

# A china key

julian A anderson

a Connections tale

Connections is a collection of stories that share a common theme, survival. Based around the discovery of an ancient substance, each book explores a different aspect and how it affects the past, present and future.

The Connections stories can be read in any order.

Whilst we are all having to stay at home, I have created free versions of some of my books. They will remain free until we all allowed out again. I hope you enjoy it.



CHINA KEY © 2011 JULIAN A ANDERSON

Cover picture © 2015 julian A anderson

The moral right of julian A anderson to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act of 1988.

All rights reserved; no part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without prior permission of the publisher.

ISBN 978-0-9934328-7-3

Also available as an e-book

ISBN 978-0-9934328-3-5

First published in Great Britain in 2015 by  
NorilskXylla Publishing, UK.

[www.julianandersonbooks.co.uk](http://www.julianandersonbooks.co.uk)



With thanks to my friends and family and most definitely, my wife for their continued support, patience and tolerance.

The wine is on its way folks.



## What if?

Every story begins with a single thought, what if?

Each year an average of ninety tonnes of material enters the Earth's atmosphere from space. Whilst most consists of dust size particles, around five hundred are large enough to reach the ground.

There are more than 38,000 documented meteorite finds and a few have become a part of the human story. In the 1970s a stone meteorite was uncovered at an Iron Age dig at Danebury in Hampshire. Archaeologists concluded that it had been deliberately placed there. There is historical evidence that some Native Americans treated meteorites as ceremonial objects whilst other cultures valued iron-nickel meteorites for their unusual qualities in creating fine cutting edges for tools and spear tips.

Just after the Danebury discovery, another deposit of meteorite material was discovered in a worked-out mine in South Africa. This deposit had mixed with the silts of a flood river plain long before evolution began. Then it was brought to the surface of a world teeming with life.

## Chapter one

‘I trust that everything was to your satisfaction?’

An immaculately dressed young woman holding a clipboard, beamed at the small group which had gathered in the VIP room after a long lunch.

‘My name is Tanya and I am Mr Taylor’s head of public relations. I will be escorting you to the laboratories where Mr Taylor has been overseeing the final preparations for today’s demonstration. Now if you will kindly follow me.’

‘Can’t you tell us what this is all about?’ Asked a small round man with a thick Sheffield accent. ‘I never did believe in a free lunch and I don’t like mysterious invitations.’

‘Nevertheless, you all accepted.’ Tanya smiled her most winning smile. ‘I am sure Mr Taylor will explain.’

‘Aye, well, he’d better. I don’t know about these others but I am a busy man.’

There followed a murmur of general agreement. Tanya clutched her clipboard close as she pressed a button for the lift. Although there were just five people trying to fit themselves into the eight capacity space, the average weight of the group made it a tight squeeze. As the lift doors opened, they almost spilt out onto a grey concrete floor.

‘Are we leaving?’ Asked a puzzled tall, thin man as he saw an underground car park.

‘No.’ Tanya continued to smile. ‘We are simply heading for the secure part of our building. This is one of the places where we conduct our more sensitive tests. Of course, I cannot divulge the location of our other test sites. If I did, it would not just be my P45 I would be handed.’

The group responded with polite laughter.



## Chapter one

Tanya led them through long lines of cars to a small door on the other side of the building. It was a plain door of the type that usually conceals a cleaning cupboard or some other mundane function. Tanya lifted a key, which had been hanging around her neck and unlocked the door. As the group filed through, they were surprised to find a long corridor on the other side. After once more locking the door, Tanya led them through a maze of passages before guiding them into a room that looked exactly the same as the VIP lounge, they had left more than ten minutes ago.

‘Is this some sort of stupid joke?’ Sheffield man huffed.

‘I must say that I am beginning to lose patience myself.’ Added a red faced man.

‘And I wouldn’t blame you if you wanted to leave.’ The voice, oozing with charm, belonged to a well-dressed stocky man in his mid-forties. ‘But then if you did, you will never know the reason for your invitation.’

‘Who the bloody’ell are you?’

‘Forgive me for being so rude. I am Edward Taylor. Your host and owner of Taylor and Hardy Ceramics, soon to be renamed International Industrial Ceramics, if today’s presentation proves of interest.’

He turned to Tanya and gave a brief nod as a signal that she should leave. Waiting for a few moments to be sure that she had gone Taylor returned his attention to the group.

‘I do not know whether you have introduced yourselves. I suspect not given the sensitive nature of your current business interests. But I am sure you will have surmised that you all have something in common and it is that interest which I hope will be piqued today. Unless you are a collector of fine china, I do not expect you to have heard of my company. You will however, know the name of the Periston Corporation, which is why they issued the invitations.’ He paused for a moment of self-satisfied amusement as each looked around just in case there were any blank faces. ‘We, together with the Periston Corporation have developed, although I would stress not

perfected, a wholly new type of animal feed. Now I am sure that will be a surprise in itself. After all, my company has been making chinaware for over two hundred years. Our connections to the animal kingdom have been understandably limited. Which begs the question, what is our connection with a worldwide chemical company? Before I go into that, allow me a moment to give you the sales talk.

We have seen in recent years, the inevitable result of famine. Sometimes it is war that is the cause as tragically witnessed just a few years ago in Biafra. At other times, it is the work of nature. With populations growing at a record pace, it is only a matter of time before the world runs out of food. The conservationists would have it that man is abusing nature and would like to introduce birth control and have us eating beans and pulses.'

Another round of smug laughter.

'But perhaps they have a point. There has been some frontier research which alludes to the dangers of something called global warming. Quite possibly, this is a new concept for many of you and it has nothing to do with the current hot weather. Essentially, some scientists have looked at trends in global weather, ocean current and ice-flow records and predict we are entering a new period of rising temperatures. Did you know that a worldwide increase of just a couple of degrees could dramatically affect rainfall patterns and lead to increased risks of flooding in low lying areas and drought in others. This might all sound like science fiction, but there are some established facts. Industrialisation is releasing vast amounts of chemicals into the atmosphere and that has had a proven impact on everyday lives. It is exactly twenty years since the Clean Air Act of 1956 made London a smoke free zone, which put an end to the smogs that were killing as many as twelve thousand Londoners each winter. Modern chemicals however, are now having a potentially more dramatic impact by trapping heat. Since we do not have the technology to even predict the weather accurately, let alone control it, we must find better

## Chapter one

ways of producing food that will be less susceptible to changing weather and which will feed a growing population. Mankind therefore, faces a choice. We either give in to the demands of a lunatic fringe and start eating beans and pulses or change the way we produce food. In which case, nature needs a helping hand and we and our partners would like to extend that hand today. Now, if you will kindly follow me.'

Taylor led the group back into the corridor and after a couple of minutes, they found themselves inside a large two storey room. A thick glass partition bisected the room at the three-quarter line. The smaller portion, occupied by the group, was laid out in the manner of a grand conference suite with thick carpet, heavy flock wallpaper and a large projection television. The other side of the glass wall was filled with animal pens containing cows, sheep, pigs, chickens and turkeys as well as more exotic animals. Taylor made his way between the group and the glass wall to get their attention once more.

'Periston of course, is well known for its fertilisers, veterinary medicines and high concentrate feed pellets. Indeed, the company has an annual turnover that is the envy of many small countries. However, I am sure they would not mind me saying that to date, their product range has yet to meet future market challenges in a truly imaginative way. If mankind is to sustain itself, we need to increase the volume of food produced for a given amount of land and a given amount of energy. For example, a chicken takes between six and eighteen weeks to reach a slaughterable size, depending on the rearing system. Beef production can take as long as thirty months, during which time the animal has to be fed, watered and kept free from infection. All of this costs money, which in turn means increased cost to the consumer. Now you as farmers may think the Sunday joint is well worth the money but for most families around the world, the cost could be several month's wages, severely limiting the export market.'

'All of which is true. My two hundred pigs are delivering smaller margins than ever.' Said the red faced man. 'But that's

why the EEC guarantees price levels, so why should we be interested in producing more?’

‘At the risk of appearing rude, politicians are fickle creatures. In the current economic climate, do you really think those subsidies will be maintained, and then what? As businessmen, we all need to look at the long-term picture. If there are to be future shortages, and this seems increasingly likely, then there is a market for you to capture.’

‘You were saying something about the time it takes from weaning to slaughter?’

‘Yes, I was. What if that time could be cut by a quarter or even by half.’

‘It would be a bloody miracle.’ Sheffield man chipped in.

‘A miracle indeed.’ Taylor added. ‘But it is that miracle I want to demonstrate today. Now sir, would you kindly have a look at this Holstein and tell me how old it is?’

The red faced man studied a bull tethered in a concrete pen which appeared to be almost fully grown.

‘I would say about twenty months.’

‘Then you would be surprised to learn that it is just fourteen months old.’

‘Aye, I would.’ The man admitted.

‘We have developed a new feed supplement, based on a type of clay we discovered.’ Again, Taylor paused and smiled. ‘You will forgive me if I do not reveal the location or indeed the nature of its unique properties. However, when we refine that clay and mix it with other nutrients, we have a feed which stimulates cell growth at a substantially increased rate.’

‘You said you had yet to perfect it, which means you are still having problems.’

‘With the feed itself, no, however, it is still expensive to produce. What we want to achieve is a production cost that is the same as the current feed supplements. That way the margins can be increased and at the same time, the end-cost brought down. An economic miracle as well as a scientific one.’

‘Well, I have to admit it all sounds very promising.’

## Chapter one

‘Eight out of ten then,’ concluded Taylor, a little disappointed with the reaction, ‘then let us try to make it ten out of ten. What would you say is the biggest problem with your pig herd outside of feed and heating costs?’

The fat man stroked his chins as he thought. ‘Well, I would say space and vet bills. We have to give the animals a certain amount of room otherwise they start to fret and bite each other and the cost of care is sky high.’

‘Precisely. One of the benefits of our new feed is that it has a completely natural calming effect on animals. It not only makes them docile, but it also boosts the immune system. Now, as to the question of why you are here. As I said, we have perfected the recipe but need to carry out further work to make it cost effective. For that, we need to carry out field tests. Each of you has large farms and are facing financial ruin.’

‘Here just a moment!’ Said red face man turning even redder.

Taylor held up his hand to still any murmurs of complaint.

‘You are all practical business people and there is no point in denying circumstances. You each owe Periston a sufficient sum to have your farms liquidated. I am going to offer you a way out. If you agree to allow your farms to become test centres, all debts will be cancelled. In addition, you become entitled to a lifetime of free supplies. Just imagine what a difference that could make to your business. However, I would not expect to have any sensible discussions without you having seen a demonstration. If you will follow me?’

Taylor led the group to the other end of the room and a section of glass that had been curtained off. He pulled at a rope and the curtains slid to one side as if to open a theatre show. On the other side of the window was a large room. The floor was strewn with straw and small branches whilst packing cases and larger branches had been fixed in such a way as to provide a climbing frame, giving the space the appearance of a zoo cage for apes or monkeys.

‘We are about to let a group of animals into this room that would normally prey on each other. In addition to feral cats

and mice, we also have a South African hunting dog, a small troop of vervet monkeys from Madagascar and a crowned eagle which normally preys on vervets. Now, you do not have to be a naturalist to know that should be a recipe for carnage. However, all of these animals have been fed especially on our pellets and... well! Let us see what happens.'

A number of small metal doors slid open and the group shifted uneasily as they watched the empty space in anticipation of what was to come. None expected anything other than to be a spectator at a pointless massacre. It was as if they had returned to an age of cockpits and bear baiting.

'Are you sure this is really necessary?' Asked Sheffield man.

Taylor smiled but said nothing and the group continued to watch as the first of the animals sniffed its way cautiously into the room. It was a mouse and it was soon followed by another and then another. The mice were then joined by a vervet and within a few moments, four monkeys were perched on a high branch, spying out the new territory whilst the mice had discovered a dish of what looked like small grey seeds and were quietly feeding. For a while this uninformative, if peaceful scene continued and it began to look as if nothing of interest would happen.

'Look.' Red faced man pointed at a floor level door as a head peaked through. 'Now we shall see something.'

At first, it was difficult to see what was emerging, but then the shapeless shadow took on the form of a cat and it looked mean and hungry.

'I should point out that none of the animals has been fed for twenty-four hours.' Said Taylor.

'Then it's goodbye mice.'

The cat padded around for a while before noticing the mice. It bent low as if it was about to launch an attack. Slowly it crept towards the mice. Tall thin man half turned away not wanting to see the inevitable as it approached the oblivious mice that were still nibbling at the pellets. Then the cat did something quite strange. It simply shuffled its way in between the mice

## Chapter one

and also began to eat the pellets. As the group watched bemused, one of the mice positioned itself right under the feeding cat's jaw, completely insensible to any danger. So spellbinding was the sight that the group failed to notice a hunting dog enter the space and stroll gently over to join the feeding.

'Well, I have to hand it to you.' Complimented red faced man.

'Just a moment.' Taylor pointed as an enormous eagle settled on the branch within biting distance of the monkeys.

The group watched fascinated as predator and prey shared the same space.

'Truly shall the lamb lie down with the lion.' Said Sheffield man.

'Good god! Look at that.'

One of the monkeys had climbed on the back of the eagle as if it were going for a ride. Sheffield man tapped on the window to attract its attention. As it looked up, an unexpected change in its expression took place. This was quickly followed by an unmistakable squeal as life was violently taken. Everyone's attention was pulled immediately back to the floor of the cage. There they saw the hunting dog standing, panting with the cat at its feet. This seemed to be the cue for an orgy of killing but it was not just predators attacking prey. As Taylor frantically closed the curtain, their final sight was of a monkey, holding the head of the eagle as it screamed at its lifeless body below.

## Chapter two

‘Robert. There has been another one.’

Robert Jennings looked casually up from his morning paper to find his boss, Chief Superintendent Gilpatrick staring at him in an accusing fashion. He slowly lowered his paper and pondered the idea that fate always seemed to conspire against potentially promising days.

‘May I ask sir, what there has been another of?’ He said in as patient a tone as he could manage.

Gilpatrick’s portly features assumed a flustered look. ‘Now don’t play silly buggers. I am not in the mood. If you bothered to read the morning reports, you would know that some blighter has thrown himself into the blades of a jet engine. I want you to get over to Heathrow and make yourself visible.’

‘Suicides are not our responsibility I am glad to say. I spent three days on the last one. Three wasted days.’

‘Yes, I know. But given that this one happened at a major airport, if we don’t put in an official appearance there will be hell to pay. Please Robert. It will only take a few hours.’

Jennings laid down his newspaper reluctantly. Just for once he had arrived to an empty in-tray. No one had been murdered and the local criminal fraternity seemed to be taking advantage of the unusually hot weather to take a holiday. As things were so uneventful, he had planned to do nothing more adventurous than spend a quiet morning reading the paper, doing the crossword and even catching up with a bit of paperwork if he was really pushed for something to do. Now it seemed as if that peaceful morning was becoming little more than wishful thinking.

‘Well, if I must. I’ll take my spanking new detective constable



## Chapter two

with me. He could do with an airing.’

Gilpatrick looked a little alarmed. ‘Is that necessary? I mean, hang it all, I have to account for the resources.’

‘Which is why you have chosen to send a chief inspector along to a routine suicide investigation?’

‘I see your point. How is the young fellow working out?’

‘The young fellow as you call him, is just that. It took me three years to get the last one used to my ways. I didn’t want a replacement, particularly not one fresh out of school.’

‘That is just the way things go, I’m afraid. You trained Peters so well, we promoted him.’

‘Yes.’ Jennings concluded with regret. ‘I’ll have to be a little less diligent this time.’

‘Anyway Robert, don’t hang around and stop by and see me when you get back.’

As Jennings watched his boss leave, he picked up the newspaper and dropped it into the wastepaper basket before wandering over to the window to cast a weary look at the cruel world. The view from his office looked out over the roofs of a hotel and the St James underground headquarters. It was not an inspiring sight and he rather missed the one that he used to have of the Thames and Westminster Bridge. In fact, he very much missed the old building itself. It had an air of grand importance at which the Victorians excelled. Even the shared third floor office of a humble detective constable was better than this leased modern office block with its open plan layout, uninspiring appearance and that silly revolving triangle outside. And they had the cheek to call it New Scotland Yard. Norman Shaw would be turning in his grave.

The street below had begun to fill with office workers and tourists milling about enjoying the sunshine. The smell of warm air, tarmac and lead petrol evoked the expectation of another glorious day, which threatened to send temperatures well into the eighties once more. Jennings was beginning to miss clouds. As he watched a carefree London going about its business, a Gilbert & Sullivan tune popped into his head. ‘A policeman’s

lot is not a happy one.'

A sharp cough from behind returned his attention to the uncomfortable reality of work. He found himself staring at the stiff-backed, lean figure of Sergeant Wilks. His large ex-RAF moustache positively bristled with expectation of new orders.

'I have ordered a car sir and DC Morton is on his way.'

'Do you always listen in to my conversations?'

'Naturally sir, how else could I maintain my reputation for efficiency? Besides, if I didn't anticipate your needs, you would have my stripes.'

'I still may. Thank you, Wilks.'

As Wilks left, Jennings absentmindedly pulled open the top left hand drawer where he kept his pipe and tobacco. As he looked longingly at the Briar and bright yellow tin, the voice of his wife, Jen reproached him for his lack of willpower and he reluctantly closed the drawer. The desk calendar confirmed the reason as to why a promising morning had gone awry. It was a Tuesday.

There was a sharp knock on the door and a tall, well dressed and handsome young figure of John Morton walked in. Jennings tried to recall what he had looked like at that age and concluded that some people seemed to have all the cards stacked in their favour. Morton was one of a new breed of well-educated policemen which the new commissioner was encouraging to join the force in his battle against corruption. It was one of the few changes of which he approved.

'Do you have all your paperwork sorted out?' Jennings asked.

'Yes sir.' Morton replied. 'Sergeant Wilks has booked us a car. Where are going?'

'Heathrow airport and don't forget to inform Ops we are leaving.'

'Yes sir.'

As Jennings walked past the eager young policeman, he made a conscious effort to recall his own, absolutely disastrous first day.

## Chapter two

The journey to Heathrow took a little longer than expected as Morton missed the entrance to the administrative block. Sitting in the back of the car, Jennings had spotted the sign and smiled guiltily to himself as they drove past the turning. A small degree of embarrassment and self-doubt was good for the soul of any young and eager man. Eventually, they found their destination and were shown into the office of the operations director by a very pretty Chinese girl. As she left, Jennings could not help giving the director a quizzical look.

‘On loan.’ The director explained. ‘They are thinking about applying for a European route and wish to learn how we do things. Forgive me, my name is Saxby and it is Chief Inspector Jennings? I was told to expect you.’

‘This is DC Morton. He is learning the ropes. Perhaps we could start with a description of what happened.’

‘Yes, of course but would you like a coffee?’

‘Thank you, no.’

‘What about?’ Saxby indicated Morton who was still standing by the door.

‘No, that is very kind. Morton doesn’t drink on duty.’ Jennings replied mischievously.

‘I have some statements which you might find useful, but essentially one of my employees, Michael Brown, was working in cargo bay six. That is where we offload chartered cargo fights. It was getting towards the end of his shift when he walked out. Made his way to one of the storage sheds where they were testing some newly upgraded engines. He then seemingly climbed one the gantries and before anyone had realised, he threw himself in.’

‘May I have a look at those statements?’ Asked Jennings.

Saxby handed over a green foolscap sized folder and Jennings quickly flipped through the pages trying to find any odd facts that might indicate something of interest.

‘I see Brown was married. Any domestic problems that you know about?’

‘I have no idea. It is not the sort of question we would ask,

but as far as I know, everything was as it should be. In fact, he appears to be a recent father. Had a spot of leave to help take care of the new baby.'

Jennings turned another page and found a photograph of a pleasant looking young man. Now he was dealing with the tragic death of a human being instead of just an inconvenient interruption to an expected quiet morning.

'I would like to talk to the witnesses.'

'I have a car downstairs. However, I should warn you about what to expect. I hope you have a strong stomach.'

Around fifteen minutes later Jennings and Morton were ushered into a small office in one of the hangers on the edge of the airport. They had used a back door and Jennings noticed that a blanket had been hung over the window that separated the office from the hanger. It was a grubby little office filled with shelves of cardboard boxes that seemed to contain various bits of machinery. A plain wooden desk also bore witness to its engineering function, but the chairs were both new and out of place. Someone had decided that a chief inspector could not sit on oil soaked furniture.

There was a tap on the door and a young man in overalls entered looking very nervous. He was accompanied by a smartly dressed middle aged man dressed in a pinstriped suit. There was something about the look of self-importance of this second character that Jennings took an instant dislike to.

'Come along Trenton. The chief inspector doesn't have all day.'

Jennings decided to teach this man a lesson.

'It's Mr Trenton, isn't it?' He asked the young man with deliberate politeness. 'Do you drink tea? I am sure we could both do with a cup. Would you mind?' He addressed the older man. 'And please ensure you close the door on your way out.'

The man left, clearly disgruntled by his treatment. Jennings returned his attention to Trenton who was now smiling sheepishly.

'Not a popular character, I imagine.'

## Chapter two

‘No.’ Trenton replied but did not elaborate.

‘I gather you worked with Michael. Can you tell me how long for? Did you know him well?’

‘We always called him Mick.’ Trenton corrected. ‘We were not friends but yes I knew him well enough. We worked together for about two years.’

‘And what sort of man was he?’

‘Quiet, I suppose.’

‘Bit of a loner; kept himself to himself?’

‘Don’t get me wrong. He was up for a laugh with the lads and he could be a good mate. Mick stepped in a couple of times for me when one of the little’uns was sick and Steph couldn’t get time off. But I suppose you could say he was more thoughtful than most.’

‘In what way, thoughtful?’

‘Considerate. Always looking out for his mates.’

‘Do you all socialise much?’

‘Not really. Most people don’t last long once they get to know Mr Withers.’

‘Yes, I am not surprised.’ Jennings smiled.

‘But occasionally we would go down the Pig and Whistle if we were doing a mid-shift, and we are both on the darts team. But of course, he and Mandy have a new baby, so it was a bit more difficult to get away these days.’

‘You have children, Mr Trenton?’

‘Yeah, two...’

‘How old?’

‘The boy Charlie is four and Kate is two.’

‘Quite a handful then. Mine are a bit older, but I still carry the scars.’

Trenton smiled knowingly.

‘How was Mick coping?’

‘Well, the sleepiness nights were getting to him a bit. He used to sneak off in between shifts for a bit of a kip, but only ever after he’d finished his work.’

At that moment, a young girl came in with two steaming

mugs of tea and set them down on the desk. Jennings took a sip and shuddered as he realised that it contained sugar.

'Now please take your time, but I would like you to describe what happened this morning.'

Trenton shuffled uneasily. 'We clocked on at 6.00am. There were only two planes to unload this shift and so were expecting a quiet morning.'

'How did Mick seem when he clocked on?'

'He was tired. He and Mandy had a rough night, but he seemed normal. In fact, if anything he was a bit more chatty than usual, showed us pictures of his baby daughter.'

'Were there any signs that something might have been wrong?'

'I suppose he was a little out of sorts. It was after we had unloaded the first lot. Yes, about an hour after. We were a bit bored and wanted to play cards. Normally, Mick would join in but this morning he didn't seem interested.'

'What time was that?'

'About half nine. By the time the second plane came in, he was hardly saying a word. But come to think of it, he was behaving a bit oddly before that. Started getting jumpy whenever there was a loud noise. Even had a go at Mr Withers when he slammed the office door. That sparked a bit of a barney.'

'I can imagine. As a matter of interest, what cargo were you unloading and where did it come from?'

'The flight was from Cape Town. I have no idea what it was carrying; you will have to ask Mr Withers. We just unload the crates.'

'Later that morning after the second plane, did you see him leave?'

'No. In fact, we were still unpacking the second plane when we noticed he wasn't there. At first, we thought he had gone to the loo but when he didn't come back, I went to look for him.'

'Where did you look?'

'Firstly, in the toilets, then between the crates. That was

## Chapter two

where he would sneak off during breaks to sleep. But he had disappeared and that wasn't like him. He was no shirker.'

'Mr Trenton. Can you think of any reason why Mick might take his own life?'

The young man looked over towards the door that led to the hanger and pursed his lips for a moment before replying.

'No, I can't. He was just an ordinary bloke. Nice wife, new kid. Why would anyone do that to themselves?'

'People can do some strange things, especially if they feel they have no alternative.'

'But that's just it,' Trenton protested with indignation, 'he had everything he wanted especially after the baby was born. He could not have been more proud.'

'And there is nothing else you can think of?'

Trenton looked thoughtful and then shook his head.

'In which case, thank for your time,' Jennings concluded.

As soon as Trenton had closed the door Jennings turned to Morton.

'As an eager young detective, what do you make of that?'

'I would say sir that he could have been thinking about something that was troubling him. Trenton did say that he seemed to change during the morning. Maybe something was wrong at home.'

'My thoughts exactly. You don't have kids do you.'

'No sir, I am not married.'

'Pity, I want you to go and see Brown's wife. Be gentle but I want to know if there were any marital problems.'

'Do you not think I should come with you and see...'

'What is left of the poor blighter,' Jennings interrupted. 'Don't worry Morton, you will get ample chances to see the unpleasant side of our work. No need to rush into it.'

Despite the fact that it was sweet, Jennings took a couple of large mouthfuls of tea before venturing into the main hanger. He was not looking forward to this. During his career, he had to deal with a few, but thankfully not too many of the more tragic aspects of police work. It was not something he handled

well. After twenty years, he was still haunted by the things he had seen as a young copper at the Milton train crash.

As the door swung open, the first thing Jennings noticed was an absence of anything out of the ordinary. It was a large hanger, perhaps three stories high but the view across the space was obscured by a number of carefully stacked crates. However, he could just make out that there were about half a dozen cars and people working on trestle tables. In the far distant corner was an enormous jet engine mounted on a gantry. It took him a while to find anything amiss and it was only when he was some way into the hanger that he spotted the first signs of what had happened. In the casing of the engine, was a gaping hole. The edges were jagged and facing outwards. As he followed the line-of-sight from the hole, he had his first view of the consequences of the incident and it made his stomach turn. Jennings stopped for a moment and took a few deep breaths to mentally prepare before making his way slowly towards the tables. As he approached, a man dressed in dark red overalls looked up and pulled down a face mask so that he could speak.

‘Who the bloody hell are you?’

‘Chief Inspector Jennings.’ Came the curt reply. He took out his warrant card and held it up for the man to see. As soon as the man’s expression relaxed, Jennings responded with his own question.

‘And you are?’

‘John Crichton, Home Office.’

‘This is being treated as an air accident?’ Said Jennings with a tone of surprise.

‘Of course. It happened on airport territory and involved an aircraft of sorts.’

‘Please don’t misunderstand. I am only here to verify whether a crime has taken place.’

‘I see!’ The man replied. ‘Well, that is not my field but I see no reason to dispute the accounts. The man walked into this maintenance hangar, climbed the gantry to reach an engine that



## Chapter two

was undergoing tests and threw himself into the blades.'

'There are witnesses?'

'Three engineers. No one noticed anything amiss until he was standing at the bottom of the gantry. Apparently, they tried to warn him but he simply raced up and that was that.'

'Are the engineers still around?'

'No, all three were sent home, quite understandably. Not a nice thing to have seen. I can let you have a copy of their statements.'

'Thank you. I assume there was not much left for the coroner.'

'Not a lot but we have yet to start scraping his remains from the walls and floor.'

Jennings looked around the hangar, carefully avoiding the unpleasantness that was just visible. His eyes once more settled on the engine casing.

'What caused the hole?'

'His head. We found most of it over by the doors. Do you want to take a look?'

\*\*\*\*

Jennings sat quietly whilst his boss, Gilpatrick, fussed over two workmen who were trying to hang a painting. It was a large painting and they had been forced to install a hefty batten to hold the weight because the flimsy panel walls were not up to the job. It had apparently taken most of the morning, but now Gilpatrick was having a change of heart and actively considering another wall. The workmen looked increasingly perturbed.

'What do you think Jennings?'

He studied the painting and its position for a moment as if weighing carefully the pros and cons of moving it. 'I think it looks very good where it is.'

The two men visibly relaxed.

'Oh well, if you are sure.'

The two men quickly disappeared before Gilpatrick had a chance to change his mind.

'Now, how did you get on?'

'Not one of my more enjoyable mornings.' Jennings admitted. 'I don't think there can be any doubt that the poor chap committed suicide, such a sad waste.'

'Family problems?'

'Apparently not. I had Morton talk to the widow, hardly more than a girl by all accounts. They had both been feeling the strain of having a new baby but were coping. He was liked at work and seems to have no particular financial worries beyond what you would expect.'

'Then why did he have to go and top himself?'

'That will be for the coroner to decide, but the Home Office is sure that it was an act of self-harm and I have found nothing to contradict that view.'

'Any prospect that he was taking drugs?'

'It is possible, but I suspect not. He has no history and I would not want to put forward such a view. His poor wife will have enough problems to deal with raising a baby on her own. The insurance won't pay out on suicides and I see no point in making things worse by sullyng his reputation.'

'Nothing for us then?'

'Nothing for us.' Jennings replied thoughtfully.

'Right in that case, can we have a look through your unsolved cases? They do seem to be building up.'

Jennings looked at the thick manila file lying on the desk and concluded that this was not a conversation he wanted to have at the moment.

'Actually, I have a court appearance in an hour. I really should leave.'

'Here, but hang it all!' Gilpatrick protested but Jennings had no intention of prolonging the conversation.

Once free of Gilpatrick, Jennings made his way across the open space of the main area towards his own office. As he passed a lift, the doors opened and he found himself

## Chapter two

confronted by Wilks carrying a small tray of sandwiches and coffee.

‘I do hope some of that is for me. I have had nothing to eat since 7.30 last night. The café at East Croydon station was closed again.’

‘Very perturbing sir. I thought you might be a bit peckish given that you missed lunch.’

‘How very thoughtful. By the way, if anyone wants me this afternoon, I am in court.’

‘Long hearing, is it sir?’

‘Very. What is that file you are carrying?’

‘The report of the first suicide case, I thought you might want to read it.’

‘I suppose I should, although why we are concerning ourselves with suicides is beyond me. By the way, why were you coming out of the lift?’

‘The kitchen is closed again sir. Leaking pipe.’

As they approached his office, Jennings took a detour to the toilet. Once inside, he took off his jacket to have a wash. Although he had already washed his face and hands twice, the memory of what he had seen earlier that day, made him feel in need of another. As he splashed warm water onto his face Jennings noticed that he had missed shaving a small patch of hair under his chin. He patted the underside of his throat to see whether the many might merge into a single chin once more, but they did not. Still, Jen had been a little unkind about his putting on weight. After all, it was her that was feeding him with all those experimental meals. As he looked at his blond thinning hair, expanding eyebrows and grey going on red eyes, Jennings concluded sadly that the young handsome man was still in there somewhere. He was just very well hidden. Jennings slipped on his jacket and headed back to his office where Wilks and Morton were waiting.

‘I have the morning reports for you sir.’ Said Morton with an unwarranted degree of eagerness.

Jennings looked at Wilks accusingly. ‘Why do I not get the

reports until the afternoon? I had an embarrassing moment with Gilpatrick this morning.'

'It's because your name starts with a J' sir. The circulation list is compiled alphabetically.'

'In that case, you have my full permission to change it.'

'Alas, that would do no good. There are already seven names beginning with A.'

'Aren't you coming up to retirement?' Jennings asked with a malicious smile.

'Not quite sir. I could have a word with the chief super's PA.'

'Yes, well, I will leave that to you.' Jennings turned to Morton who was still standing behind his desk, open file in hand, ready to read. 'Come on then. What imaginative scams have our rivals come up with for today.'

Jennings took a bite from the sandwich that Wilks had provided. He thought it might be cheese and ham but the bread was so dry it was hard to tell.

'Pinky Brown has been released from Parkhurst.'

'So, he has concluded his little holiday on the Isle of Wight, has he?'

'Yes sir, a seven year holiday.'

'Didn't I hear that he has a touch of arthritis?'

'More than a touch sir, I doubt very much we will be seeing him back to his old tricks. Then there is a report about Charlie Wheams. He was spotted at the Some Place Else club.'

'I had hoped we had seen the back of him, nasty piece of work. Who's watching him?'

'Jimmy Price.'

Jennings raised his eyebrows with surprise.

'Can't imagine a more suited couple sir,' added Wilks. 'they both deserve each other.'

'Indeed. I don't know who to feel more sorry for. Is that all we have today?'

'I have the report on the first suicide.'

Jennings glowered. 'Very well then but make it a synopsis.'

## Chapter two

‘Sykes, age twenty-seven. He worked for the Triple A Couriers based in Pimlico. Not married and lived in digs in East Ham. Petty criminal record, mostly connected with drugs but nothing for five years until his death.’

‘You don’t need to read the grisly details.’ Said Jennings. ‘Is there any possible connection with the Brown lad?’

‘Not that I can see sir.’ Replied Morton.

‘Then I suggest you send the file back to records and I can get on with my crossword.’

Jennings reached down for the wastepaper basket and realised that it had been emptied.

\*\*\*\*

Even though it was after seven, Jennings had to loosen his tie to cope with the heat. He had stopped off for a quick beer at the pub opposite the station but found that it was standing room only. Not that he minded as he had never liked that particular pub. The bus had been packed as usual and the stench of people had been made worse by the fact that it was still in the eighties at least. As Jennings approached his semi-detached house in a quiet and secluded road, he took a deep breath in order to prepare himself for what would happen when the door was opened.

‘Hello dad.’ Michael came tearing down the stairs waving a piece of paper. ‘I’ve got the train times. Mum got them for me.’

‘Hello dear. You are a bit late.’ Added a second voice.

‘Yes, well I...’

A small boy came racing along the hallway and threw himself at Jennings in a rugby tackle that would have done England proud.

‘And how is my little man?’

‘Do hurry up dear. I want to put David to bed and Michael and Sarah need to have a bath.’

Jennings rolled his eyes as he put David down. ‘Welcome home.’ He said to himself. ‘Have you had a nice day? Yes, thank

you. Would you like a beer? Yes, that would be nice. Well, you sit down after your hard day. Put your feet up.'

'Darling, what are you prattling on about?' Added Jen dismissively as she picked up their youngest son in preparation for taking him to his bedroom.

Jennings watched bemused as she disappeared up the stairs. After washing the grime of London from his face and hands, he headed to the kitchen. There was Jen as usual, seemingly quite capable of doing several things at once with great efficiency. It was the kind of thing that could give any self-respecting man a complex.

'I have put your dinner on the table.'

'Thank you dear. I think I will have a beer.' He took a bottle from the fridge before helping himself to a glass from the draining board. As he stared down at what looked like a large plate of frogspawn covered with small pieces of sliced vegetables, he tried to think of a diplomatic comment.

'This looks...nice.'

'Thank you darling. It is couscous with chillies, cucumber and tomatoes, very good for you. I had to go all the way to Dorking to find the couscous.'

'You shouldn't have gone to so much trouble. Sausage and mash would have done me.'

'I'm sure it would.' Jen reached over and patted his stomach which admittedly was hanging a little over his belt.

Jennings tentatively scooped a little onto his fork and sniffed suspiciously before daring to place some into his mouth. At first, it did not taste of anything in particular. Then his tongue started to burn. The heat spread through his mouth, climbed quickly up his cheeks and then seemed to set fire to his eyeballs.

'Lovely.' He commented before gulping a large quantity of Double Diamond beer.

'Dad you have not looked at my timetable.' Michael protested as he ran into the kitchen, still dripping from his bath. 'If we catch the 9.05 from East Croydon, we can then get the District Line to South Kensington and it's about a ten minute

## Chapter two

walk to the museum. I got a leaflet from Billy who went last week. I've marked all the places I want to see.'

'Now come along Michael. It's time for bed. I will come up and see you when you are tucked in.'

It was a blatant diversionary act, which to his great surprise, actually worked. Jennings watched as Jen led Michael out of the kitchen and breathed a sigh of relief. As soon as they were safely gone, he fetched his briefcase from the hall, took out a Tupperware box and spooned the contents of his plate carefully into it. He then put the box back in his case ready to dispose of the next day. Finally, he wiped the edge of the plate to remove any evidence of the crime. Jen could teach his detectives a thing or two when it came to observation and it would not do for a chief inspector to be caught in the act of committing a felony.

His stomach rumbled as he made his way into the living room and headed for the new colour television set. The screen briefly flushed with bright colours before the picture settled down. He quickly hopped through all three channels before concluding there was nothing of interest and turned it off once more. The children liked the new-fangled colour pictures but personally, he could not see the point. The programmes were just as unwatchable.

The local paper also failed to provide a diversion and so he flicked through his small collection of LPs and settled on an old copy of Kenny Ball and his Jazzmen. He carefully examined the 12-inch disk and noted a number of small scratches. In the last edition of Record Review, Jennings recalled reading that if a record was played wet, the sound quality improved. He went back into the kitchen, soaked the cleaning cloth in water and then wiped the disk before placing it on the turntable. He ran his finger underneath the needle to remove any dust and then slowly lowered it into the groove.

Sitting in his favourite armchair whilst listening to pleasant music, the day began to seem like a distant and distasteful dream. He had just begun to nod off when Jen returned.

'You look tired Robert.' She said as she sat down in the chair opposite to his.

'Yes, I am a bit. It's been a hard day.'

'But you can't discuss it.'

They had been married for almost eighteen years and Jen still resented the fact that he frequently could not discuss his work in minute detail. In fact, she seemed to resent that almost as much as she resented the fact that she was now a Jen Jennings. He thought this was a little unfair since she had clearly chosen to marry him in full knowledge both of his name and that he was a policeman.

'How was your day?'

Jen smiled knowingly. 'Nicely sidestepped dear. If you are really interested, I can tell you all about my meeting at the WI, my shopping trip to Dorking and the chat I had with Alice when I picked up the children from school. We also need to talk about the dinner party.'

'Perhaps I should go and see Michael first. Is he asleep?'

'No and he won't until you go up and discuss Saturday's trip. He is very excited, you know.'

'I am quite looking forward to it myself.'

'You will make it this time?'

'Jen!' Robert replied in a slightly hurt tone. 'It's not as if I let him down deliberately.'

'Yes, I know, but it is very important to him. It's not often that he gets to spend time just with his dad.'

'Well, you needn't worry. Work is as quiet as the grave and I am not expecting anything between now and the weekend. Now I had better go and see him.'

\*\*\*\*

Edward Taylor looked briefly through the windscreen at the road to check that it was clear of traffic before opening the door of his Cortina. It was another sultry London evening and, although he was looking forward to a leisurely time tasting



## Chapter two

wines, the fact that it was taking place in what would be an overcrowded cellar did not bode well for a pleasant time. Taylor handed his car keys to a man in uniform before climbing a short flight of stairs to the Queen Anne's Gate Club. Just as he feared the hallway was busy and it took him some time to get past the man checking invitations, to the cloakroom and finally down a flight of stone stairs to where the tasting was being held. Despite the thick stone walls, the air was hot and stuffy and he wondered whether they actually kept the wine in such a warm place. The prospect of a spoilt evening seemed to loom large.

As Taylor looked around the various faces, most seemed to be businessmen like himself. There were a couple of MPs and a sprinkling of wine journalists. Even if this turned out not to be a relaxing evening, there was a prospect of some useful networking. The last few months had proved difficult since that little incident. In fact, if it was not for the prospect of a significant contract from Dresden, they would have probably gone under. Two hundred years of producing fine chinaware might have ended up in the hands of accountants who would have cared little for the effort he had made to rescue the company from the ineptitude of his father.

On reaching the bottom stair, Taylor quickly scanned the room to orientate himself. The cellar complex was tightly packed with people politely pushing and shoving their way between the tasting tables. Taylor studied the piece of paper he had been given in exchange for his invitation. It contained a simple map and a list of wines. All the ones that might be of interest, seemed to be at the far side of the complex. Taylor smiled a fraudulent smile as he muttered a succession of 'excuse me please' and pushed past those who took no notice.

'Good evening Edward.'

Taylor looked around for the owner of the voice and spotted the tall, slim and elegant figure of Sir Clive Richards.

'Good evening Sir Clive. I did wonder whether you might be here.' It was more of a hope that he wouldn't. As the

company's banker, Taylor saw enough of Sir Clive during working hours.

'Not really my sort of location but I find these plebeian events can yield a few pickings for a gentleman in my field.'

'I don't doubt it. What is that you are trying?' Taylor nodded at the glass of dark red wine Sir Clive was holding.

'A Gaja Barbaresco 61, I believe.'

'Yes, of course, made from the Nebbiolo grape grown in Piedmont. The slightly warmer climate of Barbaresco means an earlier harvest, which makes these wines a touch lighter.'

Sir Clive raised his eyebrows in surprise. 'I had no idea that a recent wine would merit such knowledge. Personally, I would like to see nothing later than a 1959 Chateau Mouton Rothschild.'

'Is Victoria here?' Taylor asked referring to Sir Clive's wife.

'Good god no, this evening is strictly business. Which reminds me, I wanted to have a little chat. I suggest we follow the throng as we talk.'

As Sir Clive turned his back and headed towards the nearest table laden with bottles and glasses, Taylor resigned himself to a ruined evening.

'Edward, you might try something from Domaine Romane-Conti. I gather the 71 is promising.'

'What was it that you wished to discuss?'

'I take it you have not seen the evening papers. Both the Standard and the Evening News carried a rather distressing report on the suicide of a young airport worker.'

'And what has that to do with us?'

'Nothing I hope, but it did mention that he worked in the cargo section of Heathrow airport. Threw himself into an engine, apparently. Nasty way to go.'

'Indeed.' Taylor replied. 'Did the report mention the police?'

'Only in passing. It said that the matter was not being treated as suspicious.'

'In which case, there is nothing to concern us.'

'Wrong dear boy.' Sir Clive smiled his most charming smile

## Chapter two

which Taylor knew only too well as a precursor to bad news. 'My firm requires its investments to be reliable, provide a good return but just as importantly, not to threaten the portfolio by ill-considered action.'

'To which action do you refer?'

'Now don't be an arse dear boy.' Sir Clive had stopped smiling. 'By the way, how is your Dresden plan developing?'

Taylor sensed that he was about to be given a warning. 'The contracts are ready to be signed. I am just waiting for final clearance from the DTI. As you know all exports to the Eastern Bloc have to be approved by government, but it is a matter of formality.'

'Very pleased to hear it, however, I should warn you.'

'Excuse me please.' The unwelcome interruption came from a large man standing just behind them.

'Sorry old boy. Did you want something?'

The man held up his empty glass and wore a look of expectation.

'I think we are blocking his way.' Said Taylor.

As they both pushed on to the next table, Taylor wondered what the nature of the warning was to be and he was beginning to have a nasty idea.

'What do you think about the prospects for this year? Is it worth laying down a few bottles?'

Taylor found it hard to concentrate on wine. He was far more interested in what Sir Clive would have to say concerning his business. It was true that his investors had been supporting them since they almost went bankrupt in 71 and it had taken five years to slowly rebuild the business. The price had been that his father was forced to hand over the reins and an insistence that the board diversify. A fact that he himself had thought necessary for a long time, but neither the board nor his father had been interested.

'Possibly for the northern vineyards. The Riesling might be worth some investment, but I am not sure that 1976 will be considered a classic year.'

‘Really.’ Sir Clive answered in a distracted tone. It was clear he was not interested in wine. Taylor waited for the coup de grace. ‘Now what was I saying?’

‘I think you were about to threaten me.’

‘How refreshingly candid and indeed I was. My firm has agreed a loan for new equipment.’

‘At a very high rate.’

‘The rate is commensurate to the risk. However, I have been having doubts concerning the safety of the investment.’

‘Once the contract is signed, we have a year’s guaranteed work. What more could you want?’

‘A rather more, long term strategy. My firm has invested heavily for a number of years in Taylor and Hardy Ceramics. We had high hopes that your research would finally deliver results, which brings us neatly back to that little incident I mentioned earlier. My investors stand to lose a considerable fortune if your plans do not materialise. What is even worse is that I stand to lose my reputation. In a business like mine, you are only as good as your last quarter returns. I need reassuring dear boy.’

‘In that case, I have a meeting this Thursday to confirm our next steps. You are welcome to join us. I think it could be quite instructive. We finally have a way to iron out that little problem.’

‘But I do not want you to iron it out, quite the contrary. I have a number of interested parties that would like to see you develop it.’

Taylor looked alarmed at the turn of the conversation. ‘You do realise what you are saying?’

‘Indeed, I do.’ Sir Clive answered coldly. ‘Nevertheless, I suggest you adopt a more flexible attitude to customer demand. I think that would be in both our interests.’

\*\*\*\*

Jennings stopped at a water cooler and glared at a sergeant

## Chapter two

who was filling a cup. It was enough for the subordinate to make way. Jennings filled his own cup, drank the contents and then refilled it once more. The commute had been unbearable. Even at 8.00am, the train had been insufferably hot and as usual, he had had to stand all the way. What was worse was that the train had got stuck at Battersea Park for twenty minutes which meant that all the bacon sandwiches had gone by the time he got to the café. The one thought that had sustained him since he had emptied his dinner into a bin just outside Croydon station, was the prospect of hot bacon nicely cosseted between two soft roll halves.

The short walk from Victoria station had done nothing to soothe his temper and a rumbling stomach reminded him that his plight was of his own making. As Jennings approached his office, he spotted Morton and Wilks having a cosy chat at their desks. When he had been a young policeman his gaffer would have had his hide for not appearing busy. But thankfully those days were gone. At least some change was for the better. Still, he concluded, it would not hurt to chivvy them up a bit.

‘Office, now.’ Jennings barked as he opened his door. A wall of hot air met his face in a stifling blast. Jennings crossed to the window, put his hand over the air conditioning vent and felt nothing.

‘Not working sir.’ Said Wilks.

‘That’s all I need.’ Jennings replied sulkily. ‘Where is my coffee?’

‘The kitchen facilities are also not working.’

‘Is anything working around here?’

‘Yes sir, my network. I have the morning report for you.’

‘Well done Wilks. So, do we have anything interesting?’

Wilks handed the report to Morton who solemnly opened the file.

‘The West Yorkshire force has asked for sight on anything we have on Donald Neilson before sentencing, which is expected next week. Records are handling. There is a report on a group called Column 88 that is trying to stir up bad feelings

between the communities in Brixton. Column 88 are white supremacists.'

'Thank you Morton, I did know. Is there any normal crime going on or have they all gone off to Spain?'

'Yes sir. I mean no sir.' Morton stuttered. 'It looks like the Hatton Garden job might be back on.'

'Damn, when?' Despite the unbearable, heat Jennings felt a cold sweat as he recalled his conversation with Jen.

'Saturday night. I assume they think that nothing will be spotted until Monday morning, with everything being closed on Sundays.'

'Why does it have to be this Saturday and why does it always have to be Hatton Garden. Can't they be a bit more imaginative?'

'I think they may have anticipated your concerns sir.' Interrupted Wilks. 'They are going to target the Natural History Museum as well.'

'Can it get any worse?' Muttered Jennings to himself as he considered the implications. 'Why there?'

'New exhibition sir. Saturday sees the delivery of a consignment of precious stones that will form part of a special geology exhibition. Apparently, they are planning a double hit. With all the security focused on the delivery, they intend to tackle both jobs in one go.'

'The greedy blighters. What's the value?'

'The insurance value is over three million.'

'If there are to be two simultaneous hits, C8 will not have the resources to cover both. A possible chance for you Morton, to see some action and in your first week. That's all Morton, but Wilks, I would like you to hang on for a moment. I have an important task for you.'

As Morton left, Jennings closed the door behind him.

'I take it sir, that you require something from the canteen?'

'Yes.' Jennings replied. 'How did you know?'

'Simple sir. Whenever Mrs Jennings serves you something that you do not like, you either arrive with bread crumbs on

## Chapter two

your jacket or a sour look. Today you have your sour look.'

\*\*\*\*

'Do you know Jack Pratt?' Asked Gilpatrick as he pointed to a red faced man who was about the same age as Jennings. The two men exchanged looks of contempt before reluctantly shaking hands.

'George and I are old sparring partners.' Jack's forced smile came close to a snarl.

'How are things in C8, Jack?' Jennings asked in a tone that clearly implied disinterest.

'Same as ever.' Jack replied without enthusiasm before turning to face Gilpatrick. 'Now sir, I am very grateful for your support but I do not have much time. It seems as if this was a last minute decision.'

'Yes of course.' Gilpatrick responded. 'Fire away.'

Pratt laid out a couple of large street plans on a table whilst Jennings and Gilpatrick looked on in expectation.

'We anticipate that the gang will strike in EC1 first and the museum about twenty minutes later. I think they are hoping that if they trigger the alarms, we will be too committed to the Hatton Garden raid and will respond slower to the second.'

'Why in that order?' Asked Jennings.

'The museum haul is worth about twice that of the other and doing that job second will give them a greater chance of success. There will be a consignment of stones from Rhodesia arriving at Heathrow on Friday night. They will be driven to the Hatton vault arriving at 11.00am on Saturday. To make room, a second van will take the museum collection to South Kensington, also arriving at about 11.00am. The vault is situated below street level and is only accessible via the Penrose Diamond House building.'

'Are there any sewers close by?'

Pratt looked up and smiled coldly. 'Good thinking George. Yes, the main sewer is only about ten feet from the vault and it

is big enough to get digging equipment inside.'

'Then that will be their means of access,' added Gilpatrick, eager not to be left out, 'but that would mean they have already started so why haven't you nabbed them.'

'Because sir, they are unlikely to get much for damaging public property. We want them to go down for a long stretch and if we arrest them in the act of a large diamond haul, that will guarantee it. We have been after these buggers since Madison shot that young PC.'

'Quite right.' Gilpatrick replied.

'I think they will start their final bid at about 2.00am. There are a couple of clubs close by and that's their closing time. Could provide a bit of cover for any noise and it should not take more than half an hour to load up. At a guess, they will leave a timed explosive to trigger the alarms once they are clear, which means that they will tackle the museum around 3.00am.'

'What security has been laid on?' Asked Jennings. 'I can't imagine it's at the level of Penrose.'

'The museum has hired a specialist firm who are looking after security throughout the six month exhibition. They do have a vault in the basement but you are right. These guys should not have too much trouble. My plan is to have people on site to ensure the civilians are protected.'

'Bit risky for the museum security staff.'

'Still cautious, George.'

'What do you expect from us?'

'Numbers mainly sir. We could do with another five men and it would help if they were trained.'

'Guns.' Gilpatrick murmured glumly. 'I suppose you know your own business. You can have your men, but I want Jennings there as coordinator.'

'Always good to have him on board. Do you have any questions sir?'

'I don't think so. What about you Jennings?'

'As a matter of fact, I do. Who is your liaison for the briefing?'



## Chapter two

‘Jimmy Price.’

As soon as Pratt had left, Gilpatrick asked his secretary for two cups of coffee and pointed to a chair, inferring that Jennings should sit down.

‘Spit it out Robert. I can see you aren’t happy.’

‘I am not sir. Apart from the fact that this is a C8 operation, I do not think their intelligence is very good. This raid has been on and off for months. It’s almost as if this gang know they have been rumbled.’

‘Hang it all Robert, that does not make sense.’ Gilpatrick made no attempt to hide his impatience. ‘If they thought we were on to them why have people in the sewers?’

‘Sacrificial lambs for another job.’ Jennings ventured.

‘I think you will have to do better than that.’

‘Besides which sir, I am not happy about them using civilians as bait. And I am very unhappy about issuing arms to our people. You know C8’s reputation and I am really unhappy that Price is involved.’

‘Ah yes, I can agree with you on that one.’

The door opened and a middle-aged woman came in with two coffees.

‘Thank you Stephanie, sugar?’

‘Sorry.’ Said Jennings vaguely as his thoughts jumped to another subject.

‘Do you want sugar?’

‘No thank you.’

‘So, what else is bothering you?’

‘Something does not feel right about this. Normally, crooks choose the easy route. If I had a choice between trying to crack a vault and hijacking a van, I would choose the van, particularly as the streets will be busy with weekend traffic. A small fleet of motorbikes would stand an excellent chance of getting away.’

‘It’s a good job you chose to be a policeman.’ Gilpatrick responded as he took a sip of coffee and then his face lit up. ‘I know what’s bothering you. Didn’t you mention something about a trip with your son?’

'Yes, my boy Michael. I was supposed to be taking him to the museum on Saturday. He is going to be very disappointed.'

'I am sorry to hear that, but duty comes first.'

'I missed his birthday when that courier chap committed suicide and then his sports day to cover that wretched VIP visit that was cancelled.'

'It's back on by the way. Saturday morning. By coincidence, the cortège should be passing down Exhibition Road at about 11.00am. Look, the raid does not take place until the early hours of Sunday morning. We will not even assemble the team until after six. You could act as liaison and scout around Saturday morning, shouldn't take more than an hour. That way you will have the rest of the day to spend with your boy before the serious work starts.'

Jennings finished his coffee and started to make his way to the door when Gilpatrick called after him.

'By the way, why did Pratt keep calling you George?'

'An old joke and not a very good one. We were at Hendon Police College together. Pratt and I never saw eye-to-eye on policing methods. He always thought I was a bit old fashioned in my view of what constitutes good policing. The tv series with Jack Warner as George Dixon of Dock Green was just getting started and as luck would have it, my first beat was in Camberwell and took in Dock Hill Road.' Jennings shrugged his shoulders in resignation. 'And the name stuck.'

'Nothing wrong with hanging on to the better traditions of policing, Robert. You may have noticed that I am a bit old fashioned myself.'

## Chapter three

Jennings watched his son Michael, clamber up into the train compartment and noted with relief that they were the only ones. The smell of must, people and cigarette smoke gently wafted into the air as they sat down on the well-worn dusty blue seats. They were sitting in an old corridorless carriage that was large enough to cater for ten at a squeeze. He preferred them to the modern corridor trains which were bland and impersonal. The older carriages were wood panelled, noisy and still had the old string luggage racks to safely hold a top hat, if anyone was still wearing a top hat.

As usual, the windows were almost too grime covered to watch the passing view. However, since the view primarily consisted of rundown student buildings and the station sidings of Selhurst, it was no great loss.

Jennings absentmindedly reached into his pocket for a pipe but decided not to smoke in the confined carriage. Besides which, Michael was bound to let on to Jen. This thought brought his attention to something they had to discuss.

‘Michael. Can you keep a secret, even from your mother?’

‘Yes dad,’ Michael replied eagle eyed as he anticipated a shared dad moment, ‘I’m not a girl.’

‘The truth is that we are on a mission and I will need your help.’

‘What sort of mission?’

‘A very important one. Now, I want you to pay careful attention.’

Michael sat upright, stiff as a board that reminded him strongly of Wilks.

‘When we arrive at the museum, I may have to leave you for

a while to spy out the terrain.’

‘Gosh.’ Michael breathed.

‘I have had a tip off from Interpol that international thieves are planning to steal the brontosaurus from the dinosaur gallery.’

‘Dad, it’s a diplodocus. Are they going to sell it? How will they get out? It’s awfully big.’

‘No son, it is much worse than that. They plan to smuggle it out in small pieces, grind up the bones and then using a secret process, they will grow new dinosaurs and use them to terrorise the free world.’

Michael’s expression swiftly turned from one of keen expectation to suspicious doubt. ‘Oh, dad! I thought you were being serious. That can’t be true.’

‘Are you sure about that?’ Jennings gave Michael a meaningful look. ‘You see there are some things that sound impossible and the crooks rely on that. People refuse to believe it could happen and that is why they can get away with it.’

‘Yes, I suppose that might make sense.’ Michael looked half convinced.

‘If I get the signal, you and I will separate. I have arranged for you to have your own policewoman to escort you around the museum, but I want you to keep a watchful eye for anything suspicious.’

‘You can rely on me, dad. Where are we?’

‘Balham, I think.’

Jennings did not relish the idea of deceiving Michael, but the story would keep him out of the way and, if he did accidentally spill the beans, it would sound unbelievable, which was exactly what it was. Despite the fact that nothing was going to happen, Jennings knew that his wife would not approve and she was probably right. But this was the only way to keep his promise to Michael. An hour at most was all he needed to be satisfied that things had been properly planned to manage the raid, if it happened. Then they would spend a peaceful Saturday wandering around the museum and no harm done.

## Chapter three

Although this was a daily commute for him, Michael was fascinated as the view evolved from rough outer London suburbs to the more gentrified areas of Wandsworth Common and finally to the inner city clutter as they approached the Thames. Normally, the scenery was nothing more than a blur as he peered over his newspaper to check who was joining them in small enclosed compartments. There were the usual faces. Some he had seen almost every working day for many years. Not that they ever talked of course. Conversation was strictly reserved for critical comments if the train was much later than was usual and for furtive remarks concerning any undesirables that might join them. However, today was a little different and for the first time, he noticed subtle changes that made the journey almost interesting.

‘Look dad. They are switching turbines.’

Michael enthusiastically pointed at thin columns of white smoke coming from some of the cream chimneys of Battersea Power Station.

‘Yes, and there is a barge offloading coal.’ Jennings pointed to one of the tall riverside cranes as it lowered its gantry. ‘And once we have crossed the river, you will see the water pumping station.’

As Jennings watched Michael race from one side of the train to the other, trying not to miss anything, he concluded rather sadly that he had missed far too much of his son’s childhood.

There was a small queue outside of the museum as they opened the doors promptly at 10.00am. The building looked as impressive now as it had done to the thirteen year old boy who came on a school trip during the closing months of the war. Then, many of the exhibits had been removed for safety and some of the galleries were closed due to bomb damage, but the building itself more than made up for this. The massive two storey central hall with its arched glazed roof was by far the biggest structure that young boy had been inside.

It had been his old teacher, Mrs Carver, who had pointed out the intricacies of the blue and terracotta tiled walls,

Romanesque windows and complex carvings of flora and fauna on the walls and pillars. In fact, he had been so taken with her enthusiasm that for a while he had been determined to become an architect.

As Jennings watched Michael looking up, open mouthed at a leopard climbing a tree, he tried to recall the last time they had been here. Michael could not have been more than five. Just a few short years for him but for Michael, it was half a lifetime.

Jennings took a moment to get his bearings and then spotted Morton coming down the wide stone staircase at the opposite end of the central hall. At first, he failed to recognise his new assistant who was dressed quite differently to the usual sober style of a working policeman. Blue flared jeans with two-tone platform shoes, topped off with a shirt that could have won a Chelsea Flower Show prize. Checking that Michael was safely occupied, Jennings made his way towards him.

‘Good morning sir. I thought I might spend some time learning the layout of the museum. I haven’t been here since I was a kid.’

‘And what have you learnt?’

‘That this place is like a rabbit warren. Once you are out of the public areas, there are miles of narrow corridors and any number of rooms in which someone could hide.’

‘Have you been to look at the route the stuff will take?’

‘Yes sir. The director has been very cooperative. They have a car park and loading bay in the central square away from the road. That leads down to the basement where they have a vault. I have seen better, but it seems secure. C8 believe that the thieves will strike once the jewels are sealed in their cases and that is on the first floor. Bit odd though.’

‘What is?’

‘They will only have a limited period before the alarms are activated, unless they have the codes. Seems an unnecessary risk to me.’

‘Yes, well, perhaps it is fortunate that C8 is in charge. I would

## Chapter three

like to have a word with the director myself. Can you arrange it?’

‘Sir.’

‘And next time you decide to wear a shirt like that, can you give me a bit of warning.’

‘Yes sir.’ Morton smiled cheekily. ‘Oh, and WPC Barrie was looking for you. I think she is in the canteen.’

Jennings watched Morton walk towards the stairs and a sudden thought struck. ‘Morton, isn’t this your day off?’

‘It is but as you had planned to spend the morning with your son, I thought it might help if I sorted out a few things. Give you a bit more time and I have nothing on until this evening.’

‘Thank you. That was very considerate.’

Jennings began to search for Michael, conscious that he had temporarily neglected his parental duties. He was quietly standing next to a pretty young girl and reading a plaque. Jennings wandered over and the young girl looked up.

‘Good morning sir. We have just been learning all about how this skeleton was found.’

‘It’s not actually a skeleton but a fossil. All the bone has been replaced by stone.’ Volunteered Michael with a broad smile filled with satisfaction.

‘Has it now.’ Jennings turned to the young woman who looked a little nervous at the prospect of dealing with a chief inspector.

‘I am very grateful for your help this morning. It’s Wendy, isn’t it?’

The young woman nodded and blushed a little.

‘Michael, this is the very nice girl I was telling you about. I want you to go with her and don’t forget that little business we discussed.’ Jennings winked in conspiratorial fashion and Michael winked back. ‘I want you to be on your best behaviour and I will catch up with you as soon as I can.’

Jennings waited for them to disappear into one of the side corridors before allowing his thoughts to return to the other reason for their visit. He recalled from the childhood trip, a

narrow doorway that led to the Geological Museum next door, but it took a while to locate it via a long corridor that contained a display of ichthyosaurs. After a few minor detours, Jennings found himself standing by a multi-coloured marble staircase that bore a striking similarity to the canal bridges they had seen during a visit to Venice last year. Underneath this bridge was a steep but short flight of stairs that led down to the entrance and into Exhibition Road. Close by was one of those dioramas for which the museum was famous. It was housed in a darkened circular area that had seats for people choosing to watch the painted images of long extinct forests and savannahs as they slowly rolled by. Jennings recollected that on his school visit he and a friend had been so engrossed in the various displays that they became separated from the rest of class. It took nearly fifteen minutes to locate the main Natural History Museum. As Morton had observed, it was odd that any professional gang would wait until the stones were actually inside the labyrinthine complex when it would have been far quicker to highjack a van in the street, particularly as they could not know about the VIP visit. However, C8 had insisted that there would be a simultaneous hit on both Hatton Garden and the museum in the small hours of tomorrow morning.

Jennings wandered back through the connecting corridor and by the time he had reached the central hall, Morton was waiting with a distinguished looking gentleman.

‘Sir, this is Deputy Director Henderson-Hedley.’

‘I have to say I am extremely concerned.’ Said the director as he confronted Jennings. ‘We have been given assurance that our display would not be of interest to thieves as the stones would be too difficult to sell.’

‘I trust this advice came from your private security advisors and not the police.’ Answered Jennings, keen to ensure this man understood the difference.

‘They came with the highest recommendations.’

‘I don’t doubt it but perhaps we could discuss the matter as you show me to the courtyard.’ Jennings turned to Morton.



## Chapter three

‘Thank you, I can take it from here.’

‘Yes sir. If you don’t mind, I think I might just have another look around.’

The director led Jennings once more through the corridor with the displays of ichthyosaurs. At the end of the gallery, they went through a small door that marked the entrance to a series of corridors that looked as though they belonged to a dilapidated school rather than a prestigious public attraction. Eventually, the pair emerged into the courtyard and another very hot day. Nearby were a number of parked cars and a post van that was being unloaded. On the far side, Jennings could see the Science Museum and Exhibition Road beyond an archway that joined the Geological Museum to the Science Museum. It occurred to him that it would be an easy place to form a roadblock and therefore it would have occurred to the thieves as well. This whole set-up seemed less plausible by the minute.

‘I see you have a large collection of cardboard boxes. Will they be here when my colleagues from C8 arrive?’

‘I have no idea. Why is that a problem? I can have them removed.’

‘Don’t worry, I am sure they will be highly delighted. Is there another way out?’

‘No.’ The director replied looking very baffled. ‘Would you like to see the vault?’

The director led the way down a narrow flight of stairs and past a number of identical looking doors, any one of which could have been the entrance to the vault. By the time they reached their destination, Jennings was seriously concerned.

‘What are your plans for the display?’

‘It will be housed in one of the mezzanine galleries. Our security company will naturally provide a twenty-four hour guard.’

‘Naturally.’ Jennings replied nonchalantly.

The director responded with a warning look. ‘As I said, they came with the highest recommendation.’

'You were saying that they would be housed on the first floor?'

'We have commissioned specially adapted display cases that will set off an alarm if the air inside is disturbed. The jewellery is due to arrive at 11.30.' He looked at his watch. 'That is just about in forty minutes. They will be stored in this vault until we close. Then they will be taken under guard to the display area.'

'And what plans have been made if they are delayed by the VIP visit?'

'Visit, what visit?' The man looked flustered.

Jennings took a deep breath. 'You are not aware that a police escort is due in Exhibition Road this morning?'

'No sir.' The man was now looking angry. 'I was not made aware of that fact.'

'I see. Perhaps you could invite a representative from your security company to meet us in the courtyard. I am sure they will have ample experience to advise you on the best course of action.'

Jennings and the director made their way back upstairs and were soon joined by a man that Jennings knew only too well. This was a character who had at one time worked for the Midlands Serious Crime Squad, a group of people who had got very confused about whether they should be solving crimes or committing them. As had become sadly all too usual in recent years, he had been allowed to resign rather than cause a PR embarrassment.

'Chief Inspector Jennings?' A hand was held out which Jennings ignored.

'Palmer. It seems that my colleagues in C8 failed to advise you that at the same time as the security van is due to arrive, there will be a VIP and escort travelling down Exhibition Road.'

'Oh dear!' Palmer smiled in a sneering fashion, clearly enjoying the moment. 'You boys do seem to have mucked things up.'

## Chapter three

Jennings tried to hide his growing anger and he was beginning to wish he had left C8 to stew in their own mess.

‘You need to radio your people to let them know not to arrive until about 11.50.’

‘Quite impossible. We operate a radio blackout policy to prevent any would-be thieves from using the frequencies to locate the van.’

‘I suggest you overturn your policy in this case. The van is equipped with a radio I take it?’

‘There are radios but they are only for use in an emergency. Are you saying that your people have caused an emergency?’

‘No, Palmer.’ Replied Jennings, fighting to maintain a tone of civility. ‘I have appraised you of the facts. I am proposing that you alert your driver but any decision is your call, as are the consequences.’

Now it was Palmer’s turn to look concerned. ‘I will have to talk to my people.’

‘You do that. The delivery van is due in less than thirty-five minutes.’

Jennings waited in the courtyard whilst the director took Palmer to a telephone. He was beginning to develop a nagging feeling that this morning was about to go horribly wrong and he had learnt to trust those feelings over the years. For some reason that childhood visit once more popped into his mind. He recalled being very confused and thinking that he was on the first floor. To a thirteen year old boy, the network of galleries and display rooms seemed like an unsolvable maze. Then he had had the presence of mind to remember that the coach was parked on the road between the Geological Museum and the V&A. He ran back to that staircase bridge, almost falling down the stone steps and out into the road where an anxious teacher was waiting. If the thieves were going to strike inside the museum, they must have been studying the layout for months, unless they had an inside contact. In which case, he had to agree with Morton, for ‘professionals’, they did seem to be taking a lot of unnecessary risks.

After about ten minutes, Palmer returned and confirmed their decision to alert the driver. Both waited in silence as time slowly ticked by before Palmer lost patience and decided to wait at the entrance to the square where he would have a good view of the van as it arrived. Jennings was not sorry to see him go. He looked at his watch and hoped Michael was having a better time than he was. Eventually, after getting a little tired of waiting alone, Jennings took a slow walk towards the entrance to the square. He checked his watch once more and realised that the VIP convoy must have already passed by. The van was a couple of minutes late but that was not unexpected given London traffic on a late Saturday morning. As he walked under the link bridge Jennings noticed that all the cars were at a standstill. No doubt the VIP lot had held up the traffic to give the convoy some space. He stood at the corner of the street for a moment and slowly realised that something was not right. A large group of people had congregated on the road in between the stationary cars and were engrossed in something that he could not see. Picking up his pace, Jennings headed towards the crowd and then pushed through it. Once he could eventually see what the attraction was, Jennings knew that his instincts had not let him down. Some tough looking men were bundling a small figure dressed in a green military uniform out of a car. They were shouting in Spanish. At first, it was impossible to see what had happened as the melee obscured the cars, but then it became clear. A large white transit van had become trapped between another van and the VIP cortège. The latter had tried to ram its way through and failed. Then Jennings spotted a familiar face.

‘Palmer.’ He called out but the man in question seemed to be caught in an argument with one of the tough looking men. ‘Palmer. What is going on?’

‘It’s a complete bloody balls up.’ Palmer screamed. ‘Someone is going to have to pay.’

Once more Palmer was dragged into the dispute with the convoy security. Jennings decided to take the matter in hand.

## Chapter three

'I am Chief Inspector Jennings.' He said ensuring that he held his warrant card close enough to peoples' faces to get their attention.

'You are responsible for this?' Said one of the tough men accusingly.

'I suggest you concentrate on getting your charge out of here. Or do you do things differently where you come from.'

The man looked for a moment as if he was going to argue but then began to issue orders in Spanish. Jennings thought he recognised a couple of unkind words about the British.

Once Palmer had been freed from the dispute, Jennings pulled him aside. 'I want to know what is going on.'

Palmer returned a look of sheer contempt. 'You bloody idiots have really screwed up this time. The gang attacked the delivery van when it turned into this street. If it wasn't for the convoy going in the opposite direction, they would have got away with it.'

Finally, Jennings grasped the situation. He pushed past Palmer and made his way to the white van. Inside he could see a man slumped across the wheel. 'Have you called for an ambulance?'

'I am not bloody interested in the driver.'

Jennings looked quickly around and spotted a radio aerial on top of one of the convoy cars. By the time he arrived back at the van, a man was checking over the driver. Jennings set about supervising things until the uniformed police and ambulance arrived. Satisfied that everything was being handled properly, he once more turned his attention to Palmer and was now ready to vent his anger.

'Right, Palmer. Let me make myself very clear. You have one minute to give me a detailed explanation or I will arrest you for interfering with the police in the execution of their duties.'

The expression worn by Jennings and his tone of voice was enough for the former policeman to know that he had run out of options.

'As I said, the thieves attempted to hijack the delivery van

but got caught up in the convoy. Someone is going to have pay for this. My company will certainly want to lodge a formal complaint.'

'That is your prerogative. In which direction did the thieves run?'

'In all directions. A couple ran towards the park. Another headed for Brompton Road.'

'There were just the three of them?'

Palmer shook his head. 'I can't be sure. It's possible that there was another.'

Jennings' blood ran cold as he thought of Michael. Now that this matter was out of his hands, his only concern was finding his son. He headed back towards the Geological Museum entrance as the police were cordoning off the area. One of them blocked his path until he produced his identity badge.

'Are you closing this entrance as a precaution?' Jennings asked.

'No sir.' The policeman replied. 'We are pretty sure one of the gang is inside. The whole place is being evacuated.'

Jennings pushed his way through the exiting crowd, up the short flight of stairs towards the doorway that led to the Natural History building. By the time he reached the connecting passage, the place was empty. Without people, the museum seemed a cold and disturbing place and the sound of his rapid footsteps echoed around the hard, stone surfaces.

As he once more emerged into the ichthyosaur corridor, Jennings heard voices coming from the direction of the central hall. At the base of the staircase were two uniformed men and a man in plain clothes who stood with his back to him.

'It's Inspector Mann, isn't it?' The man nodded. 'I have not come to interfere. I am looking for WPC Barrie and my son.'

'I do not think they will be in here sir. The museum has been evacuated.'

'I certainly hope so.' He turned to go thinking that he should search outside. 'By the way, have you been to the first floor?'

'Not yet. We are running a standard search pattern. Locking

## Chapter three

the doors and starting with the ground floor.’

‘Quite right. Look, do you mind if I make a suggestion?’

‘Not at all sir.’

‘I assume you believe he came in by the small entrance from Exhibition Road. If he had any brains, I think he would have taken the stairs immediately behind the entrance to try to throw off any would-be followers. That being the case, I think I know where he might be.’

Jennings led the small group up the staircase and turned right towards a long corridor.

‘I got lost here once as a child. I took a wrong turn and ended up in a passage behind that door. In those days it was open to the public.’

Mann looked at the door suspiciously. ‘To be frank sir, this place is such a maze that I think he has long gone.’

‘Yes, but just in case,’ Jennings smiled mischievously, ‘humour a chief inspector.’

Mann realised that he had no choice and gently pushed the door open to reveal an ornate corridor that led to a number of rooms. Each time they reached an entrance, the uniformed men would take it in turns to gently open the door and peer inside. As they left the fourth room, the door swung shut with a loud noise. Mann glared angrily at the offending officer. Suddenly, another door towards the end of the corridor burst open. A young unshaven man violently pushed two figures in front of him and held up a small gun to show that he was armed. One of the figures was WPC Barrie and the other was Michael. As soon as the boy saw his dad, he called out. The man grabbed Michael around the neck whilst pointing his gun at Barrie.

‘Michael. Please stay calm. Everything is going to be all right.’ Jennings looked directly at the wild-eyed man. ‘That’s right, isn’t it? We will all stay calm.’

Jennings stared at Michael and then the young man and it was hard to tell who was the most frightened.

‘Back off.’ The young man screamed.

'We will go as far as the end of the corridor but no further. Do you understand? My name is Robert Jennings and I am a chief inspector. I give you my word that we will not try to rush you.'

'Too bloody right mate.' The young man replied. 'You know what will happen if you do.'

'We all know. No one wants trouble. You are going to ask for safe passage out of here but you know that is not going to happen.'

'Why? I have these two. They are my ticket.'

'That is Wendy Barrie you have there. She must be about the same age as you.'

'So what!' The young man cut in. 'She's a copper and don't bother to deny it. The boy blurted it out and you lot always protect your own.'

Jennings groaned quietly to himself and wondered why people always believed what they watched on television.

'Besides which, I have a boy here. Yeah! That's right, he called you dad. He's your son.'

This was not a turn of events Jennings would have wished for. This frightened man would now think that he had real power.

'I have told you my name. What is yours?'

'Yeah, like I'm gonna tell you.'

'It doesn't matter.'

One of the policemen whispered something in Jennings' ear.

'Your name is Peter Robson?'

'So you know my name. So what!'

'It doesn't mean anything Peter; it just makes it easier to talk. Now, what would you like to happen next?'

Robson looked uncertain, as if he had not given the future any thought and for the first time, Jennings believed that he might have a real chance to end this peacefully.

'I want a car.' Said Robson, hesitating as self-doubt began to creep into his thoughts.

'Where would you like the car to take you?'



## Chapter three

‘Home...’ Again, there was hesitation. ‘No. I mean a port. Greenwich.’

‘And then what?’

Once more the young man looked doubtful and Jennings decided that it was time to capitalise on those doubts.

‘Peter, you obviously now understand the situation you are in. Even if we gave you a car, there is nowhere for you to go. You are on your own with two hostages. You cannot keep your eye on both. If you give up now before anyone comes to harm, the courts will take it into account.’

‘What you are saying is that I am going to prison?’

‘I will not lie to you, Peter. Yes, you are going to prison but for how long will depend on what you decide to do now. If you give up, I will testify that it was of your own accord.’

‘You will speak up for me?’

‘You have my word.’

For a moment Robson said nothing. He stared blankly at the floor as if trying to make up his mind. As his concentration lapsed, Robson loosened his grip on Michael who, sensing his chance, tried to run. Robson panicked and instinctively levelled the gun at Michael’s head. Barrie used the distraction to her advantage and tried to grab his arm, but Robson lashed out sending her flying into the wall. Then unexpectedly, the pair of doors just behind them flew open, sending Robson to the floor. As he fell, he let go of the gun, which slid along the polished stone floor towards Barrie. She leapt forward to grab it and then stopped in a kneeling position, gun pointing at Robson, hands shaking. For a brief while, Jennings thought that she might actually fire but as Morton restrained Robson, she relaxed.

Jennings drew a deep breath as his mind tried to catch up with the flurry of events over the past few seconds. He took hold of Michael to give him a reassuring hug, and his eyes came to rest on the slightly self-satisfied expression worn by Morton.

‘Well done everyone.’ It was the most appropriate thing Jennings could think of.

Within a short while, the corridor had been cleared and Jennings could finally talk to Michael. 'I think you were very brave.'

Michael smiled before he burst into tears.

By the time they both reached Exhibition Road, a police van was driving off and Morton stood by the roadside waiting.

'I have sent WPC Barrie home. I hope that was the right thing.'

'Perhaps you should have spoken to her sergeant first, but yes I will back you up. Would you mind staying on to sort out things with C8. I ought to take the boy home.'

'Yes sir.'

'Morton' Jennings hesitated. 'John. I can't thank you enough for what you did. I am very grateful, not just as your boss but as a father.'

Morton looked slightly embarrassed.

\*\*\*\*

As soon as they opened the door, Michael ran inside and within a few moments he had blurted out the whole story with some colourful embellishments. They had apparently been taken prisoner by a band of evil cut-throats, which had ended with a shootout. The story was quite preposterous but contained just enough believable details for Jennings to know that he was in for a hard time.

Jen quietly began to fill a kettle before lighting the gas on the stove. All the while she said not a word. Jennings took a deep breath as he mentally prepared for the inevitable onslaught.

'Has he settled down?'

'He has.' Jen replied coldly. 'No thanks to you. I hope you are proud of yourself.'

'Jen, if I had had the slightest inkling about a daylight raid, I would never have taken Michael along. Besides which, I wasn't working.'

'Of course you were working.' Jen snapped. Her calm facade

## Chapter three

finally cast off. 'Do you deny that you knew what was being planned?'

'No, I...'

'Then stop trying to defend your actions. You took a small boy, our son, into a dangerous situation. Do you deny that?'

'Well...no.'

'You also handed your parental responsibilities to a complete stranger.'

'I thought he would be better off out of the way.' Jennings closed his eyes as realised what he had said.

'There, you admit it. You knew it was going to be dangerous.'

'I just meant.'

'I don't care what you meant. How dare you try to worm your way out of your responsibilities. Taking Michael to the museum was bad enough but you have obviously filled his head with a ridiculous spy story. Oh yes! He told me all about it. So, don't you try to adopt your "What, innocent me ploy." You quite obviously planned this whole thing.'

Jen fell silent for a moment, but Jennings had a strong feeling that the tirade had yet to run its course. Jen took a sip of tea and he sat patiently waiting for the brown invigorating liquid to do its evil work.

'On top of everything else he now thinks of himself as a hero. You know I don't want him to follow you.'

'Well, I am sorry but I like being a policeman.'

'Yes, I know you do. You relish all that daring-do stuff. But I don't want Michael growing up with the same attitude because you have filled his head with a lot of nonsense.'

'All right!' Jennings began, hoping that an apology might help to smooth things over. 'I was wrong not to have given more thought to taking Michael. But I really did believe that the raid would not happen until long after we left. Besides which, I did not want to disappoint him. You know how much he was looking forward to going.'

'Yes I know.' Jen responded quietly. 'I suppose I must hold

myself responsible.’

Jennings’ blood ran cold. This was going to be far worse than he imagined.

‘It’s not as if you are an office clerk where I know I can rely on you being here when you promise.’

‘I think that is a little unfair Jen. I do the best I can.’

‘Of course you do, but we need to get ourselves better organised so that we can make proper time for the children. Do you agree?’ Jen looked at him accusingly.

Jennings nodded. It was not as if he could do anything else.

‘Then that is settled and we will say no more about it. But don’t think you are getting off lightly. For a start, it is Sarah’s sports day next week. It is on Wednesday afternoon and I do not care what excuses you have to concoct; you are going to attend. Furthermore, if you are going with the children to their school events, I don’t want you standing at the sidelines with your belly hanging over your trouser belt. So, you can stop eating all those crisps and no more beer. Which reminds me, stop putting the food I cook in your case. I do not spend hours preparing good nutritious meals for them to end up not being eaten. And just to ensure that you do not forget, I am reminding you that we are having a dinner party on Friday. I want you back by 7.00pm at the latest.’

## Chapter four

‘May I say that you are not looking your usual self, sir?’  
Remarked Wilks, as he brought in the morning cup of coffee.

‘That is a very astute observation.’ Jennings replied with a note of sarcasm before downing his drink in one large gulp. ‘You should have tried to become a policeman.’

‘I take it Mrs Jennings was not happy with Saturday’s events.’

‘As you rightly surmised, Mrs Jennings was not at all happy and Mr Jennings has been sleeping on the sofa. Therefore, if Mr Wilks wishes to continue in his cushy job then Mr Wilks had better find another topic to discuss and sharpish.’ He scowled to emphasise the point.

‘The morning report sir.’ Wilks continued as if the previous conversation had not taken place. He was used to these short and quickly forgotten outbursts. ‘Nothing of particular interest. Would you like another cup?’

Jennings closely watched Wilks as he left his office and then picked up the phone. He was just about to dial when Gilpatrick walked in.

‘I was going to call you.’

‘To discuss the C8 debacle no doubt.’

‘Yes. I am absolutely livid. It is quite clear that C8’s information was either wrong or what could be worse, it was deliberately misleading. They certainly failed to inform the museum’s security people about the VIP route which is highly suspicious.’

‘You think Palmer was telling the truth when he said he didn’t know.’

‘Oh yes,’ Jennings replied with conviction, ‘I think that just for once, he suffered a bout of unaccustomed honesty.’

'I can put in a complaint, but you know how the system works. Besides which, I am not sure if there is anything constructive, we can do. Recovering the Hatton gems is for C8 and it is not for us to investigate any shortcomings of another department.'

Jennings did not reply. Instead, he stood up, crossed to the window and looked down on the people milling about in the sunlit street below.

'Look sir, I think it is now very obvious that this gang planned a daytime strike all along. I also have strong suspicions that they knew about the VIP cortege and tried to use it as a cover. That could only happen if there was a leak.'

'All of which may be true but then why leave one of their own behind and more to the point, what went wrong?'

'Robson is hardly more than a boy. He has been in trouble since he was ten but nothing more than petty thieving. This was his first foray into the big time and he probably panicked. It was pretty confused. As to why their plan did not work, I have no idea. Hopefully, Robson can enlighten us.'

'I suppose Madison will have gone to ground whilst they wait to see what happens. Thankfully that also isn't for us.'

'If the insurance company complain then it is likely we will be asked to investigate the circumstances.'

'Perhaps so but we cannot anticipate events.'

'Nevertheless, I would like your permission to do a bit of poking around, very discreetly, naturally.'

'I wish you hadn't asked me that.' Gilpatrick responded with a pained look.

'And why is that?'

'Because if you hadn't asked, I would not be placed in a position to have to decline such a request.'

Jennings smiled to himself. 'Do you know sir, I am getting very forgetful in my old age. I have to admit I have quite forgotten why you came in. Something to do with the morning report wasn't it.'

'I do believe you are right.' Gilpatrick replied. 'Blowed if I

## Chapter four

can recall why myself.'

As Gilpatrick left the room, Morton came in carrying a second cup of coffee which he set down on the desk. Jennings had decided over the course of the weekend that he had been a little unfair on this young man. It wasn't his fault that Peters had been promoted. In addition, he had to admit that his work so far had been pretty top-drawer.

'Is that a new suit?' Jennings enquired. Morton glanced a little self-consciously down at himself.

'Yes sir. I managed to get away in time for a final fitting. It seemed fine so I took it.'

'Bespoke.' Jennings commented with a degree of disbelief. 'They must be paying you young policemen, more these days. I couldn't have afforded anything like that. Not been up to anything, have you?'

Morton grinned but said nothing.

'Actually, that reminds me. I wanted to have a quiet word with you about something. Perhaps you had better have a seat.'

'That does not sound good sir. Have I done something wrong?'

'Not wrong but perhaps a little thoughtless. I have been told that you were seen going into the Gray Havens club. Is that true?'

'Yes sir.' Morton replied with a puzzled tone.

'You are aware of the type of male known to frequent those premises?'

'I went there with some friends from my old university, but I do not see why that should concern anyone. What I do in my private life is my affair, provided that I do not break the law.'

'Don't be so naive.' Jennings was surprised by the note of anger that had crept into his tone of voice and did his best to suppress it. 'Morton. I assume they are still teaching ethics at Hendon.'

'Yes sir.'

'When you don the uniform, you are given a number of powers and privileges and with that comes responsibility to set

an example in both your public and private life. The uniform is a mark of trust as much as anything. You may no longer wear a uniform or work in a local community, but you should still set an example in the way you conduct yourself. That does not mean that a young man like you cannot have fun, but it does mean setting certain standards. Going to places like that could undermine your reputation. Am I making myself clear?’

‘Yes sir.’

‘In that case, we consider the matter closed. Now, I would like you to do a bit of investigating.’

‘Into C8?’

‘Yes Morton, into C8. The theft of the gems is not our concern, but I want to know why the information we had on the raid was wrong. I want you to do some discreet, and I emphasise, discreet, digging into any unusual spending by C8 personnel. You should know what to look for, bespoke suits and that kind of thing.’

‘Then you agree that there was something odd.’

‘I do and I also think that it has to do with Jimmy Price.’

‘I have heard of him from Wilks. Not a good reputation.’

‘No, indeed not and I would be willing to bet top dollar that he was the source of the information that the gang planned a simultaneous night attack.’

‘I have been wondering sir. The only fly in the ointment of an otherwise well planned raid, is why they allowed things to get out of control if they had all the details.’

‘If they had all the details,’ Jennings mused as a new train of thought occurred, ‘they got away with the Hatton gems. I wonder if Madison used the museum simply as a diversion and offered Robson up as a sacrificial lamb. We spend our time tracking him down in a large museum and they have more time to get away. I think it may be timely to have a few words with young Robson.’

‘If Robson thinks that he was stitched up, he might talk.’

‘I doubt it. Madison is a nasty character, but he is loyal to his people.’



## Chapter four

‘Then I am not sure I understand sir. I can see that confronting Robson might confirm that they planned a daytime raid, but if he won’t talk, how does it help us track down any leak?’

Jennings gave Morton a bewildered look. ‘My, my. I keep forgetting that you are still quite the new boy. We need to establish whether one of our own is actively working with the gang. Now C8 might stumble across the answer if they can prove Madison was behind the raids. Somehow, I am not confident of that, so we have to try another way. Madison would not think twice about having something unpleasant happen to Robson or his family if he talks, but the man also has guile. There will be some financial arrangement to ensure Robson’s loyalty and that might provide a provable link between this gang and Robson in the event that he does not talk. If we can find similar transactions with someone in C8, we can strike a blow for decent policing.

Get yourself down to Rochester Row and put a bit of pressure on him. Lots of questions about what Robson was told and any light he can cast on why they left the Natural History gems behind. You never know, we might get lucky and kill two birds.’

\*\*\*\*

Taylor glanced with apprehension as Sir Clive walked into the boardroom. Although he had extended an invitation, it was made in the spirit of a PR move than with any expectation that it might be accepted. Sir Clive was not a popular figure amongst the longer serving company members who had witnessed old colleagues forced to leave as a price for securing funding.

His presence was doubly unwelcome because they were due to discuss the direction of their research and he knew that Sir Clive would take a keen interest. As Sir Clive approached, it became clear that he wanted a private word. Taylor glanced at his watch.

'I can only give you five minutes.'

'That should be ample dear boy.' He responded with his usual air of smugness. 'Perhaps in your office if you don't mind.'

Taylor guided Sir Clive into his room and closed the door behind them whilst his mind raced with trepidation as to what was to come.

'As I said, I cannot give you very long. How was your trip to Pretoria?'

'Very informative and it is that which I wished to discuss prior to your meeting.'

'I thought you were there on your own business rather than anything connected with Taylor and Hardy.'

'Amounts to very much the same thing and I think you will be interested. Certainly, what I have learnt could help you to fulfil your plans for International Industrial Ceramics. I always thought that the acronym IIC suited your ambitions far more than the name Taylor and Hardy. So 19<sup>th</sup> century don't you think?'

'Sir Clive, I have four minutes.'

'Quick précis then. I had a very interesting meeting with Sir Joshua Trennor and a man you may not have heard of called Marias Vorster; some relation of the Prime Minister BJ Vorster. The South African Government is becoming very worried about tensions in a place called Soweto. It's a township for the black population.'

'Yes, I did know.'

'Is that so?' Sir Clive looked surprised. 'South Africa is a crucial investment area for us both and the buggers have screwed up their handling of forced resettlement. I have no interest in politics, but I am interested in the country having a long term secure future. Vorster has confirmed that the government is aware of a planned insurrection and is fascinated by the potential of your research.'

'How can my ceramics technology be of interest?'

'Don't be obtuse. You know perfectly well what I mean.'

## Chapter four

‘Sir Clive.’ Taylor took a deep breath as he tried to retain his patience. ‘It has taken five months of careful planning, not to say a considerable investment in bribes, to keep January’s events under wraps and that is where we need to keep them. Do you have any idea what would happen if the authorities got wind of it?’

‘Yes, indeed.’ Sir Clive admitted. ‘Not a desirable situation. However, I recall saying to you last week, we need to be a little more broad-minded about that research. Let me put it to you in plain Yorkshire. Where there’s muck, there’s brass, enough brass not only to secure your future but to make you entirely independent of people like me. Now I am sure such a prospect must be enticing.’

Taylor again looked purposefully at his watch. ‘Sorry, I cannot discuss this now.’

‘Just so long as we come back to it, and quickly.’

Taylor guided Sir Clive back into the boardroom. As soon as people spotted who he was with, the relaxed atmosphere vanished.

‘Good morning gentlemen.’ Taylor began. ‘Unless anyone objects, I would like to dispense with the usual agenda and just focus on Project Phoenix.’

‘Edward, I do not wish to be rude, but should we be discussing this in front of...’ A balding man in his fifties gave an unsubtle hint as to whom he referred.

‘My apologies to those of you who have not met Sir Clive Richards. Sir Clive is the head of a syndicate who helped us through the lean years after my father retired. I invited him to see how we do things. As they have a fifty-one per cent stake, he is obviously well aware of our work. Now, where was I? Oh yes! In 1974, this company acquired ownership of a mine and quarry in South Africa. It had previously been used for aggregate and had been worked out. However, it still contained a good supply of ancient riverbed clays which have proved to be particularly fine and therefore suitable for our top-of-the-range products.’

During the geological surveys, a rather unique form of contamination was found in the form of a layer of compacted minerals left over from a prehistoric meteorite strike. Analysis of this layer yielded some interesting qualities which we published in a scientific paper. It was that paper which led to an approach by the Periston Corporation. They had a small quantity of this material from an unknown source and discovered that by combining it with certain organic compounds, they could produce an animal feed which accelerated growth and suppressed the animal's normal aggressive behaviour. They were convinced that this could revolutionise farming by increasing yield. Our paper provided the last piece in a scientific jigsaw, but more importantly, we seemed to own the only viable source of this material. It appeared to be the basis for a perfect business partnership. But alas, we all know the results of that venture. However, we had a serendipitous outcome. Metassonite, which is what I called this new mineral, can also substantially increase the heat resistance of ceramics. To date, we have achieved resistance of up to 4,800 Fahrenheit which is significantly greater than anything currently available. In addition, the substance also has potential for the electronics sector as its resistance can actually be programmed. The main obstacles to production were fourfold. Firstly, designing a process that can create a consistently stable material. Secondly, producing the material at a cost which is competitive. Thirdly, securing access to funding to ensure that we would be equals and not just a junior partner in this project. Our financial backers have been most forthcoming.' Taylor gave Sir Clive a glancing look. 'I should not need to remind you that without their support, a company as large as Periston would have had little trouble in absorbing us. Finally, we needed to create a mass production system that is safe. That final obstacle proved unsolvable...' Taylor paused to add dramatic effect. 'Until now.'

Abruptly the mood of everyone around the table changed as they digested the implications of what they had just been told.

## Chapter four

Uncertain faces turned to look at each other and brief conversations were exchanged to ensure they had understood what had been said.

‘Edward. I think we are delighted if somewhat puzzled. Over the last few months, you have consistently reported that no progress was being made. All the test animals became mad within minutes of exposure.’

‘I hope I was also able to reassure you that our teams of experts were confident of a solution.’ Taylor glanced at Sir Clive, anxious that he did not think he had been misled. ‘Without going into technical details, the key was in the mine itself. It had been safely used for a number of years. Indeed, our own operations experienced no problems until the material was exposed to the outside in its raw state. As yet no one understands why this should be, but if metassonite is refined inside the mine and combined with other elements, it becomes inert and can then be safely brought to the surface. It is only when the mineral is in its raw state that it seems to have toxic properties.’

‘Are we likely to get all the licences we require?’ Said a grey thin man.

‘I will not try to evade the question, but as yet I am not able to provide an answer. Our Johannesburg office is putting together an application and is in discussions with trade officials.’

‘I appreciate that it is unforgivable of me to interrupt a private meeting.’ Sir Clive spoke out. ‘However, I may be able to assist. My syndicate has significant interests in the region and more importantly, the right contacts. I am more than happy to have a word in the right ears. Just in the spirit of being helpful, you understand.’

‘Thank you Sir Clive, that is a kind offer. I should not need to remind any of you about the sensitive nature of Project Phoenix. The purpose of this fire is to spark a rebirth, not create more cold ashes.’

As Taylor carefully stacked his papers at the end of the

meeting, he concluded that this had been one of his better mornings. The meeting had finished with a round of congratulations so profuse that he had entirely forgotten that Sir Clive was still present. A soft voice speaking from behind made him jump.

'I can see why this company has done so well since you took over from your father. May I also add my congratulations?'

Taylor smiled in acknowledgement but said nothing.

'And in fact, it fits in nicely with that other subject we were discussing.'

'Sir Clive.' Taylor began with a confidence that he did not usually feel when dealing with financiers. 'For the first time since my great grandfather's tenure, this company has a real opportunity to make an impression on the markets. Even our traditional lines are doing well now that we have the go-ahead from the DTI to export to East Germany. Surely even your syndicate must be content?'

'Hardly old boy, you are still thinking in two dimensions. You have a laudable ambition but one that can only be realised if you are prepared to play in the big boys' playground.'

'You mean politics.'

'Yes, I mean politics. For example, the South African National Party has two problems, maintaining white minority rule in the face of growing unrest and placating an increasingly hostile international theatre. The concern for Vorster is the Americans as usual. They may well have their own version of Apartheid, but they will not tolerate it in others. South Africa depends on certain key exports and a heavy-handed suppression of the black majority could result in some form of economic sanctions. Now, if they had an excuse to clear certain townships, say due to an outbreak of extreme violence, then I am sure their government would look very favourably on any who assisted them.'

'Apartheid is an abhorrence.'

'I entirely agree old boy. Nevertheless, you are there working with them and you are supporting their government through

## Chapter four

your taxes. Think about it. South Africa is thousands of miles away and they are not quite so scrupulous about, shall we term them, our little difficulties. I do not think you could come up with a more perfect testing ground.'

\*\*\*\*

Jennings was so engrossed in the Times editorial that he was only vaguely aware that the car had come to a stop. The article was about the unification of Vietnam and the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of American independence. The editor was making the point that despite a gap of two centuries, both wars had seen the triumph of guerrilla fighters over professional armies. The philosophical argument was probably well made but from a personal point of view, it brought home memories of the nightly news, which for years had been filled with grainy black and white broadcasts of young, grime covered faces. For his generation, war had become wallpaper. World War Two was quickly followed by the war in Palestine, Korea, Vietnam, the Arab invasions of Israel, the Mau Mau, Algeria, Sudan, Congo, the list seemed endless.

Jennings put away his newspaper and climbed out of the car. He stood quietly for a moment in the glorious morning sunshine, looking up at an innocuous block of flats. It was hard to credit that inside; a heinous crime had occurred in such an ordinary looking place. Yet the building had been taped off and the car park was full of police vehicles and several ambulances. The duty officer waved him through, and he climbed the four flights of stairs to the second floor. The clean, almost pristine staircase and stairwell walls lightly covered by pop art, showed that this particular block in Kensington, was the abode of the well-to-do.

At the top of the stairs, Jennings paused for a moment to catch his breath before spotting the distinctive figure of Wilks standing by a temporary incident area, which had been set up by the front door of 2A.

‘Sorry that one of your rare excursions out of the office had to be like this Wilks, but Morton is still in Cardiff. Who actually discovered the bodies?’

‘A young PC sir. The housekeeper became concerned when she could not let in the cleaners. He is inside. Sir, if I may venture, he has had a bit of a rough time.’

‘Not making them so tough these days, are they?’

‘Actually sir, it’s pretty grizzly in there.’

Jennings looked curiously at Wilks. It was not like him to be tolerant of the short-comings of the younger generation. Wilks leaned in close and spoke softly.

‘You know my past sir. Two years as a Japanese prisoner, but I have never seen anything as sickening as this.’

Jennings closed his eyes momentarily in dread of what was to come. ‘All right Wilks, keep him here for ten minutes. If I haven’t sent for the man, he can go home.’

Jennings headed towards the front door but, even before he stepped over the threshold, the sight of blood and other stuff splattered over the hall’s flocked wallpaper became clearly visible. He turned back to Wilks.

‘Does the young lad have family?’

‘I believe so sir, in Wimbledon.’

‘Don’t let him go alone. Use my car if you cannot find a free patrol vehicle.’

Jennings stepped inside and the smell of salt and decay mixed with the sweet scent of vomit immediately choked his nostrils. He was tempted to fish in his pockets for a handkerchief to cover his nose and mouth but quickly concluded that it might not look good to those already having to work in the apartment. The hall was wide, thickly carpeted in a dark claret colour and decorated in the kind of way that you could only find via an interior designer. About halfway down the hall was an antique table with a heavy lamp that was lying on its side. The ornate gold coloured surface showed signs that a thick red liquid had dripped to the floor. As Jennings made his way towards it, he became aware that his shoes had



## Chapter four

trodden in something wet. He looked down and then had to quickly look away. A sudden memory of the hangar at Heathrow came to mind but this was different. This time suicide was out of the question, at least for the victims.

Jennings tried to calm his nerves as he approached the living room, but nothing could have prepared him for what he was about to see.

Unlike the dark hall, this room was lit from a curtain of glass that made up two walls. It was a large room. Bright, airy and expensively furnished in the latest Conrad inspired design. The room was also filled with people, some in uniforms and some in white overalls. Even so, they could not obscure the carnage. Jennings recalled seeing a photograph of Mary Kelly, the final victim of Jack the Ripper. It was a poor quality black and white photograph that left little to the imagination of a woman who had been almost torn apart. As he looked around, he gained a vague impression of a red sunset glow to the light. But it was 9.30 in the morning and the red glow was due to the amount of blood smeared over the inside of the windows. One of the overalled figures looked in his direction and showed signs of recognition, but it took Jennings a moment to place the face.

‘John Crichton?’

The figure nodded its head.

‘I thought you worked on aircraft accidents?’

‘I do. I just happen to be on secondment. It’s a new idea by some bright spark at the Home Office. I take it no one has briefed you?’

‘Not in detail.’

‘Well, I don’t have that. Have you been to the bedroom yet?’

Jennings glanced at an open door through which he could just make out a number of moving figures.

‘I assume that is where the bodies are.’

‘Yes,’ Crichton replied grimly, ‘there are a couple of plastic buckets just inside the door. You will need them.’

‘What do you think happened?’

‘It’s purely conjecture, but I would suggest that Nigel

Fellows first killed his wife and then their two children before taking his own life. All three were either killed in here or the hall. They were then taken to the dining room where he cut up their bodies before transferring the parts into the bedroom.’

‘Good god!’ Jennings muttered to himself. ‘Why such a vicious attack I wonder.’

‘That is a very good question. You might want to have a word with the housekeeper. According to her, they were a very happy family.’

‘I have seen quite a number of those in murder reports.’

‘Yes, well, that’s your territory. Mine is trying to understand why in three recent cases, we seem to have normal, well-adjusted people who for no apparent reason go berserk.’

‘You are not suggesting a connection with Sykes and Brown. They were both suicides.’

‘They were. Look, in both our jobs we have to deal with death. I have seen some truly dreadful sights and I am sure you have too, but this is far worse. I just find it a bit odd that over a period of a couple of months, three apparently normal people carried out acts which stagger belief. Peter Sykes killed himself by placing his head in a vat of car battery acid. Michael Brown threw himself into a working jet engine and this chap...’ Crichton paused as if he could not quite bring himself to describe what he had seen. ‘Perhaps you had better go and see for yourself.’

Jennings had been steeling himself for this moment. Even so, he had to fight a swirling stomach as he made his way toward the door accompanied by Crichton. It was not a sight that anyone could prepare for. What had once been three human beings had been carefully laid out on a king’s size bed as if Fellows had been trying to deny what he had done. Not a square inch of the bed and the surrounding area was free from blood. As he approached, two overalled people moved away and he had his first clear view of the bodies. Jennings turned away quickly but immediately wished he hadn’t as he saw Fellows. He sat propped in a crouched position by the window.

## Chapter four

When Jennings first entered the bedroom all he could see was a huddled figure. Now he had an unobscured view and Jennings felt his stomach heave. A thick glass shard protruded from his chin and the top of his head. Jennings turned away, unable to help himself and made quickly for the living room. Crichton gave him a couple of minutes to recover.

‘There is nothing to be embarrassed about. You are the first not to be sick. Can I get you some water? We have some from next door.’

‘Please.’ It was all that Jennings could say.

Crichton briefly disappeared leaving Jennings alone to recall what he had seen. It was not so much the ugliness of disfigurement but Fellows’ expression which had been particularly shocking. The man was smiling. When Crichton returned with a glass of water, Jennings drank gratefully.

‘Are you seriously intimating that Fellows did that to himself?’ Said Jennings.

‘I am. God knows how. It would have taken superhuman strength. Did you see what he did to the bodies of his family?’

Jennings nodded slightly as he took another sip of water.

‘It would have taken the best part of an hour to sew the bits back together. I have always considered myself to be a rational man, but this could make me believe in evil.’

Jennings needed something normal to focus on and noticed that the door to what he thought might be the kitchen, was shut.

‘Is that room clean?’

‘It is,’ Crichton replied, ‘and the two other bedrooms. Your people have already taken prints.’

Jennings headed for the door and knocked. There was no reply and so he carefully opened it to reveal a large pine table set out for dinner. The worktops showed signs of preparing a meal but none of the food had been touched.

‘What time have you estimated the attack took place?’

‘Sometime after 7.30 but I will have to carry out more tests.’

‘Why after 7.30?’

'It is the time Mrs Fellows telephoned the housekeeper to warn her that the cleaners had changed their hours.'

'So, it could have been shortly after 7.30.'

'It could. As you can see, everything is laid out for dinner but it appears to have been interrupted.'

Jennings wandered over to the table and bent down to have a closer look at the plates.

'If this is what I think it is, it is expensive, but that is out of place.' He pointed towards a garish green mug.

'I have a sample of the tea it contained for testing, just in case. But people are known to drink tea before dinner. Even out of a mug.'

'Possibly,' Jennings mused, 'but having seen the way this place is laid out, I would have thought that a cup and saucer was more in keeping and this is rather unusual. It looks almost like jade. I don't think I saw your report on Brown. What did you conclude?'

'Some form of extreme psychotic episode. Not chemically induced. He showed no sign of taking any form of hallucinogenic substance. At least not any known substance. The same was true of Sykes. I checked.'

'But you will be doing a complete check of Fellows?'

'Naturally, actually I had better get on.'

'Yes.' Jennings replied vaguely. 'You know; I have just realised that Fellows was clean. He must have washed and changed before he killed himself.'

'He used the ensuite shower room. As I said, I had better get on.'

'Sorry, and thank you,' Crichton looked puzzled, 'for the water.'

Jennings left the flat and looked around for Wilks. He spotted him at the end of the hall for which he was thankful as it provided an excuse to get out of this hell. Images of the Milton train crash came flooding back as they always did when he was confronted by similar situations. Twenty years had done nothing to dim a young policeman's exposure to what can

## Chapter four

happen to skin, muscle and bone when it is confronted by shards of metal and glass.

Wilks looked up as Jennings approached and wore a sympathetic expression.

‘Halligan is on his way to his parents and I have informed his sergeant.’

‘Thank you, Wilks.’

‘I am sorry sir but the chief wants a report as soon as you get back to the Yard.’

\*\*\*\*

Jennings sat in one of Gilpatrick’s faded green armchairs as he watched him pace up and down getting steadily redder in the cheeks. This was a familiar routine dating back to when Gilpatrick was his CI.

‘How long before the toxicology report comes through?’

‘Not for a day or so I’m afraid.’

‘Dammit Robert! I have got the press all over this one.’

‘That is hardly a surprise. There is nothing that sells more newspapers than a grisly murder, even more so when it involves children.’

Gilpatrick looked at him strangely. ‘You don’t know who Nigel Fellows is, do you?’

‘Some kind of architect I gather.’

‘Some kind of architect.’ Gilpatrick repeated as if he could not quite believe what he had heard. ‘This some kind of architect happened to marry the youngest daughter of Lord Winterton. I assume you have heard of him.’

‘Yes, I have heard of him.’ Jennings admitted sheepishly as he realised his faux pas.

‘This man owns half of Fleet Street and you wonder why the newspapers are interested.’

‘Irrespective of the man’s position, this is a police investigation.’

‘Don’t be an ass.’ Gilpatrick decided he had had enough of

pacing and sat down. 'Look, what have you got so far?'

'Not much as yet. The neighbours and other family members are being questioned about whether there is any history of problems. I should have an initial report by the end of today. The autopsies will start tomorrow morning. All we can say to the press boys is what we usually say. An investigation is on-going and we have yet to rule anything out.'

'Is that all?' Gilpatrick looked flustered.

'All we can say publicly, but there are some unusual aspects. The family seems to have been calm enough to prepare a three course formal meal, probably very shortly before Mrs Fellows and the two children were attacked. Mrs Fellows also spoke to the housekeeper at 7.30pm to warn her that the cleaners had changed their hours. Both might indicate that this was not a slow burn row that got out of hand but that something dramatic happened to change a usual evening pattern. I am also interested in why Fellows seems to have washed and changed before killing himself.'

'The man was clearly barking.'

'In which case, what drove him barking?' There are no signs of infidelity as yet, although we have only been able to talk to the housekeeper. Barnden is tracking down friends and family. But there is one thing that struck me as odd.'

Gilpatrick gave Jennings a look that clearly spoke of bewilderment.

'Perhaps I should have said, a possible lead. Fellows killed himself in a very dramatic way. The same could be said of Brown, although it is possible that that was simple opportunism. Then there was Sykes last month.'

'But he was an addict.'

'Was! He was supposed to have been clean for years. Perhaps there is a link?'

'How so?'

'In all three cases, something seems to have spurred a normal person into committing extreme acts of violence. To be frank I know it is a tenuous connection.'

## Chapter four

'More like grasping at straws I would have thought.' Gilpatrick interrupted with an acid tone. 'Is this your idea?'

'The Home Office is also working on the same lines. They sent a man called John Crichton to run the forensics which in itself is unusual.'

'Explain.'

'I met him when I wasted a morning looking into the suicide of Brown. He is an aircraft incident investigator. Crichton told me he had been sent because he is on a secondment which sounded a little odd. If it had not been for his presence, I would not have given the idea any credence, but at the moment it is the only tangible line of enquiry we have and it would be sensible to probe a little. Just to see if anything emerges.'

## Chapter five

As Jennings inserted his key into the lock, he thought that nothing was as welcoming as his own front door after a hard day and today had been a hard day by any standards. Stepping over the threshold Jennings imagined the conversation he was about to have with Jen. She never liked it when he had to work at weekends. Come to that, neither did he. Jennings pushed the door open half expecting to be rugby tackled by young David even though it was close to 8.00pm and was slightly puzzled to find the hallway empty. Quietly closing the door, he placed his briefcase by the shoe bench before making for the kitchen. He had promised himself a nice bottle of beer ever since boarding the train at Victoria. Despite the fact that Jen had banned buying anything new, the fridge contained one last bottle of the precious, life restoring liquid.

What should have told him immediately that a planned quiet evening was not going to happen, was that peaking from beneath Jen's apron was what looked like one of her best dresses and she was wearing high heeled shoes. Jennings slowly crept to the fridge and opened the door.

'If you are looking for beer, I used the last to make a shampoo.'

Jennings felt as if the bottom had dropped out of his world.

'You will find a jug of summer berry and banana crush on the bottom shelf. I mixed a new batch this morning, much better for you.'

Jennings regarded the pale pink sludge with suspicion. Just the sight of it made him feel a little queasy.

'Hello dear. Are you making something nice for dinner?'

Jen turned around. Her eyes flashed with anger. 'You have



## Chapter five

forgotten, haven't you?

His schoolboy look of guilt provided all the damning evidence Jen required.

'We are having guests for dinner tonight.'

'Oh no, not tonight.' The words burst forth from his mouth before he had a chance to stop them. To his surprise, Jen did not react.

'You just have time to get washed and changed before they arrive.'

Jennings had a sudden brainwave. 'Oh well, if we are expecting guests, perhaps I should open a bottle of wine. What are we having?'

'Not a chance darling.' Jen replied with what he thought was an overly enthusiastically vicious tone. 'This will be a Moroccan themed evening and there is some sherbet chilling in the fridge.'

'How nice.' It was the only response he could think of as he resigned himself to being smartly outmanoeuvred. 'I think I will go and change.'

Jennings was just about to climb the stairs when the doorbell chimed. He could see an unfamiliar shape through the stippled stained glass and concluded that the first of the guests had arrived. He opened the door and stood for a moment, not quite sure what to make of the person standing there.

'Morton. What are you doing here? I thought you were still on your way back from Wales. Whatever it is you'll have to be quick, we are expecting dinner guests, apparently.'

Morton looked embarrassed. 'Actually sir, I am one of them.'

'Oh!' Jennings stuttered. 'Then you had better come in. I assume those are for my wife.' Jennings looked at a bouquet of flowers Morton was holding.

'This is a little awkward isn't it sir. I mean you were obviously not expecting me.'

'No, I wasn't but that is not your fault.' Jennings smiled in an attempt to play more of a welcoming host. 'But never mind

and you had better call me Robert for tonight. Just for tonight mind. I'll show you through to the kitchen.'

Jen was still standing over the kitchen sink but turned to face them as they walked in.

'Jen, this is John Morton. I think you two have spoken.'

'Yes, of course.' Jen smiled her most winning smile. 'I am so glad you could come. Are those for me? How kind.'

'John, I would like to offer you a drink but we are having a Moroccan evening. No alcohol apparently, but I can offer you some sherbet.'

'I am very fond of sherbet. My father was stationed in Egypt for a while.'

'Oh good!' Jennings poured a glass of the white cloudy liquid. 'Now if you will excuse me, I had better get changed.'

By the time Jennings returned to the dining room, the other guests had arrived and were already tucking into what looked like large uncooked spaghetti sticks. There was a rather haughty woman from the WI with her dull husband and the plainest girl he thought he had ever seen, who he guessed to be their daughter. The other couple included a striking and vaguely familiar blond woman in her thirties. She was accompanied by an equally handsome man of a similar age.

Jen came into the dining room. Having removed her apron, Jennings worst fears were confirmed as she was indeed wearing one of her poshest frocks. He looked down at his slacks and cardigan and groaned inwardly.

'Shall I do the introductions?' Jen began brightly. 'Margot Winterton and her husband David. David is a QC and we also have their daughter Aurelia who is studying chemistry. Someone for you to talk to John. Next, we are very lucky to have Silvia Simons who we all know from the BBC 2 programme Culture Today. Her husband is the equally well known journalist, Anton Caruthers. The very handsome young man is John Morton who works with my husband Robert.'

'Can I offer anyone some Sherbet?' Said Jennings. 'Nicely chilled for a hot evening.'

## Chapter five

'Yes, can you believe this weather?' Margot contributed. 'They say it is going to be one of hottest summers on record.'

'Plays havoc in court. I have to keep a defrosted ice pack under my wig.'

'I assume that is so you can keep a cool head.' Jennings smiled to himself but noted a look of warning from Jen. 'Where did you all meet?'

'Darling, I did tell you. This is a charity dinner organised in aid of the WI. We are having them up and down the country to raise money.'

'Yes, of course.' Jennings lied. 'Would anyone like some more sherbet?'

'Actually darling, could you let Mary know we are ready for the first course.'

'Mary...' Jennings stood up wondering briefly whether Jen had gone mad. One of them was certainly losing their grip on reality. Who the hell was Mary? Jennings tentatively opened the kitchen door whilst concocting an excuse to cover any embarrassment, when he saw a young woman dressed in a starched maid's uniform, spooning some odd looking substance into small glass bowls.

'Em! I think we are ready for the first course.'

The woman smiled a polite acknowledgement and returned to her spooning. The journey back to his chair was made in a fog of confusion as he struggled to make sense of what was going on.

'How long have you been in television Silvia?' Asked John, breaking with convention by initiating a conversation across the table instead of with young Aurelia who was sitting next to him.

'Simply ages darling.' Silvia looked bored by the question and turned to her husband and whispered something.

'Started off doing housewives tips on Houseparty, didn't you?' Chipped in Aurelia and Jennings noted a flash of anger from Silvia.

'I don't think I know that one.' Added Margot.

'Late afternoon programme which discusses subjects of interest for women. Comes just before the children's programmes.' Silvia's husband, Anton seemed to be enjoying her obvious discomfort.

'Not the calibre of programme I would consider now, but it won several awards, particularly after I took editorial control.'

'How did you get your job on Culture Today, Silvia?' Interrupted Jen, in an attempt to make her feel more at ease.

'It was one of those flukes, darling. I had been chatting to Michael Denning. He was the head of culture programming about some projects of mine. The programme had simply been plummeting in the ratings and he thought I was just what it needed.'

'I read that you got the job after refusing to be interviewed on a trampoline for Blue Peter.'

Silvia glowered at Aurelia. 'Did you darling, must have been in one of the tabloids.'

'You might know my brother Eric. He is a producer at the BBC.' John continued.

Silvia's face broke into a broad TV smile. 'Yes I do. I am a great admirer of his work. So, you are Eric's little brother, which means that your father was the naturalist, Peter Morton.'

'Yes, that's right.'

'I was so sorry to read about his death, but you must be very proud of all he achieved.'

'I think you are rather embarrassing John.' Anton said quietly to his wife.'

'Oh nonsense,' Silvia countered dismissively, 'and what do you do? I thought Jen's husband was an important detective or something. Do you catch murderers?'

'Something like that.'

'I suppose your father must have been a little disappointed that you did not follow the family tradition.'

'He was, but policing was all I wanted to do, ever since I was a small child. He understood.' John smiled faintly pleased that the arrival of the first course temporarily diverted her attention.

## Chapter five

‘My, my Jen. What is this?’ Said Margot, looking at a glass bowl that was half filled with small fawn coloured lumps with green and purple flecks.

‘Quinoa mixed with avocado, aubergine and grated cucumber.’

‘How very clever of you.’ Added Silvia. ‘Where ever did you manage to find all these ingredients in a place like Croydon?’

‘I think we had this on our holiday to Marrakech last year.’ Margot turned to her husband for confirmation but met with a blank expression.

‘I always thought Morocco was a delightful place. I spent about a month there on a modelling shoot a couple of years ago. It was for Chanel. The campaign ran on television and in all the best magazines. Perhaps you saw it. Anyway, I met with David Niven, an utterly charming man.’

‘Although the flies are pretty dreadful and the street hawkers? Couldn’t go anywhere without being pestered, and as for the food, all that greasy lamb.’ Margot suddenly realised what she had said and turned quickly to Jen.

‘I remembered that you do not like lamb. That is why we are having fish.’

Margot looked relieved. ‘And as for the locals, dreadful habits. They spit in the street you know.’

‘I take it you did not enjoy your holiday.’ Said Jennings.

For a moment, the conversation died before it was picked up by Margot’s husband, David.

‘Did you know that Fast Eddy has been released from prison Robert?’

‘I did see something in the reports.’ Jennings replied, wondering why he had chosen to raise a work related subject.

‘Sounds fascinating,’ Silvia interrupted, ‘do tell.’

‘It was a case I worked on five years ago. Robert brings them to justice and I prosecute. Heroin as I recall. A gang of people including an unsavoury character called Eddy McVoy bought up a number of innocent looking suburban houses and bungalows and turned them into processing plants to produce

drugs. They used the bodies of underworld rivals as fertiliser. Very nasty.'

'How horrible. Do you have any more stories like that Robert?' Silvia added eagerly.

'I'm glad to say no. Most of our work is pretty dull isn't it John?'

'It can have its moments, but I think we would all like to hear more about what it's like to work in television.'

Jennings gave a look of congratulations for diverting the conversation, but the look did not last long as Silvia eagerly took the bait. The first and main course came and went before she finished a detailed description of her media conquests.

The mysterious Mary cleared away the myriad of small dishes before bringing out a large selection of figs, dates and other odd looking fruit. Jennings began to mentally count up the cost and wondered whether they were also making a contribution to keeping a legion of women jam making throughout the length and breadth of the country.

'At the risk of embarrassing our host,' said Anton as he sipped at a small cup of mint tea, 'we have actually met.'

Jennings did likewise, shuddered and noted a disapproving look from Jen.

'Although I should add that it is hardly surprising that you do not remember. It was in 1965 and I had just started work as a reporter. I must admit that I have followed your cases with quite an interest.'

'I'm flattered.'

'You have been responsible for solving many high profile cases over the years including quite a few odd ones like that incident over the moon rock, but I should think that a £3 million heist in broad daylight must be one of your most daring.'

Jennings smiled politely. 'To be strictly accurate it is not one of my cases. My presence was nothing more than a coincidence.'

Jen spluttered on her tea and to divert everyone's attention,

## Chapter five

rapidly changed the subject.

‘Aurelia, you have hardly touched a thing.’ She noted that the young girl was looking dubiously at the available selection of fruit.

‘It’s very nice thank you.’ She replied quietly.

‘Aurelia never did have a big appetite. Do you?’ Her mother replied defensively on her behalf. The girl turned bright red.

‘Didn’t I see that you had been assigned to the Fellows case?’ Anton continued as if the interruption to his question had not taken place.

Jennings had been waiting for this moment ever since he realised who Anton Caruthers was.

‘I have, but as an experienced journalist, you would not expect me to discuss a live case.’

‘No, of course not. I assume I will be seeing you at the press briefing but I just wondered whether you were connecting it to the suicides of Brown and Sykes.’

‘Is that something your paper is working on?’

‘Nothing more than a fragile link, but there are similarities, don’t you think?’

‘I think Mrs Jennings would rather we did not discuss shop.’ Interrupted John trying to negate an embarrassing moment. ‘But I would be happy to have a chat at any other time.’

Anton responded with a brief look of contempt.

‘And I would hate to end a lovely evening on a sour note by having to remind you that it is an offence to withhold information.’

Jennings smiled at Anton’s obvious discomfort and mentally made a note to complement John on his tactics later.

‘More mint tea anyone?’ Said Jen. ‘No brandy I’m afraid. ‘Not quite in keeping with the theme of the dinner.’

\*\*\*\*

‘I think that went well.’ Said Jen, as she waved goodbye to a white Jag, which roared off down the quiet, suburban street.

She hurriedly closed the door after noticing a bedroom curtain twitch.

'I'm sure it did.' Jennings gave her a kiss on her cheek in the hope that she would not press him for a genuine opinion.

'But no thanks to you. I wish you would be more sociable, even if our guests are bores. What on earth made you start the evening with a discussion about the weather?'

'That wasn't my fault. All I said was that it was hot.'

Jen gave him a reproachful look and he shrugged his shoulders.

'Perhaps I was still getting over the shock of seeing Mary. Since when do we have a maid?'

'She was on loan.'

'Thank goodness for that. However did you put such a group together? Margot and David are bad enough but Silvia and Anton.'

'Yes, she was a little full of herself,' Jen replied coyly, 'but then she is a personality and I'm afraid it was the luck of the draw.'

'How do you mean? Actually, forget it, I don't want to know. I am just glad it's over.'

Jennings was about to lock the door when he heard the sound of the downstairs toilet being flushed. He looked at Jen who was also puzzled, but a moment later they had an answer to the mystery as John Morton appeared.

'I hope I did not startle you.'

'Not at all, I thought you left with Margot and David.'

'I was helping your wife with the washing up. Thank you for a lovely meal. I really enjoyed it.'

'And I am glad you came. It is nice to meet a policeman with good manners for a change.' She glowered at Jennings. 'Now don't forget our conversation and don't you let my husband bully you.'

Jennings watched with bemusement as Jen disappeared upstairs.

'What was that all about?'



## Chapter five

'You know the rules sir, about discussing work.' John smiled impishly.

'I take it you have a car. I think the last train has gone.'

'I am staying with my sister tonight and given tonight's theme, there's no problem with being over the drink limit.'

'My apologies for that,' Jennings answered, 'but at least you can have one when you get home. I have been put on the wagon, health reasons.'

John responded with a look of sympathy. 'I'm sorry to hear that sir. Nothing serious I hope.'

'Of course it's bloody serious, but no, nothing like that.'

'In which case, I can safely leave this in your hands.' John handed over a small bottle of single malt. 'Present for the host.'

\*\*\*\*

'Your coffee sir.'

Wilks put a cup and saucer down onto Jennings' desk and was about to leave when he was called back.

'I found out something quite interesting last night.'

'What was that sir?'

'Our mutual colleague has a famous father.'

'Indeed sir.'

'Oh, you knew!' Jennings looked disappointed. 'I always liked Peter Morton's films. They seemed to get beneath the skin of the animal, so to speak.'

'Animals are not really my thing and I do not own a television. I much prefer the radio, but I gather he was very much respected.'

'Then you also knew he was dead.' Jennings ventured.

'I did sir, killed by a black rhino. Still, I suppose that is as good a way to go. Speaking of which.'

'Yes.' Jennings looked up from his reverie.

'It's time I was going sir.'

'Of course. Has Morton arrived yet?'

'No sir, but he telephoned first thing this morning and said

something about going to Rochester Row.'

Jennings sipped his coffee suspiciously and discovered that it was not quite as bad as usual. The morning reports contained just one item of interest. A transcription of a call from John Crichton confirming that he would be attending the autopsies and would telephone if there was something to say. Crichton was turning out to be a useful if enigmatic contact. Jennings stood up and went to look out of his window. The sun was bright and there was not a cloud in the sky. He was beginning to miss clouds. The street below was filled with commuters, many of whom were civil servants making their way from Victoria Street towards St James's Park and their Whitehall offices. A few were even wearing bowler hats despite the hot weather. Jennings smiled to himself as he recalled his first day in the old Scotland Yard building. He had felt very important and treated himself to a first class ticket from Balham station. His single compartment had been full of bowler hatted city gents, none of whom could have been under fifty. They had all seemed so old to that young man. Now he was on his way to being fifty and probably seemed old to all the young people travelling to work on the 8.05.

Jennings became aware of the door opening and turned around to see who it was.

'Ah, Morton!' Jennings looked at his watch to give the impression that he was annoyed at his lateness. 'I hope you are not going to use last evening as an excuse.'

Morton smiled knowingly. 'Wilks just confirmed that he passed on my message, sir.'

'Did he?' Jennings replied mischievously. 'What information did your trip reveal?'

'Not enough for a prosecution I'm afraid. Despite C8's reputation, I could find nothing more than idle gossip, with the exception of Jimmy Price. It seems that he has a long history but nothing provable.'

'I suppose if you are going to be a bent policeman, then you need to have your wits about you.' Jennings concluded

## Chapter five

gloomily. 'What do you have?'

'He had excellent reports during his training and whilst he was on the beat. In fact, it was on the strength of those reports that he was put forward for a role as a detective. It was when he arrived in London that he began to get a bit of a reputation. He was transferred from Westminster after allegations that he was soft on prostitution. He did a stint in the East End before getting a promotion.'

'Yes, it beats me how he got that.'

'He passed all the exams and had a recommendation. But it seems as though his division was only too pleased to get rid of him.'

'I see.' Jennings replied with resignation. 'So, rather than dealing with a problem they simply kicked him upstairs.'

'That's just about the size of it sir.'

'And I suppose he did a good job at covering his connections to Madison and the museum job.'

'Pretty good sir, but perhaps not quite good enough. That is why I went back to interview Robson. You were right about them using the VIP convoy as cover. Robson knew all about it. What they had not anticipated was that the security guards were armed and being foreign, were quite happy to wave them around in public, which caused a panic. Despite the fact that Madison's people were also armed, they were scared to get into a firefight and fled.'

'That explains why they did not take the gems. Pity, it means that my idea that the Natural History raid was a diversion, is wrong. It would have made things so much easier.'

'Why is that sir?'

'Because now we are dealing with a ruthless man who has had his reputation dented.'

'Yes sir. Unfortunately, we cannot prove that the leak came from us. The Home Office told the local council who sent a team of street cleaners to spruce things up.'

'Which means that the gang could have got wind of it from any number of sources. I am surprised C8 didn't sell tickets.'

What about the idea that Robson was used as a decoy?

'I am pretty sure you were right about that, but as you suspected, Robson is still not talking. His wife recently opened a bank account with a £5,000 deposit.'

Jennings opened his eyes wide and gave a whistle of astonishment.

'The money came from an uncle who owns a scrap metal dealership.'

'Damn!'

'Actually, we still might have had a bit of luck there. It's not enough for a formal investigation but I can prove a direct link between Price and Madison.'

'Can you now?'

'During his interrogation, Robson let slip that he saw Price with Madison and he was definitely not working on any connected case.'

'Which means that, even if we cannot prove that Price is actually working for Madison, we can link him to a known villain. Good work. It even deserves a cup of Wilks' coffee if you are feeling particularly brave.'

'Thank you, no. I have given up coffee. Thought I might enter the county steeplechase next month.' Morton looked at the pile of papers on the desk. 'Is there anything of interest?'

'A nasty murder, not that murder is anything other than nasty, but this one was particularly gruesome.'

'I heard talk in the canteen. Do you think that journalist fellow was right about a connection to Brown and Sykes?'

'I don't think so, but I am keeping an open mind.' Jennings mused. 'However, people like Caruthers should know better than to start a possible media frenzy with a non-story. We have seen where those things can end up. What I do believe is that we have three instances that may or may not have similar features. It's our job to investigate if only to be able to refute such claims.'

'Any ideas as to why Fellows killed his family?'

'None at all. In fact, I am rather depending on the autopsy.'

## Chapter five

For example, the presence of an illegal drug could make this a very short investigation. Still, it is odd.'

'What is sir?'

'The fact that three, seemingly normal people should undergo such a transformation of character. People can be driven to extremes, but it takes time even if there is a history of mental health problems.'

'And in each of these cases, the person seems to have snapped for no reason.'

'No apparent reason Morton. There is a difference.'

'Would you like me to have a look through the files? See if there is anything. I don't know... child care reports, complaints to the local station about arguments, that kind of thing.'

'Good idea.' Jennings replied hesitantly. 'In fact, I think I will have a chat with the housekeeper. Have something by this afternoon and we will compare notes. By the way, have you moved?'

'Yes sir, last weekend.'

'I thought so. Wilks said that you were going to Rochester Row which meant that you were no longer living in the section house.'

'That's right sir. Couldn't stand the noise and you are always on call. Why, is there anything wrong?'

'According to strict interpretation of the rules, you should have let me know first.'

'Yes, sorry sir but it was rather a sudden decision.'

'Was there a problem?'

'No, it was just a question of lifestyle. I simply was not comfortable there.'

\*\*\*\*

Jennings found himself once more outside of the pristine block of flats. The fleet of ambulances and police cars had long since departed but the same uniformed officer remained on guard at the entrance and it was from him that he learnt that

the housekeeper lived in a ground floor apartment. Jennings knocked on the door, which was opened by an attractive woman in her late twenties or early thirties. She was not at all what he expected a housekeeper to look like.

‘My name is Chief Inspector Jennings, Robert Jennings. I wonder if I might come inside?’

He followed the woman as she made her way into the living room which, although far smaller than the Fellows apartment, was nevertheless spacious and stylishly furnished.

‘May I offer you a cup of coffee? I was just about to make some.’

‘Thank you, yes.’

Shortly after the woman disappeared into the kitchen, Jennings heard the comforting noise of beans being ground. This sounded promising. As he looked around, he saw a number of photographs in simple silver frames sitting on a side table. He wandered over to have a look at the closest. There was an older couple standing in what looked like a vineyard. That would certainly fit with her strong French accent. There was also a small boy who looked very like the woman he had just met. At that moment, the subject of his musings returned carrying two cups which she set down on a small coffee table. She sat down in an armchair and beckoned Jennings to do likewise.

‘How may I help you? I said everything I could to your people yesterday and this morning.’

Jennings sipped his coffee with growing satisfaction. ‘This is excellent. I’m afraid we will probably need to check a few things with you as we find out more about what happened. Perhaps you can tell me how well you knew the family?’

‘Not well, but even in this country it is important for a housekeeper to get to know who she is looking after.’

‘Yes, I am sure. Can you tell me what you do?’

‘I am responsible for the general upkeep of the building. I ensure the common areas are in good order. Help with any complaints.’

## Chapter five

‘Did you have much to do with the Fellows?’

‘Perhaps a little more than with the others. They were both out for most of the day and so I would take deliveries, let in their cleaner. Sometimes I would pick up the children from school. Poor things.’

‘And would you say they were a happy family?’

‘Mais oui! Most certainly. The children were always laughing. From time to time there would be complaints from Mr and Mrs Parsons who live next door. But they are an elderly couple. Children will be children.’

‘Yes, they will. I have three of my own. The Parsons are away on holiday at the moment and the other flat on that floor is vacant?’

‘That is right.’

‘Do you think Mr Fellows would have known?’

‘Most certainly. He often ran little errands for Mrs Parsons. I think he and his wife were quite fond of them.’

The fact that Nigel Fellows knew there was no one present to hear him could mean that the crime was premeditated, but Jennings decided not to pursue such thoughts for the moment. Once more his attention focused on the small silver frames.

‘I couldn’t help but notice you have a picture of a boy who looks about the same age as mine. Is he yours?’

‘Was.’ The woman’s bright demeanour swiftly changed. ‘There was a fire. My parents and little Joanno died.’

‘I’m so sorry.’

‘There is no need but thank you.’

‘I suppose you must be very angry about what happened to the Fellows’ children.’

‘Angry no, but very sad. That poor man loved his children.’

‘So I am beginning to gather, which leaves me very puzzled as to why he should kill them and in such a brutal way. Is there anything you can think of that might have upset him?’

‘It is true that in the last few months he was not the gay man he was. I mean that in the old sense. He was not unisexué erm, homosexual.’

'What do you think might have been worrying him?'

'I do not know. It was not the sort of question I could ask, but there was something about his mood. You could see worry in his eyes.'

Jennings finished his coffee and put the cup down on a nearby table. 'I am sorry to have to ask this again, but could you describe any contact you had with the Fellows yesterday.'

'Mais oui, I met Mr Fellows very briefly in the morning. It was a little after 8.00am. He always cycled to work, and I said hello to him as I was emptying some rubbish into the bins.'

'How did he seem?'

'Perhaps a little pre-occupied. I had to say hello twice.'

'And the next time?'

'I had a telephone call from his wife telling me that the cleaner would arrive a little later than usual. She asked me to let her into their flat.'

'How did she seem?'

'I could not say, but she did not seem unhappy. I could hear the children laughing in the background.'

'You said Mr Fellows seemed preoccupied. Do you think he was having trouble at work?'

'I do not know but he was a partner at a firm of architects. You could ask them.'

'Thank you, you have been very helpful.'

Jennings stood up and as he passed the photograph, he stopped.

'Do you mind?' He said pointing at the picture. Jennings picked up the frame and studied the portrait for a moment. 'He was a very good looking boy. You must be very proud.'



## Chapter six

Jennings lost no time in arranging an appointment at the place where Fellows had worked. The partnership had leased a good Kensington address not far from the flats and Wilks was able to confirm that all the bills were paid promptly. This appeared to indicate a firm that was doing well despite the poor state of the economy. The waiting area proved to be a fascinating place to idle away a few minutes. Instead of the usual white card models or furniture designed for looks but was quite impossible to use, this place featured a display on the life of Sir John Wolfe-Barry, the civil engineer responsible for Tower Bridge. It seemed an odd subject for an up-market firm of architects until he read a small card beneath a portrait of the man which explained that he was an ancestor of the main partner. Jennings became so engrossed in studying various artefacts that it took him a moment to realise that he was being addressed.

'I see you like our little display.' Said a tall thin man of about sixty. 'My name is Peter Wendle. I think you wanted to have a chat about Nigel.'

'I did and thank you for agreeing to see me at such short notice. Tell me, is this really the desk that Sir John used to work out the specifications?'

'It is, right down to the very pens he used.'

'You know my boy would be fascinated.'

'By all means, feel free to bring him. Actually, I do have a client meeting in half an hour.'

'Of course.' Jennings replied apologetically and followed the man to a room which was far more in keeping with his expectations of what a modern architect's office should look

like. Smart, functional and utterly devoid of anything human.

‘Could you tell me a little about Mr Fellows?’

‘He was a junior partner, joined us about seven years ago. I think he would have been the first to admit that he was more of a competent designer rather than innovative, but he always delivered and he was a valued member of the team.’

‘What was he like as a person?’

‘I can’t say that I knew him well, but he was personable enough. Good with people. Didn’t have some of the foibles that our more colourful associates have.’

‘How was he managing his workload?’

‘Pretty well. If you want to know whether he was having stress issues, I would say no more than any of us although he did have one difficult client.’

‘And who was that?’

‘I trust that this is not for public consumption. We took over a small firm in the autumn of last year. They were about to go bankrupt but had a reasonable list of clients. One of those was a pottery company called Taylor and Hardy. They had teamed up with the Periston Corporation.’

‘The big chemical company?’ Jennings questioned.

‘That’s right. I must admit that we were all quite surprised. Taylor and Hardy is a very old firm, but hardly big league.’

‘What were you producing for them?’

‘It was a bread and butter project. They wanted some structural changes made to the cellars of one of their buildings. It was almost complete by the time we got involved.’

‘You said they created difficulties.’

‘Indeed. At first, they were concerned about deadlines. Understandable enough if a key part of your project management changes unexpectedly. However, as I said, Nigel was a very competent man and a damned good project manager. He soon had things back on track.’

‘What was the problem?’

‘To be honest, he was. It seemed that the building was to be used to conduct some sort of experiments with animals. Nigel

## Chapter six

took it upon himself to object.'

'Did he belong to any animal rights groups?'

'I had no idea the subject interested him until he worked on that project. But I think I might be doing Nigel a disservice if I let you believe that he was one of those cranks who free beagles.'

'Do you know what they were doing?'

'He never actually specified what his concern was; just that he did not think we should be associated with such work. In the end, Periston terminated the contract. As they paid in full, that was the end of the matter.'

'I see.' Jennings replied as he fished a notebook from his pocket. 'Could you give me the name of your contact?'

'Yes, it was a woman called Tanya Roberts but the name on the contract was Edward Taylor.'

'Is there anything else you can think of that might help to understand what happened?'

'I have been asking myself that same question since we found out, and the answer is no. In this business, I work with a number of people who remain barely this side of sanity, highly creative but quite mad. Nigel was the exact opposite. You could not imagine a more routine man.'

\*\*\*\*

By the time Jennings arrived back at New Scotland Yard, it was close to 4.00pm and the temperature in his office was unbearable. Morton and Wilks were drinking bottles of coke which were obviously cold judging from the amount of water running down the outside of the glass. Morton had also removed his jacket and rolled up his sleeves. Worst still, he had actually removed his tie.

'Am I disturbing your holiday?'

'Sorry sir.' Morton flustered as he hurriedly tried to simultaneously roll down his shirt sleeves and put on his jacket.

'Never mind that,' Jennings interrupted, 'have you heard

anything from the coroner?’

‘A preliminary report came through a few minutes ago.’

‘Then come into my office.’

A wall of heat almost smothered Jennings as he opened the door. Even through the slightly smoked glass, the sun felt burning hot. Jennings placed his hand over a grill next to the window and felt nothing.

‘It’s not working sir.’ Said Morton.

‘So I see. I don’t suppose you have another one of those?’ Jennings looked longingly at the cold bottle Morton was holding.

‘Fraid not.’ Morton hurriedly continued before his boss had a chance to complain. ‘The initial findings support the idea that Mrs Fellows and the children were subjected to a violent attack with a heavy object. Most likely, the lamp in the hallway according to the report. Each body was then taken into the dining room where it was dismembered, and the body parts were reassembled in the bedroom.’

Jennings shuddered as he recalled the morbid sight. ‘Anything about Mr Fellows?’

‘Not for ten days sir, to allow for toxicology tests, but we should have some preliminary blood analysis for Monday.’

‘Well, I suppose that’s something.’ Jennings replied as he took off his jacket and rolled up his shirt sleeves. ‘Did you manage to find anything from the files?’

‘Not really sir. Brown was as clean as a whistle. Not so much as a parking ticket. Sykes had a bit of form but had been out of trouble for several years.’

‘Anything other than drugs?’

‘A bit of pick-pocketing. He was an addict who got himself sorted out.’

‘Not much reward for all that effort then. I have no sympathy for people who start on drugs and complain they didn’t know what they were getting in to. But it takes a great deal of courage to come off them and remain clean.’

‘Yes sir.’ Morton paused to think. ‘I know we have three

## Chapter six

cases that appear to have some similarities but there seems to be no other connection.'

'Just a quirk of fate then?'

'Yes sir, it does look that way.'

At that moment, there was a knock at the door and the familiar form of Wilks walked in.

'I have Anton Caruthers, the journalist, outside sir.'

'Do you indeed,' Jennings replied with surprise, 'and what does he want?'

'He said you asked to see him.'

'Did he? I suppose you had better show him in.'

Jennings gave Morton a glancing look of reproach but noted that Morton was equally in the dark.

'Not been making appointments in my absence then?'

'No sir, although I did wonder whether we would be seeing him, given what he said last night.'

Caruthers was just as he remembered. Tall, elegant, and this time dressed in an expensive looking linen suit. He carried himself with a languid air of someone who is confident of his place in the world.

'Very nice to see you again, although I am a little surprised.' Jennings did his best to sound genuine.

'Thank you and I do apologise. I'm afraid I rather misled your sergeant in to believing that we had an appointment.'

'And why would you do that?'

'Because I have something that may be of interest with regards to a company called Taylor and Hardy.' Caruthers paused for a moment to gauge Jennings' reaction. 'I see the name is familiar.'

'I recall my assistant reminding you last night that it is an offence to withhold information likely to help with our investigations. I am more than happy to listen to what you have to say, now that you are here, but time is pressing.'

'Indeed, it is.' Caruthers replied. 'Possibly in more ways than you might think. I am guessing that you have already found a link between Sykes, Brown and Fellows.'

'Mr Caruthers. I sincerely hope this is not a fishing trip for one of your articles.' Jennings interrupted with an edge of annoyance.

'Not at all and do call me Anton. Going back to surnames seems a little perfunctory after last night.'

'Very well, Anton.' Jennings deliberately laboured the name. He had no intention of allowing Caruthers to think they were now on friendly terms. 'I can let you have ten minutes.'

'To be candid, it is true that my newspaper has been investigating the deaths of Sykes and Brown, but the purpose of my visit is that I have some information which I suspect the newspaper owners might want suppressed. I am hoping that if it is of interest to the police, it might also help me. I have to say that I was initially very sceptical about a possible connection other than the manner of their deaths. However, I now think that what happened to Fellows may indicate that none of the earlier deaths were suicides.'

'Go on.' Jennings urged cautiously.

'Three years ago, the Soviets sent samples of a meteorite to a number of top universities around the world as part of a programme to open up scientific dialogue. Seventeen people died as a result.'

'Yes, I recall. Wasn't it put down to some kind of contamination?'

'Something like that. Out of one hundred universities, eighty-five experienced some kind of unusual incident, but a small minority experienced an extreme event. At Southampton University, one man died of a heart attack and two had mental breakdowns. The story at the time was that the samples had become contaminated with a fungal spore, which caused hallucinations. The Russians claimed that they only discovered the problem after the incidents. However, there were a handful of more violent occurrences.

In West Berlin, a man died after he had acid thrown into his face by a colleague. Seattle saw two deaths. One man was almost decapitated and another somehow managed to crawl

## Chapter six

through a tiny window and jump from a fifth floor office. He had to hack off an arm to get through.'

'Are you suggesting that Sykes and Brown had contact with this meteorite?' Jennings asked in a puzzled tone.

'That should not be possible. The Russians recalled all the samples, and whatever did not make it back, I am sure is held under strict lock and key. Given what happened, it's not the sort of thing governments want to be caught lying about. However, there is another odd coincidence that might have a bearing on the Fellows case. After everyone was forced to hand back their samples, there was an outcry from some, about academic censorship. Around the same time, Southampton University published a paper speculating that the meteorite was large enough to have kicked up considerable amounts of debris which would have circled the planet. If so, there could be an accessible layer. The paper was sponsored by Periston. A short time later Taylor and Hardy also published a paper concerning an unusual deposit they had found in a disused mine in South Africa. Last year, the Periston Corporation formed a very unlikely alliance with Taylor and Hardy. They were ostensibly working on some kind of animal feed project.'

'Why did you use the word 'ostensibly', do you have information to the contrary?'

'Just a suspicion really, but I think it is one that merits further investigation. Periston make chemicals and that does include, amongst other things, animal feeds. At the beginning of the year, Periston and Taylor and Hardy began a joint project.'

'At the Periston HQ in Derby, yes, I know.'

'As I said, Taylor and Hardy own a mine in South Africa and my sources say that their engineers have been carrying out sampling tests.'

'Mr Caruthers.' Jennings stopped himself. 'Anton. I have seen this morning's newspapers, including your own which mentioned that Nigel Fellows worked for a firm of architects. I have no doubt that you have already found out that they were working on a project for Periston. To that limited extent, I

agree there is a connection. However, I am struggling to see how this relates to the deaths of Sykes and Brown.'

'Since last October, a company called Purbrights, based in Johannesburg, has been seen sending rock samples to Taylor and Hardy. Brown worked as a cargo handler and Sykes was a courier whose patch took in the London office of Taylor and Hardy.'

'Indeed.' Jennings responded with genuine interest in what Caruthers had to say. 'And you assume that these samples may have been contaminated with the same fungi as in 1973.'

'It is a possibility.'

'Yes, it is and I will certainly look into it but there is one hole in your speculations.'

'And what is that?'

'Fellows had no connection with either Periston or Taylor and Hardy since the beginning of the year. How could he have come in to contact with these consignments?'

'That is what you might think but according to my sources, Fellows had dinner with Edward Taylor on several occasions over the last few months. The last time was just three days ago.'

For the first time since they met the previous evening, Jennings found himself having a grudging respect. Clearly, Caruthers knew his stuff.

'You said that your owners might be trying to suppress your reports. What makes you think that?'

'Editors can be pretty ruthless if a story does not look like it is going to sell. My editor is no exception, but this was his idea. Time and resources were not a problem until I discovered the link to Periston. Then things became difficult.'

'And you think Periston got to hear about your interest and have been using their influence.'

'It's a possibility.' Caruthers answered with a knowing smile.

'Thank you. This has been a very interesting conversation.'

'If anything comes of it you will give me the scoop.'

Jennings smiled. 'Now you know I can't do that, but if anything does come of this lead, I will let you know before any



## Chapter six

press conference. Unofficially.'

Jennings waited for a few moments until he was sure Caruthers was out of view, before turning his attention to Morton. 'What do you make of that?'

'It sounds a little farfetched but those connections can easily be checked.'

'My view exactly, can you arrange for us to see this man Taylor?'

'Do you mean Periston sir?'

'No, I mean Taylor. I think I'll take the backdoor approach on this occasion. I will also have a chat with Crichton. Perhaps he can confirm whether any of the victims were poisoned by this Russian fungi.'

\*\*\*\*

The office of Taylor and Hardy proved a disappointment. Jennings had made a point of reading up on the company which dated back to the 1750s. He even discovered that he and Jen owned one of the company's less exclusive chinaware sets. It had been a wedding present and only saw the light of day when Jen's mother came to visit. The Army and Navy stores in Victoria Street kindly provided him with a brochure and it seemed that they had several factories dotted around the north of England. Their products were expensive and aimed at the discerning buyer. Therefore, it was surprising to find that their London office was a small, second floor rented space just behind Liberty's.

The reception had a moderate display of their products which appeared to have hardly changed over two hundred years. That is until about five years ago when the son took over the firm. He had closed a number of plants and modernised their range with some success. A sign in bold black letters had been fixed to the glass of a display case that proclaimed a major contract with the Eastern Bloc. Those products were modern, garish and in Jennings view, downmarket compared to the

more delicate cups and plates exhibited in the other cases. He also noted that they looked very similar in design at least, to the mug that had seemed so out of place at the Fellows' flat.

'Mr Taylor apologises for keeping you waiting but he will see you now.' Said a pretty dark haired woman who took Jennings and Morton into a room clearly used for meetings. Taylor looked older than his mid-forties and seemed to have lost some weight since he had his picture taken for the brochure.

'Chief inspector.' Taylor held out his hand in greeting.

'This is my assistant, John Morton.'

Taylor started to hold out his hand to welcome Morton but Jennings interrupted diverting him from his intended good manners.

'It is good of you to spare the time.'

'Not at all,' Taylor replied, 'all these deaths recently are a very serious business. It is my civic duty to help if I can.'

'All?' Jennings questioned.

'When I heard about Fellows I was reminded of those nasty suicides, so very tragic.'

'Of course. This is just a routine call to establish Fellows' frame of mind over the last few months. I gather his relationship with your company was not a happy one.'

'Sorry. Where are my manners, please do sit down.' Taylor directed them to a couple of chairs at the end of a large table. 'Can I get either of you a tea or coffee?'

Jennings declined, but Morton accepted, much to his annoyance. He had a strong feeling that this was simply a delaying tactic to give Taylor time to think.

'I must confess that it was a particularly fraught period. We were engaged in very delicate business discussions and the previous firm of architects let us down. I suppose with hindsight we were a little demanding, but it was important that the project was finished on time.'

'And what work was that?'

Taylor appeared to squirm a little as if Jennings had touched on a sensitive subject.

## Chapter six

‘You must understand that we are still engaged in those discussions. If knowledge became public, it could jeopardise plans that have taken years.’

‘Mr Taylor,’ Jennings began firmly, ‘you have my word that unless it becomes crucial to the case, I will not divulge anything you tell me to the public. But I must insist that you answer my questions. As you said earlier, murder is a serious business.’

‘Indeed, it is. I am sure you have heard of Periston. They are an international chemicals conglomerate that makes everything from paint to fertilisers. A few years ago, we secured a source of a very rare clay in South Africa. Normally, we use Kaolinite in our porcelain ware. When mixed with feldspar, quartz and other elements, it produces a fine translucent china; just right for our more exclusive lines. My people found that this new clay has a particularly rich chemical make-up with some unusual properties.’

‘What sort of properties?’

‘The clay has the ability to augment the properties of other materials. A bit like adding tin to copper, to make the much stronger bronze. In this case, it is far more adaptable. For example, using it instead of kaolinite produces a strong china that is less susceptible to breakage. The quality is also finer. The end result tends to be a little unpredictable but when mixed correctly, we can achieve a range of subtle colour variation which is quite beautiful.’

‘This is all very interesting, but I do not understand the connection to a chemical company.’

‘I make china. That is the extent of my interest, but Periston also discovered that if it is added to a nutrient mix, it can actually stimulate cell growth. Please do not ask me for details on how it does this because I have no idea, but I can have a report sent to you. However, the point is that whilst we owned the resource, we needed a major player to develop and manufacture the product. Periston’s interest meant that they were willing to invest.’

‘Hence your relationship with Periston.’ Said Jennings.

'Precisely. Since I developed the process to refine the clay, they asked me to oversee the installation of a test facility. MAFF, that's the government's agricultural ministry, was prepared to grant us a licence but stipulated that any tests had to be conducted away from other animals. Naturally, they were concerned about potential cross-contamination problems. We commissioned a firm of architects to build us a secure facility in the basement of the Periston HQ. Fellows ultimately did a fine job in delivering the project on time but became,' Taylor hesitated for a moment as if struggling to find the right words, 'anxious about the ethics of the project. He objected to the fact that the test animals would be held in a confined space and away from what he termed their natural environment. I had to become involved and even went so far as to make a formal complaint.'

'Were his concerns justified?'

'Chief inspector, as I have just explained, I make chinaware. I have no background in animal husbandry and so I brought in an expert. You are probably not aware, but animal experimentation is strictly regulated. We had MAFF people carrying out regular checks, some of which were unannounced.'

Jennings stood up and made his way to look at another display case. It featured a number of delicate looking objects dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

'These are very beautiful.' He commented. 'The problem I have is that none of Fellows' colleagues recall any interest in animal welfare prior to his working for you.'

'Perhaps the fact that he was directly involved stirred something in him.' Taylor answered dismissively.

'Didn't I see something like this in the V&A?' Said Jennings pointing to a set of miniature figurines.

'Yes, they have several sets on permanent display.'

'Must be very satisfying to come from a family that has made an important contribution to art.'

'Art was more in my father's line, but yes. I see you

## Chapter six

appreciate fine chinaware.'

'I have one of your dinner services. Not one of the best of course, not on a policeman's pay.'

'No, I suppose not. It might surprise you that it was only when I turned the company around, that I was able to afford our premium ware.'

Taylor smiled at Jennings' surprised expression.

'Is there any chance that your clay might contain something toxic? You did say that it had unusual properties.'

'Not in the slightest, chief inspector. Whatever made you say that?'

'The manner of Fellows' death was unusual. We are having routine toxicology reports compiled. If there is any chance that he came into contact...Could you let me have a chemical analysis of the clay, just to rule it out?'

'By all means but I assure you there is nothing to find. At least I sincerely hope not. That cup your associate is holding is made from that clay.' Taylor smiled to show that he was making a joke.

'Can I ask what you made of Fellows, as a person?'

'I'm not sure I understand what you mean.' Responded Taylor, clearly puzzled at this sudden turn in the direction of their conversation.

'I mean what impressions did you form of him?'

'He was highly professional, at least when he focused on the building work. He had a very good grasp of what needed to be done and kept a tight rein on the budget.'

'Yes, but apart from that. What did you make of him as a person?'

'Chief inspector, I am not in the habit of forming opinions of people I barely know.'

'Really sir?' Jennings looked doubtful. 'I have always found that to be a basic part of human nature.'

Taylor looked uncertain. 'He was a personable enough man, I suppose. He had an easy manner without being overfamiliar.'

'All in all, a professional representative of his company, apart

from a sudden and unexpected interest in animal welfare?’

‘I suppose so.’ Taylor admitted.

‘Just as a matter of curiosity, when was the last time you saw him.’

‘I am not sure.’ Taylor hesitated. ‘I think a few days before we let the firm go. If it is important, I can ask my secretary to check.’

‘No, no.’ Jennings replied with an air that implied he had already lost interest in the subject. ‘If you had met him at a later date, it might have provided an idea of whether there had been any change in his character.’

‘Oh I see,’ the smile returned, ‘sorry, I cannot help you.’

‘But you have been of great help. If only everyone was as cooperative as you. Thank you for allowing us to take up so much of your time.’

As Jennings and Morton climbed back into their car, Morton loosened his tie and wound down the window.

‘Off duty, are we?’ Jennings remarked.

‘Very nearly sir.’ Morton grinned as he looked at his watch. ‘I wonder why he lied about seeing Fellows?’

‘Obviously, he has something to hide, if Caruthers is right.’

‘You have doubts about Caruthers?’

‘The man is a journalist.’

‘It was interesting that Taylor recalled both Sykes and Brown. I know it was in the papers, but Sykes died well over a month ago. I don’t think my memory would be that good. Not unless I had a reason to remember.’

‘No, indeed.’ Jennings replied thoughtfully.

‘Just in case Taylor decides to pull a fast one with his chemical analysis report, I can have this checked out.’ Morton produced the cup from which he had been drinking. Jennings responded with a look of false horror.

‘Morton. I should arrest you for that.’

\*\*\*\*

## Chapter six

Braden sat in a comfortable armchair enjoying the cooling breeze from a fan which one of the club staff had found for him. He watched the smoke from his cigar billow out slowly before being caught in the rapid stream of air and dissipating almost immediately. Braden licked his lips as he recalled eating a rather fine crab salad with passion fruit dressing, but then his club specialised in seasonal food. It was one of the reasons why he stayed whenever business forced him to remain in London overnight. He was not normally one for sentimentality but the atmosphere of this establishment, which had over one hundred years of catering for gentlemen, was one that provided a haven of peace and tranquillity from the frantic pace of change of the outside world. It allowed the brain to work at its best. It would have been even better had it been winter when there was always a good fire. The general low lighting levels coupled with flickering yellow flames created just the right conditions for thinking and to hell with London's smoke free zone. However, regrettably it was high summer, and the open windows were letting in too much clean air and noise. He preferred the fug of a cigar filled room.

Braden looked casually around the Morris Room in which he sat. The walls were decorated with heavy Morris wallpaper. This was the genuine article and he was thankful that the owners had not succumbed to the modern fad for cheap imitations. Apparently, people were actually producing versions for the do-it-yourself type where you pasted the wall. Why on earth anyone would want to take away work from respectable tradesmen was beyond him. Very selfish, he thought. The ceiling featured heavy yellow plasterwork with small potholes dating back to 1941 when the Luftwaffe had been sufficiently inconsiderate as to drop a landmine nearby. The curtains were also by Morris, hence the name of the room. It all made for a home away from home. Not that he had a permanent home. People like him lived in a world unconfined by the artificial boundaries of politicians. Which was probably why he liked staying in this place. It provided a feeling of

belonging, albeit a temporary one.

Braden picked up a newspaper and glanced through the pages. One of the things that had puzzled him for many years was why a nation that had conquered a quarter of the world, a nation which had to employ two civil services, Home and Indian, a nation which had occupied nearly eighty countries, had such a parochial press. You could read all of the British newspapers for a week and scarcely be aware of international events. Nevertheless, newspapers could be of some use on rare occasions. Three recent reports had grabbed his attention and they were the reason for his presence. That and the expectation of meeting with an old sparring partner.

Lately, he had found himself wondering what it might be like to have an ordinary nine to five job. To join all those pin-striped suits and bowler hats on the 8.10 from suburbia. A quick lunch in the staff canteen then home again, pausing only to be thankful that most people chose not to travel first class and one had room to read the London Standard. The last time he had experienced anything approaching a normal job ended in Kenya in 1955 and that was over twenty years ago. My, my, how could so much time have passed so quickly. Braden closed his eyes momentarily in sad reflection. So many friends... no, he thought, no point in lying to himself about it, so many acquaintances, had long since passed from memory. In all the years, there had been only one consistent face and that was the one that he should be seeing shortly.

A stout man dressed in green brought a fresh glass of port. He thanked the man with a slight nod of the head. Talking was not encouraged within the hallowed rooms of the club. He stared appreciatively into the deep red, almost brown liquid. It gave off a rich and cosy perfume that engendered a slight sense of guilt. Alcohol was one of the few true pleasures in life, a life which now had a definite end in sight. His doctors had made a brief attempt to ban it, something to do with helping him to live a few more months. But, he had argued, what was the point in that, much better to enjoy whatever time he had left.



## Chapter six

From beyond the tall sash window that led onto the street, he heard the distinctive sound of metallic taps. His guest had arrived and it was time for him to leave for the Red Room where they could have a quiet and undisturbed chat.

It took Braden ten minutes to make the short journey. As he gratefully sat down and laid aside his walking sticks, he called for a pot of coffee. A moment later his guest strode in. Gregory was tall, slim, elegantly dressed and carrying that damned furled umbrella as he always did.

‘Braden, my dear fellow.’ Gregory began.

Braden thought that it was perfectly ridiculous for a Russian to attempt the manners of an English gentleman.

‘You look awful.’ Gregory continued.

‘The years have not been so kind to you either. How was the journey?’

‘That also was awful. Hovercraft to Dover. They call it a flight you know. More like an hour of hell.’

‘Why that particular route?’ Braden questioned.

‘Too many of your people at the airports, one of them was bound to spot my presence in your country. At least with the ferry ports, it will take a few hours. By then I will be back in France.’

‘Of course.’ Braden reached for his sticks and shifted himself slightly. It was a nuisance having to move quite so often, more so because of his guest. If he had one regret in life, it was that Gregory would outlive him.

‘How much do you know?’

‘Almost nothing, we lost all interest two years ago.’

‘That was a damn fool thing to do. Whatever possessed Aksakov to allow such a thing to happen? He is normally thoroughly reliable.’

‘It had nothing to do with Aksakov. The Council had an advisor from our Chinese comrades.’

‘But I thought you were the best of enemies these days.’

‘So we are. But there is always some ambitious party man who thinks he can make a name for himself.’

'Never understood the Chinese myself. My aged Ps were stationed in Northern China when the Japs invaded. They are supposed to be inscrutable you know. All a lot of tosh. They just don't trust foreigners and why should they, given their history.'

'This particular piece of inscrutability involved persuading the Council to send one hundred samples of a meteorite to top universities around the world and almost caused the Cold War to become very hot. It is generally believed by my people that that was exactly what the Chinese wanted.'

'Possibly,' Braden reflected doubtfully, 'but we are not here to discuss history.'

'Are we not?' Gregory raised his eyebrows in surprise. 'I would have thought that history had some valuable lessons to teach us.'

'I dare say but if we don't get on with matters, I may have the embarrassing task of having to explain why I am meeting a Russian.'

'And just why are you meeting with me?'

'The US election is due in a few months. Carter will win, naturally, which means that the Republicans will have to select another candidate and I am sure you know who is touting for the role.'

'You have concerns about the status quo but as a matter of history, the Democrats have always had a poorer grasp of international affairs. I am still amazed that we survived the Cuban crisis.'

'In this particular case, there is an opportunity to make a substantial investment but there is little point if these idiot politicians blow up the planet.'

'What kind of opportunity. I hope this is not related to the Noril'sk meteorite. We have already been down that path and have no wish to return.'

'No, indeed, although perhaps that is not entirely true.' Braden paused whilst he shifted his position once more. 'My people have no interest in the Noril'sk per se, but in its legacy.'

## Chapter six

We have spent the last two years engineering a solution to that particular problem.'

'And what is this solution?' Gregory asked knowing that he would not receive an answer.

'In doing so, we appear to have created a rather interesting sideline. Now there is an opportunity to test that sideline. How much do you know of the affairs in South Africa?'

'Not my area at all.' Gregory admitted.

'It is the perfect testing ground. Vorster is desperate to clamp down on dissent but dare not risk another international outcry. Now, if there was an armed insurrection...'

'They could send in the troops and legitimately take out the ringleaders.' Gregory finished Braden's sentence. 'And what do you need from me?'

'Reassurance. I have someone in contact with the government and they are definitely interested. If he could reassure them that no serious questions will be allowed within the UN, it would give us room to develop our ideas.'

'And what is in it for us?'

'A chance to contribute. Since you Russians created the problem, it seems only fair.'

'Point taken, but I suspect not quite true. Our little enterprise was fashioned to support frontier developments. This sideline of yours sounds as if it is almost ready to go into production. That being the case, there is almost certainly something else behind your South African interests.'

Braden looked carefully at Gregory and concluded that it might be prudent to share just a little more information.

'Unlike you, we have not entirely forsaken our wider interests in your meteorite. It has too many unusual properties for us to do that. In fact, on that subject, I was particularly intrigued by those stories concerning your facility at Medeo.'

'What did you hear?'

'A swift trial of an East German colonel following unauthorised tests on the Noril'sk. I also heard some disturbing rumours that three people vanished during said tests.'

'I think you are fishing.'

'Perhaps just a little.' Braden admitted. 'We play a long game, you and I, and sometimes that can work in both directions.'

'And what do you mean by that?'

'I think that is for another time. For the moment, we have more immediate concerns.'

'Yes, indeed, including a little home grown problem if I read your newspaper reports correctly.'

'You are quite right of course. I sometimes wish that I had not been quite so eager to retire. The younger generation don't seem to have the same level of patience and a tendency to rush into things before the outcomes have been properly considered. There is often a very delicate balance between rectifying a problem and drawing attention to it.'

'In which case, what do you propose to do?'

Braden smiled a naughty smile. 'I am sure a word in the right quarter will soon settle that matter.'

\*\*\*\*

As soon as Jennings arrived at his office, Morton and Wilks could tell that he was in a foul mood. The coffee dutifully provided each morning received a particularly critical review, which they knew from bitter experience was a definitive sign of a difficult day ahead. Wilks and Morton exchanged looks of resignation and waited for Jennings to open any conversation. It took quite a while as he seemed content to sit in his chair, reading the morning reports and glowering every time he took a sip of coffee. More than half an hour passed before they heard the first clearly understandable word of the day.

'May I take it sir,' Wilks ventured, 'that you are not in your usual sparkling mood this morning?'

Morton stared in utter disbelief that Wilks could so boldly expose himself to the inevitable tirade, but much to his astonishment, it never came.

'You may take it as such. I have just had a meeting with the

## Chapter six

deputy commissioner no less and I have been warned off.'

'Off what sir?' Morton asked carefully.

'Taylor and Hardy or it might have been Periston.' Jennings paused to take stock. 'The problem was that he was so concerned with couching his orders in political waffle, it was difficult to tell. However, the conclusion is inescapable. It seems that one or the other has some very powerful connections.'

'Was there anything about your meeting with Edward Taylor that might have caused him some alarm?' Added Wilks.

'I don't think so. Taylor seemed to be quite comfortable in answering my questions. Although come to think of it, he was quite nervous when we touched on his relationship with Periston, but that could have been a commercial issue.'

'The FT ran an article on them a few months back. Seems they have been diversifying into new areas such as biological insect and herbicides. All to do with creating naturally resistant species.'

'Yes, I was forgetting that you go through all the newspapers every morning Wilks. Has there been anything else?'

'Taylor and Hardy have won a new contract with the Eastern Bloc countries. I think they are setting up an office in Dresden.'

'I suppose it could be that, but it does sound a little odd that a business interest would carry any weight with the deputy commissioner.' Added Morton.

'Odd does not come in to it,' Jennings growled, 'there is more. I have also been instructed that in the absence of any hard evidence, I am not to pursue any links between Sykes, Brown and Fellows.'

'But you mentioned the fact that Taylor lied about the last time he met Fellows.'

'Indeed I did, but he simply was not interested. His view was that it contributed nothing to creating a case for a link and I have to admit that as links go, it is pretty tenuous.'

'I don't suppose there could be a political connection?'

'That is certainly a possibility, in which case we will never get

to the bottom of it.'

'You may be interested to know that the deputy commissioner dined with Alex Lyon last night.' Added Wilks.

'As in the junior Home Office minister?'

'The very same.'

'Now why would the Home Office have an interest in a ceramics company, even if they had dealings with Eastern Europe? Such matters are normally handled by the other lot.'

'If I might venture, it might make more sense if it was Periston making waves sir. I think they have some government contracts.'

'Wilks could be right.' Said Morton. 'Your friend Caruthers also complained about pressure to kill the story; quite a coincidence. Perhaps it might help if you could tell us what was actually said.'

Jennings gave Morton a withering look in response to the implication of friendship with Caruthers, but he did have a point. Clearly, they had both apparently stumbled too close to something that certain parties wanted kept hidden. The problem was that he did not have a clue as to what that 'something' might be, which made it hard to put their conversation into context.

'Strictly off the record, it was probably the most bizarre conversation I have experienced in my dealings with the top brass and they can be a strange lot. It was almost as if he was embarrassed. It started off in a sensible enough direction. He asked for a progress report and then wanted to know whether further investigation was necessary. Then it descended into some very unsubtle hints about being mindful of the cost to the taxpayer and an unjustified public scrutiny into both the Taylor and Periston companies, jeopardizing important overseas contracts.'

'Seems we might be back to Dresden.' Morton interrupted.

'What it boiled down to, was that unless I had hard evidence or even justifiable suspicions, I was to drop that line of investigation. It was a pretty hard line to refute, given that the

## Chapter six

only thing we do have is an unproven allegation that Taylor lied.'

'What about Caruthers' story concerning shipments of rock samples from South Africa?'

'Did the tests verify Taylor's claims that it was just harmless clay?'

'I am very much afraid they did sir. Taylor's report listed all the components of metassonite. That is what they are calling the new clay. None of them has any toxic properties. The cup certainly did contain a very small quantity of metassonite, but again nothing harmful. I also checked on the shipments. It would not have been possible for them to have been contaminated. I spoke with someone at St. Thomas' who confirmed that the variety of fungi that caused all the problems, is a common one to damp areas. It has a similar effect to LSD but far more intense. However, to have an effect it requires prolonged and significant contact. You can't just touch a contaminated object.'

'Then that would seem to be that.' Jennings muttered. 'Our only option is to conclude that the Fellows' case is closed.'

## Chapter seven

Edward Taylor loosened his tie and checked the desk thermometer which seemed to have been stuck in the upper end of the small glass tube for weeks. A loud cheer caught his attention and he glanced towards a portable TV that was precariously balanced on the window sill. Taylor was not generally keen on sports, but somehow the Olympics were different and, on this occasion, it was being staged in Montréal; a city with which he was very familiar. The small black and white picture made it difficult to see what was happening, but the commentator helpfully confirmed that Nadia Comaneci had scored a perfect ten on the bars. The first time in the history of the modern games. He watched as the scoreboard gave her a total of just 1.0, apparently because it could not manage three digits. There was a brief close up of the petite girl's smiling face before they started a rerun of her routine.

Taylor switched his attention back to a report he had been reading and what seemed to be a persistent problem. Three weeks ago, he had confidently informed the board that their production problems had been solved. This was not strictly true, but he had been assured that it was just a matter of time. Instead, those annoying little problems seemed to be getting worse and were now being augmented by ridiculous staff troubles. This latest report recounted that some of the miners were refusing to work, claiming that evil spirits had taken possession of the mine-head. All nonsense, but nevertheless it left him with a production shortfall.

His best engineers had thoroughly checked the mine and could find nothing wrong. They had even set up cameras and tape-recorders to see if their problems were due to sabotage



## Chapter seven

but had found nothing. Security had naturally been tightened and every team now had an overseer. That was a decision he had reluctantly taken since the South Africans insisted that anyone in charge had to be white. But it was all to no avail. Sickness rates had increased dramatically and now he was faced with a strike. All of this would have been trouble enough, but the quality control problems seemed to have returned with a vengeance. Taylor stood up and made his way over to a sideboard on which sat a tray of drinks. He poured himself a large whisky and then topped it up with water in an attempt to convince himself that it was not as bad as drinking it neat. Taylor knew that he was drinking too much but it helped to numb a sense of rising panic.

If he did not have enough problems, the ghost of Sir Clive seemed to be ever present. Taylor had done his best to resist the man's attempts to drive their research down a path that he did not wish to go, but that bastard could sniff out problems and had been pressuring him to meet his secret contacts in the South African Government. Now it looked as if a trip was inevitable. As Taylor returned to his desk, the phone rang. The instant it did, Taylor knew who the caller was. It seemed to have a sense of inevitability about it. He sat down and with a feeling of resignation, picked up the receiver.

'Good evening, old boy. I thought I might catch you still hard at it.'

'Just a moment Sir Clive,' Taylor returned to the tv to turn off the sound, 'sorry about that. I was watching the Olympics. It is much cooler here than in my hotel room.'

Taylor subconsciously turned over the papers he had just been reading in fear that Sir Clive might see that he was lying.

'In that case, I would switch hotels old boy. I thought we might have a chat about that little proposition we discussed. Time is pressing and I am afraid that my investors are rather running out of patience.'

'That is hardly my problem.' Taylor replied with a confidence that he did not feel. 'I thought I had made myself

clear that I am not interested. The returns from Dresden are more than sufficient to finance development of our new industrial ceramics lines.'

'So I saw from your last monthly report. How are your more interesting developments progressing?'

'Still doing very well. We have managed to increase temperature resistance to almost six thousand centigrade and the stress and compression tests are showing it to be far more resilient than anything on the market.'

'Sounds very promising but I am hearing a different tale.'

'And what is that?'

'That your production problems have returned and you are rejecting sixty per cent of everything you produce.'

'That figure is not even close.'

'And now you have a labour relations issue. My people will want to know what you are doing about it.'

'I have the best team...'

'Not good enough Edward.' Sir Clive's usual cold charm seemed to momentarily give way to anger. 'You are the CEO. You should be there.'

'I quite agree. As a matter of fact, I have asked my PA to make the necessary arrangements.'

'That is excellent news, although a little late in my view. As you are paying a visit anyway, it would not hurt to meet some of my contacts.'

'Sir Clive. I do not wish to sound rude, but you have already had my answer. Irrespective of what you are hearing, we have been successful in developing my new product, which I am calling caragillium and I have invested time and a considerable amount of money in eliminating the side effects in which you are interested. The answer remains no.'

'I am very sorry to hear that.'

Taylor closed his eyes and waited to hear what type of threat Sir Clive had lined up. But the threat never came. Instead, Taylor was confronted with a dialling tone which told him that Sir Clive had ended the call. He sat quietly for a moment

## Chapter seven

pondering the implications. It was not like Sir Clive to give in so easily. That meant he must have some other card up his bespoke Saville Row sleeve.

Taylor opened the bottom drawer of his desk and quickly searched through a small pile of files until he found the one he was looking for. It contained a number of reports detailing the work they had carried out with Periston on raw metassonite. He recalled that the early results had proved very promising. Metassonite had any number of unusual properties, one of which was that when it was combined with certain nutrients, it acted as a catalyst enabling the body to dramatically speed up cell growth. Despite months of tests, they had no idea how it worked except that it stimulated a form of energy used by cells to duplicate. After the unfortunate incident, a study had concluded that metassonite could also stimulate nerve impulses. Naturally, all research in that direction was dropped immediately. Fortunately, Periston had taken a pragmatic view. Otherwise, it could have resulted in some very nasty litigation which his company could not afford.

The discovery of metassonite had been a lucky accident. After working out the original quarry, the owners had tried to develop it as a mine for rock salt. They failed because the salt layer was too thin to be commercially viable. Keen to recoup some of their investment, they decided to sell and published a detailed geological study. It was this study that had originally caught his eye. Whilst the mine contained little of interest to other concerns, the presence of silicate minerals was an obvious attraction for a maker of chinaware. He commissioned his own study and was able to buy the mine for a very good price. The clay turned out to be of extraordinary quality and the new product lines they launched saved the company. Anyone who considered themselves part of the elite owned a Taylor and Hardy. However, the whole venture had very nearly come to an abrupt end. The machines they used to excavate the clay were periodically wrecked as they approached the borderline between the clay and what lay beneath. Analysis revealed that

when hot machinery encountered a mix of the clay and this new material, it produced a compound that resulted in a kind of metal fatigue. They refined this new material and discovered that only a minute percentage of the deposit was responsible. They called this new material metassonite simply because it sounded like a good marketable name. It was also vaguely reminiscent of Metamorphosis, the Greek god of change, and it was this ability to change other materials which was so interesting. It acted as a catalyst that dramatically enhanced the original properties. Hard ceramics became like diamond, heat resistance increased significantly. It also seemed to have medicinal properties. The potential was unbelievable. However, there were also problems. The first quickly manifested itself as they isolated and refined metassonite from the original deposit. The refining process appeared to trigger mild episodes of depression in the processing staff. There had even been violent attacks. The next problem came when they published a paper. In addition to the approach from Periston, public knowledge attracted an unwelcome attention of scientists and politicians who linked it to the meteorite that was at the centre of an international dispute a couple of years ago. A number of people had died after coming into contact with samples sent to universities by the Russians. For the first time in his life, Taylor was forced to be dishonest. Although most astronomers predicted that the whole planet might have a minute layer, to date, the material was only accessible in his mine which meant that for a short while he held the monopoly. When various governments demanded the right to examine metassonite, he realised that if they successfully proved a link, a crucial revenue source would be lost. So, he sent them a sample from another deep buried meteorite.

Thankfully, the attention was short lived, and he was able to safely return to implementing his plans to transform the company into an international corporation. It had taken two years to develop and refine the substance, only for those plans to be dashed because they were unable to solve its unfortunate

## Chapter seven

side effect. Then he had another serendipitous moment when it was discovered that if the material was refined within the mine, its toxic properties did not materialise.

Taylor turned another page and began to read the final account of the disastrous events of last January. Periston had spent three years testing its own product. Somehow, they had managed to obtain a sample of the meteorite fragment originally sent to Southampton University and had discovered its catalytic effect on certain nutrients. But they had no access to the amounts required to develop their ideas. For his part, whilst he owned a plentiful source, he did not have the money to develop his own research. Thus, was born a mutually advantageous but short lived partnership. Even after six months, Taylor still had nightmares about that day. The report detailed the chemical properties of metassonite and what was likely to have gone wrong. The plain truth was that they did not know. For some reason, in certain cases, it caused a complete mental breakdown. The best guess was that it affected the parts of the brain that were responsible for fear. Naturally, that had brought an end to their research, but fortunately, sufficient investment had gone into metassonite for him to pursue his long-term goal for International Industrial Ceramics.

Taylor was just about to close the last file, having failed to find what he was looking for, when he had an unexpected thought. A cold irrational fear ran through him as he recalled the newspaper reports of Fellows and Brown. He fumbled with the phone as he tried to pick up the receiver to dial a number.

‘Sir Clive. This is Edward. I must see you...no, not tomorrow... Very well then! Tomorrow evening.’

\*\*\*\*

Anton Caruthers sauntered into his office and noted that it was just after ten in the morning. He was not usually up and about this early but today he was looking forward to a long leisurely afternoon at a special viewing of this year’s hot film,

All the Presidents Men. He had something of a personal interest in the subject because he had been working in Washington when the Post broke the story. He well remembered watching television in a bar as Nixon made his now infamous speech where he promised that there would be 'no whitewash at the Whitehouse.' The film was to be followed by a private dinner in the revolving restaurant at the top of the Post Office Tower. Given that he would be missing for most of the day, he thought it incumbent to show his face, even if only for a couple of hours. The receptionist had informed him that Bill, his editor wanted to see him urgently. This did not bode well. An urgent task might mean he would have to forgo the invitation and it was not often he actually got to experience something prepared by a topflight chef such as Paul Bocuse. There was even a rumour that he might prepare soupe aux truffles which he had created only last year.

As Caruthers approached a glass panelled door that led to Bill's office, it was with some trepidation that he pushed it open. Apprehension was quickly replaced by surprise as he found himself confronted by a small boy sitting at Bill's desk.

'Who are you, sonny?' He tried to disguise his curiosity with a note of joviality.

'Michael sir.' The boy replied nervously. 'Michael Jordan.'

'Well, Michael. Can you tell me where Bill is?'

'No sir. Sorry sir.'

'Not to worry. When you do see him, can you let him know that Anton stopped by.'

As he closed the door, Caruthers stared monetarily at Bill's name on the glass and wondered where this young lad had sprung from.

A few moments later he sat down at his own desk; taking the cover from his typewriter and inserting some paper to ensure he looked busy. Caruthers began his working day with a cursory look through the in-tray. There were the usual notes from Bill and a couple of letters. One was a brown envelope which was immediately cast into the wastepaper basket but the

## Chapter seven

other was a response from Companies House. He eagerly tore open the envelope, but any sense of anticipation quickly dissipated. Yet another request for information concerning an organisation called Cambridge Electronics had been refused.

‘Boy! Get me a coffee will you.’

Caruthers began to search his business card carousel for a likely contact. He was sure that he must have met someone sufficiently high in government circles who could explain what was going on. As he flicked through the cards, he became aware of a shadow.

‘Bill, I was just looking for you. Who is that young boy in your office? Is it something the News of the World would like to know?’ He smiled mischievously.

‘Cut the crap Anton. If you must know the lad is my nephew. He is spending the day with me for a school report. Now, I want to know why you are still investigating the Fellows case.’

‘I am not.’ Anton did not know whether to feel relieved that his planned afternoon would not have to be cancelled or concerned that he was about to have an argument with his editor. ‘You made it very clear that matter was closed.’

‘Indeed, I did. So why am I getting complaints that you are still pursuing it.’

‘From whom?’

‘Never mind who, just answer the question.’

‘Boy! Where is my coffee?’ Caruthers shouted and a cup was duly placed on his desk. ‘You specifically instructed me not to investigate Taylor and Hardy or Periston. I thought it was a damn fool decision and still do. However, you are the editor.’

‘That I am.’ Bill replied with a steel cold stare. ‘If you have stopped why I am I getting complaints that you have not dropped your investigation?’

‘I have no idea unless these people are the nervous type. You know what it’s like. Sometimes when you are looking at one story, you find another. I have come across a rather perplexing barrier concerning another company called Cambridge Electronics. They seem to have connections with a whole range

of frontier technology projects, but I have not been able to track down who they are.'

'Doesn't sound like your sort of case? Why not pass it on to the economic boys? That's what they are there for. You are a crime reporter.'

'Can I remind you that it was at your insistence that I began to look for a connection between Sykes, Brown and Fellows.'

'I am well aware of that, but things move on.' Bill replied impatiently.

'I spent four weeks. Four weeks that turned out to be a complete waste of time.'

'Yes, I am sorry, but as I said, things move on. Besides which, it was not as if you found anything which we could print and that is the way it goes sometimes.'

Caruthers abruptly saw red. He jerked open his top drawer and pulled out a notebook which he hurriedly opened and pointed to a list of names.

'Each one of those people had some form of contact with Taylor and Hardy. We know they were shipping in samples from their South African mine via Heathrow where Brown worked. We also know that Sykes was a courier who could have delivered packages to Taylor and Hardy and Fellows actually worked for Taylor. What I have also discovered is a high incidence of absenteeism at their mine over the last few months, mainly related to stress. In fact, I have received reports that people are refusing to work there.'

'For what reason?'

'They claim the place is haunted.'

'Oh, come on now.' Bill replied with anger.

'Irrespective of what you and I think about the cultural beliefs of another country, that place has problems. Now if you take that in context with the coroner's report that Sykes, Brown and Fellows each suffered an episode of extreme psychosis...'

'As I recall you could prove nothing. The link was a guess at best.'

'All right,' Caruthers conceded, 'I admit there is nothing



## Chapter seven

provable as yet, but you cannot deny the similarities with that incident with the Soviets. Eighty-five out of one hundred universities around the world that received a sample, had people suffer psychotic events.'

'People have been going off the rails since man climbed down from the trees, and probably did when they were still up there.'

'Cambridge Electronics sponsored the UK participation in the Soviet experiment and they have clear connections to Periston. Supposing they found another source of that stuff?'

'That story is dead and gone and I don't think anyone will thank us if we try to resurrect it, least of all our readers.'

'Did you know that I have been unable even to get Companies House to confirm their existence?'

'Look,' Bill decided to change track to try to placate Caruthers, 'you are a damned good journalist. I have no doubt that you have come up with some interesting facts. But it is all coincidental. As editor, I have to make decisions about which stories are worth pursuing and which aren't. To be perfectly frank, this one smells of dead horse and it's time to stop flogging it.'

Caruthers slipped his file back into the drawer as he realised that Bill was simply not interested. 'Who has been getting at you?' He called out as Bill started to leave. The man rounded back sharply.

'Have it your way Anton. You have a simple choice. Either you drop this or I drop you and there is an end to it.'

Anton watched Bill closely as he disappeared down the corridor. He had known him for a number of years, yet the man who had just left seemed to be a stranger. He could not imagine Bill yielding to pressure from anyone, but there was no denying, it was the only possible explanation. As Bill disappeared around a corner, Anton's attention returned to his carousel. He began to flick through the carefully ordered business cards once more, but there seemed to be no one appropriate. Beyond the police and Home Office, a crime reporter did not generally

have civil service contacts. Then a smile broke across his face as he finally recollected one potential source. He found the card and began to dial the number.

\*\*\*\*

Sir Clive emerged from a taxi and headed for the entrance to the Covent Garden Opera House. Despite the fact that it was a hot evening, he was dressed in a formal suit and was even wearing a cape. Taylor did his best to suppress a snigger as he called out to get his attention.

'I must say this is most inconvenient. I have guests.' Sir Clive scowled as he was ushered away from the milling crowd.

'I think it was you who told me to always make the most of the moment and to hell with social niceties.'

Sir Clive regarded Taylor with what appeared to be contempt. 'What do you want?'

'Reassurance Sir Clive. I had a very nasty idea when reading through some old reports. Is Periston still working with metassonite?'

'I have no idea.'

'Sir Clive. I am sorry but I do not believe you.'

'Why would you doubt my word?'

'Because of your evident concern over the newspaper reports. At the time, we both agreed that those deaths were nothing more than an unfortunate coincidence and you assured me that we needed to avoid unnecessary scrutiny.'

'And what has happened to change your mind?'

'Invoices, three to be exact. Each one of them for delivery services and two have dates very close to the deaths of Sykes and Brown, but I did not order them.'

'You have a precise memory.'

'Yes Sir Clive, I do and you have not answered my question. Has Periston arranged shipments of metassonite in my name?'

'If they had, what action would you take?'

'Why, inform the authorities of course.'

## Chapter seven

Sir Clive studied Taylor carefully for a moment before leaning forward to whisper his reply.

‘Edward, I do not think you have thought this through properly. You shipped this substance for months after you became aware of its toxic properties. It was you who arranged to sack the receptionist who could have identified Sykes. You also misled your board into believing that you had solved your production problems when clearly you have not. You also failed to inform the South African Government and the DTI of the fact that metassonite does indeed stem from that meteorite there was so much fuss about. All in all, I think you need to reassess your priorities. However, if it will ease your conscience, then I can assure you that I have no knowledge of Periston maintaining an interest in metassonite. However, I have also had no contact with them for months. I could perhaps make enquires, but then so could you. Now if you will excuse me, I have a box for Aida and a rather special guest to attend too.’

\*\*\*\*

‘Who was on the phone darling?’ Jen asked accusingly as she looked at the kitchen clock which declared it to be just after seven.

‘Morton. It looks as if I will be going to Heathrow this morning.’

‘I hope it will not be a long trip. It’s Sarah’s big night tonight.’

‘No such luck.’ Jennings mumbled in a disappointed tone before he realised what he had just said. ‘It’s just a simple meeting.’

From the look on Jen’s face, he could not be sure whether she heard or not.

‘How is John? I have not seen him since the dinner party and he was such a sweet boy. I trust you have not been over-working him.’

'Jen, can I remind you that he is my assistant. He is there to be overworked just I was to my guv'nor. As to how he is doing, very well, unfortunately. I just wish they would give me someone a little more average. I am getting a bit fed up with having to break a new person in every couple of years.'

'But I am sure that promotion would be well deserved, and you should take it as a compliment. Are you taking the car?'

'Yes, I suppose so. It's a bit awkward though, getting a space at Yard is always difficult.'

'Only I was thinking that you could drop off Sarah and Michael. They are both on the way.'

'No, they are not. Sarah's school is at least a two mile detour. Why can't you take them as usual?'

'I have to call on Mrs Patterson to discuss arrangements for the next jumble sale.'

'I had no idea the country was in such dire need of more jam.'

'Do you really want to have that discussion again?'

'I suppose not.' Jennings admitted. 'Doesn't Mrs Patterson live in Renfield Road? That's only two streets away from Sarah's school.'

'Yes, but we will need to go on to the memorial hall afterwards and I thought I might do a bit of shopping. There is a new Indian store on the High Street. Anyway, it will count towards your remission for good behaviour.'

Jennings immediately knew he had lost that argument.

'As a matter of interest, how long have I been sentenced to?'

Jen leaned over as he was eating his cornflakes and gave him a kiss.

'Well now, let me see. It has been six weeks and four days since you almost killed our son. How close do you think you are to parole?'

Jennings took another spoonful of cornflakes in stubborn silence.

'I suppose there is no point in asking why you are going to Heathrow.'

## Chapter seven

‘As a matter of fact, just for once I can tell you.’ Jennings replied eager to score some more points. ‘Do you remember the plane crash from a couple of weeks ago?’

‘Yes, of course. I almost had a heart attack when they reported that it just missed Hastings by a few minutes. I had a terrible time persuading auntie that she did not need to move in with us.’

Jennings smiled as he recalled the panic stricken phone call which only ended when the aunt in question recalled where they lived.

‘You will be in trouble if she ever discovers that Croydon airport closed in 1959. Anyway, it seems that the Home Office people have asked me to attend a meeting to discuss what happened.’

‘Why, do they think it was sabotaged?’

‘I have no idea. But it does not seem particularly likely.’

‘Well, if you are going off on one of your jollies, please try to remember that Sarah’s concert starts at 6.30.’

‘I have not forgotten. Honestly Jen. It’s not as if I miss these things deliberately.’

Jen gave him a doubtful look but did not respond directly to the point. Instead, she simply nodded towards the kitchen clock to remind him what time it was. Jennings jumped up, yelled an instruction to the children that they were leaving now, grabbed the car keys and kissed Jen goodbye.

\*\*\*\*

‘Robert. It was good of you to come.’

Jennings was a little surprised by the haggard look on John Crichton’s face.

‘Are you all right? You look like you have not slept for a week.’

‘That’s probably about right. Look, I hope you coming here is not inconvenient. I must say that I was in two minds, but the fact is I could do with some advice.’

'I take it this is an unofficial request.'

Crichton suddenly looked concerned. 'That is OK, isn't it? I suppose I should have thought about using official channels.'

'That might have been best. However, you look like you need help and I am happy to offer it. Perhaps you had better start at the beginning.'

'Yes, of course.' Crichton replied with an obvious expression of relief. 'I have convened a meeting this morning to discuss our findings so far. Everyone involved in assessing why flight 109 crashed will be here. This is very much a standard procedure to ensure that we are all working on the right lines. I do not want to pre-empt our discussions, but the fact is, something unusual has turned up and I would value your opinion.'

'And that is all?' Jennings questioned.

'Absolutely.'

'Then I do not see a problem. We can always put this on an official basis afterwards if need be.'

Crichton led Jennings into a large brightly lit room which overlooked an area of the airport used to park the planes. In the far distance, just behind a Boeing 747, he could actually see Concord. It was only partially visible, but Michael would be green with envy when he told him tonight. He wondered whether it would be cheeky to ask for a closer look but concluded sadly that it probably would.

'Gentlemen,' Crichton began by calling the chattering group to order, 'this is the interim report meeting to discuss the demise of British Airways World Cargo flight 109 which crashed into the sea just under one mile from Hastings on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> of July. The last call from them was at 07:02. We have been able to salvage about seventy-five per cent of the craft, all the key systems and flight information. At our last meeting, we agreed that the plane appeared not to have suffered engine or systems failure. Neither did the crew report anything unusual at any point. In fact, it seems to have been a routine flight from Jo'burg. The question for today is whether

## Chapter seven

we are any nearer finding out what went wrong.’

An overweight red faced man opened up a green folder and studied it closely for a moment as if confirming something to himself.

‘I can tell you that it was not due to metal fatigue. There are no signs in the superstructure or the outer skin. From the pattern of destruction, it’s pretty clear that the plane was intact when it struck the water.’

‘I can confirm that.’ Said a grey haired man. ‘After further tests, I can prove that the craft was under power when it struck the water.’

‘Which leaves just a controls problem.’ Said Crichton.

‘I’m afraid not. None of the data supports that.’

‘Are we concluding that the plane was deliberately flown into the water?’

No one answered.

‘Gentlemen,’ Crichton said with a note of impatience. ‘there are only three possible causes for the plane to have crashed. A failure of the systems caused by an internal problem or an outside force such as a lightning strike.’

‘There is no evidence for that.’ Said the grey haired man.

‘A structural failure which you have confirmed is not the case.’

No one said a word.

‘That only leaves human intervention whether by error or deliberate action.’

Again, no one responded until the red faced man realised that everyone was looking at him.

‘As far as we have been able to determine from the flight data recorder, the plane had a normal journey until about ten minutes prior to crashing. During that time, the craft made an unscheduled descent from 28,000 feet. It then levelled out for a short while before striking the sea.’

‘Which could provide a strong indication that one or more of the crew chose, for unknown reasons, to deviate from the flight plan. Therefore, my question stands. Was the plane

deliberately flown into the water?’

‘I suppose it is a possibility.’ Said the grey haired man.

‘In which case, what steps do we need to take to verify that possibility.’

‘I am not sure that we can. At no point during the flight was there any sign that the crew was concerned or behaving oddly. In that context, all we can conjecture is that in the absence of a technical problem, the plane crashed as a result of unknown human intervention.’

‘Is it possible that the crash could have been due to sabotage?’ Asked Jennings. Both the red faced and grey haired men looked at him in an accusing fashion by way of an answer.

‘Gentlemen, this is Chief Inspector Jennings from Scotland Yard. I have asked him to attend this meeting just in case we conclude that a crime was committed.’

‘It is possible if the saboteur was one of the crew or at least on-board, but why would anyone want to destroy a routine cargo flight?’ Asked red faced man.

‘The Apartheid system has many critics. Perhaps someone or some group has decided to take action.’

‘Then why choose a cargo flight?’ Added grey haired man.

Jennings shrugged his shoulders. ‘What was on the manifest?’

‘Primarily food. South Africa is a big exporter of fruit.’ Crichton answered. ‘There were also a couple of industrial consignments. Some engineering parts destined for a factory in Coventry and some geological samples.’

‘What type of geological samples?’ Jennings did his best to suppress any signs of interest whilst his thoughts went into overdrive.

Crichton searched through his folder and took out what looked like a closely typed form.

‘A small box of rocks, weight, nine ounces and dispatched from a place called Paar to an address in Southampton. Why, is it important?’

‘No, just a thought.’ Jennings sat back in his chair satisfied



## Chapter seven

that sabotage was unlikely.

The meeting ended and both the red faced man and the grey haired man left the room. Jennings waited for Crichton to make the first move.

‘I did not want to mention this at the meeting but there could be some evidence that the crash was down to one of the crew.’

‘Why did you not mention that, John?’

‘You saw how nervous they were at appearing to apportion blame. Our role is to establish the cause of the crash. It’s down to the courts to allocate culpability if there is any. Besides which, if we imply blame where none exists, it could have serious repercussions.’

‘I see.’ Jennings replied in a disappointed tone.

‘I don’t think you do, this not about covering our backsides. What we decide can affect the airlines, their employees and the families of the dead crew.’

‘John, please get to the point.’

‘There is someone I would like you to meet. He was 109’s co-pilot.’

‘But I thought the entire crew were killed.’

‘So they were. Carl Rankin was taken ill, just before take-off and had to be replaced.’

A tall and distinguished looking man in his late thirties was shown into the room. Crichton directed him to a chair and then sat beside him.

‘Mr Rankin.’ Crichton began. ‘Thank you for agreeing to come. I should remind you that this conversation is private and unofficial and that anything you say will be treated as confidential. However, I may ask your permission to include any relevant facts in my report at a later date. This is Chief Inspector Jennings who is also here unofficially. I will be candid with you. We have been unable to determine any technical problem with the plane and are therefore looking to explore whether it was the result of an action by one of the crew. How well did you know them?’

'I'd been with Peter for just over three years and we had been working together on this route for just over two of them.'

'There were three stewardesses on the flight. Is that not unusual for a cargo plane?'

'Not really. Carriers often use cargo flights to transfer crew, when there are no passenger flights.'

'I see and how well did you know them.'

'Ellie and Kate, I knew very well but we had not worked together for a while. I never met the other one.'

'Mr Rankin. May I say how sorry I am over the death of your colleague.' Jennings added.

'You needn't be, Peter was a grade 'A' bastard. I could not stand the sight of him. Very few could.'

'Unpleasant sort?'

'With gold plating, he treated everyone with contempt. In all the years I knew him, I don't think he said a pleasant word about anyone.'

'Then why did you work with him?'

Rankin smiled bitterly. 'I would need a good word from Peter to get a transfer. My only hope was to complete my pilot's training.'

'Setting aside your personal feelings, is there anything you can think of that might indicate that one of the crew sabotaged the plane?'

'God no! Naturally, I can make no judgment about the third stewardess, but the others... No, not possible and Peter certainly not.'

'Why do you say that?'

'Everyone knew him as Perfect Peter. That was why so many hated his guts. If you made the slightest error, if you were even seconds late with a report or failed to stick strictly to procedure, he saw it as a personal insult. There was nothing he cared about more than his reputation as a pilot with the faultless record. Ditching a plane would not be high on his list.'

'What about previous flights. Was there anything, perhaps something small that was out of character?'

## Chapter seven

Rankin appeared to give this some thought before he shook his head. Crichton looked at Jennings and saw the same look of acceptance that there was nothing useful to be gained.

‘Mind you, if you had asked about the route itself, that would have been a different matter.’

‘Why do you say that?’ Crichton asked.

‘Jo’berg to London is not an easy flight. Lots of thermals and unpredictable weather, but over the past couple of years the 109 route has gained a bit of a reputation.

‘For what?’

Rankin looked embarrassed. ‘Look, flight crews can be a little superstitious. If I told you a fraction of the things that can go wrong during a flight, you would never get aboard a plane again.’

Jennings found himself wondering whether to ask further, considering that he and Jen were due to fly to New York in two months to celebrate their fifteenth anniversary, but decided that ignorance was probably best.

‘The fact is that some people refused to do it.’

‘And why is that?’

‘Because.’ Again, Rankin looked nervous and embarrassed. ‘Because people said it was haunted. Now I know how that sounds, but we all, Peter included, experience strange things on that route.’

‘Such as?’ Jennings was intrigued if a little doubtful but he tried not to show it.

‘It’s hard to describe unless you were there. It was as if something...evil was present. Everyone got bad tempered and started making mistakes. That made things even worse if Peter was the pilot.’

‘You have no idea what caused this ...’ Crichton hesitated to find the right word. ‘Angst?’

‘No, but Peter being Peter kept a log.’

‘What sort of log?’ Jennings interrupted. He glanced quickly at Crichton who shook his head to confirm that nothing like that had been found.

'Peter was not one to share his thoughts with mere underlings but I did see it once. It was a detailed list of all the flights we had made and the shipments we carried. Each shipment had been ticked apart from one.'

'And which one was that?'

Rankin shook his head. 'I'm sorry. I only had a glancing view.'

\*\*\*\*

'Good afternoon sir.' Said Morton. 'I have the morning reports. How did your trip to Heathrow go?'

'An honest reply would be I don't know.' Jennings took off his jacket before sitting down.

Once again, his office was unbearably hot. He switched on a small fan which Wilks had obtained, no doubt via one his nefarious networks, but it seemed to make little difference.

'Strictly between ourselves, it looks as though the plane crash was down to one of the crew, possibly due to some kind of mental breakdown.'

'I don't suppose that will be the official report.'

'I doubt it.' Jennings smiled knowingly. 'The fact that a member of the flight crew suddenly went barking, is not likely to instil consumer confidence.'

'Then how will they explain it?'

'An unknown cause, I should think, possibly linked to weather conditions encountered earlier in the flight. Makes it sound more of a one-off event.'

Jennings stared at the fake pine surface of his desk for a moment as he reflected on this morning's events. Then he came aware that Morton was looking in his direction with an expression of expectation.

'Anything in the reports of interest?'

'Yes sir.' Came a cheery reply. 'Do you recall that Pinky Brown was released from Parkhurst a few weeks ago?'

'Don't tell me he has been up to his old tricks. I thought he

## Chapter seven

was riddled with arthritis.’

‘He is sir,’ Morton smiled, ‘but that did not stop him trying to rob a shipping office on payday. They found the poor bugger stuck in a skylight. Apparently, he used a block and tackle to gain access and it got jammed. They even found his wheelchair parked in a side street.’

‘Beats me how he thought he would get around once he got inside.’

‘Well, he was evidently successful because he was found with a duffle bag full of cash.’

Jennings found himself smiling. ‘Good for him and you didn’t hear me say that. Anything else?’

‘Yes. There finally seems to be some progress concerning that raid on the Natural History Museum.’

‘In what respect?’

‘In establishing a possible relationship between Jimmy Price and Madison. I have had a tip-off that one of Madison’s gang makes a regular monthly trip to a number of banks in Croydon. Specifically, Lloyds, Barclays, the Bank of Scotland and the Midland. The amounts vary in every case except for Lloyds. I managed to persuade the manager to confirm that an account in the name of Henry Jones had £2,000 paid into it each month and the same amount is drawn out again. The account has stood at £2,011 for four years.’

‘That is quite a sum and how long has Price been in his current rank?’

‘Just about four years.’

‘Do you know who is paying the money into the account?’

‘No, I am afraid not. The money comes via a clearing account in the name of Munston Holdings which seems to be the front for a number of companies. Munston in turn, gets it from an account held by a French bank. Now, this is the interesting bit. After every trip to Croydon, this character then takes a hovercraft to Calais. I got talking to one of the people I used to know at the section house. He works in the same building as Price. Apparently, once a month Price takes a trip

to Calais. The story is that he has a sister there. He always comes back with some duty free for his cronies, but I was wondering.'

'What else he brings back.' Jennings finished the sentence almost to himself.

'Do we know who this runner is?'

'No sir and any link to Madison should be verified. I was wondering whether I should go to Croydon and see what I could find.'

'That seems like a good idea.'

'I was thinking about this Friday. I am on leave next week and was going to take the Old Yarn across the channel, but I could easily take the ferry and see what chummy is up to.'

'That all sounds highly irregular. I trust you are aware that there are strict protocols about working in a foreign country.'

Morton grinned. 'But I am on holiday sir.'

'I am not sure I should hear any more. Is there anything else in the reports?'

'Yes sir, something that could make my trip to Croydon even more relevant. C8 have received some intelligence which suggests that Madison might have another go at the Natural History Museum. Seems like a bloody stupid thing to do, in my view but they seem quite sure.'

'As you say, why would he take such a risk? I mean, if an inexperienced detective constable questions the prudence of such action, then why not an experienced thief like Madison.'

'Thank you sir.' Morton added with indignation which Jennings ignored.

'Can you find me an expert on the jewellery trade? I have a strong feeling that we are missing something very basic.'

As Morton prepared to leave Jennings had a sudden thought. 'What do you mean you are on holiday next week? You have only just arrived, and what is this Old Yarn?'

Morton responded with a look of quiet patience. 'You signed my leave sheet five weeks ago sir and it's in the diary. As to the Old Yarn, it's my ketch.'

## Chapter seven

'You know, I do wonder sometimes whether we are investigating the right copper. Bespoke suits and now private yachts.'

Morton grinned once more and closed the door.

## Chapter eight

‘Herr Frobe will see you now sir.’ Said a young and strikingly attractive woman as she escorted Jennings across the black and white marble floor towards an impressive door covered in studded red leather. As he approached, the door seemed to open by itself, but once through, Jennings was greeted by a tall and handsome blond man in his late twenties, who gave a quick and very stiff nod of the head as a form of welcome. The blond man escorted him along a wood panelled corridor and into an enormous room, easily two stories high and large enough to contain his entire house. The walls and floor were lined with marble and as his eye was attracted upwards, Jennings caught sight of a ceiling, gaudily painted with a pseudo biblical scene that mixed Old Testament with Germanic myth. Along the centre of the room was a line of crystal chandeliers, which even in broad daylight, cast a myriad of tiny lights around the expansive room.

Jennings was due to meet the chief buyer of Europe’s largest dealer in gemstones. In strong contrast to everything he had seen so far, Frobe turned out to be a small fat, unprepossessing man with watery eyes.

‘Herr Frobe.’ Jennings tried to hide any signs of annoyance as Frobe declined to shake hands. ‘It is kind of you to spare the time to talk to me.’

‘Kind.’ Frobe replied almost to himself as if the word was unfamiliar. ‘I cannot spare you long. I have a call to our South African office booked for 3.30.’

Jennings checked his watch and found that they had just under half an hour.

‘Hopefully, we will have finished by then.’



## Chapter eight

‘Perhaps you would care to take a seat?’ Frobe appeared to direct his reply to some unseen third person before pointing at a group of leather armchairs nearby. Frobe patiently waited for Jennings to sit before selecting a chair an uncomfortable distance away.

‘Herr Frobe. I would be grateful for your expert opinion. You may have read in the papers last month about the attempt to steal a consignment of gems destined for the Natural History Museum.’

‘My firm provided a small service as a personal favour to Roy. He asked us to advise them on certain security aspects.’

‘Roy?’

‘Jenkins.’ Frobe responded with some surprise as if Jennings should have known that he was referring to the Home Secretary. ‘Unfortunately, the museum declined our services and the results were entirely predictable.’

‘Herr Frobe. I know nothing about the international trade in gems, but from my limited experience of the domestic market, I am puzzled as to why a professional gang would target such easily identifiable items. I was wondering whether you could cast some light on what might have made it worth their while.’

Frobe responded a strange look. ‘I hope you are not implying that my firm deals in black market diamonds.’

‘No, of course not.’ Jennings replied hastily. Clearly, Frobe was a testy character. ‘However, I am aware that you work in an area which must provide significant opportunities for criminal activities.’

‘I see.’ Frobe answered thoughtfully. ‘Would you care for a sherry or are you on duty?’

‘No indeed. A sherry would be nice.’

In fact, Jennings hated the stuff, but he did not feel confident that a polite refusal would be taken for what it was. Frobe reached over to a silver tray and a decanter of dark amber liquid. He poured a little into a small glass and handed it to Jennings.

‘Last year my firm handled in excess of \$20 billion worth of

precious stones. That is more than the entire GDP of a number of smaller countries. One of our major headaches, concerns what are termed, conflict diamonds. In part, this is because they devalue the market and in part, because self-regulation is critical to prevent further government intervention into an already over regulated financial market. Currently, there are a number of wars between various African countries as well as a number of governments and rebels, seeking to gain or keep power by securing weapons. Most nations have currency restrictions which limit the amount you can transfer across borders. Diamonds can be used as negotiable currency although that is not as easy as you might imagine.

For most people, one diamond looks very like another, apart from the size that is, but they are quite traceable. The crystal structure has a geographically unique signature. In fact, our best cutters can often pinpoint where a stone was mined just by looking at it. Another issue that your common criminal might ignore, is that a stone cannot simply be cut to order. Diamonds may well be known as the world's hardest substance, but one wrong move can shatter them. A gem that is worth millions one minute might not purchase a cup of tea the next. The third issue is that all gems significantly devalue once they enter the black market. No legitimate dealer would contemplate investing money in a stone with an unknown provenance.'

'Which does make me wonder why a professional gang would target such a collection?'

'If this is about the value of the stones themselves, you might do well to talk to your colleagues who deal in stolen art and antiques.'

'Are you saying that this could be about stealing to order for some collector? Is that likely?'

'Human nature is a strange thing. You have not touched your sherry. Is it not to your liking?'

Jennings had been hoping to get away with not tasting it, but having been confronted, he decided it would be rude not to. Gingerly he took a sip and it tasted quite different to the stuff

## Chapter eight

Jen bought at the local Co-op.

‘Very nice. You were talking about human nature.’

‘How much would you pay for a bottle of the sherry you have just tasted?’

‘I have no idea.’ Jennings was puzzled at the sudden turn of direction and he quickly tried to recollect the price on their shopping bill.

‘Some people will pay thousands of pounds for an 18<sup>th</sup> century bottle of sherry even though it would be quite undrinkable. The price reflects the history and how much other people might pay. It is the same with gems. The price of all stones intended for the jewellery market, is dependent not on the actual value of the stone, after all, it is nothing more than compressed carbon, but on what people are prepared to pay to possess it. You have been questioning why your criminal gang might steal a gem when its actual market value, if re-cut, is likely to provide little return. However, the collection may have value in other ways. Say to a collector or for some other purpose.’

‘Such as?’

‘Most industrial diamonds are of little value in themselves, but some technologies require stones that have particular qualities. My firm is approached from time to time by specialist research companies who need to acquire stones to a particular order.’

‘Have you had any recent requests?’

‘One or two, yes. The American Bell Laboratories have been developing something called a laser for a few years and we also supply CERN in Switzerland.’

‘And what do they do?’

‘Nuclear research. However, I should reassure you that both are legitimate projects backed by governments.’

‘Which begs the question, have you received any requests that you turned down?’

Frobe hesitated for a moment before replying. ‘One, it came from the Periston Corporation. No doubt you have heard of them. They wished to obtain a number of very large stones,

diamonds, rubies and emeralds. It was an unusual request given the nature of their business.'

'Why did they want them?' Jennings interrupted.

'They stated that it was for insurance purposes, but we had doubts. They were too specific about size and the cut and when they declined an offer of smaller stones, we decided not to do business with them.'

'Do you have any idea what Periston might have really wanted them for?'

'It is not necessary to guess. We deal in facts. However, if it is of help, I would suggest that it could have been for research purposes. Had they been honest about their needs, we might have been able to accommodate their requirements.'

'Could they have gone anywhere else?'

'There is only one company even approaching the size of my firm, but there are alternatives of course. However, what might be of interest to you is that the Natural History collection would have eminently suited their needs.'

\*\*\*\*

Morton carefully studied his surroundings. He had never been on the staff side of a bank counter and it offered an intriguing viewpoint to what went on. Not least of which, was that the smart hairdos and crisp blouses, had gained legs and feet. The bank occupied the corner ground floor of a large building close to East Croydon station. A long counter ran the length of the bank separating staff from customers, but affording a clear view of all those coming and going. The staff side of the bank had around a dozen desks, although most were unused. This had often puzzled him when standing in a lengthy queue patiently waiting to be served. Where had all the occupants gone? Now he discovered that most were reserved for visitors. Two of the desks at the far end of the bank were used by typists. These were conveniently positioned next to a glass panelled door which proclaimed in large black print

## Chapter eight

'A. Wilson Manager'. Around half of the desks had large adding machines and all had trays filled with red and black ledgers, to give the impression of efficacy. After the initial run of business, the majority of customers were now OAPs and students from the nearby college, coming in to withdraw cash. For most this was around five to ten pounds and so anyone withdrawing £2,000 would be easy to identify. The counter staff had been instructed to alert him to anyone withdrawing large amounts of money and then he would follow them to confirm where they went. With any luck, the end of that trail would provide definitive proof of a connection between Price and the Madison gang.

Morton had removed his jacket and been given a ledger so that he had all the appearance of a member of staff. The last thing he wanted to do was look out of place, given that the staff area was clearly visible. Faces came and went. Occasionally a likely candidate would push open the heavy glass door and Morton would try to follow their actions without them noticing. One man in particular, had looked very shifty but turned out to be the owner of a small stamp shop in a local arcade. As the morning passed Morton found his attention wandering. A young man with long hair sat down at what looked like a portable television perched on a beige box with two large slits. He switched on the screen and after a few moments, Morton noticed that it portrayed columns of numbers in green print. They were too small for him to read but they looked like some kind of finance sheet. What intrigued him most was the peculiar looking flat typewriter used to type in numbers. Morton had recently bought a pocket calculator to help keep track of his accounts, but this machine seemed to be a very clumsy affair for a large bank.

The number of customers began to increase as lunchtime approached. A rumble in his stomach provided a reminder that he might have been overconfident in not bringing food and there would be no opportunity to pop out to find a local cake shop. He was just considering whether to ask one of the girls who

were closing their counter blinds, to buy him some lunch, when the signal came. The man who had just picked up £2,000 was a very ordinary looking elderly gentleman. He was wearing a blue blazer and white shirt of the type commonly seen in the cheaper local golf clubs. Morton quickly made his way out onto the street to ensure that he did not lose him, but he need not have been concerned as the man seemed to be in no particular hurry. Morton slowly made his way towards the shopping centre, crossing the busy Brighton Road before turning left and heading towards a quiet street where the elderly man went into a branch of the Bank of Scotland. Morton found a hardware shop close by and took an immediate interest in a display of carpentry equipment. A few moments later, the man re-emerged and continued down the street before heading towards the entrance of the Whitgift shopping centre. The man climbed a flight of steps to an atrium which Morton knew housed another bank. He decided that it was unnecessary to follow him all the way as he had a clear view across the 1950s layout. The man seemed to spend much longer in this bank and when he did emerge, Morton was confident enough of their next destination, to walk ahead. West Croydon station was the closest and that would take him to Victoria where Morton was certain the elderly gentleman would catch the boat-train to Dover and then on to Calais.

As Morton remerged onto the main road, something made him turn around to check that the man was following. A moment of panic washed through as he realised that his quarry had vanished. Scanning the lunchtime crowd, revealed no blue blazer and Morton mentally rehearsed how he could explain the loss to Jennings. He was sure the man had not doubled back, but where else could he have gone? Morton's attention was then caught by a family carrying a bag with the word 'Alders' printed on it. He took a gamble and went inside. It was a large department store covering several floors and had a set of centrally positioned escalators. If nothing else, they would give him height to survey each floor. As he was carried up to

## Chapter eight

the first floor, Morton studied the figures looking at suits, shirts and general menswear but there was no blue blazer. The next floor displayed women's clothes and seemed to be an unlikely destination. The third looked more promising with a mix of furnishings. As more than half the floor space was not visible, Morton briefly wondered whether to explore further but decided against it. A couple of moments later this decision was rewarded as he caught sight of blue blazer on the escalator two floors up and it was with a sense of relief that he approached the final floor. Blue blazer was standing in a small group of men watching a broadcast of a football match on an enormous projection television. Morton joined the crowd, standing just behind blue blazer. For a few minutes, nothing happened, but as the programme switched to the logo for Thames Television and the crowd dispersed, blue blazer was unexpectedly empty handed. A woman in a flowery summer dress was now carrying the bag which blue blazer had been clutching so closely. Morton followed, determined that this time, there would be no mistakes.

\*\*\*\*

Gilpatrick seemed to be in an unusually cheerful mood as he beckoned Jennings to sit down. This morning's report had sparked frantic action at the top levels of New Scotland Yard as they argued over who should take charge of the Madison case, now that C8 was subject to an internal investigation. The broad grin on his boss's face boded well for good news.

'What did you find out on your little jaunt to the City?'

'Confirmation,' Jennings replied with a large degree of self-satisfaction, 'that I was right to be suspicious about Madison's motives.'

'Is that so, I thought that was down to young Morton.'

'It appears that this crime might not be down to plain greed and Madison could be acting on instructions. I say could, because for the moment it is simply a possibility. However, an

interesting name cropped up in conversation.'

'And who was that?'

'Not a who, but a what. The Periston Corporation.'

Gilpatrick's grin vanished. 'Is that the thanks I get for pulling strings in your favour and securing you sole charge of the Madison case. Hang it all Robert, I thought the deputy commissioner had made it clear that they are off limits.'

'I am sure he did, but I cannot ignore what might be an important line of enquiry just because it might prove embarrassing to the top brass.'

'I suppose not.' Gilpatrick admitted grudgingly. 'What do you have?'

'Just a hunch for the moment and I give you my word that I will not do anything without talking to you first.'

'That will make a pleasant change.'

'If Madison is to have a second go at the Natural History Museum jewels, then we need to understand the motive.'

'And what have you come up with?'

'As I said, a possibility that this is not a simple jewel heist. It seems that Periston has been trying to obtain gemstones of a very particular type and have been unsuccessful. The Natural History Museum collection could fulfil their needs.'

'Sounds a bit flimsy I must say.'

'Positively feeble I agree, except that I have been wondering what concerned them so much that they complained to the Home Office about what should have been nothing more than a routine enquiry into their connection with Fellows. Frankly, something is beginning to make my nose twitch and you know what that means.'

'The end of a quiet life I suspect.' Gilpatrick now looked very gloomy.

'Just consider it repayment for sending me to Heathrow to investigate a suicide.'

\*\*\*\*



## Chapter eight

Caruthers parked his car next to a small group of shops. It appeared to be a busy afternoon for shoppers as he had to squeeze into the only space available and was glad that he had brought the sports car rather than the saloon. Caruthers was not a fan of rural life, much preferring the hectic pace of a city, but in this case, the small size of the village he was visiting would considerably help in his quest. This particular village was not the most attractive as Hampshire villages went, but it was one with which he had a passing acquaintance given its proximity to the Bat and Ball pub in Hambledon where he had spent many an afternoon enjoying cricket in its birthplace. Caruthers had endured a lengthy journey down the A3, made even more unbearable by the volume of cars driving to the coast. Temperatures were still topping the mid-eighties and he had not seen a pub or even a café since passing through Petersfield. Caruthers was parked in what looked like the centre of the village. A busy road bisected a small group of shops and he could just make out the usual green and flagpole sitting in front of a white ramshackle building which he hoped might be a pub. Caruthers looked at his watch and concluded sadly that it was not worth investigating given that it was after 2.30 and any hostelry would be closed.

Apart from a Co-op, the shops were small and varied. There was a butcher and a wool shop close by, as well as a bank and a flint faced church on the opposite side of the road. All likely sources for local gossip, which could prove essential to his task of trying to track down a potential connection between the spate of recent deaths and an international incident three years ago, which briefly caught the attention of the world's media.

Caruthers had initially been very reluctant to take on this story, but having put in some effort, he was now equally reluctant to let it go simply because his editor had been leant on. Besides which, if there was a direct connection and an important company had embarked on similar research to that which caused seventeen deaths, it would certainly enhance his reputation, even if it was not quite in the Pulitzer league.

The first problem to solve was a simple one. He had a name but no address. What was required was a telephone directory and as luck would have it, there was a phone box right next to the church. Another admitted advantage of village life was the absence of vandals. Not only was the telephone box intact but it had a full set of directories. He scanned through the letter S, but the name was absent. Either the number was ex-directory or the family did not have a telephone. A simple call would solve that question. Caruthers fumbled in his pocket for a five pence coin which was inserted into the slot of the grey payphone before he dialled a London number. A moment later he had his unhelpful answer. The family did not have a phone and that left just one option. He would have to ask around.

Although he was personally unfamiliar with village culture, Caruthers had a number of foolish friends who had not only chosen to hide themselves in some backwoods, but also rather selfishly, never seemed to tire of detailing the intricacies of village life, at whatever opportunity presented itself. Usually choosing dinner parties from which there was no prospect of escape. From them, he had gleaned a potential problem. Whilst the world had long forgotten the events at Southampton University, a small village's brief exposure to the paparazzi would have remained a significant talking point for the local gossips. The prospect of a journalist reopening old wounds was likely to result in mouths being tightly shut. What he required was another angle. Pushing open the heavy phone box door his gaze focused on the wool shop on the other side of the road.

An old fashioned bell signalled his presence as he entered the shop which smelled strongly of lavender. Caruthers felt as though he had slipped back in time to the pre-war era. For the full length of one side of the shop was a long oak counter, deeply embedded with indents from years of cutting cloth. Behind this was a floor to ceiling cabinet filled with a myriad of unlabelled hand sized drawers. A small elderly woman appeared from behind a curtain at the far end.

'Good morning sir.' She smiled with an air of superiority and

## Chapter eight

Caruthers felt very self-conscious as if he were intruding into a world restricted to women.

‘Hello there. I’m afraid that I am not here to buy anything. I am looking for directions and wondered whether you could help.’

‘If I can.’ The woman continued, clearly disappointed. ‘Where are you trying to get to?’

‘I am looking for my aunt and rather foolishly left the address at home and she does not have a phone. Her name is Mrs Stewart. Ada Stewart and her husband is called Charles.’

‘Yes, I know Ada. I did not know she had a nephew.’ The woman added suspiciously. ‘I always thought she was an only child.’

‘Yes, that’s right. She was a school friend of my mother, so she is more of an honorary aunt.’

‘Oh I see. Well, Ada lives in Kidmore Lane in the first house on the right.’

‘Is it far?’

‘Bless no, just a few minutes’ walk. When you leave here, turn right and go past the hardware shop. Then just past a house called The Laurels, is a chip shop. Opposite that is Kidmore Lane.’

Caruthers had little difficulty finding the place and was soon walking through an immaculate garden with an enormous fish pond, towards the front door of a moderately sized detached house. After ringing the bell for a while and getting no answer, he decided to take the path to the rear of the house. The garden was large, well-kept but looked a little bedraggled after weeks without rain. A rather striking woman who he knew to be in her fifties was pruning some roses.

‘Hello.’ He called out and she returned a quizzical look.

‘My name is Anton Caruthers and I work for...’

‘I know perfectly well who you are and I would like you to leave.’ The woman replied angrily, and she held up a pair of garden shears to reinforce her point. ‘I have had quite enough of your kind.’

Caruthers had already prepared for such a reception. 'Mrs Stewart. I have not come to resurrect painful memories and I do appreciate that someone from the press would not be welcome. But I think you could help me to prevent what happened to your son, from happening again. Perhaps you could give me just a couple of minutes to explain.'

Her expression softened a little but remained suspicious as she indicated for him to sit down at the garden table.

'Is your husband here?'

'No,' Mrs Stewart replied firmly, 'and it's fortunate for you that he is not. Five weeks we endured you people banging on our door at all hours demanding to know how John was. What he was working on? Whether he working for a secret government programme? As bad as it was here, we could not even get into the hospital to see him because they were concerned about the impact on the other patients. Then we were subjected to the same horrible experience during the coroner's inquest. Denmead may not be quite the place it was, but there is still a sense of community here. Some people became angry and resentful and blamed us for the intrusion. For a while, we seriously consider leaving.'

Caruthers had been a journalist long enough to know how ruthless the press could become when it was on the scent of a major story.

'I am sorry. It must have been a very difficult time when all you would have wanted to do, was be with your son.'

'You mentioned something about helping to prevent it from happening again. What did you mean?'

'Your son was one of many affected by a substance they were testing as part of a Soviet science programme. Seventeen of those people died. Because of the Cold War, you got caught up in a typically nasty East, West dispute. But what lay behind that was the fact that a meteor fragment had some kind of property that could drive people insane. In most cases, like John, it took the form of a psychosis which caused them to withdraw into themselves. In a few cases, it resulted in acts of

## Chapter eight

extreme violence. Once the politicking had died down, the authorities looked at what had actually caused the events, and it was concluded that the samples had become contaminated with a common fungal spore which had somehow mutated. All the meteorite samples were recalled by the Russians, but I have reason to suspect that a certain company might be trying to resurrect those experiments. If I am right, I think they should be stopped. Now, is that not worth a moment of your time.'

'I see.' Mrs Stewart responded in a sufficiently uncertain tone for Caruthers to press home his advantage.

'Perhaps, if it is not too painful, you could tell me what happened to John.'

Mrs Stewart stared at the metalwork of the garden table for a moment, before coming to a decision.

John was working towards his doctorate at Southampton University. He was a physics student, but I could not tell you what he was working on. He did try to explain it a couple of times, but science was never my strong point. He and his colleagues submitted an application through the Soviet Embassy to take part in a worldwide experiment using meteorite fragments.'

'What sort of experiment was it?'

The woman shook her head. 'I don't think there was any kind of set agenda. From what John said, it was more about making material available.' Mrs Stewart paused for a moment and smiled faintly. 'When they were chosen, he was so excited that he did not even attend my birthday party; just so that he could spend more time on the project. Then one evening we received a call to say that there had been an accident.'

'What kind of accident?'

'They didn't say. It was only later at the inquest that we learnt they were using high energy projectiles. Something to do with simulating a meteorite crashing to Earth. The conclusion was that breaking the meteorite apart in that way, allowed the fungus spores to spread through the air. We were not allowed to see him for over a month and by the time permission was

given, he had been transferred to the St James' Hospital. That's for people who are mentally ill.'

'Who would not allow you to see him?'

'Initially, the hospital consultant. It was just a small cottage hospital and as I said earlier, they were very concerned that other patients would react badly to hordes of media. He was then transferred to a military hospital at Gosport and that was when things became really difficult.'

'How so?'

'They insisted that he needed to be kept isolated. Whenever we called to ask how John was, they would promise that someone would call back, but no one ever did. We never actually met anyone in charge, and I had the distinct impression that they had been instructed to say nothing.'

'And you have no idea who these people were?'

'No, but Charles was in army intelligence you know. He was convinced that either the military or MI5 were running things, because of the Russian connection.'

'Yes, it would seem likely. May I ask how John is?'

'There has been no change for over two years. I do not go to see him anymore, doesn't seem much point. He does not know who we are, even during his rare quiet periods and he can be quite dangerous.'

'There were two others involved in the accident.'

'Yes, there were. A very sweet girl called Angela. I think John was quite smitten with her and Professor Meredith.'

'As I recall Meredith died but the newspaper reports were not clear about the cause.'

'That is not altogether surprising. Even the inquest had to reach an 'open' verdict because the details were so sketchy. We know they were firing pellets at a small sample of the meteorite to measure any gases produced. That much was clear from their notes. Angela was found lying unconscious beneath a piece of equipment. Professor Meredith's body was a short distance away and John was by the door. John and Angela were both taken initially to the cottage hospital. Both regained

## Chapter eight

consciousness the next day and it was then that the doctors realised that there was a serious problem. They began to scream about monsters coming from the walls and attacked anyone who came near them.'

'They were not able to do anything for them?'

'For John no, but Angela recovered.'

'Did she?' Caruthers responded with surprise. 'I did not know that anyone had recovered. I don't suppose you know how to contact her?'

'I'm afraid not.'

'The enquiry concluded that the meteorite fragments had become contaminated with hallucinogenic fungal spores.'

'That is what they said, yes.'

'You have doubts?'

'Would you like a cup of tea? I think I would rather talk about this indoors.'

'Thank you, no to the tea, but by all means, let us go inside if you feel more comfortable.'

Caruthers followed Mrs Stewart through a pair of French doors that led to a large and comfortable living room. As soon as he entered, Caruthers spotted a group of family photos, one of which he supposed was her son John. He was not a bad looking young man in a gangly sort of way. He had long straggly fair hair and was dressed in an odd mixture of cricket whites and a Doors tee-shirt.

'You must have both been very proud.' Caruthers remarked. Mrs Stewart smiled weakly. 'You said you had doubts about the enquiry findings.'

'I did. Charles works as a bursar for Portsmouth Polytechnic and through his job has a number of international connections including the Humbolt University where that poor man died. Charles was able to confirm that in both cases, the fragments had been thoroughly sterilised. Besides which, if they had been affected by something toxic, then why did nothing happen when the samples first arrived rather than weeks later. Naturally, Charles wanted to have these questions asked at

both the inquest and the enquiry, but they refused.'

'Did they give a reason?'

'Outside the terms of their remit, apparently.'

'Mrs Stewart. Have you heard of a company called Cambridge Electronics?'

'Why yes, I have. Charles found some notebooks with all of John's thoughts. I suppose they were just ideas for his thesis. But there were also a couple of official looking forms which seemed to be connected with seeking funding.'

'Cambridge Electronics do fund a lot of frontier science programmes.'

'Do they? Charles could find out nothing beyond a post office address in Cambridge.'

'I don't suppose you still have those papers.'

'No. I'm afraid they disappeared. We both think the Chinese man took them.'

'Chinese?' Caruthers exclaimed.

'We thought it was odd at the time, but he said he was part of the official investigation and it was just before the enquiry. After the newspapers lost interest, we had any number of people claiming they were making enquiries for official reports. Some of them were foreign. This man asked to see John's things and it was only sometime later that we discovered certain items were missing.'

'Do you have a name or know which organisation he worked for?'

Mrs Stewart shook her head in response. 'Sorry no. He looked Chinese and had a Chinese sounding name but he did speak very good English.'

'Are there any other names that might help?'

'I don't think so. I am sorry but most of the time, I try to forget.'

Mrs Stewart looked out through the windows in the direction of an ornamental bird-bath. As she did so, Caruthers was struck by both her dignity and sadness and unexpectedly felt ashamed for his intrusion.



## Chapter eight

‘I have taken enough of your time. It would be very helpful if you could ask your husband to let me have the name of the person at Humbolt.’

‘He just sits in a bare room, you know.’

Caruthers saw her eyes becoming moist.

‘They dare not put any furniture in his room because he would use it to harm himself. He just sits in a corner saying the same word over and over again.’

‘And what word is that?’ Caruthers asked, wondering whether it was too personal a question.

She turned around and said nothing for a moment as if trying to summon the courage to share a painful memory. ‘The name of the place where it was found? It was a town called Noril’sk. Now, what do you suppose is the significance of that?’

## Chapter nine

Jennings switched on an electric fan and closed his eyes momentarily to convince himself that it was doing some good. The temperature in his office had been approaching 100° Fahrenheit for most of the week and they had finally permitted the use of fans as an alternative to closing the building. As the soft breeze played over his face, Jennings heard the door click and reluctantly opened his eyes to see who was intruding on his moment of serenity.

‘Wilks? It can’t be 4.00pm already.’

‘No indeed not sir, but I have just received a call from young Morton.’

‘I thought he was in France.’

‘Yes sir.’

‘How much are detective constables paid these days?’

Wilks smiled knowingly but did not respond to the question. ‘He asked me to pass on a message that he followed the woman to Calais where she caught a train to Lille.’

‘Which woman? I thought they were using a man as the courier.’

‘Only for the pick-up sir. The money was passed to an unidentified woman.’

‘Has Morton had any luck in linking her to Price?’

‘Not yet sir. He has booked in to a hotel and said he will call if he has anything to report.’

‘Is that all?’

‘Yes sir.’

Jennings watched Wilks depart but then had a thought.

‘Actually, whilst you are here, I would be grateful for your opinion.’

## Chapter nine

‘Yes sir.’ Wilks replied with an evident degree of surprise as he returned to standing in front of Jennings desk with undeniable caution.

‘Now don’t look like that. You and I have worked together for six years.’

‘Seven sir.’ Wilks corrected. ‘Seven years almost to the day.’

‘Yes well,’ Jennings looked doubtful, ‘in that time I have come to respect your opinion and I would be grateful for it now, without the sarcasm.’

‘No sir.’

‘Oh do stop standing to attention all the time and sit down.’

As Jennings watched Wilks lower himself into the chair, he was curiously reminded of a history lesson about the Romans. During the period when they persecuted Christians, suspects would be made to sit in a chair filled with burning wood until they recanted. Wilks was wearing an expression as if he expected much the same treatment.

‘What do you know about Madison?’

‘Basically, a thug at heart sir. That is if he had a heart, but he does have a brain.’

‘I seem to recall that Madison had quite a stable background.’

‘By all accounts. Grew up in Purley, not too far from where you live sir.’

‘I dare say that there are a few young hooligans, even in my part of Surrey.’

‘He did well at school until he was about fourteen, then he went off the rails. A social report said that the school had not sufficiently engaged with him but then that is what you might expect these days. He spent a couple of years involved in petty crime which culminated in a stay at a reform school. When he came out, he seemed to go straight. Then in about ‘65, his name was linked to a London gang that specialised in heists requiring a bit more thought than simple smash-and-grab. He also developed a reputation for violence.’

‘You seem to be very well acquainted with his record.’

‘Only because...’

‘Morton, I suppose.’

‘Yes sir. He is young but very keen and it is quite a step from the comfortable life as the son of a celebrity, to that of a working constable. If I might venture, he deserves a bit more latitude and a lot more encouragement.’

‘Criticism noted. What I wanted to ask your opinion about, is whether you could see Madison working for someone else. A company for example?’

‘I would say it was possible sir, if the money provided sufficient motive. Are you intimating that Periston paid Madison to steal the Natural History collection?’

‘What makes you think that?’

‘Two reasons sir. You visited London’s largest supplier of gemstones. They asked Scotland Yard for a check on Periston when they were approached to buy some stones on their behalf.’

‘And the second reason.’

‘You have discussed the idea with Morton.’

‘Wilks, why did you never seek promotion?’

‘No need. I am quite content to run things without having the responsibilities.’

‘The question is, how do we flush Periston out when we have been banned from talking to them?’

‘If I may venture, the fact that we have been approached by a well-established dealer in precious stones might provide an opportunity.’

Jennings smiled conspiratorially. ‘A follow-up call. Perhaps a little unusual but something that could be justified if concerns have been reported. Yes, good work.’

‘Thank you sir.’

Wilks once more turned to leave, but Jennings had other ideas.

‘How much leave has Morton booked?’

‘Five days, sir.’

‘Cancel it.’

## Chapter nine

'I am not sure I understand sir. I cannot contact him.

'No Wilks. I mean cancel his leave retrospectively. Since he is clearly working on a relevant case, it would hardly look right if he went on leave in the middle of things.'

'No sir.'

Jennings noted a small smile.

'Then you can book me an appointment with someone at Periston.'

\*\*\*\*

Braden felt a little undignified standing inside a public phone box but there was little choice. Gregory could not risk another visit and the telephone in his room was routed via a switchboard operator. Whilst he was willing to trust the club staff not to listen in, he could not say the same for his colleagues; now that he was in a unique position of not being quite inside or outside of his organisation. One of the drawbacks of working in his particular field was that you could trust no one. Least of all your own side. Machiavelli had got it wrong. He should have said keep your enemies close and your friends closer.

During their last conversation, he had allowed Gregory's answers concerning Medeo, to pass unquestioned. Now he needed to know more. In fact, it was essential. Not that he could ask directly. That would only lead to Gregory having the upper hand and that would never do. He had given the matter some considerable thought and believed he had come up with the perfect solution. Braden just wished Gregory would get a move on. This box was cramped and there was insufficient room for both him and his crutches.

After what seemed like an endless delay, a harsh ring shattered the silence. Braden picked up the receiver hoping that he did not have to press any buttons to respond to the call, not that there appeared to be any in the tall slim, grey box underneath the handset.

'Braden old chap,' Gregory began in his usual annoying way, 'this is highly unusual for you.'

'Can we keep this short? I am in a great deal of pain.'

'Why not. What do you want?'

'Reassurance that you are not resurrecting the Noril'sk experiments.'

'Why would we do that after all the trouble they caused?'

'You have not answered my question.'

'From your interest, I can only assume that the rumours I am hearing concerning an incident in Paar, are true. Although why you would think it was down to us, is beyond me.'

'Then let me elucidate. During our last conversation, I said that we wished to test a new technology. Within a very short period, the only source of the technology suffers a mishap of a similar nature to the one your country experienced just before you closed down your research. I find the idea that this is simply a coincidence, very hard to believe.'

'I understand, but I am not sure I can help.'

This was the point in the conversation that Braden had been waiting for.

'Tell me what happened at Medeo?'

There was no response. Braden stared impatiently at his own reflection within a tiny mirror situated next to a list of emergency contacts and tried to visualise what Gregory's expression might betray at this moment in time.

'Perhaps if I were to relay a story, you could provide an opinion as to its credibility.'

'Perhaps.' Gregory answered with a lack of commitment.

'Sometime prior to a lunatic decision to send samples of a dangerous substance to the world's top universities, a certain government had already established its unusual properties. Typically, there was disagreement between scientific and military interests as to how it could be put to use. One individual took it upon himself to carry out his own investigative programme and the result was that three people vanished from inside a sealed room. This was only uncovered

## Chapter nine

by the discovery of a rather crude attempt to obscure events. How am I doing?’

‘All very believable so far, for a hypothetical story.’

‘Good, then allow me to take it one step further, but I have a small problem in developing this story. There was some sort of explosion or fire which destroyed much of the evidence. Would you suggest that this could have been started deliberately as part of the cover up?’

‘I would think a more coherent idea is that the fire began sometime later when a team went in to investigate. I would also suggest that you add a couple of interesting twists to your tale. Firstly, the fire was caused by a build-up of methane. However, no one was able to establish where it might have come from. The second twist is that it was not just people who vanished but also a small collection of animals and plants as well as a number of rock samples that contained the element carbon. However, you might wish to discuss that with someone who has knowledge of chemistry.’

‘Thank you Gregory, I will do that. Just one final point, how would you cast this tale?’

‘I am not sure I understand what you mean.’

‘Then let me put it more succinctly. We have three people. Are they men or women, young or old?’

The phone once more went silent.

‘Gregory. Are you still there?’

‘Why would you want to know?’

‘Humour me.’

‘In which case, why would I want to do that?’

‘Is there a reason why you should not take a view?’

‘Braden, we have known each other for more than thirty years; of course, there is a reason. However, just for the sake of argument, two men and one woman, all in their thirties. One is Asian and all have no family and no friends to speak of.’

As Braden shuffled his way out of the phone box and into the warm night air, it was not his current difficulties, but a distant memory that occupied his thoughts. A young officer on

his first command who had been tasked with disabling unexploded bombs. There was something about a long past incident which seemed to have a very clear connection to current events. As thoughts turned to a bottle of port sitting on a Morris room table, he quietly cursed his doctor.

\*\*\*\*

‘Ah, Robert! Good of you to spare me the time.’ Said Gilpatrick in a sour tone.

Jennings responded with a withering look whilst he decided whether it was worth trying to explain that he had had to go halfway across London at short notice, simply to confirm his name and job, to a judge in a very unimportant case.

‘Sorry to be late sir. I take it there has been some development.’

‘Indeed, there has. Yesterday afternoon a man called Joe Mann was arrested in Brighton.’

‘Joe Mann.’ Jennings gave a low whistle of surprise. ‘How did that happen? I thought he was in deep hiding after his spat with Madison.’

‘He came back to England to bury his mother. Whilst I would not wish to sound callous, her death has yielded a nice dividend.’

‘He is talking?’

‘According to the Brighton lot, he has not stopped and he has been particularly forthcoming about Madison’s plans. It seems as though your suspicions have been confirmed. Madison has diversified, but there could be a rather awkward angle.’

‘And what is that?’

‘First things first Robert, it appears that Madison has a number of planned forays and is simply waiting for things to quieten down. He also confirmed that Madison has a new partner and that they are none too happy that he bungled the Natural History job. Probably bit off more than he could



## Chapter nine

comfortably chew.’

‘So, the Hatton Garden raid was the diversion.’

‘Precisely. They may have carried off more than one million pounds’ worth of gems, but that was simply their fee. The real target was the museum collection.’

‘Did he say anything about who recruited them?’

‘Unfortunately not. Just that Madison was very pleased with himself over his new found friends and I’m afraid that he was not able to cast any light on Price. That relationship was kept under very close wraps.’

‘A pity but not surprising. I suppose that a second try at the collection is a high priority on their list.’

‘Right at the top. Now you had some idea about a connection to Periston?’

‘Yes. I appreciate they are off limits but their requirements fit the bill as a potential customer and they have the money and networks to negotiate such a deal.’

‘Hmm!’ Gilpatrick mused. ‘I suppose that does make sense. Even so, Periston? It’s not as if they are some back-street outfit.’

‘No sir.’ Jennings responded whilst trying to work out whether he was about to be given official sanction for his investigation. ‘Still, I think it might be worth having a chat with them and I have a possible answer to any sensitivities. Their recent interest in acquiring precious stones requires a formal police check. I thought it might prove appropriate to deal with it myself, given their prominence.’

‘I do believe you are right but for heaven’s sake Robert, do try and be tactful.’

‘When I have ever lacked tact?’

Gilpatrick responded with a look of scepticism.

‘You mentioned some awkward angle.’

‘Yes I did and it’s a damned inconvenient one. One of the names Mann dropped into the conversation was Barry Neville-Jones. Seems he and Madison met on several occasions and a number of those were at Madison’s home.’

‘Which implies that the Home Office funny boys are using Madison?’

‘As I said Robert, please be tactful.’

\*\*\*\*

Taylor stepped out of the lift and looked carefully around the five-star hotel lobby. Given the security measures the local police had implemented, he was not expecting to see any press, but it was a risk even in this country. The urgent message he had received from his manager Jim Clarke, signalled a potential end to five years’ worth of effort to save his company.

The room he was looking for was on the far side of the lobby and as he made his way towards it, Taylor was confronted with the full reality of the South African Apartheid system. This was an African nation and yet only one race was permitted inside the hotel. Hardly surprising since he had seen several signs stating that it was reserved for whites only.

The short walk to the conference suite felt like an eternity and it was with a sense of considerable relief that he closed the doors behind him. The others had yet to arrive and this provided precious moments to put his thoughts in order. Even though he had read a number of detailed reports, Taylor could not quite believe what was in them. However, it would be confirmed one way or another in just a few minutes.

The face of his father unexpectedly came to the fore. The initial look of anger when he discovered that he was being replaced was followed swiftly by one of sympathy. ‘One day this could happen to you.’ He had warned. Naturally, to a young man who firmly believed in his own immortality, such a prospect seemed ridiculous. Now he was wondering whether that day had arrived.

The door opened and two people entered. One he knew well and the other was in the light brown uniform of the police. Taylor’s mouth abruptly felt very dry and he reached for a flask of water to pour himself a drink.

## Chapter nine

‘Edward, this is Inspector de Klerk. He has been of immense help in relation to certain matters.’

‘Thank you,’ Taylor held out his hand to de Klerk, ‘and I am very grateful for your contribution. Perhaps we can all be seated and Jim, you can provide us with an overview of what happened?’

‘Yes of course. Four days ago, the night shift signed in and began work at 8.00pm.’

‘How many are in the night shift?’ Taylor asked.

‘Nineteen. Five at the workface, eight in the processing area and the rest were split between various support activities. Just after midnight, there was an explosion of sorts at the mine-head.’

‘Jim, I do not understand what you mean. Either there was an explosion or there wasn’t.’

‘The plain truth is that we just don’t know. There was some very localised damage in the area where they were working. The rock has become,’ he paused for a moment whilst he struggled to find the right words, ‘like a dried honeycomb. Crumbly and fragile and so far, we have been unable to determine the cause. We have ruled out sabotage but not gas, although all the safety systems registered nothing. When topside security went in to investigate, they were attacked by all those who had been underground at the time. This type of spontaneous violence has been getting more common and the cause has got us baffled.’

‘What about the five people at the mine-head?’

Jim shrugged his shoulders by way of response. ‘I have nothing to add to my reports. There is no sign of them. No bodies, no body parts. They have quite literally disappeared.’

‘Could they have escaped and gone back home?’

‘For a while, there was utter pandemonium and it could be possible for them to have left during that time. The main problem is that security is adamant that no one left the mine prior to evacuation and I have personally scrutinized all the videotapes. I am afraid that my conclusion is that whatever

caused the damage to the rock face, also totally destroyed the bodies of five people. Edward, unless we sort this, we will have no choice but to close the mine. If nothing else, we are running out of people willing to work for us.'

'Mr Taylor.' de Klerk began in his strong Afrikaans accent. 'I have made enquiries and as far as I can be sure, I don't believe they have returned home. The townships are like rabbit warrens and if I enquire too closely, there are certain trouble-makers who would be willing to making capital. Whilst I have no interest in your business affairs, I am responsible for keeping the peace as well as investigating a death. I have the Peiterson's family on my back wanting to know when we will start searching for him.'

'Has a search not been instigated already?' Taylor responded in a shocked tone. 'I would have thought that was the first thing to be done.'

'de Klerk put out a story that Peiterson left the mine as usual at 8.00am.'

Taylor turned to face Jim with a look of alarm. 'Why was that?'

'Because I asked him to. Edward, I don't think you quite understand the situation. We are weeks behind schedule and the banks are beginning to ask questions about whether we have everything under control. The authorities are also asking about when they will receive payment. We cannot afford for the truth to get out.'

'And what is the truth?' Taylor asked as he tried to prepare for bad news.

'Something has gone very wrong with the process. We know that raw metassonite is unstable. We know it can be toxic when exposed to the open air. That is why we spent months designing and building systems that were supposed to prevent this kind of thing happening. But for some reason, they are no longer working. It's almost as if it is finding ways around our control measures.'

'Which means that we have a plumbing job to do?'

## Chapter nine

‘No, it’s more serious than that. The material seems to be developing a life of its own.’

‘And what do you mean by that?’ Taylor responded with caution.

‘I mean that we are getting discrepancies in the volumes of material. As you know, it is essential that the mix uses exact amounts otherwise the ceramic becomes fragile. We track the volume of metassonite throughout the production process. After a while the quantities increase. God knows how. Then, after the final product has cooled down, the level returns to normal.’

‘Gentlemen, I am sure this is all very important to you but I still have a death to investigate. I also have to account for my actions to my superiors. How do you propose we sort this out?’

de Klerk looked directly at Taylor, clearly expecting him to provide answers. It was not an unreasonable expectation, but the plain fact was that he had no answers to give.

‘Have you told the other families the same story?’

‘What other families?’ de Klerk asked before a smile of realisation crossed his face. ‘You don’t mean the blacks, do you?’

‘There are five people missing and five opportunities for the story to get out.’

‘Yes.’ de Klerk responded with contempt. ‘You do not know our country, do you? They have their areas and we have ours. They cannot travel without permission and so have no opportunity to complain, I don’t think you need to be concerned about them.’

‘I am sorry, but regardless of anything else, I cannot simply dismiss the fact that they were my employees. I have some responsibility to their families.’

‘No Mr Taylor, you do not.’ de Klerk replied angrily. ‘As I said a few moments ago, there are political hotheads who would be only too pleased to take advantage of this situation to make trouble. The only person we need to be concerned with is Peiterson.’

'Because he is white?' Taylor replied coldly.

'Mr Taylor. I have no interest in your political views, but as a matter of record, you have been happy to base your company here. Take advantage of some very generous state investment and hope to make a healthy profit no doubt.'

'He is right Edward.' Added Jim. 'It's not just the plant here which could go under, but your company back home.'

This unexpected reminder that over two hundred years of history was under threat forced Taylor to realise that he had only one area of interest.

'Then it is primarily a question of buying time until we can find a solution.'

'That's about the size of it.' Jim replied gloomily. 'Although given our current reputation I am not sure how much time we can buy.'

'Then let us make use of that fact. We have been experiencing trouble at the mine for weeks and as you say, it has a bit of a reputation with the local township. The mine is in a white farming area. Do these farmers have the same concerns as the townships?'

'Just about,' answered Jim, 'a couple of our overseers are local.'

'And how much do the others in the night shift know about what really happened.'

Jim shook his head. 'Nothing, I guess. As usual, they woke up after an hour or so with sore heads and little memory.'

'That might play to our advantage. Mr de Klerk, could you launch an investigation into a possible kidnapping. I assume that Peiterson handled the black workers in the usual manner.'

'I don't like your tone,' de Klerk replied with unhidden contempt, 'but I do like your idea. Yes, after the riots last month, there were a number of threats from the ANC. No one would question the assumption that Peiterson could have been taken by ANC infiltrators.'

'I am glad you like it. I will leave it to you both to sort out the details. Now, I would like to have a business chat with Jim

## Chapter nine

and I am sure you will better things to do Mr de Klerk.'

Taylor waited for de Klerk to leave the room before he rounded angrily on his employee.

'How long have we been paying him off?'

'Edward, there is no point in having a go at me. It's just the way things are done here.'

'Yes, well I suppose after what I have just done, I cannot take the moral high road. What the hell are we going to do?'

'To be candid Edward, I don't think we have much of a choice but to close down operations. We simply cannot produce enough of the new caragillium ceramic to make a profit.'

'If we close down, I will lose my company. That is not an option. How much metassonite do we have?'

'Enough for two days' production of caragillium.'

Taylor shook his head sadly. 'Not as much as I hoped. Still, it will give me a bit of time. Jim, I want that mine working. Just focus on processing for the moment. And keep your bloody fingers crossed that nothing else goes wrong.'

It was with mixed feelings that Taylor made his way to the bar. There was some comfort to be drawn from the fact that there was little chance the press had got hold of the story. But on the other hand, he was facing the imminent collapse of his business. Five years' hard work to turn around a failing pottery and now that he was on the brink of launching a high-tech revolution, it all seemed to be slipping away. As he ordered himself a whisky and soda, Taylor's thoughts raced to work out a solution. Metassonite could induce mild psychotic episodes when it was being processed. That much they had known since the original tests. But they had identified a solution. Process the stuff whilst inside the mine and there were no side effects. No one was sure why, but it had worked for months. It was only when they began full production that the problems resumed. A few knock-down fights seemed a small price to pay to produce a material that could make metal obsolete. However, recent weeks had seen the situation become far more dangerous. Now

people had disappeared, and it looked very likely that the banks would pull the plug if the facts became known. Taylor took a large swig of his drink.

‘You look like you needed that old boy.’

Taylor closed his eyes with a sense of the inevitable.

‘Sir Clive. I had no idea you were here.’

‘Evidently. May I buy you another and then perhaps we could have a private chat.’

Taylor nodded and followed Sir Clive to a small secluded table in the far corner of a near empty bar. It was not that he wanted to talk with Sir Clive. In fact, he was just about the last person he wished to be with at this moment, but he was also the last person he needed to upset.

‘Still having trouble ‘t mill?’ Sir Clive smiled coldly.

Taylor was careful to take a small and deliberate sip of his drink. This was not a time to show vulnerability.

‘The process is sound, but this country is not the best place to carry out delicate and methodical work.’

‘I do sympathise old boy. Very awkward this law which designates that you can only hire people who have a pass to work in a white area. Of course, what makes it worse is that they are not allowed to have any skills that could threaten white employment. But, given the unstable nature of metassonite, I doubt any other country would have allowed you to experiment on the substance in the first place. Yes, it must be very frustrating, particularly as a solution is being handed to you on a plate.’

Taylor gave Sir Clive a puzzled look.

‘People like me survive on our wits. More often than not, we have to be flexible with the facts. But I am going to offer you a unique opportunity. For the next couple of minutes, I will only tell you the unvarnished truth.’

‘What is it that you want?’ Taylor asked with suspicion.

‘The same as I have wanted for some time. Specifically, for you to meet someone who can help you. Now, I am quite aware that you do not particularly like me. I have no problem with



## Chapter nine

that. You take a sensible, level headed position that I am a necessary burden. Likewise, I have to work with people that I would not choose to associate with. I am afraid that is just the nature of good business. Take this country as an example. It has a serious social and political problem of its own making and seems to have failed to learn the historical lesson of the consequences of isolation. I would not choose to invest here in the current atmosphere but withdrawing at this stage would result in heavy penalties. I therefore, have to make the best of things. Last month saw more than seven hundred people killed during the student riots. The Vorster government is shitting themselves over the fact that the black population might become sufficiently organised to present a real threat. However, they cannot afford to ignore international opinion and going into the townships, guns blazing, is not an option. What they need is an excuse and you could engineer that excuse.'

'And what is in it for you?'

'Money and power old boy, what else is there? However, the question you should have asked is what is in it for you. The answer is the same of course, plus the added bonus of enabling you to pay off all your debts and be rid of people like me. The truth is that you are facing ruin. You cannot fulfil your contracts and when the news becomes public, which it will, your investors, including me, will require immediate payment. But this scenario need not happen. You have a very valuable asset, which if put to good use, would not only generate a substantial income but could also pay more immediate dividends. A grateful government could be very sympathetic to your manpower needs.'

Taylor stared into his glass as he listened. The plain and inescapable truth was that Sir Clive was right. He had turned around a failing company because he had been prepared to make painful decisions and this was no different. He would have preferred another course but now there was only one option left.

'When would you like to have a meeting?'

Sir Clive smiled. 'That's the spirit old boy and there is no time like the present.'

He glanced towards a man sitting at a nearby table reading a newspaper. The stranger was a small man in his mid-sixties, dressed in an expensive three piece suit. He sported a goatee beard that curiously reminded him of a character from a children's television programme he had seen a few times whilst babysitting his nephew. The man sat down and gave him a searching look which he found deeply uncomfortable.

'Are you not going to introduce us?' Taylor directed his question at Sir Clive, but it was the small man who answered.

'I prefer that we do not use names.' He had an unexpectedly deep voice for a man of his stature. 'Keeps things nice and simple. Just to put you at ease, I have not been told your name either.'

'I do not like doing business with unnamed people.'

'That is perfectly all right as we will not be doing business. I am simply here to assess whether you have something to offer.'

'I see.'

'No, I genuinely don't think you do.' The small man paused and gave Taylor another long searching look. 'Allow me to explain. South Africa has a population of over twenty-four million but less than ten per cent of that number is white. Many would have you believe that Apartheid is just a forerunner to a Nazi style persecution, but that is ridiculous. Without the blacks, this country would collapse. But at the same time, we must protect our way of life and our culture. There are more than twenty of them for everyone one of us and it is us that have built this country and built it on Boar blood. Apartheid is a social experiment that entails the creation of completely separate cultures living side by side. I am not going to try to convince you that the system is working as it should. Unfortunately, politicians have a tendency to pander to those with the loudest voice. In this case, those voices are driven by fear of the fact that they are in a substantial minority in a far

## Chapter nine

off land from their ancestors. We cannot return because our culture is too different. That means we have to make the best of things as they are. Regrettably, we have screwed up badly. What should have been an opportunity to create genuinely separate and harmonious ways of life within the borders of a single country, has been undermined by people thinking with their emotions rather than their heads. Still, it is not too late you know. My grandfather fought you Brits in the Second Boar War and yet Afrikaans and English now work together. Time and common interest make an effective healing ointment for open wounds. However, we have a fly in our ointment. The ANC made extensive capital from the recent unrest. What we need is to calm things down to give us time to put Apartheid back on track and from what I hear, your discovery could help. I would be very interested to hear more.'

Taylor looked at his empty glass and would have dearly liked another but this was not the best time.

'Drink, old boy?'

'Thanks, but I will stick to tea. Metassonite has not been tested on humans. I should make that very clear, but the animal tests indicate that the higher the brain function, the more effective it is. What we have is an undetectable substance that enhances the state of fear. In theory, fear works in tandem with other emotions and principally that of hope. If you give a man a sense of fear and a little hope, he will run away. Equal amounts of fear and hope and he will fight.'

'What happens if you take away hope completely?'

'Then he dies. Without hope, there is nothing to live for.'

'That is all very interesting, but you said it has not been tested on people. How do you know it will work?'

'People are just another species of animal. There is no reason to doubt that a person would react in the same way.'

'Perhaps it might be possible to conduct a test. Not lethal you understand, just something with a volunteer.'

'I am sure that would not present a problem.' Sir Clive stepped in and Taylor returned a look of disgust.

'I have seen some interesting reports in the British press about people going mad.'

'Those had no connection with us.'

'Of course not, just a coincidence then. I appreciate that you are not happy taking your research in this direction; particularly at a time when you are having some difficulties with your preferred line of research. I think my government would also be very interested in assisting you with your other work. From what Sir Clive was saying, it sounds very promising. Can I say we have an accord?'

\*\*\*\*

As the taxi drew up beside the impressive entrance to the Periston building, Jennings mentally reminded himself of the need to be tactful. This was not to be an easy meeting given that the deputy commissioner was taking a keen interest. In fact, that interest was a timely reminder that he was about to enter the realms of a powerful company with important contacts.

Periston had a large complex some miles outside of a Midlands town called Nuneaton. It was not an inspiring place but then neither was the complex. Once through the perimeter gate, they spent almost fifteen minutes driving past the immense dull metal pipes and domes of a chemical processing factory. The building they were heading for, was a little less industrial, but only just. A three storey structure of painted corrugated steel and square warehouse style windows. The interior however, proved a pleasant contrast. Thick carpets, rural watercolours on the walls and a sense that this place was occupied by people rather than units contained within a machine for living, as the modernists would have it.

Jennings was greeted by a pretty, fair haired receptionist who on being told his name, personally showed him to the VIP lift. Moments later he was ushered into the office of Roger Dalton, Periston's CEO.

## Chapter nine

‘Chief inspector,’ a tall, slim, 40s something man began, ‘I hope you had a pleasant journey. May I offer you some tea?’

‘Thank you and yes to both questions.’

‘I gather you are here to discuss our interest in buying precious stones. I would have thought such a task a little beneath someone of your rank.’

Jennings quickly concluded that he was dealing with a man who was used to putting people at ease.

‘True, but then Periston is not a normal company. Outlets in over forty countries. Fifty thousand employees worldwide and a finger in almost every chemical pie including several interests behind the iron curtain.’

‘A very neat summary chief inspector, I might pass that on to our PR people, with your permission. What exactly can I do for you?’

‘You could start by explaining your interest in the diamond market.’

‘I am not aware that we have one.’

‘But you have approached a number of dealers.’

‘Ah, now I see!’ Dalton paused for a moment as another pretty young woman brought in a silver tray containing a tea set of distinctive design. ‘Do help yourself, chief inspector. To answer your question, this is not an investment issue and neither is it about getting around our antiquated export laws. The fact is that we are engaged in work that requires some very special materials.’

‘Including precious stones?’ Jennings queried. ‘Which begs the question of why you were not straightforward in your responses to the dealers? It might have saved you a lot of wasted time.’

‘That it might.’ Dalton agreed. ‘However, there were other considerations. My company has a number of government contracts and some of our work is very sensitive.’

‘Is that why you used your connections during the enquiry into the death of Fellows?’ As the question slipped out of its own accord, the disapproving face of Gilpatrick came to mind.

‘Yes, I agree that was a little embarrassing. I’m afraid the Home Secretary misinterpreted our concerns. We had a particularly complex deadline for the MoD to meet and part of their contract specified that I share any concerns that might endanger meeting those deadlines. At the time, I had no idea it was about that poor family’s death. I simply knew that the police were making enquiries. I suppose that’s politicians for you. Look, I am afraid that you may have had a wasted trip. We are no longer in the market.’

‘If I take that as a confirmation that you are no longer interested in buying diamonds, I’m afraid that that is not entirely relevant. As you mentioned earlier, this country has strict laws governing the export of currency and the international trade in precious materials and diamonds in particular. Periston is a recognised international trader and abruptly develops an interest in diamonds at the same time as exploring new African and Middle East markets.’

Dalton smiled reassuringly. ‘I can see how that might look. Just a moment please.’ He pressed a button on his intercom. ‘Jennifer. Can you ask Simon to meet me in the test area in about five minutes? Just a short drive chief inspector and I will show you why we were interested in acquiring certain gems.’

‘Thank you. In the meantime, could you tell me why you are no longer interested?’

‘Yes, indeed. As you say, we are a fully recognised international trader but that does not mean that the DTI makes things easy for us. We were simply hoping to avoid a rather tedious process. In the end, that proved impossible and so we reverted back to the usual route. Now, why don’t we make our way to the projects building. Simon is one of our scientists and they are not known for their patience.’

The journey took about ten minutes but proved to be an enjoyable one as they used Dalton’s Rolls Royce. Outside it was close to ninety degrees but inside the car, it was cool and pleasant. In addition, he had the opportunity to confirm something that he had always regarded simply a PR claim. The

## Chapter nine

loudest noise he could hear whilst driving, was indeed the ticking of the clock.

Once they reached their destination, Jennings was led through a maze of corridors and as their journey progressed, each one became more functional in appearance until concrete replaced tiles and the lighting came from simple bulbs hanging from a long cable. He had a vague impression of descending below ground level, although there were no windows. After a further five minutes, Jennings was ushered through a door into a room that bore a striking resemblance to the television pictures of the Apollo moon flight control room, only this one was substantially smaller. Just in front of the door was a bank of television screens fixed into a cupboard affair. Below the screens were rows of switches and what looked like flat typewriters. On the far side of the room was a large screen but it was a device in the centre of the room that most intrigued him. Fixed to the ceiling was a mechanism that looked like a miniature version of the radio telescope at Jodrell Bank.

‘Ah Simon, this is Chief Inspector Jennings of Scotland Yard no less.’

‘So, they have finally caught up with you, have they? Do they allow food parcels in prison these days? I gather the cooking is terrible.’

It was evident that these two were old friends and Jennings was not sure that was helpful.

‘Thank you Simon, but I do not think this is the right time for your jokes. Simon is our head of innovation. The chief inspector is here to ask about our interest in precious stones for project Doctor X.’

‘May I ask, what is project Doctor X?’

‘Do you have children?’ Dalton replied with a self-satisfied smile that Jennings did not like one bit.

‘Yes, three.’

‘And how old are they?’

‘Sarah is twelve, Michael ten and David is three.’

‘Then you may be familiar with children’s programmes such

as Star Trek and Doctor Who.'

'Yes indeed. Michael is an avid fan of Tom Baker.' Jennings answered whilst wondering where the questions were leading.

'A popular theme of science fiction for many years has been the laser. That is Light Amplification by the Stimulated Emission of Radiation. Apart from saving the Earth from marauding aliens, it has a few practical uses in certain industries where accurate measurements are important. However, light is not the only part of the spectrum that can be stimulated in such a fashion. We are currently working on the development of something called masers. Simon, perhaps you could take over from here but do try and talk in a language that we mortals can understand.'

'Humans are receptive to three parts of the electromagnetic spectrum. Heat, sound and most importantly light. However, our receptive range is quite narrow. Many species, insects in particular, can see types of light that we cannot, ultraviolet for example. We can of course, use technology to extend our range. X-rays allow us to see through flesh and other materials. Masers use something called microwaves. They are little used although I understand that some industrial kitchens have ovens powered by microwaves to heat things. A more constructive function is that they can be focused and used to generate huge amounts of heat in a small area. This can be very useful when fusing molecules to form new polymers or ceramics. The energy is very, very expensive to produce but has the advantage that a plastic which could take hours or even days to cook in a conventional way, can take just minutes or even seconds using microwaves. We can even produce entirely new materials.'

'Whilst we were developing the technology,' Dalton interrupted, 'we happened quite by accident on another property. Perhaps a demonstration.'

Dalton directed everyone's attention to the large screen on the far wall. Jennings had assumed that it was a screen because of its dull grey-brown appearance but as he approached, he could see that it was actually a glass tank filled with fine soil.



## Chapter nine

'You will need to come to this side of the console.' Dalton warned. 'I do not want to be responsible for returning a par-boiled chief inspector to the Yard.'

Jennings stood behind the two men as Simon began to operate the controls. He heard a gentle hum as though something had been switched on. This gradually built in intensity until the sound became uncomfortable. Then a new sound commenced and one with which he was familiar. The sharp clicking noise made by an electric golf ball typewriter. Then the noise stopped. Simon tore off a strip of paper and gave it to him. It looked like nothing more than a series of 'x's of different sizes but as he studied them closer, he thought he could discern a rough shape.

'It is very crude at the moment, but we are hoping shortly to achieve a picture on a television screen. What you are looking at is an image of a cup that is buried in concrete inside a tank filled with wet river silt.'

Jennings looked at the series of 'x's once more and they did seem to form a rough rectangular shape.

'This is quite amazing,' Jennings admitted, 'and is this why you were looking for diamonds?'

'And other high quality gems, yes. We wanted to test the effectiveness of different materials. They are used as part of the imaging circuits. It must be obvious that once properly developed, this technology could prove immensely useful to all sorts of industries from mining to locating buried landmines.'

'I am curious as to why a company, which specialises in chemical production should involve itself in this kind of research?'

As Jennings completed the question, he thought for one moment that he detected a look of uncertainty on the usually, self-confident faces of Dalton and Simon.

'As I said earlier, it was more serendipity than anything else. Our main interest was indeed in its application to chemical processing.'

'This was the research you were concerned about when you

were working with the MoD?’

‘I am not sure I should answer that question but, yes and as you can see, it is all very advanced and very sensitive.’

‘I can see that but what I cannot see is how this links to Fellows.’

This time Jennings was convinced from their vain efforts to hide expressions of uncertainty, that he had struck a tender point.

‘Mr Jennings, I have tried to cooperate as much as I can but we are working for the government.’

‘I appreciate that but I am not sure they would appreciate the fact that you tried to circumvent the law to meet one of their deadlines.’

‘Ah, there you have me. The truth is that our research began with a very unhappy incident. Nothing to do with the deaths of the Fellows family, I assure you, but it was sufficiently embarrassing for us to mention our concerns about your enquiries to our clients. As we did not know what they were about, I rather assumed that someone had complained.’

The problem we faced is that this kind of technology consumes an enormous amount of power. Far too much to make it economically viable. There is one substance which for a while, we thought might provide a solution but it only brought another set of problems. One of those is that it requires very high quality gems for its focusing mechanism.’

‘Would that substance be called metassonite?’

Dalton betrayed his obvious surprise. ‘You are very well informed.’

‘That is my job. Another fact I am also aware of, is that your interest in metassonite was connected to animal feeds.’

‘Indeed it was for a while, but Taylor has produced a quite remarkable material.’

‘Was he aware of your other work?’

‘Actually no.’ Dalton admitted. ‘As I said, we are engaged in some very secret government work and since we had invested a very large sum, I saw no reason why we should not try to

## Chapter nine

recoup that cost.'

'You mentioned an unfortunate incident. Can you explain what that was?'

'It is something I prefer not to talk about. I can assure you it has no relevance.'

'I think that is for me to determine.' Jennings answered firmly.

Once more Dalton's face betrayed uncertainty. 'Our original research with metassonite was, as you said, in a quite different field. One of our main sources of income comes from concentrates used to supplement animal feed. Metassonite appeared to stimulate cells in such a way as to allow greater absorption of nutrients and so promote growth. However, after the initial trials, it was found that there were some physical side effects and so we abandoned that line of research.'

'Mr Dalton, just to get this clear in my head. You assumed that because this metassonite was used in both the animal feed experiments and your current research, my enquiries might have stopped you meeting the MoD deadline?'

'That is about the size of it and let me apologise, but as I said, our hands were tied.'

The door to the lab opened and the young woman who had brought the tea walked in. She smiled sweetly at Jennings before approaching her employer and murmured something confidential.

'Yes, of course.' Dalton looked a little flustered. 'I'm afraid I must apologise once more. I had quite forgotten that we are expecting a trade delegation.'

'Not a problem.' Jennings replied with a smile of his own. 'I have all the information I need. Thank you. You have been most helpful.'

'Jennifer. Could you kindly escort the chief inspector back to the main building? Do take my car, I will return in the minibus.'

'Thank you, that is most kind.' Jennings was just about to allow himself to be led out of the room when he turned back

towards Dalton. 'Just one final question, you mentioned some physical side effects, but you are still using metassonite. I assume you managed to resolve them.'

'It only affects animals when it is consumed over a period of time.'

'What sort of effects were they?'

'Nothing of any consequence. The animals became... agitated. Not what a farmer needs. They like to have happy pigs before they kill them.'

As soon as they were alone Simon and Dalton heaved a sigh of relief.

'That girl is damned smart. She warned me you know.'

'About what the chief inspector was really here for, yes I rather hoped she would. The problem is, did he buy it?'

'I don't see why not. It all sounded quite credible, even to me and I knew I was talking rubbish.'

'I do wonder though.' Dalton replied thoughtfully.

'About what?'

'The connection he made to Fellows was just a little too close to the truth for my liking.'

'But not surprising since he was here to find out more about the shipments of metassonite. They obviously suspect a connection. Which begs the question, what do we do about it? Will you go back to the Home Office?'

'No, I think not as it clearly didn't work. This needs an altogether more subtle approach.'

'By the way, I am going to need more diamonds.'

'What, already!' Dalton looked concerned. 'You only had a delivery a few days ago.'

'I know but the deterioration is speeding up. Who would have thought it, diamonds crumbling like dust?'

'Well, that is what we are being paid for.' Dalton replied. 'To find out why.'

\*\*\*\*

## Chapter nine

Caruthers parked his car and looked thoughtfully at the entrance to the 1950s university building. It had clearly seen better days as had the grass quadrant which had turned a dull brown after so long without rain.

Following his talk with Mrs Stewart, Caruthers contacted the Humbolt University who proved very uncooperative. He therefore decided to call in a favour which he hoped might fill in some of the gaps. Caruthers was confident that there was a connection between the Russians and the recent spate of deaths. They certainly seemed to follow a familiar pattern of normal, sane people unexpectedly indulging in extreme violence. But what was missing was hard evidence. Apart from the tenuous connection to both Periston and Taylor and Hardy, there was no proof that Fellows, Brown and Sykes could have come into contact with the meteorite. In fact, it was even highly unlikely. What he needed was to talk to someone who had actually been involved with what happened in 1973, and then he recollected a family connection. His father had been at Cambridge with a man called Jarvis Edwards who was now a director at Southampton University. A few years ago, there had been some minor indiscretions with money and as a favour to his dad, he killed the story.

Caruthers got out of the car and began to cross the green. The place was largely empty as it was the summer holidays, but there were always one or two students around. As he approached the halfway point, a vaguely familiar outline emerged from the building in front of him and a moment later he could see that it was Jarvis.

'You must be Charles's boy. You look just like him when he was your age.' Jarvis cut a distinguished looking figure but there was a hardness about the eyes and mouth.

'Thank you for agreeing to see me.'

'I am quite aware of the debt I owe you. Nevertheless, I would not be seeing you now unless you were the son of one of my oldest friends. I had hoped all that wretched business was behind us. How is he by the way?'

‘Coping well enough considering.’

‘Yes, I heard he had a stroke. I keep meaning to write but you know how it is. Please do pass on my best wishes. Now what it is you want?’

‘To ask you some questions concerning Dr Phillip Meredith.’

‘I suppose one should not speak ill of the dead but engaging him was not one of my better decisions. Shall we walk to the car park? I have to visit another part of town.’

I knew that it was a bad idea to get involved with the Russians from the start but he would not listen to me. He was too concerned with building the reputation of his department and protecting it from potential budget cuts.’

‘What exactly was the deal with that? After all, the Russians are not known for favouring open-door policies.’

‘Political point scoring I should think. The SALT disarmament talks were in difficulties and this was a PR exercise to curry favour with the non-aligned countries. The US was also on the cusp of abandoning its moon programme and the Soviets were building a good lead in space research. I guess they thought that sending out samples of a meteorite was a good way of emphasising the point that they, rather than the Americans were at the forefront of space research. Then it all backfired when it was discovered that the samples were contaminated with deadly fungal spores. All bunkum if you ask me.’

‘Why do you say that?’ Caruthers asked eagerly sensing a story.

‘The particular species of spore identified as the culprit is a common one to anywhere where you have damp, enclosed conditions. It can be found in the cellars of Venice, Leningrad, even in Birmingham canalside buildings. However, it is quite a fragile species that cannot survive for long outside of its normal habitat. Besides which, I had all the samples tested and there was no contamination. About the most toxic thing we found was some e-coli. Probably due to one of the students not

## Chapter nine

washing their hands after they had been to the toilet.'

'What about the other places. Would they have not found the same?'

'Quite probably and if your next point concerns why this didn't emerge during the investigation; the answer is that it was in nobody's interest. The story about the fungal spore suited everyone as it could be put down to an accident.'

'Yes, I can see that.' Caruthers answered vaguely. 'Have you heard of a company called Cambridge Electronics?'

'I have. They were Professor Meredith's sponsors and were particularly interested in his unusual ideas.'

'Such as?'

'That life on Earth came from outer space. Ridiculous really. Life requires stable conditions. It cannot survive in a vacuum, bombarded by radiation. Still, his theories attracted the attention of some important investors. I will give him that. Particularly after he published papers on some of the more practical aspects of his work, such as masers.'

'Masers?' Caruthers interrupted.

'It's all connected with generating substantial quantities of heat for industrial systems. One of those investors was Cambridge Electronics and it was through their sponsorship that he obtained a sample of the meteorite.'

'Are you still in touch with them?'

'Lord no! They pulled out very quickly after Meredith died, although they did leave one man behind. He used an office here on a part time basis but I have not seen him for a couple of months.'

'Pity.' Caruthers lapsed momentarily into thought whilst he tried to work out how to phrase his next question. 'Jarvis, is there any possibility that someone might still have access to a sample of that meteorite?'

'You mean governments?'

'No, I was thinking more like a private company.'

'Not a chance. We actually had the army here to ensure that all samples were collected and safely escorted to where ever

they took them. You have to think of the times we were in. Anything that might threaten world stability is treated with the utmost seriousness, and there were a lot of idiots who were prepared to use what happened to make political capital, irrespective of the consequences.'

'Then there is absolutely no chance that experimentation could still be going on?'

'I suppose that it might be possible at somewhere like Porton Down. Why do you ask?'

'No specific reason,' Caruthers lied, 'just some mad speculation which I have been asked to look into.'

'If I were you, I would consign it to the wastepaper basket, which is exactly where that whole sorry incident should have been consigned to in the first place. Even if there was something unusual about that meteorite, it is all safely under lock and key.'

As they approached the end of the green, Caruthers could also sense the end of a promising story. Irrespective of whether Jarvis was right about the nature of the meteorite, the fact that it became the centre of a political storm made it very unlikely that it had any connection to the current deaths of Fellows and the others.

'There was a scientific paper published a couple of years ago about a mineral deposit found in some mine. Can't recall where. I do recollect some speculation that it might have been from the fallout of a large meteorite. The only reason why it came to mind was that some hotheads jumped on to the bandwagon by claiming it was linked to the Noril'sk meteorite. The physics department was still interested in that sort of thing and got the author to send some supporting evidence. But as I said, it was all a lot of nonsense and I soon put a stop to it.'

'Do you know who the author was?'

'Not in the slightest but if you pop along to the library, they will be able to find it for you. Just tell them I sent you.'

Caruthers started to make his way towards his car when he heard Jarvis call out to him.



## Chapter nine

‘Actually, don’t bother. I have just remembered; we had a break-in a couple of months ago by some damned vandals. They didn’t steal anything. Just trashed the place set a wastepaper basket alight. All very pointless really but then I suppose that’s what happens when you don’t have a good education.’

‘I suppose the paper I wanted was one of those destroyed.’

‘I’m afraid so. I said to the police at the time that I thought it was a bit odd.’

## Chapter ten

Gilpatrick poured a small sherry into a chipped crystal glass and handed it to Jennings who took a reluctant sip. Whilst he had no liking for the drink, Jennings smiled at the thought that Gilpatrick must be the only senior police officer to maintain the old ways and it was a comforting thought. When he joined the force in the 1950s, an invitation to a glass of sherry was strictly reserved for VIPs and fellow senior officers. Other ranks might take part if they had gone beyond the call of duty and for example, saved the life of a member of the royal family, the Prime Minister or commissioner himself.

This particular invitation was to mark an announcement that Gilpatrick intended to retire and specifically that he was looking to Jennings to provide something a little bit special to mark the end of a long career. The arrest of the Madison gang would fit the bill very well. Jennings had known Gilpatrick for a long time and the fact that they sometimes forgot protocol and slipped into using first names illustrated a solid friendship. As a friend, Jennings was eager to help, nevertheless he was a little annoyed that Gilpatrick had given the deputy commissioner the impression that it was a foregone conclusion.

‘What are you going to do with yourself?’ Jennings asked as he wondered whether Gilpatrick might be upset if he asked for a cup of tea, or even a glass of water to take the taste away.

‘Bought an old mill. You should know I have been talking for months about those blasted estate agents.’

Jennings racked his memory, but for the life of him, he could not recall Gilpatrick mentioning anything about a mill.

‘Yes, I remember. It was in...’

## Chapter ten

‘Dorset yes. Little village called Stour Provost. Thought I might do it up myself, with a little help from a friendly builder to do the actual work. It has a large garden for Elizabeth and a nice stretch of river for a bit of fishing. Most important of all there is a handy little pub at the top of the hill. It’s a bit of a steep climb, but downhill all the way at the end of a few pints. Now, where have you got to Robert?’ Gilpatrick sipped his drink whilst looking insufferably smug.

Jennings felt a sudden temptation to report that Madison had skipped the country along with his entire gang, after successfully stealing the crown jewels, just to see that smile disappear.

‘I have been giving the subject a great deal of thought and I think we need someone on the inside. We know they will be looking to replace Robson.’

‘Do you have anyone one in mind?’

‘Not specifically. It would have to be someone with a lot of street experience but completely unknown in the London area. There is one possible candidate from Birmingham. He did a nice job with the Jellico lot.’

‘That seems sensible.’ Gilpatrick mused.

‘It is pure guesswork at this stage, but if I was Madison, I would use the Notting Hill Carnival at the end of the month as a cover. It will pull in police from all over London.’

‘Again, that would seem sensible, but I wonder whether he might try and do it later rather than sooner. The stones would be far easier to take in transit once the exhibition is over.’

‘Yes they would, but I should imagine that he is smarting from a pretty well publicised failure and will want to recover his reputation. There are quite a number of rivals who will be eager to move in. That is another reason why I want to get someone on the inside. Not only will we receive advanced warning of the date, but he can also be used to feed information to Madison to make him nervous and hopefully susceptible to our needs.’

‘That’s good thinking.’ Gilpatrick’s eyes seemed to glaze

over with anticipation. 'Would you like another sherry?'

'No thank you.' Jennings held his hand over his still full glass. 'Have to keep a clear head.'

'Yes of course. What sort of information were you thinking of?'

'That would depend on how things play out. But I was also thinking that we might step up the pressure on his other activities whilst easing up on his rivals.'

Now Gilpatrick began to look uncertain. 'Have to say, I am not so sure about that aspect of your plan, Robert. Hang it all, we have a duty to protect the public.'

'I was thinking more about using our contacts to put out the message that we are gunning for Madison because we think he is vulnerable. At the same time as stepping up the checks on his pubs and clubs, we can make it appear that we are diverting resources from the others. Nothing to indicate that we are turning a blind eye, but just enough to make life uncomfortable for Madison.'

'Well, I suppose that makes a difference. What about young Morton. He seems to have done a good job so far.'

'At the moment, I have got him digging for dirt on Price. Thought it wouldn't hurt to ramp up the pressure on him as well. Madison is known for his loyalty but he has limits. With a bit of luck, something might come of it.'

'Whilst we are on the subject of luck, have you given any thought to your career? It is not often that a senior rank becomes available.'

'At the risk of stepping into your still warm shoes, which is not a cheering idea, I would be lying if I said that the idea had not crossed my mind.'

'Then you give it some serious consideration. I have to warn you that you are not at the top of the deputy commissioner's list, but then neither was I. And it wouldn't hurt to play by the rules for a while. If you can pull this gang in, I think the commissioner would find it hard not to offer you the job.'

Jennings stood up and made his way towards the door.

## Chapter ten

‘Just a minute, you haven’t finished your sherry.’

‘Drinking whilst on duty,’ Jennings smiled mischievously, ‘now, how would that look on the record of a chief superintendent.’

‘Yes, I suppose you are right.’ Gilpatrick acknowledged as he decanted the remaining sherry into his own glass. Then a thought occurred. ‘Here, just a moment!’

\*\*\*\*

‘It must be five years at least since I last took part in a surveillance.’ Said Jennings, as he stared at a battered red door set into an otherwise plain brick wall. ‘How long have you been following Madison?’

‘Started just after his last job.’

The response came from a thickset, fair haired man who was sitting in the driver’s seat of a black taxi cab they had borrowed for the occasion. The street in which they were parked had once been a busy road leading to a number of warehouse buildings. Now, like much of the docklands, it had become largely disused, apart from acting as a resting place for taxi drivers.

‘I am really pleased to be working for you.’

Jennings looked at Morton and rolled his eyes. ‘Then I hope you will still be pleased when all of this is finished. But thank you nevertheless.’

‘Joining C8 was a good career move but...’

‘Hanson.’ There was an unmistakable warning tone to Jennings’ voice. ‘C8 is subject to a review. You should not be discussing your time there.’

‘No sir.’

‘Have you discovered anything interesting about Madison?’

‘He is a man of regular habits, but they have changed recently.’

‘Changed, how?’

‘Until about two weeks ago he always left home at 8.30am.

His first visit of the day was to his office in Spitalfields. There he dealt with his import and export interests. As far as anyone can make out, he has been creaming off a percentage of anything that comes in through the market, for about five years. He stays there until noon and then he goes to his office in Esher which is where he runs his betting syndicate. Then at 6.00pm, he returns to central London to have dinner in a West End restaurant before making his way to his Brewer Street club.'

'But we are sitting outside of a disused warehouse?'

'Yes sir and as I said, it's been that way for the best part of the last two weeks. Craddock now appears to be running things, whilst Madison spends all his time here.'

Morton, who was sitting in the front of the car next to Hanson, manoeuvred himself so that he could talk to Jennings, face to face.

'This could be just the sign we are looking for sir. Madison has taken himself out of circulation to concentrate on the museum.'

Jennings returned a look of feigned surprise and Morton smiled self-consciously.

'When was the last time you actually saw him?'

'Last Saturday sir,' answered Hanson, 'but he is still in there. There are only three exits, the main door which makes a god awful noise when it is opened. The staff entrance, which is what we are looking at and the fire exit which is on your right.'

'What about windows?'

'There aren't any. They are all boarded up on the inside. He could not even leave under cover of darkness because of the number of street lights. Until the docks moved east, this place worked twenty-four hours a day.'

Jennings took a moment to have a good look around the street. Apart from a couple of resting taxis, it was empty and quiet and it had been that way all morning. Like most of this area, it had become run down and shabby. Grime covered windows and rust stained iron walkways, which joined the

## Chapter ten

buildings on either side of the street at second floor levels, gave the road a dark and sad appearance despite the fact that it was a hot sunny day.

‘Has anyone been to visit?’

‘Milliband.’ Hanson answered, in the confidence that Jennings knew that he was one of Craddock’s trusted aids. ‘And Cameron, another back-office bad boy. There has also been a woman.’

‘What woman?’ Jennings asked swiftly taking an eager interest.

‘Can’t say sir, she is not known and is not in the records.’

‘Could she be another messenger?’

‘That is possible. She does not conform to Madison’s usual tastes.’

Jennings sat back in his seat. He had taken a bit of a risk coming here but in truth he was curious. Madison would certainly know what he looked like and would also know that he was being watched. Unfortunately, Price was not the only policeman who had been bought by London’s gangs. He had come on the off chance of actually seeing Madison. There were naturally photos in the records, but they rarely looked like the person they were supposed to portray and he wanted to get to know his enemy.

‘How was the holiday Morton?’

‘Very enjoyable sir and it was actually nice to see some rain. My sister has green grass rather than brown.’

Jennings thought sadly of his parched garden suffering under the ban on using hosepipes. It had been so long since there had been any rain, that in a desperate attempt to save water, the local council had been telling people to put rocks in their toilet systems and even to bath with a friend, God forbid.

‘Your sister lives at Porz Logion?’

‘Just outside. She and her husband have a small studio producing music videos.’

‘Music what?’

‘Videos, short films to accompany pop songs. They play

them in pubs and bars.'

Jennings tried to think of how such a thing might go down at his local. There had been recent dark mutterings over the fact that they now sold an Australian lager.

'And do they make much money with these music videos?'

'About £100,000 a year, before tax of course.'

'Of course.' Jennings replied trying not to show any sign of disapproval or even envy as he thought of his own comparatively meagre pay packet after twenty years of public service. To take his mind off the injustice, Jennings became preoccupied with the details of the warehouse. It was clearly Victorian with its English Bond red brickwork. Above the ground level graffiti, was a faded painted sign that might once have advertised Fry's Chocolate Cream and a number of 'for rent' placards that had obviously been there for years.

Even though he had only been sitting in the car for four hours, Jennings was painfully recalling the long, tedious days of waiting, when he had been an eager young detective.

'By the way sir, I bumped into a friend of yours.'

'Who was that?'

'Anton Caruthers. He was asking after you.'

'Was he now?' Jennings replied wearily. 'Where did you bump into him?'

'Victoria Street. I think he was staying at a nearby hotel.'

'I thought he and his wife live behind Harrods. Great Portman Street wasn't it. Why would he be staying in a hotel?'

'According to the latest celebrity gossip, he and Silvia have had another tiff.'

'Yes, I got the impression that they were not close.' Jennings thought back to the dinner party and the frequent looks of exasperation Caruthers had worn when his wife was discussing her favourite subject. Herself.

'Was he still going on about that blasted meteorite?'

'No. He seemed to have moved off that subject but he did ask whether we had been to see Periston.'

'Did he now? I trust you told him where to go.'



## Chapter ten

Morton returned a cheeky grin and fished around in his briefcase before emerging with a bread roll. Jennings looked at it and his stomach rumbled ominously.

'Would you like one sir?' Morton handed the roll to Jennings who raised it to his mouth and was about to take a bite when his nostrils caught an odd smell.

'What is it?' He asked suspiciously.

'Mung beans, carrot and avocado in a sourdough roll. I get them from Ceres. 14½p. Very tasty.'

'Thank you, but I think not.' Jennings handed back the food and thought sadly of what he could expect for dinner.

'Still, it is a bit worrying.' Jennings mused.

'The sourdough roll?'

'No Morton. Not your lunch. I was referring to Caruthers. The last thing we need is for Periston to get nervous about the press. Could prove a little awkward.'

'You mean if there is a connection between Periston and Madison.'

'Precisely. Do we have his telephone number?'

'Yes, I think so. Wilks should know for sure.'

'Excuse me sir.' Hanson interrupted. 'It's her.'

Jennings immediately looked in the direction of the battered red door. There was a lone figure of a woman dressed in a knee length flowery dress, a broad brimmed hat and a pair of enormous sunglasses. She cut an incongruous figure standing in a derelict street, compounded by an obvious nervousness about what to do. Then she seemed to come to a decision and knocked. It was quite a while before the door opened and she disappeared inside. Within a few moments, the woman re-emerged and as she walked past the taxi, Jennings saw a large brown envelop sticking out of her white handbag.

'Hanson. Morton and I are going to follow her to see where she goes. If Madison comes out, I want him tracked.'

By the time they emerged onto the street, the woman had disappeared around the corner and they picked up speed to ensure that they did not lose her. However, the bright summer

outfit made her easy to track as she walked through the quiet dockland streets. But as they approached the main road that led towards the Tower of London, the lunchtime crowds began to obscure their view, making it necessary to get closer.

After a while, she stood at a bus stop and Jennings indicated that he and Morton should separate. He slowly ambled towards the woman, taking a careful sideways look as he made his way to the back of the queue. It was hard to see the face, which was partially hidden by the hat and sunglasses; but she appeared to be in her mid to late thirties, brown, shoulder length, loose hair and a body that was shapely but petite. However, now that he was up close Jennings noticed that her overall appearance was not quite what he expected. The white handbag and matching platform shoes were certainly from Selfridges and the dress looked vaguely like something he had seen in one of Jen's up-market magazines, but there was something not quite right about her poise. She had the look of an East End Girl, dressed up in West End clothes.

A bus drew up, the woman got on and headed straight for the top deck indicating that she was a smoker. Jennings had intended to find a seat further down the bus so that he could safely continue to watch, but as he reached the top step, he noticed that the bus had been fitted with one of the new periscope mirrors which allowed the driver to see what was happening when there was no conductor aboard. He sat in the front seat and had a clear reflected view of both the woman and Morton who took a seat about half way down the bus. In less than a minute she had lit a cigarette and began to puff whilst nervously glancing at her fellow passengers. Jennings did not have time to note the number of the bus, but it seemed to be heading towards the City. The lunchtime traffic made their journey a slow one as they drove along Thames Street towards Blackfriars. It had been quite some time since he had been to this part of London and there were still patches of derelict land and even a boarded up church left over from the war. Blackfriars merged into Embankment and a short while later

## Chapter ten

they were heading along the Strand towards Trafalgar Square. As the bus drew to a stop, the woman joined the crowd queuing to alight. Morton had been a little quicker in anticipating the rush and reached the stairs before he did. Jennings spotted both standing a short distance away at a stop where all the busses headed south of the river. As he scanned the numbers, an odd thought sprang to mind. They waited for about ten minutes before boarding another bus and less than twenty minutes later, as they drove down Kennington Road, his odd thought was beginning to evolve into an idea and then a certainty as the woman got off at a park and walked towards a block of flats on the other side. Morton, who had been following the woman a little closer, stopped as he reached the end of the park and glanced back. Jennings indicated for him to wait and they watched her enter a building on the far side of the road.

‘Is that the place I think it is?’ Jennings asked.

Morton responded with a look of self-satisfaction. ‘Yes, it is sir. If that woman is not a relative or friend of Price, I will buy you coffee for a month.’

\*\*\*\*

Jennings found himself once more walking through the Exhibition Road entrance to the Geological Museum. His thoughts flitted briefly to the young boy who had become separated from his class and then to what could easily have happened to his son. It was not a pleasant thought and he shuddered as he mentally tucked it away and tried to focus on the task at hand. After a quick word with one of the uniformed staff, he was taken to a door marked private and shown into a waiting area whilst they went to fetch Henderson-Hedley. In truth, after what happened the last time, Jennings was not at all sure that the museum would co-operate. This was why he was paying a personal visit rather than telephoning. His one potential ally was Madison himself. The fact that he was

organising a second attempt might be enough for Henderson-Hedley to agree to what he had planned.

‘Chief inspector, to what do I owe the pleasure this time?’ The tone was curious and unwelcoming.

‘Mr Henderson-Hedley.’ Jennings took a deep breath as he realised that this meeting was going to be even more difficult than he had anticipated. ‘I am afraid that this is unlikely to be any sort of pleasure. We have reliable intelligence that the same people who tried to steal the gemstones from you, are preparing to have another go.’

The director immediately looked both horrified and angry. ‘The last time we met you assured me that you knew who was behind it. Why have you not arrested them?’

‘A little matter of the law sir.’ Jennings tried to hide his impatience. He had often wondered why it was, that the very people who objected the loudest when civil rights were supposedly eroded in the name of justice, were the same people who also objected to the need to have hard evidence before arresting a criminal, particularly when they were personally affected by a crime. ‘Simply knowing who the guilty party is would not impress a judge. A man is innocent until his guilt can be proved beyond reasonable doubt.’

‘I see.’ The man looked unimpressed. ‘Am I to understand that this gang is free to ransack my museum at will?’

‘No sir.’ Jennings replied firmly. ‘They are not. But I will need your help to prevent them from succeeding. Perhaps I could buy you a coffee from your restaurant.’

‘Good heavens no, the stuff we serve to the public is dreadful. However, we have a VIP room which might be more suitable.’

Jennings followed the director into the public area and they made their way towards the top floor of the museum complex. The VIP room was without doubt, one of the most impressive areas of the building. It was not a large room but it had a striking open fireplace decorated with the same small reliefs of fauna and flora as in the public areas. Well-padded dark green

## Chapter ten

leather sofas abounded small ebony tables and dotted around the room were heavy shaded lamps. However, the room's most remarkable feature were the paintings of past directors stemming all the way back to Sir Richard Owen. Henderson-Hedley disappeared briefly before directing Jennings to an area by one of the tall windows.

'I have good reason to believe,' Jennings began, 'that the next attempt will be made in the not too distant future. Your exhibition does not finish until the end of December and I do not think they will wait that long.'

'And why is that?' The director asked.

'Because I now believe that the stones are being acquired to order. By that, I mean that this is not a simple robbery, but that your collection has been deliberately targeted because the crooks already have a buyer.'

'In which case, it seems that this is more of a probability than a possibility, chief inspector?'

'I'm afraid so.'

'Why can you not arrest them before they make any attempt?'

'Because as I explained earlier, the law can only convict a person of a crime if it can be proved they committed it. We cannot arrest a man for intending to commit a crime, unless he is foolish enough to carry certain equipment.'

'You mentioned sometime soon. When do you think they will make their bid?'

'An honest reply to that question is that I cannot be sure. It is possible that they might use the Notting Hill Carnival because of the strain it places on the local police, but that is nothing more than speculation.'

Henderson-Hedley looked thoughtful as he considered his reply.

'In which case, I have no choice but to close the exhibition.'

This was not the reaction Jennings had been expecting and for a moment he was lost for words. The arrival of some tea brought in by a young, spotty man gave him an idea.

'I appreciate that you have concerns about the safety of your staff, but any raid will almost certainly happen at night and I will, with your permission of course, post a few of my men with your night security.'

Henderson-Hedley once more seemed unimpressed. 'Chief inspector, I do not think you understand my situation. We are a publicly financed body and my budget for insurance has already been allocated for the year. The fact that you have informed me that one of our collections is to be the target of a gang, means that my insurers will put up their rates. I simply have no money left to cover the cost.'

'Would not an adequate police guard placate them?'

'It might I suppose.' The director responded vaguely. 'However, even if they prove happy, I would still object. This museum houses priceless collections. I could not possibly take the risk.'

As Jennings sipped his tea, whilst wondering what had happened to his suggestion of coffee, he realised that Henderson-Hedley and inadvertently provided a possible solution.

'Director, you have just said that you are a publicly funded body, which means that you have a public duty to the taxpayer. The people we are talking about have a long criminal history which includes the murder of a policeman. I would say that it was your civic responsibility to help the police catch them.'

'I suppose so.' Came the uncertain reply.

'I think that both our concerns would be eased if we arrange for my assistant to meet with anyone you designate in order to thrash out a plan for you and I to approve. If you are still concerned, then I can arrange for a formal request to be made to the appropriate minister.'

\*\*\*\*

'How was your meeting sir?' Asked Morton as he sat in front of Jennings' desk.

## Chapter ten

‘Could have gone better.’

‘Insurance no doubt.’ Added Wilks.

Jennings returned a look of undiluted surprise. ‘How did you guess that?’

‘Guessing has nothing to do with it, sir. When you have been a policeman as long as I have, you know these things.’

‘Then answer me this. What will it take for the insurance company not to make a fuss? The museum is very nervous, and I may have to ask the commissioner for a favour.’

‘In this case sir, I would suggest a bit of networking. The museum is insured by the Brighton Mutual Company. The sales director is a personal friend of the chief superintendent.’

Jennings looked at Wilks and acknowledged defeat. He stood up and held the back of his chair as he beckoned Wilks to take his place. Wilks casually moved around the desk and with a look of triumph, took his seat, whilst Jennings occupied the plain wooden chair next to Morton.

‘With your permission,’ Jennings waited for a sagely nod from Wilks, ‘did you find out anything about our mystery woman?’

‘A mystery no more sir. Her name is Bridget Cummings and she lives in flat 3A. She does not appear to work but has enough money for designer clothes and she runs a Morgan convertible.’

‘Does she now. I should be so lucky.’ Jennings responded with a touch of envy. ‘What did you find out from her neighbours?’

‘She keeps herself to herself. No man friends to speak of, and she is according to Mrs Morris who lives on the ground floor, one of the new toffee-nosed lot who are too good to share the responsibilities of keeping the common areas clean. Oh and I think she might have a cleaner who comes in three times a week.’

‘Definitely a woman of means then. The only question is; whose means are they?’

‘That is where I come to the bad news, sir. Or perhaps I

should say, mixed news. Jimmy Price does live in the same block but at number 4C. I checked local government records and they have her as the official occupier as far as the rates are concerned.'

'A link but not quite the one we need. What about the building registry?'

'Yes, I have been in touch with them. They are happy to help but won't move until they get the right forms.'

'I see what you mean.' Jennings pondered. 'We can hardly claim that this is an urgent enquiry.'

'No sir.' Morton replied with a clear note of disappointment. 'Neither could I find anyone who has seen them together.'

'Never mind, it is one step forward and we have something to work on. Have you managed to establish any connection with these runs to France?'

'Not yet and I have to admit I am completely baffled. The woman I tailed stayed in a hotel in Lille for a couple of days but apart from doing some shopping, she contacted no one.'

'Might be worth checking with your friends at the bank to see whether they are still getting visits from the man in the blue blazer. Has there been any news from Hanson or our mole, Evans?'

'Madison still hasn't poked his nose out of the building,' Morton replied.

'Evans disappeared two days ago.' Wilks added. 'Which means that he is either dead or has succeeded in going undercover and is now in the employ of Madison.'

'Once we get the information on who owns the block. I want to know whose names are on the individual leases and the details of any sublets.'

'Yes sir.'

'It's just a pity we have to wait.'

'There is one course open to us sir.' Said Wilks, as he reluctantly gave up his brief tenancy of the chief inspector's chair. 'If Price wanted a safe place to keep important papers, I can think of nowhere safer than Scotland Yard.'



## Chapter ten

‘That, Chief Inspector Wilks,’ Jennings said with a broad smile, ‘is not a bad idea at all. Sit back down and I will make the coffee.’

\*\*\*\*

‘Pack it in.’ Protested Sarah as Michael flicked a cornflake in her general direction.

Jennings took a deep breath and quietly cursed Jen for leaving him alone with the children in the third week of their summer holiday. Painful experience had taught him that the first week or so was fine. The children were still excited by the idea of not having to go to school until the beginning of September and that was six long weeks away. However, by the third week, the novelty had worn off and natural sibling rivalry had taken command; stimulated by the prospect of several more weeks of close contact with brothers and sisters, and of course parents.

‘Michael, leave your sister alone.’

It was more of a plea than a command and one he knew would fall on deaf ears. There was a loud clatter and Jennings’ attention immediately fixed on an upturned bowl of cereal lying beneath David’s chair. The three year old returned a look of surprise at the idea that holding it in mid-air and letting go, would result in the object crashing to the floor. Jennings looked around the kitchen for a likely cupboard that might contain cleaning cloths.

‘Dad?’ Sarah began. ‘Can I go to Amy’s this morning?’

‘Who is Amy?’

‘Only just about my best friend in the whole world. I have known her for simply ages.’

‘And how long is that?’

‘Since last term when Mrs Shepard made me and Jane sit apart.’

‘But I thought you were best friends with Jane.’

‘Oh dad!’ Sarah looked scornful. ‘That is ancient history.’

Jane is best friends with Marge because she split up with Kerry who only has time for her boyfriend Steve.'

'Boyfriend.' Jennings experienced a moment of panic. 'But you go to a girls' school.'

'Dad, you must learn to keep up. We have had mixed classes since the beginning of the year. Anyway, is it all right if I go and see Amy?'

'I don't know about that Sarah. Mummy is in town shopping and I have some reports to read through.'

'Then I will be out of your way, won't I.'

Jennings could not fault her logic.

'Mummy would let me.'

'Very well then, I will take you over after breakfast. 'What about you Michael. What are you doing this morning?' He did his best to hide any glee at the idea that he might actually get some peace.

'Jake's coming over at ten. We are going to play Pong on our old tv.'

Jennings bit his tongue, deciding that it was better not to ask what Pong was, just in case he was better off in blissful ignorance. As he cleared away the last of the soggy cornflakes, Jennings found his thoughts preoccupied with the idea of boys and thirteen year old girls together. For the life of him, he could not recall discussing this with Jen and memories of his own teenage years only served to increase his concerns. He looked at the kitchen clock and felt the weight of the long hours until Jen came home, pressing down.

'Dad?'

'Yes, Sarah.'

'Who is Clive Madison? He does not sound like a nice man.'

Jennings turned around to find that she was holding one of his reports.

'You'll get ten years for reading that.' Michael added triumphantly. Sarah stuck her tongue out to show her contempt.

'Actually Sarah, you are right. He is not a nice character.'

## Chapter ten

Madison is a leader of a gang who used to just run illegal betting, clubs and...' Jennings paused to consider how much he should tell a thirteen year old in front of her ten and three year old brothers, 'other activities. However, recently he seems to have branched out beyond robbing banks and payrolls, to stealing things to order.'

'Do you mean like art and antiques?'

Jennings raised his eyebrows in surprise at her answer. 'That sort of thing, yes, but in this case, it is valuable gemstones.'

'Like Fast Eddy.' Michael asked eagerly recalling one of his father's past celebrated cases.

'No, not quite.' Jennings smiled at a distant memory. 'These are not jewel thieves as such. These stones are more likely to be used in scientific research.'

'Like lasers.' Suggested Michael.

'Possibly.' Jennings found himself feeling very defensive at the idea that his children seemed to know more than he did.

'Perhaps this Madison person is working for important people from business or the government and it is they who want the stones.'

'That is also possible.' Jennings muttered to himself as memories of past conversations stirred. 'What makes you say that?'

'You said that he used to run betting shops and 'other activities' by which you probably mean strip clubs and call-girls. So, if he has changed the way he works, it is most likely because he is working for someone else. I can't imagine a gang leader working for just anyone, so it has to be someone who is important. Maybe even someone he is afraid of.'

'Sarah, I am very impressed. You would make a good detective.'

'Girls can't be detectives.' Michael complained.

'Girls can do anything they want, Neanderthal. Haven't you heard of women's lib?'

Jennings left the latest argument and made his way to the telephone in the hall. He dialled a London number and waited.

'This is Chief Inspector Jennings can you put me through to Inspector Cartwright in records.' Jennings waited a little longer. 'Ed. It's Robert. I need a bit of advice. Is there any way of checking whether the funny boys are using Clive Madison?'

'Madison, why?'

'Two reasons. Firstly, because Madison has been working in the same way for a long time. Then he suddenly changes his area of business. You have been telling me for years that the way a person works, is the most distinctive mark a crook can leave behind other than fingerprints and name and address.'

'I had no idea you had actually been paying attention, but you are quite right of course. As it happens, I do sometimes get to hear about when the criminal fraternity is being used. It's mainly breaking and entering and usually connected to Northern Ireland. To be frank, I don't think Madison would be seen as suitable material. Such alliances are typically struck when the miscreant is in imminent danger of being locked up. What was your second reason?'

'We have information that he has been meeting with a man called Neville-Jones.'

'Well, you could have said that in the first place.' Cartwright interrupted. 'Nevertheless, I would be a little surprised. Neville-Jones works for the funniest of the funny boys. Routine covert work is not something I would expect to see him involved with, if indeed that is what it is.'

'But if a criminal did unexpectedly change the way they were working, it could well be due to some outside influence.'

'Go on.' Urged Cartwright.

'Just supposing that he was approached to steal the Natural History Museum collection by a person or persons, unknown. Let us also suppose that such persons could make things easier for him to carry out his raid on the Hatton Garden diamonds.'

'Which are much more in his line.'

'Exactly. This unknown person might control security, or perhaps help with long term storage or maybe they have something on Madison that we know nothing about. So, in

## Chapter ten

exchange for a steal to order service, Madison gets a clear run at something which proved too tempting to ignore.'

'That is certainly a possibility.'

'Good then let me develop the idea. Given that Madison screwed up, would you expect him to have a second go.'

'Most unlikely, Madison is pretty typical of his kind. He may be smart but he is essentially a coward at heart.'

'Precisely, so based on the fact that we know he is...'

'Assume he is.' Ed corrected. 'We only have the word of another con.'

'Very well, assume he is acting for some third party. That being the case, it is a reasonable assumption that, that someone is putting pressure on him and given what we know about Madison, that person or persons must have a pretty powerful hold.'

'That is not a bad idea Robert. Don't tell me you thought of it yourself.'

'Actually, it was something my daughter Sarah said.'

'That would explain it. But I thought you were working on the idea that Madison had linked up with Periston.'

'And if they have, then this is a simple criminal investigation.'

'Now I get it. If this is a national security issue, we are wasting our time. But I still don't understand how I can help.'

'Neither do I Ed. I was just hoping that you might have something.'

'Well, don't you worry yourself Robert. I will see if records can come to your rescue once again.'

As Jennings put down the receiver, he heard another loud crash from the kitchen and he tried to mentally prepare as he resigned himself to enter the fray.

\*\*\*\*

It was not often that Jennings found himself standing outside the door to the commissioner's office, but this

invitation had been a royal command. Gilpatrick was standing beside him looking nervous and shifty. His boss had pounced as soon as he set foot in the building but had steadfastly refused to explain why. The door opened and a uniformed figure beckoned them both to enter.

The commissioner's office was as functional and devoid of personality as he remembered. Most senior officers tailored their space as a mark that they had one of the few enclosed rooms available. But apart from a small collection of family photographs on his desk, this office could have belonged to anyone. Jennings waited for both the commissioner and Gilpatrick to sit in one of the small office armchairs before taking a chair himself.

'I am sorry to have insisted on secrecy, Jennings but the fact is that I have a bit of a dilemma.'

'I assume that is why I am here sir, because I can help.'

'You are here Jennings because you are the cause of the problem, though I should emphasise that it is not one of your making. Nevertheless, it is one which could be politically embarrassing. How much do you know about the civil war in Lebanon?'

'Only what I read in the newspapers.'

'Yes, of course.' The commissioner opened a slim paper file which he had been holding very close. The cover was clearly marked 'Secret'; a marking Jennings had seen only on rare occasions. 'After a protracted period of violence, last month the President of Lebanon, Suleiman Frangieh, asked Syria to occupy Tripoli and the Bekaa Valley and a fragile ceasefire has been imposed. Because of past British involvement in the area, there has been a request for us to host highly secret talks between the Syrians, the Lebanese Government and representatives of the Palestinian factions. Essentially, we have been chosen because the UK is the last country, opponents of any peace talks would expect a meeting to take place. The delegates will arrive on Sunday for a single pre-talks discussion to determine the terms of engagement. Kamal Jumblatt, who is

## Chapter ten

the representative of the President, has specifically asked that you oversee his security.'

Jennings sat back in his chair with a look of total astonishment. The only point in his career when he had any real involvement with security work was ten years ago when King Hussein of Jordan visited the UK. That begged the question of why his name had cropped up. There was only one way to get an answer.

'Can I ask why?'

'That is exactly the question which has preoccupied both the Foreign Office and myself. Jennings, I have the greatest respect for your work in criminal detection, but this kind of area requires very specific experience, which is why we have the professionals. However, it seems that you have impressed Jumblatt's personal security advisor over that incident outside the Natural History Museum.'

'But I thought he is a Columbian.'

'Indeed he is, but Jumblatt's chief of security has moved on and you appear to be the flavour of the month. Jennings, despite my misgivings, this is not a request we can afford to turn down. I would count it as a personal favour if you would focus all your attention on this matter.'

'As you say sir,' Jennings did his best to sound diplomatic, 'this is not something I have a choice over. However, I am concerned about how I can manage this work when my investigations into Clive Madison have reached a critical point.'

'Yes, I am sorry about that.' Added Gilpatrick. 'I know how much effort you have put into that case, but this must take precedence. Hugo Greene will take over, purely on a temporary basis.'

'Greene?' Jennings found himself responding with unprofessional disbelief.

'Not ideal, I grant you, but he is available and Morton can bring him up to speed.'

'When do I get started?'

'Immediately. I will telephone the Foreign Office and you

can expect a meeting within the hour.’

\*\*\*\*

As Jennings presented his credentials to a stern looking receptionist at the King Charles Street Foreign Office building, he concluded that it was turning out to be quite a morning. A short while later, a young man in a pinstripe suit came to collect him and they entered the secluded quadrant at the heart of the complex. As they made their way to the far side, Jennings caught a brief glimpse of the door to No.10 through a gate that joined the square to Downing Street. As a young policeman, he had witnessed Anthony Eden leaving No.10 in secret by using the little known series of gates that joined Downing Street to Parliament Square.

Jennings was taken through a door in one corner of the quadrant and found himself walking up an impressive wide staircase that led to the first floor. Once at the top, they turned left passing a series of enormous oil paintings. Jennings noticed an oddly familiar face emerging from an office at the far end of the corridor. It took him a moment to place who it was before the name of the Foreign Office minister, Anthony Crosland, emerged from the depths of his memory. He was surrounded by a small mob of civil servants, each positioned according to rank. As Crosland passed by, he dropped some papers and Jennings obligingly stooped to help pick them up, noting a hand scribbled word ‘diary’. The man gave him a cursory thank you and continued on his way. It was quite odd seeing a familiar figure from the BBC news, close up.

Finally, they approached a room called the India Office Council Chamber, a massive gold and green affair with an impressive marble fireplace. Already seated at a battered oak table were three men. One was dressed in a lounge suit and the second, in the traditional garments of a city gent. Jennings imagined a bowler hat and tightly furled umbrella somewhere nearby. The final man Jennings thought he recognised but



## Chapter ten

could not place who he was.

‘Thank you Kirby.’ Said the city gent. ‘Chief inspector, my name is Townsend and I am Head of Middle Eastern Affairs. This is Fairbrother who is in charge of VIP security. Finally, may I introduce Señor Veléz.’

As Jennings shook hands with the last man, he recalled the tough looking character who had remonstrated with Palmer.

‘A pleasure to meet you properly this time. I hope I did not offend.’ The man spoke with a thick Spanish sounding accent.

‘Not at all.’ Jennings responded truthfully, as until today he had quite forgotten the man’s existence. ‘I would be interested to know why you asked for me?’

The man shrugged his shoulders. ‘It is simple. You kept your head and took charge. I liked that.’

The answer was indeed a simple one but strangely, Jennings felt a little disappointed.

‘Now that the introductions are over,’ continued Townsend, ‘I would like to concentrate on discussing the day. Fairbrother, perhaps you would start.’

Even before speaking, Jennings understood the relationship between Townsend and the lounge suited man. This was old world and new world meeting head on. The South London accent only served to confirm that class distinction was not just alive, it was kicking with all its might.

‘Yeah well! To start with I need you to learn three code words. This is the only time we should refer to the delegates by name. Kamal Jumblatt from Lebanon is the dove. The representative of the Palestinians is Yassa Al-Ahmad and will be known as magpie and Amin Hafiz from the Syrian Government will be known as eagle. The eagle will be arriving first at Lyneham. He will be taken to a safe house near Pangbourne where the talks will be held. The dove will arrive just a few hours before the talks are to begin and will be leaving immediately after they are concluded. Our main problem is magpie. This group is the most contentious but is insisting on staying the night in London.’

‘Chief inspector.’ Townsend interrupted. ‘The Palestinians are a displaced people represented by a loose confederation of interests including a number of proscribed organisations. I should not need to remind you of the potential for extreme embarrassment should it become known that we are playing host to a terrorist organisation. It is less than a month since the Palestinian hijack at Entebbe airport.’

‘Yes, of course.’ Jennings responded solemnly. ‘How long will each be in a public place?’

‘That’s a good question.’ Fairbrother took out a map and unfolded it. ‘Dove and eagle will have a journey of about forty miles either way. It’s mainly motorway with some country road. Magpie is staying at the Savoy and will fly from a central London location but that will still leave a short journey on crowded London streets. We will also have to take measures for their overnight stay.’

‘As you said, magpie presents by far the biggest problem. I suppose there is no chance of you changing their minds?’

‘We have been trying for days and they won’t budge.’

‘It seems to me,’ added Veléz, ‘that we should create three teams.’

‘Yeah! That would make sense.’

‘The hotel presents the biggest risk.’ Said Jennings. ‘Even if the staff aren’t regularly tipping off the press when a celebrity is staying, there are bound to be some hanging around, just on the off chance. It would be useful to have a diversion.’

‘I know of a pop musician who owes us a favour. I should be able to persuade him to switch hotels. He could make a useful decoy.’

‘What is the schedule for the talks?’

‘Magpie and eagle will be arriving Sunday evening and dove in the early hours of Monday morning. The talks are due to start at 10.00am and will stop at 4.00pm. By 7.30 this trip will be over.’

‘Hopefully.’ Jennings murmured to himself but noticed quizzical looks from the others. ‘I am no expert in these

## Chapter ten

matters but I do know that Beirut used to be a fashionable place to stay. If the newspaper reports are right, it is pretty much a hell hole now. The fact that the delegation wants to stay in a swanky London hotel could be down to simple opportunism but somehow, I doubt it. Civil wars are fought by fanatics. This simply does not fit.'

'You think they might only be interested in sabotaging the talks.' Said Townsend with a tone of disbelief.

'That is a possibility.' Fairbrother added. 'The PLO has little interest in the domestic affairs of Lebanon outside of their own agenda for Palestine. Making their presence known would not only sabotage peace talks but would also raise their status.'

'A very nasty thought indeed.' Townsend stood up indicating that the meeting was at an end. 'Gentlemen, I will leave the detail planning to you, but the minister will need to see contingencies, which will take this discussion into full account.'

\*\*\*\*

Taylor quietly watched a group of military and government types file into a small room. He was partially hoping that Sir Clive's unnamed contact might put in an appearance. Within this confined setting, it would be hard to disguise his identity, but as the door closed, it became obvious that the man was either not invited or had chosen not to attend. However, even if he had, it seemed that the usual social niceties did not apply as everyone seemed determined to ignore their fellow attendees.

They were all present to witness a test of his product, but Taylor felt no sense of achievement. The room was devoid of any features or furnishings with the exception of a one-way mirror which looked on to a cell-like room that was normally used for interrogations. Today however, the occupant would be a volunteer from the army. No doubt, some poor sod who was looking to get an extra stripe. The military and government

types finally exchanged murmured words and looks of self-satisfaction as they waited for something to happen.

It was likely that they would have some time to wait. Taylor checked his watch. At this precise moment, the volunteers would still be undergoing their final medical examinations. Such was the sensitivity about the forthcoming test, that they had selected a number of people. They would have been told that they were to test a new nerve gas and promised special leave. Just one would actually be selected. The strongest and most resilient, but this time they were not looking for just physical fitness, but also mental agility. It was essential that they chose someone who had a reasonable level of intelligence, exhibited a large dose of common sense and was not too imaginative. The original list of more than one hundred candidates had slowly been whittled down and now there were just five undergoing a final assessment.

Taylor had been consulted on some aspects of the test, but this was a South African programme and foreigners were not welcome, even if they were testing his product.

The other person not present was Sir Clive. Having completed his role as a facilitator, the man had swiftly returned to Britain. A little too swiftly for Taylor's liking and for the last few days he had built a number of mental scenarios, all of which entailed Sir Clive concocting plans to relieve him of his company. Taylor had even taken to carefully reading through the market reports for any sign of a take-over bid. No matter how much he tried to reassure himself that his fears were all down to an overactive imagination, Taylor could not quite shake off the feeling that he was right.

Taylor looked at his watch once more. Somewhere in the military complex, a discussion would be taking place about which volunteer to choose. The unfortunate person would then be taken to an area adjacent to the room on the other side of the mirror where he would be given an injection. In fact, that contained nothing more noxious than vitamins. The real test substance was contained inside a number of small glass

## Chapter ten

phials hidden inside the lampshades. The South Africans had insisted on this as a security measure despite the fact that it was their own people attending the demonstration.

One of the issues which had perplexed both Taylor and his chief engineer Jim Clarke, was how to rid themselves of the more volatile properties of metassonite. They had spent substantial amounts of money, seeking a solution but it was like preventing the onrush of water from a broken dam. As soon as they patched up one leak, another quickly replaced it. He had even begun to suspect that Jim's self-confessed irrational concerns might be right; that in some peculiar way, the substance was alive. Indeed, one of the more worrying facets of metassonite was that it appeared to increase in volume every time they tried to process it and the increases were becoming more substantial over time. No one had an explanation and it was only the fact that it eventually shrank back to its original size that provided any crumb of comfort. Nevertheless, it was this perverse property that was proving invaluable now. A tiny amount in close proximity to another piece of metassonite was sufficient for it to expand over a very short time, to become a perfect and invisible neurotoxin.

The group switched its attention to the other room. Taylor had intended not to watch. His presence was required at the test but that did not mean he had to actually witness it. However, as the moment came, he found himself drawn to the window. As he looked through the shaded glass, he saw that a door had opened but at least a minute passed before a figure came through. It was a man in his late twenties or early thirties who had the burly look of a long-term soldier. He made his way to the middle of the room where he stopped and stood to attention staring directly towards them. Even though Taylor knew that this room was quite invisible to the soldier, he had an unnerving feeling that the figure knew exactly where he was and had singled him out for close attention. Everyone within the group stared back at the figure whilst they waited for something to happen. Taylor began to feel a little queasy as the

tension rose. The figure remained perfectly still, staring, eyes unfocused. Taylor knew that the man had a distinguished military career and had been selected because he proved to be resilient and determined in the face of extreme danger. In fact, all of the final volunteers had medals for bravery. The military and government types started to become restless in the absence of anything obvious, but Taylor knew what was to come. He tried to imagine what was going through the mind of the man. He would be aware that something unpleasant was going to happen but not the nature of it. For any normal person, the sheer anxiety and stress could be enough to break any form of self-control, but this was not a normal man, but a highly trained soldier.

Taylor gazed at the metal lampshades and tried to speculate when the contents would be released. He knew that the heat coming from the light bulbs would be enough to break the ultra-thin glass of the phials and when they broke, pure metassonite would drift through the air.

There was a faint movement on one wall of the cell. It was so small that it could easily have gone unnoticed, but such was the escalating sense of expectation, that any change became a focal point. Taylor had to look hard before he could discern the cause and it was with a sense of disappointment that he began to trace the lazy meanderings of a small fly circulating behind the immobile figure. It flew this way and that, retracing its path in a rough figure of eight. Backwards and forwards it moved before darting off in a new direction. Then it landed. It landed on the face of the immobile figure. Taylor also stood perfectly still unable to draw breath as he watched the soldier's eyes slowly move to focus on the fly that had settled on his cheek. The soldier stared for a moment, at the small black speck and then he screamed.

## Chapter eleven

Jennings tried to concentrate on reading the Evening News, but transient thoughts concerning his meeting at the Foreign Office would not allow him to focus. Planning security for a peace conference was problematic enough even without having to cater for inflated political egos. However, in this case, they also had to take into account the possibility that some of the delegates might have a vested interest in seeing any talks fail. Given the inflammable nature of Middle Eastern politics, this desire could all too easily turn violent. Such were the permutations, that even his favourite pint of 6X, rarely available beyond the West Country, did nothing to still his racing thoughts.

The pub was crowded with local office workers having a swift drink before they went home. The air was thick with the smell of tobacco, mixed with nine hours' worth of sweat, as everyone stripped themselves of jackets and ties to cope with the heat. This was not his usual watering hole, but for the moment, the Feathers was out of bounds. At this time of day, too many colleagues were to be found propping up the bar and for the moment he did not want his presence known.

Jennings had been trying to read an article about the racing car driver, Niki Lauda. Formula One was not a subject that generally held much interest, but this report concerned an accident at the Nurburgring Grand Prix in Germany. The poor man was in a critical condition having been trapped inside his burning Ferrari after it swerved off the track. Whilst the newspaper seemed to go into great detail about how the crash had happened, there was little information on the man's condition. Memories of the Milton train crash made an

unwelcome return. In the end, he gave up and casually flipped through the rest of the paper before becoming briefly distracted by raised voices coming from a group playing darts. Jennings looked at his watch and took another sip of beer. As he toyed with a soggy beer mat, Jennings became aware of a figure standing close by.

'I see you have already bought yourself a pint Morton. How have things gone today?'

Morton took off his jacket and tie and sat down. 'Gilpatrick would not be pleased if he found out that I was briefing you. Neither would Chief Inspector Greene for that matter.'

'I can see no reason why they should find out. Do you?' He looked purposefully at Morton.

'No sir.'

'How is Hugo these days?'

'He seems a pleasant enough person, considerate too.'

Jennings gave his aid a quizzical look. 'So, what have you achieved today?'

'Not much sir. Greene seems to be focused on the fact that Edward Taylor lied about seeing Fellows.'

'That is hardly surprising. Is he aware of the edict not to investigate?'

'He is, but he seems determined to ignore it.'

'That is commendable but stupid, given the deputy commissioner's position. Softly, softly catchee monkey. Remember that Morton if you want to get on in the force. The most direct route is not always the best route.'

'Yes sir.'

'What is his next move?'

'For the moment, he seems to be content with going through all the reports.'

'If he reads all of them in detail, Greene won't have time to do any actual work, which means that I will have more to pick up.'

'I don't think he is aware of your intention to return next Tuesday. In fact, from what he was saying in his pep talk, he



## Chapter eleven

rather expects to take over the case.'

'Does he, the cheeky bugger. How is Wilks taking to him?'

'Not at all. Wilks took great exception when asked to serve Maxwell House instant coffee at the morning report meeting.'

Jennings smiled a smug smile. 'Any news from Hanson?'

'Nothing so far. Madison has now been out of sight for eight days.'

'That is just plain wrong. Are the surveillance teams sure he is still inside?'

'They are adamant that he has not come out.'

'That is not the same thing.'

Jennings found his attention constantly switching to the door to ensure that he did not recognise anyone. Or more to the point, that no one recognised him. Morton was right to be concerned that Gilpatrick would take a dim view of his continued interest in the Madison case.

'I want you to go and have a talk with the local council. Find out if there are any underground connecting corridors to the other buildings, or even a main sewer.'

'I have already thought of that, but I am supposed to be working for Chief Inspector Greene.'

'Only until next Tuesday Morton. Another thing for you to remember.'

Morton sipped his beer. 'The last report from Hanson mentioned that a new man had been seen going into the warehouse, but he is not a known member of Madison's gang.'

'Any ideas who this mystery man might be?'

'Hanson could not be sure sir. Because he had to move inside the building opposite, I'm afraid his view was obscured, and the man visited at night.'

'Too much danger of him being spotted if a taxi rested overnight, I suppose.'

'Yes sir,' Morton acknowledged, 'but there is a chance that this stranger might be working at Smithfield as a puller.'

'That is a pretty tangible connection for someone with an obscured view.'

'I think he was on surveillance a while ago, over missing meat which might explain it.'

'Madison works Spitalfields. Smithfield is Grant territory. Therefore, the question we are faced with is?'

'Is Hanson right? If he is, it could mean that Madison's self-imposed seclusion might be down to more than a simple jewellery raid. We could be facing a gang war.'

'There is another possibility. We do not know what cover story Evans concocted for himself and I take it, he has also not been seen.'

'No sir.'

'I really hate working with these deep cover types. You never know whether you are dealing with the good guys or the bad guys.'

'I suppose so sir, but it is necessary. If we knew who he was and what he was doing, then Price might also know.'

'Hmmm!' Jennings mused. 'However, I do need to be sure. There is definitely something not right about all this. Smithfield works between midnight and five but as far as I recall the pullers tend to finish around two. You don't have anything to do tonight, do you?'

\*\*\*\*

'I am not at all happy about this.'

The comments came from a small, red faced man in a grubby three piece suit. The front of his jacket was covered in small white specs from the cheap cigars that he chained smoked, probably to cover-up an all pervading salty smell of dead flesh.

'We depend on the pullers and bummares to move the loads and they don't like anyone from officialdom. We had a taxman here a couple of weeks ago, almost closed the place down.'

'I can't help that.' Morton replied sharply. 'This is police business and I would strongly advise you to co-operate.'

## Chapter eleven

‘I didn’t say I was refusing to help, just that you could cause all sorts of problems.’

Morton studied the red faced man’s worried expression and decided to take pity.

‘The only thing I need is to verify whether the man in this photograph,’ he held up a large black and white picture of a figure emerging from the docklands warehouse, ‘is working here. I am not looking to sit down and have a drink with him.’

The red faced man looked at the grainy image once more.

‘I suppose it could be him but I can’t be sure.’

‘That is why I need to see for myself. Now, can’t you take me round as a man from the City Corporation? That should not cause too much disturbance.’

The red faced man shrugged his shoulders in resignation. ‘I suppose so.’ He concluded without a note of enthusiasm. ‘It’s time I was doing my rounds. If you don’t keep a close eye on the buggers, they will try anything, and the buyers are even worse. I caught one last week trying to carry his own meat.’

As Morton emerged into the glare of the artificial lighting, he took a moment to look around the Victorian red, blue and green painted cast iron structure. The building felt as though it belonged to another age, encompassing a purpose that had become increasingly anachronistic in the centre of a modern metropolis. Covent Garden had already closed and there was talk about moving the other markets away from London’s narrow inner-city streets.

Whilst the rest of London slept, the market was a hive of frantic activity, jam packed with lorries and people offloading produce, shouting at the tops of their voices and trying to squeeze vehicles through traffic clogged roads. But amid the chaos was a rigid hierarchy. The pullers-back shifted the meat from the front to the rear of the lorries ready for the pitchers to take it to designated areas where it would be sold to the highest bidder. From 10.00pm to 2.00am the sellers dominated the market, after which it was the turn of the buyers. Deals would be done, self-employed bummarees engaged to carry the

stuff to waiting vehicles, and in just over six hours, the nearby pubs would fill for a well-earned fry-up and a beer.

It was a sultry night and the close atmosphere was made worse by an overpowering array of smells from sickly sweet entrails to the more subtle scents of muscle and bone of cows, sheep and pigs.

The market also had its own language and etiquette. A sharp angry cry of 'mine yer beck' meant get out of the way idiot and there seemed to be stiff competition for who could stack the most boxes on a trolley without them actually toppling over.

The red faced man appeared to be more tolerated than liked and his own presence generated looks of suspicion. Morton wondered how many crimes were committed on a nightly basis. Off-cuts of meat discretely hidden, to be sold on the cheap in some sleazy pub. Nightshifts slotted neatly into the routine of a weekly visit to the Labour Exchange to claim the dole. As to the prospect of payments to the taxman, Morton could easily understand why strangers were treated with mistrust.

After ten minutes they stopped at a van serving tea. The red faced man presented him with a chipped white mug full of hot steaming liquid that could probably strip paint.

'Thanks very much.' Morton smiled in a friendly way which red faced man barely acknowledged. 'How long have you worked here?' He took a sip and the taste of whisky caught the back of his throat.

'Fifteen years. My dad had a small chain of butchers from Streatham to Purley. But I was the youngest of five brothers, so there was no room for me. Just as well, they all went bust during the Three Day Week.'

'I am sorry to hear that.'

'No skin off my nose.' Red faced man replied with obvious disinterest.

'Have you seen much change?'

'The buyers are different now. It used to be all family owned business but now it's mainly supermarkets.' The red faced man looked bored and began to stare at a small group of people who

## Chapter eleven

had stopped for a break. 'Look, your man should be here by now. Do you want to go and see or stand here all night asking bloody questions?'

Morton put his mug back on the van counter by way of reply. Red faced man negotiated a route through the melee of buyers as they jostled and haggled. The sound of butchery was everywhere as sides of beef, pork and lamb were cut into sellable portions. Many of the sellers had been here for years but no one could claim a patch for more than a week at a time which meant that the best areas were jealously guarded. By the time they reached their destination, a large white van was parked and the rear doors were open. Morton could see that something was moving inside but his view was obscured by sides of beef hanging in a double row. He watched the pink and white shapes moving from side to side, mimicking the movements of the animals when they had been alive, then a face emerged. It was hard to see because the doors of the van cast deep shadows across the features and the fact that he was wearing a hat made it even more difficult.

'Can you go and talk to him.' Morton whispered to the red faced man. He received an angry glare, but they moved closer to the doors.

Once more the figure disappeared, and they waited as they watched the shiny hooks shuffle along the rack. Then the face reappeared and it did seem to resemble the one in the photograph. If it was Evans, then they would have proof that the plan was working. If it was Hanson's man, it could mean a gang war was about to explode onto the streets of London, or what might be worse, that an amalgamation was in the offing. Morton watched closely as the red faced man engaged the other in conversation. Then he saw the hooks move once more followed by an impatient voice calling from deep within the van. A second face appeared, and Morton had to quickly stifle any audible sense of surprise.

\*\*\*\*

Jennings strolled into the lobby of the Savoy and felt very grand as he made his way across the vast expanse of black and white marble set against the deep warm wood panelling of the walls. What made the Savoy special to his mind was that it had not tried to emulate the bland corporate style hotel, devoid of soul. Instead, it looked more like a stately home whose owners had fallen on slightly difficult times, right down to the mismatched sofas with worn fabric. Townsend, Fairbrother and Veléz had already arrived and were in close conversation. He sat down in the only armchair available and the musty smell of old cigar smoke gently caressed his nostrils.

‘Jennings, we were just discussing the arrangements for the day. As you know, you have been allocated dove and I will be looking after magpie. I have just been reassuring Señor Veléz that Pangbourne is well used to hosting sensitive meetings.’

‘I sure it is.’ Veléz interrupted. ‘But you can never... too careful. We... deal with fanatics who risk all to achieve their goal.’

Townsend adopted the expression of a patient schoolmaster attempting to explain an obvious point to a dim-witted student.

‘The house is set in its own grounds and from the outside looks like any other private residence. However, although security is invisible to any casual observer, it is substantial. The outer grounds are strewn with pressure sensors and bounded on each side by a 20ft electrified fence. The interior grounds are patrolled 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. In addition, there are portable anti-aircraft posts. A few years ago, a prominent former head of state fled to the UK and we put him in Pangbourne. The new government sent a couple of avengers looking for him. Needless to say, they failed. I assure you that no one can get even close to the house undetected.’

Veléz said nothing but did not look impressed.

‘Perhaps you would like to see the house for yourself.’ added Fairbrother. ‘I am sure that any helpful additional suggestions would be more than welcome.’

‘Magpie will be the first to arrive,’ Townsend was

## Chapter eleven

determined to steer the conversation on to a more constructive path, 'and will be brought to central London by helicopter. From the heliport, it is a short drive to this hotel and we will walk the route later. Our main security headache is that they will be here for about fourteen hours. I have secured the fifth floor which will make any sniper shots difficult from neighbouring buildings.'

'But not impossible.' Veléz interrupted once more, to the obvious annoyance of Townsend.

'As you rightly say, not impossible and we will be taking further precautions. Magpie has agreed to take all meals in their rooms but has ruled out additional guards. They claim to require privacy prior to the meeting.' He looked once more at Veléz, expecting another interruption. 'However, we will have two people here in the lobby at all times. There will also be additional guards by each entry point to their floor.'

Jennings' attention was attracted towards the reception desk by the unexpected appearance of a vaguely familiar face. It took him a moment to work out who it was but as the rasping tones echoed around the marble covered entrance, he realised that it was the American actress, Elaine Stricht. Not normally one to have an interest in television and film stars, she might have passed unnoticed had it not been for a late night Sunday programme with the quintessential British actor, Donald Sinden. It was one of the few comedies he actually found funny.

'Jennings.'

The voice interrupted his reverie. As he looked towards Townsend, he noted a flicker of recognition cross his face as well.

'Do you have any questions?'

'Just one,' Jennings replied, 'but please finish first.'

'The following morning, a car will take magpie directly to Pangbourne. Once the talks are over, each party will be taken separately at twenty minute intervals to Lyneham. My party will arrive in this country at 7.00pm and yours, Jennings, at 4.00am.'

Both will be immediately escorted to Pangbourne. Now, any questions?’

‘Yes.’ Said Jennings. ‘Has anyone taken a look at the register to see who else is staying in the hotel?’

‘I will go and get it.’ Answered Fairbrother.

‘Have you given any more thought as to why representatives of the Palestinians would want to stay in a top London hotel?’

‘I assume because they can.’ Townsend answered as if the question was unimportant. ‘You said as much yourself.’

Jennings watched Fairbrother talk to the receptionist as she handed over a large red leather bound book. Fairbrother walked slowly back and laid it on the table between them. Jennings picked it up and quickly found the pages he was looking for.

‘There seem to be quite a number of people from different countries, including the Vatican City.’

‘This is an international hotel.’ Answered Townsend.

‘Perhaps, but I would not expect to see people from the Vatican.’

‘I wondered about that.’ Added Fairbrother. ‘There is an interfaith conference being held at Lambeth Palace.’

‘Does anyone have any other questions? No? Then I suggest we start the inspection tour.’

\*\*\*\*

Braden shuffled uncomfortably in his plain wooden chair as he recalled something similar from his school days. It had a flat seat with a slightly raised area that was supposed to fit between the legs. The hard wooden arms dug into the side of any one of a healthy size. It was an altogether unforgiving type of chair.

He had come to the record department of his old ministry to check on a memory. There had once been a time when he could proudly boast of powers to recall the minutest detail of anything he had read, seen or heard, but those days were long gone. One of the advantages of being who he was, was that his



## Chapter eleven

reputation could still open doors, even when the authorities would have preferred to have kept those doors tightly closed. His last two discussions with Gregory had stirred a fragmentary recollection and this place would confirm the significance of those memories.

Braden had learned to be patient with himself. Long, long ago a lack of instant recall would have brought forth a sense of anger. Time had forced him to recognise that the passing years had taken their toll on both his body and mind. Usually, quiet patience was enough to allow memories to surface of their own accord, but not in this case. Now it was time to give those memories a kick up the backside and that was why he was here.

A pale youth in a yellow and blue striped kipper tie had brought him three boxes, which he then spent most of the morning sifting through. As a young officer, Braden had been placed in charge of a bomb disposal team. Much against his better judgement, he was dispatched to the depths of West Country to investigate a curious incident. The local police had been called to a farm because a German plane had dropped its cargo in a cesspit and it had failed to explode. As a low priority case, it should simply have been cordoned off and a sign put up, warning people to keep away, but the owner had reported something unusual. As a result, a small quiet farm became the focus of an extensive military operation for almost a week. The bomb had simply damaged the walls of the cesspit and an old well when it crashed. The pit was mainly empty which meant that the soil behind the bricks was clearly visible as were the partial remains of a skull. A look at the local church records quickly established that the farmland had never been used as a cemetery and a local archaeology enthusiast was adamant that there were no Saxon or Roman settlements in the area. Initially, it had been thought that it was a police matter, but that was quickly ruled out, which meant in the paranoia of war time, an altogether more sinister explanation was put forward.

He had been based in Bristol which, like many of Britain's port and industrial cities, was targeted extensively in 1941, by

the Luftwaffe. A small bomb in a cesspit seemed nothing more than an irritating distraction as his team attempted to keep pace with an almost constant stream of calls for help. He knew nothing about archaeology and had only a little knowledge of anatomy, but he had been trained to look for the abnormal. This was an essential survival skill for a bomb disposal officer.

Around the base of a skull was a small strip of cloth and it was this which attracted his attention. Despite extreme decay, it looked like a piece of uniform. As they removed some of the bricks, so more pieces of bone became apparent and these seemed to belong to different bodies. His curiosity thoroughly stimulated, Braden removed the cloth, washed it and allowed it to dry so that he could see the colour properly. There was no doubt in his mind. The strip belonged to a Russian uniform. His superiors were alarmed that this was either a Nazi propaganda ploy, or what might be worse, that Russian soldiers had been murdered on British soil. What gave the matter an even odder angle, was that the bones were soft, almost crumbly and he felt sure that could only happen after a long period of time.

He called for backup and ordered the whole area to be excavated under the cover story of the unexploded bomb. The fact that it had been safely disarmed and taken to a remote field to be blown up was neither here nor there. After three days, they had discovered several sets of bones of which only a few were intact. Braden recalled a serious conversation with his commanding officer about what to do next. Not only had they recovered identifiable strips of Russian uniform but also an initialled overall, initials in Chinese characters. There was nothing for it but to have the fragments properly analysed. He found an expert in London who came up with the rather unbelievable theory that the bones had been buried for several hundred years. It was unbelievable because the cloth was clearly machine made. Had the bones been found in peacetime, he had no doubt that the media would have picked up on the story from local gossips, but the war encouraged people to

## Chapter eleven

keep their mouths closed. 'Walls have ears' according to the posters displayed up and down the country. Braden smiled to himself as he recalled a drunken evening with friends, scrawling on a poster. 'Bet they're on the ration.' as a weak joke.

Braden continued to sift through the pile of yellowing paper. Some were type written and others hand written notes and reports, all detailing an escalating sense of alarm, perhaps even panic as the military mind tried to grapple with something that it could make no sense of. Finally, he came upon the set of papers he was looking for. The moment Braden began to read the faded ink, his uncooperative memory became unlocked.

There are ten to fourteen bodies. The state of decay is extreme, and an accurate evaluation is not possible. The pattern of decay is random, possibly due to the fact that the cesspit has been leaking corrosive material for many years. There are eight partial skulls and an additional two fragments which could belong to other individuals. Other finds include fifteen whole and partial thigh bones, sixty-four ribs, twenty-three ulnas as well as an assortment of smaller bones from hands, feet and spines. Reassembling the remains was hampered by the fact that they were disarticulated and the substantial level of decay.

Braden recalled that the need to excavate the area quickly meant that his sappers had carried out most of the work before the expert arrived. A very angry man left him in no doubt that they had destroyed much valuable evidence.

There were no personal effects to identify any individual.

That was a lie. His superiors had ordered all the effects to be destroyed despite the fact that they could have

explained a great deal.

However, nine pieces of material were recovered that consisted of a heavy fabric of a colour and weave type consistent with Russian army uniforms. A small piece of cotton was also found, which bore the partial remains of Cyrillic letters A II.

If the discovery of hidden Russian soldiers was not bad enough, analysis of the remains indicated that there were other nationalities present.

It has not been possible to determine the sex of the remains. However, at least one of the skulls displayed indications that the person was of African origins. The teeth indicated different diets. About half showed signs of poor nutrition and one was found to have a gold filling. It is also possible that one individual was Asian but further tests are required.

This piece of information had come as a shock. Whilst the Soviet empire encompassed many different types of people, as far as anyone knew, there were no black soldiers.

Due to the state of decay, it has not proved possible to determine a date of death or even an approximation. Many of the bones and teeth in particular show signs of being subject to damp and bacteriological erosion consistent with being interred for many hundreds of years. However, the cloth fragments are of recent manufacture. My conclusion is that this discrepancy is due to exposure to animal urine and excrement.

These last facts were so completely at odds, that it was

## Chapter eleven

decided to shelve the investigation. It was only later, after the owners of the house had left, that the truth, or what they thought was the truth, was uncovered.

Braden continued to sift through both the papers and his own memories. The short stay at the farm sent his post-war career in a completely new direction and by an odd coincidence, one of his early tasks was to go through old war reports and remove anything that might undermine the British and American Governments' then current view on the wartime alliance with Uncle Joe. It was at this time, he received confirmation that the farm was not the only place where inexplicable remains had been found. The bombing of London uncovered bodies of Chinese origin which was distinctly odd. All were well over two metres tall and although the bones showed the same marked decay as those at the farm, the fabric they were wearing, was not even stained. There had also been some curious incidents connected with the excavations. Even he had experienced brief periods of angst as if the sites were haunted. The MO had put this down to stress, not unnatural, considering that they were dealing with an inexplicable situation. Eventually, it was concluded that the best solution was to ignore it and bury, or perhaps more accurately, rebury the evidence.

Braden felt satisfied with a good morning's work and the newly recovered memories would be invaluable. However, there was at least one more question for which he needed an answer and he would not find that amongst the dusty pages of the past. He would need to speak to Gregory one more time.

\*\*\*\*

Jennings sat in the VIP lounge at Lyneham waiting for the plane that would bring the Lebanese Government representative, Kamal Jumblatt. Of the three groups attending the peace talks, Jennings thought he had the easiest assignment, even if only from the perspective that his delegation would be

in Britain for the least amount of time. The Syrians had landed some hours ago and were already causing headaches with additional security demands. Fairbrother had the unenviable role of guarding the Palestinians. In the few short days since becoming embroiled in this business, Jennings' suspicions about their motives for staying in London had not diminished. Like most people, Jennings knew little of the Middle Eastern conflict other than what appeared in the television news and the newspapers. The massacre of the Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics a few years ago and the recent hijack of a plane carrying 248 passengers, had brought world attention to the plight of the Palestinians and earned the terrorist groups such as the PLO a reputation for extreme violence. He had spotted an article in a magazine at WH Smith whilst searching for something to read to while away an anticipated lengthy wait. It explained that the creation of Israel and the subsequent invasion by its Arab neighbours had caused around one hundred thousand Palestinians to flee to Lebanon. Once the invasion had been defeated, the new Israeli Government refused to allow them to return to their homes, fearing an enemy within its fragile borders. The Palestinians quickly organised themselves and soon began to dominate Middle Eastern politics. Lebanon's complex mix of religious and political allegiances together with resentment of its additional population, led to the outbreak of civil war. Then two months ago, Syria switched its support from the Palestinians to the Lebanese Government, invaded and imposed a ceasefire. The point that most concerned Jennings was that throughout the complex maze of tribal, religious and state politics, one aspect remained easy to grasp; the Palestinian movements showed a single-minded dedication to getting back their homeland and considered that little else mattered. Why would they then want to see peace in Lebanon when the war had focused the world's attention on their plight?

Jennings glanced at the wall clock and noted that it was just before three in the morning. Just knowing the time brought

## Chapter eleven

forth a yawn and he thought of Jen and the children at home asleep and experienced a brief moment of envy. The plane was due to land in about an hour or maybe a little more, depending on its progress. The car that would carry them to Pangbourne was already waiting on the tarmac and in just over fifteen hours the whole business would be over and he could return to proper policing.

Jennings had heard nothing from Morton and he was a little surprised. Morton should have discovered the identity of the man at Smithfield on Friday and it was now Sunday. As it was the weekend, he could not even telephone Wilks to find out if anything had gone wrong.

‘Would you like a cup of coffee sir?’

Jennings looked up and saw a very young girl in uniform standing close by.

‘Thank you, that would be nice.’

Jennings tried to concentrate on the magazine but his restless thoughts refused to play along. Madison had been holed up in the warehouse for nearly two weeks and the passing days only served to reinforce a belief that something was wrong. Madison was a man who needed to be personally involved in his business interests to the point of having a daily routine of travelling to each of his bases, six days a week. According to Joe Mann, Madison was feeling a little out of his depth with the new found friends which, if he acted to character, should have resulted in him taking an even more hands-on approach. Instead, he was relying on lieutenants to run everything. No, there had to be another reason for his absence, which begged the question, what? It clearly had some connection to the second attempt on the Natural History gemstone collection. A good policeman had to be able to get underneath the skin of a criminal. That required not only understanding the man, but also the practicalities of planning a crime. Indeed, Jennings had often wondered whether he could be a successful criminal but had always concluded that the answer was probably not. If he was in Madison’s shoes, the

uppermost question in his mind would be how much information Joe Mann had passed on. Once firm friends, there was now little love lost between them. With the death of Joe's only relative, Madison might well correctly assume that Joe felt free to talk. That being the case, Madison would be feeling vulnerable and would probably be focused on looking after number one.

A cup of coffee appeared on the table in front of him and by the time he looked up, the young girl had returned to the reception desk. Jennings took a sip and grimaced. The act of leaning forward made him aware that he was feeling a little stiff after sitting for so long and so he stood up and walked to the large picture window overlooking the landing strip. He stared momentarily at his own reflection in the glass before looking beyond the slightly wrinkled features and his shirt, which was a little too tight around the belly, toward the numerous lights in the tarmac.

Jennings still believed that Madison would not wait until the end of the exhibition but would target the gems in their display cases. He would know about the alarms and would also assume a heightened level of security. That was why Jennings was convinced Madison would use the Notting Hill Carnival as cover because it was likely that the police would be stretched. Taking the gems was not so much of a problem. Given the number of exits from the museum complex, they could be out within a matter of minutes. Therefore, the key question was not how to get the gems out of the museum but what to do with them in the hours and days when the full force of an investigation was underway. Madison was no fool. Whilst he may not be aware that the police had anticipated a second raid, he would understand that he would become a prime suspect. That would give him hours, perhaps less, to safely store the gems and establish an alibi. The expected scrutiny would also mean that neither he nor his associates could get to the stones for some time. That left two options. Bring in some unknown person to act as a courier or to contrive a way of getting the



## Chapter eleven

gems a long way out of London without anyone knowing. Jennings' thoughts turned to Evans and he wondered how he was getting on. If all was going to plan, they should hear from him soon.

The VIP lounge felt stuffy despite the presence of air conditioning. Jennings would have liked to have gone outside for some fresh air but military security prevented that and so he looked around for something to distract his thoughts. He spotted the cup of coffee on the table and returned to it. It was now 3.15am and he briefly wondered whether it would be acceptable to have a little snooze. He glanced over to the young girl in uniform and concluded not.

Something made him think of Michael who was now at a summer camp in the New Forest. He had been a bit nervous about being away from his parents for the first time, but being a boy, of course he could not show that he would miss his mum and dad. Jennings remembered his own feelings of standing on the station platform, a piece of card hanging around his neck, as he prepared to be shipped off to South Wales along with the evacuation of thousands of other children. He had been lucky. The people he was billeted with were nice. Even so, the first few nights had seen secret tears underneath the bedcovers. It was this memory that prompted him to dig out an old copy of 'Five go mad in Dorset' to read to Michael. It did the trick and the prospect of adventures on his first expedition alone filled Michael with eager anticipation. Oddly enough, it had the opposite effect on Jennings as he realised that his son was growing up fast.

Jennings picked up his magazine once more and began to flip through it but he had already read all the articles he wanted to. A glance at the clock told him it was 3.25am.

On the wall, close to the reception desk was a large poster. In the absence of anything else to do, he wandered over to have a look. It was a calendar that included a lot of small type against certain days.

'What do you use this for?' He said to the young girl.

'It's a list of religious and cultural festivals from around the world. We get a large number of VIPs through here and the staff need to know whether there is a special holiday or other activity. Some cultures have quite strict rules of etiquette attached to certain days.'

'That's very interesting,' Jennings commented as he examined the poster in some detail.

Some dates were familiar such as New Year's Day, which had only become a bank holiday two years ago. The Jewish day of Atonement or Yom Kippur and the Muslim festival Ramadan had caught wider public attention after the recent war, but others were new. There was one called Divali or festival of light. Jennings continued to look through the long list of dates until he arrived at Christmas and smiled as he realised that the Dutch celebrated December 6<sup>th</sup> rather than the 24<sup>th</sup> or 25<sup>th</sup>. Jennings was about to walk away when he had a moment of cold realisation. During the planning discussion at the Savoy, he had looked through the registry of the hotel and noted that there were a number of names from the Vatican City due to stay at the same time. It turned out there was a major conference between the Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Orthodox church and representatives of the Jewish faith. The war in Lebanon was as much about tensions between Muslims and Christians as it was between Palestinians and Israel.

'Excuse me miss. I need a phone urgently.'

Jennings dialled quickly yet it seemed to take forever before the connection tone was replaced by a voice.

'This is Chief Inspector Jennings of Scotland Yard. I need to speak with James Fairbrother urgently. He is staying in room 206.'

Jennings started tapping his finger on the reception desk top as he waited. After two hours of boredom, his heart was now racing and he felt a knot welling up in his chest. Jennings forced himself to breathe steadily.

'I am sorry sir I am not able to locate him.'

## Chapter eleven

'Can you please keep trying and ask him to contact RAF Lyneham?'

'Who is in charge here?' Jennings said to the young girl.

'Group Captain Walters sir. Is there a problem?'

That was probably the understatement of the year if he was right and Jennings was sure that he was. The demands of the Palestinians all fell into place. This was not a peace conference but a suicide mission. Jennings stared out into the darkness and wondered how close the plane was. A loud ring made him jump and by the time he turned around to find the source, the young girl was holding out the receiver for him.

'It's Mr Fairbrother sir.'

'James, this is Robert. Did your lot go through the usual security checks?'

'There are no checks for VIP's that's why we do not use commercial airports.'

'That's what I thought...' Jennings' mouth suddenly felt very dry.

'Who is in charge of Central Information, is it still Cowley?'

'Yes. Look, what is this all about? Your lot should be arriving soon.'

'Has anyone in your delegation become sick or cried off the meeting for some reason?'

'Yes.' Came the hesitant reply.

'I thought as much. James, you need to search through their belongings.'

'Are you mad? I can't do that.'

'James, you must. I think the one who claims to be sick will plant a bomb at a meeting of the international interfaith seminar and the others are planning to kill everyone at the peace conference.'

The phone remained silent for some time.

'If you are wrong, we will be condemning tens of thousands of people in Lebanon to years of civil war.'

'And if I am right the consequences are not worth thinking about.'

'Very well,' Fairbrother gave a deep sigh, 'I will organise it now. You had better get Walters to do something with Jumblatt. God help us if you're wrong and God help us if you are right.'

## Chapter twelve

‘Well Robert,’ Gilpatrick began with a smile, ‘you scored a blinder. The Foreign Office is trying to take full credit of course but even they acknowledged your role in their official report.’

‘As it turned out, I was not entirely right as it was just down to some of the delegates rather than all of them. It seems there was a faction who did not want to see the civil war end and they managed to get two of their people inside the Palestinian contingent. The plan was to plant bombs at both the seminar and the peace talks. They banked on the fact that the only people who would not be searched were the delegates themselves.’

‘Yes, Pangbourne will have to beef up its security.’

‘They expected the explosives to be identified as stuff used by Palestinian terror groups and they would be blamed. This would ensure that neither the Syrians nor Lebanese would trust any Palestinian faction. The attack on the interfaith seminar was simply a bonus as it would read well at home.’

‘I must confess, I never did understand Middle Eastern politics, even when I was stationed there. Point is that your quick thinking saved Her Majesty’s Government from a very embarrassing situation. I think a commendation will be coming your way.’

‘That is all very nice sir, but I would rather get back to some proper police work.’

‘Quite so.’

Jennings noted a look of uncertainty cloud his boss’s previously jocular expression. He had expected a quick return to normal duties this morning but had instead received a call from Gilpatrick’s office asking him to report there first.

Jennings assumed that this was a piece of minor office politics to give them time to break the bad news to Greene. Now he was beginning to have doubts.

‘It’s almost ten o’clock. I think we will have some tea.’

Gilpatrick disappeared from his office momentarily. Jennings thought he would have perhaps a minute to himself and swiftly made his way to Gilpatrick’s desk. There was just one file which he rapidly scanned but it was simply an overtime report. By the time Gilpatrick returned, Jennings was seated once more.

‘Now, where were we?’

‘Discussing my return to normal duties sir. I have a lot of outstanding matters, not least of which is the investigation into Madison.’

‘Yes, of course.’

Jennings noted the tone of uncertainty once more.

‘The point is that Greene seems to be progressing at a reasonable pace and to be frank it is not something that requires any particular measure of skill. As you know, my job is up for grabs and I can tell you there will be a lot of stiff competition.’

‘I don’t doubt that,’ Jennings interrupted, ‘but if I do decide to go for it, I think I have a good a chance.’

‘I should think you have a very good chance, but you could help yourself.’

‘How?’

There was a knock on the door and Gilpatrick’s PA entered with a tray which she set on the table between them.

‘Thank you Stephanie. Shall I be mother?’

Jennings raised his eyebrows at this last remark. Gilpatrick was acting very out of character and he was beginning to suspect that something nasty was coming his way.

‘In my position, one needs to maintain an overview that can draw on a wide variety of experiences. Your career has been pretty much focused on just one area.’

‘I am a policeman. I investigate crime.’

## Chapter twelve

‘And you do a very good job.’ Gilpatrick moved from uncertainty to bluster, another bad sign. ‘But the modern police force has so many other issues to take into account, such as public trust, our reputation, and of course cost efficiency.’

‘I am sorry sir, but I am not quite following this conversation. Is this a roundabout way of saying it would be a waste of time submitting an application?’

‘Good god no. As I said earlier, I think you stand a damned fair chance. What I am saying is that I think you should consider options that would improve your chances.’

‘Such as?’

‘Your handling of this Palestinian matter shows an aptitude for security work and as it happens there is an opening in CI for a short period of detached duty. Just the sort of thing to beef up your record.’

‘That is very good of you sir but I think not. I happen to like what I do even if it means limiting my career. Now, when will you be telling Greene to shove-off.’

Again, Gilpatrick’s face darkened.

‘Ah! That was the point I was trying to get to. Greene has been assigned permanently to your section.’

Despite the fact that he had begun to suspect something like this, hearing it actually said, sent a rush of cold adrenalin through his body. Jennings rapidly tried to assimilate the news at the same time as trying to work out why, at the same time as wondering what would happen next.

‘I’m sorry about this Robert. I appreciate it must be a bit of a shock.’

‘You could say that.’ Jennings replied coldly. ‘What I don’t understand is why.’

‘To put it simply, Greene is a good networker and takes time to know the right people such as the deputy commissioner.’

‘I see.’

‘No, I don’t think you do Robert. You think that being a good policeman is what counts, as do I. That is why there was no prospect of my rising any higher. Times are changing very

rapidly and I am afraid that some of us will be left behind. In your case, you have a double problem. Ever since you tried to link the deaths of Fellows, Sykes and Brown, the DC has had a downer on you. Don't ask me why.'

'Is that why I was put up for the peace conference, to get me out of the way?'

Gilpatrick did not answer immediately. Instead, he poured some tea into two cups and pushed one towards Jennings.

'Probably.' He admitted. 'I have to say, I thought it odd at the time. I assumed, I hoped that because your presence was a specific request by one of the delegates, that it was no more than a sop. The fact that you did such a damn good job gave someone the perfect excuse to make it permanent.'

'By someone, you mean the DC. You do realise that if I go along with this, there is no way back.'

Gilpatrick did not reply.

'When do I start?'

'In three weeks. Until then you are officially on gardening leave.'

'Three weeks.' Jennings echoed. 'Jen has been on at me to replace the garden shed for some time.'

'I'm sorry Robert. It's all so damned unfair.'

\*\*\*\*

Taylor sat at his desk enjoying the cooling effect of the fan on his face and he closed his eyes to savour the moment. He tried to recall the last time it had rained and had to admit that he was beginning to tire of the seemingly endless hot sunny days. It was one thing to holiday in a hot country that had a sea breeze or air conditioning, but London was plain hot, dirty and unpleasant.

This morning he was due to have a meeting with Sir Clive and just for once, it did not matter. The South Africans had been delighted with the tests. So delighted in fact, that not only was his mine reclassified as suitable for whites, which meant he



## Chapter twelve

could hire a skilled workforce, but they had also invested a considerable sum. The extra money gave him valuable time to pull the processing system apart and build in additional safety features. To date, all the modifications seemed to be working and in a very few days, the production lines would be running once again. Then he would know for sure, whether his dream of creating International Industrial Ceramics could finally become a reality.

The other reason why he was no longer concerned about meeting with Sir Clive was that his fears of a takeover bid had proved unfounded. In fact, until yesterday, Sir Clive had disappeared from his life and he wondered whether some other poor sod had been the focus of attention. If so, it was all the better for him.

As Taylor glanced out of the window through the narrow beams of sunlight and across to the distinctive mock Tudor facade of Liberty's, the office door opened and the man himself came in smiling a broad smile.

'Good morning old boy. I trust you are well?'

'I am indeed Sir Clive and I hope I find you the same?'

'Positively in the pink old boy. Do you mind if I sit down?'

'Please do.' Taylor indicated a pair of lounge chairs. 'May I offer you some tea or coffee?'

'No thank you. In a bit of a rush this morning but as I am in town, I could not possibly leave without extending the hand of congratulations.'

Taylor looked puzzled.

'Surely you are progressing your plans for IIC?'

Taylor smiled with relief that he had not missed something important. 'I am, and the contract with the South Africans plus projected earnings from caragillium, mean that for once, capital is not a problem.'

'I am genuinely pleased to hear that. And I have to say that my investors are confident enough to have instructed me to enquire about future investment opportunities.'

Taylor had a sudden feeling of overwhelming contentment.

He partially suspected that the reason for this visit was motivated by greed and the chance to get their grubby hands on more of his business. After years of kowtowing to their dictates, he was going to enjoy every moment of turning them down.

‘What sort of offer had they in mind?’

‘Eight million underwriting in return for a twenty per cent stake, could give you a lot of leeway in developing your markets.’

Taylor raised his eyebrows at such a considerable sum but he knew all too well how many strings would come attached to such an offer.

‘Thank you Sir Clive. It is gratifying to know that your people have such faith in me, but my answer must be no.’

‘I thought as much. I know I can seem calculating at times, but that is just the nature of business. The fact is I do have a great deal of faith in you and I wish you every success. You deserve it.’

Such a glowing compliment might have been better received were it not for his all too vivid memories.

‘Was there anything else?’

‘As a matter of fact, yes.’

Taylor now felt on familiar ground. This was a tone he recognised.

‘When do you expect to begin shipping metassonite?’

‘I don’t. I always thought you never quite understood the process. Metassonite is the refined material that we extract from the defunct river bed. As you well know, it can have...certain side effects if handled incorrectly. That is why we process it inside the mine where its toxic effects are minimal and produce an amalgam called caragillium which is inert. This can be combined with other substances to produce pretty much what we want.’

‘Have you ever shipped metassonite?’

‘No, for precisely the reasons I have just explained. Sir Clive, could you kindly get to the point?’

## Chapter twelve

‘Actually, I am not sure what it is old boy, but I have discovered something that is potentially alarming, and it ties in to that rather curious incident over those invoices. You do recall accosting me outside Covent Garden?’

Taylor nodded briefly by way of acknowledgement.

‘I received a visit from a charming young French woman who looks after the building in which Nigel Fellows lived. She came to me with a story, which if true, might just undermine your hopes and my profits.’

‘And what story is that?’ Taylor asked with a familiar sinking feeling.

‘It begins with the fact that Fellows was not happy with the explanation he was given for refurbishing the Periston building and as the planning applications were transferred to his company, he wanted to be sure that everything was above board.’

‘You forget Sir Clive; I was there and I can assure you that it was.’

‘Oh, I do not doubt your word old boy! But Mme Emié mentioned something very interesting. Apparently, you met with Fellows a couple of days before he died.’

Taylor studied Sir Clive carefully and wondered where this conversation was leading. But of even greater importance was why he was taking an interest in the first place and the only way to discover that, was to draw him out.

‘Before I answer that question, could you explain how this Madame Emié came to have an interest?’

‘She is a very beautiful and quite a remarkable woman and I am sure it does not take too big a leap of the imagination to work out that her relationship with Fellows went beyond a professional acquaintance. As to her interest, I think she was very much in love and quite understandably wishes to leave a place of painful memories.’

‘I see.’ Taylor stood up and crossed to the window. A small family wandered up and down the narrow backstreet whilst studying a map. This morning had started well. He had even

been looking forward to this visit from Sir Clive, in a strange way, but he should have known better. The man was a Jonah as far as he was concerned. The next question was a simple one and like many simple questions, it was not so easy to find an answer. Would he tell him the truth or not?

'Fellows' problem was not so much to do with the end purpose of the project, but the nature of what we were intending to test. As you may know, if you ever read further than the business pages, animal rights are a contentious issue. Lots of idiots breaking into medical and farming facilities. His firm had previously been targeted and he was concerned that Periston had not been completely honest with their briefing.'

'That won't do old boy. If that was his concern, then the matter could have been quickly resolved. You were meeting with him for months after Periston closed the contract. I also happen to know that there were some issues concerning the end product. Some concerns about a possible link to cancer.'

'You are well informed.' Taylor now knew the answer to his question. 'That was a concern at first, but one which was quickly settled. Fellows' interest was a little more long term. He was aware that we had plans to develop our interests in South Africa if the partnership with Periston worked out and he wanted the business. After a bit of a shaky start, I found him to be reliable and good value. So, even after the partnership was dissolved, we met to discuss my plans. However, these discussions were not just about architecture. My plans required regular shipments of rock samples as part of our feasibility studies. I should emphasise that although they contained metassonite, the concentrations were inconsequential. As a matter of convenience, I had some of those delivered to Fellows simply because he was available on site. About a month after I ceased working with Periston, Fellows turned up with another, significantly larger sample. The only problem was that it was not one I had ordered. I contacted my site manager and he denied knowing anything about it, so I contacted the shipping company. Apparently, they had been paid for a regular

## Chapter twelve

order and had been delivering them for months to an address in Southampton which had subsequently closed down. When they realised that they could not return the package as the sender address turned out to be false, they did the next best thing and delivered to the same place as the other packages.'

'Fellows.'

'Precisely.'

'I can see how that might make sense except for one thing.'

'What is that?' Taylor asked sensing a trap.

'Quite simple old boy, I know Fellows was blackmailing you. Now don't look surprised. I said that Mme Emié is a remarkable woman. The French have a quite different attitude to affairs of the heart than we cold blooded Anglo Saxons. She was quite open about how she and Fellows wanted to start a new life and the fact that he also wanted to ensure that his family were provided for. I used the word blackmail but perhaps that is a little harsh. Fellows knew that you had lied to the authorities about the connection between metassonite and that meteorite. So, let us settle on the fact that you all agreed it was in everyone's best interest to work together. Securing a major contract in South Africa would have allowed them to achieve their ambitions and I have no doubt you will have used his position to secure a good price. More importantly, it meant avoiding potentially embarrassing questions concerning your shipments, the timing of which is remarkably close to the dates of those regrettable deaths.'

'I have assured you that they are nothing to do with us.'

'Indeed you have, but I dare say, the authorities would be very interested in your problems in South Africa as well as the fact that you sent those bods investigating that meteorite thing, a false sample to throw them off the scent. You must admit that it all looks highly suspicious. However, I am happy to take you at your word which leaves one small point yet to be explained.'

Taylor sat down once more as he realised that yet again, Sir Clive had the upper hand. He took a small key from his trouser

pocket and unlocked the bottom drawer of his desk. At the bottom of a pile of letter size folders was the one he was looking for. He took it out and handed it to Sir Clive who began to read. Taylor watched carefully, waiting for the tell-tale signs that would show he understood the contents. To his disappointment, the features remained impassive. After a few minutes, Sir Clive carefully closed the folder and handed it back.

'Do you think it was Periston?'

'It has to be. There is no one else.'

'What about your man, what is his name?'

'Jim Clarke. I have known him for years and trust him implicitly.'

'You said nothing to the police?'

'I have not. Can you imagine the consequences for my plans, not forgetting your investors who also have an interest in keeping this quiet.'

'Indeed Edward, you have done well.'

'What are you going to do about this French housekeeper?'

'Give her what she wants. The last thing we need is for the woman to remain in Britain, just in case the police ever stumble on the truth.'

'Sir Clive, why you?'

The man looked puzzled.

'Why would she come to you?'

'As I said, she looks after the building in which the Fellows family lived and she needed money to leave.'

'Yes.' Taylor questioned as the answer made no sense.

'I own the building. Mme Emié works for me. Now Edward, about those investors of mine?'

\*\*\*\*

'Your tea darling.' Said Jen with a definite edge to her voice. Jennings cringed. He put down his paintbrush and meekly accepted the cup and saucer.

## Chapter twelve

'I'm sorry Jen, if my being at home is inconvenient.

'Of course it's inconvenient. I have Mrs Forbes-Bryson coming this afternoon and you know what happened at your first meeting. Poor woman took months to get over the shock.'

Jennings winced as he recalled leaving the bathroom naked having entirely forgotten that Jen had a meeting of the WI in the living room. He could still clearly remember the loudness of her scream and to this day, remained in awe of the human form's capacity to produce so many decibels.

'I promise not to come into the house until she has gone.'

'I am not sure that will be enough.'

'I suppose I could go down to the library and read the newspapers along with the OAPs and unemployed.'

Jen's face swiftly brightened. 'Could you darling? Oh, wait no, it's Monday.'

'What's so special about Mondays?'

'Half day closing, pity. Still, as long as you stay in the garden, she need not know. There is just one thing.'

'And what is that?'

'The ladies might wish to have the meeting in the garden as it is such a lovely day. If they do, you will have to hide in the shed.'

'Now just a moment.' Jennings was beginning to become resentful at being treated as a pariah in his own home.

'I will open the patio door. That always makes a loud squeak as you have not oiled the doors for years. That will be your signal to disappear. I am so glad we had this little chat. I was quite concerned.'

Jennings watched Jen with a sense of bemusement as she returned to the house. He then sipped his tea, before returning his attention to the garden shed.

Had it not been for the circumstances, he might have enjoyed the process of demolishing the old shed and putting the new one together. Such work made a change from sitting behind a desk, but there was no denying the fact, that his heart was not really up to the task. Questions kept forming in his

mind about why Madison was acting out of character and who the man was at Smithfield Market. In the end however, all the questions came down to just one. Would Greene let Morton do his job? Based on previous experience, he concluded not.

Jennings switched on his transistor radio for the news. He had heard the news every hour, on the hour since 9.00am and that was four hours ago. Even after all that time, the only thing of interest was a discussion on the fact that the chimes of Big Ben had stopped due to some fault. There had been a time when Scotland Yard was based in the real Scotland Yard, he could actually see St. Stephens Tower from Gilpatrick's office. If he leaned far enough out the window.

Jennings switched the radio off and took another sip of tea. He had not been painting for long when Jen reappeared. For one awful moment, he imagined she had discovered the library was open after all, although that might be preferable to spending it confined to a stuffy shed. Then two more figures emerged, both of which he recognised immediately.

'Morton, Caruthers, what are you doing here?'

'Hope you don't mind us dropping in like this sir, but the fact is I could do with some advice.'

'Is that so, can I offer you some tea?'

Both declined much to Jen's obvious relief and Jennings took them to the garden table and benches to sit down.

'I see you are on fatigues.' Said Caruthers.

Morton looked puzzled but then he would have been too young to have done his National Service.

'What advice do you need?'

'I appreciate this is not strictly procedure sir.'

'You do not have to call me sir here, John. I am on holiday. Well of a sort.'

'You and me both,' added Caruthers, 'my paper took great exception to my continued interest in the Noril'sk meteorite and fired me.'

'I'm sorry to hear that, and I am also sorry to hear about you and Silvia.'



## Chapter twelve

Caruthers smiled faintly. 'There is no need. It was becoming inevitable. Actually, when she discovered I had lost my job we had a blazing row and she threw me out.'

'Which means that there are two areas of advice, we could use.' Morton interrupted.

'Well, as you can see, I am hardly rushed off my feet and as I am technically between jobs, I cannot break any rules.'

'The fact is that I have a rather awkward situation, delicate even.'

'Go on John. You are prevaricating like an old woman. You need to develop a sense of urgency. Never take the softly, softly approach if you want to get on in the force.'

'Yes sir.' Morton replied patiently. 'The man that was seen going into the warehouse is Evans. That was why I could not let you know earlier. I had a devil of job confirming who he was.'

'Which means that he has penetrated the gang and they trust him enough to let him out of their sight. That is good news.'

'Not quite, I saw a second man with Evans and you will never guess who that was.'

'Madison.' Jennings answered. 'Don't look so disappointed. After such a build-up it could hardly be anyone else.'

'No, I suppose not sir.'

'What has Greene done with this information?'

'That is why I am here sir. Chief Inspector Greene is convinced that the stones will be taken when the exhibition closes at the end of December. He also thinks that Madison is planning to use Smithfield Market as a way of smuggling the stones out of the country inside animal carcasses. As Smithfield is outside his territory it is unlikely to be watched.'

'That sounds reasonable. Has there been any news from Evans?'

'No, and that is part of the problem. Without news, we have no definite date.'

'And if he is working that close to Madison, it is doubtful that we will hear anything. Did he set up any visual codes?'

'Yes. He always chews gum and when he drops a marked wrapper, the raid will happen within forty-eight hours.'

'Not much notice then.'

'What else has Greene concluded?'

'As I just said, nothing will happen until the exhibition closes.'

'Has anyone been to Wormwoods to visit Robson?'

'Yes, I thought of that. He had the run of the museum, even if for just a short time. His solicitor is one regularly used by Madison.'

'Which means that Madison knows the rough layout of the private areas. I can see why Greene might think that he will wait but my instinct still says the 30<sup>th</sup> of August.'

'Mine too sir, and the word is that they are expecting trouble on the last night of the carnival. But interestingly there is an event at the museum and this time I defy you to guess who is running it.' Morton grinned.

'Well come on then, I can see you are bursting to tell me.'

'The Periston Corporation.'

'Now that is interesting. When is it?'

'Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup>.'

For a long while, Jennings said nothing as he thought about the implications. He had been convinced that Madison would use the carnival as cover but considering that Periston was in the market for gems similar to the ones in the museum collection, this seemed just too coincidental.

'Periston could be the high power friends that Madison has taken up with.' Morton added as an afterthought.

'Yes they could.' Jennings mused. 'An event of that sort means a large number of people milling around the museum which would make it much harder to detect the presence of a couple of villains. What does Greene make of this new information?'

'Nothing sir, he has gone on holiday.'

Jennings smiled a naughty smile. 'So you thought I might use his absence to have a quiet word with Gilpatrick. Yes, that

## Chapter twelve

might work, although I suggest you use official channels just to keep everything above board. If I were in your position, I would take this as fresh evidence to Gilpatrick. You might also suggest that such a high profile case needs a chief and that as I have yet to take up my new role and know the case, I should lead. Does that fit in with your plans?’

‘Perfectly sir,’ Morton replied with evident relief, ‘but it does leave one outstanding point.’

‘Indeed it does John, proving a connection between Madison and Periston, which is I assume, why you are here Caruthers.’

‘Anton.’

‘Yes, of course.’

‘I am not here to talk about Madison or to discuss the meteorite if that thought had crossed your mind.’

‘Then why are you here?’

Caruthers gave Morton a purposeful look. ‘A company called Cambridge Electronics was responsible for shipping samples of the Noril’sk meteorite to Britain back in ‘73. Engineers from that same company were part of a team that surveyed a mine owned by Taylor and Hardy; who formed a brief partnership with Periston to develop a use for material extracted from the mine. There was some scientific speculation that the mine contained fallout from the same meteorite as the one in ‘73. As you know, there were seventeen deaths and some of those were remarkably similar to those of Sykes, Brown and Fellows. The Soviets maintained that the Noril’sk samples were contaminated by a poisonous fungal spore but just suppose that it is the material itself which affects people.’

‘I thought you said you weren’t here to talk about the meteorite?’

‘I’m not. I am more interested in the fallout. I said there was speculation. That ended when Taylor published a detailed survey, but it could have been falsified.’

Jennings studied Caruthers carefully, trying to work out whether to buy in to his story. It was certainly true that both

Periston and Taylor and Hardy seemed to have something to hide, but that could have simply been commercial paranoia.

‘That might make sense if you believe that Brown came into contact with something when he worked in the cargo bay.’

‘And Sykes worked as a courier.’

‘But your argument requires that this substance is being shipped and that somehow Sykes and Brown came into direct contact with it, and what about Fellows. His case is quite different...’ Jennings stopped talking. He took a sip of tea to help him think and shuddered as the cold liquid hit his tongue. ‘I suppose it might be worth looking into but if there is a link, it’s far too tenuous for a formal investigation, particularly as we have already been warned off.’

Caruthers smiled. ‘But an informal investigation is right up my street, and as I have nothing else to do at the moment.’

Jennings looked at his watch. ‘It’s half one. Just time for a pint before the pub closes. Gentlemen, I think we have something to celebrate.’

## Chapter thirteen

Jennings helped himself to a canapé as the waiter negotiated a way through the packed auditorium of the Natural History Museum. It was a strange experience being in such a familiar public place after normal hours. Not because it was packed or because the artificial light cast a completely different feel to the place now that it was getting dark outside. It was odd because normally people would be gathered around the exhibits. Now the displays stood ignored and conversations were focused on business, dresses and establishing a social pecking order.

Jennings had never been to a private sector bash and was amazed and not a little envious at the copious amounts of food and drink available. Jennings thought of the curled ham sandwiches and orange squash served up at his last Christmas party and shuddered. Another waiter passed by and Jennings took advantage, but then looked with distaste at the green paste contained within the pastry. Failing to find somewhere to hide it, he slipped the morsel into his jacket pocket.

There were a few faces he recognised including the host Roger Dalton, Sir John Methan from the CBI and the Lord Mayor of London, Sir Robin Gillett. They were just the kind of people one would expect to see at such a prominent corporate event. Jennings wondered whether Edward Taylor had been invited but there was no sign of him. However, there was one face that instantly caught his attention. Raymond Baxter from the BBC technology programme *Tomorrow's World*. This time he would not let Michael down and Jennings imagined his son's astonished face when presented with an autograph.

Jennings purposefully made his way towards the tall figure and had almost reached him when a hand unexpectedly gripped

his elbow. He turned sharply to confront whoever it was and found himself face to face with the museum's director, Henderson-Hedley.

'I wonder if I might have a quiet word.'

Henderson-Hedley strode off in the direction of the corridor that led to the Geology Museum next door. As Jennings emerged from the throng, the temperature quickly dropped. Despite it being high summer, the museum when empty, felt cold, even chilly, a fact for which he was grateful after the hot humid atmosphere in the central hall.

'Sorry for dragging you away but I just wanted to take the opportunity to say thank you.'

'That is very kind but I fear a little premature.'

'Irrespective of what may happen tonight, your interest has been immensely reassuring, not least from the perspective of our insurers.'

'Oh I see!' Jennings tried to disguise any tone of disappointment.

'I must say that I will think twice before agreeing to host another collection unless the donator wishes to take responsibility.'

'Perhaps I had better get back. I should be keeping a close eye on things.'

'Yes of course and thank you again.'

Jennings returned to the throng and noted that a bank of trestle tables had been laid out with rows of glasses. Each was filled with a different coloured liquid. Jennings ignored the red and white ones and instead opted for a glass of fresh orange juice. He looked around for Baxter but he was nowhere to be seen.

Morton and a few sturdy constables were by now stationed at the various entry points to the gallery where the stones were being displayed. Unless Madison and his gang flew in through a skylight it would be impossible for them to enter the museum without being seen immediately. Jennings vividly recalled his feelings from that June day, standing in the courtyard behind

## Chapter thirteen

the museum. A distinct and inexplicable sense that something was wrong. A sudden conviction that he needed to go out on to the street, only to be confronted by crashed vehicles and a very angry Columbian who turned out to be quite a pleasant character. Veléz had resigned his job after the peace conference debacle and returned home. But not without leaving some choice words for his employer and the other delegates after their respective governments reverted to type and prepared to wage war on the civilian population once more.

Jennings found himself wondering how Madison would resolve an obvious conflict of interest. On the one hand, being the type of man he was, Jennings expected he would want to be present to ensure that things went according to plan. However, Madison was also a calculating type and would require an unbreakable alibi, which in his case, would necessitate being seen in public by a large number of people. It was just possible, Jennings thought, that if he had got his timing right, he would have an answer tonight.

There was a small commotion from a number of people standing halfway up the stairs. After a brief discussion, they turned towards the crowd and a young man produced a microphone which he handed to Dalton.

‘Lord Mayor, my fellow shareholders, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for coming this evening. I thought it would make a pleasant change for this year’s AGM to move away from the usual pats on the back supported by our annual report, diverting stuff though it undoubtedly is.’

There was some subdued nervous laughter.

‘As a change, we are going to provide you with a demonstration that I hope will show more eloquently the aims and ambitions I have for the company. Indeed, I am extremely honoured that the well known science, motoring and air show reporter, Raymond Baxter is with us tonight. Raymond. Where are you?’

A hand stretched into the air and Jennings carefully marked its position.

'10.30 is the time to note and until then, please do help yourself to food and drink. It has all been paid for by our animal friends. Indeed, some of it is made from our animal friends.'

Again, there was nervous laughter. Jennings looked at the chicken vol-au-vent he had just picked up and slipped it reluctantly into his pocket.

Instead of searching for replacement food, Jennings began to make his way to the place where he had seen the hand. It was hard going and several times he found himself forced into unexpected detours to negotiate a way around the larger groups. As Jennings finally broke through the last one, he realised with some annoyance that the quarry had escaped once more. Jennings glanced at his watch. It was just after 9.00pm. This was going to be a long evening.

To take a break from the temptation of food, Jennings climbed the stairs towards a curtained area, which bore a sign indicating that the displays were being renovated. Behind the curtain was a long narrow room that stretched across the width of the central hall and provided a clear view of the entire area including the mineral gallery where the gems were displayed. Jennings looked around cautiously before he slipped inside.

'Is there anything wrong sir?' Asked Morton in a clearly worried tone.

'No why?'

'It's just that you could have been seen and we would not want to scare them off.'

'I don't think you need worry about that. Actually, that is why I am here. Dalton is planning some kind of show at 10.30. It will ensure that everyone is in one place and depending on the nature of the display, it might even provide cover.'

'10.30. We still have some time to go?'

'I could be wrong of course.'

'I don't think so sir, particularly if Madison is working for Periston.'

'Why is that?'



## Chapter thirteen

‘Because Periston has been very cagey about tonight.’

‘Where have you got your people stationed?’

‘Blakemore is on the first floor of the V&A so that he can keep an eye on the vehicle entrance. In addition, each of the entrances to the gallery is being watched and I have Jackson inside the gallery, in the cleaning cupboard to be exact. We can have six officers inside that room in less than ten seconds and there is an additional four as backup. Hopefully, there will not be more than two of them at the most, three if you include Evans as a runner.’

‘Make that four. I really cannot see Madison not being here to supervise.’

‘We still have them outnumbered two to one.’

‘What about arms? We know that Robson had a gun the last time they tried.’

Morton tapped his chest.

‘Anyone else?’

‘No sir, just me. It’s an enclosed space and it could get quite frantic in there. We don’t want to start shooting each other.’

‘Good thinking.’ Jennings replied. ‘Just try to avoid using it.’

Morton smiled weakly. ‘I was wondering sir. Could this simply be an ego trip? We know Madison’s credibility was damaged after the first attempt failed.’

‘It might be that but then it would also be a major coincidence that it was arranged for the very day that Periston hired the museum for their big bash.’

‘Unless they have fallen out.’

Jennings pondered for a moment. ‘I had not thought of that. If all goes to plan, you can ask him, first thing tomorrow morning.’

‘Yes sir.’ Morton smiled one more.

‘By the way, are you hungry?’

Morton responded with a pained look. ‘The sight of all that food did remind me that I have been here for ten hours.’

Jennings reached into his pocket and took out the two canapés. ‘Never let it be said that I don’t think of the troops.’

Morton briefly looked at the fluff covered food and mumbled a thank you.

As Jennings made for the ground floor his thoughts turned to promotion, not for himself but for Morton. It was far too soon of course. There were procedures and conventions. People like Gilpatrick and himself had worked their way through the system one grade at a time and that was the way things were done. Sooner or later you got promoted for the last time and then you retired. But the old ways were not always the best ways and sometimes quality needed to be recognised and encouraged and perhaps Morton was the right sort of candidate for fast streaming.

As Jennings reached the halfway point close by the statue of Charles Darwin, he noticed a movement at the far end of the mezzanine gallery. It was no more than a fleeting blur and could easily have been one of the security guards. As he considered what to do next, Jennings noted that a small group of young people had broken away from the crowd and was heading his way. It was evident from their chatter that they were taking the opportunity to explore and Jennings decided to tag along. For a few minutes, their attention seemed to be occupied by a display of stuffed animals, but it was not long before the free wine began to show itself.

'I have always wanted to ride on the back of a lion.' Said a dark haired young woman.

'Go on then.' Egged a Kensington hooray Henry.

'Do you think I should?'

'We are honoured guests and can do what we like. Besides which, they can hardly throw out the son of the chairman.'

Jennings unexpectedly found himself being handed a half empty wine glass by the young woman who then clambered precariously onto the back of an African lion.

'Giddy up.' She yelled at the top of her voice.

'I'm bored let's go and get some more drinkies.' Replied another of the group.

Jennings wanted to take a closer look at the far end of the

## Chapter thirteen

gallery and slyly hoped that these young drunk people might provide cover.

‘There is an elephant down there. Why don’t you try that?’ He whispered to the young woman. She looked at him with bleary eyes. ‘OK! But you have to come with me.’

Jennings followed as they made their way in the semi-darkness towards the end of the mezzanine, which overlooked the gallery where the gemstones were kept. There was a staircase that led to the upper floors and on the other side, the mezzanine continued all around the central hall until it met the main staircase leading from the ground floor. If he had simply seen a security guard, then the man should have been clearly visible as he continued his way around the mezzanine. The fact that whoever it was had vanished, could mean only one thing. Jennings had to be certain that the man had not stopped off for a cigarette and was simply out of view.

‘Go on then darling.’

Jennings looked at the young woman and wondered what she meant.

‘You look like a big strong man. So, what are you waiting for? You can give me a hand up.’

The penny dropped and he rapidly tried to think of a way out of this predicament. Whilst drunk teenagers were a useful decoy, the last thing he needed was for them to draw attention to his presence. He looked at the creature and tried to recall how the mahouts mounted these enormous animals. Just a short distance away was a step ladder and a bucket which had probably been left by a cleaner. He fetched the ladder and set it up by the side of the elephant.

‘I think the old boy is going to do it.’

Jennings gave the young man a withering look and began to climb. As he settled himself on top, he looked down at the young woman.

‘On second thoughts, it does look a long way. I think I need another drink.’

Jennings watched, bemused as they made their way back

along the mezzanine laughing. As he looked around from his vantage point, he could clearly see that no one else was on the mezzanine level. Jennings was just about to climb down when something caught his eye at the entrance below. A vaguely familiar figure was handing an invitation to one of the hostesses. Madison had retreated to character after all and he had been invited. It looked as though his connection to Periston was more than just conjecture. Jennings watched Madison as he quickly headed towards the bird gallery and despite keeping watch for several minutes, Madison did not return. Jennings manoeuvred himself off the stuffed elephant and on to the stepladder. As he reached the bottom, he became aware that someone was there. He turned around and came face to face with a man in uniform who glowered in a very disapproving way.

\*\*\*\*

Morton smiled as he closed the curtain and wondered whether he should tell Wilks. Naturally, Jennings would know who was responsible but watching Wilks expertly tease his boss, might be worth any resulting hassle. He returned to his central position overlooking the hall and noticed a small light blinking on the radio. Morton slipped on a pair of headphones and adjusted the volume. By the time his conversation had finished, Morton felt very worried. Blakemore had seen a van park a short distance away from the museum but no one had emerged. The van bore the name of a well-known butcher and given the likelihood that Madison intended to use a meat market to smuggle the gems out of London, it looked like they were right about the dates. The raid would definitely happen tonight. To minimise the need to talk, Morton had worked out a code that used the signal received lights. He sent the code to each of the other radios, raising the danger level.

When Gilpatrick had first put him in charge of the surveillance, Morton could not help but feel pleased with

## Chapter thirteen

himself; even more so because Jennings would be there to give a hand if needed. Now however, he was having second thoughts. If anything went wrong, it was down to him. Morton mentally went through the preparations once more to try to convince himself that all was well. He could find no fault in the plans but that brought little comfort. He looked at his watch and it was just after 10.00pm. If the raid was to coincide with the demonstration, then it was likely that all the gang members were already in the museum. Morton felt his stomach tighten.

\*\*\*\*

Jennings stood between the bottom of the main staircase and a display about the African grasslands. He was searching once more for the figure of Mr Baxter and thought he had seen him briefly by one of the trestle tables. But by the time he was able to get a proper look, the man had vanished along with possibly the last chance to get an autograph for Michael. A few moments ago, Jennings received a message that a butchers van was parked in Exhibition Road and he knew that Madison at least was somewhere in the building. He glanced briefly up to the long row of windows above the staircase and wondered how Morton was feeling. If it was anything like his first case, not good. The waiting was always the worst part. Once things were happening, adrenaline inevitably took over, but the time beforehand allowed the brain to go into overdrive. Just so long as he remained focused on the task, Morton should be all right.

Jennings wondered what Jen was up to at this moment. The children would all be in bed, apart possibly from Sarah. She was growing up so fast. Jennings looked at his watch and saw that there was just a short while to go. A waiter passed by and jogged his elbow.

‘Very sorry sir,’ the man said apologetically, ‘would you like a glass of wine or Champagne?’

Jennings looked longingly at the array of red and white filled glasses.

'No thank you.'

As the man resumed his waiting duties Jennings watched him for a moment.

'Actually,' he called out, 'perhaps I will.'

He took what he thought was the least filled glass to ease his conscience and quickly drained the contents before anyone could see. Then he waited. The same small group of people was gathering once again, halfway up the staircase and talking amongst themselves. Dalton gave a nod to some invisible person and turned to face the assembly.

'My Lord Mayor, ladies and gentlemen. May I have your attention?' He paused whilst waiting for everyone to quieten down. 'I hope you are all enjoying yourselves.'

There was an uncoordinated murmur by way of reply.

'As I said earlier, this evening will be a little different but before I talk about that, I should just say something about our progress this year. Particularly as we have a number of members of the financial press present.'

Jennings mentally switched off and began to look around the crowd once more. He had moved from the centre of the gallery to take up a position close to the front. This afforded an opportunity to have a good look at who was present for the first time. Most faces were middle aged. Well-groomed white haired men accompanied by middle aged spouses, dripping with diamonds and pearls. A few partners were significantly younger and for the most part without valuable jewellery.

Before setting off for the museum, Jennings had carefully gone through records of the people known to associate with Madison, but as far as he could tell, none of those faces was present in this room. Neither was Evans. In fact, it was due to Evans that he had his first doubts about the timing of the raid. Evans had been seen regularly over the past few days until yesterday morning. Despite the fact that there had been no chewing gum wrapper, or any other indication that Madison was about to make his move, the absence of Evans was as good a sign as anything else.

## Chapter thirteen

The crowd was clapping every now and then when Dalton uttered some incomprehensible figure. Jennings looked carefully at the man who was making a confident speech without notes. Confidence seemed to be a good summary of Dalton's character, apart from one particular point, when he had talked about Periston's connection with Fellows.

There was another and longer round of applause that seemed to indicate the beginning rather than the end of something.

'I trust therefore that you can see the value of investing in Periston, a fact that will become even more apparent after our little demonstration. Periston is primarily a chemical company. However, from time to time our frontier research takes us in a different direction. I am sure all of you will recall our contribution to the knowledge of surgical techniques that have saved many thousands of lives. That came about as a result of our work developing a new drug. The drug did not work but rather than simply consigning to the bin, all the time and resources spent in developing a new way of introducing the drug to the body, we continued our investment and the results were donated free of charge to the medical profession. The bottom line cannot always be the prime concern of a major company like ours. We all make a good living from our products and once in a while we can afford to put something back in to society.'

There was a loud round of applause, but Jennings thought it little less enthusiastic than the one Dalton received when he announced record dividends.

'This evening I will show you something quite extraordinary. In fact, I will go so far as to say unique. Once you have seen it, I am sure that you will all recognise its enormous potential. But in doing so, I should say that I have no intention of registering any patent. This will be made freely available. We are after all a chemical company.'

Jennings smiled to himself as he anticipated what they were about to see. If he was right, he had no doubts that everyone

would be impressed, after all, he was.

‘The London Natural History Museum was built using the profits from the Great Exhibition of 1851. This wonderful building, designed by Alfred Waterhouse and opened in 1881, holds an unusual and little known secret. Behind both me and Mister Darwin lies something that was hidden by Waterhouse. We only know of its existence because he mentioned it to a friend shortly before he died in 1905. However, to this day, no one knows what it is. We could always knock the wall down but I am sure the heritage people would not be at all happy about that. However, tonight you will each have the privilege of knowing what it was that Waterhouse hid. Jim, will you do the honours.’

A young man began to fiddle with something that looked like a control board from a sound recording studio. A vaguely familiar hum seemed to well up from the floor. It began as a sensation that could be felt through the sole of the shoes. Then it seemed to flow up the body as it rose in intensity until finally penetrating the ears. As it did so, Jennings wriggled his nose as his senses caught an unexpected scent of rotting fruit. It was faint, almost unrecognisable, like the trace of something in the wind, but it was there.

Like everyone else, Jennings’ attention was fixed on the wall behind Dalton. Unlike everyone else however, he tried not to get caught up in the escalating sense of anticipation. This could be the moment that they had been waiting for and if Morton needed help, Jennings wanted to be there.

The sound had now become so loud that one or two people were beginning to wince. Indeed, whilst the noise was not causing any pain, he could feel a sense of unease that was difficult to control. Jennings looked around to see whether he could locate the source of his nervousness, but apart from a sea of expectant faces, nothing appeared out of the ordinary. He glanced up in the direction of the mineral gallery and the doors remained closed. Despite his instinct to go and check, this was Morton’s call and it was not for him to interfere. An



## Chapter thirteen

unexpected gasp from the crowd caused Jennings to look back at the wall and a small area appeared to be shimmering. Jennings watched fascinated as a shape began to form from within a tunnel of whirling whiteness. Jennings fumbled for his glasses and put them on. The shape was rectangular and appeared to have another irregular shape resting on top. Then, as it became clearer Jennings could see that it was something resting on a stand. Suddenly, there was a loud explosion and everything went black, to the sound of screams.

\*\*\*\*

Morton stared at his radio with dismay, but the signal light remained stubbornly dark. As the demonstration got underway, he began to experience an unexpected sense of indefinable panic which he fought to control. It was almost as if his darkest fears were emerging of their own volition and seeking to overwhelm him. Sensations of discovery, embarrassment and hopelessness were constant companions that he tried to suppress, and he was at a loss as to understand why they should resurface now. To reassure himself, Morton sought to focus on something real. He once more used code to signal to Jackson who was stationed inside the gallery. Because of his vulnerability, it had been agreed not to contact Jackson unless there was a serious reason, but Morton had heard nothing from Jackson or Blakemore for some time and now he could not raise them. He tried again and there was no reply. Finally, Morton resolved to speak with Jackson but the radio remained silent.

The sound from the demonstration below felt as if it were wrapping itself around him. It was almost like being smothered. Morton's lips dried and at the same time, his skin felt clammy. The room appeared to close around him and he experienced an overwhelming desire to get away. With as much self-control as he could exert, Morton opened the curtains and looked out. The sound increased and Morton cringed. As he looked back

towards the crowd, he saw that a couple of people had fainted whilst others covered their ears. Then another movement caught his attention. The doors to the mineral gallery moved slightly. He took several deep breaths to calm his nerves and then began to cautiously make his way along the mezzanine.

\*\*\*\*

Jennings found himself lying down. For a brief moment, he tried to work out why the bed felt so hard and cold but then his senses recovered enough to understand that he and many others had been rendered unconscious by Dalton's test. He glanced at his watch and with horror, realised that over ten minutes had passed. Jennings stood up and instantly regretted such a rash action as his head pounded with pain. Within a few moments, he had traversed the staircase and pulled aside the curtain expecting to find Morton, but he was not there. Instead, Jennings was confronted by a radio lying on the tiled floor, hissing quietly to itself. There was only one place Morton could be and only one way to find out what had happened during those ten missing minutes. Jennings unknowingly followed the same route that Morton had taken. There was no rhyme or reason to take the long way round, it just felt right. Every now and then he would pass through patches of scent that seemed to cling to the nostrils. The more he passed through, the stronger the smell of fruit became and the stronger his sense of unease became. The mineral gallery lay on the other side of a short flight of stairs that led to the upper floors. Behind this, the mezzanine wrapped its way around the edge of the building. When the museum was open, the entrance to the minerals gallery was well lit from a large window, but at night it seemed to be filled with dark, sinister shadows and hidden menace. From the corners of his eyes, small movements quickly became still once he looked directly. It was as if the intricately carved plants and animal reliefs, that enveloped the columns and pilasters, had somehow come alive and resented his presence.

## Chapter thirteen

Having rounded the staircase, the pair of poorly lit doors leading to the gemstone gallery seemed to be almost hidden by something opaque. Jennings had never considered himself a brave man and always envied colleagues who appeared to find it easier to shrug off the more unpleasant aspects of their work. Dark memories, half real, half the remnants of nightmares, threatened to overwhelm him. He looked down at the central hall area and one or two people were beginning to stir. The sound of muffled sighs mixed with more audible sobbing, were all signs that something truly sinister had occurred and the origin was obvious. Was it possible that Madison had used some sort of chemical or gas? With this new grasp of reality, Jennings returned his attention to the doors. Normally, he would have been able to see through the panes of glass, but they had been blacked out as part of the security measures. Jennings took hold of one of the large brass handles and pulled just a little. He could see the centre of the gallery all the way to the other end but it was a very narrow field of view. There was nothing for it but to risk opening the door wider. As he pulled, he braced himself to hear a shout of discovery, but the gallery remained silent. With a greater sense of confidence, Jennings pulled the door fully open and stepped inside. The room looked untouched and the long rows of wood and glass display cases all appeared to be intact. Jennings quickly made his way to rows 37 and 38, which he knew contained the gemstones. As he reached the half-way point of the gallery, even before he was close enough to see the stones themselves, he knew that they were still there. The gallery had not been touched, which begged the question, where was everyone. Jennings walked to the end of the row and carefully opened the door to the cleaning cupboard where he knew one of Morton's men should be hiding. It was also empty and so he returned to the display cases for a closer inspection. The stones were all in their correct positions. Each had a type written label detailing what it was and where it had been found. Jennings looked around the room for any clue that might explain what was going on. He had not

imagined Madison or the figure that had vanished and yet, nothing had been taken.

Jennings was just about to return to the curtained area to find Morton when he noticed something. It was not an obvious point but the kind of detail that over twenty years of working as a detective had trained him to look for. All the stones should have been arranged according to their base element and colour. Although he was no expert on gemstones, he knew that amethysts were not blue, but purple or violet. Scrambling down on the floor he looked underneath for a small metal box. Its only external feature was a single bulb and the fact that it was not lit, confirmed his worst fears. Jennings stood up, lifted the heavy lid from the display base and after a brief examination, Jennings knew that the stones had been taken and replaced with cheap copies. All had supposedly been carefully placed on the flattened patches of felt, but someone had been sloppy. Jennings tried rapidly to piece together what might have occurred. The smell of something strange in the air, and the fact that everyone had been rendered unconscious, left little room for doubt that Madison had used a chemical of some kind, possibly supplied by Periston, to give themselves time to complete the job. The remaining question was, had they left themselves enough time to escape. Disarming the alarms and exchanging the stones must have taken several minutes, which might mean that they were still in the building. The fact that none of their officers were around could mean that they were searching but it might also mean something else.

There were a number of potential exits that the gang could have taken, but only one that did not lead to the central hall. Jennings found himself looking at the door at the far end of the gallery. He knew that this room had a second door which led to the maze of back-office corridors and drew an obvious conclusion. Jennings moved quietly towards it, whilst carefully listening for even the smallest noise. Unlike most of the public doors which were glazed, this one was solid. Jennings carefully placed an ear against the wood and listened. Though muffled

## Chapter thirteen

by the thickness of the wood, he could hear...something. Jennings looked around for anything that could be used as a weapon and spotted a large crystal amongst several smaller stones which were on open display. He picked it up, tested the weight and found that it was easily heavy enough to knock someone out. Jennings returned to the door and looked down at the hinges. His heart sank as he realised that it opened outwards. There was only one option and it was a risky one. Taking a deep breath to steady his nerves, he knocked on the door loudly and waited. For a moment, nothing happened, then the door slowly opened, Jennings raised the stone high above his head until he saw a hand. There was a scream of pain and a shot. The next fractions of seconds blurred into a seamless interconnection of images. A gun sliding along the wooden floor and coming to rest against the leg of a display case. A desperate race to grab it. The sight of a body of an unknown man lying unconscious. A door. A frightened young man backing away and several people squatting on the floor, one of whom he recognised as Blakemore. Banking on the fact that they had just one weapon between them, which was now in his possession, Jennings pointed it at the young man, hoping that he looked intimidating enough to quell any resistance.

‘You,’ Jennings tried to keep his voice calm, ‘untie them.’

Jennings watched intently as his instruction was obeyed whilst using the time to calm his racing heart. He could tell that words were being exchanged but the rush of blood in his ears blocked out the external world. Try as he might to fathom what was going on, Jennings found any attempt to rationalise the situation simply led to an irrational sense of fear. A familiar face appeared in front of him and was mouthing something.

‘Are you all right sir? You look as white as a sheet.’ Jennings found himself unreasonably annoyed at the cliché.

‘What happened, Blakemore?’

‘Someone tipped them off sir. They came about half an hour ago and brought me here. They also knew where Jackson was. They tied us up and emptied the cases. Then they seemed to

run into a problem. For some reason, they could not get out of the gallery. I could not quite get what they were saying, but it seems as if the doors behind us were bolted from the outside and they appeared reluctant to re-enter the main museum.'

'Where is Madison?'

'I'm sorry sir. I don't know, I have not seen him.'

'There is someone else outside. You had better go and check on him.'

Jennings looked at the young man who was now handcuffed to a radiator and judged him to be the kind of person that Madison took on for muscle rather than brains.

'Where is Madison? I know he is in the building because I saw him earlier.'

The young man returned a mutinous look.

'Given that you have been caught red-handed, you might want to think about the benefits of co-operation.'

'I ain't telling you nothing.'

Jennings groaned inwardly as he realised that his conclusion had been correct. Blakemore returned, supporting the second man. He gently lowered him into a chair before applying handcuffs. Now that both men were secure, Jennings disarmed the gun and put it in his pocket. He then lowered himself so that his head was level with the newly conscious man's and carefully looked into his eyes. He was a little pale but the eyes were sharp and focused.

'Where is Madison?'

'I don't know.' The man replied in a weak voice. 'I have not seen him since he arrived.'

'He is probably long gone.' Added Blakemore.

'No, I don't think so. This was Madison's second try and I do not think his ego could stand another failure. Does anyone know where the stones are?'

'In that bag.' One of the other policemen pointed at a khaki rucksack that lay by the door.

'Then I think we can expect a visit. By the way, has anyone seen Morton?'

## Chapter thirteen

Jennings was greeted by blank faces.

‘Then can I suggest that someone goes and looks for him. You can also call for a car to take this lot away.’

Jennings was puzzled by the lack of reaction to his instructions but then slowly realised that everyone was looking in the same direction, to a point behind him. He turned to see the slight figure and piercing blue eyes of Madison.

‘I would also like an answer to that question. If you would kindly take the cuffs off my staff, one of them can go and look if you like.’

His voice was thin and precise. Although Jennings had seen him from a distance and in photographs, he remained unprepared for the reality of the man as compared to his reputation. Madison looked inconsequential, more mobile librarian than South London thug, except for the eyes. They were cold, piercing and without any sign of humanity. Jennings looked at the gun Madison was holding and became very self-conscious about the disarmed version in his pocket. Sometimes, both the culture and rules of British policing were unrealistic in the modern world. The man that Jennings had hit got up from his chair and left the room, rubbing his head as he did so.

‘Prinsent, pick up the bag.’

The young man looked horrified at the use of his name.

‘Now, there is no need to look like that. Even if these gentlemen do not know who you are, they will do as soon as they check their records.’

The young man looked unconvinced. ‘Not if they were dead.’ He mumbled.

‘What! Shoot a policeman?’ Madison’s look of shock was clearly no more than a charade. ‘These buggers are still trying to link me to the death of that idiot young copper. Besides which, after today it won’t much matter.’

‘Your friends at Periston seem to have mucked things up for you.’ Jennings ventured to strike up a conversation.

‘You’re fishing.’ Madison responded dismissively.

'Perhaps.'

'Forget it. There will be no last moment confessions. You've been watching too much tv.'

'What are we waiting for?' Interrupted the young man. 'Let's get it over with and get out of here.'

'Yes, I was wondering about that. Just what are you waiting for?' Jennings continued hoping that Madison did not accept it as a challenge.

He did not reply. Instead, Madison focused his attention on the young man and his eyes seemed to go lifeless.

'I asked you to hand me the bag. I will not ask again.'

The young man did as he was told but not without adding another complaint.

'Mr Madison. It's them or us. If they can't talk then they can't identify us.'

Madison's eyes remained blank as he slowly took the bag and seemed to hold the young man in a lengthy gaze. A look of terror filled the young man's eyes. There was a muffled sound and he crumpled to the floor.

'Why did you do that?' Jennings asked in as calm a voice as he could manage.

Madison turned to confront Jennings and his face had a puzzled expression as if the answer to the question was both obvious and simple.

'As you could see for yourself, he was not that bright, and it was only a matter of time before he was caught.'

'May I ask you what you intend to do with the rest of us?'

'I said Prinsent was not bright, but he was right about one thing. Your colleagues will quickly identify me as the culprit but if none of you are alive, that process will take a little longer. Time is all I need to deliver the stones and get out of the country.'

'I take it everything has been arranged.'

'It has.' Madison replied with a smug smile.

'Periston may have many powerful connections but they cannot protect you.'



## Chapter thirteen

'You're fishing again.'

'That may be true, but I think I have made a catch and if I have then so will others.'

'It does not matter what you or anyone else thinks. No one will be in a position to do anything about it.'

Somewhere in the distance an alarm finally sounded, and Madison's face betrayed a look of recognition. Without a word, his eyes became lifeless once more. Jennings unexpectedly found himself thinking about Jen and the children safely asleep at home and the thought seemed to quieten any sense of imminent danger. As he closely watched Madison's hand grip firmly on the gun, he felt nothing but calm at the certainty of what was about to happen. His mouth dried and the throat tightened but there was no sense of fear. There was a loud sound and the smell of burning oil mixed with burning flesh.

Jennings had witnessed someone shot at close range just once and it was a curious and disturbing sight. Logically, he knew that the time it took for a bullet to tear its way through bone and brain, was no more than the smallest fraction of a second. Certainly, not enough time for the body to comprehend what had happened, or so you might think. But you would be wrong. At the precise moment of the sound of the shot; those blank eyes changed instantly to a curious mix of shock, fear and acceptance. Then they became blank once more as Madison flew forward into his arms. As Jennings allowed Madison's body to drop to the ground, the pale, shocked face of Morton came into view.

\*\*\*\*

'No one is allowed to leave.' Said Jennings to Morton as they made their way towards the central hall.

'Backup is already on the way, but I don't think anyone is ready to put up a fight. They all seem to be a bit dazed.'

'Do you have any idea what happened?'

'Not in the least sir, but whatever it was, appears to have had

a pretty dramatic effect on some people. One of the journalists claimed that the stuffed leopard at the entrance came alive and tried to attack her.'

As they reached the bottom of the stairs, Jennings could see how pale and grey many of the people were. Then he spotted a distinctive figure just in the process of standing. He was being helped by one of Morton's people and was evidently not happy. Jennings went over and after a few moments, he returned with a look of triumph on his face.

'What was all that about?' Morton asked.

'He wanted to go home. I said he could. After all, it's not as if he will be difficult to find.'

'What was it you got him to sign?'

'That sound was pretty overpowering. I wonder if it was linked to whatever chemical Madison used. I have to say that I felt pretty odd myself.'

'What do mean by odd. What did you feel?'

'Sheer bloody naked fear Morton. I need to find a phone and talk to Gilpatrick. Periston has a lot of questions to answer.'

## Chapter fourteen

‘How are you feeling Robert?’ Said Gilpatrick, looking genuinely concerned.

‘I think that question should be aimed at young Morton. It is not easy to live with the fact of taking a human life, even one as nasty as Madison’s.’

‘No, I suppose not. When things have quietened down, you and I should have a chat about that young man’s career.’

‘Oddly enough, I was thinking the same thing last night, but I agree, now is not the time. Dalton has flatly denied that his demonstration had anything to do with what happened to his guests. Of course, the clever boys are going through the museum with their usual thoroughness, but even if he is cleared from that perspective, Periston has a number of questions to answer. My guess is that some kind of hallucinogenic gas was used to disorientate people and Periston does manufacture drugs. Then there is the coincidence of Madison using the date that Periston booked.’

‘It’s all right.’ Gilpatrick held up his hands in mock surrender. ‘You don’t have to convince me. The commissioner has decided that Periston’s activities deserve investigation.’

Jennings felt little satisfaction at this piece of news. A great deal of time had been wasted and that could only benefit whoever was responsible for using people as victims.

‘There is an equally important issue which is much closer to home.’

‘Indeed there is.’ Gilpatrick looked glum. ‘How the hell did Madison find out so much? I must admit that I was bloody seething about that when you rang me last night.’

‘Apart from Morton’s team, just three people were briefed

on the detail, us and the deputy commissioner.'

'Morton and the others are being questioned now.'

'I do not think you will find your guilty party there. According to Morton, no one left the station until 11.00am and then they went directly to the museum.'

'I gather the museum uses a telephone exchange system and the records of all calls are being checked. I suppose one of them could have slipped out and used a public phone box.'

'Possibly.' Jennings found himself yawning. After finishing at the museum, there had been no time to return home to get changed. Instead, he had had to make do with a quick wash and shave in the toilets. 'Another very odd thing is that Madison does not seem to have bothered establishing an alibi. In fact, he was quite blasé about the whole matter. That meant he was confident about plans to get him away.'

'We found Evans by the way. Trussed up in a butchers van but otherwise unharmed. One early bit of the jigsaw solved, is that Madison was expecting to use the Smithfield route to get out of London. However, the driver was not able to help with the final destination.'

'Not altogether surprising. Some time ago we discussed the idea that Madison might have been involved in some covert operation.'

'But I thought we established that that was not the case.'

'I wonder.' Jennings mused. 'According to Fairbrother, he could not confirm one way or the other. Even so, Madison was absolutely confident and he was a man for precise planning.'

'Perhaps so Robert, but I think Periston is a more likely candidate and they would certainly have both the resources and the connections. All in all, I am inclined to pull Dalton in for proper questioning.'

'Yes sir, but I can't help thinking that there is something I am missing. Morton and I were chatting just before things kicked off and he quite rightly observed that it made no sense for Periston to employ Madison to make a second attempt. Periston may have viewed the acquisition of the stones for their

## Chapter fourteen

experiments as a necessary act to begin with, but Dalton claimed they resolved their supply problems.'

'All the more reason to have him formally arrested; will you see to it?'

'Yes sir. By the way, what will you tell Greene when he gets back from holiday?'

\*\*\*\*

Braden shifted in his chair in a vain attempt to get comfortable. The pain this morning was far worse than usual, but his doctor had quickly dispatched stronger medication. He had been warned that the pain would increase and that eventually, the drugs would have little effect. That was not a situation he was willing to accept and plans were in place. It meant putting up with a little more discomfort than was necessary, but it would enable him to choose the time of his demise.

Braden was waiting for someone that he should not be meeting given the sensitive nature of their shared area of work. Nevertheless, it had an air of inevitability as one generation took over from another. Braden recalled with perfect clarity, the sense of annoyance he had felt at the reluctance of his old colonel to let go of the reins. That was not a trap that he would allow himself to fall into. Neither sentimentality nor personal ego could stand in the way of progress.

As Braden stared out of his club window, a man with a furled umbrella passed by. He looked ridiculous considering that the temperature was in the low eighties and it had not rained for weeks. But his passing was a timely reminder that he needed to talk with Gregory concerning one final matter. However, despite using all the usual channels, the man had proved elusive. Instead, his enquiries had stirred the interest of his old department as well as his successors. This was not a welcome development, but it was not unexpected.

The truth was that he could no longer devote the care or the

time that he would once have dedicated to keeping things hidden. Matters were coming to a close from many perspectives and he was determined to ensure that they were settled before... well, before the inevitable happened.

As Braden waited for his visitor his thoughts drifted to the perversity of fate and how, with hindsight, actions that seemed unrelated at the time, fell into a predictable pattern.

After the war, he had been placed in charge of a small unit responsible for adjusting history. The Russians, who had been allies of sorts during the war, were now resuming their place as the natural enemies of the West. In the post-war world, communism became the new anti-religion and technology, was the sword by which this latest enemy would be defeated. The atom bomb, the jet plane and germ warfare were deemed guardian angels to protect a world where democracy had shrunk to the frontiers of the English speaking nations and a small part of Western Europe. Once more there was a war to be won and his creation played its part in protecting the boundaries of a fragile philosophy. Not with guns and bombs, but with technology.

It had all started in 1944 with a visit to a small Cambridge factory that produced radio valves. Purely by chance, and a passing acquaintance with physics, the army had sent him to investigate a tiny alternative, which the factory boffins claimed would revolutionise electronics. Sadly, the factory and its staff were lost when a V2 struck but it set the seed of an idea which came to fruition after the war. Braden and his team brought together inventors and finance and removed any barriers to developing solutions that would help ensure the Cold War did not become hot. The fifties and sixties were turbulent years. Sometimes the enemy gained the advantage as in 1949 when the communists took over China. Sometimes there was a stalemate as in Korea. Occasionally the West gained the upper hand. The party in Berlin was indeed a night to remember. That was the way it was until 1969 when the Russians discovered something that was to change established perceptions of

## Chapter fourteen

mankind's future on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

Yet it was not until 1973 that he became directly involved. Rumours had been circulating for a couple of years and once those rumours were confirmed, it resulted in something that ideology and egos had failed to achieve over thousands of years. It united enemies in a common goal and set in train events that were essential if they were to counter a new threat that sent sheer naked fear though even the most hard bitten of men.

Braden's creation had a new task, a new structure, a new way of working, and a new head, which in part was why he was here, now. In the two years since his official retirement, his child had grown beyond the restrictions of Whitehall and governments. Even beyond those of national boundaries, which was why a one-time agent of Russians had become a colleague. However, it was not just the future that he was concerned with but also the past and his personal past in particular. It was odd to think that the merest quirk of fate had seen his dispatch to a small farm close to the border between Dorset and Wiltshire. Had that not happened, he could not have linked it to current events and so be able to understand its relevance and importance to their plans. Not that he or anyone else was in a position to do anything about it. For the moment, it was nothing more than a dairy farm and that was the way it would stay until they were ready; until his creation had helped technology evolve to the point where they could fight back.

As he stared out of the window, a young man in an electric blue safari suit and green tie approached the steps to his club. Braden smiled as he imagined the shock at reception and the hurried conversations as to whether to let him in. But they were used to his peculiar visitors and provided that they did not try to steal the silverware, they were tolerated. Times were indeed changing and he found himself once more thinking about Gregory. One more meeting should do the trick and then he could rest, not that he had much choice about the matter.

\*\*\*\*

‘Are you absolutely sure about that, old boy?’

Taylor could feel his temper rising but this was no time to show weakness, especially to someone like Sir Clive.

‘I am absolutely sure. Naturally, I cannot answer for your South African colleagues.’

‘I rather think that they are your colleagues given that you have a contract with them. I simply played the role of matchmaker.’

‘That may well be true, but the inescapable fact is that my people have not shipped any material for two months.’

Taylor glanced down at the evening paper. A page four article speculated that the suicide of a man called Stephen Lekota was due to the fact that he could not cope with the idea that his ANC activist twin brother was a mass murderer. However, it was the editorial on the opposite page that had captured his attention. It mentioned that the summer had seen a spate of unusual incidents and called into question police action to resolve matters. As Taylor sat patiently holding the telephone receiver to his ear, he could tell that Sir Clive was still on the line because he could hear him breathing, but the man said nothing for several minutes.

‘Sir Clive?’

Taylor waited.

‘Sir Clive.’

‘Yes, yes.’ Came the testy response. ‘There are only two conclusions we can draw from this. Firstly, it confirms our suspicions that Periston has found another source of metassonite or that some unknown third party is working in the same field.’

‘What the hell do they think they are doing?’

‘Edward, if you have nothing constructive to say, I suggest you keep quiet. I need to think.’

‘Then think about this.’ Taylor had no intention of allowing Sir Clive to gain any kind of advantage in the conversation. ‘If



## Chapter fourteen

there is another source of metassonite about to come on the market, then my plans and your profits could prove a very short-lived aspiration.'

'My dear boy, you are still thinking like a shopkeeper. An alternative source is the least of our worries. It might mean a smaller margin, but competition is what keeps the market going. No, we have a far more serious problem to worry about.'

'And what is that?' Although Taylor found himself asking the question, the answer had already occurred.

'This is the fourth unexplained death in as many months. Sooner or later someone is going to find the connection and since you own the only known source, the blame will be laid firmly at our, or perhaps I should say, your door.'

'I would stick with using the word 'our'. It is your money and your connections that enabled this to happen.'

'Point taken old boy, but that still leaves us with the problem of Periston.'

'Then, how do we find out whether it was them and how do we prove it?'

'You are going off on a tangent again. This is not about seeking the truth; we are not the police. Irrespective of whether Periston is responsible, we have to ensure that the trail firmly points in their direction and of equal importance, points away from us. Now, first things first, you need to erase any records of shipments that were not actually ordered by you and for god's sake don't be tempted to ship anymore.'

\*\*\*\*

Jennings sat on the deck of a police launch looking up at Blackfriars Bridge. Normally, the chance to be on the Thames on a hot summer's day would be one to look forward to, but in this case, a man had died. Not just any man, but the brother of a prominent political activist who had led the student riots in South Africa a couple of months ago. The news reports claimed that the South African police had shot a man after he

attacked his family and a number of neighbours with a machete. Seven people had died and four more were injured. To his mind, this was a simple case of murder, but the newspapers seized on the fact of his membership of a black rights group, to claim that the South African authorities had used the event as an excuse to have him executed. The fact that his exiled brother also died in mysterious circumstances, led them to make the inevitable claims. The tabloids of course, had pulled their usual trick. The story they related was true as far as anyone could tell but made careful use of parentheses and ignored any inconvenient facts. In this instance, Stephen Lekota's death had been witnessed by more than a dozen people and was clearly suicide rather than 'suicide' as the newspapers printed the word.

'When did he hear about his brother's death?' Jennings had to shout to make himself heard above the noise of the engine, which was struggling against a swift tide to keep the launch in the same place.

'At 10.30 this morning. He shared a house in Golders Green and one of his friends verified the time.'

'He jumped at 11.30 which meant that he did not hang about.' Jennings remorsefully realised what he said. 'How long does it take from his address to here?'

'At a guess, about forty minutes to an hour depending on whether he took a bus or tube.'

'It must have been the tube at that time of day. How long did he take to think about it?'

'No time at all apparently, PC Howell was talking to him when Lekota jumped. Howell is waiting for you.'

Jennings looked at the bridge once more and nodded. A few minutes later he and Morton were clambering off the boat and up a short flight of stone steps that had yet to be submerged by the rising tide.

Howell turned out to be in his late fifties and therefore a seasoned beat man. As a young copper, Jennings had been wary of anyone who had not been promoted to sergeant by the time

## Chapter fourteen

they reached thirty. Now he knew better and had significant respect for those who remained at the sharp edge of policing.

‘Would you mind if we went for a cup of tea. I can see a van just down the road.’

‘No sir.’ Howell barked his reply much in the same manner as Wilks, but then they were of the same generation.

‘Roughly what time did you arrive?’

‘It was exactly 11.23 sir. My beat has not varied in twenty years.’

‘You must have seen a fair few changes in that time.’

‘You would not believe it sir. I remember the last London smog. I came on duty on Monday morning and had to feel my way to the junction at Victoria Embankment and New Bridge Street where I was to direct the traffic. You could not see the hand in front of your face. Five days it lasted and the bloody idiots still insisted on using their cars.’

‘Quite.’ Jennings could not think of anything else to say. ‘Have you dealt with any suicides before?’

‘A few, seeing as my beat takes in the river, but nothing like this. But, if there is one thing I have learnt over the years, it’s that people are unpredictable.’

‘Indeed they are.’ Jennings pondered. ‘I had to attend a seminar a couple of months ago about the latest ideas on human behaviour. Their brand new idea was that you can gauge people’s intent from body language. God knows how much they spent teaching us what every beat officer learns on the job in his first few weeks. Is tea all right for you?’ Jennings asked as they reached the van. They were handed two white mugs and Jennings gave one to Howell. ‘Can you go through what happened?’

‘I arrived at 11.23 and saw a crowd of people looking over the side of the bridge. At first, I couldn’t see the cause, but then this man appeared from the ironwork. He was holding a long wire, a bit like thick piano wire. I had an idea he was foreign because he was wearing a jumper in this heat. Anyway, he started to clamber around the flat ledge that is almost level with

the road. He had a bit of a job as his footing slipped a couple of times but he managed to hang on. They are very strong, his type, very physical. By this time, I was not sure what to make of it. At first, I thought he was a jumper but the way he clung to the girders made me wonder whether he was up to something else.'

'Did you talk to him?'

'Once he was safely on the ledge, yes. I did not want to earlier in case he took fright and fell.'

'Yes, of course.'

'But when he was settled, I established eye contact and asked what he was intending to do. Daft really but it seems to help them to understand the potential impact of their intentions... Sorry sir, no pun intended.'

'Did he say anything?'

'Not at first. Actually, he seemed not to know where he was. Looked around as if it was all a bit of a surprise. I did the usual thing, told him my name and tried to get him to tell me his. Eventually, he said he was called Stephen, but he seemed distracted. I got the impression that he genuinely did not know how he got there or what he was doing. He kept fiddling with that wire which he had tied around one of the girders, as if he did not know what it was for. Then his whole demeanour changed. I asked him where he was from because I was hoping to get one of his family to talk to him. As soon as he told me his address, he became deranged.'

'Deranged?' Jennings echoed.

'Started babbling on about monsters.'

Jennings put down his tea as he became very interested in what Howell was saying. 'Did he specify what sort of monsters?'

'No, he just repeated the same thing over and over again about monsters in the walls that were hungry. Then he really went bananas. He started screaming that they were in his head. He then put the wire around his neck and jumped. I have seen some nasty things in my time but nothing like that. Who would

## Chapter fourteen

have thought that the human body has so much blood.'

\*\*\*\*

Jennings and Morton stood outside of the house where Stephen Lekota had lived, taking in the surroundings. It was a good sized semi with a well-kept yet functional garden and was obviously in the upper end of the rental market. Lekota was clearly not short of money even if he was sharing. As Jennings started to make his way up the short drive, he noticed a sign in the window of the next door house that was advertising a room to let. It took him a moment to take in the words as he was not wearing his glasses and when he did make sense of it, he rapidly revised his assessment of who was living in this area. As they approached the door, it was opened by a young policeman.

'Morton, can you go and talk to his friends. I want to take a look at his room.'

The young policeman pointed Morton in the direction of the living room before taking Jennings upstairs. Lekota's room had been used for living as well as a sleeping area. There was a small unmade bed by the window, a battered armchair and a similarly tatty dining table and chair. These pathetic pieces of furniture fitted in with the general rundown state of the house he had seen so far. It was all a long way from the smart close he had seen outside. There were two things that did not fit the overall image and so must have belonged to Lekota. The first was an antique desk. It looked like mahogany with a dark red leather inlaid top. The second was that Lekota had filled the room with bookshelves. There were easily three to four hundred books on African history, politics, religion and philosophy which told of character with a deep interest in social affairs.

Apart from the unmade bed, the room was tidy and free from dust which meant that Lekota was particular about his habits.

'Thank you. I can take it from here.'

Jennings watched the young policeman leave before he sat

down at the desk. Finding that all the drawers were locked, he looked around for a key but could not see it. Jennings stood up and closed the bedroom door before taking out his wallet. Jen had persuaded him to apply for one of the new-fangled cards that allowed you to withdraw money using a machine. His local bank had recently installed one in the high street and Jen being Jen, instantly seized on it as a way of getting hold of his money after the banks closed at 3.30. Personally, he could not see what was wrong with writing a cheque out to cash and taking it to a teller, but that was the nature of progress. The card was made from rigid plastic and was just the right thickness to slip into the crack between the drawer and the frame of the desk. However, after a couple of attempts, he found that it was not sturdy enough and so he tried his house key. He was able to force the top just enough for the lock to slip from its mortise and the drawer came open. It contained pens and other stationery all neatly laid out. Jennings carefully removed it to get at the one below. This one proved of greater interest as it contained a pile of letters. The language was educated but filled with odd words and phrases that did not quite relate to each other, almost as he and his brother were using code. Nevertheless, the letters were very clear on one matter. Both he and his brother were resigned to the idea that something unpleasant was waiting for them.

Amongst the various letters was a newspaper clipping. The paper had started to turn yellow, which meant that he had kept it for a while. The typeface was not one used by British newspapers and the spacing was all wrong which suggested that it could be from his homeland. It related to the sale of a mine in South Africa and included one name that he recognised. Edward Taylor.

Jennings continued his search of the drawers and found another object of interest, or rather several. Lekota had three passports and a number of identity cards. One passport was filled with the stamps of European destinations, mainly France, Germany and Italy, but also included New York and

## Chapter fourteen

Washington. Another had been used for North Africa and the third was his home passport. It all seemed to add up to a man who was actively engaged with underground political movements. Jennings returned the drawers to their slots and then went downstairs to find Morton fully engaged in a conversation about Southern Rhodesia. Jennings waited quietly until the discussion had ended before he stepped in.

‘Your colleague is very knowledgeable about my country.’

Jennings simply looked at Morton with bemusement as he realised there was another unknown facet to his character.

‘I don’t doubt it. I am Chief Inspector Jennings, and your name is?’

‘Ndabaningi Sithole,’ came the earnest reply, ‘but most people just call me Josh.’

‘Josh, I am sorry to ask you to go through it all again, but could you tell me what happened this morning?’

‘Stephen got a call from his sister. She often telephones in the morning to tell him about what has been happening at home. Usually, they talk for about half an hour but today it was a very short call to let him know that his brother was dead.’

‘Did he tell you the circumstances?’

‘Yes. He often talked about the fact that the authorities would like to see him dead and that if he was found in street one, day, I should know how it happened.’

‘You sound like you both have similar experiences.’

‘We are both from countries where the black man is second class and to protest is a crime. It’s a legacy of your empire.’

‘I don’t doubt it.’ Jennings responded not wanting to get into a political debate. ‘There are five of you in the house. Are you all from that part of the world?’

‘No, Jake is an American, from Arkansas.’

Jennings was beginning to understand how they could afford to rent a large house in this area.

‘What was Stephen’s mood like in the last few days?’

‘Pretty much as usual. He was very worried about his family since the student riots. But I do not think he was expecting his

brother to die the way he did.'

'How did he take the news?'

'He was very shocked as you would expect and then he became very angry. He questioned his sister over what she had seen. I do not think that he could quite believe what his brother did. When he put the phone down, he went into the kitchen to make himself a tea. I kept out of the way. I thought he needed some space. Then after about ten minutes, I heard the door slam.'

'Do you know what time that was?'

'I do not own a watch but I think it was about 10.30.'

Jennings beckoned Morton to join him in the kitchen. It was in the same rundown state as the rest of the house, and there were a large number of dirty dishes in the sink, as you might expect in a place shared by men, but it was reasonably clean.

'How did his story hold up?'

'Very well.' Morton answered. 'He is telling the truth, I am sure of that. By the way sir, they have recovered the head.'

'Do you think they were up to anything illegal?'

'Why do you say that?'

'I found several passports in his drawer.'

'Does it have any relevance?'

Jennings looked at Morton with a mixture of surprise and annoyance. 'Of course it is relevant. At the very least it is a criminal offence and if a man is willing to commit one type of crime, he is likely to commit others.'

'Or it could simply be that he was on the run from a system that judges people for what they are rather than who they are.'

'That is not a justification, Morton. Our job as policemen is to uphold the law and the peace.'

'Yes, but.'

'No Morton,' Jennings interrupted firmly, 'there are no buts. Laws are there to protect us all. Once a policeman thinks he can decide which laws to enforce and which he will not, he ceases to be a servant of the public and sets himself up as its judge. That is a very tricky road to go down.'



## Chapter fourteen

'Yes sir.' Morton replied meekly.

'What were you discussing about Rhodesia?'

'I thought if I showed some sympathy for his situation, he might open up. He was very wary about being questioned by the police.'

'I suppose that is understandable and did you get any results?'

'They are all exiles and involved in activist movements, but I think they are all legit, otherwise he would not have been so open.'

'Actually, I meant did you find out anything useful which might help us understand why it happened.'

'Lekota was sure he was being followed for the last few days and they think that there might have been a break-in. They found the downstairs toilet window had been forced. I had a look and there are definite indentations, possibly from a screwdriver.'

'Anything taken?'

'Not so far as they could see and so they did not report it. I think they assumed it might have been a random check carried out by the secret police from one of their countries.'

'Keep an eye on the door will you, I want to have a nose around.'

Jennings began to open cupboard doors and found pretty much what he expected. About half were filled with bags of food such as rice and tins of this and that and the others were filled with a mishmash of plates, cups and mugs. None of which matched and quite a few displayed signs of damage. Then he spotted something that was both out of place and vaguely familiar in the sink. It was a green mug. He picked it up and held it to the light from the window. The material was translucent and shot through with a myriad of subtle colours. It was at once both ugly in its gaudy appearance and beautiful in its delicate structure. He took the item back into the living room.

'Josh, who does this belong to?'

Josh shrugged his shoulders. 'I do not know. I saw it on the table after Stephen left and assumed it was his.'

'Was today the first time you can recall seeing it?'

'I do not drink tea or coffee and so I do not use cups.'

'Do you mind if I keep it, just for a while?'

By the time Jennings returned to the kitchen, he found Morton looking through the remaining cupboards.

'That is illegal?' Jennings said with a false stern tone.

'Just wanted to know whether there are any more?'

'I do not think so. I am about ready to leave, but I want to have a word with the local constable first.'

Jennings waited at a point about halfway down the drive until the young policeman joined him.

'How long have you been patrolling this area?'

'About six months sir.'

'And have you built up a good rapport with the locals?'

'I think so sir.' He replied in a puzzled tone.

'Are there many signs like that?' Jennings pointed at a piece of cardboard hanging in the window of the next door house that said 'Vacancies, no coloureds.'

'A few sir, it isn't illegal.'

'Not yet, but it will be in a couple of months. I suggest that you ensure people are made aware of that fact.'

\*\*\*\*

'You might like to know that you have got through to the final round.' Said Gilpatrick.

Jennings felt pleased with himself even though he had already heard unofficially. 'That is good to know.'

'I thought you'd be delighted. However, I am afraid I have some news that will not be quite so welcome. The deputy commissioner has confirmed that Price will not be prosecuted. Seems as if there is not enough evidence, but he has been asked to retire.'

Jennings took a deep breath. 'I am not altogether surprised.'

## Chapter fourteen

With Madison dead, the only clear link to Price was broken. Still, at least the force is finally rid of him. That man leads a charmed life. Are you going to let the matter drop?’

‘That is not for me to decide.’

‘I am puzzled as to why the DC should go out of his way to protect him.’

‘I think you are barking up the wrong tree there.’

‘Possibly.’ Jennings mused.

Gilpatrick decided to ignore that last remark. He had known Jennings for long enough to understand that when an idea settled in his skull, it was difficult to shift and all too often it meant trouble. Gilpatrick glanced at the calendar on his desk and noted that it was just five weeks until his retirement. It was time for a diversionary tactic.

‘How was your visit?’

‘Odd, to say the least.’

Gilpatrick groaned inwardly.

‘We know that Lekota was a black rights activist and I checked with one of my contacts and he confirmed that Stephen Lekota was also on a watch list. Seems as though he was in regular contact with some pretty shadowy networks, but nothing actively violent as far as they could tell. Naturally, neither he nor his brother was popular with the South African Government and his brother was most definitely involved in violence.’

‘That is all very interesting,’ Gilpatrick interrupted, ‘but was it suicide?’

‘Without doubt, he tied a wire around his neck and then jumped. There are more than a dozen witnesses.’

‘Then that is that. I’ll arrange for a statement to be released to the press. That should put an end to all this mumbo jumbo about his being killed by the South Africans.’

‘If I were you, I would be a bit cagey on that score.’

Gilpatrick’s look of relief vanished. ‘I thought you just said it was suicide.’

‘Indeed I did. There can be no doubt about that, but there

might be a question mark over what caused him to take his own life. If I were in your shoes, I would keep any statement short and vague.'

'Thanks for the advice. I see nothing much came from your interview with Dalton.'

'No,' Jennings replied thoughtfully, 'and I am now inclined to believe his claim that their experiment was not the cause of what happened at the museum. The lab boys turned up absolutely nothing and when they re-ran the test in their spanking new facility, it passed without incident.'

'Not Dalton's experiment then. What about that smell. Could it have been due to a chemical attack?'

'That would seem to be the most likely cause. From the physical symptoms, it appears that we all suffered from some kind of hallucinogenic attack and Madison's people were also affected. All the statements confirmed that everyone experienced a similar sense of angst which was why Prinsent and Kennedy could not leave the mineral gallery. As you know, one of the gang is still in hospital. Unfortunately, without any evidence to show how it was done or who was responsible, we have nothing but conjecture on a possible motive.'

\*\*\*\*

'Your coffee sir.'

Jennings stared at the cup of dark liquid which seemed to look back at him with defiance. Wilks had been on holiday when he had returned from his own enforced break and so today was the first day that their old coffee routine had resumed. It always followed the same format. Wilks would prepare the coffee in the way that he knew his boss liked and then vary the ingredients just enough to ensure that it remained drinkable but not satisfying. Sometimes there would be additional beans and sometimes too few. His use of sugar was another way Wilks liked to vary the offering.

'I know it has only been just over a week, but I have rather

## Chapter fourteen

missed these. I actually started to get my sense of taste back.’

‘I think that might have more to do with the fact that you no longer smoke.’

Jennings had completely forgotten his pipe. He opened a drawer and there were his trusty old yellow briar and a tin of tobacco. He removed the lid and just as he feared, the contents had turned green and it was with some sadness that he threw it into the bin. His doctor had been on at him for some time to give up smoking. Apparently, he was no longer able to breathe as hard into that infernal machine, which meant that his lung efficiency had deteriorated. You did not need to be a doctor to know the cause and it had nothing to do with smoking, but simply father time. Jen of course, had taken the news as irrefutable evidence that he was ready to kick the bucket, and that was that. He looked down at his old pipe with fond memories as he recalled how many difficult problems had been solved over a few bowls of Erinmore. Somehow, he could not bring himself to bin that as well.

‘No, it is definitely down to your coffee. Where is Morton?’

At that moment, the door opened and the man himself walked in.

‘Is that another new suit?’

‘It is summer sir. You can’t wear the same suits all the time. These light fabrics need regular cleaning, especially if you use public transport. London is such a filthy place.’

Jennings looked down at his own tweed jacket, which he had to admit did smell a little stale.

‘How did the old man take it?’

‘About the cup? I didn’t tell him. You know what an old worrier he is and that leaves us a number of things to resolve on the QT. Fortunately, London’s criminals seem to be enjoying an extended holiday in Spain, so there should be no distractions for a while. Take a seat.’

Jennings waited for Morton to take his place. Unlike most poor mortals he did not have the need to write things down, in order to remember them. In fact, there were times when

Morton could be very annoying even while he was not actually doing anything.

‘Let us deal with the fallout from Madison first. His associates firmly believed that he was commissioned to have a second go by Periston. In which case, the most likely candidate would have to be Dalton from the way he runs the company, but you Morton, cast doubt on that. We know for definite that Periston was originally in the market for precious stones for its research and that the Natural History Museum collection would have fitted the bill. Therefore, let us have a look at the problem from the other direction. Madison had a new best friend, which he would not divulge to his lackeys. We know he was very confident that he would not be arrested despite the fact that he expected to be identified as the culprit. Now, what does that suggest to you?’

‘That his backers were from some covert part of government. Particularly, as we know that one of the people who Madison was in contact with was Neville-Jones.’

‘Yes,’ came the hesitant reply, ‘they do seem to crop up on a regular basis. It’s just a pity Evans proved so unhelpful. He seems to have learned almost nothing despite his close contact with Madison.’

‘Don’t you have a friend in the secret service, sir?’

‘You mean Fairbrother. I suppose I could try him again, but we are getting off the point. Our main concern is proving a link between Price and the former Madison gang. I would still like to see him go to prison if we can find the evidence.’

‘We have two possible links. A mule track that led to Lille and the fact that Price was also in the habit of taking monthly trips to France, which very interestingly stopped in June. Then we have Bridget Cummings who lives in the same block of flats as Price, turning up at the warehouse where Madison was hiding. I think she was sent along when the French connection was cut.’

‘But we could not establish a direct link between accounts held by Madison or between Price and Cummings?’

## Chapter fourteen

‘That’s about the size of it.’

‘Then our next step, or rather yours Morton, is to have a chat with Bridget Cummings to see what she has to say for herself. If necessary, I think we have sufficient evidence to apply for an order to have a look at her accounts. Now, let us have a look at our other little problem.’

‘It’s strange that Periston crop up there as well.’

‘Isn’t it just, although I suppose it could be a coincidence. We have had four deaths since May, three suicides and one case of murder. Each time, a man abruptly turned violent to an extreme degree. Sykes was employed by a courier company and Brown worked at Heathrow, which handled cargo. Fellows had a definite link to both Taylor and Periston.’

‘And we know that Edward Taylor lied about the last time he saw Fellows. Finally, there is Lekota. He seems to have no links to either Periston or Taylor and Hardy and on the face of it, any link does seem unlikely.’

‘I am not so sure about that. I appreciate it is pretty thin, but Taylor and Hardy own a mine in South Africa.’

‘Yes they do.’ Jennings beamed. ‘I had forgotten that. I must be getting old. By coincidence, when I was looking around Lekota’s room, I just happened to spot a newspaper cutting about a mine. The cutting looked quite old but evidently, he thought it important enough to hang on to. I wonder what they mine there.’

‘Didn’t Caruthers say that it might have something to do with that meteorite?’

‘Now don’t spoil things.’

‘Just a moment sir, when we saw Caruthers, he mentioned something about investigating the idea that Taylor was shipping some material from South Africa.’

‘That he did.’

Jennings became silent as his thoughts jumped to his last meeting with Crichton. He was investigating a Jo’burg plane that crashed off the south coast and had established that the crew were troubled by something they were carrying. Was it

possible that they were investigating not just four deaths but perhaps nine?

‘Arrange another meeting with Caruthers will you. Perhaps he has found something since we last met. We can use the Barley Mow.’

‘I am not sure he would like that sir. Not quite to his taste.’

Jennings recalled the look of exasperation on a pub landlord’s face when Caruthers asked for the wine list.

‘Never mind, we can broaden his education.’

Jennings looked up as Wilks returned to the office.

‘Just in time, can you call John Crichton? I think you have his card.’

‘I don’t think that will be possible sir.’ From the sullen expression on Wilks’ face, Jennings knew that he was not going to hear good news.

‘I have just heard over the radio that his car overturned on the M3. I am sorry to say that he was killed.’



## Chapter fifteen

Caruthers found himself back in the neighbourhood of the Stewarts, only this time his destination was a nearby small town called Waterlooville. Mrs Stewart had confirmed that her husband had donated a box of her son's notes to the local library. Given the acquisitive nature of librarians, he wondered whether they might also have a selection of other papers on the same subject. On the face of it, it was an unlikely prospect for a suburban library, but clutching for straws was the only option left open.

A steep hill led to the town centre that consisted of just one road. He followed a sign that took him past a post office and into a car park owned by a local supermarket. Caruthers had no idea where the library was and so set off into the shopping centre. It was a typical 50s-60s place filled with a variety of small shops selling toys, jewellery, newspapers and records. After a short walk, he found himself standing by a canon of all things and obviously looking baffled, an elderly lady took pity and provided directions. The library consisted of a four storey modern brick building with narrow slit windows and a greenhouse for an entrance. Having learned an important lesson, Caruthers asked for the reference department and was directed to the top floor. The material he wanted to see took some time to locate as it had been dumped in a disused office. Caruthers took a box to one of the learning pods used by students from the local sixth form college.

It was a long way to come simply on the off chance, but a telephone call had failed to establish whether they had what he was searching for. The box contained a number of items, including several red exercise books filled mainly with illegible

hand written notes and calculations. There were several pages that appeared to be connected with ballistics and a note written in bold and underlined that simply said 'No.1 lubricant.' Another notebook was filled with chemical formulae, references to organic compounds and an experiment carried out by someone called Stanley Miller in the 1950s. Finally, he found something a little closer to what he wanted. Stuck in the fold of one of the booklets was a piece of paper with a reference number that began with the letters CE. It appeared to be a receipt and was signed by John Stewart. The most intriguing thing was the inclusion in print so small it was hard to make out, of a number of foreign words. If the words were meaningless, the letters themselves were instantly recognisable as Cyrillic. This provided tangible evidence of a link between Stewart and the Soviets. Caruthers then read through the following pages very carefully. His knowledge of science was minimal but even he could recognise a list of elements. It included iron, aluminium, zinc, hydrogen, nitrogen, sulphur, magnesium and very small amounts of a material called corundum. Caruthers was convinced that this was a list of elements contained within the Noril'sk meteorite. What was not included was definitive proof and as he finished reading the notebook, Caruthers concluded that he was not going to get it from John Stewart.

There were a number of other papers in the box and Caruthers went through them one by one. Some he discarded quickly whilst others required more detailed attention. As he reached the bottom of the box, Caruthers smiled as he realised that fate had played its usual trick of saving the best till last. It was a magazine cutting from 1974, which examined claims that a South African mine contained the same elements as found in the meteorite. The article confirmed that one Edward Taylor had published a detailed survey that proved it had no connection. However, what was most interesting was a hand written note attached to two typed papers. At a guess, it had been written by Mr Stewart senior. One of the typed papers

## Chapter fifteen

was entitled Noril'sk and the other Paar. As Caruthers compared the list of elements on each paper, he reached an inevitable conclusion. Taylor had lied. Checking that no one was looking, Caruthers slipped the papers into his pocket.

\*\*\*\*

Morton rang the doorbell and waited. He knew that Bridget Cummings was at home because he could hear the television playing the theme tune of a programme he knew well. As the notes of Barnacle Bill wafted through the glass pane, he wondered who was presenting Blue Peter these days. It was cult viewing when he was at Hendon Police College, but his favourite presenter remained Christopher Trace despite his apparent old fashioned formality. A shadow briefly flitted across the vertical strips of glass before the door opened. Morton took out his warrant card in preparation.

'Mrs Cummings?'

'It's Ms actually. What do you want?'

The tone did not seem promising.

'It is a delicate matter. May I come in?'

Ms Cummings turned without a word and led Morton to the living room where she switched off the television and sat down. Morton also sat, deciding that an invitation would not be forthcoming.

'I am sorry to disturb you, but I am making enquires of everyone in this block of flats. It's just a routine matter and should take no more than a few minutes.'

'Really!'

'Are you acquainted with a man called Clive Madison?'

'No.'

Morton waited a moment for any signs of elaboration, but none came. He reached into his jacket pocket for an envelope, took out a set of pictures, which he quickly shuffled until he found the one, he was looking for. Morton then handed it to Ms Cummings.

'I have no idea who this is.' Came the disinterested response. Morton decided to try another tack.

'Do you know a man called Jimmy Price?'

'No.'

Morton patiently took out another photograph and gave it to her.

'I think I have seen him. He might live on one of the upper floors.'

At least she was admitting some things, Morton thought. However, as the direct question approach was clearly not working, he considered trying a more conversational tactic.

'This is a nice flat Ms Cummings.'

Morton tried to sound sincere as he looked around at the brightly coloured floral wallpaper, artexed ceiling and Habitat furnishings right down to the ubiquitous lava lamps. He recalled Jennings commenting that she looked like an East End girl dressed up in West End clothes and her flat had the same appearance. Expensively furnished but without quite the right taste to pull it off.

'It's convenient.'

'Do you work locally?'

'I have a private income.'

'By coincidence so do I. You might have heard of my father Peter Morton, the naturalist.'

'I think so.' But there was no recognition on her face. Soaps and quizzes were probably more her style.

'Still, I have to do something otherwise I would probably go potty. What do you do?'

'I help manage events.'

'How interesting, what sort of events?'

'Parties, that kind of thing, I help find venues and suppliers.'

'Did you recently visit the St. Kathrine's dock area?'

'Why would I do that?'

'Ms Cummings, could you kindly answer the question?'

Morton was surprised to find himself adopting the mannerisms and tone of his boss, but it seemed to do the trick.

## Chapter fifteen

‘I took my young cousin to the Tower last May but that was as close as I got. Look, can you tell me what this is all about?’

‘Bridg, you have used up all the shampoo again.’

The voice belonged to a woman in her late twenties. Even wrapped in two towels, Morton instantly recognised the person he had followed to France.

\*\*\*\*

Dalton stood looking gloomily around a room that had until recently, held out so much hope. It lay in semi-darkness as if in mourning and that somehow seemed appropriate. 1976 would not go down as one of his better years. It had started badly when a promising partnership had almost ended in disaster and the year had never properly recovered, despite an advantageous line of research materialising from the ashes of the first.

In fact, the whole venture seemed to be plagued by problems. First, progress was stifled by bureaucracy over the acquisition of gemstones, then followed a police investigation and finally what looked very much like sabotage, derailed all their careful planning. Despite the fact that this project was set to revolutionise technology, he had been left with no choice but to place it on the shelf. However, there remained one problem and it was one that could, if left unchecked, threaten his entire corporation which could not be permitted. A door opened somewhere behind him but he did not need to turn around to know who had opened it.

‘I think this will be the biggest regret of my life.’ Dalton commented sadly.

‘At least you still have a job.’

‘Come now Simon. You had a very large payoff. I do not think you have been hard done by.’

Simon returned a sullen look by way of reply.

‘Do you think we might resurrect the project after a bit of time?’

‘I’m afraid not. I have been told to destroy all copies of the

papers relating to it. I suppose it might be possible to have another go at developing the imaging technology, but that was always a sideline.'

'Then, all that work will simply disappear into some ministry vault.'

'That is about the size of it. Still, perhaps there is one crumb of comfort. We know that our contribution would shortly have come to end anyway. We had just about reached the limit of current science.'

'Our whole reason to exist is to push those boundaries.'

Dalton smiled faintly. 'Always the scientist Simon.'

Dalton began to wander around the room and stopped underneath the dish fixed to the ceiling. He recalled all the long days and nights spent refining the systems that focused a narrow beam of energy. All the long days and nights trying to work out what was going wrong until they realised that they had happened on a truly miraculous discovery that would transform mankind's understanding of the universe. Or perhaps that should be 'a' universe. It was a hard concept to understand and he was no scientist. Despite his pretence, even Simon struggled to comprehend what it was they were trying to develop.

'I don't suppose there is any chance of carrying on the work without them knowing?'

'I would not like to risk it.'

'No.' Simon replied to himself.

'They were able to track us down originally due to its unique energy signature. We must assume they could do so again.'

'I suppose so.'

'Take a good look, Simon. This is the last time you will see this.'

'They are coming tonight?'

'They are. By this time tomorrow, this will be nothing but an empty room, which I will naturally demolish given the problems we encountered. It would probably fall down anyway.'

## Chapter fifteen

‘What about that other little problem they left us with? The police have been here once. If they stumble across it, that could prove very awkward.’

‘Indeed it could, but at least we have already lost our main headache.’

Simon shrugged his shoulders. ‘I am sorry that I ever got you involved in that. It seemed a good idea at the time.’

‘It was my decision.’

‘Even so, if I had been willing to wait until the proper licences came through, we would have never become entangled with the likes of Madison. It was just that we were so close to pinning this down.’

‘Our partners in crime bear much of the responsibility. After all, it was they who introduced him and it was they who made all the arrangements. If I have one regret about getting involved with Madison, it is more down to his ineptitude than the risks of taking a shortcut. The fact he stupidly tried a second time means that I have little sympathy for his fate. The police did us a significant service.’

‘Actually, that was not Madison’s idea.’ Simon looked shamefaced.

‘What do you mean by that?’

‘We were getting through so many stones that it was proving difficult to obtain replacements. I’m afraid it was me who suggested that Madison might have another go.’

‘I did wonder.’ Dalton replied sadly. ‘I’m glad you told me.’

‘We still have the problem of potential fallout.’ Simon paused as he thought about what he had just said. ‘Although, as of ten minutes ago, I no longer work for Periston. What are you going to do about it?’

‘It’s already in hand. All connections between metassonite and Periston are being removed.’

‘Including the shipment records?’

‘Most particularly the shipment records. I do not know how Taylor thought he could get away with it in the first place.’

‘Do you know what has been going through my mind? The

idea that our paymasters deliberately sabotaged the demonstration.'

'And why would they do that?' Dalton asked in a puzzled tone.

'To ensure that the research was discredited. Our agreement was that they would have the rights to the more long term research and we would get to keep the imaging technology. I was thinking that if you had done what you promised and made it available patent free, someone would have uncovered the other thing we were working on and they certainly would not have wanted that.'

'Good heavens, Simon. I do believe you are right.'

'But that means they will also need to remove anyone who has knowledge of the research.'

'Now you are letting your imagination run away with you. I think that your long holiday has come just in time.'

'You are probably right.'

'And when you get back, we can go through all of Periston's contracts to see where we can find you a role.'

'Then, you are not abandoning me?'

'Of course not Simon, how could I do that after all the years we have worked together. Now cut along and I will see you in six weeks.'

Dalton watched Simon as he took one last look around before making his way to a waiting car. As he climbed in, Dalton heard the roar of a motorbike as it sped off into the distance.

'Goodbye Simon.'

\*\*\*\*

Gilpatrick sat in his chair, hands clasped across the back of his head whilst looking very smug. Indeed, he had reason to be, as Jennings reflected on the fast-moving events over the last twenty-four hours. When Gilpatrick announced his retirement, he had made clear his desire to go out on a high note and now



## Chapter fifteen

there were two.

This was a unique occasion. It was not often underlings penetrated the hallowed halls of a chief superintendent, but today both Morton and Wilks had been invited for ‘the sherry’.

They were celebrating a stroke of luck as much as anything else, but on reflection that played down the role of agent provocateur which Morton had set himself. Gilpatrick filled both his and Morton’s glass once more.

‘Tell me again what happened. This is a moment I really want to enjoy.’

Morton also looked very pleased with himself.

‘We identified Bridget Cummings some time ago but in the absence of any firm links to Price, I suggested that we leave her alone until a more propitious moment. Yesterday, I paid her a visit just to see how she would react. Her answers were evasive, which if nothing else, proved that she had something to hide. I was just about to confront Ms Cummings with the photographs of her going into the warehouse when in walked a woman who I recognised immediately as the one I followed to Lille and what’s more she recognised me. Of course, I arrested them both.’

‘Excellent Morton, don’t you think so Robert?’

Jennings nodded. Morton deserved his moment.

‘Then what happened?’ Gilpatrick took another swig of sherry and his smile grew even larger.

‘They both panicked and confessed everything including the fact that they are sisters. It was the sister who was Price’s mistress and she was able to confirm that the money she collected was Madison’s pay-off. She knew all about Price’s relationship with Madison and had even witnessed a couple of meetings. The reason why nothing happened when I followed her to Lille was that she had been tipped off. Bridget was sent to collect Price’s money when Madison stopped the runs because they thought the sister was being watched.’

Jennings placed his glass on the table with the firm intention of forgetting it was there. ‘We have known for some time that

Price collected his money when he went to France. The fact that... What was her name?' Jennings asked.

'Sarah.'

'Yes, Sarah collected the money in Croydon and then took it to France, was probably nothing more than an elaborate way of hiding that fact. What we have yet to establish, is why Madison chose to use a French account to start with, but it was probably a means of covering his tracks.'

Gilpatrick looked puzzled.

'Transferring funds between a long line of accounts is a standard way of laundering money.' Jennings continued.

'Well, I am sure that will come out in the wash as they say.' Gilpatrick smiled at his own weak joke. 'Price is under arrest and I have another bit of news. Most hush, hush.' He paused for a moment to ensure that everyone was paying proper attention. 'The deputy commissioner has been suspended pending enquiries. It seems he has some questions to answer relating to why he obstructed enquiries into Madison's activities. All in all, an excellent piece of work, congratulations.'

A few minutes later they were back in Jennings' office. He switched on the desk fan in the vague hope that it might lower the temperature to something that was bearable, but experience had taught him this hope was unlikely to be fulfilled. Wilks joined them a short while later carrying three cups of tea.

'I thought this might help to counteract the taste of the sherry. I know you are not particularly partial.'

'Thank you Wilks. Now, I think it is time we focused on our remaining problems left to us by the late and not to be lamented Madison.'

'I take it you are referring to his connection with Roger Dalton and the Periston Corporation?' Said Morton.

'Indeed I am. Wilks, did you manage to find anything interesting about what Edward Taylor was shipping to the UK?'

'Yes sir. I discovered that all the dockets relating to shipments from a mine in a place called Paar, South Africa,

## Chapter fifteen

have been altered. It was professionally done but you can't kid an old soldier, especially not one with my background.'

'Altered to say what?'

'It was more a case of changing the dates. One related to May 13<sup>th</sup>. That was a Thursday but there are no cargo flights from South Africa on Thursdays. My guess is that it was changed from the 3<sup>rd</sup>, which was the date of the new bank holiday. Chummy did not realise that although there were flights, the courier services in London would have had a day off. That led me to check the other dates.'

'And what did you discover?'

'Sykes died on May 4<sup>th</sup>. If I am right about the dates, it means that Taylor arranged for a shipment on the 3<sup>rd</sup> which would have been delivered on the 4<sup>th</sup>. Brown died on the 31<sup>st</sup> of May. That was a Monday. Only two cargo planes were unloaded that day and the first was from South Africa. However, there were no shipments that coincide with the deaths of Fellows or Lekota although I did discover something of interest to you sir.' Wilks looked purposefully at Jennings. 'I reckon the plane that went down, was also carrying a Taylor consignment. It crashed on Tuesday the 6<sup>th</sup> of July. Although the paperwork says otherwise, one of the staff at the couriers recalled an angry call from Taylor asking why his delivery was late. He also recalled that a parcel arrived two days later, even though their records state that it was ten days later.'

'It looks like someone has gone to a lot of trouble to cover their tracks.'

'It does sir, someone who is extremely organised. The records at BA, the cargo company and the couriers have been changed.'

'As you rightly said Wilks, it does look methodical and hopefully, it is something I can raise with the Home Office when I meet with them.'

'When is the funeral?' Morton asked.

'Wednesday. It's just a small family affair but his daughter has kindly agreed that I can attend. It is the least I can do.'

‘Do they have any idea of the cause?’

‘Accidental death but there was one interesting thing. A farmer in a field close by was in his combine. He did not see the accident itself but he did see a white mini speed away from the crash and that driver was never traced.’

‘It does have the hallmarks of an intelligence matter.’

‘Exactly what I would have said but according to Fairbrother, it isn’t.’

‘That suggests that he does not know, which means that it has to be Periston. I cannot see a small outfit like Taylor and Hardy having the resources to carry out that sort of activity.’

‘Which would beg the question as to what the motive is?’ Morton said as he sipped his tea.

‘I think we may have an answer to that one. At my first meeting with Dalton, both he and his head of science became very agitated when I mentioned the name of Fellows.’

‘And Periston was also using the same material from this mine as Taylor.’

‘Did anything come from that mug we found in Lekota’s house?’

‘No sir.’ Morton replied gloomily. ‘Just as with the ones we acquired from Edward Taylor and Fellows’ flat, it was harmless. Apparently, the most toxic component was that it generated a small amount of methane when it was tested, but the quantities were far too small to be of any danger.’

‘I am inclined to think that we could be dealing with separate albeit related issues. Let us just suppose that Sykes and Brown died because they accidentally came into contact with some substance being shipped from South Africa by persons or person unknown. This substance appears inert otherwise it would be picked up by the authorities, but it has some kind of toxic property. Perhaps it has to be mixed with another substance. We know that Lekota was a political activist and so was a potential target. Maybe Fellows also became a target because he discovered something when he was working for Periston.’

## Chapter fifteen

‘Then we have to revisit the circumstances of Fellows’ work for Periston as well as why Taylor lied about the last time they met.’

‘Quite right.’ Jennings concluded. ‘I will have a chat with Mr Dalton. Morton, you should go and see the housekeeper Madame Emié, and Wilks, I would like you to verify with Taylor exactly what he was shipping and when.’

‘Yes sir and may I remind you that you have a five o’clock meeting with Mr Caruthers.’

\*\*\*\*

‘You are looking very rough.’ Jennings commented as Caruthers set down two glasses and a bottle of wine.

When Caruthers and his former wife came to dinner, Jennings had taken an instant dislike to him. Any man who could wear a linen suit on a hot day and not look like he had slept out all night, did not seem quite right in his books. However, Caruthers was now looking more like a traditional haggard journalist. The face showed an accumulation of five o’clock shadows and the pale crumpled suit displayed a number of stains. His eyes were also tired and reddened, clear signs that he was getting little sleep. Jennings noted that Caruthers had downed his wine and refilled the glass before he had even a chance to take his first sip.

‘Been taking tips on diplomacy.’ Caruthers said as he took another large swig.

‘Are you still living in that hotel?’

‘No, I had to move out. With no money coming in, the bill was becoming embarrassing.’

‘Where are you staying?’

‘I thought we were here to discuss the Periston Corporation?’

Jennings sipped his wine. Its sharp, almost acid flavour marked a distinct change to the high price versions Caruthers had tried to order on the last occasion they met.

‘Are you sleeping in your car?’

‘If you must know, yes. It’s convenient anyway as I am doing a lot of travelling.’

‘Alcohol is not the solution. Believe me, I know.’

‘Is that so.’ The tone was acerbic and Caruthers appeared to be on the brink of losing his temper, but then seemed to change his mind. ‘I suppose I have let things go a little. The odd thing is that although Silvia could be an utter bitch, I actually miss her and I certainly miss her money.’

‘No jobs in the pipeline?’

‘There are a couple and I have a few cheques to come for some freelance work but that does not help in the short term. The fact is that when I met Silvia, I was an undischarged bankrupt and could not have a bank account. So, I had my wages paid into hers. We relied on Silvia’s earnings to live whilst mine paid for the mortgage. The trouble is that I never got around to having it made into a joint account.’ He took another sip and smiled an angry smile. ‘Mind you, the cow would have probably just opened another account and I would still be in the same soup.’

‘Is it just a question of a short-term loan?’

‘Thanks, but no. That is how I got myself into a mess in the first place.’ Caruthers took a deep breath to clear his thoughts. ‘Shall we talk about Periston?’

‘Why not, are you hungry?’ Jennings caught the eye of a waiter and asked for the menu. ‘Your original idea was that Periston was trying to resurrect the experiments on the Noril’sk meteorite, but no samples were available.’

‘That’s right but then I realised that Periston may have discovered an alternative source, possibly via an organisation called Cambridge Electronics. I now have confirmation that a substance called metassonite, which Taylor is mining in South Africa, is identical to the meteorite.’

‘That is very interesting.’

Jennings broke off as a waiter hovered over them, conscious that he had not had time to look at what was on offer. He

## Chapter fifteen

quickly searched through the menu and eyes fixed on the section that offered sausages, steak and kidney pie, liver and onions and in particular, toad in the hole with onion gravy. Despite the fact that the temperature was in the high seventies outside, just the thought of all that heavy food made him eager with anticipation. Then just as quickly his conscience highlighted a list on the opposite page, which included lemon chicken, steamed sole and the ultimate insult to any man's digestive system, salad. His eyes jumped from left to right and back again as he struggled to make up his mind.

'I'll have the sole with a green salad.'

The words seemed to blurt out of their own accord and he instantly regretted his choice. Jennings studied Caruthers' face carefully to glean what he would order, and it was with some relief that he asked for the chicken. At least he would not have to watch Caruthers tucking in to something decent.

'To add to what you have found out, both Taylor and Dalton have claimed that this metassonite enhances the properties of other materials, which even to a non-science person like me, implies that it has an active property of some kind.'

'Have you thought about having it independently tested?'

Jennings returned a withering look. 'I may be a simple policeman, but yes, the idea did occur.'

'And?'

'It is comprised of simple everyday materials.'

'Did you use an original sample of metassonite?'

'No. We obtained a piece of porcelain ware which Taylor said contained a small proportion. The lab boys compared it to what was declared on the export licence. That tied in with a detailed report that Taylor sent us at the beginning of the summer.'

'Which is all very well, provided that both were truthful accounts.'

Jennings sipped his wine as he considered what Caruthers had just said. 'That would imply he has been lying since the start.'

'It would and I think you know he has.' Caruthers smiled as he recalled their conversation in Jennings' back garden. 'Why the change of heart?'

'It's a question of practicalities. Your interest in this organisation called Cambridge Electronics ties in with my own suspicions. Off the record, I know that Clive Madison was seen with someone we know works for intelligence. I also know that the shipment records relating to Taylor have been doctored. The death of the Lekota brothers could be due to nothing more than tragic circumstances, but their political activism could indicate another motive.'

'Yes.' Caruthers mused. 'Odd how the manner of Jacob Lekota's death was similar to Fellows.'

'I will come to him later. I am having the dates of shipments double checked to see whether they correspond to the deaths. We know from the dockets that the amounts shipped are quite small. I have been told that these are likely to be for analysis or perhaps quality control. They are certainly not large enough for industrial use, which leads me to one other conclusion.'

Caruthers opened his eyes wide as he tried to absorb what Jennings has just said. 'You think they are using it to develop a weapon. Do you have any proof?'

'No, it's just guesswork and based on the premise that this metassonite is not inherently dangerous. If it were, then everyone coming into contact with it, would be contaminated. I think that it has to be combined with some other substance, something that would have to be commonly available. This is not for repeating but I also have reason to suspect that last month's plane crash could also have stemmed from the pilot's contact with this substance. Now, Fellows and Lekota are different. Lekota was apparently screaming about demons in his head. I looked up the descriptions of those who died violent deaths in '73 and do you know what they all had in common?'

'They went mad.' Caruthers murmured.

'Most of those who died, did so as a result of major trauma to the head because they were trying to excise demons.'



## Chapter fifteen

‘Fellows killed himself by impaling his head on a glass shard.’

‘And Lekota was decapitated. He could have killed himself simply by jumping but tied a wire around his neck. He must have known what would happen.’

‘I am glad I did not order a rare steak.’ Caruthers commented. ‘Let me get this clear in my head. You appear to be suggesting that someone is already using this substance to assassinate people.’

‘Jacob Lekota killed seven people before he was shot. The South Africans rid themselves of an aggravation using the perfect excuse.’

‘And Stephen Lekota was a leader in waiting. That is quite a conjecture, Robert. How the hell do you intend to prove it?’

‘Anton, I am a policeman, not a journalist. I have to deal with real facts.’

‘Thanks.’ Caruthers interrupted.

‘No offence intended. Earlier today, I found myself reminding young Morton that we exist to uphold the law because the law is there to protect us all. When individuals choose to place themselves beyond the law, the consequences can be bad enough, but if that individual has the power of government behind them.’

‘I see your point.’ Caruthers added. ‘But the reality is that parts of government have always seen themselves as beyond the law.’

‘That may be so. It is not a view I subscribe to, particularly when the outcome is the deaths of two small children.’

‘The Fellows children, yes I had forgotten.’

‘I haven’t and I don’t intend to let others forget.’ Jennings replied darkly as he recalled the blood splattered flat. ‘All the evidence at the moment points to the fact that we have a series of unrelated deaths. As far as we are officially concerned, all cases are closed. But there are strong circumstantial indicators that these people had something in common and the best candidate for that appears to be metassonite. If that is the case, then someone is responsible for those deaths. Someone

developed this substance as a weapon and someone used it. If one or both are within reach of the law, I want them.'

Caruthers smiled. 'Consider me enlisted. What do we do first?'

'Begin a classic pincer movement. My first concern is to close any loose ends concerning Madison because I think he is the key. I keep asking myself two questions. Why did he keep out of sight for so long and why he was so confident he would not be caught, that he allowed himself to be seen at the museum.'

'Did you come to any conclusions?'

'I did. His association with Periston involved more than just stealing precious stones and whether or not Periston was aware of the fact, I think Madison was working with government intelligence. They have the resources that would have helped him disappear to a country with which we have no extradition agreement, such as Spain. Madison always kept a close eye on his business interests but then at a critical time, he vanished. I think he was establishing an escape route. Now, I cannot imagine the funny people being too concerned about the future of a nasty criminal like Madison, which means that they feared he would talk and we would unearth his other activities.'

'Which begs the question, what were those activities?'

'Madison controlled a sophisticated criminal business across much of South and West London. Apart from the usual interests, he also controlled distribution networks including meat, drugs and arms. Those networks could have been useful to anyone wanting to smuggle other items...'

'Such as metassonite?' Caruthers interrupted.

'Indeed. As a policeman, I can investigate potential crimes which means that any Madison connection is down to me, but there appears to be another dimension to this. A freelance journalist with good connections would be free to ask the kind of questions I cannot.'

Caruthers smiled a broad conspiratorial smile. 'I think I can guess what you want. A mole to dig around bits of officialdom

## Chapter fifteen

to see what is hiding in the undergrowth.'

'Yes.' Jennings replied with a tone of self-doubt. 'Just let me be clear that working with you in this way, is highly unethical. If this becomes known, I could be joining you in your car.'

'I'll bear that in mind.'

'Dalton is a man with top level contacts. However, they will not save him if his actions were indeed responsible for so many deaths. If I can build enough evidence to show that a crime was committed, then no one needs to know how I came by it. If this is something political however, it will take the power of the press to force an investigation. Seven people are dead, more if you include those killed in the plane crash. If their deaths are down to criminal or political action, I don't think they should get away with it. Do you?'

Caruthers smiled. 'No, of course not. Now, where is our dinner?'

'Anton, I was thinking. You won't get far in your dealings with people if you turn up dressed like a tramp.'

'You certainly have a delicate way with words.' Caruthers looked down at his dishevelled jacket and had to admit that he looked a mess. 'As I said earlier, I will have money in a week, perhaps days. But I admit I would not mind having somewhere to clean up.'

'I have a beach hut in Portsmouth. It's not much but it does have a small kitchen, a bathroom and a bed. You are welcome to use it and it's only a ninety minute drive. In the meantime, you can come back with me tonight. Jen can take care of your laundry and you can have a bath.'

\*\*\*\*

'Well done darling. I think that reducing your red meat intake is bringing out your feminine side.'

Jennings could not work out whether Jen was being serious or having a go at him for bringing Anton back without warning her first.

'I could not leave him to carry on sleeping in his car. You saw what sort of state he was in.'

'I was more concerned about the smell, but do you think he will be all right in the hut.'

'We use it, so I don't see why not and he can hardly stay here.'

'Perhaps. By the way, he seems to have left me with a bag of his dirty washing. I got the strong impression that he expects me to do it.'

'Really!' Jennings did his best to look innocent.

'I thought you might make use of this.'

Jennings looked at a white paper booklet with a picture of a washing machine. 'What is this?'

'The instructions on how to use the twin tub. I cannot imagine that two intelligent men should have too much difficulty in working out how to use it.'

As Jen left the kitchen, Jennings opened the booklet and began to study the contents. He made his way to the utility room with the intention of familiarising himself with its controls, but the large white machine simply stared back at him with defiance. As he tentatively stretched out a hand towards one of the dials, Caruthers appeared carrying his bag.

'Do you know how to work one of these?'

Caruthers smiled and opened one of the two lids.

'I was thinking about what you said earlier concerning Periston.' Caruthers remarked as he began to go through his things. 'They have some major government contracts, particularly in the field of agricultural products. They have also been dabbling with some medical treatments. That is the kind of expertise that might be useful if a government wanted to develop a chemical weapon of the kind that causes people to experience major mood swings. Did you know that Dalton and Taylor worked together on a project earlier this year?'

'Are you sure you should be doing that?' Jennings asked as Caruthers refilled a cup with soap powder after already tipping the contents of one, over the clothes he had just put in. 'Yes, I

## Chapter fifteen

did. Both seemed very cagey when they talked about it. Actually, come to think of it, they were testing some animal feed and Dalton did mention that it had some kind of side effect.'

'That is interesting. Some farmer in Yorkshire contacted my ex-newspaper, but he was dismissed as a crank. I thought I might go and see him.'

'A good idea, you forgot to put these in.' Jennings indicated a number of coloured shirts which still filled the bag. 'There is plenty of room.'

'You can't mix coloureds with whites.'

'You think this might just be a corporate thing?'

'It's possible, but that does not rule out other lines of enquiry. I have established a definite connection between Cambridge Electronics and Southampton University at the time that the Noril'sk meteorite samples arrived in this country. They also have connections with Taylor and Hardy and by definition an association with Periston. Their name crops up from time to time in connection with all kinds of frontier investments.'

'Perhaps the name is a bit of misnomer. They may simply be an investment group. My brother is involved in that kind of thing. Identifies the latest trends and arranges for investment groups to take an interest.'

'Does he now? I would not mind having a word with him.'

'Do you think that is hot enough? I thought whites had to be boiled.'

'Trust me, I know my way around these things. I am very grateful to you and Jen. I think they were beginning to pick me up on radar.'

\*\*\*\*

'What have you been up to?' Wilks looked accusingly at Morton as he strolled into the office.

'And a very good morning to you. I am fine thanks for

asking. I take it from your demeanour, that the old man is in a bad mood?’

‘The worst. He was cheerful enough when he arrived this morning, didn’t even complain about the coffee. Then he went to see Gilpatrick and came back in a foul temper. Said he wanted to see you as soon as you arrived.’

‘Then I had better go and see what he wants. It can’t be that bad.’

Morton knocked on his boss’s door and then went inside. As soon as he saw the expression on Jennings’ face, he knew that something was seriously wrong.

‘You wanted to see me sir.’

‘That I did.’ Came the cold reply. ‘Please sit down.’

Jennings then did something out of character. Instead of sitting down himself and confronting the problem, he stood up, went to the window and stared down at the street below. He stood in silence for quite a while until Morton felt he had to say something.

‘Madame Emié has returned to France but I did have a chat with a couple of neighbours, one of whom said something very interesting. Apparently, there was some gossip that she was having an affair with Nigel Fellows.’

Jennings showed no reaction. Morton began to look around the office wondering what he should do. Then Jennings slowly turned around.

‘Do you have something that you would like to tell me?’

His voice was quiet and calm, almost as if he were talking to a small child. Morton felt he could do nothing but try to maintain his composure.

‘I am not sure what you mean sir?’

‘Then let me rephrase the question. Is there anything about your private life that could compromise your ability to carry out your job?’

‘I have committed no crime. Neither do I have any associations with criminals outside of those necessary to carry out my work.’

## Chapter fifteen

Jennings sat down and looked intently at Morton for a minute or two before opening a file that lay in front of him.

‘That was a very carefully worded response which does not address the question. This morning I was made aware of a serious accusation, which if true, means that you have just told me a lie.’

‘From whom?’

‘That is none of your concern. What does concern you is whether you can give an assurance that this accusation is not true. If you can, as far as I am concerned, it will be the end of the matter.’

‘Then you had better tell me what has been said.’

Once more Jennings fell silent and when he did speak, it was almost too quiet for Morton to hear.

‘Are you a practising homosexual?’

‘No sir, I am not.’

Jennings experienced a brief moment of relief, but the expression in Morton’s eyes warned him that there was more to come.

‘I am no more a practising homosexual than you are a practising heterosexual.’

‘Don’t you get funny with me.’ Jennings spat the words out as his anger finally got the better of him.

‘I would like to know who my accusers are and what they said?’

‘You have already been informed that the name is not your concern. I have no doubt that his identity will be disclosed to your representative before your conduct hearing. However, I can confirm that you were seen in the intimate company of several men at the Gray Havens club. It has been under surveillance for some time. I warned you about going to that place.’

‘There is to be a hearing?’

‘Of course there will be a hearing. What else did you imagine? Your actions could compromise all the cases you have worked on so far. God knows what the lawyers will make of it.’

I am very disappointed in you Morton.'

'Sir,' Morton took a deep breath to calm himself, 'my behaviour has been scrupulous. There is no reason to believe that any actions I have taken could undermine confidence in my work. If I had been picking up girls, no one would have batted an eyelid.'

'I don't believe I am hearing this.' Jennings became very agitated and began to pace the room. 'The fact you are...what is the current trendy word... gay, makes you a liability. Any lawyer worth his salt will be able to make a case that you could have been blackmailed into falsifying or withholding evidence. At the very least it will cast doubt on your character and therefore your fitness to be a policeman.'

'That is utter rubbish sir.'

Jennings stopped pacing. 'No, it is not rubbish. I recall a conversation with you about the ethics of being a policeman. We are given certain rights and with those rights come responsibilities. A policeman is never off duty and must ensure his actions instil a sense of confidence at all times. Once this becomes known, do you think you can maintain that confidence? Do you think people will still respect you? You have become useless. Worse than useless, you are a liability.'

Morton sat quietly for a moment whilst his boss also sat down. Jennings closed the file and put it away in the top drawer of his desk.

'I take it, I am suspended.'

'With immediate effect.'

Morton stood up and made his way quietly to the door. 'All I ever wanted to be was a policeman.'

'Yes, I know.' Jennings replied. 'John, I will do what I can. You will get a good reference both from me and Gilpatrick.'

'The hearing is a foregone conclusion.' Morton added.

'What do you think, and yes, it is bloody unfair.'

\*\*\*\*



## Chapter fifteen

‘How did he react?’ Asked Gilpatrick as Jennings sat down at his desk chair.

‘Pretty much as you would expect, with great dignity. Alistair, I am absolutely furious. Morton is a damned good policeman, one of the best I have seen in fact. We spent years trying to get rid of scum like Price and yet the system falls over itself to lose someone like John simply because he bats a different wicket.’

‘That’s just the way things are I’m afraid. I don’t like it any more than you do.’

‘I see the report came from Andrews.’

‘It did and I had the same thought. His position became very difficult after we arrested Price. As his boss, there will most certainly be questions as to why he was unaware of his activities.’

‘If he was unaware, Morton’s investigations unearthed some highly inconvenient facts. A large house in Esher should be well beyond his means. There also seem to be indications that he has another in Brittany.’

‘I know, but nothing could be proved. As I said, I have my suspicions. They obviously could not get at you and so they chose the next best course of action and it has the added benefit that it casts doubt on young Morton’s judgement.’

‘Which means that John has to pay the price of being thorough and associated with me. I told him that he can expect good references from us.’

‘Yes, I suppose that is the least we can do.’

## Chapter sixteen

It had been months since Taylor last managed to attend a wine tasting and this one was being held in the prime location of the Regent's Park Open Air Theatre. It was a pleasant evening. Warm enough for the ladies not to suffer from goose bumps as they paraded the latest London and Paris formal fashion. So much had happened since that last tasting. Then his business had been on the verge of collapse with only the prospect of a DTI approved export order to the Eastern Bloc as a potential life-saver. Now, he was in a very fortunate position. Countries like Poland and Romania had become lucrative gateway markets. In fact, things were going so well that he was no longer obliged to expand beyond his company's core interests to guarantee the future of a two hundred year heritage. Trade shows such as Leipzig were attracting buyers from the Middle and Far East and he was now having to consider taking on more staff. Plans for the distribution of caragillium were also going well. Campaigns to target the US and Europe were underway and stockpiles were building up nicely. This time next year he would be the CEO of a major listed company. But as always there was one blot in an otherwise perfect vision and this time it did not come in the form of Sir Clive Richards.

Thoughts of Sir Clive brought his attention back to reality. Somewhere amongst the throng would be the wiry frame of a man who had become his personal Jonah. Taylor gently manoeuvred his way to one of the tables where he had spotted a particularly interesting vintage. As he tasted the rich sweet red liquid, he found himself thinking of leather and chalk, which took him back to his old classroom and the Yorkshire Dales.

## Chapter sixteen

‘Good evening old boy.’

The opening words were almost a signature tune. Taylor turned to locate the voice and found Sir Clive dressed in his dinner suit.

‘A little formal for an open air tasting?’

‘What?’ Sir Clive looked down at his jacket and realised what Taylor had inferred. ‘Just a little business dinner, I think it so important to keep up the proprieties. Otherwise, you would never know what riffraff you were talking to these days. How is it?’ Sir Clive nodded towards the glass that Taylor was holding.

‘A little sweet for my taste but exquisite none the less, you should try it.’

‘Staple food old boy, now if there is a ‘29 Latour?’

‘I suspect not.’

‘No.’ Sir Clive agreed sadly. ‘Did you manage to resolve our little problem?’

‘I certainly hope so. It cost an absolute packet.’

‘But there is no possible link.’

‘I could hardly remove all traces. It is possible someone might remember me.’

‘Did you manage to ensure that all roads point to Periston?’

‘My instructions were that enough clues should be left to show that the records had been tampered with. Since Taylor and Hardy is a small chinaware outfit, the inevitable conclusion should point to Periston. They do have the resources and the connections.’

‘Stirling work old boy. You have done well.’

‘Of course that does leave the little matter of the additional shipments and why the invoices were in my name. Although the samples I requested did contain metassonite, the quantities were far too small to have caused any problems. The extra shipments however, were quite different. It was all very unfortunate that Fellows was so keen on the South African contracts. If the man had not received that final shipment, he and his family would still be alive.’

‘On that subject, I see from the newspapers that there has been no follow-up interest after our friends put your discovery to effective use.’

‘True, but it is a little awkward that they chose to use one of my products as their Trojan horse. Still, I do not suppose that any harm will come of it.’

‘Let us hope not. I have one other matter to discuss. Once you have IIC firmly established, my little group was wondering whether you would care to join them.’

Taylor opened his eyes wide at the invitation. Sir Clive had always kept their identity a closely guarded secret.

‘Could be an opportunity to put something back into society and help people in similar positions to you.’

‘You mean by putting them through the meat grinder.’

‘You have to admit that it worked in your case and you cannot expect such a substantial investment without some safeguards.’

‘No, I suppose not. What would it entail?’

‘Nothing that would not suit your particular skills, an assessment of ideas to ensure they are workable. Perhaps some mentoring to help refine their business plans and of course, a willingness to contribute funding. Just think about how many struggling inventors and entrepreneurs there are, to whom you could give a helping hand.’

‘I’ll think about it.’

‘You do that old boy.’ Sir Clive unexpectedly came very close and whispered. ‘But don’t take too long.’

\*\*\*\*

Caruthers turned his car into a dirt track road that led up a low-lying hill. Within a minute the hedges on either side had been replaced by a panoramic view across the countryside and the smell of decent leaded petrol gave way to the strong odour of pigs. This was one of the main reasons why he hated the countryside. By the time he got back to Portsmouth, he would

## Chapter sixteen

certainly need to take a bath, even if he did have to bend double to sit down.

The hut as Jen and Robert called it, turned out to be just that. It was only a little larger than a standard garden shed. Within, was just enough space for two bunk beds, a kitchenette that consisted of a two ring stove and a bathroom with a sit-up-and-beg bath, whose makers should be done under the trades act. The other little problem that the Jennings' had failed to mention concerned the tides. Twice a day they came up to the steps of the hut. If he had not been fortunate enough to get into conversation with an old lock keeper, he could have easily seen his car wafted off to who-knows-what foreign shore. Still, he was not ungrateful.

The arrival of a cheque together with Jennings' help to set up a bank account, had enabled him not only to give his car its first proper drink in a long while, but had also funded a visit to some old colleagues. Even when he had been bankrupt, there had been enough money to eat and its sudden absence made him realise all sorts of things. Without money, you quickly became cut off from the rest of society. You do not go into shops or bars because there is no point. The local swimming baths, which had enabled him to stay clean, became out of bounds. He had even struggled to find a decent place to take a pee. Pennies found in the street became prized possessions. Naturally, he had written an article which had been snapped up by one of the Sundays. Caruthers smiled at the thought of the tabloids' reaction. Poor old Silvia was rapidly becoming a pariah on the celebrity circuit.

Caruthers came to a gate and he stopped the car to get his bearings. The man, who he was due to interview, had warned him that it was a long way from the road to the house. He was not kidding as he could just see it in the far distance. An unexpected grunt made Carruthers look through the gate to be confronted, almost face to face with a huge pig.

'Do you know you look like my old editor?'

The pig regarded him in a lazy manner and carried on

chewing whatever it was that he was eating. Caruthers resumed driving. One benefit of having money is the ability to socialise. It was during one such occasion that he had one of those lucky breaks that journalists need to survive. A rather drunk woman who he barely knew told him all about her flatmate who worked for Periston as a receptionist and how they had treated her very badly. Sophie Maynard was not a typical receptionist. She had a degree in design but had graduated along with thousands of others just as the jobs market hit yet another buffer. Sophie had been employed for about seven months when one day, out of the blue, she was sacked. She was told that it was due to a realignment of the business but at her leaving do, she could not find anyone else who had been given the chop.

The drunk woman was eager to ditch the dirt and recounted all the stories she could. One proved of particular interest after his laundry conversation with Jennings about the unlikely association between a global chemical company and a Yorkshire pottery. After her fourth Babycham and third Bacardi and coke, the woman relayed that Sophie had acted as a receptionist and general factotum to a late evening event for a bunch of farmers. Given that Periston makes fertilisers and animal feed, that could have seemed a normal activity; had they not emerged from their dinner looking as if they had seen a whole multitude of ghosts. The managers were very keen to keep this quiet. All the staff on duty that night were given strict instructions to keep their mouths shut and rewarded with a two week holiday. When Sophie returned, she was given a choice, move to London or lose her job. She moved to London, not that it seemed to have done her much good, but it proved very beneficial for Carruthers and his promised visit to Yorkshire took on a new sense of urgency.

Caruthers found himself in front of a very large and shabby house. It was typical of the stone-built kind that you find in the dales. Caruthers checked to see whether there were any farm animals wandering around and satisfied that there were not, he

## Chapter sixteen

got out and made his way quickly to the front door. It was opened by a fat red faced man.

‘Mr Bottomley? My name is Anton Caruthers. I telephoned yesterday.’

The man looked vague, as if he did not recall.

‘I am from the Farmers Weekly... writing an article about the Periston Corporation.’

The name seemed to jolt something in his memory and Caruthers could tell from his expression that the memory was not favourable.

‘Aye well, I suppose you had better come in.’

The man led him through a large hallway towards a room at the back which turned out to be the kitchen. If the exterior of the house appeared shabby, the inside was positively dilapidated. Mr Bottomley had either fallen on very hard times or he had lost it. Caruthers crossed his fingers that it was the former reason.

‘You will have to excuse the mess. I have not had time to clear up. Bloody pigs are more trouble than they are worth. Would you like some tea? I don’t have anything fancy.’

‘No thank you.’ Caruthers looked in horror at the pile of mouldy crockery that covered almost every worktop.

‘You said you are writing an article. Is there any money?’

‘If the information is worth it?’ Caruthers wondered whether Bottomley expected cash-in-hand which could prove a little awkward. ‘I gather you did not have a good experience with Periston?’

‘They are a bunch of thieving buggers and they are in cahoots with them buggers at Maff.’

‘What makes you say that?’

‘Stands to reason, the government keep passing more and more laws on bloody animal health and that enables parasites like Periston to make big fat profits which the government then creams off in tax.’

Caruthers had never thought of the relationship between lawmaking and tax in quite that way and briefly wondered

whether it was worth investigating.

‘When did you first have contact with Periston?’

‘When they took over Marsdens. They were an old family firm that really understood farmers. Mind you at the start, they seemed reasonable enough. Sent people round to offer free consultations. I had one here who came up with a list of ways I could save on outlay. They even organised a cooperative so that we could pool equipment and have a stronger voice in negotiating prices.’

‘That all sounds very good.’

‘Aye, but it did not last long. Take my pigs. I built up a good herd until the outbreak of foot and mouth in ‘67 and lost the bloody lot. The government compensation was pitiful. Hardly covered the cost of a good boar and few sows, because the price of quality animals rocketed once the all clear was given. I was just beginning to rebuild something worth having when SVD broke out two year ago.’

‘SVD?’ Anton questioned.

‘Swine Vesicular Disease. Tens of thousands of pigs had to be slaughtered. That was when Periston started to cash in. At first, they were all over themselves to help. Offered free healthcare as well as feed and medicines on tick, til’ I got on me feet. Of course, the cost of their stuff shot up whilst the price of pig meat plummeted thanks to the supermarkets. You would not believe to look at this place now, that I was once one of the biggest farmers in Yorkshire.’

‘Turned nasty, did they?’

‘I’ll say. Started threatening me with bankruptcy but then they said that if I became one of their test farms, they would write off the debt and even help to build up the place.’

‘Is that why you went to Periston in January?’

The question seemed to spark a sudden change in the farmer’s demeanour. His expression changed from one of self-pity to one of suspicion.

‘You from the government?’

This unexpected reaction so surprised Caruthers, that it took



## Chapter sixteen

him a moment to respond.

‘Why would you think that?’

‘Because I had one of them buggers ere a few weeks ago. Said he was from trade investigations and thought I might be owed some compensation. Very interested he was in the pigs I sent off to Periston.’

‘You sent animals to Periston.’ Caruthers found himself repeating. ‘Why was that?’

‘Some experiment they were carrying out. They took ten of my best piglets for a month. I was supposed to get them back for finishing off but they never came.’

‘Did they say what they were doing with them?’

‘Not at first but then I got an invite to a demo and a right shambles that turned out to be.’

‘Why, what happened?’

The man remained silent for a moment and seemed to be brooding over something. He then stood up and left the room leaving Caruthers wondering what he was doing. He could hear drawers being opened in the next room and then the man reappeared carrying a fistful of papers.

‘Have a look at these.’

Caruthers took the papers and saw that each was an invoice from Periston. All had a large red stamp stating, ‘Paid in full’. He handed them back to Bottomley with a quizzical look.

‘That’s over five thousand pounds’ worth. That was the price of my silence but I’ll be bugged if I let them get away with it.’

‘Get away with what?’ Caruthers found himself intensely interested.

‘There were five of us invited that night. We were treated like VIPs. A car came to collect us and we were given a top-notch dinner, but they would not tell us what it was all about. Some woman called Tanya Roberts said she was Edward Taylor’s PA but I had seen her before with that bugger Dalton.’

‘Who else was there?’

‘No one I knew. Made out they were all important farmers

but I reckon they were the same as me, up to their eyes in debt. After the dinner, they took us into the car park of all places. You would not believe it, but they had a secret entrance to an underground bunker. This Ms Roberts said it was a testing facility.'

'For what?'

'I'm coming to that. Then this Taylor character shows up. Real full of himself and says we can be part of some big experiment that will end world hunger. They had developed a feed that could reduce the time it takes to finish a pig by as much as a half and they wanted us to test it for them. Then they took us to a weird place that was full of animal pens. They had all sorts there from farm animals to monkeys and birds.'

'What happened with this experiment?'

Bottomley took a deep breath before he answered. 'Bloody mayhem. I have never seen anything like and never want to again. To start with they were all quiet. Predators and prey eating side by side, peaceful as you like and then...' He paused as if trying to cope with an unpleasant memory. 'They started killing each other and not just in the usual way. They just seemed to go mad.'

'Did Periston say anything about what was in this animal feed?'

'No, just that it was some new additive. All very secretive they were.'

'Pity.' Caruthers replied with disappointment.

'But I reckon that there is some connection with South Africa. One of the animal pens had a couple of packing cases in them. Sort of climbing frames and they each had labels.'

\*\*\*\*

Jennings was once more at Heathrow. He was not overly fond of airports at the best of times and the last two occasions had done little to quell a growing sense of foreboding whenever he entered these soulless buildings. The first trip had concerned

## Chapter sixteen

the death of Brown, and the second followed the deaths of five crew. This latest visit was to discuss the circumstances of the demise of John Crichton. For some reason, Jennings' thoughts jumped to Morton, probably because they had the same first name. The normally slow wheels of Human Resources had moved swiftly for once, and a date for the hearing had already been set. Not that the outcome was in any doubt. He had tried to call Morton, but no one was at home.

Jennings had been waiting for some time in the reception area of the building used by both the local police and the Home Office. Faces came and went and the minutes passed by as he began to think about his final job interview. Gilpatrick seemed to spend an inordinate amount of time in resource meetings or hobnobbing with the great and the good. Jennings wondered what questions might crop up and what answers he could provide to show that he was a competent networker. Just the notion of having to indulge in idle chit-chat, was stirring second thoughts. Whilst promotion and the additional money would be welcome, he was not looking forward to the idea of stepping into Gilpatrick's shoes.

'Chief inspector?'

Jennings looked up with a start at a man he thought he recognised.

'Yes, and its Galloway, isn't it? You were at the meeting John called to discuss flight 109.'

'That's right. I have a room booked where we can discuss things in private.'

Jennings followed Galloway intrigued by his choice of words. Whether the use of the word 'private' was intended or accidental, it indicated that he had something sensitive worrying him. Jennings had his own questions that were partly work related but mainly driven by personal curiosity.

The room was just a few minutes from the reception and Jennings' feelings about the purpose of this meeting were confirmed by the furtive way Galloway looked along the corridor before closing the door.

'Thank you for taking the time to see me.' Jennings decided to open the conversation on a polite note.

'Actually, I wanted to talk to you in any case. The fact is that I have come across some alarming information.'

'Then you had better start from the beginning.' Jennings suggested.

Galloway sat down and poured himself a glass of water from a decanter. He took a long draft before realising that he had forgotten his manners.

'Sorry. It's been one of those mornings. Would you like some?'

'No thank you. You were saying you've discovered something that concerns you.'

'The last time we met, John was very worried about why Flight 109 crashed. I think it was said at the time that we have to be very careful about pointing the finger at individuals. This is not just professional caution. Families have found themselves being sued by relatives in some countries.'

'Yes, I can see the need for prudence. But if I recall correctly, the conclusion was that the crash was the result of human error of an unknown cause and origin.'

'That is not quite the language we used but essentially correct. It got the manufacturers and the maintenance staff off the hook but did not specifically apportion blame to either the aircrew or ground staff.'

'I assume that John uncovered something else.' Jennings ventured.

'He told me about your meeting with the co-pilot, Carl Rankin. After that, he became fascinated by Peiterson's interest in the cargo manifest and the general belief that the route was, for want of a better word, haunted. He initiated a check on the dates and contents of all cargo flights from Johannesburg since January.'

'Did he find anything?'

'He used his connections with the South Africans to obtain all the manifests and found that they differed to the ones here

## Chapter sixteen

in the UK. Someone had been doctoring them.'

'I am aware of that. Do you have any ideas about who is responsible?'

'John may have, I can't be sure. According to the South African data, shipments from a company called Taylor and Hardy doubled in May. Between January and May, they were sending small, regular consignments, usually around 1lb, but from May, a regular second shipment was made weighing anything up to 50lbs. God knows how, but John managed to establish that the timing of these second shipments coincided with the flights that seemed to interest Peiterson.'

'Do you still have a list of those dates?'

'I have it here. The thing that worries me is that John also had a list with him when he died. It was in a green folder, but that folder was not amongst his effects when his things were returned.'

'I saw the report about the white mini. Do you think the crash was caused deliberately?'

'I don't know.' Galloway took another sip of water. 'It is probably nothing, but John mentioned that a spook recently moved into the office next to his.'

'Spook?' Jennings echoed.

'It's a slang term. If you work in certain government departments, you will find that some people do not appear in the telephone directories or the circulation lists, hence the name spook. It means they are involved in security work.'

'And one of these people moved next to John.'

'It could be entirely coincidental. Space is always at a premium.'

'But it could also mean something more.'

'Quite.'

'Can I have a look at the list?'

Jennings quickly scanned through the carefully noted dates and details of shipments, written in neat columns and rows. Whilst he would need to verify this information, it did appear to confirm his own suspicions that the shipments could be tied

in to at least two of the deaths. From that perspective, there was some progress, but from the perspective of his conversation with Caruthers, it only served to muddy the waters. Someone had gone to a great deal of trouble to hide what they were doing. All the indications pointed to government security, but it left one nagging question. If the government had wanted to hide shipments, they could have used military craft. In addition, Fairbrother was pretty convinced that his people were unaware of what was going on until quite recently. That left just one option.

‘May I keep this?’

‘Yes, of course.’

‘You said that you were thinking about calling me. Was that due to the missing file?’

‘No.’ Galloway replied but then fell silent.

Jennings could tell that he was worried, frightened even and so decided to let him finish whatever he wanted to say in his own time.

‘Amongst the various things that came back, was this.’

Galloway handed over a plastic Tupperware box inside of which was a large irregular shape. He took off the lid and found it to be a rock. It had a metallic appearance, almost like steel but was shot through with different colours.

‘What is it?’

‘I have no idea but I have a nasty suspicion that it might be what this is all about.’

\*\*\*\*

‘Good morning Wilks. Have the morning reports arrived?’

‘Yes sir.’ Wilks responded with his usual military air.

‘Detective Constable Hanson is waiting for you in your office.’

‘Is he?’ Jennings replied without much enthusiasm.

‘Seems an eager sort.’

‘Eager.’ Jennings murmured. ‘Yes, I suppose that is an admirable quality.’

## Chapter sixteen

‘How did your visit go yesterday?’

‘Very disturbing. Actually, Wilks, I would value your advice. Perhaps you could sit in on my little chat with the new boy.’

‘Yes sir. By the way, I had a call from Morton’s brother. He is worried because he has not been able to reach John and wondered whether we had heard from him.’

‘I tried calling myself a couple of times and got no reply. Did he say when he last had contact?’

‘The day before yesterday.’

‘I suppose he could have taken off in that boat of his.’

‘That is what Eric thought. Nevertheless, he was concerned. Apparently, John was very distracted the last time he saw him.’

‘Does he want to report officially?’

‘Not yet.’

‘Then there is not much we can do. I will give him a call later. In the meantime, contact the Lymington lot and ask them to check whether his boat is still there. I think it was called the Old Yarn.’

‘I already have sir. We should hear from them later this morning.’

Jennings smiled weakly and opened the door to his office. There was Hanson large as life, larger given the size of him. Jennings gave himself a stern warning not to make life hard for the young man just because he had replaced Morton.

‘Good morning sir. Can I say I was no end pleased when I was assigned to you.’

‘I think you mentioned that the last time we met.’ Jennings sat down at his desk and switched on the fan. He glanced briefly down at the morning report before pushing it towards Hanson.

‘Here. We may as well start as we mean to go on. It will be your first job of the day to go through this and précis anything that you think might be of interest.’

Jennings watched Hanson as he laboriously read through each page, marking each item as he finished reading it.

‘Pinky Brown was sentenced to five years for burgling the

Mathis shipping office. There has been a spate of lead thefts from churches in Islington and manhole covers in Shoreditch and that's about it.'

'Looks like some of our best customers are finally coming back from holiday and are a bit short of the readies.'

'Yes sir. Is there anything on at the moment?'

'Mainly tidying up after Madison.'

'Who would have thought he was sneaking out of the warehouse via a tunnel. No wonder we did not see him for so long.'

Jennings bit his lip firmly to prevent his thoughts from being articulated. 'Which reminds me, if you ever get a call from a man called Anton Caruthers, he is to be put through, no matter what. Ah, Wilks with the morning amber. Take a pew.'

Jennings waited until Wilks had dished out the refreshments and taken his seat before he continued. 'I want you to have a look at this.' He handed Galloway's list to Wilks who quickly read through the columns.

'This is very interesting sir.'

'Isn't it just.'

'If I read this correctly, it means that someone was using Taylor and Hardy to smuggle in large quantities of something or perhaps were simply trying to make it look that way.'

'What makes you say that?'

'Well sir, we know that the dates have been altered. I thought that one which had originally been on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, which would have coincided with Sykes's death on the 4<sup>th</sup>, was changed to the 13<sup>th</sup>. However, from this, it looks as though Taylor's shipment was indeed on 13<sup>th</sup>. The bigger shipment was on the 3<sup>rd</sup>. That one was completely deleted and then they altered the one on the 13<sup>th</sup> to make us think it was the 3<sup>rd</sup>, although in fact, it was the 13<sup>th</sup>. I think that is clear enough.'

'Quite.' Jennings responded, trying to suppress a smirk at the perplexed expression worn by Hanson. 'I think what is also becoming clear is that we are dealing with three different sets of people who are all running around each other. Our job is to



## Chapter sixteen

disentangle the mess. Do you have anything to add Hanson?’

‘No sir. I am all ears.’

Jennings firmly bit his lip once more.

‘Let us suppose that both Edward Taylor and Roger Dalton think that the other is responsible for smuggling some dangerous material in the guise of normal rock samples. I know that they were both working on a project which went badly wrong. According to Caruthers, it took the form of some kind of drug that drove animals mad.’

‘That has a familiar ring sir.’

‘Yes Hanson, it does. Caruthers has an idea that our third mysterious party is a body calling itself Cambridge Electronics. He is confident that it is a front for spooks.’

‘Spooks?’ Hanson repeated looking very blank.

‘Yes, spooks, people who work in our intelligence agencies. You really must keep up to date with these things.’ Jennings smiled secretly to himself at Hanson’s obvious discomfort.

‘Yes sir.’

‘On the other hand, it could also simply be a cover for fraud or industrial espionage. I checked with Companies House and no such business has existed for over thirty years. If we are indeed dealing with an activity initiated by our beloved government, I am sure we will be warned off again. In which case, both of you will have a new boss and we will have confirmation. If not, then I think we may have uncovered a nasty little crime which has caused the death of a number of people including two children. Hanson, I want you to go and see Taylor. Ask him directly about the shipment dates and I want a detailed analysis of this metassonite and the substance he is supposed to be shipping. I then want to have it checked against this.’ Jennings handed over the Tupperware box. ‘Don’t mention our suspicions about a third party. He might use it to wriggle off the hook. I also want you to ask him why he lied about the last time he met with Fellows. Wilks can fill you in. Wilks, I would like you to use your contacts to establish any Whitehall interest in either Taylor or Dalton. Feel free to call

Fairbrother if you need to.'

'And what will you be doing sir?' Asked Hanson.

'I am going to have a chat with friend Dalton. He got very cagey about Fellows and I think it is high time I sorted that out.'

\*\*\*\*

Braden was sitting in his usual place looking out of the window. He had developed a new game to try to keep himself entertained as well as ensuring that his mind did not become as crippled as his body. He had suffered last week from what his doctor described as, a minor stroke, in his best reassuring bedside manner. There was a time when such ridiculous behaviour would have made him very angry but there no longer seemed any point to such trivialities. His new game employed all the skills he had learnt over years and was based on trying to deduce who people were, where they came from, what class they belonged to, their profession and possible politics. There was no way to check whether his assessments were correct, but it did keep him occupied and it was better than watching the mind numbing entertainment called television.

A youngish man passed by. He was pushing a pram in a rather proud fashion, which meant that he was a new father. His demeanour was too full of self-importance to be pushing anyone else's offspring. The man was of above average height and the girth. He had a thick beard, was wearing sandals, orange corduroy trousers, a tie-dyed tee-shirt and a pair of red socks. If it were not for those socks, he might have believed the man was a teacher or similar sedentary profession. Probably one of those who went on demos and smoked pot, but those socks told a different story. Red socks marked him as belonging to the elite, which meant that he was either in banking, the city or God forbid with that dress code, the civil service. The beard then became a mark of a profession rather than rebellion. This man was an expert in some form of mathematics, possibly

## Chapter sixteen

statistical analysis or perhaps even cyphers. Satisfied that he had reached the right conclusion, Braden settled back into his chair.

It was five in the afternoon and thus time for a snifter. There was no need to order it. Now that he had resided here for several weeks, the club knew his ways. What was more important was that his doctor had finally stopped pestering him to give it up. That meant he could enjoy his glass of port without a guilty conscience.

Today was a red letter day that would see his final meeting with Gregory. Just for once the poor man would not have to sneak into the country as he had used his influence to get Gregory a visa. Officially, he was here to assess the work of their embassy. Unofficially he was here to complete the final part of a puzzle which had first been laid in 1941.

It was during the war that they met, 1944 in the Officers Club in Regent Street. The site was occupied by a supermarket now, Tesco, Spar or some similarly unlikely name. Gregory was the equivalent of a lieutenant, whilst he had been promoted to captain. He had been assigned to keep an eye on Gregory and the simplest way was to strike up a friendship, little knowing that thirty years later they would still be meeting. After the war, they lost direct touch although he would see Gregory's name crop up from time to time in various reports. Then began a rather curious period when they were opposite numbers, each trying to outwit the other. It was an evenly matched game which gave it an edge. He never felt any bitterness when he lost and assumed that Gregory felt much the same way. Then in 1973, everything changed. Best of enemies found themselves working together for the benefit of both their countries, in fact for the entire world.

A man in the club uniform gently touched his shoulder to alert him that his visitor had arrived. Braden allowed himself to be wheeled into the Red Room, despite the indignity. One look from Gregory was enough to confirm the man's shock, but Braden had got used to it.

‘Can I get you anything?’ Braden asked. ‘The tea is passable, although I will confess that I was always partial to the way you Russians make it.’

‘Thank you, yes.’

‘And how is your assessment going?’

‘Very well. Inevitably, I have company everywhere I go.’

‘From both sides I assume.’ Braden gave a knowing smile.

‘This meeting must be very important for you.’

‘Indeed it is, but first things first. I note you have avoided making any references to my health, but you must have known about my condition for some time.’

‘I read the reports, but the reality of it came as a bit of a surprise.’

‘I am glad that you did not say anything needlessly sentimental such as how sorry you are. You and I have been through too much to indulge in that kind of affectation.’

‘As a matter of fact, I wanted to say just that but I knew you would resent it.’ Gregory considered for a moment. ‘I have decided to retire. They have given me a place just outside Oselok. There are nice woods and a lake nearby; I might even take up fishing.’

‘Somehow, I cannot quite picture you, fishing rod in hand. Always thought of you as a chess man.’

‘We shall see.’ Gregory smiled weakly. ‘I see from your newspapers that our investments have been put to use.’

‘Possibly.’ Braden reflected. ‘I fear I may have let the side down.’

‘Not your fault old man. It is no longer your outfit.’

‘Has it never struck you as being...’ Braden paused whilst he considered what to say next, ‘unusual for a Russian to use phrases such as ‘old man’, particularly with your accent.’

‘Not in the least. I have always been very fond of English eccentricity. I like the way you apologise if someone accidentally bumps into you, a bit like you are doing now.’

‘Even so, I do feel responsible. I encouraged the research. No, that is disingenuous. I engineered the research, even

## Chapter sixteen

ensured that Taylor had access to sufficient funds to develop his ceramics and I was particularly intrigued by Periston's imaging technology. Both could have been very useful when the time comes.'

'I don't doubt that, but once the information became public, someone would have stumbled across the truth sooner or later. I have seen a report that a journalist called Caruthers has been making some very inconvenient enquires. I am also concerned about his relationship with the police.'

'Yes indeed.'

'Will you take action?'

Braden glanced out of the window as the man with the pram passed by once more. He wondered what kind of world that child would know and felt no envy. There had been a time when the life of an individual seemed of little consequence. That was something he no longer believed. Not because his own life would soon come to an end, but because everything he had been working for over the last three years had been brought into sharp focus, a life devoted to protecting not just king and country, but the lives of people like the man with the pram.

'Not of the kind that you are hinting at. There have been too many of those and they have been handled in a very sloppy manner. Dalton must go. He knows far too much. We have already closed down his research facility and once he is gone, I think we can safely assume that the next CEO will focus on more mainstream markets, especially if we manipulate those markets correctly. Taylor is a little more problematic as the cat is already out of the bag. My successor will ensure that the South Africans have their fingers burnt. He has come up with rather a good wheeze. One of our investors has been itching to try out a process of manipulating genes. A new disease and ensuring that it is firmly associated with metassonite should give us two bangs for our money. If it all works out, I don't think even the South Africans will be stupid enough to continue with their programme. It should also guarantee that

the mine is closed down and sealed off. As to Taylor and Richards, I think we can leave them to the police.'

'Do you think that is wise. If my information is correct, this Caruthers and a chief inspector called Robert Jennings, could prove dangerous. Caruthers has been to see one of the farmers who witnessed the unfortunate event at Periston and both have been making enquiries about Cambridge Electronics.'

'Have they now? How very perspicacious of them. In which case, and if it becomes absolutely necessary, a minor adjustment to our plans may be required. We might be able to engineer one final test of metassonite. Murder is as a good a reason to lock up a man as any.'

'Then that is settled. As my minders are probably becoming impatient, what is it you wanted to see me about?'

'Medeo. I think you may have the answer to something that has been puzzling me for a very long time.'

'Personal or professional?'

'Definitely professional,' Braden answered decisively, but then thought a little more, 'perhaps personal to a small degree. I appreciate the reasons for your previous reticence, but you may consider it as my last request. At the end of the sixties, your people were conducting experiments on the Noril'sk. They discovered that when it was bombarded with high energy beams, the substance produced a form of energy which caused people to experience an extreme form of fear. Your people did not understand the nature of this energy and looked on it rather as we did, as a potentially useful weapon. That is why Major Schmidt decided to strike out on his own. I need to know what happened.'

Gregory regarded his old friend for a long while. Medeo remained a very sensitive matter but then both he and Braden now had quite different allegiances.

'Schmidt recruited three people, two men and a woman. It was the woman who was Asian by the way. They all had to be experts in their fields, which included physics, mathematics and geology. It was clear that Schmidt, with the usual view of an

## Chapter sixteen

army man, regarded the Noril'sk as a source of potential superiority in the Cold War.'

'Were they all from the military?'

'No, one of the men was a civilian. Schmidt confessed that he made the people repeat the experiments many times over the course of a few hours. He knew from the work of Anna Fedotov, that bombarding it with high energy beams in quick succession, somehow increased the effect. Naturally, Schmidt planned for the inevitable and had several replacement teams lined up. As a matter of fact, he had even gone so far as to only recruit people with no families so that they would not be missed. What he did not plan for was what happened.'

'They vanished.'

'Without a trace. Not just people, but anything that included the element carbon. He tried to cover up the incident by staging an accident, but there was a major fire. That required an investigation and the whole story came out. Why the interest in Medeo? This is the second time you have asked about that place.'

'Because I believe I have found your missing people. It was many years ago and if I am right, I think that the cataclysm we have planned for, could be coming much sooner than we thought.'

## Chapter seventeen

Jennings hung his briefcase on a coat hook in the hall and headed for the kitchen. He could see Jen in the garden cutting some runner beans and wondered what they would be having for dinner. She seemed to be fixated on Southern Europe at the moment and the prospect of a green bean salad with olives and feta cheese was distinctly preferable to some of the concoctions she had served up recently.

Glancing at the calendar Jennings noted that it would soon be the end of August. The game season was underway, and the nights were noticeably drawing in. All that was required was some rain and the long hot summer would finally be at an end. The usually lax July and August had not materialised. Whilst the thieves and fraudsters had gone to plague the Spanish and Portuguese police, a rather more sinister series of events had ruined his expectations of a lazy summer break followed by a quiet holiday for two.

Jennings went to the fridge and took out a jug of black coloured juice. Summer berry had now been replaced by blackberry and apple and neither was a substitute for a decent beer or even a glass of wine. It had been eleven weeks and three days since his last relaxing drink at home as the calendar painfully reminded him. He poured himself a glass and wondered how on earth this could be better for his wellbeing than a bottle of bitter beer.

As he returned the jug to the fridge, Jen emerged with a basket of home grown veg and a home grown three year old boy in tow.

'Hello darling, you are back early.'

'I have to make an early start tomorrow.'



## Chapter seventeen

‘Just the one day, or an overnight?’

‘Just the day.’

Jen’s smile vanished with disappointment.

‘Pity, Mrs Forbes-Bryson is coming to discuss the harvest supper.’

‘I will not be back until after ten if that helps.’

‘Immensely darling. Have you had a good day?’

‘Passable and how is my little man?’

Jennings gave his son a kiss and whilst listening to a garbled account of adventures in the garden, he wondered whether to tell Jen the latest news concerning John. He had been quite taken aback by her reaction to the news of Morton’s suspension and she, quite unreasonably in his view, held him personally responsible. Jennings watched David run off in the direction of the living room and could just see Michael playing with his train set.

‘I am afraid I have some bad news. Wilks had a call from John’s brother Eric, to say that he was not at his flat. We thought he might have gone sailing for a few days. You might recall that he has a boat moored in Lyminster, but it is still there.’

‘And what are you doing to find him?’ Jen demanded, looking a little angry.

‘Unofficially, we have put out a call but there is nothing we can do officially until his brother registers him as a missing person. Wilks has even gone to that club of his to see whether he is staying with a friend.’ Jennings took another sip of his blackberry juice and shuddered. ‘I must admit; I was quite surprised by Wilks’ reaction to the news that Morton is homosexual.’

‘Why is that?’

Jen had her back to him as she started to cut the beans, but he did not need to see her face to tell that she still held him directly responsible for anything that happened to Morton.

‘I suppose because he is an old fashioned sort. I just assumed that he would disapprove. I have known Wilks for more than

seven years, yet he can still surprise me.'

'I know the feeling well.'

'Jen! That is really unfair.'

'And you think that what you have done to John is fair.'

'No, but that is quite different.'

'Why?'

Jennings set his glass down on the nearest worktop, took Jen's hand and led her to the kitchen table where they both sat down.

'I regret to say that the police force is just as full of bigoted people as any other organisation.'

'That's your excuse, is it? Pander to bigots instead of trying to change things.'

Jennings looked at Jen with some sympathy, after all, he could not fault her logic. 'Jen, there are times in my job when you find yourself doing things that you are not too proud of. A policeman is not so different to the army or the navy. As I explained to John, when you join the force, you are given special powers that civilians do not have. But as a democratic society, those powers come with responsibilities, otherwise we would rightly lose public trust. The rules have to be adhered to equally by everyone. No one can pick and choose which ones they will obey. John knew that it was impossible for him to function once it became known that he was homosexual. It was his decision to ignore the rules. I had to suspend him, not because he is gay but because he chose to break those rules and therefore the trust that was placed in him.'

Jen leaned forward and gave him a gentle kiss. 'Do you think he will be all right?'

'John is a tough nut.'

Jen smiled weakly. 'I wish I could be so sure.'

Jennings became aware of a small hand pulling at his trousers. He looked down to see David stretching out his arms, waiting to be lifted onto his lap. Jennings obliged.

'And what have you got there?' David was grasping a green object that might have once been a jam sandwich.

## Chapter seventeen

'I found it. Daddy, what's a nomanexal?'  
Jennings gave his wife a pleading look but it was to no avail.  
'He's your son.'

\*\*\*\*

Jennings once more found himself inside the drab headquarters of the Periston Corporation. He looked at a clock behind the reception desk and wondered how Hanson was getting on with Taylor. Try as he might to give the man some room to find his feet, there were deep misgivings when comparing him to Peters or Morton, Morton most of all. The girl in charge of reception had looked very perplexed when he asked to see Dalton even though Wilks had confirmed an appointment. Jennings was asked to wait whilst the receptionist made a number of hushed and increasingly anxious calls. Eventually, he was asked, with profuse apologies to take a seat.

Although the building was deep inside the Periston complex, there was a constant flow of visitors, from men in hard hats, to men in pinstriped suits. The only women he saw were those who obviously worked here. Plain skirts and crisp white blouses marked them as typists and secretaries. Eventually, the reception girl came to inform him that the Deputy Head of Research would be available shortly and apologised once more for the wait.

Despite protesting that he had asked to see Dalton, not an underling, Jennings decided not to vent his anger on someone who was quite clearly trying to handle an embarrassing situation. After another five minutes, another plain skirt and white blouse approached, no doubt another secretary.

'I do apologise for keeping you waiting. My name is Jessica Field by the way.'

'Are you taking me to see this Deputy Head of Research?'  
Jennings chipped in, finally allowing his exasperation to get the better of him.

The woman smiled a patient smile. 'I am the Deputy Head.'

Jennings was glad that his daughter, Sarah was not present to witness this gaff otherwise he would never hear the end of it. Field led him through a number of security doors until they arrived at a small office. A tray of tea, coffee and water had already been laid out.

'Let me apologise once more. I am afraid you have caught us at a very bad time.'

'Nevertheless, I must insist that Mr Dalton makes time to see me. This is a police matter.'

'I'm afraid that will not be possible.'

'If it becomes necessary, I can ask for an arrest warrant. Perhaps you would like to inform him of the fact.'

'I might do when we find him.'

Finally, Jennings understood the cause of all those panicky telephone enquiries.

'The fact is that he failed to turn up this morning.'

'Have you contacted his family? Perhaps he is ill.'

'His wife lives in France. Mr Dalton has a house on the perimeter of the complex and he is not there. His bed has not been slept in and security is adamant that he did not leave.'

'Have you reported this?'

'Not yet. I gather he has to be missing for forty-eight hours before the police will do anything. Besides which, there is a small matter of preparing the markets. They are jittery enough. If the press gets wind of this, our stock value could plummet.'

'In which case, I would like to see Simon Pegg.'

'That will also not be possible. He's dead.'

Jennings looked at the coffee pot and reached for it. 'I think we both could do with one of these. Do you take milk and sugar?'

'Neither thanks.'

'How did he die?'

'A motorbike accident, he loved his Norton. Poor man had just been made redundant.'

'I thought he and Dalton were old friends.'

'They were but business is business. After the debacle at the

## Chapter seventeen

museum, the key shareholders put pressure on the board to close down all the advance research that was not directly connected with our core business. Since Simon headed up that side, there was no job for him. He was due to take a holiday but was killed on his way to the ferry port at Dover.' Field paused for a moment whilst she contemplated the cup of coffee handed to her by Jennings. 'I have been here for eight years and it was the first holiday I had seen him take; such a tragic waste. He was a genius.'

'What about the rest of the people working on the same project?'

'All made redundant with immediate effect. I can give you their names and addresses, but I am not sure they can be helpful if you have specific questions about the projects Simon was running. Mr Dalton was passionate about security. People only knew about what they were immediately working on.'

'I suppose only he and Simon had an overall view.'

'That is correct I'm afraid.'

'Where do you fit into the picture?'

'I was Simon's deputy, but I head up our core research. Fertilisers, pest control and livestock feeds, that sort of thing.'

'Did you work on the partnership project with Taylor and Hardy?'

'Yes. I was responsible for animal welfare.'

Jennings felt a sudden sense of relief that this trip might not be entirely wasted. 'The first time I talked with Dalton, both he and Simon mentioned some experiment that went wrong last January. They also became uneasy when I mentioned a man called Fellows.'

'Was he the one that killed his family?'

'He was.'

'I thought I recognised the name. In that case, I am not surprised. Simon was not normally the sort to show his emotions, but he became very agitated when he saw the story in the newspapers.'

'Any idea why?'

'Because Fellows and Edward Taylor used us to smuggle pure metassonite.'

'I keep hearing that name and what it does, but what exactly is it?'

'It's a highly refined material derived from an ancient meteorite deposit. Edward Taylor owns the only currently accessible source.'

'Is it connected to that Soviet meteorite?'

Jessica looked very embarrassed. 'Yes.' She admitted quietly. 'It is supposed to be a big secret. Mr Dalton said that if the authorities got wind, they would stop his research. Metassonite was critical to his work.'

'You mean the imaging technology?'

'Partly, but he and Simon were working on something else. I have no idea what.'

'You said metassonite was critical, but I do not understand why this material is so special.'

'For want of a better explanation, it is programmable. It enhances the property of whatever it is mixed with. Blend it with steel and you can produce a strand as thin as a human hair and as strong as a two inch cable. Add it to heat resistant ceramics, and you have something that in time could take a space probe into the sun.'

'I can see how that could be a very important commercial secret. You accused both Taylor and Fellows of smuggling this substance in your company's name. Since Taylor owns the mine, why would they do that?'

'Because in its natural state, it is a powerful psychotic drug. Even when diluted it can result in mood swings but refined it could easily cause someone to kill themselves.'

'Or commit murder.' Jennings said to himself. 'How do you know they were responsible?'

'When we saw the reports about those people who killed themselves, we obviously became concerned. Dalton ordered checks to be made and discovered that once Simon had stopped his shipments, Taylor had somehow contrived to

## Chapter seventeen

continue them after our relationship had been terminated. Since we had been working with the same material, Simon and Mr Dalton were very worried about the potential publicity.'

Jennings finished his coffee, despite the bitter taste and he wondered where Mme Emié was and who was now having the privilege of drinking her coffee.

'What happened last January?'

Field looked uncertain for a moment. She took a deep breath as she tried to cope with the memory. 'Have you ever read Dante's *Inferno*?'

'No.'

'Pity, it might have given you an idea of the kind of hell that was let loose. We had developed a new type of animal feed that stimulated cell growth. It could have revolutionised food production, but it was also the kind of thing that these animal rights groups scream about. Millions of people can die needlessly without comment but appear to mistreat an animal and they go bananas. We were just about ready for proper field tests when there was an absolute disaster. Somehow the feed became contaminated with pure metassonite and the animals went insane.'

'Any idea how it happened?'

'Oh yes, it was down to Fellows. He had been going on about the dangers to children.'

'Children, I thought his thing was animals.'

'At first, yes. Apparently, his firm had previous experience with activists and discovered that we had not been completely straight with him about what the building would be used for. He did some poking around and found out. On the basis that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, Mr Dalton took a chance and explained what we were doing. The new feed accelerated cell growth in the same way that cancer causes cells to mutate. It is true that in some early cases the meat from test animals could be carcinogenic, particularly to developing cells, hence the slight risk to young children. But we had that problem licked. Fellows however, would not have it. He said

he was going to inform the authorities. It was Taylor who persuaded him not to. But he obviously decided to take more direct action.'

'So, what happened next?'

'Serendipity.'

'Seren what?'

'A happy accident. Simon had been working with a group of investors through a man called Sir Clive Richards. It was Sir Clive who introduced Simon to Edward Taylor by the way. One of Sir Clive's investor people told Simon about some other work that involved material from the meteorite. Theirs was a poor quality sample but they had had some success turning short range electromagnetic signals into visual range signals. The two got together but eventually, it was decided that Simon would carry on the work alone. It was that research which was demonstrated at the Natural History Museum.'

'Yes, I saw it.'

'Did you? Unfortunately, I was tied up here.'

'If this metassonite is so dangerous, how did Simon obtain it?'

'It is only dangerous in its natural form. Taylor found a way to combine it with other elements so that it is completely harmless. He called this composite material caragillium. It's the basis of a revolutionary line of heat resistant ceramics.'

'And you extracted metassonite from this caragillium.'

'It is a simple process. You simply add acetic acid. But you have to be quick because metassonite combines with acetic acid after a while.'

'What do these materials look like?'

'Natural metassonite looks essentially like a metallic meteorite residue. A largely blackish dust, or if you find a lump, it will have a metallic sheen with different colours. Pure metassonite is green, a bit like jade. Caragillium is white mainly, perhaps more of a pearl colour.'

'Thank you, Ms Field. You have been very helpful.'

'It's Miss actually. You don't have to be a feminist to get on



## Chapter seventeen

in a man's world.'

'No, of course not.'

Jennings did not speak another word whilst Miss Field led him back to reception. His thoughts raced with the implications of everything she had said. Not least of which was finally sorting out why Taylor and Dalton were so nervous about their relationship with Fellows.

That still left open the question concerning the death of Fellows and his family, but he was now convinced that his demise had been engineered. Miss Field was just handing in his visitor's pass when Jennings had an idea. He fished around his briefcase for a photograph of Madison. He was sure that he still had one and a short while later he found it.

'Have you ever seen this man?'

Her face instantly confirmed his suspicions.

'Yes, that's Franks, most unpleasant man. He was one of Sir Clive's people.'

'Sir Clive Richards. You think he was an employee?'

'No sorry. I meant that he was with Sir Clive. You know, the one I was telling you about. He invented the idea of the imaging technology.'

\*\*\*\*

Taylor picked up the receiver and dialled another in a long list of numbers he had for Sir Clive. He had been trying to call the man for several hours, ever since a Detective Constable Hanson came to ask questions about shipment dates. Taylor listened as he finished dialling, but all he heard was yet another unanswered tone. Taylor looked at the telephone for a few moments as if trying to decide what to do next. Then he came to a decision. Opening the bottom drawer of his desk, he took out the manila folder, emptied the contents into a wastepaper bin and set the paper alight. Taylor watched with satisfaction as the last tangible connection curled in to small fragile black ribbons. Thousands spent on ensuring that the trails pointed to

where they belonged, seemed to have been completely wasted.

Taylor stood up and began to pace around his office to give himself a chance to think. Less than a couple of weeks ago he had been congratulating himself on how much had been accomplished over the summer. Now all of that seemed to have vanished and for the first time, he had absolutely no idea what to do. He looked in the direction of the drinks tray. It seemed to beckon once more, and he licked his dry lips before giving in to its call and pouring a very stiff whisky. A second was shortly followed by a third. Then the phone rang and Taylor grabbed it in a flash.

‘Good evening old boy. I gather you have been trying to call me.’

‘Yes I have.’ Taylor allowed his anger to get the better of him.

‘Have you been drinking?’

‘I have and so will you when I tell you what’s happened. Periston has screwed us and there is nothing we can do about it.’

There was a long pause whilst Taylor stood patiently waiting.

‘Don’t say any more. Are you still in your office?’

‘Yes.’

‘Then wait for me. I will join you as soon as I can.’

\*\*\*\*

Caruthers sat on a bench in St James’s Park, watching the tourists feeding the ducks. In his short walk from the underground station, he had lost count of the number of different languages to be heard which presumably was why a family were throwing the remainder of their picnic lunch to the pelicans, right next to a sign that asked people not to feed them. He watched for a short while until they had emptied their paper bags, which they happily dropped on the pavement not a few feet from the bin. Caruthers thought briefly about pointing out the error of their ways but decided against it. Partly because

## Chapter seventeen

they seemed to be speaking Dutch but mainly because the man looked like he could demolish a wall using only his little finger.

The lunchtime park was full of tourists and office workers. Short sleeved shirts and flowery dresses mixed with pinstripe suits in a concoction rarely to found find outside of a London park in summer.

One of those suits seemed to be making its way directly towards him. Caruthers had used his many years' experience as a journalist to ask the right questions of the right people until he came across a man called Donald McGill who had worked with Simon Pegg in developing the imaging technology. It was now becoming very clear that something unusual was being masked by claims of commercial sensitivity. According to Jennings, Dalton and Pegg had become evasive when the subject of Fellows was raised, and this unease was closely connected with this thing called metassonite. Jennings had telephoned to let him know that Pegg was dead and Dalton was missing. This together with his own discoveries, was beginning to add up to a nasty little conspiracy.

'I would feel more comfortable if we walked.' Said McGill, as Caruthers stood up to shake hands.

McGill regarded the hand as if unsure what it was there for before turning towards the direction of Buckingham Palace.

'As you wish,' Caruthers replied, 'let me start with a basic question. From our telephone conversation last night, you are obviously concerned for your personal safety. Three of you worked with Simon Pegg. You appear to be the only one left.'

McGill looked both tired and weary. 'You have tried contacting the others? I knew Peters was going on holiday.'

'Dalton has also disappeared and Pegg is dead.'

'I knew about Simon but not Dalton, although I am not altogether surprised. I think we will head towards Green Park if you don't mind.' McGill's voice trembled. 'I have not slept properly for three nights. Do you mind if find somewhere to get a coffee?'

The pair walked on for a short while until they reached a

trailer selling refreshments. Caruthers bought two coffees. McGill drained one quickly and then started sipping the other.

'You look like you needed that.'

McGill smiled weakly. 'What happened to Scholefield?'

'His landlady did not know. She took him his morning tea to find that the bed had not been slept in.'

'Him too.' McGill said sadly.

Caruthers spoke in almost a whisper. 'What the hell is going on?'

'Let me make one thing clear. I am taking a huge risk coming out into the open. The only reason I am still around is that I skipped sharpish, but it is only a matter of time before they catch up with me. I want people to know what happened.'

'That I can guarantee,' Caruthers replied, 'but who on earth do you think is after you?'

'I don't know.' McGill took another sip of coffee. 'The people Dalton brought in were government types, I think. I can't be sure because there were some questions you did not ask.'

'Then tell me about your work?'

'My field is electronics. Peters is a geologist if he is still alive and Scholefield was a physicist. Peters and Scholefield were recruited long before me. I came in halfway through the work.'

'To develop this imaging technology?'

'Good grief no, at best that was nothing more than icing. Look, it all happened before my time. Periston was working on government projects. They have the necessary resources to test all kinds of chemical technology and sometimes places such as Porton Down are just too small to cope with development work. The government was interested in anything connected with that Russian meteorite. They knew that such a large impact must have resulted in substantial residue spreading all over the planet. If a small sample could cause seventeen deaths, just imagine what a few tons could do, and millions of tons of contaminated dust would have been thrown up by the impact.'

Then a company run by a man called Taylor published a

## Chapter seventeen

paper, which appeared to confirm that he had found a rich source. Periston was told to contact him and claim that they were working with a similar material.'

'Was that true?'

'No, but it worked. Taylor had developed a way of refining the rock and discovered he had a miracle substance which he called metassonite.'

'Which Dalton wanted to use to develop an animal feed?'

'Yes,' McGill agreed, 'adding metassonite enhanced growth and for a while, everyone was happy. Then something happened that sent Dalton ballistic. The animals killed each other and the blame was laid firmly in Taylor's lap. It turned out that he knew that exposure to metassonite could lead to psychotic episodes but had hidden the fact. He claimed to have discovered a way of combining it with other materials to make it inert.'

'Caragillium?'

'You have been doing your homework.' McGill put his cup on the counter. 'Thank you. Shall we walk on? I feel a little uncomfortable standing in one place. If you add acetic acid to caragillium, it dissolves the metassonite.'

'Is that what happened to the animals?'

'It did, but no one could work out how or why. Taylor claimed sabotage but could not prove it.'

'What happened after the partnership ended?'

'Simon expected all the research to be closed down. Instead, he was introduced to a man called Franks who had developed a new technology, which could use certain electromagnetic waves to create images, a sort of sophisticated x-ray. That is where I came into the picture.'

'And this technology used metassonite.'

'No.' McGill replied with surprise. 'What made you think that?'

'Dalton told a colleague that it was essential. Something to do with enhancing the signal.'

'Your colleague got that wrong, although Simon and I did

experiment with it.'

'Did you ever meet this Franks?'

'I did and if he invented the technology, I am a monkey's uncle.'

'What makes you say that?'

'He knew no more about electronics than I do about plumbing. Besides which, Simon referred to him a couple of times after we took over developing the technology. I got the impression he was some sort of intermediary used by the people Dalton worked with.'

'Would these people work for an outfit called Cambridge Electronics?'

McGill abruptly stopped in his tracks and turned to directly face Caruthers. 'That is not a name I would use quite so freely and certainly not in a public place.'

'And why is that?'

'I just wouldn't. That's all.'

'Thank you for the warning. You said that the imaging technology was only a sideline.'

'It was and that is a timely reminder that I do not have much time. Security around this work was obsessive. Everything was managed on a need to know basis. The only reason I know as much as I do, is because Simon and I worked such long hours.'

'And what were you working on?'

'I said that the imaging technology was like an x-ray, but in fact, it is far more sophisticated than that. Although we did not need to use metassonite, Simon suggested we try it to improve the quality of the images. It was not one of his better ideas.'

'Why is that?'

'Because it actually affects the molecular structure of materials. It breaks them down, even the diamond focusing devices. Everyone initially got very excited and we were ordered to try to increase the effect, to break the bonds between atoms.'

'Just a moment, are you claiming that Periston was trying to develop some kind of disintegrator gun?'

## Chapter seventeen

‘No, that is not what I am saying and there is no need to look quite so incredulous. We have known how to split the atom for sixty years thanks to Rutherford. The problem is that it takes an enormous amount of energy to be of any real practical use.’

‘Did you succeed?’ Caruthers interrupted, hoping to bring the conversation back on track.

‘No. Something very strange happened. After a month, my work unexpectedly switched direction. Instead of trying to disrupt molecular bonds, I was trying to reinforce them.’

‘Why the change?’

‘I don’t know. We were never told and there some things that you did not question.’

‘You said that metassonite is refined from the residue left over from the impact of the Noril’sk. Perhaps the government types got scared.’

‘Maybe...But even if they weren’t, we were.’

‘Why was that?’

‘Because metassonite and the meteorite are not natural, there is an abnormal connection. Metassonite was not just once part of that meteorite, it still is.’

‘What do you mean by that?’

‘I mean just what I said. You were asking about Cambridge Electronics. I can tell you one thing about them. I think that they are working with all kinds of companies and not just in Britain.’

‘To do what?’

‘To increase their knowledge of how it works.’

‘Do you think that they are trying to develop it as a weapon?’

‘If we had been allowed to finish our initial work, perhaps. But I agree with you, they are shit scared of it. In fact, by the end of my...’

McGill was not able to finish his sentence as the large man and his family suddenly reappeared and barged into them. McGill looked shaken and his face filled with panic until the man apologised profusely and began to dust him down. One

of the children yelled at the top of his voice and the large man went off to investigate.

Caruthers watched the family for a moment, puzzled by what had happened. Then he recalled what McGill was saying.

‘You were saying that they were scared of something.’

‘Was I?’ McGill replied vaguely.

‘Are you all right? It was just an accident.’

‘I think so. I just feel a bit odd.’

‘Then let’s turn back. There is a café at the other end of the park.’

‘Yes, that might be a good idea.’

They walked on for a short while before McGill began to complain of dizziness.

‘Do you mind if we sit down for a moment. I just need to catch my breath.’

‘Of course. You don’t look at all well. I think I should try to get a doctor.’

McGill slumped down onto a nearby bench, quietly looking over the lake as the noise and bustle of tourists passed by unnoticed. He took several deep breaths which steadily became more shallow until they finally stopped. Caruthers became aware of a small crowd that had gathered and a few moments later they were joined by a man in uniform.

‘Can I help you sir?’

Caruthers looked up to see the concerned face of a park warden. ‘Thank you.’ He replied. ‘I think you should call the police.’

\*\*\*\*

‘What took you so long?’ Said Taylor, as he poured himself another large whisky. ‘Would you like one?’

‘I would go easy if I were you, old boy. We both need to keep a clear head if we are to think this problem through properly. Now tell me. How exactly have Periston screwed us?’

‘Sir Clive. You must believe me. I did all I could to ensure



## Chapter seventeen

those bastards got the blame.’ Taylor took a large swig of whisky. ‘I have often wondered whether they engineered January’s events just so that they could keep metassonite for themselves.’

‘You are rambling old boy. Do you have a coffee machine?’

‘There is one in the sideboard. I don’t think you understand. It all makes sense if you think about it. First, they ruin the experiment so that they can dissolve the partnership. Then they start shipping raw metassonite so that we will get the blame. I would not be surprised if they were behind all the events at the mine.’

‘Where can I get some water?’

‘There is a kitchen through that door.’

‘Thank you. Sit down and for God’s sake stop panicking. That’s not the actions of a man that took a failing pottery and turned it into a worldwide enterprise.’

Taylor looked at his whisky glass, contemplated refilling it, but decided that Sir Clive was probably right. He watched his personal Jonah potter around, filling the coffee pot and plugging it in. Moments later, it was gurgling happily and producing a strong aroma of normality. Sir Clive rummaged around in the cupboard and produced two cups and a tray before sitting down beside Taylor.

‘There is milk in the minifridge.’

‘I think you need it black and by the smell of your breath, several cups. Now take a drink and let us start at the beginning. Specifically, with what Periston knows and what the police know.’

Taylor took several large gulps of black coffee, which seemed to do some good. Usually, the presence of Sir Clive filled him with trepidation, but now he was glad of his presence.

‘When the experiment went wrong, Dalton demanded a detailed analysis of the feed and caragillium. It was then that he found out my little deception.’

‘That metassonite can be dangerous.’

Taylor nodded his head.

'If that was not bad enough, he also found out that Fellows had been handling my packages. He put two and two together and concluded, erroneously, that I had been using his company to ship raw metassonite.'

'Which you hadn't?'

'No,' Taylor replied defensively, 'but it was the start of all our troubles with the processing. The amount of raw metassonite in the packages had begun to increase, but it was still within acceptable levels. I think Dalton saw his chance at that point, to use it as an excuse to get the monopoly. Our contract with them meant that if either company relinquished their share, all rights would go to the other party and that includes bankruptcy.'

'Do you think they arranged for the larger shipments of metassonite on the basis that sooner or later, it would be sufficient to contaminate somebody?'

'If the police had linked the deaths of Sykes and Brown to the shipments, we would be blamed for their deaths and they would have sole rights.'

'I can see how that might work, but then why would they pull strings with the Home Office to have the investigation stopped and how did Fellows become infected?'

'I am not sure. As to Fellows, that was just an unfortunate accident.'

'No, I don't think it was. Did you know one of your special items turned up in his flat? Madame Emié helped Fellows' father clear up after the police left. She came across a package containing a set of cups, pale green cups.'

'Jesus Christ. How the hell did that happen?'

'A more pertinent question would be why. I think you and I need to be very, very careful. What exactly have you told the police about all this?'

'The truth as far I could, but I lied to them about the last time I saw Fellows.'

'You did what?'

## Chapter seventeen

‘I know with hindsight it was a stupid thing to do but at the time they were simply interested in the contract we had with his firm. I didn’t see the point in stirring up a hornet’s nest.’

‘When did they ask you about this?’

‘When they were enquiring about Fellows’ death. That was at the beginning of July, and then again today.’

‘I wonder why the gap?’ Sir Clive mused. ‘They seem to be playing a very long game. However, I think we may have had a stroke of luck. I had some news just after your telephone call. It seems that Dalton has vanished and there is no more useful role for an absent person, than to become a scapegoat. If the police had definitive evidence, I think they would have arrested you by now. The fact that they are still making enquiries means that they are still fishing. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that your money was not entirely wasted. I made a couple of phone calls before I left home and I learnt that a Chief Inspector Jennings, who is leading the case, is out on a limb. His boss is due to retire shortly, and his sidekick has been suspended for some misdemeanour. I think that if this Jennings was removed, the police might lose interest in favour of more productive leads such as Dalton.’

‘What do you mean, removed?’

‘It could be another little test for your invention.’

Taylor gave Sir Clive a look of horror as it slowly dawned on his befuddled senses what was being proposed.

‘Now don’t look like that old boy. It was your expertise that enabled our South African friends to dispose of two people.’

‘I can’t do it, supposing he has a family?’

‘Supposing he does? You were not so concerned about Lekota.’

‘That was different.’

‘Why, because he was a black man living thousands of miles away?’

‘You know perfectly well what I mean.’

‘Edward. You have spent five years rebuilding your company. You had to make many hard decisions along the way,

including a very brave one not to allow sentiment to undermine your ambitions. Just think about it. This time next year you can be the CEO of a multi-national with a worldwide monopoly of a new revolutionary technology, or you can be in prison. I know which I would choose.'

## Chapter eighteen

‘Do you know? I have never been one for public houses, but I could become quite at home in this place.’ Caruthers looked around the long narrow bar at the exit of South Kensington underground station. ‘It’s so Tolkienesque.’

‘Just looks like a pub to me. More importantly, it’s a long way from the Yard.’

‘I was forgetting your reputation.’

‘Well kindly don’t. I have a wife, three children and a nation of jam makers to support. I was sorry to hear about McGill. That must have been quite a shock for you. Greene is keeping an open mind on the cause of death until the pathology report comes through.’

Caruthers’ face darkened. ‘There is no doubt in my mind. The man was murdered.’

‘It certainly looks that way. The Dutchman you described is known, so the outcome of the inquest is a foregone conclusion.’ Jennings involuntarily tightened his grip on a glass of lemonade as he spotted the barman uncover one of the beer pumps. ‘They found Dalton in Epping forest. A man was out walking his dog.’

Caruthers sipped his wine. ‘I often wondered why it is, that dog walkers are always finding bodies. Any indication of how he died?’

‘Massive head injuries, but I do not have further details. Did you manage to find out any more about last January’s events?’

‘Not much more than we already knew. The animals died as a result of consuming a new animal feed. The farmer I spoke to said that there were crates marked from South Africa. Periston was running the tests and the animals went mad.’

‘And we both established that the feed contained metassonite.’ Added Jennings. ‘I think that is enough for me to put things on to a more official footing. It’s just a pity our sample proved so unhelpful.’

‘Sample?’ Caruthers echoed.

‘One of the items returned to John Crichton’s colleagues was a small lump of rock. Our lab boys confirmed that it could be a piece of meteorite but found nothing inherently harmful. If it is connected to the incident three years ago, it could imply that the Russian claims about natural contamination were correct. However, I have had it sent to a specialist because our people could not identify all of its constituents. I am hoping that the missing element provides an explanation, because it will be the only proof we have that metassonite is harmful. However, that said, I think things are finally becoming a little clearer.’

‘Robert, the only thing which is clear is that things are not clear. You were speculating that there were three sets of people involved, all trying to run rings around each other. I think just one is calling the shots.’

‘You mean these Cambridge Electronics people. I asked my contact about them and he told me in no uncertain terms to forget that I had ever heard the name.’

‘McGill said much the same thing. They must be some kind of government outfit, and given the reticence about even mentioning them by name, I am beginning to doubt that we can ever bring them to account.’

‘Then I suggest we explore another angle.’ Jennings sipped his lemonade whilst eagerly watching the barman pour a pint. ‘If we cannot approach the problem directly, then we should try the indirect approach. Let’s see if we can pool our knowledge on Taylor and Dalton. We know that Dalton was working with our mysterious friends and that he was asked to get in touch with Taylor when he published a paper on his caragillium process.’

‘We also know that both Periston and Taylor blamed each

## Chapter eighteen

other for running the large shipments which coincide with at least two deaths.’ Added Caruthers.

‘Periston suspected sabotage but could not be sure. They blamed Taylor and Fellows.’

‘That is one thing that surprised me. Jessica Field claimed that it was not animal testing that Fellows objected to, but the potential effect on children. Yet Taylor stated that he and Fellows maintained contact because Fellows was interested in working for him on their South African project.’

‘True, but Taylor also said that he only met with Fellows after their contract had come to an end, because he received a package which was supposed to be for Taylor, but he had not ordered.’

‘I think I need another drink.’

‘Not until we sort this out.’ Jennings responded tartly as he leaned back in his chair to try to put his thoughts in order. ‘There was a very good tv programme last year called Five red herrings. It’s an Agatha Christie story or was it Dorothy L Sayers. Anyway, the main character, Lord Peter Wimsey, was faced with a number of confusing and quite erroneous clues and I think that is what we have here. I think you are right about Fellows being the key to the problem but he is not part of the problem. That is one red herring. Next, we have two separate but related things going on here. On the one hand, we have some political machination over this meteorite. Some covert part of the government has got its knickers in a twist and that is the second of our red herrings. We have three groups, all trying to outdo each other when it comes to the blame game and that is the third. Then we have the events of last January at Periston.’

‘And the fifth?’

‘I am not sure there is one at the moment. I think you are right. It is time for another drink. I’ll have a Double Diamond.’

Jennings watched Anton make his way to the bar, which was beginning to fill up with the post five o’clock crowd. He suddenly remembered that he was not supposed to be drinking

and closed his eyes as he thought about Jen's inevitable reaction. He had tried eating strong mints last time, but it failed to do the trick.

'Have you heard anything about your colleague?' Caruthers enquired as he set the fresh drinks down on the table.

'No, I am afraid not.'

'Well, I am sure he will be all right. He looked like a very capable young man.'

'During all this business, I have kept reminding myself that I am a policeman. My job is to catch criminals.'

'I have a horrible feeling this is a preamble to something I am not going to like.'

'Dalton or somebody who worked with him hired Madison to steal the Natural History gemstones.'

'But both Madison and Dalton are dead.'

'As is Simon Pegg, who was next on my list. Taylor has been knowingly shipping dangerous materials without the right paperwork. I think we can now prove that the dates of those shipments coincide with the deaths of Sykes and Brown.'

'But the autopsies turned up nothing and both were cremated. In addition, Fellows came into contact with the stuff on a number of occasions and seemed to be fine.'

'Unless he was contaminated by one of those other shipments, but again, there is no solid evidence. Then of course, Taylor lied to us about the last time he saw Fellows. Do you know, I think we may have found our fifth red herring.'

'What is that?'

'Trying to show that all the deaths have a common motive as opposed to a common cause.'

'I don't suppose you have any genuine herrings in there?'

'A good question.' Jennings murmured. 'All in all, I have a rather nasty suspicion that the only justice we will see is the natural kind and that has already been dispensed.'

'All except for Taylor, he is heading for the big time if all the financial reports are to be believed.'

'What reports are those?' Jennings asked.



## Chapter eighteen

‘Robert, you really should get past the news pages. Edward Taylor is about to launch a worldwide marketing campaign to promote his new company, International Industrial Ceramics. They will produce a range of new materials that will revolutionise industry, from chemical processing to construction.’

‘I suppose it is connected with his caragillium.’

‘The biggest thing since the invention of plastic.’

‘If nothing comes of our search of Periston’s records, I am inclined to pass on Taylor’s details to customs, but somehow it seems like a waste of time.’

‘And there is nothing that can be done about Fellows or Lekota?’

‘Both are officially suicides. We simply do not have anything to disprove that.’

\*\*\*\*

‘Good morning sir.’ Jennings closed the door to Gilpatrick’s office.

Just for once he was not wearing the smug, self-satisfied look that he seemed to be wearing permanently since announcing his retirement. Jennings wondered whether Gilpatrick was to be the bearer of bad news concerning his job interview, even though he was beginning to have grave doubts about whether he actually wanted it.

‘Ah, Robert! Thank you for stopping by. I know you want to get off home. The fact is that I have some bad news.’

‘About the job, I suppose it was...’

‘No, not about the job,’ Gilpatrick interrupted, ‘you had better sit down old chap.’

Gilpatrick pointed to one of the old battered leather sofas and sat down himself.

‘It’s about John Morton. Look, there is no easy way to say this. I’m afraid they found his body this morning in a disused gasworks near to St. Pancras. It seems that he hung himself.

Dreadful business, I am truly sorry.'

'I see.'

It was all Jennings could think of to say. Somewhere at the back of his mind, a small voice had been whispering dire warnings, but he had done all he could to ignore it.

'Any ideas when?'

'Not really, a couple of days at least. I regret to say that his body was stripped. You know what that area is like.'

Jennings made no effort to quell his rising anger. John deserved better. 'Does Eric know?'

'I gather he formally identified the body.'

For a long while nothing was said. Jennings sat quietly, unable to come to terms with the news whilst Gilpatrick fumbled with some papers on the table.

'The trouble is,' Gilpatrick concluded, 'there is nothing you can really say when something like this happens.'

'No there isn't,' Jennings replied darkly, 'but there is something I can do.'

Jennings was only vaguely aware of walking across the open plan office towards his own room. As he approached the desk where Morton once sat, he noticed that the family photograph, which he used to keep on his desk, was now in the wastepaper basket. He picked it up, gave it a wipe with the back of his hand and replaced it on the desk before opening his own office door. There was Wilks and from his expression, it was evident that he had heard the news.

'I thought you might want this sir.' Wilks handed over the file on Price. 'You may also wish to be aware that Price's gov'nor is in his office.'

'Thank you. I think it would be best if you left. This is not going to be the kind of conversation you will want to hear.'

Jennings sat down and opened the file. He sifted quickly through the pages of typed and hand written notes. As he located the one, he was searching for, Jennings found himself momentarily looking at the vacant chair on the other side of his desk and recalling all the times Morton had sat there. Then

## Chapter eighteen

he remembered their last conversation and the expression on John's face and he knew that would become a lasting memory. There would be no chance to apologise, no chance to put things right. As perceived images of Morton's final moments imprinted themselves into his conscious mind, Jennings was determined that he should not lose sight of the anger that he was feeling. He took a deep breath and dialled a West London number. The phone rang for some time before it was answered.

'Andrews. This is Robert Jennings here. I have on my desk a file that John Morton put together. I know that the board of enquiry was satisfied with your explanations. I also know that it recommended a note should be included on your file. That enquiry has yet to send its final report to the commissioner.

You will not be aware of this, but John Morton was asked to investigate your activities as well as those of Price. John's departure was unexpected, and we did not have a chance to discuss the findings. You and I could in no way be described as friends. Nevertheless, we are both policemen and we protect our own, no matter how much they might stink of corruption. I thought you should know that I have just found a photocopy and a signed statement which clearly shows that you bought a house in Brittany two years ago. By an odd coincidence, the exact amount that you paid for the house went out from one of Madison's accounts that same morning by direct transfer.' Jennings paused for a moment to allow the news to sink in. 'Andrews,' he continued quietly, 'unless I hear of your resignation by tomorrow morning, that file will be going to the board.'

Jennings heard no response, just a tone showing that Andrews had replaced the handset. He read through Morton's final note which stated that he could find no evidence to connect Andrews with Madison.

Wilks came into the office and was wearing a faint smile. 'Do you think it will do the trick?'

'I hope so.' Jennings replied in a sullen tone.

'Amen to that. If I might venture, a cup of coffee and

perhaps a car to take you to Victoria station.'

'Thank you.'

Jennings watched as Wilks started to leave and felt a sudden need to say something.

'Wilks.' He stopped himself. 'Alistair. I never really told John how much I rated his work or indeed that I regarded him as a good colleague. We are all so wrapped up in work culture that we tend to forget these important things.'

Wilks nodded his head. 'I understand sir and thank you.'

Wilks closed the door behind him and made his way to the kitchen. By the time he returned, Hanson was sitting at Morton's desk. Wilks noticed that the picture was back in the bin. He regarded Hanson coldly for a moment and then opened Jennings' door very slightly.

'Hanson. Have you heard the news?'

'What news? Oh, you mean about Morton, yes I heard.'

'I am starting a collection to send flowers to the funeral. Would you like to contribute?'

'For a faggot like him? The poor bugger is probably better off dead. I mean what sort of life is that. This country should never have repealed the law against it. It ain't natural. Sorry Wilks, I know you liked him but as far as I am concerned, the world is better off without his sort.'

Hanson gradually became aware that Wilks was no longer looking at him but at the door behind his desk. He turned slowly and saw Jennings.

'Hanson, you are owed leave. I suggest you take it until we find you a new assignment.'

'I'm sorry sir. I didn't mean.'

'Just get out of my sight.'

## Chapter nineteen

Jennings studied himself in the bathroom mirror. The eyes were red, the skin a little more haggard and somehow, the face appeared older than it had this morning. Jen had taken the news of John's death badly, but such thoughts had to be set aside when the children returned from a day trip to Butlins at Bognor Regis. As a result, it was not until nearly 9:00pm before he and Jen finally had time for themselves. Neither felt like eating and so it was agreed that after putting away the children's supper things, they would open a bottle of wine and toast John.

'What is that?' Jennings asked as he was confronted by a large cardboard box on the kitchen table.

'Have a look inside. It came this morning.'

Jennings opened the lid and pulled away a large quantity of tissue paper until he reached a layer that had a number of carefully wrapped objects. He unwound the wrapping and was faced with a delicate looking teacup.

'Is this from your aunt?'

'Considering that all of your family are dead or in Australia, I suppose it must be.'

'That woman does not know which century she is living in, let alone the date of our wedding anniversary.'

'Don't be beastly Robert. It is a very kind gesture and an expensive one. Have a look at the label.'

Jennings turned the cup over and his heart sank as he read the name, Taylor and Hardy. 'I wonder who Hardy is? I will have to remember to get Wilks to find out. With a bit of luck, he may have to take over the business very soon.'

'What are you going on about darling?'

'Nothing.' Jennings added as he unwrapped another cup.

‘Then do something useful and unwrap them all. I would like to take a photograph of us using them to send with the thank you letter.’

‘Our anniversary is not until next month. She might be upset that I opened our present early.’

‘Shouldn’t think so; the dear woman has probably forgotten that she sent anything by now.’

‘By the way, I stopped off at the travel agents to pick up the tickets. I have put them in the top drawer of the bureau.’

Jennings sat down to his task and soon there was a large mound of brown paper both on the table and the floor around his chair.

‘Oh, for goodness sake!’ Jen said angrily as she finished washing up and was confronted by the mess.

‘It’s all right. I will put it all away.’ Jennings replied as he hastily forced the wastepaper into the box.

The table was now covered by plates, saucers and cups. Jennings picked one up and held it to the light. Through the translucent pearl colour, he could see a myriad of subtle colours from red through to green.

‘There is no doubt Taylor does produce beautiful chinaware.’

Jennings opened the wine and took it, together with two glasses into the living room. Neither of them felt much like watching television and so they sat quietly listening to music on the radio. As the hall clock struck half past ten, Jennings disappeared into the kitchen and a while later re-emerged carrying a tray.

‘What is that?’ Jen asked.

‘I thought we both could do with a cup of tea before we go to bed. I have used the new cups. See!’

Jen peered over the top of the tray and inspected it. ‘Thank you darling. I think I will take mine up with me if you don’t mind. We can take pictures in the morning when the light is better.’

Jennings watched as she picked up her cup and saucer and

## Chapter nineteen

left by the hall door. He sat down in the armchair that he liked to use when Jen was not with him and sipped his tea.

The peace and quiet were shattered by a harsh ring of the telephone in the hall. Jennings rushed out and lifted the receiver a little way off the hook. He heard a mouse like voice for a few seconds before pressing a small silver button to disconnect the call. Jennings listened for a high-pitched tone to satisfy himself that the line was open. He then laid the receiver down on the table before going up to bed. By the time he arrived, Jen was fast asleep, the tea apparently untouched. He smiled and leaned over to give her a kiss. She stirred slightly but was soon breathing gently once more.

\*\*\*\*

Caruthers lay on his bed, listening to the sound of the sea. The drive from London had been a long one with the usual bottleneck traffic on the hog's back, seeming to double as people returned from their holidays. It was not until after eight that he finally made it to the hut and by then it was beginning to get dark. The old man who lived at the end of the road, had kindly taken in his post and for once it was good news. A publishing company had seen his article on living in London without money and offered a respectable advance to write a book. It was enough to move back to London and start a new life.

If he had one regret, it was that his work with Jennings had failed to yield anything worth writing about, or rather, anything that an editor would actually believe. So many leads, so many possibilities, that all came to nothing. Caruthers reached for the bottle of whisky on the bedside table and poured himself a small measure.

As he stared up at the ceiling Caruthers wondered what Taylor was up to now. Of all the people involved in this story, he had developed a particular dislike of Taylor. He did not know why. He had never met the man. According to the

newspapers, Taylor was a hard working character who had turned around his father's company and saved the jobs of around one hundred people. Yet it all came at a price. He had replaced his father and many of his peers, with a disregard that would not have been out of place in a Shakespeare plot. Whilst on the surface, it seemed unreasonable to count Taylor as the prime culprit, when there were so many; somehow the prospect of his achieving significant wealth on the back of all he had done, simply added insult to injury.

The truth however, was that Taylor was indeed just one of many, yet he owned the mine and developed metassonite. He chose to conceal its deadly qualities even after Fellows killed his family. But as Jennings had pointed out, where was the evidence and where was the elusive poison. All believed that metassonite was dangerous, but every test had concluded that it was harmless.

Caruthers realised that dwelling on the subject was pointless. The stone cold reality was that this was going to be one investigation that could have no resolution. Caruthers regarded his empty glass, thought about refilling it but decided not to. He had no wish to go down that path again. Not now that his life was finally coming to some sort of order.

'Tea.' He said to himself and got up to go to the kitchen.

It was an over ambitious name for a space no larger than a cupboard. It contained a two ring stove, a fridge the size of a shoe box and that was about it. Water had to be fetched from a standpipe outside and so he had got in the habit of filling a large bell jar to save himself from having to make the trip too frequently. Carruthers topped up the kettle and lit the gas. Then he took a box of teabags from the cupboard. He was not one for teabags as a rule, but as there was no proper sink, they were more convenient. The tiny cupboard contained one cup for each of the Jennings family including one that obviously belonged to young David. Not having any children himself, but having two married sisters, Caruthers often wondered what it was about raising children that seemed to exclude the idea of



## Chapter nineteen

good taste. This cup was in the shape of a bright green bird. Caruthers selected another, dropped in a teabag and waited for the kettle to boil. As he stared at the stubborn object, his thoughts jumped back to Jennings. During one of their conversations, they had tried to work out whether there was a common factor between Fellows and Lekota. It seemed unlikely and indeed they struggled to identify a single thing. Except... Caruthers tapped the side of his head lightly to encourage the thought to surface.

Abruptly, the cosy, half asleep feeling of a late evening was replaced by cold realisation. He grabbed a torch, quickly pulled on a pair of Wellingtons and ran outside. As he jumped down from the hut, water rushed into his boots.

‘Damn!’

Carruthers swore as his skin protested strongly at the sudden drop in temperature, but he was more interested in the telephone box at the top of the street than he was in wet feet. He sloshed through the rapidly rising tide as he ran as fast as he could towards the yellow light of the kiosk. Once free of the water, his progress quickened. Caruthers yanked open the door, picked up the receiver and put several coins into the slot before dialling a London number. He heard the high-pitched purr of the dialling tone repeat and repeat until finally the call was answered. He rushed into a warning but quickly realised that he was talking to himself. Caruthers slammed down the receiver, picked up, dialled again but this time got an engaged tone. As he stared at the long grey metal box, he wondered what to do next.

\*\*\*\*

Jennings was vaguely aware of being awake as his eyes focused on a thin vertical line of light cast by a gap in the curtains. He had been lying awake for some time, not daring to look at the small green luminous dots of his bedside clock as it ticked away the sleeping hours. It was still dark outside, which

meant that if he could get back to sleep, there was enough time for a decent kip before the alarm went off. He could hear Jen gently breathing beside him and the sound was both reassuring and annoying at the same time. Reassuring, because after the last few days, it was something refreshingly normal. Annoying, because it meant that unlike him, she was fast asleep.

At one point, he heard the soft Westminster chime of the living room clock strike the hour but could not tell which hour it was. After a little while longer, Jennings became aware of a discomfort in the lower part of his back and turned onto his side to relieve it. He then found himself once more looking at the line of vertical light on the wall, originating from a street light in front of the house. Considering the fact that the gap was a single space, the light coming through should have produced just one line, but in fact, there were two. Jennings puzzled this conundrum for a while before turning over to check the curtains. Yes, there was only one gap and only one light outside. He had seen this light many times when the window was open and the air from outside moved the curtains apart. Yet when he looked at the wall once more, there were indeed two distinct lines. No there were three, three lines equidistant from each other. Perhaps a house close by had turned on a bedroom light which might explain the presence of multiple lines. No, that was still wrong. There were four. He stared at them with a furrowed brow whilst trying to make sense of the puzzle. One light source should produce one light track, but there were five and they still appeared to be multiplying. Jennings pondered the idea of getting up and going to the window to check but he did not want to risk waking Jen.

He had heard a couple of cars start their engines a while ago. If they had their lights on and some neighbour was outside to wave them off, that might provide the answer. He continued to stare at the vertical strips whilst they steadily multiplied. The dark gaps between them shrunk until they merged into a soft formless shape. There was something both forbidding and compulsive about that shape. The way it seemed to pulsate with

## Chapter nineteen

subtle areas of light and dark. Jennings watched quietly for several minutes. Explanations no longer seemed important as he slowly found himself absorbed into its hypnotic shimmer.

The shape then began to swell very slowly, like a tidal river as it gently engulfs the banks. It flowed across the wall and from the depths emerged something amorphous and grey, like a small dense cloud. Then it seemed to grow out of the wall, reaching towards him. Without knowing why, he stretched out a hand and the grey cloud wrapped itself around his fingers and then the palm. It felt cold and empty, as if nothing existed within the fluid shape, except, except perhaps a hunger, a hunger that was searching for something. It continued to creep along his arm, flowed over his shoulder and chest before crawling upwards towards his mouth.

As it began to obscure his view, the room became black and cold with only a small light left at the very centre of his vision. At first, it was nothing more than a single point penetrating the thickening, swirling fog, but it grew steadily in intensity and as it did so, Jennings became aware of a faint, high pitched noise, like a far off scream, which was quickly followed by the roar of metal being torn apart.

Jennings found himself standing. He did not know how or when, but he was standing. He stood, rigid, unable to move, unable to think. All he could do was to wait. To wait for whatever was coming. Slowly the fog began to clear, and he became aware of pinpricks of scolding water striking his face and hands. The tiny light had now become harsh and hurt his eyes. He brought up his hand to shield them but quickly withdrew it as it touched something hot. The noise was almost unbearable now. Like the thunder of an impossible waterfall and from far beyond, came cries and sobs of hopelessness.

As the fog continued to clear, he became aware of a wall of broken pipes and splintered wood to his left. It towered above and seemed to stretch almost to infinity as it merged into the fog. Water was pouring out of a large hole torn in the side of the wall and as he peered in, Jennings saw the deep red glow of

burning coal. The smell of sulphur and burnt wood mixed with something else. A sweet odour that was both familiar and repulsive.

Jennings tore himself away from the fire and looked upwards. A pale glow of metal in the moonlight stirred a feeling of slow dawning horror. He knew this place and he knew what was to come but there was nothing he could do to avoid the terror that awaited.

Beyond the twisted wall, was a more familiar shape, a train carriage turned at a bizarre angle. Long lines of broken windows stared blank and blind. As he moved along the edge of the carriage, bare feet crunched on something lying on the ground. Jennings looked down and saw the glint of broken glass but felt no pain.

All about him were blurred movements. Erratic, slow moving and always just beyond his comprehension. A soft cry came from deep inside the fog which rolled and flowed around the lifeless form of the broken train. He reached up to a door handle and pulled; the glass within shattered, covering him with small splinters. Unthinking, he brushed them away and one became stuck between his fore and ring fingers. He pulled it out and watched the blood trickle down the back of his hand.

Jennings hauled himself up to the carriage. Once more his bare feet reacted to the crunch of glass, but still there was no pain. The carriage was dark, yet a cold pale light that seemed to have no definable source, cast a pallid shroud over twisted metal and wood. Jennings waited and watched the long lines of broken seats. He sensed something in the dark and wanted nothing more than to turn around and leave, but at the same time, he knew that he could not. It was as if he was compelled to confront whatever was lurking in the shadows.

As he stood silently watching, something wet ran down the outside of his lower lip. It tasted hot and salty and as he touched it with the tip of his finger, Jennings realised that he had bitten hard into the side of his mouth. Bitten with fear of what was to come. He wiped the blood away and took a

## Chapter nineteen

cautious step forward. The sound of grinding glass rang out with each step and brought forth all the memories of that November day in Milton. All he could think of was to run. To get far away and yet the memory of that pitiful cry was a reminder that he had a duty. He tried to call out, to let whoever was present, know that help was at hand. But no sound left his mouth. The cry came once more and seemed to originate from the very end of the carriage. He quickened his pace and as he did so, his foot struck something both hard and yielding. He stopped abruptly, heart pounding as he recalled what that something was.

The soft cry came again. Jennings closed his eyes momentarily as he tried to summon the courage to continue. Lifting his foot high over the object, he started the measured journey once more, but this time the sound of broken glass was accompanied by sharp gouging pain. He bit hard down on his lower lip, this time with deliberation as he tried to ignore the pain of each step which tore into his flesh.

‘Daddy, please.’

Jennings froze as twenty years evaporated. He knew what he would find and it would haunt his dreams across two decades.

‘Daddy, I can’t see you?’

A sickening cold feeling swelled up in his stomach. Why did he have to go through all this again? Jennings licked his blood soaked lips and mentally tried to prepare. Painful after painful step he took whilst focusing on the pale glint of metal of the last seat. He knew what he would find and he did not want to see it, but he had no choice. As Jennings reached the final seat, a small form curled up in the corner, emerged from the darkness. Long matted hair covered her face and the remains of a dress hung in rags around her. She sobbed again and only gradually seemed to become aware of his presence. Little by little she turned her head towards him. The long hair fell from her grubby face revealing sightless eyes and rotted teeth, but this time there was something different, something very different. She was smiling, a cold hard, heartless, evil smile.

\*\*\*\*

Jennings found himself sitting upright in bed. Sweat racing down his face. He took several deep breaths as he tried to calm his pounding heart. Jennings knew that he had been dreaming, but almost every detail had somehow conspired to increase the very real feelings of terror and helplessness he had experienced all those years ago. Yet certain aspects were wrong. It had been day, not night and the carriages had been full of bodies. The little girl had been a young woman on her way to art school. It was as if something had captured his worst memories and twisted them into a tale to inspire fear.

Finally, the pounding quietened enough for him to hear the rhythmic ticking of his bedside clock. It was comforting to listen to a familiar sound and he settled down once more. As Jennings lay on his back, staring into the darkness, his thoughts began to wrestle with an idea that he could not quite grasp. It was a thing he knew he should know but every time the thought began to surface, it was quickly lost.

He turned over towards Jen and flushed cold. She was not there. Jennings sat up and looked towards the bedroom door, but there was no landing light peeking around the edges. He tried to switch on the bedside lamp. Nothing happened. It was then he noticed that the street light was no longer working.

Jennings swung his legs over the edge of the bed and felt around for his slippers with his toes. Slipping them on, pain shot through his foot as if he had stepped onto burning coals. He reached down and fingers touched a cold, hard object sticking from the side of his heel. He pulled and a cry of pain burst forth from his mouth. Steeling himself, Jennings tried again, stood up and cautiously made his way towards where he thought the main light switch should be. It was an unnerving feeling to be in a place where they had lived for ten years and yet not to know his way around. As his outstretched fingers met something hard, Jennings finally got his bearings and fumbled along the wall until he found the square raised shape

## Chapter nineteen

he was looking for. He rocked the switch back and forth a few times, but nothing happened. This was serious. If the children woke up to find a power cut, they would be very scared.

Jennings recalled that during the Three-Day Week when there were so many power cuts, Jen had insisted on keeping a candle in her bedside table. Stretching out his arms once more, he cautiously made his way across the floor until his knee struck the metal bed rail. Using it as a guide, he found the cupboard and pulled open the drawer. It was filled to overflowing with different things. Jennings abruptly pulled his hand away in pain as it struck sharp metal. He sucked his finger and tasted salt. Despite the risk, he tried again. As his fingers touched each object, Jennings tried to discern the shape. Then he found what he was searching for. A box that when shaken gave a reassuring rattle. Striking a match produced a small light that seemed almost lost in the darkness. In the dim flicker, he located a candle and lit it. It gave off a curious smell of fish mixed with the faint stench of rotting fruit. He could not recall the candles smelling that bad, but they were many years old.

Now that he had a reliable light, Jennings made his way back to the bedroom door and opened it. The hallway was dark. He had never seen a darkness like this. Not even when they had rented a cottage in Cumbria, which was only accessible down a mile long dirt track. It was a smothering dark, a clammy dark, filled with the menace of a vulnerable child's nightmare.

Jennings took a deep breath and reminded himself that his first action should be to ensure that the children were all right. Michael's room was the closest. He opened the door gently and held the candle high to maximise the amount of light it cast. The bed was empty. Jennings quickly went to the bedrooms of David, then Sarah. Both had gone. His stomach churned with worry. Jennings ran down the stairs, almost falling over in the process. The lounge was empty as was the dining room, which left just one more place to check. Even with the door closed, Jennings could tell that the kitchen was in darkness. He pushed open the door and saw nothing. Raising the candle once more,

it flickered as his movements generated a swirl of air. Then the light caught something, a glint of white and blue. Jennings found himself frozen to the spot as he looked into the hard, lifeless eyes of Madison.

\*\*\*\*

Caruthers stared at the reflection of his eyes in a small framed mirror at the back of the telephone box, as he waited for the phone to ring. After failing to get hold of Jennings, he realised that he did not have enough change to make another call. Then Caruthers had an idea as his attention fixed on a sign that listed emergency and local contact numbers. He dialled 999 and got the operator to put him through to the police. It took several minutes before they understood the situation sufficiently to transfer the call to the switchboard of Scotland Yard. He then had to negotiate his way to someone who had access to the out-of-hours duty roster.

'I don't care how you do it, just get Gilpatrick.' Caruthers found himself almost screaming down the phone, but it did the trick. He was now waiting for Gilpatrick to call back. Outside of the confines of the red framed windows, the world was dark and the night air cool for the first time in months. His attention switched back to the mud coloured receiver perched on top of the grey box, willing the harsh bell to sound. As the seconds passed into minutes, Caruthers quietly cursed himself for not realising sooner, what was blindingly obvious.

'Come on, will you.' Caruthers said with determination at the stubbornly silent phone. His thoughts went into overdrive. Supposing the message had not got through. Supposing that in being passed from person to person, his number had somehow got lost. Caruthers found himself reaching for the receiver and having to make a conscious effort to pull back, hoping against hope that Gilpatrick would call.



## Chapter nineteen

\*\*\*\*

Jennings was unable to move as lifeless eyes stared directly back. His mind locked in to uncomprehending immobility by the paradox of what his own eyes were telling him.

‘This is not real.’ He whispered.

Jennings watched the unmoving features of Madison framed in the circle of light thrown by his candle. The emotionless smile was the exact same smile he had seen on the little girl.

‘You are dead. I saw your body in the morgue.’

Madison’s smile broadened slightly revealing yellow teeth.

Without knowing why Jennings reached out and his fingers came into contact with the smooth weave cloth of the jacket. Madison’s eyes traced his movements, but the rest of his features remained impassive.

Jennings watched his hand in disbelief as it followed the contours of the lapels upwards towards his face. Warm skin touched something cold and wet. Jennings felt sick and unsteady. Just beyond the face was the kitchen table and Jennings felt an inescapable need to sit down. As he made his way towards the nearest chair, he was careful not to let that face out of his sight.

The familiar kitchen, once cosy and safe, now seemed strange and foreboding. The light from the candle created an insignificant haven and beyond, lay an infinite space of shadow and threat. Jennings maintained his focus on the face which had now become the only thing of which he could be sure.

‘You appear to be real.’

The words were grudging but engendered a small look of approval from which he bizarrely drew comfort. The candlelight flickered in reaction to some undetectable movement of air. Jennings panicked as the shadows moved swiftly to take advantage. Backwards and forwards they jumped in a short frantic dance whilst the only thing that remained constant was the glow of that face and the cold glint of the eyes. Then the candlelight steadied and Jennings breathed

calmly once more.

‘Could it be that my senses are deceiving me?’ Jennings tried to reassure himself. He stared directly at the still smiling face. ‘That must be the case because its being here simply cannot be. But then why am I seeing it and why did I dream that I was back at the Milton train crash site.’

Now that he was rationalising things, Jennings began to feel that he was once more in control of himself. He stood up and made his way to the kitchen sink to get a cup of water. Despite the fact that it was tepid, it seemed to refresh but he then recalled that Jen always kept a jug of water with lemon juice in the fridge. Jennings opened the door, half hoping that the interior light would work, but was confronted with darkness. He refilled the cup and then cursed as he realised that he had turned his back on Madison. Jennings wondered whether he would still be there when he turned around once more. If this was just a dream, perhaps things would have moved on, but it did not have the feeling of a dream as his painful feet reminded him. Jennings took a deep breath and turned. Madison was still there, still smiling, his cold blue eyes peering out from the dark.

‘There are two possibilities. Firstly, this is a nightmare. Perhaps conjured up by stress or something I ate.’ Jennings recalled one of his favourite childhood books. ‘As Charles Dickens wrote, there is more of gravy, than grave about you.’

The smile grew colder and Jennings fought to quell the panic he felt once more.

‘The other possibility is that I have been poisoned. Somehow, I have consumed something that is stimulating my sense of fear.’

An icy realisation took hold as Jennings understood what was happening.

‘Yes, that is it. This is what happened to Fellows and the others. They were given something that inspired so much fear that they took their own lives.’

No, Fellows had not just taken his own life.

‘Where is my family?’

## Chapter nineteen

The words came out as hardly more than a whisper. The face continued smiling but the eyes looked upwards. Jennings realised that the one place he had forgotten to search was the bathroom.

‘It won’t work now I know what is happening. I will just sit here and wait for whatever it is to wear off.’

The figure of Madison remained both immobile and unresponsive, except for the smile. That had returned to its original thin lipped look of contempt. As Jennings contemplated the figure, he began to wonder how and when they had succeeded in contaminating his food. The question of ‘who’ had already been answered. The only candidate still alive was Taylor. The ‘why’ question was undoubtedly due to panic. If Hanson had managed to frighten the man into believing that they were close to securing the evidence they required for an arrest, Taylor may have thought it prudent to get in first; banking that his demise might put an end to any investigation, or at least delay it sufficiently for him to flee to another country. Rhodesia would be close enough to his South African interests, yet remain out the reach of the British courts. That just left the question of how. He and Caruthers had been through all the evidence many times and found no common link. They had guessed that it was connected with metassonite but had found no traces in the bodies of Lekota or Dalton. Yet there was something at the back of his mind. Something he had seen at each of their homes.

Jennings took another sip of lemon juice. This time it appeared to have the opposite reaction. Instead of finding it refreshing, he found himself becoming ever more fearful. Patches of light from the small candle cast dancing shadows, behind which shapeless things seemed to be lurking.

‘You can leave now. I said it will not work.’

The words were spoken for his own benefit, but Jennings felt no sense of comfort. If he had been poisoned, then was his fate already determined? His eyes focused on a block of wood from which protruded the kitchen knives. Perhaps all he could

hope for was that Jen and the children would be safe if he... No, he would remain in the kitchen. They would not have their way.

The candle flickered once more, and Jennings found himself shaking as the lurking shadows moved swiftly.

'Monsters in the shadows.' He said quietly to himself. Lekota had said that he had monsters in his head.

The smell of fish and rotten fruit was becoming almost overwhelming. He would have dearly liked to try the lights once more but dare not move.

Dr Field had said that they used acetic acid to extract metassonite from the caragillium clay. Science had never been his strong point, but he was sure he had seen acetic acid mentioned in one of Jen's many books about food. Wasn't it to be found in fresh fruit juice? No that was ascorbic acid. Vinegar, that was it, something that limits acidity. He looked at the bookshelf in the far corner, which seemed to move swiftly away as if the shadows were seeking to conceal it. Did he dare to move? Jennings glanced towards the face. It was still there, pale and lifeless.

Jennings looked at his candle with grim determination and picked it up. It spluttered and spat foul smelling wax, which burned his hand as if it too conspired to keep him from the bookshelf. Step by step he moved towards it whilst carefully keeping the face in view. Holding the candle close to the spines so that he could read the titles, Jennings risked quick glances until he found the one, he was looking for and took it back to the table. As he sat down Jennings became aware that he was feeling dizzy. He took another sip of juice but its recuperative powers seemed to have finished.

Jennings opened the book at the index. The small print was difficult to read by candlelight and he had to get very close to discern what the words were saying. He found the reference for acetic acid. It was used as an additive in a number of foods mainly to regulate acidity, just as he thought. Jennings screwed up his eyes to try to read the tiny print and was finding it

## Chapter nineteen

difficult to concentrate. The smell of rotting fruit was becoming overwhelming and a growing headache was making him wince. Acetic acid was a by-product of fermentation and was also to be found in fruit and other drinks such as tea.

As Jennings read these final words, he finally understood how it was done. It was all so simple. He reached down for the cup from which he had been drinking and held it behind the candle. Within the depths of the pearl white shape, was the colour jade.

\*\*\*\*

The bell rang so loudly that Caruthers felt his heart skip a beat. He frantically grabbed for the receiver and had begun speaking before he could hear what Gilpatrick might be saying. ‘...had better not be a waste of my time.’

Caruthers could easily guess how the sentence began. ‘Have you done what I asked? Have you sent someone round to check?’

‘Check what?’ Came the puzzled response.

Caruthers closed his eyes in resignation as his worst fears were realised. ‘What message did you get?’

‘Just to call some damned phone box to talk to a journalist, now what is this all about? Do you know that it has gone one o’clock?’

‘I do not care what time it is.’ Caruthers stopped himself. The last thing he needed was to antagonise the one man who could help. Jennings was looking for a common factor between all the people who died. He thought that Sykes, Brown, Flight 109, Lekota and Dalton, had all come into contact with metassonite.’

‘Yes, I know that,’ Gilpatrick interrupted impatiently, ‘but Jennings could find no proof. Nothing showed up in the autopsies.’

‘That is because they were looking for something that should not normally be in the body. Periston used acetic acid to

recover the metassonite from caragillium. Caragillium is an inert clay based material which could be made into anything. Since people consume acetic acid all the time, it would be present in the body, purifying the metassonite until it has done its work. When Jennings last went to Periston, they told him that metassonite eventually breaks down to form harmless chemicals such as carbon and hydrogen. That is why nothing shows up. It is the perfect killing tool. It can be made into a completely harmless object until it is combined with something that contains acetic acid.'

For a moment Gilpatrick did not reply. Caruthers looked at his reflection in the glass windows of the phone box and through this image, he could see the moonlight sparkling on the rising tide as it approached.

'Gilpatrick, are you there?'

'Of course I am. Look, I can see you may have something, but can't it wait until tomorrow morning. I am sure Jennings will find this very interesting.'

'That is the whole point. I have tried calling him and I cannot get through.'

'I should imagine that he has simply gone to bed and I don't blame him.'

'No, I have a strong feeling that something is wrong. Very, very wrong.'

\*\*\*\*

Jennings sat immobile, staring at the cup. Its translucent colour seemed to pick up the flickering light of the candle and cast an iridescent glow around the room. Shadows moved freely in and out of dark corners, creating menacing shapes that stretched towards him, almost within touching distance. Madison had gone. One moment he was there, smiling his cold lifeless smile and then there was nothing but shadows. Jennings kept his eyes fixed on the cup. He desperately tried to close his mind to the shapes that were swirling all around. Always just at

## Chapter nineteen

the edge of his peripheral vision. Playing with him, taunting him, threatening to close in the moment he became distracted. The pain in his head had become almost unbearable and the shadows seemed to know. Small grey fingers reached out from the darkest corners.

The candle flickered, flared briefly and then went out. Now he could see them, grey against black, slowly emerging from the walls. Soon they would be inside his head, but he knew how to be rid of them. Jennings had seen it before and he knew exactly where the kitchen knives were kept. With the last flicker of light, he had seen the glinting handles protruding from the wooden block. It was almost as if they were calling out to him, beckoning, no, begging to be caressed in his hand.

The shadows were all around now. He could feel them circling. Hopelessness replaced fear. Now that he was certain as to his future, fear seemed a pointless emotion. As he stared into the darkness, a small...something appeared in the far distance. At first, it was a barely visible speck of light but as it grew in size it seemed that the amorphous shape, which appeared in his bedroom, had returned. It looked like a shapeless finger of cloud, rolling and flowing until it filled the room. Then something else emerged from within. Jennings watched. He had no choice but to watch. A memory stirred, a half recollected thing seen long ago and the thought filled him with despair as the shape gently enveloped his body.

The last remnants of fear drained away, to be replaced by... a hunger, a hunger that had to be satisfied. Jennings thoughts turned to those who were responsible, and he became aware that he was still holding the cup. Without thinking he swept it aside and it crashed invisibly in the darkness. As it did so, Jennings recalled the cup of tea on Jen's bedside table. It was almost full but had she taken a sip. Was that why she stole away in the darkness taking the children with her. She must have heard him on the landing and yet she said nothing. Perhaps that was why the lights were not working. Jen had turned off the electricity. Yes, that was it. Jen had turned off the power.

There was a sound inside his head like the far distant cry of a seagull. Hardly noticeable at first but it was growing. Why would Jen do that? Why would she hide in the darkness? There could only be one answer. She was part of the conspiracy. Yes, of course. Why had he not realised before? Jen was the only one who could have poisoned him.

The sound was much louder now.

Jen had poisoned him and now she was free to do the same to the children. Images of the nightmares they would suffer, the torment and pain they would endure, filled his mind. He covered his ears but it did nothing to still the sound, the awful sound that filled his head, reverberating around and around inside of his skull.

Jennings fumbled for the matches. He struck a light and the shadows darted out of view, but they were still there, lurking at the edge. He looked around for the candle but it was burnt out. Matches would have to do. Determined not to allow the light to go out, his progress from the kitchen and up the stairs, was desperately slow. The scream came once more. It was not in his head but was coming from the bathroom. Jesus Christ, it was coming from the bathroom. Jennings ran and fell. His head struck the edge of stairs and for a moment, stars spun all around. The scream came again, a small voice crying for its life. That was David. Jennings picked himself up and lunged at the bathroom door. He tried turning the handle but the door was locked from the inside.

'Jen, open up.' He shouted.

From within he could hear the terrified whimpers of the children.

'Jen. For God's sake open up.'

Something crashed and broke on the tiled floor. There was another whimper and then silence.

Jennings stared into the darkness. An overwhelming sense of anger consumed him.

'Please Jen.' He banged his fist on the door as hard as he could until the pain stopped him. 'Jen, please let me in.'



## Chapter nineteen

As his voice died away, he could feel his body trembling. The dark and silence created a void and the void filled with hatred. He stretched out his hand to locate the door and then took a step back. He lunged forward with all his might. The sound of a body colliding with wood was mixed with small cracking noises and the cry of a child's distress. At least one of them was still alive. He had to get in at all costs. Jennings took a step back and lunged again. Another crack. Once more should do, he felt the door give.

'Daddy.'

Jennings saw a movement against the dim light of night sky through the window. He felt his hands grip a narrow neck which squirmed beneath his fingers. Small hands grasped his arms tight as they tried to force him away, but he would protect his children.

'Daddy! No, please.'

There was a rasp of gurgling and the small hands loosened. Jennings felt the weight of Jen's body begin to sag and he tightened his own grip. There would be no second chance.

All around the shadows vied for supremacy with iridescent lights that danced around the walls. Brighter and larger they became as he found himself kneeling on the floor. Then lights exploded inside his head.

## Chapter twenty

Braden sat in the Morris room looking at a cloud filled sky. It cast a flat, even light that gave the busy street a sense of calm after the hectic and very hot summer. Most people were now wearing long sleeves and there were even a few coats to be seen as the temperature dropped into the sixties. As he sat watching the outside world, Braden experienced a sense of cosy belonging, something he had not felt for a very long time.

The mantelpiece clock struck a melodic six. He looked down at the glass of port he was holding. He could no longer drink it, but simply caressing the glass provided a comforting feeling of normality. His doctor had visited this morning and despite an attempt at cheerful banter, the face maintained a grave expression as he prodded and probed. That would be one thing Braden would not miss when the time came.

A car horn sounded and Braden resumed his close watch of the street. A tall Asian man was standing on the opposite side of the road. The man had first appeared not long after he came to stay at the club. Some days the man would be there for hours, always just standing, watching and then he would disappear for as much as a week. There seemed to be no discernible pattern to his presence, and it was only Braden's sense of vanity that provoked the idea that the man was watching him. There had been a time when such a puzzle would have demanded a solution, but no longer.

Braden saw the man with the pram once more. He had become a regular passer-by and still looked proud, although the features and his gait appeared to be tired and slow. As he turned the corner at the end of the road towards St James's Park, Braden returned his gaze to where the tall man had been

## Chapter twenty

standing but he was gone.

‘Excuse me sir. There is a message for you at reception.’

Braden nodded an acknowledgement, put down the glass of port and allowed himself to be wheeled into the lobby of the club. The receptionist handed him a letter and a parcel. He placed both in his lap before tearing open the letter.’

‘I hope it is not bad news sir.’ Said his attendant.

‘I am very much afraid it is. A very old,’ Braden paused for a moment whilst he considered his words, ‘a very old friend has died suddenly.’

‘I am very sorry to hear that. Was it your Russian friend?’

‘Indeed it was, a stroke. He was about to retire you know. Very sad.’

‘Yes sir. I always thought he had the manner of a gentleman, despite the fact that he was a foreigner.’

‘I think he would have liked that.’

Braden turned his attention to the package. He had difficulty opening it and had to watch whilst the attendant performed the task. Inside the package was a box which contained a small rock. It looked like a lump of blackened metal with a number of different coloured veins running through it. The other item was an important looking paper, which turned out to be the deed to a farm in Dorset. Both were a reminder that their task would continue long after both he and Gregory had been forgotten. Irrespective of his condition, it seemed as if there was one more duty to perform. Of course, he recognised the value of both items and they would be passed on to the right people. Neither could be used immediately. In fact, it could be many years, but the time would come.

‘I think I would like to go to my room. I am feeling a little tired.’

\*\*\*\*

‘A capital vintage old boy,’ said Sir Clive as he took an appreciative sip of his wine, ‘and a capital dinner.’

‘Yes, I would agree with that.’ Remarked another of Taylor’s dinner guests. ‘By the way, why all the mystery concerning the nature of the celebration?’

Taylor sat at the head of the table in a reserved dining room of his club looking very pleased with himself. Just a few days ago, his world seemed to be on the point of disaster but Sir Clive had been right. Decisive action had set things back on to their proper course. A date had been set to launch caragillium on an unsuspecting world. IIC had become a publicly registered company and the shares were sufficiently undervalued to ensure that he and Sir Clive would shortly become very rich. Tonight’s dinner was a little premature, but he strongly suspected that there would be little time to enjoy such frivolities in the coming months.

‘I’m afraid that must remain confidential for a while longer.’ Taylor answered. ‘But rest assure, it will be worth the wait. I have quite a surprise in store for you all shortly.’

Sir Clive returned a knowing look. ‘And I think you will find that the use of the word ‘surprise’ is a significant understatement.’

‘But I can share one piece of news. Sir Clive and I are launching a new venture. We have yet to decide on a suitable name but it will provide capital at zero interest rates to any entrepreneur with a worthwhile invention or business idea. It’s our way of putting something back into society.’

‘I never saw you Sir Clive, as a philanthropist.’ Said another dinner guest.

‘We will of course, be insisting on a suitable percentage of the royalties. That will ensure the business is self-financing.’

‘But essentially,’ Taylor interrupted, ‘the idea is that people will have the chance to get their ideas off the ground and not have to worry about returning the money until such a time as they are making a healthy profit.’

‘Well, I must say, that does sound very laudable.’

There was a small round of cheers before the guests broke off into conversation.

## Chapter twenty

Taylor regarded the deep golden colour of his brandy and was hardly aware that one of the club waiters was trying to get his attention.

‘Excuse me sir but there is a gentleman to see you.’

‘To see me?’ Taylor responded in a puzzled tone.

‘He is asking to see both you and Sir Clive.’

Taylor wiped his lips with a napkin and stood up. As he passed Sir Clive, he gave him a tap on the shoulder accompanied by a look that made it clear he was to follow. The waiter showed them to another room where they found a portly looking man waiting.

‘My name is Edward Taylor. I gather you wanted to see me. I must say this is very inconvenient as I am in the middle of hosting a dinner party.’

‘I apologise for disturbing you, but this is a police matter. I am Chief Superintendent Gilpatrick and I have a few questions for you concerning a product called metassonite, which your company produces.’

‘I see.’ Taylor risked a look of concern aimed at Sir Clive and noted his face betraying the same worried expression. ‘I understood that the answers I gave to your Detective Constable Hanson had settled the matter.’

‘Not quite.’ Gilpatrick replied coldly.

‘I am happy to answer any further questions, but can’t they wait until Monday morning. I have all the relevant papers in my office for your people to go through.’

‘That is very helpful but time is of the essence. I believe you met a colleague of mine. Chief Inspector Jennings?’

This time Taylor was careful to control his expression. ‘Yes, I think so but it was some months ago.’

‘He was leading an investigation into a number of unusual deaths. One line of enquiry examined the possibility that they might have been caused by your metassonite.’

‘You use the past tense.’

‘I regret to say that Chief Inspector Jennings is no longer with us.’

'I am sorry to hear that. Heart attack I suppose. Well, I can put you right on one point. What you have said is quite impossible. Metassonite is indeed a volatile compound and as such has strict safety procedures concerning its movement. Besides which, the people concerned all died in the UK. Is that not right?'

'And your point is?'

'There is no metassonite in the UK. None of it has left the confines of my mine in South Africa.'

'So I gather from your manager Jim Clarke. He was also very helpful in confirming the symptoms of metassonite poisoning.'

'That is a very strong word.'

'I am happy to use the word contamination if you prefer but it all amounts to much the same. Irrational fear, leading to uncontrollable bouts of violence if the dose is sufficient. By coincidence, Sykes, Brown, and Fellows all had the potential to come into contact with metassonite.'

'As I have just said, chief superintendent, I have made no shipments of metassonite and all the records will confirm that fact.'

'I think not. Rather strangely, every written record shows clear signs of having been doctored.'

Taylor responded with carefully engineered incredulity. 'Are you suggesting that I somehow managed to access the records of a number of different companies both here and in South Africa? I think you give me too much credit.'

'Then we come to the matter of Lekota and Dalton.'

'Dalton committed suicide. I believe your people found evidence of a massive fraud. As to Lekota, I seem to recall that he jumped off a bridge in full view of a dozen witnesses.'

'Indeed, he did. Thank you for reminding me, and there we appear to have another coincidence. Lekota exhibited signs of extreme fear prior to his death.'

'Chief superintendent.' Sir Clive interrupted in a quiet tone. 'I do not know much about how the police work, but I suspect that a man of your rank would not be paying house calls unless

## Chapter twenty

the matter was very serious. I have heard you make a number of allusions but have heard no evidence to support them. Can I suggest that you come to the point?’

Gilpatrick gave Sir Clive a cold look by way of a warning. ‘I am here because this could be a matter of national security.’

‘How so?’ Taylor enquired nervously.

‘We have evidence to suggest that the South African Government has used metassonite to assassinate one of its dissidents.’

‘You must be referring to Jacob Lekota but the newspapers said that he...’

‘Went mad, yes I know; another coincidence to chalk up to an ever lengthening list.’

‘You said you had evidence. May I ask the source?’

‘You may not Sir Clive. As I mentioned, this could be a matter of national security. If it proves to be the case, you could both be in serious trouble. Shipping dangerous materials without the right paperwork is one thing. Supplying arms is quite another.’

‘You cannot be serious.’ Taylor blustered. ‘I make chinaware.’

‘Interesting you should mention that fact.’

Taylor caught a cautionary look from Sir Clive and he realised that he had to tread carefully.

‘According to Dr Janet Field, who works for Periston, metassonite can be safely shipped in the form of a product called caragillium. If you add acetic acid, you can recover the metassonite.’

‘That is true,’ Taylor admitted, ‘and it also proves my point. Irrespective of whether any records have been tampered with, the shipping companies will confirm from their visual inspections that I shipped small quantities of rock samples. Certainly, none were large enough to recover any appreciable amounts of metassonite.’

‘Is that so? There is one point that perhaps you may be able to clear up. We appear to have two separate types of shipment.

The small rock samples you just referred to, which went directly to your office or to Fellows. There were also some larger shipments that initially went to an address in Southampton.'

'Ah! There you have put your finger on it old boy.' Added Sir Clive. 'The fact is that we were unaware that these second shipments were being made until one was delivered to Fellows.'

'My manager Jim Clarke will confirm that they did not originate from us.' Taylor added.

'In fact, I have already spoken to him concerning the matter. Clarke did indeed confirm that there are no records but he also said that given all the trouble he had been experiencing at the mine, there was no way of checking.'

'I am glad he has proved so useful.' Taylor grumbled.

'Chief superintendent.' Sir Clive looked at his watch. 'We have been here for almost ten minutes and you have yet to answer my question. Do you actually have any pertinent points to make?'

'Dr Field informed me that the acetic acid recovery process has to be carried out quickly. That is because after a while it recombines with metassonite to form other harmless chemicals. The same kind of chemicals that naturally form in the human body. Metassonite contamination therefore, cannot be identified after a short while, making it undetectable. However, if you know what to look for you can repeat the process and that is what we did with Dalton. He showed substantial signs of contamination.'

'But he was working with metassonite.' Taylor protested.

Gilpatrick smiled. 'But I thought you said there was no metassonite the UK.'

'I...I meant that we have none.'

'So you keep saying. Look at it from my point of view. There are large, unaccounted for shipments of caragillium from which metassonite can be extracted. We have at least one confirmed death from metassonite poisoning,' Gilpatrick paused and looked directly at Taylor, 'and this time I mean poisoning.'



## Chapter twenty

However, it came to be in his body, we have several others that showed the same symptoms.'

'All of this is pure conjecture old boy. If you have any evidence against us, I suggest you make an arrest or leave us to apologise to our guests for this unwarranted intrusion. I must say I am rapidly losing patience.'

'Then just a couple more minutes, if you can spare the time.'

There came a knock on the door and a uniformed policeman sheepishly entered and handed Gilpatrick a note, which he read before stuffing it into his pocket.

'I am sorry gentlemen if I have disturbed your evening.'

For a moment neither Sir Clive nor Taylor quite knew how to react to this sudden change.

'Is that it?' Asked Sir Clive.

'For the moment.'

'In that case, I think an apology is called for old boy.'

'If you have a complaint, I suggest that you write to the commissioner.'

'I will most certainly do so.' Sir Clive continued in an indignant tone. 'You have interrupted a private celebration for no good reason.'

'As I said Sir Clive, if you or Mr Taylor wish to complain, you are free to write to the commissioner.' He paused to examine one of the coffee cups laid out on a table. 'These are rather fine.' Gilpatrick commented as he picked up a cup and held it to the light. 'I take it you make these.'

'Yes,' Taylor replied, 'it's one of an exclusive set.'

'Expensive?'

'Very. We produce just one hundred sets a year.'

'Not the kind one could afford on a policeman's wage then. Strange we should find a complete set at the home of Chief Inspector Jennings.'

'That would be very odd. It retails for five thousand guineas.'

'May I ask why it costs so much?'

'It is made from a very special clay, much finer even than porcelain and extremely rare.'

'Is that so, and you have the exclusive rights?'

'I developed the mixture.'

'How very interesting.'

'Why is that? Most good quality potteries have their own paste recipes.'

'It is interesting because I had a useful conversation with your PA. She very kindly confirmed what you have just said. She also informed me that you keep all the stock at your home for security. Is that correct?'

'Yes.' Taylor replied sensing that something was wrong.

'The note that was just handed to me contains the results of an analysis carried out on random items at your home. It found that certain items contained high levels of metassonite, far higher than you would normally find according to Mr Clarke. I also had the items at Jennings home analysed and found identical results. What is even more interesting is that a mug, which Jennings took from the home of Lekota, also had high levels as did a similar item found at Dalton's home. As these objects were made by your company Mr Taylor, do you have anything to say?'

Taylor seemed to deflate visibly and Gilpatrick nodded to the waiting constable, who opened the door and two more uniformed police entered the room.

'Edward Taylor, I am arresting you for the murders of Stephen Lekota and Nigel Fellows...'

'Don't worry Edward. This is all circumstantial. They have no witnesses and I will secure the best lawyers.'

Gilpatrick turned to confront Sir Clive and the look on his face warned there was more to come.

'You are wrong Sir Clive. We do have a witness and one I think the courts will find highly credible.'

'And who is that?'

'When I said that Chief Inspector Jennings was no longer with us, I should perhaps have said that he is currently on sick leave. If you had let me finish, I was about to inform Mr Taylor that I am also arresting him for the attempted murder of a

## Chapter twenty

policeman. Sir Clive Richards, I am also arresting you.'

'Whatever for? I have no direct connection with Edward's firm.' Sir Clive tried to maintain a calm demeanour but the tone of his voice betrayed concern.

'I am not convinced of that. However, even if it proves to be the case, you will have to answer a charge of procuring a criminal act. We know all about your relationship with Madison ... old boy.'

Gilpatrick then returned his attention to Taylor and took him roughly by the shoulder. 'Robert Jennings is not just a colleague but a very dear friend. Get this one out of my sight before I am tempted to lose my pension.'

As Taylor was led into the hallway, one of the dinner guests emerged blearily eyed from the other room. He stared blankly, puzzled at the sight of Taylor handcuffed to one of the policemen.

'I say Edward. Is this your surprise?'

\*\*\*\*

Jennings was toying with a glass of lemon squash as he sat at the kitchen table. He was not overly fond of the stuff but somehow, he had gone off the idea of drinking anything that was not in a nice clear glass. It had been five days since that terrible night and thoughts of what he could have done still filled him with dread.

Jennings could remember very little. Apparently, he had woken in the early hours, and raced around the house, ranting and raving incoherently. Jen and the children had been forced to lock themselves in the bathroom. Then all had gone quiet for a while and Jen was considering venturing out when he attacked. If Anton had not acted in the way he did, God knows what would have happened. Odd to think that someone he had once disliked, should have turned out to be their saviour.

Jennings took a sip of the sweet juice. His doctor had ordered him to drink plenty of liquid to help flush the poison

out of his system. Personally, he would rather have a beer or two.

Jen was busy cooking and had been very mysterious about what she was preparing. She had recently brought a book on French regional foods. Thoughts of coq au vin or perhaps, a ratatouille was one thing, but the idea of eating the outer extremities of an amphibian filled him with horror. Jennings unexpectedly found himself yearning for the days of baked beans on toast, which they had been forced to eat several times a week when they were first married and saving for a home of their own.

'I'll get it.' Said Jennings, as the phone rang. He stood up and winced as the pain of his cut feet shot through his ankles and into his calves. The only explanation they had been able to come up with was that he must have trodden on the remains of the broken cup which he had thrown across the kitchen.

'6116'

'Hello Robert, it's Alistair. I hope I am not disturbing you?'

'Not in the least, gives me the chance to say thank you.'

'Whatever for?'

'For listening to Caruthers. For coming to the house so quickly and for taking up the lead against Taylor. I gather there was a bit of opposition from the funny boys.'

'A bit. The fact is I rather enjoyed my swan song as a real detective and of course, it gave me the chance to make that wretch squirm.'

'Wilks told me about your little charade with the note and making them think, they were off the hook.'

'Anyway, apart from wanting to know how you are, I also wanted to let you know that the results of the toxicology reports have come through.'

'And what did they say?'

'Just what we expected, the chemical signature of all the items was identical to the paste made from caragillium. Since Taylor has already confirmed that it was unique to his company, any argument that it was down to some mysterious

## Chapter twenty

third party does not stand up. Taylor has confessed everything, but he is still insisting that he had nothing to do with the deaths of Sykes, Brown and Fellows. We will have to drop the charges concerning the first two in order to secure a conviction on the others.'

'I see.' Jennings answered with a note of disappointment.

'But the verdicts of suicide will be overturned as will the verdicts on Nigel Fellows and his family.'

'I suppose that is something. At least Brown's wife will now be able to claim their insurance. Look, I had better go. You know how Jen is at the moment.'

'How is she?'

'Bearing up well, at least as well as can be expected.'

'You have a remarkable woman there.'

'Yes, I know.' Jennings smiled to himself. 'Is there anything else?'

'I'm afraid so. The fact is that I have some mixed news and I did not want to leave it until Monday, just in case you heard from someone else. Robert. I am sorry, you did not get the job.'

'I see.' Jennings replied flatly. 'Who did get it?'

'This is all confidential at the moment but it's going to Bryden.'

'John Bryden? He's a good man. I look forward to working with him.'

'That's just it. You won't have the chance. The commissioner is launching a tough new initiative to tackle corruption inside the force and he wants you to lead it. It's a promotion, but I know you. I don't want you turning it down just because it's not what you consider proper policing. Talk it over with Jen. At least promise me that.'

'Yes, I will promise you that.'

'Don't forget my leaving do, wouldn't be the same without you. There was one more thing. Bit embarrassing really.'

'And what is that?'

'The rock you sent for testing. It's been stolen.'

Jennings put down the phone receiver gently and thought

for a moment before firmly putting those thoughts at the back of his mind. The truth was that he had more important things to sort out.

As he re-entered the kitchen, a long forgotten scent gently caressed his nostrils. The smell was accompanied by a sound that he had not heard for a very long time.

‘Who was that?’ Jen asked in a tone that clearly implied she knew exactly who it was.

‘Just Alistair, asking how we were doing.’

‘I hope he is not putting any pressure on you to return to work.’

‘No. Is that sausages you’re cooking?’

‘I thought it would make a pleasant change.’ Jen answered dismissively. ‘Why don’t you lay the table and there is beer in the fridge.’

Jennings stopped cold and wondered whether Jen was suffering from some kind of delayed effect from the metassonite. He glanced nervously at the knife block, close to her left elbow. Jennings cautiously opened the fridge door and there indeed was a pack of four Double Diamonds. He then went to the drawer where they kept the cutlery. He took out two knives and forks and the long neglected bottle opener. It provided a welcoming fizz as the cap was prised from the bottle and the aroma of malted barley permeated the air.

‘How are the children?’ Jennings asked as he laid out the cutlery and fished out almost forgotten bottles of brown sauce and English mustard from the cupboard.

Jen turned around to face him. She was wearing a smile that tried to reassure but which had tinges of sadness.

‘Sarah is still a bit shaken and a little embarrassed about knocking you out. But she is a sensible girl and old enough to understand and Michael. Well, he just loves his dad...’ Jen paused and the smile vanished. ‘I think it will take David a while. I know you want them back and I do too, but it will give them time to adjust if they stay with mum and dad for a bit longer.’

## Chapter twenty

‘I suppose you are right.’

Jennings had initially felt nothing but hatred towards Taylor. Of all the criminals he had met over the years. The unintelligent, the greedy or the just plain nasty, none had ever involved his family. But then he realised that being angry would not help him to rebuild life with his family, if that cosy world could ever be rebuilt.

‘What is this?’ Jennings asked as he spotted a piece of card with a length of string attached, on the table. It was covered in a faint blue wash that might have been writing at some point. The card showed distinct signs of water damage.

‘I found it on the floor. I thought you might have started the luggage labels for our holiday.’

‘No, I don’t think so. Do you know what else it looks like?’

‘No, what?’

Jennings considered for a moment and decided not to share his thoughts. After all, it was a ridiculous one. As he listened to the sausages sizzling in the pan, Jennings became aware of another sound. It was like a faint tapping coming from the window.

‘Jen, look it’s raining.’

A sudden thought occurred and his heart began to race.

‘Jen,’ he stopped to check that it was in fact raining, ‘do you know what we have not done since we were courting?’

Jen looked at the window with a dubious expression. ‘Darling, we are not teenagers, besides which, I am cooking.’

Jennings looked again at the window as long rivulets made their lazy journey down the outside of the glass.

‘Turn them off. They are only bangers. They won’t spoil. Come on.’

He seized Jen’s hand giving her just enough time to turn off the gas, before yanking open the kitchen door and dragging her out into the steady rain. He stood there, quite still for some time, enjoying the feeling of cool water running down his face. Then he turned to look at Jen. Her expensive hairstyle was rapidly becoming plastered to her head and the mascara was

beginning to run, but she looked just the same as the girl he had met at a set of traffic lights. Twenty years vanished in a moment as he recalled two young people standing in the rain.

‘Do you think we will be all right?’ He whispered cautiously.

Jen turned slowly to face him. She leaned over and gave him a kiss.

‘What do you think?’



## Connections

It was a grey, miserable wet day that provided an appropriate backdrop to mark a sad occasion. A small group of people huddled beneath umbrellas, stared at the ground, each other or vaguely into space as they carefully avoided looking at the small crowns of water that bounced off the dark wooden top of the coffin.

An elderly priest was saying a few non-committal words, which became lost as the sound of drumming on wood and canvas grew steadily louder. Faint looks of embarrassment spread between the assembled people who struggled to hear what he was saying.

To Porterman, it seemed an ignoble, if fitting end for a man who had spent most of his life cultivating anonymity. He studied the faces of the small group, trying to discern any details from their blank expressions, manner of their dress, age, etcetera, that might provide an idea of who else was in attendance. Certainly, the deceased had no family or friends to speak of and he would not have been surprised to have found himself alone.

As the group slowly dispersed, Porterman waited until he was some distance from the grave before raising his umbrella. He had never met Braden, but the name was well known, almost revered in some circles and attending his funeral seemed the least he could do. This area of London was filled with statues and tributes to the great and the good but none had approached Donald Braden's contribution to the safety of his country.

The October shower was developing into a heavy downpour and his car was some distance away. Somehow, the long hot

summer seemed nothing more than a distant memory.

‘You are James Porterman?’

The voice belonged to a very tall Chinese looking man. Porterman regarded him with overt suspicion.

‘I believe you have the advantage.’

The Chinese man smiled faintly. ‘Perhaps I do, but if you wish to have a name, Harry is as good as any.’

‘Is it?’ Porterman sniffed and began to walk on.

The Chinese man, having no intention of allowing the conversation to end, gave quick pursuit. ‘Please forgive the intrusion at such a time, but I have come a long way and I would be grateful for a moment of your time.’

Porterman stopped and regarded the strange man carefully whilst he tried to gauge whether he might be an enemy agent who knew something that he should not.

‘I have to know whether Mr Braden passed on the box that was left for him?’

‘I’m afraid I have no idea. I am simply here to pay my personal respects.’

Now it was the Chinese man’s turn to look suspicious. ‘My apologies if I have caused you needless concern.’

Porterman concluded that this was the end of the conversation and left with a polite nod of the head as an acknowledgement that the apology had been accepted. He could just see his car through the church railings, waiting on the street along with a couple of others. The rain was coming down hard and he was looking forward to a strong black coffee when he got back to the office.

‘It’s just that I was curious about what you made of the Noril’sk sample that box contained.’

The church bell, cracked and tuneless, jarred the tranquillity of the graveyard with its monosyllabic clang. Porterman stopped abruptly and turned to confront the Chinese man. ‘Who are you?’ He demanded.

‘I have already told you.’

‘Well... Harry. Perhaps you would be kind enough to

explain how you came by that knowledge.'

'That is not important. What is important is what you intend to do with both the sample and the title deed.'

'That is my business.' Porterman saw no need to deny their existence since this strange man appeared confident of his information.

'It is also mine otherwise I would not be here.' The man paused whilst he considered what to say next. 'Would it help if I told you that, despite my appearance, I have no political or national allegiances. I know these things were regarded as important in your time.'

'In my time?' Porterman echoed.

'Perhaps an awkward turn of phrase. I simply wanted to provide some assurance that my concerns are only to ensure that you understand the importance of the sample and are taking appropriate action.'

'I think you can be assured of that. However, I also have a concern.'

'And what is that?'

'That you are in possession of information of which you should not be aware.'

The Chinese man regarded him carefully. 'The fact is that I am, and you could profit from that fact.'

'How so?'

'I will make a guess that despite Braden's best efforts, you do not truly understand the nature of what is in your possession. It is a key.'

'To what?'

'To the past and to the future.'

'That is somewhat vague.'

'You have been trying to control the thing discovered by Dalton, with an electromagnetic field.'

'How did you come by that knowledge, and if you do not answer my question this time, the conversation is at an end.'

'Is it?' The Chinese man replied. 'Then so be it.' He turned and began to walk back towards the grave.

'Just a moment,' Porterman called out, 'you said it was a key to the past and future. What did you mean?'

The Chinese man turned around and this time approached very close and when he spoke, it was little more than a whisper.

'If you check your records, you will find that you are storing the remains of a number of bodies. They were found in 1941 by the man you have just buried. He knew what they were.'

'And what are they?'

'Clues to the answer you are looking for. You will not find it because you regard the Noril'sk as a metaphorical key, a clue that points to an anticipated disaster. You have wasted an enormous amount of time and resources, firstly in trying to use it, and then when you had some limited understanding of its nature, in trying to hide it away. You regard the Noril'sk as a kind of poison, to be safely stored until you can find an antidote, but you are wrong.'

'Am I?'

'The qualities you attribute to what you call metassonite do not exist.'

'They appear real enough.' Porterman answered dismissively.

'Is that so? You will have tested the substance and found that it contains nothing that could be the cause of any problems, or indeed account for any of its claimed miraculous properties.'

'We also found that there is a tiny amount missing from its matrix.'

'And what did you make of that?'

'It is something we have yet to determine.' Porterman admitted.

'But the answer was handed to you on a plate, as the expression goes.'

Porterman looked baffled.

'Then I will give you the answer. The Noril'sk and metassonite are the same. They are a literal key, a key that has already been used to unlock what you might term the future

and the past.’

‘Am I supposed to understand any of that?’ Porterman asked in an exasperated tone.’

‘Braden understood just a small part of the puzzle and I was concerned that his knowledge might be lost. That is why I am here.’

‘You mentioned bodies. Bodies found in 1941. You said they were a clue, a clue to what?’

The Chinese man appeared uneasy and began looking furtively at the door to a small mausoleum. ‘To where the door is, of course.’

The Chinese man smiled faintly at Porterman’s perplexed expression. A car horn sounded and Porterman glanced towards the road to see whether the culprit was his chauffeur. When he turned back, the Chinese man had gone. Porterman looked around the small graveyard but there was no sign of the man and so he began the walk to his car.

The Chinese man had left him with a conundrum, thirty year old remains that pointed to an unlocked door. Had the door been keeping something in or keeping something out. The man had said that the answer had been provided on a plate and an odd thought occurred. On the first day of his new job, he had been handed a report on the forthcoming trial of the man who had developed metassonite. Porterman smiled to himself as he finally understood. If he was looking for a key, could it be a china key?

As Porterman approached the heavy cast iron gate that led onto a busy London street, a man with a pram almost bumped into him. Porterman watched the man for a moment until he disappeared around a corner. Life always goes on. At least he hoped it would. Braden had fulfilled his role and now it was his turn.

## Other titles

in the Connections series include:

The Condyne paradox

ISBN 978-0-9934328-0-4 (e-book)

Noril'sk

ISBN 978-0-9934328-1-1 (e-book)

ISBN 978-0-9934238-5-9 (print)

The Occam factor

ISBN 978-0-9934328-2-8 (e-book)

To come

London Tales

Other titles

Harvest of minds

ISBN 978-0-9934328-4-2 (e-book)

ISBN 978-0-9934328-6-6 (print)

## Inspiration



In 1995, I decided to plunge into the modern world and bought a cable tv service. Whilst I am not a huge fan of television, I was tempted by the prospect of widescreen programmes to watch on my new 32 inch widescreen tv. However, multi-channel television brought an unexpected bonus in the form of all the programmes I grew up with from the 1960s and 70s.

Having finished the first three books in the Connections series, I had begun to sketch out ideas for a fourth, but nothing seemed quite right. The Condyne paradox, Noril'sk and The Occam factor had a strong science theme. For the next book, I wanted to move away from this to ensure the stories did not become repetitive. Then I hit on the idea of a detective story and turned to my childhood years for inspiration. The Avengers, The Saint, The Champions, all mixed conventional crime solving with a hint of fantasy.

I hope you enjoyed A china key.

Cheers

Julian

