don’t see why not.’

‘That’s a touch non-committal, Ade. I don’t really want to put in thirty-six mill if you’re half-hearted about this...?’

‘I think I said it wrong then. I see no reason why we can’t add value to the new casinos and make them a good value purchase,’ he said with total commitment.

‘That’s better. Now I feel much more comfortable spending my thirty-six mill.....’

The bacon and egg butties arrived, and they tucked in.

‘Heard a great story the other day,’ said Cleggy, ‘although I may have it slightly wrong, but many years ago Stu Ungar, or it may have been Jack Struass.....anyhow we’ll say it was Ungar, and somebody else get to the end of a large poker tournament. They have roughly equal chips, and nobody raises preflop, and the flop comes Ace, Ace, Queen. The guy raises, Ungar goes all in and gets called. Ungar flips over Ace Queen, and the other guy looks for a moment and says “I can’t beat that”.

‘Ungar goes wild and dances round the table with his hands in the air, and the other guy just sits at the table. After a moment Ungar senses something wrong, goes back to the

table and the other guy turns over Ace Queen as well. Good, eh?’

‘Like it,’ said H. ‘There are some bloody wonderful poker stories and I could listen to them all day.’

‘Have you been watching *Poker after dark*?’ Asked Ade.

‘Yeah,’ they said in unison, nodding enthusiastically.

‘Isn’t it fascinating.....’ said Ade. ‘I mean, I’ve been in this game twenty odd years, but the gamblers and card players still fascinate me. They are just a breed apart.’

‘You know, I can never work out how they all make a living?’ said Scotty.

‘I think,’ said Cleggy, ‘What you see on the tele is just them advertising themselves. Tele time as they say. They make their money in cash games where some of the competition has more money than sense.’

Ade nodded again.

‘You know,’ said Scotty, ‘I love playing poker, but I can’t get in the black with it. I play, as you know and delight in reminding me....’ they grinned knowingly, ‘pound games and so far in the last twelve months I’ve lost three hundred quid. And then the other day I’ve got seven quid left in my account, and I see a six-pound tourney and think ‘screw it’, and I win a hundred and ninety quid. Three days later I do the same again and win a hundred and twenty quid. As I’m now Phil Ivey - the only difference between him and me is he’s taller and black...’ the room erupted in a burst of laughter, ‘... I go back into the pound games and find nothing has changed....’

‘You can’t win at pound games, Scotty,’ said Cleggy, ‘we keep telling you. They call with anything and see you with anything because who gives a shit about a pound? You have to move up if you want skill to have a chance.’

‘Nah. Can’t do that.’

Which is what he said every time it was suggested.....for him it was too much risk, too much exposure and far too aggressive.

‘Did you see that thing on Annette Obrestad the other night?’ continued Scotty.

‘I did,’ said H.

‘Amazing. It would appear our nineteen-year old Norwegian miss won a tournament with one hundred and eighty players in it and didn’t look at her cards. Didn’t look at her cards! Shit.’

‘Fucking hell,’ said Cleggy, ‘I wouldn’t need the Fab Four...’

‘I can’t win when I see the bloody things,’ said Scotty.

‘A friend of mine,’ said H, ‘A guy called Chris Purnell, thinks they must be autistic. They must remember everyone’s betting pattern. Everyone’s.’

‘Could be,’ said Ade, ‘could be. It would explain a lot. I’d never looked at it that way, but some of the chess people certainly are.....’

They chatted a bit more then H said, ‘Over the next few days I need you three to have a wander round these casinos to make sure we know what we’re getting...assuming I can raise the cash...because I also need to know if we have to spend millions doing them up?’

‘An idea, H,’ said Ade, ‘why don’t Cleggy, Scotty and I do the South, you and me the North?’

‘It’s a good idea, Ade, but we all do this together. I want everybody to contribute to this and to do that we all have to see everyone. I don’t want any *‘well, I didn’t actually see that one’* after I’ve made the decision, and it turns out to be a balls up.’ They nodded silently. ‘So keep your diaries free and Veronica will make all the travel arrangements, and we meet

back here exactly one week today and decide if we approach Packster.....and at what price?’

After they had gone, he rang Senor Serrano at the Colombian Bank and enquired about borrowing between thirty and forty million?

‘Assuming it stacks up, James, I see no problem in that.’

H thanked him and hung up saying he’d be back in touch when he had more details. H didn’t really need that much as he had a few million in retained profits and Directors’ loans, but he liked the knowledge that the whole amount was there if he needed it. In fact, he could easily have funded the lot if he had used his ‘offshore’ money but better to be an ordinary businessman, with ordinary borrowings, should the plod or Inland Revenue ever come sniffing around...

Senor Serrano knew there would be no problem about it ‘stacking up’. James’ figures were good and his businesses were well run but even if they weren’t when you were part of the Reyes family it ‘stacked up’.

And not only that, Senor Reyes would never let a loan go unpaid....

Chapter 46

Bad night for England

Ade's phone went as he and Cleggy were just about to leave one of Packster's casinos in Bristol. He looked at the number and saw it was Birmingham. 'Hello?'

'Adrian, it's Justin.'

Justin was the Manager and in charge of the general day to day working of the casino.

'Hi, Justin, how's it going?'

'I need a little help, please.....'

Jonathon England, footballer extraordinaire, had visited his sister in Stratford and gone to the casino in the evening. He had a rolling one million pound credit account with all the casino Groups, and although JJ Casinos was only small, he also had one with them. The fact that he had one didn't mean that he necessarily used it, and he mainly used the big London casinos, but he arranged them in case. A call to any of the London casinos verified his arrangement and winning and losing habits and, more importantly, his settling of the account. He always settled and most had automatic debiting arrangements up to one million.

Tonight he was pissed off.

He had arranged to go into Birmingham first to see a woman that had been prearranged for him by his ever accommodating Agent, but she had been taken down with chickenpox which, he thought, was very apt, but never the less he was pissed off.

He was frustrated, and he wanted to take his frustration, his anger, his sexual needs out on someone. He rang his Manager and screamed at him to find someone else and while he did he was going to the casino. His manager didn't think that was a great idea but said nothing. Sometimes you said something, sometimes you didn't. That was the skill of being a good, and wealthy, Agent.

Within an hour he had lost a quarter of a million on roulette. Half an hour later by going for the high odds, high-risk numbers he had lost just under a million. He asked to see the Manager and said he wanted another million credit. The Manager said that would be difficult, but if he gave them a cheque, he would confirm that might be acceptable and anything not used would be put back in his account. England ranted and raved, but the Manager politely stood firm until England agreed and Justin rang Adrian.

'I don't see any problem with that,' said Ade. 'Just make sure the obvious things are right; it's not Bank of Toyland and he's signed it correctly ok.....ok.'

While England was waiting, he rang his Manager again and reiterated his demand for a woman but the Manager was struggling. It wasn't just any woman England wanted, it was one to hurt, and in the mood he was currently in, one to hurt real bad. And that presented problems.....afterwards.

Placating England by saying he was still trying to organise it he put down the phone. What to do?

If England didn't get a woman, he would lose a load at the casino. If he did get a woman he would more than likely kill her. Better a few quid down the drain and of course it was England's money, rather than something that could ruin his career and, by extension, stop an income stream to the

Agent. The cost benefit analysis undertaken he started getting his excuses ready.....

Half an hour later England had lost another million and demanded another cashed cheque, but after Justin had talked to Adrian again, the request was politely refused. The now half drunk England demanded a taxi to take him across town to another casino.

In the other casino, he was lauded as someone of his stature was, and he immediately started again on the roulette table. Single numbers, high odds. And missing.

When his million was up, he demanded another extension, and again they asked for a signed cheque which, although screaming at them, he gave.

He lost that as well.....

Chapter 47

Making preparations

Liam Luteene sat in his study in the cottage and looked up at the dry wipe board on the wall. It was covered with dates and arrows and different colours for different degrees of importance. As Head Gamekeeper for Sir Dennis Pothole, Liam was a critical employee and Sir Dennis a critical employer.

Thirty-nine year old Liam had worked there for twenty years, and when Sir Dennis took over several years ago, he was just the Under Keeper doing long, arduous hours. Not long after Sir Dennis took over he, John the Head Gamekeeper and Sir Dennis were touring the estate in a Land Rover when they came to one of the many streams that it housed. Stopping by the stream Sir Dennis had, in a city sort of way, told them how fantastic it looked. The Head Gamekeeper agreed, but Liam said nothing. Sir Dennis looked at him. 'You don't agree?' said Sir Dennis, sensing something was amiss. 'Why don't you agree?'

Liam looked at the Head Gamekeeper and still said nothing. 'Why don't you agree?' asked Sir Dennis again, 'and don't look at him, I pay your wages.'

Liam knew the stream was in poor health. It ran slowly, the sides were eroding due to the cattle grazing the banks and pushing them bit by bit into the stream, and the alder was taking all the light. That meant there was no gravel on the bottom to spawn in, no birds, no insects, no life. But it looked pretty.....to a townie.

‘What’s going on?’ demanded Sir Dennis. ‘I asked you a question and I expect to get answered.’

‘Excuse me, Sir Dennis, but it’s not my place to advise you. I’m just the Under Keeper, and it is the Head Gamekeeper’s role to do that.’

Sir Dennis thought for a moment. ‘John,’ he said to the Head Gamekeeper, ‘what’s wrong with this stream?’

‘It’s a touch slow, Sir Dennis, perhaps a touch shallow but a good storm will clear it out.’

He turned back to Liam. ‘Under Keeper, what’s wrong with the stream?’ he demanded.

Liam knew he was out of a job. If he didn’t answer, Sir Dennis would sack him, if he did, John would get rid of him. Ah well...

‘The Head Gamekeeper is quite right, Sir Dennis, but from my point of view what you see there,’ he nodded at the stream, ‘are symptoms rather than problems. There are several issues that, if corrected, would bring life back to the stream and by that I mean fish, birds, insects, plants.’

‘And what are those issues that I should correct?’

Liam told him.

‘I see,’ said Sir Dennis who said no more, and they set off to continue their tour with the Head Gamekeeper now giving Liam a stony stare. Later that night Liam was visited by the Head Gamekeeper and told to make arrangements to vacate the cottage within a month but that they would provide a reference. Liam knew it was going to happen....and it had.

Three days later as Liam and his wife were having breakfast, they were visited by Sir Dennis. They offered him a mug of tea which he accepted, and he sat with them at the large old wooden table. After enquiring about their children, he said,

‘Liam, I’m off abroad tomorrow for about five weeks so while I’m away, I want you to sit down and write a report about the estate. I want to know what could be made better, even different, so that the estate thrives and everything on it enjoys a habitat that it would flourish in. Can you do that for me?’

‘Yes, Sir Dennis.’

‘I take it you have a computer, and you can put it in Word and cost it in Excel?’

‘I have a computer of my own I can do it on, Sir Dennis.’

Sir Dennis paused. He had noticed Liam’s wife looking uneasy, and Liam was.....helpful but.....guarded. ‘What’s wrong?’

‘Nothing, Sir Dennis. It will be ready for you on your return.’

Sir Dennis saw the increasing agitation on his wife’s face and addressed her directly. ‘Will *you* tell me what’s wrong?’

‘He’s too bloody.....noble.’

‘Noble?’

‘Yes, noble. He’s been sacked, and still he helps....’

‘Sacked?’

‘Yes. We’ve been given four weeks to vacate the cottage and get out.’

Sir Dennis looked at Liam. ‘Should I ask who ordered this?’

‘The Head Gamekeeper, the bastard,’ exploded his wife.

‘Now, now, love...’ said Liam gently, then looked at Sir Dennis.

‘It’s ok, I’ve had a word with a friend at the estate of Mister Al Fayed, and they have a vacancy which I can fill.’

‘If you want to go I will not stand in your way but would you prefer to stay here?’

After a pause, Liam nodded.

‘Then it’s settled. You stay!’

‘Sir Dennis,’ said Liam quietly, ‘It won’t work.....you understand?’

‘I’ll sort it out with John; don’t worry, there won’t be any rancour.’

And true to his word, there was no rancour from John as he was sacked within one hour of the end of Sir Dennis’s conversation with Liam.

Six weeks later Liam sat down with Sir Dennis, and they went through everything the estate needed. Liam was made Head Gamekeeper and put in charge of the management of the ‘natural’ estate, as Sir Dennis put it. It was his job to allow, and where necessary help, nature to thrive. To Liam, it was like a gift from God.....

He was also given a fixed budget and told that any extra expenditure had to be costed correctly and approved. It may be a natural estate, but the resources of mammon also became part of its natural cycle of life.

It ruined his marriage as, much as he loved her, he loved the job more so she found someone else who didn’t work from dusk till dawn and sometimes longer. She needed a man who, when they were walking together and saw deer rutting, thought of sex rather than whether they would need to be culled next year? The two boys stayed with him and would hopefully follow in his footsteps.

Part of his duties was the organisation of the guest days when Sir Dennis invited his friends to shoot or fish and one of those days was approaching quickly. The Glorious Twelfth when Sir Dennis invited people who he wanted to experience the occasion. And it was going to be a very good occasion this year. The wild grouse were plentiful as the weather had

been kind and the sheep, which were used as 'tick mops' to attract the ticks to the sheep rather than the grouse, had done a great job and the grouse were healthy. The sheep were dipped every four weeks or so to rid them of the parasites. And as the grouse were plentiful a full shoot could be organised as the number of days was related to grouse stocks so that their ability to breed and thrive was always protected.

This year Sir Dennis had invited ten guests, or 'guns' as they were properly known. They would leave the lodge in the morning and stay out all day before coming back for dinner which would, on this occasion, be celebrated with the first grouse of the season. For lunch, *garrons*, small Scottish ponies, would be loaded with panniers of food and wine and they and the staff would make their way to the guns accompanied by the Head Chef. The meal would be laid out in a hut built of stone, and after lunch, the Head Chef would go back to the Lodge with enough grouse for the evening meal.

Each gun was housed in a 'grouse butt'; a dozen holes cut into the ground with a flag floor and stone walls. With them was a loader who would either be someone the gun had brought specially with him, perhaps the chauffeur or valet, or if not, Sir Dennis would provide one. It was the loader's job to have the second, of what would be no doubt one of the best English side locks produced, at the ready for the second shoot. Obviously, the loader had to be competent to not only assist his master but also safeguard the guns. A good pair of Holland and Holland or Purdeys that a wealthy Englishman would own would certainly cost about a hundred and thirty thousand a pair and ones that were purchased by people

from less restrained nations, with carvings or gold inlay, would be around two hundred thousand pounds a pair.

The gun would fire twice forward facing, change guns, and then twice when the covey, a family or several families of grouse, had passed overhead. A good shot would certainly bag two in front and two behind. The gun never fired sideways as it could blow the head off another gun which was seen as quite unsporting...

There were five drives a day and on hand were the Head Keeper plus four beat keepers, all dressed in their estate tweed, with ten pickers up and thirty-five beaters. The beaters all carried a small white flag which they 'cracked' with a flick of the wrist to startle the grouse and start them on their way forward. Any birds shot in front were picked up by the beaters and behind were *pickers up* with spaniels and Labradors who quickly found any injured birds. The dead grouse were laid on their backs to cool on a good day, a three hundred brace day, which meant sixty birds per gun.....

And so Liam looked at his board on the wall and made sure, for the umpteenth time, that everything was catered for; the timing correct, the extra staff hired for the day and, according to the Met Office on the web, the weather was also going to favour them.

He even had God working for him.

A beautiful, perfect day.....

Chapter 48

England bounces

H had his feet up on his desk at home when the phone went.

‘Hi, Ade, how you doing?’

‘Fine, H, you?’

‘Good. How can I help you?’

‘We have a problem, I’m afraid, H. One of our better known customers has reneged on a cheque.’

‘How much for?’

‘A million.’

H swung his legs off the chair and sat up. ‘A million? Is that what you said, Ade, a million?’

‘Yes, H.’

‘That’s a lot of money to be giving away, Ade. Who is it and why did we agree on it?’

‘It’s the footballer Johnny England, and we allowed it because it’s common practice. Quite often someone will go over their credit limit, and casinos allow their rich clients to give them a cheque. It’s there in black and white, so there’s no argument.’

‘But.....?’

Ade was beginning to wish he wasn’t having this conversation but he was, so..... ‘This happened two weeks ago, and he cashed a cheque with us and later on that evening with the Round Table in town.’

‘So....?’

‘So we offered the cheque the next day to the Bank, and two days later we find it has been stopped, and the one to the Round Table.’

‘Stopped? How can he stop it?’

H realised that was a stupid question and so did Ade. ‘Why did he stop it?’

‘He said it was a gift.’

‘A gift!’ exploded H, ‘what are we, a fucking charity?’

‘He has said, through his solicitors I might add, that both casinos allowed him the extra money on the understanding that they would accept the cheque, as it was standard procedure, but he would be allowed to cancel it as long as he would do promotional work for them. Meet clients etc etc.’

‘Does he live in fantasy land? Why would I pay him a million to do that?’

It was another stupid question for which there was no answer.

‘If it’s ok with you, H, I’m giving this to our solicitors to start the legal process of getting the money back. I’ve talked to Round Table, and they would be happy to join us in a joint action.’

‘Can he get away with this, Ade?’

‘No. If it had just been us, he may, just may have done but as there are two of us he hasn’t got a cat in hell’s chance.’

‘Good.’

‘And I would think that once he gets the writ he will more than likely pay up anyhow.’

‘Thank God for that,’ said a relieved H, ‘but what if he still says ‘no’, how long will it take?’

‘Six months, maybe a year.’

‘To get my money back? *My* money!’

‘Yes. It’s a long and tedious process.’

‘And the cost?’

‘About thirty thousand split between Round Table and us.’

‘And I take it we get that back plus interest on our money?’

‘Yes.’

‘But only if we win.’

‘Yes.....’

There was a pause in the conversation. ‘Ade, I don’t want to question your judgement but should this have happened?’

Ade was silent for a moment, but he had been waiting for this.

‘I’m afraid it’s part of the industry, H. It happens very, very rarely. Most customers wouldn’t dream of doing what he did as they couldn’t gamble anywhere, ever again.’

‘Are we insured for this?’

‘It’s a debatable point as we are obviously insured for theft but Mister England says we gave it to him...’

‘Bastard! You know, Ade, I hate the fact that some third rate celeb can just take our money with absolutely no regard for the consequences. If we’d been strapped for cash that would have taken us under. Just like that. Gone.....’

The message was quite clear.

‘I’m sorry, H. It won’t happen again.’

‘Should I be part of the decision making process on such large amounts?’

‘You’re the owner, H, it’s your money. If that makes you more comfortable then yes, you should.’

H thought for a moment. ‘Ade, I’m going to leave it to you. I got you here because you’re good and I respect your judgement and so I’m going to regard this as one of those things and leave it to you....’

‘Thank you, H, I appreciate that.’

There was nothing else to discuss, so H terminated the conversation.

He sat and stared at the ceiling for quite some time.....

He respected Ade's judgment but.....

He was stuck with Johnny fucking England but.....

He didn't want a legal battle but.....

He wanted to expand but.....

He had no wish to be a drugs baron but.....

But.....

But.....

But.....

But me no fucking buts, thought H, quoting Shakespeare just a touch out of context.

Chapter 49

What to buy, what to sell?

H and the team visited all the Packster casinos and had an informal talk with Packster who were insisting that they were not up for sale but would look at 'any attractive offer'. They were also insisting that any offer for the casinos should include the London Casino.....but that wasn't for sale either. It had been agreed that an offer should be put forward in due course but before then H had to decide what to do with the two companies that he had 'bought' off Bob and Pat.

Scotty had spent three months at B & P Skip Hire, and it was now less profitable but quite legal. Brian had done the same with B & P security with the same loss of profitability. Both companies had cleared out the more undesirable elements, stopped indulging in illegal activities, established better relationships with existing customers and attracted new ones. Essentially they were now just ordinary trading companies.

H had the casinos, betting shops, JJ Security, the two B & P companies and now he was going to make an offer for the casinos. But did it all stack up? Did it make sense? Was it strategically sound or just opportunistic? He sat down with Scotty and asked the question. 'Is our Group strategically sound or just opportunistic, Scotty?'

'I don't think it's either or, boss. From my point of view, it's nearly strategically sound and it's also been put together strategically and opportunistically.'

'Well, that makes it much clearer,' grinned H. 'And in English?'

‘As a Group, we are fine, with the obvious exception of B & P Skip Hire. To me, that doesn’t fit in at all. We get no synergy with any other parts of the Group, can’t move management around if we get stuck as they don’t have the skills, and we can’t cross-sell to our other customers. Something like ‘you’ve had a good evening at the casino now how about an early morning, piling rubbish in skips’ doesn’t quite linger in the ‘successful marketing campaigns I have known’ category.’

‘You could buy it off me, Scotty. You could run it.’

‘No money, boss.’

‘You could pay me back in instalments and have your own company. Why not, Scotty?’

Scotty looked down at the floor. Why not indeed? A company of his own. Nobody to tell him what to do. Once the boss had been paid off all the profit would be his. The answer was a bit obvious. ‘No thanks, boss. I really appreciate it but no thanks.’

‘Come on, Scotty, what can go wrong? I’m taking the risk.’

‘Something would, boss. That’s the way it goes with me.’

‘You’re sure?’

‘Yes, boss.’

Scotty was quite sure. He had tried in the past and failed. And he could try again and succeed, but he didn’t want to try anymore. He was happy where he was. With a boss that appreciated him and a woman that loved him. That was fine. That was enough. He was content. ‘Yes, boss, quite sure,’ he reiterated.

H looked at the man before him and felt something for him. Whatever kept Scotty there, the emotional attachment hit H like a blow to his heart. He was still overwhelmed by acts of affection or loyalty or appreciation..... He picked up his tea

and walked to the window to hide his emotions. 'Raining again...' he said to get on to a neutral subject. 'Yes, boss.'

Composed, H came back and sat down. 'You're right about the marketing thing. It pulls the whole friggin lot down with its association with garbage. So we dump it, so to speak?'

'I think so, boss. The one problem is the money you have already lost to the terrible two when you bought it. You can only break even if you're lucky.'

H shrugged as casually as he could. 'Spilt milk and all that, Scotty.'

It's a different world, thought Scotty. One to which I will never belong. But now that's *my choice*.....

'Who do we sell it to?'

'Well, you could have a word with your friend Paul, but I doubt he can afford it and it may not fit in anyhow as his operation is essentially computer driven rather than capital equipment. Or you can do some kind of equity swap with him and take it into his organisation and get paid over time, or maybe one of the big boys will take it off you...Onyx or whoever.'

'Well, I don't want any long term tie-ups so let's get it gone. Can you arrange a sale for me, please, Scotty..... Give Paul first option and if not I'll leave it up to you.'

'Yes, boss.'

'Boss...'

'Scotty?'

'You know I went up to the skip hire company and I, one way and another, managed to get it under control and sort it out.'

'Yes, Scotty, you did a good job there.'

'Yes, boss, but it took me weeks. And you went to the security company, and it took one meeting.'

'Sort of but yes.'

‘Well, I’ve heard the stories but can you show me what happened? If I sit at the desk will you show me?’

‘Scotty, it was nothing. You shouldn’t believe stories.’

‘Humour me, boss.’

‘Ok, Scotty.’

H positioned Scotty, pulled out his handkerchief and went through his spiel. As Scotty peered at the handkerchief H grabbed his hair, and his head hurtled down towards the desk....stopping an inch away. Then he let go...

‘It was a bit like that, Scotty....’

Scotty’s head came up, and he was visibly shaking. His face had lost his colour, and there was fear in his eyes. ‘Scotty, I wouldn’t hurt you.’

‘It took me unawares, boss. I’m sorry; it shook me for a moment.’

‘No problem, Scotty, I should have shown you.....using hand puppets.’

They both giggled. Normality resumed.

They talked some more then Scotty went back to his own office. As he sat with his large mug of sugared tea, he never had sugar, but for some reason he needed it, Scotty became totally aware of the power that his boss, James James, better known as H had.

Scotty didn’t have it, and he realised not many men did. Most men were, at some level, scared. The boss wasn’t. The enormity overwhelmed him. Fucking hell! To not be scared.....fucking hell!

He ought to write a book about the boss. He would call it ‘H’ – for huge, hatchet, hacksaw, Hades, hair-raising, hell, halothane, hammer, etc, etc. - and it would be about a man who owns clubs and things and has no fear. Unfortunately,

the boss may not appreciate that and anyhow, what the hell did he know about owning clubs and things and writing about a man who had no fear?

Not a lot.

Maybe a book about someone who was the opposite? He could call it 'I' for inconsequential, invisible, impotent, inadequate, insipid, ibuprofen, Icarus, ichor, idiot, etc etc.....

The complete opposite of H? Could he write that? Naaaaaah. It would be a bit like all the other things he had attempted to lay claim to fame...doomed to failure.

Sisyphus Allan Scott, the eternal roller of boulders.....

xxxxxx

Chapter 50

Kylie and John

‘And then you, Kylie,’ said the vicar, ‘turn to John and repeat after me. I, Kylie Rogers, do take you, John.....’

She looked at her man, and her heart pounded with unbridled love.

John had not, after his contradictory thoughts in the park, gone back. He wanted to but many things stopped him, and he decided to call it a day. There were other women and also he had received a letter accepting him into the M&S fast track managerial scheme, and he didn’t need her as part of that.

‘This is my wife, Kylie.....’

‘Oh yes, I met her a while ago...I fucked her in the back seat of the company car in a dark alley. Thirty pounds wasn’t it love?’

Not quite the start he needed to impress his bosses.

And so he did his thing and joined M&S and buckled down to learn as much and as voraciously as he could. After work, he went back to his flat then went out with his mates to do whatever men did and then find a girl/woman to fuck. It was difficult to tell which was which these days.

One evening they picked up three females and went to the local park, forcing their way through a small gap in the fence that allowed them into its darkness and solitude. After a short time he had her blouse off and her tits out and his hand inside her wet pants when one of his mates came over out of the gloom.

‘Bad news, mate.’

‘Eh?’

‘She’s fourteen.’

‘Fourteen?’

He looked down at the lovely body spread across the bench. Surely not? You don’t get tits like that at fourteen! ‘You’re fourteen?’

‘It’s ok, I want it.’

‘You’re fourteen?’

‘I still want fucking. I’ve been fucked lots of times. Come on. Come on.....’ she pleaded. He was tempted. God, he was tempted. Who would know? And look at her. Who wouldn’t fuck that?

‘Come on....’ she said and pulled her skirt up, wriggled her hips and her pants were in her hands. ‘Come on.....’ She opened her legs and drew up her knees. ‘Come on.....’

He desperately searched his brain to find out what was legal with a fourteen-year-old. There must be something. *Please* let there be something. But he didn’t think so. You could try standing before the Bench..... ‘I knew fucking her was illegal, so I came in her mouth, Your Honour. Or..... I knew I wasn’t allowed up her vagina, Your Honour, so I did the gentlemanly thing and stuck it up her arse.’

The Judge would understand, and due to the mitigating circumstance, it would only be two years. Shit! His prick was rock hard to the point that it hurt and he so desperately wanted it, and so he did the only thing open to him, so to speak.

‘How old’s yours?’

‘Seventeen.’

‘Want to share?’

‘I don’t mind if she doesn’t.’

She had never had two men, and they had never shared a woman but after a bit, in fact rather a lot, of persuasion she agreed and while his mate fucked her he had her mouth and then they swapped. It was a very civilised arrangement only marginally spoiled by the young girl who moaned continually about how unfair it was and tried to upset the party by stripping and putting her tits or pussy close to the men to put them off. Indeed his mate decided that cunnilingus could not be equated with *entry* so.....

But the night of fucking crystallised what he knew but had refused to acknowledge. He missed Kylie. Christ, he missed Kylie. You could fuck the world but when the eyes looking at you, and quite often not looking at you, are not eyes that hold any degree of affection what was the point? It was just a fuck.....

And so, through an intermediary, he made tentative enquiries about her position vis a vis other men and was elated when the drums beat back a positive message. And so they met and talked and talked and life went on as though they had never been parted. They were meant for each other, and that was that and little Tracey as well. And fuck what the world thought!

Kylie was still at Uni but had got a part-time job in the afternoons working in a casino and doing well. They were pleased with what she did as a croupier, and the owner had laid on the wedding cars free of charge from another company he owned that ferried celebs around. How about that then? He and his Kylie were celebs!

And here they were with the local vicar going through the rehearsal for their wedding.

Their wedding!

Fucking magic!

Chapter 51

The August Visitor

After delivering lunch to the guns, the chef made his way back to the Lodge with the newly shot grouse in the back of the Range Rover and parked at the rear. He had one deputy chef and two junior chefs with him today because of the guns, but usually, it was just him. Sir Dennis was not an avid entertainer...

The Lodge was quiet as most of the staff were at the shoot and other than a couple of waiting-on ladies getting the dining room ready for this evening, making sure the bedrooms and en-suites were available and generally ...waiting, there was little going on.

He, like Liam, had his dry wipe board on the wall. He wasn't copying Liam, they had all been told to put one up. The chefs had one; the Butler had one, the cleaning staff had one, and the domestic gardeners had one. It was certainly true that several just had *stuff* put on them in case Sir Dennis came round but they had them nevertheless.

On the board, he saw the shoot finishing time, and he would have everything prepared before then, but he would get a call from the Head Gamekeeper as they were leaving to make sure.

An hour into the vegetable preparation he heard the roar of a helicopter overhead and went to the kitchen window which had a view of Sir Dennis's helipad. He saw the large red helicopter come slowly down and as it straightened up, he

saw an insignia on its fuselage. The helicopter turned a touch more, and as it landed with a slight bump, he saw the Royal Crest. With the Lion on the left and the Unicorn on the right with the Crown above he knew it was Prince Charles, The Prince of Wales. He knew because he alternated between Sir Dennis's houses in Britain and he had once gone to Royal Ascot to prepare and serve the food, and Sir Dennis had 'parked' next to The Prince. There was no one in the house to take charge, so he went rushing into the main room and told the ladies to stand by the door. He then rang Sir Dennis but couldn't get through. The Prince, with entourage, arrived at the door and The Head Chef bowed....

He managed to get through to Sir Dennis, but it was a bad line. Sir Dennis, who was a non-exec on a major mobile phone Board, had had a quiet chat with the Chief Exec who arranged to put a booster on one of the hills for a favour but although it was better, it wasn't exactly great.

'What did you say, Mark? Say it again, I can't hear you? Again, please....?'

He pressed the phone even tighter to his ear, and in due course, he heard the word 'prince'. *Oh, fuck!* He thought, *not now*. He had seen Prince perform in June in Montreal when they were racing there. He was there as a guest of Ferrari and then given an impromptu performance for the Team bosses and friends at a small club he had hired for the evening....! And of course you say *'you must visit, any time, any time at all'*. And he had! But now? Now? Shit!

'Has he brought a band or something with him? Who is with him? His Manager or what?'

'Pardon, Sir Dennis?' said the crackling phone.

'Who's he got with him?'

‘Some security officers and two members of the Royal Staff, I think, Sir Dennis, and that’s about it.’

Royal staff? Royal staff? Why would Prince have security? Well yes, he’d have that, he was a pop star! But Royal staff? Sir Dennis was lost. He sighed deeply. He didn’t need this. ‘Mark, I’m a bit lost here, and so I may have misheard. Who is visiting?’

‘Prince Charles, Sir Dennis, the Prince of Wales.’

Oh shit. This was excellent...and horrendous. No welcoming party, nothing.

‘Sir Dennis?’

‘Yes, Mark, I’m still here.’

‘The Prince has requested that you don’t announce his arrival as it’s only a short visit as he was local, but perhaps you could just excuse yourself for a few minutes....?’

‘Of course.’

He apologised to his guests and jumped in a shiny black Range Rover and headed back. He was quite excited. Whilst not giving a shit about Royalty there was something quite....*elevating* about having one just dropping in at your home.

Chapter 52

Packster

Was in the shit... Everything had turned sour, and it was not exactly their fault. It was some fucking retarded moronic pimple faced fucking investment banker that had thought an investment in crap housing to crap people with jack shit was a good idea.

And now Packster was paying for that arsehole's lack of fucking nous. And all the other moronic wankers that had jumped on the bandwagon. Bastards! And the heat was on. Was it on fucking on!

Randolph 'Randy' Zeigler had been sent over to head the European operations, based in London, to help sort out the shit. A Harvard graduate who had trained in law, became one of Citibank's investment stars, moved to Packster, zoomed up the ladder and was now known as the man they sent in to sort things out. Randy was one of the nicest people you could meet at a dinner party and the one person you didn't want to meet if you were doing business with him.

When Packster, with six main investing areas; Technical and Telecom, Media, Healthcare, Retail and Consumer, Financial and Business Services and Defence, bought out a company or Group in need of their specialist help they sent in Randy.

Randy had certain qualities that were useful when costs needed to be cut, and the current management was reluctant, for whatever reason, to comply with their new master's wishes. Randy was a hard-nosed bastard who knew what

return they needed and adjusted the P&L to suit. Adjust meant go through the organisation with a knife.

Randy was quite aware that one executive cost as much as twenty, thirty, fifty or a hundred production staff. Add on the perks, the secretaries, the assistants, the travel and so on, and it could be double that and so Randy always started at the top. But this was different.

This wasn't a problem buying a group and slimming it down, this was a problem within their own group and how to slim that down. And it wasn't about people and their costs. It was about money, finance, collateral and its costs.

Fucking interest payments. Huge fucking interest payments. They shouldn't be. They weren't going to be. It wasn't part of the plan. But now the credit crunch had come the money they had borrowed to finance deals, billions of dollars was now costing a lot more; plus one big deal they had sown up pre-crunch they were now even struggling to finance at all! But they had no option... They had to find the money somewhere and no doubt they would. But at what cost.....?

And so Packster needed liquidity. Everything had to go that wasn't nailed down and at the best price possible. And if they couldn't get the best price possible then any fucking price to help stem the vast cash outflow. Fucking city wankers; to use an expression he had nicked off the Brits.

Randy would have preferred to be back in New York working his arse off and then up to their place in the Hamptons on the east end of Long Island, but he was stuck here. Deep in the shit and with limited room for manoeuvre.

And the deal they had just done for fourteen billion, *fourteen freakin billion*, to purchase a large pharmaceutical group which they had signed and sealed with the agreement of their banks and then the crunch. *Then* the crunch! Not before, so they could have got out of the deal, oh no. And now the Banks, the bastards that started all the shit, were reneging on the original informal deal and wanted a 'rate of interest concomitant with current market conditions'....or put another way we've lost a load in a bad housing deal and we're getting it back somehow. Bastards! And so assets had to be converted to cash anyhow, anyway.....

And today they were meeting Mister James James who was the owner of a tiny leisure group and wanted to buy the casinos. Well, let's fucking hope he does because no other fucker was interested. He had even rung a friend who ran one of the biggest casinos in Vegas and told him about a steal he'd got for them but.....no. Conserving cash, Randy, conserving cash.....

And so Mister James James would have to give him the money one way or the other. Randy couldn't make the meeting so had given it to Giles Fordyce, an old money descendant who had started at the family Merchant Bank and when it had been swallowed up had found his circuitous way to Packster Inc. His brief to Giles had been short and sweet. 'Get as much as you can from them and make sure the deal is done today. Ok?'

'Ok, Randy, it's in safe hands.'

Giles, for all his elevated background, was a terrier like bastard who would wipe the floor with them...

A fly to the spider, thought Randy, come into my web.....

Chapter 53

Meet the Prince

He parked the Range Rover outside the massive front door of the Lodge and entered in as casually as he could. He had no interest in Royals and would show absolutely no deference.....but in the next F1 paddock he could casually say 'there we were, the Glorious Twelfth, and who should pop in? Why HRH the Prince of Wales'.

That didn't sound so good.

'The Glorious Twelfth? Oh..just a few friends...and The Prince of Wales dropped by.....'

That was much better. He went in, strode through to the massive lounge and found several masked men pointing sawn off shotguns at him. A jab in the back made him aware that there was also one behind. He was about to ask as to the whereabouts of The Prince but realised he had been done.

'Where's Mark, my Chef?' he asked, concerned. He knew he must have been coerced to have made that call.

'He's fine,' said a tall man, 'he's in the kitchen with everybody else and no one has been harmed.'

'You made him do that somehow...' accused Sir Dennis.

The tall man nodded to one of his men who said, 'Prince Charles, Sir Dennis, the Prince of Wales,' in a voice that, on the phone, anyone would have thought was Mark's.

Sir Dennis smiled. 'Very clever.'

He sighed as though this was a common day occurrence.

'Let's get this done so I can go back and shoot. What do you want?'

‘We want your paintings,’ said the big man.

‘I’d prefer to give you money.’

‘It’s our preference that needs accommodating.’

‘You know you won’t get away with this.’

‘If we thought that we wouldn’t be here.’

The sentence shook Sir Dennis. It was a statement that brooked no argument. As though this was all over and done with. The big man came over and put the gun next to his head.

‘Let me make this very clear. We are not idiots. We know exactly what we want, and we expect you to help us. If you don’t, we will kill you. That is a promise. That being the case, as you are an intelligent man, you have to decide whether a few paintings are worth more than your life?’

Sir Dennis hated this. He was a man used to power and control which he assumed by any means necessary, but in this instance, he knew but hated the fact, that he had nothing going for him. Nothing! He could be stubborn and tell them to fuck off and see what happened but then what? A world of pain? Sir Dennis wasn’t really into pain. He was a thinker, not a fighter.

‘And if I say yes?’

‘This isn’t a debate.’

‘Ok...when you have them what happens to me?’

‘We leave you tied up with the others, and when the shoot returns later, you will be found. Safe and well.’

‘But poorer.’

‘Alas....’

He shrugged and shook his head in which a rage boiled. Fuck! Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!..... But where was the choice? He led them down to the cellar where a vast room had been

turned into a superb art gallery. 'Which do you want?' he asked resignedly.

'The ones behind there,' said the man, pointing at a Matisse that he had memorised although he also had a small photo in his pocket just in case. Sir Dennis, startled, involuntarily looked at him. He regained his composure and said, 'Which? Just take the ones you want.'

The tall man walked to him and put the gun between his eyes. 'You know what I am talking about. Either open that or I blow your head off, and we take what's in here.....'

Sir Dennis looked at him. It was difficult to tell his features correctly behind the balaclava as each of the men had put cotton wool in their cheeks so that their speech would alter and also puffed them out and they had eye make-up on to camouflage their eyes.

He didn't want to do this. He had spent years collecting these, in the greatest secrecy, and only a handful of people in the world knew about his private collection. Two of them were currently enjoying his hospitality today..... 'I will give you twenty-five million,' he said, 'if you go and say it had to be aborted.' No one moved. 'Thirty-five million....?'

'You've got five seconds to get us in there, or some of these paintings are going to get another coat of red.... One....Two....Three.....'

Sir Dennis visibly slumped; he walked slowly to a glass case where two dozen or so artefacts were housed. He lifted three in a particular order, and the micro switches below them started the operation to move a large exhibition cabinet slowly and noiselessly to one side.

'Is there anything that will happen in there to trigger an alarm?' asked the tall man.

Sir Dennis shook his head.

‘Ok,’ said the tall man, ‘you all know what to do.....’

Two of them tied up Sir Dennis securely, gagging and blindfolding him while the others ran to the large Bell 212 *Twin Huey* helicopter, which had been stripped of its seats, and brought out the special crates that would house the Old Masters.

Half an hour later they were done and half the paintings in the room were gone; photographed with a tiny digital camera before they were crated so that H could check their provenance....somewhere. More than likely the net. If not how the hell would they know what they had acquired? And what they were worth?

The tall man took off Sir Dennis’s gag and blindfold, let him look around the room then dragged him out. ‘You have half your paintings left. It was decided that your secret should continue. How do I close the entrance?’

‘What good is half.....’

But he shut up abruptly as the man’s balaclava closed in on his face.

‘You’re alive, you have half your paintings left....count your blessings, you cretin,’ said the balaclava and its owner’s eyes flared with menace and violence.

‘In the...the...the,’ he stammered, ‘case with the artefacts....lift up the bottom left, top right, bottom right...’

One of the men did as instructed and the cabinet went back to its original place.

‘Now,’ said the tall man, ‘this is what is going to happen. When they come back from the shoot and find you, you will say some men came to rob you but one of them started having a fit, and they panicked and left. You will say that

nothing was stolen. That way you will never hear from us again. You will give your staff that are tied up a bonus and tell them everything turned out fine and so to forget it happened as you do not want bad publicity for the estate and the loss of privacy.....’

He looked into Sir Dennis’s eyes and saw the nerve returning and his brain looking for angles, seeking a plan...

‘So that you understand exactly where we stand.....should you do something different then your secret will be out, and you will die within days. That is a promise. If you don’t believe me just think about who could possibly have arranged this and how powerful he or they must be. And if he, or they, can do this then killing you is well easy.’

Sir Dennis clenched his fists so they wouldn’t see his hands shake. H gagged his captive again, and as he was doing so Sir Dennis scanned his memory for which of his ‘friends’ had the power and money to arrange this?

Unfortunately, they all did!

Chapter 54

The Hospital

In the casualty department, the doctor in charge ran into the cubicle.

‘What’s the panic?’ he rasped, trying to get his breath.

‘Look,’ said a junior doctor.

‘Oh Christ, what a bloody mess, how long’s he been out?’

‘We don’t know exactly but certainly since the ambulance picked him up; about half an hour.’

‘He must be in real deep shock, he’s literally shut down.’

‘Anybody here with him to give us times etcetera?’

‘No one; an anonymous 999 call and they found him in the park.’

‘Do you recognise him?’

He moved around to take a closer look at his face. ‘No, should I?’

‘It’s Jonathon England.’

‘*The* Jonathon England, the one that’s always in the papers? How did it happen?’

‘No idea.’

Jonathon England’s eyes started to move rapidly under his lids. The junior doctor put his hand on his forehead and placed his thumb on the eye to raise the lid. He suddenly backed away, a look of fear in his eyes, and finding himself unable to speak, tugged the other’s arm, who was reading a chart.

‘Mmmmm?’ He turned round and watched as England, his eyes wide open like a rabid animal, sat up. Staring ahead his eyes slowly moved down his body and then up to the ceiling. He raised his arms like a prophet calling for a miracle, his hands forming claws; he screamed...a dreadful, despairing, primaevael scream and then as though God had ignored him he turned his unseeing eyes towards the two men and held his arms out to them, imploring them...

Moments later his eyes shut, and his body slumped back on the bed.

‘What the shit was that all about? What happened?’

‘That scream should have happened at the time of the accident, but his body couldn’t stand the pain long enough to get it out. His subconscious has just decided, for whatever reason, to do it now. He’s finished now, he’ll be under a long time but to make sure keep him topped up, will you?’

‘Christ, what did happen to him?’

‘And why?’

‘Poor bastard. No-one deserves that.’

Jonathon England, had he heard the conversation, could have helped a little. He knew how it happened, but not why.....?

Chapter 55

The vicar

The vicar's wife had everything as it should be. The table was laid ready and on the hob, a lovely stew made from the very best meat and veg that the local market could provide.

Her husband had joined the Church at the same time as Henry, but Henry had not only been an excellent, caring vicar but had a natural leaning to the theological side of the discipline. And now he was a Bishop and, rumour had it, that when Rowan Williams retired and when perhaps, *perhaps*, John Sentamu became the first black leader of the Church of England, then Henry Johnson would be elevated to assume John's position. She liked Rowan Williams and would miss him when he went, not that she actually met him very often, indeed rarely. Oh well. But she wouldn't miss his poetry which she found quite obscure.

Henry and his wife arrived in the late afternoon. They shook hands and kissed as old friends do.

Sitting in front of a log fire Henry explained that they had been to the Amaeas social project in Brighton which he found exciting and wondered whether it could be a template for the Church.....?

Dinner was immensely enjoyable with quite wide ranging topics and topped off by the vicar's copious supply of 'Satan' jokes which always brought the house down. It had been agreed that they would stay over which would allow them all

the freedom of one glass of wine too many and get rid of the 'who's driving?' wet blanket.

The next morning there was minor panic as the vicar writhed in bed clutching his tummy then rushed to the loo to be sick and then he had diarrhoea.

'What's he got on today?' Asked Henry.

'Just one wedding this morning.'

'I can do that for him,' he said instantly, 'why don't you get him a doctor?'

'Henry, that's really kind of you.'

He smiled. It was what he did.

At the Church, Kylie was a wreck. She had hardly slept, she had a headache, kept going to the loo and her heart was pounding. She had no idea whether it was nerves, happiness, trepidation, flu or the Black Plague but she felt like shit. No matter, the show would go on. She would not miss this for the world!

As she slowly walked up the aisle, desperately trying to control her bowels, she knew she was ill. She was happier than she had ever been in her life so this had to be a tummy bug.

Now.

Of all times.

She reached the altar and stood by her man, looking nervously at the floor. As the Bishop started saying 'We are gathered here today.....'

She looked up, looked at her adoring man and then to the new vicar and passed out. She slumped to the floor, and it was only John's quick thinking by putting his shoe under her

head that stopped it smacking on the hard, cold, stone floor.....

This is a bloody good start, he thought.

He wasn't sure how ill she was so they called an ambulance.....

Chapter 56

Goodbye Huey

The Huey helicopter immediately headed south-west for a hundred miles where a waiting car had been left for H and the team, and then Biggles headed due west until he was about thirty miles off shore then banked and flew straight North. The Huey still had about three hundred kilometres range left of its standard four fifty maximum in its tank, and it continued flying at wave height for a further two hundred kilometres.

When it was almost half way to the Faroe Islands, he spotted the luxury yacht that had left Rhode Island to meet it. Biggles headed for the yacht, circled from a distance to make sure as radio contact was not allowed, then settled it softly down on its helipad.

Twenty minutes later the cargo was safely stowed in the hold, and the helicopter was hoisted overboard, and they watched as it quickly sank leaving only a trail of surfacing bubbles.

As it disappeared into the depths, Biggles felt a pang of sadness as it was a good old workhorse helicopter which he had managed to get especially for the job through an old mate called Andrew Whitney who had found it for him in Sudan and he was sorry to just shove it in the drink...

The tidying up finished he transferred to a much smaller, but considerably faster helicopter and headed back to a small airfield in the south of England. As he was nearly over the horizon, Biggles glanced round and saw the yacht had changed direction, its powerful motors had built up to full speed, and it was heading towards the Caribbean.....

Chapter 57

How much?

James, Ade, Cleggy and Scotty were shown into the boardroom at Packster to meet Giles and two of his colleagues. The board room was the size of a football pitch and in it was a table to suit. Each team sat on either side in the middle, and the table extended miles to either side of them and could have housed another forty people.

After pleasantries that lasted seconds, Giles Fordyce said, 'You want to buy our casinos,' as a statement rather than a question.

'At the right price,' replied H.

'I think you may struggle,' said Giles, 'interest is quite high and we have several interested parties.'

H said nothing.

'You know we want at least sixty-six mil?'

'We know that's what you *want*.'

'If you're suggesting less we can't really do business,' said Giles.

'Ok,' said H, 'it was nice meeting you,' and he and the others stood up.

'How much were you thinking of?' asked Giles.

'Are we negotiating or just having a chat?'

'We should keep talking, how much you offering?'

'Forty-six.'

'No way,' replied Giles, 'that's not a sale, it's a fucking gift.'

H shrugged. He was willing to pay fifty-six at a push but as it was silly season.....

‘They’re pulling our plonkers,’ said a colleague, ‘they’ve got no money. Giles, we’re wasting our time.....’

‘Is that right, James, you’re just fucking us about? Trying to play with the big boys but without the money or the cojones?’

‘Giles. You English?’

‘Of course.’

‘So are we.....’

The implication was obvious but rather than quieten Giles down it stirred him up. He wasn’t going to look bad in front of two junior colleagues who he had brought into ‘learn’ at the feet of the Master. ‘Jimmy, if you ain’t got the money we could maybe lend you the difference.’

‘I don’t think we need your money, thanks.....Jilly.’

Giles’ face went red. He stood up and leaned over towards H who looked across at him. ‘What did you call me?’

H said nothing.

‘I said, what did you call me?’

H smiled serenely at him.

‘You be fucking careful, Jimmy boy, as we can buy and sell you just like that,’ and he clicked his fingers. ‘You’re fucking plankton in a sea of whales.’

H looked at his three compatriots who had not said a word since they had sat down. They had strict instructions; say absolutely nothing unless I ask for your advice or opinion. Ok? Ok.

‘It’s time to go,’ said H and turned to Giles. ‘It’s been a pleasure meeting you.’

‘We haven’t finished yet,’ said Giles urgently but H and the entourage were already on their way to the door...

Chapter 58

The abattoir

Rogan Subramani had taken over his elderly father's abattoir several years ago and modernised it to provide Halal meat as well as the traditional meat they had always sold to the non-believers. Believers, non-believers? Who gave a shit? As long as they paid on time and in full.

The abattoir fulfilled several needs in his life; it gave him a very good living which gave him a status which he craved, and a place where he could enjoy certain stimulation that society deemed unsuitable in a mainstream sort of way.

For the most part, Subramani was dead. For whatever reason, his brain had been wired differently from most, and so he felt very little. He saw things as two-dimensional; the third, *feeling*, was missing from his makeup and so he could not thrill at a sunset, cry at a sad movie, laugh at a poor joke. He moved through life as a robot and as right and wrong were also emotional paths that he had never walked down the slaughterhouse was perhaps as good a place as any.

However, he had found that killing and watching suffering moved him. At the opposite end of the XY axis to most human beings, he had found that the more extreme the suffering the more feeling he got. And it was nice to feel.

It was a relatively new experience for him, and he had quietly delved into a world unseen by most. He holidayed in areas not exactly known for Human Rights. He bought sadomasochistic and snuff movies to watch in the dark of night, and he found girls.....

In his younger days, he had hardly bothered with girls, they did nothing for him. He'd had sexual encounters, intercourse even, but that did nothing for him either. He felt nothing, and it all seemed rather meaningless. He couldn't work out why half the world went on about it, the inside pages of popular newspapers had bare-breasted women in them, mags showed nudes and porno was.....so fucking dull.

What was the attraction? He had no idea.

Then one day he visited a dealer friend, cracky, who had his girlfriend there. They sat and chatted for a while, drinking beer and cheap wine and then his friend said to the woman.

'Suck me off.'

'Eh?'

'Suck me off.'

'Now?'

'Now!'

She sighed. It was the price you paid for being with someone who made a lot of money dealing. You got to go in the flash cars, you got the bling, but you opened everything up on demand. A bit like a 24/7...

'Come on then,' she said and went to the door.

'No. Here. Now!'

'I don't think Rogan wants to see you getting sucked off,' and she opened the door.

The half drunk dealer shot out of his chair, grabbed the woman by the hair and dragged her back to the chair. 'You're not here to do what Rog likes, you're here to do what I like. Now get fuckin down.'

'But.....'

He slapped her hard across the side of her face. 'Don't make me fucking tell you again,' he snarled.

Her face smarting and crying quiet tears she knelt down in front of him, and he took his erect dick out. As she moved to hold it, he said, 'Take your tits out; Rog may like to see your tits...'

She didn't move quick enough, and so he ripped the blouse from her and grabbed her bra and literally pulled it over her head. 'Now fuckin do as you're told.'

She started sucking, and half way through he grabbed her hair and put it all in. She gagged and gagged some more, but he wouldn't let her take it out. When she was struggling for air, he pulled it out. He looked at Rog.

'Good, eh, Rog? Want her to suck you off after?'

Rog was a bit lost. To answer his first question, yes it was good. Fucking good. His body felt alive. And he knew exactly when it had happened. It was when his dealer mate had *made* her do it. Fuckin hell... He had felt a surge in his chest as his blood pumped. And then when he had forced his dick straight down her, almost choking her. That was even better. Wow..... what a fucking rush.

'I don't think er...er...'

'Go on, Rog, I'm sure she likes it really, don't you, hun?' There was only a slight pause before she made a grunting sound as she continued sucking. 'See....?'

She sucked him off, he came with a loud aarrghh and wiped his dick on her tits.

'Your turn....'

He looked at the woman and nodded in the direction of Rog. This woman was no lady and had been fucked by half the world, but she didn't really want to do this. Her eyes held his, telling him not to make her.

'Go!' he commanded.

She had no choice. There were worse things in life than sucking two dicks. No crack for instance... She crawled over and took out his dick, already hard, which was rare for him. She put it in her mouth and sucked away, but it wasn't the same. He looked at cracky, put his hand over the woman's head, and his face asked a question. Cracky balled up his fist, made an aggressive face and nodded enthusiastically.

For Rogan, it was as though the floodgates had opened. He grabbed her hair and forced his dick half way down her throat. It took her unawares, and she had not taken a breath and was struggling. She tried hard to move away, struggling frantically, but he held her tight. He looked at cracky?

'Get in there, my son,' slurred cracky.

Holding her head until she had no more air in her lungs he felt her go limp. He pulled her head away and the incredible force within him that had been mounting, mounting, mounting, let go, and he instantly came over her face. He let go of her hair, and she slumped to the floor. His pulse raced, his mind raced, his body raced. He was *alive!*

'Fuckin wow,' he said to cracky.

'Good?' asked cracky as though discussing a meal they had just eaten.

'Oh yes. Mother fucking good...'

'Snort?' asked cracky.

Rogan shook his head. He didn't do drugs as they did nothing for him either.

But this.....? But her.....? But that....? He had to get more of *that*.

And so he did. Discreet enquiries found pimps that would supply women who liked it rough or at least that's what the pimps said. Some did, some didn't. Rog found it was the ones that didn't that did it for him. Make them! Force them! Humiliate them!
Rule the fucking world!

From that, he gravitated to rape. He went a hundred miles from home in any direction, parked in a quiet, dark street, not too far from nightlife and waited.

There was always one.

Always one alone.

Always one that had had too much to drink.

Always one that had had too much E.

Always one that had had a row with her boyfriend.

Always one that would get in his car.

Always one that would be in the hospital the next day with a fractured jaw, breasts ripped open by teeth, vagina bleeding from the broken bottle.....

Always one that paid the price.

And his enjoyment, his rush, his orgasm, his *reason for being* was in inverse proportion to theirs. If they were near death, he was as close to the perfect life as was possible.

And then his father had a stroke and could no longer work, so he took over the business he had worked in all his life. With its meat and blood and hooks and knives and cleavers.....

Tools of the trade.

He built it up. Expanded the general meat business and moved into Halal which was certainly a bit more entertaining. Slitting throats had more zing than shooting bolts into heads or electrocution. Although the extra voltage he put through did

make them jump around a bit. Of course, a vast majority of the Halal meat that he sold, at premium prices had not had its throat cut at all. It was just ordinary non-believer meat that had accidentally been put in the wrong bin. This meat was now actually Haram and forbidden as its blood had not flowed from its body in the ritualistic way demanded; with the windpipe, carotid artery and jugular vein all severed in one slash of the knife. And it should be carried out by a Muslim. But who gave a shit?

And then he moved into human flesh.

No more rapes. Just pick them up, knock them out if needed, as most were so stoned it was more difficult to wake them up than put them to sleep, then bring them back to the locked up room just off the large cellar which had been a storeroom.

Now it was just an extension of the abattoir. With its meat and hooks and knives and cleavers..... Tools of the trade.

And there he could do with them what he liked. Every unspeakable thing he could do with an impunity that was God-like. No one heard their screams, no one saw the spurting blood, no one saw the white bone jutting through the open wounds, and no one saw the body parts taken off one by one.

That wasn't entirely true, as someone did. Two people. Rogan did, and his victim did. Rogan had put mirrors on the wall so that they could see what he was doing to them.....

And no one saw them again as he expertly sliced and diced them and they just went in the bins as Halal, and their bones were crushed and became bone meal...

Chapter 59

No deal?

Giles had been called up from his office and told by the secretary to sit down and wait for Randy. She didn't tell him that Randy wasn't even in the building but if that was what Randy wanted...

He sat there for an hour. No drinks were offered, and when he wandered out of the office to the two secretaries positioned outside and suggested he go, they politely told him that Randy had asked that he wait in there. Of course, if he *insisted* on going.....? Giles had his rather stupid moments, but this wasn't going to be one of them.

'Do you think I could have a drink, please?' he asked rather too politely.

'Of course,' said one but he noticed that neither moved. He waited for a moment, but they had gone back to whatever they were doing, and he self-consciously went back in the office and sat down. Three-quarters of an hour later Randy walked in, and Giles stood up. 'Randy....'

'Just sit down and shut the fuck up until I'm ready for you!' snarled Randy.

For another twenty minutes Randy signed papers and took calls, and then he asked for a coffee which arrived immediately, put his feet on the desk and looked at Giles. 'I think my parting words to you were 'get as much as you can from them and make sure the deal is done today'. Ok? And you answered with 'Ok, Randy, it's in safe hands'. Would that be about right?'

‘Randy, I.....’

‘I asked you a fuckin question. Would that be about right!’ he screamed at Giles, and the secretaries outside flinched.

‘Yes, Randy but.....’

‘But fuckin what? I give you a simple job. A tiny fuckin deal, fuckin pocket money and you fuck it up. My fuckin ten year old kid could have done it but you, you prick..... tie it up I say and get the money. And what do you do? You threaten a fuckin potential buyer. Isn’t that what you did.....Jilly?’

Giles nearly, so very nearly, rose to the bait. ‘They had no money,’ said Giles in mitigation, ‘the others will corroborate that.’

‘Is that right, Giles, you stupid cunt? Is that right?’

Giles had heard that tone before. Oh shit! He had missed something. What the fuck had he missed? He had looked at their financials but there wasn’t too much to be gleaned from them as JJ Holdings was a private company and so could get away with submitting limited information. They were ok but hardly much else. There was no obvious hint of accumulated wealth. Was there accumulated wealth? Surely not? No, Randy was just turning him over and when he had finished Giles would apologise, and Randy would let him get them back and start again.....he had done the ‘I am a powerful boss’ bit.....

‘Do you know who Jose Reyes is?’ asked Randy.

‘No, should I?’

‘You would have done if you had read all the notes I gave you.’

‘I did,’ said Giles with panic in his voice, ‘I did, Randy, I swear.’

‘No, you didn’t, you cunt, and because you were a lazy fucker we have now lost our only sale for the casinos. Fifty or sixty million that we desperately need have slipped through our fingers, you fuckin idiot.’

‘I can get it back, Randy, you know I can,’ pleaded Giles.

‘You’ve fucked up, and you’re out of here. Get your stuff out of your desk and security will escort you out.’

‘Randy....please.....I can sort it out...please Randy....’

But security were already waiting behind him to get him gone.....

Chapter 60

Discount the Old Masters

H and Benshima had flown out to Colombia for a week to stay with Jose and Maria. A few days' break and talk to Jose who had deposited the art in a safe place, and certain people had visited and looked. Repeating the process of previous visits H and Jose sat under the stars...

'How did we do?' asked H.

Jose grinned. 'You must have a lot of trust in me.'

'I have.'

'It's just as well.'

'Why?'

'Because you have absolutely no idea what came out of the secret gallery of his and I could tell you anything...'

H didn't respond for a moment. 'So how did we do?'

'You did very well. More than very well. Incredibly well.'

'They were appreciated?'

'Very much so.'

'So what are the offers?'

'About twenty-five million.'

'It doesn't seem much if they were *very appreciated*.'

'That's a lot of money for stolen paintings.'

'Stolen paintings is somewhat of a misnomer, don't you think, Jose?' said H grinning. 'Perhaps Old Masters or National Treasures rather than stolen paintings...?'

'Are you saying you have a figure in your mind as to the worth of these ...National Treasures, James?'

James reached down and took a sheaf of paper out of a folder sitting on the floor. 'Just a few of those paintings, let's call them Old Masters, were stolen in 1990 from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. These included Vermeer's The Concert; Rembrandt's The Storm on the Sea of Galilee; Rembrandt's A Lady and Gentleman in Black; Degas's La Sortie de Pesage plus a few more which were, at the time of their theft valued at around three hundred million dollars.

'There is also a Picasso, Rubens and Titian stolen from Harry Hyams in England. A Leonardo from the Duke of Buccleuch. A Cezanne from the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. A Renoir from the National Museum in The Hague. A 1952 Lucian Freud taken from Berlin. Plus a few others I have not managed to attach a provenance to..... Either way, I would have thought fifty million was nearer the mark.'

James handed Jose copies of the digital images taken of the stolen paintings plus the notes about them that he had acquired through the judicious use of Google. Jose read them for a few moments then looked at James intently. Mister James James was not, again, to be underestimated and Jose's stock for him went higher.

'I am impressed. So you want me to ask for fifty million?'

'Yes, either from one collector or split between several.'

'They may find that a touch high.'

'No; they may find it more than they wanted to pay but it's not higher than their worth. In fact, they are more than likely only paying twenty pence in the pound.'

'I'll see what I can do,' said Jose who would have preferred to have paid twenty-five million.....or at the most thirty-five. Fifty was too high but no doubt he could get it down to forty-five. But what was an extra twenty million to your son in law? It

was, after all, looking after the family. And they would look superb in the collection that he and Maria had built up over the years.....

James may even get to see them.....one day.

The next day Jose brokered the sale on behalf of James to the unseen buyers for forty-five million. The deal agreed, H sent Harry Cohen a text and although in the middle of a Board Meeting he opened his phone and saw the text from the anonymous pay as you go phone with no number. He opened the text and read:

5 children

Harry knew that meant fifteen. A child was a teenager, if - teen, whereas 5 babies would have been 5 million. So his share was fifteen million. He did a quick calculation in his head and decided it may have been a touch light, but he could live with it. At the end of the day, he had only provided information. And he quite often came across information.....

He also knew that H hadn't quite cracked sending little images via text. His little nephews were far superior.....although at times quite rude.

Chapter 61

A deal?

H was at his desk when his mobile went. He looked down at the display and saw the number had been withheld. 'Hello?'

'Is that James James?'

'Who wants him?'

'I do.'

'And who would you be?'

'Nobody he knows but someone he should meet.'

'Why should he?'

'It would be to his advantage.'

H searched the voice for any clues but it was a funny voice, funny accent and a bit muffled. More than likely someone with the mouthpiece partially covered. 'And what would we discuss?'

'Something you want, something I have to give.'

'Give?'

'Not give, sell.'

'I'm rather busy.'

'So am I,' came the reply.

H paused for a moment. It was intriguing, and he could do with a bit of intrigue. 'Where do you want to meet?' and thought that if it was some out of the way place on a moonless night, he could 'go away'.

'There's a place, Ed's Easy Diner in Moor Street, West one, you know it?'

'No.'

‘Well, you will soon. Shall we say seven thirty tomorrow morning?’

‘That’s bright and early.’

‘We’re busy..... Is that ok?’

‘How will I know you?’

‘I’ll find you,’ said the voice and the call was terminated.

The next morning H found Ed’s Easy Diner, drove around and parked the car then headed back and ordered himself a mug of tea. Ed’s was a do it yourself heart attack emporium with massive fries, thick milkshakes and calorie packed burgers. He found a seat at the back of the diner, sat against the wall and watched everyone coming in. Dead on seven thirty a city type entered and walked over to him.

‘James James,’ said the city type and held out a hand.

‘And you are?’

‘My name’s not important at the moment, not until we understand each other, but you can call me...Doris.’

‘You don’t look like a Doris,’ said H. ‘Doris’s are usually quite old as it’s an old fashioned name.’

‘What do I look like?’

H looked up and down. ‘Expensive suit, expensive watch, nice shoes, good tan..... you look more like a Phillipa or Sara....?’

‘Sara....? Mmmm, I quite like that. Sara, it is.’

‘Ok,’ said H, ‘I can go with that,’ and held out his hand.

‘James,’ said Sara, ‘I want you to go with me on this and help me as much as you can, ok?’

‘I can do that.’

‘You are interested in Packster’s casinos.’ It wasn’t a question.

‘I was.’

‘You still are.’ James said nothing. ‘How much are you willing to pay?’

‘Not a lot.’

‘How much?’

‘Forty.’

‘James, I asked you to go with me on this. You and I both know you will never get them for forty and so you tell me your best figure.’

James looked at Sara for a while, sipped at his tea. ‘Fifty.’

‘That’s still a touch difficult. How about fifty-two five?’ H shrugged his shoulders non-committedly. ‘Good. We have a deal.’

‘We do?’

‘Yes.’

‘At fifty-two five?’ asked a stunned H but keeping all surprise off his face.

‘No. At forty-seven five. Five will be paid separately to a consulting company.’

‘Really...’

‘Yes.’

The person held out a hand. ‘We have a deal?’

‘Can you deliver?’

‘Would I be here?’

‘We have a deal.’

Sara got up. ‘We’ll be in touch. Just remember forty-seven five is your highest offer and this conversation never existed.’

And then Sara was gone.

Back to Sara land.

No drink, no fries, no nothing.

Just a deal.

From Sara land.....

Chapter 62

England in the park

Jonathon England lay in the hospital bed too traumatised to make any sense out of what had happened...

The classic old red Ferrari Dino hurtled up the dual carriageway at just under one hundred and thirty miles an hour, exceeding the speed limit by nearly sixty miles an hour, and reaching the turn-off point, the driver heel-and-toed from fifth to fourth, to third, to second, going down to fifty miles an hour and headed for the roundabout.

He handled the car well, as he should, as he had gone to Modena when he had acquired the car and had spent several days there with one of the factory instructors who had schooled him in the ways of this beautiful machine. In Italy, he had learned to use the power in the controlled way that was necessary for a performance machine. Too many drivers of fast cars, lots of them footballing friends, treated them without due respect and paid a high price. He loved its response and the way it held the bends on the road. It was a driver's car, and he drove it as such.

However it was not really a town car, and generally, he drove the latest model automatic Jaguar, supplied free, and only drove the Ferrari when distance or road conditions allowed. He also felt that anyone who drove a Ferrari as a first car had to be a poser and he had no need to be a poser. He was far too famous to have to pose.....

As it was only breakfast time on this Sunday morning, the streets were generally quiet, with people clutching the morning paper or walking the dog. He turned off the road and pulled into a large car park just outside the city park, driving to the nearest bay by the entrance and shut off the engine. Pushing both feet against the pedals he stretched his body, raising his arms above his head, and felt the physical pleasure. He got out of the car, changed his driving shoes to trainers, locked the door, and jogged into the park entrance.

Jonathon England wended his way through the park, usually keeping to the paths but occasionally going onto the grass to jump over a park bench. He had a grace of movement that the natural athlete has; effortless motion with reserves of untapped power, like a big cat that never seems to hurry and yet draws ever nearer to its prey.

In five days' time he would lead the English team onto the field for the start of the World Cup, and because of his presence, they were joint favourites to win.

He thought of Annie; slim attractive, articulate and willing, indeed wanting, to endure pain. An ideal woman for a man on top of the world.

In the distance, he saw two figures kicking a football. He smiled, a remembering smile, days on the field with his father, 'no, not like that, like this,' his natural talent being forged with technical skills while still so very young.

Closer now he saw that it was a young man with a boy. The young man saw him approaching and excitedly pointed for the child to look. Nearly upon them, he heard the shout.....

'Mr England, Jonathon, would you kick the ball for my brother?'

Generally, he tried to avoid this kind of thing, not out of unkindness, but because it tended to escalate into a melee and it took too much out of his life if he agreed to every little request. Looking around he saw no one else so changed his direction to join them.

‘Thank you,’ said the young man, ‘would you, if I threw the ball to you, show my brother how to kick it over that tree?’

He indicated the tree by nodding his head in the general direction.

‘Sure, what are your names?’

‘I’m Pete,’ said the elder, ‘and this is Tommy.’

‘OK,’ he looked at the distance and the height of the tree, ‘what do you want me to do, kick it like a goalie?’

‘No, it’s to show Tommy how you kick a ball without having to control it, using your ability to position your body,’ he said in a soft voice.

‘You sound as though you know a bit about it?’

‘Not really, I just like the technicalities of things. I’ve told Tommy you are the best when it comes to eye, ball, foot coordination; that is I’ve told him, but I don’t think he really knows what I mean. This is a demonstration.’

‘Right, give me a reasonable chance, not something head height.’

He looked at the tree and relaxed his body.

‘Ready?’

‘Now.’

The ball came to him in a small arc, his brain computing angles, force, power, working out the point at which the ball and his foot would meet. He kicked the ball, and it sailed away and just caught the top of the tree.

‘Hit the crossbar,’ said England good-naturedly.

‘One more try,’ said the man and held the other ball ready. He lobbed it to England who was waiting. This time it would be right. The ball arced towards him and he automatically did everything to correct his previous error. He knew what to do. He had done it a million times before. The arc was slightly different with a slightly steeper downward path but that would help the angle to give the ball a touch of extra height.

It seemed like years that his brain screamed at him to stop. There was something wrong.....?

Stop! Stop! Stop, Jonathon, there is something wrong.....!!!!

Terribly wrong!

Please stop.....!!!!!!

It may have been that the youth seemed to put just too much effort into throwing the ball, or that somehow it wasn’t reaching him quick enough, but the screaming messages from his brain came too late.

His extended foot, accelerating to be at optimum speed at the point of contact, met the round piece of plastic covered concrete and the sound of the breaking bones in his foot were like a thousand cockroaches being crushed.....

Chapter 63

Ex gardener in prison

The Archbishop sat on the chair in the tiny cell, his bible in his hand, and watched the man sitting on the hard, uncomfortable looking, bed. The man had changed somewhat since he had last seen him. Then he was unkempt and smelled, and now he was clean shaven and apparently took more pride in his appearance and general well being. Time flies, he thought, and much happens to change things. He wondered what had happened to this man to change him and also to bring him here?

‘Is everything ok?’ he asked his ex-gardener.

‘Yes, thank you, Henry. You?’

‘Very good. The Church are having the house redecorated, and we have had to move out for a little while so that it can be done from top to bottom which is a bit of a nuisance, but it will all be worth it in the end.’

‘That will be nice.’

Henry thought the man was much more ‘gentle’ than when they had met before. Less abrasive, less filled with the anger of life. That’s good, there’s hope yet. One day..... ‘Would you like me to pray for you?’ said Henry in a voice that suggested it wasn’t really a question.

‘If you want.’

Henry got off the chair and kneeled on one knee. The ex-gardener didn’t move from where he sat and just watched Henry do his thing. Whatever turned you on.....

Henry intoned for several minutes, and the ex-gardener heard 'amen' and thought *thank fuck* for an end to that nonsense. Ah well, I suppose he took the trouble. It could have been worse. He could have splashed water all over my face, immersed me entirely in a flowing river or cut off half my prick..... In this day and age. I don't fucking think so! Shit.....

Henry talked to him for another fifteen minutes then looked at his watch. 'It's time to go now.'

'Ok.'

'I will pray for you, my son.'

'Thank you, Henry, I'm sure that will make all the difference.'

'Bye then,' said Henry.

'Take care of yourself, Henry,' said the ex-gardener.

'The Lord takes care of me,' replied Henry.

Chapter 64

Pamela.....?

Doug collected her from her small detached house, and they went into town to an Indian restaurant. She wanted a 'proper' Biryani, and she wanted it hot, which she knew they did there and not the insipid crap she knew most places dished up. She wasn't disappointed. He tried a little of hers and dived for his lager waiting at his side to extinguish the flames in his throat and trying to get down to his stomach.

They had a pleasant evening, and before they left she said quite unexpectedly, 'It's been a long time since I've slept with anyone.'

He smiled. 'Don't sleep.'

'That's a very smooth reply.'

'It wasn't meant to be. Just a reply.'

He would have liked to have asked why it had been so long since she had slept with anyone but he didn't think this was quite the time. Had he asked she would have explained that her husband used to like getting drunk and when he got home he beat the shit out of her and then fucked her or whatever it was the drunken bastard was trying to do. When she had plucked up the courage to leave him and start a new life, getting fucked wasn't high on her agenda. Her agenda had now changed and tonight more than anything, more than anything, she just wanted a good, disgusting, dirty, smelly, wet, unrestrained fuck!

'Would you like to come back with me or shall I take you to your home?' he asked.

‘My house, please.’ Just *in case*.....

Douglas had married his childhood sweetheart and sex had never been high on her agenda either. But that didn't bother Doug as what you didn't get you didn't really miss. When he heard his mates or colleagues discussing what they had done, he didn't really believe it and thought they were making it up or exaggerating.

He certainly didn't believe everybody got sucked off! Maybe a lucky one or two...? He was quite sure that if his wife didn't then most women didn't as his wife was quite normal. She would certainly on occasion, and more so if she got a bit drunk, suck his dick, perhaps more a lick really, but it was only for a few moments. He once considered just letting go and coming in her mouth, but that wasn't really on..... And so he never had.

But she lay on her back quite happily and opened her legs wide and lay there until he had finished, so that was ok. What more could you want?

Once, when he was close, she had mentioned there was a small crack in the plaster on the ceiling, and they really should get a man in to fix it.....

Chapter 65

Randy isn't happy

Randy was livid, and everyone knew it. The secretaries kept their heads down, the staff kept their distance, it rained, and the birds stopped singing, such was Randy's rage. Luckily for them the next day Randy had to fly to their Barcelona office for four days which took them out of his line of fire. Thank fuck!

The weather changed.....

After three days he rang and asked for the Finance Director. 'Gerry,' he said with no preamble, 'how desperate are we for that casino money?'

'We're not *desperate*, Randy, but it was good short-term money which would help. We have lots more we can liquidate, but as you know they're much bigger, more complicated packages, so the casinos are an easy *sell today* sort of commodity.'

'Ok. I'm in a meeting now for about.....three, four hours so could you get Fiona to ring me in four hours' time.'

'Ok, Randy,' and Randy hung up.

It was seven hours before Fiona got hold of Randy and he gave her specific instructions. Get hold, one way or another, of Mister James who had the money to buy the casinos. Get a meeting with him, take him out to dinner, let him give you a good fucking if necessary but sell those fucking casinos! At any fucking price near fifty. And there was a fifty grand bonus when, she heard the emphasis on the word *when*, she succeeded.

Fiona knew Randy wasn't joking about the fucking. She was single, and she knew exactly why she had been given the job....she knew about the balls up, and she was expecting the call.

The next day she rang James James who was less than interested, but there was no way she was going to take no for an answer. She said whatever it took to get him to see her and that included, in a round about kind of way, offering to spread her legs. She was with him nearly three hours, and when they had finished, she had wrung a deal out of him worth forty-seven and a half mill. Not quite fifty which would have been better, but good enough. And she didn't have to fuck him which, looking at him, seemed a shame. She would have thrown that in if there had been no deal! Never mind, there was still that fifty grand bonus.

She got back to her car and rang Randy immediately but, as usual, he wasn't available. He was in a meeting. Always in a meeting... She left a message. Done at forty-seven and a half.

An hour later he rang her back. 'Good one, Fiona, at least somebody in this fucking organisation can do a deal. When is it being done?'

'As soon as due diligence and the lawyers are finished with it.'

'I didn't ask you *how* it was being done, I asked you *when*?'

'We could, if we wanted to help, do it in four weeks.'

'Make sure it is, Fiona, and there's another ten for you.'

'No problem, Randy.'

'Did you have to fuck him?'

'Unfortunately not.'

'Why's that?'

'He's a bit of a hunk.'

She heard him laugh and then he was gone.

Randy arranged that their in-house finance team made available all necessary financial information to the Accountants that were responsible for the due diligence report and that everything was smoothed through for J J Holdings' legal representatives.

Four weeks and one day later, which saved Randy ten grand for Fiona, H and his team arrived to meet Randy and his team. Although in theory it was done and dusted they both had their accounts and legal teams there to make sure everything was as it should be and if there were any last minute hitches they could be solved there and then. Randy didn't want another balls up.

They started at 9:30 am, had a coffee break, continued, sandwiches and biscuits were ferried in at lunch time and then at four fifteen precisely Randy said, 'I'm not sure we should be doing this.'

A stunned silence swept over the room. 'It's too low. I think we should look at this again.'

H watched Randy. What was this? What was he trying to pull? H knew the saying that was ascribed to Tiny Rowland *the time to negotiate is when you're about to sign* or something like that. Was this it? Was this the Randy version?

'Randy,' said H softly, 'the last time I was here I got the same treatment and I walked out. I can walk again.'

'James, it's just business, it's not personal. One of my colleagues has negotiated a deal that has to be ratified to go through. The more I look at this, the more I think she has made a bit of a balls up.'

H shrugged. 'No problem. I can see your point, and I can see it's just business. That being the case the deal is off. Nothing personal. Let's go,' he said to his team.

He looked back at Randy. Randy shrugged. 'We tried.'

As they got to the door, Randy said, 'Ok, forty-seven five.'

H turned round, went back to his seat and waited for the rest of the papers.

'Nothing personal,' said Randy.

H smiled.

At seven thirty pm H handed over the Bankers Draft for forty-seven and a half million, and it was done. Finished. They all stretched their aching and weary bodies and shook hands and smiled. The lawyers had made a few quid. Quite a few quids actually. The accountants had made a few quid. Quite a few quids actually.

Packster had a few extra million in liquidity and had fucked off some assets that were not producing as they should.

And H had some assets that were not producing as they should but if Ade did his job correctly that would soon be remedied.

Randy went back to his office and asked for coffee as he was going through. It arrived almost before he did. He sat down, put his feet up on the desk and smiled.

Good old Giles, so predictable.

And Fiona. She thought she was the dog's bollocks...or whatever it would be had she been a dog and not a bitch. He pictured her naked in his mind. Mmmm. He rather fancied fucking Fiona himself, but business and pleasure didn't mix. You shouldn't fuck the staff because then they've got you by the balls. Literally!

It was wonderful being a fucking capitalist!

Called Sara.....

His mind wandered to the new extension that the five million would pay for at his place in the Hamptons.....

Chapter 66

Worm's eye view

Thomas, Richard and Harry Phillips were sons of loving but whimsical parents who had decided when they were still children playing together that when they got married and had babies, they would call them Tom, Dick and Harry. And so they did. All three were now in their twenties with Thomas and Richard at University doing Computer Science Degrees and Harry, the oldest, already finishing his and going on to do a Doctorate in Applied Software Integration. All three were interested in cards, card theory, game theory and relative odds. All understood the mathematics behind the theory and each wanted to earn more money from their skill in computer and software technology.

Then one day Thomas saw a programme on the Discovery Channel about a team that had been cheating by having tiny cameras up their sleeves and trying to see what cards the blackjack dealer had dealt. From that, they tried to work out what kind of cards were coming next. High or low? It was a bit basic, but the idea was good.

'We could do that,' he exclaimed excitedly.

'Oh yeah,' said Harry. 'Scam a casino and get your legs broke. I don't think so.'

'We could,' he repeated, 'listen.....'

And they listened and decided on a plan. They bought and built the equipment they needed and tried it out in the kitchen. Harry continually tweaked the software so that the probability that the next card would be high or low became more and

more accurate. When they were satisfied, they went to the nearest small casino to them and tried it out. But it didn't work.

They realised that they needed one more person to help them. Two to play cards, one to bet when the time was right and one to monitor the software. In the kitchen, they had just looked at the monitor and forgotten that someone would be needed full time to do it.....

Harry roped in a friend from his PhD studies, a real techie, swore to secrecy, and they went back. And won! It was only £750, but that was for one night! Three days later they went back again and won another £1250! Nearly £700 each, tax-free in three days!

A week later they tried another small casino with the same results and then waited for a further three weeks for the University summer shutdown.....

Chapter 67

Rogan meets Sam

The taxi driver arrived at the dark building of the Abattoir and waited. After a few minutes, there was a knock on his window, and he jumped in his seat. That had happened several times before, but it always startled him. He never saw it coming.

He followed Rogan as his remote opened the large industrial door. He went in, and it shut behind him. Rogan didn't put on any lights as there was dim emergency lighting already on. He opened the back door and dragged her out. Taking off her hood he looked at what had been delivered. Posh.... Expensive clothes, makeup applied properly, expensive ring.....

Good. Very good.

When he was torturing her, she would be able to articulate exactly what she felt and thought. She would plead and beg, and her words would provide him with as much stimulation as her ripped flesh and gaping wounds. He handed the taxi driver five hundred pounds.

'Good one. I'll give her a good fucking for a few hours then drop her off miles from here later.'

The taxi driver nodded. She'll be in a bit of a state when he does, he thought, but what did he care? Who cares about flaunting, painted sluts? He went to the back seat, found her handbag and gave it to Rogan who would find her name and, he supposed, sell her credit cards.

The taxi left to be swallowed up in the dark night. The large door rumbled down leaving Rogan in the dim light with Samantha. He sat and watched her for a few minutes.....savouring the delights to come, running through them in his mind and wondering what words she would use? How would she say them? What tone would she use?

Please let her be good..... *please*.....

He put her over his shoulder and took her down to his own private abattoir and laid her on a cold wooden block. An old fashioned butcher's block. The soft colour of the wood contrasted to the brilliant white walls which would soon be splattered with a kaleidoscope of bloody droplets.

She stirred slightly, and he knew it was time to restrain her. Two metal hooks hung from the ceiling, so he tied her hands, leaving a loop that allowed him to put both hands over the hooks and left her dangling there with her feet just on the floor.

He glanced at the other solitary hook to her right, also attached to the ceiling, and he smiled.

At the end he would.....he stopped himself from going too far ahead. One step at a time; enjoy the moments as they unfold. When he was still an amateur at this, he had, in his head, repeated this process and then imagined the end which unfortunately aroused him so much he had a frenzy of masturbation which left him drained. It also took much away from the beginning when he started again, so he vowed not to do it again.

So don't think about the end...even though he knew it was the most beautiful, exhilarating feeling in the whole world!

He went over to his knives and sharpened them expertly on a diamond faced butcher's steel, going up and down with a deftness that would have defied most and left the rest fingerless.

His fingers lightly touched a blade and as he felt its razor sharpness a feeling of power ran through him like an electric current. Moving over to a rail that ran along a wall he took down several hooks which he would need a little later. They were stainless steel, about six inches long in the shape of a letter S and both ends had long tapered points which easily inserted into flesh. He stared mesmerised at the point of one of them, and as he turned it slowly, its evil sharpness glinted as it caught the reflection of the lights.

Taking one of the small knives, he went to the woman and cut off her clothes, leaving her naked as she dangled from her restraints. Samantha, in her mid-thirties, had an excellent body; a body which exercise, wealth and surgery had kept as a young girl's. He looked at it with no interest whatsoever.

It would be a much more interesting sight soon.....

Exercising the discipline that he had perfected he took one more look at 'her', the thing on the hooks waiting for his.....attention, then went out of the room and upstairs where he made himself a cup of tea, sat on a rickety chair and went through her handbag. He found her name on her driving licence and thought she had a posh name. He scrutinised her assortment of black, gold and platinum cards. It would be nice to use a bit of that spare credit but he knew it was far too risky and they would be destroyed. He rummaged through the myriad of things that a woman has in her handbag but there was little that interested him, so he put it on the floor and sipped his tea. Pleased with his discipline, he stayed there for

a few more minutes; there was no rush. Well actually there was, but this allowed the dam to fill completely..... His tea finished he went back downstairs where he found her conscious.

She had come round, and when her head cleared, she had scanned the room, saw the knives and the cleavers and knew she was going to die.

Not just die....die painfully.

She struggled in her bonds, but it was useless.

Samantha was an intelligent, cultured, highly educated woman; one of Vassar's brightest lights who had actually gone to classes that took young women, forward thinking modern women, through situations such as this; well mainly rape or physical violence but nevertheless she knew what to do. They had told her what to do. Do this, do that, don't do this, don't do that...

Unfortunately, she was so shit scared she couldn't remember a thing. And not only that she felt her strength ebbing from her; a dreadful weakness enveloping her. Christ!

She was terrified. Her whole body trembled and her mind fastened on to things that it would have been better to let go. Things like how pretty she was and what would he do to her face?

What a nice body she had and what would he do to her body?

What nice breasts she had and.....

What a nice vagi.....

She writhed in torment as the images flashed before her, her body lacerated with knives and cleavers, ripped and separated like chopped meat...

'Where am I?' she asked as he walked in.

They all said that. It was the first thing they all said. Why did they say that? What fucking good did it do them knowing where they were? Now if they had said are you going to kill me, am I going to die, get raped, get hurt, chucked in an acid bath, burnt alive....?; now that would be more sensible. At least they'd know where they stood.

But *where am I?*

Where fucking am I? Where the fuck am I?

He used to say 'in a slaughter house' but found they went hysterical or passed out and that wasn't much use. He hadn't got all fucking day....or night. Now he just said, 'You're my guest.'

He liked her accent. The American confidence mixed with the conservative English.

'Say 'please', ' he asked of her.

'Pardon?'

'Say please.'

'Why?'

'Because here you do what I say,' he said menacingly.

'Please.'

His body tingled. What a beautiful voice. What a beautiful sound. It would be a word she would be uttering a lot soon, and he was thrilled with her pronunciation.

Please don't do that...

Please put the knife down.....

Please don't hurt me.....

Please don't kill me...

Please let me go...

Her words would be the crescendo that would accompany the symphony he would create with his knives and together they would lead to a climax of unimaginable ferocity and ecstasy.

He stood in front of her, holding a knife whose blade had been sharpened so often over the years it curved down to a point like a needle.

‘No...’ she whimpered, ‘*please* no. I’ll give you anything; my family are wealthy, and they will give you anything....*please*.’

Please, please, please, please.

How they unwittingly invited him to do what he did so well. He reached up and drew the point of the knife down the inside of her exposed arm; from her wrist to her armpit and the blood followed the blade as it trickled out.

She started to writhe and shout, but he ignored her. Something else he had learned. Never lose your temper; never do anything that will diminish their pain or your pleasure. He traced the tip of the knife down the other arm and watched the blood ooze out. That was better. He liked blood.

‘*Please*,’ she pleaded, ‘no more. *Please* no more.’

Then she lapsed into a hysterical writhing of screaming and shouting, twisting and turning, calling him obscene names and questioning his manhood. Just about the opposite of everything she had learned in the self-defence classes at Vassar. But it didn’t bother him, she could call him whatever she wanted.

And if she wanted to call him names he had a name for her as well.....temporary! And another..... expendable.

He lifted her one leg and ran the knife from the inside of her leg by her vagina down to her ankle. Blood trickled out.

He repeated the process with the other leg. Blood trickled out. She sobbed uncontrollably, started to shake violently and begged desperately.

He smiled at her. ‘We haven’t started yet.....’ he said softly.

Chapter 68

Prison cell

The Archbishop sat on the chair in the tiny cell, his bible in his hand and watched the woman sitting on the hard, uncomfortable looking, bed. The woman had changed somewhat since he had last seen her. From what he remembered she was thinner.....or maybe fatter? And her hair had changed. It was lighter before....or maybe darker? Time flies, he thought, and much happens to change things. He wondered what had happened to this woman to change her so?

'Is everything ok?' he asked her.

'Yes, thank you, Henry. You?'

'Very good. The Church are having the house redecorated, and we have had to move out for a little while so that it can be done from top to bottom which is a bit of a nuisance, but it will all be worth it in the end.'

'Good.'

Henry thought the woman was softer than when they had met before. That's good, there's hope yet. One day.....

'Would you like me to pray for you?' said Henry in a voice that suggested it wasn't really a question.

'If you want.'

Henry got off the chair and kneeled on one knee. The woman didn't move from where she sat and just watched Henry do his thing. God wasn't for her.

Henry intoned for several minutes, and she heard 'amen' and felt relieved that the nonsense had come to an end. Ah well, I suppose he took the trouble. It could have been worse. He could have had me lashed to purge me of sin, or stoned, or crucified.

In this day and age. In this day and age.....

She shook her head sadly.

A god?

Do me a favour.

Henry talked to her for another fifteen minutes then looked at his watch. 'It's time to go now.'

'Take care of yourself, Henry,' she said.

'The Lord takes care of me.'

Although she wanted to go, Cecilia Everitt, she had now reverted to her maiden name for her own good and that of the children, stopped at the prison canteen for a cup of tea.

Sitting there, contemplating, she decided she was not coming back again. There was nothing here for her except an insane man and bad memories, and she no longer had compassion in her heart for the monster she had just seen.

Initially, she had been loyal and stood by him, convincing herself that The Lord had done all this, orchestrated all this, for a reason. But time, and perhaps more realistically, time away from him and the cloistered world of 'The Lord' had changed her view of the world.

There was no God!

A God would not have put a man on this earth to promote good within a Church, made him a Bishop, and then send him out to carve up women on 'God's days' under the guise of *The Angel of Death*.

As if.....

She had been living with a monster all that time. Someone who was kind, gentle, generous and carved up women. Thank you, God. Thank you very fucking much!

A small thrill ran through her. '*Fucking*'. What a word. So expressive! So liberating!

Her life had changed since he had gone. The Church was no longer a factor in her life. She had moved to another area where she had met another man who was quite different to Hen.....him. It was amazing how you think that life *is*....and then you find out that life can be another *is*.

Cocooned within the Church, with the Church's values, she had no idea there were other ways of doing things. Indeed if she read about those *other ways* in the paper, she was appalled.

Her new man was entirely different.

At times a touch insecure and she had helped him there but other than that he didn't give a shit about God, authority or much else. *Shit*. What a word. So expressive! So liberating!

And the first time he had taken her to bed had terrified her. He had wanted....well....all manner of things. But he was good. He didn't force her to do anything, just showed her that if you relax, if you want to give it a try, feel it, enjoy it, share it, live it, embrace it and accept it for what it was...sex.....then it would be good.

And little by little she did, until she now wanted fucking with abandon and, at times, the rougher, the better. She liked him up her arse as far as he could go and pulling back hard on her long hair as though being forcibly taken.

'Fuck me, you bastard!' she would scream. 'Fuck me harder!'

And when he wanted sucking she would put her mouth close and tantalisingly lick his dick but refuse to put it in, and he would force her head down until it was all in. Half way down her throat. She liked that.....

Dick! Prick! Cock! Knob!

Every word was the shedding of the skin of another world. So life *is*.

But another, different altogether, type of *is*.....

And if it hadn't been for one of those, one in a million things that happen, her life would not have changed.....

If they hadn't been visiting their vicar friends.....

If they hadn't stayed overnight; which they rarely did.

If their friend the vicar hadn't been taken ill.....

If Henry hadn't stood in to do the wedding.....

If the woman getting married, Kylie, hadn't been the one woman who Henry hadn't.....Henry hadn't.....who had managed to get away...

And if she hadn't helped a friend on Christmas Day who was laying on a buffet for someone and was in danger of letting them down she wouldn't have met Scotty.

Chapter 69

Yes.....

They arrived at Pamela's house, and she took him into the lounge, ignored the light switch and put on the gas coal effect fire. She sat him down by it and went off to make coffee.

A few minutes later she returned and sat opposite. They drank in silence, bathed in the heat and glow of the flames. She looked at him, stared at him almost, and liked what she saw. It had been such a long time, and she felt the moistness forming between her legs. Such a long time... She moved to him, kissed him lightly on the lips, kneeled in front of him and started to unbutton his shirt.

'Can I hel.....'

'No,' she said softly, 'no....'

She unbuttoned to his waist then pulled it out of his trousers and undid the remaining two buttons. She slid it off him and saw a body she liked. It was a man's body, a masculine body but not an aggressive body. A lover's body.

'Stand up,' she said gently.

'Stand up?'

She nodded. For Doug, this was getting out of control. His heart was pounding, his prick was completely solid and he had no idea what would happen if he stood up. And not only that, this was the most erotic thing that had ever happened to him. In his entire life! He was a wreck! He stood up in front of her, and she started to undo his belt and then moved to his button and zip.

'I er.....' said Doug who was almost on the verge of embarrassment, 'I er.....'

'Shhhhhh,' she whispered, 'shhh.'

His trousers dropped to the floor, and he saw this huge bulge in his pants. She pulled the elastic top towards her, pulled his pants over his erect dick and let them drop.

He didn't know what to do...? What do I do now?

She looked up at him and smiled. Her smile moved to a grin when she saw his discomfort. How nice, she thought, a virgin. He watched as her face left his and went to his dick. She held it in one hand and kissed it gently with her soft, full lips. She kissed the end and ran her tongue lovingly up and down. Putting her mouth over it she slowly let it go to the back of her throat. He was amazed! Really? All in? He was beginning to think in all that exaggeration there may be a grain of truth.....

Her head started to move up and down, and she continued for a minute or two then stopped. 'Lie down.'

He did as he was told, lying on his back, and waited for the command to fuck her but it didn't come. She nestled down by his midriff, her head on his stomach and began sucking again. He knew, *he knew*, that this wouldn't last long if she continued. He was in such a heightened state that he could happily blow her head off now with an eighty kiloton orgasm. If this orgasm was equated to earthquakes, God help England!

'I er.....' he tried to say. She continued sucking. 'If you er.....' She sucked harder. 'If you er continue.....' Harder, faster, more urgently.

And then he understood and with an almost animal howl he came in her mouth. His face contorted in what appeared anguish but was the release of a million years of built up

sexual repression. It poured out of him, but she didn't stop and kept swallowing...

When he had finished, she moved up and kissed him. For a second he didn't understand what the taste was, but then he realised that she had kept a mouthful of his sperm and she had just transferred it to his mouth. Momentarily he was revolted, but then, instantly, he realised that this was sex. Proper sex. Sex like he had never known. And his revulsion left him to be replaced by a feeling of calm and acceptance that he had never experienced before. He put his arm around her and cradled her and kissed her lovingly.

'Did you like that?' she asked.

'You have no idea.'

'I have, but I was just checking.'

After a few minutes, she left his loving arms and kneeled by him. Taking off her clothes she kissed his lips, and slowly she went down his chest, kissing him as she did. When she got back down to his dick, she put it in her mouth again, and although he knew he couldn't possibly get hard again, he did. Very quickly.

She parted his legs and kneeled between them. Raising his knees, she put her hands under his bum and made it obvious she wanted that raised as well. He complied, and she put her face down and started licking his balls. He felt her tongue move below his balls and start probing towards his arse.

What.....?

The sensation was amazing. He felt her hands exert more pressure under him so he lifted his arse farther off the ground. She got closer to where she wanted to be but not quite. Kneeling up she said, 'Lie on your tummy.'

'Turn over?'

She nodded.

He turned over and realised that turning over naked on a hard carpet was no fun but....

He lay completely flat with his head resting on his arms.

‘What do you want me to do.....?’ he said to the carpet.

She said nothing. She splayed out his legs, knelt between them and started to lick the cheeks of his arse. Then, using both hands, she slowly forced open his cheeks, and he felt her warm, wet tongue go up and down the crack. He had never experienced this before. The sensation was so erotic. She was licking his arse! Fucking hell!

Her nails bit softly into him and made him moan.

The crack of his arse was warm and wet with her saliva, and he felt her tongue stop over his anus. He felt her tongue probing and slowly, little by little, he felt it enter him.

It was unbelievable! Absolutely fucking unbelievable!

‘Oh, God...Oh my God.....’

She stopped for a moment. ‘Are you talking to me?’

‘I think I am.....I think I am.’

She went back and continued licking and kissing and probing with her tongue, moving it in and out of his anus. After a few moments, she put her finger in her mouth for lubrication and gently started to work it up his anus. It took his breath away and when she had it all the way in he couldn’t believe what he felt.....

She pumped with her finger whilst kissing and licking his arse... Leaving her finger in she moved slowly up his spine, kissing as she went until she got to his shoulders and sank her teeth into one of them. He groaned a mixture of pain and exhilaration. She sank her teeth into the other shoulder. A louder sound.

‘Thank God this is a detached house. It is, isn’t it?’
She sank her teeth in again.
‘Aaaahhhhhh.....’

A little later she took him to her bedroom where they made love with an abandon and freedom that he never knew existed but wanted for evermore.
With her.....

Chapter 70

An early night...

Perry Marr was the Manager at the Nite Life, one of H's night clubs, and he was feeling more like an out of control Manager. He had a bug, or food poisoning, or beriberi or his missus was still putting ground glass in his food, but whatever it was he not only felt shit he was doing nothing but shit! And vomit.

It was like Regan in the Exorcist! He could pebble dash a wall at ten paces! Perry was standing behind the bar sipping an Indian Tonic water as he thought the quinine in it may calm his tummy when he felt the rumblings again and ran to the nearest loo. Just getting his trousers down in time he felt his bowels let go and a stream of God knows what hurtle out of him. A pain creased his stomach...

He suddenly realised what was going to happen next and he shifted his weight on the toilet to allow him to reach the tiny sink beside him. Leaning over he started to vomit...

Fucking great! Both fucking ends at once!

When it had subsided, although it still felt like wolves were snapping at his arse, he decided there was no point being there, so he rang for extra cover and left for home.

On his way back as he left the town with the street lights coming on with the setting sun, he felt his arse snap once or twice and knew he may not make it. Nearly home he was passing a large lake, and he knew something wasn't good. Pulling over quickly he ran into the bushes where he pulled down his trousers and squatted down while leaning against a

tree to support him. His bowels opened again, and it flew out of him.

Where the fuck was it all coming from?

When his arse, with the inbuilt power hose, ceased its flow he realised he was a mess. Wet and smelly arse and no loo paper. Should have stayed at work...

One way or another he managed to get his trousers and pants off then used his pants to wipe his bum and clean himself up. He put his trousers back on and went down to the water's edge, found a stone which he placed in his pants and threw them into the lake. Bending down he washed his hands and arms in the cool water. Feeling weak he leaned against a large rock and decided to rest for a few minutes...

It wasn't long to get home now, fifteen or twenty minutes. It would make a nice change as his nights tended to be quite late, which unfortunately gave him less time with the missus as she worked in the day but it still worked well for them, and it gave them a good standard of living. They had moved into a modest detached house in a nice neighbourhood, took a holiday abroad twice a year, could afford one or two of life's little luxuries and generally felt little or no financial pressure.

Funny thing was he didn't mind the hours. He didn't see the clock ticking by and the day never dragged. Somehow he was occupied all the time.

He noticed the lake shimmer as the dying sun was split on its surface. He stood and stretched, his arms reaching to the tiny glittering stars that were emerging. Looking in wonderment at the quickly setting sun and glorying at its majesty he felt his body shiver and realised he had been touched, as have all men over the ages, by the enormity of the universe and the

inconsequence of man. For a fleeting moment, he felt scared and then it left him. Sitting down he stared at the sun until it disappeared from view. In those few brief minutes, he felt he had been cleansed.

Just as well.....

Rising, he walked to his car and started off home. Because the price of petrol was so high, he often coasted downhill, and there was one down to his house, so he slipped it out of gear, ran silently for half a mile then pulled into his drive.

He got out of the car and stopped as he saw the landing light go off and his bedroom light go on. The bedroom curtains were closed, and a few seconds later the light went off again. His heart started to pound, and he felt his hands tremble. He had seen, for just a second, two people in the room.

He tiptoed back out of the drive and a little way up the road. Leaning against a fence, he tried desperately to steady himself, to stop the thumping in his head, the tension in his fists. He took several deep breaths then berated himself for being so stupid. What if he hadn't seen two people? What if it had been a reflection of the first person? And what if it had been two people? It could have been another woman. His mind then hurtled away on its frenzied path, and he imagined his wife in bed with another woman.

Oh for fuck's sake, get a grip...

What to do? What to do? He desperately wanted to know and desperately wanted to know.....nothing. Deciding on a course of action he returned to the house, walked quietly down the path to the rear of the house, very gently inserted his key into the back door and with bated breath slowly turned it. His heart felt as though it was going to burst as he slowly made his way to the lounge and then on through to the bottom of the stairs.

Straining to hear any sounds from upstairs he thought he heard a low moan but decided his brain was playing tricks. He ascended the stairs very carefully, acutely aware that one of them creaked when stood on and tried desperately hard to remember which. Taking a long step he missed two entirely, knowing that one of them was the offender, and then in mid stride, he heard a sound. He stopped completely still.

It was a familiar sound.

Although he had not heard it for a while.

It was a familiar sound.

He heard it again.

It was a familiar sound.

And it brought tears welling to his eyes.

It was a familiar sound.

It was the sound of his wife.....having an orgasm.

His hand grabbed the bannister, and it propelled him up the stairs, a scream erupting from him as he went. Wrenching open the door he saw, in the twilight of the room, his wife lying on the bed with her legs open and draped over a man's shoulders. Perry rushed to the bed, grabbed the man by the hair and pulled him screaming off the bed; he grabbed his arm and in one continual hammer thrower movement slammed him into the bedroom wall, and he heard the back of the man's head crack! Consumed by fury Perry grabbed his head with two hands and started repeatedly hitting it against the wall, not hearing his wife's pleading screams. After a few moments, her voice permeated his roaring brain, and he let go of the now limp body and went over to her. She tried to run for the door, but he had the quickness of a maniac. He spun her around and slapped her hard across the cheek.

‘You bitch....you cow....you bitch....you cow...’ he kept repeating.

He slapped her again and again then threw her to the corner of the room where she slammed against the wall and slid slowly down.

Bending over, his hands on his hips to try and get more air in his lungs, he shuffled back to the naked body of the man on the floor. Turning him over he became aware of two things.....

The man was not breathing.

The man was his brother.

He was aware of nothing as his wife dragged herself to the bedside phone which had been knocked onto the floor in the melee. She punched 999 into it, and when she was asked which service she required, she was too traumatised to speak so after several attempts she dropped the handset to the floor and dragged herself back to the corner where her body racked, and she sobbed heavy, silent sobs.

Perry was still cradling his brother’s head when the police arrived. Getting no reply from their knock they had elected to break down the door and in due course found the inescapable silence of death. Not getting any sense out of Perry’s wife they assumed, as Perry was the only one clothed, that he had somehow been caught burgling the place. They handcuffed him and took him to a police car.

In the interview room, Perry was subjected to an hour of questioning that produced nothing, primarily because Perry said nothing, and it was only after a visit from the doctor who realised the extent of Perry’s withdrawal that they put him in a cell.

He sat in a corner, his knees pulled up to his chin, his arms entwined around his legs and slowly rocked.

In his mind, he could see, over and over again, the blood on the wall. And he heard, as though it were happening at that moment, the sickening thud as his brother's head was continually rammed against it.

Chapter 71

Handbagging

Rogan was now reaching an ecstatic state of mind. It was a living dream and his every sense was magnified. He saw vividly her every open wound, breathed in the smell of her bodily wastes, sniffed at the blood that oozed, put his fingers in the wounds that emitted it and gloried in her dreadful high pitch screams as he inflicted ever more barbarous pain.

She was still dangling, and soon he would lay her down on the waiting butcher's wooden block....but there was a little left to do first. He had already amputated several of her fingers and toes, one by one, one by one. And when he had finished amputating one he would stand in front of her contorted, pain filled, wide-eyed, terrified face and say, 'I toed you I was going to hurt you,' and then smile at his little joke before going down and severing another.

With several of her fingers and toes still left he lifted her off the hooks and set her down on the wooden block. He preferred not to amputate everything as he felt it was too aesthetically correct. He wanted her disfigured and ugly.

Going back to his much-sharpened knife he took the steel and with quick expert strokes he moved the knife up and down to sharpen and hone it. He walked back over to her bleeding body and saw the look in her eyes. The look of a hunted animal, a fox or a deer that was running, running, running but it knew there was no escape. And it showed in their eyes. Hunted and haunted.

Kneeling behind her head, he placed his knees on her tethered wrists and looked down at her face...and beyond to the breasts he was going to take from her.

And then....and then...

Be patient.....be patient...

He inserted the point of the knife under her nipple and pulled it up, slicing her. She screamed. It was a dreadful scream, a wailing, despairing scream that lacked....hope. She had given up. She would still fight for her life, she would kick and scream and shout abuse, but she knew she was going to die...

He stared at the knife in his hand in front of him, the breasts waiting to be sliced off and reached up to the skies in a dramatic pose and drank in the power. The knife glinted above him, telling him of their bond and how they were made for each other. He nodded in silent agreement and smiled behind crazed eyes.

Now the real pain would begin. She thought she had suffered already, but she knew nothing.....*nothing*.

Let it begin.....

His hand trembled slightly as the deadly blade it held moved slowly towards her. The blood from his pounding heart smashed into his brain and deafened him with its screaming need. He was in a world between life and death, and ecstasy beckoned.....

His heightened mind didn't immediately register the slight sound, but when it did eventually permeate his brain, he struggled to put into any kind of context.

For just a moment he stopped, but his glazed eyes stayed transfixed on the sacrifice before him and then behind him, the door flew off its hinges, and a police SWAT team with armoured vests, balaclavas and semi-automatics rushed in. They were screaming and shouting to confuse him but quick as they were, he was quicker, and the knife that was destined for her beautiful body came up in a wide arc and slashed his throat from one side to the other...

Chapter 72

Watch me play

They were slowly working their way down the country; starting in Glasgow and finishing on the south coast. Then depending on how it went they may, just may, try France. Unfortunately, none of them spoke French so they were concerned that they would miss the signs and signals that warned them of impending danger.

Last night they had hit both Coventry casinos, and tonight they were in Birmingham. They weren't winning much, between four and eight grand in each casino but it all added up. And it was tax-free. And you could do it in two weeks. They should certainly clear a hundred grand this trip, and between four of them, that was a bit good.

Deciding on the Round Table first they pulled onto the car park. The large van nestled at the back of the park and its occupants moved through a small door into the back. They switched on a light and then the techie turned on the battery of electronic equipment that was waiting for them. When it had all booted up, he clicked away at a keyboard. 'Check the cameras.'

They held up two tiny cameras and scanned the inside of the van and watched the images on the screen.

'Fine. Tape them on.'

Using flesh coloured adhesive tape two of them taped the cameras under the tip of the middle finger of their left hand.

'Test two,' said the techie, and he watched as their images played on the screen.

‘Move your tape up a fraction, Robbie.’

Robbie adjusted the tape fractionally, and the screen image became clearer.

‘That’s fine,’ said the techie. ‘Earpiece,’ and the third member of the team put a tiny earpiece in his right ear.

‘Testing.’

‘Fine,’ came the reply.

They all grinned.

‘To the fish waiting to be caught,’ said Mark.

‘Good fishing....’ said the techie and the three of them went out into the dark night, at ten-minute intervals, to sign in at the Round Table...

An hour and a half later it was all finished, and they were nearly five grand up. All they had to do now was go to the JJ Casino and then find a nice hotel; have a good meal, a drink and a good kip. Tomorrow they were in Luton before they hit London.

They were looking forward to London as they could raise the stakes and should be able to double their take.

At JJ casinos they repeated the *modus operandi*. Park at the back of the park, out of the way, but close enough so that nothing weakened the signals. The three went inside, individually again so as not to arouse any suspicion and mooned around the casino for a few minutes to get their bearing and find out where the Blackjack action was. Once that was established two of them, the ones with the finger cameras, went to play on separate tables. They played small stakes, keeping their left hand on the table at all times and pointing towards the dealer.

As each card was dealt the table level camera caught a glimpse of the cards and sent the images back to the van. An Optical Character Recognition System recognised the card, and its value then computed for its statistical significance.

As each card came out the computer made a statistical forecast of what cards were likely to come next; not specific cards but whether they would be high or low. And when a particular trend was flashed up the techie talked to the third man who casually walked over to the statistically 'hot' table and made a series of large bets. He didn't have to win them all, just more than average to make a nice sum, and he stayed there until the forecast changed or the dealer shuffled. And then he wandered off to get a sandwich or a coffee and waited for the next SHT – 'statistically hot table' to arrive in his earpiece...

Tonight was going well, and it would be a very profitable night.....

Upstairs in the Casino security room H, Ade and the team watched the bank of security cameras, several of which were constantly monitoring the three men. One was also trained on the old van parked at the back of the car park.

They had watched them from the moment they had arrived, as had the Round Table and one of the Coventry Casinos who had been alerted by a prior casino. It had become evident, at least to the casinos, that something was amiss. To the punter, it may seem as though the wins would be seen as just lucky and unnoticeable which indeed lucky wins are. Unfortunate for the casino but it happens.

But regular lucky wins.....? Alas.....no.

And so the evidence against them had been gathering, and it had been agreed that Ade's casino in Birmingham was where it would all come to an end primarily as Ade's car park was the easiest to block if it got a bit ugly.

To make sure of their catch Ade had doctored the cards on one blackjack table which he knew they would visit next. The cards were stacked in such a way that the cards were not spread evenly and a pattern would be quickly picked up which should alert the team, and the one that placed the bets should arrive very quickly.

They arrived, they played, and true to form their accomplice came and started betting larger than average amounts, allowing him to win greater than average pots.

When they had won nearly ten thousand, they called it a night and went back to the van. In the back Harry said, 'Team, we are *The Men!*' Everyone high-fived and they chuckled a bit wildly, full of testosterone and adrenalin.

'A glass of wine, I think,' said Harry who was the accepted leader and Tom pulled out several plastic beakers and filled them up.

Half way through the drinks they heard the strange noise, but it meant little to them. Then they heard a hissing sound. Then they heard a scraping at the back where the lock and chain were put through the door handles. A sound scraped along the sides where the lorry ties were circling the whole of the van to stop any doors opening. Richard opened the adjoining door to look through the windscreen, but it was black; it and the side windows sprayed with black aerosol paint.

The strange noise was now next to them, and then they lurched slightly as the van tilted and the noise became louder, and they realised it was a stacatruc and they were being

lifted. The staca placed them lightly on the low loader that had pulled up nearby, and they were taken to the police station at Belgrave Middleway where the officers and cells were waiting...

Chapter 73

Too many

There had been twelve of them at the start, and now it was down to five. Five! It had taken nearly fifteen minutes, but he was down to five.

Fucking bastards!

H was mad. It took a lot to get H mad, but he was *mad*.

There was no way they were going to win. He had fucked off seven of them, and it could only get easier. H smashed down at one but it moved out of his way, and he missed. Smiling up at him; a mocking smile.

Cunt! I'll fucking have you!

He took another swing, but it moved again. The others looked on, and he heard them giggle.

You can fucking giggle but you're next you bastards!

He smashed at it again, harder this time, but it moved out of his way and sneered at him. Missed me you useless cunt, it taunted.

I'll fucking have you.

He heard the giggling turn to outright laughing. Loads of it. Laughing and laughing and laughing.

Watch it you bastards...

He swung at it again and just caught it before it moved. It rocked on the spot.

See....

H took a swig of water and wiped the sweat from his brow. There was no going back; it was either him or them. He gripped the weapon tighter and swung again. It moved out of

the way.

Again!

The fucking thing kept moving...

The voice next to him permeated his brain, telling him what to do. H took a deep breath and sat down as instructed.

‘James, this isn’t life or death, you don’t have to kill them, they’re only golf balls.....’ he heard the Golf Pro say.

Chapter 74

Perry....? Perry.....?

Rob Gwilt the solicitor who H had instructed to help Perry was ushered into the cell. Behind him, he heard the officer lock the heavy door. Perry was sitting in his bed in the corner and was staring straight ahead, rocking slowly.

‘Hello, Perry,’ said Gwilt, ‘I’ve been sent by Mister James to help you....’

Perry gave no outward sign of acknowledgement. Gwilt went to the opposite corner where a small wooden chair for visitors sat forlornly. He moved it slightly closer to Perry and sat down.

‘Perry...? Can you hear me, Perry..?’ he asked gently.

Perry continued staring ahead. ‘Perry....I’m here to help you. James has asked me to help you...’ Still no movement. ‘But to help you it’s important that we talk a little of what happened..... Perry.....? Perry, can you help me with just a few moments talking so that maybe we can get you out of this place.....?’

He waited in the stillness for several minutes, then he put the chair back, picked up his briefcase and called for the police officer. Outside the cell, he said, ‘Would you get the police doctor for me, please.’

Sitting in the office of the doctor, they sipped coffee.

‘Christ, he’s eerie,’ said Gwilt. ‘He just sits there and stares like a zombie, you’d think he was catatonic!’

The doctor smiled. 'I think you should stick to law, Rob. A catatonic seems to be a general laymen's description of anyone who sits still. Whereas the actual state is catalepsy which tends to be a trance or seizure with a loss of sensation or consciousness accompanied by rigidity of the body. Catatonia, however, is schizophrenia with intervals of catalepsy and occasional violence.' He sat back in his chair and puffed out his chest. 'The defence rests,' he said grinning.

'Well, whichever way you put it,' said Rob, 'to me he looks really fucked up!'

'Exact and to the point,' said the doctor. 'Exact and to the point.'

'Well, what are you going to do about it?' said Gwilt in exasperation. 'It's difficult to defend my client when he won't bloody talk to me...'

'Relax, Rob. In a few hours, his body will allow him to sleep. Should that not be the case I shall induce sleep. After he's slept, we'll see what his condition is like then. If he's still, as you so succinctly put it, fucked up, then we'll get him to the local psychiatric hospital, and they'll sort him out....'

'Is he primarily in a state of shock?'

'Yes, he is, in the widest sense of the word. I'm not a psychiatrist, but I would guess that too much has happened, too much horror, too much pain and his mind has shut down. He denies the existence of the event, but he has done it so well he denies the existence of everything. It is as though to remember anything will cause him to remember that precise moment he wants to forget. And he can't bring himself to do that...'

They looked in on him later that evening and found him lying on his bed with his eyes closed. The doctor knew by the breathing rate and the movement of the chest that he was not asleep, but he apparently wanted to appear so. The doctor thought for a moment and decided there was no need to interrupt him tonight, better to leave him alone. Let him sleep, let him relax. They left the cell and put off the light.

About an hour later Perry slowly sat up on his bed. In the semi-light, his face looked gaunt from the lack of sleep and the mental exhaustion. He walked quietly to the cell door and peered through the small square with the three bars. He saw no-one. He went back to the bed in the police holding cell and slowly, quietly, he raised it on its end and walked it over to the opposite wall where he leaned it upright. He moved the small chair and put it under the overhead light. Standing on the chair he took out the light bulb then unscrewed the light fitting. A tug on the dangling light holder left the two wires exposed. He pulled on the wires to see if there was any slack and found an extra six inches could be brought from the roof cavity. He held the wire and stretched out his arm towards the top of the upturned bed and saw that it would reach. He let go of the wire and moved the chair to the bottom of the bed. From the chair he pulled himself onto the top of the bed where he perched precariously. When he was sure he was in no danger of falling, he reached out and took hold of the wire. Holding it in front of his face he stared intently at it for a few moments. Then he slowly nodded his head twice as though acknowledging a silent command. He took a deep breath and then screamed at the top of his voice, 'Help, help, help, help.....'

When he heard the footsteps running towards the cell, he put the wires in his mouth.....

Chapter 75

Gucci

The Gucci Ferrari F1 bag was instantly famous and would become an icon. Several weeks after her ordeal, with her several amputated fingers and toes healed and wearing special shoes to accommodate, Samantha, with Benshima and Estelle in tow, was invited to the Gucci Headquarters to meet Robert Polet the Gucci CEO and François-Henri Pinault the boss of the Holding Company and an accompanying fanfare of publicity.

François-Henri had unwittingly and unknowingly saved her life by a rather 'off the wall' idea that Gucci had taken up, mainly to please their owner but also as a bit of a gimmick. It was not intended to save anyone's life; it was intended, in theory, to allow a stolen handbag to be located again although Gucci assumed that the owners of Gucci handbags would have the money to go out and buy another rather than go through the process of tracing it.

But nevertheless, Ferrari had designed a tiny transmitter that would go in the middle of one of the straps with two batteries at either end to power it. It was wired through the bag to the other strap where a booster was similarly held with its own power supply and from which a signal was emitted at fifteen-minute intervals to give the batteries long life. Each signal was unique and designated to its owner, and each signal could be tracked if need be through Tracker technology that was usually used to find stolen vehicles on expensive cars.

And as soon as Samantha was reported missing, and incredibly luckily with her new Gucci bag, the police had a fix very quickly.....

Gucci quickly dropped the tracker idea as the potential buyers, having read about Samantha Bennet-Coleridge, realised that if the police could track them so easily.....so could their husbands.

Chapter 76

The new casinos

The team went back to H's office, and he opened two bottles of Cristal champagne. 'Team!' and raised his glass in salute. 'To you.'

They all raised and chinked and drunk and sneezed when the bubbles poured into their nose.

'Forty-seven!' Exclaimed Cleggy, still bewildered by the low price. 'Why forty-seven?'

H hadn't mentioned the other five million as they had no need to know, so he just smiled.

'Come on, H,' said Cleggy, 'you can tell us. Who did you drop a bung to? Or did you give Fiona a good rodgering? Come on, H.....'

'There's nothing to tell. I think we were, thanks to you, in the right place at the right time with money and, as you suggested, they needed money. Voila!'

After much merriment, they drifted back to their own working, or in the case of Cleggy non-working, lives and left H to sit and mull.

He now had nine casinos, nine night clubs, thirty betting shops, an internet poker site, two security companies and a waste company that would soon be gone. That was some little Group he was amassing, and it was all his. No outside shareholders, no inquisitive eyes, no one to answer to. J J Holdings, the Group holding company, employed no one other than H as Managing Director and Benshima as company secretary and she had never seen the accounts.

She just signed as and when requested and assumed James wanted it that way which he did. If he brought Benshima in entirely it meant discussing with her where it was, where it was going, why, where, when? But he didn't want to be answerable to anyone, and so she stayed at a distance. There was only one person who had an entire picture of what was going on and who understood its significance. Only one person who had all that knowledge and any he didn't have he could put two and two together.....and make four.

Scotty.

Scotty was the icing on the cake or the fly in the ointment. What to do with Scotty? H not only liked Scotty but admired his thinking process. It wasn't intellectual, in many ways quite the opposite, but it was simple and got rid of the trees that stood in the way.

What to do with Scotty?

It had been a thought for quite a while with H that he would like Scotty to have something tangible. Currently, he was 'Operations Manager' which said little and in fact was never used as a title for him. Scotty was Scotty. Scotty was the person you rang when you had a problem, and he thought about it, and thought about it, and scribbled notes on his Nobo board and put figures into Excel, and then he rang you back with a simple answer. Sometimes the answers were so simple you couldn't believe he had spent so much time to come up with it. What do you mean, an extra two bar staff? We know that we get extra on busy nights. Come on, Scotty, you can do better than that. And then Scotty would explain what two extra bar staff would be doing and what percentage difference it would make to customer throughput and takings. And you did it, and it worked. Good old Scotty.

Scotty was the fixer, Scotty was the strategic thinker, Scotty gave you what appeared to be a short-term solution to a short-term problem but was actually a long term solution which, at times, changed the way of looking at things entirely. He would challenge anything and everything. There were no sacred cows.

That was Scotty's gift.

But did H want to be challenged? Wasn't he happier being up there somewhere and merely asking for these talents when he needed them? At arm's length and in control.

H was also aware that there was only one person in his life that he totally trusted and that was Benshima. The only person in his life he allowed himself to get close to who had never taken advantage of that trust and hurt him.

H realised he was struggling with Scotty because not only did he admire his skill but he liked him as a person. And, for some reason, he also wanted to help him belong and have a bit of status. There was obviously something in Scotty that resonated in H on an emotional level that was both gratifying and unsettling. It was gratifying that Scotty was helpful and loyal. It was unsettling that H liked him and therefore could get hurt...

What to do?

He went to the printer and took out a sheaf of paper then went back to his desk and put his feet up. Screwing each sheet up in a ball he lobbed them over the room to where a bin futilely waited. After ten minutes and one in out of thirty James James, The Managing Director of J J Holdings had a brainwave. As the Group was now much bigger and needed to be looked at again with regard to responsibility and

accountability, another Scotty phrase, then there should be a complete review.

And who could do it better than Scotty? Let's see if Scotty gave *himself* a new job and title! He picked up the phone and got Scotty on the second ring. Explaining that he wanted a complete strategic review all he heard was 'How soon, boss?' and 'ok' and that was it.

There was only one more thing now to make a decision on; Jose. What to do about Jose's wishes that he join the family company and takes over control of the European distribution of cocaine? They were due to go over in two weeks, and he had to have a decision. In fact, the default decision was already no so what he had to do was look at everything that could, would or should make it yes.

But there were two weeks, and he would look at it, again, tomorrow. On top of that, there were one or two loose ends he had to tie up before he went to Bogota.....

Pleased with the day's work H decided to call it a day and go to the gym then take Benshima out to celebrate. When he got home, he saw that Benshima was in as her keys were in the fruit bowl but she was nowhere to be found. He found her in her en suite, lying on the floor and sobbing silently. He cradled her gently. 'What's wrong, Benny, whatever's wrong?' Her eyes were wide open with a mixture of fury and despair. She tilted her head down to her skirt, and he saw the red stain that had seeped from her womb.

Oh fuck.....

Oh fuck...

Not again, not again..... He pulled her closer to him.....

Chapter 77

Skip Hire

Scotty went to see Paul about his possible acquisition of B & P Skip Hire, but after an hour or so, as Paul's enthusiasm for the purchase dampened, Scotty knew it would be a sale to one of the big boys. In a way that would be okay as he could then play one off against another and get a better price. Hopefully.

Paul moaned on about how he would have liked to have moved into the skip hire business properly, as against his brokering service, but when you looked at all its inherent vagaries, which he didn't currently have, the massive leasing costs, which he didn't currently have, arsey drivers that didn't turn up after a good night's drinking, which he didn't currently have, why buy it? Why take on an entirely different operation with massive borrowings and leave yourself exposed when things were pretty good as they were?

At the end of the meeting, as Scotty stood up to shake hands, Paul offered five times profits for B & P Skip Hire.

'Pardon? I thought you weren't interested?'

'I'm not really, but it may fit in...'

May? Thought Scotty, *May?* You've led me by the fucking nose!

Scotty sat down again. 'Paul, I admire your negotiating technique, but the boss isn't a Charity. I can go to the big boys and get ten.'

'Maybe.'

‘Ok, maybe, but if I can get nine, that’s two point four million more than you are offering so I can’t do a deal at that.’

‘What can you deal at?’

‘Ten.’

‘Or nine?’

‘Perhaps nine.’

‘Maybe eight?’

Scotty smiled. Sitting in front of him was a man in his early thirties, six foot, slim, fit, handsome, wearing a huge Breitling watch that Scotty couldn’t even lift and smiling like a cherub. Eight indeed? The boss had paid four million for the companies which seemed to Scotty to be incredibly cheap.....but he also had to inject capital in, to keep them afloat when they had been robbed by Bob and Pat.....

Scotty struggled with both those statements, but he would also struggle to say why...? It didn’t quite add up....? Four million for the two....?

Anyhow the skip hire company was making about £600,000 a year pre-tax, and he could definitely get one of the big boys to pay ten times if he was lucky, maybe more if he could get two who wanted it. Six mill would go a long way to sort out the financial mess they had been left in.

Scotty smiled. He would like to take some money off one of the big boys. When he had left dear Mister Hixon at the skip hire company, he had managed to get a job as National Accounts Manager at one of them, dealing with the larger customers. A staff of twenty and answerable to the Marketing Director who knew as much about marketing as Scotty did about nuclear physics...

It went downhill the first week when Scotty was asked to sign a report his boss had written, in Scotty's name, for the MD. Quickly reading through it Scotty realised it was bollocks and refused to sign. Week three a customer demanded things that Scotty refused to comply with as they would have cost the company thousands and were not in the contract, but a call to his weak boss got him overridden. Week six and Scotty was asked to put forward the department's projected profit for the coming year. His boss suggested £250,000 would be a good figure, but Scotty worked it all out and came to a loss of £430,237. They were a service department for Christ's sake, drumming up business for the depots; how the fuck could you make a profit? The depots made the profit, you stupid prick! Week ten and his boss showed him a copy of a new brochure which unfortunately Scotty giggled at.

'What's the matter?' asked the Marketing Director.

'What idiot did this?' Asked Scotty, the answer coming to him as he said it.

Week fourteen saw him in an office with the Marketing Director and the HR Director for a review.

'You're sacked,' said the HR Director.

'Why?'

'You're crap!'

'You know I'm not.'

'We think you are.'

'He knows I'm not,' said Scotty looking at the Marketing Director. 'Anyhow, you can't sack me, I'm past my three months' probation time.'

'Watch us.'

He was escorted from the building, and he sued and won a case for wrongful dismissal. At the end of the day, it cost them forty thousand for three months' work but also added to the impression on his c.v. that Scotty was a liability...
Impression.....?

So why haggle with Paul? Scotty really wanted cash for this transaction, and Paul hadn't got cash as far as he knew, but the big boys had. 'Paul, I know you're a friend of the boss, but it really isn't a deal. I could perhaps have gone to nine but below is out of the question.'

Paul stood up. 'Scotty, I must pop to the loo. Shall I get us a coffee while I'm out?'

'Please.'

In the main office where staff were staring at computer screens, taking orders from customers and passing them to suppliers Paul gave an instruction for two coffees then went into the Finance Manager's office.

'I want to make sure,' he said, 'how much we're giving to Potters?'

'Around a hundred thousand a month.'

Potters was the skip hire supplier that Paul used to cover that area. All he had to do was move it to B & P, and he had an extra million a year turnover which would more than likely yield half to his bottom line. Maybe more? So what he needed now was staged payments, and it wouldn't cost him a penny. He went back into Scotty with two coffees.

'That's better,' he said. 'I think there was an Indian in my Indian. I could do this at eight, Scotty, if I could stage it in some way?'

'No. I want cash.'

‘Half cash and half staged?’

‘Can’t do it, Paul.’

Over the next three hours, they tried to hammer out a deal, but they got nowhere. Scotty wasn’t convinced that the buoyant economy would hold up forever and then what would happen to the staged payments? No...it was too big a risk. They shook hands and left it at that, and five months later Scotty got eight times profits off one of the big boys in cash.

Chapter 78

A loss...

The ridiculous thing was, H knew who had caused Benshima's miscarriage. Fancy that. He knew who it was, Jon Dewey, which meant that he could find where he lived, which meant he could.....

It was after the Gucci fanfare. The girls had been flown home in the private jet of François-Henri Pinault as a final treat and laden with luxury goods of all kinds. She had taken a taxi from the airport, dutifully phoning H with the registration number and a description of the driver, much to his consternation, and it had dropped her off outside their block of apartments. Moments after he had pulled away and she was trying to get all the goodies in her arms she heard, 'Give me your phone and your watch.'

She looked up to see a youth, no more than sixteen or seventeen, holding a knife. 'I won't ask again,' he said menacingly.

Benshima was too slow, and he was starting to panic. He kicked her with a pretend karate kick to the stomach to send her to the floor and then ripped her watch off, rummaged in her handbag, found her phone and some money and fled. She wasn't hurt, mainly shaken and dropping to the hard pavement had jarred her spine, but she was still alive, not beaten or knifed, and she lived to fight another day. She told James when he came home that night, and he berated her for not telling him straight away.

'What could you do?'

It was a sensible question to which James had no reasonable answer. Only an overwhelming feeling of frustration that he had not been there and protected her.

The next day a policeman arrived at their door and asked her to identify some items of jewellery and a phone. They were hers. The boy had done the same thing a few minutes later but had been caught by a passing Lions rugby player and taken to the local police station. H didn't say how lucky they must have been to find one open..... The policeman was quite helpful with details of the boy.

Benshima didn't press charges as there was no point. He had been caught mugging someone else, and so she was just another statistic they could use against him.

'My client would like you to take into account three hundred and sixty other counts, your Honour, for which he is truly sorry.'

A slap on the wrist, maybe an ASBO and maybe not, and then the start of a new tally. Ah well, no harm done.....

And now this.

The after effects of a stupid kick when one wasn't necessary. H wanted to kill this person who had injured his wife and killed their embryonic child. He wanted to kill him so badly it hurt but he couldn't. The one person in the world he should kill was a little too obvious. Too traceable. Even the plod should be able to work that out given time and enough forensic evidence.

Too risky. Far too risky. He picked up the phone. 'Andy.'

'H.'

'I have a little job for you.'

'Little?'

'No.'

He was easy to snatch. He was a child who knew nothing of the world or its consequences when you did the wrong thing to the wrong person. Little old ladies, shuffling old men and women were the right people to mug. He hadn't yet come across anyone with a friend or relative that had taken enough exception to his deeds to seek him out.

Until now.

Because H hated him so much he had immediately written him out of any scenario of revenge. Initially, it was a good idea, but he wanted him dead.

Now! Gone! Forever!

They watched him come out of the pub, and when he walked through a dark stretch, they grabbed him, smacked him over the head to put him out, put him in a car and headed off to where Biggles was waiting. Andy had taken somewhat of a liberty on H's behalf as he wanted to know something before the boy went in the sea. Any sea. Andy never quite knew why Biggles picked this sea instead of that? Maybe one was getting full.....?

'Come on, Biggles,' said Andy, 'it'll only take a minute and it's dark and there's no fucker around.'

'Andy, we don't have the time. We've got to be gone; it's too dangerous to fuck about.'

'Come on, Biggles, where's your sense of adventure?'

After more badgering, Biggles gave in. 'You fuckin clear it up.'

'Right ho, Cap'n,' replied Andy and stood to attention and saluted. Biggles got in the chopper and started the engines. By the time the rotors had gathered speed Andy had tied the boy to a stacatruc and was slowly raising his head towards them.....

Chapter 79

Deserted

Leaving the searing heat of Riyadh behind them the entourage headed into the mountains where the cooling winds and their large pitched tents awaited them.

Stanley Arnold had gone ahead with the other servants to help prepare. It was his job to make sure that things were organised properly and although he couldn't speak the language, he had no tongue for it, he could indicate when certain things should be changed. He did this through a series of grunts and gesticulation which they now generally understood. While holding no power within the household, they had recognised that he was a good organiser and was therefore allowed to use his skill to assist in its well running.

They arrived in the afternoon; the big, black SUVs covered with dust, rested and then they ate outside. Stanley, as usual, sat slightly behind the gathering which showed he was not part of the family, a cursory look at his features would establish that, but was part of the valued retinue.

Although strictly forbidden the malt whisky flowed, and after a while, two of the men got up and beckoned to Stanley who knew it was now his job to either administer or be administered to.

It was one of the better parts of his 'employment'. He got lots of sex. They went outside, walked forty yards to the SUVs and drove into the dunes for about a mile and then disembarked.

Stanley knew what they wanted, and he was more than happy to give it. One man pointed to the ground, so Stanley kneeled and watched as he undid his zip and took out a hard prick. Stanley smiled up at the man then put it in his mouth and used his mouth and hand to suck him off.

Stanley nearly choked when he came.

Where did it all come from? It must be the desert air. You don't get that much in Britain.

Changing places with the man standing behind Stanley, the second man, who had been masturbating, put his prick in Stanley's mouth and came within seconds.

Sometimes, Stanley thought as he kneeled, waiting for the next command, he was lucky and got sucked off himself, but that wasn't often. He usually sucked them off or got fucked...

He was still wondering what it was to be when one of the men looked into the distance and following his gaze, saw another SUV approaching.

This was going to be a rather energetic day, thought Stanley. One of the men beckoned to him to get up and pointed to their SUV, and Stanley went to it, raised his robes and leaned over the bonnet.

The SUV stopped close by, and the remaining Arab went over to greet them, leaving his friend fucking away at Stanley. Stanley couldn't see them, but it sounded like more than one and so it was possible he was going to get four cocks today. Not a bad day...a four cocker. He still wondered if they'd let *him* do something.....?

After he had come in Stanley, his friend took over and then when he had finished Stanley waited for the next. His arse was starting to feel a touch raw now, but he could manage one more, and then he could suck.....

One of them held his shoulders and guided him into a kneeling position on the sand, and three of them stood in front, looking at him. The man behind, the man he couldn't see, grabbed his hair, yanked back his head and pulled a sharp hunting knife across his throat. It opened like a shark's mouth. Air from the severed windpipe made a pssst sound and blood gushed everywhere. For a second Stanley looked at the men in front of him and his face looked surprised.

Why?

Why?

What had he done wrong?

He had done nothing wrong.....

Why?

When his body stopped twitching two of them took a rope from the SUV, tied it to his legs and to the tow bar and dragged him away from the blood soaked sand into the dunes several miles away, where they left him to be eaten by anything that strayed that way.

It was a shame. He had been an excellent servant, and he had a throat like a cormorant, but a deal was a deal. Mister James, who had paid seven hundred thousand Riyals, one hundred thousand pounds, and travelled a long way, for the pleasure of slitting his throat.....

Chapter 80

Time to think

On the Qatar Airways flight to London H settled down in his seat. It was a long way back, and he was tired, so he shut his eyes, and his mind wandered and went, unfortunately, to a subject that peeved him. It had peeved him more and more recently, and he knew there was little he could do about it. What he wanted to know was...

Why hadn't Tony Hatch emailed him back about his classic poker lyrics?

Why.....? Why.....?

It was obviously, by far, the best poker song ever written.

Obviously. By far. So why?

Maybe he was going to nick it? Even now it could be floating around the airwaves having been adopted by Party Poker or whoever at great expense?

Maybe H could *force* him to write the tune?

He could get Andy, and they could kidnap him and take him to Andy's out of the way place...

And they could make him do it.....

Stick a Ukulele up his arse, Andy

Chop off his Tuba

Stamp on his flugelhorn

Rip out his clavichord

Stick one up his bagpipe

Kick him in the timpani

Biff him in the bongos.....

Smiling gently his eyes closed and he nodded off.

Half way through the flight his body sensed something different, and he woke. At the same time, he heard the bong, bong, bong, bong of the warning alarms and then a voice over the intercom.

‘This is the captain. We have a fuel problem and are losing altitude rapidly. Please put on the oxygen masks and immediately assume the crash position. I repeat, please put on your oxygen masks and assume the crash position....’

People around him screamed and shouted, some prayed, others accepted what was to be.....

As the plane hurtled towards the earth, James James just thought of Benshima, and the loss of her warmth and love made him feel incredibly sad.....