

H₄



BYE

David C Jaundrell

These books are dedicated to
Banner
(Wendy Mansell)

Acknowledgements

For their continual patience

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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

13947312	Soldier
Adamo	Italian chemist
Adrian	Managing Director of JJ Casinos
Aldo	Italian drugs trafficker
Allan (Scotty) Scott	Operations Manager for H
Am Shoo	Taiwanese maid
Andy Pandy	Supplies muscle for 'dirty work'
Armel	Albanian travelling worker
Arthur	Used to work on 'roads' with H. Part owner of several betting shops.
Benshima Reyes (James)	Wife of H. Daughter of wealthy Colombian business family
Big Eddie	Neighbour from hell
Biggles	Ex RAF Tornado pilot, now freelance
King Bongo Bongo	Despotic Ruler
Cerberus	H's poker name
Cleggy Jenkins	Ex gambling industry executive.
Colin Moore	Detective
Harry Cohen	Head of family gambling Group
Ian Patrick	Con man

J J Group Ltd	Holding company for James companies
James James (H)	Owner of Night Clubs, betting shops, Casinos, Security companies
Johnny Harris	Famous rugby player
Johnny Rozzano	Poker player
Kate Day	Divisional Manager at JJ Betting Shops
Lillian	Friend of H
Loopy Lew	Rapist and murderer
Martin (legals) Gwen	H's Commercial solicitor
Mary and Charles James	James parents
Mickey Wernick	Professional Poker Player. Ex European No 1
Miguel Carmena	Head of International Investment – Colombian Bank
Neil Channing	Professional Poker player
Norm (the numbers)	H's accountant
One	Head of Italian drug syndicate
Peter Andrews	Record producer / manager
Presheva	Albanian travelling worker
Robert Fletcher	Golf Club Chairman
Roger Davids	MD JJ Betting Shops
Sener	Turkish drug dealer

Toby

Senior Manager at H's clubs

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Chapter 1

Help.....help.....

Benshima knew something was wrong.....terribly wrong. Looking at the clock there were still four hours before James' plane touched down but.....she knew James was in trouble. She knew the airplane was in trouble....she just knew. She knew her husband was going to die unless he got help immediately. She was over two thousand miles away for Christ's sake; what could she do?

There was only one answer...

Superman!

She rang her friend Lois at The Daily Bugle, who knew Superman, but the operator said she was out on an important assignment and couldn't be reached. Knowing it was a forlorn hope she tried Lois's mobile and after it rang for quite a while Lois answered.

'Yes?' she said in an agitated tone, 'I told you no calls when I'm on such a sensitive assignment!'

'Lois, it's Benshima; I'm sorry to bother you when you must be in a critical situation, a war zone, or a blazing building, or talking clandestinely to a serial killer or something, but James is going to die....'

Benshima explained about James' predicament and pleaded with Lois to get in touch with Superman immediately. Lois promised she would do whatever she could and hung up.

'What was that?' asked Superman.

'Nothing,' said Lois, 'don't stop.'

Several minutes later, with smoke coming out of her vagina, Lois collapsed in a heap. Looking down at her singed pubic hairs it did look a bit like a war zone so that justified the expenses.

‘That was some fuck,’ she said, taking in great lungfuls of air, ‘some fuck indeed. It’s a pity they didn’t send more of you lot...’

She reached for a tin on the table beside her, took out paper and tobacco and rolled a cigarette. Lighting up she took a deep lungful of its medicinal properties; eight parts nicotine to one of tar and one of oxygen mixed with the taste of several strands of tobacco that had escaped through the end into her mouth. Nice.....

‘Some fuck.....’ she repeated.

She brought her legs back together to try and get some blood back in them. It was always *ages* before they were any good for fucking again.

‘Oh, I’ve just remembered, do you remember Benshima James?’

‘Not sure....do I?’

She shrugged. ‘Who knows?.....anyhow she rang to say her husband’s in a plane on his way from Riyadh to London and it’s about to crash.’

He looked at her and smiled affectionately. ‘You’d forget your head if it wasn’t screwed on,’ and gently cupped her cheek. He stretched and a sort of purr emanated from him. ‘I’d better go.’

‘Just one more?’

‘I don’t think there’s time.’

‘Faster than a speeding bullet.....?’

‘Ok, just one.’

One point three seconds later she had come again, twice, and he had run naked down to the nearest phone box. Struggling to get the zip up on his pants an irate lady rapped on the window and shouted, ‘Pervert!’

Five minutes later, with the sound of police sirens getting closer, he got it up and was on his way to help Benshima who was on a sinking cruise liner..... somewhere? High over the city he couldn't remember her name, or the name of the ship so, sighing, he turned round, went back in through the window and found Lois in bed with the Janitor.

‘Who am I helping?’

‘Don’t stop,’ she said to the Janitor and repeated the message.

‘Thanks; see you later...and hello Mister Zancovitch. Nice day....’

It was thoughtful of her to make the menial workers feel wanted.... And then he was gone.

Half way over the Atlantic he thought her name was Benjamin but that didn't sound right.....? He turned back again and found his beloved Lois sitting astride old Mister Roosen from two doors down. Old Mister Roosen looked close to death, which he would be at ninety three, and it was kind of Lois to give him a happy ending.

‘It’s ok, Mr Roosen, I won’t stop,’ and without looking up, between clenched teeth, said, ‘Benshima,’ and carried on.

He looked lovingly at her and then he was gone; his red cape swirling behind him. He was so lucky to have found someone who loved him so much and was so sharing with the least able of the community....

As he headed down towards Florida and left the coast to go on towards Venezuela and Riyadh it occurred to him that he didn't actually know where Riyadh was.

He screeched to a halt in the clear blue sky forming a hot vortex of air around him from the sudden deceleration. A huge pipe of water started to rise up out of the ocean and slowly started its dance of circling death. It headed towards Miami.

He fished in his pocket and found his World A-Z but he couldn't get to grips with it. It was all in gibberish or maybe

Polish. He saw nodnoL which had to be Polish.

What to do? Turning round he peered East...West...North...South....and kept circling to try and find his bearings but it didn't work and he gave up. But he did know the way to Lois who would know what to do. Lois was incredibly 'together'.

Behind him another water spout was taking shape and building strength rapidly. As he receded into the distance it also headed towards Miami.....

Through the window again he found Lois lying face up on a table, naked, with her legs wide apart and little eleven year old Johnny Smithers standing with his face buried in her vulva.

'Hi, Johnny,' said Superman, 'how's it going?'

Lois grabbed his head. 'Don't stop,' so he just mumbled something.

'Good,' said Superman, 'education is the key.'

He went over to Lois and explained the problem. She turned the map the right way up and he visibly swooned. What a woman.... He moved to the window, looked at her and swooned again, said goodbye to little Johnny who couldn't have responded anyhow as his tongue was aching but he still mumbled out of politeness for his elders.

He located the plane just before it was going to crash into the centre of Athens. Punching his way through the fuselage he went in where they were all waiting to die.

'It's Superman! It's Superman! We're saved! We're saved!' shouted the passengers and cheered and whooped and hollered as one. 'It's Superman...we're saved!'

'Which one of you is Benshima?' shouted Superman above the din.

Nothing.

'Which one of you is Benshima?' shouted Superman again. Several light bulbs cracked and a woman with a hearing aid

screamed in pain and felt blood start to trickle from her ears.

‘That may be me,’ shouted back H hesitantly.

Superman looked at her suspiciously. She didn’t look like the Benshima he remembered, although his memory wasn’t what it was, but she was the only one that had answered so.... Superman picked H up and flew out through the hole in the fuselage by which he had arrived.

‘Let’s get you back home, little girl,’ he said, supporting her more securely by holding her firm bum tightly. As they flew away H watched the centre of Athens erupt in a ball of flame and the Parthenon, standing on the Athenian Acropolis since the 5th century BC, laid to waste.

The guests were in hysterics. The meal, the copious wine, the company and the story were too much. Too much.... Tears flowed from their eyes, one lady had wet her pants but the laughing struggled to stop.

‘And that’s why you didn’t die?’ laughed one.

‘God’s honest truth,’ said H.

More laughter.

‘And it had nothing to do with, as reported in the papers, the electronic fuel line de-icers suddenly deciding to work as you got down towards sea level?’

‘None whatsoever. It was Superman. It was.....it was. Honest.’

More hysterical laughter...

‘I can prove it,’ said H and he got up, took something out of a drawer and handed it round. It was a photo of Superman and written on the back was:

Benshima

You’re very attractive, with a lovely tight bum, but

perhaps you could lose just a little weight?

Superman

XX

PS My mobile number is 07810 009292

More hysterics.....

Chapter 2

Expansion

Roger Davids was early for his meeting with H and sitting in the reception of the JJ Casino in Birmingham. Roger worked for one of the big three owners of betting shops in Britain which comprised Ladbrokes, William Hill and Coral and it was Roger's job as Divisional Development Manager to not only make the shops in his remit more efficient and therefore more profitable but also to keep an eye open for the opportunity of hoovering up more shops from the independents of which H was one. With his thirty shops H was a prime candidate for a buy out and Roger made a point of calling every four to six months to see if H was amenable.

'Want to sell, H?' was the usual opening gambit, with 'Want to sell, Rog?' the response.

Excluding the fact that Ladbrokes had the best part of 2500 betting shops which would have cost H around two and a half billion pounds which may have been a touch difficult to muster. Then it was usually a chat about current conditions and a 'don't forget to ring me if you ever want out of this cursed industry' as Roger left.

Roger knew H's shops and knew they could be improved. Not that they weren't ok but H had the casinos and the night clubs and whatever else he had and the betting shops were just a bit of a cash cow. Roger thought they were making about 100 – 125 a year each but they should, as the locations weren't bad and with a bit of investment, be nearer 175.

Rog knew the industry was changing and for many reasons.

Going were the small betting shops and in were coming the much larger, more user friendly, air conditioned shops. Tables to sit at, tea and coffee, soft drinks and good lighting all helped invite the punter in and keep them there just that little bit longer and raised the amount of women that came through the door.

Due to the capital needs of this change Rog knew that many small independent shops and small Groups would not invest and would carry on their own sweet way and so, in due course, either the big boys would pick up a few more stragglers or the Insolvency Practitioners would.....

Rog had seen it all before in its many guises as he'd been in the industry from when he left school and had worked his way up to where he was now. And he still loved it. The hustle, the bustle, the bets, the people; the frauds by punters and employees; everything. He loved it and only wished that he owned some but his path hadn't taken him that way and so he worked, and excelled, at being the corporate man.

From the vast expansion of the seventies and eighties by the big groups to the seismic shock that hit them when the National Lottery started as around eight billion was siphoned away from them for a ridiculous fourteen million to one shot!

The dumbos would put a quid on a 14,000,000 to 1 shot but not a 10 to 1. Don't you just love 'em...?

And of course the movement from paper systems which needed a good mathematical mind, to calculators, and then to the latest Electronic Point of Sale systems that made life much simpler and helped, but not eradicated, internal fraud. What the EPOS systems had done was give them an instant analysis of where they stood in terms of risk. Was the book over round or over broke?

Not only that it allowed them to do what industry had been doing for years; dumbing down. The electronic equipment meant you didn't need an Einstein to do the figures so it opened up a

much larger pool of potential employees and lowered the wages you needed to pay. And in a peculiar way the banning of smoking had also increased that pool of resource as potential employees who were non smokers could now quite happily work there without worrying about dying through passive smoking!

But, Roger felt, the future was Fixed Odds Betting Terminals or FOBTs. They did nothing! They just sat there. You put your money in, you took your winnings out. But, as with all machines designed to gratify the needs of the unwary, they tended to give back a little less than you gave them and so every hour, on average, they made about a tanner profit. From nine in the morning until ten at night six days a week... And now they contributed around half of the profit in the shop! Fancy that?

Four little moronic machines, sitting in the corner known as the 'Games Zone'; clanking and whirring and making money. No holidays, no sickness, no PMT, no hangovers, no stealing, no PAYE, no Industrial Tribunal. Fucking wonderful!

Roger reached over for the latte he had been given and noticed his hands were still shaking a little. He did around forty thousand miles a year so the odd scrape with death was taken for granted but today he had actually been pushed up the arse by some cretin who hadn't liked the way he had come onto an island. True it wasn't a classic island manoeuvre but neither was it in any way dangerous; it was more....opportunistic. Anyway the Neanderthal had followed him down the road and when Rog came to a right hander in the road he had felt a shove on the rear end and the car carried straight on across the verge and ended up in a hedge! Jesus!

God knows, thought Roger, what will happen when he finds out I'm fucking his wife and eighteen year old daughter. Together! Rog smiled at himself. Good one, Rog....

‘Want to share it with me, Rog?’ asked H from by his side.

‘Believe it or not, H, and excuse me for relating this but you did ask, I was just fucking someone’s wife and eighteen year old daughter.’

‘That would make you smile.....Come in.’

Rog sat down and recounted the tale.

‘I like your taste in revenge. By the way did you get his number?’

‘Fraid not.’

‘Shame.’

‘Why?’

‘We could have gone and scratched his car.....’ which Rog had no idea was shorthand for.....? They talked for a few minutes then there was a knock on the door and Scotty came in.

‘Roger, I don’t think you’ve met Allan Scott, have you? Allan is our...what are you today, Scotty...?’

‘Not sure about today, boss, but yesterday it was something to do with strategy.’

They shook hands and Scotty sat down.

‘Scotty helps me with acquisitions and disposals and general strategy and we were discussing the betting shops.’

‘You want to sell, H?’ asked Roger quickly. ‘You know we’ll give you a good price.’

‘Maybe.’

‘Could I ask you,’ asked Scotty, ‘what you would do with them if we sold them to you?’

‘You could ask me, but I’m not going to give you free information which you could use if you don’t sell.’

‘Ok,’ said Scotty, ‘let me put it another way. If we sold them to you do you think you could make them more profitable?’

‘No good to us if I couldn’t although we would get some automatic cost saving obviously.’

‘By how much would you expect them to increase?’

‘Where is this going?’ asked Roger.

‘You’re interested in our shops. I’m asking you about those shops. If you don’t want to talk about them I can quite happily talk to your competitors.’

Roger looked at H and held out his hands. ‘Come on, H, don’t treat me like this. I’ve always been up front with you.’

‘We’re not conning you, Rog,’ and then looked back at Scotty which Rog took to mean that was the end of that little chat.

‘What percentage increase, on average per shop, will you try and achieve?’

I am, thought Tony Blair as he was kidnapped and bundled into the boot of a car in a Beirut suburb whilst on his ‘Save the Middle East’ peace mission, completely fucked.

‘It’s difficult to answer as I don’t know your average net profit at the shops but I doubt whether they are more than one twenty to one thirty and I would want nearer one seventy five.’

‘Achievable?’ asked Scotty.

‘Of course, but more than likely with a shop fit, some new FOBs and perhaps even larger premises.’

They talked another twenty minutes or so and Roger was getting pissed off with Scotty asking daft questions about something he appeared to know sweet FA about. Why did H have him there? Why? Rog didn’t know H too well but from what he did know of him from his chats and from others was that he was quite switched on. And yet here he is almost playing second fiddle to a moron. Why? H wasn’t known for employing morons although there was certainly one, or more, in every organisation. Maybe it was jobs for the boys? His brother or cousin or someone he felt sorry for who was busking in the underpass?

Another thought came from nowhere and entered his head. Or maybe he wasn’t dumb at all? He looked at it again from the

other angle. If he wasn't dumb but was asking dumb questions it was.....it was.....to get a response. Some kind of response that they may not have got otherwise? Was that it? It made more sense. Surely that made more sense?

They talked for another fifteen minutes and H promised to call him when they had decided what to do.

When he had gone H said, 'What do you think?'

'Certainly knows his stuff, H. Lives and breathes betting shops. Guarded obviously, protecting his employer, but a good understanding and seems....energetic and full of passion. Wants to make them better, wants to be the best and wants to satisfy the customers. He's mid fifties but with all his maturity, experience and knowledge he's got a good few years left.'

'What do you think?'

'I think, of the three we've interviewed,' they both grinned, 'I would go with him without any hesitation.'

'I agree with you, which is why I kept him till last.'

H picked up the phone and rang Roger's mobile. 'Where are you Rog?'

'On the car park about to leave.'

'We've made a decision. Do you have time to pop back and talk to us?'

Rog clenched his fist. 'Right on!' He had done it. Whatever he had said it had worked and he was getting first chance at the thirty shops. Fucking magic! He went back into the office and Scotty arranged another round of coffees.

'Roger,' said H, 'as you know we have a small group of betting shops and we have decided we want you as its Managing Director.'

Roger didn't know what to say. He hadn't seen this coming and wasn't prepared. As far as Roger was concerned an unprepared salesman was a contradiction in terms....

‘I see,’ said Roger, now understanding, ‘good cop bad cop sort of thing.....’

Neither of them said anything, just looked at him...waiting.

After a few moments’ thought Roger said, ‘H, and Allan, I am obviously.....er er....’

‘Honoured,’ suggested H.

‘Humbled,’ suggested Scotty.

‘Over the moon,’ said H.

‘Lost for words,’ said Scotty.

‘You should be on the stage,’ said Roger, ‘any one of those.....but I was thinking more of.... appreciative that you have given me this opportunity but, and I say this with the greatest of respect, H, you only have thirty or so betting shops and that doesn’t seem to me to merit an MD. General Manager or something, yes, but not really an MD.’

‘Seventy four,’ said Scotty.

‘Seventy four.....?’ said Rog quizzically.

‘Shops,’ said H, ‘we now have seventy four shops. As from yesterday.’

‘How, H? I would have heard and how come nobody offered them to me?’

They both looked at him.

‘Ok, ok, I know why they wouldn’t offer them to me but how come I never heard?’

It was a truth in the industry that some of the independents so despised the big boys they would never, ever, ever sell their shops to them. Unless the cheque was really big and over the top..... in which case....

‘Whose did you get?’

‘The Waces.’

‘Not the warring Waces? Surely not...’

The Waces had been a reasonable sized independent but when the founding father died the sons squabbled and in the end split it in two and refused to speak to each other. However one had recently had a heart attack which had scared him enough to make it up with his brother and decide to get out of business. His brother had decided to do the same and between them they were going to buy an ocean sailing yacht and take their respective wives around the world. They had approached H who had been a friend for several years and he had found a tax efficient means of paying them which involved Colombia and casino chips and everyone was happy.

And almost at the same time Arthur, H's old friend, had rung to say Mister Evans had died and did he want seven shops? It was a bit like London buses....

'I'm in,' said Roger.

'We haven't discussed money,' said H.

'If you want me enough to offer me the job then you'll pay me what I'm worth so we can sort that out, I'm sure.'

They all stood up.

'Welcome aboard,' said H, holding out his hand.

Scotty let out a squeaky whistle through pursed lips and saluted smartly.

Chapter 3

Cocaine

He did not regard it as a situation he could live with. There they were about to give up the European distribution of cocaine and for what? To save their arses so they could sleep at night? Fuck! That was what had got them here? That was what made them rich? That was what made them powerful? Cowardice? An easy life? Fuck off!

Fucking *thumb suckers*!

It was certainly true that the Ministry of Justice had, over recent years, decided that the threat from them was less than it had ever been due to the massive dispersion of power that the State could wield if it was properly mobilised. And so it had utilised and mobilised the *Arma dei Carabinieri* - the Military Police, the *Guardia Costiera* – the Coast Guard, the *Guardia di Finanza* – the Financial and Customs Police, and the *Polizia di Stato* – the State Police. The State had worked out that if they combined the strength of several forces it would not only cut out, or at least diminish considerably, the Mafia's power of corruption within that force but they could also play off one force against another with massive financial incentives for the Force or Forces that did well.

And so the power had shifted from the Mafia to the State and the Mafia knew the days had gone where you just bumped off another politician or Judge and everyone kowtowed for another few years. Now there was almost a pride in catching another *Mafioso*.

And so they were running scared, the fucking *thumb suckers*, but he knew there was no need. Just change. Do it better, be more efficient, organise better logistics....plan!

Of course he also knew the downside. The downside was you could be as efficient as you liked but the second the product left your own organisation and moved to another.....well that was the downside. Who the fuck knew what would happen then? Some of the fucking idiots they dealt with had a brain little larger than an ant and a lot less organised. Organised? Fuck!

Some of them just pointed a gun and expected it all to happen and of course it did until someone else came along with a bigger gun. And that was the downside. You could be as good as you could be but the chain was as strong as its weakest link and there were far too many links in their chain and each one had the propensity of being weak. Each one changed on a regular basis....the leader changed, the gang changed and sometimes the fucking world changed!

And so it needed reorganising. What it needed was one of them in a leadership position in other countries so that the chain was always strong but, although he knew that was the answer, it could not be done. You needed immense power to do that in another country. Immense power, immense amounts of money, immense bribery, immense contacts, immense everything....

It couldn't be done; unfortunately. If it could he could turn the whole thing into an immense global multi national. Of course that still left a problem. They would have the means of distribution but not the means of production and really you didn't want one without the other. As a graduate in Engineering and a degree in Business from the renowned Politecnico di Torino University he knew all about horizontal and vertical integration. Especially the models that the energy companies used; the oil companies who owned and controlled upstream and downstream operations.

That should be happening in drugs but such was the nature of the beast that it didn't and perhaps never would or could. In Italy they were vertically integrated as it went down to the streets but when it left them to cross borders it became horizontal and then vertical again. It was the middle bit that was a fault. Vertical – *horizontal* – vertical. The fly in the proverbial ointment.

He put away his thoughts for world distribution and went back to the immediate problem; the *thumb suckers*.

What to do about the *thumb suckers*?

As if he didn't know....

Chapter 4

King Bongo Bongo

Eremsala Perobongo was the ultimate ruler of his own tiny kingdom. Adored by many, feared by all, he ruled with a mixture of compassion and compression. If you displeased him he crushed you!

Like most tyrants he had become reclusive and isolated within his vast palace and issued his edicts as and when he was moved to do so and they were carried away immediately by one of his many minions that he kept, literally, at The Palace.

Within the vast hall that he ruled from and rarely left, other than for meals, a hundred soldiers stood at the ready to do his bidding. Never wavering, never shuffling. It was an honour to serve him who the nation affectionately called King Bongo Bongo and every hour, with pride, the one hundred men changed guard in a ceremony not unlike the one that he had seen on his television of The Changing of The Guard at Buckingham Palace in the United Kingdom. It had been realised many years earlier by a Captain of the Guard that King Bongo Bongo took exception to his guards fainting through the heat or lack of food or water and would break their necks with a single snap of his huge hands and so, more in self preservation than anything else, had instigated the Changing of the Guard which over time had become, at his Master's request, more grandiose.

Today there was a frisson of fear running through the room as it was Election Day. Every five years King Bongo Bongo put himself up for re-election as King and waited nervously for the result. Several years ago one person had voted against him and he was duly hung in the vast Hall where all could see him but King

Bongo Bongo still waited with trepidation in case there was an uprising or any form of opposition.

He wandered over to where his one hundred brightly uniformed men stood rigidly to attention and wandered up and down their lines inspecting them. Their eyes stayed fixed forward and never looked at him. King Bongo Bongo stopped by one and moved the soldier's cap less than a millimetre down.

'That's better,' he said, 'it has to be right.'

As he moved to the next soldier he stopped in mid step, didn't move for several seconds, and then went back. 'Did you say something, soldier?'

'No, Sir,' replied the soldier immediately.

'I think you did,' said the King.

'No, sir.'

'Are you arguing with me, soldier?'

'No, Sir.'

'Are you saying I didn't hear what I heard?'

'No, Sir, yes, Sir,' said the confused and terrified soldier.

The six foot five, solid, twenty stone King of all before him smashed the soldier in the face with his huge fist and the power of the blow gave the soldier severe brain damage and broke his neck. Within seconds he was dead.

King Bongo Bongo paused for a moment then moved along the aisle where soldiers were trying hard not to shit themselves.....

Chapter 5

Johnny Razz

Johnny Rozzano lived, used to live, in council housing in the Woodside estate in Telford. Built in the 70's for the 'overspill' of Birmingham to move to and supply labour for the new Telford town and its new industrial estates, Birmingham had taken the opportunity to rid itself of all the undesirables it had on its own social housing books and shipped them out and in to the arms of the waiting Telford.

So Woodside became one of three areas in Telford that became dumps before they even had chance to become dumps. Young, jobless couples with babies they didn't want and didn't need and little hope for the future.

She arrived there when she was nineteen in the late seventies with her unemployed boyfriend and a bulging stomach. Four weeks after they moved in a late night kick from her drunken man found her in hospital with a haemorrhage and two days later she aborted. The police could do nothing and he moved out after giving her a hefty slap on her face as a leaving present.

She stayed on her own for the next few years until she met a chap in a pub. It was Saturday night, she had had too much to drink, he was good looking with a good body and in the heat of the moment, and her pants, he took her outside for a knee trembler in the dark against the side of the building. She saw him again and they became a couple which was just as well as the knee trembler had created a foetus. He moved in with her and in the late eighties the baby was born.

Johnny's father left when he was two and his mother struggled on a mixture of benefit and afternoons packing screws

into bags at a local company. But unlike some on the estate whose main proficiency was stealing cars or burglary, she struggled through in an honest way and managed to keep her and Johnny fed, clothed and warm.

But she did worry about him. He was introverted, shy and had a habit, when he was old enough, to say what you were thinking. She had no idea how he did it? She would look at him and he would look at his watch and tell her the time, or pass the paper, or the TV remote, or put on the kettle, or, or.....

It was, in its way, amazing but also slightly disturbing. She sometimes wondered if he knew what she was *actually* thinking. Was he possessed of some strange power? Could he read minds? Could he read other people's minds? She noticed that he couldn't read the minds of visitors to their tiny house but he could if they visited again, and more so the more they visited.

Johnny Razz, who got his nickname from an aunt who used to tease him and say 'you little razz you', was excellent at school. He was top in many subjects that involved maths and logic but had no interest whatsoever in sport or social events. In many ways he was the odd man out as his need for other company was nil and although he was a good looking lad his need for a girlfriend was also nil. He was happy in his own world wherever and whatever that was.....

At 17 he went to Aston University in Birmingham to study business which he and his mom could ill afford but she took on an extra job and he found some part time income serving in a pub. The pub had a Sky Sports big screen which showed all the sports and then one day a customer asked to see the poker. Razz had seen them play it in the pub and had taken no notice but on the big screen he watched the hands played out while you saw every hand which was not like the pub where you hardly ever saw a hand shown.

And over the ensuing weeks he watched the poker on the Sky plus box whenever he had a break and found that he understood, as he did with his mother, what they were going to do although he wasn't sure why they were doing it.

He borrowed Super System by Doyle Brunson off one of the pub players and avidly devoured its statistics and logic. Then another book by Dan Harrington and then, perhaps the most illuminating one, by David Sklansky where he espoused The Fundamental Theorem of Poker.

And then they told him about internet poker and his boss let him use their laptop in his breaks and he would log on to a site and play in £1 games which he was marginal at. He struggled to win and then realised they were difficult to predict as they were unpredictable. They went in with any two cards, called up to the river, called any bluff with crap and went all in with ridiculous hands! He took a risk and went up to £10 and although it was better there were still some maniacs. He looked up one player on Sharkscope and saw that he had lost £24,000 over the last twenty four months. £24,000! More money than Razz had seen or earned in his life. He looked at the other eight players on the table and only two had a positive return on investment. Only two! That meant that, excluding him, seventy percent of the players lost over any length of time. 70%!

But what did it mean? It seemed to mean that there were a lot of people out there that were happy to lose their money for the enjoyment of playing. Razz looked on the Sharkscope leader board and found the top earner, whose table name was livb112, had earned half a million pounds in two years. Half a million! He had only had a 5% return on his investment but he had played 23,000 games at an average stake of £400 and an average profit of £22.

Half a million!

What a way to make money!

He stayed in £1 games for eight weeks to completely familiarise himself with poker and the net and in between he watched £50 games. He watched the players limp in, raise pre flop, re-raise, go all in, bluff, fold. He watched their hands shown at the end and when he saw the players again he started to see the patterns.

Wonderful patterns.....

He went in his first £50 game and came fifth. Although he had studied them on the site and checked their stats on Sharkscope he was unprepared for the aggressive betting. Whilst he had seen it when he was watching he had not been part of it and had therefore felt no threat. But playing against it was something different and his body had reacted to the threat and he had withdrawn.

It was a blow.

He saw the chink in his armour and knew there was no room for emotion. If he was certain of what he was doing, within his own mathematical and pattern reading parameters, then he had to play to those strengths. Indeed the aggressors were really there to be encouraged, not kowtowed to. Let them put large amounts in to frighten you, show them weakness....and then take their money.

He went in another £50 game and came third. So, for his investment of £100 plus his £10 entrance fee he had earned £100. A loss of £10.

It was a loss but it was a small loss.

He asked his boss if he would allow him to use his laptop all day Sunday, for which he would work a day for nothing, which he agreed to. He played ten games over eight hours and had a WLLLPLPLP which gave him a total investment of £550 he had won £900.

A profit of £350. £350! For a day's work. A day's work!

He bought a cheap PC for his room at home, put in broadband and started playing at night. He kept working in the pub in the

day in Birmingham between seminars until he realised it was rather stupid working in a pub for £6 an hour when you could be making £50. And so he found a hot spot in the University library and turned the sound down....

He made a decision that he would like to play poker for a living in due course. But he would finish his degree which he may need should anything happen, and would only play to make money to get him through that period without it getting in the way of his studies. And so in the day he studied and at night and weekends he played poker on the net. Over the rest of his three and a half years at Uni he made an average of £70 a day or £35,000 a year. Tax free. Well possibly tax free.... The Inland Revenue may want to argue that as it was his sole source of income it should be taxed so to get round this little hurdle he left his money on the site he was playing at and only took off what he needed when he needed it. But it still bought him a reasonable second hand car and a lovely holiday once a year for his mother and the woman who went to the Bingo with her.

And when he got his Business Degree and left University to become a poker player he had a bank roll of nearly £50,000.

Chapter 6

Coast to coast

The two men had been on the road for the best part of four years. Not continually of course but most of the time. As self employed tradesmen from a small town just outside Tirane in Albania they had left their beloved but poor Shqiperia with its nearly four million people but a gross per capita income of less than \$7,000 and travelled outwards to other countries to get rewarded for their labours. As they went from job to job they were paid in money but also in kind and they either despatched it home via a bank or it travelled with them until they next went back to their families.

They were both trained as cabinet makers and when they had initially started out that was how they made their living. A job here, a job there. They would knock on house doors and ask if they needed anything doing and if they were lucky... The jobs were sporadic but even that paid better than the full time jobs they had at home.

They moved up the coast through Bosnia and Herzegovina, through Slovenia and into Italy and down the east coast.

After two years they got a small job that changed their lives.....

They saw an isolated farm and drove up to ask for work. The old farmer needed some help to mend part of his rotting barn so he took them on. It was estimated he could use them for four weeks and they agreed a deal to cover it.

After a week or two of sawing out rotting timbers and replacing them with new wood they sat down in the barn for lunch and were surprised when a girl, perhaps sixteen or

seventeen, brought them some fruit and a small carafe of wine. They had never seen her before and didn't know there was anyone there other than the old man. She was beautiful as only a young Italian woman can be. A classic face, smouldering eyes, full breasts with a cleavage you could ski down, slim waist and wide hips. In ten years she may be quite different but now.....

Wow!

They took the items offered and peered down her blouse as she leaned over. She raised her eyes and saw what they were doing and bent over even farther. Both men were transfixed by the girl woman and both were very aware that their sex lives had been, to say the least, ignored. She stood, smiled at them and then she was gone.

Their hearts pounded and after a couple of minutes Armel said, 'At the moment I could fuck anything that breathed.'

'And me,' replied Presheva. 'Did you see those tits?'

'In fact they wouldn't even have to breathe,' continued Armel. He shook his head. 'Fuck it,' he said and got up and went behind a pile of wood. Presheva heard the sound of a zip and then his friend starting moaning and then quite quickly a long moan. He came back and sat down. 'I needed that otherwise I would have fucked the farmer.'

Why not? Thought Presheva. Why not? His dick was out before he got to the pile of wood and his orgasm followed quickly after.

The next day she arrived again with more sustenance but with a lower blouse which struggled to hold her breasts in. She gave them the fruit but as she bent over to fill their glasses with wine one of her breasts slipped out. She looked at Armel who was staring at the wonderful sight in front of him but she made no attempt to cover up. He looked into her eyes, saw the lust smouldering in them, then reached out and held her breast in his hand. He fondled it for a moment, rubbing her nipple between his

finger and thumb and then she turned slightly towards Presheva. She looked him squarely in the eyes and, after a moment's hesitation, he stood and undid the top button of her blouse which allowed it to drop over her shoulders, leaving her standing there half naked.

They stood each side of her and had a breast each, then Presheva kissed her and she moaned and he put his tongue in her mouth and she sucked it hard. They kneaded and fondled and Armel ran his hand down her skirt until it settled over her vulva. She reached down and stopped him. It wasn't a no, more a *wait*. She pointed at her wrist and said something in Italian.

'I think she's saying something about time,' said Presheva, pointing to his own watch. She nodded, then she moved away from them, pulled up her blouse, pointed to his watch and left. They stood there, amazed at the turn of events.....then both headed for the opposite sides of the pile of wood....

They didn't see her the next day but the day after she arrived at lunch time accompanied by the farmer. She still wore a low blouse but made no attempt to establish eye contact. They gave the men food and the farmer jabbered something in a mixture of Italian and English which they had found worked as a means of understanding each other and then they left them to it. A minute later the girl came back into the barn, moved away from the open door, opened her blouse, showed them her tits, smiled, closed her blouse and left.

'Oh Christ,' mumbled Presheva, 'this is getting to be a habit,' and off he went.....

They didn't see her the next day but the following night, in their outhouse by the barn where they were sleeping, they were awoken when the door opened and they saw her in the semi darkness. She took off her clothes and went to the nearest bed and

lay next to Armel who immediately grabbed hold of one of her tits. Presheva got out of his bed and went to them and she put her arm around him, drew him to her and kissed him.

They fucked her every way they could think of and she moaned and moaned and did everything that they wanted. She was like a woman unleashed. She had it up her cunt, in her mouth, up her arse and then any two out of three. They gave it her and she loved it. An hour later she pointed to her wrist and held up five fingers. It just gave them both time to come again....

A while later when they had stopped talking about it and Armel was about to fall off to sleep he wondered about time? How did she know what time it was and why did she indicate five more minutes when she never wore a watch? Did she count the seconds.....? Did she count her pulse.....? Did she watch the moon's shadow.....? Did she.....?

And not only that she had never spoken to them. Never....

Weird, but somehow highly erotic.....

And then he fell into a wonderful relaxing sleep.

Chapter 7

The Group

Scotty had done his analysis of the Group which he did studiously but actually knew the answer just from looking at the board on the wall. Each of their Groups needed an MD or General Manager but more than likely an MD. A GM would be good as you could dangle the MD carrot in front of them but the MD slot would attract a better field.

Adrian would be the MD of the nine casinos, that was a given. The man currently running the nine night clubs was doing an adequate job but the world was changing and adequate wasn't good enough.

The deal with the warring Waces meant that definitely needed an MD and the two security companies? What was the advantage there? Just two companies. Why do we need an MD to oversee two companies that already had MDs? The obvious thought was to make sure they both performed efficiently and as profitably as they could especially now the world, or at least Gordon Brown's world, was going to the dogs. He, or she, well he, would make sure that both used best practice as he could use his own expertise and also take best practice from either and introduce it to the other. They could also get better competition between MDs in some way?

Scotty looked again at the board on the wall. He couldn't see it. It didn't warrant a new MD to oversee two companies. He had to find another way. Perhaps one of them to be responsible for both? But that would leave one under attended. Perhaps leave them as they were but with better reporting?

I am, thought Alistair Darling as Gordon Brown cackled in a corner whilst pulling legs off a spider and denying he had ever been Chancellor of the Exchequer, completely fucked.

‘So what do we do with the security boys, Scotty, leave them as they are?’ asked H.

‘I have an interim suggestion, boss, to allow me a bit more time to try and work out a solution.’

‘What’s that?’

‘Give them to me.’ H looked and waited. ‘Put them under my control and let me see if there is anything I can do to either make them better or at least establish if they could just stand alone. Give me....say....six months and let’s see what happens. It adds nothing to our costs except a bit of petrol and maybe the odd overnight stay...’

‘That *would* be odd, eh, Scotty?’

Scotty smiled. H was quite aware that Scotty hated staying in hotels overnight and would usually travel miles and miles just to get home and sleep in his own bed and, more to the point, wake up in it.

‘Sounds good to me, Scotty, go with it.’

H reached for the phone. ‘More coffee, please, and could you send someone for two bacon and egg sandwiches. Well done bacon and runny eggs..... thanks.’

‘Thanks, boss.’

‘What are we going to do with you, Scotty?’

‘In what way, boss?’

‘Where do you fit in with all this, Scotty? You do a bit here, a bit there, sort this out, sort that out. Where do you fit in the new scheme of things?’

A pain ripped through Scotty’s chest as he took in the information. Every insecurity, every sacking, every job loss, every refusal rushed into his head and he knew he was there

again. You do a good job and then you're not needed. You do a good job, you think you've found a home and then..... He moved his hand to the pain in his chest and rubbed to soothe it.

'You ok, Scotty?'

Scotty nodded and bit his lip.

'What is it, Scotty?' and quickly thought back to his last sentence and realised how ambiguous it was and how fragile Scotty still was.

'I was thinking,' said H quickly so that he could change the subject and get Scotty off the hook, 'that you should have a proper job.'

Scotty nodded but his eyes were somewhere else. Unfortunately Scotty had also heard something like that before: *'you're really too good for this place and you'll only get cheesed off and leave us for a better job so we've decided.....'*

'It seems to me,' continued H, 'that you appear to have given everyone a job but yourself. We have an enlarged Group, Scotty, which, by the looks of it will get ever larger, so where are you going to sit? Where in your analysis are you going to be?'

Through his internal anxiety Scotty heard what H was getting at and looked at the conversation anew. 'Me, boss? Where do I sit? I hadn't given it any thought, boss. I just do what I do and what you and the others want me to do.'

'I think that's my point, Scotty.'

'What do you want me to be, boss?'

This was the Scotty that H despised, or at least the inner H that H despised. The one that reminded him that once he was powerless and someone else decided his fate.....

You going to hit me? Hit me.

You going to kick me? Kick me.

You going to fuck me? Fuck me.

What can I do about it?

‘Scotty,’ continued H after a moment’s pause for the irritation at Scotty to go away, ‘there are only two people in the whole of this company that are not part of a company; that’s me and you. I run the whole show and you get paid by JJ Casinos as an employee but they then defray that cost by invoicing all the other companies a pro rata share of your costs. The point being that you don’t actually belong anywhere....’

This is getting fucking worse, thought H. I bet it was someone like me who started the Arab Israeli war. *We don’t actually want to destroy you; no, let me put it another way. You won’t actually have your own lands; no, that’s not what I mean. Look, you won’t automatically have to convert to Judaism; no, what I mean is..... Oh fuck it, let’s fight to the death!*

‘Come on, Scotty, for heaven’s sake, help me out here,’ pleaded H.

‘Are you saying, boss, that you want me to have a specific function, with a specific title, with specific responsibilities and with a specific employer?’

‘Yes.’

‘No thanks, boss,’ said Scotty quietly.

‘What do you mean *no thanks?*’

‘I’ve enjoyed working for you, boss, and I have no wish to work and be responsible to anyone else.’

‘Scotty, this conversation is driving me nuts!’ said H exasperatedly.

‘Then tell me exactly what you have in mind, boss, because I don’t know and you’re not telling me.’

H held up his hands in more exasperation and then realised it was all a bit vague. And it was a bit vague because H didn’t know whether he was doing the right thing and, in a cowardly way, he had given Scotty the opportunity of taking the decision from him. But he hadn’t and that was also irritating. Oh for fuck’s sake! To

prove that there was a God the phone went. H picked it up, listened for a moment and said, 'Oh shit.'

He put down the phone. 'I'm sorry, Scotty, I have to go; I've forgotten a meeting I'm supposed to be at. We'll continue this another time, ok?'

'Yes, boss.'

'And give it some thought, Scotty, ok?'

'Yes, boss,' and he was gone.

I am, thought David Cameron, as his affair with Boris Johnson hit the tabloids, completely and utterly fucked.

That evening Scotty was sitting playing internet poker with his lady by his side.

'He's bluffing, Allan,' said his dear lady as the only person in the hand to his right put in a big three times raise to steal his big blind which was, at this stage of the game, quite big.

He had JQ unsuited which was a reasonable hand but hardly a show stopper. Fold, call or raise? Fold was a good possibility. Call was an option but if he missed the flop then what? Raise really meant all in.

'What do you think, Allan?' said the dear lady.

'I don't know.....' said Allan whose confusion merely reflected the dilemma H had left him with.

Where do you fit? Where do I fit? Where indeed?

'I think he's bluffing, he's stealing your blinds...'

He used to think that a back seat driver was as bad as it could get but this.... This was ten times worse. This was not just about what you should do, this was about what you should do in relation to someone else and at times it felt almost gladiatorial. Her gladiator against the one, or two or nine sitting around the table on the tele.

'You can get him, Allan!'

It's a game of cards.....

'He's got nothing, Allan.'

How do you know?

'He's stealing your blinds, Allan.'

He's supposed to – but that doesn't mean he has nothing. At times she made it feel personal. Allan against him or them and all he wanted was to play the cards. He didn't want physical confrontation; he wanted his cards and his brain to help him win, not some macho posturing.

'He's raised, Allan. Get him!'

If he folded did that make him look weak in her eyes? If he called and lost was he a poor poker player? If he went all in and saw two Aces staring at him was he a complete pillock?

I am, thought President Kennedy as they approached the Texas School Book Depository and Nellie Connally, wife of the Governor of Texas, turned in her seat and said, 'Mister President, you can't say Dallas doesn't love you,' completely fucked.

At times, much as he loved her, he wanted to escape her. He felt like screaming, *'leave me alone, you're castrating me....you're taking the very air I breathe away from me.....give me some room.'*

His confusion as to what to do, who to assuage, who to obey, who to ignore made the clock run down and his hand automatically mucked.

'Maybe that was a good fold, Allan,' she said. 'He could have had anything. You're very good, you know. I would have just gone all in but you think it through..... I'll make a cup of tea.'

And she was gone.

Eh.....?

He had agonised over that decision. *Agonised.....* He had taken her at her word but what she said and what she meant were

two different things..... *All in Allan* didn't mean *All in Allan* at all it meant....well who the fuck knew what it meant?

Fuck it, he thought, fuck it! From now on he would just do what he thought he should. And fuck it!

Maybe.....

In that instant of glorious confusion Scotty knew what job he should have...or jobs.

He got H on his mobile and told him.

'You got it,' said H, pleased that Scotty had worked it out.

Scotty would not be on the Board of JJ Holdings which was good. Scotty would not work for a specific company which was good. Scotty would not run a specific company other than the internet poker site which no one else wanted anyway, which was good. Scotty would be Chairman of each Group, which was good. That way he would be involved in all, employed by all, didn't run any but had a responsibility towards them..... which was good.

Chapter 8

Thinking – dying

Benshima had gone to Colombia to the wedding of an old school friend. As the woman was marrying another woman it was deemed that H didn't really need to make an appearance and for that he was thankful. Not that he had anything against lesbian weddings he just thought that most weddings were a pain in the arse.

He had driven in the Ferrari out into the countryside but had kept going and ended up in Margate. Why? He hadn't got a clue. Today was one of those days, luckily infrequent days, when his past took him over and all he wanted to do was run. Anywhere!

It didn't make any difference where he went as there was no escape from the feeling of dread within him. He knew it had no basis in today, or today's reality, but the feeling was so strong it made rational thought impossible. He was a grown man, whose mind and body had been taken over, for now and for whatever reason, by the feelings of a desperate child who wanted to be somewhere, anywhere, but where he was. When H was controlled by this feeling he was on the edge of panic, overwhelmed by the irrational fear within him. It tired him out to keep control and he wanted to cry and he wanted to sleep. Panic and sleep all at the same time. Tired and wired.....

He parked the car on the sea front and wandered off to try and find something to occupy his mind but he knew it was useless; so he bought some fish and chips on which he put a load of salt and then lashings of something that had been watered down so much to make an extra buck that it hardly smelt of vinegar. H wanted to

start a row over the vinegar but he made himself pay and walked out.

He sat on a bench in front of the sea and, much as Scotty had done, it offered him a peace that he at times so desperately wanted. He hated waking in the night, screaming and crying in terror and being comforted by Benshima. He hated the days like this when he was so consumed with an all pervading panic that the only way to escape it was death. He hated the fact that he had been so violated as a child that it had affected his life in this way. And in a peculiar way he hated the fact that he had killed his father, wonderful though that had been, and that he was not still alive so that he could hold him by the throat, man to man, and get the bastard to atone for everything.

Fucking everything!

The beatings, the kickings, the smack with the house brick over the head from which H still had the scar on his head, the playful use of a wood chopper from which H still had a scar on his finger, the pain in his teeth from when they were kicked out, the buggery, the little game his father played at teatimes of leaving a tea spoon in his hot tea and then taking it out and putting it on James' hand, the threats and most of all a life that was devoid of any love or affection and filled with terror.

Unremitting terror.

Tears started to roll down H's eyes and he lost control. He sobbed quietly, his face a mask of despair, contorted by a lifetime of hurt. He put his elbows on his knees and rested his face on his hands while he cried.

'Are you all right, love?' he heard a voice ask.

He wiped the tears on his shirt and looked to the person standing by him. 'I'm fine, thank you. Just a little upset as.....a friend of mine has died.'

'What's your friend's name, love?'

H paused, stuck for a name. 'Jimmy,' he said quietly.

She looked at him. She looked into his eyes. 'That wouldn't be your name, would it?' she said softly.

He looked up at her and she saw the wide, desperate, child's eyes and the imploring look for help within them. His face contorted in anguish and he started crying again. She moved to him and cradled his face as he sobbed silently.

'You're safe now, you're safe now.' She whispered to him.

After two or three minutes he composed himself and looked at her. She was about sixty, attractive, with a lived in face and a safe smile. A safe smile.

'Are you ok now?' she asked.

'Always ok.'

'Well, you've got this far...'

He smiled. 'Yes, I have.'

'You're a survivor.'

He nodded. 'How do you know all this?'

'I keep cats.'

That lost him entirely and she watched with glee the confusion on his face.

'It's a joke. I actually do have a little cat sanctuary over in Woodchurch although the planes do scare the cats a bit, but not much. How do you think I know?'

He thought for a moment. 'I've no idea, you look a bit more balanced than me.'

'I doubt it. I've chosen to spend my life with cats so that should tell you something.'

'I'm sorry,' said H sincerely.

'It's not a problem or at least I don't see it as a problem, so it can't be a problem, can it?'

'How do you afford to do it?'

‘I was lucky. The house and paddock were left to me by my parents and I have a little pension and I try and get as much of a donation out of new owners and old owners as I can. I manage..... And *you* manage?’

He turned and pointed to the red Ferrari gleaming in the sun and nodded. ‘I manage financially,’ he said with sadness. ‘Sometimes I wonder whether I would swap my money for peace of mind but who knows...?’

‘Does anybody have peace of mind?’

He shrugged. ‘Would you like a cup of coffee ..I don’t know your name?’

‘That’s kind of you but cats and cats wait for no man and so I have to go.’

‘Can I give you a lift?’

‘I have a little old van parked somewhere so I’m ok, thank you.’

She held out her hand which he took with both of his and held tightly.

‘Thank you,’ he said with warmth.

She paused before answering. ‘I think I should be thanking you.’

‘Why?’

‘I’m not sure..... Anyhow, got to go,’ and with a huge beaming smile she was gone down the street and round the corner. After a moment he heard a shout from that direction and turned round.

‘Lillian,’ she shouted from the corner’s edge.

‘James.’

‘I know.....’ and she was gone again.

James stayed for another hour and watched the sea. His few minutes with Lillian had been cathartic but he was still quite

emotionally exposed. He looked at his watch and walked to the Ferrari. On an impulse he put Woodchurch in the Sat Nav and when he got there he asked where the cat sanctuary was. He parked nearby and stood and looked at it for a while and was tempted to knock on the door and talk to the woman who had shown him kindness and understanding.

He stood, watching, wondering, for nearly fifteen minutes but then he got into the Ferrari and started for home.

Halfway there a thought crossed his mind. It was an intellectually profound thought. Was Benshima a lesbian? Was she, even now, writhing in ecstasy with some young South American beauty? Could he watch? He grinned to himself and wondered what it was about two women that was so erotic.....?

Three weeks later as Lillian was about to leave her house the postman dropped an envelope through the door. In it was a cheque for ten thousand pounds. A short note said:

Hope this helps the cats, and you, nap more peacefully.

If I can ever help you, let me know.

With affection.

Jimmy

She took off her coat and put her mother's gold watch back in the drawer. The pawnbrokers would not be seeing her today.....

Chapter 9

Going Home

It had been a wonderful night and they sang bawdy rugby songs as they went home. Two in the front and two in the back of the V8 Supercharged Vogue SE Range Rover which the driver had taken delivery of only two days before. Nearly eighty thousand pounds but what a machine in all black with the blacked out windows of doubtful legality but he'd worry about that if the cops asked him. And if they did, once they knew who he was it would just be one or two autographs, a warning and then off again. What it was to be a famous person. A celebrity. And all that came with it. Fucking magic!

The previous day they had reached the final of the Rugby League championship and last night and into this morning they had celebrated with a closed party. A very blue comedian had entertained them, drink had relaxed them and strippers had opened everything up for them. What a fucking night!

One of the strippers had brought a python with a head as big as his massive hand and she had put it up her cunt. Straight up! How the fuck did she do that? And then she'd said, 'Anyone else got one this big to stick up?'

Amazingly several had - well not quite! And they did. Well, after the python had been removed and she had tightened up a bit. He had decided 'strippers' wasn't exactly what these girls were. They certainly stripped but only as a prelude for anything else that was going. Or coming. They had pricks stuck in everywhere and those that couldn't get in masturbated over them and those that were a bit shy or had small pricks just drank themselves silly

and watched. And now it was one in the morning and they were going back to their loving wives...

Bottles of bubbly were still being passed around the car and the songs got louder and bluer.

*The sexual life of the camel.
Is stranger than anyone thinks
At the height of the mating season
He tries to bugger the Sphinx
But the Sphinx's posterior orifice
Is filled with the sands of the Nile
Which accounts for the hump on the camel
And the Sphinx's inscrutable smile*
They sang the chorus louder:

*Oooo....We're all queers together,
Excuse us while we go upstairs, IN PAIRS!
We're all queers together,
And nobody bloody well cares.....*

Johnny Harris, the driver and captain of his team, just about heard the mobile ring out over the singing. He peered at the Sat Nav screen and the name, which kept going in and out of focus, and saw it was his wife. Oh fuck! Just what he needed.

In his drunken state he stared at the name and wondered what to do? Answer it and get a bollocking in front of his mates? Ignore it and get a bollocking when he got home? The easiest way would be to answer it and tell the whining cow to fuck off but, big as he was with his male friends, he hadn't got the guts for that.

His eyes locked on to her name on the screen. Karen. He had married her because she fucked like a stoat but it had gone...

somewhere. He didn't know where? So now he knew her as Barren Karen the fuckless wonder.

‘Johnny!’ a voice screamed behind him.

He jolted his head up and saw the traffic had slowed in front of him and he was about to hit the back of a lorry. He yanked the wheel and the huge car moved right but went over its centre of gravity and turned over. Still turning over and over down the adjoining lane it hit a Mercedes with two women in and rolled up their roof. Using the Mercedes as a springboard it went over the central reservation and into the path of a people carrier with two families in it coming home from two weeks camping in France. The huge SUV smashed straight into their windscreen and ploughed into the occupants before carrying on over the people carrier and sliding on down the motorway. After bouncing off two other cars it came to rest after another hundred yards.....

Ten minutes later a fleet of police cars with sirens blaring and flashing lights glaring arrived at the carnage followed almost immediately by three ambulances. The paramedics checked and found the women in the Merc were injured but not too badly, the two families in the people carrier were all dead, several with their heads completely severed, and two of the four people in the Range Rover, the ones in the back, were also dead.....

Chapter 10

13947312

It wasn't supposed to have been like that. None of it was supposed to be like that. For a start he should never have joined the Army but he was so pissed off when his girl friend had left him that, to show her, he had enlisted the same day. That really fucking showed her. Not!

He had waited a month for her to ring or write to plead with him to take her back and then he had heard that she was in Antigua with her new man. The bitch was obviously suffering dreadfully without him. Not!

And somehow he had stayed and it was always going to be short term but somehow within that short term there he was..... in Afghanistan.

Af fucking gani fucking stan!

A wonderful, green, gentle, quiet, safe place. Not!

So there they were, dying by the fucking minute, in a country they had never heard of and fighting for.....fighting for.....? Well no one had a fucking clue what they were fighting for but it must have been important because they were there. And it must have been important because Tony Blair had been there and said so; in November 2006. That was how important it was. Not!

So there they were, he and his two mates going down this road, on the outskirts, in a Scimitar armoured vehicle.

'Chocolate?' says Alfie.

'Right on.'

There's one thing about the military, they provide really good chocolate. No idea why but they do. Love chocolate. Adore chocolate. Yum.... Anyhow there we are still wandering around in the middle of nowhere when we see these two little chappies ahead. One is signalling us to slow down. As if....

When we're closer the one who's signalling suddenly bends over towards us and we see a rocket launcher strapped to his back and the other little chappie grabs the firing mechanism and lets one off. Playful little fuckers, the Taliban. Anyhow the rocket hits the side of the vehicle at an angle and there's this fucking tremendous bang and half the side opens up to daylight. Jezza, the driver, slumps over the wheel with a piece of metal in his head the size of a dinner plate and the fucking vehicle picks up speed because his foot's jammed the accelerator and careers off in the wrong direction. Not towards the barracks, oh fucking no, the daft cunt, towards the waiting fucking Taliban. Except they're not actually waiting; we just suddenly career through a group of them and then every man and his dog is shooting at us. Eventually we come to rest by hitting the side of a house.

Of course we put up a bit of resistance but the AV is on fire and that makes you a bit reluctant to bed down and fight....

So, with our arse singeing, we're dragged out and smacked around a bit.....

A few weeks later a deal is done, we're given back, and life goes on.....

Not!

Chapter 11

Colin looks for Roy

Colin Moore's life had changed since Roy Jenkins, his boss at the Yard, had retired. He had found a new woman, left his old wife, been deserted by new woman, begged for new chance with old wife who, she told him with glee, had found a new man. So now he was woman less, half a house less, half a pension less and had come to the conclusion that if you want new pussy in your life you should buy a cat! And he had moved out into the sticks to a new force that had housing he could afford.

He was sitting in the office one day with his annual two weeks' leave imminent and nowhere to go and nobody to go with. And he thought of his old boss; the retired Roy Jenkins who he had not heard from since the day he left.

He knew he had gone to Spain so he cheated and got in touch with the Spanish police and asked for a favour..... But they came back and said there was no one of that name moved to their country in the last two or three years. Good detective that he was he asked for 'official' help from the airlines; did they have any record of his going to the States or Australia? He picked those as he thought that Jenkins may have decided on somewhere hot but English speaking...well sort of. British Airways came back with a record of him making two flights to Miami but the second did not record a return... Gotcha!

Moore got in touch with the Florida police, assured them it was a missing person rather than some gun crazed killer they may have in their midst, he didn't want a SWAT team descending on Jenkins, and several days later they came back.

Roy Jenkins, they said, was dead!

Dead?

....the unfortunate victim of a case of mistaken identity when his wife...

Wife?

.....thought she was being attacked in her home when he was out and shot.....

Shot?

.....what she thought was the attacker.

Shit!

Colin thanked Sergeant Gil Gazuma and asked if he could tell him the name of the local paper and he would have a look at it on the web. Sergeant Gil complied, Colin thanked him again and the conversation finished.

Questions rushed into his head. Dead? Wife? Shot? And why hadn't he got a name like Gil Gazuma? Fucking Gil Gazuma! What a name for a copper!

He found the paper on the web and looked in their archive section by putting Jenkins' name in the search bar.

And there he was. And there was his wedding photo. And there was the bride. And there was?.....it was?.....it was?.....Norma Baxter?

Norma Baxter? He was sure it was her. Slimmer, without her depressing glasses but it was Norma Baxter all right.

But Norma Baxter? Why Norma Baxter? Norma, *I didn't murder him it was an accident*, Baxter?

He stared at the photo for several minutes then sat back in his chair and thought it through. There were only two reasons why Roy and Norma could have formed a relationship. He had fallen for her as the investigation proceeded.....or he knew her before it had started?

And as he thought it through he knew it was the latter. It had been unlike Jenkins to have been so pedantic about a case. By all means be thorough and stick to your guns but time served Detectives didn't do pedantry. They quickly learned that most criminals go free, for many reasons, so you did what you could and then let it go. Another day, another dollar. Just another cog in the creaking and groaning machine they call justice.

He got himself a coffee and a hamburger from the canteen, went back to his office, sat down and wondered what to do? He had two weeks before his two weeks' leave.....and he wondered what to do?

Chapter 12

Cocaine 2

They met at a small chalet in the hills outside of Brescia, a small town about 10 kilometres east of Milano. Surrounded by paddocks and olive groves it gave their protectors a periphery of vision that allowed all to be seen if someone, anyone, should approach.

There were seven of them; the leader and undisputed leader at that, his second in command and five deputies. Between them they controlled what the public would know as the Mafia but which they knew as the *Society*.

They were there to discuss the handover to another organisation of their distribution rights for Europe. There were one or two things to be settled. Compensation; from the new party and the Colombian producer. Safety; guarantees from the new party and the Colombian producer that the handover would not mean any change in the general status quo as the new distributor became more wealthy and more powerful. Continuation; of supplies for the future.

Without those guarantees it was difficult to do a deal but Lorenzo Kosko, their leader, knew a deal could be done and so it would. Then all they had to do was live happily amongst themselves and make sure there were no plays to extend territory. Certainly if that happened and one man became the importer of the cocaine rather than the *Society* the world as they knew it would change forever.

They were a disparate lot; different ages from thirty four to sixty seven and different backgrounds; car dealer, waste disposal,

banker, plastic extruder, quarries, construction and metal fabrication. All legitimate businesses to hide behind and funnel money through. As was usual, prior to the meeting they had their usual buffet and wine and discussed all things non business related; family, football, politics.....

They sat around the table to accept or reject the proposals the leader had with him which he had negotiated with the Producer and the new distributor. There was no chance of rejection as he had kept them informed all through the negotiations and they were comfortable with the final conclusions and the monetary considerations he had managed to extract. Before the vote one of them started to double up with stomach cramps. After a few minutes he started vomiting and looked quite ill. His protector was summoned and his car whisked him off home. As they carried him out he told them that he would go with anything the Leader had agreed.

They carried on with the meeting and it was obvious they had a consensus for the change of operation. Before the vote they had a coffee and wandered off to relieve themselves at the small lavatory across the corridor. As they waited for the last one to return they replenished the coffee.....

The man sitting on the loo, his trousers round by his knees, straining his muscles to have a crap and looking at the naked lady on a calendar on the back of the door in front of him was debating what it would be like to fuck her and would she have it up her arse? And what an arse she had. A taut firm arse to grip your dick. What an orgasm that would give you.

And then the earth moved and the wall fell on him.....as the bomb ripped through the meeting room, killing all in it....

Chapter 13

Lillian

Lillian sorted out the cats then went back inside and made herself a cup of tea. She leaned back in the wooden chair and put her feet on the other chair by her. Taking a small sip as it was too hot she put the cup back down again and ran her fingers through her hair; feeling its thickness and the way it just....fell. She got up and went through to a large body length mirror in the hall way and, reluctantly, looked at herself.

It wasn't a pretty sight. It could have been but it wasn't. Ignoring the wellies and the dirty sweater and jeans and the fact that she stunk, she was overweight, not by too much, but in the wrong hippy, thighy, facey sort of places. And her hair? It looked like that woman who had snakes coming out of her head. What was her name? It was....it was....? Turned men to stone....? Anyhow that's what it looked like.

She peered at her image for a while, turning this way and that then went back into the kitchen, put her feet up again and continued sipping.

Lillian was aware what was happening but reluctant for her acknowledgement to take any material or practical form. She decided to look at the accounts for the week and went to a drawer for her statements but sat back down without them. Staring into space she allowed her mind to think the unthinkable; when she had been with Jimmy she had felt a feeling not felt in a long time.

Sexual. Wanting. Needing. Fucking.

Something she had not done, or wanted to do, in nearly twenty years and now here she was at nearly sixty; desperate, yes desperate was the word, for a good fuck! Where the hell did that

come from? And the way she felt, the overwhelming need, made her wish she kept stallions rather than cats!

She went upstairs to the bathroom and put on the shower. Undressing she cast her eyes around but there was nothing. She put on a robe and went back downstairs to the cupboard under the stairs, rummaged around until she found something and then went back to the bathroom and under the shower. She grabbed some soap but decided it could wait and picked up instead, the hammer by its head. She put one foot on the side of the bath over which the shower rained and widening her legs she slowly, very slowly, inserted the wooden handle into her vagina. Gently putting it in as far as it would go Lillian started moving it up and down. It was wonderful but it took her completely by surprise when her body exploded and took her breath away and she felt a sexual ecstasy the like of which she had never felt before. The massive orgasm made her feel faint so she sat down in the bath and let the healing powers of the hot water wash over her.

‘Christ,’ she said aloud. ‘Twenty odd years without one of them. In fact it may be sixty years without one of them!’

After a few minutes sitting under the hot, cleansing shower she stood up again, put her foot on the side of the bath and spread her legs.....

Half an hour later she went back downstairs. Anointing herself with oil, she washed and brushed her hair and made a mental note of her sore vagina but she felt wonderful. She went to the Yellow Pages, found what she wanted and rang. ‘I want my hair done.....’

With an appointment for the next day she went to the cupboard and took out all the chocolate, biscuits and crisps and dumped them in the bin.

‘Game on,’ she announced, copying what they said on the darts on the tele.

She sat back down with a new cup of tea and a light bulb came on in her head.

‘Medusa!’ and she put her fingers in her hair and made them dance like snakes.....

Chapter 14

The Hospital

H held Benshima's hand as he sat by her bedside as she slept. She had suffered minor concussion when the roof had pushed her against the airbag along with a few fractured ribs. It could have been a lot worse. Her friend, who was in the next private room along, was in roughly the same condition.

Benshima would be fine and out in a few days. Sore, a little pain, but alive.

As H sat there and listened to her gentle, rhythmic breathing he was considering how to make Johnny Harris pay for his drunken foray in his big SUV that had hurt his wife and her friend and had certainly killed several others.

Because of his physique Johnny Harris, amazingly, had hardly been injured which, H thought, was something that should be remedied.....

Chapter 15

King Bongo Bongo 2

He waited nervously for the result to come through. Who would they vote as King? Even though there was only one candidate, himself, and even though all the ballot papers only had one name on, his, he still got very worried. More than worried.

He paced up and down the vast room and every so often he quickly looked up to see if his soldiers were perfectly still. It would be so nice if one moved..... Just the arch of an eyebrow. Anything.....

The first results started coming in and he scanned the papers that held the results. So far everyone had voted for him but there was still a chance that a massive plot was being hatched behind his back.

Who would do that?

The Prime Minister?

The Finance Minister?

Perhaps even now a group of foreign mercenaries could be on their way via sea or air to try and depose him and another would take his place. His fury started to mount. He rushed over to the soldiers.

‘Kneel!’ he screamed. ‘Kneel before King Bongo Bongo!’

Fear filled the soldiers. What were they to do? They had strict instructions never to move but here was The King, who gave those instructions, telling them to kneel. What did he want? What was the right thing to do? What action would keep them alive?

‘Kneel!’ he screamed again and, as one, they did.

A voice behind him or in front of him, or somewhere *shouted*, 'Shut up, you bastard!' but he saw no one. He shook his head to make the voices go away but they didn't. 'Shut the fuck up.....'

'Attention!' he screamed and they scrambled back immediately. He went to a soldier and put his face in his.

'Do you know who is plotting against me?' he yelled hysterically. 'Do you?'

'No, my Lord,' quaked the soldier.

'Liar,' screamed King Bongo Bongo and picked the soldier up and broke his neck. 'Who else is involved in this plot? Who else?'

He heard a voice far away shout, 'Fuck you.' He turned quickly but there was no one there. He became confused when it happened as there was no one in the vast room with him other than the soldiers so how could he hear a voice? Sometimes several voices? Why did it happen? How did it happen? Did they have hidden speakers in there? Was one of the soldiers throwing his voice? Were they trying to send him mad?

He marched up and down the row of soldiers and commanded each one to say 'Shut the fuck up' but not one did. They may be simple soldiers, they may be stupid soldiers but they weren't suicidal soldiers. When he got to the end of the line he had worked himself into such a fury he broke the last soldier's neck as a warning to the others.

'If I hear that one more time,' roared King Bongo Bongo, 'I will kill you all. Have you got that?'

No one said anything because they were too scared and also because they had not heard a thing.

But again a voice somewhere said, 'Shut fuckin up.....'

With his pulse banging in fury in his brain he looked deeply in the eyes of each soldier but he knew it wasn't any of them. There were plotters afoot somewhere, everywhere, and they must be destroyed....

Chapter 16

Lillian 2

It had been four months and the cats hardly recognised her. She had lost two stone, lost some hips, lost some thighs, lost some chins, found a waist and found herself a woman again. Her hair had been cut by someone who could cut hair to suit your face rather than the style of the day and she had actually started wearing gloves when she was working with the cats so her nails had grown and her hands softened. She could now look in the mirror again and she liked what she saw. She may be nearly sixty but she had a good figure for her age and she felt feminine again.

She checked herself in the mirror again. It was warm and she had on a summery frock with black high heels. The frock buttoned from the waist up and she had, for quite a while, tried to decide at what point she should finish buttoning. When she stopped *there* it looked quite sexy as it showed her cleavage but she *was* nearly sixty. When she stopped *there* the cleavage disappeared but somehow so did part of her being. She wanted to be seen, if only a little. It was time for her to come out so to speak. To take a chance, to take a risk. To be a woman.

When she had left her god awful father who used to beat her she quickly married a man who also thought it was great fun to get drunk and thump her. Or maybe not do the drunk bit and just thump her. What kind of cosmic force directed battered children to battering spouses? She lasted ten years with him. Ten years! Before she plucked up the courage to run away. He pursued her of course and found her and gave her a good smacking but the mould had been broken and she didn't go back. She went into rented accommodation and got a job at a kennels which seemed

ideal. The dogs and cats didn't hit you. And then her parents died in a road accident one snowy evening and she had the smallholding which she put kennels on and which she had been doing now, man less, for many years. Too many years.

And now it was Terry time!

She had answered one or two ads in her local paper and met Terry Andrews who was a nice chap. He was a widower whose wife had died of cancer four years earlier, good looking, a touch younger than her but that was even better. They had been out twice and he hadn't thumped her or tried to get into her pants or even in her bra. In fact he had been the perfect gentleman.

Terry was the MD of a small company nearly fifty miles away that were in plastics of some kind and he collected her in his black company Jaguar. Taking her out into the country they parked a couple of hundred yards from the meandering banks of a river. He took a hamper out of the back of the car and they walked down to the water's edge where he put down a car blanket and opened a bottle of cold white wine.

'To us,' he said affectionately.

She smiled. 'To us.'

After a few moments she said, 'Do you think there will be an 'us'?'

'I have no doubt. From the moment I met you I have not stopped thinking about you. I am more comfortable with you than I have ever been with any woman in my entire life....'

He leaned over and kissed her lips gently and she melted into his arms.

Chapter 17

Johnny Razz 2

After he left University he concentrated on his long term plan. Firstly win as much as he could on the net and also start playing in games at a casino. On the net he knew he could win as the betting patterns were 'obvious'. Sometimes he was wrong but mainly he was right. Of course he could still lose, and lose he did when they had a better hand like Aces against Kings or picked up a three, two or one outer on the river. That was poker and no matter how much you could read the signals you were still going to lose. All you had to do was win more money than you lost. That's all it took and Razz remembered the man on Sharkscope who had won £500,000 by having a 5% edge.

Just 5%.

It was no different from the people in the shares and money markets; they may only make a tenth of a percent on a deal but when you've moved a hundred million a tenth of a percent was £100,000.

And after he was comfortable playing face to face and made sure he could read them from their gestures as well as he could read his mother and many other people, obvious or otherwise, he would go into bigger and bigger cash games because that was where the real money was.

You could certainly make five grand in a heads up on the net in an hour but you could make a hundred grand in a London Casino or in Las Vegas.....

And so he hit the net with gusto. He started playing at 8am and played four games at a time. He checked the table lobby before

he went in and checked the players against the copious notes that he kept in Excel, his HUD and his head. Making money was much easier when the players you were up against were inferior to you....

And even though people put in £100 or £300 or £1000 he was always amazed at how poor some of them were. As his mom would have said, 'they've got more money than sense!' And luckily for Razz, they had.

He played for six hours at a time in blocks of two hours with a thirty minute break for food, to relax his muscles and clear his brain.

In the evening he went over to the Grosvenor Casino in Walsall to learn his trade.

And he watched and he learned. He trained himself to see everything that could possibly give him an edge in his reading abilities and therefore an edge in the game. He not only watched how they played he saw every movement of their body. When he was out of a hand he still watched everybody like a big cat stalking his prey. He even noticed how they dressed. How their style of dress matched their mood that night. They didn't know it, but he did.

And he progressed. He went in tournaments and did well and more often than not cashed. Then he started playing in cash games.....

At this stage he worked out that he just needed a good reputation as a card player rather than a shark. If you were too good you didn't get invited into anything. Why would they?

If you only had £50,000 would you play Phil Ivey heads up for all you've got? As if.

Chapter 18

Kate Day

Kate had moved to the JJ Group of companies and joined JJ Betting Shops as one of Roger's deputies. She and Roger had been work colleagues for many years and when he wanted two people who knew what he expected and would give him what he wanted he asked her and Gerry Smith to join him. They got a slightly better pay package but a chance to share in added value by way of bonuses which, Rog had warned them, they would have to earn.

The move had been opportune as several months earlier her husband had died quite suddenly of a heart attack at only thirty eight and her world had crashed down around her. Rog, friends and colleagues had rallied around but it had been grim. From being with someone she had known since school to being with no-one was almost too much to bear and she had even considered suicide, such was the emptiness in her soul which she thought could never be filled.

And so the move had helped and it had got easier as time went on. She still had the occasional cry but it was more the loss and the loneliness rather than the abject despair of before.

She spent the day at the Betting Exhibition at the NEC in Birmingham and was spending the night at the local hotel where there was also a dinner for exhibitors and guests. Roger should have been with her but he had developed flu like symptoms half way through the day and gone home to bed with an incredibly high temperature. Although Gerry was there he was leaving straight after the dinner to drive home.

And so here she was...

The meal was adequate and the company around the table above average. The speakers could have done with a little more originality and less of the in-dustry jokes. However one of the speakers, a minor Royal, invited to bestow prestige on the occasion, won Kate fifty pounds. Each person round their table had to put five pounds in the kitty and try and guess how long the minor Royal would speak. Kate waited until they had each announced their own estimate and then added thirty seconds to the longest. Every time the minor Royal said anything that was faintly coherent, intelligent or funny, Kate started the applause. Politeness demanded that it continue. It was one of the shortest longest speeches any of them had ever heard! Kate bought champagne for the table and was toasted by the losers.

At the end of the evening, after the thank you's and goodbyes, Kate trudged wearily to the lift. Seven floors above her in 830 waited peace and tranquillity. Into the lift with her went two men in their early thirties.

'Hello,' said one. 'Didn't see you at the Kempf bash, were you there?'

Kate looked a little blank.

'Obviously not,' said the other.

'I was at the Betting Show.'

'We...' he continued, grinning broadly, 'are two of the top three salesmen for Kempf UK.'

Kate suddenly realised what they were talking about. Because they were very slightly slurring their words she had not understood the word Kempf.

'Oh Kempf.....isn't that the huge Japanese computer manufacturer?'

'None other...!'

‘Aren’t they the ones that do the incredible brochures with the amazing graphics? They do for brochures what Pirelli used to do for calendars...?’

‘You got it...that’s the one. In fact we have the absolute, state of the art, latest edition in the room if you’d like a peek. We can’t let you have a copy, but you can have a look....?’

‘Yes, please,’ replied Kate, wondering whether it was anything Roger would like to see?

They went past Kate’s floor to 906 above her. As they walked across the landing one held out his hand. ‘By the way, I’m Martin and this is John...’

She shook their hands. ‘Kate..’

In the room Martin hunted in the several cases that were strewn across the room.

‘For Christ’s sake, John, fix Kate a drink while I find this bloody thing.’

Kate declined the drink but found one put in her hand anyway. After a few minutes he found the brochure and handed it to her so she sat in an easy chair and started studying intently. They sat on the chair arm and pointed to different items, explaining how certain effects had been created. She hardly noticed the arm over her shoulder. It was only when a hand slipped down her blouse that she understood. She started to move but strong hands held her down.

‘Let me go! Let me go or I’ll scream the bloody place down....’

A pair of lips smothered her and she felt hands fumbling at her blouse buttons. Then a hand went over her mouth. ‘Come on, Kate,’ said a slurring John. ‘You’ll like it soon.’

With a hand still over her mouth, so hard that her lip was being cut by her teeth, they half carried, half dragged her into the bedroom and put her on the bed. One, from behind, held her arms

and covered her mouth. The other sat on her legs and took off her blouse and bra.

‘Magic,’ he mumbled leeringly.

He lifted her skirt and started pulling her tights and pants down. She squirmed and wriggled and tried to kick and scream, but they were far too strong. Undressed, the one controlling her legs started to unzip his trousers.....

Twenty minutes later, when they had finished, they explained the situation to her.

‘You can scream as much as you like now but it won’t do you any good. The cops won’t help you because you obviously wanted it by going with two men to their room....men you didn’t know. So you’ve got a choice. Put on your clothes, go back to your room and forget it....or scream the house down and see what happens in the cold light of day to your so called story.’

She was sitting on the bed, a sheet drawn up over her naked, defiled body. Her wet, smudged eyes were fixed to a point on the floor. As though coming out of a trance she picked up her clothes, went into the bathroom and after a few minutes reappeared and walked to the door without looking at them. Martin looked at John and held up his thumb. John looked slightly relieved. They would get away with it.

Again.

In her room Kate walked into the bathroom and turned on the shower. Getting under it she started to scrub. She scrubbed the clothes she was still wearing, she scrubbed her hair, her face... scrub, scrub, scrub.... Frantically she scrubbed, feeling the powerful, hot cleansing water cascade over her body taking the filth away.....from her body. Scrub, scrub, scrub.....

After fifteen minutes she struggled out of her wet, clinging clothes and started scrubbing again. Scrub, scrub, scrub..... When she was more exhausted than satisfied with the result she put on a

large clean fluffy bath robe and went and sat on the bed and slowly rocked backwards and forwards for many minutes. She looked at the clock by the bedside which said 1.15am. She rocked a while longer.

Kate looked at the window of the eighth floor room and went over and stood by it. She saw the long drop and with a bit of difficulty she opened the window. Putting one leg gingerly through she felt the cold night air envelope her and she sat astride the ledge.

It would be very easy. Just lean too far over and crash to the ground and join her beloved husband. So easy. To lose someone you love and then be raped by men you didn't know.

How cruel was life? Very cruel!

She yearned for the release that death would give her but something inside her refused to allow her to die. She sat for a few moments more until a gust nearly did her job for her and then, trembling, she went in and closed the window.

She desperately needed to talk to someone, be with someone, but there was only Roger and he was ill in bed. For no logical reason she took her mobile phone out of her handbag and rang her boss, Mister James.

H heard the phone go in the lounge and knew it must be important, or a wrong number in which case he would be really pissed, so he got quietly out of bed and went to it. Kate sobbed and wailed her story into the phone and H told her to stay where she was, get in bed and keep warm and he would have her collected and looked after. He asked her for her room number and also the number of the men concerned.....

Rape, thought H, *the ultimate obscenity*.

He whispered to Benshima that he had to go out, which she may have heard in her slumber. He got dressed and went downstairs and into the Ferrari. It had been a while since it had

had a blow out. It was about 110 miles to Kate and he could do that in an hour, or a lot less assuming he wasn't bothered by mister plod.

He pressed a speed dial on the car phone. 'Evening, Johnny, it's H.....and you, my friend.....forgive me for waking you at this time but I need your assistance.....'

The 360 Modena flew up the motorway, at one time touching 168 mph, but there was no one around and if there was a speed camera hidden somewhere....then there was and fuck it! The 360 should have been changed a year ago for the 599 GTB that he had on order but he had realised he had made a mistake and the 599 didn't have a soft top option. Not to have the ability to take the top off in a car so small would have sent him nuts so he took delivery and sold it on for a 10% premium which was about £20,000 and kept the 360 Modena which, he thought in hindsight, had been a good move. The 360 was the most beautiful car he had ever seen.

He knocked on her door and said, 'It's James, Kate. It's James.'

After about a minute her wide, frightened, doe like eyes stared at him as she opened the door. He smiled at her and then she flung herself into his arms and he held her as she sobbed. He felt her start to go limp and so he picked her up bodily and kicked the door shut with his heel.

'You realise,' he said smiling, 'you should have rung HR,' and gave her a big squeeze. He kept talking to her about all and sundry, all the time smiling at her, a warm protective smile. In due course she went to the bathroom and got dressed.

'Kate,' he said as they went down in the lift, 'at the reception it is very important that you smile and look happy. I know you don't feel it, but you have to act it. Can you do that for me....?'

She nodded.

He put her address in the Sat Nav and as he drove to her home he chatted to her while the radio played soft music in the background and she fell asleep. He drove at the legal limit and arrived at her house in two hours. Helping her out of the low car he guided her into the house and took her upstairs to her bedroom.

‘Kate,’ he said gently, ‘get undressed and jump in bed and get comfortable and warm. I’ll go downstairs and make you a cup of tea....’

It seemed important to H that he should restore her confidence in men, and herself, as quickly as possible. After a few minutes he returned and found her fast asleep. He went back downstairs, drank the tea himself then put on the tele and sat on the settee with his feet on a stool. Half an hour later he nodded off.

The next morning he woke to the smell of bacon and eggs and he wandered, shirt and trousers creased, into the kitchen. She looked at him. ‘Thank you.’

He nodded.

‘Mister James.’

‘James....’

‘....James, I am sorry I rang you. I don’t even know you. I only met you once and that was for a moment but I had no-one....’ she started to cry.

‘It’s ok,’ he said softly, ‘*you’re safe now....*’

Those magic words, thought H, those magic words.

‘I would like....’ she carried on through the sobs, ‘that’s the wrong word....to tell you about last night. I know I don’t have to, but I want to show you that I had nothing to do with it. I didn’t ask for it, didn’t want it, and when I saw it coming I honestly believed that I could stop it....’

She looked at him and saw the compassion in his eyes.

‘It’s very important to me,’ she continued, ‘that you understand

He nodded. He did understand, but let her do it her way, so that she knew he understood. She took a deep breath, as though bracing herself for what was to come.

‘The reception had just finished and I went to the lift and as I was on the way up when these two.....’

Chapter 19

Lillian 3

Lillian was gloriously happy. Everything was good. The cats were good, the weather was good, her relationship with Terry had been consummated and they had discussed living together. Terry had taken a shine to the life of a smallholder so they had looked around to find something bigger which they had. It was a modest house but it had nine acres, more than enough for cats and dogs and maybe a few sheep and horses as well.

They would both sell their houses and pool resources and buy half each which would also leave them both with a tidy sum in the bank. Terry's house was currently being redecorated due to a freak storm and some flooding and it would be a little time before it could be put on the market but her house was up for sale and its rural location was attracting a lot of interest. If she sold first she could put her half in to secure the other house and Terry would pay the mortgage on the difference until his house was sold.

Things got more and more complicated with Terry's house taking longer than expected to put right due to some kind of acid that had been in the flood water permeating the cement below ground level and an analysis was being done as to the effect it would have in the long term on the bonding and therefore on the structure. Terry had been lodging with friends so they decided that when her house was sold, and should there be any period between that and going to their new house, that they would live in a hotel in the interim. She would have to spend a little time alone there as Terry was all over the country with his job but it was only going to be the odd day or two and she could cope with being pampered at the hotel while he was away.

Her house went through but with two weeks before the purchase on their new place could be completed she was lucky that the new owners of her house were kind enough to allow her to keep the cats there until she moved. She picked up the cheque for £274,369 late on the Monday afternoon and took it back to the hotel to show Terry. They had a nice meal that night and to bed early as Terry was off to Middlesbrough for two days for a plastics exhibition. They took a bottle of bubbly to bed, toasted their happiness, and made love. The next morning they had breakfast together then went to the car park. She to go into town and him to his exhibition. He started to move off but heard her car crank and crank but it didn't fire up. He reversed and quickly looked under the bonnet but hadn't got a clue. 'You need the AA or a garage or something.'

'Great,' she said.

'Lill, I'm sorry I can't stay and help but I have to be off.'

'It's ok. Look, I'm supposed to be dropping the cheque off at the Bank; do you have time to just stick it in the deposit hatch?'

'Course.'

They kissed goodbye again and she went into the hotel to find a number to ring.

Chapter 20

Coast to Coast 2

Armel and Presheva worked hard the next week to complete the barn and be on their way. They struggled up rickety ladders with heavy beams but they were used to hard work and they didn't complain. They would have preferred carpentry in its more pure form as cabinet makers but money was money and they still earned more here nailing planks and beams than they did back home. Amazingly they had once travelled one hundred kilometres to a library to pore over books by the 18th century English cabinet makers Thomas Sheraton, Thomas Chippendale and George Hepplewhite so that they could improve their skills. They couldn't understand the English but they learned from the line drawings shown within.

Unfortunately they had not seen the girl again and thoughts of her produced frenzied masturbation and so, in a way, they would be glad to be gone. It was no fun getting all worked up in the hope of seeing her and enjoying her body when she didn't arrive. It was hard.....and then it wasn't.

On the last night with just a couple of hours the next day to finish off they were already asleep when she let herself silently in. She shook them both gently to wake them and they watched as she undressed. Beckoning to them she kneeled between the two beds. They stood each side of her and she watched as they enlarged instantly. She sucked them alternately and at one point managed to get them both into her mouth. Not all of course, only really a little of each, but it was still a wonder to behold..... In due course she stood up, moved to a bed and lay there with her legs

wide open and her arms wide. Armel looked at Presheva and smiled. 'After you.'

'No,' replied Presheva, 'after you.'

'You, sir, are a gentleman.'

Armel lay between her legs and started pumping and Presheva kneeled on the bed beside her, leaned over her and put his prick in her mouth. She held his prick as it went in and out and with her other hand she kneaded her left breast until it induced an orgasm.

A few minutes later Armel got off her and indicated that Presheva would go underneath. So she sat astride Presheva, his prick up her and one of her tits in his mouth, while Armel moistened her arse with wet fingers from her cunt and she let out a loud moan and arched her back as he slid it up her.

Armel had just got his prick as far up her arse as it would go when the door burst open and the farmer hurtled in. He had a shotgun in his hand, his face was bright red and he was screaming at them at the top of his voice.

They understood very little Italian but the word *moglie*, wife, they did understand and *bastardi* was quite clear!

Wife? She was his wife? She was no more than eighteen and he must have been near to seventy, how could she be his wife? *His wife?*

It then all happened very quickly and at the end Armel and Presheva would argue as to the course and sequence of events. Armel threw himself at the farmer and felt a sharp pain as his prick was turned sideways as it left her arse. His fist, aimed at the farmer's head, just missed and smacked his ear and the farmer yelped and the gun went off. The force of Armel took the farmer to the floor where he started to shout again so Armel put his hands round his throat.

'Shut up!' he screamed at the farmer, 'shut up! We didn't know she was your wife! We didn't know.'

The farmer struggled to move and Armel increased his grip. 'Be still,' he screamed in Albanian, 'be still. We didn't know. Be still!'

The farmer's struggle increased and Armel responded by increasing the pressure even more. 'Be still, you old fool,' he commanded and then the farmer did as he was told. To make sure he wouldn't continue Armel released his grip only slightly but the farmer didn't start again so he released it even more and saw the farmer's head slowly roll to one side.

Armel stared at the dead man in front of him.

His mind became numb with the enormity of what had happened but he shook his head to clear it and tore his eyes away from the old man and looked at Presheva who was covered with blood. His arms were extended, still holding up the girl by the shoulders; dread and horror masked his face. His unblinking eyes stared at the girl still sitting on his soft prick and as Armel's gaze moved to her he saw she had no head. The shotgun had blown her head off! He moved to his friend and pulled the girl off him and she collapsed in a heap on the floor. Presheva didn't move, the shock had overwhelmed him.

'It's ok,' said Armel, embracing his friend, 'it's ok. You have to pull yourself together because we have to go.'

He looked him in the eyes and saw little.

'Get cleaned up and get dressed,' he commanded to the traumatised eyes and Presheva robotically did as he was told.

They packed their belongings but before they went Armel said, 'To the farmhouse.'

'You must be joking?'

'No. We're owed money and we're going to get it.'

They went in and scoured the rooms for money, striking the proverbial jackpot when they found a small chest under the farmer's bed. In it they found not only enough to pay them but

also to keep them for a year if not longer. Armel took it all and they left.....

Chapter 21

The Deciding Panel

The four men and one woman met every four weeks to decide the fate of the people before them.

Medical Reports, legal reports, staff reports were handed around and experts were questioned as to their opinion. Then one by one the people whose fate was to be decided shuffled in to be questioned about their thoughts, hopes, dreams, aspirations....

Some had none. They just wanted to leave.

Some had none. They just wanted to stay.

The man sitting before them had been before them many times previously. He had been with them now nearly twenty years. It should only have been ten but the unfortunate death of one of the others meant he had to stay longer. Some argued he should stay forever but a more liberalistic attitude and lack of space made those decisions, no matter how inviting they were, less possible.

After official introductions that weren't necessary but were part of the protocol they asked him a series of questions and after he answered each one they consulted the notes they had in front of them.

‘And,’ said the lady, ‘what would you do if you left us?’

‘I would want to work with wood. Perhaps make puppets or little models that I can sell at craft fairs, car boots and to small shops.....’

After the questioning had finished he filed out and they were left to decide.

‘A vote For?’ asked the Chairman and three put up their hands.

‘Against?’ and one went up.

‘Arthur,’ he said, ‘you are in between?’

‘I am, Sir George. I have absolutely no idea whether he will do what he says. He is, or was, I tend to think still is, devious, cunning, a liar and completely amoral. He just confuses me and I have no idea whether he is just leading us by the proverbial nose.’

There were nods and one or two smiled. It had been done before; unfortunately too many times...

‘Well, I’ll tell you one thing,’ said Sir George. ‘If we decide Yes and he makes his little models and he goes out to sell them he’ll sell a lot.’

More nods and smiles.

He certainly would....

Chapter 22

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So that was that really.

The Taliban gave us back and received...well, I don't know what they got in return, but anyway we were back with our mates. Well, sort of.

There were a few weeks in the hospital as we both had broken arms and legs and neither of us had nails on our fingers. And we hadn't taken too much to the strap around the head. You wouldn't think, would you, that a strap around the head would be too much of a problem. But it is. Because they ratchet it up a notch every day. And the pressure becomes.....too much.

So much pressure.....

So much pressure.....

You think your brain is going to burst.

Or your eyes pop out.

And last but not least they give you a little of what does you good. And then a bit more. And then a bit more. Let's face it they've got enough of the fucking stuff. Growing fucking everywhere. All of a sudden you're a fucking opium addict. Now by all accounts that should be fun but it isn't. You spew your fucking guts up, you get terrified, shapes come and go and scare the shit out of you and then it gets a bit better. A bit...

After a while it's fine. It makes you relaxed, bit spaced out, euphoric even.

But what you've got to remember is the Taliban aren't giving us this because they like us. They're giving us this because they *don't* like us. And so they have fun.

They wait until we're dependent and then won't give us any. Now if you think taking it the first time is bad then you don't want to know what it's like when they stop giving it you.

You *do* want to know? Ok. What happens is this; and I'll keep it nice. Firstly you get restlessness, then anxiety, rapid pulse, increased blood pressure, crying, runny nose, yawning, muscle spasms, back pain, tremors, and many other symptoms. So many other symptoms.

You wouldn't want to know.....

And so we spend a lot of time in hospital getting over the torture and the opium addiction and.....

I got over the opium in about four weeks.

I got over the wounds from the torture in about twelve weeks.

It's the other bit I have trouble with.....

Chapter 23

The Hotel

At 4am Martin and John were awoken by an insistent rapping on their hotel door. John felt a shiver pass through his body.

‘Who is it?’ shouted Martin at the door.

‘The police, sir, would you open up, please....’

Oh Jesus, thought John, oh Jesus, oh Jesus.... Martin opened the door to be confronted by three men in suits and mags. The first man showed a card. ‘C.I.D., sir, can we come in...’ and walked in before he had an answer.

After the door was shut he said, ‘Earlier this evening, sir, you had a lady in this room with you. Is that correct?’

‘No,’ said Martin, ‘that’s not correct. We have been here all night by ourselves.’

The detective sighed. ‘Gentlemen,’ he said as though to children, ‘we know the lady was here. I can get ‘scene of crime’ guys here in two minutes and her fingerprints and DNA will prove she was here. Now at the moment this is just a chat but if you mess about over what may have been no more than a bit of fun that got out of hand, I will arrest you on suspicion of rape and aggravated assault and then you’ve got big trouble. It’s up to you...’

‘Look,’ John said quickly, ‘She came in, we had a few drinks, had a bit of fun and then she started to panic. Said what would happen if her boyfriend found out? Started to cry and so we packed her off. That’s about it really.’

‘Mmmmm.’ He had the right ones. ‘Would you stand against the wall, please, gentlemen, facing it, hands behind your backs....’

They looked puzzled but did as they were told.

‘Now we’re going to handcuff you for five minutes while we search the room. Because it’s a serious allegation we have to do that in case you try to escape.’

‘In pyjamas?’ blurted Martin.

The detective grinned and shrugged. ‘Just routine, sir. You could be the Yorkshire ripper....’

Facing the wall the handcuffs were put on then Martin and John choked as they received two powerful blows to the kidneys. As they started to fall they were held from behind and sticky tape quickly put over their mouths and black hoods over their heads. They were dragged half unconscious to the twin beds where one man held their hair, lifted the hoods and forced them to look ahead.

‘So you think rape is fun, eh, fellas..?’ and they watched the two men in front of them start undoing their trousers. He pulled the hoods down, turned them over on their stomachs and pulled down their pyjama pants.....

They were not gentle. Firstly, because they had strict instructions not to be and secondly, because it was more fun this way anyhow. Fucking rock and roll!

The other man went through their clothes and found the credit and debit cards. He took a small laptop out of the case he had with him, plugged it into the hotel’s broadband and switched on. Designed for such occasions it was stripped of everything superfluous to requirements and booted very quickly.

He clicked on a screen icon and went straight to a website that was housed, well God knows where it was housed, but it was operated by Russians. The screen prompted a password which was unique to them and he put it in. Another screen appeared and asked for the credit and debit card numbers with the security numbers on the back. He typed the details of five cards in and the

site went away to do its thing. After a few seconds it came back with one message *OK* and he turned off the computer and went back to the fun.

The site took the card details and presented them to their respective Banks and then, by a process of iteration or perhaps more accurately recursion, it emptied each bank account to the card's limit. It did this by asking the Bank's computer if there was a starting point of £10,000 in the account. If the Bank computer said no the site cancelled that transaction and went back and asked if there was £5000? If the Bank said yes it went back again and asked if it had £7500. If the Bank said no it went back again and asked for £6250 and continued until it had a 5% margin either way which was fine for this procedure and was a 95% clean out situation anyhow.

It also worked the other way. If the Bank said yes to £10,000 it then went back and asked for £20,000. If it said yes it asked for £40,000 and repeated the process until it got a no and then drilled down to the correct amount.

The Russians charged £20,000 for setting up the service then they took the first 30% and the 70% remaining was automatically transferred to a Bank Account of your choice. Anywhere in the world.....

After ten minutes Martin passed out through pain but they dragged him into the bathroom, stuck his head under the cold shower to wake him and then smacked it against the hard tiles, breaking his nose, which nearly sent him unconscious again. They were sexually abused for as long, coincidentally, as Kate had been. Not only that, they were badly, very badly beaten, receiving broken ribs and both had their front teeth knocked completely out. Martin, in due course, lost the sight in his right eye... John somehow had an ear bitten off...

Every so often they took off a hood and took a digital image with a tiny Sony camera. At the end, with both men in agony and

barely conscious they dragged them onto the floor. Martin whimpered with fear, tears fell from his cheeks and his body shook uncontrollably.

‘Now remember this, gentlemen,’ said the ‘Detective’. ‘What you have just received is only a start. If you think the lady would have got it rough if she had talked, you can’t even imagine what will happen to you. Now we know who you are, where you live and where you work. We’d love to visit you again. So.....two things to impress on you.... Firstly, have a look at these....’ and he showed them the images in the camera viewer of them being raped, and their faces very visible, ‘which will be sent to your employers and put on the net if we hear so much as a squeak out of you. That will, of course, be done just before we find you and kill you. Secondly, as a little present to remember us by....’

He put his foot under the upper arm of Martin and pressed down on the lower arm. Martin’s face contorted with pain, sweat poured out of him, and then they heard the snap....

He writhed in agony, the gag stifling his screams, as the men smiled at his contortions.

The man then went slowly over to John and grinned. John passed out and neither felt the pressure being applied to his arm, nor heard the break.

Because he had cheated, the man also broke John’s other arm.....

Both men were in such a dreadful mental and physical state neither of them noticed they still had an object up their arse....

Chapter 24

Cocaine 3

Senor Reyes had just left a Board Meeting at the Oil Company the family owned and was on his way home in the back of an armour plated limousine when his mobile phone rang. The call had been switched through several computers, located all over the world, on its way to him. When it had reached the first one it had been transferred to Skype to get rid of all caller id.

It was a call from the *Society*.

He had been expecting the call. He knew what had happened at the meeting and he knew that the main man was dead and was expecting the number two to ring and finish off the handover.

‘Ciò è due?’ asked Senor Reyes.

‘This is not Two,’ said a voice in English with a heavy Italian accent. ‘Two has joined the others.’

‘The others?’

‘Dead,’ said the voice, ‘as he should be for setting us up. How cowardly is it to leave a bomb in a room for your friends? Where is the honour in that?’ spat out the man.

‘And you are.....?’

‘I would have been Five but now I am One.’

‘One? Already?’

‘Yes. Nature abhors a vacuum.’

Jose smiled. How true. ‘How can I help you, One?’

‘There is to be a change of plan.’

‘In what way?’

‘The European distribution will stay with us.’

‘Really?’

‘Yes.’

‘I thought it had been decided it would go to your neighbours.’

‘Times change, people change, plans change.’

‘I am not sure it is still possible. It was all agreed, compensation, safety, general rules of conduct etcetera. It may be too late to go back.’

‘It’s never too late.’

‘Sometimes it is....’

‘Tell our neighbours the deal is off.’

‘Are you giving me an instruction?’ asked Senor Reyes softly.

There was a pause the other end. ‘I am sorry. These have been troubling times and I have had to make many decisions and direct others. I meant no offence.’

‘Let me be candid. Your neighbours will not like this; in fact they may take extreme exception to it. I am warning you of that now. However, I will talk to them but you must assume it will go ahead as planned.’

‘I am sure when they know that we have a new leader and we can make our operation much more efficient they will be happy to continue as normal.’

Senor Reyes did not say what he was thinking. ‘I will talk to them and be back to you within seven days.’

‘Seven days? That’s a long time.’

‘Fourteen days is longer....’

Another pause. ‘Seven days is fine. Thank you.’

‘Arrivederci.’ Senor Reyes hung up.

Senor Reyes took several other calls and when he got home he poured a small brandy then went out on the porch and sat and thought.

So Two is dead and Five is One.

And Five says Two was the traitor?

If Two was the traitor why is Five alive?

If Two was the traitor and had the brains to get rid of the others then it was obviously to take control. And if that was the case why was his planning so bad that Five was allowed to not only live but to take control in his place? And kill Two?

What is this nonsense...?

So Five was the traitor and wanted power. But how could he succeed with the European product distribution when One had put forward a quite convincing case with regard to the inherent problems of the distribution? What does Five know that One didn't? Or is Five just a gung ho, kill 'em all, solver of problems?

Although Senor Reyes had initially discussed the opportunity of James heading the European distribution, when the Turkish contingent had expressed their interest in taking over Senor Reyes was delighted. The Turks were highly efficient, highly aggressive, had miles and miles of coastline and a Customs Force that struggled. They, and it, were ideal and it removed the problem of James. Although Jose knew James would be ideal in the position he also knew that James was not keen and that would always, maybe not always, stand in the way. You had to be one hundred percent behind your product! A bit like selling Coca Cola. A lot actually. There was certainly, by revenue, more cocaine sold than Coca Cola!

Another sip of brandy.....he took another mobile off the small table at his side. The mobile was registered to no one and he rang a number. The call went to a computer that converted it to Skype and then went on its way. After several rings he heard a voice.

'Sener,' said Jose.

'Good sometime of the day,' said Sener in perfect English. He had long ago given up working out whether it was morning, afternoon or evening in Colombia so he said '*sometime*'.

‘How are you?’ asked Sener. Sener wasn’t his real name but in Turkish it meant ‘bringer of joy’ which he thought was apt.

‘I’m well.’

‘And you?’

‘Fine.’

‘Sener, I think we have a slight problem...’

Senor Reyes went through the conversation he had just had. Sener said nothing as Jose meticulously repeated the whole conversation as though it was just taking place.

When he had finished he said, ‘How do you suggest we proceed, Sener? Do you want to go back to the current system? Do you want me to persuade them to move to the proposed system? What do you suggest, Sener?’

After a long pause ‘Give me a few days to think about it.....’

Chapter 25

Lillian 4

Lillian got the car started, well the local garage did, who found that it was soaking with water which must have been the dampness of the night which tended to affect old cars that attracted moisture and it permeated the electrics.

Terry rang from Middlesbrough to say he had arrived ok and would ring her at about nine that evening which he did.

The next day she went back to her old house to feed and muck out the cats and got pleasantly tipsy sitting on the lawn in recliners with the new owners.

Back at the hotel later that evening Terry rang and gave her some good news. Although he was the Managing Director of his company he had had a call from the Group Managing Director who had told him they were making him Divisional Group MD for the plastics side and that meant a fifty percent pay increase. Fifty percent! And a big Mercedes!

Because of that his plans had changed slightly and after the Exhibition he had to go to London to be officially appointed and meet the rest of the Group Board, but he would be back the day after and they would go out and celebrate.

Him, Divisional Managing Director.....wow.

‘This,’ he said, ‘deserves a slap up meal and I think my lady should get a little trinket from the Capital...?’

‘You don’t have to.’

‘I know. I want to.’

‘I love you,’ she said, her eyes misting.

‘And I love you and I’ll see you in a few days and we can, what’s the word, *demonstrate* our love.’

He heard a dirty giggle and smiled. 'See you soon, love.'
'Drive carefully.'

She lay in bed in the hotel room and watched the tele. BBC ten o'clock news issued a storm warning for the east of the country with lashing rain and high winds. That was the route Terry was taking.... Please God, keep him safe. Please God, keep him safe. It just wouldn't be fair if he was taken from her now; not now; not now that she was so happy. *Please* let him be safe....

Her imagination overwhelmed her and she rang his mobile.

'You're up late, love.'

'I was worried about the weather and I was....'

'I'm fine.....less than a hundred miles to go and everything's fine so don't worry. Go on,' he said kindly, 'back to sleep and I'll talk to you tomorrow.'

Relieved she said goodnight and after cheating with a herbal sleeping pill she slept soundly.

Chapter 26

Johnny Razz 3

Adrian, the Managing Director of J J Casinos, was also looking for an edge. In the vortex of the credit crunch he knew they had to do as much as they could, and it may only be a fraction, to beat the other casinos. And Birmingham was losing out. Not by much, but a touch.

He needed something a touch special as a teaser. The Birmingham manager had heard about Johnny Razz. It wasn't much but a passing pro had played against him in a tournament and had realised very quickly that he had something that most didn't.

It was only a cheap tourney, £1000 buy in and two hundred entrants and Mickey Wernick had only bothered as he happened to be there at that time doing a commercial for Blue Square, an Internet Site.

Anyhow Mickey had got through and he was heads up with this man who looked like a boy. Initially the boy was no problem. Mickey won hand after hand and the boy usually called with the worst hand. Sometimes he even called with no hand and Mickey wondered how the hell he had got this far?

That was the automatic thinking process but in reality Mickey didn't really care as he was completely fucked. He hadn't been to bed the night before, or the night before, as he had been involved in cash games and trousered nearly £38,000.

But when he had a 75 – 25 chip lead it all started to change. When Mickey raised with a poor hand to bully the short stack the boy put in a massive re-raise. When Mickey raised with a good

hand the boy folded. Mickey won pots but with few chips. When the boy won they were significant.

When Mickey was down to 20% of the chips he realised what had happened. The boy had let him win all the initial hands just so he could see what he had. No other reason. And then he had worked out his responses.

Fuck!

Mickey knew he had to change his whole demeanour so he borrowed sun glasses and a baseball cap. But it was too late. Razz had seen his every movement and although the picture was now less clear, it was clear enough.

Razz won and Mickey shook his hand warmly. He hated getting beat but he had respect for someone beating him who had outplayed him. Even if he did look about twelve.

‘Well done, son,’ said Mickey, ‘well done.’

‘Thank you,’ replied Razz with respect. ‘You were unlucky, you struggled with poor hands towards the end.’

Mickey looked at him. ‘You and I know that’s not true, son. I *was* unlucky. I was unlucky to have been heads up with you. That’s all. Let me buy you a drink, son, and you can tell me why I’ve never heard your name....’

After the prize giving, actually the cheque giving, they settled down in a corner and chatted. Razz asked continual questions of Mickey Wernick; how had he started, why, where, when? Where had he been, who had he met.....?

Mickey Wernick was sixty four years of age and his nickname was ‘the legend’ although his mates at times called him ‘the leg end’ to get him on tilt.

Mickey had a lived in face with a heavy physique which, in his early years, he used to good effect as an amateur boxer.

Born in Wolverhampton Mickey worked in the family sectional building business until at 15 his father, a lifelong

gambler who also worked there, decided he wanted a different life and they both left and opened a betting shop. In the late seventies they started Wolverhampton's first casino which went well.

But Mickey was a gambler and loved playing cards and he would go anywhere for a game. Which obviously took him to Vegas where he went to play in the World Series every year.

In 1975 he went with some friends to see the Bugner - Ali fight and ended up playing in a cash game with Doyle Brunson, Johnnie Chan, Chip Reece, Stu Ungar and a few others. Not for the first time Mickey did a three day stint with no sleep; just the occasional visit to 'the john'. Mickey started off with \$10,000 and ended up with \$50,000 and it was only sheer exhaustion that made him stop there. When he told the table he was calling it a day Stu Ungar had said, 'The old hit and run trick, eh, Mickey?'

'Three fucking days I've been playing here, Stu, I gotta sleep.'

Stu Ungar grinned and they shook his hand and he went to bed. He was supposed to ring his wife every day but he hadn't for three days and so he stripped to his underclothes, lay on the bed and picked up the phone. He woke twenty hours later with the phone still by his ear.....

In the 80's they sold the casino and Mickey lost the first of many large sums of money by reinvesting it in the roulette wheel of the casino he had just sold.....

From there to the race track as a bookie under his dad's name of Solly Wernick but still playing as many games of cards as he could.

In 1984 Mickey went with Solly to Vegas and had a bad run, losing twenty thousand dollars quite quickly. Solly lent him another ten but that went as well. Mickey persuaded Solly to let

him have just a bit more but Solly was only prepared to lend him £500 and then when that was gone.....

Mickey turned the £500 into £10,000 in a Omaha high low game. When that finished he moved to a No limit Hold 'em game and turned the £10,000 into £130,000. He gave Solly double the money back that he had borrowed and life was good again.....

From then on it was up and down, highs and lows. Mickey was a gambler and that was the normal life of a gambler. You had good runs, you had bad runs.

And so it went on until 2006 and Mickey found himself broke....again. He was down to his last £60 and he went to the Grosvenor Casino in Walsall and got himself into a £20 re-buy and ended up winning £1,150.

He went home and he and his wife decided which of the red bills should be paid but Mickey opted for the phone; then at least his friends wouldn't know he was broke. They went to the supermarket and stocked the freezer and after paying a few other odds and sods Mickey was left with £800. He decided to go to London to the European Championships where he sold 50% of potential winnings to three friends for £500 which gave him his £1,000 stake.

He came 7th in that and won £7,000, £3,500 of which he gave to his friends as their 50%. From there he went into a Omaha high low and came 5th winning a further £9,000. He then went into a £200 re-buy no limit and won a further £21,500 which made around £40,000.

Mickey was back!

They talked continually for an hour and towards the end Mickey said, 'Would you be interested in being attached to a Casino, son?'

'What does that mean?'

‘Well, I’m not sure what it means exactly but loosely it means that you become their face, their poker ambassador. You play there and bring in punters. The poker interest is built around you.’

‘I’m not that good yet,’ said Razz.

Mickey smiled his grizzled face. ‘You took me to the cleaners.’

‘I was lucky.’

‘Let’s not start that crap again, son.’

So Mickey rang the manager of J J Casino in Birmingham and he rang Adrian. And Adrian told the manager to set up a meeting and then he rang H and asked him if he’d like to meet a poker whiz kid and help him decide whether they could use him in some way in J J Birmingham.

And here they were; a table of seven. H, Adrian, Scotty, Razz and three locals who played frequently in the casino. The winner got £1,000 paid by the casino. No entrance fee, invitation only. Scotty had never played for more than a fiver and he certainly wasn’t used to playing across a table but H had thought he would enjoy it.

He could even win.

Nah....

The three locals were there as an indicator. They all regarded themselves as pros and they certainly made a living gambling. They played well and were consistent winners at the casino. They may not be Ivey or Brunson or even Devilfish but each would say that, given the cards, they could take any of them. Adrian never replied that, given the cards, a pillock could take them..... But that brought up the luck versus skill debate which most poker players were reluctant to look at.....

It started slowly. The blinds were small and the local boys took as many of the small pots as they could. A few chips here, a few

chips there made a difference when it came to relative stack size. And with those few extra chips a speculative raise was essentially a freeroll.

Scotty waited for reasonable hands but he didn't get many and then when he did have something that he thought he could call with, Jack Queen or 9 10 suited, he found that there had already been a raise and so he folded. He was surprised that boy wonder was in so many pots early on and losing so many with poor hands.

H was card dead and kept looking at 9 3 or 2 7 and seethed within at his lack of competitiveness. He owned the fucking place! Surely God would let him put up a good fight? God to H - *get fucked!*

Adrian was somewhere in the middle and wasn't sure if that was a good place to be. They were good enough to play but needed a flop to go with them and when you consistently missed the flop you found your chips draining away.

The locals realised quite quickly that they were against amateurs and the pickings would be easy. They had been told it was a bit of a treat for the boss while he was there and that was quite obvious as the Head Office boys weren't too good and they assumed the kid was one of their sons.

The locals had agreed beforehand to split the pot between them after the game; £333 for an hour's work, well hardly work, wasn't bad.

After twenty minutes Adrian went out with the idiot end of a straight to be followed soon after by Scotty whose straight, made on the flop, was beaten by two pair that moved to a full house on the turn. Scotty's all in when a safe card came on the river was dramatic but futile.

H still had a fair amount of chips as he hadn't played one hand. Not one. He had managed the rare check when he was the

big blind but usually he had already been raised so he just folded his J 2 or 10 3. Where are you God? God to H - *fuck off!*

Razz just sat there and took everything in. He had already worked out that there was some kind of understanding between the pros. He didn't think there was any collusion at the table, well maybe a little as they avoided playing big pots against each other, but he saw no hint of any signalling between them. So it seemed that they just wanted to make sure they were the last three standing so they could divi it up afterwards.

At forty minutes H was short stacked and went all in with K Q suited which, based on the cards he had been getting looked like a monster, but he was ignominiously beaten by a pair of threes!

And then there were four. The locals and the boy; and the locals were already relaxing. Three against one was hardly a problem but three against a boy who could hardly play....

Razz had about sixty percent of his starting stack whilst the others had his difference plus the stacks of H, Scotty and Adrian between them. And so Razz had about 8.5% of the total chips and if he got it wrong any one could bust him.

But he'd had nearly three quarters of an hour to watch them and was ready for battle.....

The next hand he had two aces. He was on the button and the first to act raised and he called. The small blind folded and the big blind put in a massive raise to get rid of him. The third man folded and Razz went all in.

It hadn't worked and there was a long pause. With all Razz's chips in the man had little option than to call as the odds dictated it. He turned over Q 10 and his friend blanched as he had mucked K J. It shouldn't have made any difference as the boy should have folded. In hindsight they had played it wrong. Once the boy had called the first raise the other pro should have called. The second

re-raise was designed to tell the boy to fuck off, make him fold, and weaken him further.

But what it had done was get rid of the first pro and left the boy near enough pot committed; if he knew what pot committed was.....

Yeah...it was a bit of a fuck up.

Razz turned over the A A and watched as a rainbow of small cards were dealt on the table. He now had 19% of the chips and he could fight.

He had been lucky; they knew that. He had been lucky to get a good hand that stood up and he had been lucky they fucked it up. But it hadn't looked good that one had to show a Q 10! That meant they were either in cahoots or it was a bluff too far. One of the pros looked at H who was standing, watching with Ade and Scotty, and H winked.

H had also worked out what they were doing but it wasn't illegal and it was what pros would do. Isolate and destroy the weak player. But he wasn't supposed to be the weak player.....?

What was going on?

Now that he had chips and knew what he was up against Razz started playing poker.

He had three advantages he could use; they wanted to knock him out which meant they had to take the others into account; they didn't want to knock someone else out which meant it was then two to one; and last but not least, he knew pretty well what they were playing....

Because it was four handed he knew, generally, the hands would be poor and there would be a fair amount of raising to steal a pot or the blinds.

When the small blind raised to steal his big blind and Razz knew he was weak he went all in. When someone raised who was strong he folded. When they raised with a reasonable hand he re-

re-raised. With the blinds going ever higher he soon had 45% of the chips and the pros were wondering what was going wrong?

They also knew that as long as one of them won everything was ok. But how could they guarantee that now? Before they could have just let one of their mates take him out but now they weren't so sure that was going to happen as their strategy was not to weaken each other and that strategy had, in effect, weakened them all.

The boy was now chip leader but they weren't quite sure how? He was playing aggressive poker but they didn't know whether they had been set up or whether he just didn't have a clue and was whistling in the dark....

And how could they have been set up?

They were Birmingham's finest!

And he was a boy.....

His aggression slowed them up and allowed him to be even more aggressive. He still didn't play stupid hands; he always had some kind of chance if he was called but he was sure he knew what they had and they wouldn't call.

With the blinds now getting too big the game reached the stage where the short stacks would go all in with any reasonable hand. This was the most tricky stage. The short stacks could easily, with a bit of luck, take enormous amounts of chips off the leader who had called with a good hand. He may have called with A K but a 3 7 was only a two to one dog and that was hardly good odds. It sounded a lot but it meant that in every hundred hands the 3 7 would win 33 of them. And if you were the chip leader and those 33 came all at once you were, in poker terms, completely fucked!

And so Razz bullied the short stacks when he knew they had absolutely nothing and called or folded if he thought they had

something. If he called he knew he had to be able to continue the betting if they went all in....which was likely.

Ten minutes later it was heads up with Razz having 70% of the chips. The protagonists moved to either side of the oblong table and shook hands.

On the first hand Razz had 5 5 and the pro in the small blind, went all in. Razz knew he was bluffing but didn't really want a coin flip, not with 5 5. No matter what he was bluffing with they were almost certainly to be overcards and that wasn't good. He was chip dominant and losing would mean the pro would have 60% of the chips. Why chuck away your advantage on a coin flip?

He folded and watched the look of triumph flash momentarily across the pro's face as he saw his bluff work. A few more of those and he would take this..... Any two good looking cards and he was all in! He knew it took a good hand to call. A very good hand when there was so much riding on it.....

But Razz also knew that and so he kept raising. The short stack couldn't call with nothing as he was covered and would be out so he waited his chance.

And then he got J J. Halle fucking lujah! But how to play it? He was the small blind; should he raise or should he just call and hope for a raise and then he could re-raise? He called.

Razz knew he had something. Perhaps a big pair? More than likely. If he had had A K or A Q he would have to raise, more than likely all in as he could miss the flop. So it must be a fairly high pair. Which one? The way he had put the chips in hit a chord from the beginning of the game when he had played J J. It certainly wasn't Aces or Kings so Queens or Jacks it was.

Razz had Ace King and he checked.

The flop came A 9 5 and Razz checked. So did the pro. The turn card was a 10 and Razz thanked the Gods. He put in a large bet and was called. The river gave them a 4 and Razz put in a bet.

The pro went all in. Razz looked at him for what seemed an eternity and then he smiled.

‘It’s been a good game, you played well.’

‘Are you calling or folding?’ asked the exasperated pro.

‘I have to call, you only have Jacks.’

‘Eh?’

The pro looked startled. He looked at the onlookers with bewilderment in his eyes and it was as though he expected one of them to be holding up a board with J J on it. How could he know that? And if he did know that and he had called the all in it meant he had lost. *Lost....*

Razz turned over the Ace and the pro looked forlornly at his cards and then put them in the muck face down. For a moment the pro lost it and snarled ‘Fuck you!’ and got up from the table. He had only walked a few paces when he stopped and turned back and walked towards Razz.

‘I’m sorry, mate. It took me unawares and I don’t like losing. I take that back.’

He held out his hand which Razz shook. The pro looked at him for a few moments, studying the boy in front of him. ‘You stitched us up.’

Razz just shrugged. ‘How could I do that? It was three against one. I thought you were the ones doing the stitching...’

The pro ignored the last bit.

‘I have no idea how you did it but you did.... Like a fucking kipper. The one good thing about it is I didn’t lose any money. I think you could have cost me a bomb under different circumstances but I’ll watch out for you and maybe we could have a proper heads up, not this Mickey Mouse shit, and see what happens next time?’

‘We could,’ said Razz, ‘but you’ll lose.’

The pro should have been insulted.....and he was.

And he didn't like it.

The assembled throng congratulated Razz and they all went into the restaurant area where food and drink had been laid on. Adrian presented Razz with the cheque for a £1000 and they stayed for half an hour and discussed the game and the poker scene generally.

As the pros left H said to Razz, 'You've just won £1000.'

'Yes.'

'Would you be interested in doubling that?'

'How?'

'Play me for it.'

'Ok,' said Razz without any hesitation but no outward sign of enthusiasm either. 'Now?'

'Sure. We can go to the Manager's office and play in there. Scotty can be the dealer.'

'No,' said Razz.

'No what?'

'With all respect to Scotty,' said Razz, smiling at Scotty, 'I want a proper dealer.'

'What's wrong with Scotty?'

'Nothing's wrong with Scotty but his dealing won't be as good as an experienced dealer, or should I say his shuffling abilities. The cards will be less random with a poor dealer and there will be too many cold decks. And then the maths go out the window.'

What Razz was saying was true but he knew it made little difference when he was heads up as he was reading the player and wasn't really concerned with maths. But he chucked it in anyhow as a red herring to send them off down the wrong road.....

H knew he would lose a grand but it was worth it to experience the kid first hand. Razz also asked if they could have a small partition between them; not much, maybe a few books a drawer or something. Just something to stop him seeing H's hands.....

‘Really?’ asked H, ‘why?’

‘You are quite vocal with your hands and this will even us up a bit.’

‘You read my hands?’

‘Mainly your fingers; they’re quite a tell at times.’

‘Really? I had no idea...’

A piece of wooden board was upended on the table and held there by four books.

‘Happy now?’ asked H good naturedly. Razz smiled.

The dealer from the casino shuffled and started dealing. From the off H met an aggressor. H would look at his cards, look up and see Razz staring at him intently.

‘Raise.’

That’s all he seems to say, thought H. He can’t continually have good hands so fuck him!

The next time Razz raised H went all in and Razz folded. H had A J and maybe should have called or re-raised but fuck him!

H was a good poker player but that wasn’t how he made his living and so at times he reacted to a raise as he would to a threat; with a counter and more aggressive threat! And of course, at times, your aggression wiped you out when you were confronted with someone who not only didn’t fold but actually had a monster.

H was never in the lead but he put up a good show. The game lasted thirty minutes with Razz stealing many of the pots. And when H had a big hand Razz would invariably fold so that he rarely picked up a substantial amount of chips.

When he was short stacked he did go all in and was surprised to see Razz call with 9 3 against his K J. Razz had worked out the odds and knew H didn't have a monster and so it was overs against unders. Two to one against but that was no big deal.

The blinds were high and H only had two left and so it was, again, all in, and Razz called with Q 9. H's J 10 missed and Razz won it with the high card.

H stood up and shook Razz's hand. 'Well done, although I must admit I thought you would have got rid of me quicker than you did.'

A big grin swept over Razz's face.

'Why are you grinning?' He looked at the others who had watched. Adrian, Scotty, the Manager and the Dealer. They were also grinning. 'Why are you grinning? What's the joke?'

Ade held out his hands as though to say *'I'd like to tell you but maybe someone else could first...'*

H looked at Scotty. 'Scotty, tell me what's going on?'

Scotty thought for a moment. 'It's difficult, boss, and I'm not sure how to put this..... I know, let me ask you a question. On a scale of one to ten how do you think you fared against young Johnny here?'

H thought about it. 'Well, as an amateur playing against a pro who, admittedly, was fair enough to get me to hide my so called finger tells, not too bad. I would say about six.'

'Ok, boss, and how would you rate yourself against young Johnny here if he wasn't looking at his cards when he played you?'

'What?' blurted out a stunned H. 'He wasn't looking at the cards? He's just played me and he hasn't been looking at his cards? You're joking? Surely you're joking?'

Scotty shook his head. 'Sorry, boss.'

‘So all that crap about my fingers giving off tells was bollocks? You were just hiding your own hands so I wouldn’t know you weren’t looking at your cards?’

Razz nodded and grinned again. ‘And of course,’ said Razz, ‘subconsciously, you thought, as your fingers were the ones giving off tells and I could no longer see them, that you were safe, which only meant you gave off even more with the rest of your upper body.’

‘Expletive fucking deleted,’ said a deflated H. ‘So my dreams of being a poker professional need to go on hold for a while?’

‘I think so,’ said Razz, ‘you just need a little more practice.’

‘So that was why you called some of my all ins with crap hands.’

‘Yes. I had no idea what I had but I had an idea what you had and so I was getting reasonable odds to go in with any two cards.’

H shook his head in amazement and looked at Adrian. ‘See if you can work out some kind of deal but I tend to think he should be in J J London rather than Birmingham.....’

Chapter 27

Benshima

Benshima was starting to get worried and with only a few weeks left before the arrival of their child it wasn't at all what she needed. H read the letter that had arrived that morning. Benshima received two a week and had done so now for four weeks. They fell into two camps and were diametrically opposite to each other. Today's said....

My wife

You're nothing but a fucking tart. A whore who'll do anything for anybody. Grunt and groan and beg and grovel.

BITCH!

Why should I continue to love you?

You don't deserve my love, you cow.

BITCH!

Your husband

The one at the beginning of the week said.....

My wife

You looked so wonderful today my love; so beautiful.

I adored your hair cascading over your shoulders and resting on the bosom we both love. Very soon, my love, our baby and I will both be suckling at your wonderful breasts.

So soon, my love, so soon.....

Your husband

When the letters had started they had taken them to the police although, as H predicted, it would be a waste of time. No threats, no untoward advances, just some nutter with too much spare time. But that nutter with the spare time was watching Benshima and he knew where she lived.....and H didn't like that.

The police were quite wrong. He had very little spare time. When he finished work where he was sorting with occasional delivering, his time was taken looking at and following women and taking long range photos and then he would go home and start up his computer where he would download the images into the software that allowed him to manipulate them.

Depending on what part of the week it was dictated what he would do. If it was early in the week he would go through his vast collection of wedding images and choose one or several that, he felt, fit the occasion and then he would manipulate the head of his adoration on to the body of a woman in a shimmering white wedding gown and then put his head on the groom.

At the end of the week he would go through his vast catalogue of pornographic images and choose one or several that, he felt, fit the occasion and then he would put the head of his adoration on to the body of a woman who was being fucked or raped or had an animal up her. In these he didn't put an image of his head, not even on the ones where she was just getting fucked. He wasn't into things like that.

He wasn't that kind of man....

He didn't have a girlfriend as he had no idea how to have a proper relationship as other things got in the way. What he would like to see her in, what he would like her to do, what he would like her to do with other men and animals, what he would like her to say.... it would have been less a relationship than a puppet

show and there weren't many women that would go along with that unless you were very rich and he wasn't.

Better that he lived his relationships in his head where he was in control and everything was how he wanted it and how it should be. No complications, no one to question his needs, no one to spoil his fantasies.....

And when he did need a woman he went out and found one. Less a woman than a young girl. Not too young that they would have looked like children; no, a girl in her mid teens, developed and, in his mind, innocent and easy to control. Indeed he had been with many women over the years that had merely looked like girls due to their young features and slight body. His mind didn't know the difference; it merely saw the overall form of what he wanted to fulfil his fantasy.

He would approach a woman and explain, in a masterful way what he wanted and they would succumb to his power and masculine presence and would do whatever he wanted. They would certainly do whatever he wanted as they were usually unconscious or nearly so as his habit of coming up behind them in the dark and smacking them over the back of the head with a rubber tube filled with sand tended to make them quite amenable. Then he would drag them into bushes or a dark alley and command them to do his bidding.

'Take off your blouse!'

And he would take off their blouse.

'Lift up your skirt!' (He never approached women in trousers or jeans; they were obviously men....)

And he lifted their skirt.

'Take off your pants!'

And he took off their pants.

'I am now going to fuck you everywhere until you are too sore to be fucked anymore!'

And he would masturbate over them.

‘And now I’m finished with you I am going to let my friends have you!’

And he would wave his arms to tell all his invisible friends they could now have her.

‘I’ll ring you when I want you again!’

And he would go home.

When he first started doing what he did, when he came to woman number three and he put his hand up her vagina, she prematurely came on. He completely freaked out and screamed abuse at her then ran away. It ruined his fantasy so he changed the scenario so that it couldn’t happen again.....

Of late he found his fantasy was changing and young women were no longer what he wanted. Now, for some reason, he wanted more mature women..... And he knew that older women, someone had told him women over thirty, didn’t have periods.....

The unwanted attention of the nutter made H and Benshima come to a decision she had mulled for a while and had talked to H about recently; she wanted to move. She wanted to get out of London and find a nice place on the outskirts where it was green and quiet and their child or children could play in a large garden and be happy and safe.

H knew it wasn’t a good time to sell but they had a very attractive home for someone who wanted it. Extremely spacious, wonderful views, close to the shops that mattered....it would go.

But they had to find somewhere and H knew it was time to start looking. And he had the money. Lots of it. Now was the time for a good deal.

He put their apartment on with Savills at nearly three and a half million pounds and, as luck would have it they found what they wanted at the same place.

It was in Winchester in Hampshire and set in eighty acres of beautiful parkland. It had 6 bedrooms, 6 reception rooms, 4 bathrooms, a 2 bedroom lodge and 3 bedroom coach house. All surrounded by well kept gardens and complete with the obligatory paddock which would no doubt soon have the obligatory horses. And only four and a half million! A fucking snip! H wondered why you could get all that for four and a half and get very little, in comparison, for his at only a million less?

The Estate Agent smiled and just said, 'The convenience of the City, sir.'

What he didn't volunteer was *'the cost of running a house in the country'*. The security, the cleaning, the gardeners, the repairs and renewals, the heating, repairing the drives, pruning the trees, repairing the fences and on and on..... And then the horses, the vet's bills, the grooming.....and on and on....

He reckoned it cost a hundred and fifty thousand a year just to stand still!

For the boy from the back streets who had started his life digging roads a hundred and fifty thousand a year would have been a fortune but H had moved on from there. Between them the casinos, betting shops, night clubs and security companies had a profit of just over twenty two million before tax. That was a lot of money. And of course it ignored the forty million that was sitting in several Colombian banks earning him a modest 4%. H had taken everything he had out of Switzerland as that had become far too accommodating of the US Authorities and would in due course also help the UK. Soon he would move some to other helpful countries in case anything happened to Jose and the tide turned.....

And many of the new house bills could be offset to some of the companies in the form of entertainment, repairs and renewals etc etc. H gave that another thought. Nah..... For the sake of a

few quid who needs the tax man finding a window cleaning bill in the wrong place and then a full blown audit? Nah..... He would give it to Numbers Norm who would tell him what he could actually offset and others in the grey area that he would offset and they would argue about it if the tax man asked.

One thing he could offset was the cost of the security for his new home. That could be done by his own companies and the costs would be 'lost' within the overall work programming.

The thought of the Security companies brought up a thought that Scotty had mentioned recently. 'Should we still have the Security companies, boss? They make money and they are well run but we now have, essentially, a gambling group. Do we still want Security companies?'

The answer was no.

They didn't fit any more other than to ferry round the casino customers and celebs but that was just a small part of the operation. But could you get a sale now? Now as we enter a recession? Unlikely but you never know. One of the big boys may be interested? He would give it back to Scotty to explore.

Having made that decision he rang Scotty and told him what he wanted.

I am, thought the Archbishop of Canterbury, when his relationship with the Dalai Lama was exposed by The Sun as actually a relationship with a Tibetan Llama at Whipsnade Zoo, completely fucked.

H also made another decision, much to the chagrin of the Estate Agent; he took his apartment off the market. He liked the apartment and it would be handy if....., or if....., or if.....; well, fuck it, he just liked the apartment and he would keep it. And Numbers Norm would find a way of renting it to the casino or something....

Chapter 28

Lillian 5

Lillian woke and found she was anxious. Was Terry ok? Was he safe? Had there been an accident on the motorway? She turned on the news and froze when they showed the film of the carnage that had struck the M1. Thirty cars and lorries had been involved with ten dead, seven seriously injured and the rest were the walking wounded. For a fleeting moment she saw an image of a mangled Jaguar and she died. She knew. She knew..... Her entire being knew it was his car and no one could have escaped that. She started to sob and her body trembled. How could this be fair? This fucking bastard of a world wasn't fair!

Her mobile rang and through the tears she looked at the screen and saw his name. He was alive!

‘Terry,’ she almost screamed down the phone, ‘Terry!’

‘Hello, love, you ok?’

‘I saw the accident on the M1.....’

‘I’m fine. I keep telling you that so please relax.’ He heard her cry. ‘Everything’s fine. Look, I have to go in a minute so I’ll talk to you tonight, ok?’

‘I love you so much.’

‘And I love you but you have to calm down. I do a lot of miles and it’s no good if you are going to worry yourself sick every time I go somewhere.’

‘I know. I’ll learn.’

‘Talk later.....’

He rang her later that evening and said he would be back the day after tomorrow. Five days, she thought, is a long time. No man

for years and years and now five days is an eternity.

On day five she got all prettied up for his return and sat down to watch tele and calm her fluttering heart. Switching on the news she saw, again, the storm warnings and the flutter turned to hard pumping. Please let him be ok. Please let him be safe.

He should have been there about ten o'clock. She rang his phone but it was shut off or disconnected. At eleven, in a state of panic, she decided to ring the hospitals.....

Chapter 29

King Bongo Bongo 3

When it was time for his meals he would, with much pomp and ceremony leave his vast room and, taking four soldiers with him, one on each side, would go and join his subjects. There were many of them and they queued before him; lines of them waiting for their meal. He would nod as he entered the vast room and they would line up for their meals.

He watched them.....sheep. One moved and they all moved. He allowed them all to be fed and then he was waited on last. It showed them he was one of them, sort of, and it also made sure that if the food was poisoned they would be dropping long before he ate.

He sat down with a soldier either side of him. ‘Keep your eyes open.....I smell trouble in the air today.’

But that day he was wrong and there was no trouble and at the end of the meal, when they all stood, he walked back to his vast room with his two soldiers either side.

He entered and saw the soldiers standing rigidly to attention.

‘At ease,’ he barked at them.

No one moved.

He smiled.

They had strict instructions *never* to move and he had caught them out once with an ‘at ease’ and twelve of them had assumed the ‘at ease’ position and they had been destroyed and replaced by new soldiers. He went over to his vast desk and started reading important papers of State that needed his immediate attention...

Chapter 30

Johnny Harris

Johnny Harris, with two police officers, was taken in an ambulance to hospital. His mate who was still just alive and his two other mates who were dead followed in two more.

In hospital they established he was nearly four times over the legal limit and the next day they charged him with just about everything they could think of. He may be a celebrity, he may be rich, and no doubt they would ask him for his autograph in due course, but he *had* caused the deaths of nine people and injured seven others to varying degrees and so he was, to use a legal term, fucked!

Had he known Scotty he may have thought, *I am, as the rich and famous rugby player said as he ploughed drunkenly into the cars, killing many of their occupants, completely fucked.*

Several days later an eminent solicitor arrived to see him and they went through everything. Actually *everything* wasn't quite correct. The solicitor had told him that 'a good memory was a bad witness'.

So when the solicitor asked him time and time again what had happened Johnny Harris could remember little. The solicitor, used to helping celebs in these situations, knew that what his client couldn't remember they could always make up. In many ways a fabricated story, woven around the truth was so much more believable than one where the client was lying. If he was lying he could be tripped up. A story that was....close, was a story devoid of lies.....and contradictory body language.

The good thing, and this was the positive bit, was that the two in the back were dead and so they could be blamed for anything. It was just a matter of deciding what. It was certainly true his client, his rich client who could afford an expensive bill, was well over the limit but if that could be shown as a *contributing* factor rather than the *deciding* factor then they were home and dry. He may still get a few months but otherwise it was a few years. At least.

The first thing to do was get him out on bail, but that wasn't going to be easy. In the old days you could swing it but drink driving had moved on from that and this, with a few having snuffed it, made life a bit more difficult.

He scratched about for reasons for compassion. Wife ill? He got the impression his wife would be happier if she never saw him again so that was a non starter which was a shame as they could, with a Harley Street friend, have concocted something plausible. Parents about to die? Unfortunately both in excellent health so difficult to scam that one.

Judge Mainwaring was a non smoking, teetotal, hill walking, Church going, God fearing member of the community whose only pastime that made him eligible to join the rest of the human race involved being spanked quite hard by a lady in black leather twice a week whose urine he also drank out of a crystal goblet.

The solicitor put on a brave show using every trick in the book to influence the Judge to let his client out on bail. Unfortunately for his client all those tricks were essentially to impress the client as to the work being put in by the solicitor, and therefore the size of his invoice, as both he and the Judge knew he had no chance of walking free.

He was sent down to the cells to wait there until his trial for the manslaughter of several people.

H read of the decision in the next day's papers and was a bit peeved. But he was a patient man. He would have his revenge at some point in the future.

Nobody, *nobody*, hurt his wife and got away with it.....

Chapter 31

Of course you did Grandma

Kate had taken a few days off with ‘women’s problems’ which Roger thought was fucking typical. Here we are with a brand new job, brand new employer that we’re trying hard to impress – leave it to me *H, me and the team will sort it out* - and the stupid woman gets ‘problems’.

Men should have ‘problems’, thought Rog.

I can’t come in today because.....my tap’s dripping, my gutter’s leaking, my drive’s developed a vicious hook, the car’s the wrong colour, can’t tie a Windsor knot, waiting for a delivery of new flares, getting screwed at snooker....

He smiled to himself at that little gem. Getting screwed at snooker...getting topped at snooker....having a rest at snooker....pass that snooker cushion for my head.....my balls are in the pocket..... tee hee.

Anyway....I can’t come in today because....but he was bored of the game now so he gave up. Ah well....

Another woman with ‘*women’s problems*’, his wife, had given him instructions to call in and see her Grandmother at *The Home* on the way back from work as she had a bad cold and didn’t want to give it to her grandma. So he called in with the birthday card she couldn’t read and the chocolates she couldn’t eat but the staff could.....

He sat by her a few minutes as she dozed on and off in her chair and then the ninety four year old woman said, ‘Who are you?’

‘It’s Roger, Alice. Mary couldn’t come today so I have. Happy birthday,’ he said with affection that he didn’t feel as he hardly knew her. This was usually the wife’s job...

She smiled. ‘Who’s Mary?’

‘Your daughter, Alice. Mary is your daughter but she’s ill today.’

She mumbled something and then he heard her say ‘Mary’ very quietly and then nod a few times and mumble again.

‘She’s not illegitimate, I’ll have you know,’ she said sternly.

‘Er....ok.’

Her eyes sharpened and she looked at him. ‘Who are you?’

‘It’s Roger,’ he said again and wondered whether it would be in bad form if he asked God to take her now? For her sake of course...

‘What do you do?’

‘Do? Do you mean what is my work?’

‘Yes, do. What do you do?’

She would not understand Managing Director of J J Betting Shops Ltd so he said, ‘I work in a betting shop.’

Her face lit up. ‘I was a bookie.’

Roger knew she hadn’t been a bookie; she had made her money by being the daughter of a wealthy farmer.

‘When I was a bookie,’ she started to say then went into a world of mumbling and nodding and smiling and scowling to which Roger had no access. After a few moments he said ‘goodbye’ softly and left her to it.

Alice could see it in her mind’s eye. So clearly, as though it was now....

Alice was born the illegitimate daughter of the daughter of a farmer whose wife had died several years earlier from pneumonia. In reality it was less the pneumonia than him making

her work sixteen hours a day in all weathers to tend animals and keep the home. When she died he had little interest in the girl, Alice's mother, but she was well clothed and fed and kept warm and felt secure in an insecure kind of way. Her father became a chronic alcoholic and he and the farm suffered accordingly. However life went on and at seventeen, with her first experiment at sexual intercourse, Alice's mother became pregnant with a farmhand who left quite quickly nursing a sore head after her father had found him. Father and daughter established a regime where she did what was necessary to make his lot better and he didn't get too drunk although he had no time at all for little Alice.

When Alice was fourteen, with the farm teetering on bankruptcy, she ran away from home and never returned.

She found work in a little shop and they let her sleep in a small back room which housed stock. She worked hard and eventually, at eighteen, met and married a man and they moved into a tiny rented terraced house.

When she was twenty two she decided to make a bit of money by investing half their meagre savings on the sure fire winner of the Grand National which was touted as being 'Cooleen'.

Royal Mail came from nowhere at 100/6 and Alice lost her money. She was horrified and vowed never to bet again; but she had also seen something. It was quite obvious to Alice if you wanted to make money, rather than lose it, you should be a bookie. In those days betting was illegal so money was laid with illegal bookies. One year later Alice had saved a starting pot, learned everything she could about racing and, more importantly, its finances, and set herself up as a bookie.

From a slow start she gained a reputation as an honest bookie who settled her bets instantly and never, accidentally of course, gave you the wrong ticket.

Alice prospered. Her husband disapproved but she had already made enough to buy them a little house of their own so he

kept his thoughts to himself. He would see her put the money in stone jars on the lounge floor and the jars went over the corresponding horse's name. If she took a big bet she would lay it off but occasionally, if her instincts told her so, she would take a risk. Luckily, she would say cannily, her instincts didn't fail her.

Everyone bet with her. On dark nights there would be a light tap on the door which would usually signify someone who shouldn't really be there; a policeman, magistrate or even a vicar or two.

She rarely had problems but she did take extra precautions on big race days. Once, the night before Ascot, a burglar stole into their home and as he entered their lounge he was assailed by a screaming Alice who had slept downstairs and proceeded to club him severely with a cricket bat.

After several years Alice had enough money to buy another house as an investment and still had quite a chunk in the Bank.

When betting was legalised it put Alice out of business so she retired but was persuaded by a distant cousin to help him with a garage which she did and it grew under her stewardship and made her more money.....

So Roger was wrong.

Alice *had* been a bookie....

That night Alice died peacefully in her sleep, dreaming of runners and fences and stone jars.....

Chapter 32

Lillian 6

After she realised there were dozens of hospitals she could ring she tried to calm down and work out how to find out if he'd had an accident. She rang the AA who told her there were no problems that evening; although the weather was bad the roads were quite quiet and everything was normal. Who else could she ring? It was nearly midnight on a Friday night for Christ's sake! In an ever increasing panic she rang the local police and explained the situation but from their point of view there was hardly a situation. Her old man was late; wasn't everybody's?

Lillian was in despair. She knew her man was lying in a ditch somewhere, maybe badly injured and calling her name, but where? Where was he? How could she help him if she didn't know where he was?

She paced the room all night and made calls to his phone every fifteen minutes but to no avail. At three o'clock she went down to the car park to go to his home but realised she had no idea how to get there as he had taken her in his car and they had never spent any time there due to the redecorations. She thought hard and decided that she could find it, maybe, but she had no chance in the dark as it would be too unfamiliar. She went into town and found an all night cafe where she could get a coffee but she struggled to drink it as her hands were shaking so badly. She tried to ring him again with no success but noticed her battery was getting low and had an overwhelming urge to throw it across the room and scream at the top of her voice.

She finished her coffee, went back to the hotel where she connected the phone to the charger lead and carried on making

calls.

It was about seven o'clock and she'd got nowhere. She was half out of her mind with a lack of sleep and worry when a thought entered her head. It shouldn't have done as it was totally at odds with everything she believed but it did. Where was her money? Fear gripped her! Where was her money? What if he had taken her money? How could he have taken her money? He had banked it....hadn't he? She hadn't checked whether he had or not? It had been five days since she had given it to him. Five days. Enough time to clear and be half way round the world by now. She got dressed, got the car out again and went into town to wait for the Bank to open. She had to wait an hour and a half, going more frantic by the minute, to find out she had no money. No money? If it had been deposited it hadn't been in her account!

Her mind and body could take no more and she passed out in front of the Teller. The Bank called an ambulance and the police and she found herself in A and E twenty minutes later with a doctor tending her and a policeman waiting to see her. They gave her oxygen, concentrated food and a tablet to calm her and then left her with the policemen to whom she explained as much as she could but it wasn't really his scene. This appeared, but maybe wasn't, fraud. In which case he would hand it over to the white collar boys who would huff and puff but as there were only two of them in the department and loads of white collar stuff she hadn't got much hope. He didn't tell her that of course.

Two hours later she discharged herself and got a taxi back into town where she picked up her car and headed to Terry's house. When she was close she started asking people where a particular site was. She remembered it was close to a large house with huge iron gates. When she was directed to that she knew she was within a quarter of a mile but it took her another half an hour to find it.

There was no one there, the decorators obviously not working at the weekend and so she went to the house next door and knocked.

‘Yes, can I help you?’ asked the man.

‘I am trying to find the man who owns next door?’

‘Yes.’

‘Yes?’ she asked confused.

‘Yes, that’s me.’

Her face screwed up. ‘You own next door?’

‘Yes.’

‘But you live here?’ she said, nodding in the direction of the house he was standing in.

He smiled. ‘We’re doing it up for our daughter and her husband so they can be next door and we can help with the children.’

‘Terry doesn’t live there?’ She said in despair.

‘No, I’m sorry. We don’t know a Terry.’

She tried to get her breath but it eluded her and yet again she sank to the floor. He shouted for his wife and between them they managed to get her through to the lounge where they lay her on the sofa. His wife gently stroked her face while her husband made tea. She came round quite quickly then burst into tears.

‘He’s taken all my money. The lying, thieving bastard has taken all my money!’

‘All your money?’ asked the lady incredulously.

‘I sold my house, we were going to move in together into a new home and I gave him a cheque to bank but....’ and she burst into tears again.

‘He didn’t put it in?’

‘No.’

‘Maybe he forgot?’

‘No, he said he had. He told me five days ago that he had...’ her shoulders dropped and it looked as though she had no life in her, ‘.....and he hasn’t. I’m homeless and penniless.’

‘You can stay here for a few days,’ said the lady, ‘if it will help you.’

‘That’s very kind of you but I live a distance from here and I have cats to feed....’

She stayed another hour and was overwhelmed by their kindness but then she was on her way. She knew what she had to do.

Chapter 33

Coast to coast 3

After the minor problem at the farm in Italy Armel realised there was a lot more money to be made by just taking it than working for it and after persuading Presheva that taking money was hardly comparable to murder, they set about it with a thoroughness that reflected their cabinet maker's expertise.

They moved from place to place and country to country looking for opportunities. It may be an isolated farm, it may be an isolated house, it may even be a house in a small bundle of houses but wherever it was Armel had spied it out first until he was certain there should be something in there worth taking.

Initially they were petty burglars but in due course they became hooded, violent thieves who tied up their victims and made them tell where any money or jewels were. In due course it became clear to Armel that it was much safer if they just killed their victims..... Much, much safer. True there was a bigger hoo haa over it but the chances of getting caught when you had already moved a couple of hundred kilometres or so and had no connection whatsoever with the victims made the risk of detection almost nil.

And there were bonuses. If the women were nice.....

They travelled down the east coast of Italy and up the west coast. A brief stop in Monaco which proved very fruitful although it cost a young Brazilian heiress her life, and then into France and down the coast again to Marseille, Montpellier and Perpignan and then into Spain.

At this point Armel realised their trail of victims could, should anybody have a bright idea and look, be plotted on a coastal map.

So they headed for Zaragoza, then on to Madrid and then they doubled back to Lleida and then back north to the coast and Barcelona. And then down to Valencia, Murcia and across inland again to Cordoba. On to Malaga and Cadiz but Armel ignored Gibraltar as it could be blocked off if they were surprised and trying to escape.

Then to Portugal, up the coast towards Portimao and then on to Lagos.....

Chapter 34

Lillian 7

She motored back into town in her little van and called at the pet shop and the hardware shop. Then to her old home and pulled up on the drive. Gently blowing the horn to tell them who it was she took the food out of the back and round to the cats. She had bought quite a lot and it would last them for some time. They came running to the front of their cages mewing for her food and her attention. She picked each one up individually and stroked it and talked to it by name. She fed them all, sat down by them as they licked their lips and stretched and yawned then put them back in their cages.

As she walked away she turned once, then got in the van and left, forgetting to pip goodbye.

She knew exactly where she wanted to go. She knew what she wanted; the picture, the smells, the sounds, everything...

At the small, gravelled out of the way glade where two or three cars could park she left the van running and got out and stretched. Looking out over the fast flowing river she watched its turbulence sparkle in the sunlight. It was peculiar that she, an ex county standard swimmer, would come here to die.

Going to the back of the van she took out the hose pipe, put it in the exhaust, shut the rear door and fed the hose through the front window which she then put up as far as it would go.

Lillian got in the car and looked in the mirror, putting her hair straight and then delved in her bag and applied some lipstick.

She didn't want to look a mess when they found her.....

Chapter 35

The Trial

Johnny Harris had been stuck in prison for four months awaiting trial. A soft prison to be sure and one where he had lots of visitors, mainly press and team mates. Barren Karen rarely visited as even his solicitor couldn't persuade her to play the loving wife.

He called at her home early one afternoon and found her just a touch inebriated. He had thought of a new strategy and needed the help of the slightly vacant eyed wife. After a few moments of pleasantries he decided to tell her what he needed her to do to help.

'I would like....' he started to say but she immediately interrupted him.

'I don't care what you would like.... I would like,' she said, 'to watch him rot in hell. Did he tell you,' she asked the solicitor, 'that he fucked the woman who used to come in to do the cleaning? Can you imagine that? The fucking cleaner!'

He tried to say something but she carried on. 'Did he tell you he fucked my best friend and then, the bastard, he fucked her sister for good measure? Did he tell you that, mister solicitor? He'll fuck anything, will our Johnny. I came home one day and found him messing with the sink. He said it was blocked but I bet he had his prick up the tap. Fuck anything, will Johnny.'

He tried again but it was no use. Every time he started she would say, 'And did he tell you he fucked.....etc etc.'

The solicitor was beginning to get the hint that Johnny did indeed fuck just about anything that moved. That would stand him in good stead if he went down. So to speak....

And so the solicitor had his work cut out to persuade her to do just one thing to help. Just one thing. If she wouldn't go to Court and plead for him would she at least stay away and say nothing? If she couldn't say anything good could she at least say nothing bad? He would arrange for a doctor to give her a note showing some kind of illness which would not allow her to go and she could just sign a statement instead?

'Of course I will.' He breathed a sigh of relief. At last some fucking sense from the silly cow. 'If I get something in return.'

The solicitor couldn't believe it. Her husband could be going down for a good few years and here she was haggling over a sick note and a statement? What had Harris called her? *Barren Karen the fuckless wonder.*

'You'll get no help from her,' Harris had said, 'she'll help them build the fucking scaffold.'

'What do you want in return?'

'Immediately after the Trial I want a divorce. I want this house and our villa in Spain and I want one million in cash.'

'Does he have that much?' Asked the solicitor, worried that Harris wouldn't be able to pay his inflated fee.

She shrugged. 'Who knows, who cares? But that's the price and I want it all signed and sealed before I do anything.'

'I'll see what I can do.'

'Look,' she said, 'it makes no difference to me either way. It only makes a difference to him. If I don't help you he gets, what, six, eight years, so I am rid of him anyhow and will sue for divorce for obvious reasons. If I do help you he gets out but has a little less money which he will soon make up with all the press interviews and the 'My six months of Hell' by Johnny Harris ghost written by someone with a brain....'

The solicitor looked at her in a new light. What a bitch. What a complete and utter manipulating scheming bitch. She had it all worked out. Get him while he's down.

His view of Mrs Harris went up considerably.....

Chapter 36

King Bongo Bongo 4

He wasn't convinced.....

There was a plot, he knew there was a plot, there had to be a plot. How could there not be a plot? Behind his back the Court was always a viper's nest of intrigue; he knew that.

But catching them....?

Catching them plotting was difficult.

He whipped his head round suddenly to stare at his guards. 'Did someone talk?' he screamed. 'Did you?'

And then it was there again. Distant, but there.

'Shut the fuck up.....'

He hurtled to one of the guards who instantly cowered and then realised that he shouldn't have moved and fell over and begged for his life but to no avail. King Bongo Bongo snapped his neck as though it were a twig.

'You,' snarled King Bongo Bongo, 'have to learn a lesson. You have had it too easy for too long and it is time your loyalty was tested. Tomorrow,' he said ominously, 'you will be tested.'

The soldiers tried hard not to shake and firmly clenched their buttocks.....

Chapter 37

Bye....

Beryl Berris had been the Manager of one of Wace's betting shops for about fifteen years and she ran it like a clock. First in last out she was the consummate manager and had the most efficient and profitable shop within the little group that one of the Wace brothers owned.

A stickler for detail one of the first jobs was to make sure the toilets had been cleaned properly the night before and that the toilet rolls were in place. There was nothing worse than a customer rushing in between bets, having a good crap and then finding there were no toilet rolls! Many years ago she had heard the story of a man who had done just that, so he wiped his arse on his underpants and brought them out and put them on the counter.

'Toilets need bog rolls,' he said and went back to studying form in the Racing Post.....

The Manager took one look at the underpants, got hit by the smell and instantly puked into the rubbish bin.

To add insult to injury the punter had a 33-1 shot in the next race.

And now as luck would have it, as the group had been sold, she was leaving quite soon and emigrating to Australia. The new owners had owned the shops now for a week and Beryl was leaving in a week's time. Three weeks after that she would be boarding a liner on a four week cruise to Australia which would go via the Canary Islands, South Africa and then across the Indian Ocean to Australia where she would start a new life in a lovely home on the oceanfront in Perth. She had shown her colleagues

the new house they had bought and promised them they could visit any time they wanted. Their own home was already sold, their belongings already on their way on the high seas and they were living in rented accommodation until it was time to depart.

With only a week to go there were important things that she had to do to tidy up and then it would be a Saturday night party with her staff and other employees, one or two of her better punters, and then three weeks later off to a new life. She had timed the move to coincide with the end of what she knew would be one of their busier weeks so they would not be left in the lurch and she could make sure that everything would be done exactly as she would've wanted it. Mister Wace had appreciated her help with the handover and had given her an extra bonus for her thoughtfulness and also her years of devoted service.

The week started well with large amounts of bets taking place and a large punter coming in with £40,000 in cash to spread across five bets which all lost! At the end of the day she filled out the bank deposit slip with just a minor inaccuracy. Instead of writing £75,317 on the slip she wrote £7531 then took that amount with the deposit slip and put it in the bank's external wall-mounted deposits safe. The difference in the amount of £67,786 she took home with her. Doing this every night she had amassed by Saturday night a total of £183,000 in cash. She knew that it would be several days before Head Office would reconcile what her terminals in the betting office had registered as receipts against what the bank would have registered as deposits; and several days was all she needed.

On Saturday evening they all went to the local pub that had an outside function room with a private bar and disco and had a great time.

Straight after the party she and her husband drove down to the coast in a hired car. Leaving the car at the Car Hire depot they

caught a night ferry to Calais, a Euro flight to Amsterdam and then on to Thailand to start a new life in their new home by the beach.

One of Roger Davids' first tasks as the M.D. of JJ Betting was to tell H they had lost £183,000 in cash.

It was not the start he had anticipated.....

Chapter 38

Darren and Sharon

Darren had a 2004 Honda Civic 2 litre SE Sport which was his pride and joy. He'd put on wider wheels, low profile tyres, large exhaust outlet, go faster stripes (but tasteful; he would always argue they were tasteful) and eerie blue lights that lit the underside of his car at night. The eerie blue lights he had more trouble defending.

Either way it was his pride and joy and only came second, perhaps first, perhaps second, to Sharon who was currently sitting beside him. In fact she wasn't sitting she was leaning over the centre console, her head in his lap, holding his prick in her left hand while her mouth pumped up and down as he drove along. She was naked to the waist and had no pants on. In between changing gears he would put his hand up her vagina, which was a bit of a stretch, or knead whichever breast he could reach without breaking his wrist.

In moments of fantasy Darren wondered what would happen if they had an accident? Would she bite his dick off? And if she did what would happen then? Did you bleed to death if your dick was bitten off or did you need to be hard? But if she was sucking him he would be hard..... But if you weren't hard would you still bleed to death?

And what would the coppers say when they radioed in? We've got a fifteen ten (or whatever they said) comprising a half naked female with a dick sticking out of her mouth and a male with his trousers down by his ankles who appears to be the rightful owner of said dick. Do we charge him with dangerous

driving and her with theft? And for the record she has lovely tits.....

Darren was a mechanic, loved all cars and a complete petrol head. He knew all the facts and figures about cars; their performance, DIN, gear ratios, top speeds, weights.....fucking everything. He even thought Top Gear was cool....

Sharon, who tended to pronounce it Shaaaron, wanted to be a hairdresser but there was no money in it unless you catered for the rich and famous and there weren't many of those on their estate, so she was a Trainee Legal Executive in a large legal firm and doing well. So instead of wanting to emulate Daniel Galvin, perhaps the most expensive hairdresser in the UK, she now aspired to be another Fiona Shackleton who represented Sir Paul McCartney in his divorce with Heather whatsername.....

But today they had been to a car rally and on the way back they were both indulging their other passion. Darren was struggling to concentrate on the road; what with his dick in her mouth, his hand up her cunt and having to change gear so he said, 'Shar, let's pull over and let me fuck you properly, for fuck's sake.'

He heard a mmmmm from somewhere down on his lap so he headed to a quiet place he knew which was only ten minutes away.

A couple of minutes before he got there she sat up and said, 'It's hot down there.'

'It certainly is,' and his tone told her they were discussing the same thing.

'You're disgusting,' she said mischievously.

'And you're not... ?'

He pulled off the road, down the track to the small clearing overlooking the river.

‘There’s someone already here,’ she said, quickly pulling a blouse over her naked top. ‘Let’s go somewhere else.’

He turned the car round and started to depart when he braked hard.

‘What are you doing?’ she asked, startled.

He reversed the car quickly until he could see the little van and then he opened his door and started to run to it. After a few faltering steps he had to stop and pull up his trousers, do up his zip, then carry on.

He ripped open the van door and saw her slumped over the wheel. The carbon monoxide stung his nose and eyes but he dragged her out and away from the van.

‘Shar,’ he screamed, ‘ring 999 for an ambulance and tell them to be real quick. Like real fucking quick! And put some clothes on....’

Laying her on her back Darren started mouth to mouth resuscitation which made him feel dizzy and ill but he continued until the ambulance came and they took over with oxygen. They also gave Darren some to clear his head. When the ambulance left they gave a short statement to a policeman who seemed more interested in Shar’s cleavage than the incident and then when he left Shar looked at him.

‘How do you feel?’

‘Ok.’

‘How do you *really* feel?’ she asked again.

‘Do you mean in your roundabout way am I still capable of giving you a good fucking?’

‘Something like that.’

‘I’ve no idea, what does carbon monoxide poisoning do to your sex drive?’

‘I’ll ask,’ and knelt down in front of him, undid his zip and took it out.

‘Oooh.....so small. How are you, little dick? Can we make you into a Richard?’ and she gave it a loving kiss and watched it slowly turn into a Richard.

‘There, we know what to do now when little dick is tired. You can go outside and sniff the exhaust....’

He grinned and kissed her.

‘I quite like that,’ she said.

‘Like what?’

‘Richard. It’s good, don’t you think? From now on there are two men in my life not just one; Darren and Richard. When you’re tired Richard can fuck me and when he’s tired you can fuck me and on a good day you can both fuck me.’

He shook his head in mock disbelief. ‘And when you’re tired?’

She looked into his eyes. ‘I’m never too tired for you.’

He kissed her again, took her hand and led her into the cool trees. As they sat down in a tiny clearing she suddenly said, ‘You saved her life.’

‘I don’t know; she may have been ok.’

‘How could she have ended up ok with a hosepipe full of gas killing her?’

‘I don’t know, maybe someone else would have found her.’

‘And done mouth to mouth?’

‘Shar, I don’t know..... I’m not sure what you’re getting at?’

She looked at him.

‘What? What.....?’

She continued to stare at him.

‘For Christ’s sake, Shar, what?’

She looked at him for a few minutes longer. ‘Make love to me. Make love to me softly and gently....’

Darren still didn’t quite know what was going on but he would have made love to her from the other side of the river if

she had asked. He thought for a moment. The other side of the river? How the fuck would that work?

When they had finished and arranged their clothes she looked at him again.

‘Shar, this is getting a bit creepy.’

‘Shhhh’ and continued looking into his eyes.

She said nothing for almost five minutes and then she nodded to herself as though reaching a conclusion. ‘Darren, this is back to front but will you marry me?’

‘That’s a daft question.’

‘Why?’

‘Because you already know I will.....’

‘Good, because we’re getting married in three weeks.’

‘We are?’

‘Yes.’

‘Three weeks?’

‘Yes, there are certain Notices and things we have to do which I will sort out and that’s it.’

‘Just like that? Aren’t there other considerations? Best man, bridesmaids, parents, reception, things like that we have to consider?’

‘No..... don’t confuse marriage with the show that can go with it.....’

‘Ok.’

Chapter 39

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After I'm patched up in England they decide they don't really want me any more so they give me an honourable discharge on medical grounds. I thought it sounded revolting. An honourable discharge on medical grounds..... It sounds like the Queen's given you gonorrhoea!

Anyway I go home to a home I haven't got and go back and live with my mom but that doesn't work out. She can't cope with me spending all my time in my bedroom and insisting all the lights in the house stay on and the screams and crying in the night. And when we go out I point at them and scream *Taliban* and dive for cover.

She struggles with that.

So they gave me sheltered accommodation, a little bedsit, and my mom took me to the doctor who is arranging for me to see someone else and they will get in touch.

Heard nothing yet.....

I've thought of a good way of surviving on not much money. Read this article on the net and it says casinos only make about 2% on slot machines. That's not much. If they make 2% it means that I win 98% of the time. So if I put in a tenner I get back £9:80.

I know what you're thinking; this man's thick. He's going to go into a casino or somewhere with slot machines and lose 2% all the time.

Well you're wrong.

Because in a casino they give out free food. Free coffee, free sandwiches, nice loos, etc. So for £0:20 I can live and eat well.

Now who's thick?

Not me.

It must be you for not thinking of it.....?

And, you see, the less I pay for ordinary food the more I have for chocolate.

Good, eh.....?

Chapter 40

Colin looks for....

There were advantages to being a detective, thought Colin. Not many, true, but if you wanted to find someone, better if you were a detective. This is Detective....you would say, I wonder if you could help me? And a copper somewhere else, who had also used the same line at some time, would help.

And he had found her. Norma God knows who...he had found her. And he had rung her and she had agreed to a visit. Why she had agreed he had no idea but she had and so he had taken a flight to Miami at the start of his two weeks' holiday.

And now he was sitting opposite her. She looked paler than her tanned wedding photographs and a touch heavier? Maybe not. Maybe it was the light.

‘You’re looking well.’

She smiled. ‘It’s been a long time, how did you know where I was?’

‘I’m a copper.’

She smiled again. ‘Why are you here?’

It was a reasonable question but he didn’t really have a reasonable answer. He shook his head slowly.

‘Curiosity?’

‘I suppose so.’

‘What happened to Roy?’ he blurted out.

‘You know what happened to Roy.’

‘What *really* happened to Roy?’

‘You know what *really* happened to Roy,’ she responded.

She looked at him. He seemed a nice man.

‘Do you like my eyes?’

‘Pardon?’

‘My eyes, do you think I have nice eyes?’

He studied her eyes. I suppose they are, he thought. Who knows what nice eyes are? It’s all subjective.

‘Yes, you have nice eyes.’

She nodded in agreement.....then closed them.....

She went back, for some reason, to another time, another place. She remembered little Andy. She called him little Andy but she was smaller than him; she was tiny. He was nine and she was eight and they had adventured over the old pit mounds and found a large hole in the ground. Not so much large as deep from where the heavy rains of the previous week had exposed an old mine shaft. She had walked slowly to the edge and peered down. It was very deep and the bottom was out of sight as the light didn’t get down that far. Andy joined her.

‘It’s dark,’ he said.

‘Maybe there’s ghosts,’ she offered.

‘Do ghosts live down holes?’ He turned round. ‘Let’s throw a stone down and see what happens.’

He moved away a few yards, picked up some heavy stones, gave one to her and moved back to the pit shaft mouth. He lobbed one in to the centre and watched as it arced and then carried straight on down. Out of sight they heard a small *click*. Little Norma did the same thing and they waited for the click which dutifully happened.

‘Mine was a bigger sound than yours,’ said Andy.

‘No, it wasn’t.’

‘It was. Let’s do it again and I bet mine’s louder than yours.’

He moved to the edge and as the stone left his hand she pushed his back and watched as he plummeted to his death....

She heard the small click first and then a dull thump. She sat down by the edge and looked over. That was nice.....

After a few minutes she got up and went over to a small blackberry bush and picked some, eating them as she did. When she had finished she went back and sat by the edge for a few more minutes, looked down and then looked at the blue sky. She was glad it wasn't raining any more. She didn't like rain, she liked to be out and free. What a nice day.....

An hour later she ran all the way home, and crying out of breath she told of the tragic accident.....

When she was fourteen she and some friends were walking along a motorway crossover when one of the boys decided to show off by climbing on the wall and sitting there. A bit precarious what with the seventy mile an hour traffic hurtling along below but relatively safe. Not to be outdone one of his mates went to the wall on the other side of the small road and climbed on it but stood up.

'What about this then?' he shouted and as they all looked Norma quietly gave the first boy a shove and he fell, screaming, to the motorway thirty feet below where he was hit by several lorries....

A nice day.....

The police questioned them all but it was obviously one of those stupid things that kids do that go wrong.

One way or another Norma had been responsible for the deaths of ten males. Never females. She wouldn't dream of hurting a female. In fact she never even considered it.

And Roy Jenkins had been number eight.

The last one had been in Yellowstone National Park with Henry and they were at the edge of one of the hot, pumping springs called Churning Cauldron which had a temperature of about 164 degrees Fahrenheit. As it was coming to the end of the

visitor day there were few people there so Norma casually moved behind him and pushed him in. She watched as he submerged under the water, then surfaced a bright pink as the scalding water took his skin off, then saw his mouth open to scream but it was too late; the shock had ripped through his heart and he, unfortunately, died quickly and slid back under.

‘Help. Help, help.....’ screamed Norma ‘Help me....’

Men were so silly. You could make men do anything. Flash your eyes, open your blouse, pant, moan; they loved anything; anything. They saw no farther than.....well they just didn’t see.

Moore looked at her, waiting for her to open her eyes, and wondered what he was doing there. He knew now she had killed Roy, although he had known it anyhow, so now why was he here? He had no idea. He just knew that any interest he’d had in this woman had gone. Just like that. Gone. So when she opened her eyes he said, ‘I’m going now, Norma. It was a mistake me visiting you.’

She looked hurt. ‘You’ve only just arrived.’

He nodded.

‘You said you liked my eyes.’

‘Take care, Norma,’ and he got up and left.

She watched him go then sat back and crossed her legs.

Men!

Chapter 41

H in the cafe

H had been in a meeting at his accountant's half the afternoon sorting out his tax with Numbers Norm and he was knackered. All those figures and rules and regulations, so he found a little cafe where he could do nothing for a few moments and have a nice large sugary latte.

He leaned back and stretched and then slowly sipped away. His tranquillity was broken by his mobile going off. He looked at the number but it was withheld and he was tempted to ignore it but he knew many firms' phone systems withheld the number as a matter of course.

'Yes?'

'Is that Mister James James?'

'Yes.'

'Mister James, I am sorry to bother you. I am ringing you from the Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother Hospital in Margate; could you tell me whether you know a lady called....Lillian Preece?'

'I do,' said H hesitantly.

'Mister James, Mrs Preece is quite poorly and I haven't been able to locate anyone else who is near to her but I found a letter from you in her handbag.'

'What's wrong with her?' asked an alarmed Jimmy.

'I am reluctant to put it so bluntly, Mister James, but she appears to have tried to commit suicide.'

A hammer crashed in H's chest. 'What do you want me to do?'

‘If it is possible it would help if you were here. She will survive but she isn’t out of the woods yet and we don’t know what damage has been done until she regains consciousness. However in these circumstances we have found that it is much better if they wake with someone they know...’

‘I’ll come straight down.’

‘It’s ok, Mister James. She is currently sedated so we can administer to her but if you could be here at 9ish tomorrow morning?’

‘I’ll be there.’

‘Thank you, Mister James, it is very much appreciated.’

H thought for a minute then got up and bought another latte. He sat back down and became lost in thought. Why the hell would Lillian commit suicide? It had to be money. What else? Were the Council routing a road through her property or something? What? Lost in his own thoughts, staring into the distance it was a moment or two before he realised he was being talked to.

‘What are you fucking looking at?’ said the man standing by him.

‘Eh?’

‘I said what the fuck are you looking at?’

H looked up at him. ‘I’m sorry, mate, you talking to me?’

‘Don’t get funny with me or you’ll fuckin regret it. Why are you starin at my woman?’

‘I wasn’t, mate, really. Just looking ahead lost in thought.’

‘That’s not what she says.’ He nodded towards a woman sitting at another table in H’s eye line. God, thought H, what an ugly cow.

‘She may have misunderstood my vacant expression for one of interest’ suggested H with just a hint of irony which was lost on the man beside him.

‘She says you winked at her.’

‘I think I must have had something in my eye.’

‘You have to apologise.’

‘You want me to apologise for something I haven’t done?’

‘She says you have to.’

‘Look, mate, it’s just a mistake. Why don’t we just forget it and I’ll buy you both a coffee and be on my way?’

The man looked at his woman who shook her head. ‘She wants an apology,’ he insisted.

H shrugged. What could he do? He got up and went over to her table where she sat preening.

‘I am very sorry.....that nature has been so cruel to you and this poor bloke is paying the price.’ He then turned to her man and said, ‘You have a choice. You can continue this outside if you wish and I promise I will destroy you or you can stop being told what to do by her and life carries on.’

‘Take him outside, Ron,’ interjected nature’s reject, ‘and fucking show him you’re not to be messed with.’

H looked at the man. ‘Your choice?’

The man looked at her and she nodded outside. ‘Outside,’ said the man after a moment’s hesitation.

‘Wrong choice,’ said H quietly.

H went out of the door first and then as the man came out H turned and smashed him in the mouth. As he went down he did the same thing again. Blood splattered everywhere. H sighed, shook his head, wondered why men did stupid things for women, and turned towards home... After a few steps he remembered he hadn’t paid and went back inside to the counter. A hush descended in the cafe and eyes watched him.

‘Sorry,’ said H, ‘I was distracted and forgot to pay.’

‘You must have been distracted because you’ve already paid for the coffees you’ve had,’ said the girl.

‘I have?’

She nodded. The owner came over, opened the till, took out the equivalent of two cups of coffee in change, gave it to H and said, ‘It’s on the house.’

‘Why’s that? I’ve just upset two of your customers who may not come back.’

‘Will you?’ asked the owner.

‘Sure.’

‘And will you sort out another slapper and her dumb boyfriend?’

‘Hopefully I won’t have to. I just wanted a cup of coffee, not a prelude to war.’

‘Shame,’ said the owner, ‘best entertainment we’ve had in years,’ he thought for a moment. ‘I’ll tell you what..... If I could ring you whenever we get a pair in like that and you come and give us some fun the refreshments are on me. You could bring *your* missus and we could have a real match up.’

H grinned. For a moment H thought of Benshima wading in there with her Gucci handbag and the vicious pointed heels of her Manolo Blahnik shoes.

‘Wonderful offer, one I’m reluctant to refuse, but I tend to be a bit busy to just swing over here at a moment’s notice to sort out your customers.’

‘Damn,’ said the owner with a huge grin on his face, ‘we could have roped off a special area, sold tickets.....’

They shook hands and H went outside to find the man still sitting on the floor with his face in his hands and the woman standing over him still giving him a hard time.

‘Was that the best you could do?’ she demanded of him. ‘He insults me and you let him knock you over like a pansy. Is that how you show your love for me? Is it? Is it? If I’d been Tom Cruise’s woman he wouldn’t have stood for it.....’

She felt H's presence behind her and turned. 'Look what you've done, you bastard. He didn't deserve that; all he wanted to do was talk to you.....'

H just looked at her and said nothing.

She looked him up and down and her eyes paused at his crotch. 'Are you married.....?'

H sighed and walked away. Without a moment's pause she turned back to her hapless mate.

'.....He gives you a bit of a smack in the face and you go down? Is that it? A tiny tap and it's all over? He insults me, me, not just any woman but me, and you can't even stand up to him, you fucking wimp? Look at me, you dick, it's obvious men are going to look and leer at me, they want what you're getting..... There isn't a man out there that wouldn't want a piece of this tail. What do I have to do, get another man? When I say man I'm not so sure.....'

Her ranting slowly died away as his distance from them got farther...

Chapter 42

Roger reviews the shops

Roger Davids met H at his office at the London casino after he had done a complete review of all the betting shops and their operations. He was joined by Kate Day and John Gorman, the other member that made up his team and had come from his previous employers.

It had taken him nearly 3 months to do a complete comparative analysis of all 78 betting shops. He would have liked to have been able to present something to H much sooner but he knew if he did it would have been a shortcut, devoid of everything he needed to appraise the situation completely and honestly.

He and his team had gone through the shops by geographical sector first, grouping them per area so they were at least like for like with the clientele. He had visited every one and had scored them. This he did by having a spread sheet on his laptop and he assigned every category a value. Size of shop, location, parking, shop front area, internal layout, colour, state of the furniture, attitude of the staff and so on and so on until he had a complete analysis of every shop. Then he went back to the office and put them all into one big spreadsheet so that he could interrogate it and find out where they not only stood in relation to each other but also in relation to their relative profitability.

Then everything became clear.

Profitability per area, per square foot, per employee, per customer, per hour, per day, per FOBT, per *everything*.....

And when they had it all worked out they decided what to do? What was the strategy to maximise profits? What was the way forward? And when they worked that out they worked out what it would mean? And what it would cost? And what extra profit it would generate?

To refurb a shop was between fifty and seventy five grand. To shut down and move to bigger premises was nearer a hundred and seventy five and then there was the messing about with 'change of use' etc with the local Council.

Roger had worked out that, on average, he should be able to get another thirty five grand out of each shop when the plan was completed; that was the best part of an extra two and a half mil. It had cost H about two hundred thousand for him and his team so that was a net result of over two mil. *If he did what he thought he could.* Of the shops 20% really needed a move to larger premises, 40% needed a refurb and the rest a good lick of paint and maybe a few new chairs so the costs of getting the shops into the right state for today's market was about £5,000,000 which would cost about three fifty grand a year to finance; but it would go on the balance sheet anyhow and be amortised over five or seven years dependent on what H wanted. A strong balance sheet or quick write downs? More than likely the latter as he didn't have shareholders to impress.

Roger presented all his figures, with input from the other members of his team, to H and Scotty. As he presented he occasionally yawned and apologised. After about the sixth time H said, 'What's the matter with you, Rog? Bored?'

'I'm really sorry, H, but I'm knackered.'

'Why?' asked H.

'Where we live, about two doors down, is a psycho who owns two bloody enormous, hundred and thirty pound Bull Mastiffs and they bark. Jesus, they bark; and the owner does nothing,

absolutely nothing about it. You can't go and talk to him because he will quite happily clock you one and it's that bad the neighbours next to me have put their house up for sale. And it's such a shame because we overlook fields and it's a great place but I think we're going to have no option either.'

'That's not good, can't the local Council help?'

Roger gave him a derisory look.

'Ok, daft question,' agreed H.

'And he's mental,' continued Rog as though relieved to be talking about this scourge on his life, 'he walks around in all weathers in a T shirt, arms and body covered with tattoos and holding these two beasts as though he was on a friggin chariot.'

H thought for a moment. 'In our casino in Birmingham we have a guest suite where I stay overnight occasionally or very occasionally a punter. Why don't you move in for a few days and get some rest?'

Roger's eyes lit up. 'Could we, H? That would be wonderful. Just to get a good night's sleep....'

The meeting lasted another hour and Roger left a written proposal for H and Scotty to browse. Roger hoped they accepted his strategy or he was out of a job.....

When they had all gone H picked up the phone and dialled Andy Pandy.

After a chat H explained his problem and left it to Andy to sort out.....

Chapter 43

Cocaine 4

Sener rang back Jose several days after their initial conversation and said he wanted to meet the new Number One.

‘Meet him?’

‘Yes.’

‘Really?’

‘Yes.’

Jose paused for a moment. This was quite unusual in that most of the operations were very territorial and their leaders could be volatile and were quite capable of going to war so they tended to keep away from each other and use go-betweens; perhaps Jose, but that was also rare. It wasn’t his problem. ‘You’re sure?’

‘Yes.’

‘Where would you like to meet?’

‘Here,’ said Sener.

Jose smiled. That was quite a good joke. ‘*Here*’ meant come to your death, you poor Italian *campesino*.

‘Where do you really want to meet?’

‘Here.’

‘You know that will never happen.’

‘I think it will.’

‘Why?’

‘His brother has very kindly agreed to join us until he does.’

‘What?’ asked a stunned Jose. ‘Do you know where this will lead?’

‘Yes. To a meeting.’

‘Sener,’ said Jose who admired the man’s audacity if not necessarily his strategic vision, ‘this is not a good move. He will not bargain with a gun to his head.’

‘Does a man bargain *without* a gun to his head?’

Jose smiled. Sener 1 – One 0. Bit of a mouthful..... ‘Sener, I have to leave this to you. I am not going to get involved other than tell One that he has to deal direct with you or your emissary. You understand that?’

‘Of course.’

Jose rang One and told him of the conversation and One went wild. He screamed and profaned down the phone and Jose let him get on with it. When he had subsided a little Jose gave him a contact number and left him to it. It was his problem. He would now learn, as all usurpers to power do, that being One was not as easy as it looked. Just because you watch Number One basking in luxury, having an easy life, you tend to forget the qualities that got him there.

The main one was utter ruthlessness.

And Sener, for all his culture and sophistication, was the ultimate in ruthlessness.... A smiling, intelligent, gentle and charismatic assassin!

Chapter 44

Lillian 8

He had been there an hour before the sedation wore off and she woke. They had monitored the carbon monoxide in her blood and noted that the oxygen had dissipated it. If she woke and started talking naturally, as naturally as one could after an aborted suicide, then she would be fine. If she struggled she may have brain damage.....

She looked around her, at the nurse in attendance and then at Jimmy. 'I take it that didn't work then? Once a failure...'

The nurse smiled. It seemed she would be fine. The nurse performed one or two little tests to make quite sure and left Lillian and H to it.

'Hello, Lillian.'

'Hello, Jimmy. What brings you here?'

'That's what I'm waiting to find out....'

Although she started to get upset she told him what had happened.

He smiled. 'I thought it was something bad..... So all that's happened is that you fell in love, after a long sabbatical from the male species, with a man who's run off with all your money and left you penniless and homeless.'

'Put that way, I can see everything's fine.'

He held her hand. 'Lillian, I can't undo anything that's happened but I can help you sort out your immediate problems. When are you supposed to complete on your new home?'

'Not sure, I think about four or five days.'

'Ok, I will lend you the money to.....'

‘No, thank you,’ she interrupted. ‘I don’t have any way of paying you back. I only have a tiny income.’

‘Don’t worry about that. What I’ll do is lend you the money and you can guarantee it against the house.’

‘I can’t afford any rent.’

‘I haven’t asked you for any rent and anyhow when the coppers find your man you may get your money back anyway which means you will only owe me fifty grand and the same conditions will apply.’

She looked at him. ‘It’s such a lot of money.....an enormous amount of money.’

Jimmy shrugged.

‘Why are you doing this? Why are you helping me?’

‘You helped me.’

‘I just cuddled your face and comforted you for a moment when you needed it, but you’re lending me three hundred and twenty five thousand pounds.’

‘And which,’ he said, ‘do you think is the more important?’

She started to cry and H worked desperately hard not to join in....

Lillian stayed in one more day. H found out off the staff what had happened and they told her the story as told by the paramedics. H and Benshima collected her and she stayed with them for the time it took for Lillian’s new house to become available.

Chapter 45

The Trial 2

The Barrister was working well and it was going well. Johnny Harris was an excellent witness; humble, contrite, apologetic and affable. His barrister led him along the narrow path between outright lying and lying and between them their story had a resonance that was all too familiar to anyone who had ever had one extra drink and inadvertently drove home with friends; and somehow managed to ignore the fact that he was found to be four times over the legal limit which the defence team had questioned anyhow.

Their expert explained that whilst, *technically*, it could be assumed to be the case, it could also be the case that an *inexperienced new nurse may have misunderstood* what she had to do and the sample *may* have either got *mixed up* with someone else or *may* have been *taken wrongly* and therefore the sample was in danger of being *contaminated* or prejudiced in some way.

The barrister noted that at no point did he say it was wrong, which it wasn't, merely that it could have been and therefore the seed of doubt would be sown in the minds of the jury. The barrister was well aware that in most cases there was rarely a massive eureka moment when the truth came out and all was revealed; it was more the drip, drip, drip of propaganda that won the war for one side or the other. He knew that justice had little to do with anything in a trial and it was the guile and cunning of one legal team against another.

When it came to the end of all the submissions and evidence Johnny's legal team felt that it had gone quite well taking all things into consideration and they were quietly confident. If they

were lucky it was community service and a fine and if not they may be looking at six months max. The Judge's summing up was not displeasing and could be taken by either the Defence or Prosecution as in their favour, such was his even handedness.

When the jury were sent away to deliberate Johnny's barrister gave him a guarded thumbs up but he was quietly confident. There had certainly been *aggravating factors* which were quite clearly outlined in the Sentencing Guidelines as laid down by the Sentencing Guidelines Council and one of these was obviously;

'The consumption of drugs (including legal medication known to cause drowsiness) or of alcohol, ranging from a couple of drinks to a 'motorised pub crawl'.

Another one which was a minor irritant;

Driving while the driver's attention is avoidably distracted, for example by reading or by use of a mobile phone (especially if hand-held).

And last but not least:

Driving when knowingly deprived of adequate sleep or rest.

There was a bit of everything in there and it wasn't good but they had glossed over all that and the prosecution had not really managed to portray him as a monster. Let's face it he was a famous rugby international, loved by all, always good for a quote and who had studiously courted the media in all its forms. How could you dislike him? And the great and the good had come out and given him glowing references by the handful.

And so it looked like a healthy fine and community service? Perhaps three months and those already served waiting for the trial so let him go? Three months clink, two years maybe three driving ban, and a good fine?

His legal team, with the Prosecution, started a sweep on what they thought he would get.....?

They thought it would take the rest of the afternoon but after nearly four hours the Judge arranged for the Jury to be put up in a hotel for the evening and they would reconvene the next day.

The opposing Barristers weren't quite sure what that meant so, as usual, both teams took comfort from the long deliberations.....

Chapter 46

Big Eddie (The tattooed one)

Big Eddie Jones was lying on a sun lounger in Ibiza by the hotel pool. He and his missus were on a two week holiday which they had won in his local pub lottery and he needed. It was hard work being a small time pusher, fence and general petty crook. Of course it was augmented by the benefits he picked up as he was out of work and had to keep the missus and four kids. He didn't actually have any kids but nobody ever checked and they had been thinking it was time they had another....

They lived in a nice £235,000 house with a £150,000 mortgage and, unfortunately, moaning pricks for neighbours. Nine months earlier, on their last trip to Spain, he had used their savings of £45,000 plus a £100,000 mortgage to buy a nearly built villa just down the road from where they were now. He rented it out when he could to friends and it was going to be their possible retirement home in due course but certainly an appreciating asset and provider to the mortgage and their income. The income had dried up a bit recently and he had heard reports on the tele that the housing in Spain was entering some sort of crisis but he thought that was the usual exaggerated bollocks they gave out. His villa, so he was told by his mates at the pub, was in a sought after area and would surely have gone up rather than down. The better areas, they had said, were recession proof.

In a day or two, after a rest and a good few beers he and the missus would get a cab to the villa and ask the developer if there were any signs of reducing prices.....?

He stretched out on the sun lounger and looked out over the ocean. From where they lay he had the perfect position to see the

sea, the pool, the hotel and access to the outdoor bar. When they had come down this morning he had checked to see if anyone else had booked this spot and found they had so he took their towels and effects off the loungers and threw them into some nearby bushes. Big Eddie wasn't the kind of man that you challenged about minor things like that.

His missus doggy paddled over to the other side of the large pool and he shouted at the top of his voice, 'How's the water, darlin?'

'Fuckin cold,' she shouted back, 'you hadn't better come in or you'll have no balls left for me to lick.'

Eyes rose in disapproval but nobody was going to reprimand Big Eddie. Perhaps a quiet word with the Manager tonight after dinner? But what if the Manager told Big Eddie who had complained? Perhaps best to wait. Perhaps best to let it sort itself out..... Perhaps they were going home soon? Perhaps next year they would use another hotel?

'Show us your tits, babe,' he hollered and she took her bikini top off and held them aloft in her hands.

'What do you think of them for tits?' he asked the couple on the loungers nearest to him.

'Pardon?' asked the man, looking appalled and feigning ignorance of watching any other bosoms other than those being discreetly displayed by his jealous, territorial, bitchy and generally frigid wife.

'Those, you daft bastard,' said Big Eddie, pointing, 'what a pair, eh? Nipples like fuckin organ stops....'

It was quite peculiar that on holiday Big Eddie would invite you to look at his wife's tits or any other part she decided to show off but if you so much as looked at her in a pub you were usually unconscious for quite a while after; and perhaps with a missing ear. Biting one off was his speciality.

He lost interest in the pillock next to him. ‘Come on out, babe, I’m getting a lob on.’

Several minutes later she arrived by the loungers and took his hand and went indoors. She still had her top off and he had a large bulge under his trunks. The frigid woman voiced her disgust at what had taken place but noted fleetingly that he had an enormous cock.

The elderly couple waiting on their landing to go into the lift were startled when it opened to see Babe kneeling on the floor with six of his eight hard inches in her mouth.

‘Fuck off!’ and they scuttled away, tutting as they went.

They went to the room with Babe still clinging on to his dick and then he gave her a good fucking. When they had finished she had a large Gin and Gin and soon dropped fast asleep.

Whilst still playing with one of her tits Big Eddie rang his brother to see how Caesar and Napoleon were doing at home. The Bull Mastiffs were his pride and joy and he felt pleasure coursing through him as he remembered how they fucked off the neighbours. Knowing that they were being fed by ‘little bro’ on a daily basis and that they would create holy shit every night made him happy so he decided to give his wife another one. He rolled her over but couldn’t wake her so he put his face between her legs and stuck his tongue up her but the chlorine from the pool was fucking God awful. He kneeled by her and masturbated over her tits.....and squeezed the last few drops over her face.

The next day they took a cab to their villa and went to the sales people in the show house who weren’t there. Most of the houses were unsold and with For Sale signs and a few others that had been sold were already up for resale. They knocked on the door of an occupied For Sale house and when the owner appeared Babe asked him how much he was selling for?

‘A hundred and twenty. You want to buy?’

‘Nah, we’ve got one over there,’ Eddie pointed with his head, ‘and we just wondered whether it had gone down and it looks like we lost twenty fuckin grand.’

‘How much did you buy it for?’

‘One forty five,’ said Babe.

‘That’s not so bad then, is it?’

The man had a sudden thought. ‘Was that pounds?’

‘Yeah.’

‘Well, this is up for sale at one twenty Euros.’

‘What’s that mean?’ asked Babe whose knowledge of the world’s monetary structure was limited.

‘Well,’ said the man, perking up as he quite liked the fact that some other cretin had also lost a bomb and he wasn’t alone, ‘when we bought our villa it was about the same time the Euro was worth about seventy pence in the pound and these houses were going for just over 200,000 Euros. Now they’re selling for 120,000 Euros and so at the current exchange rate you’ve lost roughly sixty five grand...’

‘What’s he mean Eddie?’ asked Babe.

‘I think he means we’re fucked!’

‘Unfortunately,’ said the man, ‘you can’t sell them for any money.’

‘Why?’ asked Babe.

‘Because the whole housing market has crashed out here and there are thousands and thousands of houses for sale. It’s a complete balls up!’

‘What’s he mean Eddie?’

‘I thought he meant we were fucked, but now I’m sure of it.’ He paused, deep in thought. ‘Babe, you know that kid we talked about having.....? Well, I think you may have to have twins....or triplets.’

Chapter 47

The new house

H had tied up all the legal loose ends and all he had to do was pay. He had got it down to £4,147,390 which seemed a daft figure but that was what it ended up at after all the haggling over the odds and sods was over.

Plus, of course, the 4% Stamp Duty which added about another £160,000. But that was ok. It was good, thought H, that the Government, which was doing such a wonderful job about the NHS, Education and Crime was going to get even more money to piss down the drain! Fucking arseholes!

After handing over the cash, well actually a Bankers Draft, he set about getting the security on their home sorted out. JJ Security had already done a survey of the property with the permission of the previous owner and had everything ready to be installed. They had assured H that it could all be done in one week so H had allowed two and Benshima had started the process of arranging the move on the fourteenth day.

He had arranged for extensive security to make sure his wife was safe. Although the whole of the property had a fence around, it was essentially to keep in the sheep that grazed there. Electronic gates at the entrance of the drive would do little to deter a determined intruder.

So they were installing a Red Care GSM Monitored system which would alert them and the police should anyone enter. There was also audio verification, triggered by the householder which automatically allowed the monitoring company and the police to see and listen in. H had also earmarked a room to be converted to

a safe room. In that room, which was impenetrable, housed the facilities to make sure you survived. Food, water, warmth, bandages and medicines, two mobile phones always on charge, panic button to another occupier, the monitoring company and the police. A monitoring system that had a feed from all the cameras and a voice system that allowed the user to speak through the speakers in the house and several that were housed near the roof.

Round the outside of the house, at points so that there were no blind spots whatsoever, were CCTV cameras. There were also several positioned on the large trees near the house that gave a full view of the house. One hundred yards from the house was an infra red fence. These were attached to trees or with their own mounts and gave an uninterrupted shield all round the property. Wireless cameras were instantly triggered if a beam was cut and floodlights bathed the area. The JJ Security companies lost the costs of the install within their own workbook and it saved H about £80,000. It had all been completed on the eighth day and when H arrived at their apartment from his new home he was much pleased.

Benshima handed him a letter. They'd had one off the nutter at the beginning of the week with the usual adoring platitudes and he read the follow up.

My wife

Why are you leaving me? Cow!

Why are you going to the countryside? Bitch!

Do you think moving to Hampshire will stop me? Whore!

Your husband

H tried to keep the alarm off his face and anger from his voice. 'He's more than likely got it off one of the neighbours or

something. It'll be ok. And at the end of the day, if necessary, I'll leave half JJ Security there to look after you.'

She moved to him and he cradled her and heard her softly sobbing... She was scared. Soon to have their baby and she was scared... He would kill whoever was doing this. If he found them they were dead. And it wouldn't be Andy Pandy that did it.....

Chapter 48

Lillian 9

H and Benny sorted out Lillian's house, got her settled and H gave some thought to laddy. Laddy didn't exist but laddy was an accomplished scammer and so laddy did exist. Not only did he exist he existed fairly close somewhere, more than likely within a hundred miles' radius, perhaps less, and so laddy could be found.

Lillian didn't have a photo of laddy as he was 'shy' and didn't like his photo taken but the resourceful Lillian had taken several of him on her mobile phone when he wasn't aware, and so they had his face quite clearly and in one his whole body. Unfortunately without clothes...

In the past H would have given it to his high ranking friend at the Met who would have taken a peek in the database but that was too difficult now as it needed authorisation, which he had, but also a proper record was kept of all searches, and H and his friend didn't need that. There was one other way to try first so he rang Andy. In Andy's line of business people quite often jumped out of the cab without paying and so many cabs now had a small camera which automatically took the fare's picture at the start of their journey, triggered by the meter. It had to be the start of the journey as at that point they still had their clothes on....

And when people did a runner if no one back at base knew who they were an image was sent to other taxi companies to see if *they* did? And usually they did. And then someone would knock on their door and politely ask for payment. Sometimes not politely.

So Andy sent it out locally but to no avail. He then widened the circle and did it again. Nothing. One more try, slightly wider, came back with a result! He had used their taxi service several times and, praise the lord, they had picked him up from his home. Hello laddy....

H thanked Andy and asked him to give the name and address to Sammy the Search for all the background he could get.

It came back six weeks later and H read it intently.....

Chapter 49

13947312 – 3

Chloe looked up from her reception desk and saw the man peering in the large windows from the street. He had his hands to his eyes, his face pressed against the windows and looked intently through the smoked glass windows for several minutes. Moving to the door he found it wouldn't open and he didn't know what to do. Chloe spoke into the intercom. 'I'll open the door for you, just push it now.'

She watched as he visibly jumped and moved quickly from the door and back into the street. She picked up the phone and asked one of the security staff to join her. If she was going to let him in she would be a lot more comfortable if they were with her. On second thoughts it would be even better if they did it. The man joined her, she explained the situation, and he went out and talked to the man who, quite apprehensively, followed him in.

Chloe smiled her smile. You smiled as they came in and you smiled as they went out...

She looked at the man before her. He couldn't have been more than mid twenties but he looked fifty and she had no idea why? His face was handsome but....tired; his eyes were dull and seemed devoid of life. There was no curiosity, no fun, no....life.

'Can I help you, sir?'

He nodded.

She waited. 'What can I help you with, sir? Do you want to join our casino?'

'I want to play the fruit machines, please,' he said quietly.

'You have to be a member.....would you like to join?'

'A member?'

‘Yes. It’s free to join but as we’re a licensed casino we can only admit members.’

‘It’s free?’

‘Yes.’

He nodded. ‘Yes, please.’

She pulled out some forms from a drawer. ‘If you could just fill in these for me, please, sir?’

She gave him a pen, he took the forms to a small adjoining table and filled them in. When he handed them back she saw it was all in order except one small detail. Where it said ‘name’ he had written 13947312.

‘Excuse me, sir,’ she said, ‘you have to write your proper name.’

‘Pardon...?’

She pointed to the Form. ‘Your proper name, sir. Is that your credit card number or something?’

He looked confused.

She pointed again. ‘You have to write your proper name in that box, sir. What is your name, sir, and I’ll do it for you if you want?’

‘It was my Army name.’

‘I can’t use that, sir. What is *your* name?’

‘Clive,’ he said slowly.

‘And what’s your last name, sir?’

‘Stone,’ he said even more quietly.

‘Thank you, Mister Stone. Now I’ll just take your picture if you’ll look that way.’

Uncomprehending he did as he was told and a light flashed. He jumped again and backed against a wall, his eyes darting from side to side.

‘Are you all right, Mr Stone?’ she asked and saw the security man move closer to her.

His eyes slowed their darting movements and went back to her. 'Yes.....I'm all right.'

She gave him his membership card and pointed to the door that would lead to the casino. He went to the door, walked down the corridor and came to the top of the stairs from where he could see most of the casino floor. The security man put down the phone and watched as he came down the stairs. Chloe was bothered and that meant he was bothered.

13947312 went to a bank of machines and sat by one. He pulled out a bag of ten £1 coins and over the next half hour he fed five of them in. After that he went and got a mug of coffee and several sandwiches. Sitting back down again he put in the other five £1 coins over the next half an hour. When they had gone he sat and stared at the machine; and the security man stared, from a distance, at him. 13947312 gesticulated as though arguing with himself, then got up and went back upstairs. He went to the desk where Chloe still sat.

'Two percent,' he said.

She looked at him quizzically.

'A hundred per cent,' he said with a tortured look on his face. 'A hundred percent. How is that fair?'

And he turned and left.

Chapter 50

Big Eddie 2

The two men had on works overalls with H D Redman on the back. They sat in the van having a fag and occasionally got out and wandered up the road and round the corner and down another road to a caf for a mug of tea and bacon, sausage, eggs, mushrooms, beans and hash browns. It was hard work waiting around.

They would be gone later, their work completed. They had surveyed the job, reported back to base, got the ok to go ahead and now they were just waiting..... And while they waited they went to the caf.

They had everything they needed in the van.

The one in the driver's seat looked outside and said, 'What do you think? Fifteen more minutes?'

His mate peered through the screen up at the impending dark and said, 'Yeah.'

Fifteen minutes later the mate took two small parcels out of the back of the van and wandered down the road. As he passed a house, dogs started barking and he threw them something and carried on walking down the road, round the block and back to the van. The driver looked at his watch. 'Fifteen minutes? A bit longer?'

'A touch. They're big dogs,' said his mate.

'Let's hope they eat it.'

'I'll be pissed off if they don't, it's best steak, for fuck's sake. If they don't eat it I'm taking it back and cooking it for supper.'

'I don't think so,' said the driver. 'There's enough fuckin cyanide in the middle of that lot to get rid of half the rats in

Britain.’

The mate grinned. At twenty minutes they moved the van into another street and then, in the dark, they left the van and went to the house. At the side, behind the padlocked gate they saw two huge Bull Mastiffs. One was obviously dead the other pretty close.

‘Good one,’ said the mate.

He cut the padlock with bolt croppers; they went round the side of the house to the side door and then on to the back of the house and the kitchen. They knew it would be alarmed but that didn’t bother them as they weren’t going in. The mate took a small length of bent steel from his overalls and inserted it into the bottom of the small double glazed window housed above the larger ones. It was designed to insert and lift. It took a bit of effort but they had the effort and they knew exactly what to do. It was small enough that the motion detectors would not catch the movement as they were designed to ignore small movements such as a cat.

A couple of minutes pushing and tugging later the small window opened and hung limply. They fished in their pockets and took out several small canisters which they lobbed one by one into the room. The last one was adjusted as it had a small timer within its screwed top.

That was it. Done. No bangs, no flames, no quick exit. Nothing....yet. They went casually back to the van and got on their way. It would take about half an hour for the multi sequence of events to unfold. Firstly the larger canisters would, on impact, rupture internally and a small amount of acid would start to eat through its outer layer. This would then release the accelerator which was comprised essentially of petrol and oil. These had been thrown to different parts of the kitchen which had been chosen as, excluding the wooden ceiling, it was the most flammable part of the house. In the old days you did the lounge

but now everything was full of fire retardant so now you did the kitchen where most of it was wood and plastic and God knows what else. And when it got going really well the kitchen usually housed the gas boiler.....

The last one he had thrown in housed the timer. At a given time, he had allowed half an hour, it would explode and a burning gel, a bit like the old napalm, would fly all over the place to the waiting accelerant.

And that was that. Quite simple. No sweat. Unless someone happened to be sleeping in there which, at times, their clients did prefer.....

Chapter 51

Ian Patrick 1

Ian Patrick, sometimes known as Terry Andrews, Andrew Terry, Terry James, James Terry, John Terry, Terry John, Andrew Williams or William Andrews to name but a few, but today he was Terry Fowler, sat in his reclining chair, feet up, in his more than modest home and looked down the long garden with its well cut lawn with the perfect stripes from the well sharpened cylinder mower and sipped at his gin and tonic.

Everything was good in the garden; literally.

Usually he made about eighty or ninety thousand a year tax free but this would be a bumper year what with the two seventy five plus the sixty he had made already.

He took another sip, patted the sleeping golden Labrador on the head, got up and wandered into the large study. Ian was a meticulous man who would have made a good Managing Director had his life not taken him down other paths.

On a large table he had copies of several local, but not local to him, newspapers. On another he had twelve mobile phones on chargers, all pay as you go, all registered to people who didn't exist and all were shut off. Ian only used them when he was away from his own area so that his home could never be traced. Each phone was allocated to a woman so that when he was with that woman another one could not call him inadvertently.

On another table were a computer and a top quality printer on which he did his bespoke stationery and business cards. He had realised a long time ago that identification was the key to a good scam. If everything you produced, overtly or covertly, told them who you were then you *have* to be who you are. With all the little

pointers reinforcing the message there was never any doubt about your credibility. Indeed he found it worked wonders if you doubted *their* credibility.

His scam was always the same. Put an advert in the Lonely Hearts columns in a local paper and pay for it with cash at the reception desk. He wore clothes not associated with him, donned a false beard and wore a baseball cap in case there were cameras monitoring the area.

Then wait.

There was always someone. Someone who would help fund an operation, tide him over with a loan until his redundancy came through, give him the money for their half of the holiday, go halves on a holiday flat, or time share or, or, or.....

There were a lot of *ors*.....

All it took was a bit of ingenuity to work out what it was that would make them open their purse and then you put your hand in. Or in the case of dear Lillian two hands. He still couldn't believe his luck with that one. How stupid could a woman be? For a second he wondered what she was doing now but it didn't go any farther because he really didn't care....

Currently he had eight women on the go and one man. Ian wasn't a homosexual but he was an opportunist and had met a man, quite by accident, who was obviously well off, unattached and preferred male company. And so Ian, actually William John, had befriended him and they had been to one or two shows together and the theatre for Richard the Third which had bored the arse off Ian who hadn't got a clue what they were talking about but the end justified the means. Richard, by coincidence the man's name as well, explained that the play had been shortened as it was the second longest play that Shakespeare had written. Ian thought it was the second longest play that Shakespeare *shouldn't* have written.

Ian had no woman in his life as they, to a large extent, didn't interest him. He had his home, two Labradors, his twice weekly round of golf with his friends, was an enthusiastic member of his local Amateur Dramatic Society, his G and T and he was absolutely fine. Why would you spoil all that with a woman? Or a man?

Chapter 52

Cocaine 5

One hung up and threw the phone across the room. He was so angry he could hardly breathe. Kidnap his brother? Kidnap his brother? Suddenly a thought flashed across his mind; how did he *know* he was kidnapped? He had just been told by the Turkish dog turd but so what? He grabbed a mobile as the house phone was in bits on the floor and rang his brother who lived in Ragusa on the heel of the country. The phone answered and it was his brother's wife.

‘Hello,’ she said with a yawn.

He looked at his watch. 9 am and she was sleeping? Lazy cow!

‘It's Aldo,’ he said. ‘I want to speak to Adamo.’

He was curt with her as he didn't like her and it showed. As far as he was concerned she was an American two bit whore who had seduced his brother to a life that was banal and corrupt. His brother was a hard working conscientious scientist until he had met her on a visit to America and he had completely fallen. So fallen he had come back only to tell the family of his intentions and then he returned to get married. And in Los Vegas! Los fucking Sodom and Gomorrah Vegas! He came home several weeks later with his new silicone enhanced bride and upped sticks and went to live down south where he got a job doing God knows what? She'd taken his baby brother.....the Devil's whore!

‘It's very early, Aldo.’

‘Adamo,’ he said, making it quite plain he had no interest in any conversation with her.

‘He's not here; he's away for a few days.’

‘Where?’

‘Turkey.’

‘Why?’

‘I don’t know. The company told him to go there but I don’t know why...?’

He abruptly hung up. How would they know he was there? How could they possibly know that? How?

How would he do it? Just bribe someone in Customs to keep a check....?

But why? He had been One for a very short time so why would they even know who he was or that he had a brother? It didn’t make sense. No sense at all. But where did that leave him? Go to Turkey and get killed? No chance. Don’t go and Adamo got killed. Much as he loved him, better Adamo than him... He rang the contact number he had been given and spoke to the go-between. Fuck ’em! No deal! The Turkish turds could go back up their own arses!

The next day he received a phone call. ‘One,’ the voice said, ‘your brother wants to talk to you.’

One listened as his brother sobbed and begged for his help and then he heard a thud and a pitiful scream.

‘Bastards,’ he screamed down the phone.

‘We just want you to come and talk to us.’

‘Never.’

‘Then we will ring your aged mother and let her hear what her son is going through and tell her that you could stop it but you won’t.’

‘You fucking cunts,’ he screamed.

He was a good Italian momma’s boy and the thought of his frail mother getting hurt was too much..... ‘You wouldn’t,’ he said automatically.

‘Oh come on.....’

‘What do you want?’

‘We want you to come to Turkey and talk to us.’

‘Talk. Hah!’ he retorted. ‘If you wanted to talk we could do it on the phone or over dinner in Milano or Roma; you don’t want to talk.’

‘Is that a no?’

It should be a *no*. It should be a *fuck off*! But they had his brother, which wasn’t that big a deal as he sounded half dead already.....but his mother? If he didn’t go she could be the next target; although he could protect her. How? Take her away from everything she loved? The grave of her husband? Her grand children? Her friends? That would kill her as quickly if not quicker. But go to Turkey? It was just a suicide mission. But it was also difficult to believe that they would invite him to a meeting and then kill him. It actually did them no favours. No matter what happened they still needed a supplier in Italy and asking for a meeting through The Man in Colombia and then killing him would not go down well at all. Unless The Man in Colombia was in on it?

‘I’ll ring you back,’ he said.

He rang Colombia and asked for The Man’s assurance that he had no part in this? The Man gave that assurance. He thought it through for another hour but saw no alternative. He could hardly invade his rivals in Turkey. He had never even been to Turkey. Who the fuck would want to go to Turkey? A dirty, smelly, dusty place with flowing robes hiding unwashed bodies....

He called them and arranged the meeting.....

Chapter 53

The Jury

They had started out quite well, picking a Jury Foreman, talking politely about the case, putting their comments across as lucidly as they could which was a struggle for one or two of them, but nevertheless they were getting there.

They were about 100% on his guilt but 60 – 40 on what kind of guilt. Was it not good, bad or very bad? Or just one of those things that happen to us all if we are unlucky enough to be in the wrong place at the wrong time etc as the Defence had so eloquently put it.

After an hour and a half a man said, ‘Well, I think we should just let him off and then we can go home.’

‘Pardon?’ asked a horrified woman, ‘there are several people dead and you want us to let him off so we can go home? Are you mad?’

‘Look,’ he said, ‘let’s be realistic. He’s rich and famous and he will have spent more on his defence team than many of us will earn in a lifetime. He’s untouchable as all celebs are. Even if we said he was guilty of manslaughter to the nth degree the Judge is more than likely his mate and he’ll get a suspended sentence and a driving ban, which means he’ll hire a chauffeur while he sits in the back and takes calls from a publisher for his new book, so what’s the point? Let’s just accept the inevitable and go home.’

Another woman joined the first to condemn such a blasé attitude to justice and so the argument started and became so unrelenting that they ran out of time and were sent home.

The next day it started all over again and the man insisted they should be realistic and just basically let him off. It was quite

simple; if they didn't the Judge would. And then he would go off and sell his story for loads to the Sun or whoever..... and life would go on.

'But not for those killed,' said a man who was getting a bit sick of the idiot with the ridiculous arguments.

'They're dead,' he replied, 'and Johnny Harris is too famous to be sent down. It's that simple.'

'Rubbish!'

'Look, we're just the little people. They don't listen to us. It doesn't matter what we say in here as they won't listen. It's all a facade.'

'Of course they will listen,' said another infuriated lady, 'we're the Jury, they have to listen.'

He grinned at her. 'You must be joking. Did you see the trial of O J Simpson? Now that was a trial that sums up exactly what I'm saying. He was so famous...'

'And black...' interjected one, 'that's why they let him off.'

'What's that got to do with listening to a Jury?' said another. 'In fact he was guilty and the Jury got him off.'

'The point is,' said the original man, 'whether we let him off or the Judge does he will get off because he's rich and famous.'

Pandemonium swept through the room and people started shouting.

'Let's just get this over with and go home,' he said resignedly.

'I will not!' said a woman. 'I will stay here until the cows come home if that's what it takes to get this bastard locked away for ever!'

'Now you're just being stupid,' said the man.

'Stupid?' she screamed back. 'Stupid? How dare you call me stupid?'

'I'm with her,' said another, 'he killed a family for Christ's sake; of course he should go down and he should go down for the

longest term possible under the law.'

The man just sat and grinned. 'As if they are going to take any notice of what we say.....' he reiterated. 'I bet they're laughing their socks off at us this very minute for even bothering when they know it's already cut and dried.'

'I utterly resent you saying that,' said a meek man who had said nothing to that point, 'and I resent the fact that you belittle and mock us so.'

'Just wait and see,' he said, 'you have no chance....'

Later that morning, with the man still scoffing at them, they went back into Court and gave their verdict. Guilty of manslaughter but they respectfully recommended that the Judge impose the maximum sentence possible! The Judge retired to consider the verdict and then imposed eight years with four months off for time already served.

The court went silent. Johnny Harris, perplexed and not a touch scared, looked at his Counsel who had made a point of looking down.... Two lady Jurors looked over to their male colleague and gave him a '*we told you they'd listen you cretin*' stare.

The Court broke up and the mocking man headed home. On the tube he smiled softly to himself. *How wonderful*. To be picked out of the blue and quite at random for a Jury deciding the fate of a man who had killed whilst drunk in charge of a vehicle. The death of his first wife by a drunken arsehole, who had got off literally scot free, had been avenged.

And the fact that he was a Visiting Lecturer with a PhD in Psychology had nothing to do with it.....

Chapter 54

Big Eddie 3

They had a great time; excluding the fact that they had lost a packet on their holiday home, which Eddie would sort out in due course. ‘There’s a way round fuckin anything’ was one of Big Eddie’s mantras. He wondered whether he could get a couple of his mates back here soon and they would talk to the Property Developer. Eddie was sure after a good talk the man would happily give him all his money back.

They had a great time.

They went sailing in a small sailing dinghy and had to be rescued nearly three miles out at sea by the Coastguard. The drunken couple thanked their rescuers by Eddie offering them whisky and Babe a feel of her tits.

Eddie impressed Babe by doing stunts on a jet ski, causing panic in the water around him, and then losing control and smashing it into a jetty.

They were admonished by The Hotel Manager who had to respond to a complaint from several guests that they had seen Babe tossing Eddie off.....at breakfast.

Eddie did his famous walk the wall trick where he would go up on the roof garden and walk along the edge of its retaining wall. To one side a four foot drop and to the other about a hundred and fifty. Guests around the pool watched as he did his thing and prayed that he would fall and break his neck...

They were admonished by The Hotel Manager who had to respond to a complaint from several guests that they had seen Babe sucking off Big Eddie as he sat on the side of the pool with

his feet dangling in and Babe treading water. Eddie assumed that's what she was doing but it could just have been the dick in her mouth that stopped her going under.....

They entertained the guests one evening at dinner, Italian night, by getting up on the table and belting out a rendition of 'I got you Babe' on the assumption that Sonny and Shirley Bono must have been Italian.

They were admonished by The Hotel Manager who had to respond to a complaint from several guests that they had seen Big Eddie walk from the pool to the bar quite naked to get more drinks, with just a baseball cap covering his erect phallus. It looked like a tiny jockey having a ride in front of him.....

Several ladies complained, to their friends, that it hadn't been windy enough to remove the baseball cap....

Several ladies complained, to their friends, that what Big Eddie had, was, even half hidden, far more than they had ever had....

Several men complained, to God, that life wasn't fair....

They were ignored by The Hotel Manager when they both got so paralysed with booze that they spent all night comatose on sunloungers by the pool on one of the worst nights of rain, thunder and lightning that the area had ever experienced.

They hired a scooter one day and came back in a taxi.....

They went to a wine tasting evening, taking extra large Coca Cola plastic cups.....

They were admonished by The Hotel Manager who had to respond to a complaint from one of the waitresses that Big Eddie and Babe had offered her ten pounds to have a threesome. Ten pounds.....! What kind of Hotel did they think he was running?

They went out in a taxi one day and came back on a scooter.

On the penultimate day Big Eddie got a call from his brother...

Chapter 55

Ian Patrick 2

Ian Patrick decided to go to the races and on his way one of his phones rang on the seat beside him. He looked down at the display and saw it was the man, what was his name...yes, Richard.... with whom he had been to the Shakespeare play. What could he want? He hadn't scammed him of anything so it wasn't a moan and he had another man, and so why was he ringing him? *Another man?* What was he saying?

He pulled over into a lay-by and picked up the phone.

'Hello, Richard, how are you?'

'I'm fine, William, how are you?'

In the old days Ian would have wondered, for a moment, who William was but that was the old days. Nowadays he was a chameleon....

After a pleasantry or two Richard said, 'William, I was telling a friend of mine about you and he'd like to meet you.'

'Really? What were you saying?'

'Just that you were good company and that he would like you. Is that ok?'

Ian thought for a second. What the hell was he getting in to? Richard was just a taster to see whether he could scam men but he wasn't really sure that he could. Well, yes he could, but with women he could use his charm and sex and God knows what else but with men what had he got? Charm? Ok I'll go with charm. Wit? Ok I'll go with wit. Conversation? Ok I'll go with conversation. He was quite aware the word sex kept going to the back of the queue.

Could he do sex with a man?

Not really....

But if there was enough money in it?

How much is enough?

And for what?

Masturbation?.....maybe

Anal intercourse.....yuk

Blow job.....double yuk

And what would the man have to be like? How the hell did you work that out? You knew, with a woman, whether you could actually, at a push, fuck her. Was she too fat? Too old? Too ugly? Not really. In the lexicon of the scammer, all these types were more susceptible to the scam.

They were desperate for affection or a good fucking as no one else would touch them. They were *grateful* for any morsel thrown their way and showed their gratitude and very kindly put reality to one side. Suckers!

But a man? How do you gauge a man?

‘You still there William?’ asked Richard.

‘Sorry,’ said Ian/William. ‘Richard, if you think we should meet then I will be guided by you. Obviously you know me and where I’m at but if you think that’s ok then it’s ok by me....’

After a few more pleasantries they said goodbye and less than a minute later the phone went again but he didn’t recognise the number.

‘Hello?’

‘William, this is Peter Andrews, Richard’s friend. He suggested I ring you.’

‘That was quick,’ interjected Ian, ‘were you sitting next to him?’

‘Sort of.... Anyhow, I was wondering if you were free this Saturday and would like a day at the coast?’

‘It tends to be a bit difficult on a Saturday,’ said Ian.

‘Don’t tell me, you play golf.’

‘Er.....yes.’

‘Well, if I may sum that up for you,’ said Peter, ‘you are going to meet your friends. It may or may not be raining. You will bash a ball around for four miles or so, *again*, as you have done, no doubt for years, and then it’s to the bar for an hour’s drinks and back to an empty house. That about right?’

‘Er....I suppose so.’

‘So let me ask you again. How do you fancy a day at the coast? Some sea air, nice lunch, more sea air, nice dinner, drinks on the balcony looking at the ocean..... Which would you prefer?’

Christ, thought Ian, he should be doing my job. ‘You’ve talked me into it.’

‘Good,’ said Peter. ‘I will give you an address and if you were there at say ten o’clock?’

‘That’s fine,’ replied Ian. He found a pen in the glove compartment and took the address and telephone number. They hung up and he wondered what he was going to tell his golfing partners. I’m sorry I can’t make it but I’m having a drink under the stars with a Willie Woofter.

Maybe not.....

The post code in the Sat Nav took him to Christchurch on the Dorset coast and then up a narrow road up a hill overlooking the sea. Above him he could see a magnificent house and it occurred to him that may be it but it was unlikely. The man lived in London and a house that size would cost a good two or three million and not too many people could afford to live in London and here. He realised he knew absolutely nothing about the man. What he looked like, what he did for a living, his age..... nothing? He was also aware this could be a disaster waiting to happen and there was a part of him that wanted to turn round and

go and play golf. He looked at his watch and computed how long it would take him to get back but knew he would miss the tee time by miles. Oh fuck!

As his car passed the house the Sat Nav issued a '*you have arrived*' notice so he braked quickly, reversed, and pulled up by the large iron gates with the intercom to one side. He got out of the car and stretched lazily in the warm morning sun and walked to the intercom. As he went to press the button a voice said, 'You must be William...'

Ian/William jumped and he saw the small lens in the console that must enclose a camera.

'Peter....? I have the right place....I wasn't sure....'

'Come in,' said the console. The gates noiselessly opened and he drove up the hundred yard drive to the beautiful house, which must have had at least eight bedrooms, where Peter was waiting to greet him.

Peter was in his early fifties but looked forty; tanned, fit, six feet tall and with a welcoming smile. Peter was also rich, with homes in London and Bermuda; educated, astute, initially trained as a lawyer, and a negotiator and deal maker extraordinaire.

'Welcome,' said Peter smiling.

'Thank you.' He looked at the house and scanned the vista. 'It's beautiful.'

'Come in.'

Peter led him through to an enormous lounge with a complete forty foot wall of windows overlooking the ocean. Ian looked out dreamily. Fucking hell! What a view. What a life. For a few moments he felt completely and utterly insignificant. He had a nice home but it was most likely as big as this guy's garage. Fucking hell! All his years of scamming had got him, by comparison, sweet FA.

'Like it?' asked Peter.

‘It’s unbelievable, quite unbelievable.’

‘Drink?’

‘What are you having?’

‘I’m just having iced water but you have what you like.’

‘That’s fine for me too.’

He came back a few moments later with two glasses, gave one to Ian, then opened one of the large sliding windows and walked outside to the terrace with its array of sunloungers. Surrounding it, beautiful flowers cascaded from large oriental urns. Ian was astounded. It was breathtaking. Stunning! Absolutely fucking stunning....

They sat and sipped the iced water, chatted about all and sundry and got on quite well. It was easy conversation and Ian relaxed.

‘I’m not sure why you wanted to meet me?’ asked Ian. ‘My time with Richard was quite short and I’ve no doubt he told you that.....’

‘You’re not gay...’

‘Yes....’

Peter grinned. ‘He told me three things that intrigued me. One, that you’re not gay, two, which leads on from that, you’re a virgin and three, you’re a hustler.’

Peter, still grinning, watched Ian’s face.

‘What would make Richard say that?’

‘Gays are either very good or very bad at spotting it. It’s all about self preservation.’

‘Well, certainly the first two are correct but I think I’m a bit offended about the third.’

‘Why? Are you saying you’re not a hustler?’

‘Of course not.’

Peter smiled softly. ‘You see this,’ he swept his arms in a wide arc to indicate the property, ‘this is all the end result of hustling. I

work in the music industry and I have spent my life hustling. Not in any illegal way....well, yes, at times illegally but only in terms of contract law. I have made money out of Groups and singers you've never heard of because I can hustle. Not only can I hustle I can actually spot real talent as well and then I negotiate a deal that few others can. I'm good at what I do.... So, let me ask you, man to man, are you a hustler?'

It was several minutes before Ian answered. In that time he sipped his drink, looked at the ocean and wondered about the consequences of telling the truth. Or should he just go before this got out of hand? Was it some kind of set up? Was the scammer being scammed? But why the hell would someone with all this money scam him? Still looking at the ocean he said, 'I thought I was, and I suppose I am, but it seems, like all things, a matter of degree...'

'And you're here today to hustle me?'

'I'm not quite sure why I'm here today but I suppose so....'

'What's your real name?' asked Peter.

Another long pause. This was getting very tricky. Really tricky.

'I don't think I should stay..... It was a mistake. I'm sorry I've taken your time.'

'You haven't taken my time. I've already told you Richard said you were a hustler and I invited you because of it. I'm not offended by it; I'm intrigued and pleased to be with a fellow who I can talk to. So stay. It's ok.....'

'What's your name?' He asked again.

Another long pause. 'Ian. Ian Patrick.'

'And the car outside is hired for the day or the plates are changed?'

'Changed....at the bottom of the hill.'

'See,' said Peter, 'we understand each other.'

They talked some more then Peter suggested they go down to the beach and have a walk. They went to the garage, the doors opened with a gentle hum, where a new Reg Mercedes SUV stood accompanied by an SL 600 Roadster which Ian knew, must be over a hundred grand. And sixty or seventy for the SUV? Fucking hell! They got in the 600, the roof housed itself in the boot and off they went. Three hours and a long beach walk later they had lunch in The Lord Bute Hotel up on the cliffs then went back to Peter's home where they sat with a G and T on the sun loungers.

‘Do you have any trunks?’ asked Peter.

‘No.’

He nodded to a door. ‘In there are changing rooms. Call if you need any help,’ and a grin crossed his face.

Ian went in the enormous changing rooms that housed a Jacuzzi, steam room, large walk in shower room, and saw several thick white towelling robes with ‘Harrods’ emblazoned on the front. They lay there neatly folded with several pairs of exquisite silk trunks of various colours lying next to them. When Ian returned Peter had already changed and lying on one of the beds.

Ian lay down on the next bed. ‘That’s better.’

‘Yes,’ said Peter, ‘now you must tell me about some of your scams....’

Surprisingly, for Ian, he did.....

They chatted away all afternoon, as though they had known each other for years, with Peter telling Ian about the Groups he was, or had been, involved with and the PPG (profit per Group) that he had made or was making. Ian told Peter about his scams which, in monetary terms, were nothing compared to the amounts Peter was making but Peter still listened intently. He was fascinated at the lengths Ian would go, and the subterfuge involved, to make the scam work.

‘And she gave you all her house money to Bank for her? Really? How dumb was that!’

‘It wasn’t dumb at all,’ said Ian. ‘I wasn’t a stranger. I was her friend and lover and we had discussed marriage.....’

His voice tailed off.

‘A pang of conscience?’ asked Peter.

Ian smiled. ‘Just for a second. Mustn’t let it become a habit.’

Late in the afternoon Peter asked, ‘You hungry?’

‘I’m not really, no.’

‘Nor me. Why don’t I refill the glasses and we’ll sit out here for a while longer and then, later, I’ll make us a light salad?’

‘Sounds ideal....’

For some unaccountable reason the two bit scammer and the multi millionaire hustler were at ease with each other. They sat and lay and talked and laughed for the next four hours until dusk arrived and their bodies started to feel a slight chill.

‘Time to eat,’ said Peter and got up, ‘let’s have a hot shower and then I’ll prepare something.’

They went into the changing rooms and Peter turned the valve that operated them all, although the ten faucets could also be done singly, and Ian watched as a waterfall of water beckoned them. Without thinking Ian followed Peter’s example and took off his trunks, enveloping himself within the cascade of hot steamy water. He found the Harrods soap and started lathering himself when he heard Peter softly say, ‘Let me help you.’

Peter, standing behind him, started to gently lather his back. For a moment Ian stiffened but Peter said, ‘It’s ok...’ and carried on lathering him. Ian’s body started to relax and he felt the large soap filled sponge massage his back and neck.

‘Do you know anything about sponges?’ asked Peter.

‘I like them with jam in the middle and cream on the top’.

‘You’re a love,’ said Peter and Ian felt a brush of lips on his back. ‘These sponges, and these were not from the depths of Harrods, these were from the reefs off Antigua, are one of the simplest animals on the planet.’

Ian felt the sponge slowly leave his back and was now softly lathering his arse.....

‘.....They have no legitimate tissue, nerves, muscles or internal organs and it was once thought they were one of the first inhabitants of this tiny planet.....’

The sponge found its way to the crack of his arse and Peter moved it up and down gently.

‘.....but now it would appear that fossils date them to the Neoproterozoic period which is a period about a thousand to five hundred million years ago....’

The sponge left his bum and went round his hip to his crotch.

‘Peter, I.....’

‘Shhh,’ said Peter, ‘just enjoy.....They don’t,’ he continued, ‘even have a circulatory system, but create a water current.....’

Peter slowly moved round to the front of Ian and was now kneeling in front of him, gently lathering his prick and balls and, much to Ian’s embarrassment, his prick was getting harder.

‘Peter, I.....’ tried Ian again but he didn’t quite know what he wanted to say and what he *had* said was half hearted.

Peter looked up to Ian, his face drenched by the heavy shower and smiled. Without thinking Ian moved aside some hair from Peter’s forehead and rested his hand gently on his head.

Peter held Ian’s prick, now quite large, in one hand and lathered his balls with the sponge in the other. After a few moments he looked up and said, ‘Watch.’

Ian watched as Peter started to kiss the end of his penis and then, little by little, put it in his mouth. Taking it out he started

stimulating it with his hand and it gave an immediate, wonderful sensation.

Peter looked up again. 'Women can't do that for you..... Have you ever known *one* woman who could give you real pleasure with her hand?'

He continued for several minutes with Ian becoming more and more aroused.

'Peter....Peter....Peter.....'

He watched Peter's head go over his prick, felt the warmth of his mouth as it closed around him, felt him start to suck as his head went up and down and then, with a massive shudder rushing through his body, he started to come in Peter's mouth....

Chapter 56

Johnny Harris

H read his copy of The Times and saw the headline:

Harris given eight years for drunken killing!

Fucking hell, thought H in one of his rare, well, maybe not, blasphemous moments, eight years. For a moment his thoughts of revenge went away as he thought of being put in a cell for eight, well more than likely four, years. No chance. And Johnny Harris? From first to worst as they say at poker. From first to worst.

When you have everything that fame and money can buy, and then it's taken away from you. Shit! He turned back to unfinished business. What to do about our Johnny? Certainly it wouldn't take too much to get him maimed in prison. A couple of fags was about all it took for someone who liked slashing faces as a pastime.

H found himself shaking his head.

No....

No..no..no...no..no...

What good would it be slashing his face in prison or even having him killed there? Where was the satisfaction? Where was the subtlety? No, it had to be as he came out.

Let him do his stretch and then, when he was out, with hope rising for his new future, wife waiting, deals waiting, H would have him destroyed. That was better.

Andy would like that...

Chapter 57

King Bongo Bongo 5

His one hundred special guards were assembled in a column five wide and behind them another five hundred soldiers in columns of ten. Behind them were selected courtiers, ministers and several of his wives who had been painted up for the occasion.

King Bongo Bongo led them out of the gate to the flat, open plain that went on and on until.....

As they reached the edge of the plain and came to the three hundred feet rift cliffs that tumbled down to the raging river below King Bongo moved to one side and shouted out the orders.....

‘Forward two, three, four,’ to the marching soldiers.

They were now within thirty yards of the cliffs.

‘Forward two, three, four.’

Twenty yards.

‘Forward two, three, four.’

Ten yards.

‘Forward two, three, four.’

At the edge the first row of soldiers paused but were pushed over by the still advancing column.

‘Forward two, three, four.’ He ordered, ‘Forward two, three, four.’

And they carried on.....

When half the column had disappeared over the cliff to their deaths King Bongo Bongo screamed, 'Stop!'

And they stopped and waited.....

'You will stay there until I return,' he commanded, beckoned for his horse and rode back to the Palace....

Chapter 58

Am Shoo

Am Shoo, the little Taiwanese girl, who wasn't actually a girl as she was eighteen but she was tiny, had lived in England for over a year and enjoyed it. True she didn't get out too much, although she could get a bus into town and she was given the fare to go home once a year to see her family. She had been bought by a man who had paid her family \$570 and had arranged that she come into the country as his house keeper.

Her duties included looking after them, well mainly him, keeping the place clean and having sex. She didn't mind the sex, in fact it was quite enjoyable, as she knew of others from her country who had gone to foreign lands and been badly abused, but he hadn't abused her. He certainly wanted everything in relation to sex that a man would want but that was ok because that was what any man would want.

Oral, anal; so what.

It's what you did for a man. But other than the usual things he had demanded nothing more and every so often he took her to the coast, or a ride up in the mountains where he bought her tea and then usually they had sex.

No, she was happy. It could be a lot, lot worse.

So she busied herself keeping the place clean and generally looking after the house. It was, by her standards, a huge palace but it was actually just a large house, five bedrooms, two baths, en suite etc that lay behind some trees, half a mile down a lane in lovely countryside. Housed in an acre and a half, much of which was lawns she would watch her master go put, put, putting along

on his little tractor thing to cut the grass. And she would help by rushing over at the end of every cut, when the bag was full and put it on the compost heap.

They did lots together when he was at home but he never took her to meet his friends. She had no idea why.....?

Chapter 59

Ian Patrick 3

He had no idea how it had happened but it had. They had dinner, talked and drank under the stars and then he had stayed the night. They had separate beds in the same room but Peter had joined him for a while and sucked him off again. He kissed Ian lightly on the lips and went back to his own bed where after a ‘Goodnight’ he was quite quickly asleep.

Ian lay there, looking out to the night and the stars, and wondered what the hell was going on? It wasn’t even so much as *what* had gone on but his utter incredulity that it *had* gone on. And somehow, and this was the most weird and scary thing, it had been enjoyable. How could that....*homosexuality*, be enjoyable? How? How can you spend your life fucking women, albeit without an incredible amount of pleasure, and then find yourself having a rewarding sexual experience with a man?

But he had.....

He stayed the week until Peter had to jet off to America to pitch a deal and then he had gone home.

He was still a virgin in that he hadn’t had a prick up his arse but Peter had put his fingers up and had licked his anus which, Ian now knew, was called rimming. Fancy. He had been rimmed!

But he had put his prick up Peter’s arse and found it to be not unlike a vagina. Sort of.....

And Peter knew all the tricks and Ian had come in him.....on several occasions.

The man next door had fed his dog and the cleaner had let herself in to clean the house and all was as it should be. Assuming you ignored the week of gay sex and the fact that he had agreed to see more of Peter.....and was looking forward to it.

Chapter 60

H moves

The letters started again as soon as they moved in.

My wife

I miss you and look forward to your safe return.

Our new child will be very special; a product of our union.

Soon my love....

Your husband

And then later in the week they received another, disturbing letter.

My wife

You ugly bitch!

You opened your legs for him?

For him? Ape man?

Where? In the coach house? Was it in the coach house?

And the flowers are red. Red?

You know I hate red!

I loathe and detest you, you whore.

Your husband

H saw the fear in Benshima's eyes. He could have got the coach house or any other part of the property off Savills internet site but the red flowers? Benshima had been given a beautiful bouquet of

red flowers off one of her friends as a moving in present and they sat resplendent in a lounge window.

So now he knew their address and had visited. But how? How could he possibly have visited and got close enough to see their lounge? Even in the day the 100 yd electronic fence was in operation and that had not signalled anything and if it had and they had missed it there would be film of the intruder; but it hadn't. *H realised he always thought 'he' and it could be a 'her' but it was highly unlikely. If it was a she the term nutter didn't even half cover the description.* He could, thought H, have got close enough and used binoculars but why? Just to add a bit of detail to add to the scare factor? Possibly. If you want to scare the shit out of someone use their own minds to do it. Let their imagination, working out what you were capable of and what may happen to them, do the job for you.....

H rang the MD of one of his security companies and gave him instructions. An hour later two guards were patrolling the exterior of the house and H gave the monitoring camera tapes to another who took them back to the company to be studied.

Later that morning he drove Benshima into London and back to their apartment where she would stay until this was resolved. It was not the start he wanted for their new home but it was what they had got. He also left a guard outside their apartment and, for now, one of his trained lady guards, the ones the celebs hired, would go with Benshima whenever she went out. H thought again about the police but better if he could do it himself. That way the solution would be permanent.....

It also made him think that maybe he should keep the security companies and look at them again? Or maybe just keep them? In the overall scheme of things they didn't make much; three quarters of a mill out of twenty two, around three percent, but they didn't create many problems either. Were they an underused and undervalued resource? Had he taken his eye off the ball with

them? Had the casinos and betting been more interesting? Of course they were but that didn't mean the others should be ignored. He rang Scotty and told him his thoughts....

I am, thought Tony Blair, as his peace cavalcade was ambushed going through Damascus and he was hauled off and put in a six foot square, black, windowless, airless room where he would spend the next three years, completely fucked.

The next day H, sitting in his office in the apartment, took the call from the MD who said they had gone through the tapes twice but could see no untoward comings and goings. However he would email a list of visitors to H to look at...

H went through the list but he was right, nothing. Security vans, BT, painters, postman, flowers, new patio furniture, new ride on mower.... H's eyes sparkled. A new ride on mower. He could see himself now zooming all over the place in his ride on mower. The back street boy wanted to have lawns that had wonderful symmetrical stripes down them but the arsey boy within him wanted to go all over the lawns at any angle and create a total confusion of lines. Maybe he could do half and half?

Benshima came in and kissed his forehead. She was doing what any woman would do under these trying circumstances and going shopping with the girls. H was going to say 'and don't forget to watch the taxi drivers' but he shut up.

He was still bothered so he decided to drive back to the house and have another think. How could he know about the flowers? He sat up. Of course! The van that delivered the flowers! He was a van man! A flower delivery man! He would obviously know they had flowers! Highly pleased with his deductions he was just about to ring his MD when he remembered they had been a present from a friend and not flower van man. Oh fuck! Well maybe it was him anyway?

H felt like a detective who had pressure to solve a rape and murder case when the pizza man walks in.

'Were you in England last Tuesday?' he asks.

'Yeah,' says the pimply youth.

'You'll do. Now if you'll just hold this gun and knife for prints and I need a sample of your sperm to put over her pants.....'

On his way to the house he was going through the list in his head that the MD had sent him. Something was nagging him about the list but he couldn't get it. There was something....? He pulled up behind a car at an island and as they pulled away he looked right and decided he just had time. He floored the pedal and hit the back of the car in front of him who, for some reason, had decided not to go. He put his hands on the wheel and rested his forehead on them. What a fucking day....

He opened the car door and as he put a foot out and started to stand up a fist hit him in the face, followed by another that put a finger knuckle in his eye and made it sting and water. What the fuck was going on...?

H knew he mustn't retaliate so he put his arms out stiffly and started shoving his assailant away.

'What are you doing, for Christ's sake, missus?' he demanded of the woman in front of him.

'You fuckin scumbag!' she screamed at him.

Eh? What had he done? He had knocked her car up the arse, not stuck a prick up hers! 'Eh?' he asked, still quite lost.

'My fucking car, you arsehole,' she screamed, 'look what you've fuckin done to it.'

H looked. True it wasn't pretty. The boot would struggle to open any more and even if it did he wasn't sure how much you could get in it now.

'I'm sorry, it was a mistake. I thought you'd pulled away.'

'You fuckin blind or what?'

Eh?

He looked at her. She was no more than twenty or so and he wondered how she got in the car. She was as round as she was tall and H furtively looked in her car to see if he could see the McDonald's wrappers but all he could see was half a bar of uneaten chocolate, two Easter eggs which he thought she must have bought by the tonne the day after Easter for a knock down price, a half eaten doughnut and an apple. An apple? Maybe she thought that was a balanced diet. Nah.... Her idea of a balanced diet would be fish, chips, curry sauce and a large coke on her lap as she was driving.....

She started to moan in agony.

Eh?

'My neck,' she said, 'I can hardly move my neck. Oh, the agony.....oh, the pain.'

I'll move your neck, thought H, let me do it for you. If it doesn't rotate now it will in a minute.... Jesus. Now she's angling for a few grand for whiplash.....

'Let's just exchange insurance details and let them sort it out,' suggested H, rubbing his watering eye.

'Fuck you! You can give me some now and we'll still give it the insurers.'

H thought for a moment. *I'll happily give you one now...*

'Let me,' he said, 'go over where I think we're at. I have, accidentally, hit the back of your car. You, being the tart that you are, have taken exception.'

'What did you call me?' she exploded.

'The word was tart. I could have said a fat, smelly tart but I was being restrained and polite.'

'How dare you?' She exploded again.

'I dare,' said H, moving menacingly close to her, 'because although you may have a weight advantage I could fucking kill

you now....easily.'

'You....' she started to say but H put his face in hers and said softly, 'Shut the fuck up.'

She saw the cold aggression in his eyes and he saw the fear mount in hers. She backed away.

'For your safety I suggest we start again, or you take the consequences because, believe me, I am a little pissed off with you.'

H couldn't believe he was having this conversation with a woman. A woman! A woman? And what could he do if she continued? Hit her? Hardly.

'Give me your insurance details,' and she sullenly went to the glove box of the car and went back and handed them to him. He gave her his. 'How's your neck?'

She paused for a moment. 'It's very painful.'

'I can help you relieve it.'

'How?'

'By telling you that if you claim off my insurance for whiplash I will get my solicitors to contest it and it will cost you more than you would ever imagine. And secondly I will make sure that your neck really hurts next time I, or some of my associates, meet you again.'

He saw her start to tremble as he towered over her. 'Luckily I have your address,' he said as an after thought, 'if I want to find you....'

'What do you do for a living?' He asked.

'Why?'

He waited.

'I'm in PR.'

Of course you are, thought H, of course you are.

She got back in her car and H watched the crushed boot drive off. He looked at the front of the Jaguar that he had borrowed off

Scotty for the day while his went in for a service. A bit crumpled but nothing too serious. Unfortunately it was the model with the aluminium body....

He rang Scotty to tell him to find a spare one in the company or hire one.... Ah well...

Getting back in he let his mind go back to the subject that he had left. There was something wrong about that list..... something wrong about that list. He went through them in his mind again; *security vans, BT, painters, postman, flowers, new patio furniture, new ride on mower....*

And then it hit him. For a moment he was lost in his thoughts.....then he remembered to look ahead and saw the bright fog lights on the car in front, inadvertently switched on, thought it was braking and instinctively slammed on the brakes. He heard the long screech of tyres behind him and then his car jumped forward as someone piled into it from the back.

For fuck's sake.

He stared at the wheel.

Again? Again? What fucking homicidal woman would he encounter this time?

His door flew open and he was grabbed by a young male who dragged him out and then held him against the car by his suit lapels.

Eh....?

'What the fuck are you doing, granddad?'

Granddad..?

Another male joined him.

'I thought you crashed into me?' said H.

'Don't get fucking smart, pal,' said the newcomer.

'Wouldn't dream of it.'

The dragger of people from cars went on his toes and put his face in H's. 'You being fucking funny?' and then screamed and

sank to the floor as H kned him in the testicles. H grabbed his mate by the arm and swung him into the side of the Jaguar, winding him, and then followed up with hard fists into his kidneys which would help him piss blood for a week. As he doubled up H grabbed his hair and smacked his head into the side of the car and he collapsed in a heap. He went back to the first and took hold of his arm and bent it against the elbow until he heard the crack and the scream of agony.

H suddenly remembered the revelation he'd had in the car and realised this was nonsense. There were far more important things to do. He applied the judo strangle, Gyaku Juji Jime, to put him out then went and did the same to the other. He pulled them out of the way on to the verge and left.....

On his way back in the car he decided not to think any more about Benshima's stalker, or whatever you called him. He had, maybe, an answer and it could wait until he got to his office. And also one more dent in Scotty's car and it would be totalled what with a smashed in front, rear and dented side...

At his office he asked for a milky coffee and put his feet up on the desk. How to play this? Did he give it to plod or sort it out himself? Let's see now... Plod or me and Andy?

Plod or me and Andy?

Difficult choice.....?

He slowly drank his coffee, mulled it over in his mind, and rang Andy Pandey.....

Chapter 61

Big Eddie 4

Big Eddie and Babe arrived four days late at their house due to one or two minor problems en route.

The first in the Departure Lounge where Eddie and Babe were out of their skulls and Eddie was giving her a knee trembler against the wall. The second when they were refused access to the plane and Eddie smacked the co pilot;

The third when Eddie lurched across the runway and positioned himself on the ground in front of one of the jet engines which had to be shut down;

The fourth when he smacked one of the local Guardia Civil police and the fifth when Babe, to make everything all right, took off her clothes and offered herself to anyone that could get them on the flight that had already left....

They were put in cells overnight, saw the Local Judiciary the next day, fined and then put back in the cells until another flight would take them which they had to pay extra for. When the flight was ready they were handcuffed, taken on board and each sat handcuffed to two police officers who they also had to pay for.....

Back in England they were arrested again and taken to the cells to meet another Magistrate the next day. Bailed, they were picked up by Eddie's brother and taken to the remains of their home. The dead dogs had been taken away as they were a health hazard although in reality they were so burnt there was little left to be a hazard.

Wonderful; 'hot dogs', a local wag had suggested gleefully.

Big Eddie was distraught that his dogs were dead and Babe was distraught that their house was gone. The Fire Service and the Police had already sifted through the remains and established it was arson, their equipment picking up remains of the accelerant.

Babe and Eddie moved in with his brother and wife and three kids which was a squeeze and Big Eddie arranged for his Insurers to come down and arrange a hotel for them and a payout so that the house could be rebuilt as quickly as possible.

The man from the Insurer met them at his brother's and went through the policy; just one or two things to clear up. It was obviously arson and he wanted to know whether they had any debts and could he see their Bank Statements. Obviously not..... so he asked them to get copies. He asked about their house in Spain which was also insured by them and what its current worth was? *Although he had already rung Spain and found out.....* He told them he was prepared to put them in a Hotel for a week at the Insurers' expense to give them time to assess the claim.

'What do you mean,' demanded an irate Eddie, 'assess the fucking Claim? What is there to assess? The house has been torched by mad fuckers and that's it. Give us our money!' He bellowed at the man.

'I'm sure everything will be fine,' soothed the man, 'but in instances of arson we have to make quite a lot of enquiries.'

'What's he mean?' Asked Babe.

'He means he thinks we may be scamming him.'

'Course we ain't,' said Babe, 'you stupid tosser.'

No.....thought the man....*course you ain't*. Cow.

'I'll be on my way now but if it's ok with you I'll just go and have one more look at the house.'

'We'll come with you,' said Big Eddie.

They followed him around the house as he peered and poked but they hadn't got a clue what he was doing. Big Eddie merely knew he was getting more pissed off by the second. The man from the Insurers kept peering and poking and making tut tutting sounds as he knew it pissed off Big Eddie.

Babe was standing by what was left of the front door when she heard a voice behind her.

'What a tragedy,' said the lady.

'Yeah,' said Babe, assuming it was one of the neighbours.

'How are you managing?' asked the lady.

'It's ok. We're living with Eddie's brother and his three kids and the Insurers are putting us in a hotel tomorrow.'

'That must be a bit of a squeeze with six kids.'

'Nah,' said Babe, 'three.'

'You didn't have any children?'

'Nah.'

They talked a little more and then the lady from the Council, who had seen their plight in the paper and gone to offer support, went back to her desk and looked again at her computer and the Council Tax Forms and other documents that had been filed. Well, well, well.....

She sent several internal emails then rang The Department of Work and Pensions.....

The Insurance man finished peering and poking and knew there was no way on earth a penny would be paid over under the current circumstances. Too much debt, too much doubt.....and the classic 'we were away on holiday and our house burned down – oh woe is us'.

They must think he was a friggin idiot.....

Roger's next door neighbour had rung him with the good news that tattoo man's house had burned down so they moved back

from the casino to their home. After he had surveyed the charred skeleton that was his neighbour's house Roger knew it would take months, at least, before it was rebuilt which gave them time to decide what to do. Stay or go? At least if they went now they could put, quite truthfully on the selling documents, 'no' to 'any problems with noisy neighbours etc?'

The next day he rang H about the shops and also told him the good news and that he would no longer yawn in meetings.

'Good,' said H.

When they finished the conversation H rang Andy Pandy.

'I thought we were shutting up two dogs?'

'We have.'

'True, but we also burnt down their house.'

'True, but dogs can be replaced.'

'True.....'

'It takes a lot, lot longer to replace a house.'

'True.....'

'Take care, Andy.'

'And you, H.'

Good old Andy.....

Chapter 62

Ian Patrick 4

Ian was enjoying his time and his life with Peter. It had been nearly three months since they had met and Ian now spent most of his time with Peter at one of his homes wherever he needed to be at the time. Recently Peter had needed two weeks in New York and had dropped Ian off at his beautiful beach front home in Bermuda a week before, spent that week with him and then hopped a jet back every couple of days after.

It was in the second week at 'Haven', the beach house, that Ian lost his virginity. Peter was gentle and explained softly what to expect at each stage and when there was a little pain as his anus refused to accommodate Peter's prick Peter softly kissed his shoulders and whispered gently to him.

'It's ok,' he whispered, 'you're a virgin. You have to feel a little discomfort initially. Let's make it a little easier....'

He picked up the jar of soft jelly from the table and smeared some more on Ian's arse and his erect prick, wiping his hands on a Kleenex.

'Now.....just relax.'

When it was an inch in Ian said suddenly, 'I'm desperate for a shit.'

'No, you aren't, it's just a reaction, that's all. Just relax...just relax...you're doing fine.'

Gently, little by little, Peter got it all in.

'I'm going to split apart.'

'No, you're not. Now just relax...let every muscle relax...'

'It's not easy with a big prick up your arse...'

'.....and everything will be fine.....relax.....relax...'

And Peter started slowly moving his prick in and out....in and out...in and out....

‘I had no idea,’ said Ian after being quite silent a while, ‘that it could give such pleasure.’

‘See, my sweet.....see.....I told you.’

Peter continued gently for several minutes and then his body shuddered and he gasped.

‘Wow,’ said Ian, ‘was that what I think it was?’

‘Yes.....’

‘Bloody hell.’

‘Welcome aboard the good ship buggery...although,’ his law training coming to the fore, ‘an act of buggery does not need ejaculation for it to be an offence....Anyhow, there’s a lovely song about what just happened....’

‘A song? About what we just did?’

‘Yes. It’s a parody on the old Lesley Gore song and it goes like this...’

‘It’s your anus, you can cry if you want to

Cry if you want to, cry if you want to

We all cried too

But now it’s up you...’

Peter got the iced champagne. ‘Partner,’ he said, raising his glass, ‘To us.....’

They had, as adults and fellow hustlers, discussed their financial arrangements. Peter was quite aware that Ian had, by comparison, very little money and Ian had no wish to be a kept man (which wasn’t entirely true but....) and so he contributed when he needed to which wasn’t often. Ian had about £450,000 in the Bank as his needs were small and so the odd scam here and odd scam there had mounted up over the years and of course the influx of £175,000 from Lillian had added to it considerably. So Peter paid

for most things but in reality it wasn't too much. A bit of food, the odd flight, and Ian paid for what he could in the normal day to day things that they enjoyed together.

Back in Christchurch they were sitting out on the deck quite unaware that they were being looked at through high powered binoculars.....

'Well,' said the man to the person sitting next to him, 'I think this is it. You sure you're ok with this?'

'Quite ok.'

He turned round and looked at the man in the back of the car.

'Everything ok with you?'

'Everything A ok.'

'Let's go.....'

Peter put down his Perrier water and went to the wall that housed the intercom from the gate. 'Yes?'

'I'm here to see Ian,' said the voice.

'Ian? You're here to see Ian?'

'Yes.'

'Just a moment, please.'

He clicked off the intercom and turned to Ian. 'There's someone here to see you....?'

'Me? Why would anyone ask for me?'

'I don't know.....'

The answer swept across Ian's face. 'It's the fish. Remember they said they would ring when they had the fish and they must have been around here and decided to deliver it.'

Peter snapped his thumb and finger. 'Bingo, Sherlock.'

He pushed the button again. 'The gates will open; please come in.'

Peter went through the lounge to the main door and Ian heard him talking. After a few moments he came through to the deck and said, 'It's not fish, it's chickens.'

'Chickens?' queried Ian.

'Yes. Come home to roost.'

He moved to one side and the person with him walked in.

'Hello, Ian. How are you doing.....?'

He was stunned. 'Hello.....' for a moment he couldn't remember the name, '..... Lillian.'

'Hello, Terry.'

'Let's go into the lounge and be comfortable,' said Peter and they followed him through.

'How have you been keeping?' she said from her armchair.

He nodded rather stupidly. 'Ok, you?'

'Great. Couldn't be better. I live in sheltered accommodation and have no money since you went off with it,' she smiled. 'You little scamp, you.'

Ian looked at Peter to see the disgust and contempt on his face at this intrusion into his life of a former life of his but he saw none of it. Peter was sitting with one leg draped over an arm and a small grin on his face that said '*let me see how you get out of this one partner....*'

'Why did you take my money?' She asked. 'It was all I had in the world.'

He didn't know what to say.

He honestly didn't know what to say.

He found himself between two worlds. The world of the lying, cheating, thieving, deceitful, duplicitous scammer and the world he was now in; which was a world built on trust and honesty and sharing and caring and he knew, like he had never known anything in his life, which world he wanted to be in. He

had thought about it for a while and knew that he could never go back to his other world and that terrified him as it was the only world he knew and the only world that had paid the bills.

He looked at Peter but saw only the eyes of someone watching. For what? What did Peter want of him? Did he want to be impressed with the ultimate in scamming when he would come out with his story and Lillian would forgive him and go away? Was that what he was waiting for? More than likely.

And if he didn't do that? If he just gave her the money back and she left, more than likely to tell the police afterwards, what would happen then? He knew he was in a lose lose situation but that was the way it was. That was the way it was.....

He felt a dreadful tiredness envelope him and he knew he had given up. Too many lies, too much deceit takes it out of you. This was one step too far...

'I'm sorry, Lillian. I really am sorry.'

'Well, that's something,' she said, 'but I would like my money. I want my one hundred and seventy five thousand plus a hundred thousand for what you've put me through plus twenty thousand to pay back something I owe. So what's say we call it a round three hundred thousand?'

The figures whirled round his head. Three hundred thousand? Three hundred thousand! Where the fuck was he going to get.....? But he knew where he could get it. It was in his account at the Northern Rock Building Society where all your money was guaranteed. Good old Gordon. It still left him with a hundred and fifty or so which wasn't a lot but fuck it. Let's get this gone!

'Lillian,' he said, 'I am going to struggle with that amount but if you could agree to two hundred and fifty thousand I can let you have that in seven days.'

'No.....it's three hundred thousand or you take the long overdue consequences of your actions. Maybe your friend here

can help you?’ she said sarcastically.

Ian didn’t look at Peter. ‘No, I don’t need any help, I can get the balance. I will make sure you have it within seven days.’

There was no need for her to know he had it all. Let her feel a bit sorry for him. He may need her sympathy in due course. Who knows? It may even be in a Court of Law. The thought sent a cold shudder through him.

‘And how do I know you will send it? How do I know you won’t just skip the country?’

‘You don’t.’

‘Actually I do. You see this small wire attached to.....’ she unbuttoned her blouse ‘this microphone? All our conversation has been transmitted and recorded. If I don’t get my money in seven days we will go to the High Court and issue Proceedings against you and put a Lien on your house. We will also hand all the information we have to the police.....’

Well done, thought H, listening back in the car, exactly to the script. Well done....

‘And so you see,’ she continued, ‘you have little choice in the matter if you want any kind of life in the future.....’

Well done again, thought H, make him concerned about losing what he’s got....

‘You’ll get it, Lillian. For what it’s worth, and I know you think it’s very little, you have my word. Where do you want me to send the cheque?’

She gave him a card.

‘James James of J J Group Ltd? Who’s that?’

‘A friend who has helped me out.’

‘OK, I’ll send it there, but still made out to you?’

‘Yes.’

She turned to Peter. ‘I am sorry that this happened in your house but sometimes situations dictate events...’

‘It’s not a problem. I’ve found it quite *fascinating*.’

When she had gone they went back outside and sat in the warm summer sun.

‘I’m sorry,’ said Ian, ‘I truly am sorry. If I had known anything like this was going to happen I would have made sure it wasn’t here.’

Peter looked at him and Ian didn’t know what it meant. Was this the end? Was Peter going to give a five minute soliloquy and then it would be over? To be or not to be....that is the question? Perhaps the greatest soliloquy ever uttered? Ah well. What will be, will be.

Ian grinned inwardly. Where was all this literature coming from as he was more inclined to Jack Higgins.....?

‘Before we discuss it,’ said Peter a touch ominously, ‘can I look at that card she gave you?’

He took it and studied it. ‘I’m not sure....?’ he said, more to himself, ‘just a minute.’

He went in the house and into his office. Opening the Contacts in his email he found the number he wanted. When he returned: ‘The situation you were just in. How do you see it?’

‘See it?’

‘See it.’

‘You mean how do I feel about it?’

‘Not quite but we can start there.’

He decided to tell Peter exactly what he thought and take the consequences. He explained the dilemma he had felt. The old life of deceit against his new one of mutual trust. The fear and insecurity of losing a lot of his money but also the fear of what would happen if he didn’t. And also the fear of what Peter would think afterwards...

When Ian had finished Peter got them drinks and came back and sat down. This could be the end, thought Ian. This could be it.

‘Let me tell you where I’m at,’ said Peter.

Ah well, thought Ian, it was good while it lasted.

‘You want me to go?’ he said to save himself being dismissed.

‘Just sit and listen,’ said Peter. ‘Initially, I must admit, I thought you were pulling a wonderful scam. Here is old Lillian, from the dead so to speak. How convenient that she should show up here asking for money. And then you told her you didn’t have enough money and said you would get the balance. I’m the balance, I thought. But then I remembered you had told me how much you had in the Bank so I thought there must be more to it. But I watched your face throughout and I saw nothing in it except a man who had given up. Had enough and was willing to give up a large chunk of his ill gotten gains to buy a new life. Then I knew, or thought I knew, it wasn’t actually a scam. But the clincher was the card.’

‘The card?’

‘Yes. The business card of one James James who is affectionately known by some as H.’

‘H?’

‘Yes, H. I came across Mister James James a little while ago, in fact it could be several years but I’m not sure. I was in the West Midlands I think trying to sign up some pimply faced idiots and went with some local friends to the casino...’

‘And you met him there?’

‘No, I’ve never met him. I actually met a man, sort of met, called Billy Som...Sim.....a famous boxer once.....?’

‘Simmons?’

‘Yes, Simmons. Well, it would appear that mister Simmons was upset because H, as we shall call him, in some way beat him at cards..’

‘You mean cheated him?’

‘No. From what I remember he slow played two Aces and it knocked Billy out of the game. Well, Billy took umbrage at this and when H went to his car at the end of his evening Billy followed to sort him out.’

‘Jesus,’ said Ian, ‘poor Mister James.’

Peter laughed. ‘Not exactly. H destroyed him. He smashed his face in, broke his arms and maybe his legs and God knows what else. He left him in such a mess he ended up in hospital. Not only that he wrecked Billy’s brand new BMW with one of Billy’s golf clubs.’

‘Christ!’

‘So what I saw was them getting the unconscious Billy back inside with arms and legs all over the place like a rag doll. I asked what had happened dah de dah and who had done it? And that’s when they told me about H.’

‘I’m not sure what you’re getting at?’

‘What I’m saying in a round about kind of way is that you are lucky to be alive...’

‘What?’

‘To put it another way, if she is a friend of James James and you have hurt her you are lucky you are not already dead.’

‘Oh Christ,’ said Ian and Peter saw him visibly shake with fear.

‘I think,’ said Peter, ‘H wanted his friend to get her money back, with interest, which may be enough to assuage him and he will leave you alone.’

‘Christ, I hope so. But what if he doesn’t?’

‘I am afraid, my love, if that is the case, if you stay in England you will die.....’

Chapter 63

Loopy Lew

H and Andy sat down and watched the tapes and they knew H was right. The postman didn't usually deliver mail to the house. How could he with an electronic gate to navigate so he left it in a post box set in the wall by the huge iron gate and H or Benshima picked it up as they came in. But recently with all the comings and goings, with the gates quite often open, the postman had wandered up and delivered them directly. But it was a different postman.... The usual postman left them at the gate and the other one, the occasional one, would walk up. And he was obviously a postman as the letters were genuine. Why would he do that? Curiosity about the new people? Want to see the house? But once you've done it why do it again? Why not just leave them at the gate and get on with your round....?

Well, well, well....

So he was, maybe, could be, a postman.

Andy didn't think so. How could he deliver letters to the apartment in London and this house in Hampshire? And how would he know they had moved?

What if he worked in the sorting office? They got advance notice of all changes of address to redirect mail. Could he be a sorter who also filled in for posties who didn't arrive...?

They decided to give it to Sammy the Search to do the spadework as Sammy could find a particular maggot in a huge barrel of squirming maggots. It was a gift...

Four days later Sammy came back with name, age, marital status, address, employer, NI Number, shift times etc. He also

gave them photos to prove it was the same man. Sammy was nothing if not thorough.

Andy and an accomplice let themselves in to his flat one morning, giving him enough time to get to work, and went through his things to make sure. They knew there would be something there to corroborate their thoughts. And there was. The pictures on the wall told the whole story. Graphic scenes that exposed his troubled mind and Andy noticed one of a woman with a superimposed head and a donkey's dick in her mouth. He was very glad H wasn't there.....

They left everything untouched and faded back into the world outside from where they would work out what to do with Lewis Mason.

It was easy to take him. They waited in the dark until he was going to the pub or wherever and walked up in front of him and tapped him in the stomach with a fist. It only took a tap; amazingly, it only ever took a tap. The pros amongst them knew from past experience if you smashed someone in the stomach they usually died of a ruptured spleen or a general squashy mess of internal bits which refused to function properly.... Either way they didn't want him hurt so they just bundled him in a car, put a hood over his head, injected him with a tranquilizer and took him off to Needles. It was initially going to be Andy Pandey's out of the way place but for this Needles out of the way place was better....

They left him with Andy Pandey, H, Needles and two invited guests who were the opening act. The invited guests had been given strict instructions although they didn't really need them as they were masters of their own art, but they needed an understanding of *why* so that they could play their part to perfection.....

Chapter 64

Johnny Razz 4

Greivey, the pro who had been beaten heads up in the game against Razz rarely went into the JJ Casino in Birmingham anymore. It had been three months since that day and he was still pissed off about it. He had lost his cool there and pulled it back immediately but they *had* been set up.

No one told them about this fucking wunderkind and he was quite sure that if they had, and if someone had also told them about the possibility of a job representing the casino, then he would have had a shot. And because of those omissions he wasn't on his A game and that was hardly fair. Not fair at all.

He had taken them to the cleaners because they didn't know it was important and they were pissing about. As simple as that....

Greivey wanted to get back all the kudos that he used to have in Birmingham. Now he was the man *who was beaten by a kid*. Was it you that was beaten by that kid? They asked.

Fuck off!

He had rung the casino and spoken to Johnny Rozzano and invited him to a private game. He had agreed but also asked if he could invite his new mate Mickey who was home at that time between tournaments and between countries and Greivey said fine. Mickey Wernick was also another cunt who took away the limelight. When Mickey was European Numero fucking Uno in 2006 it was all you ever fucking heard!

And so here they were at a private room in a pub in Birmingham. Greivey, Johnny, Mickey and five more of Greivey's friends from around the vicinity. The rules were quite simple. It was a £10,000

buy in with one £5,000 re-buy allowed in the first hour if you were knocked out. At the end of the hour you could buy the same amount of chips again for another £5,000. So the most it could cost you was £20,000 for the night. The other rule was also uncomplicated. Last man standing or, put another way, winner takes all.

The one thing that made life complicated was the fact that it was held in a private room in a pub in Birmingham, where, if you wanted a drink it was literally on tap. Many gamblers have strict rules when it comes to booze and gambling; don't. Others can take a little and exercise discipline.

Others.....

Razz was card dead. He could pick up the odd pot with a bluff if enough folded, or the occasional blinds but otherwise he was a spectator. Mickey was doing better and after two hours was chip leader. Two had already gone out but had stayed to watch as Greivey was enjoying himself goading and raising Razz. It had become quite apparent that there was another agenda behind the game and now they knew what it was. Greivey just didn't like Razz. Pure and fucking simple.

It had been quite well hidden initially with just the odd poker jibe but as alcohol loosened Greivey's tongue so the jibes turned more and more personal and insulting.

'Give it a break,' said Mickey at one point.

'Fuck you, old man,' said Greivey, 'but if you want to take him home and change his nappy....?'

Mickey was about to say something but ended up saying nothing. In a way Greivey was right. It wasn't his problem and as a professional poker player his very livelihood depended on how much he earned, and there was money at stake. You either lost your money or won £80,000 minimum so it actually served him

well that Greivey was on tilt and Razz was under pressure from him. Take advantage Mickey boy, take advantage. The missus, the kids, the Bank, the Bookie, the local restaurant, the travel agents etc would expect no less..... Mickey's mobile made the message sound, a fanfare from the Trumpet Voluntary, and he looked down as it flashed. It was from a good friend of his, Neil Channing.

‘What are you doing?’ he read.

Mickey thumbed the keys. ‘What the fuck do you think I’m doing?’

‘Ring me when you’ve won’ came back the reply.

Mickey smiled. Most men would think he meant he was having sex but poker players knew exactly what you meant. And Neil was a poker player to his toes, a daily visitor to the Victoria in London, and only a few weeks ago he had won £800,000 in the big Irish tourney.

‘You fuckin playin, Mickey?’ Asked a voice.

Jolted from his thoughts he quickly looked at his cards, saw the 6 4 and mucked and then realised everyone had folded but him and the big blind. And he had mucked his cards without even thinking. He could have limped to see a cheap flop or even raised to try and take it uncontested.

But no; he had folded.

Had wasted an opportunity.

Wake up you stupid fucking prick!

Another half an hour and down to four. Mickey, Razz, Greivey and one of his mates. The others sat, watched and drank.

With the blinds now quite big Razz was beginning to get the odd big hand and found himself with Kings. He raised and everyone but Mickey folded and he re-raised. Razz stopped and looked at Mickey. He knew he had a hand; the thing was how

good was his hand? It was only really aces that bothered Razz although A K would also have been bad. KK against AA would be about 20 – 80 whereas KK against A K was about 70 – 30. It would still be better to get him off it or fold.

Razz needed more information so re re-raised to see what would happen. Mickey looked at him, smiled, and then pushed all his chips in which told Razz all he needed to know and he folded.

‘You cheatin cunts,’ screamed Greivey and picked up the unseen cards off the table and turned them over.

‘Fuckin Kings and Mickey had aces. How fuckin fortunate,’ and he launched himself across the table at Razz, catching him on the side of the head with his fist. Mickey jumped up, balled his fists, assumed a boxer’s stance but went down as soon as the heavy pint glass hit his head from behind. Razz slumped to the floor and was followed by Greivey who had scrambled over the table and started smacking Razz as hard as he could with his fists.

It took them too long to drag the frenzied Greivey off him and Razz’s face was a bleeding pulp by the time they did.

The four left them there, minus their money. A few minutes later Mickey came round and found Razz, face swollen out of recognition. He made sure he was alive then dialled 999 on his mobile. After giving all the details he dragged himself slowly downstairs to the bar.

‘Two doubles, please,’ he said, which he took back upstairs without paying. While he waited for the ambulance, he cradled Razz and started on the doubles.....

Chapter 65

Golf

H had managed to get into a small local golf club. He could have joined a posh local golf club like Wentworth with only a £15,000 joining fee and £5,000 a year but this one was fifteen hundred and that was fine. And anyhow half the members of the posh one could be his clients and he didn't need them coming up to him every five minutes bellyaching about their losses. No, this was fine.

But after six months he wondered if he should be there at all? It was like rent an arsehole. Fucking hell! The members were fine but the ones he had met that had any so called *authority* were complete and utter pricks!

Little men desperate for some kind of recognition.

On reflection he thought he should have joined the other club where at least, in theory, the members had no need for *recognition*. If they could afford the twenty grand they should already have recognition *somewhere*.

'Good morning, Mister Captain,' you heard as you wandered around. *Good morning, Mister Captain?* Shit!

And there was a President, and past President, and Captain and past Captain, and Vice Captain, and Chairman of Greens, and, and..... And they all had their own parking spots.

On one occasion H was changing into his golfing shoes in the car park. 'Hey, you,' he heard in the distance but took no notice.

'You, chappy,' he heard again more insistently.

H looked round to see a man in his fifties walking quickly to him. 'You want me?'

‘Of course I want you, I’m talking to you, aren’t I?’ said the man condescendingly, ‘can you see anyone else around?’

‘You may have a mild form of dementia.’

‘Pardon?’

‘You may be seeing people that aren’t there.’

‘What are you talking about?’ asked the man. ‘Are you mad?’

Another time, another place, thought H. Could we have fun with you...

‘You wanted to talk to me,’ said H, moving on.

‘No, chappy, I don’t want to *talk* to you, that would suggest something quite different. I want to *tell* you what you should already know. *You are not allowed to change your shoes in the car park!*’

‘Why’s that?’ asked H, knowing about the rule but choosing to ignore it.

‘Why, chappy? Why? It’s all about *fucking* standards, chappy. *Fucking* standards.’

A wide grin spread over H’s face.

‘What’s funny?’

‘You are.....this club is.’

‘What’s funny about it?’

H was about to launch into a twenty page list of reasons why it was all nonsense when he realised he couldn’t give a shit. This wasn’t for him. The pomposity and the jumped up idiots like the one before him who thought changing your shoes was lowering standards but uttering expletives wasn’t. It was all bollocks.

All round the course you heard every swear word known to man, but he couldn’t change his shoes on the car park..... And going round the course you could take a piss anywhere, but you couldn’t change your shoes on the car park.... And if you were really stuck you had to have a shit on the course, but you couldn’t change your shoes on the car park. And, according to the

grapevine, the Chairman of Greens was fucking the President's wife, but you couldn't change your shoes in the car park.

What utter bollocks.....

He had an overwhelming urge to smash this pathetic little hypocrite in the mouth. What stood before him was everything he loathed. This facade of gentility and manners behind which lay a rotting core.

'Anyhow,' said H, 'Good to talk to you but I've got to finish putting my golf shoes on.'

'I have given you strict instructions not to do that,' puffed up the man.

'Pardon?'

'As a Committee member I have the authority....'

H grabbed the top of his tie and yanked the man towards him, holding his face close to his. 'Be very careful. Because I am very close to smashing your face in.'

'You.....'

But as he started to speak H put his fingers behind the tie and twisted and he started to choke. 'Yes?'

The man shook his head.

H twisted some more. 'Yes....?'

He shook his head again, his breath rasping out of his constricted throat and his face going red.

'Now you go. And don't ever come near me again, ok?'

He twisted even more. The man, with difficulty as his shirt stopped his neck moving, nodded. H let go of the shirt and the man gulped in as much air as he could and then scurried away. H took off his golf shoes, put them back in the boot of his car and headed home. Never to return. If he was going to play golf, and now it was a big if, he would go to Wentworth or somewhere like that. Or not....

Two days later he got a phone call from the police asking about an alleged assault on a Golf Club car park and H had to go and give a statement. The police decided there was no mileage in it as it was one person's word against another.

H rang his solicitor and seven days later the Club, and every person in authority at the Club, received a letter from H's high powered London Solicitors threatening legal action against them all for the abuse, trauma, physical harm and bullying that H had suffered at the hands of a Committee Member. A culture instigated and promoted by all the members in authority and therefore they were all separately and severally to be held responsible. The letter went on to suggest that proceedings would be undertaken in the High Court to establish damages but a figure exceeding £500,000 would be demanded.

The Chairman rang the Committee member concerned. 'What's this about, Henry?'

Henry explained what had happened and that it was all about standards. The Chairman listened some more then hung up. Henry was the salt of the earth, a backbone of the club and indeed the Chairman had been his proposer when he was appointed Captain.

He then instructed the Club Secretary to email everyone and hastily arranged a meeting in three days' time to be held at the same time as the usual Committee Meeting.....

Chapter 66

Roger 3

After the review and the agreement from H Roger had a memo, along with everyone else, stating Allan Scott's new role. Chairman of JJ Betting shops.

Oh fucking great!

Roger could see himself answering to H but to Scotty? Hardly. What the fuck did he know about betting and betting shops? Rog knew that Scotty played internet poker in £1 games, *£1 games*, which showed a highly professional and razor sharp betting mind. As fucking if....

Unfortunately today was his first official meeting with Scotty in his new role and Roger had something rather contentious to bring up with him. Scotty ran, if that was the word, the Internet Poker site and Roger wanted it in his stable. Not only that he wanted to add Roulette and Sports Betting to it. He didn't want Bingo as that was small stakes, large volumes, large central costs and was only inhabited by the droopy tits brigade as the trade affectionately knew them.

He knew Scotty would be arsy about it and could see that once he mentioned the Roulette and Sports Betting that Scotty would know it was a good idea and then farm it off into a separate enterprise which he would control and then get the plaudits from H.

Roger had seen it happen so many times.....

But he knew it was the right thing to do. The roulette was just software, would add little to their costs, but add about 3% net to their bottom line.

The Sports Betting was another kettle of fish all together but it had one good thing going for it. It was 24/7. You sat at home, or your office, or anywhere where you could access the internet and you could bet on most sports from all over the world. Horses, dogs, football, cricket.... And it meant the bigger customers could be serviced all the time. There was nothing worse than a big punter taking you for a few quid and then going down the road and blowing it in the casino. Rog wanted them to have the opportunity of losing it all with him and so the ability to bet on line and, at a push, go to a JJ Casino, was a necessity. But on line was better. Better for his P & L and better for his bonus. And again it was relatively low cost. All he needed were a couple of Traders working out of these offices to compile odds and hedge risky bets and that was about it.

And another problem.

The Wace shops made money but they weren't that savvy, which was surprising. A few days ago he had a phone call from a manager telling him that they had just lost £84,000 on an outsider and they needed to go to the Bank for a top up as he wanted cash.

'Tell him we don't have the money until tomorrow and to come back first thing in the morning.'

'He won't buy that.'

'What choice does he have? If you have a problem get him to ring me,' which the irate punter duly did.

Roger placated him with all manner of professional logic which, on close scrutiny may have had one or two flaws, but Roger was an expert on moving you away from those and the man agreed to collect his money the next day. It was what Roger wanted. He knew that once he had that money in his hands he would wander round the shop, look at a few races....and start giving it all back.

It was what Roger was good at. Very good at. Taking money off punters.

Roger rang the Managers of those shops that had key, large staking customers and told them what was expected of them if someone won a large amount of money and wanted the cash.....

Roger had rented offices for his small team. Just two offices; a largish one that the three of them could work out of and a small office that could be used for privacy if needed. Scotty was meeting him at 10am and Roger made sure the coffee was bubbling away in the percolator.

Just before 10 Scotty arrived and Roger heard him climbing the stairs between the bakery and the florists to their first floor suite. You could live or die here, thought Roger; it was all catered for.

Here we go....this should be fun.

‘Morning, Allan,’ said Roger, smiling and shaking his hand. ‘Good journey? Coffee?’

‘Yes and yes, please.’

‘Milk, sugar?’

‘Yes and a couple, please.’

They sat down and Rog thought he might as well get straight to it. ‘Allan, I’ve got one or two things to put to you.’

‘Good,’ said Scotty, ‘but before we get in to that how do you feel about having a new boss?’

The word *boss* rankled him.

‘In what way?’ asked Roger, feeling out the way forward.

‘Well, here you are as the new MD and I was just the prick asking daft questions in the office when you were hired. Now I’m your Chairman.....’

Roger didn’t quite know what to say?

‘A bit irritating?’ suggested Scotty. ‘Answering to a prick?’

All of a sudden Roger's perceived animosity towards Scotty evaporated and he found himself smiling. What an opener..... His body relaxed and he lost his *fight* mode. 'I'm fine.....just fine'

'Good,' said Scotty, 'I'm glad you are.'

Scotty had used the word *boss* purposely to provoke a reaction and had watched.....

'What do you want to discuss?' asked Allan. 'We've given you an ok on the shops plan so I assume you want the poker site?'

Roger went back on guard. 'Well....' he hesitated, wondering whether now was the time? He had got off to a good start with Sco.....his Chairman, why fuck it up? It could wait a while; he had enough on his plate anyway.

'What do you want to do?' asked Scotty, 'put it under your remit?'

'Well.....'

'I think you should.....and I assume you want to add roulette to our software in Malta?'

'Well....'

'It will add, what, three or four percent to your bottom line?'

'Well....'

'And sports betting out of here?'

'Well....'

'And not Bingo I take it. We don't want to be inundated with droopy tits...'

'Well....'

'I think you're right,' said Scotty, 'can you cost it out for me and let me have your proposal. Let me have it in eight weeks so you have a bit of room to breathe.'

Eh? Thought Roger. Eh?

They moved on to more general subjects and half an hour later Scotty left, leaving Rog a bit bemused.

Rog made an exaggerated display of going round the room trying to find the listening bugs although he had not discussed the add-ons with his team. Then he stuck his fingers in his ears to check for implanted probes. How did Scotty know what he was going to say? He shrugged, got himself another coffee and sat down with his feet on his desk. It was funny how you just *knew* what someone was going to say..... He giggled to himself as he remembered the old Noddy and Big Ears joke.

Noddy needs to cut his lawn but his mower won't work so he decides to ask his friend Big Ears who lives a few doors up if he can use his.

As he's putting back his own mower Noddy thinks....

What if he's using it? He won't let me use it if he's using it.

As he's going through his gate Noddy thinks....

What if he's watching tele and I disturb him? He won't like that.

As he's walking up the road Noddy thinks.....

I bet he'll moan when I ask him and pulls a face.

As he opens Big Ears' gate Noddy thinks.....

I bet he won't let me use it. I bet he'll say it's broken or something.

As he knocks on the door Noddy thinks.....

What lame excuse will he use to not help me?

The door opens and Big Ears stands there smiling. 'Hello, Noddy, me old mate, how can I help you?'

'You can help me,' shouts Noddy, 'by sticking your fucking mower up your arse, you obnoxious, tight fisted cunt!'

Sticking two fingers up in Noddy's face he storms off down the path, slams the gate and goes home.....

Chapter 67

Andy Pandy, H and Loopy Lew

He awoke in a large room with subdued lighting, creating a forbidding gloom and it took him two or three minutes to adjust to it. Even then he could see little. It took him a lot longer to adjust to the fact that he was on some kind of bed, a bit like one of those that they wheel you round hospital in, and that his arms, body and legs were held securely by restraint straps. He was caught between panic and relief. Was he a prisoner or was he in hospital for some reason? He knew he had been captured but there was no reason why anyone would want him so they may have realised their mistake, thrown him on the side of the road, he'd been spotted and taken to hospital? His optimism said yes but his intellect said no.

‘Hello...’ he shouted out. ‘Hello..... Is anyone there.....?’

Nothing.

He lay there for another fifteen minutes and his stress and anxiety levels mounted by the minute. His brain, so good at conjuring up weird and perverted images, became a receptacle for everything bad that he could imagine could happen to him. He started to frantically tug at his restraints which refused to budge and his stress went higher. Panic overtook him and he started to scream louder and louder and then he started to cry. Crying turned to minor hysterics and then his body racked with convulsions.

After another fifteen minutes, when nothing had happened, he calmed and tried to think more rationally. He tried to work it out logically and was slowly convincing himself that he was actually

safe when he saw a movement in the gloom of one of the corners in front of him.

It moved slowly towards him, a black shadow slowly advancing like a ghost. He started to panic as the shadow stopped just in front and to the side of his head. There was enough light for him to see two eyes looking down at him from the black, threatening shape. His bed was just below waist high to the black shape and he watched as the shape drew apart the black robes that enveloped its bottom half and he saw, a few inches from his face, a woman's vulva. He felt sick....

Not seeing the black gloved hands that had inserted their fingers, he watched as if by magic the mouth of her vulva open wide; the red lips assaulting him with their vulgarity as they slowly opened to reveal her vagina.

His mind screamed with pain as the image before him found his innermost confusion.....the world in which his torment lay.

H had given the letters to Needles to get an opinion off one of his Harley Street psychiatrist friends. What kind of man wrote this?

He, said the returning note, is struggling to find not only his relationship to women but them to him. On the one hand they are Goddesses to be put on a pedestal and revered and on the other they are the lowest of the low to be reviled. And so he swings from one to the other; both giving him pleasure, both giving him pain. He lives in a world of fantasy where he is safe and in control. A woman that either got too emotionally or physically close would be dreadful for him as reality and all its needs would impinge on his fantasy.

So he is more than likely a loner who has posters of women on his wall and conducts his relationship in his head and in his room.

It is also possible that he would rape to act out his control fantasies and relieve him of unbearable pent up emotions and

pressure. He may also feel a need to inflict pain or even, in due course, to kill.....

He turned his head away as much as he could from the disgusting image to find that another shadow had arrived on the other side. As the bottom of her black cloak moved aside he saw again, a vagina staring at him. This one was not open but from it he saw a tiny string emerging. Oh no...he pleaded to someone in his brain with more power than he had...oh no...oh no.....

He watched, appalled as the string tightened and the unseen black gloved hand pulled the soaking red Tampax from its bloody resting place. He thrashed and jerked in frenzy as he watched the vile object that represented everything he loathed move to his face and over his cheeks, leaving vivid stains like scars where it had been. He felt it touch his lips and he wanted to gag but he kept his mouth fiercely closed.

‘Hello, my Darling,’ said a black shape softly, ‘do you still love me?’

His flesh crept with revulsion. *Love you? You fucking low life cow! Love you? I want you to fucking die you bitch! Die! Die! Die!*

‘Kiss me again, my love,’ said the shape.

Kiss you? You? Again? Again?

‘I’ll kiss you,’ the shape said softly, almost lovingly.

And the bloody Tampax caressed his lips once more.

He writhed on the table in an agony of hell but there was no escape.

‘Shall I give you a special gift, my love?’ she cooed.

He watched as the evil black shape got on the table and felt a leg go either side of his waist. They moved up until they were touching his upper arms. The lower cloak opened and his face stared at the vagina that was so close to his face he could smell it.

He smelt it! It was....it was.....that smell....it was.....

He felt the sick rising in his throat.

‘Look, my darling,’ said the soft voice, ‘my cunt for you.’

Cunt! The word filled him with a vile loathing and disgust. He saw the blood oozing from it and he screamed. He screamed and screamed and screamed until he stopped dead still as the shock of the hot urine hitting his face took him unawares. His eyes widened and a fury that had to be unleashed but couldn’t took hold of him. A scream rent the air like a wounded animal trapped in hideous pain and dying in a gin trap. He howled and howled, a cry seemingly going on forever then he stopped abruptly and lay still.

A door opened and Needles, H and Andy Pandy came in.

‘Good work, girls,’ said Andy, ‘go and have a break and get a coffee.’

Needles checked him over.

‘How long’s he likely to be out?’ asked Andy.

‘Quite a while,’ said Needles. ‘Massive heart attacks leading to death tend to be permanent...’

Andy Pandy rang the boys and they took him back to his flat, put him in a chair, made a cup of tea, put it by his side and left him there.

If only, Andy thought, people would be this accommodating every time they needed someone dead.....

Chapter 68

Coast to coast 4

They sat in a small beach cafe close to the small village of Ferragudo and looked across the estuary to Portimao; following the coast west Lagos stood waiting. It had been their intention to go to the west of Portimao and then when the deed was done they could hot foot it straight over to Lagos but Armel had taken to Ferragudo. It was only small but just off the beach there were maybe a dozen villas obviously rented out to holiday makers from who knows where.

They had two rules with relation to these types of property. Either forget them entirely if they were cheap as the occupants would have little money or if they had a degree of style the occupants would more than likely bring a fair amount of cash and a few trinkets which made it worthwhile. If they had children you left it alone as it could get complicated but a man and a woman were ideal.

With a man and a woman you had a degree of power if things started to go wrong. Men usually made decisions that took into account their woman which was a strategic mistake. Luckily.

Presheva had moved into the role of spotting the marks and had noticed a couple move into a villa the day before. Mid forties with an obvious look of money about them. He was a big man which helped and she was pregnant. Presheva had always wanted to fuck a pregnant woman, preferably with big swollen tits, as his wife had always refused him after three months. Why three months? Why not four or eight? Or the day before the little bastard dropped out? Fuck knows.....

Anyhow here was an opportunity for them. The villa was on the edge of the small development where they met the plains which spread on to the mountains in the distance. There was a small road next to it which would take them straight on to the N125 to Lagos.

The following night they watched and waited for the couple to get back from wherever they had been.....

Chapter 69

Peter Andrews

Peter Andrews kept the card and rang H who was not available. He left a message asking H to ring him back but the next day, when he hadn't, he rang again to be told that Mister James was out of the country 'for a few days'. He left another message.

Just over a week later he received a call from H.

'Mister James, thanks for returning my call. My name, obviously, is Peter Andrews and I would like to meet with you for a few minutes if that's possible.....it's quite a personal matter and face to face would help.....it would be quite difficult over the phone.....I can fit in with you.....Thank you. The JJ Casino in London at 10am.'

The casino was quiet other than cleaners, admin staff and a team of shop fitters doing something to the bar area. He was shown upstairs to H's office where H greeted him cordially. The lady who had shown him up waited for instructions.

'Can I get you a drink?' asked H.

'Just black coffee, thank you.'

H nodded and she went to organise it.

'Nice place you have,' said Peter.

'Thank you.'

'You bought it quite recently.'

'Yes.'

'You have quite a Group now.'

'Yes.'

A pause.

‘How can I help you, Mister Andrews? What is it that brings you to a casino at ten in the morning rather than at ten at night?’

‘I want to do a deal with you.’

‘You want me to be the lead singer in a group?’

‘Google?’

‘Among other sources of information.’

‘Well, not exactly, but I will consider it when I get back to the office. No, it’s about a friend of mine.’

‘A friend?’

‘Yes. You may know him, his name is Ian Patrick.’

H shook his head. ‘I don’t think I’ve ever met someone called Ian Patrick.’

‘I don’t think you’ve met him but you may have heard of him?’

‘He’s a broadcaster?’

Peter shrugged and looked irritated. ‘Mister James or H, whichever you prefer to be called, I came here today to get help for a friend, without his knowledge, and you are playing with me. All I want is.....’

He paused and thought for a moment. Is that what he was scared of? Was it? He stood up. Casually dressed in slacks, shirt and Armani jacket. Bending down he undid his laces, took off his jacket, his shirt and then his trousers. Standing in silk boxer shorts he took everything out of his pockets, then put his clothes on the floor and jumped up and down on them as though he was mad. There was a knock on the door and H looked at Peter. Peter shrugged.

‘Come in.’

A lady with a silver tray came in, put their drinks on a glass table and left. She didn’t even look. It wasn’t her job to look.

‘Please,’ said H, ‘get dressed.’

Peter got dressed and reached for his coffee. H held up his hand.

‘We’ll get a drink out.’

He followed H out of the door and they walked for several hundred yards until they came to a small bistro.

‘Same as before?’ asked H with a grin.

‘Yes.’ Peter went and found a table by the window and sat watching the traffic until H arrived with the brews.

‘Tell me what you want. In English. I’m not too good with coded messages.’

‘I have a friend called Ian Patrick. He hurt a friend of yours called Lillian...I’m sorry, I’ve forgotten her last name....and although he has reimbursed her financially I am concerned that another fate may await him.’

‘Why would you say that?’

‘I know a little about you.’

‘A little knowledge is a dangerous thing,’ said H.

‘A little *learning* is a dangerous thing; drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring: there shallow draughts intoxicate the brain, and drinking largely sobers us again. Alexander Pope from his *An Essay on Criticism* in 1709.’

‘I am genuinely impressed,’ said H.

‘Impressed enough to call off the dogs?’

‘Why do you think there are any dogs?’

‘Do you remember Billy Simmons?’

‘I do remember the name but I can’t place it.’

‘A casino in the West Midlands I think. You slow played two Aces and Billy took exception....?’

‘Ah yes, Billy. How is he these days?’ Asked H sarcastically.

‘No idea, don’t know him from Adam, but I was there the night it happened.’

‘Aaaah.’

‘And I made a few enquiries.’

‘Aaaah.’

‘And I made a few more enquiries after my friend paid back his money and I tend to feel there may be more...recriminations to come.’

H said nothing.

‘Is there?’

H said nothing.

‘Look, James, I know Ian was a prick. He scammed unsuspecting people of their money and now he has to pay. But since I have met him he has changed, genuinely changed, and not only that I care quite deeply about him and don’t want him hurt.’

H said nothing.

‘So...what I want to suggest is that, between you and me, I give you a further fifty thousand for Lillian and we can call it the end of the matter...?’

A big grin spread across H’s face. ‘Fifty thousand? Your man is worth so little?’

It was Peter’s turn to smile. ‘It was worth a try.’ He paused in thought for a few moments. ‘I’ll make it a hundred and fifty thousand.’

‘What’s he worth to you dead?’

The words crushed Peter. It was a sentence with a sentence.

‘Please.....I don’t want to get on my knees and beg but I will. I care for this man, I really do and I don’t want to lose him. But how can I put a price on his head like a piece of meat or a painting? He’s a human being, for all his faults, so please, I beg you, help me.’

‘Another coffee?’ asked H but Peter shook his head.

H went to the bar and got another milky coffee with two sugars. He came back and sat down.

‘You are a wealthy man, Peter, and yet you talk in pennies. Make me one more offer. Your final offer.’

Peter’s body slumped and he put his head in his hands. He had no idea what to offer to save Ian’s life. No idea. Much as he loved him he could hardly give all his money away.... What to do? What to do?

He looked at H and took a deep breath..... ‘A million pounds. In her account within seven days.’

Peter waited for H to say something but H merely looked at him. He just sipped at his coffee and looked....

After what, to Peter, seemed a lifetime H said, ‘No.’

Peter died inside.

‘How much more do you want?’ he asked weakly.

‘Two fifty.’

‘Ok.....’ said a defeated Peter. ‘I will arrange to transfer one and a quarter within seven days.’

‘No,’ said H, ‘two fifty is the figure.’

‘That’s what I said, one million two hundred and fifty thousand pounds. Seven days.’

‘No. Pay Lillian two hundred and fifty thousand pounds. That’s it. Finished.’

H saw tears fill Peter’s eyes. ‘Thank you, thank you so much.’

‘I have to go,’ said H. ‘Could you have the cheque brought to my office by Courier tomorrow?’

‘Yes.’

‘And as I’ve just saved you a million pounds perhaps you could get the coffees?’

Peter nodded. They shook hands and H left Peter sitting in the Bistro. Peter dabbed his eyes then went to the men’s room and put cold water over his face to freshen up. Going back he got another coffee and sat down. He was lost. The hustler part of him wanted to be jubilant over a wonderful deal. Down from one and

a quarter to a quarter of a mill but the more rational part of him knew that what he had just experienced he didn't understand..... Not one bit of it. H could easily have kept the million pounds and given Lillian the two fifty? Or given her the lot.....? Or kept the lot?

What the fuck was all that about?

On the way back to the office H also thought about the transaction that had just taken place. It was difficult to put a price on someone's life and he was amazed and somewhat moved that Peter Andrews was willing to give over a million pounds to save the life of someone he loved.

H appreciated that.

H appreciated people that cared.

That someone cared enough to do that.

Lillian didn't need a million or so. She had already made a healthy profit and another two fifty would keep her nicely into her old age.

He also thought it was interesting how, when you start going down a path, every other path seemed to be out of bounds.

There was Peter, convinced that H was going to have Ian killed and didn't even consider asking him outright if he was going to be killed. After Ian had paid over the money to Lillian H had lost all interest in him.....

H's mind wandered off at a tangent.....

In a good novel, he thought, he would go back to his office and ring Lillian and tell her the good news. After she puts down the phone she turns to the friend sitting by her and raises her cup of tea.

'They bought it?' says the friend.

'Hook, line and sinker,' says Lillian.

'Great,' says Ian, 'no more pricks up my arse then....'

‘To us, my love,’ says Lillian.

‘To us....’

H grinned to himself. What a load of nonsense. You’d have to be some kind of screwed up author to think that one up.....

Chapter 70

Loopy Lew (deceased)

In due course the smell from the flat alerted the neighbours to a possible problem and the police smashed down the door. They found Lewis's decomposing body in the armchair but with no obvious signs of forced entry and no indication of any struggle; everything appearing to be in its rightful place and with his wallet sticking out of his putrefying body with money still in it there was no reason to suspect foul play.

He was carted off to the morgue where a cursory examination showed up nothing to be alarmed at and so, other than a routine DNA search, it was of little interest.

Three weeks later his DNA had matched the genetic configuration of DNA left in semen on the clothes of several women that had been assaulted and Lewis suddenly found himself famous. A bit late and not quite how he would have wished but fate and fame can be quite fickle.....

H told Benshima, without quite explaining how or why, that she would not be bothered again. Her relief was obvious and she had a little cry on his shoulder. She could relax again, go to their new house, and start planning for the birth of their child.

And H could get back to thinking about work. What to do about the security companies? Were they underused in terms of the range they should be offering? Could they even offer anything else? Did they have the skills to move up a division or two? And into what?

Or should they just go?

Three days later in Scotty's new office, H was going through it with him. He knew it was really the province of the two security MDs but this allowed them to talk it through informally and explore any scenario without worrying about the effect it would have on an MD sitting with them. The door opened and a man in overalls came into the office. H looked critically at Scotty.

'Problem with the computer?' said the man.

That would seem a good reason to call out a computer repair company, thought Scotty. He glanced at H and knew what he was thinking but better to get this done.

'I'm struggling to get emails,' said Scotty. 'I can send but none come back.'

'You should get more friends, mate,' said the technician from the computer service company.

Ah well, thought Scotty, if I'm right I think this is now out of my hands. First you walk in without knocking and now this. He was wondering whether to still try and save the situation when H said, 'Pardon?' in a relaxed way.

'He should get more friends, mate, and then he'd get more emails,' he grinned broadly.

'I'm afraid you're going to have one friend less now,' said H.

'Why's that then?'

'Leave.'

'What do you mean?'

'I mean leave, go, fuck off and never come to this company again.'

'Why?'

'You can work it out on the way out. Go!'

'You're a bit of an arsy fucker, aren't you,' said the techie, 'missus said no this morning, did she?'

H was up and out of his chair in one movement. Grabbing his throat he marched him back into the wall, smacked his head

against it with a clunk and pinned him there. The techie, who now knew how big H was, realised his mistake.

‘Just a joke, mate,’ he said hoarsely. ‘I didn’t mean any offence. Honest....’

‘Boss....’ H heard Scotty say through a void filled with rage, ‘boss.....’

He looked hard at the techie, increased his grip and watched the techie’s face scrunch up with pain. A few seconds later H watched as he gulped frantically for air that refused to go down his restricted throat. ‘Go,’ he said, ‘and just thank your lucky stars you hadn’t said that outside these walls. Ok?’

H let him go and he dropped to the floor, drawing in deep lungfuls of air. As soon as he was able he quickly zipped up his small tool bag and almost ran from the room. H picked up the phone.

‘Get me the MD of the company whose computer technician that was.’

A couple of minutes later it came through. ‘.....yes, you can help me,’ and he explained what had happened, ‘.....he didn’t mean anything by it?.....unfortunate?.....’ H held the phone at arm’s length as the man droned on and raised his eyes to Scotty. ‘Mister Evans, I can see why your man did what he did as it appears to be of little consequence to you either. That being the case, as from today, I am cancelling our contract. Thank you for your helpful attitude,’ he said sarcastically and put the phone down.

Scotty smiled. He knew what was going to happen and it had.

‘Couldn’t you have thrown him out *after* he’d mended my computer?’

‘Sorry, Scotty, but they really piss me off. I’m the customer and I want treating like one or they can fuck off!’

Another smile. H may appear quite laid back but he demanded excellent service off his suppliers and courtesy and

initiative off employees or there was no home for you here... And by the same token he expected every one of his customers to be similarly treated.

‘Why haven’t we got a computer repair company?’ asked H.

‘Because we don’t need one.’

‘Why? We have a load of companies, shit loads of computers, software coming out of our ears.....’

Scotty knew where he was at but he did it anyway. ‘The casinos have bespoke software integral to the machines and tables and supported by the supplier. The betting shops have the same arrangement. The security companies are in two locations and each have a local repairer. The clubs likewise. We don’t have any need for our own computer company.’

H nodded. ‘I knew that...’

‘I know you did, boss.’

‘So why did I go through that then?’

‘You’re frustrated. You’ve had a trying time with Benshima and you don’t know what to do about the security companies and you’re looking for a fight.....which you nearly had.’

H thought about what he had wanted to do to dear Lewis to make him pay for what he had put his wife through and the bastard had gone and snuffed it. Fucking great. The ladies of the night were just to drive him out of his mind and then he was going to drive him out of his body... Ah fuck!

‘Why not have a few days away, boss? Why not take Benshima somewhere warm for a week or two or three? The security companies can wait as they aren’t a problem. They’re a strategic issue, not a problem we have to solve today.’

What a fucking wonderful idea, thought H. Fuck the new house, fuck everything, let’s just go. Benny needed a break, I need a break....

‘And it will save on cars, boss....’

H grinned; a wide, boyish, impish grin. 'Just a small scratch.....or two.....'

Benshima was dubious but H talked her round. Where to go? H thought he could ring Freddie and get a Barbados villa off him but it was too far. He wanted something a little closer; Spain or Portugal. So he rang Freddie anyway to see if he had something out in that direction.

'Got some good ones in Florida,' said Freddie, 'really good. In fact I'm buying them up at the moment like wild fire. There's nothing like a good recession for bargains. Last month,' hurtled on Freddie, full of profitable zeal, 'I bought a complete beach side housing estate. Lovely things. Four bed, three bath, own pool, three car garage and brand new although three or four need a bit to finish them off. How much do you think, H, my man? How much?'

It was a game Freddie liked to play. A game he always won.

'How many houses?'

'Twenty one.'

'Beachside?'

'Half of them have sea views, the others have a small walk.'

'Original price?'

'Five sixty.'

'Dollars?'

'No, Polish Zlotys, you pillock,' he said sarcastically.

'Dollars it is then.'

He thought for a minute.

'How much, H, how much?' prodded Freddie like an excited child.

H knew that they would have been a steal but it was part of the game that he couldn't say so. Freddie more than likely got them for about a quarter of their value by giving a tenth officially and the rest in a foreign account away from the grasping

American Internal Revenue Service. So more than likely about one two five or one fifty?

‘Two forty.’

‘Not even close.’ H could feel him preening over four thousand miles away. ‘One thirty! What do you think of that, H? Eh? Eh?’

‘Only you could do that, Freddie,’ said H quite genuinely. ‘How did you manage it?’

‘Agreed a very cheap deal as he was going bust anyhow and paid the rest in Belize.’

‘Clever.’

‘Right on, H. So do you want one of those?’

‘Freddie, at the risk of repeating myself. I want something close in Spain or Portugal.’

‘It’s not very exotic, H.’

‘I know but Benny is pregnant and she doesn’t want to go a long way and to be honest I can’t be arsed either. Just something close...?’

Freddie mulled something over for a moment.

‘H, I can help you. I wouldn’t do this for anyone else but for you and the lovely Benshima....’

‘Go on...’ said H waiting for the catch. *You can have it if you kill Barack Obama or whoever.*

‘My mother has a villa in Portugal which she uses between November and February although she didn’t go this year as time and tide is catching up with her.’

‘Doris not good?’

‘Not bad but she’s eightyish now and prefers to stay at home and potter about. Anyhow she has, actually I own it, this villa. It’s nothing special but she likes it. Three bed, two bath, own private heated pool, two hundred yards from beach with wonderful sea

views towards Portimao and up to Lagos and also back over the mountains.'

'Ideal, sounds absolutely fine. How much?'

'Nothing, H,' said Freddie. 'Not to you. Regard it as a new child present; whatever that's called.'

H smiled. The hard nosed, money grabbing, totally exploitive Freddie had, at times, an unexpected kindness. 'That's very kind of you, Freddie. I appreciate it.'

'My mother,' said Freddie, 'wanted to show it to her friends and so I put it on our web site for her. Password protected of course so I'll send you the link and the password and then you can check it over.'

'Thank you again, Freddie.'

H heard a large crash.

'Fuck me!' he heard Freddie scream.

'What's up, Freddie?' asked a startled H.

'We're in the middle of a fucking hurricane and a fucking dustbin has just come through the window and landed on my fucking desk. Email you later! Gotta go!' And he was gone.....

The next day H got an email with the link for the villa. It was absolutely fine and exactly as Freddie had described it. In the small village of Ferragudo, it had wonderful sea views from the bedroom, pool and terrace; a barbeque area, big lounge and the 200 yard walk to the Pintadinho beach from where they could wander round to the harbour opposite Portimao.

Two weeks there to recharge the batteries and fuck the world!

Chapter 71

Sharon and Darren

It was as she had foretold. They were married in three weeks and they used their holiday fund and borrowed a little from their 'house deposit' savings and went to Cyprus where they found it was nearly forty degrees and Darren burnt his feet on the hot sand, as his theory that as long as you ran fast enough, and as long as your feet hardly touched the ground and then only for a fleeting moment, you would have no problems. Wrong..... He proved, as many before him, that people born and bred in Britain were not impervious to hot clinging sand you could cook an egg on.

When she took him to the doctors for a salve for his blisters they encountered another Brit who had decided that fish and chips, five pints of lager and a sleep on a towel on the beach on his first day were an ideal way to start the holiday. That was four days ago and he still looked like a bright pink lobster with sores and pus seeping from bloody wounds. He was obviously in agony but bearing up like any 68 IQ Brit would. When he went in to see the doctor who spoke better English than he did they heard the doctor ask what he had been taking for the burns? 'Hot showers.....' he replied.

Hardly Pax Britannica thought Sharon who knew it didn't fit but it sounded good....

On their return it was time for work and they decided to find a small house. If they were married they wanted a small house together. Not a rented one, one they would own with their mate Bill. Bill Dingsociety..... They found a small semi in a not too bad part of town and went to see Bill who told them their ten

percent deposit now needed to be twenty five. Twenty five? Twenty five? Did he know how long it took to save ten? Did he realise how little they had over at the end of each week to save with? They had to be realistic so they settled for renting until such time as they had saved more and both had wage increases to help with the earnings multiple.

Several months later, on a hot sunny Sunday evening on their tiny patio Darren was shining wheel rims and Sharon reading the Sunday Times when they heard a knock on the door.

‘I’ll get it,’ said Darren.

He opened to find an elderly woman standing there.

‘Are you Darren?’

‘Yes.’

‘And you have a girlfriend Sharon?’

‘No. I have a wife called Sharon,’ he said proudly.

‘I’m Lillian.’

He had no idea who she was.

‘Can I come in?’ she asked and Darren was too polite to say no.

‘Who is it, D?’ called Sharon.

‘It’s.....er....’

‘Lillian,’ shouted back Lillian.

‘Who?’

‘Lillian.’

Sharon appeared from the patio and said, ‘It’s you.....’

‘Yes, it’s me.’

‘D,’ said Sharon, ‘don’t you know who this is?’

He shook his head apologetically.

‘I’m the lady who you kissed and I turned into a princess.’

He was still lost. Sharon looked at Lillian and smiled; one of those *how do they manage without us* sort of smiles.

‘It’s the lady you pulled from the van.’

‘Ah,’ recognition dawning, ‘sorry.’

She moved to him and kissed him softly on the cheek. ‘I’m sorry it’s taken so long to say thank you.’

‘You didn’t have to. It was nothing, anyone would have.’

Lillian looked at Sharon who raised her eyes and gave her one of those *you have to lead them like babies* looks. Lillian nodded in silent agreement.

‘Tea?’ asked Sharon, which was the female equivalent of $E=mc^2$ but solved all problems rather than just one tiny one which was of no use to anyone anyway...

‘Please.’

Lillian stayed for nearly an hour and, for some unfathomable reason, she and Sharon hit it off like a house on fire. They even agreed to go and see the musical *Mamma Mia* in London together. She popped to the loo *in case*, kissed them both goodbye and said she would ring in three weeks to arrange the London thingy.

‘A nice lady,’ said Sharon. ‘It makes your efforts to stick your tongue down an elderly lady’s throat even more commendable.’

Darren looked uncomfortable as the image didn’t sit well.

Just before midnight they went to bed and as Sharon pulled back the sheets she saw the envelope. She took out the letter and the cheque for thirty thousand. ‘Your deposit,’ she read.....

Chapter 72

Coast to coast 5

James and Benshima had been across to Portimao, had a light sardine and salad meal, then to Praia da Rocha and The Algarve Casino Hotel where H spent an hour wandering round and Benny put a few pounds in slot machines, but they were both tired so they headed home. Maybe they would go back again in a few days' time when they were rested and relaxed.

It was two in the morning when H was woken by a sound. He opened his eyes and listened intently but heard nothing more. What was the sound? It had sounded like several small cracks but had he just been dreaming it? He listened for a few minutes more and hearing nothing, went back to sleep.

It was amazing, thought Armel, how lax holidaymakers were. What they would do in their home country, lock doors, secure windows, put on alarms, hardly occurred to them on holiday. They were either too laid back, or too drunk or too happy to bother half the time. They were on holiday; nothing happens on holiday. Where we're going everyone is wonderful.....

Black hoods masking their faces, Armel slowly put the wire in and around the partially open lounge window, the one that let the breeze in, and lifted the rod off the stay. He pulled the window out towards them, carefully making sure that the catch did not drop until the window was wide enough that he could secure it on its housing and out of harm's way. Presheva, the smaller of the two, went in first and softly slipped over the window sill. Walking softly across the lounge he positioned himself behind the door leading to the bedrooms in case anyone had heard or would hear Armel follow him in.

Armél got through the window and put it back in its nearly shut position as it would produce too much airflow and it may be noticed. He went first into the corridor from which the three bedrooms led off and stopped at each one to listen for breathing. Very early in their new career they had made the mistake of hearing breathing at the first one they came to and had rushed in only to find the wife sleeping soundly and a moment later they were confronted by a husband who had been sleeping in another bedroom. Luckily he died quickly after the knife entered his heart.

They listened at all three doors and heard two distinct types of breathing from the one bedroom. Armél looked at his friend and stared questioningly at him. Presheva nodded his readiness and they went in.....

The big man had heard something and he was awake and aware. Of what he had no idea but he knew something was wrong... He was half out of bed when Armél reached him and smashed him over the head with the handgun he was carrying and the big man dropped like a stone and just lay there with blood oozing out of his head.

Presheva already had his hand over the woman's mouth and a knife in front of her face. He shook his head slowly to tell her not to do anything. Armél checked the man but he was out cold and he wondered whether he should just slit his throat in case but it didn't seem necessary. They would be long gone before he woke up.

'You speak English?' asked Presheva.

The woman looked vague.

'Money,' he said, rubbing his thumb and finger together; the universal sign.

She nodded frantically and indicated to the wall where Armél found the small combination safe in the wardrobe. Presheva put

his finger over his mouth and the knife closer to her face as a warning and then he motioned for her to go and open it. She got out of bed, pulling the sheets around her to cover up her naked body and went to the safe. Her hands were shaking too much to press the buttons and she started to cry. Exasperated, Presheva demanded the numbers which she gave him. Inside Armel found ten thousand in Euros, traveller's cheques for another ten, two Rolex watches and some jewellery.

Not bad. Not bad at all. In fact very fucking good!

Presheva gripped her arm tightly and led her back to the bed. He nodded to Armel who came across and ripped the bedclothes from around her. She opened her mouth to scream but Presheva held her throat and Armel went round to the unconscious man and put a gun to his head.

Presheva looked at her. She must have been about six or seven months with a swollen belly and tits just as he imagined. He undid his belt, unzipped, dropped his trousers, forced her legs apart and got on her. Her face was contorted with anguish and revulsion at the vile act that she must now endure to save her husband's life and possibly even her own and her unborn child. She willed herself to accept what was happening, stopped struggling and thought of a life after now; not the one now. Armel left the unconscious man and joined his friend. He had no interest in fucking a bloated woman but she could suck him off.....

His head was pounding and the pain overwhelming but he slowly regained consciousness. He kept perfectly still until he understood what was happening and then perfectly still for a while longer so that he could work out what to do. He heard them fucking his wife and every fibre in his body wanted to leap up and rip into them but if he did he knew they would die. He needed to get to the valise under the bed which was hardly difficult as that's where he was lying but if they saw him.....

How long would they do what they were.....? It killed him to think of it.

He very slowly moved his arm along the side of the bed, out of sight, until the next step would make it visible. It was quite gloomy and he was quite tanned and so, he decided, if he kept still and only his arm moved a little at a time they may not notice. They may not.....?

Little by little he moved his arm but found the position he was lying in and the tiny movements of his arm sent excruciating cramping pain down his shoulder but he carried on and reached the valise.

He heard the pig on his wife start to make obvious noises and he knew he was running out of time. He slowly pulled the zip down and slowly put his hand in. *Please don't see me now. Not now....*

He found what he wanted and dropped his hand to the floor to get some of the ache out of it. The Polish WIST 94 felt good in his hand. An old friend and trusted ally which had on its muzzle the SAI E.Ve-Tech silencer.

He mentally prepared himself, took a long, deep, quiet breath. With one quick movement he sat up and let off six rounds of the sixteen round magazine into both of them. He went for the heart and his aim was accurate, as expected, and they were both either dead or close as he put another into Armel's head. He dragged Presheva off his wife and put two more of the 9mm x 19 mm, 7.5 g, parabellum hollow point bullets into his head at about 1200 ft/sec. The black hood inflated before him as Presheva's brains tried to escape.

He went immediately to his wife and cradled her, soothing her and told her it was alright, even though he knew it wasn't, and they had to go. He knew she was in no state.....but they had to go.

Under different circumstances he would have killed one and wounded the other and made him suffer afterwards; oh how he would have suffered. But this was the wrong time and wrong place and so they had to die..... His training and discipline dictated it.

He found his mobile and rang a number, giving brief instructions to the person on the other end who would meet them on the N125 and get them out of the country and back to Russia.

He was so angry. Two low life arseholes had raped his wife and he had no idea what that would do to her, or even him, in the future?

And the tiny child? Would the child be harmed?

Fury swept through him so he reloaded and put another few rounds into both their heads. Taking a deep breath he calmed himself instantly with a practiced discipline.

And the job he was supposed to do? They had fucked that up as well! On his way back from Portugal he was supposed to kill a man who had cheated his boss in a holiday villa scam and now he would have to run like a dog instead!

What a fuck up!

He would just have to come back. He would have a few days at home to comfort his wife and get her back on track and maybe a private nurse to help her cope. Then back to Portugal and finish the job as his boss didn't really like a failure....for any reason.

He would have to wait a few more days for the two hundred thousand Euros!

Chapter 73

Johnny Razz 5

It was nearly five weeks before Razz went back to the casino. After he had spent a few days in hospital for the swelling to subside and to make sure nothing was too serious happening underneath, H had talked to Freddie and found him a villa by the sea in Barbados where he had gone with his mother and new girlfriend. On his return he was instructed to get a train to London to see H.

‘You look a lot better from when I saw you in hospital.’

Razz looked confused. ‘I didn’t know you’d been to the hospital.’

‘You were asleep.’

‘You could have woken me. I would have thanked you for coming all that way.’

H shrugged. ‘Better you slept, I think.’

‘Well, thank you anyway.’

H shrugged again. ‘I’ve heard what happened but you tell me anyway.’

Razz recounted the tale.

‘I didn’t realise poker was so violent,’ omitting his encounter when he was accosted on the casino car park by Billy Simmons.

‘Neither did I. It makes me wonder...’

‘What does it make you wonder?’

‘Whether I’m cut out for this?’

‘For poker?’

‘Yes.’

‘Of course you are. Getting beaten up goes with any job. You may not think so but it does. No matter what job you’re in you’ll upset somebody, or their wife, or their kid, and somebody will be pissed off. That’s life.’

It was Razz’s turn to shrug. ‘Suppose so.’

‘Want some coffee?’

‘Please.....and I want to thank you for your help with the recuperation.’

‘It’s ok.’

The coffee arrived and was served appropriately.

‘You asked me to come to see you for.....?’ asked Razz tentatively.

H settled back in the leather armchair, pushed out his legs and crossed them. ‘I wanted to hear your story.’

‘I could have rung you.’

H smiled.

‘So why did you want to see me? Am I a liability? I would understand if you thought so.’

‘I saw you as an asset and I still think so. It was hardly your fault that you got beaten up. By the way, how is Mickey?’

‘Mickey’s fine. I asked him whether he’d like to join us on holiday but he has children to worry about and he was committed to do some days for his sponsor.’

‘I’ve only met him a couple of times, but he seems quite a character.’

‘He is. Been a gambler all his life and will no doubt already have a bet on when he is going to die.’

H nodded. ‘No doubt.’

He poured more coffee. ‘Going back to your little night of excitement, did the police get involved?’

Razz shook his head.

‘Why?’ asked H.

‘No point. Greivey thought I was cheating, we weren’t by the way, and he’d had too much to drink and he lost it. That’s about it. I can hardly go round ringing the police every time I upset somebody, can I? Not in this game. But I am pissed off that he nicked my money. Fifteen thousand is a lot to me and I wouldn’t have minded if he’d won it but the bastard nicked it; and Mickey’s, except Mickey got his back.’

‘How come?’

‘He went round to Greivey’s house and asked for it, and mine, but he only got his.’

‘How come he gave him his and not yours?’

Razz shrugged. ‘Mickey’s well known and he could make it very difficult for Greivey in poker circles.’

H sipped at his coffee for a minute or two. ‘How are you going to get your money back?’

‘I can’t. I could get it back at poker but he isn’t going to play me and I’m not exactly built to go and smack him about a bit, so I think I just have to put it down to experience.’

‘Ah well, at least you know where you stand in your own mind and that’s good.’

They talked some more and discussed the possibility of Razz moving to London in due course, and then H got someone to take him to the station for the ride back.....

Chapter 74

The Lord

Peter Henry Cecil Montague D’Arcy loved his life. Born into an aristocratic family who stretched back generations and a family seat that used to encompass two hundred thousand acres until death duty started its corrosive munching at the edges and eating up a bit more every year. Peter lived in the country and he loved its peace, its wildlife and its seasons. Life was wonderful.

As he left his home one day he found a man sitting outside, on a small canvas camping seat, waiting for him.

‘Good morning,’ said the man.

The startled Peter didn’t know what to say. A man on a seat sitting outside his home?

‘I’m not going to hurt you,’ said the man but Peter had seen the shotgun resting on the man’s lap and the man’s hand near the trigger.

‘It looks like you are,’ said Peter in a cultured and refined, though not posh or condescending, voice.

‘No, I’m not; unless of course I have need to?’

Peter shook his head.

‘Have a seat,’ said the man and reached behind his chair for another camping chair which he held out. Peter hesitantly took it, slowly worked out how to unfold it then placed it about twelve feet from the man and sat facing him.

The man looked at him and waited.

Peter looked at the man and waited.

After five minutes of silence the man said, ‘Perhaps you should explain....?’

After a moment Peter said, 'Perhaps.....but who am I explaining to?'

'The owner.'

'Aaah.....' said Peter softly, then let out a deep sigh and shrugged his shoulders. 'I'll go,' said Peter and moved to stand up...

'I didn't suggest you go, I suggested you explain.'

There was no menace in the man's voice but it did suggest an answer was expected.

'It's long and difficult and it's better I go, it really is.'

'Explain,' said the man. 'Explain why you're living in a hole in the ground on my property....?'

Slowly Peter Henry Cecil Montague D'Arcy told H his story. He had lived in the woods on the eighty acre estate for just over four years. The previous owner was a friend and had allowed him to do so but when he was selling he asked him to move on, which he had, but had then moved back without their knowledge and had assumed it would be quite a while before the new owners found out; if they ever did. But he had not reckoned on the cameras H had installed and so he had been spotted and tracked.....

Peter had seen the estate that their family owned for generations slowly dismantled as his father went from one wife to another and they, and the tax man, took huge chunks. Portions of land were sold; paintings; cottages on the estate; and literally the family silver, until there wasn't a lot left. English Heritage took it over and his father and wife number four or five moved into one of the wings.

And at age forty two he had called it a day and packed his bag and gone.....anywhere. He hitched across Europe, through the Balkans, Russia to the Middle East and then the Far East and into Australia and two years on a sheep farm and then on again to

America where he travelled from North to South. Then into southern America where he earned the money for a passage home on a cargo ship. It had taken just over eleven years.....

When he got back he didn't get in touch with his family or anyone he knew but continued travelling, tramp like around Britain. Living rough and eating what he could from where he could. He'd found that road kill, cooked over a wood fire, was one of the most delicious and nutritious meals you could have....

And then he found his current home quite by accident. He had no idea what it had been but it was a small bricked room, for want of a better word, dug into the ground. He had made a make shift cover, dug out a small hole the other side to facilitate the movement of air for ventilation and had settled in. He knew it was private property but it would be unlikely he would be found...

He was found and, by coincidence, it happened to be an old school chum. As he and his family were rarely there he offered Peter the run of the house but he didn't want it. He was happy in his hole in the ground, in the woods, and so his chum let him stay....

'And here you are,' said H, 'in your hole in the ground.'

'Yes.'

'On my land.'

'Yes, but I'll go now.'

'Would you like a deal?'

'What kind of deal?'

'You like nature?'

'Of course.'

'Looking after it, the trees, the woods, the lawns and things?'

'You want me to be a gardener?'

'It may suit us both.'

‘How?’

‘You can live in the Gate House which is out of the way for us both to lead our lives and you get modest accommodation which is a palace compared to this; and I get someone to make sure the land and gardens at this place are well kept.’

‘I can’t do all of that by myself,’ he said, looking quite uneasy as though he had been sold into slavery.

‘I know that. We’ll work out what’s acceptable to both of us and then we can hire anything extra we need..... What do you think?’

‘I didn’t really want to work for anyone. I don’t really want to be told what to do...’

‘I can understand that as I don’t either, but if we agree what wants doing between us, you take control and only come to me for a yes or no on something, then really you’re working for yourself aren’t you?’

‘I suppose I am.....?’

‘And you can’t live in a hole forever...’

‘I could.....’ he said without great enthusiasm. He did enjoy it but the winters, especially the rainy winters, could be a bit grim.

‘Why not?’

‘There’s just one thing.’

‘Yes?’

‘My wife has to ok this and if she does we give it three months. If it works for us that’s great but if I find you have no idea how to do this or you’re some kind of upper class psychopath you go. No ifs, no buts. Ok?’

‘So it would be ok if I was a psychopath from a council estate?’

H grinned. ‘Come and meet the wife.....’

Chapter 75

King Bongo Bongo 6

It was twenty four hours before King Bongo Bongo returned to the rift to find his loyal guards still standing stiffly by the yawning chasm. The other soldiers, brought along so that all could see the wrath of the King were standing behind them and the courtiers, his wives and ministers were sitting on the ground.

King Bongo Bongo shouted to his loyal guards, ‘To the King,’ and they immediately arranged themselves in a phalanx around him.

‘With me,’ he commanded and they moved as one to the sitting coterie.

‘Him,’ pointed King Bongo Bongo, ‘him, her, him, him, her, her, him and him. Over the cliff.’

The soldiers dragged the pleading, screaming, and terrified people over the edge and King Bongo Bongo watched as they bounced on the floor below.

‘Now,’ said the King, ‘is there anyone here who knows about any plots to kill me or take my throne.....? If there is, now would be a good time to show loyalty to your King....’

Chapter 76

Golf 2

The meeting was convened and all concerned sat and waited for the Chairman to start. There had been much chat between them in the previous days as to their liability, or not, as the case may be and feelings were divided between ‘tell him to fuck off’, ‘smack him round the ear and make him fuck off’ and ‘is this going to cost *me* anything?’

The first meeting got them nowhere as tends to be the case in any meeting where twenty people have a view, most different. In the end the Club solicitor, who also happened to be a member, was given the job of sending back a strongly worded letter denying all the charges levelled against them and, they thought, that may just get rid of it. The solicitor, who usually transacted house purchases and commercial property tried to get one of his partners to help but he was just off on holiday and so he put down what he thought he should say.

Seven days later he, and everyone else, received another solicitor’s letter repeating the same charges, adding new ones and now included another of libel. And the sum claimed increased to £1,000,000!

Another hurried meeting found them all together again a few evenings later. They had a few drinks in the bar first and the men, when they got their drinks, looked down the low top of Sally the barmaid. In her early fifties, with not a bad figure and a face that in her earlier life would have been regarded as pretty, Sally was paid a commission on the amount of bar takings and she knew exactly what helped sell booze...

Upstairs in the Committee Room one of the members, a man in finance who had the wherewithal to look at credit ratings, had been given the job of finding out a bit more about Mister James James and his delivery was sombre.

‘He’s obviously rich. Just bought a five million estate in Hampshire and owns an apartment in the City that’s worth two or three million. He owns the J J Group of companies which includes nine casinos, dozens of betting shops, night clubs and security companies. No idea how much they make but you have to assume on the upside of fifteen mill a year....’

‘Fuck me,’ said one, who heard an exaggerated cough from the Chairman who nodded in another direction. ‘Sorry, Lady Captain. I was going to say ‘oh gosh...’ several men giggled, ‘I wonder if he’s one of the Krays?’

The assembled group suddenly realised the shit they were in and it descended into chaos with only the wise words and calming influence of the Chairman bringing it back.

‘Henry,’ said the Chairman to his friend of many years, ‘you got us into this, how do you propose getting us out?’

‘It’s not my fault, he assaulted *me*!’

‘Well,’ said the Chairman, ‘unfortunately we only have your word for that...’

‘What! Did you see the size of him? He must be eight foot and built like a brick..... And I assaulted *him*?’

‘You’re missing the point, Henry. The point is, you, not us, have given the club, and us, a dire financial problem.’

‘But.....’ spluttered Henry.

The Chairman held up his hand imperiously as though a King in a passing car. They all waited. The Chairman was revered in the club. A sage, wit, after dinner speaker and wonderful man. He had tended, for years, to his poor wife who was bed ridden at home with Alzheimer’s and his time at the Club, his second home, allowed him some relief and relaxation. Although in his

mid sixties he was a handsome, distinguished man and many a lady had tried to tempt him away but he was loyal to his beloved wife.

‘It seems to me, Henry, that we are in a mess. It seems to me that Mister James will hound us and has the means to do so. It seems to me that this club will end up paying Mister James something, if only his membership back and a grovelling apology.’

There were nods around the table.

‘It seems to me, Henry, that the Club should offer to reimburse Mister James and you should write a personal letter of apology.’

‘But.....’

‘And it seems to me, Henry, that we should work out some kind of mechanism whereby you reimburse the Club for any amount it is out of pocket. Perhaps an addition to the yearly subscription or something....?’

The Chairman had done it. Put into words what all the others were thinking but hadn’t said. After all Henry *was* a pompous prick!

‘But that’s totally unfair,’ said Henry, ‘totally unfair.’

‘Henry,’ said the Chairman, ‘it is quite unfair that the Club or your friends should have to pay for your belligerence.’

‘Belligerence! Belligerence! I didn’t do anything, for fuck’s sake...’

‘Language, Henry,’ said the Chairman, ‘don’t forget we have the Lady Captain with us.’

The Lady Captain nodded and smiled at the Chairman. ‘Thank you, Mister Chairman,’ she said demurely, ‘would that all in this Club had your manners...’ and she glared at Henry.

Her eyes moved back to the Chairman. He was often the subject in the ladies’ locker room as they all thought it was a

waste of a good body. Indeed they had a bet on the first one to get him outside at the annual Christmas Party. It was £20 off the girls if you got his cock out, thirty if you gave him a hand job, forty if you sucked him off and a hundred if he fucked you. So far no one had won a penny.....maybe his wife would die soon?

Henry stood up. 'I resign!' Turning to the Lady Captain he said, 'And fuck you, you two faced bitch!' then walked out of the room.

Several of the members looked at her but most decided her day had come and gone and so they wouldn't be fucking her.....

'Sorry about that, Lady Captain, Patricia, ...' said the Chairman and they saw her preen. 'Moving on, that may have solved one problem but I have a feeling a bit of help from our colleague,' he looked at the solicitor, 'can solve the other. I suggest we send a letter of apology, an offer of his fees back and we cover his legal costs to date. And of course tell him we have thrown the miscreant, kicking furiously, out of the Club.'

The meeting started to break up with many of the Committee members going over to the Chairman and shaking his hand. 'Well done,' they whispered, 'well done.....'

In due course he went back downstairs and left a couple of members upstairs talking about the state of the greens. Half an hour later they came down and found the Chairman behind the bar sipping a whisky.

'I've put the money in the till.'

'I think you should have it on the Club,' said one, 'you deserve it.'

'Well, it's not over yet but we're on our way.'

'You alright, Mister Chairman?' said the other.

'I'm fine. A touch tired but I'll have my dram, lock up and be on my way.'

He smiled at them. 'Thank you for your support tonight. You take care now and I'll see you at the Medal at the weekend.'

'Goodnight then, Mister Chairman,' they said in unison and then they were gone.

He stood behind the bar, slightly leaning against it for another five minutes and then he shuddered a little and took a deep breath. A moment later Sally's head appeared and she licked her lips. 'Nice?'

'Very.'

She kissed him lightly on the cheeks. 'Don't forget, whenever you have a need.....'

'Thank you,' he said sincerely.

'And maybe one day.....?' and it hung between them. She adored this man and she knew that one day....one day..... they may..... they could they should..... But she could wait.

He squeezed her arm gently and kissed her lightly on the forehead. 'Get off home now.'

She nodded, found her coat in a small room adjoining, kissed him again and left.

On his way home the Chairman rang his house from the car, let it ring several times and then hung up. As he arrived at the front door it opened and she stood there in a tiny nightie, low at the top and high at the bottom.

'Hello, Am Shoo, how are you?'

'Verra good, mista Lobert, verra good.'

Robert Fletcher went in and closed the door after him.

'You wan foo?'

'No, thank you, Am Shoo, not tonight.'

'Me sleep you?'

'No, not tonight. You go off to bed now and I'll see you in the morning.'

He watched her pad away, heard her climb the stairs, then went into the sitting room where his wife lay in bed. A small light by her side softly illuminated her face and he saw her open her eyes as he walked towards her.

‘Hello, my darling,’ he said, kissing her softly and lovingly on the lips. ‘How are you?’

She looked at him and smiled but her eyes held no recognition and although he should be used to it, after all these years, a dull pain gripped his heart. It had been nearly ten years since they had noticed the symptoms and around six since the Alzheimer’s had taken her completely. Taken her..... How true.

They had been together over forty years and were still together only she didn’t know it. And so he had his sexual dalliances and Am Shoo provided certain things but his heart ached with love for his wife..... wherever she was. He would have preferred to have sex with his wife but he couldn’t; he thought it would be like rape. She wouldn’t know him, she could get scared, she could.....die.

And no matter what state she was in, no matter how little she recognised him, he didn’t want her to die.

If she died, he would die.

It was that simple.....

It was late and he was tired but he went back to the hall, picked up the daily paper off the small polished cupboard and took it back to her room. Sitting by her bed he did what he had done now for a long time; he told her what was going on in the world. And as he gave her the condensed version of events she would look at him, then look at the paper and then back to him and nod wisely.

‘It says here,’ he said softly to her, ‘that Cherie Blair thinks Tony Blair should be compared to Churchill.’

He looked at her and giggled. ‘He must mean that dog they have on that insurance advert.....’

He giggled some more and watched as she smiled and he remembered her a long time ago and tears started to slide down his cheeks.....

Chapter 77

Cocaine 6 - The Meeting

They met him off the plane. Three burly men, any of which could have been entered into a 'World's Strongest Man' tournament.

They searched him thoroughly. Everything he had in his pockets, no matter what, was taken from him. When he registered a protest three sets of glaring eyes told him not to bother.

Put in the back seat of a large sedan they drove him for an hour and a half until they came to a quiet, secluded but sumptuous villa. He was taken in and met by Sener who held out his hand but it was ignored. 'Welcome to Turkey. I don't believe you've been here before?'

'Where is my brother?'

'In due course,' said Sener, 'we have business to discuss first.'

'No brother, no business.'

'Look, One, or perhaps we should revert to custom in this land and call you Aldo, as friends do, we can discuss business first and then you can see your brother. All we're doing is laying the groundwork for our new relationship so that we can work together when we take over the European distribution.'

'I've told you. There is to be no change in the distribution. We are the distributors and there will be no change.'

'We agreed,' said Sener, 'with your predecessor that we would take over. We did not insist on it, we did not go to war over it, we agreed based on a common understanding that it was in both our interests to do so.'

'That has changed. My predecessor,' sneered Aldo, 'was losing control of the situation, had too easy a life and lost his

desire for *battaglia*. I have not!’

‘So we do battle for the rights?’

‘If need be but why not just allow the status quo to continue? Why not look at this again with, perhaps, a better market price for you to offset this...misunderstanding?’

Sener thought for a moment or two. ‘Aldo, why not just let us have the rights?’

‘I can’t do that.’

‘Aldo.....we have guaranteed your safety with The Man as you are our guest but not the life of your brother. What if we just bring him in here and shoot him? Would that change your mind?’

Aldo had debated this on the plane. It was an obvious but dangerous bargaining tool. The distribution of white powder in all its various forms and untold wealth.....or his brother?

‘No.....’

Sener shrugged. ‘Perhaps we could shoot your mother? Would that do it?’

‘You won’t do that. There is too much risk, too much bad blood. No-one in Italy or elsewhere would deal with you if you did that. Even The Man would cut you off.’

‘I think you’re right,’ said Sener, ‘so your mother is safe. Your brother is not worth it so where does that leave me?’

‘It’s a battle you can’t win,’ said Aldo. ‘It was a good try but it hasn’t worked. You can’t touch me here so it would be better if we started again and I will allow you a bigger share of the cake.’

‘I misjudged you,’ said Sener.

‘I think you did,’ replied Aldo with more confidence in his voice, ‘so perhaps I could see my brother now?’

Sener nodded to one of the men who opened the door and a moment later Adamo walked in.

Aldo hadn't seen Adamo for quite some while and he hardly recognised him. The last time he had seen him he was slightly flabby with clothes that hardly fit and looked a typical scientist or chemist or whatever he was. But the man in front of him was lean, taut, bronzed; wore an expensive, well tailored casual suit and what looked like a heavy, gold, expensive watch.

‘Hello, Aldo.’

Aldo was lost. Adamo looked fine, fit and healthy and yet he had heard him screaming in pain? ‘Are you all right?’ he asked, puzzled.

‘Of course. My good friends here always look after me but I am slightly bothered that you prefer drugs to the life of your own brother?’

‘Of course not,’ protested Aldo. ‘I knew they wouldn’t kill you, they were just using you as a gambit and I called their bluff. That’s all.’

Adamo smiled. ‘I’m disappointed in you, big brother. You were going to let me die....’

‘Never!’

‘I think so.’

‘No, you’re just traumatised; let me take you home...’

‘Do I look traumatised? Do I look as though I want to go home? Haven’t you worked it out yet?’

Aldo was now completely lost. It seemed that Adamo was in some way connected with these people but how could that be? There was no connection. These people were criminals who did drugs in a massive way and there was no way Adamo could be of any use to them.

And if Adamo was selling they wouldn’t supply him, he would have come to big brother. So what was going on? Why was he so comfortable here?

‘No?’ said Adamo. ‘Not got it? My friends here, as you know, sell drugs. All types of drugs. Many in tablet form. Now I, as you may *not* know, am their largest supplier of drugs in tablet form. One of the beauties of being a highly qualified pharmaceutical scientist.’

‘But how....?’

‘It’s a long story which you may find boring but is about my wife, who you detest and quite happily show it, being a cousin of my friend here; but the point is there is now an opportunity to not only sell the tablets but also take over the distribution of cocaine in Italy...’

‘But I run.....’

‘You did, brother, you did.’

‘You bastard, you’re my brother.’

‘No, I’m not.’

‘What do you mean, you’re not? You are!’

Adamo held out his hand to the man standing to his right who took a gun out of a shoulder holster. He handed it to Adamo who quite coolly put a bullet between Aldo’s eyes.

‘No, I’m not,’ he repeated softly.

Several days later Adamo met with the others of the Committee that Aldo had headed only a few days before. He explained to them that his dead brother had more than likely organised the bombing of his predecessor. That he would take over the organisation; they would get a better deal with less risk and the Turks would make sure they were treated well in the supply chain. Everyone would be better off....

It didn’t take them long to agree. They had *also* come to the conclusion that Aldo had planted the bomb which, in hindsight, was quite obvious....

They all shook hands and Adamo relayed the good news to Sener who rang Jose who was pleased it had been resolved. Sener

also confirmed that Aldo had planted the bomb that had effectively wiped out the *Society*.

Jose picked up a bottle of opened Claret that had been sitting there for half an hour with two waiting crystal glasses and walked to a large extension that had recently been built with a large heated pool, Jacuzzi and steam room to help alleviate Maria's occasional arthritis.

She was relaxing in the Jacuzzi so he placed the glasses on a table, filled them, handed one to Maria, stripped off and joined her in the mass of bubbles. They talked for a few minutes then he fell quiet and she left him to work out whatever it was he was struggling to understand, while she welcomed the relief from the hot, bubbling water.

Jose went back to the beginning and replayed everything in his mind. He had a superb memory which never let him down and he recalled all the conversations; even the nuance. It was like a professional poker player going back over all the moves of a hand to decide whether to call an all-in. After nearly fifteen minutes she saw him smile softly and knew he had arrived at some kind of explanation or enlightenment.

'You remember,' he said, 'I told you a little while ago that Aldo had planted the bomb that killed the members of the Society to become One?'

'Yes.'

'And I have just confirmed that to you via Sener.'

'Yes.'

'I was wrong.'

'Really? How can that be?'

'Well, firstly I arrived at a conclusion with imperfect information and secondly I was lied to.'

She waited.

'It was Sener.'

‘Sener?’

‘Yes, he must have someone on the inside, a guard or someone, but it was definitely Sener.’

‘Could it have been Adamo?’

‘No.’

‘How clever of him,’ said Maria. ‘More than clever.’

‘Yes.....More than clever. Cunning; very cunning and shows an appreciation of strategic thinking that is way beyond our usual expectations of those that distribute our crop.’

Maria nodded.

‘We must keep Sener in our sights,’ said Jose. ‘I don’t think he will trouble us but we must keep him in our sights....’

But at least, thought Jose, the European distribution problem is now solved.

Chapter 78

13947312 – 4

He had gone back home and went immediately onto the net. It was there; 2%. The casino made 2% on the machines. And yet he had lost all his money!

How could that be?

There was only one explanation. They had cheated him! There was no other answer. They lure you in with free food and then they take all your money. How was that fair? And why did no one do anything about it? People were just not to be trusted. No one. Look at how the Army and the Taliban had treated him. And why? He was only doing his job.... And even his own mother throws him out and now these thieving bastards scam him of his money. It had to stop! It just had to stop! Someone just had to take a stand against all this otherwise where would it end? It would end with the Taliban taking over the whole of the world, that's where it would end!

So he decided to make them pay. Make them all pay. He would go back and make them pay. They owed him £9:80!

But he needed a weapon and they hadn't let him keep the one from the Army so he would have to get one. But he had no idea where from?

For several days he wandered round the shops but the chain stores didn't sell Uzis or Glocks and it had to be small so he could get it in his overcoat.

And then he had a wonderful idea. He would make one. He had the practical and technical ability and it would be a lot cheaper than buying one.....

Chapter 79

Golf 3

Robert Fletcher, Golf Club Chairman, was totally unprepared for what happened.

Totally unprepared.

Am Shoo had spent the night with him and they had sex. Not much sex because Robert was struggling. He hadn't struggled before with this subject but now he was.

Sex.

When his wife had succumbed to Alzheimer's he had decided to still have sex as that would not affect his wife and it did not affect his love for her. It was a need. And it was a release. Sometimes a good, mind blowing orgasm was better than a few pints or a sleeping tablet or a week in Portugal playing golf with your mates. Sometimes you just needed a good fuck and a good blowout!

But for some reason something had changed. He had no idea what had made it change but change it had. He had felt it coming, so to speak, and its call had been more and more insistent.

He no longer wanted sex.

It was no big deal but now, for some reason *now*, he felt as though he was betraying his wife and he couldn't do that. At breakfast he decided that Am Shoo must go and so must all the other women. He finished breakfast and went in to his wife.

'My darling,' he said, 'I want to tell you that I love you more than anything in the world and that from now on we sleep together. Is that all right with you, my love?'

She looked at him and smiled, then played with a crease in the sheets. He kissed her tenderly. 'I'll see you later, my love.'

As he was going through the door he heard her say something. He froze in his tracks and then slowly turned round. She was sitting up and looking at him, her face beaming. He went back to her.

‘What did you say?’ he asked incredulously.

She smiled brightly at him.

‘Did you say something, my love?’ he asked again, holding her hand tightly.

He watched in amazement as her other hand moved to his cheek and softly caressed it.

‘Thank you, my darling,’ she repeated softly and a bright light shone in her eyes that lit up the world.....

And then it dimmed and she closed them and slowly slumped back on her pillow.....

He wasn’t prepared for her to die but he had prepared for her death. Am Shoo was given £10,000 and she caught the first plane home to live a life of comparative luxury.

Then he set about organising her funeral with all the attention and love that he could put into it. And it was a lovely funeral with lots of pretty flowers and happy songs and she was laid to rest in a quiet, leafy plot that he had bought which would, in due course, house both of them.

Several weeks later, at the beginning of winter, he drove in his car to Scotland, to the mountain of Lochnagar, which he and his wife had both walked when they were young. Although cold it was too early for snow so he took an easy walking route to go as high as he needed and when he thought he was high enough he sat down to watch the sun set.

As it went down the wind became bitterly cold and the temperature dropped considerably.

It seemed a nice way to die.
You watch the sun go down.
You get cold.
When you are close to death, by all accounts, you go warm.
And then death is quite nice.....

He remembered what she had said.
'Thank you, my darling.....'
And he saw her face and knew she was waiting.....

Chapter 80

13947312 – 5

It took him several weeks but he did it. It was pretty much the same as the Glock 17 machine pistol, certainly good enough to get by. It had taken a little while to get the right material but he had worked it out and then laboured away, day and night, until it was completed.

The material was the most difficult. It had to be the right material otherwise it was no go. You couldn't make a gun from the wrong material otherwise the heat would distort the barrel and then you were looking at a major disaster!

He practised taking it out of his overcoat in front of a mirror. Shazam. Out! Just like magic.

Shazam!

Shazam!

Bang!

Bang!

Tali...ban...g!

He went back to the casino and when he got to the top of the stairs in full view of the floor, he took out the home made Glock and screamed at the top of his voice:

'Everyone on the floor. Last person standing gets shot! NOW!'

Pandemonium broke out. Women screamed, people looked horrified but they all, every man and woman, dropped to the floor. Chloe had heard what he had shouted and pressed the police panic button and the casino security button which H heard in his office. He went immediately to the security room and

watched the security monitors intently. He watched as the man descended the stairs and H waited for him to go to the cashier's desk but he didn't. What was going on? At the bottom of the stairs he started ranting about some money the casino had stolen. Stolen? The casino took your money in many different ways but stolen? Then H heard him rant about his nine pounds eighty. Nine pounds eighty?

Someone on the floor moved and the man pointed the Glock at him. 'Do you want to die?' He screamed. 'Do you all want to die?'

H moved to a paddle at one of the monitors and moved it.

'Enlarge,' he said to a security man. 'More.....More.'

H peered intently at the screen, then he went to the door, down several corridors and into the gaming room. He appeared on the opposite side of the room to the man and when he entered he held up his hands.

'Get down!' screamed 13947312. 'Get down!' but H didn't go to the floor.

'I own this casino.....I want to help you.'

'You stole from me. You lied to me. You took my money!'

'If we did, I'm sure it was a mistake.'

H looked at him closely. He was ex Army. Had to be. Everything about him said ex Army. A bit overweight but had to be....

'You,' he said, pointing the gun at H, 'are a thieving bastard.'

'I may be.....but these people aren't. If you think I'm going to steal from them why don't you let them go? It will save them money....'

13947312 thought about it. It made sense.....

'You,' he said to H, 'sit on the floor. Everyone else get out of the room.'

He moved out of the way and very quickly the room emptied.

When it was quiet H said, 'why don't you sit there and we can talk. I can help you....'

After a few moments, with the gun pointing at H's head, he sat about thirty feet in front of him. 'If you move,' he said, 'you die.'

'What's your name?'

'13947312,' he snapped off instantly and then he looked dazed and confused. H just watched him. He watched the man's eyes which were full of confusion and fear and H felt an affinity with the man. Confusion and fear. The hallmark of the abused. You might as well stamp it on their heads it was so obvious....

'What's your real name?' asked H gently.

'Clive.'

'You don't really want to hurt me, do you, Clive?'

'You stole my nine pounds eighty,' he said and tears started to roll down his cheeks. 'It was all I had. Nine pounds eighty....'

'It must have been a mistake, Clive,' said H softly. 'I'll make sure you get it back.'

'They lied to me.....they told me you only made two percent on the machines.....so the most I could lose was two percent...?' The confusion was rampant in his face.

'It isn't quite like that, Clive.....they gave you the wrong information.'

The man shook his head slowly and his shoulders slumped.

'Would you like to join me for a coffee and a sandwich?' asked H.

'I'm supposed to kill you...'

'I know, but I know you don't want to and we can talk about everything as we eat.'

He said nothing.

'Come on,' said H, slowly getting up, 'let's eat and let's see what we can do to sort this out.'

The man thought for a moment and then nodded. ‘Do you have any corned beef and Branston Pickle?’

‘If we don’t we’ll get you some but we have quite a selection for you to choose from.’

‘Do you have any chocolate?’

‘I’m sure we do.....’

He rose slowly.

‘Why don’t you leave your gun there?’ asked H and smiled.

The man looked at it and put it on a nearby table.

‘Or we could eat it?’

‘I like chocolate,’ replied 13947312.

‘How did you manage to keep it solid so long?’

‘I got the ingredients off the net.’

When the police arrived the Manager explained it had been a mistake. A punter had lost a little money and become upset but it was over now. Gun? Nah.... Just a mistake...

H rang Needles and found the name of someone who could help Clive come back into the real world. It would take a while but most things can be undone with a little help and a little TLC.....

Chapter 81

Jose

Jose Reyes was deep in thought as he sat on the veranda. What should he do? The cocaine business was going well, perhaps as well as it ever had although overall production was down. The State was cracking down on producers to get dollars from the USA but his friends in the Government gave him plenty of warning so they gave up small amounts to show that the Government plan was working.

The European situation was going smoothly and Sener had shown himself to be a more than able organiser, as Jose knew he would. He was tidying up the distribution and it would be better than ever. Sener had demanded an amount off each supplier down the chain to put towards a central fund that paid the high and mighty that the smaller distributors would never get to. They were still responsible for maintaining relations with local politicians and police but Sener could get to others; mainly Judges, politicians, Euro MPs. Even Euro MPs needed an additional income on top of their untaxed one....

So what was the problem?

There was no problem.

Jose was the problem.

He wondered whether, after all these years, the Reyes family should be out of the cocaine business? They were amassing, had amassed, vast wealth and he had no male heirs. No-one other than Benshima and James to leave it to. But it wasn't like a sweet shop or a small business. It was cocaine!

And cocaine had several important elements: money, risk and death. Death always rode by your side.

Always.

And he was tired of death. He was tired; period.

They still had the massive industrial and agricultural group that they owned which was quite legitimate, well nearly, as it quite often took advantage of the large cash deposits that were held around the world but it could exist quite happily without them.

He wondered whether he should just keep the Group, keep the deposits, and sell the rest to the highest bidder which, amazingly, could even be the President and the Government. It would be in their interests to either own the operation or shut it down.

What to do?

As he sat there and tried to go along the different routes the different strategies could take one of his mobiles rang.

‘Yes?’

A voice in Russian identified himself. ‘We have a problem.’

‘Yes?’

‘Gregory is dead.’

‘How?’

‘He was gunned down coming out of a night club.’

‘By who?’

‘We believe it to be The Stars.’

It was what Jose didn’t really need at that point but it was all part of being in the cocaine business and it never changed. The cocaine business was totally Darwinian. Indeed it was pure Darwinian in action. It wasn’t just the survival of the fittest; it was the emergence, on a regular basis, of not the fittest, but the most greedy, and indeed quite often the most psychopathic and certainly the most ruthless.

The Stars, an ultra ruthless, mafia type gang, were importing cocaine from neighbouring Peru who had become the world’s

second largest producer to Colombia. Since the Colombian state's crackdown the trade had moved south and Peru had willingly taken up the baton and was now producing enough leaf to manufacture about 150,000 kilos of cocaine. But The Stars were not only greedy they were ambitious and, it seemed, they wanted it all. And Peru couldn't provide enough which meant, yet again, the need for a territory to be taken over and that distributor's supply to be 'acquired'. Which meant that, if the soon to arrive war between the two culminated in a victory for either side, that side would not only control all of the Russian supply but it would also be sourcing from Peru *and* Colombia.

That would be fun.

Thank God Russia was a long way away or they sure as hell would be at his house with Kalashnikovs and that would be that.

In reality if someone with immense power, like the President of the USA, legalised cocaine and then took over the means of production it would mean an acceptance that it was here to stay and, if it was, it could be sold quite legally through pharmacies which would get rid of all the suppliers and distributor and dealers and violence in one stroke.

Just like they did with alcohol.....

Always problems.

Well, nearly always.

He was, he thought, lucky he didn't have any Bank shares. Indeed he was lucky he had no shares at all other than in one or two companies such as the Ritz holding company. Several months ago his friends at the Bank had made him aware of the upcoming sub prime problem and he had sold everything; at the top of the market. Which meant his money from the share sales, and the cocaine, was in Banks without sub prime issues which, as it happened, was one of those he used. And now he was awash with

cash, still had their own Group which was very liquid and anything else was in property around the world; large office blocks, apartment blocks and vast tracts of forest and plain.

Soon he would take advantage of all that cash and start buying at the bottom.....

He rather fancied getting in to the one commodity that the world would soon need and there wouldn't be enough of....water. The world was running out of water and a few strategic purchases would make a killing.

But even if he did who would he leave it all to?

Benshima?

James?

The Catholic Church?

Now there was an idea. Perhaps they would make a Saint of him on his death. It would usually take decades or even centuries but a few hundred million was a lot of money. Any Pope could recognise a miracle if there was a cheque for five hundred million dangling before him.

For services to the poor we canonise thee Saint Cocaine of Colombia.....Saint Aqua of Colombia.....?

Maybe not.....

Chapter 82

Norma

Norma finished her lovely meal. Sea bass with salad and a smooth red wine and now she was sitting opposite her new man friend. He was tall with short, pepper coloured hair that looked very distinguished and the lean square jaw that Americans have. Some Americans have. He was looking at her intently. *Men!* He wasn't looking at her blouse so it must be her eyes.

'Do you like my eyes?' she asked.

He smiled at her. It was her standard question and he knew the standard answer.

'You have beautiful eyes,' he said genuinely.

A wide smile swept across her face. 'Yes, I do, don't I?'

'How are you feeling?'

'Good. I think it's going to be a nice day, don't you?'

He didn't think it would be but... 'Yes, it may be.'

'I think so,' she said, 'I think so.'

'You enjoyed your meal?'

'It was lovely, thank you. The fish was *beautiful*. When I lived in England the fish was drab and tasteless but here it's *beautiful*. So tasty and full of flavour and big. The fish are so *big*.'

At times, he thought, it was like talking to a child who saw wondrous things in everyday events. 'Yes, the fish are big. We have large, warm oceans and I don't think we overfish here like the Europeans do and so the fish have time to mature and grow to a decent size.'

'I love America, it's a wonderful place.'

They talked for several more minutes and then he said, 'I have to go now.'

'Really? So soon?'

'I'm sorry.'

'If you must,' she said a touch sullenly. 'Are you sure you couldn't stay?'

He shook his head. 'I have to go.' He put his hand on hers. 'Take care and.....'

'What?'

'Nothing...take care.'

He left the room, the door shut behind him and a few minutes later a 2000 volt current rushed through the chair she was strapped into.....

Usually the person being electrocuted would have a hood over their head but Norma had insisted she wanted the men outside the glass cage to see her eyes.....

The pepper haired priest sitting as one of the witnesses couldn't look at her eyes. In fact he couldn't look at all as her body twitched and writhed and wisps of smoke left her burning skin where the electrodes were attached.

He kept his head bowed and said a silent prayer for the woman with the nice eyes who may now, unless God showed his mercy, be on her way to hell.....

It was ironic really, thought the priest, that Norma had been brought down by something she detested; the Chinese.

The small Chinese group that were on holiday and visiting the park were quite a distance away but one of them, using the latest Chinese gadgetry was taking a long range video. He had swept slowly around and paused on the couple by the hot springs and the geyser, just as Norma pushed him in.....

It was ironic because Norma hated the Chinese. Well not really them. She hated their eyes.....

Chapter 83

Johnny Harris goes to jail

There had been several famous people in the nick before but they tended to be famous in areas in which the prisoners had little interest; mainly commerce. So they were looking forward to having Johnny Harris who they could look after and he would look after them. It would be good craic to have him here.

The day he arrived he went through all the usual procedures and was then given over to his two minders to take him to his cell. One, a long time warden and the other his new colleague. They were together so that the new boy could learn off the old hand and it lessened any chance of problems for the new boy as inmates could be a touch devious with the unwary.

They were let into their balcony by a guard and from then on they had a key to every cell. Getting off the balcony again had to be done by someone else outside of that area to maintain security and make sure the prisoners, if they kicked up a fuss, couldn't get any farther than the balcony they were assigned to.

The gate clicked shut behind them and the long timer stopped for a moment. The balcony was hot and heavy as a summer thunderstorm was forecast and he knew what that did to pissed off prisoners. Pissed them off even more!

He looked ahead, saw the prisoners milling about on the landing and started to feel a bit anxious. Nothing was happening; maybe nothing would happen.....but

He started to walk and after about ten yards it started. The posturing, the insults, the shouting, the screaming and then the glint of a blade as it slashed towards a face.

‘Keep him there,’ he commanded his new colleague then ran towards the melee. As he got there he tripped and fell just in front of the crowd and the new boy saw a foot come out and swipe his head. He grabbed his key, opened the nearest cell and pushed Johnny in. ‘In there until I come back for you.’

He relocked the cell quickly, then ran to his partner blowing his whistle and shouting and screaming all the right things. He got to the melee, still screaming to try and assert his authority and managed to get to his partner who he stood over to protect.

‘Don’t make this any worse,’ he shouted to the prisoners. ‘I don’t know who kicked my partner but if you don’t go to your cells...now! ...I sure as hell will find out and they won’t see the light of this ceiling for a long time.....’

They were surprised at his bravado and courage and they could handle that. It was pricks they couldn’t handle so they went, sullenly and slowly back to their cells. They could pick this up later on.....

‘You ok?’

The long timer got up and shook his hand. ‘Thanks. I appreciate that. It could have got nasty today. I owe you.’

‘It’s nothing,’ said the new boy.

‘Believe me, it is...’

Remembering Johnny Harris, the long timer said, ‘Where’s the prisoner?’

‘I locked him up out of harm’s way while I came to you.’

‘Good thinking, let’s go and.... which cell did you put him in?’

‘Don’t know. The nearest to where we were standing.’

A look of mounting concern flashed across the long timer’s face and he ran back to the cells near the entrance and looked in one in particular. ‘Oh fucking Christ!’ he groaned. He fumbled for his keys and opened the door.....

Inside he saw Johnny Harris on the floor with his head at a peculiar angle and his chest quite still.

‘Oh shit.’ He looked over at the other man standing there. ‘What have you done? Why did you do this?’

‘He wouldn’t kneel and bow, Mister Evans. I told him if he wanted to enter my Palace he had to kneel and bow but he laughed at me.’

‘So you broke his fucking neck, Bongo, for fuck’s sake...?’

‘He was in my palace Mister Evans....’

The old timer took a deep breath and shook his head. ‘Oh, for fuck’s sake, Bongo. Jesus fucking Christ!’

‘It’s not my fault Mister Evans....’

‘You had a chance of parole, for Christ’s sake, Bongo, why the fuck did you have to do this? Again? Do you want to stay here forever?’

The six foot four, powerfully built black man looked at the warder and spoke like a child that had been caught stealing and was trying to justify it.

‘He wouldn’t kneel and bow, Mister Evans, and that’s treason.’

‘Stupid fucking mental bastard...’ shouted a prisoner from across the landing.

Bongo’s head immediately swivelled to one side and he looked at the wooden soldiers on the little table, all standing perfectly in a line. Each had been meticulously constructed and hand painted. For such a big man Eremsala Perobongo had surprisingly deft fingers.

He went over and picked one up. ‘What did you say?’ he screamed. ‘What did you say?’ he screamed again.

Another voice from across the landing permeated the cell. ‘Shut the fuck up.’

King Bongo Bongo stopped berating the soldier and said to Mister Evans....

‘Did you hear that? They’re plotting to overthrow me. They’re everywhere but I don’t know where? And as for you,’ he said to the trembling soldier in front of him, ‘a lesson...’

And he snapped his little wooden neck.....