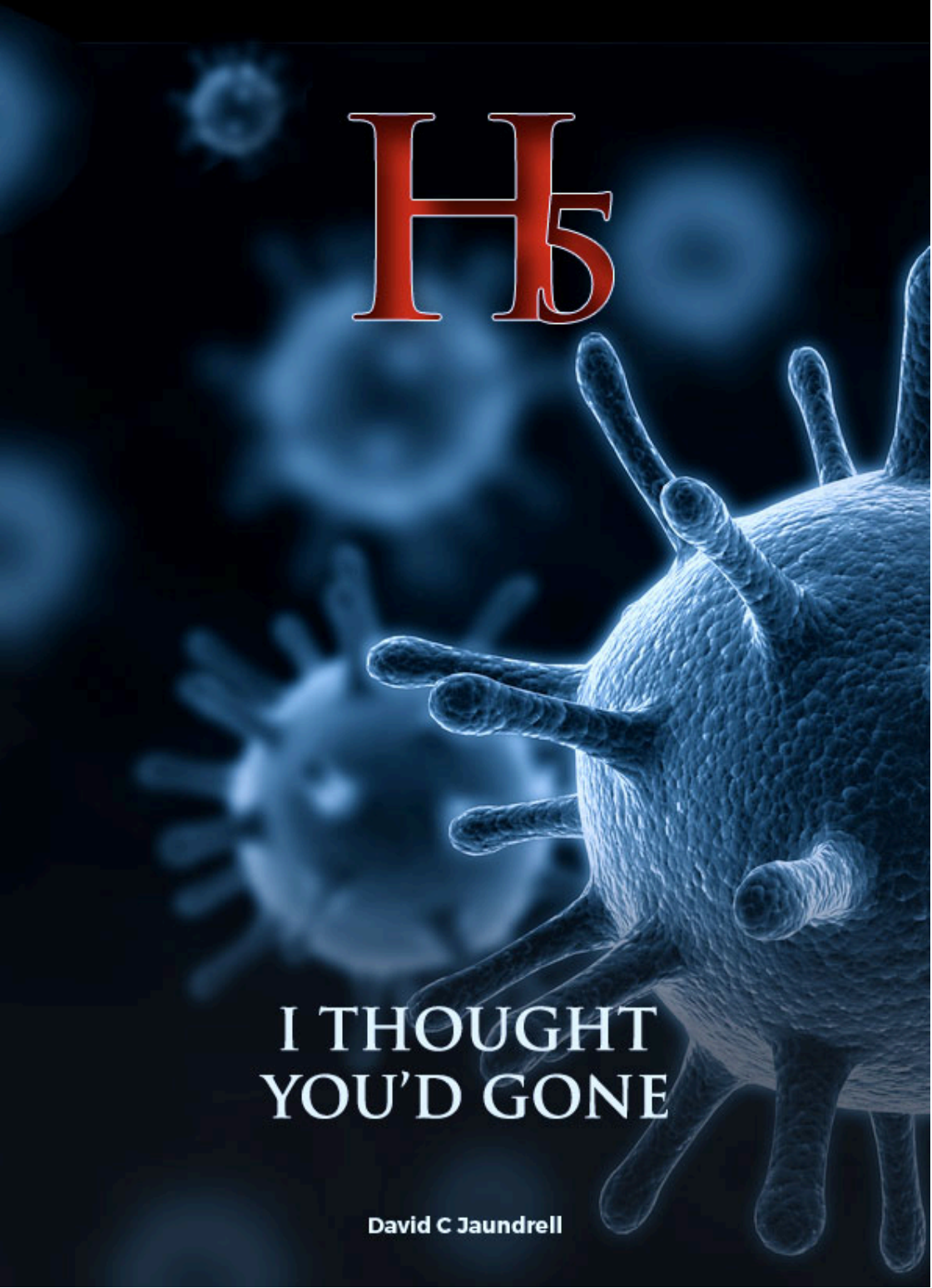




H5

I THOUGHT
YOU'D GONE

David C Jaundrell

These books are dedicated to
Banner
(Wendy Mansell)

Acknowledgements

For their continual patience

Adrian Frost	Grosvenor Casinos (Rank Group)
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Mark Corbett (Dr)	Molecular Biologist
Mickey Wernick	Professional poker player and gambler
Neil Channing	Professional poker player and gambler
Roger Higgins	Ladbrokes
Roger Tucker	Ex Prison Governor
Steve Hindley	And the creatures in his dining room

And

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

Landowners Association

Lear Corporation

Mercedes Dealer

Natural History Museum

Sotheby's

Telford Crematorium

US Treasury

Main Characters

Adrian	Managing Director of JJ Casinos
Allan (Scotty) Scott	Divisional Chairman of J J Group
Andy Pandy	Supplies muscle for 'dirty work'
Ben	Son of James and Benshima
Benshima Reyes (James)	Wife of H. Daughter of wealthy Colombian business family
Cleggy Jenkins	Ex gambling industry executive.
Derry Day	Crook
Gavin	Martial arts expert
Geoff Mulley	Owner of chain of Undertakers
Gerry Smith	Divisional Manager JJ Betting Shops
Graham Gamble	Betting shops owner
Harry Cohen	Head of family gambling Group
J J Group Ltd	Holding company for James companies
James James (H)	Owner of Night Clubs, betting shops, Casinos, Security companies
Jerome Nelson	In charge of 'doors' at J J Nightclubs
June	Wife of Richard
Lucy Wilson	Housewife
'Manners'	Brother of Geoff Mulley

Maurice Wilson	Husband of Lucy – stacatruck driver
Mickey Wernick	Professional Poker Player. Ex European No 1
Neil Channing	Professional poker player
Penny Beasley	Admin lady
Peter Henry Cecil Montague D’Arcy	Aristocrat. Lives in H’s coach house
Rafic Mafouge	Lebanese arms dealer
Ray Beasley	Doorman at one of H’s clubs
Richard	Husband of June
Roger Davids	MD JJ Betting Shops
The Sandlers	Bowling friends of Andy Pandy
Saul Abraham	Betting shops owner
Shannon Black	Croupier
Ted	Casino cashier
Trevor Howard	Close protection expert
Vi	Wife of Andrew Pandena (Andy Pandy)

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Chapter 1

A new beginning

Although it had been two years since James had sold J J Group he was still amazed at what had happened.

First the sale of J J Group. That had been prompted by the irretrievable loss of little Ben who, just over a year old had contracted meningitis and died a cruel death. When that had happened it all seemed so irrelevant. The Group, the Ferrari, the Mercs, anything that wasn't really needed they had. The one thing they wanted had gone. Forever.

They had taken a long holiday, not as a holiday, but as a cleanser of the soul and it was lying on a sun soaked, white sandy beach when H suddenly said, 'Let's sell.'

'Sell what?'

'The Group.'

'Why?'

'I have no interest in that now. It seems so....irrelevant. It's not what I want anymore.'

'But what would you do?'

'I want to put the money into a Charity, I may not even get taxed on it if I do and you and I should run it.'

'A Charity?'

'Why not?'

'What would we give the money to?'

'Well considering what we have just gone through with the loss of our child and what I went through as a child I would think it rather tells us where we should be focusing our energy.'

It only took Benshima a second. 'Let's do it....'

And they had. The BEN International Charity, named after their beloved little Ben, was approached by James with the same organisational mind as he had his Group. It was efficient, focussed, gave money to those that needed it and avoided those that merely wanted it.

And Senor and Senora Reyes, devastated by the death of their only grandson, had matched the amount that James had put in and offered any other help they could give. What they could give, which James didn't have, was contacts. Jose Reyes knew most major people in the civilised world and many in the not so civilised. He got James interviews with Ministers, Prime Ministers, Captains of Industry and, the coup of coups, an audience with The Pope. That had been tremendous and James, a long time non believer in any God, started to take an interest in the subject and took tentative steps in that direction by going occasionally to Mass with Benshima.

James travelled all over the world either trying to secure money or give it away and this time he was returning from Delhi where he had seen the Vice President of India in the Prime Minister's Office to get his help with a new school that they wanted to build there. On the day of his return he had lunch with the VP; a peculiar mixture of spaghetti and Indian food.

Halfway through the flight home he dropped off to sleep and an hour later he started to get hot, his skin felt clammy and then he started to sweat. He was on fire. Sweat flooded from him. His skin burned...

He awoke with a start. His clothes were drenched and he felt groggy. In a daze he tried to get his recliner to go upright but his clothes were sticking to it. It was so hot..... With an extra effort he managed to get the seat upright and stood up. He heard someone shout 'James'. Stumbling to the door he made a grab at the handle and missed.

‘James,’ he heard again but it seemed far away.

Refocusing his eyes he retried, pressed the handle harder and it suddenly opened and H found himself engulfed by cool wind.....

Fucking hell!

What the fuck was that all about? He had nodded off in the conservatory and the sun had come from behind the house and cooked him but....

But...

What a fucking God awful dream!

Ben was dead, he’d put all his hard earned money into a Charity, seen the Pope, the Pope of all people, gone to Mass and was flying home from Delhi. Delhi? And worst of all....worst of all... he had eaten spaghetti. Ughhhh. Fucking spaghetti; fucking horrible squirmy worms in your mouth stuff..... Yuk!

He shook his head in relief.

‘James,’ shouted Benny again from inside the house, ‘cup of tea?’

‘Benny,’ he shouted back, ‘I’ve just had the most horrible daymare...’

Chapter 2

Monday

Richard woke and stretched. Seven o'clock. He looked at his wife who was trying hard to appear asleep but he knew she wasn't. He had to be at work at eight and she at eight thirty. He pushed down the stop button on the radio and went in to the en suite where he had a nelson, then turned on the shower over the bath, drew the curtain, waited for it to get hot and got in. It wouldn't take long but just as he was washing his face he knew he wanted to fart; an enormous, ear splitting, wall shaking, 9.5 on the Beaufart Scale fart and he tried hard to rein it in. Even after twenty years of marriage he was reluctant to let his wife think he was common or uncouth so he shouted, 'You awake yet, love?' to coincide with the rush of air from his bum.

His wife smiled. *Sometimes men were so.....dim.*

'Getting up now,' she shouted back over the noise of the shower and the now receding fart. As though she cared. You don't stop loving a man because he farts....but she did wonder if they were having too much bread.....?

He finished his shower which had only taken five minutes, got dressed and went downstairs to make them both a cup of tea and some toast. The toaster, a good deal from the local cut price supermarket was only a week old and already two of the compartments had ceased working and, true to form, he had lost the receipt. And so he had to do two pieces in two separate goes. Typical.

He kissed her goodbye and went off to a small company that manufactured cast brass beer fonts and a few minutes later she

left for her admin job at a Care Company.....

Chapter 3

On earth, as in....

The imposing cathedral rang with the choir rehearsing the Magnificat; the choristers' beatific voices echoing through the magnificent building, going ever higher, as they should, to God in Heaven.

He walked up the aisle, kneeled in front of the cross and said a short prayer. Walking slowly to a pew he knelt again and spent further time in prayer. After a few minutes he raised his head and glanced at the confessional box, watched until someone came out, another few moments to make sure no one else was waiting and then he went silently to the waiting window to God.

He went in noiselessly, sat down. 'Bless me, Father, for I have sinned.'

'How long is it since you last confessed, my child?' asked the priest in the adjoining dark cubicle.

'Too long, Father.'

'The eyes of the Lord watch you at all times, my child. He sees you. He knows what you do and He waits for you to atone.'

'Yes, Father.'

'In what way have you sinned, my child?'

There was a long pause. 'It's very difficult, Father.'

'The Lord will be the Judge of that, my child; please....go on.'

'I am also a priest, Father.....from a tiny parish many miles from here.....'

'Yes, my son.....' said the Father softly.

'.....In that parish we.....I....cultivate a family environment where families can congregate and enjoy communal

pursuits.....’

‘As God would want it,’ said the Father, then waited for him to continue.

‘Within those.....pursuits there are many which involve the children of the parish.....’

He felt his penis begin to stir.....children....little, angelic children...soft skin.....tight cunts.....tight arses.....wet mouths.

‘Yes, my child....?’

‘Swimming.....cycling.....camping.....’

Just the thought of them was getting him harder. Oh Holy Mother of God..... A tingling sensation ran through his body..... Oh Christ. Oh Christ.....

‘Go on, my child.’

‘I enjoy the company of the children.....’

The Father waited.....

‘I enjoy.....touching them.....’ It was a couple of minutes before he continued, ‘I enjoy.....touching them.....everywhere....’

He was rock hard now and his mind and body were on fire. After several moments the Father said, ‘There is more, my child? More than touching?’

‘I.....!.....’

He slowly and quietly undid his zip, pulled his pants over his penis and took it out. Holding it in his left hand he started to move it up and down.

‘My child.....?’

‘I use them, Father....’

‘Use them? In what way do you use them, my child?’

‘I.....I.....I.....’

‘You are safe here, my child.....’

‘I have..... carnal relations with them.’

‘You have.....sex....with them?’

‘Yes, Father.’

‘With the little children?’

‘Yes, father.’

It was several moments before the Father said anything. ‘*All* the little children?’

‘Yes, father. With the little boys and the little girls.’

His hand was pumping faster and he knew he was close. His whole body was ablaze with an inner fire that he had to release. With his other hand he reached into his pocket and took out a paper tissue which he placed over the tip of his penis.

‘Surely, my child, not with the little girls?’

‘Yes,’ he said quietly.

‘How can that be? Surely they are far too young....? It is not possible...?’

‘There are ways, Father....you cannot imagine.....’

Nearly there now....the little children.....pretty, innocent little children.....nearly there....nearly there..... He wanted to scream with ecstasy as he came but he didn’t; just enjoyed the massive shudder that rippled through his body and the warm wet fluid that he could feel soaking through the tissue. His heart pumped with such force that he thought he would have a heart attack; he thought the entire Cathedral would hear his pumping heart. He slumped in the small cubicle as all his strength left him.

Neither said anything for what seemed like an eternity.

‘I am at a loss, my child,’ said the Father, ‘as to what to say. You have defiled, and it would seem in the most deviant and barbaric way, those little children and although God will forgive you He will be horrified that you could have done this. You....a priest. How could you? To God’s sacred children?’

‘I am truly sorry, Father.’

‘My child, please recite the Act of Contrition.’

‘Deus meus, ex toto corde poenitet me omnium meorum peccatorum, eaque detestor, quia peccando, non solum poenas a te iuste statutas promeritus sum, sed praesertim quia offendi te, summum bonum, ac degums qui super omnia diligaris. Ideo firmiter propono, adiuvante gratia tua, de cetero me non peccaturum peccandique occasiones proximas fugiturum. Amen.’

‘My child,’ continued the Father, ‘you must go back now to your community and right your wrongs. You must strive to reach harmony and peace with God. And to give you strength in your endeavours you must use The Lord, The Holy Church and me as your bedrock. You must think of us, use us for strength and, my child, I would suggest you return here in twelve weeks’ time and report on your mission.’

‘I will, father, I will. Thank you, Father.’

He crossed himself, rose slowly and left the dark cubicle.

The Father sat for several moments and then heard someone else going into the confessional box. He used another tissue to silently wipe his still hard penis completely dry and then put it into a waste bin by his side. Quietly he put his clothes tidy, pulled up his zip, composed himself and gave himself back to God.....

Andy Pandy was sipping a gin and tonic in The Tankard and looked at his watch. The second hand was just about to reach its target. About noooooooooooooooooooooow and in walked Doddy.

‘How did it go?’ asked Andy.

‘Same as usual; no problems.’

‘Good. What are you drinking?’

‘Pint of the local please.’

Andy came back with the bitter and sat himself down. From his pocket he took an envelope with five hundred in fifties inside.

‘Five hundred?’ asked Doddy.

‘As usual.’

‘I don’t mean any disrespect, Andy, but I’ve been doing this every three months for a year and perhaps a little more would be appropriate....?’

‘No disrespect taken, Doddy. In what way would it be appropriate, Doddy?’

‘Well I, you know....I er do all the work,’ he said quickly.

‘Doddy, you go in a fucking confessional box and tell a story to some fucking pervert for a few minutes and get well paid for it. Tell me again how five hundred quid isn’t appropriate?’

‘Well, er I could....er....but I still do all the work and I bet you get the majority of the money,’ he said hesitantly.

‘Doddy, if you get in bed with somebody you have to assume you’re going to be fucked.’

‘But....’

‘Doddy, five hundred for ten minutes makes that about three grand an hour. And how much do you get for your work as a walk on?’

‘Well true, but it’s just that.....’

‘Let me help you here,’ said Andy. ‘Currently you are a good looking lad trying to make it in acting, drama, films, plays, pantomimes or whatever. Is that right?’

Doddy nodded.

‘And this is an opportunity to rehearse those skills ready for the big chance. Am I right?’

Doddy nodded again but it was slower and he was getting concerned. This wasn’t going as he wanted it to go. He had rehearsed it but now this was actually real life his adopted character had a flaw in it. Himself.

‘And am I right in thinking that a good looking lad like you has a wide range of possible parts available due to your good looks, good health, physique and vitality?’

Doddy nodded again but even more slowly.

‘Then why spoil it, eh.....?’

Doddy’s face went ashen. ‘I didn’t mean...I didn’t mean....’

‘Another drink, Doddy?’

Doddy shook his head. ‘No, thank you,’ he said quietly.

‘Ok, son, then I’ll be off and I’ll ring you in about three months. Ok?’

‘Yes. Thank you, Andy, thank you. Much appreciated, thank you, thank you...’

Andy walked down the street and put The Guardian over his head as it started to rain.

Stupid Doddy. Ah well..... Two grand every three months less five hundred to the aspiring actor helped a bit towards the holidays. On reflection, thought Andy, looking at himself in a shop window, I am somewhat of a thespian myself.

On reflection.....good one Andrew, good one.

He adjusted a cravat that wasn’t there, flicked a speck of dust off his Derek Rose traditional style smoking jacket and took a dainty puff from an imaginary Denicotea art deco cigarette holder.

Me and Noel Coward, thought Andy, me and Noel Coward.....what a team we would have made.

A Mad dog and an Englishman.....

Chapter 4

Ben

The new born child lay asleep in its cot, making the occasional baby sound, its tiny arms moving sporadically and its hands grasping at unforeseen things. A tiny child at peace.

True the initial stage from being a passenger in a warm womb to entering the world amid much screaming and shouting had been a bit traumatic, and then this big squeeeeeze (they all shouted ‘push’ but I swear it was a squeeeeeze) that didn’t quite work and more shouting and screaming and then some bastard grabbing your head and trying to pull it off wasn’t much fun either but hey, here we are. It could be a lot worse.

My parents are rich and happy, so I am led to believe; we live in a big house with lots of room for me to play, a large estate to roam in and in due course, when he snuffs it, I may own a gambling empire. Right on.

As little children go you really couldn’t want much more.

And I have a name now; I am Benjamin Joseph James. Fancy! Benjamin in homage to my mother Benshima, and Joseph to my grandfather Jose who I have yet to meet. I’m surprised I wasn’t called James Benjamin Joseph Maria James. Let everybody in on the act. Bloody good job they don’t have pets. This is Buster Patch Spot Bruce Rover Floppy James.....

Tee hee....

The pain was sudden and the child screamed into life although its eyes didn’t open. Its face crinkled up in discomfort with the throbbing pain from the vicious pinch on his ear.

A few moments later H heard the crying baby and shouted, ‘It’s ok, Benny, I’ll get it.....’

Chapter 5

At your service.....

The man and his girlfriend had visited old friends in Stafford. Arrived the night before, had a meal at their home, had a good evening, wandered into Stafford the next day to see not a lot and then went back to their friends.

That evening they decided on a takeaway and the man and his girlfriend went into town to pick up Indian food. The takeaway was quiet and as they stood waiting for their order the door burst open and three young men with baseball bats burst in.

‘The money out of the fucking till!’ screamed one. ‘Now! Give it fucking now!’

The man watched and wondered what to do? Let them get on with it? As long as they didn’t nick the food that was coming who cared? He looked at one of them, actually all of them at once, but one in particular. Maybe eighteen or nineteen, white, lean, mean, angry; maybe crack, maybe just life. Who knows? Who cares?

‘What the fuck are you looking at?’ screamed the youth.

The man’s eyes looked down, no point in riling him. Looking away made little difference.

‘Eh you, cunt! What the fuck are you looking at?’

The man hardly appeared to move but his woman was now behind him.

‘I’m fucking talking to you motherfucker!’ he screamed even more loudly at the man who still appeared to be averting his eyes.

The man eventually looked at the youth; whatever he was on the adrenalin was ratcheting it up a notch or two. The man’s pulse didn’t increase and everything started to slow down. Even the lights on the solitary game machine by the side wall were

flickering more slowly. He saw the bat rise and the youth come for him. With lots of time he looked at the other two. They would come next; they would have no choice. It hadn't started yet but in his mind he could see it unfolding. He played out the possible scenario in his head. Block the bat arm, throat, break, go there, there, move right, right again, left.....

As the youth took one step forward the man moved on his inexorable path. The youth didn't see him coming as his feet slid along the floor and his head kept exactly the same height, completely disguising his movement. With two steps he had covered three metres and then the man turned sideways, brought up his knee towards his chest and with massive force smashed his foot down into the youth's knee, breaking it immediately, the knee going back twelve inches behind its rightful place. The man continued forward, moving to his right, guided a bat away from him, hit the youth in the throat with his fist, brought his other fist down on his nose, breaking it, smashed him again in the face and then stamped hard on his foot, breaking his ankle..... Still moving he blocked the other bat, smashed the youth in the collarbone with the palm of his hand, breaking it, then restrained his arm and hit it hard to snap it. His hand found the wrist which he pushed back until it broke and then, locking the wrist and arm so that it was not only rigid but causing incredible pain, marched the youth across the room and smashed his face into the flickering machine. As he crumbled to the floor the man raised his foot and smashed into a knee with another loud *crack*.

It had taken no more than twenty seconds but why would you need any more....?

He heard a faltering voice from behind the counter. 'If you've broken that machine you'll have to pay.....'

The man sighed and walked slowly to the counter.

'I was talking to them,' said the owner quickly.

The man continued looking at him. ‘My food,’ he said slowly, ‘where’s my food....?’

The owner scurried away and came back with his food. ‘That’ll be.....er.....er....’ anguish invaded his face as he struggled so hard not to say what he had to say, ‘...on the house.’

The man took the food and his girl and walked out. Behind them they heard the owner shout after them, ‘Oy....what am I going to do with these twats.....?’

She looked at him and smiled. Shutting one eye, she looked through an imaginary telescope and said, ‘I see no twats.’

Jerome Nelson did the same. ‘Neither do I....’

An old joke from two daft adults doing silly things.

She took his arm as they walked to the car and he slowed to match her steps. It was nice being with the man although sometimes a touch scary. What had happened tonight she had seen before so it wasn’t a surprise. What surprised her most was that the lads had got off relatively lightly; the man could be quite touchy when he was hungry.....

Chapter 6

Allocated

Allocated. Good word, eh? Bet you've heard that before?

We have *allocated* you our best table by the window, sir.

We have *allocated* you a seat in First Class, sir.

Sounds good?

How about *you have been allocated to the shit house*?

Not so good, eh?

A fucking God awful word now, eh? *Allocated*.

Quite.

So here I am; me, my mates and, I have to say, some evil bastards. NASTY's we call em. Cause that's what they are. Anyhow, here we are *allocated* to the shit house. Sorry if that offends, call it what you like if that helps but to us it's the shit house. Now we could have been *allocated* to other departments; for example, preparing food, keeping the place clean, boiler house, general housekeeping, keep fit etc etc. Nice jobs. Not glamorous true but...better than the shit house.

Have you ever seen shit? Really seen shit? Close up? Really close up? It isn't fucking nice you know.

And sometimes it's...how can I put this nicely? I can't.....a bit runny. Can you imagine that? Think Montezuma's Revenge, think Delhi Belly, think a good night out with loads of beer and a curry..... Or all together?

Get the picture now?

Well me and my mates have this every day. We were *allocated*.

Not asked did it suit our proclivities?

Not asked did looking at turds all day offend us in any way?

Not asked was it against our religion?

Oh no. You have been *allocated* so get the fuck on with it.

And that was that....

And so I see shit all day.

Good, eh?

One day, when the opportunity presents itself, we're gone.
Someone else can look at turds all day.....

Chapter 7

Where are we now?

H, Scotty, Adrian and Roger had had a gruelling five hours. Adrian and Roger had produced their current figures and also their predictions for the next twelve months.

From Roger's point of view, the Betting Shops' point of view, life wasn't so bad. It could have been better, a lot better, but it wasn't so bad....

He was half way through his plans for modernisation and the Betting Group profits had increased by nearly a million pounds per year with still another million to go when the refurbishments and new locations were completed.

The credit crunch had not put a stop to that but had stopped the rise in turnover, moving more towards a flat scenario. It was well known that in bad times the bookies were one of the few areas which were hardly affected.

Roger was a bit pleased about that.

And his bigger punters had moved over to his new on line betting facility and the businessmen that used to 'pop in' for a bet now just looked at the screen in their office and bet on just about anything; football, golf, cricket, horses, dogs.....anything. They would get bets on whether someone would sink a putt.....

And Rog, following Ade's casinos, had introduced loyalty cards which was also helping keep the take up.

And then there was Lewis Hamilton and Jensen Button who had helped them to make a few quid and dear old Fabio Capello's revival of England was inspiring the odd punter to actually back England to win!

On top of that Roger had gone back on his first decision not to allow internet Bingo on the site. Industry information told a story of more and more of the ‘droopy tits brigade’ playing on line. They had found out that it was, at times, a lot easier to sit in front of your little laptop or your hooked up tele and play from home. Warm, cosy, glass of wine, pizza delivered, no petrol costs, no parking and you could have a good medicinal fag.....

And some were even congregating at friends’ houses with a laptop each and playing as a group; with friends and having fun. Rog talked to Scotty and they immediately added Bingo to the site and advertised it heavily in the shops and casinos.

Another change of heart was the internet poker site. Situated off shore it had been decided that it may help ‘certain’ punters to ‘lose’ funds but it hadn’t been used like that and so its income was dependent on the people using it and there weren’t enough of them. Just not enough.

The advantages to the company of a stand alone site was that a closed system allowed you to make your own decisions based on the system data, giving the company flexibility but poor liquidity.

Because you weren’t part of a multi ‘front end’ system – a bit like a franchise, you all had a poker site that had your name on it but you were actually part of a much larger system – the disadvantages were that your players can only play other players on your site. On a stand alone site you may have two or three thousand players playing at any one time whereas on a large site there could be thirty or forty thousand.

So on your small, stand alone site it meant that players were unlikely to get the game they wanted, when they wanted so may move rooms to find the game they want, which was especially noticeable during the day. They could also have a long wait for STTs, single table tournaments also known as ‘sit and go’ to start. On top of that the guaranteed tournaments were small compared

to the competition and high value players were reluctant to play as there were not enough players to keep the game going.

Therefore a multi front end gave you extra churn; that is a lot more players to play, a lot more games take place and therefore better liquidity and ultimately profit.

So it was all change. They had talked to Cryptologic and a few others but had settled on Ipoker as their platform of choice.

So Roger was ok. His little empire was ok. His continued employment was ok.

Adrian's little empire was another kettle of fish altogether. The casino industry, with one or two exceptions, was on its knees. The smoking ban had been bad enough but the current economic climate had devastated their client base. Of the nine casinos only three were making a reasonable profit, four were making a small profit and two were losing money. Overall the Group was making money but for how long? How bad was this recession going to get?

The three that were still doing well were in London, Birmingham and Manchester and what they had in common was that they were popular with high rollers and, it would seem, high rollers still had a few quid left. Another advantage was Adrian. Adrian had a way of making his casinos customer friendly. Any customer, any punter, with loads of money or not, was made at home in Adrian's casinos. Adrian knew that a happy punter stayed longer. And the longer they stayed.....

But it wasn't completely mercenary. It was just that it was in Adrian's nature to look after his customers; but in the casino industry it paid extra dividends. At times millions extra.....

And so Adrian had gone through his power point display, his excel charts, his P&L and cash flow projections and had them scrutinised by H and Scotty while Roger looked on, his part over and inwardly thanking the Lord that he was the poor relation with

the betting shops. The daft thing was, although everyone looked at it as the poor relation, in business terms it was nearly two and half times bigger in turnover terms than the casinos and its profitability, which used to be the same as the casino, was also larger.

Casinos had moved down from ten million to four whereas Roger's little empire had moved up from ten million to nearly eleven and a half; with more to go.

It was known as the poor relation because Roger's punters tended to use cars and buses and one or two of Adrian's had their own jets!

Although H and Scotty had debated keeping the meetings separate they had decided that something may come out of having them together. It may be something that was obvious in one industry was not being used in another and you never know.....?

It certainly hadn't happened in the meeting of the Night Clubs Group and the Security companies. And it hadn't happened here. Alas no. Ah fuck! And so it was the usual. A plan to increase punters and decrease costs. Easy!

The universal salve for any company in trouble. A bit more of this, a bit less of that, keep warm, and you may live.....or not.

Adrian had already saved nearly a hundred and fifty grand by not replacing the General Manager of J J London who had decided to go back to America and marry his childhood sweetheart who he had re-met through Friends Reunited. It would seem that a dream from the past was better than a wife and three kids from the present...

Adrian had taken over running the casino himself so at least that way, in the short term, he knew the high rollers would be well catered for. They were crucial for the casino's survival.

After the meeting they all had a light mid afternoon sandwich snack at the casino and suddenly Adrian stopped quite still, miles away.

‘You ok, Ade?’ said Roger.

Ade looked at him. ‘The betting shops are still making money?’

‘Thank God,’ said Roger.

‘The casinos are struggling,’ continued Ade.

Roger was reluctant to say, ‘*Yes, but that’s your problem....*’ and so he said nothing.

‘Why don’t we,’ said Ade, ‘open up a bookies at the casinos?’

‘What do you mean?’ asked H.

‘Well if the bookies are doing well and the casinos are struggling why don’t we get a bit of synergy going? If they’re going to a bookies next door they might as well pop in to the casino and have a look. And the casino boys can also pop out and have a fag and place a bet at the same time.....?’

He looked at Roger. ‘What do you think?’

Rog thought for a minute. ‘As long as the footfall is high enough you may just have something there.’

‘I may,’ said Ade, ‘I may. I’ll do some checking as to the legalities of what we want to do and report back and perhaps you would look at it from your end, Rog?’ Roger nodded.

‘Well done, Ade,’ said H.

‘Nice one, Ade,’ said Scotty.

The conversation started to lag and then H said to Scotty, ‘I must go and wash my hands.’

Scotty only hesitated for a second. ‘Good idea; I think I’ll stretch my legs and join you.’

As they washed their hands and H put refreshing cold water on his face he said, ‘Why have the Security and clubs meeting together?’

I am, thought Barak Obama, as his staff suggested his first port of call as President should be Dallas, completely fucked.

‘We did it because that was the way I set it up but this meeting made me realise there is nothing in common between them. I put these two together for seemingly obvious reasons but at the end of the day, excluding the gambling, all three are essentially in the entertainment business.’

H nodded, ‘That’s what I was thinking.’

‘It also made me more aware of the difference the security companies are, which may not be bad, but.....’

‘Yes...’ said H slowly, ‘but where is this taking us?’

‘Nowhere really as we don’t have a concrete path to follow. The security boys are still making money and because so many of the staff are contracted we can, and have, shed labour and therefore costs, easily. Although they don’t fit in there is a part of me that thinks ‘forget the strategic logic’ and keep them. If we sell them we will get very little and they are still contributing.....’

‘Do you think,’ asked H, ‘that somehow we could get more business by protecting assets that are *not* being used?’

‘Very possibly.’

‘Can you get them on to it, Scotty?’

‘Of course.’

‘And there is another avenue, boss.’

‘What’s that, Scotty?’

‘You meet, every day, people with money and influence. Company owners, property owners, fund managers....’

‘I should offer our services....’ Scotty nodded. ‘Don’t know why I haven’t already.’

‘We’re not Gods,’ said Scotty philosophically, ‘we’re not omnipotent.’

‘I’ll email every one of our customers and tell them what we also do.’

‘As could every company we have. We have a massive data base between us. In fact why don’t we get a copy of every database from every company, combine them, and do a mail shot to every one and tell them what JJ Group does. I bet there’s someone out there that will think ‘I didn’t know that’....’

With new plans forming by the minute they decided to get together again the next day and then went back to the other two.

Half an hour later Scotty, Roger and H departed. Ade stayed until six and then, quite knackered, headed home. Today was his anniversary and he was taking his wife out to dinner. On his way home he bought her a bunch of red roses, albeit from a man selling them in a lay-by, and was glad when he pulled into the drive.

A gin and tonic; long, hot power shower to get rid of all the tension and then out for a nice meal. And tomorrow off as well.

Lie in, tea and toast in bed.....heaven.....

He went through the door and shouted, ‘It’s only me, love.’

There was no answer.....

Chapter 8

Enough

The small cavalcade left the countryside and entered the city, slowing to the legal limit. The three limousines with blacked windows kept tightly together, the first and the last to make sure the one in the middle was secure. In each of the limousines the men were armed. Front and rear had machine pistols and AK47s and the men in the middle machine pistols, AK47s and grenades. Sometimes you just had to get out any way you needed to... It was unlikely they would be used but you never knew. It was a dangerous world out there and you never knew....?

It reached the cemetery and the cars stopped outside the main gate. A man from the lead vehicle got out and, machine pistol hidden in his coat, walked in. After a few minutes, when he was sure that everything was safe, he beckoned the cars in. With only the tyres scrunching on the weed free gravel path they moved silently to a point near the grave.

He opened the car door for the lady in the middle car then held out his arm for her to hold as she got out. When he saw that she was steady on the path he immediately removed it. She nodded slightly to him. One of the men gave her the flowers that he had retrieved from the boot.

The lady in black walked the thirty yards or so to the grave and the men stood by the cars. Watching, waiting, alert....

She placed the flowers neatly on the grave then knelt and made the sign of the cross. Looking up to Heaven she asked the Holy Mother for forgiveness for what she was about to do.

She made the sign of the cross again and then stood slowly.

She stood there for five more minutes, perfectly still, made the sign of the cross one more time, asked for forgiveness one more time and then took off her black veil, threw it down and then spat on the grave.

For too long Maria Beatrisa Eleanora Reyes had visited the grave of the husband she had hated and she would no longer be a hypocrite.

She would never visit again.....

Chapter 9

Luck?.....What fucking luck?

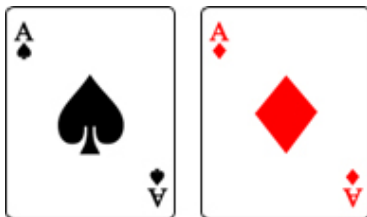
H was seething. Two months, give or take. Two fucking months! How could that be? For Christ's sake it was relentless. Fucking relentless. H knew all about the maths and the law of averages but some bastard had suspended them. For some reason some almighty fucking being, somewhere, had suspended these mathematical laws just to show him! Why me? Why not show some other fucker? What have I done to deserve it?

He was out again. AGAIN!

Two fucking months of waiting....waiting.....waiting.....being patient....keeping calm.....sticking to the principles and then.....a decent hand. *Here I am* it said. You've waited, you've been patient, you haven't played any old crap in the hope you'll see a 9 9 3 to go with your 9 3. You've even mucked, quite rightly, your Ace rags even though you watched as Ace seven came out which you would have won with. No matter.

You've done the right thing and now, because of your patience, you've been rewarded.

Ace Ace



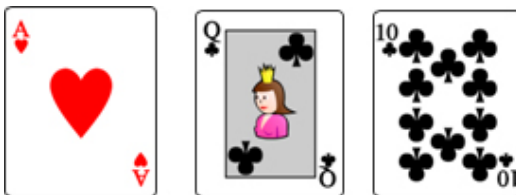
Worth waiting for, eh?

Raise in front of you, a call, fold, fold, fold and now you can re-raise.

Nice re-raise, that'll sort out the men from the boys.

A fold and a call. Interesting..... Now the flop.

Ace hearts, Queen clubs, Ten clubs



Wonderful, fucking wonderful. Could be a problem with the clubs or a possible straight but the odds of the only person left wanting clubs is remote and a Jack for a straight is only 8% on the next card.

He's gone all in! Eh? All in? What's he got?

Well he can't have a straight as he wouldn't raise and call a re-raise with King Jack.

So what's he got? Flush draw? But with what? His raise would suggest an Ace King or Queen or a high pair. If it's Ace King of clubs it means any club and any Jack and he's won.

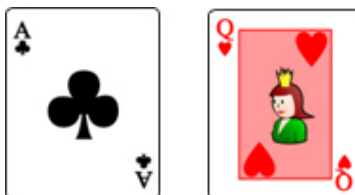
Surely not....

Surely he hasn't hit the only cards that could get him there?

He must be losing now and you can hardly chuck three Aces. I know it's been bad but three Aces. What are the odds of losing with three Aces?

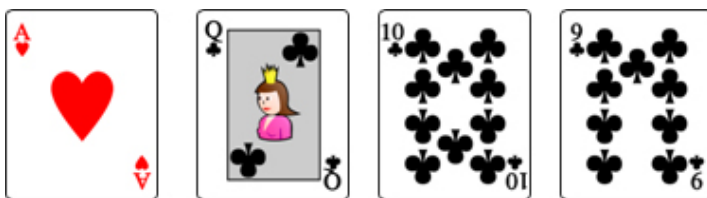
Call..... What's he got? Now we know.

Ace clubs, Queen Hearts.

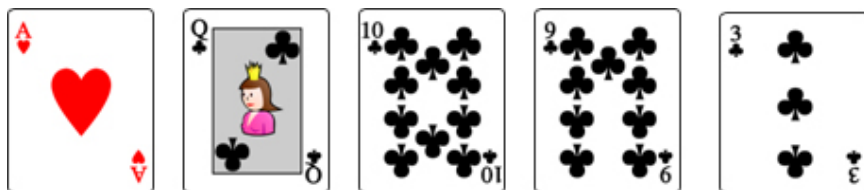


Two pair. Thank fuck.

The turn showed the nine of clubs



and the river the 3 of clubs.



A flush! He's picked up an Ace flush! Again! AGAIN!

FUCK! FUCK! FUCK! FUCK! FUCK!

AGAIN!

It had happened now for about two months. No matter what he had it was getting beat.

FUCK! FUCK! FUCK! FUCK! FUCK! FUCK! FUCK! FUCK!

And a flashing fist stopped a millimetre short of the monitor.....

.....H had got back into martial arts and his speed was increasing. He had enjoyed it when younger and was still very fit and could handle himself but the opportunity to start again had, quite surprisingly, presented itself and he had taken it.

It had been in a small street. H was walking along and his mobile had gone and he had taken it while still walking. At one point he had been given some information and, not quite understanding it, he had stopped suddenly to concentrate. A second later a man had walked into him and they had both toppled over.

They got up and looked at each other and H immediately saw the stance of the warrior. It was hidden, it was relaxed, he was smiling, but it was there. One foot in front and to the side of the other. Front leg slightly bent, back leg nearly straight. His open left hand followed his left leg and his open right had gone towards his face. It wasn't obvious to most people but he was ready. Quite ready.

H realised he was in roughly the same position but his lack of training over the years had removed the instant defence/attack position and he wasn't as well balanced. A bit sloppy.

H smiled, 'Sorry, mate, I was miles away on the phone. My fault.'

The man's hands and eyes didn't move. 'No problem,' and returned the smile, 'I was in a bit of a rush myself. Six of one, half a dozen of the other.'

H moved back a little. 'Where do you train?'

The man smiled, 'You noticed.'

'Oh yes.'

'I've got a little business, on the outskirts, selling martial arts equipment and I have an area there where I teach.'

'Do you teach one to one?'

'Yes.'

'You got time for one more?'

'I could do an hour, two or three times a week.'

'Count me in,' said H. 'Give me your number and let me ring you and sort something out.'

He fished in his pocket and gave H a business card and held out his hand. 'Gavin.'

'James.'

Chapter 10

Safe...?

For some reason Adrian was bothered. He wasn't sure why but he was. He searched the house but couldn't find his wife which alarmed him. He wasn't sure why it did? Ringing her mobile he got no reply and a panic started to rise within him. His tiredness left him and he went in to the lounge to decide what to do? Why was he so bothered? Why?

He poured himself a gin and tonic and sat down, pondering, then he noticed the envelope sitting on the fire mantelpiece. He didn't move towards it, just looked at her writing that said *Adrian*.

Adrian; it seemed so formal, so cold. At that point he knew. She had gone. Why she had gone he had no idea but she had. On their anniversary of all times. A pain crushed his heart and it took all his will power to move to the fire and open the envelope.

Taking mom out, the slip of paper said, *back later than usual. Can't wait for tonight. All my love XXX*

He stared at it incredulously, not understanding. She hadn't gone? She hadn't gone? He slowly sat down again and tried to work it out but it was quite simple. He was knackered. In fact completely fucked. Too many hours work, too many late mornings, too much bad news, too much stress, too much of everything you didn't need and so you see the next problem....which isn't there. *Fucking hell*, thought Ade who rarely swore *Fucking hell*.

He heard the door and her voice. 'Put the G and T on, love, I'm just going to the loo.'

When she came out of the loo he was waiting outside the door for her. He gently cupped her cheeks with his hands. 'Don't ever leave me,' he said softly.

'Why would I ever do that?'

He shook his head. 'Just don't ever leave me.'

'What's going on? What's the matter?' She looked deep in to his eyes. 'You thought I'd left you?.....You thought the envelope was a goodbye note? What have I ever done to make you think that?' she asked gently.

He shook his head again. 'I'm just tired.....'

She smiled, 'Never going, never leaving; we're dying at exactly the same time and we're being buried in the same plot with you on top....'

He found a smile.

'Come on,' she said, 'let's Gargle our Throats.' She pulled him into the lounge where she started mixing more G & T's.

'I'll drive,' she said and trebled the G & T in his glass, 'you just relax.'

He took it gratefully and after thirty minutes she watched his eyes slowly shut and his head loll back and his body relax. Let him sleep. He's so tired, so exhausted, he needs a holiday; but now isn't the right time, I know that. But he does.....

Later they went to Galvin at Windows. On the 28th floor above the London Hilton, on Park Lane, the restaurant had an airy, contemporary décor that didn't detract from the wraparound views of Hyde Park and the Queen's back yard. Adrian had reserved one of the best tables facing west over Hyde Park where they could watch the setting sun.

After ordering the wine he started with Poached Scottish lobster salad, mango & herb fromage frais and Claire had Salad of summer vegetables with 'hand picked leaves'. Taking their time Claire watched the tension drain from him, his smile became

ever wider and relaxed and she fell in love with his boyish grin all over again. The main course of Fillet of Glen Fyne beef, braised cheek, English carrots & Madeira jus for Adrian and Risotto of sun dried tomato, mascarpone & aged parmesan for Claire was taken just as leisurely.

‘We should do this more often,’ she said.

‘You may not say that when we get the bill.’

‘How much?’

He paused and shook his head slowly. ‘Oh dear. I don’t know and it really doesn’t matter; I don’t even know why I said it but that’s one of the problems of running a business. Everything starts to equate to pounds shillings and pence and sometimes what you’re getting and what you’re getting from it, gets lost in the monetary equation.’

After the long and leisurely meal they went down to the hotel and had drinks in the lobby, watching the people in there; well off people, people passing through from country to country. Who were they? Where were they going? Did it matter? It never ceased to amaze Adrian that he felt so insignificant. Not as a human being, but as a human being within the vast amounts of human beings there were in the world. He knew that half the youngsters in the world today had hardly heard of Hitler, or Stalin, or Mao Zedong and *they* changed the world so what chance his immortality?

Walking to the car she nestled within his arms and he was very aware that he should do this more often. Take more time out, as they say, with the missus.

In the car going home she moved her right hand over and rested it on his left leg and as the journey progressed she moved it up to his crotch and softly rubbed. A few years ago he would have been instantly hard but time and tension plays tricks on a body and mind and so it took longer than usual. He had to adjust

himself as his prick was straining to be straight but had tucked itself at a peculiar angle in his pants and was uncomfortable.

‘Better?’

‘Much,’ he said, grinning.

‘Good.’

She stroked his bulging trousers all the way home.

When the car stopped in their drive she looked at her watch.
‘It’s quite late.....bed time.’

He opened the front door and as they walked in and he felt for the light switch he was knocked violently to the floor.....

Chapter 11

Lucy

Maurice ‘Morry’ Wilson went to work perturbed. His wife, Lucy, wasn’t right, she wasn’t right at all and he had no idea why? It was true they were struggling with their mortgage and that was a worry but his job at the company he worked for as a stacatruck driver had gone to three day working and there was nothing he could do about it. He had managed to get an extra day’s work helping a mate cleaning windows, paying bugger all but it all helped.

He knew all that. He knew they had financial problems but as long as they were careful it would be ok. They had stopped going to the pub and the pictures, Lucy had given up Bingo and they walked the fields on the outskirts of town, potted about in the tiny garden of the tiny terraced house or watched tele or whatever didn’t cost a lot. It was a bit boring at times but it would be ok.....

So why wasn’t she right? She was edgy and teary and just not her usual self and it tore him apart to see her like that. If she hurt he hurt. It had been like that since he had met her at school when they were ten and they had been at each other’s side ever since. Fifteen years.....

Doug Graham was the Manager of one of J J’s betting shops and he grinned as he read the letter. ‘We did it,’ he shouted out of the office. ‘Shop of the month!’

‘How much?’ he heard through the slightly open door.

‘Ten percent.’

‘Better than nothing....’

He and his little team had received a letter from Roger Davids, the MD, telling them they had won the Shop of the Month Award which meant an extra ten percent in your pay packet that month. And you got your picture taken with Roger giving you a bottle of Champagne. Nice one. It looked good in your file and on your c.v. if you left. He was pleased. Even in this recession they were doing ok, mainly because he was a nice chap and his team were a nice team and they looked after their customers. Not punters; customers. Although it was quiet today, not a problem sort of quiet, just one of those.....quiet days.

He stretched his arms and blinked his straining eyes from too much looking at a computer screen and got up and went out of his office into the betting office. A few people, not many, mainly stalwarts, no big hitters. Morning, morning, morning he morninged as he went round, then hovered in the corner with the Fixed Odds Betting Machines.

‘Winning much, Lucy?’ he asked.

She shook her head but didn’t turn to him. There was something about her demeanour.....?

‘You ok, Lucy?’ he asked her back.

She shook her head again still without looking round.

‘Whatever’s wrong?’

He watched her start to shake as she started to cry. Looking frantically at the desk he beckoned to the lady behind it to come over. This was women’s work. He had absolutely no idea how you sorted out a crying woman. Totally beyond him.....

‘Jo’s just coming over to help you, Lucy,’ but just as Jo arrived Lucy got up and ran out of the shop.

An hour later, somehow, she had no idea how, she found herself sitting in the dingle of the local park with its beautiful flower arrangement and manicured lawns. She found its beauty staggering; the incredible colours, the butterflies, the bees. She

burst into tears as the nature given beauty before her contrasted darkly to the violent and ugly contrast of her own life. How could her life be so ugly? How could it? How could a life that was nice now be so ugly?

She knew why.

And she knew there was nothing that could be done about it.

And there was no way out.....

Chapter 12

Ben 2

The child was confused; not in any logical $2 + 2 = 4$ kind of way but in a ‘What the fuck’s going on, I think I’ve been conned’ kind of way. So what was the deal?

Let’s get this straight because something just ain’t right?

Let’s get back to basics.....

My mother has had sex before but not with ‘the right man’, although I’m not quite sure what that means? Anyhow along comes dad and whoosh, off they swim, swimming and swimming until one gets through. Now I may be waiting, and I may only get this one chance, but I ain’t stupid so I say, ‘Hang on a minute, just hang on a minute. Why you? Why should I choose you?’

So it just stops there, aware that it could be caught up at any time, its tail swishing away, but it’s fucked without my ok and so it has no option.

‘Ok,’ it says in a resigned ‘if I must’ sort of way, ‘this is what I have to offer.’

And it didn’t sound bad at all. Exactly as I told you earlier, not a bad catch at all. That’ll do me, I thought. Get in there, my son, and fertilise...

But here I am and getting hurt. Where was that part of the deal? Why do I deserve that? What have I done? It’s true I may be making the odd mess too many but I really can’t help that what with my lack of social understanding at this point in my life, my diet of non solids and not having a clue what a toilet and soft toilet paper are.

And yes I do cry at inconvenient times. It’s what we do.

And yes I do wake at inconvenient times. That's also what we do.

The fingers pinched hard into the baby again and he screamed..... again. Releasing the grip they turned quickly to the door only to see someone standing there.

A look of horror was on Benny's face. 'How.....?'

H just stood there.

'Why.....?'

He said nothing, just looked at her....

'How could.....?' She sobbed. '.....our child.....?'

He moved to her and held her gently. 'It's ok,' he said softly, 'it's ok.'

Her sobbing increased. 'Why.....?' she cried, 'I don't know why?'

H knew why and was annoyed that he had let it happen this time when he knew it could. Benny had post natal depression; totally unexpected and totally unforeseen. Usually it occurred through extreme stress or something in the past but it seemed that in Benny's case it had been the trauma of the difficult birth and a hormone imbalance.

Benny would be fine soon, she was getting better every day but she needed more time and H needed to be more vigilant. He took her downstairs and left her in the kitchen to make a cup of tea and then went back and picked up the little boy.

'Sorry, Benny Two,' and held him close and safe, 'I fucked up if you'll excuse the expression. But I'll make sure you're safe from now on. I promise. You'll be safe now.....'

The child gurgled and smiled, its little hand clamped on to H's finger.

'Now that's more like it.....dad.'

H put the child down in its cot, tucked him in and checked the small camera that overlooked the bed. Everything ok. He went to the door but as he went to go through he turned and whispered to the child, 'Don't use the word "fuck", especially in front of your mother.'

Chapter 13

The Lord

Peter Henry Cecil Montague D’Arcy, the aristocrat who lived in H’s coach house, was troubled. Firstly H had given him a small ad from The Times, put in by a firm of solicitors, enquiring as to his whereabouts and secondly what about the lake, which was far more worrying? He had pondered it for quite some while now, had said nothing to H, but now he was quite certain.

After the changes he had made to the structure and form of the surrounding areas, at points taking out whole areas of trees and only leaving enough for a feeling of perspective, he knew it needed a lake. Not a pond, not even a big pond, but a lake. And there was one particular area, a natural depression in the land measuring about four hundred by two hundred yards that would invite water run down and serve as a natural focal point for his idea.

He had done some homework, invited two contractors down to have a look, and had an estimated cost of between a hundred and a hundred and fifty thousand, plus water although it would fill up naturally over time and then stocking with fish and wild life. There was a possibility that deer could also be introduced. He looked again at the ad, picked up his mobile, changed the setting to ‘withhold number’ and dialled. Getting through to the Solicitor concerned and after answering a number of questions to prove his identity he was told that he was now the proud owner of what was left of the estate plus about a hundred and fifty thousand pounds.

‘What do you think?’ asked the solicitor.

‘About what?’

‘About your inheritance.’

‘Why, are you a counsellor?’

‘I didn’t mean.....’ spluttered the solicitor, ‘to offend....’

‘Why hasn’t this gone to my brother?’

‘I think your father thought he’d had enough.’

It suddenly occurred to Peter that his father must have died? Obviously! And yet he hadn’t even thought about it. ‘How did he die?’

‘Perhaps too good a life....?’ ventured the solicitor. His face grimaced in anticipation; another reprimand? He carried on quickly. ‘Where shall I send the papers?’

‘I am in between houses at the moment so please send them to a friend of mine. Mister James, Managing Director, J J Group.....’

‘Will you be a Lord?’ asked James. ‘Will I have to bow?’

‘Will I have to curtsy?’ asked Benny doing a delightful old fashioned curtsy, bending her knees outward rather than straight ahead and sweeping one foot behind whilst holding her skirt out.

Peter looked at them and gave a big sigh of ‘*give it a rest*’. ‘Anyhow it’s going to your office if that’s ok?’

‘Of course.’

‘This calls for a celebration,’ said Benny, ‘I’ll go and put the kettle on.’

‘But will you be a Lord?’ persisted H.

‘No, my elder brother will. I will have part of the estate and, according to the solicitor, a hundred and fifty thousand or so.’

‘Better than a kick in the teeth. Benny,’ shouted H to the kitchen, ‘how much does Peter owe us in back rent?’

‘About a hundred and fifty thousand pounds.’

Peter grinned, ‘Easy come easy go.’

Benny came back with the tea and they sat down.

‘I have a little project that may interest you, James.’

H waited. It was something in the word *little* that made him think this would be another Versailles.

‘Some water,’ said Peter.

‘Water?’

‘Yes. Beautiful shimmering water to reflect the seasons and maybe skate on in a bad winter.’

Shimmering water thought H? Versailles here we come. ‘Could you flesh it out a touch, Peter?’ asked H suspiciously.

‘A lake.’

‘A *little* lake?’

‘Definitely little.’

‘How little?’

‘Four hundred by two hundred.’

‘That would be.....?’

‘Yards.’

‘And that’s little?’

‘Ever been to the Lake District?’

‘No.’

‘Well they’ve got big lakes there. This one’s tiny. Just think, James, how beautiful it would be. With wildlife, geese, swans, stocked with fish. You could have a quiet afternoon fishing in your own lake....?’

‘A lake.....?’ murmured H dubiously.

Peter changed tack, knowing H was going to say no. ‘Wouldn’t that be wonderful, Benny? And for young Ben as well. What a wonderful environment.....’

H wasn’t showing any enthusiasm but his mind was going haywire. His own lake? How good was that? Why hadn’t he thought of putting in a lake? ‘I don’t know,’ he said casually. ‘What about costs?’

‘Not too bad,’ said Peter.

‘Which means what in money?’

‘Well you’re *very lucky* that we have a natural depression in the land that will need very little excavation; we can put in a liner and it will fill over several months by itself.’

‘Which means what in money?’ repeated H.

‘Between one fifty and two fifty.’

‘A hundred and fifty thousand pounds for a pond?’ blurted H.

‘Lake,’ said Benny and Peter as one. ‘Lake....’

‘It’s a lot of money.’

Peter said nothing while Benny looked at James with derision. Peter hadn’t pointed out that if the lake took too long to fill, just their luck to have a sunny, dry summer, the cost of pumping water via the local water board to fill up the lake from scratch to a depth of ten metres would be just over seven hundred thousand. Seven hundred thousand! So half full was three hundred and fifty thousand! For water. From the sky.

‘I would have to cut down on your allowance, Benny.’

‘You only give me fifty pounds a week as it is. And that has to pay house expenses and food.....’

‘I didn’t realise I gave you so much... And Prada could go under if you stop spending.’ H looked at Peter. ‘Benny spends more than that on a pair of shoes.’

Benny shook her head in despair.

‘It will mean one pair of shoes less, Benny. How will you handle it?’

‘I’ll try and there’s always Shoes Anonymous.’

‘Hmmmm. Do you have any plans or..... ?’ said H reluctantly.

‘It just so happens I do.’

‘Why don’t you bring them up tonight, we’ll have dinner, spread them over the floor and go over it whilst listening to the theme from The Dambusters.....?’

No sooner had Peter left when H lifted Benny up in the air. 'We're going to have a laaaaake....we're going to have a laaaake.....' he sang excitedly.

Chapter 14

Safe 2

Adrian and Claire had a fist put in their faces, were told to ‘shut the fuck up’, trussed up and dragged to a settee in the lounge. A hand grabbed Adrian’s throat and squeezed. Hard.

‘If you so much as fucking move a muscle or open your mouth, even a fraction, I will hurt your wife so fuckin bad she won’t walk for a month. Got it?!’ said one of the three men, dressed in all black with black balaclavas.

Adrian nodded. One of them pointed to another who said, ‘Let me tell you what you’re going to do. We’re going, later on, back to the casino and you’re going to give us the cash in the safes....’ He looked in Adrian’s eyes. ‘Yes, both safes. And when you do that and we’re a long way away, you can come back to your woman. Ok?’

Adrian went to say something but a fist appeared in his face. ‘Not a fucking word! Now I know you don’t have the sole combination to the safes so you will have to arrange to meet the cashier there to complete the process. Right?’

Adrian nodded. How did they know this or was it common knowledge in and out of the industry? The casino had two SMP Security vacuum safes, well actually three, in separate rooms but only two had money transported into them. In these there would be around a million in cash in total, maybe a bit more, maybe a bit less.....

What they wouldn’t know was that, if he rang the cashier, he could mention a code word and the police would be alerted. But what would happen then? They had his wife.....

‘You may be tempted,’ said the man, ‘to tip off the cashier when you ring him but just remember one of us will be here with your woman and if there’s a problem you won’t recognise her when you next see her...if you ever do.’

Adrian noticed the man, who seemed to be directing operations but saying nothing, put his hand to his covered ear and it looked as though he was getting instructions from somewhere else....?

‘So what we, you, are going to do is ring the cashier now and arrange to meet him at eight tomorrow morning to get some things from the safe. When we have what we want we will go, ring here, he will go,’ he pointed to the other man, ‘and we will be richer and your insurance bills will increase. Ok?’

Adrian nodded.

‘Right. Now you can talk, what are you going to say to the cashier to arrange this? Tell me now, word for word, what you are going to say. And when we get it right, if you change one word, or one emphasis, you will *both* regret it.’

Adrian looked at his wife, saw the fear in her eyes and knew there would be no signal. Adrian nodded again.

‘Ok, now let’s get your little script right, eh.....?’

Chapter 15

The bookie

Graham Gamble had all you needed to be a bookie. He had the right name, had married a woman called Betty Betts and owned twenty betting shops. All the things you needed to be a bookie. He'd built his little empire up over thirty years and it had served him well. A nice house, now up for sale, a new villa in Portugal, his and her Mercs and once they had even done a world cruise. How good was that? Even in the recession, as he told everyone who would listen, he was still minting it.

Unfortunately, as happens, everything changes at some point and his beloved Betty had developed a terminal disease and they had decided to spend what time they had left together at the villa. It was no big deal. They were both in their sixties now and so it was a good time; if ever there was a good time for a couple to lose each other. The house should sell for about £750,000 and they had two very interested potential buyers; and the business would fetch on the high side of £7,000,000. It should have been more but there were few takers with that kind of money at the moment what with the goings on of Gordon Clown but it would be more than enough to keep them for a while and him for the rest of his life.

The big four had all expressed an interest along with two or three independents including the Mayfield Group, an Irish betting group and also JJ Betting, part of JJ Group. Graham knew the MD of JJ Betting from the old times when Roger Davids worked for one of the big boys and had pestered him continually to sell. So when he had decided to sell he contacted Roger who had arrived, as if by magic, the next day.

From Roger's point of view they were ideal. They made, according to Graham, an average of £70,000 each which gave Rog loads of room to add value. The locations were good; several were very good and on top of that they weren't overlapping any shops that JJ currently owned.

And the figures stacked up. H borrowed £7,000,000 at 4% which cost £280,000; profits were £1,400,000 and Rog could sweat them for at least another £30,000 each which gave an additional £600,000. So the seven mil would produce 2 mil less £280,000 giving £1.72 mil. And no extra costs. Ok there was the new branding and perhaps just one extra person to manage them all. Call it just over a million and a half at the very worst. Got to be good.....

Although times were bad Graham Gamble watched the players' mounting interest in his little Group of shops and realised there was more to this than just money and returns on investment. This was about mano a mano, cojones, big dicks, superiority, inferiority....etc etc. And when you had all that you had something else.....a better price!

And so he invited them in and made sure he managed, in a 'just mentioning it in passing' sort of way, how *very* interested the other parties were. And they would scurry back, look at their projections again to see what they had missed that the others could see, spot the potential they had missed, real or imagined, and they would revise their offer upwards....

Chapter 16

Gavin

Gavin watched H punch the bag at the Club and he knew there was something wrong. H had the timing absolutely perfect and the power he was putting into the last six inches was impressive. Not exactly Fourth Dan stuff but it would still knock your head off! He went over and watched for several minutes as H slammed into the bag.

‘You ok, H?’

H stopped; sweat pouring out of him. ‘No.’

‘Anything I can do?’

‘No. Other than giving me a new brain which I seem to have got out of the habit of using.....’

H was annoyed, mainly at himself for being lax. The previous night he had, for the first time in a while, gone to one of his night clubs. As usual he watched from a distance to see what happened on the doors and was appalled at how sloppy it was. It seemed just about anybody could get in, dressed any old way, with little effort at stopping obvious rough types who could create mayhem once they were in.

He went up to the three men on the door. ‘Who changed the “let in” policy?’

‘We were told to be a bit more relaxed, H,’ said big Ricky.

‘A *bit* more? Every bugger’s getting in.’

‘We just do as we are told, H.’

‘And who told you?’

‘Tom.’

H nodded, went inside and was met by the Manager who spotted him. 'Evening, H.'

H nodded and the Manager noticed H's irritation. H looked around and saw people in there that should have been told to go away before they got in the same road let alone the club. He looked at the Manager.

'H, I know, but it's not my fault. Tom said to get the figures up we had to let more in and so we have. I don't like it as the good punters are leaving but what can I do?'

H looked around. This wasn't what the clubs were about.... He nodded at the Manager. 'Thanks.'

Walking to his car he phoned Tom. 'Tom, it's H..... You've changed the "let in" policy at the clubs.....and I don't get a say?..... well see me at my office tomorrow at ten and I'll have my say then.....'

Annoyed he rang Scotty. 'Scotty,' he said without any preamble, 'we're letting Neanderthals into the clubs of which you are Chairman. Did you know about this change of policy? Did you ok this change of policy?'

'I didn't know, James.'

'Why not?'

'I must admit I rarely go to the clubs and tend to rely on the stats. The stats showed that numbers were still good but of course they showed the quantity and not the quality of the people going in.'

'Do you know how hard it is to get good clientele and to keep them?'

'Yes.'

'And you've allowed it to change?'

Scotty said nothing. It was unusual for H to wade in like this but if he needed to let him get on with it.

'I'll talk to you tomorrow,' said H curtly and hung up.

And so here he was, having a good workout before his meeting. The thought of it made him angry again. How could a fucking MD make such a ridiculous mistake? Why would you let in Neanderthals to make the figures better when you knew that quite soon all the good punters would go, depressing the figures again, and the knuckle draggers would destroy the place as well? Oh fuck! He smashed into the bag again!

‘And it’s my fault, Gav. Took my eye off the ball.’

‘You can’t do everything, H.’

H grinned. ‘Didn’t know you were a diplomat?’

‘H, I’m not great at business, as you know, I just know martial arts; but if I employ a cleaner to clean I expect them to clean. Not me.’

It was true, thought H, quite true. Simplistic but true. Whilst it was his job to make sure they were still there next year and in ten years it was the MD’s job to run the fucking things! He smacked the bag again! And maybe he should give Scotty a ring? Let him sweat....

‘Well, I know that sorting out dear Tom isn’t going to be enough because now the Neanderthals are used to getting in they are going to take some stopping.’

‘You should employ Jerry.’

‘Who’s Jerry?’

‘Best doorman that ever lived.’

‘How come?’

‘Just magic at his job. Done it forever, but nowadays he works as a nurse and only does it part time for some extra cash.’

‘How do you know him?’

‘He teaches me.’

‘He teaches *you*?’

‘Yeah.’

‘What does he teach you? I thought you were the man?’

‘I’m not bad at what I do, in fact I’m very good, but Jerry is a different kettle of fish.’

‘In what way?’

‘Why don’t you just meet him and find out for yourself, that’s if he’s interested of course. It’s worth an hour out of your life just to meet him.’

‘Why is he so special?’

Gav just grinned, ‘You’ll find out.’

Chapter 17

Safe 3

Adrian let himself and two of the men in to the casino. It was still early morning and dark. They had removed their hoods but their faces were blackened and they had on false moustaches and larger noses. It should have looked comical but it wasn't; it was quite effective as a disguise and completely, much to Adrian's surprise, disorganised and confused the contours of their faces.

They waited two hours, with Ade trussed and gagged and them drinking coffee, until the cashier let himself in and went up to Ade's office. He knocked lightly and walked in to be met immediately by the muzzle of a sawn off shotgun. Involuntarily he jumped and the blood rushed from his brain and he slumped to the floor in a faint.

They dragged him to a couch and slapped him about a bit to bring him round. When he woke and grasped the situation he started to tremble with fear.

'It's ok, Ted,' said Ade who'd had his gag removed, 'they just want the money.' Ted was handling it badly; he shook and tears streamed down his eyes. 'All they want is your code numbers, I'll give them mine and then they'll go. It's ok, Ted, it's ok.'

Ted whimpered and whined like a cornered animal. His body shook violently and Ade wondered why he was so scared.....?

'To the safes; and no funny business.' A shotgun was put in Ade's face to emphasise the point.

It took only minutes to empty the safes and Adrian and Ted were left tied very tightly and securely and gagged in Ade's office which they locked as they left. Ted was still taking it very badly.

Extremely badly. Outside, each with a holdall full of money, they went in opposite directions to cars they had left. Once on their way one of them, the one who had been doing the pointing and somehow directing the operation, rang the third man at Ade's home. Making sure Claire was completely trussed he waited exactly forty five minutes and then went outside to the car that had just pulled up.....

Chapter 18

Tuesday

Richard, or Ric, or Rich or whatever they called him, left the foundry at 4:30 and headed home. They still called it a foundry but in reality it was now just offices as the fonts were made in Portugal or Spain and shipped back to have the beer lines, taps, badges and anything else that needed to be added ready for whichever brewery or pub chain needed them.

When he got home he found the heating full on which it shouldn't have been and after an inspection of the system found that the timer in the hall that coordinated all that kind of stuff had packed up.

Oh great, more money...

He went back to the car and headed to a nearby industrial estate where he knew there was an electrical wholesaler and bought a new timer. Sixty quid! Plus VAT!

Christ. How soon did money go? You get your salary and then all the things you were going to do with it were put back another month by the things you had no idea were lurking for a piece of it.

After tea they went to a dancing class to learn rock and roll and the waltz and quick step. Ric struggled with rock and roll. So much to do... so many steps.... so little time.... Surely the music was too fast?

The dance instructor would take a lady to show a particular step and when he took June, Ric wasn't sure that he didn't hold her a touch too close, or his hand didn't just brush her breast as he let her go but she hadn't complained so he said nothing.

He must have got it wrong....

Chapter 19

Lucy 2

Morry felt his mobile vibrate in his pocket, stopped the staca, looked at the screen and saw it was Lucy.

‘Hello, love. What brings the light of my life ringing me in the afternoon at work?’

‘Maurice...’ and the line went dead.

‘Maurice?’ She only called him Maurice if he had been an arsehole or something was wrong. He immediately rang her back.

He heard it ring and then it connected. ‘Lucy,’ he said urgently, ‘what’s wrong?’

‘I can’t.....’ she sobbed, ‘I can’t.....’

‘You can’t what, Lucy?’ he begged. ‘What’s wrong, love?’

‘I can’t.....I can’t.....I.....’ and the phone went dead again.

He rang it back immediately but she didn’t answer. He leapt off his truck and shouted at the works manager, ‘Gotta go, Jim, sorry,’ and ran to the car park where their little old Corsa waited.....

Half way home he came across new roadworks. Single file traffic inching forwards as the Tee junction lights wound their slow way between the different junctions. ‘Fucking bastards,’ he screamed. ‘Get a fucking move on!’ He punched the wheel in frustration and anger. ‘Fucking move!’

It took him nearly an hour to get home due to the single carriage roadworks that were designed to ease the traffic. Fucking,

fucking, fucking roadworks! His anger at the fucking roadworks knew no bounds.

Parking on the road outside the house he ran to the door. Fumbling for the keys he started swearing again. Come on, come on, for fuck's sake come on..... As soon as he knew the key had turned he hit the door hard with his shoulder and ran inside where he found her in the kitchen, sitting at the table.

Thank God.

He almost wept with relief.....

Chapter 20

Jerry 2

H had a long meeting with Tom, the MD of the clubs, but arrived at the same conclusion. Tom had blown it and his complete lack of strategic thinking plus he had taken a major decision without talking to the man who paid the bills meant he had to go. So now H needed a new MD *and* someone who could sort out the door problem. Oh good.....

He looked at the clock on the wall and saw he had five minutes to go. Maybe he wouldn't arrive, this mystery doorman? His phone went and two minutes later Jerome was shown in. Whatever it was that H was expecting it wasn't this.

Jerome was six foot something, maybe three, at least eighteen stone and a half caste. For such a massive man he walked in softly, quietly; his feet hardly leaving the floor in almost a shuffle, and shook H's hand gently. His smile was warm and his eyes were kind. H could see how his demeanour could suit a nurse but a doorman? He may be big but so are a lot of people. Best doorman in the world? Gav had lost the plot. Too many punches to the head.....

Jerome Nelson, known to all as Jerry, was forty three years old and had come up the hard way. His father had gone to the pub one evening when he was two years old and never returned; Jerry found out many years later that he was living in Canada.

Living as a half caste in the Midlands was traumatic. Picked on by whites who picked on all blacks and excluded by blacks who saw his family as 'Uncle Toms' and called him a 'coconut'; brown on the outside but white underneath, he retreated inwards

until at age eleven he joined a karate club and learned to fight back.

At school he was bright, though not at maths, and found he had a leaning towards design and thinking 'outside the box'. His thinking was imaginative and original and he channelled it into art.

Outside of school he excelled at Karate, his physique filled out, and he developed a leaning towards the techniques and history of the art; an understanding of *why* rather than just using it to hammer someone.

When he left school he found that no one would give him a job except the state and that was only a succession of training schemes that went nowhere except help lower the unemployment statistics. And so he drifted into the only work he could find that paid a big bloke like him with martial arts skills a reasonable wage.

The doors.

His massive frame and knowledge of karate helped considerably but he soon realised that karate was more effective in a dojo than on the street so he took up other disciplines until he had black belts in Karate, Hapkido, Arnis and hand to hand combat. But he took it farther; he adapted standard karate techniques for use on the street.

Jerry Nelson had come a long way and he had changed. No longer was he the hunted little half caste who dreaded going out, insecure and victimised. Now he was a man at ease with himself. True there would always be some arsehole who wanted to have a go because of his colour but Jerry could either ignore them or annihilate them.

Whilst no longer the hunted, Jerry was not the hunter either; unless you did something that made him see you as prey.....

Chapter 21

Writing

From the first time H had written a poem, for Benny when they had been in Barbados, and then the poker poem that he had sent to all his mates and Tony Hatch *who still hadn't replied*, he had found that occasionally he enjoyed writing others as when the opportunity and need arose.

But he had gone off the moon in June stuff and found himself writing about weird and wonderful things. Things that resonated. Things that perhaps he couldn't express in the spoken word.

H was aware that although he could converse with anyone he had a lack of education that you didn't make up through adult life. Yes it got better; you learned more words, you educated yourself, you read The Times, you watched documentaries, you listened, you took things in, but you would never know the rules of English and he had realised a long time ago that he would *never* know what a *present participle* was no matter how often he looked it up.

Even his letters tended to reflect the way he spoke rather than a predisposed code of writing within the boundaries of good grammar. It was a foreign world and almost a foreign language and it was the same with maths. H could do maths in his head as good as anyone else but when he saw someone who did *proper* maths write a vast equation on a board it made no sense; no sense at all.

And today he wanted to write because yesterday two things had happened that had touched him. The first was word about Edward Stone an old friend. H knew Ed when they were teenagers and

had kept in touch until the usual happened; Ed got married and his contact with him became less and then stopped altogether. In due course Ed met an American woman, left his wife and two children, and went to live over there complete with a small nest egg from his parents who had died and left him a farm. And he lived well. He got a part time job selling cars to yanks who liked to buy cars off someone with an English accent and his wife sold property. Then, about two years ago, his wife had developed cancer and needed more medical help than their insurance would buy so Ed had to use the money in the Bank and then, when she developed other symptoms, mortgage the house. Ed's world was unravelling before him as the debt and the responsibility, especially the responsibility, sat on his shoulders and pressed him down. Ed and his wife had Christmas down the road at his in-laws and at the end of it he had excused himself to go home for a forgotten present.

They found him in the locked garage, with the car engine running and a half drunk bottle of whisky on his lap. Not for the first time in his life did H think about death and what would take you to the point of taking your own life.....

The second thing was a day out with Roger Davids, the MD of JJ Betting, visiting some of the shops that had been refurbished. H had inspected the shops, talked to the staff, made the usual jokes and afterwards they had gone to dinner. Roger then took him back to where H had left his car but had taken an indirect route through a red light district and H had seen the women waiting for their next trick. And he saw the cars drive up and slow down and the drivers look at the women as they drove slowly past and then stop and a window would go down and a few words to, he assumed, agree a price and for what, and then she would get in and off they would go.

And something inside him made him sad. He was sad that the women may have no other way of making money and the men had no other way of being fulfilled in whatever sense they were being fulfilled. And surely they weren't all there for a good fuck, or even a bad fuck. How many were there for something else? Love, affection, understanding, company, a talk.....?

And if they were there for any of that it was sad. Sad that you had to pay money to someone who would *pretend* to care but in actual fact couldn't wait for you to fuck off with your perverted needs.

You want me to care?

You want me to listen?

You want me to understand?

You want me to talk?

Fucking pervert. What's wrong with you?

Have a hand job, love; I'm much more comfortable giving you a hand job. Let me suck your dick but please, *please* don't tell me you just want to talk to me. Not that; oh *please* not that.

Oh for fuck's sake. The things I have to do for money.....

And so H sat in front of his computer and wrote; *Secret Love*

I see you waiting

Under the lamp light

As I round the corner in my car

My heart pounding ever quicker

I have travelled oh so far

To be with you

For a short time

You look so lovely

Oh my darling

As we head out to the wood

Where I'll fumble with your buttons
Which will make me
Feel so good
For a short time

It was wonderful
Quite ecstatic
What you did as I lay there
On the back seat, windows steaming
Moonlight glistening
On your hair
For a short time

I took you back then
Breathing deeply
My trembling hand upon your knee
I wished you could stay longer
Just a little
Just for me
For a short time

As I dropped you
Under the lamp light
Then I slowly drove away
I watched you in the mirror
Get in another car
To play
For a short time

But I know that
You don't love them
That one-day we'll set a date

Living happily forever
But for now
I have to wait
For a short time

I look forward
Oh my darling
To seeing you in two weeks time
Under the lamplight
Round the corner
Waiting to be mine
For a short time

Oh my darling
How I love you
How I yearn to make you mine
To be near you
To be with you
For more than
A short time

He read what he had written and was surprised at how much he was concerned about the man. And it was so sad.... Why was that? Was it because he had tried so hard, as a child, to get love? Had done anything to get love? Convinced himself that getting fucked and beaten was love?

That anything, no matter how degrading or brutal, was better than nothing?

Silent tears ran slowly down his face.....

Chapter 22

Camptown Races

The police had swarmed over the casino which seemed a bit late and scenes of crime had descended like a plague on Ade's house. They found nothing in either but did have a copy of the casino's video and also Ade's at home. H had insisted that all MD's took advantage of the expertise of the Security group and had hidden cameras put in, along with good security systems which, it would appear, had been fucking useless in this instance.

H had kept a copy to look at in his office, and sent one to Andy Pandy, but it told him very little. Just three hooded men, all in black, quite menacing and professional. Didn't bother the woman, no small talk, just there to do a job, do it well and get out quick. Impressive.

The police struggled as well and had arrived at the same conclusion. Obviously a well trained, intelligent team of robbers who knew what they were doing. In fact they did it too well and it suggested an inside job which should be one of their main strands of enquiry. However they also knew that an inside job did not necessarily mean 'inside' at all. What it often meant was that inside knowledge from one place would be used elsewhere and therefore the trail was not there. It was very possible that the inside knowledge about this casino was gleaned from someone who worked in another casino miles away.....

Andy received the DVD of the robbery, to look through for H, and sat down to watch it one night but was distracted when the football came on and then..... and then..... and then..... he forgot about it.

Six weeks later he had been given another DVD of an anatomical nature that he decided to watch when his missus went to Bingo. Pressing the open button on the DVD player he was surprised to see the DVD copy of H's video confront him which caused a dilemma. Should he, as he said he would, watch H's robbery video, or should he, as he thought he should, watch the women with the donkeys.....and have a good, mind blowing wank?

It was a difficult decision and Andy, a man with a yen for solving difficult problems, wondered whether there was any way he could do both? Nah..... so, difficult decision it was. H's video or women, donkeys and wank? Andy realised it needed a deep intellectual process to establish the priority and he decided to watch the porn video while he mulled it over.....

Nearly half an hour later Andy had cleaned up the mess his ejaculations had caused, run round the room with an air freshener, opened the windows, and come to the conclusion that he would watch H's video first.....

Come to the conclusion....tee hee.

Five minutes into the video from Ade's house, Andy Pandy nodded to himself and stood up. He went upstairs to the bathroom, cleaned his teeth, gargled with mouthwash and started the bath running. When he felt he had enough hot water in the bath producing enough steam in the bathroom he went back into the bedroom and collected a cordless phone. Back in front of the large bathroom mirror he cleared his throat once more and did a *do re me fa sol la ti do* using the correct solfège syllables. Not quite right he did it again. Still not quite right he went into the bedroom, stripped off his clothes, put on a robe and stuck a pillow under it. Looking more like Pavarotti he went back in front of the mirror and did another *do re me fa sol la ti do*. Better; much better.

He dialled H's office number but got his voicemail which was what he expected. 'H....listen and join in when you're ready.....' and he started a rendition of

De Camptown ladies sing dis song, Doo-dah! doo-dah!
De Camptown race-track five miles long, Oh, doo-dah
day!
I come down dah wid my hat caved in, Doo-dah! doo-
dah!
I go back home wid a pocket full of tin, Oh, doo-dah
day!

Gwine to run all night!
Gwine to run all day!
I'll bet my money on de bob-tail nag,
Somebody bet on de bay

De long tail filly and de big black hoss, Doo-dah! doo-
dah!
Dey fly de track and dey both cut across, Oh, doo-dah-
day!
De blind hoss sticken in a big mud hole, Doo-dah! doo-
dah!
Can't touch bottom wid a ten foot pole, Oh, doo-dah-
day!

'Come on, H,' he said, 'one last burst,' and he went an
octave and about twenty decibels higher.

Oooooooooohhhhhhhhhhhh

De Camptown ladies sing dis song, Doo-dah! doo-dah!
De Camptown race-track five miles long, Oh, doo-dah
day!

I come down dah wid my hat caved in, Doo-dah! doo-dah!

I go back home wid a pocket full of tin,...

Ooooooooooh,

doo-daaaaaaaaaaaaah

doo-daaaaaaaaaaaaah

daaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaay

Andy bowed to the mirror, imperiously mopped his brow on a white hand towel and waved it majestically at the adoring crowd. Throwing the towel to his admirers he watched as the radiator fought with the towel rail for the honour of retrieving it, while the sink shouted, 'bravo' at the top of its voice. He bowed again, both arms outstretched and gave them an 'it was easy' look of superiority. Walking backwards and bowing as he went he shut the bathroom door and said into the phone, 'It went down well tonight, H. They loved me.....' and hung up.....

Chapter 23

The Judgement of Abraham

Saul Abraham, whose parents were Jehovah's Witnesses and whose name bore witness to that, had always been on a mission. To rid himself of God, to rid himself of his parents, to get some money and climb the social ladder.

And he had. From the point when knocking on doors that people didn't open or who spit venom at you when they did became the most stupid pursuit in the world; to finding out that pre marital sex wasn't bad, it was absolutely fucking mind blowing; to getting a job and earning a few quid and having a life. A life in a little flat where you could be yourself and fuck the world. Literally! Anything over sixteen, give or take a year or two, was fair game and he had a way with the ladies. He had no idea why but he could spread their legs and open their mouths very easily.

Come here....and come again.....and again.

And at work he employed the same enthusiasm. He worked hard, moved up, destroyed any potential underling that could be a threat, found the ear of the Chief Exec and whispered appropriate and sometimes not so appropriate evaluations of the person next in line above him. If there was credit going he took it and if there was criticism it was fuck all to do with him!

In due course he left and went as G M to a privately owned forty shop betting company. Within three months the owner had been killed in a car crash and he found himself, when the body was cold, just, spreading another set of legs. Twelve months later

he married the widow and set off building the company which was now up to sixty eight shops.

He looked at the Capital Expenditure Proposal in front of him, scanning it quickly and taking in the financials. Twenty betting shops, £70,000 net each, days of a seven multiplier were gone and so a cheap deal. He read the summary at the end and saw the others who were sniffing about and his hackles raised. JJ Group. Those cunts!

He had met James James once at a Betting Industry Dinner and he was totally unimpressed. What an arsehole. How the fuck did a man with a brain no bigger than a pea get to own a gambling Group? Rich daddy or something?

More than likely made a fortune as a rent boy.....

And his poodle who ran the betting shops now; a fucking no hoper if ever there was one. Roger fucking Davids. What a prick. Got out of his last job before he was thrown out you can bet. We've got, thought Abraham, office cleaners with more knowledge of the betting industry than those cunts!

Well fuck the stupidly named James James and the stupidly named JJ Group. Abraham had missed out on the Wace brothers but this was one they were *not* getting!

He looked at the figures again. There was lots of room in there for a mass of added value and there was no way he was going to be outbid by a prick called James James and a no hoper called Davids. Jewish bastard!

Chapter 24

Mickey

Mickey Wernick, professional poker player, professional gambler, professional ‘if it moves have a bet on it’ looked at his mobile and slumped down in his chair.

He felt tired and he felt old.

Now in his mid sixties the late nights, the stress, the fantastic, brain buzzing highs and the dreadful, stomach churning lows had taken its toll and he needed a break. He needed a holiday. But there was no break on holiday. There should be but....but....

On holiday.....there were casinos, sports bars, mobile phones, the internet.....and always a card game somewhere.

A gambler’s dream, a gambler’s nightmare.

He looked at the phone again. A text from his mate Neil Channing read, ‘Smithy’s playing cards with Stuey tonight. Lol.’

Neil had a way with words. How to tell someone that your mate, everybody’s mate, Smithy, was dead and yet make it somehow wonderful by suggesting that he would soon be sitting at a table and playing cards with Stu Ungar, perhaps the greatest poker player that had ever lived. Now that was class.....

Smithy was a touch younger than Mickey but had come up the same way and not far from the same street. Friends as children they remained friends all their lives although they only saw each other occasionally.

They always made a point of meeting up for the World Series of Poker in Vegas each year, but this year Smithy hadn’t turned up because, Mickey found out later, Smithy couldn’t raise the

cash. Mickey shook his head, sipped a glass of wine and lit another cigarette.

Couldn't raise the cash.

Why the fuck didn't he ask? Mickey knew why.

Sometimes you just couldn't. You should, but you didn't. It was about pride; about having to go to winners when you are a loser. It was a difficult thing to do. A gambler always has to think the next bet or the next tournament will be the one that brings them back. The one that ends the losing streak. And begging off someone who is winning only reminds you about how bad it is. And tells them you are a loser.....

Of course it always turns round. Mathematics says it has to. What mathematics doesn't tell you is when?

It's like the cards....

Aces against a lower pair.

You're sitting there, all your chips in and across the table from you is someone who thought, for whatever reason, his pair of twos was good. He saw you as Ace King or Ace Queen or anything other than an over pair. So what he thought was a marginal 56 – 44 opportunity was now a four to one dog.

So you're sitting there knowing that you are just over an 80% favourite to win the hand. Eighty percent. A four to one favourite. And then out comes a two and you're gone. Trip fucking twos.

Of course he looks a bit sheepish, may even silently mouth the word 'sorry', but it's just an act. He's ripped your fucking heart out and he knows it....

Now the maths says that you should now win the next four high pair against low pair battles. You're four to one favourite, you've lost one, so the next four are yours.

Well.....no.

Your four to one odds have been derived from maths and checked by a computer that has played those hands a million

times and says that of those million hands a high pair will beat a low pair eighty percent of the time.

Over a million hands.

But over the next fifty times, or a hundred times, or a hundred and fifty times you may lose every one! Every fucking one! And when you think that the chances of getting Aces are about two hundred and twenty to one it means the losing streak can go on for a long time....

Mickey knew one American pro whose bad luck had continued for four years. Four fucking years.....

Mickey once had a losing streak of fourteen months. Shit that was a bad time....

A thought struck Mickey and he rang Neil. He slumped back in his chair again. *Hung himself*. Oh fuck; how desperate do you have to be to hang yourself? Tears filled Mickey's eyes. Poor Smithy. Poor Smithy....

In some ways it didn't matter how long the losing streak was, it was what it cost you. He knew poker players that had lost everything; one even several million in less than three months.

And the major problem, which everybody overlooked, was where did you get the money for the next bet or the next tournament? When you were running hot you could afford any Tourney and, if you were lucky, as Mickey had been, sponsors knocked on your door.

But when the cards were glacial and you had to lower your sights the five thousand buy in became five hundred and if you still lost it became fifty.....or lower..... And that meant playing with fucking idiots who called a raise with Ace six and then you didn't know where the fucking hell you were....?

Well you did..... out would come an Ace six and your Ace King raise and all in was fucked again,.....

In his fourteen month bad spell Mickey had also lost everything except of course, the house. Well.....ok you sometimes had to mortgage it but.....

And it destroyed the family. Your missus doesn't have enough money for the bills and the kids; and the kids' fund that you put by in good times has already been raided and gambled away. And you argue; how couldn't you argue when all your family wanted was a decent life and all you wanted was a decent win? And the one depended on the other.....

And of course you get an overdraft and then the letters start arriving from the Bank Manager. You know it's for you, they're headed 'Dear Loser'. They begin, 'You haven't made any money, Loser, your overdraft is now at its limit, Loser, and you can't have any more. Loser! But you owe us £25 for this letter which I will add to your overdraft. Loser!'

A few days later you get another letter, cost £25, complaining that your overdraft has gone up by another £25! And then a demand for a reduction in the overdraft!

With what, you daft cunt?!

It was great being a winning gambler; the pits being a losing one. And of course when you are winning you are playing with other people's money. You can go in more games, in higher stakes and have more confidence when you go all in for a ton of money that the person sitting opposite can't afford..... Because he's having a bad time.....

And so you bully him. You make him quite aware that the twenty thousand you've just pushed in is small change to you but the kid's university fees and the mortgage payments to him.

The difference between winning and losing was everything. It was life and death and, in Smithy's case, death.

Smithy had got to the end of the line and, according to Neil, killed himself because he saw no end to the losses and all he had

left was the house and this way he knew they were safe. This way he couldn't gamble away the house.

It hadn't occurred to him that if he stopped gambling and got a job, any job, the house was safe. Hadn't occurred to him.....it wouldn't have occurred to any gambler.

Mickey wondered whether it was time for him to call it a day? He'd done quite well recently, mortgage gone, again, kids' fund topped up, again, missus happy, again, money in the bank which meant the Bank Manager was happy, again, and all well with the world. Now would be a good time...

Maybe just earn a few quid as a commentator with Jesse May or something.....? In fact Neil was doing a bit of that.... Maybe they could be a team? The Neil and Mickey Show? Mickey and Neil's Poker Hour? That sounded better.....

He looked again at his mobile. Poor Smithy.....

He saw the tele flicker and watched as the horses paraded in the paddock at Chepstow. Picking up the opened Racing Post lying on the table in front of him he found the race. Punching a speed dial number on his mobile he said, 'Jimmy, it's Mickey; five hundred each way on.....'

It came fourth.

Fucking donkey.

Shit!

Automatically, but involuntarily, Mickey worked out how many five hundreds would have to be lost before he raided the kids' fund again.....?

Quite a few, thank God.

Chapter 25

The Lord 2

Peter's lake plans were stretched on the table in front of him but he struggled with one particular view from one particular angle which his mind refused to replicate for him. He rolled up the drawing, tucked it under his arm and walked up to the main house. It was a long walk but he enjoyed it and there was something familiar about arriving, in due course, at a lovely house.

Benny opened the door and led him in. 'Tea?'

'Please.'

'What brings you here?'

'I'm off to the lake, or soon to be lake and I wondered whether you'd like me to take Ben?'

'Lovely, I'm sure he enjoys your strolls into the parkland. It's good that he has this to enjoy and it's nice that he can grow up and appreciate nature around him. Do you still think we could have deer?'

'We could have them with one or two fencing alterations but you have to take into account whether it's a good idea...'

'Why not?'

'Poachers.'

'Really? They'd come here and take the deer?'

'Perhaps. It would fetch good money in a London restaurant, but the main point is that if they do come they will not be the kind of people you want on your property and so you have to ask yourself do we want to have something here that invites them?'

'James would lay down a minefield.'

Peter grinned. He would indeed.....

Peter took the sling for his back off the hook on the wall; Benny put little Ben in and kissed him on the cheek.

‘Off you both go and this time no drinking and no womanising. You’re getting Peter into bad ways.’

Peter walked through the colourful, fragrant gardens, past the swimming pool and into the parkland where he headed for the long depression that would be the lake. He went to the north end of the lake, put Ben on his back on the floor and spread out his plans on the ground. Peering around he tried to visualise an area with some trees taken out and from which a jetty could be constructed but he struggled so he took out a small digital camera and took some shots which he could alter later on his computer.

He had seen the solicitor yesterday and it was much better than expected. Certainly there was only one hundred and fifty thousand pounds in cash but there was also twenty five thousand acres of prime farmland that had somehow escaped his father’s, and his wife’s, avaricious clutches. And that land was worth about five thousand an acre which meant around six million pounds.

Well, well, well. Life was good and getting better.

He looked down at the softly giggling, wide eyed little child who was looking up at him inquisitively and started to undo his zip.....

Chapter 26

Camptown Races - 2

H got his voicemail off Andy the next day and hadn't got a clue what was going on. Was Andy drunk? Drugged? Won the lottery? And why Camptown Races? Although it was a good rendition.....

He rang him at home and Andy's wife picked up the phone.

'Good morning, James, how are you? I haven't spoken to you in a while. How are you?' she repeated with a concern and interest that only someone who'd had lessons in counselling could muster. Mrs Andy Pandey was the antithesis of Andy. Cultured, charming, educated; she helped troubled souls in the community whereas Mr Andy Pandey tended to create them....

'Good, thank you, Vi, and you?'

'Very good, James, very good; but I am concerned at the poor souls who are suffering currently under the troubling financial circumstances we all find ourselves in.'

H smiled. We didn't actually include Andy and Vi. They were more than well looked after financially. However Vi's worries were genuine worries as Vi was a genuine person.

Vi and Andy had met several years ago. Vi was the widow of an Army Brigadier and had met Andy at a bowls match. For some reason the two had been quite at ease with each other and when she asked Andy what he did he said, without any hesitation, that he owned several taxi companies, was also a crook and occasionally killed people. He also quite liked women....and men.

From the cloistered, regimented, spit and polish regime of an Army Brigadier to the company of a bisexual, killer businessman

sounded wonderful and in that moment they became an item. She couldn't believe she had ever done it, could ever do it, but it was the most natural thing in the world and she was happier in Andy's world than she had ever been in her whole life. Not that she ever saw Andy's world but in the back of her mind she was a part of it although, once, she had seen Andrew 'in action'. Well not really in action but.....

They were at an open bowls competition and they had been drawn in the round robin against the Sandlers. The Sandlers were...how did Andrew put it?...oh yes, pseudo upper class, pseudo intellectual, pseudo sophisticated, pseudo rich....but genuine cunts. Andrew had a way with words.....

The top two from each four went to the next stage and Andy and Vi were in with the Sandlers. The Sandlers had a way of upsetting people without actually doing anything. If it wasn't telling people how big their house was, or showing pictures of their last cruise, or their new car it was telling you what you were doing wrong when you were bowling. Just as it left your hand there would be *tuts* from one, or both of them, and murmurs of *missed line, too high on the crown, too low on the crown, bit fast, bit slow*.....

They were so fucking irritating.....

On this particular occasion they excelled themselves. Mrs S took one look at Vi's dress and panic swept over her visage. 'Is red back?' she asked, 'I didn't see anything about it in Vogue. Was it in Vogue? Have I missed it?'

Andy saw the hurt in Vi's eyes and decided Mrs S should die.

'Don't worry,' said Mr S in a kindly sort of way to Vi, 'it will come back. Fashions always do.'

Andy decided Mr S should die too.

Another irritant was Mr S's habit of standing behind the bowler and just as the bowl was delivered he would move quite

close, kneel down and watch the line of the bowl. You had to be careful you didn't step back and tread on him.

Andy and Vi and the Sandlers were top two and went to the next round. In the brief period between the rounds Andy wandered out to the car park and found the Sandlers' latest toy; a black turbo diesel V6 Range Rover Sport with AS 1 on its plates. Going to his own car he rummaged under the spare wheel and took out the small propane gas powered pistol which fired, with just a pop, a small round pellet. Technically known as an airsoft gun with gas blowback, or GBB, it could be used automatically or semi automatically and was very quick as the magazine emptied as fast as the trigger was squeezed. Wandering round a few yards in front of AS 1 he made sure no one was around and then he put a pellet into its radiator. He bent and did up his lace and then, as he saw the trickle of fluid starting on its emptying way, he returned the gun to its little hideaway and went back.

Andy and Vi got through the next round only to find themselves against the Sandlers....again. Andy could see Vi getting bothered at the mere thought. He held her hand gently, 'Would I let you down?' smiled and winked. 'Come on, let's win.'

It was several ends before Andy judged the time was right and after releasing the bowl he stepped back and brought his elbow back quickly. Sadler screamed in pain and clutched at his face. 'By doze,' he squealed, 'by doze.....'

'Anthony,' said Andrew, 'I am so sorry.....' Concern flooded his face. 'How unfortunate. I had no idea you were there.'

Mr S was taken away by his wife to the local hospital by car and taxi to have his broken nose set. While there she rang for the local Range Rover garage to collect the abandoned AS 1 on the side of the road and its seized up, £9,400 to repair, engine. A few days later Vi heard about the car and mentioned it to Andrew, 'Anything to do with you.....?'

Andrew had smiled like a mischievous child. Her Brigadier husband had thousands of troops at his command and defended the Empire but Andy had defended *her*.

‘I’ll get Andrew for you, James,’ and wandered through the house to the garden where Andy was creating a stink putting gas pellets down a mole hole. She held her nose in disgust. ‘James,’ she said in a funny voice, handing him the phone.

‘H,’ said Andy, ‘how are you doing?’

‘I’m fine, Andy; I was a bit concerned about you.’

‘Why, H?’

‘The Camptown Races. You sang me the Camptown Races.’

‘Yes.....did you get it?’

‘Get it? Get what?’

‘The Camptown Races. Did you get it?’

H was lost. What was he talking about?

‘Come on, H,’ said Andy, ‘get your friggin act together. Do I have to do everything.....?’

‘Andy, mate, I’m lost. Help me here. Help me.....’

Andy sighed a long, *if I have to you dimwit*, sort of sigh.....
‘Ok, sing along with me; stay with my time and especially with the last verse.’

‘But...,’ said H, but it was too late, Andy was off and running

*De Camptown ladies sing dis song, Doo-dah! doo-dah!
De Camptown race-track five miles long, Oh, doo-dah
day!*

*I come down dah wid my hat caved in, Doo-dah! doo-
dah!*

*I go back home wid a pocket full of tin, Oh, doo-dah
day!*

Gwine to run all night!

*Gwine to run all day!
I'll bet my money on de bob-tail nag,
Somebody bet on de bay*

‘Andy, I.....’ tried to get in H but it was no use as Andy kept singing and H, not exactly familiar with the words, tried to keep up

*De long tail filly and de big black hoss, Doo-dah! doo-dah!
Dey fly de track and dey both cut across, Oh, doo-dah-day!
De blind hoss sticken in a big mud hole, Doo-dah! doo-dah!
Can't touch bottom wid a ten foot pole, Oh, doo-dah-day!*

Oooooooooohhhhhhhhhhhh

*De Camptown ladies sing dis song, Doo-dah! doo-dah!
De Camptown race-track five miles long, Oh, doo-dah day!
I come down dah wid my hat caved in, Doo-dah! doo-dah!
I go back home wid a pocket full of tin,...
Ooooooooooh,
doo-daaaaaaaaaaaaah
doo-daaaaaaaaaaaaah
daaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaay*

‘Good, eh, H? Nothing like a sing song with your mates, is there?’

H shook his head in silent despair. ‘But why are we singing, Andy? Much as I love you why are we friggin singing?’

‘Because we’re happy, H.’

‘We’re happy, Andy?’

‘We are, H.’

‘Why are we happy, Andy?’

‘Because we know who robbed the casino.’

‘We do?’

‘We do.’

‘Who, Andy?’

‘I’ve just told you.....You’ve just told me.’

H was even more lost but he knew that everything that Andy was saying must be correct, albeit in an obscure, convoluted and maniacal way.

‘The song?’ asked H.

‘Yep.’

‘The song is the clue?’

‘No, you pillock, of course the song isn’t the clue. The song is the *answer*,’ replied an exasperated Andy Pandy.

‘How?’

‘Let’s do the last verse again, H.’

‘Do we have to?’ pleaded H, ‘couldn’t you just give me a hint?’

But Andy started anyway and H tagged along. This time Andy sang it slower and when it came to the last part he sang it even more slowly and with more emphasis

Ooooooooooh,

doo-daaaaaaaaaaaaah

doo-daaaaaaaaaaaaah

daaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaay

H thought long and hard and then it hit him. ‘Surely not?’

‘Yep.’

‘Not Derry?’

‘Yep.’

Now Andy had told him it was obvious. Wow. Fucking Derry Day had ripped him off.....!

Chapter 27

Geoff Mulley

Geoff thanked the staff, left the offices and went to the waiting Jaguar. Just one more thing to do and the day was over....Good. Behind the offices the less visual side of one of his many operations was quietly ticking away.

The large building housed the necessary functions needed by any modern undertaker who wanted to make money by adding value. They would not use the term *added value* of course as they were dealing with death and love and sadness and grief but if you couldn't add value in those situations when could you? If there wasn't a more perfect time for *adding value* from people who were consumed with love or guilt when was there?

Exactly. So let's not be prim.....

A large garage housed the stately funeral cars; the more stately the more the cost. Along a bit a workshop prepared coffins. These were bought in from Vietnam in their rough pre-packed wood state and then an employee would set about making it into a thing of beauty. Ornate hinges and handles, fluffy padding, silk linings; all the things that tugged at the heartstrings. You wouldn't want them to go out of this life looking drab and miserable would you, you tight fisted bastards? There were 'viewing rooms' where you could, if you had the stomach, go and see your dead dad, or mom, or husband, or wife, or friend, or enemy.

Whoever... Whatever.....

Gentle, soft rooms with choral music that told you they were at peace and would soon be in Heaven and you thought, 'how nice', or, 'about time', or, 'thank fuck' dependent on your

feelings at the time. Of course for them to look ‘at peace’ they had to be transformed from the wide eyed, open mouthed, shrinking body that death tended to give you into something more akin to what the people they had known would recognise and so they were embalmed.

In the embalming room two people usually worked together. One did the main embalming and the other would add the cosmetic touches that made them what they would be seen as.

‘Ah.....’ they would say as they looked in, ‘doesn’t Aunty look peaceful.....’

Actually Auntie’s dead; she looked God awful but we made her look peaceful. But if that’s what makes you happy then your money has been well spent. Dear Aunty. *How peaceful.....*

Stewart Evans went over to a small table, took off a glove and had a sip of the cooling tea. ‘Come on, Jackie,’ he said, ‘finish off your drink and then you’d better be off.’

She came over beside him. ‘I’ll finish the tea, just got to tousle her hair a bit and then I’m gone.’

‘Have a good birthday party.’

‘How do you have a good birthday party with thirty kids at McDonalds?’

He grinned, ‘Thank God I don’t have kids.’

‘They’re fine as long as they’re caged, but McDonalds don’t seem to have any. I did put a note in their suggestion box but....’

He grinned again. They finished their tea and went back to the two bodies on the stainless steel trolleys. Jackie finished off blow drying the one old lady’s hair while Stewart inserted a small incision in the other old lady’s neck with a scalpel and prodded around inside until he uncovered her carotid artery. Lifting it out he secured it with callipers and then cut it, inserting a tube in one side of the cut. He went over to the small pump, pressed the

button and watched as the formaldehyde moved up the long tube and entered her carotid artery to start the process of removing some of her blood and replacing it with the fluid that would preserve her for longer, keep the bacteria at bay for longer and also give her a more lifelike look. As the pump did its job he raised her arms and legs, one at a time, and rubbed them so that the blood that had congealed near the surface and gave her skin red blotches, would go back into her veins and be replaced by the formaldehyde.

Across from him Jackie was finishing off.

The other eighty year old lady was done. She was now one of the *Doesn't she look peaceful* ones. Her dead, lifeless, wide open eyes had clear plastic lenses inserted and then closed slightly to give them an *alive* look. Her open, drooping, mouth had been nearly closed, a sort of soft smile, by stitching it up from the inside. Her hair had been washed and combed; her nails, hands and feet, cut and, as the relatives had wanted it, her fingernails had been painted. Clothes provided by relatives would be put on and then a little cosmetics to really bring her to life. So to speak.....

Jackie looked down at the old woman and smiled. She liked her job. She gave them some dignity and made life easier for those that cared about her. It was a worthwhile job.

'I'm off,' she said.

'Best of luck.'

'Thanks. If I'm not in tomorrow ring the Mental Institution.'

'I will....'

He watched her leave and the door close and went over and locked it. You didn't really want people wandering in by mistake when you had dead people around. He put the kettle on and made himself another cup of tea. For some reason his body ached. A cold coming on? Flu? Swine flu? Oink, oink? He looked at his bum to see if he had a curly tail....?

Finishing his tea he went back to the women.

One completely naked, her eighty five year old body looking more life like now that the embalming fluid had done its job and the other old woman dressed and pretty.

He wheeled the partially embalmed woman to one side and went to the bank of refrigerated housing units and took out another body. Another old woman in her eighties, maybe more.

She wasn't cold as he had turned up the control unit several hours earlier and she was near room temperature. He looked at the name above the refrigerated unit, saw her name was Mabel, and wheeled her to where the other old woman had lain a moment before.

Old, very old, dead people were not a pretty sight. Not at all. The one next to her on the other trolley with her *look alive* eyes and pink face was a lot prettier but that did not move him.

Mabel moved him.....

'Mabel,' he said as he moved to her and gently kissed her still shrivelled lips. Her unseeing, dead eyes stared up at him.

'Mabel.....'

He kissed her again, his tongue going into her dead mouth as far as it could. His hand moved down to her vagina and he forced one finger inside her.

'Mabel.....'

His head moved down to her flat, shrivelled breasts and he sucked the dry, non responsive nipples. He squeezed more of his fingers up her.

'Mabel.....'

He looked at her lovingly.

'Mabel.....' he whispered affectionately and moved his face down between her legs.....

Several minutes later, his tongue aching, he finished and licked his lips.....

Moving back to her face, he caressed it gently, kissed her lips again and then undid his smock, unzipped his trousers, took out his hard cock and from a small jar on a shelf took a small amount of jelly that he smeared on. Moving to the end of the trolley where her feet lay he lifted her legs high in the air, pulled her hips down towards him and, still standing, leaned her legs on his shoulders. Using both hands to open her up he slid his prick in.....

It was the most wonderful feeling in the whole world....

‘Mabel,’ he grunted as his balls smacked against her dead body. ‘Mabel.....’

It didn’t take long and when he had filled her he felt a lot of the ache in his body go.

Tension ebbed from him.

The smell of formaldehyde and death in the room wrapped round him like a warm blanket.

Chapter 28

Wednesday

June's day had been hectic. One of the carers, one of the women that did house visits, had been caught stealing money off a senile old lady. Just what you need when it's the local Council who are paying the bill! The old lady's son couldn't understand where the pension money was going so he had hidden a small camera in the room. And there she was, helping herself to a bit here and a bit there and he had told the Council and they had put hidden cameras in other old folk's homes and she was making quite a packet with a bit here and a bit there...

At lunch time June had gone to the local butchers in the small market town and bought a variety of meats for their barbeque that evening.

Going back to work they were hit by another little setback. Another of the carers, who had been, without telling them, a bit under the weather, actually had swine flu. And she had lots of clients. Going from this old person to the next, this disabled person to the next. Oh dear. She was glad she didn't own the company as soon their clients would be dropping like flies and there would be no business left....

Rich had lit the barbeque in plenty of time so that the coals were a hot dull red. June had marinaded the chicken and chops and then, contrary to the BBC and Sky weather forecasts, huge black clouds rolled in, it went several degrees cooler and then it poured.

Oh to be in England now that summer's here..... not here..... here.....not here.....here.....not here...

Ah well, maybe next year will be better.....

Chapter 29

Andy bowls

Three weeks after the bowling incident Andy received a letter at his home with his address on it that had been typed in some form of calligraphy. Very posh, or pretentious, or something?

He opened it to find a solicitor's letter demanding compensation for the battered face of Mister Sandler, compensation for his traumatised wife and compensation for the poor Range Rover whose demise would have been avoided had Mister Sandler not been attacked by Mister Andrew Stephen Pandena. A total figure of £150,000 was mentioned. Andrew Stephen Pandena did what any concerned person confronted with expensive litigation would do and threw the letter in the bin.

Three weeks later another letter arrived repeating the demands but this time upping the ante by explaining the consequences should Andy not pay up. It joined its fellow bearer of bad news in the bin.

Three weeks later another letter arrived. This one gave Andy fourteen days to reply or they would go straight to The High Court and ask for an interim judgement for damages and then pursue Andy for the full compensation plus costs which they estimated would be at least another hundred thousand. Andy needed some time and so he rang his solicitors. 'I need a bit of help.'

Andy met his solicitor and they drafted a letter repudiating all assertions and suggested that if the Sandlers carried on with the Writ they would counter claim for costs.

Over the next few weeks a barrage of paper went between the Practices until it was agreed that they would meet in the offices of the Slanders' solicitors when, hopefully, an agreement could be sorted out between them....

On arrival in the large room with the table with twenty chairs around it, Andy went over to the waiting Slanders and held out his hand. 'Sorry it's come to this, old chap, let's see what we can sort out to make you comfortable, eh?'

'I should think so,' said Sandler.

Andy held out his hand to Mrs Sandler but she didn't move so he went back to his wife and solicitor and sat down. He took a pad out of an exquisite leather brief case, a gold fountain pen and his mobile and laid them out neatly on the highly polished table in front of him. After a moment he picked up the mobile, pressed the middle button and watched the time come up on his screen saver. He checked it against the clock on the wall. Exactly eleven o'clock. They would either sort it out, or they wouldn't, in an hour.

Vi was considerably concerned as the original letter had said, 'separately and severally' which she knew meant they could come for her. Where would she get two hundred thousand pounds? And Andy? She was also concerned for Andy. Here he was working out how much he should pay Sandler when usually he would have just sorted out anyone who bothered him and yet here he was. What was it about the Slanders that Andy was scared of? Why was he giving in? Or did Andy see this as a way of winning? He knew he couldn't win and so he was trying to minimise their losses? Or was it like Andy said, repeating H, give up but never give up? What was going on?

Andy tried hard to be reconciling. He apologised. He bowed, he scraped, he did everything he could to be let off the hook but

Sandler's solicitor, scenting victory, demanded his pound of flesh. Andy tried and tried, with arguments from each party going back and forth, but to no avail. Exasperated Andy looked at the clock on the wall and shrugged. Twelve o'clock. He had done his best. What will be will be.....

At twelve o'clock a man waited for his mobile to ring.....but it didn't.

At twelve o'clock another man waited for his mobile to ring.....but it didn't.

Andy asked for coffee and a fifteen minute break with their own solicitors and then they tramped back in. He squeezed Vi's hand and said, 'Be over soon, love...'

After another thirty minutes, with Andy still trying desperately hard to resolve it to the Sandler's satisfaction but getting nowhere, Sandler's mobile went and seconds later so did the one of his wife.

'Excuse me,' they both said.

'What?' they both said again. 'The house is on fire? Eight fire engines?' It was like a double act.

Sandler screamed at Andy, 'You did this! You set my house on fire!'

Andy looked at his solicitor. 'See, I told you we were dealing with someone who's unhinged.'

'I know it was you,' shouted Sandler hysterically.

'Yeah,' said Andy. 'And I made it rain yesterday....'

Sandler flew at Andy, fists flailing but Andy just cowered and let himself get hit until the Sandler's solicitor pulled him off.

'Calm down,' commanded his solicitor but Sandler just adjusted his tie, straightened his bright red blazer and grabbing his wife's arm, they ran from the room. Andy waited for a moment, looked at his solicitor and said, 'This has been a

disgraceful episode but I assume you can sort it out from now on?’

‘I can.’

‘Good.’

Andy left, cradling Vi in his arms. ‘It’s ok now, my love,’ he said gently, ‘the bad man has gone. You’re safe now....’

The solicitors sat back down. ‘Let me see,’ said Andy’s solicitor, ‘assault, physical and verbal plus, which I’m sure the whole building heard, slander. Accusing my client of setting fire to his house for Christ’s sake!’

‘He was upset.’

‘He’s insane. He was insane starting this whole stupid thing and you were insane for taking it on. It was an accident while they were playing bowls for Christ’s sake. Bowls! Hardly a contact sport!’

Sandlers’ solicitor said nothing. There was a time to speak and a time to shut up and he was good at knowing when to do which.

‘Under the circumstances,’ said Andy’s solicitor, ‘I think my client will drop his claim for compensatory damages if you agree to cover our legal costs and shall we say twenty thousand so this goes no farther?’

‘I will have to take advice on that,’ said Pagett.

‘No,’ said the solicitor, ‘you say yes or no now but if it’s no we will go straight to the High Court and commence proceedings against your client for everything I can chuck at you.’

Pagett sighed. It had been worth a try...

Andy and Vi found a small café for a coffee.

‘That’s why I love you,’ she said.

‘And why’s that?’

‘You fight for you, for us. And you fight to win.’

He smiled, ‘The fire was just one of those coincidences, Vi.’

It was her turn to smile. 'Like the one you told me about where that hotel dropped on those people trying to steal James' clubs?'

'Exactly,' he said grinning, 'just one of those fortunate coincidences.'

Another, unfortunate, coincidence beset the Slanders on the way to their house that was now around 1100 degrees F. The radiator in their Range Rover Sport, registration number AS 1, with the new engine, had developed a leak and it ran out of water at 70 mph and the engine came to a squealing, screaming, hissing, grinding stop.

Which meant they missed the exciting bit, so the neighbours thought; when the roof collapsed and a gas canister for a barbeque roared off into the sky like a rocket.....

Chapter 30

Snooker

When H had purchased his new house it had a snooker room complete with a snooker table. He had bought the table, a Riley Aristocrat Tournament table for an extra £1000 off the owner, which seemed a bit daft when he had paid millions for the house, but nevertheless he set about trying to be a bit better than he was in his youth. As a teenager he had once knocked in an eighty one break but later on in life he realised it must have been one of the luckiest breaks ever, the white just wandering into all the right places as he never made one of more than thirty five after.

He spent a few nights trying to look like Ronnie O'Sullivan but it didn't work. Putting some reds around the black spot to see what break he could amass he was forlorn that it was usually eight, nine or sixteen and then he would either miss the pot by a mile or the white would scurry up to the baulk end and nestle against a cushion, never to be seen again. Not only that H wasn't comfortable over the shot and every stance seemed to be a different one.

And he'd never done the pause thing.

They all did it on the tele.

Feather, feather, (Was that the right word? Sounded ridiculous. Surely not, he must have the wrong word?) pause.....hit.

He tried but it didn't work. How the hell did you pause? All he did was build up tension in his arm and then, in a panic, ended up hitting the ball ten times harder. It was no good, far too

frustrating so H decided to do two things; get some lessons and get someone in to check the table over.

The table was the easy bit. The company came in and persuaded H that although it was in very good condition it did run off near two pockets, the slates may have moved a smidge and the cushions need a bit of tender loving care and so it would help in the long run if it was taken apart, reclothed and set up again which he agreed to.

When they had finished the new cloth looked beautiful, the cushions bounced the ball a hundred miles and a slow ball across and down the table stayed on line and, surprisingly, it cost less than a grand. Now the table was done there was the small matter of a lack of skill to play on it, so H hired Andy Highfield, a qualified snooker coach and the man you see in the foyer at the World Snooker Championships giving lessons, to come in once a week for a lesson.

Andy set up some reds up and down the middle of the table with the blue on its spot.

‘James, let’s see you knock in red, blue, red, blue until they’re all down and I can watch your cue action.’

After several attempts Andy saved H further frustration and gave him another routine. He put a red on the blue spot, the white between the spot and the middle pocket and asked H to pot the red into the other pocket and also let the white follow the red into the same pocket. H could pot the red, usually, but the cue ball refused to follow the red in. It either didn’t reach or went through and hit the jaws or the cushion on the side of the pocket.

‘It’s not quite right at the moment, is it?’ Andy said kindly. ‘There are several areas that aren’t quite right.....’

H looked at him and waited as there seemed to be an implied understatement in the ‘not quite right’ and ‘several areas’ bit. A

bit like ‘we’ve dropped a tiny bomb on Hiroshima and there’s one or two dead’ sort of thing.

‘Let’s try one more thing,’ said Andy and put the white on the brown spot. ‘Send the white up the table, over the spots, over the black spot and bring it back to the brown spot.’

H sent the white down the table, missed the black spot entirely and it came back in between the yellow and brown.

‘Again....’

‘Again....’

‘Again....’

It didn’t work and H couldn’t get the white back to its starting point on the brown spot.

‘Your stance is all wrong. Your body is in the wrong place, as are your feet. There is no pause in your backswing and you hit the ball way too hard and usually with side spin by cueing across the ball.’

‘Anything good?’

Andy smiled, ‘The table.’

‘So we have a bit to work on?’

‘We do but it’s not a problem. Just get rid of old habits, start with new posture and cueing routines and we’ll get there.’

‘You sure?’

‘Quite sure.’

And so they did. Andy was a good teacher; patient, informative, pleasant. Didn’t tell you what to do, just suggested....which was what H liked. Don’t *tell* me what to do.

They spent quite a while getting H’s stance right so that he approached the ball exactly the same way every time which made his cueing action straight and in line with cue ball and object ball. He put an elastic band on the butt of H’s cue so that H knew

where to hold it as, in that position and with the right stance, his wrist to elbow was always vertical at address.

And then the.....pause.

The pause, it would seem, did several things. It allowed you, when paused, to focus and keep your eyes on the object ball which H found difficult to do. It also allowed you to relax your arm, take the tension out, and hit the cue ball softly and in a repeating rhythm which H also found difficult to do.

It was easier when Andy got him to just hit a ball gently with top spin, but when Andy said *use bottom* all hell broke loose and H would panic, ignore the pause and hit the ball *so hard*.....

It was agreed between Andy and H that the professional snooker circuit was some way off yet.....

Chapter 31

Allocated

Or yeah right. Go on fucking laugh.

Yes, we're still here in the turd factory.

I told you we were *allocated*, we didn't have a choice.

Laugh again, mate, and *I'll fucking have you....*

Anyhow pressure is building, if you'll excuse the pun, for a mass breakout. Enough is enough. We wouldn't have got to this stage if they had listened to our requests for a transfer but they haven't and so we have.

Unfortunately it's a bit secure this place. There hasn't been one recorded instance of an escape. Not one. That should tell you something. There is a legend, or just a myth, that once some of our forefathers escaped. A breach, somehow, of the barricades and gone! Wow....that would have been something. A fucking riot.....

Not that we would ever try and escape, of course not. Not even if the opportunity presented itself.....(*just in case someone's listening*)

Later on some big boys are arriving. Just passing through. Fucking turds! That's what we call them. Turds. Appropriate we thought.

Please yourself.

A tremor ran through them as a NASTY came near. They should all have been equals in this hell hole but some were more equal than others. Working harder now they sensed, rather than saw, the NASTY eyeing them over. A NASTY was to be avoided at all

costs as they preyed on the weak. If ever there was a Darwinian doubter a NASTY was positive, or perhaps negative, proof of its existence.

Fear ran through their collective senses.

Am I safe? Am I weak? Will it be me....?

‘You,’ screamed the NASTY. ‘You!’

It wasn’t him the NASTY was pointing at but he, like all the others, felt the fear run through him.....

And the more the NASTY’s culled the weaker members the stronger they became.....

Oh to get out of this shit hole....

Chapter 32

Derry Day

John ‘Derry’ Day lived in England because if he had stayed in Northern Ireland where he was from he would now be a dead man. Twenty years ago the IRA had sent word that no matter what it took he was a dead man....unless he left and had no more association with the UVF in which he was a major player.

Derry had been brought up in ‘the Troubles’ and something about its chaos and violence appealed to him. He started off as just a young tearaway who burgled old folks’ homes and stole pennies from shops until he was told by the Ulster Volunteer Force that he should be directing his efforts at the enemy, not his own kind. And so he joined, in the late seventies, as a fourteen year old, and found a home for his antisocial needs.

The group had formed in 1966, was concentrated around east Antrim, County Armagh, the Shankill Road and east Belfast, and formally declared war on the Irish Republican Army. The UVF were a disciplined but violent assembly who were quite happy throwing bombs into bars, killed anyone that they thought should be killed, which meant anyone that was Catholic, and became a proscribed organisation. Derry, who wasn’t from Derry at all, flourished in the UVF and in a few years joined the Governing Council which organised the attacks, robberies and purchasing of arms shipments.

In the late eighties, late one night, Derry’s house had several grenades thrown into it; injuring one of his daughters, terrifying his wife and leaving Derry with half an ear after a piece of shrapnel sliced it off. They moved to a safe house and the next

night another object smashed through the window but this time it was an unarmed grenade with a note round it.

Leave Ireland, it said, *or your wife and children will be dead in a week!* That threat was bad enough but the fact that the Provos knew where the safe house was posed an even bigger threat....

And so Derry handed his house over to the UVF who handed him a large pot of cash, which they'd nicked the night before, to pay for the house and 'smooth his way'. The family left in the middle of the night and caught a ferry to England and a new life on the outskirts of London where Derry moved near to relations, bought a house and set about settling into the community.

He used his organisational ability, high levels of violence and access to arms to displace the local drug dealers and moved into that. From there it was robberies; banks, building societies and security trucks. Not too many.....just enough to provide a good living and instil fear. Over the years the drugs had paid well but the robberies had decreased considerably due to the more sophisticated protection available to the money lenders.

Derry had also met a man who didn't rob lenders, he robbed borrowers, and they set up a series of companies to take money from householders who wanted to release capital from their homes when they were either ready for, or in, retirement.

The companies with names like Retire-Safe, Live-Long, Happy-Life, Now's-the-Time advertised a service whereby they bought your house and gave you a large slice back to live on and enjoy in retirement and you could also stay in the house you loved as well.

Sort of.

On a £300,000 house, for a £20,000 once only fee, they gave you half on completion and the rest in twelve months. Unfortunately it usually took about twelve months for the mortgage company to evict you as the company would buy your

house, remortgage it, pay six months' mortgage and then skip the rest. Leaving old people homeless and broke didn't bother Derry.

Fronting the criminal side of his activities Derry owned a small plastics distribution company and lived in a relatively modest detached house. He had a lovely villa in Marbella that the income from the company would never have afforded and interests in two night clubs in the Canaries. He also owned, with a friend who fronted it, a property rental company that had about twenty houses; many of which had been paid for by the proceeds out of the back of a Group 4 security truck. He also made a couple of quid supplying arms, not prosthetics, but the AK47 variety that kept the prosthetics companies in business.....

He had also, quite recently, and quite by coincidence supplied the IRA with a cache. They hadn't known he was involved of course and luckily, neither did the loyalists, but still money was money and if you had the contacts.....

Not that the IRA or loyalists were still active of course.....

Chapter 33

Lucy 3

Bernie Smout lived in a suburb known locally as millionaire row. It had been supplanted by other millionaire's rows outside the vicinity but to the older folk, and certainly to the poorer folk, it was millionaire's row. A house there would cost you about £750,000 but Bernie had bought his several years earlier, had only paid just under £500,000 and had paid in cash. On the deeds it said that Bernie had paid two ninety five (due to the urgent need for some structural repairs) but he had paid the rest in twenties and fifties.

At thirty three years of age he had done very well in his life. From humble beginnings he had found a niche in buying and selling and then moved into finance and his businesses had grown to the point where he had a two million income per year. Not bad for a no hoper called Bernie Smout which, he had found out from Google, was a Dutch or Low German form of the name Smith which is 'occupational for a worker in steel'. Bernie had pondered that; *which is occupational for a worker in steel*. Who the fuck talked like that? Why didn't they just put *steelworker*? Wankers!

In the recession his businesses were thriving. True there were a few bad debts but most could be sorted by having a meaningful discussion with the clients, helping both parties to understand what the client could afford.

Take the other day for instance.....

One of his employees had rung in sick so Bernie had decided to do the interview himself; it didn't hurt to get stuck in once in a

while. A bit of shop floor research, so to speak, a bit of company PR; the boss going down to see how it was running....

He knocked on the door and as it opened he pushed past her and walked in. Walking through to the lounge he sat in a chair and asked for a cup of tea. When it arrived he sipped at it, placed on a small coffee table then held out his hand. 'Fifty.'

He knew straight away she hadn't got it.

'You were warned what would happen to you this time if you haven't got the money you owe.'

'I've got some...I've got some,' she said distraught.

'Some isn't fucking good enough.' His voice raised and she heard the menace.

'Please,' she pleaded, 'it's so difficult. My husband's on short time.....it's so difficult.....' her voice had become a faint whisper.

'How much have you got?'

'Twenty.'

He took a book out of his jacket pocket and made an entry. 'That's twenty off, so you now owe just under four thou.'

'It can't be?' she gasped, 'It can't be.' She started sobbing, her shoulders sagged and her face portrayed her utter despair. She had borrowed £100 nine weeks ago and now it was four thousand? Four thousand? 'How?' she said quietly, looking at the floor.

'You know how. We told you that when you borrowed the money.'

'But I'll never repay it.'

'Don't worry, at the end of three months we'll give you the opportunity to make it all official and you can do it against the house.'

'The house?'

'Yes, I take it you've some equity in the house?' he asked roughly.

She nodded slowly.

‘But twenty’s fuck all today, darlin,’ he said, ‘so I suggest you give me a bit of something else...’

‘What?’ she asked worried.

‘Well I don’t know what you’ve got so you can suck me off.’

She was horrified. ‘No!’ she gasped.

‘Oh yes, darlin, or I go to...’ he looked at his records. ‘Palmer and Jones and have a chat with the man who drives the staca. I take it he knows fuck all about your little loan?’

‘Please....no.....’

‘Where shall we do it, darlin? In here or upstairs.....?’

On his way to the next house he thought he may go back next week. As she sat on the side of the bed sucking him off and he stood over her, he realised there was a nice pair of tits down there so he ripped her blouse and bra off and watched them shake as a prelude to his orgasm.....

A few quid and that every week wouldn’t be bad. And when he got bored with her he’d hand her over to the usual collector....

It was one of the pricks of the job.....

Chapter 34

Golf

H didn't join Wentworth. Why would he join a club that had just lost the World Match Play Championship to a club in Spain? If it wasn't good enough for IMG it wasn't good enough for him. And so he joined a club nearby, not too expensive, had some more lessons and got himself down to nineteen handicap. Not that he could hit the ball particularly straight but he was good at chipping and putting as he spent a bit of his leisure time at home trying to get golf balls over trees, shrubs, fences and the house. The latter he had given up on as the first ball smashed a bedroom window.....

He didn't go to the club often but at least he had somewhere to take the odd client and it allowed him to get a bit of practice for when a client or supplier wanted to take him out.

He was amazed at how many people in business played golf. You didn't even have to be any good, but it was the place where you could have a quiet few hours discussing whatever it was you needed to discuss.

Today he was wandering round with Harry Cohen who had rung and said it was time they got together. Harry was past his prime as a golfer now but had once been down to two and it showed. He still played off twelve and H marvelled at the total lack of effort that Harry put into hitting the ball and how far it flew. And straight. H hadn't quite mastered the art of hitting the ball fluidly yet, or straight, and still had moments when you would think he was trying to club it to death.

'Another funeral in a few days,' said Harry unexpectedly.

‘What can I say?’

‘Nothing. Even I can’t say anything and I’m going to the damn thing.’

‘You’re not too bothered?’

‘Not really. He was a nice man and all that but....’

‘You know, Harry, how often people do that?’

‘Do what?’

‘Say something nice, or apologetic, about someone they may even loathe.’

‘I know, it’s ridiculous. The majority are standing there thinking what a bastard he was and the vicar is telling the world what a wonderful person they were. What nonsense. Why is that? Why such hypocrisy?’

‘When my mother died I made sure there were no glowing tributes,’ said H quietly.

Harry looked at him but didn’t pursue it. ‘You know I have known people who have hated someone when they are alive, but if you criticised them after they had died these same people would tell you *‘not to talk ill of the dead’* or *‘not to criticise them when they are no longer here to defend themselves’*. What utter nonsense. What gets into these people? Why does death change anything?’

‘Don’t worry, Harry, I’ll still think ill of you when you’ve gone.’

‘Thanks, H, that takes quite a weight off my mind.’

Harry took a silver hip flask from his golf bag and handed it to H.

‘What is it?’

‘Rusty nails.’

‘What’s rusty nails?’

‘Try it and then I’ll tell you.’

H wasn't much of an alcohol drinker. 'Will this put me on my back?'

'Just try it; live dangerously for once.'

H poured some into the silver cap that he had unscrewed and had a sip. 'That's quite nice. What is it?'

'Whisky and drambuie. The whisky tempers the sweetness of the drambuie and the drambuie takes the edge off the whisky. Not bad, eh?'

'Quite pleasant. I didn't know spirits could taste quite so nice.'

'They can. They most certainly can.....'

On the seventeenth hole, with Harry still pouring out Rusty Nails, H topped his ball in the pond at the front of the tee on the one hundred and eighty yard par three. He walked to the water's edge to see if his ball could be retrieved but as he peered into the green water his head started to spin and he overbalanced....

Back at the house Benny saw H arrive in his golfing wet gear and his wet clothes under his arm.

'Are you ok?' she asked concerned.

'It was horrendous. There we were, me and Harry, just minding our own business, under my handicap, when a cloud of hornets suddenly arrived and Harry and I had to jump in the lake to protect ourselves.'

'You had to jump in the lake?'

'Yes.'

'To escape a cloud of hornets?'

'Yes.'

'Where did they come from?'

'They escaped from a zoo. I read about it in the paper. Hampshire zoo loses hornets, it said, with preference for golf courses.'

‘Really...?’

‘We went underwater for several minutes until they left.’

‘That’s a long time.’

‘Our life depended on it.’

‘Of course.’

‘And then when I got to the surface there was no Harry!’

‘No Harry?’

‘No, and so I had to swim underwater to find Harry who was stuck in the weeds.’

‘And you disentangled him?’

‘It took four attempts. I had to keep going back up for air.’

‘You must have been exhausted.’

‘A man’s life was at stake; you don’t think of yourself in those circumstances.’

‘Of course not, sorry.’

‘And then I had to swim with him to the bank and resuscitate him.’

‘I didn’t know you knew first aid.’

‘Still waters..... I lost him twice but managed to bring him back from the jaws of death.....’

‘Wow. Lucky Harry.’

‘And then I carried him the half mile back to the Club House.’

‘My man.....’

‘And then an Air Ambulance arrived to get him to A and E.’

‘Thank the Holy Mother.’

‘And all the Members cheered and they are going to propose me for a medal, give me Life Membership and put a plaque where it happened.’

‘That’s amazing.’

‘You have to do what you have to do.’

‘You know I could have believed all of that except you made one tiny error in your heroic story.’

H thought for a moment. ‘No, I don’t think so....it’s exactly as I said.’

‘You’re sure?’

‘Mmmmm.....yes.....exact and to the point. Perhaps a touch understated due to my modest disposition.’

‘You said you were under your handicap.....?’

‘I’ll have a shower.....’

Chapter 35

The Lord 3

Peter returned from the lake with Ben, had a cup of tea with Benny then left to phone the company who would be responsible for the lining. Benshima put Ben in his cot, made another cup of tea and rang her mother on the internet phone. After a few minutes of putting the world right Benny noticed Ben squirming a bit in his nappy and knew it was time for a change. She bade farewell and took Ben upstairs to a room that had been designated ‘baby’s room’; which only meant you did things there if time actually allowed you to get there.

She undressed him, cleaned him up, washed him and then noticed the nappy rash around his bum. She caressed his face, smiled at him then reached over for the talcum powder to help dry and soothe his delicate skin. As she started to apply it she saw the small tear at the edge of his tiny anus and stopped and looked closer. It was a tear; it wasn’t a rash, it was a tear.

How had she done that? Had she been too rough with him? Had James, obviously quite strong, been inadvertently too rough with him? Wiped too hard? Split his skin? But it hadn’t been there yesterday and James hadn’t changed Ben’s nappy for several days.....?

What could have caused it?

She thought back and froze. No. Surely not? Surely not?

Calm down, calm down. For goodness sake calm down.

This could just be an innocent thing that happens to tiny bums. What the hell did she know about tiny bums? Maybe they did this all the time? She needed more information and rang a nursing friend who told her to get Ben to a doctor. She rang a

friend whose husband was a Harley Street Consultant, explained, in confidence, her problem and an hour later another consultant rang and she was in his rooms two hours later. After an examination he said, 'I cannot give you a categorical answer, Mrs James, but the balance of probabilities would suggest that the tear has been instigated by the insertion of something that has traumatised the edge of the anus causing a tear in the exterior and interior sphincter.'

Benny's face filled with despair. What had she done? What had their lodger done?

'I suggest you contact the police, Mrs James.....'

Chapter 36

Derry Day 2

H had given Derry Day to Sammy the Search and then left it alone. The insurance company would pay up but they would also increase his insurance rates dramatically. Thank you, Derry, thank you very fucking much. It would seem only fair that Derry recompensed H but how? Sammy the Search may give a clue and H had also asked Andy Pandy to do a bit of very discreet nosing around. Another person that could possibly help in the process was sitting opposite.

‘How are you doing, H?’ asked Harry Cohen as he picked at his salad and sipped at his water.

‘Not as good as you, Harry,’ said H with a grin.

They chatted for a while, like old friends do, to get up to date and then Harry said, ‘What did they take you for?’

‘About a mill.’

Harry nodded slowly. It could have been worse....

‘That’s what I wanted to talk to you about, Harry.’

‘It wasn’t me, H,’ grinned Harry. ‘If it had been me you would have planned it which means you would have robbed your own casino....’

It was H’s turn to grin.

‘It’s been too long, H.’

‘I know, Harry, but we have to be choosy and the return has to be worth it. Neither of us wants to go down for a few quid.’

‘We won’t go down. Israel for me, Colombia for you.’

H shrugged, ‘Prefer England.’

‘In truth so do I.’

‘So how can I help you, H? Stuck for money? You must have more money in Colombia than the Colombians.....’

‘Do you know Derry Day?’

Harry thought for a moment. ‘Derry ripped you off?’ H nodded.

‘Impressed.....Derry Day rips off H.’

‘Thanks, Harry.’

‘You sure?’

‘Quite sure.’

‘How?’

‘You know that occasional habit he has of hiding the ear that’s sliced?’ Harry nodded. ‘Well, it would appear, although I didn’t know it, it happens when he is in the company of women he doesn’t know. A bit of vanity, or self consciousness, or something but nevertheless he did it in the video. Adrian thought he was moving his hand up to communicate with someone somewhere else but, even though he was hooded, he was involuntarily hiding his ear from Ade’s wife. Andy spotted it....’

‘But you haven’t told the Yard?’

‘No. No point. By the time they get round to nabbing him he’ll be far away. Or they’ll nab him and give him bail and he’ll be far away or.....or.....’

‘Do I sense a bit of retribution here, H?’

‘That would be unlike me, but I would like my money back.’

‘So how can I help you?’

‘I don’t know, Harry. I’ve got Sammy the Search doing a background for me now but I wondered whether you knew much? I know he’s not exactly your social equal but you never know what little morsel you may have picked up...? And it was an opportunity to catch up.....’

‘I think I may let you down a bit here, H. I obviously know a bit about Derry but, I doubt, no more than you. His name comes

up occasionally in conversation with his general criminal activities and more recently his old folks' scam...'

H looked quizzical, so Harry told him about the 'retirement' scam.

'I must admit, as you know, criminality doesn't bother me but old folks being scammed does. I don't like that, H. It's a bit mean..... They save all their lives to allow them to have old age with a degree of relaxation and happiness and then Derry goes and does them over..... Can you imagine what it does to them, H? It destroys their lives. I don't like that, H. Life's too short, life's too precious....'

Harry stopped talking and H watched as he picked at his food. After what seemed like several minutes Harry said, 'Count me in.'

'In to what?'

'The destruction of Derry Day.....'

'Really?'

'Oh yes.'

A mischievous grin swept across H's face and he picked up his glass of water and held it to Harry. 'To the destruction of Derry Day...and all who sail in her.'

They touched glasses.

'And,' said Harry, 'we have right on our side, for once.'

H grinned, 'For once.'

Harry thought for a moment. 'Have you ever read Bertrand Russell?'

'The philosopher?' Harry nodded. 'No.'

'Good old Bertrand once said, "War does not determine who is right – only who is left."'

'I like that,' said H repeating the quote, 'I like that.'

Harry nodded. H thought about the quote for a moment. *War does not determine who is right – only who is left.* Wow! How

fucking clever was that!

‘It is rather good. Anyhow, H, I’m bored,’ said Harry. ‘After we’ve destroyed Derry and if I still need a bit more excitement can we have a little caper.....?’

‘If we can find one that pays enough....’

‘Right.....How do we destroy Derry, H?’

‘No idea, Harry, no idea.....’

‘Yet.....?’

‘Yet,’ said H, ‘yet.’

‘We should call this Operation Yet-i,’ announced Harry.

‘Why not. Let’s go after old big foot.....or in his case middle aged big foot. Or whatever he is....?’

‘I think we should use any and all means at our disposal to destroy him. Utterly and forever!’

H looked at him. This was unlike Harry. Harry was usually calm and measured. ‘What’s wrong, Harry?’

‘Nothing really, H. I think it’s like I’ve already said, I don’t care about what he does generally, who am I to judge, but taking old people out of their homes, H? I am old, H, and lucky enough to not be in that position. But what if I wasn’t who I am, H? What if it was me that he booted out....? And me and the wife have nowhere to go and no money? And worse than that, H, no self respect.....’

His voice tailed off and H could see Harry was living the scenario in his head. For whatever reason Derry’s little home scam had affected Harry deeply and Harry wanted to make amends. But for what? And why? H waited until Harry came back from the world he was in and he saw tears trickle down his face. Harry took out a pristinely pressed, gleaming white handkerchief and dabbed at them. ‘I’m not saying sorry, H.’

‘Good.’

‘Every means at our disposal,’ repeated Harry. ‘Every one...’ and the words came from him like venom from a viper.

‘Ok, Harry.’

H didn’t understand why Harry was so bothered but Harry’s name should have given him a clue. Harry had been lucky. His parents had shipped him off out of harm’s way before the Nazis arrived and the train had taken them to be gassed.....

One week later H and Harry had lunch again.....

Harry gave H his thoughts.

H gave Harry his measured appraisal.

Harry gave H more thoughts.

H gave Harry his measured appraisal.

Through the process of iteration they arrived at a meaningful start to the destruction of Derry Day.

Operation Yeti was under way and, much to H’s amazement and excitement, using all means at their disposal.

Chapter 37

Thursday

On Thursday night June had a Tesco delivery, a good bath, anointed her head with oils and then a good chat with other girls on the phone. Rich went and had a game of golf with his mates at the local municipal course.

It was always a hard fought tooth and nail affair where the losers paid for the drinks afterwards. The conversation was dominated with the reasons why certain things hadn't quite happened as they should. Bad bounces were a good one, or many, as was the wind that would suddenly spring up just as the shot had been taken and then the ball would drift and the green missed; because of the wind.

And there were classics such as

'I set it out to draw it back but the wind kept it out there....'

'I went for a fade to get it over the bunker and then let it run down to the hole....'

'I wouldn't have thinned it if there had been more sand in the bunker.....'

'These greens are so slow.....'

'Why they put a bunker there I'll never know...?'

'That green was much faster than all the others.....'

'Head up, mate, head up.....'

'Fucking spike marks...'

'On a better course, Lytham or somewhere, we would do much better than this; they need a new Head Green Keeper.'

'Why they put a tree there I'll never know....?'

'We should join a Club....it's more our level...'

And all this from a quartet whose lowest handicap was twenty one....

Chapter 38

Jerry 3

H arranged a coffee for himself and a cup of hot water for Jerry. To make conversation Jerry asked H what he thought of England winning the Ashes and H, quite candidly, said he didn't know and didn't care as cricket was boring.

Jerry grinned. 'Beyond me as well. Just something to say.'

'Well at least we have something in common. Football?' Jerry shrugged.

'Rugby?' Jerry shrugged.

'Tennis?' Jerry shrugged.

'Golf?' Jerry shrugged.

Thank God, thought H, thank God. Unless he knows fuck all about anything else either?

'Art, design, politics, current affairs, martial arts, my collection of martial arts weapons but mostly understanding and teaching applied martial arts.'

'Applied?'

'What works on the streets.'

'And you teach that?'

'Yes.'

'To Gav?'

'And others all over the country.'

'Would you teach me?'

'Are you a black belt?'

'No, I'm not any belt.'

'Then I can't help you.'

'Why?'

‘With respect, you’re too far down the ladder. I don’t even accept half the black belts that apply.’

H was a bit lost. What the hell does this man do that was so different? ‘You’ve lost me.’

Jerome reached into an inside pocket and brought out a DVD. ‘This will give you an idea of what I teach.’

H put it into the machine and watched on the wall plasma as an amateur video played itself out..... Oh fuck!

Chapter 39

The Bookie 2

Graham Gamble had met all the interested parties, told them about his shops, took them round his shops, shown them last year's audited accounts and all of this year's management accounts. They had sent men and women in their numbers who gave his systems a once over but there was nothing to find and so it was a matter of setting the price. If any of them wanted to take it farther they would hire the 'due diligence' boys, usually a large international accountancy firm, who would take the numbers apart. And then if there was a fuck up there was someone to sue.....

Roger Davids had been in the previous day and Graham had taken him around a few shops where Roger had met Chris Topper, an old manager, who had used to work for him before he joined JJ and was now the GM of Graham's shops.

'What you doing here, you old rogue?' asked Rog.

'Takes one to know one.'

They both laughed.

'I hope you're not selling to him,' he said to Graham, 'I'm not staying if I have to work for this evil bastard.'

It was Graham's turn to laugh. He shrugged apologetically. 'You've got to look after my staff,' he said to Rog. 'They're a wonderful bunch of employees. Couldn't have done it without them.' In truth he didn't care what the fuck happened to them after he had been paid.

'Rumour has it,' said Chris Topper, 'when you joined JJ you got rid of all the staff, except one, to save money. And she was the one who did the expenses and sucked your dick.'

‘How did you find out?’ asked Roger with a horrified expression. ‘Do many people know?’

Watching the tele that night Chris Topper’s phone rang with a number he didn’t recognise. ‘Hello, Roger.’

He heard the giggle at the end of the phone. ‘You should be Head of MI6.’

‘I may be. This may be my cover.’

‘I think we should get together and have a drink.’

‘For old times?’

‘Or even new ones?’

‘What’s in it for me?’

‘A drink?’

‘I can drink here in the comfort of my own home, watching the darts on the tele and my missus’s heaving bosom at my side which she kindly takes out in the commercials. Can you beat that, Rog?’

‘Well I can’t beat the last bit, although I promise to wear my most daring shirt, but I’m sure we can come to some kind of agreement.’

‘You sure?’

‘Yep.’

‘Ok, Rog, where and when....?’

After the conversation he wrote down the details and stored the number in his mobile that had rung on his home phone.

He looked across at the wife whose top had seemed to go down another inch or two showing a cleavage that was deeper than the Grand Canyon and breasts that swelled higher than the highest Pacific rollers. Natural, massive, unbridled, undulating mountains of power with swirling tips. Not unlike Pacific rollers.....

Even after all the years together she turned him on like a fucking light switch. He moved over to the sofa on which she sat

and kneeled down in front of her, pulled down the flimsy straps that held her top up and then pulled it all down to her waist.

‘Fucking hell,’ he said as he looked at her large, shapely tits and nipples that acted like magnets to his eyes. He lifted them both with his hands, felt their weight and wondered for an instant how the hell she managed to carry them round? He put a nipple in his mouth which he sucked hard, then put even more in and closed his teeth around them, closing them ever tighter until he heard her moan as the pain became too much and so he eased off a touch. Just a touch. He took her breast from his mouth, seeing the teeth marks that circled her nipple and put the other one in and repeated the process, but harder; just easing off when her moan turned to a small squeal.

‘Bastard,’ she said softly.

He buried it ever deeper in his mouth, cutting off his breathing as his nose was covered by its soft warm embrace. Running out of breath he took it out. ‘I adore your tits,’ he gasped between big breaths.

‘I never knew.’

‘I hide it well.’

She stared into his eyes and he saw the lust.

‘Fuck my tits,’ she commanded.

As he pulled down his trousers she took her top completely off and lay on the sofa, her head resting on the arm. He kneeled over her, his knees either side and lowered his hard cock between her tits which she was holding up for him, ready to close them around him. He moved up and down, rubbing softly. Not quite as good as his own hand.....or her mouth.....or her hand..... but bloody good.

‘Fuck my tits,’ she whispered. ‘Fuck my tits.....’

He moved faster.

‘Fuck my tits.....,’ she pleaded in a husky, earthy voice that sent him wild.

He moved faster.

‘Tell me when you’re ready.....’

He moved faster. He was getting close. God he was close. ‘Now,’ he shouted. ‘Now....’

She moved quickly, putting her hands under his bum, gripping him with her long nails and forced him up towards her face where her open mouth waited for the eruption that she knew was about to hammer into the back of her throat.

‘Aaaaagghhhhhh.....’ he shouted,
‘aaaaaagggghhhhhh.....’

It filled her mouth and she swallowed as quickly as she could to make room for the rest which she knew would follow. Her man may lack one or two qualities but the capability to make voluminous amounts of spunk wasn’t one of them. When he came to the end she used her fingers to squeeze out what was left and then he slowly, gently, collapsed on top of her.

‘Aaaaagggghhhhhh....,’ he moaned softly. After a few moments he rolled off her, toppled off the settee and fell with a thud on to the carpet. One of these days, she thought, he is going to injure himself doing that. His eyes were closed and a look of peace and relaxation adorned his face.

She smiled; men slept, women thought of pretty shoes.....

‘Cup of tea?’ she asked. He nodded fractionally without moving or opening his eyes. Men are like babies, she thought; such simple needs. And the same reaction. She sensuously wiped her mouth with the back of her fingers and then licked them, put her top back on and went in to the kitchen. As she put the kettle on the phone rang. ‘It’s for you,’ she said, ‘a mister Abraham.’

‘He won’t be a minute,’ she said to the phone, ‘he’s just coming.’ She giggled to herself. Just coming. Again? What a man she had. Her own factory, continuously producing sperm. Chug a

chug, chug a chug, chug a chug, ding! Another bucketful for you, madam. Just as you like it. Warm, creamy, merest hint of salt.....as madam likes it. Napkin, madam? Will madam be swallowing it now or in her room? And if madam would like some later she has only to.....well madam knows what to do.

Chris dragged himself to his feet, collapsed back down into a chair and picked up the phone on the small table near him. 'Mister Abraham.'

'Call me Saul, Chris, call me Saul.'

'How can I help you, Saul?'

'I think we should get together and have a drink.'

'For old times?'

'That may be a bit difficult but perhaps for new ones?'

'What are we going to talk about?'

'How I can help you when I take over the shops.'

'I think the competition is a bit fierce to assume that, Saul. The price may be a bit too much for you, there's lots of competition.'

'Not really. The big boys won't pay enough and JJ are a fucking shower and so all I need is a bit of an edge.....'

'You're well informed.'

'Yes.'

'And the money?'

'That's not an issue.'

'It's a lot of money, Saul.'

'It's not an issue.'

'You sound pretty determined.'

'I am.'

'But having an edge tends to also mean an investment of some sort.'

'Yes.'

'An investment that the other players have overlooked?'

‘Yes.’

‘But which a canny businessman sees as part of the purchase price?’

‘Yes.’

‘Ok, Saul, where and when....?’

‘I don’t know too many places by you so where do you suggest?’

Chris thought for a moment, then a wide grin spread over his face. ‘Do you believe in fate, Saul?’

‘Maybe, why?’

‘There is a pub not far away, overlooks a valley. Pub’s called The Edge.....’

She wandered back in with two cups of tea.

‘Chug a chug chug.’

‘Eh?’

‘Nothing...,’ she said smiling. ‘Just wondering how production was doing.....?’

‘Eh?’

The next morning as Chris went to his car on the drive to go to work, his next door neighbour called him. ‘Seven thirty,’ he said.

‘Eh?’

‘Seven thirty P M.’

‘Seven thirty what, Ken, for Christ’s sake?’

‘You were aaaagggghhhhhing at seven thirty P M.’

‘Aah.’

‘Quite.’

Chris walked over to him.

‘There I am,’ said Ken, ‘quietly minding my own business in the garden and off you go aaagggggghhhh, aaagggggghhhhing again.’

‘Sorry.’

‘It’s not good enough.’

‘Sorry.’

‘It’s disgraceful.’

‘Sorry.’

‘A man of your age aaaagggghhhh, aaagggggghhhhhing. Have you no concern for the children?’

‘I haven’t got any children.’

‘What about my children?’

‘You haven’t got any children.’

‘It was a metaphor.’

Chris nodded slowly, ‘A metaphor for the fact that you’re still not getting any?’

‘Am I fuck. She’s dryer than the fucking Gobi desert. Actually I don’t know any more. It’s a Ken free zone. Has *Ken Free* stickers on her knickers and her bra.’

‘And how long has this been now?’

‘How long has the fucking Gobi desert been there? Eons, fucking eons. I was thinking could I.....?’

‘We’ve had this conversation before.’

‘Please...?’

‘No.’

‘Just a small peek?’

‘No.’

‘Oh come on. I won’t look at your inadequate dick, just your missus.’

‘No.’

‘Oh fuck. I think my fuckin brain’s going to blow up with the frustration.’

‘Wank.’

‘Look at this,’ he said holding out his right arm. ‘It must be twice the size of the other. I look like Popeye’s half brother.’

‘Pay for a woman.’

‘And come back with the clap or Aids?’

‘What’s it matter, there’s no one to pass it on to.’

‘You have a point.’

‘Get her drunk.’

‘Tried it. She was preparing a meal and we had a glass or two of wine and she was getting tipsy and so I put my hand up her skirt and she put a knife by my throat which I assumed wasn’t her clumsy attempt at foreplay.’

‘Bummer.’

‘Bummer is an understatement. I could be lying there bleeding to death even as we speak.’

‘Even as we speak? I thought you were bleeding to death?’

‘See that’s the trouble when sex is sadistically withheld; you get confused.’

‘You’re always confused.’

‘Half past six.’

Chris grinned. The old ones were the best. ‘Ah well,’ he said stretching his arms to the sky and yawning, ‘been *lovely* talking to you. *Delighted* things are going well but got to go, mate.’

‘Fuck off then; leave a mate in the lurch.’

‘See you.’

‘Pub Thursday?’ asked Ken of Chris’s departing back.

‘Does a dog quack?’ replied Chris without looking round.

On his way to work Chris wondered how the fuck you managed with a woman who wouldn’t give you sex? No idea..... His mind wandered to all the places he and the wife had had sex and he spent the next half an hour remembering all of them and got to work with a prick the size of a salami which he managed to reduce considerably after five minutes and then quietly *aaaaaagggghhing* in the toilet.

Later, in the office, bored, his mind went again to all those places he had fucked his wife. Amazing places, weird places, open places, closed places, public places; he had actually fucked her one night on his office desk.....oh fuck.

Hiding his bulging dick behind a file he wandered back to the loo....

Chapter 40

Shannon

Shannon Desiree Black was almost, almost, a description of the woman herself. She had been conceived in Shannon Airport when her mother and her boyfriend, circuitously en route to England from Turkey with a suitcase half full of marijuana, decided to have a quick fuck in the male lavatories to help pass the time in between flights.

Desiree would have fitted her exactly if she had been pretty but she wasn't; however she made up for her lack of outward appearance by fucking like the proverbial stoat and had an amazing capacity for gripping a dick like a vice when one was up her.

But black she was, having a skin the colour of darkest ebony which, had she been pretty and with the body she had, would have been wonderful but somehow....wasn't.

And she knew it and inside, under the surface which few saw, she seethed at the injustice of her name, her looks and her colour. An occasional observer might wonder how someone with the predisposition to hate everything around her could still go like a train and seemingly enjoy it? Shannon knew why she did it. Power, control and it got her liked.

And after she fucked them silly she despised them and their weakness..... Sometimes she even despised them at the time, but she still groaned and sucked and pushed and gripped while, at the same time, imagining, in an outer body sort of way, going down to the kitchen, getting the longest sharpest knife there and coming back and cutting their dick and balls off! Not even cutting, which

was a bit clinical and.....sort of painless. No; more hacking than cutting. If that was the case maybe a serrated knife? One that ripped and cut at the same time? That was better....

Her mother was now dead; doing a run from Jamaica with several tightly wrapped condoms in her stomach, when one of them breached and the white powder rushed into her bloodstream and she died a quick, frenzied and painful death on the flight home. Her father was still very much alive and every so often he would ring and try and persuade her to 'just take a small package' to some far away place but she had none of it. Fuck him! Fuck them all!

And somewhere deep in her subconscious that mantra had converted itself into a physical expression of loathing and physicality. Fuck them! Fuck them all!

And Shannon Desiree Black now had another reason to gloat over the male species; she had just done one over all too well. The prick! The pathetic, weak, grovelling prick.

She had despised him from the moment he had interviewed her for a Croupier's job and had told her she just didn't have the experience but he was willing to help her as he thought she could make it. If she was prepared to come in and work at a waitress's wage while she learned to do the croupier's job properly he would help her and get her as much help as she needed.

The prick! Weak fucking bastard! How they were so easily fucking manipulated! And then the bastard reduces the wages! Waitress level? Waitress level? Bastard! Fucking tight fisted bastards! All of them! And while she worked for Adrian and he helped her improve, she tried very hard to find ways to get back at the weak, snivelling fucking bastard who was continually nice and supportive to her.....

Bastard!

And then one night in a club she met a man who took her outside and fucked her against the wall. The man didn't get sex like this at home. He got sex, certainly, but this woman, this writhing, demented fucking woman, fucked like tomorrow was going to be the end of the world and she would do anything.....

Derry Day sequestered one of his properties from two unfortunates who were five days behind with their rent and met her there and fucked her on a regular basis. And so she spent half her nights in her little terraced house and half with Derry up her.

One night it occurred to her how to get back at the weak bastard who had paid her a waitress pittance at the casino..... And get back at the bastard who was keeping her and fucking her. Bastards!

Chapter 41

Snooker 2

H was getting nowhere and he was frustrated and angry. He'd had eight lessons off Andy Highfield but he was getting nowhere. Absolutely nowhere and he hadn't got a clue why.

He would start off well but then it would go downhill rapidly and he didn't know why? Easy pots would be missed by a mile and H would get frustrated to the point where he was now considering packing it up. What had started off as wanting to learn how to play snooker better and get more enjoyment out of the game had turned into an unenjoyable nightmare.

And so he decided to spend an hour at the table, on his own, and try and work out what the hell was going on? He put the white on the brown spot and sent it down over the spots and it came back in a straight line touching his cue at the end. Good.

And then he put a red on the blue spot and the white in between the blue and middle pocket and then potted the blue and the white followed it in. Good.

He then put five reds in a line between the pink and blue spots and the white in a straight line to the bottom pocket and started to pot them, gently, with bottom. First one in. Good. Put the white in line with the next. Straight in. Good. And another. And another. And then he missed the last one by a mile. Frustration bordering on rage swept through him. What the fuck was going on? How could you pot four and miss the fifth by a mile?

He set them up again and it happened again, this time after potting three reds.

He did it again and it happened after two.

What was going on? Why was he getting worse with each attempt? The punch in his kidneys took him unawares and he fell to his knees in pain. He felt the pain again in his kidneys as the kick followed. He rolled up into a ball to protect himself, and shuffled under the table for protection where he stayed, curled up, for several minutes before he realised what was happening.

He was alone.

Just him, an empty room and a snooker table. And a ghost from the past.....

Something he had forgotten, something that had never occurred to him, had come back to haunt him. His father had taught him how to play snooker....

Taught him may have been the wrong choice of words. Found another way to criticise, humiliate and hurt him would have been a better choice. He started to tremble and then he cried and when that was spent he got up and smashed a cue over the table, ripped the score board off the wall and hurled it through the curtained window, then leapt on the table and started to rip the cloth by kicking it with his heels.

‘Bastard,’ he screamed, ‘bastard. I thought you’d gone....’

After more ranting he sat down on the table, slate apparent everywhere between the ripped cloth and wondered why he had spent all that money getting it re-done?

Benny came in and saw the devastation. ‘Daddy come back?’

‘How did you know?’

‘You’ve been a touch....niggly for a day or two now and that usually means something is going to rear its ugly head.’

‘I wish he was here. I wish he was standing here and we could talk.’

‘Euphemistically?’

‘No, just a word I’m using in place of something more offensive.’

Benny giggled, 'You intellectual, you. Cup of tea?'

'Bloody wonderful idea.'

Benny wandered off and H fished in a drawer for a number. Picking up a phone he dialled. '.....Yes.....good afternoon... my name is James James and a few weeks ago you refurbished my snooker table. Could you do it again please?.....No, no I'm quite happy with the way you did it the first time.....it's had a slight accident.....'

Chapter 42

Gerry Smith

Gerry, one of Roger Davids' Divisional Managers, along with Kate Day, left the last shop on his route that day and headed home. He was knackered. Roger was pushing the modernisation plan for all it was worth, which was fair enough, but at times it was too much. Every bugger wanted to be consulted, or have their ruffled feathers smoothed, or have a hissy fit, or not turn up out of petulance, or tell you about what some naughty person had done as though they were children.....

But Roger kept pushing.

It was your job to make sure it happened and whilst Roger would listen to your problems he wouldn't listen to your excuses.

You had to listen to them all day from employees, contractors, the Council, the big service companies who say they are going to do it tomorrow but.....

He had to listen to them all but Roger had his schedule to complete.....and didn't want to know.

He had twenty miles to go so he put the radio on and tried to relax but got Queen and 'Under Pressure'. Great! He pressed the button to change to an Abba cd and got 'Knowing me, knowing you' which was just a bit too close and so that didn't work either. He shut it off and watched the road and spent the Lottery money he was going to win this coming Saturday. It would certainly sort out a lot of the problems....

He pulled into the drive of the small semi, went to the boot of the car to take out his brief case and then decided not to bother, went to the back door and let himself in.

‘It’s me,’ he shouted and a moment later she came in to the kitchen, her face beamed and she went to him and kissed him. His arms encircled her and all tension left him. He cradled her and felt her warmth and femininity and softness and it washed away his day as though it had never existed.

She had been in his life now for four years and he thanked God for the day that he had met her, quite by accident, in a street by one of the shops. He had been miles away mulling over some problem or other and had walked into her path and knocked her over. Apologising profusely he had helped her up, gathered her shopping together and volunteered to buy her a cup of coffee which, surprisingly, she had accepted. And from then on they spent what time they could together. Quite happy in each other’s company.

He had a shower and sat and watched tele while she cooked dinner. A simple meal but healthy, tasty and fat free with a glass of wine which relaxed him even more. Later they went to the cinema to watch some film that had managed to get a premier on the BBC A Premier under the heading of.....news. He wondered how much they had paid for that one? News? As if....

Back home she made two cups of milky horlicks and they went to bed. She nestled into his arm and quite quickly they were fast asleep.

The following morning, refreshed, they made love.

Then breakfast and, without wanting to go, it was back to Roger’s world.....

Chapter 43

Derry Day 3

H received the report off Sammy the Search and marvelled, not for the first time, at Sammy's talent. The report, because that was what it was, was thirty pages long, indexed, itemised, cross referenced and bound.

It had everything about Derry Day. Every conceivable thing. How Sammy did it H had no idea but that was what you paid for, indeed paid a lot for, but Sammy was the best there was.

And so you got his full name, address, previous addresses, mother and father's names, their addresses, children.....etc.

Then his National Insurance Number, tax details, business details, shareholdings, Directorships.....etc

His medical records were also there, *how the fuck did Sammy manage that*, which showed he had the occasional heart murmur that as yet was not considered a problem and that he was suffering from intermittent eczema on his legs and had done for quite a while for which he got a steroidal cream....etc

His general habits were there; what he did, what he ate, what he liked.....etc

And his mistress was there, and where she lived, and what she did.....etc

And what she did.....

And what she did.....

So now we know.....an employee of J J Casinos is being fucked by Derry.

So now we know.....

Chapter 44

Lucy 4

Bernie Smout had thought about it the night before and got hard thinking about the little woman who could suck him off the next day. Why not? It would, if he wanted, go on forever, because she'd never repay the loan. How could she? The mathematics weren't designed to allow you to pay it off. What good's a fucking punter who can pay? And the maths were simple.

You borrowed a few quid, let's say a ton. If you don't pay all that back in the first week you then owed what you hadn't paid off plus the original amount. Get it? No? Good, that helps. That's exactly how we want it.

Anyhow for the more intelligent amongst you here's how it works: let's say you borrow a ton but you only pay 90. So then it's the ten you still owe plus the original amount, a ton. Adds up to one ten. Not bad, eh? I get ninety, you only owe a tenner and yet you still owe one ten.

I tell you it's a fucking steal.

And then when they're completely up to their neck in it you securitise it against an asset like their house. They still pay of course, so in reality they're completely fucked....

Chapter 45

Jerry 4

After his meeting with H, Jerome was hired to sort out the problems at the door and inside the clubs while H set about trying to find another MD or at least a GM until he was sure it was the right man.

Some of the doormen had heard of Jerry, as he was generally known, others hadn't. Jerry left a message with each club manager, that he wanted to see all the doormen at the J J Gym at midday the following Tuesday and they dutifully arrived.

There were seven night clubs and Jerry wanted seven good teams. And he wanted balanced teams. It was no good just getting four or five big fuckers and leaving it at that. Handling problems was much more sophisticated than a few big fuckers dishing it out. You needed several elements to be successful.

The Information man.....who knew everybody, knew what they were capable of, where they lived, what turned them on. Forewarned is forearmed.....

The Watcher.....the eyes and ears, who saw everything happening before it happened, who judged the mood and ebb and flow of the club.

The Talker.....who could talk them down, keep it calm, stop it before it kicked off; the diplomat.

The Man.....the one that stops anybody no matter what. Of course that wasn't to say they weren't all hard, they were, but The Man was fucking evil....

Jerry had been The Man most of his door career. His height, weight, technical skills and lack of fear made him formidable. In

many ways Jerry was a one man team with all the skills. He was a strategic fighting machine and you fucked with him at your peril.

Jerry still had the memories of a visit to New York four weeks earlier with his girlfriend when they had been mugged by three white guys. Two had knives and the one without, the leader, said, 'Money, watches, cards, now!'

Jerry had been quite specific. 'Just leave us alone and no one will end up in hospital,' he said quietly and moved in front of his woman.

'Just leave us alone and no one will end up in hospital,' mimicked the leader in a simpering voice. 'Put the motherfucker in hospital!'

The leader moved back and the other two moved forward. Jerry didn't give them chance to do anything; he blocked the knife arm of one and his fist went into his throat with the speed of a spitting cobra. The man's air pipe immediately restricted and he felt sick. As he gasped for air Jerry moved his blocking arm behind the man's arm to restrain it while the palm of his hand smashed into it and it snapped with a crack! Instantly he moved back and sideways as the other man slashed with his knife. Jerry blocked again, went under with his right arm and wrenched the man's elbow violently towards him, breaking his arm and dislocating his shoulder.

Jerry saw the gun come out of the back of the leader's jeans and grabbed his wrist, turned it backwards, making him scream in agony and pointed it down towards the leader's thigh. The gun went off and the man screamed as blood started oozing from the wound. The gun dropped to the ground and Jerry kicked it away. In the old days Jerry may have taken it from him but he had learned you didn't want your prints on a gun no matter what the circumstances!

Jerry moved round the man's back, locked him hard round the throat and then, as he was strangling him, smashed heavy knee kicks into his ribs which he felt give slightly as they snapped. As the leader passed out and went down Jerry moved to the other two, smashed them several times in the face with his heavy fist until they were both completely out of it and then broke their remaining arms.....

It had been very quick. Just seconds. But how much time did you need.....?

Jerry looked down.

Oh fuck! Oh fuck!

There was always a cost to fighting; always fucking a cost!

People thought that if you won, the other guy had lost.

But what about when you have won and you scuffed your new shoes beyond repair? LIKE HE JUST HAD! That's a cost. It may be a tenner or it may be a hundred quid. That's an expensive fight. Now you could of course take it out of the pocket of the person laid out in front of you but that's theft and a different kettle of fish altogether. Now the coppers won't bother you for fucking a dickhead over but they will bother you for nicking his money. That's their job.....

Jerry surveyed the motley crew standing in front of him and it seemed obvious a bit of culling was needed. He smiled to himself. *Obvious*; what the fuck was obvious in this world? Ah well it would all unfold. 'You're all here today...'

'Except Jimmy,' shouted one.

Jerry shrugged, 'so that we.....'

'And Ted,' he chipped in again.

'can sort out....'

'And Phil.'

Jerry looked at him. 'And what's your name?'

'Sonny.'

‘Your real name.’

‘I go by the name of Sonny.’

‘Ok, Sonny, you can join the others who didn’t arrive.’

‘What’s that mean?’

‘It means fuck off!’

‘Come on, man,’ said Sonny, ‘just having some crack.’

‘I don’t care whether you’re having it or on it. Go...’

‘Just chill out, man, it’s cool.’

‘Sonny, you got ten seconds to go or you get thrown out. It’s your choice....?’

‘Fuck you...’

The man didn’t move, but shifted his weight into fight stance and was waiting when Jerry ran over to him. Sonny couldn’t believe his luck; this big lumbering cunt would run straight into a haymaker that would take him out until fucking Christmas. He watched Jerry’s every step and then when he was about to come into range he lashed out with a hard right and smashed nothing. Jerry had turned slightly before the fist reached him. He knew what Sonny would do to a man running on to him; he just wanted to know which fist he would use.....?

Jerry took control of the arm, forced it against the joint to break it, took it agonisingly round his back, up towards his neck, used his other arm to control his neck and marched Sonny’s face to the nearest wall. As Sonny flinched ready for the sickening crunch that he knew was coming Jerry stopped an inch away. Still locking Sonny in terrific pain Jerry turned round and looked at them.

The unspoken question was obvious and no one said a word....

After Sonny left Jerry got back to work.

He talked to every man individually in a small room nearby; he gave them written aptitude tests and he tested their combat ability. He put them into teams to see how they reacted and then changed some of them round for better balance. He sent another seven home; thanks but no thanks....

When he had sorted those he had left, he went round the martial arts clubs and put an advert in the local paper for good doormen. The word good was italicised. Soon he would have the teams he wanted and if there was something they couldn't handle there were other specialist teams he could call upon.

The first was the police. He would ask the police to make their presence known; and he would get the local paper to advertise the fact and then the dealers and the pimps would move on.

If that didn't work, and it usually did, and a club was infested with undesirables and it needed a show of strength to make them understand they were not welcome then the other specialist team would go into action.

Jerome Nelson at your service, sir.....

Chapter 46

Derry Day 4

Derry Day was at the races when his mobile phone went but he ignored it as he watched the horse that he had bet on come in second. Second! So much for the 'it can't lose, put your shirt on it' hot tip. He sighed. He knew you could never really bank on a hot tip although he'd had some good ones over the years from the odd trainer or jockey who was in on the scam. But from third parties? Not usually. And quite often the third party had been set up to create interest in the wrong horse to confuse the bookies and change the odds so that the real winner paid better. He sighed again and shook his head. He only had a hundred on it so it was no big deal....

He took the phone out of his pocket and saw missed call. Pressing the button it gave no number so he didn't know who had called. The phone rang again. The number was still withheld and that concerned him a little as he didn't like taking withheld calls.

'Yes?'

'Derry?'

He paused, not recognising the voice. 'Who wants him?'

'Alfonso.'

'I don't know you.'

'No, you don't. You know someone I know and they say you can help me.'

'And who would that be?'

'Derry, I can't have this conversation with you now as who knows may be listening with their little computers and their word sensitive software so I will be in touch soon. Just remember....Alfonso' and the phone went dead.

Derry thought for a moment but there was little he could deduce from the brief conversation. Only that someone had acquired his number, which few had, and that someone knew about word sensitive computers which they, the British, had used very effectively in Ireland.

Chapter 47

Friday

Thank God for Friday! Friday at 5:30 when they were together again seemed like the end of all problems. It wasn't always of course but it seemed like that.

A cutting off point to the working week.

They would have a cup of tea and settle down to watch Sky News although they had no idea why? Doom and gloom. Doom and Gloom. And the credit crunch.

The CC as it was known in the house had largely passed them by. Their mortgage was small and their savings modest although what little they had was getting a paltry 3% interest whereas last year it was 6.3!

After a few minutes of tele they would get out all the Takeaway leaflets they had and decide what to order? Chinese? Indian? Thai? (there was a difference?) Pizza? And even the local fish and chip did a delivery!

After much umming and aaahing they decided not to spend the money and June rustled up two healthy fresh bread salad rolls with a bottle of Blossom Hill Californian which they got at three for £10 at their local wine store.

So they settled down for a night watching tele and exorcising the week's troubles and traumas.

Chapter 48

Allocated

Another day, another...fuck all.

And now, to add insult to injury, some brain damaged cretin in Admin has come up with a company song. Well not exactly a company song, a departmental song...

You'll like this.....

*We are the lucky ones
We get to move the twos
For that we thank the Lord
We never will be bored*

*We are the lucky ones
We get to move the twos
You couldn't make us stop
There till the last soft plop*

*We are the lucky ones
We get to move the twos
It's where we want to be
We'd like a number three*

Classic, eh?

Lennon and McCartney? Fucking amateurs compared to this lot. We suggested it might not get to Number One but it would certainly get to Number Two; but they didn't get it.

Which may be just as well.

I told you before we wanted to get out but having to sing that crap every morning has made it rather more urgent....

Singing crap, moving crap.....is there no end?

To this crap.....

Chapter 49

Anticipation

H and Benshima sat on one of the three patios at the rear of their lovely home and looked out towards the parkland with its open spaces and old, beautiful trees. A few feet away in the shade their baby slept, albeit with the occasional gurgle and H watched the child at peace with the world. At his age, thought H, I was already black and blue, terrorised by a psychotic bastard.

Oh happy days.....

Part of his brain immediately launched into a soaring rendition of ‘Oh happy day’ by the Edwin Hawkins Singers and his leg, resting on his knee, started bouncing animatedly.

‘What are you singing?’ asked Benny.

‘Nothing.’

‘Tell me.’

‘Just an old song.’

‘Tell meeeeeee.’

“‘Oh happy day’ by Edwin Hawkins.’

She closed her eyes and sat still. ‘Magic,’ she said softly, ‘magic. Believe it or not we actually sang that in the school choir.’

‘Really? A Colombian school choir?’

‘Good music. Choir music. Team music.....magic. In fact to prove it I’ll do the first verse for you.’

She stood and started softly clapping to get the rhythm and when she was happy with the tempo she increased the strength of the claps and started swaying and started to sing. Softly at first.....

Oh happy day (oh happy day)
Oh happy day (oh happy day)
When Jesus washed (when Jesus washed)
When Jesus washed (when Jesus washed)
Jesus washed (when Jesus washed)
Washed my sins away (oh happy day)
Oh happy day (oh happy day)

As Benny carried on, her voice getting ever louder as the song entered her soul, H joined in the clapping and found that his non religious mind was moved by the memory of a Happy Day that had been provided by a Lord that never existed. But he could see why people would want one.....*to wash my sins away.*

When she finished he clapped wildly and shouted, 'bravo'; and she curtsied.

'I didn't know you could sing so well.'

'Hidden depths.'

They went back to sitting, if that was the word, on two chairs that pivoted in the middle and gave you a sort of 'floating' feeling. Near to the floor that he was H saw a solitary ant wandering between them. 'Look,' he said to Benny, 'a pop star.'

Benny looked where H was staring and saw the ant. *Here we go*, she thought affectionately, I wonder where this will end up?

'Pop star?' she asked knowing what was expected when H went down one of these roads.

'Adam Ant,' said H giggling like a child.

'It could be a girl,' said Benny quickly, 'Gall - Ant.'

'Or a male,' replied H, 'Buoy - Ant.'

And so they traded ant words

Benny

Bossy ant,

Tyr - Ant

H	Big ant,	Eleph - Ant
Benny	Homeless ant,	Vagr - Ant
H	Flying ant,	Pheas - Ant
Benny	Lowly ant,	Peas - Ant
H	Boss ant,	Import - Ant
Benny	Helpful ant,	Assist - Ant
H	Trusted ant,	Confid - Ant
Benny	Philosophical ant,	K - Ant

Kant?

Kant?

H paused before his next contribution. He knew it was soon time to stop as Benny's rather superior education was now coming to the fore and it would make the game too intelligent....and he would lose. Not that it was a winning, losing sort of game of course. He tried hard to think of something intellectual to rhyme with ant...

'Busty ant,' he said, 'Impl - Ant.'

Benny looked at him derisively. 'You and busts.... Ok, Flattering ant,' she put in. 'Sycoph -Ant. Or maybe oblique ant, Asl - Ant, or priest ant, Bacch Ant, or pouring ant, Dec Ant, or surgical ant, Expl Ant, or.....'

'I'll make a cup of tea,' said H and got up muttering something about '*it's only a game....it's not serious.....it's not about scoring points.....*'

After a few minutes he ran back out of the house. 'I've thought of a good one...shining cat's eyes....chatoy - ant.'

Benny looked at him despairingly. 'It's French, so where did you get it, Merriam Webster?'

'No.....well anyhow you cheat.'

'And how do I cheat?'

'You went to school.'

'Make the tea....'

He shuffled back and she shouted after him, 'And it also means a narrow band of light that would come off a gem.'

'I want a divorce.....' came the distant reply.

'Just make the tea, Assist – ant.'

'It's not funny.....'

'Come on, be Buoy – ant.'

'I'm not listening.....'

'Don't be a Miscre – ant.'

'I'm not listening....'

'What did you say? You're so Dist – ant.'

There was no reply. H had given up.

'Have you gone Dorm – ant, my love?' shouted Benny.

He arrived a few minutes later with two mugs of tea.

'How about,' said Benny, 'an acrobat ant.....Flipp - ant.'

'Enough,' said H, 'or I shall be an Emigr – ant.'

'And how long did it take you to think of that, my Gall – ant Merch – ant?'

H shook his head in despair. 'You always have to win.....'

'Not really...I'm quite Nonchal – ant about the whole thing.'

H got up and went to the child. 'See, Ben, this is marriage. They spend all their time telling you how wonderful you are before marriage and then after they spend the rest of the time proving to you how wonderful you aren't. So, Ben, never get married and never, ever, ever marry a Colombian.'

'That speech was so.....how can I put this.....Poign – ant.'

He came back and kissed her gently on the forehead. 'Venomous bitch.....'

She raised both arms. '*Triumph – ant.*'

Chapter 50

Andy's mom

Andy's beloved mom had died and he struggled with it. Hard, sadistic bastard he may be but he loved his mom. Andy's sadistic traits had nothing to do with a brutal childhood as he had been loved and nurtured by both his parents; Andy's sadistic traits were....just the way Andy was. Maybe a neuron or two were hurtling off in the wrong direction at times.....who knew?

Even though Andy was quite well off his mom still lived in the council house that Andy grew up in although Andy had bought the house for her, in her name but using a legal device that held it in trust for him, and taking advantage of the generous Local Council discounts for buying your own home.

Andy's mom had never asked him for any money and when he had offered she had refused. She lived relatively well for an old person on a state pension and when Andy had occasionally brought up the question of how she managed she would merely say that the company helped out, which Andy took to mean the company she kept of other old ladies who picked her up to go to Bingo or the pub or the shops or wherever old women went. Certainly some of them had their husband's pension to go at.....

Several days after the funeral Andy was going through the drawers and cupboards which housed her belongings and treasured possessions and was amazed at the things she had hoarded. She still had his Primary School reports, a school tie, smallpox vaccination certificate, a certificate for the fifty yards race on sports day and also a small cup which had inscribed on it *World Snooker Invitation Cup* and underneath for successive years the winners

Andrew Pandena

Alan Bloor

Alan Bloor

Andrew Pandena

Alan Bloor

And then they stopped.....

Andy grinned. He remembered the Cup as he and Al had bought it between them from a junk shop; had it engraved and created the World Snooker Invitation Cup which only he and Al were invited to. And the reason it stopped was because one year they nearly came to blows when Al accused Andy of moving the blue with his sleeve which Andy vehemently denied and from then on it was downhill.

‘You moved the yellow,’ said Andy a few shots later.

‘I was nowhere near the yellow!’

‘Yes, you fucking were.’

‘No, I fucking wasn’t.’

‘You calling me a fucking liar?’

‘You calling *me* a fucking liar?’

And that was the end of the World Snooker Invitation Cup.

And then he came across an old metal chocolate box in which he found some documents. He looked at them and couldn’t believe what he was seeing. He looked again. He shook his head, tilted it to one side to let the confusion slide out and then studied them again. Unbelievable. Completely fucking unbelievable!

He laid them out on a table and also the newspaper cutting she had left with them. There were four of them. Credit card statements.

They totalled £34,783. His mother had credit card debt of nearly £35,000! How could she? She was eighty five years old for

Christ's sake. On a fucking old age pension! How could she have any credit cards?

He picked up the yellowing newspaper article which she had cut out and highlighted the appropriate passage. *The appropriate passage* explained that the relatives of an old person that died with credit card debts *could not be held liable for those debts*. The old bugger!

She had augmented her pension by living on credit and from the look of it when she was reaching the limit of one she would get another and use it to live and also help pay the interest on the other, then the other..... The old bugger!

Andy felt quite proud of his mom. It wasn't just the scam it was the strategic thinking that went into its conclusion.

The old bugger!

Maybe he should have consulted her about some of the jobs they had done? Not so much Bonnie and Clyde as Andy and Mom...

The old bugger.

Andy debated whether he should pay off the cards' debts anyhow? As if.....

Still filled with pride he took his mobile out of his pocket and pressed a speed dial number.

'H, you just gotta listen to this, it's fucking amazing.....'

Chapter 51

Derry Day 5

Shannon Black had been a bona fide croupier for a week and was on one of the black jack tables. It was only early afternoon and the casino was quiet when the man sat down. He only had a few chips, the smallest denominations, which he quickly lost by making the wrong calls. A few minutes later, chipless, he stood up, took an envelope out of his jacket pocket which he handed to her, nodded slightly and then turned and headed for the door. She looked at the envelope and saw it was addressed to D D. How the hell did he know? Who...?

She looked after the man but he was already gone from the main hall and she realised someone had moved beside her.

‘You ok, Shannon?’ asked her floor boss.

‘Eh?’

‘Are you alright?’

‘Do you know who that was?’

‘Who was who?’

‘The man.’

‘What man? Shannon, what are you talking about?’

She looked at him with contempt. Fucking idiot. How did he get to be her boss?

When Shannon finished her shift at 10 pm she went straight to meet Derry and gave him the envelope.

‘Why did they give *you* the envelope? How do they know you know me?’

‘How do I know?’

He looked at her suspiciously.

‘I told you; he just walked in, played a bit and as he was leaving he gave me this. That’s it.’

He looked at her but he saw nothing in her eyes except perhaps.....what was that in her eyes? They were hard, always been hard but there was something else.....? He opened the envelope and written in block capitals it said

NEED URGENT SUPPLIES. AT LEAST £2M. CAN YOU SUPPLY? TEXT YES OR NO TO 07801 002299. ALFONSO

Urgent. How urgent? And £2M? That was a lot of arms. What the fuck did they need all that for? Were they going to war? The IRA against the British Army? That was a no brainer. What would that buy? They were hardly in the market for tanks, not that you’d get a tank for £2M, more like twenty.....?

He dragged his mind back from the dead end track it had gone up....

£2M....that was indeed a lot of arms. So it wasn’t just small arms? Rockets? Anti tank? Explosives? Was there something else? Something a touch more exotic they were after? Who knows? He thought some more. No, it wouldn’t be anything exotic. They hadn’t got the fucking brains.....

He sent a text saying, ‘Yes.’

He got an immediate reply, ‘Good. Back soon.’

Derry felt the adrenalin rushing through him. ‘Kneel down,’ he instructed Shannon. She did as she was told; he undid his zip and put his already hard dick as far as he could down her throat.....

Shannon was good at sucking dicks. Shannon was good at most things sexual and if ever they started giving out Degrees for sex Shannon would be in line for a PhD. Shannon knew you didn’t suck a dick properly if you tried to breathe through your nose; that didn’t work. Or if you tried to hold your breath; that didn’t work either. The secret was to not quite close your mouth.

Leave it open just enough so that you can breathe through your throat as usual and then you can suck forever...

It didn't take long for him to come; she felt the warm liquid hit the back of her throat and started swallowing immediately. Derry always had a lot of spunk; too much to keep in your mouth until he'd finished.

And, which she liked, he tasted nice.

Some men she had sucked were God awful; thin and rancid like separated goat's milk and you wanted to retch; the texture of others was ok but too salty but Derry's spunk had a fine texture and she could swallow his spunk all day.....and sometimes did.

Chapter 52

Geoff Mulley

Geoff Mulley stretched his weary body.

Death got you like that. Tired you out.

Geoff was involved in the business of death. Had been all his life; man and boy. As had his father, and his father's father and his grandfather. All involved in death. A family tradition....

Geoff was now sixty years of age and his ancestors would not have believed how he had changed the business of death. Geoff wasn't just into death he was also into business and over the years he had increased the deaths, so to speak, so that he earned a very good living.

When he had joined the family Undertaker's business it was still in the days when they were mainly carpenters and made the coffins and then arranged the rest. And in those days while those arrangements were being made and the relatives were getting Death Certificates, the body was still lying at home....waiting. Now in the winter, and these were the times when there was still no central heating, it wasn't too bad; but in the summer, Christ! The smell! What a friggin smell! It would knock you over as soon as you walked in the room which had essentially been sealed for several days. And occasionally, only occasionally thank God, the body was putrefying and the foul liquid ran everywhere.

Those were the good old days...

Geoff had taken to the business like a duck to water. He had learned about dying from top to bottom, working in every part of it from consoling the relatives to embalming the body.

And now he had eight Funeral Services companies and three crematoriums.

Howard Hodson had started it all by merging small funeral directors; realising they all had assets that were underused. Expensive funeral cars just sat there depreciating, gobbling up money. Staff just sat there...waiting. Better if you bought up the other local companies and they shared cars and staff and resources and made more money. Howard had been the catalyst, others followed and so Geoff started his own local expansion.

Geoff was also contracted by other funeral directors in the vicinity to help out with services that they could not afford in their stand alone business. He had a state of the art embalming theatre which could store thirty refrigerated bodies, a specialist vehicle with four stretchers to collect bodies from the hospital, had a repatriation service for bodies far and wide and produced his own coffins. Of course it wasn't on the scale of what Howard Hodson did with his city money, but on a scale to suit him. And Howard sold out in the early nineties to the company that was now Dignity whereas Geoff was still going on quite happily with about two and a half thousand bodies a year passing through his companies.

And he had bought a crematorium when the local Council were trying to cut costs and he saw the opportunity to take it off their hands. When he found out how much money he could make he scoured the country for an opportunity and built two more. And that was another six thousand or so bodies to add to the company tally.

Of course it wasn't the cremating that made the money. It was the Memorial add-ons. You want a Memorial Rise? A Memorial Urn. Name in the Book of Remembrance? Of course you do. It's right they should be remembered.

Now how many years did you want to have it for? Five, ten, fifteen.....?

Ah yes, it wasn't the cremating that made the money.....

He was sitting in one of the Crematoriums now, waiting for the last one of the day and just letting his mind drift....

He thought for a moment about 'Manners', his brother.

Manners wasn't his real name, that was Henry, but he had been nicknamed *Manners* many years ago when it was quite apparent he would never have any. Manners had been born with a condition that had stopped parts of his brain meshing with other parts, the consequence of which was manners didn't have anything in his brain to stop him saying what he thought, or saw. So manners would quite happily say 'you're fat' or 'I could fuck you' or 'you bore me' or 'you smell'; none of which were good introductory lines.

Luckily Manners had turned out to be an exceptional embalmer which kept him out of the way in the embalming theatre for eight hours a day and with only the dead to say daft, unexpected things to. Also luckily, manners had no desire to travel far as he had a passion for his enormous train set that took up half of the cottage they had bought for him so it was not too much of a problem.

The local people all knew him and knew what to expect. Indeed they found him quite useful if they needed an honest opinion. It was a bit like 'do you think my bum looks big in this?' And manners would tell you.... And there was a standing joke locally where one person would say to another something like, 'How do you like my new hair style?' and they, being diplomatic, would say, 'Have you seen *Manners*?'

'Yes.'

'And did he say anything?'

‘No.’

‘*Then it’s fine.....*’

He also had one more peculiarity. He would quite happily be walking along and then for no apparent reason stop abruptly, turn and say something to the person who happened to be behind him.

‘It’s raining,’ he may say.

‘Don’t like your suit,’ he may say.

‘Like your hair,’ he may say.

‘You’re ugly,’ he may say.

‘You’re pretty,’ he may say.

‘It’s half past ten,’ he may say.

Trouble was he may say *anything*. You never quite knew what he was going to say but neither, of course, did Manners.

Geoff shifted his position on the chair and drifted back to the business of dying... and sitting and waiting for the last one of the day.

Chapter 53

Lucy 5

Maurice heard the knock on the door and took a deep breath.

‘Don’t worry, Lucy love, we can sort it out and I’m sure he’s a nice bloke really.’ He took one more sip of hot tea from the mug and put it back on the little kitchen table. ‘I’ll let him in.’

She moved slightly but said nothing.

He opened the door to find a well dressed man, not as large as he would have expected, but with a hard face.

‘You must be Mister Smout?’

‘And you must be Mister.....?’

‘Wilson.....Lucy’s husband. She’s told me about the mess we’ve got ourselves in and so I’ve borrowed the money to pay you off,’ he paused. ‘All of it. We want to be rid of the problem.’

‘Don’t blame you, mate,’ said Smout. He gestured indoors. ‘Getting the money then?’

‘I’ll need a receipt,’ said Maurice. ‘It’s a lot of money.’

‘No problem, mate. I assume it’s cash?’

Maurice nodded, ‘Cash. I assumed you’d want cash....’

‘A good assumption.’

‘Come in please,’ said Maurice, moving over and opening the door farther, ‘through to the kitchen.’

As Smout moved past him Maurice picked up a cricket bat leaning against the wall behind the door and smashed him behind the head as hard as he could.

Smout came round nearly an hour later. His head hurt like crazy and his eyesight was a bit out of focus. He was sitting naked at the tiny kitchen table; his hands and arms were taped to the chair

with a brown, strong adhesive packing tape that Maurice had taken from work and the same tape was wrapped around his mouth.

‘We’re just having fish and chips,’ said Maurice. ‘Do you want some?’

Bernie assessed the situation and didn’t want to be there. He was in the company of a fucking maniac and on the wrong end. Receiving was never his cup of tea; giving it out yes, but not receiving. The little fucker would pay dearly for this.....

He struggled and strained but where it did give a little, the pain, as the tape ripped the hairs off his body, was immense. He tried to shout and scream but was securely taped.

Maurice put some fish, on foil and covered in butter, in the oven. He lit the flame under the chip pan and then came over, sitting next to Lucy and opposite Bernie Smout. He gave her hand a gentle squeeze.

‘Be ok, love, Mister Smout will help us, won’t you, Mister Smout?’

Bernie wanted to scream. He wanted to scream as hard as he could. He was sitting across from a maniac who had smashed him over the head and now had him trussed up; and facing him a lifeless woman whose frozen body was starting to melt.....

Maurice had found her sitting at the table. Dead. On the table was a jar of sleeping pills with only one or two left, a large container that should have had bleach in it and a large beaker with the remnants of the container. On the table she had left him a note;

My beloved Maurice

I have gotten us into a lot of trouble and i dont no any way out. To get us thru Mister Smout borrowed me a hundred pounds and now he says i owe him four thousand

***And he mayed me do things. I didn't want to honest i didnt.
I didn't***

Maurice saw where the tears had fallen.....

I tride to win the money at the bookies but it just made matters worse

But i cant pay it back and now he wants our home and the only way to stop him is this way

I have loved you all my life and i will never stop loving you and i hope we meet again when we can

Your belovd wife Lucy

He went to her and cradled her and loved her. Stroking her hair, caressing her cheek; his soul entered her body so that he was with her and always would be with her. Tears flooded down his face which was contorted with pain.

He looked at the letter again. Her writing was crafted, painstaking and beautiful but, he smiled, she couldn't spell to save her life. He started crying again.....the crying turned to sobbing and whimperings of anguish.

After a little while he made them both a cup of tea, carried her into the lounge and they watched tele together. Later that evening he took her to bed, gently cocooning her in clean sheets and stayed awake all night with her in his arms.

The next day he cleared out the deep freeze and placed her in a sitting position, made her comfortable then took all the food to the tip.

Maurice looked at Bernie. 'You ok, Mister Smout?'

Bernie struggled and tried to shout but.....

'You sure you don't want any fish and chips?' He went over to the pan. 'Soon be ready.'

Sitting back down again he stared at Bernie, thought for a moment and then got up, went to the cupboard under the sink and came back with two industrial size containers of bleach that he had nicked from the cleaner's cupboard at work. He went to a cupboard and found a glass beaker which he filled with bleach and put it in front of Bernie.

‘Do you know what you are going to do with this?’

Bernie looked at the glass, guessed how the maniac's wife had killed herself and knew what was about to befall him. But he also knew for that to happen the maniac would have to take the tape off his mouth and then he would have a chance. Scream at the top of his voice and then clamp his jaws closed. Or maybe bite his fucking nose off! What could he do?

Unless he could make him open them he was fucked! Useless little cunt!

Maurice pushed the glass closer to Bernie. ‘Do you know,’ he asked again, ‘what I am going to do with this?’

Bernie had relaxed a little and his mind was working out as fast as it could what other options were open to him.....

Maurice put his finger in the bleach and flicked the liquid at Bernie's face. Spots landed and they started to sting. He pushed the glass even closer. ‘Guess.....?’

Bernie almost felt like shrugging. Fuck you, you little cunt!

‘No?’ said Maurice. ‘You can't guess? Maybe this will help you.’

He went to the sink, picked up the plastic dishwashing bowl and brought it to the table where he placed it in front of Bernie and filled it with the bleach. The ammonia stung Bernie's eyes. Maurice put his finger in and flicked some bleach at Bernie's face.

‘Now can you guess?’ Maurice put his face close to Bernie's. ‘Mister Smout? Can you?’

Bernie tried to head butt him but the restraint just made him miss.

‘That wasn’t nice,’ said Maurice, aggrieved. ‘What have I done to you to deserve that?’

Maurice went back to the sink and came back with a large sponge which he put into the bowl of bleach.

‘Now...have you guessed what I am going to do with those?’

Bernie ignored him and his eyes defiantly told him to fuck off. Bernie was just waiting for a chance. Any chance.....

Bernie knew that with just one chance this little fucker was no match whatsoever. And while the bleach may sting and burn it would not stop him killing this little fucker.....

Maurice got up and moved away, and Bernie’s eyes moved involuntarily to Lucy’s wet, melting body. He shuddered; it was fucking horrible.....

‘The fish is nearly ready,’ said Maurice, ‘you sure you don’t want some, Mister Smout? I made enough so that you could.... You sure you won’t join us?’

Maurice came back and sat opposite Bernie. He dipped his fingers in the bowl of bleach and flicked it at Bernie; a tiny drop of which caught him in the eye and it stung.

In fact it was fucking painful...!

‘Do you know what I am going to do with this bleach?’ said Maurice softly again.....

Chapter 54

Gerry Smith 2

Gerry Smith left the last shop on his route that day and headed home. He was knackered. Roger was pushing the modernisation plan for all it was worth, which was fair enough, but at times it was too much. Every bugger wanted to be consulted, or have their ruffled feathers smoothed, or have a hissy fit, or not turn up out of petulance, or tell you about what some naughty person had done as though they were children.....

But Roger kept pushing. It was your job to make sure it happened and whilst Rog would listen to your problems he wouldn't listen to your excuses. You had to listen to them all day from employees, contractors, the Council, the big service companies who say they are going to do it tomorrow but..... He had to listen to them all but Rog had his schedule to complete.....

Same fucking routine...different fucking day.

He had twenty miles to go so he put the radio on and tried to relax. He got Neil Young and 'Band of Gold' so he pressed the button to change to a Beatles cd and got 'All you need is love' which was just a bit too close so that didn't work either and so he shut it off and watched the road and spent the Lottery money he was going to win this coming Saturday. It would certainly sort out a lot of the problems....

Same fucking routine...different fucking day.

He pulled into the drive of the detached house, went to the boot of the car to take out his brief case and then decided not to bother,

went to the back door and let himself in.

‘It’s me,’ he shouted and wandered into the lounge where two kids were watching tele.

‘Where’s your mom?’

They shrugged, their eyes glued to the 42” flashing monster in front of them.

He went to the bottom of the stairs. ‘You up there?’ he shouted.

A head appeared round the wall at the top with a towel curled round it as only women with wet hair can.

‘Won’t be a minute,’ and then it was gone again.

He went back into the lounge and sat down. ‘What are you watching?’ he asked, knowing quite well it was Futurama but wanting the fruit of his loins to acknowledge his existence.

The fruits of his loins decided not to acknowledge his existence.

Gerry had several options. He could ignore them, go into the kitchen and make a cup of tea, go into the dining room and have a glass of scotch, go into the dining room and have a bottle of scotch or go into the kitchen get a long sharp knife and kill them all.....

Of all the options he yearned for the latter but the years in prison in a tiny cell with a large, demanding boyfriend who no doubt would have halitosis and never washed didn’t appeal.

He went to the kitchen and put on the kettle. A moment later she came in, her face tired and she went to him and kissed his cheek. ‘How did it go?’

‘Oh, you know,’ he said, ‘just work.’

‘I would hate all those nights in little hotels.’

He nodded. They had had this conversation for nearly four years....

He finished making the tea, they made small talk and then he had a shower. Afterwards they sat down and watched tele, eating while they did. Somewhere, somehow, dinner around a table had been lost. Now it was on your lap watching the tele.....

The kids went out and they watched more tele although as he lay in bed later, he couldn't remember what....?

She fell asleep quickly and he tried to read a book about a man who had built up a gambling empire, that Roger had raved on about, but his mind wasn't on it.

He wanted so desperately not to be there.

He wanted to be with *her*.

The woman who loved him and made him feel good and where he felt at home. A proper home where you could relax and where your chest didn't hurt with the anxiety of holding in an enormous secret which would destroy lives if it got out.

Several times he had been so close, so close to telling his wife but he hadn't. Twice he had rung to say he wasn't going back but he didn't have the guts to go through with it. And once he had sent her a letter, telling her it was over and explaining about his other life, but he had panicked after it had been posted and had rushed home to make sure he was there the next day when the postman arrived.....

The following morning, refreshed, well actually knackered after a bad night's sleep, she made him breakfast and then it was back to Roger's world.....

Chapter 55

Derry Day 6

It happened again. Shannon had been dealing out the Blackjack cards and a nondescript punter lost a fiver and as he left he pushed an envelope towards her. She looked at him quickly, but it was too late and his back was towards her and on his way out.

MEET ME Derry read AT O'NEILLS WIMBLEDON AT 1500
THURSDAY

Derry arrived at O'Neills 15 minutes early to see what was in there but there was nothing that gave him any cause for concern. He knew all the mad dogs and their handlers or helpers and he saw none of them and so he bought a pint of Guinness and sat down and waited. Dead on three o'clock an elderly gentleman, having lunch with his wife, stood up and went to Derry's table. 'Why don't you join us, Derry?' he said in an accent that could have been Cornish?

Confused for a moment, Derry had been expecting a Northern Ireland accent at the least; he got up and followed the old man.

'This is Irene,' he said gesturing to the lady with him. She held out her hand and Derry shook it. 'Would you like some food, Derry? I've got the Shepherd's Pie topped with Colcannon and Irene is enjoying Limerick Ham and Irish Cheddar Quiche.....?'

Derry was even more confused. Here he was to discuss a £2M arms deal, well he assumed it was for arms, but he was sitting with two old dears that should be playing Bingo. 'No....no food.'

'Drink perhaps?' asked the old man who had not given his name.

Derry held up his half finished pint. ‘No....’

‘This Colcannon is wonderful. Do you like Colcannon, Derry?’

Derry didn’t like Colcannon which he knew from his childhood was a concoction of potatoes, onions, cabbage with milk and salt added.

‘We’re here to talk,’ said Derry, ‘not swap recipes.’

‘Of course,’ said the old man, ‘your time must be precious. As is ours....’ He looked at his wife. ‘We have been asked to give you this,’ and Irene took an envelope out of her handbag. Derry took it from her and went to open it but she said, ‘Perhaps better not here, love?’

He felt like telling her to fuck off but he didn’t. She was right but he still resented the old cow for telling him.

‘Anything else?’ he asked brusquely.

‘Another drink perhaps, Derry?’ asked the old man.

Ignoring the suggestion Derry stood up and left. The old man smiled at his wife. ‘That went well, love,’ he said, ‘*nearly* a nice man and I’m sorry for his discourtesy.’

She smiled. He picked at his food. ‘I’m not too fussed about this Colcannon stuff but orders are orders.....’

Derry stopped in the nearest lay by and opened the envelope

WE NEED

Barrett 50 cal LR Sniper rifle	10
Ground to air – shoulder launch	6
Armour piercing incendiary RPG’s	500
Improvised explosive devices – shells	500
Glock 9mm SA Pistol	200
Colt M4 machine pistol	200
Amatol	20 tonnes
RDD for large building	2

PAYMENT ON DELIVERY. CASH OR BANK OF YOUR CHOICE

TEXT YES OR NO TO 07801 002299. ALFONSO

Derry looked at the list. Not too difficult but not that easy. He would need to widen his buying net a bit to secure some of the items but that wasn't really a problem. Difficult to know at this stage what it would all cost and so he did some rough sums on the paper's edge.

Barrett 50 cal LR Sniper rifle	10	£20,000
Ground to air – shoulder launch	6	£350,000
Armour piercing incendiary RPG's	500	£500,000
Improvised explosive devices – shells	500	£500,000
Glock 9mm SA Pistol	200	£200,000
Colt M4 machine pistol	200	£200,000
Amatol	20 tonnes	no
RDD for large building	2	no

With a bit of haggling he should be safe for two or three hundred from it, maybe more. He obviously couldn't ship the Amatol in, all twenty tonnes of it for Christ's sake. Excuse me asking, he could hear the Customs man saying, but what have you there, sor? I see. And why do you need twenty tonnes of ammonium nitrate fertiliser, sor?

And to hell with the RDD. If they wanted a radiological dispersal device let them go to Russia, North Korea or even Iran who of course had no such thing.... but he wasn't getting involved. Bit of a bastard if you start turning blue as you hand it over. Is it safe? Oh yes, I'm always this colour.....

And what or where was that for? It could only be Stormont or, if they were feeling really bold, Westminster. Either way it wasn't his cup of tea.

It was a lot of money for him to find, nearly two million, but he had a long standing arrangement with an Irish Bank who let him have cash as and when he needed it on the understanding that it was paid immediately his deal was completed. Should he not pay up they went immediately for your assets and old friends from Ireland would pop across and say hello. Perhaps not so much *say* as cut it into his face.....

With one finger he punched in a return text

SHOULD BE OK. YES OR NO IN 7 DAYS MAX

and seconds later he got a reply

NO LONGER!

He could already hear the men swishing their demonic tails with agitation.....

Derry rang his contact who told him he would return with prices and approximate delivery which he did the next day. The prices were marginally better than Derry had allowed for and so he could sneak another hundred thou in there if he was lucky. Delivery would be four weeks to a destination of his choosing as long as it was possible. Derry would like them delivered direct which should be ok. Ireland was one of the easier places to deliver to even with the Brits' presence. He sent a text to Alfonso and gave the price and delivery and waited for a reply. And waited. The next day he was getting concerned that he had somehow been set up? In fact it suddenly occurred to him that he had not spoken to anyone. Everything had been done by text and letter with just the one meeting with the old couple in the Irish Bar. What was going on? Was he being set up? And if so by whom? His phone beep beeped an incoming text

OK he read WHERE AND WHEN?

Don't know yet Derry texted back, *Will be in touch. How do I know I can trust you?*

Several minutes later a reply came through. SABRE it said. Derry relaxed. It was a name they had given to a particular type of operation against the Brits.

Fast in, fast out. Like a sabre lunge.

Chapter 56

Penny

Penny Beasley was a pretty, petite, lively, vivacious thirty six year old.

Was.

That was the operative word.

Was.

Now she wasn't.

Now she looked fifty and her life had been drained from her. She had put on weight, was tired and listless, had no yen for socialising and would not be classed as the life and soul of the party. Which was a shame because once she *was*.

She had been married for seven years to an asshole who got drunk and hit her. She had run away twice but had gone back after he had begged her forgiveness, bought her a lovely bouquet of flowers and promised to change his ways.

Which of course he did.

For a while.....

He demanded instant obedience and sex any way he wanted it.

Any way.

And that included holding her down one night and shitting over her!

He even....he even....he even; she had never told a soul; she struggled to recount it to herself....

He came home late one night and all he wanted was his dick everywhere and she would have to put something up his arse.

She had no idea why but he quite often insisted she put something up his arse. A handle of some kind. Something that

just about fit and went as far up as she could get it.

Anyhow this night she was ill with mumps, genuinely ill because she feigned it as much as she could, and there were spots all over her. Well even he wasn't fucking a mumps infected cunt and so he went back downstairs in his drunken haze and a few minutes later she heard a dreadful wailing. She padded quietly down the stairs and peeked into the unlit lounge and saw her 'little ray of sunshine' as she once called him, hanging on to the dog's collar and thumping away at its arse.

She went quietly back upstairs and was sick in the bathroom. The next day, when he went out, she put the dog in the car, took him forty miles away and left him at some kennels for stray dogs. Better there than home.

Home?

And if she demurred at all she got a smack. Not across the face, that would show; a punch in the ribs, or kidneys, a punch on her thigh like a school dead leg, or a Chinese burn on her wrists.

The funny thing was she was used to it. It had become so part of her life that it was normal. Normal?

How could being beaten and made to do horrendous sexual acts be normal?

But it was. The abnormal had become normal.

Funny how one person's normal is quite different from another's? If *funny* was the right word.....?

Her respite was work. A plumber's merchant where she answered sales calls and talked about valves and fittings and taps and radiators and washbasins and pipe cutters and...and....and..... Once upon a time a ball cock was funny and a pipe bender something to make her giggle, but no more....

Today was stocktaking, a Sunday, ready for the year end accounts. Her husband, Raymond, Ray, had gone mad that she

wasn't going to be there to make lunch but the overtime pay of double time had mollified him. She picked up the items, counted them, shouted out the number to Patty and then moved to the next item. At this time of year one or two things would go missing as the men took a fancy to the odd tool. Let's face it, if they knew how many were there why would they be counting them?

She had seen a new tool in the catalogue that would be handy at home and it was in her aisle.....and no one would notice surely?

At the end of the day she put on her overcoat, picked up her bag with the purloined tool at the bottom and was half way out of the door when she heard the Manager say, 'Penny, just before you go perhaps you could join us for a minute?'

She saw him waiting at his office door and inside another man she had not seen before.

'Ok,' and went to take off her coat.

'You can leave your coat on if you want.....and bring your bag.....'

Chapter 57

The bookie 3

Chris Topper knew he was on to a good thing. He had something they wanted and he knew they would pay for it. But to maximise what they would pay for, what exactly did they want? What exactly was he selling? Sure, they both wanted to get the shops but what did he have that they needed? They could make their decisions based on the figures the boss gave them so what did he have to give them? His thoughts as to today's trading? Someone to run it as he knew the ropes and the staff? Someone to trust? Someone who had the boss's ear and could put in a good word?

And on top of all that there were egos.

Abraham wanted to win and he certainly wanted to beat JJ Betting and Roger Davids who he obviously hated. What had he called them? Oh yes, 'a fucking shower'. Well they were hardly that so there was obviously something else going on there. But what?

And how to take advantage of it?

The obvious way was to make them think he was worth more than he was, and of course he *was* worth a lot, *obviously*, and make sure they bid up the price to get him. Or was this all bollocks? Were they doing to him what he was debating doing to them? Were they shmoozing him and then he was expendable after they had what they wanted?

His mind spun. Who was fucking over who?

And in reality he was the General Manager of a fucking bookies, not a wheeling and dealing Richard Branson....

Oh fuck!

He shook his head. Play it as it comes but get all the answers ready. He went in to the accounts package and used the password that allowed him the highest level of entry. Usually he didn't need it as he was mainly interested in the day to day stuff and left the rest to the accounts department and Graham but he had it in case he needed to while Graham was on holiday.

He scanned the figures, scanned the ratios, scanned the bets, scanned the customers and then his phone went. He listened for a while and then put it down exasperated. He didn't think the Managers had one fucking brain cell between them!

Chapter 58

Rafic

Rafic Mafouge, the Lebanese man who supplied arms to people all over the world, was very wealthy; with three expensive homes, a beautiful wife and three lovely daughters. He had everything money could buy and life was good.

In the old days he had to tout his wares from one war zone to another and from one Dictator to another. They were lucrative but extremely dangerous times. In Iraq he had been imprisoned, starved, taken out to a courtyard and faced a firing squad. He had heard the commandant say to his men, ‘Remember, only one of you has the live bullet so aim for the head and be accurate....’

He had shut his eyes and prayed *Please don't be accurate, in fact please miss by a fucking mile....please*

After thirty seconds of tightly screwed up eyes he tentatively opened them to find Saddam Hussein who, as this was 1981, had been in power just a couple of years standing there and smiling. ‘Let’s talk about the price, my good friend.’

And they had talked and surprisingly, Saddam had not demanded a massive discount, just a token gesture. He was just showing what power he had over life and death and that Rafic should take that into account next time they wanted something.....

He had been treated with even less respect in Congo and Rwanda but in Somalia he was actually hung by his neck. Fuck, but that was a close one. Luckily they just dangled him and there was no drop to break his neck, so he just hung there with his breathing restricted and his life flowing slowly away from him.

And then, with moments to spare, they cut him down and the Warlord had him flogged in front of his supporters. Then he was dragged into the Warlord's house within the compound and thrown on the floor.

'Wine?' asked the Warlord, pouring out two wine glasses with solid silver stems. He held one up to the light. 'Petrus.'

The Warlord brought it over to Rafic who was still on the floor. Rafic looked at the dark ruby purple wine that could be his last drink.

'Drink.....and tell me what we need to do to conclude our business?'

Rafic was lost. He had nearly died and now here they were drinking wine, in fact very expensive wine. The Warlord saw his confusion.

'Oh that,' he said waving his arm to indicate *outside*, 'it was just to make a point to my men and others.'

'What point?' asked Rafic respectfully.

The Warlord shrugged. He didn't really know but he was sure it sent one.

And that was the problem, used to be the problem, with selling arms. The people who bought them tended to be, how could one put this...a touch unhinged, psychopathic, sadists, butchers and generally mental. But if they weren't they wouldn't be buying arms to kill people. They were his captive market and sometimes he was theirs.

It was better now as he was internationally known and they came to him or if they didn't, business could be conducted quite rationally over the phone or internet.

Having said that, not too long ago he made a mistake by visiting an old client and getting involved in their internal politics.....

Dangerous.

.....Beneath an austere concrete building about a mile from a much larger concrete building that housed the Headquarters of the ZRP, the Zimbabwe Republic Police, on the outskirts of Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe, changes were taking place. Not for the first time as it was formerly named Port Salisbury and then plain Salisbury and the country used to be Rhodesia.

Of course it also used to be the centre of a rich farming area producing tobacco and maize and the city's industries included flour-milling, textiles, electrical and mechanical engineering, motor assembly, railway rolling stock, chemicals, plastics, furniture, clothing, cigarettes, and metallurgical and food processing.

But that was the past.

That was before Robert Mugabe liberated the country, threw out the whites, nationalised the farms or gave them to friends who specialised in agriculture, nationalised the companies or gave them to friends who were specialists in production.

And as the whole world knew, Zimbabwe had prospered, becoming a player of some importance on the world's stage where the President, renowned for his intellect and humility, upbraided other world leaders when they let down their people and themselves.

The current cholera epidemic sweeping through Zimbabwe had, the Central Intelligence Organisation or CIO discovered, been brought to the country by British Aid workers who had been picked specifically for the job as they were carriers and could go from town to town and village to village spreading the deadly virus as they went.

Of course at times it was difficult for the ordinary man and woman to see this. Sometimes they believed the ridiculous rumours that unfriendly foreign powers, mainly Britain, spread throughout the country. Rumours that there were food shortages, power shortages, medicine shortages, hyper inflation and that

cholera was rife was, obviously, utter nonsense. Anyone could see, if they watched the Presidential cavalcade swish through the streets, that all was well....

And Rafic, diplomat that he was, could see it quite clearly.

And so now, in the bowels of the building, some of the doubters, the misguided, the uneducated and those that just enjoyed fomenting unrest and disquiet had been invited to discuss the issues with Mansa Mtobe, one of the CIO's more persuasive debaters and a close friend of the President.

Mansa, who could find the President's ear at a moment's notice, was unfortunate in that his name meant 'A King' and many thought, including at times the President, that Mansa would use his position to take power..... It would happen at some time, his name said so. But when?

The President worried about this possible upturn of events, not being one to uphold the pleonastic 'I never make predictions, especially about the future.....'

And so the President kept him very close knowing full well the old line once delivered by President Lyndon B Johnson about the FBI Director J Edgar Hoover, *'It's probably better to have him inside the tent pissing out, than outside the tent pissing in.'*

Mansa nodded at one of his men; they opened a large, heavy door and saw the nearly one hundred and fifty naked people lying on the floor of the big walk in refrigerator. The missionaries would more than likely be dead as they had been put in an hour before the others but who knows? The whites were surprisingly loath to die...

They left them for half an hour as the temperature struggled up and watched as one by one the frigid state left them to be replaced by massive shaking and, the one they all liked, the teeth chattering. It was amazing how loud teeth could chatter. Walking

amongst them they found that not one missionary had died. Not one!

The Lord had kept them alive.....but it may be that they had wished The Lord had let them die.

When they were still very cold but could walk they were herded out of the room, put in columns and told to lie, face down on the floor and men went about them lashing them with traditional African Sjambok whips. Nowadays they could be bought made out of plastic but Mansa insisted on the traditional ways of causing pain and theirs were made of Rhinoceros hide. A strip of the hide about 5 feet in length, tapering from about 1 inch at the handle end to around three eighths of an inch at the tip and then rolled through heavy metal rollers until it became quite round, very flexible and very tough.

They went along the columns and thrashed the naked bodies with the Sjamboks, the tips cutting into the naked flesh, leaving vivid gashes. Mansa knew that for a few minutes the cold flesh would not react but when it did, when the nerve endings warmed and could conduct their message properly, the pain would be excruciating. And when the pain was excruciating they would throw buckets of salt brine over them. Then they would know what excruciating pain really was....

A few minutes into the continuing suffering of the non believers who would soon believe anything they were told, the door flew open and the President walked in flanked by an escort of his armed Elite Guard and Rafic, who had been happily sitting having coffee with the President when the man had suddenly stood up and said, 'Come with me....' and strode towards the door.....

The President pointed a finger. 'Him!'

The Elite Guard moved to Mansa and held his arms.

'You,' screamed the President, 'have betrayed me!'

‘No, Your Excellency, no! I am your most loyal servant.’

‘You,’ screamed the President in a louder voice, ‘are plotting against me.’

The Elite Guard forced him down into a kneeling position, his head towards the floor and one handed the President a semi automatic pistol.

‘Please, Your Excellency,’ pleaded Mansa, ‘I have done nothing ... nothing.’

‘Prepare to die,’ said the President and put the gun to his head. After a moment he lowered the gun and turned to the group huddled on the floor, surveyed them for a moment and turned back to Mansa.

‘What are you doing to my loyal servants?’ he demanded, ‘why are you treating them so?’

Pointing back to them he said, ‘Get warm and after I have gone they will let you go. You have the word of the President.’

He turned back to Mansa.

‘Please.....please.....no.’

‘Die,’ said the President.

Mansa flinched as he heard the trigger pulled. The gun clicked but did not fire. Mansa waited for the next click and heard the President take out the magazine and ask for another. He heard it slip in and knew this one would not jam. Should he try to escape? There was no escape. If he made a run for it he would be chopped down by automatic fire; even by his own guards if *the man* commanded. He sensed, rather than heard, the trigger being pulled again and he tensed. What happens, he wondered? Is that it? I go from life to death just like that? Is that it?

The gun clicked and he jumped but nothing happened.....

He continued to look down at the floor, not daring to look up into the mouth of the gun and then after what seemed like

minutes he slowly looked up to the President and saw the broad grin across his face.

‘Get up, my friend,’ said the President, ‘did you like my joke? Surely you didn’t think I would kill my friend Mansa? Mansa the King? Why would the *lowly* President kill Mansa the King?’

Mansa stood and the President moved his face close and stroked Mansa’s cheek. He looked him in the eyes and said softly in his ear so no one else would hear. ‘Mansa. I think it’s time you changed your name before you are called Kapera, *this child too will die....*’

He moved away slightly and smiled a fixed smile and then turned. ‘In a few minutes you will all be safe and warm. I will send a coach to bring you to the palace where you will be given help and compensation for today.’

The group clapped as well as they could and then he left as quickly as he had arrived.....with Rafic running along behind.

Mansa, shaking, looked around him. At the guards who were waiting for his command but refusing to look at him; at the captives who were still writhing in their own pain filled hell but with triumph on their faces at his humiliation. Slowly he regained his composure and then a broad smile split his face and he shook his head. The President liked his little jokes although the bit about the name was a bit worrying.....? He turned to the group and then to the soldiers. ‘Kill them.....slowly,’ he said with a smile.

‘No!’ they screamed, ‘no! The President said we could go.’

‘He lied....it was a joke,’ and then left to join the President and his visitor at the Palace for a coffee....

When Mansa joined the President and Rafic at the palace there were jokes all round. The President and Mansa bantered but Rafic felt the undercurrent, the unspoken words, the code within the joshing.

I am, one was saying, *The Man* and you be very fucking careful because if you give me one reason, not even a valid reason, just a hint of a reason I will fucking destroy you, your family, their family and every fucking village they came from. I will wipe all traces of them from this earth. They will never have existed...

And I, *the other* was suggesting, am the one that is going to sit in that chair at some point. But until then I will bow and scrape like all the others. But when that time arrives, and it surely will, I will fucking destroy you, your family, their family and every fucking village they came from. I will wipe all traces of them from this earth. They will never have existed...

It was the last time Rafic had got himself in one of those spots. They were too.....unpredictable. Dictators by and large were a volatile lot and there comes a time when you just can't take it any more....

And so here he was sitting in his elegant office in his palatial home in Switzerland about to make a phone call. He scrolled the directory on his mobile, found the number and waited for it to be answered.

'Mister Day?.....It's Rafic.....Good.....and you?....Derry I will be in England next week and I thought we could take the opportunity, as the items will have been delivered by then, to meet up and transact the payment?'

'Yes....next Thursday.....unfortunately a friend's funeral....it happens.....I suggest I email you where it will be and we could meet there? Quite out of the way.....good, good. See you then, Derry....'

He hung up and placed the small mobile softly on the desk. Leaning back he put his hands behind his head. That was that.....

Chapter 59

The Lord 4

Three weeks after Benshima had taken baby Ben to the consultant they were all sitting on the patio after dinner, bathed in the warm sunshine. H had tried valiantly to explain to Ben how the sun worked but it was obvious the little child was a bit dim; and hadn't even grasped a rudimentary knowledge of nuclear physics.....

'No wonder we haven't seen him in a few days,' said H looking again at the letter.

James and Benshima

An opportunity too good to miss and not had time to drop in and see you. Met an old friend at the solicitors who is off on a round the world yachting adventure and one of the crew broken his leg. As you know I have two legs and therefore qualify as a replacement. So I will be away a few months and who knows where I may just drop off and stay awhile.

So thank you for everything

Peter etc etc

'Shame,' continued H, 'he was a nice man. And what are we going to do about the lake....?'

'Fancy a cup of tea?' asked Benny, getting up quickly and going towards the door.

'Please.'

In the kitchen Benny tried hard to rein in her fury as she thought of the 'nice man'; the animal who had abused her son. Luckily, if that was the word, for not too long; maybe once or

twice based on the medical examination. And now he was gone which was just as well as now there was no need to tell James.....

And it had taught her a lesson.

But what was it?

What was the lesson?

That you never let anyone else near your child?

No one?

Ever?

That there is no one out there you dare trust?

Surely not?

Surely not.....?

Out on the patio H picked Ben up and cradled him in his arms. 'How are you doing, little fella? How's it going, mate?'

Ben looked at him through scrunched up little eyes and gurgled a reply.

'How am I doing? How am I doing?' How the fuck would you be doing if someone had tried to get a stiffy up your arse? Eh? Eh? So where the fuck were you when I needed you, eh, big man, eh?

Where the fuck were you? You palm me off on some pervert for 'walks in the woods'. Walks in the woods? Come on, my son, come on, my son; wake up. What the fuck do you think grown men do with little kids when they go a *walk in the woods*? Build fucking lakes?'

'Good lad,' said H, 'good lad.'

'Oh for fuck's sake, you cretin.....' came the gurgled reply.

Chapter 60

Close Protection

Trevor Howard wasn't old, he wasn't dead and he didn't want an affair which got rid of three of the opening gambits when people met him.

'I thought you would be older?'

'I thought you were dead?'

'Would you like a brief encounter?'

How very bloody original! When he was in the Royal Military Police he heard it quite often from those cheeky little chappies in uniform. How we laughed; and occasionally, how we fought....

At forty five years, six feet one, lean, tanned, fit and eyes that shone with vitality Trevor had seen it all; from the close protection in the theatres of war for the RMP and then moving into civvy street where he had been for the last ten years providing CP for a list of companies; the last one being Clearwater. He had also done a small stint in Iraq with Blackwater and sometimes wondered whether the two companies should amalgamate and be Muddywater?

As a self employed person he worked for whoever would provide him with interesting and well paid work. Last summer he had been part of a team that provided CP for the Saudi Royals who had a large estate in the south of England and had also rented several large houses nearby. It was a doddle really, no one wanted to bump off the Saudis nowadays but of course the second you reduced the CP they would become a target.

It had been three months of continual work; thirteen weeks, seven days a week. When you got these jobs there was no going home for a break. The pay worked out at anything between a hundred and fifty and two fifty a day but he was respected in the industry and known to Principals and Clients and managed to get three hundred. So he had earned just over twenty seven thousand and had also been given a 'bung' at the end of the job of nearly fifteen thousand. And, being a loyal citizen, he would inform the tax man of the total amount although on occasion he had forgotten. Ok, more than occasionally. Ok, never.

A lot of the men after a summer stint like that and with their bung in their back pocket would then go abroad for the winter but Trev had carried on working here and there and saving his money for the day when it would end and he would do something 'ordinary'.

In the eighties, so he had been told, when the Arab oil money was still splashing around, the CP boys and girls would quite often be handed the keys of the S Class Mercs which were no longer needed or the gold Rolex off a wrist as they shook hands and left.

Mainly CP was quite boring which meant you were doing your job well. If it was hairy it meant your charge had been exposed to danger and that wasn't the idea. CP was all about the strategy of reducing the risk of danger to a complete minimum; this isn't some Kevin Costner Bodyguard bullshit....

Although three years ago he had been assigned to go with a Lloyds Bank Director on a trip to Mexico. Without CP the man would not have been insured and so there he was. It was fine until they were in a taxi on the outskirts of Mexico City with its eight million teeming inhabitants and it stopped at a red light. A man standing nearby grabbed the door and jumped in waving a gun. Without a moment's thought Trev just grabbed the man's wrist,

twisting it up sharply to break it and then put the gun back under his chin and pulled the trigger. Brains and blood went everywhere. The Lloyds man, with the speckled red face, started to shake as his adrenalin kicked in and the taxi driver jumped out and ran. Trev went out of the other door, round the taxi, and dragged their assailant out on to the verge. That done the Lloyds man said, 'You killed him!'

Trev looked at him sternly. 'You're a little shook up at the moment but I'm sure that if you thought about it a little longer it was obviously an accident.....?'

'But.....'

Trev shook his head slowly and his face softened. 'It was an accident.....'

'But.....but.....I see what you mean..... It was an accident....'

Trev smiled and nodded slowly, 'Better that way....,' he said kindly.

He looked again at the J J Group website. Four weeks ago he had seen an advert for Head of Casino Security and on the spur of the moment had applied. He was too old now for CP. No, that wasn't true, he had had enough. Up until recently it had been fine but several months ago his brother had died of cancer and for some reason it made him yearn for something more settled. A proper job; maybe a woman in his life. It had been years since he had a steady woman and in reality he hadn't been that bothered but now he wanted a different life. A quieter life, a less dangerous life....

And so he had answered the advert and, quite truthfully, told them that even with all his experience, he wasn't really qualified for the post but perhaps they were in need of a 2IC? Someone prepared to learn?

And H had read the C.V. and decided nothing would be lost by interviewing a famous old film star who should be dead, and

also looking at whether this man would fit in with one of the security companies and perhaps move it more into the close protection arena?

So Trev had bought a new suit and polished his already brilliantly shining shoes and in a few minutes he would be on his way. And if it meant a drop in earnings for a while to get in on something that offered stability and less exposure to danger then so be it.

Chapter 61

Jerry 5

Jerry did an assessment of all the clubs and categorised them.

- A Fine – good atmosphere – no undesirables
- B Ok - good atmosphere – one or two undesirables
- C Tipping point – tense atmosphere – too many undesirables
- D Urgent – meeting point for undesirables
- E No hope – close down for period and let them go else where

Of the seven clubs they constituted A A A B B C D. Not horrendous but not good. He reconvened the teams, told them the situation and asked for volunteers for teams C and D. Most volunteered; those that didn't he left where they were. He was quite happy with those that didn't volunteer; they knew where they were at. Why be gung ho if you can't back it up? Why go up against people whose delight in life is swiping a credit card down your face that has a razor blade super glued on to it?

Unsurprisingly the C Category club calmed down quickly. The new door presence and the local bobbies popping in was enough to change the balance and the undesirables quickly moved on.

The D Category didn't move. The police presence made little difference and the door, still relatively low key, didn't either. The club had become a meeting point for druggies and almost a sign of their prestige. The club was 'theirs' and fuck anybody that thought otherwise.

Jerry gave it a little time so he could understand the situation. Who were the leaders? Which gang in there was the one the others would fear? Who were the top dogs? When he was comfortable he knew what he was dealing with he put one team, his hardest team outside the door and another, nearly as hard, inside. Just in case....

Of course the team outside had an edge.

Jerome Nelson at your service, sir.....

Jerry was now ready for his prearranged strategy of *escalation*. No matter what they did you topped it. If they shouted at you to fuck off you *screamed* at them to fuck off you cunts!

If they threatened to smash your face in you told them that you would break their arms.

If they invited you out on to the road to sort it out you were there before they were.

Whatever they did you beat it. You beat them psychologically and physically and if you couldn't handle someone you gave it to Jerry.

Jerome Nelson at your service, sir.....

Jerry had a room at home, known by the police, covered with weapons. There were at least two hundred knives and quite a few were trophies. Taken from some cunt who thought he was a big man when he had one.

Evil fucking knives; serrated knives to rip you, hooked knives to tear you, long knives to stick you, V shaped knives to open you up, knives of all shapes and sizes to put you in hospital for a month.....or a grave forever.

Oh yes there were some evil fuckers out there....

Chapter 62

Derry 7

In the morning Derry received a text from his ‘friends’ in Ireland

REC. OK. MON TRANS. DWTBP

Good. Everything was ok. The shipment had arrived, they had checked it over, fired off a few rounds, transferred the money and still found time to send a witty text. DWTBP. *Down with the British Pigs*. Right on. It would take two days for the money to reach his Bank but that was ok as his friendly Bank Manager had the cash waiting ready for his meeting with Rafic. The arms had cost £1,850,000 and he had quoted them two and a quarter; a nice four hundred profit. Not bad for doing not a lot...

He rang his man at the Bank and arranged to go in just before closing time to collect the cash which gave him plenty of time to fix another small problem. One of his tenants was behind with the rent and had gone to the Citizens Advice Bureau who had very kindly informed him of his rights and so they had decided to sit tight as the law of the land said they could.

Fuck the law of the land!

They had had the MP’s expenses in the papers and on the news for days now and they seemed to be doing legally what he was doing illegally. So fuck em!

He arrived in his sixty grand, five litre V8 Lexus and found two of his men sitting in a large van a door or two up. He got out and went round to them. ‘Ready?’

They nodded.

‘Jack and Vera?’

They smiled and nodded.

‘Let’s go.’

They got out of the van and went round to the back where the two massive, one hundred and thirty pound, bull mastiffs were waiting patiently. Although one was called Vera they were both males. It was just that their owner was an avid Coronation Street fan...

They went to the front door of the house. Three men, two dogs and a large, four foot long, six inch diameter piece of iron with a pointed end that went straight through the lock.

They hurtled in, screaming and shouting for effect and found the couple, in the middle of having lunch in the small kitchen, halfway out of the back door.

‘Go,’ ordered one of the men and the dogs went for the legs of the couple and sank their teeth in and held on tight. Very tight. Derry watched as blood ran from their legs and hope fled from their eyes to be replaced by fear and panic.

‘Hello,’ said Derry. ‘Just passing and we thought we’d pop in as you were just about to leave us.’

‘You can’t make us go,’ shouted the woman, ‘you can’t.’

Derry shrugged and nodded to one of the men.

‘Squeeze,’ said the man and the dogs’ jaws locked ever tighter. The couple screamed in agony.

‘As I was saying,’ continued Derry, ‘as you are leaving today we just thought we’d help. Bring them in,’ said Derry and the men went to the couple, the handler said, ‘Leave,’ the dogs let go and the bleeding man and woman were dragged back in.

It was less than thirty minutes later when the couple’s sparse belongings, and themselves, were thrown into the back of the van and dropped off again in a car park over fifty miles away; with strict instructions never to return.....or else.

Chapter 63

More mad dogs....

H sat in the café drinking his latte and reading The Times. He wasn't really reading it, just going through the motions, not really aware where his mind was. He was reading but if you asked him what he had just read he would have struggled to say. His mobile went off and he looked to see who it was but there was no number displayed and so he ignored it. Let them leave a message and then he would decide whether to talk to them or not.

Bit arsey today Jimmy boy, thought H, a bit arsey.....

He put the phone back in his pocket and went, half heartedly, back to The Times. Today he didn't really feel like reading about the troubles of the world. He looked at it for a second, saw Gordon Brown's name against some new initiative to save the world and pushed it away again. He picked up his latte and then heard a woman scream.

Looking out of the café window he saw a large Rottweiler with its head shaking furiously trying to drag a child from a pram. The child's mother was trying in vain to hit it but was having no effect. H jumped up from the small table, knocking it over as he did so and ran across the road to where the mother was screaming hysterically. The dog had now dragged the child from its baby buggy and was waving it around by its arm in its jaws like a football supporter would wave a scarf.

H went behind the dog, grabbed its collar, and smashed his elbow down into one of the dog's eyes and as he yelped in pain and let go of the child H lifted the dog off its feet and started to rotate the dog in the air. H kept slowly turning his body, keeping the dog at arm's length, letting centrifugal force keep it at a

distance and giving it no chance to get close. After a moment H spotted a lamp post and slowly, turning all the time, went to it and positioned himself close. He increased the speed of his turns until the 110 pound dog was literally flying around his body and then H moved closer to the lamp post and let the dog's back hit it lengthways on and he heard the crack as its back broke. H let go and watched the dead dog fall to the floor.

H felt a little giddy and steadied himself on the lamp post and was unprepared when a fist smacked hard into his ear.

'You cunt,' screamed the man, 'that's my fucking dog.'

H moved to the other side of the lamp post, needing time for his head to clear and looked at his assailant. Had to be; Tee shirt, shorts, trainers, tattoos and shaved head. The caricature of every male with a Rottweiler....and here he was.....Mister Fucking Inadequate.

'I'll fucking kill you, you cunt.'

H smiled at him. 'Like I just killed your dog...?' he goaded. H saw his eyes bulge with rage. Good.

'Your dog's dead, little boy,' sneered H, moving away from the lamp post.

Neanderthal ran to him, arms outstretched, fists bunched and H, now in the classic position was waiting. As the man swung a left handed punch H swept away the arm with an outer block and as he came side ways on H smashed his face with a powerful right hook. The hand that had blocked the punch moved with the arm of Neanderthal and now went over the wrist to stop it moving away and H smashed into the man's elbow with his other forearm and with nowhere to go it broke instantly.

He screamed in pain and fell and as he went down H's fist smashed into his ribs. More cracking sounds. He screamed again. Still holding the wrist of the useless arm, as Neanderthal hit the floor H pushed his wrist back and broke it. Neanderthal lay on the floor, face down, whimpering like a kicked dog.....

For some reason the measured aggression of H left him and for just a second was replaced by a rage and fury that welled up from somewhere inside him and he raised his foot over the back of the man's head and smashed it down, ramming the face into the hard, black, spiky tarmac.

The man lay still, breathing laboured, while H walked to the dog, lifted it and dropped it on the head of its master.

R I P, thought H.

R I fucking P.

Chapter 64

The bookie 4

Chris Topper met Saul Abraham and Roger Davids and said what he had to say.

They said what they had to say.

And then they got rid of all that bullshit and started talking business.

With Saul.....

‘How can I get this?’ asked Saul.

‘Pay more than the others.’

‘That simple?’

‘That simple.’

‘And how much are the others paying?’

‘No idea.’

‘But you could know?’

‘Yes.’

‘And you could tell me?’

‘Yes.’

‘If I*invested*...in you?’

‘Yes.’

‘And that investment would be.....?’

‘£50,000 and my continuation as GM of the shops you’re acquiring.’

‘That’s a lot of money.’

‘It is if you haven’t got it....?’

‘I could give you a job offer which would say that I would be prepared to let you continue as GM and give you £25,000 after one year for your loyalty.’

‘You could.’

‘But.....?’

‘There would be no point.’

‘Why?’

‘Because you wouldn’t have the shops.’

‘So it’s fifty grand or you help the opposition.’

Chris nodded.

‘Ok, I can do that. You stay with me one year and you get fifty grand.’

‘In writing.’

‘In writing.....’

With Roger.....

Chris explained the deal to Roger.

‘No thanks.’

‘Eh?’

‘No thanks.’

‘I have already been offered the deal.’

‘Then take it.’

‘Come on, Rog, you must have something for me?’

‘I’m sure we have lots of things for you but this isn’t one of them. We’re not a tin pot little bookies, Chris. We turn over a couple of hundred million and that will go up soon. Our friend Saul has offered you that because the others won’t and neither will I.’

‘It’s a lousy fifty grand.’

‘You’re right. And do you think my boss would put a two hundred million operation at risk with the Gaming Commission for a few betting shops and fifty grand? But if you want to talk

about what we can do for you, your career, your *future* then let's talk.....'

At home in bed that evening Chris was a bit lost. In his head he had assumed that Roger Davids would be the one splashing the cash but it hadn't been the case. So now he was stuck between a rock and a hard place; whatever that meant? Another fucking Americanism. What to do? What to do? He lay there and couldn't sleep and at two thirty his wife stirred and turned over.

'What's wrong, love?'

'Nothing's wrong, just trying to work out what's best?'

'You should get some sleep,' she said sleepily.

'Can't.'

'Would you like me to help you relax? Shall I suck you off?'

It was tempting but..... 'No..... thanks, love, but I think I'll go downstairs for a bit and watch the tele.'

He heard a faint OK and then she was asleep again. And in that second he knew the answer. He went downstairs and watched the tele, amazed that a tiny thing like the offer of being sucked off could solve a problem in one second that he had been mithering on about for hours.

As he was drowsing downstairs, too tired to get off his arse and go to bed, he suddenly froze!

What the fuck? No? Surely not? Fucking hell.....!!!!!!!

Chapter 65

Saturday

They got up quite early for a Saturday, 7:30, but it allowed time for Rich to meet his mates at 9 am for a round of golf and June went the fifteen miles to see her mom and dad and then she and her mom went to the large shopping centre to have a ‘look round’.

In the afternoon they potted in the garden although Rich wasn’t much of a potter or a gardener, so his wife bought the plants and he dug the holes. And did the important bit of watering them after. On top of that he was the man when it came to mowing the lawns. That certainly wasn’t a woman’s job.

In the evening June would cook a ‘proper’ meal, or not if they didn’t feel like it, with their bottle of soft mellow wine and then settle down for a chat in the garden in what was left of the sun and then a good film on Sky although, at times, that was a bit difficult to achieve.

Then to bed....

They watched tele for a few minutes in bed with June cuddled in Rich’s arms and then one of them may do something that meant that was the end of the tele.....

He kissed her softly; his right hand found her left breast and she moaned. You would have thought after the years they had been married that she would have felt little, but the feeling had never gone away. From that time, many years ago when he had found

his way into her bra the intense thrill of her man's touch, *her man's touch*, had never diminished.

Still playing with her nipple he lightly kissed her throat and she moaned again. She loved the soft touches, the gentle caresses, the aroused areas that he touched. It was so.....sensual. He moved his lips to her breasts and let his right hand move slowly, lightly, down to her pubic hair which he stroked and then to her clitoris which he parted and gently rubbed.

Her right hand found his penis, rock hard and a part of her wanted to squeeze it so tight....so tight.

In their early days together she had confessed that she would love to do that and he had shown her that you could squeeze a hard prick quite hard without hurting; and he had let her hold it and squeeze little by little, harder and harder, until she thought it would explode. When she had got to the point where it was nearer to a death grip Rich had called a halt.

He thought the point had been proved long before that but it seemed important to her.....

He knew what she enjoyed and where and how gentle or hard and for how long and he rubbed as he knew he should and soon she had an orgasm. Moving his hand down he entered her vagina with one finger and then another and then another two. He moved them in and out and she soon climaxed again. One more orgasm and she moved his hand away, pushed back the bedclothes and went down to his prick which she started masturbating. She did that until she knew he was getting close and then stopped and moved up and kissed him long enough to let his ardour cool and the moment pass..... Then she went back down and he felt her wet mouth envelop him. Going up and down with her mouth while she cradled his balls with her hand he watched her head bob in the soft shadows of the night and, absurdly, it reminded

him of a float on a pond whose bait was being pecked at under the surface.

Maybe not so absurdly....

Knowing her man she stopped again when she knew he was close and took her mouth away, moved up to kiss his chest and then moved farther up and raised his arms to rest on the headboard and put her nose in his armpit. She had found out by accident, ages ago, how sensual the smell was and how sweet and salty the taste when she licked. She smelt and licked both armpits until she had licked his man smell away.

He put his arms round her and brought her face to him and they kissed passionately until she disentangled herself, kneeled over him and his prick went up her.

Very easily...she was wet and wide.

She moved up and down and he raised his bum so that it went in as far as it could. He held her hands and she leaned back as far as she could so that his prick was at the wrong angle but it made it feel much bigger and it rubbed a point on her clitoris for added pleasure. Sated she pulled herself forward and he kneaded her tits and pulled her towards him and sucked them; at one point making her squeal as he sucked too hard.....

She got off and he moved over, letting her take his vacated space, and she lay there with her legs wide open waiting for him.

Several minutes later she felt the hot liquid enter her, and then again, and again and then she felt him go heavy. He kissed her softly on the forehead and then the tip of her nose, raised himself on his arms from her as though he was going to do press ups, toppled over to his left and landing with a soft thud on the pillow next to her, let out a deep exhale of air from his lungs, said, 'Shiiiiiiiiiiiit' and within seconds was asleep.

Shiiiiiiiiiiiit, she thought, just about summed it up.

Wow!

She lay with her head resting softly on her hands, her still aroused nipples highlighted by the moonlight that reflected from the mirrored wardrobes. She didn't stir for several minutes, lost in her own world, then she slowly released her hands from under her and moved them down her body, lingering over her breasts and then, leaving her left hand there to slowly caress her nipple, she carried on down, over her damp pubic hair and gently inserted three fingers into her wet vagina.

Moving them up as far as she could, she moved them round to feel the texture within her and then removed her fingers, bringing them back and held them under her nose where she smelt the sex that clung to them. Taking a quick look to make sure that Rich was still asleep she started to lick her fingers, tasting each one and then she put them all in her mouth and her tongue flicked between them, sucking them clean.

A tingling sensation travelled through her and she slowly moved both hands down to her vulva. Her left hand went to her clitoris, found the spot that gave her pleasure and the other went into her vagina. Long, slim fingers went in again, caressing the inner wall, scooping up the wet lubricating fluid that she had created in her sexual excitement. Her fingers went back to her face and she smelt them again, this time smearing some of the sex on her lower face and mouth so that the smell stayed with her, and the fingers went again into her mouth and as she licked she gently rubbed her clitoris.

She took her time; there was no rush. It wasn't an orgasm she was after, although one, or two, or three would surely come; it was the elongated pleasure that only self masturbation could provide.

Slowly build it up, let the senses heighten, *nearly there, nearly there* and then let it subside a little. So near.....so far.

Tantalising teasing.....erotic.....

She came with a rush; expected but unexpected. She moaned softly and her body convulsed.

Fuck me! Fuck me! Fuck me! She screamed in her head to an imaginary, omnipotent being.

Fuck me! Fuck me! Fuck me, you bastard.

Fuck me! Fuck me!

In her imagination all sorts of things fucked her but the one she liked best, the one that really did it for her was an evil, ugly, demonic, masterful being that could have been the devil, reared up on two strong legs and had a prick as long as she was tall and when he made her take it, *made her take it*, it went all the way up her until she could feel it in her throat and then in her mouth. And in her mind's eye she could see him standing powerful, with her astride his prick, going in one end and coming out of her mouth.

She could see his enormous prick coming out of her mouth!

His weapon filled every part of her and its size within her felt as though it would split her apart.

Her fingers rubbed her clitoris frenziedly and she came with an explosion that permeated her body with a pleasure that no man could ever give her.

A basic, depraved, dirty, disgusting lust that gave her an orgasm of such exquisite intensity that only her mind and imagination could provide.....

Chapter 66

Derry 8

Shannon Black was fuming. She had not heard from Derry in two days and she knew, *she knew*, the bastard was screwing someone else. Not that he screwed her, he didn't; *they* had a *meaningful* relationship which just happened to have a lot of sex at its core. And so she stood there, at the roulette table and inwardly fumed.

'How's everything going, Shannon?' asked the voice of Adrian who had appeared unnoticed at her side, standing in as he was for a week while the usual manager had a break. She nearly asked him what the fuck did her business have to do with him, but she reined back quickly and said, as sweetly as she could, 'Everything's fine, thank you, Adrian, everything's fine.'

'Good.....good,' and wandered away to mingle with the other employees.

Dick, she raged inwardly, pompous friggin dickhead. As though he fucking cares....

She raked in a load of chips and paid out the winners and wondered again who Derry was screwing? If she found out she would scratch her eyes out, the bitch. She felt her mobile vibrate in her pocket, took it out, which was against the rules, and saw a text had arrived from Derry.

Urgently need your help tonight, she read; meet me at 21:30. The address was miles away! She looked at her watch. It was already eight fifteen! How could she do that? She was working for fuck's sake! She signalled the office for a stand in and when she arrived Shannon went and found Adrian. 'I am ever so sorry,' said Shannon, 'but I have an emergency at home?'

'What's wrong?'

‘My mother’s been rushed to hospital and I have to go.’

‘Ok, Shannon. Ring me later and tell me what’s happening.’

‘Thank you,’ she said and she was gone.

It was over half an hour later when Adrian remembered Shannon Black’s mother was dead.....

Chapter 67

Penny 2

Ray Beasley walked out of the room and went to the pub with his mates. They had a round, then another and then started on the shorts. The assembled clan argued ferociously about the merits of Man U and Liverpool and the wealth of Chelsea and the new wealth of Man City but all were agreed, to a man, on one immutable thing. Jerome Nelson was a cunt! A CUNT!

He had shown them the door before he had even seen them on the doors and that made him a short sighted, syphilis riddled prick. One of the more educated among them said, 'Jerome C Jerome' but it was lost in the alcoholic haze and lack of schooling of his mates.

'It's a play on words,' he said. 'There was a writer called Jerome K Jerome but instead of K it's C for cunt.'

They looked at him blankly.

'His middle name was Klapka but Nelson's is cunt...? C for cunt.'

They looked at him blankly.

'He wrote Three Men in a Boat.....?'

They looked at him blankly and then one perked up. 'Is that the one with that actor Tracey?.... Bogart?..... and..... and?'

'It doesn't matter.....'

'The main thing is,' said one, 'he fucked up Sonny. There was no way he should have done that for fuck's sake, he was only pissing about...'

'Over the top, man...' said another.

'Yeah, some fucker should take him down...'

‘Fucking right on.’

‘Why don’t you go back and let him know what’s what, Jacko?’

‘Oh yeah, as if. He may be a cunt but he’s a fucking big cunt....’

‘Rumour has it,’ said another, ‘that he pulled one poor fucker’s balls clean off.’

‘Fucking hell. Would that hurt or what?’

They stayed for another hour, arguing and plotting all types of plans for revenge that would never see the light of day and then they departed. Ray Beasley was done for drink driving on the way home....

Chapter 68

Allocated

I know, I know.

Go on, laugh. That's it, go on.

It's all right for you.

YOU haven't been ALLOCATED.

I HAVE.

Sorry; getting a little upset there.

Sorry; shouldn't raise my voice.

But it's been difficult in here recently. The NASTY's seem to have increased in number and they really are sorting out the weak fuckers.

And of course how do you know if you are weak or not? It's not your appraisal that matters. It's theirs.

And of course the general environment isn't really conducive to hilarity and general bonhomie. You're surrounded by shit for Christ's sake.

HOW WOULD YOU FEEL?

Sorry.....

Sorry.....

It's getting to me.

I'm not sure how much more I can take. I tell you, if I'm given just one opportunity, just one tiny opportunity to escape then I'm gone. Me, my mates, even the NASTY's would take the opportunity.

Just one opportunity....

Please.....

Please.....

Chapter 69

Squatting

Michael Johnson lived alone in a squat. It was dirty, untidy, cold, draughty and at times quite damp but it was much better than the mental institution he had escaped from. Escaped may not even be the word as he had literally walked out. He had just been sitting in a waiting room, reading the daft magazines until his solicitor arrived, and someone had come in, shouted, ‘Evans’ and Johnson had stood up and wandered over.

‘Come on,’ said the man and Johnson had walked out with the Probation Officer and had taken the first opportunity when he was outside to escape. That was over eighteen months ago and he had lived in different squats, abandoned houses, ever since. He thought there would have been a man hunt for him but there wasn’t. And so he grew a beard, let his hair grow, acquired a small stray dog and begged on street corners for food. He also had a little job working with some Poles who hand washed cars which gave him the opportunity to nick the odd pound coin from under the seats.

Michael had been in the High Security mental institution for several years for his predilection to knifing innocent people and the legal system felt it was better they put him there and he stayed there, preferably for the rest of his life. Whilst he hadn’t been given a life sentence the powers that be knew he would never get out as there were many ways a ‘patient’ could be assisted to rehabilitate, or at least not stab again, the main one being by never letting him out.

And so Michael was out, living rough and having the occasional stab. With the money he had earned he had saved some to allow him to buy a serrated hunting knife, which he spent hours sharpening, and he had reverted to his familiar modus operandi.....

Scouring the backs of clothing shops to find a mannequin that had been discarded he had ripped off the right arm. In his squat he had an oversize overcoat he had bought at a second hand shop and he inserted the mannequin's right arm into the right sleeve which he then secured in the right pocket. Trying it on he found it was fine and worked as well as the last one.

You wandered down the street, left hand in left pocket, pretend right arm in right pocket and actual right arm within the coat nestled near your waist. The knife sits in your right hand, waiting, and when you see someone you want to stab you just walk up behind them and jab the knife through two opened buttons at the front of the coat and then keep walking.

He put on his overcoat, made sure the arm was secure, picked up his knife and went out onto the streets.....

Chapter 70

Jerry 6

When the phone call came....

Todd was fly fishing in Scotland

Andy was still asleep from a hangover

Robby was wiping his arse

Jim was reading an unrealistic thriller called G

Tony was trying to undo a frontloading bra

Rick was in the park sailing a model boat with his son

Tezza was laying a tarmac drive

Jim was in the gym

Mal was half way up Snowdon

Tippy was under his car looking for something that was making little squeaky sounds

When they heard who was calling, and the proposal, each one smiled.....

Why not?

A chance to get together and a fair amount of money in the bargain.

Chapter 71

Santa

It was a long time to Christmas but H, sitting in his large office in the casino, felt the urge to write a letter to Santa.....

Dear Santa

Having ignored me for most of my life I wonder if you would be kind enough to get your head out of your arse and start earning your keep? Now I can understand you keeping away when I was a kid because if you had come down our chimney two things would have happened; my old man would have lit a fire to singe your arse and then he would have given you a good buggering which would have set it alight!

I can understand a Santa not really wanting that, what with the hard sleigh seat and all those miles on a cold night.

No, let's be honest, I can't really understand it?

Where the fuck were you? There I am on Christmas Day, Christmas Day for fuck's sake, ready for another fist or knee in the ribs and then something stuck up my arse, but it should have been offset by something.

Something..... Something nice.

Yes, you for fuck's sake.

With your sack and a jolly Ho Ho.

Where were you when I needed you? When all the other kids were getting presents they could show their friends I was getting presents I had to hide. And that's Christmas?

I'm sorry to go on but where the fuck were you?

From all accounts you are a big, roly, poly sort of fucker and you could have taken him. Knocked him over with your bag, sat

on him and then the reindeer could have trampled him and gouged in their antlers until he died a slow and agonising death.

Ho Ho Ho. Best present I could ever have had.

And you bottled out, you cowardly fucker.

Anyhow I think I've gone off the point. The point is you're supposed to inject (that may be the wrong word in this instance) a little happiness once a year and so, by my calculation, you owe me about fifteen odd days' worth.

So how can we even it up? Make the rest good? I'll be lucky if I have another fifteen Christmas days left and even if I have that still leaves the fifteen you've missed so what are you going to do?

No, I don't want a signed photograph of Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Donner and Blitzen; and yes I did know that Rudolph wasn't one of your reindeer. No, I don't suppose reindeer do have glowing shiny noses.

But that's not really the point either.

How are you going to make up the lost days? Now I have, as someone once said, a cunning plan. You know at the moment I'm getting lots of bad luck at poker? Well.....? Well.....? What do you mean you can't help?

You only deliver presents, you don't do good luck? Well I could also differ on the first. You delivered fuck all to me. Ok, ok, that was a bit apropos, but the point is you must have something?

Say that again? Again? *You can't help me but you'll make sure that Ben has a nice Christmas.....?*

H's eyes watered and his shoulders slumped in exhaustion. If you rambled on long enough, no matter how ludicrous it was, there was always an answer. In there, somewhere, amongst all the nonsense, there was always an answer.....

For fifteen minutes he did nothing. Lounged back in his chair with his feet on the desk and his eyes closed. Tired. Sometimes

the past, when it came back to see if you could take it, was more exhausting than the present.....

His phone went, stirring him from his time travel. 'Ok.'

A couple of minutes later Adrian knocked and walked in bringing with him two coffees. He looked at H who nodded towards the sofa and armchairs where they settled.

H and Adrian had decided to have some time together to decide what to do. Ade had done all his homework and he knew this was the time to buy. Parts of the casino industry were on their last legs and now was the time; now, while they needed the money and would talk. JJ Group currently had nine casinos but there were, money permitting, many advantages to adding more. Their overheads could be spread more thinly, managers could fill in where necessary, advertising became cheaper. Indeed everything other than attributable onsite costs became cheaper as the cost per casino came down. Or put another way Ade's cost of about £200,000 cost each casino about twenty odd thousand each. If they had twenty casinos the cost to each would be less than half that. As it would for all the other costs that were not specific casino attributable.

And the time was now.

Now you could get a casino for four times profits instead of twelve, although of course, profits were very low. Before it may have cost you twelve times a million but now it may be four times one hundred and fifty thousand. So two years ago twelve million and now maybe six hundred thousand up to a million.

There were lots of bargains if you could afford them and if you could make them work. Again, some casinos would make instantly more money once some of the overheads were taken out. This certainly applied more to the small independents but could equally apply to the big boys who had built too quickly and had massive debts to service and a bloated Head Office.

Indeed if you looked at Riva Gaming Group, their business had collapsed leaving Hermes Private Equity and Royal Bank of Scotland with huge losses, perhaps up to a hundred million. And it had recently been in the paper that the Ricoh Casino in Coventry, thought to have cost its parent company Isle of Capri nearly forty million to set up, had been bought by Rank Group through its Grosvenor Casino Division, for less than a million pounds!

So now was the time to buy, in good locations, at good prices. It was obvious to the trade who was doing well and who wasn't and all it needed was a bit of detective work to make sure and get the best deal.

'Well,' said H, 'I can arrange the money but how do we do it?' That sounded a touch flippant, thought H; yeah, here it is, ten mill in my back pocket..... Calm down, Jimmy boy, don't get too excited.

'I think the obvious way is the best. We send a letter to Gala and all the independents and ask them if they want to sell all or some of their casinos.'

'I should know this,' said H, 'but how many casinos are there?'

'There are 143 casinos in the UK now of which only 38 are not Gala, Stanley or Grosvenor. Of the 38, Aspinalls has 3 provincial and 1 London. The only other relatively big group is London Clubs with 4 London casinos and 6 provincial.'

'You always know these things,' said H.

Adrian shrugged. Of course he did, he was supposed to.

'And you feel we should go to twenty?'

'If we had a choice. Lots of opportunity within that for economies of scale.'

'And checking them out if we get a bite?'

‘We enlist Cleggy and get him to hire a few of his retired gambling industry mates, give them a check list of what we want to know and send them out. After we evaluate the data and narrow it down we can go and take a look ourselves.....’

Chapter 72

Gerry Smith 3

Gerry Smith left the last shop on his route that day and headed home. He was knackered. Roger was pushing the modernisation plan for all it was worth, which was fair enough, but at times it was too much. Every bugger wanted to be consulted, or have their ruffled feathers smoothed, or have a hissy fit, or not turn up out of petulance, or tell you about what some naughty person had done as though they were children.....

But Roger kept pushing. It was your job to make sure it happened and whilst Rog would listen to your problems he wouldn't listen to your excuses. You had to listen to them all day from employees, contractors, the Council, the big service companies who say they are going to do it tomorrow but..... He had to listen to them all but Rog had his schedule to complete.....

Same fucking routine...different fucking day.

He had twenty miles to go and he put the radio on and tried to relax but that didn't work. He hadn't, yet again, won the lottery.

If he had he could have given it to the wife and let her go, having paid his dues and with no more moral or financial obligations. His mind wandered back to the previous night when they had watched an old MASH episode and a part of it had stuck in his mind.

*Cause suicide is painless,
It brings on many changes,
And I can take or leave it if I please*

Suicide is painless. Is it? Is it really?

And even if it wasn't would it be better than the hell he was currently in?

The lying, the deception, the double life, the pain that racked his body, the headaches, the panic, the confusion.....

He couldn't find a way of telling his wife and kids that he didn't want to stay.....and he couldn't find a way of telling the woman he loved that he couldn't find a way to tell the wife and kids he was going to go.....

For some reason it was an easy decision and after he had made it an overwhelming calm and relaxation swept through him.

The motorway was quiet so when he saw the next bridge coming in the distance he increased his speed to ninety miles an hour.

Judging the right moment he steered the car diagonally across the lanes towards the concrete base of the bridge that pointed at a right angle towards him and would slice the car, and him, in two.....

Chapter 73

Penny 3

Penny left work still in shock; she wasn't going back to her job! They had made the choice quite clear and she had been given little option really. And maybe it was for the best? She had done it for a long time and so..... Tears welled in her eyes.

When she arrived home she put the key in the door and opened it to find a raging husband standing tall in front of her. He swayed slightly and his eyes struggled to focus on her.

'Where the fuck have you been?' he barked.

'I've been at work.'

He looked confused. 'That's no fucking excuse, where's my fucking tea?' He grabbed her round the back of the neck, pushed her into the kitchen and threw her against the cooker. 'Get fucking cooking, I'm starving.'

'What do you want?'

'Food, you stupid bitch. What the fuck do you think I want? Lumps of fucking coal?'

Coal, she thought, why would he think of *coal*? She quickly took off her coat and hung it up. 'Do you want hot or cold?'

'Oh for fuck's sake, just get on with it,' he snarled.

How could she win? If she gave him hot he would want cold and if she gave him cold he would want hot. He was just a despicable pig! She rustled up a baked potato with baked beans and a cold side salad.

She put it in front of him. 'What's this shit?'

'It's what you like.'

'How the fuck do you know what I like?' he slurred.

She waited a moment for the next outburst but he picked up his knife and fork and mumbled something and so she started to move away.

‘Come here!’

She stood by him and he lifted her skirt, pulled her tights and pants at her waist and slit the material down to her thigh with his steak knife. He tried to put his fingers up her vagina; her body tensed and she held back a shudder of disgust as the pig fumbled with her body but the booze had control of his movements so he gave up and started eating. As she left his side she heard him say, ‘When I’ve finished...bitch.’

What would he want today? Would it hurt? Or would he be too drunk to even get started? Either way he would want something up his bum. She sighed. How did she get in to this mess? And why hadn’t she got out of it?

She hung up her coat, picked up her bag, made sure her make up was in it and went, servile, upstairs. She always made sure she was made up when he abused her. She was often abused, but she was *always* a woman....

She washed her face, applied some lipstick, which was a bit rich as she hadn’t been kissed in years, a little mascara and then she heard him coming up the stairs. He had his dick out before he entered the room and when he tried to drop his trousers he got tangled up and fell over.

It would be nice, she thought, to laugh at his daft antics but... this was no laughing matter. And even a smile would get her a hard punch. As he struggled to get his trousers off he commanded her to get on the bed and open her mouth wide. ‘Very fucking wide!’

She did as she was told and lay there, her mouth wide open as though she were at the dentist’s, until he clambered over her and put his dick in. For some reason he quickly lost interest in that

and took it out and started to masturbate in front of her face. She saw his blurry eyes and no matter how hard his hand pumped and no matter how many sluts wandered through his depraved imagination he couldn't come.

'Fuck,' he slurred.

He got off her and lay face down on the bed and spread his legs. She knew what to do. It had to fill his arse side to side and go as far up as it could. She took the hammer handle from by her side, smeared it with a little Vaseline and slowly pushed it up him. He let out a long moan.

'More,' he said, 'more.'

She moved it in and out and watched as his hand went under his body to his dick and it started to move up and down. He would come soon; he always did with something up his arse.

His arse, through practice, soon accommodated the large object that it housed and when she felt that it was quite relaxed she slowly took out the hammer handle. She had something else to replace it. It was ideal for the job and it had taken a while to find something that would be so mind blowing for him.

She had found it at work, in the new catalogue, and it was for getting a grip of tube that was inserted in something else. It was like a pair of pliers whose jaws operated in reverse; a bit like circlip pliers. You inserted the four mating six inch noses of metal into the tube and then you squeezed the handle and they opened and pressed against the inside of the tube.

Of course on their own they would slip and so the rows of sharpened tungsten steel points, sitting on each nose, pierced the tube on the inside, locked on, and you could then pull the tube easily. Or whatever it was you were pulling.....

'You ok?' she asked.

'Get fucking on with it, can't you see I'm fucking close?'

'This should do it,' she said softly and replaced the hammer with the inverse pliers.

She took a deep breath to steady her nerves, closed her eyes and gripped the handles as hard as she could; *the levers shot out inside him and twenty razor sharp steel points flew into his colon.*

The pain was instant and he screamed. He tried to turn but she was hanging on to the handles for dear life.

And pulling him backwards.....

Every movement was excruciating; he had never, ever, in his life experienced pain like it.

He screamed and screamed and screamed in agony but she didn't release, she hung on as tight as she could and kept pulling him backwards to control him. Suddenly he slumped, unconscious on to the bed, his mind and body unable to cope with the horrendous pain any longer. When she was convinced he had passed out and not just trying to fool her, she released the grip on the grippers, felt it loosen its hold and rotated her hand a little and then gripped hard again. Why stop at twenty perforations? Every rotation meant an extra twenty perforations.

She did it ten times by which time his colon was like a sieve.

Getting off the bed, she went downstairs, found a cast iron frying pan for cooking steak, went back upstairs and smacked him hard over the head with it. She checked to make sure she hadn't killed him, removed the gripper, put it in his hands to get his prints on it and went back downstairs for a cup of tea.

Three quarters of an hour later she rang for an ambulance.

It wasn't the end to the day she had been hoping for.....

They had taken her into the Manager's office. The other man, it transpired, was the new Regional Manager.

'Sit down,' said the Manager formally.

They all sat and the two men looked at her.

'Well....?' said the Manager after a silence that had gone on too long.

Well indeed.... She just wanted to hand them the tool out of her bag that she had stolen from the warehouse and say *sorry, I've never done it before. Sorry....*

‘Do you have something to tell us?’ asked the Manager.

What could she say? They knew she had stolen the tool and that was that.

‘What will happen?’ she asked. She was really asking *are you calling the police?* but she prayed it was just the sack. *Please*, not the police, *please.....please.....please....*

‘The email, I thought, explained it in detail,’ said the Manager.

‘Email?’ asked a confused Penny. ‘Email?’

‘Yes. Haven’t you read my email?’

‘I’ve been stocktaking in the warehouse all day and not been back to my desk.’

He reached for the mouse, clicked a couple of times and read out the email. She was amazed to hear that they had offered her the job of Office Manager on the understanding that she took two weeks off, starting immediately, so that her next holiday would not get in the way of changes that the new Divisional Manager was about to make.

Fancy that.....

No police.....

Well, not for stealing anyhow.....

Chapter 74

Derry 9

Derry arrived at the meeting place at about 20:00 and pulled up on the car park. It was already dark and he saw the long silhouette of the building in front of him and a light in a window which he assumed to be an office where Rafic was waiting. Derry had no idea how Rafic would know the manager of the place but so what....? Rafic was an arms dealer and they seemed to have contacts just about everywhere.

He took the small pistol out of the glove compartment and put it in a small holster wrapped around his ankle; then pulled the holdall out from under his seat and quickly looked round the almost deserted car park as he did so. Satisfied that all seemed ok he got out of the car, pressed the locking remote and walked up the long gravel path to the entrance. He tried the door but it didn't give so he located a bell push at the side and gave it two jabs. After a few seconds a man appeared on the other side and spoke into an intercom.

‘Mister Day?’

Derry nodded and heard the click as the electronic lock slid away and the man opened the door.

‘Good evening, Mister Day,’ said the man holding out his hand. ‘Mister Mafouge is here and waiting for you, sir. Can I get you a cup of tea or coffee?’

‘Coffee, milk, two sugars.’

‘Certainly, sir, please come this way.’ He took him down a long corridor, knocked on a door and opened it for Derry, indicating with his hand to turn right as he entered and then Derry walked past him and went in. As he rounded the door a fist

smashed into his face, another into his stomach and three men restrained and searched him, found the gun, dragged him to a chair and tied him.

It took a few minutes for Derry to see properly and catch his breath and then he saw James James looking at him.

‘Evening, Derry,’ said H holding Derry’s gun, ‘glad you could make it. And thanks for bringing my money back.....’

H looked at him for a minute or two and then they left Derry alone. Derry tried hard to get out of his bonds but to no avail.....

Chapter 75

The Lord 5

Peter lay on the deck; he felt the warm sun and heard the lapping waves against the hull of the boat. He had a bit of a hangover but that was only to be expected; he'd had enough to knock out a rhinoceros. Even behind his closed eyes the sun glared and felt uncomfortable. He clutched his throbbing head and tried to move but it was a struggle to sit up and in due course he gave up the fight and went back to sleep.

Nearly three hours later a bucket of cold, fresh sea water woke him with a start from his slumber and he spluttered as he gasped for air as the salty water entered his mouth.

'Welcome back,' said a voice in front of him that he couldn't see due to the bright sun. 'We thought you'd never wake up, so we helped you.'

Peter blinked but his eyes hurt from the dryness of the sun and not blinking for so long. 'Where am I?'

'You're on a yacht.'

'What yacht? Where?'

The man smiled. Surely the questions were the wrong way round?

'The yacht is a Spherefish which is technically a Custom Sports Fish class and was manufactured by Hatteras. She is twenty six metres long with a six metre beam...'

'But where...'

'The engine produces eighteen hundred horsepower and has a maximum speed of twenty four knots and a cruising speed of twenty one.....'

‘I don’t want to know about your bloody yacht!’ shouted Peter.

‘It has four cabins and sleeps eight.’

‘I don’t want to know about your fucking yacht!’ he screamed at the top of his voice.

‘Then why did you ask?’ said the man quietly. The yacht had been built in 2002 and the man had bought it recently for just under three million. The asking price was three nine but these *were* troubled times.....

‘Enough of your stupid games,’ said Peter, ‘untie me immediately and explain yourself.’

The man in front of him didn’t move and neither did two men by his side.

‘Untie me, I said!’

‘You speak with authority, Peter, but from where do you get it?’

‘What?’

‘From where do you get your authority to tell us what to do?’

‘I am demanding that you release me this instant!’ he shouted at the top of his voice; like a child having a strop.

‘To go back to your second question,’ continued the man, ‘we are in the Southern Pacific Ocean about fifty miles off the west coast of Colombia.’

‘What? That’s not possible!’

‘All things are possible.’

‘How can I possibly be where you say I am....?’

They had knocked on his door late one evening.

‘Mister James?’ one had shouted through the door. ‘Mister James?’

He heard the accent which sounded perhaps Spanish and went to the door and opened it. ‘You have the wrong

house.....Mister James lives up the drive.'

The man smiled, 'We have the right house.'

A hard fist knocked him down and a syringe knocked him out. They found a letter with a sample of his writing and then put him in the car with three men and took him to a safe house in London where he stayed for twenty four hours until they were certain they had the right man. That done they took him to a small airfield where a fast Colombian Air Force Lear was waiting. It usually ferried the Head of the Armed Services but this time.....

In Colombia he was handed over to a waiting limousine and taken to Tumaco on the west coast and then on to The Lady Maria and given to his host.....Senor Jose Reyes.

'You are where I say you are,' said Senor Reyes.

'But why am I here? Why?'

'Because you have hurt a member of my family.'

'How the hell could I have done that? I live in England for Christ's sake.'

'So does my daughter and her baby son.'

Peter looked at him but said nothing.

'I believe you know them? Benshima and James and little Benjamin?'

'Of course I know them. I live there, they are my friends.'

'Your friends? In what way are they your friends?'

'I told you I live there.'

'They invited you to stay with them?'

'Yes.'

'They took you in?'

'Yes.'

'They gave you shelter?'

'Yes; they are my friends.'

'And yet you still defiled their son?'

‘Of course not, for Christ’s sake. What the hell do you think I am?’

‘I don’t *think* you are anything,’ said Senor Reyes slowly, ‘I *know* what you are.’

‘That’s ridiculous,’ retorted Peter almost laughing. ‘You bring me all the way out here for some mistake?’

‘It is not a mistake, senor.’

‘Of course it’s a mistake. Why the hell would I defile a child? And even if I was that kind of person would I be so stupid to do it with a family I was staying with?’

‘Why you do it, senor, I do not know; that is beyond my comprehension. And yes, you are stupid enough to do it with the family who have taken you in and protected you.’

‘That’s complete and utter rubbish.’

‘Senor, when little Benjamin was medically examined they took a small sample of DNA from his bottom. When my associates took you to London they analysed your DNA’

‘It must be a mistake,’ said Peter, his voice rising, ‘maybe it was when I helped him go to the toilet or something?’

‘Of course, senor,’ said Senor Reyes sarcastically, ‘that makes sense...’

‘Untie him.’

Two men undid his plastic ties.

‘Do not jump from the boat, senor, as we are, as I explained, a long way from land and there are also sharks.’

Peter stood and rubbed his arms and legs to increase the circulation and then ran for the side of the boat and dived in the ocean. No one moved to stop him. They watched him slowly swim away; he was a good swimmer but it takes more than a good swimmer to swim in a powerful ocean. One of the men looked at Senor Reyes who nodded. The man signalled to the wheelhouse and the powerful motors started and slowly brought

the boat round to follow the swimming man. When it reached him the motors stopped and the boat sat in the water; they watched the man swim until he was another hundred yards away and then they started and followed him again. They did this until they saw he could hardly lift his arms in the water. He was exhausted and much longer in there and he would drown.

‘Get him out.’

One of the men opened a compartment and took out a long gaff hook which was used to bring in swordfish and marlin. He reached over, circled the man’s arm, trapping it, and they brought him to the steps and two of them hauled him on deck.

‘Dry him off, tie him up and take him downstairs until tomorrow.....’

Chapter 76

Sunday

Richard woke early; he looked out of his bleary eyes at the day through the window and decided it was about six thirty. He moved his body slowly, turning over to look at June who had her back to him and sleeping soundly. In need of the loo he decided not to use the en-suite so put on his dressing gown and softly padded downstairs to the one in the hall where he tried hard not to make a noise. He didn't flush it and made a note to do it when she was awake.

Phew....must remember to flush the loo. He shut the door to keep the smell in.....

Going in to the kitchen, he put on the kettle for a cup of tea and noticed it was seven fifty. So much for his innate sense of time. Taking his tea into the lounge he put on Sky News to find the latest on MP's expenses, or fiddles, or fraud as they were known to the rest of the country and a bit about how many companies were going under. The company he worked for wasn't doing well either but they had a low cost base and would survive.

What to do today? He always fretted about Sundays, as though on that day her happiness was his responsibility. He had no idea why but he did; and on the days that it rained and they were stuck inside he was at a loss what to do and so at times he fretted, but she just smiled at his discomfort.

'How long have we been married?' she would ask. 'For goodness sake just sit down and read the paper or watch the tele. Don't fret.'

But he did.

But today the sun was shining and so he was ok and they could go a ride into the hills or something and all would be well with the world....

Chapter 77

Rafic 2

Rafic Mafouge, the Lebanese man who supplied arms to people all over the world, beckoned to the two men to sit down and then he sat behind his large desk opposite them.

‘I was just about to have a drink of iced tea, would you like one?’

‘Lebanese, I assume?’

‘Of course.’

They accepted, he picked up a phone and asked for the iced teas.

‘We came to thank you for your help.’

‘There was no need. I am always happy to help my friends.’

What bullshit. He was not their friend and they were not his but they coexisted, as they should but usually didn’t, in the murky world in which they found themselves.

‘You could have phoned,’ he said pleasantly.

‘We fancied a ride out,’ said one. ‘It was a nice day.’

He said it softly and without malice but its meaning was quite clear. *Don’t tell us what we should do. Don’t even suggest. If we want to travel nearly 3000 km to talk to you, we will.*

A smart, middle aged lady arrived with their tea and set it down. Lebanese iced tea made from black tea and rose water with pine nuts floating on the top.

‘I have always enjoyed this,’ said one as he sipped. Surprisingly daintily, Rafic thought.....

‘So what brings you here? Can I help you in some other way?’

One shook his head. 'No, we were just passing.'

He was getting nowhere so he waited for them to tell him what they wanted. And so for fifteen minutes they chatted about this and that and then they stood up to leave. They held out their hands. 'Nice meeting you again,' said one, 'take care,' and they walked to the door and he showed them out.

He watched as they walked down the drive of his landscaped garden, with the beautiful flowers down either side, and the snow capped Swiss Alps straight ahead.

It was weird, thought Rafic, that they all looked the same. In person, on the news, in newspapers. Tall, athletic, tanned, well dressed, sunglasses, usually a gun. A honed killing machine that Mossad churned out.....

But why had they arrived?

What did they want?

And would they be back?

Maybe it was just a message. We're always around, listening, talking, orchestrating.....

And why had they asked for his help with Derry Day? Why would they even know Derry Day existed?

Sometimes the murky world they moved in was very murky indeed....

Chapter 78

The Bookie 5

Saul Abraham looked at the letter from Graham Gamble and punched the air. 'Fuckin yes!'

He stood up triumphant and grinned like a dog with two dicks! He had blown them away. The big boys, the little boys and stick it up your arse JJ Group.

Dickhead James James and his poodle Roger Davids; open the door, boss? get you a coffee, boss? run your errands, boss? lick your arse, boss?

Well fuck you!

It had cost a lot more than he would have liked but the Bank had grudgingly coughed up a sizeable chunk albeit with a personal and company debenture. It would take about a week to tie it all up, give Gamble his money and then boogie on in there and start kicking arse.

Topper would be the first arse that would be kicked. Fuck the avaricious cunt and his fifty big ones. Saul would run him ragged getting extra value out of the business and then he would fuck him off well before his 'loyalty year' was up.

People were so dim. Why would anyone think that a letter saying they would get paid in one year mean they would get paid in one year? Cretins!

In the end he handed over a Banker's Draft for just over eight million from the auction that Chris had kept him informed of as the other bids came in. It was a discount on the seven ratio of a year ago which would have worked out at about ten mill, and a lot more than the current market, but he could make it work and

he had fucked off JJ arseholing shitting Betting which in itself was worth a mill.

He dined out with his wife that evening; an expensive meal with copious champagne, and then home in a taxi where he fucked the arse off her for ages until the triumphant high wore off and he slept.

The next day he went to his new business to find it ticking over nicely. Chris Topper was nowhere to be seen but who gave a fuck? With luck he was involved in a multi car pile up on some motorway somewhere and was lying, headless on the bonnet with the last of his blood oozing away. That way he saved his fifty grand and his salary. One could only hope.....

Two days later he received a letter of resignation from Chris Topper informing him that he had got another job, was taking the holiday that he was entitled to, would be working his Notice in that period and would not be returning. Saul almost jumped for joy! Fucking right on! That was the best part of a hundred grand he had saved with that one small piece of paper. Headless on a motorway would have been more fun but this was ok.

He joined his friends for an evening's golf and played well. Well that is until the thirteenth hole when a thought struck him. Why would someone who was guaranteed a fifty grand bonus leave? Why? On reflection.....it didn't make sense? Why would someone who had helped him get the betting shops, informed him of the other bidders' prices, leave? Why?

A dread invaded his mind and his shoulders tightened. His straight driving went into a massive slice and he watched the ball go high and wide out of bounds.

Informed him of the other bidders' prices? A thought rushed through him. Oh fuck? *The other bidders' prices?* Had he overbid against other bidders? He thought for a moment but that made no

sense either. There was nothing in it for them except that he would be higher. But he would still have the shops and so there was no gain for them. Where was the catch? *Was there a catch?*

‘You hitting a provisional?’ asked his partner in the four ball.

To steady himself he took out a five wood recovery club, slowed it all down and it landed just off the fairway at about one eighty. He couldn’t reach the green on the four thirty par four but he was playing four anyway so he would leave this one up to his partner.

As he walked down the fairway he was tempted to talk it through with his partners, businessmen all, but if it was a balls up he hardly needed them to tell him.

Topper, he was sure, had the answer to this so as he walked to the green he rang his mobile. *This is Chris Topper of Gambles*, the phone said, *sorry I can’t take your call right now but please leave a message and I’ll get back to you.....* Saul realised it was more than likely sitting on Topper’s old desk ringing away as he would have handed the company mobile back. He rang his home phone which was stored on his mobile but the answer phone just said they were away on holiday. There was nothing he could do except go to work tomorrow and ask a few questions.....?

The next day he ferreted around but got nowhere. Everything was as it should be. A little quiet but that was to be expected. Business always ebbed and flowed and, amazingly, it was different from shop to shop. Thursday at one shop could be manic whereas in another it could be dead. Just one of those things. He wondered about ringing Gamble and asking about Topper but he was now in Portugal, his English house sold, starting his new life with his dying wife and may not appreciate it. But who gives a fuck? If she’s going to die, she’s going to die...

He rang Gamble’s mobile only to be told the number was no longer in operation. Why wouldn’t it be in operation? What the

fuck was going on?

A week later Saul Abraham was getting concerned.

The shops' numbers were down. By quite a lot. True it could just be one of those things but.....quite a lot. He analysed the sales data and realised that the main problem was the big betters. He was getting hardly anything off some of the big betters; where were the big betters? And then it hit him! Topper had fucked off with his biggest customers! The cunt had fucked him over.

He forced himself to stay calm.

But how could Topper do that?? How could he make them stop just like that? What could he induce them with that could make them go? In reality not a lot.

He could hardly give them free bets and it takes a lot to move people from shops they know and like visiting or ringing. It takes a while to build up a relationship and many gamblers had 'lucky' shops and didn't wander round all over the place.

Abraham's head was beginning to ache and he ferreted around for some pain killers. Every time he thought he had an answer to the question it was a dead end.

Unfortunately he didn't even know if he had the right question.....?

A week later it was dire. Sales had gone off a cliff and the profits weren't even covering the interest on the loan! And still no big bets. There was only one thing to do as there was no one else to ask; he would have to bite the bullet and ring some clients and ask if they had moved and if so why?

His hand hovered over the phone. He wanted to know but didn't want to know...

Taking a deep breath he rang the first.

'Is that Stuart Morris?'

'Yes.'

‘I’m sorry to bother you, Stuart, my name is Saul Abraham and my company has just bought out Gambles betting shops. I see you haven’t used us in a few weeks and I wondered why?’

‘I think you’ve got your facts wrong there, mate.’

‘Why? Why are my facts wrong?’

‘I haven’t used you for at least five months.’

‘You have,’ said Saul. He looked at the computer screen. ‘You laid a bet for five grand three weeks ago.’

‘Not me, mate, you must be mixing me up with another Stuart Morris, God forbid.’

‘Are you sure, Stuart? You haven’t used us for five months?’

‘Quite sure, mate. Company’s doing badly, banks squeezing and no funny money to play with.’

Saul’s shoulders scrunched up and he hung up in a daze. Not used them for five months? But the screen said.....? Although he was panic stricken he made himself ring another customer.

‘Is that John Bent?’

‘Yes.’

‘I’m sorry to bother you John, my name is Saul Abraham and my company has just bought out Gambles betting shops. I see you haven’t used us in a couple of weeks and I wondered why?’

‘Been ages since I laid any bets, Saul, and if I have they were just small.’

‘You have,’ said Saul. He looked at the computer screen. ‘You laid a bet for three grand three weeks ago.’

‘Sorry, Saul, your programme must be knackered, it certainly wasn’t me. Having said that did I win?’

The humour passed Saul by. ‘Are you sure, John? You haven’t used us recently?’

‘Sorry, Saul.’

He was not half as sorry as Saul.....

Chapter 79

The Lord 6

The next day God was obviously content and the ocean around them barely rippled. In a sail driven boat it would have been a matter of waiting for God to huff and puff again but in this expensive machine they didn't need God. After breakfast Senor Reyes spent two hours making phone calls, checking emails and monitoring some stocks he had made an early investment in. Mid morning he went on deck and they brought Peter Henry Cecil Montague D'Arcy to him.

'Do you have anything to say?' asked Senor Reyes.

'Like what?'

'Perhaps an apology? Some indication of contrition?'

'For something I didn't do.....? I told you it must be a mistake.'

Senor Reyes nodded, 'Mistakes happen, I agree.'

'Of course they do. See, even you know they do and I am sure you can see that one could have happened here.'

Senor Reyes nodded slowly, 'Working on that assumption....'

He stepped back and two men manhandled Peter to the floor.

'What are you doing?' he screamed and kicked out with his legs. Another held him as they put a life belt over his head and arms and then tied his arms to it so that it was around his trunk and his arms rested on it. They lifted him up, took him to the back of the boat where a winch was located, then fastened a hook from the winch to a ring on the buoy located behind Peter's back.

'Another opportunity, Senor. Tell me what happened between you and the boy?'

‘Nothing! I’ve told you the truth. Nothing happened, it’s a mistake,’ he pleaded.

Senor Reyes shrugged. ‘You had your chance,’ he said softly.

Two men dragged him down to the deck again and another produced a fish gutting knife. Peter was only wearing underpants and the knife scored his arms and legs. Peter screamed but they held him tight and watched the blood trickle from the many small wounds. They lifted him up, took him to the step at the rear and held him over the water.

‘No,’ Peter screamed. ‘No!’

The boat engines started up and started to creep forward. They lowered him in and let the winch slowly increase his distance from the boat until he was about fifty metres away. His shoulders and head were facing away from them so that the swell from the buoy as he was pulled slowly through the water would not wash over his face and drown him. All Peter could see as he was dragged through the water was the wake he was leaving and a vast expanse of water.

It was less than fifteen minutes when Peter saw a fin emerge about fifty yards away from him. It rose about a foot out of the water and he saw it come towards him and then he lost sight of it as it went round his back.

‘Get me out,’ he screamed, ‘get me out.’

Thirty yards ahead of him he saw another fin emerge from the murky depths but this one was huge, at least a metre in height, a large male. And then another surfaced....and then another.

He kicked and kicked frenziedly; he shouted and screamed to make as much commotion as he could to keep them at bay. ‘Pull me out,’ he screamed.

On the boat the watchers were sitting in comfortable fishing seats, strapped in just in case. Of what they had no idea as it was

an enormous boat they were on, but best not to take chances. They sipped brandy and two had a cigar.

Senor Reyes raised his arm and the yacht gunned forward, dragging Peter behind, surfing along the water in his life belt. Peter's lifebelt jumped and skimmed the waves and his body flicked this way and that like a lifeless marionette. After four hundred yards Senor Reyes brought the boat to a gentle halt, the wake subsided and they watched the distance, beyond Peter's floating body and saw the fins locate the new scent and move in their direction.

Peter saw them coming. 'Please!' he screamed. 'Please! Help me, don't do this. Please..... I did it, I did it.....'

Senor Reyes raised his hand and the boat was gunned again, away from the sharks and as it went they winched him in.....

Chapter 80

Squatting 2

Leaving his squat behind him he caught the tube and went just two stops. Two stops would be enough to get him out of the way and the hustle and bustle would shield him and allow him to be anonymous. He hadn't shaved for several days to hide his face, wore a baseball cap and was complemented by his long coat.

The only drawback to stabbing in a long coat was the weather. If it was hot and sunny that had to be designated as a no stabbing day. You looked a bit of a prick in a long coat in 90 degree heat. And if it went wrong how the fuck could you run in a coat that was cooking you? So it either had to be chilly, cold, or raining.

Today it was pissing down but the forecast said it would ease which would help. Too much rain was a pisser.....so to speak. Rain was better than the very cold as people put too many clothes on in the very cold weather and you never knew what the knife would encounter on the way in. But in the warm rain they were just lightly covered and so it slid in easily. No obstruction; well not until it hit the spinal cord..... On a good day Michael would position the blade to go in and straight to the heart. A nice, clean death. On a bad day Michael would sever the spinal cord to leave them as a paraplegic.

Fuck them!

Let them fucking suffer!

Let the fucking arseholing cunts suffer.

On a bad day he really, really wanted them to suffer.....

He left the tube, climbed to the surface and found, as predicted, the weather had changed to a gentle drizzle. That was better. He

joined the gentle flow of pedestrians and settled in to their rhythm. Keeping his head straight ahead he let his eyes wander from side to side for a victim. Although he only ever saw their backs he would know him, or her, when he saw them.

He knew from their walk; the way they walked, whether they should die. He had no idea why but their walk decided whether they live....or die.

Just up ahead he saw the man and his body tingled.

It was perfect.

He was perfect.

Everything about the man aroused his killing senses. He moved a little more quickly and the pavement thinned a little allowing him to see his quarry more clearly and savour the moment even more....

His heart was thumping and he found himself taking in several lungfuls of air to keep steady. Moving closer to the man he undid the two buttons on his coat to allow him to lunge and took the knife from its sheath. Carefully he ran his thumb over its stoned blade to feel its exquisite cutting surface. His mind and body were alive. Alive! The most incredible feeling.....

Once he had even ejaculated before he plunged the knife in.

He was now within two paces and ready. Holding the handle firm in case it hit a rib and got deflected he was about to move in when the man in front suddenly turned, looked him in the eyes and said, 'You're an evil looking bugger.'

Johnson froze; a look of shock spread over his face, his mouth dropped open and then he panicked and ran.

Manners shrugged, turned and carried on his way.....

Chapter 81

Blackwhite

A few weeks earlier H had gone through the Times, as he did every day, to see what he could learn. A casino piece shocked him. The casinos in Russia were being shut down as a gambling ban enforced by President Putin came into force.

All of them. Shut down! Just like that.

Costing up to half a million jobs and about £600 million in tax revenue. Now that was some power that Mister Putin had. Some power indeed. Thank God Gordon Brown was a confirmed ‘chuck money at it’ leader; the only thing he had shut down was Britain’s financial and economic systems. But you have to start somewhere. Was there an opportunity here for J J Casinos and if so how? He read that the big Russian gaming Groups would more than likely move to Kazakhstan, Armenia or Georgia.

Did he want to get in there? Was there an opportunity? Nah. The Russian Mafia were not to be messed with.

Keep your Rubles.

Looking up at the wall he gazed for a while at the large picture that said, in Japanese, Universal Peace.



Universal Peace.

H peace would be fine..... ah well.

He moved back to The Times and found an article, one of the Comments, which he read over and over again;

.....But the prime minister appears to have taken a leaf out of George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four: *"The keyword here is blackwhite. Like so many New-speak words, this word has two mutually contradictory meanings.*

Applied to an opponent, it means the habit of impudently claiming that black is white, in contradiction of the plain facts.

Applied to a Party member, it means a loyal willingness to say that black is white when Party discipline demands this.

But it means also the ability to believe that black is white, and more, to know that black is white, and to forget that one has ever believed the contrary."

Wow. Black is white and white is black. And even more; if you ever thought the contrary you forgot it.....

H was sure that in some profound way it was a key to his childhood. Another piece of the jigsaw. But for the life of him he couldn't see how..... Fuck!

How?.....How?

Love was.....hate? To them love was hate but to me hate was love?

Sex was.....violence?

Caring was pain?

Affection was.....sex?

Dysfunctional family was.....your fault?

Everything back to front?

Black is white? Blackwhite?

Love is hate? Lovehate?

Whilst showing a caring family to an outside world they beat you and fucked you at home.

Lovehate?

Sexviolence?

Affectionsex?

Independent and opposite words that sat happily together like peaches and cream but were mutually at odds with each other? No wonder it fucked up your view of the world.....no wonder there was so much confusion.....

So much uncertainty, so much panic, so much fear.

No wonder he read The Times so avidly. Trying to find the truth. Of course it was still The Times truth as they saw it, but at least it was better than *their* truth.

Blackwhite truth.....

Chapter 82

Penny 4

Penny went with the ambulance to the hospital where they asked her the obvious question. And she gave them a truthful answer. *He liked putting things up his arse* and after he had got drunk he had gone upstairs, stuck this.....implement up himself and at some point she had heard screams and had rushed up to find out what was going on? Well, he appeared to have got this thing stuck and he was madly grasping the handle trying to loosen it, but of course the more he grasped it the more damage it did. He was getting more and more hysterical and so she had tried to do it but he had moved all over the place and then passed out.

‘How long has he been doing this?’ a Doctor asked.

‘You mean.....?’ He nodded. She shook her head despondently. ‘A long time.....too long. Usually it’s with hammer stales and things like that. This was a.....departure,’ she sighed, with just the right amount of embarrassment tinged with just a teeny weeny bit of shame.

‘How did he get the bang on the head?’

She was quick. ‘I thought if he came round he would start thrashing about. I just tried to stop him doing himself more harm....To be honest I panicked.’

The Doctor thought for a moment. ‘Maybe just as well you did although it’s a fair old lump.’

‘Sorry.’

The Doctor shrugged.

‘Will he be ok?’ she asked with as much concern in her voice as she could muster.

‘Should be. As long as we’re quick and the antibiotics do their job he should be ok.’

Oh great, thought Penny, he gets better and either comes home and kills me or tells the police and they lock me away for a few years...

It was an easy decision. She had two weeks’ holiday and she certainly wasn’t going to visit him in hospital so on her way home she went to the Travel Agents and found a nice hotel overlooking a beach in Barbados; plane leaving tomorrow....

She went to the airport without her mobile phone.

She didn’t want to know. Know what she wasn’t sure but she didn’t want to know.

Just enjoy the holiday and not know.....

Chapter 83

Derry 10

Shannon pulled up on the car park by Derry's Lexus and sat and waited. What was she supposed to do? Sit and wait? Go into the shadows and make funny wooooo wooping sounds and scare the shit out of him when he came for her? Go and knock on the door? After ten minutes of hanging around she left her car and went to the entrance and pressed the bell. A few moments later a man arrived and said into the intercom, 'You must be Miss Black come to see Mister Day?'

'Yes.'

'He's expecting you, miss.' He pressed the button which let her in and she followed him to the room where Derry and his friends were waiting for her. Well not Derry exactly, they hadn't told him she was arriving. When she went into the room the door shut behind her and a man stood by it, blocking an early exit.

'Hello, Shannon,' said H, 'I'm glad you could make it too. Why don't you take a seat while we sort a few things out....'

A hand touched her arm but she screamed at the top of her voice, which made them all jump except Derry who was trussed up a bit too tight. 'Don't you dare fucking touch me!' she screamed and backed into a corner.

H shook his head. 'Sit down, Shannon.'

'Lay one fucking hand on me,' she screamed again at the top of her voice, 'and I'll lay you fucking out!'

H looked at Andy and Andy looked at Pete who looked enquiringly at Andy. Andy raised his palms in front of him in a gesture of 'what else is left?' Pete turned and slapped her across the face so hard her head swivelled and she dropped to the floor.

Pete picked her up bodily, carried her to the chair, dropped her in it and trussed her up.

‘Now we’re all here we can start,’ said H. ‘Firstly whose idea was it to nick my money from my casino?’

Neither said anything.

‘Ok, predictable response I suppose, so who do we hurt first to get an answer?’

‘It was him,’ Shannon screeched. ‘He knew where I worked and he made me do it.’

H looked at Derry who so far had said nothing at all. There was little of confirmation in Derry’s eyes to support her story.

‘And how did he force you to do it, Shannon?’ The hesitation was too long. ‘Shannon, when I ask you a question I expect the truth.’

Pete moved to her, put his hand down her blouse, over her left breast and gripped it as hard as he could, sinking his nails in for extra pain and then he twisted. She screamed in agony and lunged at Pete’s arm to try and bite him. Pete slapped her hard again for her trouble.

Her eyes glazed and her head rang.

‘So it was you, Shannon. We give you a job, we give you a chance, Adrian helps you and you fuck us over. Now why would you do that?’

She glared at him and then spit at him with a malice that H had hardly ever seen before. So much malice. So much hate. Why? Why him? He had never even met her.

He nodded at Pete who went over and cupped her right breast and repeated the process. She tried to bite him again but the pain straightened her body immediately and she missed then yelped like a kicked dog.....

Pete slapped her hard across the face again and she slumped down, hardly conscious.

H turned his attention to Derry.

‘Why rip me off, Derry? There you are with all these little scams earning you a good living and you decide to rip me off. Why me, Derry? Surely you don’t do everything that slag tells you?’

Derry still said nothing, defiance written all over his face. When you can survive the Troubles this was hardly a big deal. Let them talk themselves to death...

The one thing he couldn’t work out was where was Rafic? He knew Rafic had set up the meeting as he had talked to him on the phone but where was Rafic?

A thought crossed his mind; when they had roughed him up and let them go what would happen to him if the boys over in Ireland hadn’t had the weapons? But they *did* receive the arms. They had confirmed that. What the fuck was going on? It couldn’t all have been a scam because it was too sophisticated and too complicated for that. So what was happening?

‘Talk to me, Derry,’ said H, ‘talk to me. Let’s sort this misunderstanding out.....’

As one of the few things that Derry could move were his fingers he raised two of them up in a V.

H held out his hands and shrugged, ‘We’ll give you a little time to think it over,’ and they filed out to get a coffee.....

The instant Shannon came round and saw Derry she started, ‘You useless heap of turd,’ she screamed, ‘you pathetic motherfucker. You couldn’t even pull off a little armed robbery, you stupid bastard...’

Despite himself Derry grinned at her. She was totally fucking mental but he loved her spirit. *You go, girl.....*

‘Don’t grin at me, you fucking thick Mick, you useless fucking eunuch!’

Eunuch, thought Derry, eunuch? He had fucked her every way there was and some that there wasn't and he was a eunuch? Where did she drag all this stuff up?

He grinned again. His grin infuriated her even more and as she started to rant again she suddenly slumped, her head lolled to her chest and she lost consciousness as the fury and the pain overwhelmed her and her brain called a temporary halt to the proceedings.

After ten minutes she woke and was just about to kick off again when Derry shouted at her to shut up. Her eyes blazed at him but she did as she was told.

After a few moments she said, 'What's going to happen to us?'

'I don't know. They have the money, and more, so they're ok.....'

But I'm not, thought Derry, I'm out of pocket. And then he remembered he didn't have the money from the boys yet. What if he didn't get it? What if this was a scam? How could this be a scam? He dismissed the possibility again.....

But the thought returned. If it was a scam that meant the money had not been sent to him and the money they had just taken from him on short term loan from the Bank could not be repaid. And that could be much worse than the situation we have here.....

'.....so I think I'm in for a rough time, a severe warning about crossing their paths again etcetera etcetera and then we go. You won't get hurt again if you keep your cocksucking mouth closed.....by the way there's no chance of a quick suck now, is there? While we're waiting?'

'Fuck you.'

Outside a Bentley Continental pulled quietly on to the car park.....

Chapter 84

The Bookie 6

Chris Topper, ex GM of Gambles, was enjoying life. The villa was beautiful, set in quiet grounds, no neighbours, privacy and a maid who came in daily to wash and clean. Cooked if you wanted her to but they didn't. It was so private Chris had taken to wandering round outside naked. He'd never had an all over tan and now he would.... and no wet trunks after jumping into the expansive pool. The villa, so he had been told by Roger Davids, was owned by a friend of his new boss, Mister James James. When his three weeks' holiday was over he was joining JJ Betting as one of two Divisional Managers who answered to Roger as his predecessor, it seemed, had been killed in a car accident. Poor bugger.....

He marvelled at the chain of events that had brought him here. Roger, the tight fisted bastard, had offered nothing when they met at the pub. Nothing! If they bought the shops he was offered a job as one of his three Divisional Managers and if they didn't...he offered him a job as one of his three Divisional Managers. It was that simple. He didn't want any inside information, actually he did, but the deal was either at a price they wanted to pay or they weren't interested. It was that simple.

But fifty thou for inside help? No. Thirty? No. Ten? No.

So he had lain in bed debating over fifty thou from Saul or nothing from Rog.

Why debate it? What was there to debate? Fifty thousand pounds was a fortune to Chris so what was the debate? He didn't know.

But his wife crystallised his thinking. ‘Do you want me to suck you?’

She was knackered and yet still she offered. It was that, that did it. The unselfish act of someone who loves you.

He didn’t, if he was truthful, trust Abraham but he did trust Roger Davids and he did love his wife and she deserved to have a future. Not a one off, maybe, payment and then no job. And then he had gone downstairs and suddenly realised that one of the client’s names he had seen on the screen was no longer a client. Well he was still a client but they hadn’t seen him in ages. Gamble was fiddling! He had made up bets on accounts where they had lost their bigger clients! And unless you looked hard it wouldn’t show. It would only show up in the Bank and Abraham, in his haste, had relied on the previous few years’ audited accounts and the management accounts which showed all was well. So Chris had told Roger who said to forget it. *Forget it? Forget it.*

‘What does Saul really want?’ Roger asked.

‘The shops; and to beat you and Jimmy James.’

Roger looked at him. ‘Shouldn’t say that to his face,’ he said softly.

Roger went away and redid the figures he was sending in. The figure he was intending to pay ‘*subject to due diligence and a two week deadline*’ and added one point two million pounds. The bit in italics would get him out of it if Abraham didn’t bite.

One month later Graham Gamble and his wife Betty nee Betts were relaxing on their sun loungers, sipping Pimms and feeling the caress of a gentle breeze coming off the sea. For some miraculous reason, maybe the sea air, the lack of stress, the sun, retirement, perhaps even God’s intervention.....but for some reason Betty’s cancer had cleared. Amazing.

At the end of the day as the sun moved towards the horizon over the Indian Ocean they walked slowly, hand in hand, back to

their luxurious balcony suite on the massive liner. They still had over three months left of their £100,000 world cruise and then to their new home in.....somewhere.

Three months later Saul Abraham came out of his Bank Manager's office and it was bleak. The bank knew from the activity, or lack of it, on the account that he was in trouble and they wanted it sorted. They knew that he was paying part of the interest out of an expanding overdraft and they had just frozen it. Not only that they wanted it reducing by three million in twelve weeks. Twelve fucking weeks! Only three million....cunts!

Here, take it out of my wallet you fucking blood sucking dickheads! He was in a corner with nowhere to go. If he resold Gambles / Abrahams betting shops there would be a massive shortfall which he couldn't cover. He had paid over eight and a half million for the shops and, at the current trading level and a forced sale and the jackals wanting to see him suffer, he would be lucky to get half that. Perhaps less. The thought made him feel sick. Physically sick... And so the only option was put all the shops up for sale. The fucking lot! There was no other way. Maybe he could keep one or two which would give him a living....? Just not the living he was used to. His wife would go fucking ape! Absolutely fucking ape!

His mobile vibrated in his pocket. 'Yes?'

'Saul Abraham?'

'Yes.'

'It's Roger Davids of JJ Betting.....'

Chapter 85

Jerry 7

There was just one club left. The worst one. The others had been sorted out but this one had not been persuaded. Not by visits by the coppers, a chat with Jerome, general hints that they weren't wanted.

Nothing.....

The other clubs had their share of undesirables, small time criminals, show offs, piss heads, dealers, prostitutes et al but not in any numbers and so they were easy to persuade.

One way or another.

But this club had become a home for the Wide Boys. A group of wannabee gangsters that were climbing the criminal ladder although no way near the top. And this was where they came to show off their prestige. And if you fucked with them you could end up really fucking injured, maybe dead. Small time they may be but a good putting away did much for your street cred.

Jerry had done all his homework. It had taken weeks but he had amassed volumes of information about them and the one thing, thank God, that they didn't have was a Mentor. There was no Big Boss somewhere who was keeping them safe. No daddy, or uncle or whoever much farther up in the Underworld who would take umbrage if there was a dispute. That could always be a problem. Some people had quite good connections.....

Jerry went to the club, talked to the men on the door for a few minutes then went to find the Manager. 'How's it going?'

He shrugged his shoulders. 'Not much change.'

Jerry nodded, 'Anything happening tonight?'

‘Not yet..... a few of the Wide Boys in, the rest will no doubt be in soon. We’ve got a bunch of rugby lads arrived in a coach from God knows where which I could have done without, but other than drink too much and piss too much they haven’t been a problem. We’ve already got a couple of small time dealers in but they are supplying the Wide Boys so I can’t touch them. And of course the idiots who follow the Wide Boys around to bask in their glory and watch whatever goes down. Some good time girls who’ll get drunk and fucked by everybody after and won’t remember it and if they do will prefer to forget....and.....’

‘As you say, nothing changes.’

The Manager shrugged again.

‘I’ll stay awhile and see what’s going on,’ said Jerome.

An hour later it was full. All the Wide Boys were in attendance with their adoring followers. The leader spotted Jerome and sidled over. ‘Hello, cunt. I hear you’ve sorted the other clubs?’

‘Yeah.’

‘You know what will happen to you if you upset the status quo here, eh?’

‘Yeah.’

He grabbed Jerome by the lapels. ‘One whiff, mate, that anything’s going down here and you’re fucking dead. You got that?’ He put his face next to Jerome. ‘You fucking got that loud and clear, you stupid, black cunt?’

Jerome stumbled as he was pushed back and saw the leader point menacingly. ‘Fucking dead. Got it?’

Jerome nodded.

As The Leader walked back to his adoring throng a half drunk rugby player bumped in to him as he weaved to the bar. The remnants of his glass spilled over The Leader. ‘Sorry, mate,’ he slurred.

Enraged, The Leader grabbed the man's lapels and was just about to head butt him when he noticed something that seemed peculiar. The man was smiling. Smiling? And there was something wrong with the smile? And there was something wrong with the eyes? And the face....? He was looking at a drunk.....what was wrong?.....there was something wrong.....?

It was too late to change what he was going to do and as his head continued forwards the drunken rugby player moved his head down and The Leader's face and nose met a hard skull.

Todd moved back slightly, grabbed The Leader behind his neck, pulled him close and viciously brought his knee up in the man's balls. Moving away slightly he forced his head lower and smashed his knee three times into the man's chest to break his ribs in several places and then pushed it even lower and kneed him twice, very hard, in the face. Dragging him back up by his hair he smashed him four more times in the face with his fist until it looked like raw meat and then lowered it slightly and got him in the throat.

As The Leader was going down Todd grabbed his balls in a fierce, unyielding grip and pulled upwards as hard as he could until he felt them come away..... As he hit the floor he stamped as hard as he could on his head. Jerome had mentioned that he would *prefer no corpses* but brain dead was presumably ok.

Jerome watched as the drunken rugby players who had been staggering into the bogs to have a piss and throw their booze away moved into action. Their instructions had been quite specific. No one comes back; make the message quite clear.

For the next few minutes it was the Todd, Andy, Robby, Jim, Tony, Rick, Tezza, Jim, Mal and Tippy show and when they had finished they had fulfilled their brief.

The Leader was indeed brain damaged and would make no sense of the world from then on. One of his mates had a broken

back and would be in a wheelchair for the rest of his life. Four others had multiple breaks of arms and legs and it would be months, if not years, before they functioned again properly. If they ever did.

Two had extensive kidney damage which would stop them enjoying life until they had a transplant. One died before he did.

All in all it was a good night's work....

At the end of the mayhem they got back in the coach, the one with no distinguishing features and false plates and went out into the night, never to be seen again.

Jerome, still leaning on the bar, was approached by the Manager, horror on his face, who had been watching from a corner. 'Did you fucking see that!'

Jerome nodded. 'That's the trouble with the rugby crowd, they have a few too many and..... Just make sure they don't come back, ok?'

'You're joking, right? Right....?'

Jerome smiled and the Manager, relieved, scuttled away.

Jerome smiled.

He was really proud of Todd tonight. Todd was ex Special Forces and Todd only knew how to do one thing...kill. No fucking about with breaking arms and all that shit. So tonight Todd had been on his best behaviour and he hadn't killed anybody all night!

Jerome was so proud.....

Chapter 86

Derry 11

The man locked his Bentley Continental and walked from the car park towards the crematorium. He looked up at its black, forbidding shape against the dark sky and a quote from W H Auden forced its way into his mind; *Death is the sound of distant thunder at a picnic*. He shuddered.

H, Andy and Pete had talked for half an hour and drank coffee until Geoff Mulley brought in the visitor. As he entered H stood up and held out his hand. ‘Harry, welcome to the party.’

Harry Cohen gave H a warm but slightly nervous smile.

‘You know Andy?’

‘In passing.’

‘And this is Pete....and the gentleman who kindly let you in is Geoff Mulley.’

Harry shook their hands. ‘How’s it going?’ he asked H.

‘It’s going fine. We were just waiting for you and now the fun can begin.’

They filed back in to the room and when Derry saw Harry Cohen confusion spread over his face. He didn’t know Harry Cohen personally but he knew who he was and what he was; so why was he here? What the fuck was going on? It made no fucking sense....

‘Good evening, Derry,’ said Harry, then looked across to the girl, ‘and you must be Shannon...’

‘Who the fuck are you?’ demanded Shannon and then felt Derry’s eyes blaze into her. *Shut the fuck up*, they implored. *Shut the fuck up, you mad cow*.

‘Let me explain what’s going to happen,’ said H. ‘Our problem is mainly with Derry here as he did the deed but it is not in our interest to have a stupid woman blabbing her mouth off when she leaves and so, unfortunately, Shannon, you have to die.’

What he said didn’t register with her for a moment and then disbelief, horror and panic flooded her face to be replaced by bravado. ‘You wouldn’t dare,’ she said defiantly.

H nodded at Pete who took Derry’s gun out of his pocket, moved to her and held the gun to her head. He looked at H, waiting for the signal. Her bravado changed to pleading.

‘I won’t tell anyone,’ she whined pathetically, ‘I won’t. It was just a joke, I didn’t think he’d do it....I won’t tell anyone. Not a soul. I promise.....I promise.’ She burst into tears. ‘Please.....’ she whimpered, ‘please.....’

‘You should have thought of that earlier,’ said H. ‘Kill her.’

Pete put the gun to her head which she twisted this way and that as hard as she could but she couldn’t avoid the line of fire.

‘Bye, Shannon,’ said H and Pete pulled the trigger. The click bounced around the room and when Shannon realised she had not had her head blown off she was sick down her blouse.

‘Surely you didn’t think we’d shoot you, Shannon?’ asked H. ‘You, a loyal employee? Shoot you?’

She was gagging on her own vomit but no-one moved to help her. ‘We’re not wasting a bullet on you, Shannon, at least not yet. You’re a stupid cow but Derry here took my money so the first bullet has to be for your lover boy. Derry understands that, don’t you, Derry?’

H looked at Pete and he took the bullets out of his pocket, loaded the gun, moved to Derry and put the gun against his head.

‘Let’s deal,’ said Derry.

‘Talking now, Derry? A bit late now, don’t you think?’

‘I’ll give you more money,’ said Derry, ‘lots more.’

‘And where’s that going to come from, Derry? And how much more is lots more?’

‘Another million.’

H looked at Harry. ‘A million interest you, Harry?’ Harry shrugged uninterestedly. ‘See, Derry, it doesn’t turn us on. Ten may have helped...but one? You think we’re broke, Derry? You really think we’re broke?’

‘I’ve got two mill coming from Ireland for the arms.’

H grinned and looked at Harry who also grinned. ‘You wish.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Derry, how fucking thick are you? You not got it yet? There is no Ireland, there are no arms and there is no money.....’

‘But Rafic.....?’

H looked at Harry. Harry shrugged. ‘Anyhow, Derry, you can’t help us and so you die..... Pete.’

Pete came from behind Derry’s back and held the gun to his head. Derry pleaded again. ‘There must be something,’ he said, ‘there *must*.....’

‘Get on with it, Pete,’ but then Harry said, ‘Let me do it.’

H looked at Harry then nodded to Pete who handed Harry the gun. Harry held it next to Derry’s head.

‘What are you doing?’ cried Derry. ‘I’ve never hurt you, Mister Cohen, I’ve never hurt you.’

Harry lowered the gun and thought for a moment. ‘No, you haven’t, that’s true, but I am still going to enjoy seeing you die.’

‘Why? Why kill me?’

‘You pick on people, vulnerable people, people who can’t fight back....’ as Harry was saying it, it sounded nonsense. Why would you pick on people who *could* fight back? But now wasn’t the time for an ethical and philosophical debate, ‘and now I’m picking on you and you can’t fight back which either makes me their champion or just like you.....’

‘Come on, Harry,’ said H, ‘it’s time to go to bed. Just put one in his head and let’s go.’

‘Sorry, Derry,’ said Harry, put the gun against Derry’s forehead and pulled the trigger. The click bounced around the room and when Derry realised he’d not had his head blown off he started to tremble and then his body started to shake.

‘Surely you didn’t think we’d put a bullet in your head, did you, Derry?’ asked H.

Derry looked Harry in the face to try and understand but Harry just smiled and winked. Derry, the strong man, was getting to the end of his tether with the sadistic mind games and his woman, watching in horror as she had expected her man’s head to pebble dash the walls, slumped into a faint.....

Chapter 87

Close Protection 2

H was impressed.

Trevor Howard was quite a man; just looking at him was impressive in a calm, assured, in control sort of way. Very impressive. Of course Trevor was right that he couldn't be much help in the casino part of things and so he had offered him an opportunity in one of the security companies that already did close protection but could certainly move more up market.

Trevor had declined the offer as he wanted to move out of CP not get back into it but H had persisted and they had reached an understanding. If Trev would meet H's MD of the security company and, with his blessing, build up a unit to do higher profile CP – not work in it, just build it – then H would, at the same time, get him involved with the casinos with the object being that he became number two and number one if he made the grade and the incumbent left. Trev liked the sound of that. If it worked out with the MD of the security company he would get a proper job and a good salary and a car with the possibility of moving over to the casinos in due course. Yes, he quite liked the sound of that.

So they shook hands and Trev arranged to meet the MD the following week.

He went down the casino stairs with a spring in his step, gave the receptionist a huge grin and went out into what could be a whole new chapter in his book of life.

Out he went through the big glass doors, into his new world. Wonderful! No more boredom, no more danger, no more scouting

for work, no more twelve hour days, no more three month stints,
no more life on the line.....

At last a bit of normal living.....

He hardly felt the serrated blade enter his back and go through to his heart and he was dying as he hit the floor. He certainly didn't see a grinning Michael Johnson wander off in another direction. And he certainly didn't know that Michael Johnson had plunged his knife into the first person that he had come across, no matter what they walked like, as he was totally pissed off.....

Chapter 88

The Lord 7

He lay soaking on the deck. His chest heaving, his pulse a hundred and fifty, his teeth chattered and he shook with terror. They tied him and let his fear subside for a few minutes.

‘You were going to tell me about the child?’

Ah, the child, thought Peter. What a pretty little thing he was. But they all were, always had been. If it wasn’t for pretty little children his father would never have thrown him out.

Pretty little children.....

Even in the state he was in now the thought of pretty little children with their soft skin and tight arses was starting to make him excited. Even in the state he was in.....

It had taken a lot of money from his father to sort out the last incident when the pretty little thing was rushed to the Emergency Department with the implement still stuck up his arse and blood pouring out. No, that wasn’t good. That had been one experiment too many....

And so a quick getaway overseas.

To friends in the South African Transvaal which had also been a mistake. A very good, very bad mistake. Little children there were two, or more, a penny. You could fuck them and defile them in every way imaginable as long as you paid a few pence. A few pence to you, a fortune to them.

But after six months out there even the most depraved amongst the elite white set felt that he had outstayed his welcome and it was politely suggested he move on. He ignored the request

but accepted his fate when he was locked out of the home he was staying at and the police arrived, handcuffed him and put him on a plane to Thailand; one way ticket already paid for.

They knew what he wanted so let him go somewhere else and get it.

And in due course he was thrown out of Thailand and then went from country to country, using and abusing as he went, until he came full circle and ended up, broke, back in England. He made a full confession to his father about his past and how, for several years now, it had been left far behind him. His father gave him an allowance and offered him a home again but Peter thanked him graciously and said he had bought a small one down south. They shook hands and Peter left. The allowance would buy a lot of pretty little children.....

And somehow it was easy to live in the hole in the ground. It was safe, secure, no address, no telephone, no neighbours. Just wander into London to a little place here or there where the appropriate, some would say inappropriate, little morsels were waiting to be tasted. And then along comes James James, Benshima and pretty little Benjamin.

Pretty little Benjamin..... People were so trusting.....

‘It is a *weakness*, Senor,’ he replied. ‘It is something I do.’

What else could he say?

It wasn't me was unlikely to work any more.

The child insisted I fuck him wouldn't hold water. A touch young for moving the blame.

It helps them grow up was a bit lame, though true.

They enjoy it really was also true but people couldn't see it.

The purest form of love; again also true but misunderstood.

He looked at Senor Reyes. What was the man thinking? Was that understanding he saw in the man's eyes? Was this a charade

from someone who had his own dark secrets and had to go through this to protect himself? Was this a way out?

He looked deeper into the eyes of Senor Reyes. There was definitely something in his eyes and it didn't appear to be schadenfreude. Perhaps he had an ally after all? Perhaps all would be well after the mock angst.....? Perhaps this show was just to establish his credentials as one of the straights? Perhaps this man, after all, was a like minded brother?

'And this weakness, Senor,' he heard the man say with what sounded like a hint of sympathy, 'it cannot be curtailed?'

'Alas,' said Peter thinking that it was something he would rather not curtail even if he wanted to. Why would one curtail sticking a big, hard prick into an inviting little bum? Unthinkable.....

The man smiled gently, 'That is a shame, senor.'

'I am what I am,' said Peter softly with just enough humility that he thought the occasion warranted.

'And we,' said Senor Reyes, 'are what we are.'

'And what is that?'

For a long moment nobody replied.....then a soft voice behind him said, 'Family.'

The snub nosed bullet from the hand gun entered the base of his skull, ripped through his brain and left through his face, leaving a massive gaping hole where his eyes and nose should have been. Blood and brains splattered out over the gleaming white deck.

Senor Reyes looked at the dead man lying before him and felt.....very little. It was what happened in his world when you crossed, or threatened, the family. The family was everything. Without family what was there? He took the gun from the hand of the killer of Lord Peter Henry Cecil Montague D'Arcy, tossed it casually overboard and said to the men, 'Give him to the sharks.'

Going downstairs he opened a bottle of refrigerated champagne, filled three glasses, handed one to his wife and one to the killer. 'Good shot,' he said, smiling at his little joke.

On deck the men bound Peter in his life belt, threw him overboard and then sat down, opened a bottle of wine and waited. Peter drifted slowly away from the boat and it was nearly ten minutes before they saw a fin approach and then his body bobbed in the water like a fishing float. More fins arrived and circled. Peter bobbed again. Then again. Then again.

And then he was dragged under and disappeared from view. A few seconds later it popped up three feet out of the water with Peter still attached to it but with no legs. Moments later it was dragged down again and after nearly a minute the solitary life belt shot twenty feet out of the sea propelled from the pressure of the lower depths...

Below deck Senor Reyes, his wife and the killer of The Lord Peter raised their glasses, saluted each other and drank the cool wine.....

Ten minutes later the killer of The Lord Peter went on deck to get some fresh sea air.

Senor Reyes looked at his wife. 'Are you ok?'

She smiled warmly, 'Yes.'

'Any regrets?'

'We're not talking about today, are we?'

He shook his head.

'No regrets,' she said softly.

'Good,' he said gently and held her hand. 'Let's go and get some air.'

On deck she looked out to sea and thanked The Holy Mother that Jose, her beloved husband, was such a kind and generous man. He had never said anything when she tended the grave of

her first, womanising husband. The one who had given her gonorrhoea and made her abort her first child when she was still only nineteen. He had died in a car crash not long after. She crossed herself. Thank The Holy Mother.

And she would tend the grave no longer.....

Chapter 89

Allocated

It was amazing really..... You've just gotta listen to this....

This *thing* arrives. Well *things* do arrive now and then and so we work around it while it does what it does. Whatever that is. Personally we don't see the attraction but it takes all sorts.... I mean who would want to be in shit?

Anyhow we finished off our wonderful departmental ditty designed to make us truly happy in our work

.....*You couldn't make us stop*

There till the last soft plop

We are the lucky ones

We get to move the twos

It's where we want to be

We'd like a number three

and got back to it. Then a fucking NASTY arrived, the bastard. With two mates; the bastards. NASTY cubed. And so they did a bit of culling, and we did what we could while *the thing* was doing whatever it was doing, and then there's a lull and off *the thing* goes. Gone!

Thank fuck.

But seconds later another *thing* arrives and then all hell lets loose. The new *thing* is thrashing about but, and this is the exciting bit, it was penetrating the wall.

Yes! Penetrating the fucking wall!

The same walls that keep us in!

It wasn't us. Honest. It was the thing. Not that it matters now who the fuck did it.

Well we didn't need a second chance. We were off! A mad scramble through the new exits and away. Every fucker went which included the NASTY's.

And once we were out we were amazed. We'd never seen anything like it! No fucker had ever, ever, ever told us that there was a world like this out there. There were roads everywhere, things flying along them like nobody's business. Lights shining, bells, whistles, just about everything you could imagine. Of course we hadn't imagined it as it was beyond our pool of knowledge. When somebody allocates you to a shit hole for life what can you know?

And so we went everywhere.

Every one of us; all shapes and sizes *and* the Nasty's. And how the NASTY's loved it.

Rampage?

Understatement!

NASTY's a lot, outside world nil.

When Penny had finished perforating her husband's anus with the handy little sharp pointed cable puller she had acquired from work the enterobacteria of his gut and the Klebsiella pneumoniae bacteria hosted by his faeces rushed out into his body through the means of escape she had created.....

At the hospital they immediately started a highly invasive laparotomy to repair the damage to his perforated colon and investigated the likely damage to other organs. They knew immediate action would be the only way to stop the risk of massive, life threatening infection.....

Massive doses of antibiotics were administered to lower the risk of infection...

The Klebsiella pneumoniae bacteria couldn't wait. What a chance to cause some mayhem! They rushed everywhere trying to find hosts to dominate and very soon, Penny's dear, sweet, loving husband had septicaemia.

The Doctors infused large amounts of antibiotics to reinforce his antibodies as they marshalled quickly to quell the onslaught. The battle was fierce and bloody.....

The Klebsiella pneumoniae bacteria were too strong, though only just, and many died. On they marched until they breached his abdominal wall and infected it with Peritonitis.

The doctors responded quickly by pumping fluids into him but he was suffering incredible pain in his stomach which had become inflamed and rigid.

They fought back even harder using every drug at their command and after five days, five life threatening days, the medical team saw signs that they were turning the corner.

The monitors were more stable, showing that his body was fighting fewer and less life threatening battles, his temperature dropping and his pain less.

Another day of monitoring showed that the drugs and fluids had done their job and whilst they weren't out of the woods yet it was looking good.....

It's me again...yes me....allocated, remember? Baccy, remember Baccy? I thought I told you my name was Baccy....?. No? Oh... Ah well it's a bit obvious really as we're all called Baccy. It's short for Bacterium..... but you knew that...

Shhhh...shhh....talk softly....we're hiding.

Waiting....waiting.....we're good at waiting...

They think they've won but we've got one or two tricks left. When I say we I don't actually mean me, I'm just a lowly

bacterium. I'm a foot soldier so to speak. More an arse soldier really. I just help to keep the antibodies busy; we spread out to distract and weaken their defences. And, in confidence of course, we're mounting another attack soon. We just need them to relax a little more and sorry, got to go...they've just told us Plan B is on the move. We're going to infect his blood and give him bacteremia!

The doctors started the fight back by increasing the level of antibiotics; Ray Beasley started to respond to the treatment and his own natural defences did their bit by battling.

For three more days they battled and battled and then the Doctors saw the improvement and knew they had turned the corner. Thank God.

It had been a close one but this time he should be safe. They could see no signs that anything else was happening; his temperature had dropped appreciably and the monitors had hardly changed so they left him to rest, with a nurse to call in every thirty minutes to make sure he was ok, although he should be alright now.....

We're still here.....it's me, Baccy.....shhhhhh.....we're doing a spot of guerilla stuff.....shhhhh

Four hours later, still unconscious, Ray couldn't tell them about his sore throat and the sores that were starting to develop.....

Well we got in there without them noticing..... a small raiding party have established a beach head; just a bit of infection to start off with, but orders have come down the line that the big push is on soon. Is this better than working in shit all day or what? Haven't had this much fun since the time he had food poisoning. Actually that wasn't much fun....

Anyhow rumour has it we have received reinforcements. Not sure what that means but I'm told we'll know soon.

Just a sec, getting a message coming down the line.... Again....? Say it again....?

Did you hear that? Fucking hell. Blitzkrieg or what?

Well it looks like this is it.

They've called up the big guns; Klebsiella pneumoniae carrying R Factor. Now there's one mean fucker. I wish you could stand by me and watch (I know I can't actually stand but you know what I mean). You'll like this.....

The army of Klebsiella pneumoniae carrying R Factor forced their way to Ray's face and went immediately to work creating a secondary infection within the reservoir of bacteria housed in Ray's sinuses just under his eyes. Ray's defences there were too weak, what with the after effects of the surgery and the drugs, and the pathogens surged outwards in murderous waves and invaded his tongue, voice box and throat with necrotising fasciitis.....

It was the next day before the nurse noticed the problem and alerted a doctor to his new symptoms. The doctors examined him and were horrified with the new and frightening development. Ray had *crepitus* which was causing a crackling sound on examination, due to gas trapped under his skin. X rays and a laryngoscope probe were undertaken immediately which confirmed their diagnosis and he was immediately taken back down to surgery.

Did you like that? As if we were just going to go away..... No chance. And we haven't finished yet.....one final push, so I am led to believe, should just about do it. Now was this worth watching? I tell you this is fucking awesome.....With a bit of luck we're going to eat him alive....

We're going in again.....

Stealthily they evaded the doctors who were operating frantically to remove the flesh eating tissue from his throat and went straight for his face.

Ray's skin and soft tissues became swollen and started to blacken and pus filled sores and gassy blisters started to develop. Dead skin and tissue started to rot on his face. Like something out of a horror movie, as the blisters burst, a vile, dying stench erupted from them.

The doctors were running out of time. They felt nauseous from the stink that permeated the room and they took it in turns as best they could to leave the room to be sick. Although they repeatedly debrided the dead and dying flesh they began to realise his face was being attacked with such ferocity that holes were opening up in his flesh. They had run out of options but they battled on...

Told you they'd get him.....we haven't survived three and a half billion years without learning how to fight....

For four days Ray Beasley, although pumped full of pain killers, suffered excruciatingly as they devoured him.....

The winners!

We've eaten him away bit by bit. Unfortunately we now pay the price but it was exciting while it lasted and certainly better than moving shit. Sort of life before death scenario.

And this is a bit perverse but it will be good for one last laugh; me and the boys from the shit house are going to sing the Departmental Song. A last coming together of all the bacteria. A sort of swan song in our case.....

Would you like to join us?

Although we only met a short time ago I feel like I know you....

It would be nice if you did but if not it was nice meeting you....

Oh...we're off

We are the lucky ones

We get to move the twos

For that we thank the Lord

We never will be bored

We are.... the lucky..... ones

We....get..... to..... move.....t

Monitoring alarm bells rang, the screens flat lined and the doctors knew they had lost.....

Penny Beasley came home from her holiday, tanned and refreshed, to be told by the doctors that her husband was dead.

That his death had been quite *painful* due to a flesh eating bug.

That he had died *alone*.....

On the car park she danced a dance of joy.....

Chapter 90

Derry 12

As Shannon came round from her faint she felt herself being untied and held up and then she was tied again. Her hands in front of her and her arms pinned to her sides.

Derry resisted but got a vicious smack off Andy Pandy. They were marched into the Chapel area where Geoff Mulley was waiting. H nodded in the direction of Geoff and said to Harry, 'What do you think?'

Harry walked over to Geoff and inspected carefully. 'Ideal.'

Shannon screamed and struggled and then Derry cottoned on and kicked out with his feet but to no avail. They were dragged over to the waiting coffins with their raised lids, dropped inside and their legs held down and tied again.

The coffins had one small change in their detail in that the lids had a transparent glass panel at head height so that the deceased could be seen by their loved ones or in this case their loveless ones.

The coffins were wheeled to the small holding area. A coffin would usually sit there while the vicar intoned and those who wanted to say a few words did their thing. And then the soulful music would start, the coffin would gently move along the conveyor out of the chapel and the gathering would tearfully leave.

H moved to the small lectern and the others sat in the front seats. 'We are here today,' intoned H, 'to mourn the passing of our dear but stupid friend Derry and his slag of a girlfriend Shannon.'

Shannon started screaming obscenities from her open coffin so Andy walked softly and respectfully over and shut it. ‘Sorry, H,’ whispered Andy as he walked back, ‘some people have no respect.’

‘To continue..... Derry will be missed by many people; his warm smile, outgoing personality, his selfless fundraising for the underprivileged will all be a lasting testament.....I’m sorry....I’m welling up.’

He dabbed at his nose and went and sat down.

Harry succeeded him. ‘I did not have the privilege of personally knowing Derry but have heard him mentioned on many occasions when he was providing homes for the less well off in society and then, from the goodness of his heart, he re-housed them. Perhaps not so much re-housed as....de-housed them, but that is not to detract from his warm hearted motives....I’m sorry....this is too distressing....’ and he went and sat down.

Andy went up to the lectern. ‘I was fortunate in that I did know Derry but I think my friends have already covered his saint like character and so my thoughts today go out to Shannon. My first thought as she prepares to leave us for a better place is..... just how much prick could I get down her throat? And secondly would she like it up her arse? Perhaps we could take a moment or two to ponder these quite profound questions.....?’

After a minute’s silence Andy said, ‘As our dear friends prepare to leave us we will sing their favourite song....’

The assembled throng picked up their hymn sheets. ‘After me.....one, two, one, two, three, four.....’

*De Camptown ladies sing dis song, Doo-dah! doo-dah!
De Camptown race-track five miles long, Oh, doo-dah
day!*

I come down dah wid my hat caved in, Doo-dah! doo-dah!

I go back home wid a pocket full of tin, Oh, doo-dah day!

Gwine to run all night!

Gwine to run all day!

I'll bet my money on de bob-tail nag,

Somebody bet on de bay

De long tail filly and de big black hoss, Doo-dah! doo-dah!

Dey fly de track and dey both cut across, Oh, doo-dah-day!

De blind hoss sticken in a big mud hole, Doo-dah! doo-dah!

Can't touch bottom wid a ten foot pole, Oh, doo-dah-day!

Oooooooooohhhhhhhhhhhh

De Camptown ladies sing dis song, Doo-dah! doo-dah!

De Camptown race-track five miles long, Oh, doo-dah day!

I come down dah wid my hat caved in, Doo-dah! doo-dah!

I go back home wid a pocket full of tin,...

Ooooooooooh,

doo-daaaaaaaaaaaaah

doo-daaaaaaaaaaaaah

daaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaay

Andy walked to Derry's coffin, shut the lid, ignoring Derry's screams, and went back to his seat. Geoff Mulley started the soulful music and the conveyor slowly took the coffins away.

'That went well,' said H.

'Very,' said Harry.

'Indeed,' said Andy.

'Yes, H,' said Pete.

'Want to see them off?' asked Geoff.

'Least we can do,' said Andy.

They followed Geoff out of the chapel, through a door, through another door and found themselves at the back of the chapel in a corridor between the chapel and the furnaces. Geoff started loading the first coffin on to a trolley coffin. The back saving, battery operated piece of equipment allowed him to pull the coffin from the Chapel waiting area and rotate it through one hundred and eighty degrees until it lined up with the small door of one of the two incinerators. He looked at H who went to the coffin and opened the lid. 'Hi, Shannon, how are you doing?'

'Fucking bastards! Let me out!' she screamed and then her voice changed dramatically. 'Please,' she begged, 'please....I'll do anything.....anything you want....for you....for all of you....anything....?'

'Sorry, Shannon,' said H and put down the lid.

'What's her problem?' asked Andy.

H shrugged, 'Who knows? Maybe it's that time of the month?..... All yours, Geoff.'

Geoff Mulley raised the door of the oven and they saw the hot, bright red glow from the seven hundred degree heated bricks that lined it. Usually, by law, the oven had to be around eight hundred and fifty but it hadn't been used for several hours and it had cooled. *But not enough to make a difference and it would soon*

warm up. Warm? The flames would kick in as soon as the computer sorted out the temperature difference.

He wheeled the trolley to the mouth of the oven, pressed a button and an arm started to push the coffin towards the furnace. This was technically known as *charging* but Shannon could have argued it was also technically known as *murder*....

Shannon saw, through her glass porthole, the ceiling move above her and she knew they were pushing her in. Her face became a map to the terror within her and she screamed and screamed and screamed and her body shook violently as terror and uncontrollable panic took hold of her. The bright red glow of the oven chamber came into view above her and she knew she was going in head first. Her body went into an uncontrollable frenzy as she went even farther in.....

When she was completely in Geoff Mulley lowered the door.....

Shannon was in a frenzied, terrified panic. She screamed continuously, her body shook ever more violently and then she felt the heat permeate the coffin. Her mind knew what dreadful things were going to happen to her body in only a few more seconds and she lost consciousness. Thirty seconds later she died of asphyxiation; not through lack of oxygen, there was more than enough, but the oxygen was being used as fuel to fan the flames and raise the temperature that would burn her body. Ninety seconds later her skin was charring and her blood started to boil....Her mind

Derry was screaming at the top of his voice and banging his legs up and down as much as he could which was not a lot. H opened the coffin lid. 'You ok in there, Derry?'

'H,' begged Derry, 'there has to be a way we can sort this. You can have anything, everything, I own. I'll sign all the

property over to you. Everything. Every last brick you can have. Everything, H....please, H....take it all, just let me live....’

‘You’ll let us have everything, Derry? Everything you own you will sign over to us? All the property, all the money, all the investments?’

‘Everything, H, you can have everything.’

‘That may certainly make a difference, Derry, a big difference. Let me talk to my friends here.’

He went into a huddle with the others and then came back. ‘Nah, sorry, Derry.....’ and he closed the lid.

Hope was such a cruel weapon.

Geoff wheeled Derry to the mouth of the other oven, raised the door and pushed him in.....

‘Do you want to watch?’ asked Geoff.

‘We can watch them burn?’ asked Andy. ‘Really? Fucking right on.’

‘Come with me.’

He took them round the back of the ovens to where there was another small door with a glass peep hole in. He pointed and Andy went to one and Pete to the other.

‘Who’ve I got?’ asked Andy.

‘Shannon.’

It’s so small, thought Andy. Hardly any room to breathe. He smiled to himself; *hardly any room to breathe...* good one. In fact the exact dimensions, as Geoff could have told him, were 92” long x 32” wide x 23” deep. Just enough to take a coffin....and a body.

Andy could see Shannon’s coffin was already on fire; in fact it had ignited almost immediately on entry. For a few minutes whilst the fire tried to take hold the temperature in the main

chamber would drop as the heat was taken in by the cooler coffin and body.

H and Harry took their turns to have a look. Harry felt a little queasy knowing that, due to his advancing years, his time to be in there would be a lot sooner than his colleagues.

‘Want to stay and watch?’ asked Geoff, ‘I’ve got some wine in the fridge?’

‘Stay and watch?’ repeated H. ‘Stay and watch.....what? Them burning?’

‘Yes.’

Watch them burn, thought H, now that would be a first. Why not? ‘How long will it take?’

‘About seventy five to ninety minutes.’

H looked at Harry. ‘You up for it?’

‘I’ve gone this far.’

‘Andy, Pete?’ It was a daft question. You couldn’t have prised Andy out of there now he had the chance to see someone burn away. ‘We’re in. Get the wine, please, Geoff.’

Geoff got two bottles of cold plonk and dragged up some chairs the technicians would usually use and they took it in turns to have a look. It would take a little while before too much happened and so after a glass of wine H decided they may as well sort out the cash.

Geoff went back to the office with H and Harry and took Derry’s briefcase out of the safe. It was locked but Derry had been searched for the key and it opened quickly. The twenties were all laid out in neat piles, all £1,850,000 of it. H looked at Harry and Harry smiled. ‘Seven fifty?’ asked H, starting to count the £750,000.

Harry nodded. It was the price Harry and Mossad had decided to charge H for their help and it was going to the J N F, the Jewish National Fund. It still left enough to pay H for the casino

losses and next year's insurance premium hike. And Geoff Mulley.....

Back in the furnace room Andy and Pete had a bet as to who would burn the quickest, Derry or Shannon? They had tossed a coin to choose which oven they would have but then Pete had realised that Derry, who was in his incinerator, was bigger than Shannon who Andy had got, and would therefore take longer to burn.

'Come on, Andy, for fuck's sake, man, he must be five stone heavier and that must mean he'll take fifty percent longer to burn.'

'Why fifty percent?' queried Andy. 'If she's ten and he's fifteen surely that's a third?'

Pete thought about it. 'You're doing the maths wrong.'

'No, I'm not.'

'Yes, you are.'

'No, I'm not.'

'Yes, you are.'

Andy's face took on a daft grin. This was the World Snooker Cup all over again. Andy remembered from his school days the BODMAS principle and was just about to launch into why it would apply when he also remembered he couldn't remember what it stood for. Ah fuck.

'Let's split the difference and call it twenty five percent,' he said.

Pete started grinning. 'Fuck off, you daft cunt. I'll tell you what, let's just watch until Geoff comes back and he can tell us what's what?'

'I can go with that.'

They went back to their respective spy holes and waited for... they didn't know what? What the fuck happens when somebody burns? They watched as the coffin slowly burned away and for a

little while Shannon and Derry's graves were filled with black smoke....just for a little while...until it suddenly flashed and turned to flame.

When the others returned Andy and Pete demanded the cremating time difference for a ten stone and fifteen stone person so that they could continue with their little bet.

'Surprisingly,' said Geoff, 'it's very little. Perhaps five minutes at the most. Perhaps not even that.'

'How come?' asked Andy.

'It's just so incredibly hot in there. It's not like burning a witch from the bottom up. This is eight hundred and fifty degrees and it consumes you.'

'So it doesn't matter how big you are it's all the same?'

'Not quite. There would certainly be a noticeable difference between a twenty five stone man and a nine stone woman. But those are extremes...'

After fifteen minutes Pete's coffin disintegrated. 'Geoff, what's that round black thing I can see?'

'That's her head...'

'Oh fuck.'

Andy quickly moved over to have a look. 'Oh fuck.'

He went back to Derry. 'Come on, Derry, don't let this slag beat you. Burn, you bastard!'

Harry looked at H who shrugged. Boys and their games.....

Derry was several minutes behind Shannon and no sooner had Andy shouted out that Derry's charred head was showing than Pete jumped suddenly and nearly fell off his chair. 'There's flames coming out of her eyes. Out of her fucking eyes!'

'Right on,' said Andy and leapt across to have a look. 'Wow, now that's a fucking sight for sore eyes,' and for once he missed the pun. 'Look at this, H.'

H and Harry watched as her burning and expanding brain looked for ways to escape.

Andy went back to Derry to be called back almost immediately by Pete. 'Andy! Andy! Her head's splitting apart! I can see her fucking brain!'

'No, you can't.'

'Yes, I can.'

'Pete, if she'd had a brain she wouldn't be in there.'

'Good one.'

H and Harry grinned. *Yes, it was quite a good one...*

Andy came and had a look. 'Wow....I like that. Satan's whore...'

He hurried back to his own oven. 'Derry's starting,' he shouted excitedly. 'Come on, Derry, don't hold back. Let it go..... Pete, Pete....Derry's having so much fun in there he's splitting his sides....' Pete grinned but for a split second, just a split second, his mind allowed him to wonder what it would have been like had he been pushed into an oven while he was still alive....and somebody was watching him burn? What the fucking hell did you feel.....? And for another second he felt sorry for Derry and Shannon.

What a fucking God awful way to die...

His body went cold and he shuddered....

Geoff had a peek in to see if there was anything that could be a problem but saw nothing. If a body had cancer it took longer to burn due to its dense mass but there was no sign of anything like that. It was interesting that apart from old age, the three main types of corpses he received were cancer victims, young men who had been involved in traffic accidents, took drugs or committed suicide and young women who usually had kidney damage through too much booze.....

‘Once,’ said Geoff, ‘we put a woman in and after a few minutes I had a peek to make sure everything was ok only to find a face looking at me with staring blue eyes. Scared the life out of me!’

‘Was she still alive?’ asked Pete whose face had a look of horror.

‘It wasn’t her. Someone had put a ceramic head, some kind of Eastern good luck symbol, above her head in the coffin and it was that. It hadn’t burnt....’

‘Jesus Christ, Geoff,’ continued Pete, ‘how the fuck do you sleep?’

‘I count money,’ said Geoff looking at H.

H and Harry grinned. Geoff went over to the Facultatieve Technologies computer that controlled the incinerating process and looked at the schematics on the monitor. Burn rate good, chamber temperatures good, minimum pollutants....fine.

Pete was getting queasier by the minute as Shannon’s split skull exposed her charred brain. The top of the coffin had burnt through and collapsed on top of her chest but it would just be ashes in a few minutes.

As the coffin disintegrated he saw her folded arms, crossed on top of her, slide down her charred sides and he jumped again. Hard man though Pete was he was struggling with this. He didn’t like this at all....

Feeling wrong he suddenly looked round at Geoff who had been watching Pete in case, and he nodded to a side door. Pete rushed to it, ripped it open and just made the sink in time....

Andy, always the opportunist, moved to Pete’s chair....

At about thirty minutes the computer injected a continual flame that licked over and around the body and Andy thought it looked like The Wrath of God. Get one in early, eh, God; show em who’s boss before they get there...?

After forty minutes Shannon's skull was full of large holes and her brain glowed brightly. Her rib cage was now quite obvious and her organs were glowing and getting smaller as the flames consumed her. Andy stayed glued to his little porthole and ten minutes later half her rib cage collapsed on top of her burning torso leaving the bottom half of her ribs pointing eerily upwards like the rotting hulk of a wrecked, glowing galleon.

'She's going well now,' said Andy gleefully and Pete headed back to the sink...

In due course all that was left of Shannon, Derry was still happily burning away, were some charred ashes and some of the large bones; shoulder ball joints, hip joints, pelvis.....

'How much is left at the end?' asked Andy.

'There's usually about eight pounds of bone and ash left,' replied Geoff, 'and we scrape it out into a cooling compartment and then after about an hour or so when it's cool enough we put it into the cremulator which is like a tumble dryer with ceramic balls in and it grinds them all down to dust.'

'A cremulator?' asked Andy, 'sounds like something for making toffee.'

Geoff grinned. One way of looking at what happens to you at the end. Toffee...

'And then that's it?' continued Andy.

Geoff nodded. 'That's it.'

Andy thought for a while. 'Not much to look forward to, is it? Live a few years, burnt to eight fucking pounds of dust, scattered who knows where and then the next billion, billion, billion, billion, trillion years of nothing.'

'Time you started believing in God,' said Geoff, 'softens the fear of dying....'

A silence enveloped them all for a moment and not one of them said what they were thinking.

Nothing softens the fear of dying...it scares the shit out of us.....and it's not just the dying that scares us, it's how you die.....

Please...let it not be like this.....alive.....in a glowing, red hot furnace.....

Chapter 91

Lucy 6

Bernie Smout was losing it. He was a hard man but this....this..... fucking maniac in front of him was.....a fucking maniac.

Do you want some fish and chips, Mister Smout? What am I going to do with this bleach, Mister Smout? Do you want some fish and chips, Mister Smout? What am I going to do with this bleach, Mister Smout.....?

Mental or fucking what?

And that hideous fucking woman sitting opposite him. Jesus.... And the maniac had kissed her! Kissed a fucking corpse. Oh for fuck's sake.....

Maurice sat down opposite him again, dipped his fingers in the bleach and flicked it over Bernie's face. 'Guess what I'm going to do with this bleach, Mister Smout?'

Bernie strained and wriggled in a mixture of fury and terror. One half wanted to kill the fucker in front of him and the other half wanted to run like fuck!

Unfortunately he could do neither....

Maurice stood up and went behind him, grabbed his hair and forced his face down to the corrosive mixture below. Bernie resisted with all the strength he could muster but his face kept going down, little by little, with Maurice now using two hands and his body weight for leverage. When it was an inch away Maurice held him there. Bernie held his breath but the bleach permeated his shut eyes and its fumes burnt his skin. He held him there until he had to breathe and the corrosive fumes burnt his nose as he inhaled.

‘You getting an idea what’s going to happen, Mister Smout?’

Maurice let go of his head and Bernie yanked it back up out of harm’s way. Bernie mouthed a silent obscenity.

Maurice came back and sat in front of him. ‘It’s time, Mister Smout,’ he said and filled a beaker with the bleach. ‘It’s time.’

He stood up again and went behind Bernie and then Bernie heard him say softly again, ‘It’s time.....’

Maurice moved so Bernie could see him...

‘I’m not doing anything with the bleach, Mister Smout,’ said Maurice as he emptied the large saucepan of boiling chip fat over Bernie.

The boiling fat enveloped his head, ran down his face and continued down the rest of his body; a pool congregating on his lap. The smell of burning flesh filled the room as the crackling skin, looking and smelling like a good pork roast, started to peel off Bernie Smout. Bernie was in terrible pain and he was trying to scream just as the hot fat melted his plastic gag and entered his mouth, attaching itself to the inside and ripping off the skin; then continuing on its burning, ripping, horrifically painful way down his windpipe.

Bernie’s mind and body couldn’t take it and he passed into unconsciousness.....

Maurice made two cups of tea. He sat by his beloved Lucy and watched Bernie’s slow, shallow breathing which went on for nearly twenty minutes and then it stopped.

‘There you go, love,’ said Maurice. ‘Problem solved.’

He leaned over and kissed her gently then went upstairs and found two white, clean towels in the airing cupboard. Wrapping them gently round her he carried her into the lounge where they sat together and watched television. When it was dark he carried her up to bed, cocooned her again in new sheets then went back downstairs.

He came back, got undressed and climbed softly into bed so as not to wake her. Turning off the light he gently cuddled her, kissed her lovingly on the lips and then reached for the sharp steak knife beside him.

Slashing both wrists, he reached for her hand. 'Sleep well, my love, sleep well. See you in the morning.....'

Doug Graham, the Manager of one of J J's betting shops, picked up his half drunk cup of tea, milk no sugar, and wandered into the shop to see how they were doing. He could have looked at the screen, which he would in due course, but he was an old fashioned manager who wanted to see and feel what was happening.

'Morning,' he morninged to one and all, moving from punter to punter, saying hello, enquiring how they were doing, making them feel part of the family.

He moved over to the Fixed Odds Betting Terminals expecting to see young Lucy but she wasn't there. He hoped she was ok as they hadn't seen her in a week. He moved away.

Ah well, he thought, life goes on.....

Chapter 92

Monday

Richard woke and stretched. Seven o'clock. He looked at his wife who was trying hard to appear asleep but he knew she wasn't. He had to be at work at eight and she at eight thirty. He pushed down the stop button on the radio and went in to the en suite where he had a nelson then turned on the shower over the bath, drew the curtain, waited for it to get hot and got in.....

As he lathered his dick he wondered if everyone else's life was as quiet and repetitive as his?

More than likely.....