

PHIL COSKER

The Sticks

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Sunday 10th November

07:18

Do dogs know the days of the week? Jack wondered as the wind carried incessant barking to the path where he ran. Sunrise. Thump, thump, thump. The rhythm of running. Solace. Freshly ploughed slabs of earth black as hewn coal gleamed beneath weak sun. *Poor bloody dogs ... never go for sodding walks.* The beagles in the “InVivo Research Centre” were not barking in excited anticipation of something good. The wind changed direction and they were gone.

That's the way it always is. If you can't see it, hear it, it isn't there. It's over. That's the trouble – one of the troubles – of being a copper. Whatever it is, if it's wrong, it's always there; even if the wind is blowing in the wrong direction you still know it's there. The wind freshened. He gulped it in. Joy.

As he ran he knew he'd made the right decision. It had meant demotion but what could compare this with that? With London? With being a DCI in the Met's SCD9? Back in the sticks. Back for a quiet life and rid of the shit. His feet pounded along the track and despite their heavy thud birdsong filled his ears. No roar of traffic here. Not even a single empty can. Nor a turd to avoid - human or otherwise. He chuckled. Run. That was the way. Run in the place where you had grown and remember that this was once home. Is home again. *Bloody hell,* he thought, *almost forty and starting all over.* It was wrong to think that one couldn't ever go back. That one should never go back. Would they have been pleased with their prodigal? No answer to that. He tried to push their memory back into the box where it was safely locked. It wouldn't go in. It was guilt. *Pointless. I can't run from the truth: I didn't do enough.* He had excuses. The workload in the Human Exploitation and Organised Crime Command was immense and never pleasant.

He'd come back to visit after the burglary at the cottage and the attack on his mother, Mavis Ranger. *Why had they attacked a defenceless woman?* The bastards had left not a trace. The local force didn't seem to have a clue as to who was responsible. *Did they give a shit?* No one was ever charged. In the Pilgrim Hospital he'd been assured she'd make a full recovery. It almost put his mind at rest. *At rest? Irony.* He went back to work. Two days later his dad, Ralph, called, sobbed – *Mum's dead.* Died in her sleep. Even his Dad wasn't there. Ended. Gone. Begged another day off work. In the cottage, once his home, he found his father slumped in a cold chair, his life in an old hessian sack, warp and weft unweaving. Jack lit the fire. His father didn't stir. They found no words to say, to share.

The cottage went downhill. Ralph didn't care anymore. Jack came back when he could; it wasn't enough. Couldn't be enough. Neither he nor his dad were good on the phone. Jack had his own family to care for. That, and work was hard enough. The call from Chief Superintendent Wainstock had been short but kindly meant. His father had taken his own life. 'Too much grief to carry on without his Mavis,' Wainstock said. There was no note. Jack was grateful that he'd hung himself in the wood and not in the cottage; then he could never have come 'home'. That was five years back. He ran faster. The pain fell into its box and he shut the lid. Light. Air. Birdsong. A robin. *How can such a small bird make so much noise?* His heaving lungs made him glad to be alive. There was another box; he wasn't going to open that, not today, not if he could help it; but he often couldn't help it.

Warming down, he walked the unmade track from the road to the cottage and revelled in its isolation. There was nothing for miles, just land. *How could land be nothing?* Two acres. An almost derelict cottage. A barn, in good shape with a new roof. In the yard, Jack's temporary home – a brand new Carnaby Belvedere, a 35 by 12 foot static caravan – in which he intended to live until he had restored the cottage to a glory it had never known: central heating but no bloody plastic double glazing – he would have new casements made. Gil would know who could make them because Gil knew just

about everybody within twenty miles of Louth. But restoring the vegetable garden to its former productive splendour would have to wait – probably for ever.

Closing the garden gate he stood staring at the cottage. The early morning sun was fading, the sky turning flat grey. *I've had the best of the day.* Turning away, he crossed the yard and climbed the three steps up into the Belvedere. *Surely a belvedere is some part of a building like a turret, raised up high, so why is a bloody caravan called a Belvedere? Isn't there a belvedere in Ulysses?* Stooping slightly, to avoid hitting his head, he went in. If you were over six foot, stooping was a way of life. He stripped off in front of the kitchen sink and dumped his running kit on the laminate floor and stood in front of the window, naked; there was no one to see him but he wouldn't have cared if there had been an outing from the Mother's Union staring in. Just in case there was, he winked. He was pleased; the van was the business. Tall and thin as the proverbial rake he smiled. 'You need to get some meat on you, son,' his father had repeatedly said and despite the best efforts of his mother he was what he was, tall and thin. *Jack Sprat could eat no fat,* he hummed but couldn't remember the rest of the ~~so-called~~ nursery rhyme.

Standing at the shelf that housed a vinyl deck and Leek amp, he hesitated before picking up the framed photograph of a little girl. He tapped in numbers on his mobile phone and waited.

'Hello?' a woman's voice asked.

'Sam?'

'Yes. Jack?'

'Yeah, it's me. Sorry to bother you on a Sunday.'

'It's okay – I'm sorry ... I haven't found her yet. I'll find her. I promise.'

'You can't promise, Sam. You know that.'

'I can promise I'll try.'

'Thanks. Call me if there's anything, won't you?'

'You know I will. Take care, Jack.'

He thanked her and ended the call. The irony was not lost on him; finding missing persons was what coppers were supposed to do but with no case to investigate, no crime to solve, what else could he do? Employ someone who would go on looking: that's what Sam did.

Showered, dressed in black skinny jeans and an old jumper he reluctantly set up the ironing board to press the five white shirts he'd need for the week ahead. It was one thing he'd never let slip; when you went to work you were smart: crisp white shirt, button down collar, pencil thin deep grey tie, matching two-buttoned thin lapel deep grey suit with straight cut, sixteen inch, slim fit trousers and a pair of brown Chelsea boots as brightly glistening as fresh conkers. That way you looked the business – a veritable Bradley Wiggins of a copper with a touch of Paul Weller. He carefully placed “Quadrophenia” on the turntable, *Best start at the end*, lowered the stylus onto the last track and cranked the volume up loud.

“Only love can make it rain” The Who sang.

07.48

Sam smiled. Not only had she changed her name from Tickinson to Ticks, she had changed her life. She was no longer the reluctant head and owner of “Tick Box Consulting”, dedicated to the protection of the powerful and privileged whom she loathed. Now she searched for those missing souls the police had given up on ever finding, sometimes because they didn't have the resources to take the loss of someone's loved one seriously enough. *That's why I do it, I suppose.* She thought of Harry and Red. *Whatever I do, I'm never going to find them again.* She remembered the conversation she'd had with Jim Campbell when she'd told him that she was going to sell the business and move on – not that she needed to work with the fortune Harry had left her. *Jim, dear Jim, thank god I've still got you as a sounding board, a friend, more than that: a rock, my rock in the storm. That's good; I'll be seeing the lovely old*

bugger on Thursday just as always. She smiled again. Then she frowned. *What am I going to do about Jack?*

07.50

Dr Silvia Kinsey climbed out of her Range Rover and slammed the door. *Why in God's name do those bloody dogs keep barking?* she wondered. She was in a bad mood. Her vodka hangover didn't help; it never did. As the “InVivo Centre's” Clinical Director she had no choice about coming in on a Sunday when there was a crisis. But she doubted that's what it really was but rather something that could have waited until Monday morning if the weekend Duty Officer – Frank Ritchie – hadn't sounded so agitated. *Anybody would think he was a dog lover,* she grumbled to herself as the dogs continued to bark. And, it was a big and, she was fed up with running the gauntlet of protesters encamped on the verges around the entrance to the two mile drive that led to what some of the locals called the “dog farm” whilst others referred to it as “that place”. Every morning and every evening it was the same; it almost made her wish she lived at the bloody place, but not quite. The protesters never actually did anything very much; just blocked the road, tried to start an argument about animal bloody rights, contested her right to do what she did, sullenly registering their disgust at what was being done to dumb animals. *Don't they get it? Surely they know that the drugs that keep the senile alive and vaguely compos mentis and whimpering brats healthy would not exist without animal experimentation? How would we keep this country safe without being able to counter unseen and invisible weapons? Bloody middle class hippies with nothing better to do with their time than prevent people going about their lawful business,* she fumed. *Why can't they all piss off and go back to their Aga stoves, fucking flower arranging and making wholemeal bread? Haven't I got enough on my plate as it is?*

She took a deep breath. She needed to be calm. She climbed out of the car, took her laptop bag from the passenger seat

and slung it over her shoulder. She patted its leather case affectionately. *What would I do without you?* she mused. For a moment she stood and looked at the single storey buildings that comprised the “InVivo Immunological Research Centre”; they weren’t very pretty. The isolated site, chosen for that very reason, was surrounded on all sides by a wall of immense Leylandii; it lay amidst the flatlands that make up a large part of rural Lincolnshire. The buildings had belonged to RAF Bomber Command during the Second World War and were part of one of the many bases situated right across “Bomber County” as it had been known. Though they retained their original form the asbestos roofs had been removed and extensive internal and external renovations and modifications had been done to produce the required clinical environments. The dogs lived in kennels until they came into experimental use. One building had not been restored: the Officer’s Mess. Locals said the men who never came back from missions over Germany haunted it. The belief was that on certain nights of the year the spectral shapes of dead airmen walked back from where the runways had once been for a drink in the mess. None of the local builders had been prepared to go anywhere near it, let alone go inside, thus it had never been upgraded.

Unable to face going into her office she turned her back on the buildings and pushed her way through a gap in the Leylandii. She looked out across a landscape almost bereft of trees, full of a myriad dykes, where the wind whistled unhindered beneath a morning sky now heavy with cold. *Sun would be good*, she thought and shivered. The land seemed so low. The dull heavy sky so high, a place, just as Larkin had put it, “where sky and water meet”, she’d seen a photographic book of the same name. *The sooner I’m out of here and back to civilisation the better*, she thought.

‘So tell me,’ Kinsey said as she stood in the Duty Officer’s little office.

‘Six died in the night, doctor,’ Frank replied.

‘Where? In the lab or in the kennels?’

‘In the kennels. I just went in like always and they were just lying there dead. The others just kept barking and they’ve been barking ever since. They know, don’t they? Same as when they’re taking lambs to slaughter.’

Do me a favour and spare the violins. ‘But you took the bodies out of the kennels?’ she asked.

‘Of course I did, like I’ve been told; they’re in the cold room till you’ve taken a look at them.’

‘So why did you think this was a crisis, Frank?’

‘They don’t usually die in the kennels, do they? I thought you should know, just in case something had got out from – you know, from in there and done for them.’

‘Nothing, as you put it, Frank, gets out from in there to do for them out here. That’s why we have bio-security in place that makes Porton Down look like open house. There’s no way they could be infected.’

‘But you’ll check?’

‘Of course I’ll check! Keep the bodies locked up where they are and I’ll do the necropsies first thing in the morning when everyone’s here.’

‘Sorry to have dragged you out so early, Doc.’

Don’t call me doc, she thought as she forced a smile. ‘Don’t worry; you did the right thing, Frank. Make sure you leave a note for – who’s Duty Officer this evening and overnight?’

‘Wriggles, Norbert Wriggles.’

‘Is he really called Norbert?’

‘Yeah, but that’s why everybody calls him Wiggy.’

Oh, that makes so much sense! ‘Leave Wiggy a note to keep the carcasses safe and sound, won’t you?’

‘Will do, Doc,’ Frank said.

‘Thanks, Frank. Have a good day.’

‘It’s going to be sunny later,’ he said as the door closed behind her.

Like bloody hell it is, she thought.

The developer had gone bust before he'd finished building the eighteen semis that were intended to comprise Falkingham Close; only two of the three bedroomed properties had been partially completed. Dimitri had been told to buy them even though they were barely habitable. He got them for a song; his boss was pleased and gave him a bonus. Most people wouldn't have wanted to live on an abandoned building site with unmade roads miles outside a small country town but they were perfect for the purpose; it kept the occupants out of the way and, as Dimitri had learned, in England, out of sight did mean out of mind. Internal ground floor and upstairs doors linked the two properties so that the men who lived there could share one kitchen and two bathrooms. Sunday was the only day of the week they didn't work; all nineteen men were at home.

Ilko made his way past piles of bulging black bin bags that would never be collected across a muddy rubble "garden" to take a piss. What was the point of queuing for one of the two toilets when it was so much easier to piss outside? He finished, cursed England and kicked a black bag; it split, disgorging its fetid contents onto the mounds of rubbish that had already escaped confinement and tumbled in the wind in their efforts to escape the place.

Back inside, the first breakfast shift was underway; cooking and eating in shifts was the only way of managing to make hot food. Cigarette smoke and the fumes of frying pans fused in a dense cloud around the four men who were making breakfast. "Kartoplia Piure", mashed potatoes, in this case made with out of date yoghurt, to replace the cream they couldn't afford, and cheap margarine steamed in a large heavy bottomed pot bought at the local car boot sale. Ilko pushed his way to the kettle and made himself a black coffee. 'This is a shit life,' he said after he'd taken a big sip of his coffee.

'It's not life,' Stepan said. 'It's worse than life. We should go home to Rakhiv.'

'And how would we get there? We have no papers for here or there. No National Insurance, no passport, no nothing,' Pavlo said as he scraped the Kartoplia onto his plate and started to eat with his fingers.

'And there is a war,' Yuri said.

'We should kill that bastard Dimitri. He got us into this,' Ilko said.

'This would help?' Stepan queried.

'It would help me feel better,' Ilko said.

'How do we let him get away with it?' Ilko continued. 'He takes forty pounds a week from our pay up front as rent for living in this shit hole and then another fifty a month to pay off our debt for smuggling us into here. We are serfs. No, worse than serfs - dogs. A kennel would be warmer than this.'

'And drier,' Pavlo added.

'We should kill him,' Ilko said once again. 'Where are the fine jobs he promised? Where is the good money? Where is the security? We don't exist.'

'Everyone told us England was a soft touch with easy money, a good health service and schools,' Pavlo said. 'Where you can live like a king on the fat of the land.'

'There is no fat in this land, just work from dawn till dusk and beyond,' Ilko said. 'Just work. We should kill him.'

'Ilko,' Yuri said shaking his head. 'You are my friend, and a good man, but you know as well as I do that you will do nothing of the sort. You will nod your head and obey. You will let the English shits who work for him kick you and abuse you and you will do nothing. We'll do nothing because we're afraid. And afraid not just of him, but of those who own him just as he owns us. We are trapped but we do nothing - we lack courage.'

'At least Bohdanna and Marina are better off in the big house at the hall,' Ilko said.

'But we should be with our women, not alone here without them,' Stepan said.

The men fell silent. There wasn't much more to say. This conversation had become a Sunday morning ritual like going to church had been back home in the Ukraine; neither had much effect upon reality.

10.16

The barn was warm. The roar of the industrial heater was deafening but that didn't matter; only the heat was important. Jack looked at the chrome wing mirror. He was pleased; not with his reflection but with the shine he'd achieved. Straightening up, completely lost in his admiration for his treasured Lambretta, he hummed the words of The Who's "I've Had Enough" – "I've had enough of childhood. I've had enough of graves, I've had enough of street fights, I've seen my share of kills." When a hand unexpectedly tapped his shoulder he span round, both hands in fists, ready for instant battle. 'Who the fuck are you?' he demanded.

'I'm you're neighbour,' a portly man gulped, awkwardly stumbling back over his own feet and out of range.

It's you! Lord bloody Haugham, no doubt about that, Jack thought as he looked at the man's tweed jacket, moleskin trousers, check Viyella shirt and knitted tie. 'I don't have any neighbours. There isn't another house for miles,' *and fucking brogues.*

'Neighbour in the sense that I own the land that surrounds your cottage.'

'That doesn't give you the right to walk in here uninvited.'

'You obviously didn't hear me with that damn blower thing and fiddling with your motorbike.'

'It's not a motorbike; it's a scooter.'

'Does it matter?'

'It matters in the same way that a dog is not a cat.'

'I didn't come here ...' he hesitated. 'I thought it was time to say hello – you've been back here for six months after all. I'm Reginald Haugham, Lord Haugham, but my friends call me Reggie,' he said extending his hand.

Jack ignored his hand. 'I don't like surprises, Reg; sneaking up on somebody like that ... you're lucky I didn't punch your lights out. What do you want?'

'That's not the attitude one expects of public servants.'

'I'm off-duty.'

'I thought that detective inspectors worth their salt were never off-duty.'

'What do you want?'

'I thought we should meet.'

'Why?' Jack asked

'You haven't replied to my offer letters.'

'Why would I reply? My cottage isn't for sale.'

'It's a ruin and that caravan outside is a real eyesore.'

Jack chuckled. 'You don't like static caravans? There's thousands at Skeggie just like this. I was thinking of putting in a couple more as holiday lets to help out with the restoration costs. What do you think, Reg?'

'You'll never get planning permission; it was only a gesture of goodwill that yours was allowed.'

'Ah, noblesse oblige. Most generous, I'm sure,' Jack said, bowing slightly. 'It's alright, just teasing, Reg. You feeling okay? You look a bit flushed. Got a bit of hyper-tension?'

'Your parents were much more amenable.'

'The fact that your grandfather, a real gentleman, so my dad said, gave this property, and the two acres on which it sits, to my grandfather for saving your grandfather's life in the trenches in 1916, may get up your nose but that's the way it is. I've come home and I'm here to stay. Is that clear?'

'Are you always so belligerent?'

Jack considered this for a moment. 'It depends on who I'm dealing with, or is it whom?' Jack looked at his watch.

‘Shouldn’t you be marching with a wreath somewhere? After all, it is Remembrance Sunday.’

‘I shall speak to the Chief Constable about you; Richard and I are on the best of terms.’

Jack smiled. ‘You must do as you think best, your lordship, but be clear - my cottage is not for sale and neither you nor Chief Constable Sylvester can do a thing about it.’

Jack stood in the lane and watched as Haugham drove away. *So what was all that about? What did I expect? What did he expect? Why does he want to buy me out? It’s just a ruin and a measly two acres when he owns thousands – it’s like wanting one more grain of sand when you already own the beach.* He turned and looked out across the Lincolnshire Wolds and found them beautiful. When he’d been a boy all he’d wanted was to get away – buy a Lambretta and be gone – now he had the Lambretta and he was back. The beauty of the place was a reason to come back but it wasn’t the reason at all. The land was the same, but as ever, different, as different as he was from the boy wanting to escape. He could have been five years of age standing in exactly the same spot holding his father’s hand before they went to dig up spuds for Sunday lunch. Or the first of his days at Louth Grammar; his mother kissing him before he walked along the flat pot-holed track to wait for the school bus. Or even the day returning from King Edward VI with his A-level results in the knowledge that he was out of here – and for good – to the LSE to read Sociology. They were dead. His dream was gone but still he dreamt. He was back: Detective Inspector Jack Ranger back in the sticks. It wasn’t what he’d planned. It was what had happened. Crows cawed in the spinney just as they had always done. *Are they the same crows? How long do crows live? I’ll Google it,* he thought, knowing he never would.

In the Belvedere he turned on the kettle to make a pot of tea. As it mashed he once more lowered the stylus onto the vinyl of “Quadrophenia”, this time onto track nine. Looking out of the window he watched the crows fly away as he sipped his tea and listened. “I’ve had enough of crying, I’ve taken all the high roads, I’ve squandered and I’ve saved, I’ve had enough

of childhood, I’ve had enough of graves ...” *With any sort of luck it should be calmer back up here,* Jack thought.

11.09

Chief Constable Richard Sylvester sat in his allotted place next to the High Sheriff, both ceremonially dressed with their good lady be-hatted wives in attendance at their sides. Lincoln Cathedral, as on all such occasions of public display for the great and the good, was crowded.

The Dean, having earlier climbed the steps into the Archbishop Benson pulpit, came to his concluding remarks, ‘From Isaiah two, verses one to five. In the days to come the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say, Come, let us go to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths. For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.’ The Dean paused. ‘And now, from John fifteen, verses twelve to seventeen. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends ... In the name of the Father, the Son and ...’

The Chief Constable wasn’t listening, he was thinking about himself; a common occurrence but when in church it acquired the flavour of guilt. *What is the punishment, what do they call it? Vainglorious pride. Sin. Pride the basis of all sin. Lucifer’s sin. Mine. How can I not be proud? Look at what I am. Broken on the wheel, that’s what it says. Punishment.* He sighed but was comforted that later he would attend the Armed Forces Day of horse racing at Market Rasen.

12.04

Looking at his watch Jack saw that it was gone twelve and that the best buys at the car boot sale would be long gone. *What the hell, Bella needs an airing.* In the barn he turned off the heater, pulled on his parka, donned his decaled helmet and kick started the Lambretta. The noise of the 200cc engine thrilled him as he rode off down the lane knowing full well that the real reason he was going to the car boot was because he wanted to show off his scooter – just like a kid – but – he might just find some goodies; some vinyl to add to the collection. He was a bit short of “The Steampacket” with the young Rod Stewart and there was always the very small chance of finding a copy of Frank Wilson’s “Do I Love You?” *That would pay for all those casement windows.*

There wasn’t a copy of “Do I Love You” or anything else that Jack wanted ~~to add to his collection~~ so he adjourned to the canopy of “Janets’ Mobile Meals” even though the apostrophe was in the wrong place. He wasn’t hungry but the large Styrofoam cup of steaming tea was perfect as he stood on the grass watching the chattering crowd hefting myriad bargains to add to burgeoning collections of worthless tat.

A man in a shiny black leather jacket and matching leather peaked cap stood next to him holding a steaming cup of what smelled like Bovril. ‘You from round here?’ the man asked.

‘Born and bred.’

‘I am new here - two years only. It is good, yes?’

‘I hope so. And before that – where are you from - Poland?’ Jack asked.

‘No, Lithuania, from Utena; it is in the East of the country.’

‘What’s it like?’

‘Where I come from, poor, with much unemployment; that is why I am here,’ the man explained.

‘You work on the land?’

The man laughed. ‘No, my friend, I am a dentist with a practice in Louth,’ he said as he fished in his wallet. ‘Here is my card,’ he said. ‘If you need a dentist, I’m your man.’

‘National Health?’

‘Private patients only but we have good scheme. I assess the health of your mouth and then we work out a plan for you and it will cost you each month the sum that will cover all your dental needs.’

‘Dentists used to be on the NHS,’ Jack said.

A bulky man, verging on the obese, dressed in a shell suit who’d been eavesdropping on their conversation butted in. ‘That’s what fuckin’ happens, innit?’

‘What fucking happens?’ Jack asked.

‘Fuckin’ foreigners,’ the man said and spat on the ground. ‘Ruining the fuckin’ place they are.’

‘Ah, another happy UKIP activist! Go on, piss off while you can,’ Jack advised.

‘I’m not going nowhere, I’m from here and he fuckin’ isn’t. They take all the fuckin’ jobs that should be for us.’

‘So you’re an out of work dentist, are you?’ Jack asked.

‘You trying to take the piss?’

‘You’re doing a fine job all on your own.’

‘You should watch yourself, mate.’

‘You do know that inciting hatred is a crime – even here in Lincolnshire,’ Jack said.

The dentist nervously moved a little further away.

‘Telling the fuckin’ truth isn’t a crime – not yet, anyway. If the likes of him,’ the man said jabbing his finger in the direction of the dentist, ‘weren’t here there’d be more jobs for us. That must be bloody obvious even to a twat like you. They should fuck off back to where they came from.’

‘Sorry about this,’ Jack said to the dentist.

‘Remember, if you need a dentist, you know where to find me,’ the dentist said as he hurried away.

'Thanks, I shall,' Jack said to the back of the departing leather jacket. 'You know something?' Jack asked as he turned back to the man.

'What would that be?'

'I'm not a twat but you're an ignorant xenophobic moron who should watch what he says in public.'

A small crowd began to gather as the man laughed and knocked Jack's Styrofoam cup from his hand. 'So do something about it, twat!'

'Deck him!' a young man in the crowd shouted.

'Just hold it right there,' another male voice said and both men turned to see a Police Community Support Officer in his late fifties joining them. 'What's going on, Wiggy?'

'This twat's asking for a good kicking,' Wiggy said.

'How many have you had already, Wiggy?' the PCSO asked. 'A couple.'

'Chummy is trying to pick a fight,' Jack said.

'Who are you?' the PCSO asked Jack. 'You're new round here.'

The crowd swelled around the stall; they were beginning to enjoy the unfolding scene.

'Just look at him,' Wiggy said. 'Some fuckin' old mod in his fuckin' parka. You seen his fuckin' scooter? Probably fuckin' nicked, covered in fuckin' chrome it is.'

'That's enough of that, Wiggy.'

'Are you going to caution him?' Jack asked.

'Who the hell do you think you are, giving me instructions?' the PCSO asked.

Wearily Jack fished out his wallet from the inside pocket of the parka, pulled out his warrant card and held it up for the PCSO to see. 'I'm detective inspector Jack Ranger - and you are?'

'He's never a fuckin' copper, looking like that,' Wiggy objected.

'I'm sorry, sir, genuine mistake, just trying to avoid any unnecessary ...' the PCSO stumbled to an embarrassed halt.

The crowd tittered.

'And you are?' Jack asked again

'PCSO Billy Swann, sir.'

'There's no need to sir me, Mr Swann, but perhaps you might warn Wiggy, or whatever his real name is, that if I catch him mouthing off xenophobic drivel about unwanted foreigners again I'll have to have more than a quiet word with him.'

'Who you fuckin' threatenin'?' Wiggy demanded.

'Shut up, Wiggy, for fuck's sake, shut up,' Billy said as Jack walked away.

'What's zeno fuckin' what mean, anyhow?' Wiggy asked.

Wiggy, Billy and the crowd watched as Jack waved as he drove away. Jack smiled; it wasn't the first, and it wouldn't be the last time his appearance had caused a degree of confusion to both fellow officers and the public at large. His clothes might be coming back into the mainstream of fashion but his haircut and sideburns were apparently things of the past – even Bradley had shaved his mutton chops off.

'Fuckin' hell,' Billy said. 'What's the world coming to with the likes of him in the force?'

'Fuckin' terrible,' Wiggy agreed.

The crowd dispersed; the entertainment was over.

'What time you due at the dog farm?'

'Not till six.'

'I'd ease up if you want to be sober by then,' Billy advised.

15.50

'They're off!' the commentator's voice blared from the televisions in the Tote Exacta Bar as the horses in the 'BDN Construction "Hands & Heels" Handicap Hurdle' set off.

'What've you got your money on, Reggie?' DCI Jeremy Fulsome asked Lord Haugham.

'Dormouse ... I've just noticed, for God's sake it's not even spelt right on the card.'

'I've got Bowie, always liked Bowie, the pop star, you know?' Penny Fulsome giggled.

'Shall we go and look through the window, Penny?' Fulsome asked his wife taking her arm to steady her as they walked away.

Chief Constable Sylvester joined Haugham as the Fulsomes stood in front of the floor to ceiling glass window that overlooked the Market Rasen course. 'My sister tiddly again?' he asked.

'Isn't Penny always tiddly?' Haugham replied.

'Come on Wily Fox!' Sylvester shouted at the television. 'I suppose we should go outside.'

'Too bloody cold. Do you always put your money on the favourite?'

'That's why I'm Chief Constable – always bet on the certainties.'

'I need better odds than that,' Haugham sighed.

Sylvester nodded at his sister and brother-in-law as they watched the race through the window. 'Just like them.'

'Pity he brought her along today ... I thought we'd said it was just us three so we could have a chat about the situation.'

'Quite,' Sylvester replied, 'but Penny threw a major wobbly ... leave it for now,' he whispered. Jeremy and Penny turned and walked back towards the other two men as she tore up her betting slip. 'Lost again?' Sylvester asked.

'It was ever thus,' Fulsome sighed.

Penny, close to tears, made an excuse and tottered off to the Ladies.

'She alright?' Haugham asked.

'Nothing a couple of grand wouldn't put right,' Fulsome said. 'Spends money like it was water.'

And drinks gin in the same way, Sylvester thought.

Rachel Robert's terraced house in Sheep Street in Louth was modest but comfortable; for a twenty-two year old she seemed to be doing rather well with her own house and no mortgage. Her parents had bought it for her when she was eighteen with part of the proceeds from the sale of their petrol station before they emigrated to Spain; they wanted her to have a roof over her head even though they thought her, as her father had put it, 'an idle fucker and a waste of space who'd never amount to anything'. Rachel was glad they'd gone to Spain; she hadn't seen them since and never wanted to see them ever again. For two years after their departure she lived up to her father's description, partied and slept around but she was lonely and, despite the efforts of her uncle Gil, was in a mess. Then one night she met Dimitri in "The Three Crowns" and he was gorgeous - dark, black hair like fresh gloss paint, tall, strong and with a deliciously odd and amusing accent; he'd only been in the country for a few months. Before she knew it she thought she was in love and, like a cuckoo, Dimitri moved in; her world was never the same again.

'Where have you put the thing?' Dimitri demanded.

'What thing?' Rachel asked as she stood in the doorway to the room where an enormous flat screen television was bolted to the wall. She put her hand to her face and felt the frantic nervous tic under her right eye and remembered that it hadn't always been there.

'The thing! The fucking thing that changes TV channels. That fucking thing!' he shouted as he pulled the cushions off the sofa opposite the TV and hurled them across the room. 'If you've fucking hidden it, I'll fucking kill you.'

'Why would I hide the remote?' *Why is he like this? What's happened to me?*

'If I miss kick off ...' Dimitri shouted lifting up the front of the sofa to look underneath. He let it crash back to the ground.

'It's there, on top of the telly where you put it last night so you wouldn't forget where you'd put it. You've forgotten because you were pissed.'

'So why wasn't I told this? Why have you been making me look for the thing when you knew where it was all the fucking time?'

'I haven't done anything wrong,' Rachel said as she backed quickly away but he moved too fast for her. She screamed as he grabbed her by the hair and dragged her across the room as if she was a rag doll, slapped her hard across the face then punched her in the stomach.

She sank to her knees gasping and groaning as he turned on the TV. 'See, it's fucking started. So now you do something useful, yes?' He pulled down his jeans and his Calvin Klein boxers, once again grabbed her by the hair as he sat down on the edge of the sofa; his penis was already rigid. 'Open mouth, bitch.'

'No! I won't!' she shouted and clamped her jaws together. She couldn't believe that he could grip her hair any harder but he did. She wanted to scream but kept her mouth tight shut.

'Stupid bitch,' he laughed. With the thumb and forefinger of his left hand he pinched her nose so hard that tears flowed down her cheeks.

She held her breath. He chuckled as he pinched her nose even harder. She couldn't breathe. She gave up. She opened her mouth. 'I don't want ...' she gasped.

He rammed his penis into her mouth and down her throat; she gagged, struggled. He held her head fast clamped in both hands as he drove his penis back and forth. She no longer knew which was the worse pain – his thumbs and fingers like steel needles drilling into her skull or the battering in her throat. He pulled out and ejaculated all over her face. 'Go wash, you look disgusting,' he ordered as he clothed himself. She fell in a heap on the floor. He kicked her. 'Go!'

She crawled away crying. In the doorway she dragged herself to her feet. 'I hate you,' she croaked through her badly bruised throat.

'You try to leave, I kill you. Understand? Now fuck off while I watch match.'

19.28

The drive from what had been his family home in Chiswick to "The Manor" in Berkshire had been easy; the traffic was always light around 19.00 on Sunday evenings. Ian Wain was pleased with himself. It was as had been promised: he had the rank of Commander in the Met and had been assured that if he played his cards right his next move would be to the role of Deputy Assistant Commissioner. Secretly, he hoped that if he really impressed with his zeal to their cause and went beyond the call of duty, let alone obligation, that he might even bypass this rank and move straight into the position of Assistant Commissioner – that was the benefit of having friends who knew exactly how to influence those in high places. He was required to visit The Manor once every eight weeks to report and to receive guidance on matters of importance. He had begun to regard these visits as a formality as it was rarely the case that any such guidance was given; usually he received a pat on the back and told to keep up the good work. On this occasion, however, he had information prior to his visit that caused him to be far less relaxed than usual so that as the tyres of his own car (using the Met's vehicle for such visits was out of the question) crunched on the gravel drive he found himself nervous and was irritated with himself. After he'd parked the car under the old coaching portico at the front of the great Elizabethan house a man emerged and drove his car to the stable yard as Ian went inside. As ever he was made to wait before his audience began. After the customary five minutes, a butler, who he knew as Mothmann, emerged from the double doors that led to the library and ushered him inside where he found, again as ever, the man he knew as Simpkin sitting at the end of the oak table that ran down the centre of the room. Simpkin rose awkwardly as a result of his chronic rheumatism,

and walked towards Ian who quickly moved forward to prevent the old man from walking too far. They shook hands but gently; Simpkin had warned Wain that a robust handshake was both unnecessary and painful; Wain didn't like the feel of the old man's gnarled and twisted hand held limply within his own.

'Are you well, my boy?' Simpkin asked. Wain confirmed that he was in the best of health; he didn't feel the need to say that his wife had left him taking their two children with her. 'Do sit down, Ian. Shall I ask Mothmann to bring you a hot drink?'

'No, thank you, sir. I'm not at all thirsty.' *But I couldn't half kill a good scotch right at this moment* he thought because even though this elderly man seemed to be his friend and mentor Ian knew that he was Simpkin's to command; more than this, Simpkin had the aura of a great character actor who could be heard in every corner of a theatre even though he spoke in a whisper.

'It's good to see you, Ian, and it's equally satisfying that you are doing so well; it pleases us all greatly.'

'Thank you, sir, but I wouldn't be where I am without your support.'

'That is true,' Simpkin agreed. 'Have you read the dossier we sent you?' Wain confirmed this. 'You have understood, digested it and subsequently destroyed it?'

'Indeed I have.'

'And do you have any progress to report?'

'As you know the matter falls outside my immediate responsibilities in commanding SCD9 and as I only received it two days ago I haven't as yet been able to ...'

'We realise,' Simpkin cut Wain short by abruptly raising his hand, 'that the matter doesn't come under your direct jurisdiction but it shouldn't be too difficult for you to subtly interrogate your peers under some pretence or other, now should it? Specialist Crime Directorates always have to support one another, do they not?' Wain remained silent. 'Good. Let

me be clear, Ian, we feel that a concerted effort is being made to usurp our position and power and, as must be obvious to you, we can't allow that and need to take the necessary remedial actions – the latter do not need to concern you. You have a week to find out what exactly is going on and who is behind it – we're not interested in the spear carriers but in the identity of the principal protagonist. I suggest you get to it, Ian, just as soon as you can – a week is not very long after all,' Simpkin concluded and shook a little hand bell that had been on the table in front of him. The library doors opened and Mothmann stood waiting to see Wain out.

Wain rose to his feet while Simpkin remained seated and the policeman knew his exact status as minion - it made him uncomfortable. Simpkin had never been this direct: Wain felt threatened but realised that had been the purpose of the meeting.

Monday 11th November

05.30

Dave Broadbeam drove the first of two dented white Ford Transits across the muddy and potholed unmade road; the van's headlights bounced crazily in the dark. The two vans pulled up in front of the two houses that comprised Falkingham Close. Shelley, Dave's wife, drove the second van and parked up behind him. He sounded his horn. Nothing happened. He put his hand on the horn and kept it there. Shelley did likewise. The front doors of the houses opened and "the labour", as the Broadbeams called them, reluctantly came out, their breath a microclimate of clouds in the freezing air. Dave got out of his van and Shelley from hers and opened the doors so the men could climb in.

'Come on, you fuckers, it's Monday – another day, another dollar,' Dave shouted.

The men talked and grumbled to each other.

'Why the fuck do they have to bleedin' jabber like that?' Shelley asked.

'Jabber, jabber, jabber - like fuckin' monkeys,' Dave laughed. 'Move it!' he shouted. 'We ain't got all fuckin' day,' he added as the men climbed inside the vans huddling together on the hard bench seats for warmth.

As the two vans pulled away Ilko leant forward from where he was sitting to speak. 'Mr Dave, you remember today I and Stepan are in greenhouses, yes? This we agreed, yes?'

'Like I said, it'll cost you being in the warm while the rest of the other fuckers are freezing their bollocks off in the fields.'

'We know this.' Ilko said. 'Ten pounds each. Do I pay you?'

'Who else you going to fuckin' pay?'

'Dimitri?' Ilko suggested.

'Ger off. I'll be taking it out of your pay packet at the end of the week,' Dave explained. 'Deducted at fuckin' source,' he laughed.

In the other van a similar conversation was taking place. Pavlo and Yuri were going to be in a bagging shed and they would pay a similar sum for the privilege of being warmer than the others. When "the labour" worked in factory units rather than the fields no such premium was paid to the Broadbeams. Neither Dave or Shelley realised that the men had agreed to share the surcharge they paid between themselves and the loss of wages would be equally shared so that each day at least four of them took turns in having a warmer day; the Broadbeams would have been horrified at such radical collective action - it smacked of old fashioned trade unionism.

The two vans went their separate ways once they were on the main road. Dave going due East while Shelley went South. Today they would pick Brussels sprouts, swedes, cauliflowers and celeriac - the sprouts would be the worst to harvest in the freezing cold. Ilko and Stepan were the last to be dropped off to be met by one of what Dave called his "management team", in this case Scrote, who was standing next to his pimped Peugeot 106 amidst the greenhouses that the two men were to clean.

'See you finally got it finished,' Dave observed, nodding at the car.

'Gem, innit?' Scrote replied. 'Where else is the trash working today?'

'Didn't you fuckin' get my text?' Dave asked and then noticed that Ilko and Stepan were just standing waiting to be told where to go. 'In there,' he said, pointing at a nearby greenhouse that was open at both ends and had all its roof windows wide open.

Stepan looked at Ilko who shrugged. 'I thought we were supposed to be inside working, yes?'

'You will be inside, you daft cunt,' Scrote said.

'It's open to weather - no heating,' Stepan persisted.

'What you think this is – fuckin' Butlins?' Dave laughed.

'There's hose pipes and brushes,' Scrote said. 'Start at the far end and work your way back 'ere.'

Ilko and Stepan went into the vast greenhouse stumbling in the dark searching for the tools they'd need to do their work.

'You was asking about your text,' Scrote said. 'We all got it last night when we was in the Three Crowns.'

'So Noddy, Capstick and Mouse know what they're supposed to be doing?' Dave asked.

'Harass the buggers cos they're slacking and Dimitri is right pissed off - he's been getting complaints.'

'Just make sure they know that if Dimitri cuts 'em loose they're well and truly fucked; nowhere to go, nowhere to live and all they got to look forward to is a detention centre before they get deported and they'll still owe Dimitri money. He'll get it from them even when they're back home; he's well connected is that cunt.'

'So he's not the big boss?'

'Nah, but he's a big enough boss for me.'

'Do the farmers know what the labour gets paid?' Scrote asked.

'Course they fuckin' don't, they think it's all above board, minimum wage and shit like that.'

'They must know, Dave; they ain't stupid.'

'Dimitri has told 'em that if they screw it up by blowin' the fuckin' whistle they're dead.'

'He's fuckin' scary is Dimitri.'

'He's alright,' Dave said, 'so long as you don't cross him. I need to get on. Remember, if they need a good kicking make sure they get it. Who they going to complain to, eh?'

06.42

Silvia Kinsey was keen to get to InVivo early; she wanted the necropsies out of the way to put her mind at rest as to

the cause of the dogs' deaths. As importantly, she hoped that by arriving just as dawn was breaking she might avoid a confrontation with the protesters at the gate. As she turned the corner before the entrance her heart sank; a brazier was already glowing and burning in the dark. Around it a group of six men and women, well wrapped against the cold in big padded coats and colourful hats that she felt were only suitable for children, were drinking something hot from steaming mugs. 'Shit!' she groaned. Within a few moments she was at a standstill at the entrance to the drive with the protesters preventing her moving forward. As always, she was tempted to run them down and would have undoubtedly done so if she could have got away with it. 'Do we really need to have the same conversation every day?' she asked through the open car window.

'Until you stop torturing innocent creatures, yes,' a small woman in her early sixties wearing a knitted hat replied.

'Don't you find it boring?' Kinsey asked. *What's that bloody stupid hat supposed to be? A dog or a cat?*

'Boring? No. Frustrating that you and your kind won't see sense, won't behave in a morally acceptable way, thinking you have some sort of god given right to torture animals in the pursuit of profit. Frustrating – yes. Boring? No.'

A younger woman wearing enormous zebra striped earmuffs poked her head through the window and asked, 'Would you like a cup of hot chocolate? It's not personal, you know.'

Of course it's bloody personal. 'No thanks. Unlike you lot I have work to do, so if you wouldn't mind will you all please get out of the way before I call the police – again!'

'And as you know,' the older woman said. 'There's nothing you or they can do. This is public land; it's not owned by anyone and until we commit an offence we're immovable.'

'And seeing as we have no intention of committing any offences you'll just have to get used to us until you stop,' the younger woman said.

'Oh, for god's sake,' Kinsey said, revved the engine and slowly eased the car forward, relentlessly pushing the protesters

aside. Once past them she floored the accelerator pedal, crashed the gears in anger and roared up the drive with tyres screaming.

Wiggy saw the beams of her headlights coming and was watching from his little office window as she screeched to a halt on the shingle car park. Kinsey stormed out of the car and disappeared round the corner out of sight. The sun wasn't up yet but the light was good, though cold and grey. He was about to sit back down and light another cigarette when she reappeared wielding a lump hammer. He switched on his iPhone, pressed the camera button, chose video and started to record. Wiggy's mouth opened in wonder as Kinsey pounded the bonnet of the Range Rover with the hammer and then, because she was so tall, its roof. She stood back and with a satisfied nod inspected the damage.

She's finally fuckin' lost it, he thought as she once more disappeared from view. He stopped recording, warmed his hands on the heat from the little fan heater, re-lighted his roll-up and waited - but not for long.

The door to the little room burst open and she stood in the doorway glaring down at him as he sat in a battered armchair. 'You're not allowed to smoke in here - how many times do I have to tell you?'

'I forgot.'

'You didn't bloody forget, Wiggy. There's even a bloody sign on the wall. You can read, can't you? No. You just think you can do what you like. It's not good enough and it's against the law.'

'Sorry, doc.'

'You're no more sorry than - I don't have time for this. I need you to get the dead animals from the cold room and barrow them up ready for me to take them in for their necropsies.'

'They've gone already.'

'What's that supposed to mean?'

'I incinerated them last night - it took hours there being six of them.'

For a moment Kinsey was so shocked she was incapable of speech. Finally all she could manage was, 'What did you

just say you've done?' She wished she still had the hammer; she would have smashed in his stupid head - she was glad she didn't have the hammer.

'Incinerated them like normal when we have dead dogs, like I'm supposed to do - it's on my job description, innit?'

'Didn't you get the note telling you to keep them under lock and key until I got here this morning?'

Wiggy frowned. 'There wasn't any note that I saw.'

'I explicitly told Frank to leave you a note.'

'Frank can be a bit forgetful - he is getting on a bit, forgets stuff.'

God save me from these inbred idiots. 'Do you have any idea how serious this is?' Wiggy shrugged. 'What we are researching ... *no, I can't tell him that, even he might understand*. I needed to find out why they died. Can you imagine how much pressure I'm under?'

'They looked healthy enough to me.'

'And you can tell just by looking at a dead dog if it's healthy or not can you? You're a wonder, Wiggy. We should hire you out - it would be much cheaper than having to pay the likes of me - sod the science! We have a clairvoyant night watchman.'

'I'm not a night watchman - I'm a duty officer.'

'Then why didn't you do your duty and do what you were asked to do?'

'I was never asked; there was no note. I burnt them all up and if they were sick they won't be infecting anyone now, will they?'

'You're not to tell anyone about this. Do you understand? If news of this gets out, we'll be closed down. So not a word,' Kinsey said. 'Or we'll both be out of a job.'

'I'm good at keeping secrets, I am ... but won't the rest of your team wonder what happened to those dogs?'

'You will say they were collected for use in our unit in Devon - I will confirm this.'

'So you want me to be part of a cover up?'

'We're covering up your mistake, Wiggy, and that way you'll still be in a job, won't you?'

'The secret is safe with me,' Wiggy said with a broad smile.

Back out in the fresh air Kinsey wanted to scream. He hadn't a clue what he'd done. She took out her mobile phone and tapped in numbers. 'Yes, this is Dr Kinsey from InVivo ... Yes the protesters ... I know that ... They went too far today and attacked my car with a hammer - I want to press charges ... How long will it take to get someone up here? ... That long? ... Of course I'll be here, it's where I work!'

Wiggy was surprised when Kinsey returned to his room. 'I need you to witness what's been done to my Range Rover.'

Outside she showed Wiggy the damage and explained that the police might need him to corroborate the fact that her car had arrived in this condition.

'You want me to say that this car of yours was like this when you arrived here this morning and it was them buggers down at the gate what done it?' Wiggy asked finding it hard to restrain a smile as he thought of what he had on the phone in his pocket.

'Yes.'

'But you don't want me to say nothing about the dead dogs if anyone asks?'

'That's right, Wiggy.'

'I was thinking that I might be due an increase to my pay rate about now, doc. What do you think?'

'I'll have a word with HR.'

'Cheers,' Wiggy said.

10.29

Jack started going to Gil Robert's café when he was a teenager; it was the one place in Louth where you could sit for a couple of hours over a coffee, not be hassled and, most importantly, listen to the very best music there was – not from

a jukebox but from the record turntable that was behind the counter and the vast collection of vinyl albums shelved all along one wall. Gil had been in a band back in the day but after an accident had been confined to a wheelchair for all the years Jack had known him. He became a kind of surrogate father to Jack in those times when someone older is needed who is not a parent, someone who will tell the truth about the world and all that therein is.

The bell behind the door tinkled just as it always had as Jack went in. Gil looked up from his place beside the counter and smiled. 'So it's true, you're back. I wondered how long you'd leave it before coming to say hello. Did I do something to offend?'

'Of course not,' Jack replied as he bent down and gave Gil a big hug. 'It's a bit quiet in here, isn't it?' he asked and sat down on a chair at the table next to Gil.

'All in school, and anyway they've all got iPods, iPads, MP3 players, headphones – they don't need to come in here for music. They have it wherever they want it, whenever they want it. I only get the odd old bastard like you in here these days. Coffee?'

'Please – and less of the old.'

'Still black, no sugar?' Jack nodded. 'Knocking on forty though, aren't you?'

'You do know we've known each other since I was fourteen? That's twenty-six years. What shall we have? What's suitable for half past ten of a Monday morning?'

'You choose,' Gil said as he worked the vintage Gaggia coffee machine.

The machine hissed and huffed while Jack stood making his selection. 'Okay if I put it on or do you want to do it?'

'I started letting you put them on when you turned sixteen - why would it be different now?'

Jack lowered the stylus onto track two.

'How did I know you'd choose "Them"? ' Gil asked. 'You were only three when that first came out.'

'Almost the best thing Van the Man ever did.

Van Morrison sang, "Call it stormy Monday, Lord, but Tuesday's just as bad ..."

'It's good to see you, Jack. I tried to write but I couldn't find the words – I was only ever a guitar player, not much of a writer.'

'It's strange being back.'

'How are you coping?'

Jack sipped his coffee and sighed with satisfaction. 'No one makes coffee like this, no one.'

'It's the machine, not me – so answer the question.'

'Harder than I thought it would be. It was tough stepping down a notch and the culture here, in the force I mean, it's kinda different from the Met.'

Gil laughed. 'You mean you'd forgotten that Louth was on another planet?'

'Not quite ... but somehow ... I'd expected that things would have moved on. Wainstock is still the super and he's okay ... but things aren't right, Gil.'

'He's got a right prick as his DCI.'

'Fulsome? Yeah, and he's my so-called line manager – we gave up calling people line managers in the Met years ago – but here they think it's bang up to date. What makes you say he's a right prick?'

'It's his manner mostly; struts round like he's cock of the walk just because he married Sylvester's sister, and I tell you what, when your old mate Wainstock finally hands in his truncheon it'll be Fulsome who takes over as Chief Superintendent.'

'It would have to be advertised.'

Gil laughed. 'Oh, yeah?'

'So you don't like him because he's stuck up?'

'No, it's more than that.'

'Like what?' Jack asked.

'Just rumours ... keeping his eyes shut and backhanders.'

'Bloody great.'

'Fulsome getting to you?'

'No, I can handle creeps like him. It's not the job either; that's what I thought it would be, what I wanted it to be, trivial, mundane. No, it's the reality of coming back to the cottage after what happened to Mum and Dad.' Jack's mobile phone started to ring. He answered. 'Hi. Clare ... Again? ... They want me up there this time? ... Okay. Sure. I'll be back at the station within fifteen minutes. Yeah, okay, thanks.' He ended the call. 'That was Clare, my sergeant. She's alright, young, like I was, a graduate entrant – I think she finds it a bit prehistoric round here. What do you know about InVivo?'

'The protesters or the dog farm?'

'Both.'

'The protesters are okay, got their hearts in the right place and stubborn as hell – I like them and I suspect you think they may have a point.' Jack gave a wry smile. 'As to the Research Centre? It's pretty cloak and dagger stuff up there. Even some of the low life that work there don't really understand what they're doing and I'm not sure I do either. Wasn't your Anastasiya involved with that sort of thing - using animals for research?'

'Yes, she was. Still is ... so far as I know.' Jack finished his coffee. 'I'd better go and see what's going on otherwise the fulsome Fulsome will be on my back. Isn't there a Johnny Cash song about Fulsome?'

'That's Folsom not Fulsome.'

'Sounds the same,' Jack said as he stood up to leave.

'I'm sorry about what happened, Jack. Real tragedy, there, boy.'

'Thanks, Gil.'

'You know where I am, sitting here waiting for customers.'

'Do us a favour, will you? I need someone to make some casement windows for me; have a think, eh? I'll pop in later in the week ... and, sorry, I should have asked how's that niece of yours?'

'Rachel? Don't ask.'

'Okay, but sharing the load is a two-way street, Gil, and I owe you. See you, mate.'

11.02

While James Scrench, the senior partner in Scrench, Scrench, Matwit and Cassidy, Solicitors, and his client, Lord Reginald Haugham, had stood in his office observing the two-minute silence Scrench was annoyed that his own respect for “the fallen” had been disrupted by the attitude of his client; Reginald Haugham’s father had been a much easier person to deal with, a man of probity who took his responsibilities, and inheritance, seriously.

‘Come on,’ Haugham said, ‘let’s get on with it; bloody pointless anyway standing in silence.’

‘Reggie, don’t get so irritated. I really am trying to understand what you want me to do.’ Scrench often wondered why he didn’t hand Reggie over to one of the other partners, perhaps even his son who had recently joined the practice but he couldn’t be that unkind; at the age of nearly eighty James Scrench could do without the aggravation Haugham always provided.

‘I want that bloody man Ranger out of there.’

‘You know as well as I do that the transfer of the land and the cottage to the Ranger family was done legally and completely above board when it was carried out in 1919. There are no legal grounds whatsoever on which the ownership of the property can be contested.’

‘My grandfather was not of sound mind; he let sentiment rule his head.’

‘If that was the case your father should have done something about it at the time and as far as I can remember he never had a moment’s doubt about it himself. It just won’t wash, Reggie. It won’t wash at all.’

‘I can’t stand having that bloody man and his caravan right in the middle of my land.’

‘Why ever not? I would have thought it was a bit of an advantage – bit like having a scarecrow to frighten off the birds – you’ve got a copper to keep the poachers away. In any case,

DI Ranger was apparently very highly regarded when he was at the Met – a rising star by all accounts – until a family tragedy brought him low. That’s apparently why he came back – to regroup.’

‘Well, he can bloody well regroup somewhere else other than on my land.’

Scrench sighed wearily. ‘Look, Reggie, I must be blunt. It’s my professional duty. In your current circumstances wouldn’t we be better trying to find a way out of your financial difficulties rather than wasting your time on ...’

‘For god’s sake, James,’ Haugham interrupted, ‘it’s only cash flow, that’s all. My investment will pay off. Pharmaceuticals are the thing.’

‘Your creditors won’t wait forever.’

‘Look, James, this has to be confidential, just you and me.’

Scrench frowned. ‘Everything between us is confidential.’

‘What I’m going to tell you ... I don’t want Howard knowing just now and I most certainly don’t want my wife to get to hear of it.’

‘I doubt her ladyship would understand anyway unless there’s been a dramatic improvement in her mental health. Your son and heir is another matter; he needs to be carefully considered.’

‘I’m the best judge of that.’

‘What are you proposing, Reggie? Or is it a fait accompli?’

Haugham hesitated for a moment. ‘I’ve been made an offer for the estate.’

‘Really? By whom?’

‘A man called Victor Plushenko – he’s an entrepreneur, investing in a lot of estates right across the country, pumping in investment like there was no tomorrow.’

‘Why?’

Haugham looked perplexed. ‘Bit of an Anglophile despite being a Ukrainian ... maybe he believes it will make him respectable.’

‘Does that mean he isn’t respectable at the moment?’ Srench asked.

‘Status would perhaps be a better word – a bit like owning a premiership football club.’

Srench grunted with displeasure. ‘I’d be very careful, Reggie. What’s the name of his company? If there’s any chance of a sale we need to do due diligence. I presume he’s not a UK citizen?’

‘Quite frankly, James – does it matter?’

‘That’s a bit rich coming from you, don’t you think?’

‘I’ll keep my title; it’s hereditary.’

‘And so is the land – it should go to Howard after you’re gone.’

‘He’ll have the money instead.’

‘I think he might prefer the land – money tends to slip through one’s fingers, whereas land tends to stay put – if it’s nourished and cherished.’

Haugham stood up. ‘You know sometimes, James, you can be overly pompous.’

‘At the very least don’t sign anything until you’ve let me see it,’ Srench advised.

11.35

Clare parked the grey Skoda Octavia in the muddy pull-in by the wood where people walked their dogs just down the road from the entrance to InVivo. Jack, protected from the cold by his parka and with the fur-lined hood pulled over his head, joined the protesters at their brazier. ‘Brass monkey weather,’ he said. ‘Any space for another near the fire?’

‘Who are you?’ the woman wearing the knitted animal hat asked.

‘Detective Inspector Jack Ranger. We’ve had a complaint.’

‘You’re a copper?’ the younger woman wearing the zebra striped ear warmers asked. ‘You don’t look like one not dressed in that old parka. Are those Northern Soul badges on the sleeve?’

‘They are.’

‘The next thing you’ll be saying you ride a Lambretta,’ she continued.

‘I do.’

‘Come on what are you really?’

‘He’s a police officer,’ Clare said as she joined them. ‘And so am I – Sergeant Farmer. Shall we get on?’

‘Sergeant farmer Giles, I suppose?’ a man in his early twenties asked.

‘Ra, stop being a dick,’ the woman with the ear warmers said.

Jack and Clare displayed their warrant cards.

A middle-aged woman wearing a North Face ankle length purple padded coat joined in. ‘You must admit you look more like one of us than one of them.’

‘Tell you what,’ Jack said with a big smile, ‘I’ll put my prejudices on hold if you’ll do the same. I’m not one of you and I’m not one of them. I’m an officer of the law here to investigate an accusation of criminal damage. I’m not making any assumptions about guilt or innocence. I’ve got an open mind so shall we press on as it’s bloody freezing out here?’

‘There’s no need to swear,’ the woman in the animal hat said.

‘Is it just the four of you who’ve been picketing this morning?’ Clare asked.

‘No,’ the woman in the long coat replied, ‘the other two have gone to do the shopping. What are we supposed to have done?’

‘Attacked Dr Kinsey’s car with a hammer when she arrived for work this morning,’ Clare replied.

‘She’s not right in the head, poor woman,’ Ra said. ‘I’ve been here for six months off and on and she gets worse every day. I’m no doctor but I’d say she’s in the middle of a major psychological crisis; she’s cracking up in a big way.’

'Might that have anything to do with the harassment she experiences every time she goes in and out of here?' Clare asked.

'It might,' the woman in the animal hat agreed. 'But it might also have something to do with what they're doing to defenceless animals who've done no harm to anyone and who are being abused for profit.'

Long coat was next in. 'Our protest is passive and peaceful. We block the entrance, enquire of the driver if she or he knows what is being done at InVivo and then when they want to pass we move aside. There are no circumstances when we would be violent towards anyone involved with this dreadful place.'

'They have no shame ... do you know what in vivo means?' ear warmers asked.

'Yes,' Jack sighed. 'Processes, experiments carried out on living things.'

'Horrendous,' ear warmers said.

'We'll need to take your names and addresses when we come back after we've been to speak to Dr Kinsey,' Jack said. 'In the meantime, keep warm and when the others come back please ask them to stay put here. Can you get our car please, Clare?'

'Did you say she said we attacked her car with a hammer?' ear warmers asked.

'Yeah.'

'I offered her hot chocolate this morning,' ear warmers said. 'She wouldn't take it.'

'We have a mallet for the tent pegs but we don't have a hammer,' long coat added.

'Sit tight while I go and have a word,' Jack said as Clare pulled up in the unmarked police car. As they drove up the drive Jack asked, 'Have you met the good doctor?'

'No, but I've seen her in the station – she has the reputation of being a serial complainer. She's almost as tall as you are but haughty and really up tight.'

'Can't wait to meet her. So why are we dealing with it instead of uniforms?' Jack asked.

'I think the CC regards the research centre as an asset rather than a liability.'

'And he'll have had a word with Fulsome, bypassing the super. So he's sending a DI and a DS on a fool's errand?'

'I thought you said you were going to be objective, Jack?'

'I am, but can you really see that lot attacking a car with a hammer? I can't, even if they had one.'

'You don't know they haven't got a hammer,' Clare said.

'If they did they'll have got rid of it by now – but I can't see that being the case either.'

'Why would Fulsome go behind the super's back?'

'Because he's a loathsome arse licking shite.'

'It's a joy to work with someone so objective,' Clare laughed.

'Well, he is,' Jack chuckled. 'Probably a mangy bendy toy fan.'

'A what?'

'Barry Manilow fan.' A few minutes later they pulled up in the car park next to Kinsey's Range Rover and got out. 'It looks just like a concentration camp,' Jack said.

'Someone certainly had a go at her car; just look at it,' Clare said as she ran her hand over the Range Rover's battered bonnet. She took out her phone and proceeded to photograph the damage.

'I'll photo the roof – you won't be able to get up there unless you stand on the sill with the door open,' Jack said and Clare handed him her phone. 'Job done. The dogs are quiet today, poor buggers,' Jack observed as they followed the signs to Reception where they identified themselves, asked for Dr Kinsey, and were shown to her office.

With introductions over Kinsey got straight to the point; there was no offer of a hot drink or any other welcoming gesture. 'I take it you've seen my car, seen what they did to it?'

'Yes, doctor, we've seen your car. Perhaps you'd like to take us through what happened this morning? Sergeant Farmer will take notes,' Jack said.

‘Of course. Finally being taken seriously is a step in the right direction,’ Kinsey said. Jack and Clare waited silently for her to begin. ‘You should know that I’ve complained directly to the Chief Constable?’

Jack smiled and nodded encouragement. *Maybe just like that young guy said, you’re at the end of your tether?*

‘There were things I wanted to get done so I was really early today ... that’s not true. To be honest I was early because I hoped that they’d all still be in their bloody tents in their sleeping bags out of harm’s way but oh no, they were there just the same as they always are. Do you know how long I’ve been running the gauntlet of their abuse? Twice a day, sometimes more often than that if I have to go out during the day. Do you know how long they’ve been threatening me? No? Well I’ll tell you. Eighteen months, eighteen months of constant intimidation. And this morning was the final straw. I’ve seen it coming for months. All that peaceful protest nonsense – they’re no more peaceful than fly. They’re burnt up with hate. I suppose you’ve spoken to them already? You couldn’t get in if you hadn’t. The woman wearing the bloody stupid hat thing with ears – she’s the ringleader, I think – she just came at the car wielding this big hammer and started hitting my car – without warning, just like that. I thought she was going to kill me. I just sat there terrified and then when she looked as if she was going to bash in the windows I put my foot down and got out of there as fast as I could.’

‘She attacked your Range Rover without warning?’ Clare asked.

‘That’s what I just said, didn’t I?’

‘So just to be clear,’ Clare continued, ‘the older woman with the funny hat, as you describe it, pounded the vehicle all over the bonnet and the roof with a hammer?’

‘Yes!’

‘Isn’t she a bit short?’ Jack asked.

‘What do you mean – short? Short of what?’

‘Height. Given her height I’d say she’d struggle to get anywhere near the roof of your car; it’s quite a high vehicle, she’d have needed the door to be open and have stood on your seats to have reached the roof. Perhaps she handed the hammer to someone else, someone taller, perhaps?’ Jack suggested.

For a moment Kinsey looked confused. ‘I was frightened. I might not have been seeing things clearly – it’s quite possible she handed the hammer to someone else – that young man with a stud in his nose; he’s tall, it could have been him.’

Jack and Clare let the ensuing silence hang until finally Clare said, ‘It’s a pity there were no witnesses to the incident apart from the alleged perpetrators.’

‘I do have a witness – not of the event but of what my car looked like when I finally got here,’ Kinsey said.

‘That’s interesting. He works here?’ Kinsey nodded. ‘Could you send someone for him?’ Clare asked.

‘I’ll go and fetch him,’ Kinsey said.

‘Surely you could just call someone to do that?’ Clare asked.

‘No, I’ll get him myself,’ Kinsey said and left the room.

‘Just wait,’ Jack said to Clare. ‘Not a word.’ He and Clare waited in silence until Kinsey opened the door and brought Wiggy into her office.

Jack laughed. ‘So, we meet again.’

‘You’re that copper from yesterday,’ Wiggy said, obviously shocked.

‘Got it in one.’

‘You two have already met?’ Kinsey asked.

‘It’s not relevant to this enquiry,’ Jack answered.

‘Your full name please,’ Clare said.

‘Norbert Wiggles, but they all calls us, Wiggy.’

‘I wonder why,’ Jack murmured. ‘And what do you do here?’

Kinsey sat down behind her desk. ‘He’s one of our duty managers – he was on nights so was here when I arrived this morning, I asked him to stay until you arrived,’ she explained.

Jack and Clare remained in their seats as Wiggy stood uncomfortably shifting from foot to foot. 'Don't I get to sit down?' he asked.

'We won't keep you long,' Clare said. 'Can you tell us what happened this morning?'

'What do you mean, what happened this morning?' Wiggy asked.

'I told the officers that you saw me arrive in the car park and would be able to confirm that my car had been attacked with a hammer before I arrived here,' Kinsey said.

'I don't know if it was an hammer, do I? Could have been anything round, like.'

'But you can confirm that when you saw Dr Kinsey's car it was already damaged?' Clare asked.

'Yeah, I can do that.'

'That's all for now. You can go,' Jack said.

'That it? Okay, I'm off shift now, anyhow. Off home for some kip,' Wiggy said and winked conspicuously at Kinsey who looked distinctly unimpressed.

'If we need to speak with you again and take a statement we can get your address from Dr Kinsey. Thank you for your help,' Clare said.

After the door closed behind him Jack asked, 'Does he always wink at you like that?'

'I don't know what's wrong with the man – perhaps he was just currying favour or thinking that he was being helpful to me and that ... of course I don't bloody know why the idiot winked at me.'

'A lunch box short of a sandwich, is he?' Jack chuckled.

'That's a quaint turn of phrase, inspector,' Kinsey said. 'How do you know him?'

'We met at a car boot sale yesterday – but as I said, it's not relevant.'

'If you say so. Can I ask what you're going to do about my complaint? I want to be able to tell Richard what a good job you've done.'

'Dr Kinsey,' Jack said. 'You can tell the Chief Constable what you like; it'll make no difference to the quality of our investigation. Okay? Simple question – do you want to persist with your allegations of criminal damage against the animal rights activists?'

'Of course I do.'

'Okay, in that case Sergeant Farmer will write up her notes and when she's done you can come down to the station to make a formal statement or use her notes as the basis of your statement.'

'When will that be?' Kinsey asked. 'I have a busy day in front of me.'

'Criminal damage is a serious offence, doctor,' Jack said. 'We'll call you when we're ready. In the meantime we'll go and see if we can find that hammer.'

As Clare drove them back down the drive to the entrance Jack said, 'She's a liar and so is that excuse for a human being, Wiggy. But let's not talk about him right now.'

'I recognised him - he has form. Minor stuff, handling worthless stolen goods, poaching, drunk and disorderly – you know the sort of thing.'

'Pillar of the community and the good doctor's witness – nice.'

'What did he actually witness?' Clare asked.

'Bugger all.'

'Are we really going to search their tents looking for the hammer?' Clare asked.

'We are, because if we don't she'll get away with wasting police time and I'm not letting her away with that.'

An hour and a half later Jack and Clare arrived back at the station; they hadn't found a hammer but they had been accused of police harassment and been assured that a complaint would

be made; Jack told them he had every sympathy with that and suggested they get their complaint in as soon as possible.

As they walked into the building the first person they met was DCI Jeremy Fulsome. 'You've taken your time. Does it take that long to verify a complaint against a bunch of saboteurs?'

'Have I missed something, boss? Have Al Qaeda made a full frontal assault on Pound Stretcher again? Which saboteurs were you referring to, boss?'

Clare admired the way Jack could make "boss" sound like an obscenity; it was clear Fulsome didn't share her admiration.

'I'm referring to the do-gooders encamped outside InVivo. I'm expecting that Sylvia's complaint will be substantiated and we can finally get them removed.'

'They're not saboteurs and being a so-called do-gooder isn't yet a criminal offence; they're citizens exercising their democratic rights of peaceful protest against something they passionately disagree with,' Jack said.

'I want them gone. They do our image no good at all. We can't afford to lose another business because they've been hounded out of the county.'

'Who else has been hounded out of the county?'

'Listen, Inspector, in case you've forgotten you report to me so I suggest you have a full report on my desk this afternoon so that I can report back to the Chief Constable that we're making progress with clearing up this mess.'

'Not a problem, boss. You'll have a full report by this afternoon. Dr Kinsey, one of her employees, Norbert Wiggles, along with the animal rights activists will all be here making their statements. After that it'll be up to Chief Superintendent Wainstock if he wants to pass it over to the Crown Prosecution Service – it's not up to the Chief Constable, not unless he intends to sack him.'

'You're impertinent, Ranger.'

'But accurate. Come on, sergeant we have work to do - no time to stand and gossip no matter how much fun it may be.'

'You're going to be on a disciplinary for this, Ranger,' Fulsome said but Jack had already turned his back and was walking away, followed by Clare. 'Did you hear me?' he shouted at Jack's back.

'I bet you're chuffed to beans you came back for crap like this,' Clare said as they walked down the corridor.

'People try to put us down,' Jack quietly sang, 'Just because we get around.'

'Talkin' about my generation,' Clare added with a laugh as they entered their shared office.

'Didn't know you were a "Who" fan.'

'Who said I was?'

'Enough,' Jack laughed. 'We have yet another bicycle theft to investigate and there's no Vittorio to help us.'

'It's a great film, "Bicycle Thieves".'

'You have hidden depths, sergeant,' Jack said as he turned on his computer.

Clare smiled; finally she was breaking down that steel drum within which Jack seemed to be hiding. *Then again*, she thought, *perhaps that wasn't flirting at all but just friendly banter?*

14.35

Harold Bentosh's butcher's van drove up the road between the greenhouses and parked next to the one in which Ilko and Stepan were busy cleaning and disinfecting. Bentosh parped the van's horn to draw attention to his arrival and waited. The two men stopped working: any excuse good enough for a rest. The butcher climbed out of the van, opening its rear doors as Ilko and Stepan came towards him.

'Afternoon, lads,' Bentosh said, all jolly bustle. 'Got a treat for you today.'

'How you know we are here?'

'Saw Scrote in the pub lunchtime – said where you was,' Bentosh replied. 'Got something special for you.'

'You always say special, but meat you sell us is when sell by day past.' Ilko said.

'Sell by dates are bollocks, mate, never had them in the old days and no one died then, did they, eh?'

'But you sell to us because no one else buys,' Stepan added.

'Has any of it been no good?'

'But it will not sell in shop,' Ilko added.

'Waste not, want not – but today I've got something really special.'

'What?' Stepan asked nodding at the large white plastic tray that contained meat encased in plastic bags.

'Take a look at this,' Bentosh said, pulling on his blue food handling gloves, opening one of the bags and lifting out a medium sized steak. 'Smell this,' he suggested, lifting up the meat so that the men could easily smell it without bending over.

'Is what meat?' Ilko asked.

'Does it smell good?'

'It smells like meat,' Ilko said. 'Its colour is different. What is it?'

'Venison, mate. Fucking venison, wonderful, best meat there is.'

'Venison is expensive meat. How can we afford this? How come you sell to us if so good?' Stepan asked.

Bentosh smiled. 'Like you mate, it's illegal, stolen, can't be sold in my shop. It's not traceable, mind, so when it came my way I thought to myself I know who might be interested in this – you lot, bit of a treat. I'll be havin' some myself tonight and that's for certain. Just can't sell it legal like.'

'Illegal meat like we are illegal meat,' Ilko said. 'This English joke?'

'Cheer up, mate. This is a treat. If I can't sell it to you I can't sell it to no one. It needs getting rid of before I get caught handling it and that's the truth.'

'The venison is the good meat; I know this,' Stepan said. 'Expensive.'

'How much?' Ilko asked.

Bentosh sighed, blew air out from between pursed lips. 'Thirty quid.'

'Too much,' Ilko said, doing the calculation in his head; nineteen men would share the price. 'Ten.'

'Get off,' Bentosh said putting the meat back in the bag.

'Fifteen,' Stepan said.

'Get real, son,' Bentosh said.

'Twenty, for tray full,' Ilko said.

Bentosh shrugged. 'You drive a hard bargain ... yeah, why not?'

They loaded the meat into plastic carrier bags and as Bentosh drove away he smirked.

'Bargain!' Stepan said as he high-fived his friend.

'We'll have party,' Ilko said as they carried the bags into the greenhouse.

'Eat and make merry – live like kings – we'll get that bastard Dave to stop on the way home and buy some drink from the Spar,' Stepan said, 'or steal it if I get lucky while you keep the old man busy.'

'A proper party,' Ilko added.

16.10

Kinsey and Wiggy had signed their statements, Clare was finishing off those made by the InVivo protesters and Jack had finished his report and had delivered two copies – one to Fulsome and the other to Chief Superintendent Wainstock. His advice was that the complaint made by Kinsey was unfounded and contained the recommendation that she and Wiggy be charged with wasting police time. Fed up to his back teeth he left the police station and walked through the dark streets.

Are those last year's Christmas lights or this year's? He opened the door to Gil's café; the bell jingled, there were no customers and no music played.

'Bloody hell, Jack, twice in one day; GPS on the blink, is it?' Gil asked, saw the look on Jack's face and added, 'Coffee?'

'Do you still have that bottle of vodka hidden at the back of the fridge?'

'I stopped – disabled enough.'

'A double espresso would be grand,' Jack sighed as he sat down. 'You know someone nickname of Wiggy?'

'That tosser? What about him? Works at the dog farm?'

'That's him.'

'Hang on,' Gil said as the Gaggia steamed and spluttered. With the coffee dispensed Gil rolled his wheelchair across to where Jack sat and put the cup on the table next to him. 'So what about Wiggy?'

'It would seem that Dr Sylvia Kinsey – you know who I mean?' Gil nodded. 'She and Wiggy have made a set of false accusations against the animal rights folks. To be accurate, she's made a complaint and Wiggy is backing her up – they seem unlikely accomplices to me.'

'Wiggy is a chancer, a no good waste of space; he'd sell his own mother down the river – lucky for her she's long dead. The good doctor has a reputation in the town ... in old money she'd be called a firebrand. Loses her temper at the drop of a hat. You know the Cheese Shop on Eastgate? Great little place. The other month she was in there, misread the price per kilo and when they told her how much the bill was she hit the roof, accused them of trying to cheat her and stormed out of the shop without the cheese and with no hope of ever going back in there again.'

'Acts on impulse,' Jack mused.

'What's she accused them of?'

'Beating the shit out of her Range Rover with a hammer. I reckon she did it herself but that doesn't explain why this Wiggy character is backing her up.'

'She'll have made it worth his while.'

'I've recommended that they both be charged with wasting police time – but that'll come to nothing given the Chief Constable's feelings about InVivo,' Jack said.

Gil was about to comment when the bell above the café door jangled and Rachel came in. 'What's up, love?' Gil asked.

'Thought I'd say hello and have a latte, Uncle Gil,' she said in a whisper.

'What's the matter?'

'Sore throat; laryngitis. Can't speak.'

'Sit yourself down. This is Jack. Jack, this is my niece, Rachel.'

Seeing the anxious look on Gil's face, Jack stood up. 'I'll do the coffee. I don't think I've forgotten how. You talk to your niece.'

'Thanks,' Gil said as he rolled his wheelchair next to Rachel's chair and put an arm around her shoulders. 'That bastard been at you again?' She shook her head and kept her face turned away from her uncle. 'There's no point trying to hide; I saw the bruising when you came in.'

'There's nowhere to hide,' she managed to say in a barely audible croak.

'You've got to get out of there, love.'

'But it's my place. I want him out – why should I have to go? How am I going to make him leave?'

'I don't know, but until I do, you need to get out of there.'

'Where would I go?'

'Like I've said before, here, my place upstairs, it's big enough. You'd be safe here.'

'But you wouldn't be. You don't know what he's like.'

Jack brought Rachel her coffee. 'Sorry to butt in but I couldn't help overhearing ... if it's a case of domestic violence you can bring charges.'

Rachel tried to laugh but it was only a cackle. 'He'd kill me. He's told me he will.'

'Jack, what can you do? He's a policeman,' Gil explained to Rachel as the door to the café opened and Dimitri sauntered in.

'Rachie, girl, you're here with the uncle. I was worried and looking for you all over the town,' Dimitri said. 'You should not be wandering off when you have the bad throat.'

'Or with a bruised face,' Gil added.

'She fell. She was drunk.'

'Like fuck she was,' Gil said.

'Don't make trouble, uncle. I'll go now,' she croaked.

'You're not the cause of the trouble – that bastard is!' Gil bellowed pointing at Dimitri and rolling the footrest of his chair into Dimitri's shins.

Rachel stood up. 'Come on, Dimitri, we should go.'

'Listen cripple, I break your fucking arms to match your fucked legs; you want that?'

Jack pushed himself between Gil and Dimitri and eased Gil's chair backwards with his heel. 'I'm going to say this once. Don't ever threaten my friend and his family because if you do, not only will I arrest you, but I will also beat the living shit out of you. Understood?'

'You think me pushover?'

'You're a bully and a prick. As to whether you're a pushover it's your call,' Jack said. 'So fucking go for it.'

Rachel tugged at Dimitri's coat sleeve. 'Please don't, let's go. Please? He's police.'

Dimitri pushed her aside. 'You think I'm afraid of this shit?' he asked her.

'I mean it, Dimitri,' Jack said. 'You hurt her again - I'll come for you and then I'll find out whether you're not just a prick but a pushover as well.'

'Police are shit!' Dimitri said and spat on the floor.

Rachel followed him out of the door; she didn't dare look back.

'That went well,' Jack said.

'Is there anything you can do?' Gil asked.

'Give me her address and I'll get the PCSOs to keep an eye and ear open and see if I can get the odd patrol car to trundle past from time to time.'

'He's bad, that one.'

'Yeah, the perfect end to a perfect Monday. I'm going home to make myself some chilli pancakes and some salad washed down with a bottle of Rioja – possibly two. Look, Gil, I'll do what I can and you know you can call me anytime.'

18.25

Aneta was tall for fifteen and with skilfully applied make-up and a figure more mature than her years easily looked the twenty year old she claimed to be. She, like her brother Ilko, had been imported in the same shipment as Bohdanna, Marina, Stepan, Pavlo, Yuri and all the other men who lived in Falkingham Close. The three women thought themselves lucky as they mostly worked indoors at Haugham Hall; the comparative warmth in winter almost made up for the paucity of their wages. Aneta was a housemaid, a drudge, working under the intimidating supervision of Scrote's elder sister, Tammy, who was Haugham's so-called housekeeper.

Bohdanna, Marina and Aneta were in one of the storerooms surrounding the stable yard packing free-range eggs for the market – on another day it might be jars of local honey and on another cheap imported baubles for Christmas to be sold in the Estate's farm shop. 'Aneta!' Tammy shouted from the doorway. 'It's half six - time for his lordship's fuckin' tipple before dinner.'

'Why can't he get his own drink?' Aneta asked.

'Because he's the lord of the fuckin' manor and you're his skivvy – it doesn't take much doing taking in a glass of whisky, does it?'

'You speak different when you speak to him than when you speak to me,' Aneta said.

'To her we're rubbish, Aneta,' Bohdanna said in English.
'Got it in fuckin' one,' Tammy laughed.

Beyond the heavy drapes drawn across the double doors of Haugham's study lay the west terrace and beyond that the land, his land, stretching as far as the eye could see. He opened the curtains and looked out into darkness. It was a cold night with low cloud – nothing stirred and now that the doors were double-glazed no sound came from outside. *Why does that bloody lawyer always get on his high horse*, he wondered. *It's my land and I'll bloody well do what I like with it*. He closed the curtains. Turning, he looked at the room; he liked it. Originally it had been his grandfather's small library but now the shelves within the yew glass fronted cabinets were half empty; Haugham had sold the most valuable volumes immediately after his father's death despite promising not to do so; the needs of the living were more important than those of the dead; the needs of his bookmaker more urgent yet. In the circumstances he decided that the room was better called a study rather than a library. He admired himself in the Georgian mirror mounted over the ersatz Adam fireplace in which a log fire burned. *Not bad*, he thought, *for a man in my early sixties, not too much of a belly, can still just about see the old todger when I look down and with all my own hair*. The computer on the desk made the noise it always made when a new email arrived. He'd meant to ask Howard, his son, who had set up the notification – a claxon - to change it to something more suited to a country gentleman but had never got round to it. Sitting at the desk he opened the email; it was from Plushenko – he read it carefully. Though Plushenko never committed himself to anything over such an insecure medium as an email it looked as if the sale of the estate was going to go ahead. He closed the email, moved the mouse, clicked on another icon on the desktop and sat back. *It's all going to plan*, he thought. He smiled as he watched a naked young woman extract a rather large penis from a young man's boxer shorts.

Aneta knocked on the study door. There was no reply even though she could hear noise from within the room. She knocked again. The noise continued. She strained to hear it; it sounded like a woman groaning. She sighed. It would be a woman. She hated this man. Tentatively she opened the door, picked up the tray with his drink from the little table that stood beside the door, went in and saw Haugham seated in front of the large computer screen at right angles to where she stood waiting.

With a start he turned to look at her. 'Ah, Aneta, I didn't hear you come in,' he said. 'Lock the door, there's a good girl.' She turned the key in the lock. 'Come and see this,' he ordered. As she turned away and put the tray down on his desk he quickly leant forward and secretly switched on the little web cam mounted on the top of the computer screen. Now standing next to him she saw the packet of Viagra lying on the desk. 'Look at that,' he chuckled as he unzipped his flies. 'Look at the size of it – his not mine,' he said as he eased his already engorged penis out of his underpants and slipped them and his trousers down over his backside. 'There's a tenner on the desk - a tip. Just finish me off, there's a good girl,' he said leaning back with his fat pink belly hanging above his erect penis.

'I don't want to do it,' Aneta said. 'It disgusts me.'

'You always say that but you always do it just the same,' he replied as he continued to watch the screen where a man was ramming his thick penis into a young woman's anus.

Aneta saw the look of anguish on the woman's face and knew just how she felt. 'Only because I have no papers and you will send me back.'

'True, but it's harmless enough – a little wank. Come on girl, get on with it.'

She leant over him and took his penis in her right hand; she looked away; within moments he was spent; she wiped up the semen with a tissue from a box of Kleenex conveniently placed next to the monitor for just such a purpose.

'Now where's that drink?' he asked. Aneta picked up the ten-pound note and turned to leave. 'See you tomorrow,

same time, same place,' he chuckled and pulled up his clothes before turning off the computer. 'Maybe we could extend your repertoire a little further tomorrow – what do you think?'

As Aneta walked down the corridor she resolved that she would put an end to him; she had no idea how she would achieve this but there was no doubt about her determination.

20.18

Finally all the men were back in Falkingham Close. There was considerable excitement; they were to eat venison. Yuri had bought three bottles of cheap wine from the Spar store after work but Pavlo had done better; he'd stolen two more bottles while Yuri was arguing with the storekeeper about the price of the wine. Bohdanna and Marina would arrive later with more wine from Haugham's cellar or if they were lucky they might have stolen a bottle of whisky. The other men would have to make their own arrangements for alcohol.

As Ilko and Stepan had bought the meat they wanted to assert their right to cook it even though they were not the best cooks in the house. Sense prevailed and Pavlo, who claimed to have once been a chef, was given the task. It was agreed that dinner would be ready at nine thirty when each man would file through the kitchen, pay their pound and take their portion of the feast. With Pavlo, fortified with a few cans of lager he'd bought for himself and occupied with cooking, the others sat around on their beds drinking.

'I wish Bohdanna could join us for the food,' Ilko said, 'I miss her.'

'The same for me with Marina – we should not be without our wives,' Stepan said.

'They can only escape the house when it's night and everything is locked down. I wonder if my sister, Aneta, can escape as well,' Ilko said. 'I worry about her there on her own.'

'The women look out for her,' Stepan said.

At nine fifteen the queue for food was already formed; it ran from one house to the other – it was too cold to go outside.

Ilko, Stepan, and Pavlo took their food back to the bedroom they shared with Yuri and sat on their beds eating the venison.

'This is fine food,' Ilko said. 'You should taste some, Yuri. What Pavlo has made is really tasty; as good as home.'

'I'll stick to the chips he made,' Yuri said. 'The potatoes they grow in Lincolnshire are good, very good, but when they are stolen they are excellent, perfect.'

'How can you be a vegetarian when there is meat to eat?' Stepan asked. 'You need meat to get it up, right?' he asked, laughing as he grabbed his crotch with his free hand.

'Drink and be merry,' Yuri said raising his bottle in a toast.

'I could eat this every day of my life,' Pavlo said. 'It's delicious – the best food I've had since being in this terrible place.'

'Drink, Pavlo, it numbs the pain,' Ilko advised.

Elsewhere in the house the rest of the men were tucking into the meat with much pleasure.

By the time Bohdanna and Marina arrived at eleven fifteen there was no food left but their men were happy, already slightly drunk but delighted that the women had indeed managed to steal a bottle of whisky; they'd had enough of the astringent wine. Cups were found and in the bedroom the four men and two women drank a toast to their freedom, health and wealth. Ilko put his arm around Bohdanna's shoulder and kissed her. Stepan did the same with Marina. Without a word being said Pavlo and Yuri stood up, took the remaining wine and left the two couples together. Ilko and Stepan took a mattress from one of the beds and placed it between the two beds where they would lie with their wives; it was a gesture - privacy could not be afforded to their intimacy.

Tuesday 12th November

07.00

Jack was surprised when he heard Chief Superintendent Wainstock's cheery 'good morning'; on the basis of experience Wainstock didn't get in until nine unless there was a major investigation under way and there hadn't been one since Jack had been back.

'Morning, Sir,' Jack replied peering out from behind his computer screen.

'You're early, Jack. Looking for worms?' Wainstock asked as he lowered his considerable bulk onto the edge of Clare's desk; it creaked in protest.

'You could say that.'

'How long have I known you, Jack?'

'Since I came to see you just before I graduated to ask what you thought about me joining the force – that makes it nineteen, going on twenty years.'

'You used to call me Simon; seeing as we're the only ones here, why don't you drop the sir and do so again, or at least boss?'

'I'll try,' Jack chuckled.

'How are you coping with being back and downgraded to a DI?'

'It's different.'

'I bet. So what worms are you after?' Wainstock asked.

'More like snakes in the grass.'

'Too enigmatic for me first thing in the morning – who precisely?'

'The same ones I was chasing at the Met,' Jack replied.

'With SCD9? Which element of Human Exploitation and Organised Crime are you thinking of?'

'I smell something rotten. There's a certain someone I'm not happy about, a nasty piece of work called Dimitri - I don't know his surname.'

'There aren't many Dimitris around here so if you mean the one who's living in Louth and is involved with supplying casual labour. Would that be him? A Ukrainian.'

'That'll be him. He's giving Rachel Robert a hard time. He lives with her and I want to find out if he's legal or not.'

'He's legal.'

'You know about him?'

'He's called Dimitri Guraya. He's been here for nearly two years. I asked Fulsome to do some work on his so-called business supplying casual labour and who he's working for, but Fulsome said there was nothing untoward to report.'

Jack frowned and hesitated for a moment. 'Could I ask you something?'

'I can guess what that is – go ahead.'

'Do you trust him?'

'Fulsome? Trust? That's a non-sequitur.'

'You do know he goes round you and straight to the Chief Constable?'

'Of course I do, Jack, he's his brother-in-law. I may be getting near retirement age but I've not lost all my marbles – he's after my job and thinks it's his for the taking.'

'And you put up with it?'

'Softly softly catchee monkey,' Wainstock whispered putting his finger to his lips. 'Listen Jack,' he leant forward continuing in a barely audible whisper. 'I think Fulsome is tied up with something pretty unsavoury. I'm not sure what – that's why I jumped at the idea of you coming back. I actually need someone who can do the business and you can,' Wainstock said. 'Someone I can trust.'

'I see. What sort of unsavoury?'

'Not here, not in this place; it's not safe,' Wainstock said as they heard footsteps coming along the corridor.

Moments later DCI Fulsome stood in the open doorway. 'Discussing old times?' he asked.

'No,' Wainstock replied, 'I was just checking a few things about Jack's recommendation that we prosecute Dr Kinsey and her night-watchman for wasting police time.'

'That's not what I've recommended to Richard,' Fulsome said.

'Just in case you've forgotten, chief inspector, the pips on my epaulets mean that it's not your job to recommend anything to the Chief Constable over my head and without my authority. I shall make that clear to Richard later because he's as culpable as you are.'

'What's that supposed to mean, sir?'

'Work it out for yourself; after all you're supposed to be a detective,' Wainstock said as he clambered off the edge of Clare's desk and left the office.

Jack studied Fulsome's expression without any satisfaction even though the man was clearly enraged. *So much for the quiet life*, he thought.

'Who are you staring at?' Fulsome demanded.

'Not staring, boss, just wondering if you'd like me to take you through my report on the doctor and her sidekick so that when you speak to the chief constable again you'll be singing from the same hymn sheet as the chief superintendent – would that be helpful?'

'When Wainstock gets to his office he'll find a detailed written complaint from me regarding your behaviour, attitudes and unsuitability for the role of detective inspector.'

'Do you think the Commissioner will have to get involved if we have a situation where you're reporting me, Wainstock's reporting you, and we both get put on gardening leave meaning that the most senior detective working out of this nick will be Sergeant Farmer?' Jack asked.

'Someone mention my name?' Clare asked as she came in passing Fulsome in the doorway.

Fulsome turned and left the office without saying another word.

'Did I miss something?' Clare asked.

'That deaf, dumb and blind git doesn't play any sort of mean pin ball.'

'Too much time playing pocket billiards?'

'Clare! How does a nice girl like you know about things like that?'

13.45

As Scrote burnished the bonnet of his Peugeot 106 he dreamt of the day when he'd be able to afford leopard skin seat covers and matching seat belts.

Ilko interrupted his reverie. 'Scrote,' he called as he ran towards Scrote.

'Mr fuckin' Scrote to you, arsehole.'

'There is problem.'

'What fuckin' now? First it was the fuckin' hosepipes, then the brushes, then no gloves, then no fuckin' disinfectant. What now?'

'It's Stepan. He's ill.'

'Don't you fuckin' bastards ever give up on fuckin' skivin?'

Ilko grabbed Scrote's sleeve and pulled him towards the entrance to the greenhouse. 'He needs help, you have phone, phone for doctor, yes?'

'Oh for fuck's sake,' Scrote said and knocked Ilko's hand from his sleeve. 'Where's the idle fucker?'

'Here! Here!' Ilko shouted as he ran ahead.

By the time they reached Stepan he was on his knees groaning and clutching his throat desperately trying to breathe.

'You see,' Ilko said. 'He's ill.'

'What's the fuckin' matter with you?' Scrote demanded. Stepan looked up. Scrote recoiled at the sight of the man's

face. 'Can't you read? You're not supposed to drink the fuckin' disinfectant, you daft cunt.'

Stepan gaped. 'No breath ... pain chest.'

'Look at face,' Ilko said. 'Like white stone in cliff.'

'What you been drinkin?'' Scrote asked.

Stepan's panting increased, his eyes wide in pain and fear as dark black boils appeared on his face. 'No breath ... help me,' he murmured as he toppled over into a heap and lay very still. Ilko and Scrote watched as his mouth opened and a stream of thick green bile and mucus spluttered steaming out in the cold air.

'That fuckin' stinks,' Scrote said.

'We need doctor. You call, yes, Mr Scrote?'

'See if the fucker's still alive,' Scrote said.

Ilko bent down next to his friend, held his nose against the reek of the foul mess that covered Stepan's chest foul and felt for a pulse. 'Alive. Doctor, call doctor,' Ilko begged. Looking startled, he abruptly sat down on the ground. 'Doctor,' he said clutching at his throat. 'No breath,' he managed to whisper. 'Bad pain, chest.' Just like Stepan, black boils suddenly erupted on his face. He touched one; it burst leaking dark red pus.

'Jesus fuckin' Christ,' Scrote groaned. He took out his phone, tapped in numbers and waited. 'Dimitri? That you? ... Two of these fuckers in the greenhouses are ill, real bad ... I know that ... but what do I do? I don't know what to do. One of 'em is passed out already ... no, they're not swinging the lead, honest, Dimitri ... Okay ... Okay ... How long will you be? Okay. Okay, don't shout.'

Nearly forty minutes later, Dimitri pulled up in his VW Golf, clambered out slamming the car door behind him. 'Where are they?' he demanded.

'In there,' Scrote said pointing at the greenhouse.

'So fuckin' show me.'

By the time they reached the far end of the long greenhouse it was clear that the situation was worse; both men were curled up in foetal balls. Pools of foul smelling vomit were congealing

on the ground beside their heads; flies fed. The pallor of their faces, accentuated by the flecks of red blood around their nostrils and on their upper lips, the seeping boils, their still silence and so shallow breath made Scrote think that they were both dead until he saw that their bodies occasionally twitched with barely visible tremors. 'Jesus,' Scrote gasped, 'that one's shit his self.'

'Scum,' Dimitri said.

'We should call an ambulance,' Scrote suggested.

'What?'

'We should call an ambulance, look at them, their faces, they look like all the blood's been sucked out of 'em like in a vampire movie. They might be infectious or something - or fuckin' Zombies.'

'You're a fuckin' idiot, Scrote.'

'They're dyin', Dimitri, honest they are. I'll dial 999.'

Dimitri knocked Scrote's phone from his hand and grabbed him by the collar of his jacket. 'Fuckin' idiot! How can you call for ambulance? These fuckers don't exist, right? Don't exist. Have you forgotten that? With ambulance comes police and with police comes shit. You want shit? I don't - no 999.'

'But what do we do? Mr Weatherill will come teatime to see what they've done and if he finds them what do we do then, Dimitri?'

'Get them out of here. We put them in your car and you take them home while I clean up here.'

'I'm not putting them in my car. Look at the fuckin' state they're in.'

'Tell you news, Scrote, you don't put them in the fuckin' car I'll make you even fuckin' sicker than them,' Dimitri said and slapped Scrote across the face.

Scrote found some sheets of polythene with which he covered the seats of his beloved Peugeot. He and Dimitri lifted Stepan into a wheelbarrow; he didn't make a sound, despite their rough handling, as they emptied him out of the barrow and pushed him onto the back seat of the car.

'This fucker stinks,' Dimitri complained as they sat Ilko on the front passenger seat and fastened the seat belt around him; his head dropped forward onto his chest; his mouth dribbled yet more thick green bile and bloody mucus dripped from his nostrils.

'My car will be fucked after this,' Scrote complained as he shut the near side door.

'Better your car fucked than you fucked.'

'What do I do when I get there – all the rest will still be out working?' Scrote asked.

'I will go to the hall, find their wives; they will come and look after their men.'

Scrote waited outside the houses in Falkingham Close for nearly two hours wondering if Dimitri had found the women; he was too afraid to call and ask. He was beginning to give up hope that they would ever arrive when a Landrover bumped towards him driven by a young man who remained in the vehicle as Marina, Bohdanna and Aneta climbed out and hurried to Scrote who now stood beside his car. The Landrover drove off. 'Who was that?' Scrote asked, knowing full well that it was Howard Haugham. *Maybe Tammy's right*, he thought.

Bohdanna and Marina ignored him as they looked inside the Peugeot; they wailed in horror at what they saw.

'Call an ambulance,' Aneta said over the sobs of the two women.

'No fuckin' ambulance,' Scrote said. 'You're illegal. They catch you and they'll send you to a prison and then lock you up for months - years - before they send you back where you belong.'

'Get them inside,' Aneta said. 'There is not point arguing with this shit.'

'Fuck you,' Scrote said.

In silence Marina and Bohdanna lifted Ilko out of the car and carried him inside while Aneta stayed with Stepan. It took the three women a good ten minutes to extract Stepan from

the back seat; he was heavier than Ilko and so limp that they thought he was already dead but he was still breathing when they got him inside the house.

As soon as the car was empty Scrote pulled out the polythene sheeting and left it where it fell and drove off with the windows wide open; he had no idea what he could do to get rid of the stink the two men had left behind; he had no idea how long it would take him to forget what they looked like, but however long it was it wouldn't be soon enough.

Aneta started to walk back to the hall as soon as the men were on their beds; she'd kissed her brother, Ilko, on the forehead and made the sign of the cross. Bohdanna begged her sister-in-law to stay but Aneta was afraid that Tammy would find out what was going on – little did she know that Scrote had already called his sister and told her the gory details. 'I will say prayers,' Aneta said as she hugged Bohdanna.

By the time the other inmates of Falkingham Close arrived home after their long day's work Ilko and Stepan were still inert on their beds – Pavlo and Yuri were happy to agree to bunk down somewhere else in the house given the condition of their friends. Marina and Bohdanna sat with their men not knowing what to do next – they had bathed them as well as they could – but they had no idea how to stop the slow ooze of blood and bile - they just mopped it up and wept. From time to time men stood in the doorway of the room staring anxiously whispering.

18.30

Howard Haugham had lived in one of the estate lodges near the main road for three years since he was eighteen years of age; he'd left the Hall at the same time as his mother. Unlike her, he'd been able to persuade his father that it was best if he learnt to look after himself whereas his mother, having

been sectioned under the Mental Health Act, had had all her choices removed.

When Howard had returned from dropping the three women off in Falkingham Close he'd been unable to settle. Though he'd not been inside the houses he could imagine the conditions and Aneta had, of course, told him how bad a place it was; he hadn't wanted to believe her – after all this was England. He paced up and down the living room before going outside where he walked round and around his Landrover trapped in a circle of indecision. He wondered why he'd been in such a hurry to get out of that place and realised that he'd only been thinking of himself; *nothing new there then*, he concluded. Realising that the only way the women could get back to the Hall was on foot he jumped into the Landrover and set off.

The back road was narrow and twisty and his headlights frightened an owl that flapped straight at his windscreen before finally veering off into the safety of the night. The next moment he braked hard; Aneta was walking towards him. He dipped the lights, jumped out of the Landrover, ran to her and embraced her tight against his chest.

'Thank you,' she said.

'I was worried about you,' he said. 'Come on, let's get you home.'

'I can't go back there yet, that Tammy woman will be screaming at me for not being there – I can't take that, not now. We go to your place?'

'Don't worry. I'll deal with Tammy. Come on, in we get,' he said as he helped her up the step and onto the passenger seat. She fastened her seat belt, put her feet on the seat and crunched herself up tight with her arms around her head. 'It'll be alright,' Howard said.

'What?' she asked bringing her head out from beneath her hands.

Glancing sideways he saw tears rolling down her cheeks. 'I said it'll be alright.'

'No, Howard, it will not be alright. Ilko is dying. Stepan is dying. Nothing will be alright,' she said and once more buried her head in her hands.

He drove the rest of the way back to the lodge in silence.

Standing together locked in an embrace in the lodge's open plan kitchen diner they kissed.

Aneta released herself and stood back. 'Take me to bed, please.'

'Now? I thought you'd be too upset for ...'

'Not sex. I need to be warm, with comfort, safe.' As he led the way up the narrow stairs she added, 'Then you can protect me from the Tammy woman, yes, as you promised?'

'I'll be your knight in shining armour.'

Aneta wondered when it would be the best time to tell her knight that she was fifteen years old and what she was forced to do to most afternoons. Howard saw what he thought was a smile and was pleased she was happy again. He wondered when he would be brave enough to tell his father that he was in love.

19.10

Jack looked in the vegetable rack he kept outside the Belvedere's only door and with the help of the outside light selected two onions and a clove of garlic. In the kitchen he poured himself a second large glass of Rioja and dumped the now empty bottle in the recycling bin, slightly amused that the district had such great recycling policies but in most other regards seemed enmeshed in the tenth century. Having finely chopped the onions he dropped them into a pan in which olive oil and a small knob of butter were already heating; once they were at a good sizzle he reduced the heat to let them gently cook for thirty minutes because Nigel Slater had "told" him that this was the best way to maximise their flavour and sweetness; he liked Slater's writing style as much as his recipes. He chopped the garlic and put it inside red peppers he'd already cut in half

and deseeded. When the onions were ready he would stuff the peppers with them along with fresh basil and grated Manchego and bake them in the oven until ready. What could be better than a simple meal with fresh bread and another bottle of wine? The room fell silent so he spent a few minutes deciding which album to play next – it needed to be something comforting, something soft, and though jazz was little represented in his collection, he chose Miles Davis’ “Kind of Blue” – in that regard he was something of a conservative. He sat down and opened the paperback he was reading.

He was just about to serve dinner when he heard a knock on the van’s door. *Who the hell is that out here at this time of night?* he wondered but looking at his watch saw it was only eight o’clock. He opened the door. ‘Clare! Hello. What brings you out here into no man’s land?’

‘I thought it was your land – aren’t you going to ask me in?’

‘Of course I am, come on in.’ He was flustered as he closed the door behind her. ‘Can I take your coat?’

‘I’m sorry, you were about to eat – expecting guests?’ she asked looking at the table where three places were set with knives, forks, side plates and paper napkins. ‘I should have given you a bell, it’s nothing ... I just thought you could do with a bit of company ... I’m sorry, I’ll be on my way.’

‘You’ll do no such thing. I can explain. Will you have a glass of wine?’

‘Just the one, I’m driving.’

‘I didn’t hear your car,’ Jack said as he took her coat. ‘Too engrossed in the latest Frances Fyfield ... I wasn’t expecting anybody, no one at all.’ He poured her wine as the timer rang. ‘It’s ready, there’s plenty. I always make enough to have cold leftovers the next day, I sometimes think that they’re *Jesus, what’s the matter with you?* Will you join me?’

‘What is it?’

‘Onion stuffed peppers with melted cheese, salad and bread.’

‘Yes, please, sounds good.’

Jack cleared away one of the place settings. ‘Sit yourself down,’ he suggested as he went to the oven, pulled out the roasting tray and set it on the table between them. He sat down and stared at the peppers. ‘You must think I’ve lost it,’ he said looking up at her.

She held his gaze, then smiled. ‘Absent friends?’ she asked.

Jack sighed. ‘Would you like to help yourself or for me to serve you?’

‘You serve, but not too much, just a half pepper, please.’

Jack did just that. ‘Help yourself to salad and bread.’ He stood up abruptly. ‘I forgot the salt and pepper but taste it first,’ he continued returning to the table, ‘I think it’s pretty well seasoned as it is.’

She tasted the food. ‘Delicious – it needs nothing.’

‘But you do – an explanation.’ He emptied his glass, refilled it to the brim and drank some more. ‘It’s a ritual – high days, birthdays, Christmas. Today is one of those days – a birthday,’ Jack said struggling to keep his voice even and his emotion from breaking through.

‘You don’t need to explain a thing, Jack, really you don’t.’ For a moment she was tempted to put her hand on top of his but resisted the temptation – that wouldn’t help either of them.

‘My daughter, Tassa, would have been six today ... you think you’re over it but you never are ...’

‘And did your wife die as well?’ she asked and saw Jack’s shocked look. ‘Sorry, I assumed it was an accident ... no one knows why you came back, gave up on the Met.’

‘Wainstock knows ... it was an accident, misadventure, an unexplained death,’ he sighed. ‘The coroner’s verdict was bollocks, a cover up. My wife, Anastasiya, disappeared from the face of the earth, not straight away but not that long after it happened. I’ve not seen hide nor hair of her for going on three years now. Vanished. You wouldn’t think it was possible. All I want is the truth.’ The silence between them was suddenly filled with the drumming of heavy rain on the roof of the static caravan drowning out the sound of “Flamenco Sketches”.

'That's noisy,' Clare said not knowing what else to say.

'Yeah, like Keith Moon completely out of control,' Jack said. 'But then he was out of control most of the time. It's one of the drawbacks of living in a caravan ... So there you are, now you know my secret – just keep it to yourself, please.'

'You don't need to ask that.' *But I don't really know your secret at all, just that you lost a daughter and a wife – to know why would be to know a real secret.*

'I'm sorry – I don't thrive on tea and sympathy. Shall I put this lot back in the oven? It's stone cold by now,' Jack asked.

'I'm not really very hungry.'

'Me neither – but I'll have a fine spread tomorrow.'

'If you ever do need some of that tea and sympathy, Jack, just say so. Until then I'll not say a word about it to you or anyone else.' She looked at the ceiling of the van and listened, her head to one side. 'I think Keith Moon's finished. Could I see inside the cottage – and, oh yes, your scooter? I'm dead nousey about what people do to their houses – must be from watching too many make-over programmes.'

'My pleasure – but best put your coat back on. It's like a cold store in there.' He lifted the stylus off the centre of the album and got Clare's coat.

He switched on the neon lighting in the barn. 'There she is,' Jack said pointing at the Lambretta.

'Wow! That is a mod's bike if ever I saw one; it's even got the Davey Crocket tail things on the chrome seat rail at the back.'

'Coonskin.'

'You mean they're not fake?' Clare asked.

'No, authentic raccoon, same as this,' he indicated the fur around the hood of his parka. 'I got a job lot.'

'I thought you were a veggie? Cruelty to animals and all that.'

'Looks like I'm a hypocrite as well,' he chuckled.

'I didn't mean that.'

It was so tempting. He liked Clare but he liked her too much to screw up their professional relationship by kissing her. They looked at each other. They recognised the moment. Nodded. Smiled.

'Thanks,' she said. 'Now show me your cottage.'

21.34

Stepan died first. Ilko eighteen minutes later. It wasn't dramatic. Just bleak. Hands were held. No last words whispered. No fond farewells. Last breaths. Death. Hands still. Held. Silence. An eternity of silence seconds long. The women wailed. Frightened men peered from the doorway. The men scurried away. The women stayed.

The tenants of Falkingham Close were faced with an impossible dilemma: they wanted the dead to be shown respect and buried properly with due ceremony but had no idea how this might be done. And they were diseased. Untouchable. A man murmured, 'Plague'. Marina and Bohdanna's anguished cries filled the house. Men stood outside in the cold rain; there was no escape from the women's agony, no escape from the men's fear.

Yuri, the only one with a pay-as-you-go mobile phone, was full of indecision about whom to call. Hot drinks were made and taken to the two women. No words were exchanged. The wailing stopped. The silence was deafening.

Pavlo joined Yuri as he stood in the doorway, protectively watching the women. 'What do we do, Yuri?' he asked.

'They must decide about their men.'

'Is it infectious?' Pavlo asked.

Yuri shrugged. 'I don't know.' He stepped inside the room. 'Marina, Bohdanna, I'm so sorry; they were good men. What do you want us to do?'

Marina was the first to respond. 'They can't stay here.'

'There should be a funeral,' Bohdanna said. Yuri and Pavlo looked at the ground. 'But a funeral is impossible, I know,' she added.

'We must bury our dead,' Marina said.

Yuri nodded. 'We'll go, all of us, and dig graves in the wood. Is that what you want?'

'Yes,' Bohdanna said and Marina nodded her approval. 'But make them deep so no animals can find them and dig them up,' Bohdanna said.

'No, this is wrong,' Marina said shaking her head. 'They need more honour than this. But we can't give them honour or respect. Look at them. At least someone must find out why they've died? They should be taken to the hospital so that the doctors can find what has killed them.'

'How can we do that?' Bohdanna asked. 'We have no car. We have no papers. We're not here.'

'But they are,' Marina said pointing at the bodies, 'and they're dead. There must be a reason why.'

'I have an idea,' Yuri said. 'I'll call Dave Broadbent and tell him what's happened and ask him to take the bodies to the hospital and leave them there.' *Is now the time to do more, or do I wait to see what happens next?* he wondered. *I didn't used to be as hard as this.*

'That man will not help us; he treats you like animals,' Bohdanna said.

'He has no choice. If they find us, if they find Ilko and Stepan here like this, there'll be big questions for him to answer. If they find us out, they find him out, and then he's fucked like we're fucked,' Yuri said. 'He's illegal just like us.'

'Call him,' Marina said.

Though he was far from pleased by Yuri's news and request for help, Dave and Shelley Broadbeam went straight to Falkingham Close; it was a mess that needed clearing up; they hoped they might impress Dimitri with their prompt action. Shelley was driving as Dave had sunk several pints too many.

'You take them to hospital,' Yuri said. They wrapped the bodies in the polythene sheeting Scrote had left behind and loaded the two bodies into the white van.

'I'm not taking them in – we'll leave 'em round the back of A and E and someone'll find 'em and then it's nothing to do with us,' Dave explained.

'Yeah, we'll take the back road; no one there at night,' Shelley said. 'Come on, Dave; let's get out of this fucking place. I don't want 'em in the van for any longer than I have to.'

Pavlo, Yuri, all the men, Marina and Bohdanna stood around the vehicle as Shelley started it up. All made the sign of the cross. 'Fucking superstitious fuckers, ain't they?' Dave observed as the van pulled away.

'What do we do?' Marina asked.

'We must go back to the hall – Aneta must know about her brother, Ilko, and there is nowhere else for us to go,' Bohdanna replied.

'I can't tell her – I just can't – I want to die now,' Marina said. 'What is the point of this? This good life?'

'I'll walk back with you and tell Aneta,' Yuri offered.

Marina nodded her thanks and Bohdanna started to weep once more. The men went inside the houses as Yuri and the two women set off into the night.

'Are we really going to take them to the hospital?' Shelley asked.

'Not fuckin' likely – I've got a better idea,' Dave said taking out his mobile phone and tapping in numbers. 'Wiggy, that you? ... Yeah, it's Dave. You at work? ... Great ... Need a favour, mate and there's fifty in it for you... Waste disposal job ... Nah, I'll tell you when we get there, Shelley's with us, driving like, I had too much of a skin full ... Yeah, alright, see you mate.'

The older woman in the animal hat had been unable to sleep; sometimes the wind in the trees seemed deafening and for a moment she thought it was that but as she looked out of

the flap of her tent she was surprised to see a white van drive slowly past the encampment and up the drive to InVivo; there was never any traffic at night. Inside the tent, with the benefit of her head torch, she found paper and pencil and wrote down the number plate and the words printed on the van's side.

Wiggy was waiting when the van pulled up next to his little office. 'So what's this favour that's worth a nifty fifty?' he asked as Dave and Shelley stood in his office.

'We got a problem, Wiggy,' Shelley said. 'No point messing you about – we got two stiffs in the van and we want rid of 'em.'

'What sort of stiffs?' Wiggy asked.

'Dead labour, you know the lot we keep in Falkingham Close. Two of 'em, popped their clogs earlier and frankly we could do without that being common knowledge. Thought you could help, mate,' Dave said.

'Bloody hell, that's a big ask, Dave.'

'But you burn up dogs in that furnace thing, don't you?' Shelley asked.

'I ain't never put a human in it,' Wiggy said.

'But it would still burn one up, wouldn't it?' Shelley persisted.

'Yeah, but only one at a time.'

'Come on, Wiggy, we're mates ain't we?'

'And family,' Shelley added.

'A ton, hundred quid, not a penny less,' Wiggy said.

'Done,' Dave said and shook Wiggy's hand. 'I'll have the cash tomorrow evening. I'll drop it round.'

'Nah, don't want the wife finding out about it – I'll see you in the pub before I come back up here for my shift. Better get to it then – so much for a quiet life.'

'Good man,' Shelley said and gave Wiggy a kiss on the cheek. 'We'll give you a hand to get 'em sorted, ready like.'

'Will they need, er ...' Dave began.

'Cutting up? Nah, I'll just do 'em one at a time.'

'That's a relief,' Shelley said. 'I couldn't face having to cut 'em up.'

When Marina and Bohdanna arrived back at the Hall, all was quiet as they moved through the yard, into the converted stable and slipped into the bedroom they shared with Aneta; her bed was empty and was cold to the touch.

'Where is she?' Yuri asked. 'Maybe she came to some harm walking back here?'

Marina shook her head and looked at Bohdanna who shrugged. 'You'd better know, Yuri; she sleeps with Haugham's son, in his lodge by the main gate.'

'But she's only fifteen!' Yuri protested.

'Aneta knows what she wants; she wouldn't be told,' Marina said. 'She thinks she's found a way out of this hell.'

'She's playing a dangerous game,' Yuri sighed. 'These people can't be trusted ... is the lodge the one we passed coming back in here?' Bohdanna nodded. 'I'll go and find her and tell her about her brother, then I'll come back here to make sure you're both okay.'

'Don't come back, Yuri. There's nothing you can do for us - but thank you for trying,' Marina said and Bohdanna nodded agreement.

Yuri knocked on the lodge door and waited. After a few moments it opened and Howard, wearing Jack Wills sweatpants and a hoodie, glowered at his unexpected visitor. 'Who are you? What do you want?'

'I have come to speak with Aneta.'

'Who? I don't know anyone called Aneta.'

'I want to speak with Aneta,' Yuri said and made to walk in.

Howard put his hand on Yuri's chest. 'I don't know who you are or what you want but you're not coming in here.'

'I need to speak with Aneta,' Yuri said knocking Howard's hand aside and pushing forward.

'Fuck off!' Howard shouted pushing Yuri back.

'No,' Yuri persisted.

'Stop!' Aneta shouted as she ran down the stairs dressed in jeans and a sweater. 'Yuri; what is it?'

'Who is he?' Howard asked.

'A friend, let him in.' Howard stood aside. Yuri went in and Howard closed the door behind him. 'What's happened?' she asked in Ukrainian.

'I'm so sorry, Aneta, but you need to know – it's Ilko – he's dead.'

Aneta put her hands to her mouth and bit into her knuckles.

'What did he just say?' Howard asked Aneta.

'I said her brother, Ilko, is dead.'

Howard put an arm around Aneta's shoulder and eased her across the room towards a sofa. 'I'm so sorry. I didn't think he was that ill.'

'Take me to him,' she said to Howard.

'He's not at the house,' Yuri said.

'For Christ's sake speak in English so I can understand you,' Howard pleaded.

Aneta stared wild-eyed at Yuri.

'He and Stepan have been taken to the hospital to find out why they died; it is Marina and Bohdanna's wish,' Yuri said in English.

'Who has taken them?'

'The gang master man, Broadbeam,' Yuri said.

'He's a bad man – why would he help us?' Aneta asked.

'We are illegal, so is what he does.'

'Howard,' Aneta said standing up. 'Take me to the hospital I want to know what the doctors will say.'

'You know I can't do that,' Howard replied standing up beside her.

'You said you'd do anything for me.'

'He is right,' Yuri said. 'This is bad enough. You go to the hospital and they'll lock you up and send you back.'

'You don't want that, do you?' Howard asked.

Aneta sank back down on the sofa and began to weep. Howard and Yuri stood staring at each other.

'What do you mean to do with her?' Yuri asked.

'None of your bloody business.'

'It is my business – she is one of us, not one of you – I care for her as if she was my own sister.'

'I love her – that satisfy you?' Howard asked. Yuri said nothing. Howard sat down beside Aneta. 'They won't do anything with the bodies tonight; they'll do autopsies in the morning, or some time tomorrow, and I'll find out what's happening at the hospital – I know people who can tell me off the record. I'll find out so there's no risk to you or the rest of your people.'

'What will you do with Aneta?'

'She's a grown woman – she can decide for herself,' Howard said. 'She can stay here with me or I can take her back to the Hall. But I will look after her, have no fear of that.'

Yuri nodded and spoke in Ukrainian. 'I'm going now, Aneta. Remember two things: I will protect you if you need me. Promise me not to trust these people; it's dangerous to trust them.' Aneta nodded. 'I'm sorry about Ilko, I liked him and he loved you.'

'What did he just say?' Howard asked as Aneta threw her arms around Yuri and gave him a big tearful hug.

'He was just wishing me luck,' she said.

Wednesday 13th November

06.45

The woman with the animal hat was wide-awake when, just as dawn was breaking and she was seated just inside the doorway of her tent drinking a mug of tea, she saw Kinsey's car driving past the encampment and up the drive. Three hours earlier, as she cursed her insomnia, she'd seen the Broadbeam's van returning down the drive and out onto the main road. *What on earth is going on?* she wondered. Looking eastward she saw the first faint real signs of light and not just the prospect of dawn. The clouds were gone, the rain had stopped and she hoped for a bright sunny November day.

As Silvia Kinsey powered up the drive she frowned and slowed down; *why is there smoke coming from the incinerator chimney?* Instead of driving all the way to her parking space she stopped on the outer side of the Leylandii and walked into the complex of buildings feeling like a burglar. She looked through the window of Wiggy's office. He wasn't there. Her suspicions aroused she continued on; it wouldn't have been the first time that Wiggy had been caught using the incinerator to burn waste for his mates who wouldn't pay to dump it at the tip – *but at this time in the morning?* She stood in the lea of one of the outhouses and was aware of movement and could hear the sound of a hammer thudding. She stared, standing stock still, with shadows hiding her as she tried to make out what was going on with an ever-increasing sense of alarm; despite the cold, her hands were covered in sweat. *What in God's name is the bloody man doing?* Wiggy had one of the incinerator cages open and was smashing something with a hammer as the chimney continued to belch fumes. On tiptoes she went forward until she was just behind him, his concentration so intense that when she said, 'What are you doing?' he jumped in alarm and for a moment she thought he was going to hit her with the hammer.

'Housekeeping ... just making sure everything's clean and tidy.'

'You're a liar. What are you burning? What are you smashing up?'

'Like I said, Doctor, making sure everything's clean and tidy.'

'Why are you trying to stop me seeing what you've got in there?'

'Just rubbish.'

'Have you been up to your old tricks again, Wiggy?'

'Just tidying, gettin' rid of old rubbish.'

'Move aside,' Kinsey commanded. Reluctantly Wiggy complied. 'What the hell is that? Oh my god! That's a human bone! A femur. A pelvis. What the hell have you been doing? Those are human body parts,' she said putting her hand to her forehead in horror. *Is there no end to the madness of this,* she thought and feared that she would be sick at the idea of what this might do to her career. 'Say something, Wiggy! Say fucking something!' she bellowed and pounded her fists on his chest.

'Leave off!' he shouted pushing her away. 'I didn't have it hot enough; not all the bones burnt up,' Wiggy said, seeing that there was little point in lying. 'Caught with my trousers down and that's no mistake.'

Kinsey gulped. 'And you're burning another body in there right now?'

'Yes, but this one'll disappear properly - it's burning at full temperature now,' Wiggy said.

'And that makes it okay? I'm going to have to call the police. I don't want to know how the bodies got here or anything else. That's for the police.'

'No, doc, you ain't going to do that – think of the tricky questions you'd have to answer and – and I got this,' he said taking out his phone from his pocket. 'Look,' he said, showed her the screen and pressed play. 'That's you, doc, beating the shit out of your car with the hammer what I'm using right now – funny coincidence that, ain't it?' Silvia Kinsey looked as if she was going to pass out so Wiggy grabbed her arm to stop

her falling over. 'I'd go and have a nice cup of sweet tea in my office if I was you while I clear up here.'

'This isn't possible,' she whispered. 'This isn't happening to me.'

'If we both keep our mouths shut then we've nothing to worry about, have we?'

'Who are they? Who were they?'

'They never existed.'

'Who were they? How did they die?'

'Go and put the kettle on, eh?'

'How did they die?' Kinsey screamed.

'I don't fucking know, do I? I'm not a fucking doctor, am I?'

'How old were they?'

'I don't know – in their thirties, twenties – it's difficult to tell with them lot,' Wiggy said.

'What's them lot?'

'The illegals that work where you don't want to notice 'em.'

'These were two illegal immigrants who died – what of? Natural causes?'

'Like I said, doc, I'm ignorant; they're dead, gone.'

'They were human beings,' Kinsey said.

'If you say so.'

'You're disgusting – how could you do such a thing?'

'That's a touch of the pot calling the kettle black ain't it, doc? At least they were dead and didn't feel a thing – not like them poor bloody dogs you put through hell.'

'They don't go through hell!'

'Don't sound like it.'

'Research is for a purpose – this is just barbaric,' she protested.

'Whatever it is, it's done and you ain't going to do anything about it, are you?'

'I have to report this.'

'Listen, doc, you do that and your career's going right down the toilet and you with it.'

'What did they look like?' she asked.

'Dead.'

'What did they look like?' she shouted. *Please don't let this be true.*

'Faces looked like they'd been dipped in a bucket of whitewash, bloodless, apart from being covered in black boils and they had this green muck they'd gobbled up, stuck to 'em like glue stinking to high heaven like someone with the runs, but worse, a lot worse.'

Oh Christ, she thought. 'I see,' she said. This is impossible, this couldn't happen. Maybe it's just as well he's burnt the poor sods – no, it's not. Jesus! What do I do now? This just isn't possible. I'm finished.

'You alright, doc? Like I said, I'd go and have that cup of tea if I was you. I won't be long here.'

06.55

Jack was not fully awake but in that condition where even the most trivial issue grew into a threat of such magnitude that it was impossible to resolve, let alone vanquish; and his issues weren't trivial – not a single one – but that's how it always felt. He turned onto his side and pulled the duvet up over his ear; it was cold. Until Tassa had died he'd been filled with an irrational optimism; not based on his daily experience as a policeman working on cases that would have made a lesser man run for cover but on the idea that things would get better. There was her new life to live. Thereafter, despite all his best efforts whilst still in London, he had been filled with a deep sense of foreboding; not of any one thing in particular but something that was always there ringing in the background as if suffering from tinnitus of the heart. The plan: a return to pastures new, or actually pastures old, would release him from

the pack of black dogs that took each and every opportunity to harry him wasn't working. *But why not?* he asked himself. His every instinct told him that all was in jeopardy. He looked up at the ceiling. *What do I mean by jeopardy? The natural order of things – whatever that means, this place, me?* Utterly tired of tossing and turning as his black dogs circled and growled he started to compile yet another list of problems. Suddenly, enraged by his self-indulgence he threw back the covers and quickly dressed in his running gear.

Five minutes later he was sprinting away from the Belvedere as fast as his waking legs would carry him. He should have stretched, remembering what a physio had once said about the difference between trying to blow up a balloon that hadn't been first stretched to one that had, but by the time he was on the path to the woods he was as loose as he was going to get. *That's better. Now let's see if those bloody dogs can keep up with me. Dogs. What is it about dogs? Those up at InVivo are quiet but I guess it's a bit early for them to be off to the gas chambers ... stop it, Jack. There is something though, I can feel it in my bones, not the dogs after me, something here, something real and very bad. Don't believe in hunches except when they come true and they most often do.* He revelled in the sound of his footfalls breaking ice in puddles, the crackling of branches shedding hoar frost, beech leaves rattling in the wind, the sparkle of new air in his lungs. By the time he turned the corner his breath was under control and he relaxed into the run letting his mind go blank listening to the sounds of his body working and the immediate world that surrounded him, sensitive to every nuance of movement and sensation on his skin; this was the only form of meditation he'd ever mastered. He thought of poor Rachel and Gil's distress and allowed himself anger – a different anger for it had focus – as well as sadness. Tassa was there in his head but he didn't want to hear her right now – there was far too much to regret, to miss, to try to understand, to explain and the one person who might be able to tell the truth would no longer speak to him. *Anastasiya, why won't you tell me the truth? Perhaps you did? Perhaps it's just me never trusting a thing I'm told. Pointless. No, it's not. Perhaps Sam will have found her. Always a perhaps.*

I'm not sure it was such a good idea to tell Clare – the last thing I need is sympathy and he sprinted for the next tree his breath billowing in the air. I was right about Clare though. It would have been a disaster but Sam, that's a different matter, what do I do about Sam?

Forty minutes later he was standing in the shower glowing, with not a dog in sight and ready to start the day. *What was it dad used to say? It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good – what does that actually mean?* As he dried himself he sang, *Just wanna keep doing all the dirty little things I do, And not work all day in an office just to bring my money back to you, Sorry, baby.* As he did up the buttons on the white shirt he'd ironed back on Sunday he thought of Sam; he smiled as he remembered that she'd changed her surname from Tickinson to Ticks explaining that it made her feel like someone else, someone new, and then she'd asked him if he really was the Lone Ranger and did he have a Tonto? *Somehow I don't think Sam fits the part of Tonto – doesn't look a bit like Jay Silverheels. But I'm the Lone Ranger – but no mask – that's not true either.*

07.15

Aneta hadn't slept all night but had lain awake beside Howard watching him and wondering what would happen now that he had, in the end, after many of her tears (shed for Ilko but he wasn't to know that) agreed that he would tell his father about their relationship. She wished she could be there for that moment; imagining their confrontation gave her some solace as she mourned her brother. But she had doubts; was that the best way to get what she wanted?

The alarm went off, Howard stirred and seemed, for a moment, surprised to see her lying beside him.

'When do we go to the hospital?' she asked as his soon as his eyes were fully open.

'Aneta, um, you're still here, yes, of course you are ... sorry, not awake yet,' he said rolling towards her and kissing her on the cheek before slumping back to his side of the bed beneath the duvet. 'What a night. How are you feeling?'

'How would I be feeling? My brother is dead.'

'I love you, Aneta,' he said putting his hand on her naked thigh: she made no response. 'Okay. Yes. The hospital? There's no point in trying to find out anything until late morning at the earliest. They'll want time to get a pathologist and go through all the bureaucracy ... I'll go down there late morning.'

'No, we'll go – I want to be there even if I can't go inside.'

'That's fine,' Howard agreed. 'Well, better get up, get some breakfast and then go and tell the old man the good news that he's about to have a daughter-in-law. You're sure you don't want to come with me to tell him?'

'No, that is for you to do on your own ... I'll cook you breakfast – eggs and bacon?'

'That would be great, thanks. I'll have a shower. I want to catch him first thing.'

Yes, it would be good to be there, Aneta thought as she cracked an egg into the frying pan. Revenge has to be better than just a moment; it has to be more, last longer, maybe for ever. When it's mine I will destroy everything in that room, everything about that man.

As Howard walked along the corridor to his father's study, Lord Haugham was speaking on the telephone. 'Yes, Victor, I completely agree ... another shipment coming in through Boston as usual. How many this time? ... Yes, I've got a couple of contacts who'll only be too pleased to buy them. We could do with some women, young ones, preferably ... Yes, a good market for them.' He heard the door opening, turned and saw his son, 'Victor, I've a visitor, I'll call you back later. Okay. Fine. Good-bye.' He completed the call and turned to his son. 'Howard, what do you want? You sounded very dramatic on the phone.'

'I want to talk about my future.'

'Glad to hear it. Now that you're twenty-one and all that – time for a man to take on more responsibilities round the place. Coffee?' Howard nodded. 'I'll get Tammy to bring us some; that little Aneta seems to have gone AWOL,' Haugham said and picked up the phone. *Now's the time*, Howard thought, *he's mentioned her name so get in there now* but he hesitated.

His father finished giving his instructions on the phone and immediately asked, 'Have you seen your mother recently?'

Oh, for god's sake. Why bring her up now? 'Yes, I saw her last week – she's not improving.'

'Still as mad as a hatter?'

'Why do you have to speak about her like that, as if she was a complete stranger to you?'

'Because that's what she became, Howard, a complete stranger.'

'You've never really explained. Why did she end up like she is?' Howard asked, cursing himself for being lured into discussion about his mother but unable to dismiss her as easily as his father.

'Difficult to say – doctors thought it was post natal depression after you were born – never got herself back into one piece.'

'So it was my fault,' Howard said.

'Grow up, Howard. Of course it wasn't your bloody fault – it was in the woman's genes. It surely wasn't her you wanted to talk about so urgently.'

'No, but if it wasn't my fault, whose fault was it?'

'What are you talking about?'

'She says it's because of ...'

'I know what she says, Howard, she's been saying the same bloody thing for years – she's off her head, mad, deranged and thankfully locked up. Now do you want to tell me what you want to talk about?' There was a knock on the door. 'Yes! What?' Haugham shouted. Howard knew he couldn't have handled the situation more ineptly had he tried. The door

opened and Tammy brought in a tray of coffee. 'Any sign of Aneta yet,' Haugham asked.

'Probably stayed over at her brother's,' Tammy said.

'Let me know when she turns up – I'll need to have a word with her,' Haugham said.

'Yes, sir,' Tammy smirked as she left them alone.

Haugham poured the coffee and looking up at his son asked, 'Perhaps we should start again? What is it?'

'I wanted to talk about the Ukrainians and ...'

'Why?' Haugham interrupted.

'Because ...'

Again, Haugham interrupted. 'You're not going to start all that mamby pamby nonsense about their working conditions, are you?'

'It's their living conditions as well. Have you seen where the men live? Know how they live?'

'Why would I want to do that? How many times do I have to explain this to you? England's gone to pot. The Ukrainians and the rest of them, the Lithuanians, Bulgarians, and before them the Poles, are just like the West Indians, the blacks, used to be in the fifties and sixties when our bloody lot wouldn't clean the toilets and work for peanuts in the NHS – it's just the same now. If we didn't employ the Ukrainians we'd never turn a profit, not with the way farm prices are these days.'

'But we treat them like animals.'

'And? What's your problem with that? They can be trained like all domestic animals ...'

'For Christ's sake! This is just, just ...'

'Face the facts, son. Train them well and they'll do our bidding for years and be grateful for it.'

Howard tried to control his rising temper. 'Even if I thought that was true surely ... if you're training a dog you don't punish it, you reward it so that it learns to be happy in what it's doing.'

'Dogs are brighter. Look, I'll give you a case in point – Aneta.'

'What about her?' Howard demanded feeling the blood rushing to his neck.

'She's willing ... with careful training she could be turned into a delightful little whore who'd do anything asked of her; you must have noticed, she's quite a cracker.' Howard's mouth dropped open as he struggled to his feet. 'They're slaves, Howard, slaves to do with as we like.'

Howard stood in front of his father. He shook from head to foot. No words would form; there were too many to be said. His heart beat harder than he had ever known. He thought he might vomit. Scream. He went to the desk and picked up the coffee pot. Kill him. Lord Haugham frowned, genuinely perplexed as to what was wrong with his son. Howard put the coffee pot back on the desk. *What was I going to do with that?*

'Are you ill?' Haugham asked. 'Sit down, you look awful.'

'No. I'm not ill but I am sick, sick of you, of you and your hateful hideous views of the world – I disown you.'

Haugham laughed. 'You're disowning me?'

'You're despicable; I want nothing more to do with you.'

'Then you know what to do.'

'I most certainly do,' Howard said and left his father alone.

As he was about to leave via the rear of the hall Tammy came out of the kitchen and stopped him in his tracks. 'Mr Howard? Sorry to bother you but thought I'd better tell you that I know what happened yesterday; my brother told me on the quiet about them two men dying, so give Aneta my condolences.'

'What?'

'Your little secret's safe with me,' she said. 'For now.'

Aneta was sitting on the sofa in the lodge's living room when Howard burst into the house and slammed the door behind him. 'What did he say?' she asked.

'I didn't tell him. I couldn't tell him. He stopped me, said things, unrepeatable things.'

'Things about me?'

'Not you ... I hate him. We must pack and leave here forever. I'll get a job. I'll work. We'll find a place to live. We can be happy away from here and him,' he said as he paced up and down.

'Go slow. What happened?'

'I can't tell you, Aneta; not what he said. He's just despicable - thinks your people are animals to be used - used up - as he and his kind see fit.'

'Of course. Did you only just realise this?'

Howard was surprised at her directness. 'Yes. No, but somehow I could pretend he wasn't like that,' he said. *I can never tell you what he said about you, never; what did he mean when he'd said 'she's willing'. I won't ever know, will I? I won't ever want to know.*

'Your world maybe is a pretend world, Howard. My world is real, too real ...'

'Let's pack my things, get yours, and get out of here.'

'I have no things I would take - nothing. But you, Howard, have everything. You have an inheritance - you should not give it up; it's yours to take - and - you have me. Don't I deserve to live like you and not be a slave.'

'That's exactly what he said - you are slaves. I don't want to be part of that.'

'So change it.'

'How do I do that?'

'Not by running away,' she said.

'You want me to stay?'

'I want us to stay. Now, you can tell me more about what he said as we drive to the hospital.' She stood up. 'Come on, let's go.' She took his hand and led him out of the lodge.

Despite her suggestion that he could tell her more about what had happened as he drove Howard was silent for the entire journey. 'You can come in with me and wait in the cafeteria while I find Les; no one will know who you are,' he said as he turned off the engine.

'I will stay here ... why wouldn't you speak to me as we came here?'

'I was thinking, Aneta, thinking that you're right; I must fight for what is mine.'

'Good.' She kissed him quickly on the lips. 'Now go and find out why my brother died.'

'If you get cold turn the engine back on for the heater.'

'I am used to the cold.'

'Not any more you won't be,' he said as he climbed out of the Landrover.

She smiled. She closed her eyes and her expression changed as she remembered how she and Ilko had been so excited about their new lives in the promised land. *Promised land. Promised hell. I'm sorry, Ilko, you won't ... you won't get what you deserved but I will get it for us both and I will take it all for you as well as me. I will make them pay.*

After only twenty minutes Howard opened the door and climbed in.

'You were quick,' Aneta said. 'They have done the autopsies already?'

Howard took a deep breath. 'I'm sorry, Aneta, your brother is not here. No one brought any bodies here last night.'

'What? That's not possible.'

'I'm afraid it is - no bodies of any sort were brought here last night.'

'The gang master - Broadbeam - Yuri said he'd agreed to bring them here,' Aneta said. 'Then he must have taken them somewhere else. I am stupid and so is Yuri to have believed him. Broadbeam wouldn't bring them here - he would have to explain - no, he planned to dump them and run - he dumps them like rubbish. Then there are no questions asked.'

'No one would do that.'

'Of course they would. You know they would.'

Howard sighed in agreement. 'So what do we do now? Find Broadbeam and find out what he did with them?'

'Broadbeam and his thugs – like the boss, Dimitri – are bad. If we ask them that question we will suffer when it is they who must suffer. You have your phone?'

'Yes, of course.'

'Find the number for the police and tell them what has happened.'

'What do I say? How much should I tell them? I don't want to put you at risk, Aneta, anything but that.'

'Okay, let's sit here quietly and think exactly what you're going to say.'

'I will be anonymous on the phone, won't I?'

'You make a good point – they can trace your phone. We go to Boston, to the supermarket, and you buy pay-as-you-go-phone with cash, then make the call then the phone goes in the river. That's the safe way to do it.'

'I would never have thought of that,' Howard said as he started the engine.

'No, you wouldn't - but you're not illegal.'

'And nor will you be after we're married.'

'You mean this?'

'Of course I do.'

'Then, I accept,' Aneta said.

11.06

Sylvia Kinsey waited impatiently for the last of her team to arrive in the seminar room that was only ever used for staff meetings; it was called a seminar room to signify academic respectability. *Why did I let myself in for this?* she wondered. *It couldn't have just been the money – or perhaps it was. Just look at them. Not a single peer amongst them just a load of bloody lab technicians – sometimes I don't think they've a clue what we're doing but maybe that's not such a bad thing in the circumstances.*

And there's no one to really talk to, confide in, share ... totally on my bloody own - and now this.

'Sorry, I'm late,' a young woman, Janice, who was Kinsey's secretary, said as she closed the door behind her and took a seat at the table with the others.

'Okay, folks, good morning,' Kinsey said and received a murmured response in return. 'I know you're all busy so I won't take too long over this. Ten minutes ago I had a phone call from Angers Anderson, *yes his first name really is Angers and it just about sums him up*, who as you may know is the CEO of our parent company InVivo International. Mr Anderson will be paying us a site visit first thing tomorrow morning which means that on top of everything else we need to make sure that everything, and I mean everything, is in perfect order for his inspection.' A number of the technicians sighed wearily. 'I know. I know, but at least we have notice of his arrival – which isn't always the case. So I want you to suspend any lab work scheduled for today and get on with making the place spick and span. Janice, you and I are going to do a full run through of all our bio-security systems. We'll all to have work late this evening but I'll make sure that's recognised in your pay packets. Any questions?'

'Does he know he'll have to go past that lot at the gate?' a man asked.

'It's all right, Karl, he won't have to,' Kinsey said. 'He'll arrive by helicopter.'

'Lucky sod,' Karl murmured.

'Quite,' Kinsey agreed. 'Anything else?'

'There's an awful build up of ash in the incinerator and I don't understand why; we've had no deaths for weeks,' a young woman said.

'Thank you, Brigit. One of our local staff has been burning domestic rubbish in it – I've had a word with the culprit and it won't happen again, but thanks for reminding me that I need to ask Frank to get it bagged up and ready for the tip.'

'It didn't look like domestic rubbish – the ash was too fine and heavy for that,' Brigit persisted.

'I've given you the reason so that's an end of it, Brigit, okay?' Brigit shrugged. 'Anything else? ... No? Good. Let's get to it. Janice, I need twenty, maybe thirty minutes, so can you come to my office then?'

'There's just one other thing,' Karl said.

'What is it now, Karl? A worry about helicopters frightening the dogs?'

'No – I was doing the inventory and six dogs are missing – there should be forty two and there are only thirty six – I don't understand,' Karl said.

'Sorry,' Kinsey said putting her hand to her face to cover her sudden flush of colour, 'I should have entered it on the log – got a call over the weekend and the centre in Cornwall needed some beagles in a hurry – so I came in and saw them on their way.'

'I didn't think Cornwall used dogs,' Karl said.

'That's why they wanted six just to see if they would suit their new area of research – sorry to have caused confusion. Karl, if you let me have the log I'll enter it in. So, shall we get on?'

Once again standing alone in her office Sylvia Kinsey wished she still smoked, wished she could knock herself out with vodka but it was too early in the day for that - as yet - wished she was anywhere but where she stood desperately trying to stop her hands shaking. *Did they notice? I kept them in my pockets, didn't I? I can't remember. Shit. I can't even remember that. Why did they have to ask about the bloody ash – I told Wiggly to sort it out but I've hardly got much authority left over that bastard – I'm going to have to do something about him – he's dangerous but thankfully he won't be about tomorrow when Angers comes but just because he's not here won't stop him being a liability. Somehow I need to keep him permanently quiet – what's that supposed to mean, Sylvia? Bloody Karl, there's no way I'm logging the disappearance of those dogs before Anderson gets here.*

'Yes,' Clare said as she picked up her phone. 'Anonymous? ... Okay ...' she continued to listen intently, making notes until the call was completed. 'Jack?'

He looked up from his desk where he was reading an incident report. 'You know I thought rustling only happened in the wild west until I came back here – it didn't seem to happen when I was a lad – perhaps I should change my first name to Texas? Sorry. What's up?'

'That was from the switchboard at headquarters; they've just had an anonymous phone call suggesting that two men died in suspicious circumstances last night and that their bodies were disposed of by one Dave Broadbeam who was apparently taking the corpses to the hospital but they never arrived.'

'Is this some sort of hoax? Is there a single fact that we can check or is it just another nutter trying to waste police time?'

'We've got a name - Dave Broadbeam, we can check him out and the caller gave the address of where the men supposedly lived – Falkingham Close,' Clare said. 'The caller also mentioned the name, Dimitri.'

That twat! 'Why don't you get someone to do the spade work on Broadbeam, address, phone etc. etc. while we go and take a look at Falkingham Close. They can phone us the details about Broadbeam to save wasting time.'

'You're going to take this seriously?' Clare asked.

'I wouldn't, but the name Dimitri gives me cause for concern - not a nice piece of work. And I don't think I can face reading yet another badly written report on rustling just now – don't they teach English in school anymore? Just listen to me – nearly forty and sounding like the archetypal miserable old git.'

'When's your birthday?' Clare asked as they left the office.

'Next week.'

'Any plans for a celebration of some sort?'

'No one to celebrate with,' Jack said.

'I could cook you dinner at my place.'

'No, it's okay, you don't want to be bothering with all that - I won't be good company anyway - but thanks.'

Clare shrugged. *Suit your bloody self. I thought we'd resolved all that last night? But hey ho.*

'Any idea where Falkingham Close is?' Jack asked.

'Not a clue - we'll ask Sergeant Cliff on the desk - he knows everything - in fact he'll probably know who Dave Broadbeam is as well.'

'Sergeant Cliff - the one with a Teddy Boy's DA - how does he get away with hair like that?' Jack asked as they walked down the stairs. Clare looked at him sideways, raised an eyebrow, as Jack laughed as he stroked his sideburns. 'Take your point.'

'He's too young to have been a real Teddy Boy, probably a New Romantic. I can just see him wearing eye-liner and bopping along to Adam Ant,' Clare said.

'Not sure about the eye-liner,' Jack whispered as they approached the desk. 'Sergeant Cliff, we need your help.'

'It'll cost yer,' the sergeant said.

'Stop teasing, sarg,' Clare said. 'What would the missus say?'

Five minutes later Jack and Clare were heading out of town on their way to Falkingham Close and from there they would go to where the Broadbeams lived; Cliff had known their address but didn't have a phone number. Thirty-five minutes later their unmarked police car bumped its way across what passed for a road towards the two houses.

'Bloody hell, what a dump,' Jack said. 'They look like two broken teeth looking for a set of dentures.'

'What did you say you read at university - creative writing?' Clare asked.

'No, something equally useless - sociology.'

'You don't mean that, do you?' she asked as she pulled on the hand brake.

'No - I loved it. Just thought it would be a useful body of knowledge for a copper - not sure about that anymore. You know if I had to live somewhere like this I think I'd be grateful to pop my clogs just to escape.'

'And you don't mean that either,' Clare said as they climbed out of the car.

'Jesus! It's cold.'

'You can see why this doesn't have a post code.' Clare said as they picked their way through black bin bags and assorted rubbish that tumbled in the biting east wind.

'Just need tumbleweed and Gary Cooper and the scene would be complete, though more the Coen brothers than Fred Zinnemann.'

'What are you talking about?'

'"High Noon", Fred Zinnemann directed it.' Jack knocked on the front door. They waited. 'No one in,' he said and tried the door handle - the door was unlocked. 'Let's just see if there's anyone about.' They went in. 'Christ! It's colder in here than outside,' he said as he pulled his parka more closely around him. 'Hello! Anyone home?'

'It's the damp that makes it feel colder,' she said as they stood in the hallway. 'People live here?'

'They do if your caller was right.' Jack flicked the light switch but the unshaded light bulb hanging from the ceiling stayed off. 'It'll be on a meter, won't it?'

'I'm amazed they've got electricity at all,' Clare said.

As they entered another room full of beds, Jack asked, 'Have you noticed there isn't a single radiator in here? There's no heating apart from those little fan heater things.'

'And it doesn't look like they have a vacuum cleaner either,' Clare said.

'Don't think this lot would be in the running for a Dyson.'

It didn't take them long to discover that there was no one at home and that the only rooms that didn't contain beds were the kitchen and the bathroom.

Back downstairs, Jack said, 'Nineteen beds. Only two missing bedding, they'd been stripped. Why would that be?'

'Because the users didn't need them anymore, because they'd left?'

'What about that smell in that one bedroom?' Jack asked.

'Christ knows what that was.'

'I wonder what happened to the sheets? If outside is anything to go by then the sheets will be in a black bag.'

'Who lives here like this?' Clare asked.

Jack sighed. 'My guess would be illegal immigrant labour – it has all the hallmarks – I saw it a hundred times at the Met. Funny, as we drove in here I thought I could smell it, metaphorically of course, but then I told myself that wouldn't be happening here.'

'You know it does, Jack. We all know it does, but there's no real will to do anything about it, especially around Boston and Wisbech. It's hidden. Look at this place, off the map, out of sight, perfect.'

'Maybe we'll have a go at changing that. Let's start with Mr and Mrs Broadbeam. But first we'd better see if there's any sign of those sheets.'

After spending nearly a fruitless hour in freezing fog they gave up the search for the sheets. Forty minutes later they pulled into the drive leading to the Broadbeam's property nosing slowly forward through increasingly dense fog until a large bungalow loomed up in front of them. Two white transit vans were parked next to each other with "Labour Logistics" stencilled on their sides.

'Someone's got ideas above their station,' Jack observed. 'I've heard mini buses called a lot of things but Labour Logistics is going too far.'

'Big place,' Clare said as they got out of the car.

'And regal if you like single storey ersatz castles – shame they haven't got a moat, but look, they do have a sort of a portcullis thing above the front door,' Jack chuckled.

As he was about to raise the ornate wrought iron knocker to hammer on the black studded oak front door, it opened. A large overweight man dressed in a dirty white vest and voluminous blue track suit bottoms stood glaring at them.

'Mr Broadbeam, Mr Dave Broadbeam?' Jack enquired.

'We're not buying owt so bugger off,' Broadbeam said.

'How did you know we were here?' Jack asked.

'CCTV.'

'That work in visibility like this?'

'What's it to you?'

'Were you waiting for us?' Jack asked.

'Go on, bugger off while you can.'

'We're police officers, Mr Broadbeam, and we'd like to come inside and ask you a few questions if that's alright,' Jack said as he pushed past the barrier of Broadbeam's wobbling belly. 'Nasty weather, isn't it?'

'Oi! Who said you could come in?'

'Close the door, will you, sergeant? We don't want Mr Broadbeam to catch his death, do we?' Clare suppressed a giggle seeing the expression of confused outrage on Broadbeam's face. 'Lead the way, there's a good chap. Where would be best for us to talk?'

'Kitchen,' Broadbeam grunted.

In the kitchen work surfaces were filled with innumerable electric gadgets and a TV mounted on a wall bracket blared. Shelley sat in a large bamboo framed easy chair; Jack guessed that the upholstery would depict a tropical forest but there was no way of telling; Shelley completely filled the chair.

'That's the wife, Shelley.'

'Who are this lot?' Shelley asked.

'Coppers.'

'What do they want?'

'Don't know, Shell.'

'Then why are they in here?'

'Perhaps we can help with that?' Clare suggested.

'Can you turn that TV down a bit?' Jack asked. 'Ta. Mind if we take our coats off? It's roasting in here, bit different from where we just were – you probably know the spot? Falkingham Close, charming little place. Know where I mean?' Jack asked as he took off his parka and put it on the back of a dining chair on which he then sat.

'Make yourself at home, why don't you?' Shelley asked.

'Thanks, most considerate,' Clare said and sat at the table beside Jack. 'You could sit down as well if you like, Mr Broadbeam,' she suggested as she took out her notebook.

'Bloody coppers,' he mumbled as he lowered himself onto a capacious recliner that creaked and groaned under his weight.

'Good. Now that we're all settled – Falkingham Close,' Jack said.

'What about it?'

'You know where it is?'

'Course I bloody know where it is. It's where I picks up the labour in the morning and takes it back at night; that's what we do.'

'Hence the name of your business – Labour Logistics.'

'I thought of that,' Shelley volunteered.

'Are you aware that there is every likelihood that the men you transport are illegal immigrants?' Jack asked.

'Nothing to do with me, mate. I haven't got a clue about anything like that. I just drives 'em.'

'So you're not a gang master?' Clare asked.

'Logistics, that's what we are,' Shelley said. 'It's not for us to ask where they come from; not our problem.'

'Could be,' Jack said, 'but let's leave that aside for the moment. Where were you after midnight last night or more accurately in the early hours of this morning?'

'In bed fast asleep,' Broadbeam said.

'Snorin' his bleedin' head off - had an absolute skinful; pissed as a rat,' Shelley said. 'What's it to do with you anyhow?'

'It's been reported that last night two men died in suspicious circumstances in one of those houses in Falkingham Close,' Clare said.

'What's that got to do with us?' Dave asked.

'You didn't know about the two deaths?' Clare asked.

'Maybe someone mentioned it this morning when you collected the men to drive them to work in your transits?' Jack suggested.

'Anyone mention it to you, Shell?' Dave asked.

'Not to me, love.'

'Nor me.'

'So you know nothing about two unexplained deaths last night?' Jack asked.

'Got it in one, mate,' Dave said.

'I see ... so you didn't agree to take the bodies to the hospital?'

'Are you really coppers?' Dave laughed, 'or are you just trying to take the piss? We're logistics, mate, not fuckin' undertakers.'

'It's funeral directors, Dave,' Shelley added.

'No, we're not taking the piss. We're investigating a serious offence,' Clare said.

'We was here last night after we got home from the pub, I drove cos he was too pissed and we was here till we got up this mornin' to drive 'em to work,' Shelley said.

'And can you prove that?'

'Why would we have to? We've done nothing wrong,' Dave said.

'Presumably that CCTV of yours would prove that you stayed home all night,' Jack said.

'It was on the blink last night,' Dave said.

'And the night before,' Shelley added. 'Dave only fixed it just before you barged your bleedin' way in here just now.'

'Okay, that's fine. Thanks for your help,' Jack said as he abruptly stood up. 'We may need to ask you to come in for

questioning at a later date but we'll leave you for now. It's okay, we'll see ourselves out.'

'No, you bloody won't,' Shelley said. 'See them off the premises, Dave,' she instructed.

With the door firmly shut behind Jack and Clare, Dave returned to Shelley who was smoking a cigarette. 'Don't start,' she said. 'I know I said I'd only smoke in the garden but those two have set me off and it's too fuckin' cold out there anyway. You'd better get on to Wiggy and tell him to keep his gob shut.'

'Wiggy's not going to say anything, is he? For Christ's sake if he says what he's done he's in even deeper shit than we'd be if we was found out – which won't happen.'

'You should give him the heads up, just in case,' Shelley suggested. 'And what about Dimitri – should he know about the cops?'

'I wish we'd never got tied up with that bastard – it was easier when they were just casuals not fuckin' illegals,' Dave said. 'You know, ex-cons, drop-outs, students in the summers – easier than fuckin' foreigners.'

'But it's been good money, real easy, but I know what you mean – we could always tell him we was retiring. There's plenty of others that'll be happy to take it on.'

'I'll give Wiggy a bell and then see about the Ukrainian bastard,' Dave said but at that moment his mobile, on the kitchen table started ringing and spinning in a little circle.

'Cor, look at that,' Shelley said.

Dave answered the phone. 'Yeah ... Scrote ... calm fuckin' down will you ... stop! Just try and say that like normal – slowly, right? ... Oh, fuckin' hell. Just get the fuck out of there – someone else can call that in ... go home and stay there. Right.' He tossed the phone back onto the table where it landed with a clatter. 'Fuck!'

'What's fuckin' happened now?'

13.10

Jack and Clare's police car moved through the dense fog at a snail's pace; as normal, Clare was driving.

'Nice couple, the Broadbeams,' Clare said. 'Helpful, welcoming, don't you think?'

'Shelley was sublime; straight out of Vogue.'

'I thought she was going to blow a gasket when you asked her to turn down the volume on the repeat of Corrie. They'll probably be watching the Jeremy Kyle show by now.'

'It's one of my great joys in life that I don't have a TV.'

'You don't have to watch it all – there's good stuff amidst the dross.'

'Books and music are good enough for – shit! What was that?'

'I think it was a barn owl - almost hit the windscreen.'

'They only come out at night,' Jack said.

'Perhaps the poor bloody bird thinks it's night – it's dark enough. What about the Broadbeams? Are we going to bring them in for questioning?'

'Let's see how they run.'

'So we can cut off their tails with a carving knife?' Clare laughed.

'Something like that. There's no doubt they were up to no good last night but it's not going to be easy to pin it down. I think we'll have to initiate a search for two bodies on the assumption that there's something in the story.'

'Did you think they were expecting us?' Clare asked. 'The way that front door opened.'

'In that fog they couldn't have seen us coming on their CCTV – and where was the monitor? No, they were tipped off.'

'Who knew we were coming here?'

'I think you know the answer to that, Clare.'

She thought about it for a moment. 'Not sergeant Cliff?' Jack remained silent. 'Maybe we'll get lucky and there'll be a trace on the phone that was used for the anonymous call?'

Jack shook his head. 'Somehow I don't think we'll get very far with that – we may well find out where the call was made from but I'd bet the phone'll be in a skip or more likely in the Witham.'

Nearly thirty minutes later they reached the main road; it should have taken them ~~not~~ more than fifteen. 'I think it's clearing,' Jack said. 'I'll never understand the weather round here. Now it's as clear as a bell, there's even enough blue up there to make a sailor's trousers.'

'I've not heard that before,' Clare laughed.

'My granny used to say it, she always ...' the sound of his mobile phone interrupted him. 'Yep, Jack Ranger ... okay ... we're on our way. I think you're going to have to turn us around and head back south. As quick as you can, Clare. Farm two miles off the A17 near Wisbech.'

'More rustling?'

'More bodies and this time they're not virtual.'

'Christ! How many?' Clare asked.

'Three men, in a field, dead as dodos – the farmer on the land where they were picking sprouts found them – I don't know any more than that – scene of crime are on their way along with the police surgeon.'

Jack and Clare were the first to arrive and found Mr Chesterman, the farmer, standing just inside the gateway to his farm; he was clearly distraught.

'I'll drive on down – you follow me,' Chesterman said.

'Have you driven down there already?' Jack asked.

'No, I was walking the land to see if they were pulling their weight.'

'Were there any tyre tracks you noticed?'

'Yes, some.'

'Then we'd better walk – we don't want to be contaminating what could be a crime scene,' Jack explained.

'If you think I'm bloody walking all that way, young man, you can think again.'

'I'm sorry, sir, but until I know better I'm going to assume it's a crime scene. I'm taking the role of senior crime scene officer so it's not really up to you. My apologies, but that's the way it is.'

'I've got a crop to get in, a contract to keep – they don't accept late deliveries,' the farmer said.

'Is it far?' Jack asked.

'Far enough,' Chesterman grunted.

'Clare, sorry, you'll have to wait here for the rest of them – make sure no one comes blundering in.' Jack said. She nodded. 'Thanks. Will we be hard to find when my people arrive?' Jack asked.

'Down this track, three quarters of a mile in a straight line, you'll not miss us,' Chesterman said. 'Have you got boots? It's muddy.'

'No, I haven't, not today, wasn't expecting to be out here.'

'You'll be needing new shoes after this I can tell you,' Chesterman said as they set off.

Jack made a face at Clare who grimaced in return.

The field containing the crop of Brussels sprouts was enormous and bounded by a long shallow drain containing brackish water and brown bedraggled reeds. Long stalked teasels, their wet heads enmeshed in spiders' webs gently shook and trembled in a bitter wind.

'Can we walk on the grass verge, please?' Jack asked as he saw four sets of tracks: a set from a car and the other from a larger vehicle. 'Thanks,' he continued as the farmer complied. 'Who supplies your casuals?'

'Labour Logistics.'

'The Broadbeams?'

‘That’s them – pair of scoundrels.’ Jack raised an eyebrow. ‘They’re just over there,’ Chesterman said pointing at the only tree that could be seen for miles. ‘I’ll leave you to it.’

‘I’d be grateful, Mr Chesterman, if you could stay. You can wait here if you’d prefer not to see the bodies.’

‘If I must.’

With great care Jack made his way toward the tree ensuring that each step was preceded by a careful inspection of the ground in case he obliterated the imprint of other footsteps in the muddy ground.

The first body was seated bolt upright against the foot of the tree as if he was relaxing after a pleasant picnic lunch. The sight of his face caused Jack to take a quick intake of breath. It was beyond white. *Not even the Inuit people have a word for that sort of white*, Jack thought. Black boils oozed dark blood through the white skin. The corpse’s staring eyes said it all. Jack knew that look; he’d seen it before, the wide eyes of immense pain, of torture, before death had released them from their misery. The mouth was wide open, aghast. A long strand of congealed dark green mucus flecked with red hung from swollen lips so completely devoid of pigment that they were almost transparent. The cadaver’s chest was entirely covered with reeking green bile that reminded Jack of a long dead bulbous hulk of a man he’d once found in a canal. The second of the three men lay face down on the ground partially covered by a mound of Brussels sprout sticks that looked as if they had been cast in a bizarre version of “pick-a-stick”. From his posture Jack reasoned that his death had been sudden. Standing over the corpse Jack was unable to see if this man also had the terrifying appearance of the other; it was clear that the man had emptied his bowels as he died. The third body was kneeling, the forehead resting on the ground; the man’s right gloved hand still clutched the handle of a large knife with which he had been harvesting the sprouts; it appeared that he had accidentally stabbed himself in the stomach as he had fallen exsanguinating as he knelt dying; if the wind had been stronger he would have toppled over. Bending down beside him Jack saw that his face was identical

to that of the man leant against the tree. Jack sighed; somehow this was worse than his experience of gang warfare where death was meted out with brutal and macabre efficiency. *A field of sprouts? It’s not the right place to see things like this. Whoever killed them he corrected himself whatever killed them wasn’t someone who sneaked up and murdered them, it was something much more sinister than violent crime, something almost beyond my imagination – or it might be if I didn’t know better. Please God the pathologists know their jobs.*

Chesterman was leaning on his stick with his back to the scene as Jack came up beside him. ‘Did you see what they looked like?’

‘More’s the pity,’ the farmer replied. ‘I’ve not seen anything like that in all my life; I won’t be forgetting it in a hurry.’

‘Nor me. I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have asked you to wait here. Look, why don’t you go back to your house and wait in the warm – I’ll come there later and we can talk – you’ll have to make a statement.’

‘Thank you. Bit sobering this, isn’t it? Sorry I was so rude first off but this was a bit of a shock.’

‘Not a problem, Mr Chesterman. One thing before you go if I may?’

‘Go ahead.’

‘There are two sets of tyre tracks going two and fro from the crime scene – are they from one of your vehicles?’

‘No, just tractors down here. One set’ll be from the Broadbeam’s van and the other likely as not’ll be from one of his lads that keep an eye on the labour to make sure it’s not skiving.’

‘Any idea who that might be?’ Jack asked.

‘It’s normally a lad called Scrote but I haven’t seen him today.’

‘That’s his real name?’ Jack said.

‘Short for scrotum. It’s supposed to be a joke; real name’s Hitchcox, Richard Hitchcox, Dick Hitchcox – get it?’

‘Doesn’t work for me.’

'Nor me. Right little ne'er do well, obsessed with cars, not the brightest star in the heavens.'

'What does he drive? Do you know?'

'Peugeot 106 with a flash exhaust that sounds like a bloody Vulcan taking off.'

'Thanks, Mr Chesterman. Any idea where this Scrote might live?'

'It'll be Louth somewhere. They all live in Louth.'

'Who do?'

'The lads that act like site foremen for Broadbeam – there's four of them: Scrote, Noddy, Capstick and Mouse.'

'I can't wait to make their acquaintance. You get off into the warm – I'll catch up with you later,' Jack said.

Jack met the police surgeon, Dr Davis Sage, at the farm gate.

'This sounds a bad business,' the doctor said.

'DI Jack Ranger,' Jack said as they shook hands.

'Jack, I thought it was you. I didn't know you were back. Good to see you.'

'Good to see you too, doctor, even in these circumstances. It's this way; bit of a walk, I'm afraid.'

'I was really sorry about your Mum and Dad; we all went back a long way,' Dr Sage said.

'You seemed more of a family friend than a doctor.'

'That's what GPs used to be like.'

'Do you remember when I was really ill and you gave me a tiny little yellow swan and told me it would help me get better?' Jack asked.

'No, I don't remember that,' the doctor chuckled.

'I've still got it.'

'Your dad helped me out of a scrape when I first joined the practice here - fifty years ago it is now; I owed him. Never really paid him back. It broke my heart when he ... I should have taken more care of him after what happened to your mother. I'm sorry. Enough of that. Duty calls.'

After Dr Sage had issued three death certificates, a pathologist was called to the scene for an initial investigation before the corpses could be taken away for autopsies. Jack and Clare had watched as white suits had meticulously scoured and photographed the scene for evidence. Jack had decided that it was indeed a designated crime scene and received authority from Wainstock to act as Senior Scene of Crime Officer. At which point he called in more foot soldiers and ordered a search of the square mile surrounding the site, even though he knew it was pretty pointless; not to have done so would have exposed him to the risk of being accused of negligence. Finally Jack and Clare sat in the warmth of the farmer's kitchen both clutching mugs of hot tea.

'Is there anything else, anything at all, that you can think of that you haven't already covered in your statement?' Jack asked.

'My statement's about what I know for certain, right?' Jack nodded. 'But I could have an opinion that I might want to share, that was just that, an opinion, not a fact.'

'You could,' Jack confirmed.

'It's not about what killed 'em and I just hope that it's got nothing to do with my sprouts...'

'I don't see how it could, Mr Chesterman,' Clare said.

'You don't know what these supermarkets are like with contracts – any excuse they have to reduce the agreed price ... if they think there's a health risk then they'll just terminate. I can't afford that.'

'I'm sure the autopsies will show that it's nothing to do with your farm,' Jack said.

'You can't know that, son. You just can't know it ...'

'What was the opinion you wanted to share,' Clare prompted.

'I don't like what's happened with hiring labour – it's not like it was. As I told you the Broadbeams are scoundrels but you know where you are with them though when you've shaken hands you're as well to count your fingers. No, it's the bugger that runs them, the Ukrainian, Dimitri Guraya. You heard of him?'

'Unfortunately,' Jack confirmed.

'You've met him?' Jack nodded. 'He's a hard bastard, sorry about the language, miss. He's relentless in getting his own way. Threats,' Chesterman whispered even though there was no one else there to hear.

'He threatened you?'

'I know someone who refused his services and he lost his entire crop of lettuce, every pane of glass broken in his greenhouses, the ground contaminated with petrol, oil, whatever they could get their hands on and everything dead.'

'Why didn't the farmer bring charges?' Clare asked.

'Because he knew what would happen next if he did,' Jack replied. 'That right, Mr Chesterman?'

'That's right – there's more to life than crops - there's the health and welfare of your family as well.'

'You feel that threatened?' Clare asked.

'Tell you what, young lady, I'd rather you lot spent your time trying to get rid of the likes of Dimitri than wasting all your time on petty crime and speeding offences.'

'So what you're saying is that you're forced to use his gangs of labourers on your farms?' Clare asked.

'That's about it.'

'But you wouldn't stand up in court and swear to it?'

'Damn right I wouldn't – I have a family,' Chesterman confirmed.

'You do know that they're all likely to be working illegally and a large number of them are also likely to be illegal immigrants?' Jack asked.

'We know that alright but unless you lot do something about them getting into the country what are we going to do? I tell you what, it's taken the jobs away from them that was born here and there's anger, real anger that we're being taken over and we can't do anything about it. It's like in them old gangster films – the Godfather and the like – a protection racket, that's what it is,' Chesterman concluded.

'I believe you,' Jack said. 'But you're not suggesting that these men's death are to do with Dimitri?'

'No, I'm not. Not directly. But I don't think it would have happened if things were like they were.'

'Why did they change?' Jack asked.

'You know why, son – because money talks and the supermarkets have the money. They call the tune. We can't pay proper wages because we can't afford to pay proper wages - not because we're mean sods and live in the lap of luxury because we don't! We're over a barrel from every point of view. I don't like it. I'm no socialist but I tell you that money has ruined farming - turned it industrial. On Haugham's estate they used to employ over two hundred farm workers – you know how many they've got now? No? Ten full time and the rest are casuals. Two causes – machinery and cheap labour.'

'That's one powerful argument,' Clare said.

'But they won't even need what labour they still have for much longer what with moving over thousands of acres to bio fuels – if I see another bloody field given over to miscanthus I don't know what I'll do,' Chesterman said.

'Why are they doing that?' Clare asked.

'Subsidy. Government bloody subsidy. EU. Christ knows. But I tell you what, it's not just Haugham's estate, it's happening all over – I don't really understand it despite the subsidies.'

Jesus! Do we have to talk about the rural bloody economy when I've murders to solve? 'Can we get back to the matter in hand? Haugham uses Dimitri's services as well?' Jack asked.

'He contracts it out – he doesn't care. I know for a fact that he's got women servants working at the Hall; they're Ukrainian an' all.'

'Well,' Jack said. 'Thanks for the tea and thank you for telling it as you see it – I won't forget what you've said.'

'Then do something about it, son – and – remember to put some wellies in the boot of your car.'

'I will,' Jack said. 'On both counts.'

16.08

Sylvia Kinsey was tired – it had been a long day and it wasn't over yet by a long chalk so that when she and Janice emerged from the door of the larger of the holding kennels she wasn't delighted to see Wiggy standing in the twilight smoking his ever-present roll-up. 'What are you doing here? You only work nights,' she said.

'I came up early. Needed a word, doc.'

'I'm really busy, Wiggy; we've got the CEO doing a site visit here in the morning and I'm nowhere near being ready – can it wait?'

Wiggy looked at his watch. 'I'll go and have a chat with Frank in the office – but I've got things to do as well, you know. This place don't own me; I only work here.'

Kinsey noticed the strange look Janice was giving her. *Yes, I know*, Kinsey thought, *you're wondering why he's speaking to me as if he was my boss and not vice versa?* 'You could do with learning a few manners, Wiggy. I'll come and find you when I'm good and ready.'

Wiggy looked offended. 'I didn't have to come up here in my own time.'

'Is it important?'

'I wouldn't have come up here in my own time if ...'

'Alright! Alright. You just said that. Janice, carry on to the next kennel, please, and I'll be with you in two minutes.'

Janice raised an eyebrow in surprise and walked away clutching the metal clipboard Kinsey had given her.

'Shall we go inside?' Wiggy asked. 'It's not very private out here.'

'Into the kennel?'

'Yeah, don't think as how they'll make any sense of what I got to tell you,' Wiggy said.

'What do you want?' Kinsey asked once they were inside the low wooden building in which beagles sat in separate cages.

'Look at them poor bloody dogs just sitting there waiting to be executed – just like death row in the States.'

'This comes from the man who illegally cremates bodies? They aren't waiting for execution; they are waiting to be used in scientific and well designed experiments that will ...'

'But they die, don't they?' Wiggy interrupted.

'What is it that you want? More money? What?'

'More money is always handy, doc, but I came to do you a favour.'

'A favour? You, doing me a favour, like blackmailing me? Is that supposed to be a joke?'

'Someone has tipped off the coppers that the two blokes what died and was supposed to be taken to the hospital never got there. They've been told that my sister Shelley and her husband dumped the bodies somewhere. The coppers have been to see Dave and Shell and they've told 'em to piss off. We got nothing to worry about, cos there's no way the coppers can prove anything anyway as there's no trace of the bodies, is there?'

'Why do I need to know this? How will anybody make a connection between two missing bodies and me?'

'Because someone might have seen 'em bringing the bodies in here; they had to bring 'em in past them protesters, didn't they?'

'But wasn't it at night?'

'Yeah, but someone might have been awake. You never know: better to be safe than sorry, eh?'

'What am I supposed to do with this information?'

'Nothing. It's so you've got a heads up, that's what Dave calls it. If the coppers find out their van came up here and come asking questions you know nothing, right?'

'I would hardly tell them the truth, would I, Wiggy?'

'No, you're a brainy bugger, ain't you? Point is, if they do come it won't be no shock cos I've warned you; that new copper that was up here with you, the one I met at the car boot, he's not stupid that one; that's why it's a favour.'

‘That protects us both, Wiggy.’

Wiggy smiled. ‘I knew you’d understand, doc. I’ll be going home now and maybe I’ll see you later if you’re still here when I come on shift at eight tonight.’

‘Oh, I’ll be here,’ Kinsey sighed as she left Wiggy alone in the kennel.

Wiggy stood looking at the dogs and was pleased with himself; he’d made the right decision not to tell the doctor about the three dead bodies that were now in the morgue; that really would have turned her into a rabbit caught in headlights.

Outside the kennel Kinsey stood with her eyes tight shut and her fists so tight against her thighs that her finger nails were at the point of drawing blood. *If that was death row in there I can't think of a more suitable candidate. So what do I do now? Run? Where to? I didn't think this could get any worse but it just did. Suck it up. Is that the phrase? Disgusting phrase. Maybe I could just go to the police, tell them I lied about the damage to my car and take it on the chin, put it down to stress, plead guilty, get told off, go on sick leave, get the sack, end of story ... I might get away with that but not with what I've let Wiggy get away with – that would be the finisher and who would want to take me on after that. Oh, by the way, Mr Anderson, I've been incinerating missing persons - hope you don't mind? But it's nothing to worry about because they were illegal immigrants. Somehow, I don't think so ... Enough ... I've had enough.*

16.10

‘Are we going back to the station to find out where Scrote lives?’ Clare asked.

‘No, we’ll go straight to Rachel Robert’s house and see if Dimitri’s there.’

‘Do you really think Sergeant Cliff told the Broadbeams we were coming?’

‘Don’t know. Just my suspicious nature – put it down to not liking Teddy Boys,’ Jack said, aware that Clare’s sideways glance meant he hadn’t convinced her at all; he was pleased she said nothing. The time would come for that but not yet.

Rachel answered Jack’s knock on the door. ‘I’m sorry, the bell’s not working.’ Jack noticed that her hand was shaking as she held it over her right eye. ‘You can come in; he’s not here.’

‘What happened to your eye?’ Jack asked.

‘Can you just come in? I don’t want everyone on the street seeing me like this,’ she said. Clare led the way into the narrow hallway of the terraced house. ‘Come in the kitchen ... cup of tea?’

‘What happened to the TV,’ Clare asked as she saw that the large screen on the wall was cracked diagonally from top left to bottom right.

‘I’ll make the tea,’ Jack said. ‘Rachel, sit yourself down and tell Clare what’s happened – I’ll listen while I put the kettle on – no – stop! I’ll find the cups; I’m a detective remember? Milk and sugar, Rachel?’

‘Thanks. Two sugars, no milk ... there isn’t any anyway ... ran out of milk ... that is ... couldn’t go out looking like this,’ Rachel said as she slumped into the armchair beside the artificial coal fire and lit a cigarette.

‘When did this happen?’ Clare asked.

‘Yesterday ... last night.’

‘It was Dimitri?’ Jack asked from the kitchen area.

‘Who else?’

‘Look, Rachel, I know you’re afraid. I’d be afraid, but we can help you,’ Clare said.

‘Your name’s Clare, right? You’re a copper as well?’

‘Yes, I’m Detective Sergeant Clare Farmer and Jack’s my boss.’

Rachel took a long drag of her cigarette. ‘I know you mean well but it’s pointless – you don’t know what he’s like. You wouldn’t want to know what he’s like ... I don’t want to know what he’s like.’

'So let us help you do something about him,' Clare said.

Rachel stared at the fire as the kettle boiled. Jack poured water onto the tea bags in the mugs then added a little cold water into the top of each so that they wouldn't have to wait an age for the tea to cool down; despite his sympathy for Rachel, they couldn't devote too much time to her situation. He stirred in her sugar and took her and Clare their mugs.

As Jack sat down beside Clare on the sofa holding his mug, Rachel looked up at him and managed a weak smile. 'It's all my own fault; I should never have taken up with him ... he seemed so ...' She sipped her tea and fell back into silence.

'Just tell us what happened, me ducks,' Jack said.

Rachel looked up and almost smiled. 'Never thought I'd hear the likes of you saying "me ducks".'

'Born and bred here just like you,' Jack said. 'Come on, tell us.'

'He came in last night, foul mood, nothing new there. He was going to watch the football but it was on BT Sport but we don't have that - we're on Virgin so he punches the screen and that happened - it doesn't work now. Then he says he told me to get BT as well - he didn't do any such thing. I said so. Then he says it's my fault that the TV is bust. Then he hit me - only the once this time - but it was really hard. I passed out. When I woke up he was gone, but he'll be back. He's gone down to London to see his boss, some other Ukrainian called Plushenko. That's it ... He'll kill me one day.'

'You must press charges,' Clare said.

'No way,' Rachel said with a vigorous shake of the head. 'No way.'

'You can always change your mind,' Jack said. 'I need to ask you two things. Will you let us take you to your uncle Gil's so he can look after you? Just for a few days - you look like you could do with some TLC and leaving you here on your own you won't get any. Will you do that for me?'

'That would be good, thank you.'

'Second thing, do you know someone called Scrote?'

'Went to school with him - Richard Hitchcox. It was me that gave him his nick name - mostly because he was always scratching his balls - Scrote lives round the corner at number 41 Sewerby Lane.'

Gil was delighted that Rachel had agreed that she would stay with him for a few days above the café but was horrified to see the extent of her bruising. Jack had a quiet word and promised Gil that one way or another he would sort Dimitri.

Outside 41 Sewerby Lane Jack briefly inspected the pimped Peugeot and was suitably impressed with the quality of the paintwork. 'You'd think he'd keep his white walls cleaner than that though, wouldn't you?' Jack said pointing at the thick mud that covered them.

To his and Clare's surprise the doorbell worked; to their even greater surprise a young man who agreed he was Richard Hitchcox, despite being slightly drunk, opened the door. 'Who the fuck are you?' he demanded waving a can of Special Brew in his right hand as if conducting an invisible orchestra.

'Can we come in, Scrote?' Jack asked.

'Only my mates call me that.'

'Everyone calls you Scrote, Scrote,' Jack said.

'I thought I asked who the fuck you were?'

'You have a fine memory.'

'You're fuckin' pigs, ain't you?'

'Oink, oink,' Jack said.

'Fuck off!' Scrote bellowed as he tried to shut the door. Jack's shoulder prevented this and Clare shut the door behind them.

'Thanks for asking us in,' Jack said as they all stood in the small hallway. 'Clare, could you go through and guard the back door so Mr Scrote can't do a runner? I'll wait here while he gets himself suitably dressed for the cold outside.'

'Excuse me,' Clare said as she tried to ease past Scrote.

'Giss us a kiss,' Scrote said as he puckered his lips. Clare deliberately stepped on his bare left foot as she pushed past him. 'Fuckin' hell, watch it! Bitch! That fuckin' hurt.'

'Do you want to get yourself some outdoor clothes?' Jack suggested.

'I'm not fuckin' going nowhere.'

'It might be a good idea to get some socks and shoes, warm shirt, jumper, jacket, coat – whatever you like - I don't much mind, but with all the cutbacks it's fucking freezing down the nick.'

'You can't arrest me; I ain't done nothin',' Scrote said and tipped the can up to his mouth, emptied it and burped.

'Arrest you when you ain't done nothing - apart from the excessive use of double negatives - why would I do that?'

'Dun know, I'm having another of these, mate, so you can piss off,' Scrote said as he turned and tottered into the kitchen where Clare was leaning on the back door. He opened the fridge and took out another can and with some difficulty popped the tab.

'Get yourself sorted now or we'll take you in just as you are,' Jack said moving closer to Scrote and taking the can. 'You've had enough. Don't want you pissing yourself in the back of the police car, do we, Clare?' he said passing the can to Clare.

'Oi! Giss us that back.'

'Fuck this,' Jack said, spun Scrote around, pushed his arm up his back, shoved him out of the kitchen and down the hall. 'Where are your house keys?'

'There! On that fuckin' hook! You're fuckin' hurtin' me, you cunt,' Scrote complained as Clare took the keys from the hook by the front door, opened it, and closed it behind them. 'I ain't got no fuckin' shoes nor me fuckin' fags.'

'It's against the law to smoke in the nick these days, Mr Scrote.'

'I'm not your fuckin' Mr Scrote.'

'But you are fucked, Scrote,' Jack said, opening the rear door of the car, protecting Scrote's head with one hand and pushing him in.

Within moments Scrote and Jack were sitting together on the back seat of the car as Clare drove them away from Sewerby Lane.

'How long are you going to leave him in there?' Clare asked.

'Just waiting for that call from forensics.'

'Are we really going to interview him while he's still pissed?'

'He'll be sober by now. Stropo little sod, isn't he? ... I know it was before both our times but fancy the old Z Cars approach?' Jack asked.

'Who am I supposed to be? Stratford Johns or Frank Windsor?'

'Good point – but do you want to take him in some socks for his bare feet, there must be some somewhere? I expect your Sergeant Cliff has some in his locker.'

'He's not my sergeant Cliff, Jack. You want socks, you get them.'

'Fair enough,' Jack chuckled.

'Isn't me playing the good cop to your bad cop a bit of a stereotype?'

'It is, but young Scrote doesn't strike me as much of a radical free thinker or.' Jack's mobile rang. 'Okay, that's fine ... Inside the Peugeot, okay ... I'll ask him. Thanks.' He ended the call. 'Time to party. Let's get to it.'

'Sorry to keep you waiting,' Clare said as she and Jack sat down opposite Scrote. She turned on the recorder.

'I'm not saying nothin' till I know why the fuck I'm in here for without no shoes or socks and freezing fuckin' cold when I ain't done nothing.'

'That was a long sentence, Scrote, and no punctuation,' Jack said.

'You're helping us with our inquiries, Mr Hitchcox, and that's all. You were offered the opportunity to find warm clothes but you refused that offer and so here we all are,' Clare said with a broad smile. 'Right ... you must have been through this before ... you help us and then we give you a lift home and you can get your socks.'

'And have a fag,' Jack added.

Scrote was unimpressed.

'Let me tell you what the situation is, Mr Hitchcox. One of our forensic team has confirmed that the mud on the tyres of your car exactly matches the mud on the track on Mr Chesterman's farm. Were you there earlier today?' Clare asked.

'Course I fuckin' was. It's my fuckin' job, innit? Checking on the labour.'

'How many were working?'

'Three.'

'How were they when you saw them?'

'How would they fuckin' be? Pickin' sprouts, jabberin' away like always and moanin' like fuck about the cold.'

'Fit and well?' Clare asked.

'Yeah, they were fit and fuckin' well. Why wouldn't they be?'

'At what time did you see them?'

'First off, in the morning, like - I didn't look at my watch.'

'It's okay, sergeant,' Jack said to Clare. 'The pathologist will be able to give us a pretty good fix on the time of death.'

'What you talkin' about time of death for?'

'Mr Chesterman found all three of them dead.'

'I don't know nothin' about that.'

'Really?' Jack queried. 'Nothing at all? Didn't see them? Didn't take a look? Didn't get out of there as fast as possible?'

'I don't know nothin' about dead men.'

'What about the two that died yesterday?'

'What two what died when?'

'You've done a really nice job pimping that 106,' Jack said. Scrote frowned and looked perplexed. 'Good paintwork – must have taken hours with the old wet and dry; I've done a fair bit of that myself and it really eats up the time; good work, Scrote. Of course I don't know what it sounds like but I've been told it's like a Vulcan taking off.' Scrote looked pleased. 'You do know what a Vulcan is?'

'Course I know what a fuckin' Vulcan is. Seen it at Waddington Air Show, ain't I? It's a sweeter sound than a

Vulcan. A Vulcan's a bit ... raspy like, crunching metal ... I don't know ... it's not like one of them.'

'Quite poetic for you, Scrote – "raspy like, crunching metal", nice. Going back to your 106. If you've spent so much time, and presumably money, getting the bodywork and engine up to such quality why is the interior so shitty?'

'I ain't finished it yet. Got to chuck the back seat out, put in two rally seats, roll bar and get covers – it takes time.'

'And money,' Jack added.

'Too fuckin' right, mate.'

'But you could at least keep it clean. All that time and money and you leave the back seat and the passenger seat, let alone the floor, covered in mud and have you smelt it – it stinks, Scrote, it stinks like an abattoir on a hot day. You must get flies coming inside for lunch with a smell like that.'

'It's a health hazard, Mr Hitchcox,' Clare said.

'What have you been carrying round in it, Scrote? Offal?' Jack asked.

'I had to shift some sprouts.'

'Sprouts don't smell like that.'

'They do when they're rotten,' Scrote said, his face now flushed.

'You carry rotten sprouts round in that lovely car of yours – why?' Clare asked.

'It was a favour, like.'

'Must be a good mate to do a favour like that,' Jack suggested.

'Yeah, well.'

'Who were you doing a favour for?' Clare asked.

'I need a piss. I'm fuckin' desperate.'

'Dave Broadbeam? Mr Chesterman?' Clare continued.

'I just said I need a fuckin' piss,' Scrote said and stood up.

'Just answer the question and you can go to the toilet,' Clare said.

'Sit down!' Jack said.

'I'll piss myself.'

'Go ahead, at least you won't wet your socks,' Jack said.

'You're a cunt.'

'And you're up to your neck in shit and still diving for pearls.'

'What's that fuckin' mean?'

'It's from an Elvis Costello song – "Ship Building". What were you carrying in your car? I'll make it easy for you and then you can have a piss. Our forensic people say there's evidence ... it's okay, I'll tell you when you get back from the toilet,' Jack said stood up, opened the interview door and shouted, 'Can someone please come and take Mr Hitchcox to the toilets please?' After a moment Sergeant Cliff appeared. 'Perfect. Thanks, Serg, stay with him will you? Cheers,' Jack said as he shut the door leaving Scrote and the sergeant alone in the corridor. Jack turned off the recorder. 'I don't think old Clifly liked that very much.'

'What are you playing at, Jack? What is all this about the inside of the car? Do we know anything?'

'Only what I was told on the phone; that it smells like an abattoir.'

'So, if there was a lawyer here they'd call it a fishing expedition?'

'Precisely.'

A few minutes later the door opened and Scrote came back in and sat down.

'Better now?' Jack asked and turned the recorder back on.

'Yeah. What was you goin' to tell us?'

'We're keeping your car while we run some more tests on it but you're free to go. I'll get someone to drive you home. Sergeant Farmer, have you got Mr Scrote's house keys?'

'Yes, I have them here.'

'How am I supposed to get to work without my fuckin' car?'

'Walk?' Jack suggested.

'You really are a cunt.'

'We may have to talk to you again ... just one last thing. You didn't seem very surprised about there being three dead bodies on Mr Chesterman's farm,' Jack said.

'Of course I was fuckin' surprised - I don't know nothing about dead bodies.'

'Did you dump them at Mr Chesterman's?'

'I didn't dump them nowhere.'

'What about the other two?'

'What other two?' Scrote asked, panic now written all over his face. 'Thought as how you said I could go?'

'Yesterday night two other men died in mysterious circumstances and they were supposed to be driven to the hospital but they never arrived. Do you know anything about that, Scrote?' Clare asked.

'I don't know nothin' about that.'

'Now, if you'd seen the three bodies on Chesterman's farm,' Jack said, 'or more to the point, if you'd smelt what they'd vomited up, smelt them, then you'd understand why we're asking about the stench inside your car.' Jack paused. Scrote stared at the table. 'Because the stench inside your car is exactly the same as that of the three dead men – it's not a smell you'd mistake for any other. I know because I've smelt it.'

'It was sprouts.'

Jack couldn't help himself; he laughed. 'Have you ever seen a Harold Pinter play?' he eventually asked. 'Silly question. Of course you haven't. What we're going to do is go back to your place, get you some shoes and socks, some warm clothes and then we're going to the morgue and from there we're going to the car pound where forensics are taking your 106 to pieces as we speak.'

'They aren't really taking my car to pieces, are they?'

'Of course they are – it may have been used in a criminal conspiracy to cover up the death and disposal of two people who may possibly have been murdered,' Clare said.

Scrote thought about this for a good two minutes while Jack and Clare watched him become increasingly agitated. 'I

don't know nothin' about murder. They was alive when I took 'em to that dump where they live. I just drove 'em there. That's why my car stinks,' Scrote said. 'That's the truth. I don't know nothin' about no hospital – you'll have to ask the labour what happened after I dumped 'em. Tell you what though - Lord bleedin' Haugham's son, Howard, he was there, I saw him with the women. Them other three - they was dead when I got there, just dead ... honest they was. It's the truth. They won't have to take my car to pieces now, will they?'

'I'll go and have a word. Then I think it'll be time for you to make a statement,' Jack said.

17.43

Once again in the comfort of Howard's lodge Aneta had spent several hours persuading Howard that his fervent desire, founded upon his recently discovered courage, fuelled by outrage, to confront his father, reveal his love and his intention to marry her was not the best way to preserve either his current privilege or, more importantly, his future prospects of inheriting the estate and title. She had surprised herself, previously unaware she was such a skilled negotiator, a diplomat even, and thus imagined herself fulfilling the same role in public life as Lady Haugham as an Anne and no longer an Aneta.

Towards the end of their conversation, he'd asked, 'So you mean that we should pretend that nothing has happened, continue as normal and just wait and see what comes from my phone call to the police?'

'Yes, we must wait and see how the land lies in a few days.'

'You know I'd give up everything for you.'

'I know, but I want the best for you, Howard; being poor would not be good for you.' *Or me.*

'I wouldn't mind.'

'You would, believe me you would. Think of this - if you love me why would you want me to stay poor like I am now, a slave – don't I deserve better than that?'

And so it had gone.

'You're going to go back to work at the hall just like before?' he asked.

'I have to go to Marina and Bohdanna and support them – they are widows now. Widows with no bodies to grieve over and no place to go to remember their men except inside their heads; it is a bad time for us women. If I can do this, so can you, Howard. You must go and build a bridge with your father and no more disowning, yes?'

'He doesn't forgive easily, but I've said I'll try, so I will – much as it sticks in my throat.'

'You can be proud of being clever instead, yes? Now it is time for me to go back.'

'But we can still be together? Please say we can.'

'We agreed we must wait for a few days – we don't know what will happen, who will be investigated by police. You don't want me sent home, do you?'

'Of course not, but I'll miss you.'

'Soon we will be together all the time for the rest of our days, yes?'

'I could drive you.'

'It is better I walk.'

As she entered the packing shed at the rear of the stable yard Aneta found Marina and Bohdanna putting mushrooms into latticed wooden trays ready for the farmers' market. Tammy stood in a corner watching them while she smoked a cigarette. No words were spoken as silent embraces were exchanged; it was clear that both of the older women had been weeping.

'So, the bad penny's finally turned up, has she? Where the hell have you been?' Tammy asked.

'I have been looking for my brother.'

‘Where’d he go?’

Bohdanna and Marina exchanged a worried glance – Tammy had already told them she knew that their husbands were ill and they had in turn told her that they had died. Aneta saw Marina give a tiny shake of her head as she closed her bloodshot eyes for a second.

‘To heaven,’ Aneta said.

‘Fat chance of that,’ Tammy laughed. ‘The lord and master has been asking after you – seems he’s taken a shine to you; told us to tell you to go and see him as soon as you turned back up, so best get to it, hadn’t you? By the way, I’ve got news for you: three more of your lot have popped their clogs, dead in a field, so me brother, Scrote told us. Just hope you bloody lot ain’t infectious.’

‘More have died?’ Marina asked putting her hand to her mouth with a gasp. ‘That’s what popping clogs means, yes?’

‘That’s what it means.’

‘It’s like a plague,’ Bohdanna sighed.

‘As long as it sticks to you lot we won’t have nothing to worry about, will we?’

‘You are evil,’ Aneta said.

‘And you’re a slag who needs to watch what she says – so get on and see to his lordship.’

Aneta knocked on Haugham’s study door dreading the reception she might get.

‘Ah, there you are, my dear, where have you been?’ he asked as she closed the door behind her and stood anxiously waiting. ‘People have been telling tales about you. Lock the door, there’s a good girl.’

She knew she was blushing, ‘What sort of tales, sir?’

‘How many times, girl? Call me Reggie – it’s not as if we’re complete strangers, is it? Been skiving off, looking after a sick relative – you know you should have asked and not just disappeared.’

‘I’m sorry, Reggie.’

‘Is he better?’

‘He’s dead.’

‘Shame. Fond of him, were you?’

‘He was my brother.’

‘Happens to us all, my dear. No good crying over spilt milk and all that ... I wasn’t expecting you,’ he said and took a swig from a glass on his desk. ‘But we can soon put that to rights. Come here.’ He waited while she reluctantly joined him. ‘I have a little surprise for you; watch,’ he said as he used the computer mouse to scroll to an icon labelled Aneta. ‘Come and stand beside me so you can see the screen.’ She did and he double clicked the icon. She gasped. There she was pounding his penis in her hand until he ejaculated.

‘Oh, I didn’t know, you are sick,’ she gasped and tried to turn away.

He held her tightly around the waist. ‘Look, there’s more, lots more.’

She watched as the second clip played. She found herself compelled to look. Her hatred welled up. By the end of the sixth clip she broke free of his grasp. ‘How?’

‘That little thing on the top of the screen – it’s a camera. I’ve never done editing before but I had such fun putting together all those clips of you tossing me off.’

‘Wasn’t it enough to just make me do it to you?’

‘I wanted to be able to look at it – be my own porn star – quite something. I never thought it would prove useful but there you are, life is full of surprises.’

‘This was wrong to do this.’

‘And you’ve been doing something wrong as well, haven’t you?’

‘What have I done wrong?’ she asked, fearing that she knew exactly where this was leading.

‘I wonder what Howard would have to say if he saw you doing that for me? But I expect you go all the way with him ... of course you do ... personally I couldn’t give a damn, but

I do think there ought to be parity between father and son, don't you?'

'He loves me,' Aneta blurted out.

'He's a fool if he does.'

'How did you find out?'

'None of your business.'

'What are you going to do?'

'It's what you're going to do, my dear; parity.'

'Not with you. No.'

'Then I will show Howard my little film – somehow I think his love might fade just a tad in those circumstances, don't you? You did lock the door?' he asked as he stood up and unzipped his flies. 'What's the Ukrainian for a blow job?'

18.27

'Given that we're the only ones looking after this can of worms and with Fulsome away on yet another of his endless HR courses shouldn't we split up? I could go and interview Howard Haugham while you go to Falkingham Close. What do you think?' Clare asked as they walked into the car park.

'You going to drive?' Jack asked.

'Don't you trust me or something?'

'Don't be ridiculous – of course I trust you – why wouldn't I?'

'Because you don't trust anyone?'

'Shit, Clare, I know it would save time if we split up but I need you with me at Falkingham Close. Come on, get in the car. I'll drive.'

She climbed in and they moved off. 'If you need a witness you could take a PCSO with you. Most of them seem to be hanging around doing nothing at the moment.'

'A toy copper? No thanks.' Jack drove on in silence. 'I'm afraid.'

'You? Afraid? Come on, Jack, that hardly fits your person spec, does it?'

'I'm afraid of me.'

Clare studied his profile as he drove and saw that he looked troubled. 'You'd better explain that,' she said.

'Dimitri Guraya is up to his neck with these illegal immigrants and a decidedly nasty piece of work who's also beating the shit out of my best friend's niece, Rachel. If he's at Falkingham Close and starts to mouth off I might just sort the bastard out once and for all. That's what I'm afraid of doing because then some fucking brief will help him get away with it all. That's why I need you with me.'

'I have that much influence over you, do I?'

'In such a circumstance - yes.'

'Should I take that as faint praise?'

Jack laughed. 'If you like ... once we've been to the Close we'll go and find the heir apparent. Looks like it's going to be more overtime tonight – you didn't have anything planned did you?'

'It's alright; I'm recording the match.'

'I didn't have you down as a football fan.'

'Why not?'

'You've just never mentioned it, that's all,' Jack said.

'You do not have to say anything, but it may harm your defence, if you fail to ...'

'Alright,' Jack interrupted with a laugh, 'it's a fair cop ... so who do you support?'

'Nadal.'

'Oh. Tennis. Well I guess that's game set and match to Sergeant Farmer.'

'To love,' she chuckled.

It wasn't long before their attempt at good humour dwindled; it had completely evaporated by the time the car bumped its way into Falkingham Close. At one moment the car's headlights lit up the ground, next the tops of trees, again the ground, fractured muddy puddles, rubble, more distant trees, an early owl and finally the two houses.

'Jesus, look at it. No cars. Looks as if Dimitri isn't here,' Jack said.

'Didn't Rachel say he was in London anyway?'

'Don't think it would be wise to believe a word he's said to anyone,' Jack said as he pulled on the hand brake.

Standing in the pitch black outside the front door of the house on the left Jack knocked for a second time. There was no answer. He opened it and crossed the threshold shouting, 'Anyone at home?' He recoiled at the smell and stepped back out of the house.

The door to the kitchen opened and Yuri walked towards them. 'You call this a home? It's shit hole.'

'And you are?' Jack asked.

'Yuri.'

'Yuri what?' Jack asked.

'Yuri Tomenko.'

'Mr Tomenko, I'm detective inspector Jack Ranger and this is detective sergeant Clare Farmer. We have a few questions we'd like to ask you about two missing persons. Where can we talk?'

'I wondered how long it would take you to come,' Yuri said.

'You were expecting us. Why was that?'

'Not here,' Yuri said pointing at the police car. 'We talk there, privately.'

'Look, I know you're an illegal but for the moment I'm not interested in that. So ...'

'Not here,' Yuri interrupted.

'Okay, the car will be fine.'

It was cold. Jack turned on the engine and the heater; within a few moments the windows began to fog up as snow began to fall outside.

'Before I answer your questions I must be honest with you,' Yuri said. 'As far as the men in there know I am like them. Yes, I am illegal and have no papers, but this is not the full truth. I entered your country illegally but,' Yuri explained as he pulled

out an envelope from the inside pocket of his donkey jacket and passed it to Jack, 'here are my papers. My name is, as I said, Yuri Tomenko. I am a journalist working under cover to expose the trafficking of people from my country to be exploited here and made slaves.'

Jack inspected the passport and passed it to Clare. 'Then, Mr Tomenko, we're on the same side,' he said and proffered his hand. 'I'm Jack, this is Clare.'

'Good. Call me Yuri. No one must know what I really am until I've found out who is behind Dimitri – I must have your word on this.'

'You have it. Do you know about the three men who were found dead today?'

'Of course. The men in those houses are terrified. They fear the same death will come to them; some are already sick, some aren't. How did you know about Ilko and Stepan?'

'Is that what they were called? We had a tip off they'd died here and been taken to the hospital by Dave Broadbeam but they never arrived. Can you tell me what happened?'

Yuri told them what he knew including the relationship between Lord Haugham's son and Ilko's fifteen-year-old sister, Aneta.

'Jesus,' Jack sighed, 'you were right, Clare, this is a can of worms.'

'Not a can of worms. A viper's nest,' Yuri said.

'And in a viper's nest you become a viper,' Clare said.

Yuri nodded. 'What happened to Ilko and Stepan's bodies?'

'We don't know. I'm sorry. Obviously we're also here to investigate today's deaths; we're waiting for autopsy reports. Do you have any idea about cause of death?'

'No. I can only think they were poisoned, perhaps deliberately, perhaps not; I don't know. No one in there will go to a doctor; they are too afraid, more afraid of being put in prison, sent home, more afraid of that than dying likes rats in trap.'

'Someone's coming,' Clare said as headlights illuminated the inside of the Skoda. 'There's more than one car,' she said clearing the condensation from the windscreen.

'I called Dimitri, told him to get here as more men are dying,' Yuri explained. 'I wanted to put him on the spot, yes?'

'You could have warned me,' Jack snapped as he quickly got out of the back of the car and found himself facing the full beam headlights of three vehicles. Jack shaded his eyes against the intense light struggling to see how many men were standing beside the cars in visibility made worse by the falling snow.

A figure came out of the light, a silhouette rushing straight at Jack. Suddenly it was pitch black. At the last moment Jack saw a fist swinging towards his face and heard a shout of, 'Cunt!'

Clare watched open mouthed as Jack parried the blow and with seemingly no effort grabbed Dimitri's fist and arm crashing his head onto the bonnet of the police car and ramming his arms up behind his back. 'Got any cuffs?' Clare dived into the car and pulled out a pair from the glove compartment with which she quickly locked Dimitri's hands behind his back. Jack let him go and Dimitri slumped into a heap on the ground where snow settled on his gelled jet-black hair.

'Prick!' Jack said.

'Whoa!' Clare said quickly putting her hand on his arm as he was about to stamp on Dimitri. 'Enough, Jack. Where did you learn to do that?'

'Tell you later,' he said as he lifted Dimitri to his feet. 'You awake, you little prick? Oh good. Dimitri Guraya, I'm arresting you for assault. You do not have to say anything, but it may harm your defence, if you fail to mention, when questioned, something which you may later rely on in court. Anything you do say may be given in evidence. Do you understand?'

'Fuck you,' Dimitri mumbled as Jack pushed him onto the back seat of the car and locked the doors.

'Right, what do you lot want?' Jack asked as he advanced through the swirling snow towards the three young men who were standing beside the cars. It was enough; they jumped into

their vehicles as Jack wrote down the registration numbers on the back of his left hand.

Clare stood beside him. 'Yuri's done a runner.'

'He won't be far, probably inside. Can you call for back-up and an ambulance, I've got a feeling it's not going to be very pleasant inside there.'

'What sort of martial art was that?'

'Stav. It's Norwegian. I went on a course in Bridlington – the pubs were crap but the instructor was great. I'm going inside; ask the cavalry to get here pronto.'

Jack was about to enter the front door when it opened and Yuri stepped out. 'I didn't want to be seen with you. Before you go inside you must know more - I may not be able to tell you later.'

'Come round the side out of the wind,' Jack suggested. 'Who were those lads?'

'Noddy, Capstick and Mouse; no Scrote tonight; they are scum.'

'Scrote's been helping us ... what did you want to tell me?'

'I have thought about nothing but this; I think I know how they were poisoned. There was a party, Ilko and Stepan bought venison, it was brought to them where they worked. All the men ate the meat, all except me – lucky for me I am vegetarian. They are sick, they die, and I am well. This is not a coincidence, I think.'

'Venison? Off the back of a lorry?'

'No, from the van of a butcher named Bentosh. He often comes to sell them cheap meat passed sell by dates, yes. Now we go back in. You will not like what you see, inspector.'

Yuri was right; Jack didn't like what he saw and nor did Clare. Of the original nineteen inhabitants of Falkingham Close five were already dead and one, Yuri, was in good health. The remainder were already ill or terrified they soon would be. When Jack and Clare had first visited Falkingham Close the houses were empty and though their squalor and cold had been obvious it was only now when the rooms were fully occupied

that the extent of the overcrowding was evident. The stench was so intense that Jack almost gagged not having the benefit of the silk scarf on which Clare had sprinkled perfume before covering her mouth and nose. The collective body odour of thirteen unwashed men, the smell of damp earth on boots and sodden clothes, the fetid fumes hanging heavy in the air, the stinking toilet, the sound of men struggling for breath, their extraordinary pallor, the cloying clinging reek of putrefaction all filled him with a sense of hopeless doom. Looking closely, Jack saw the same physical signs he'd seen on the bodies of the corpses in the field: gaping mouths, eyes aghast with pain and terror, black boils on chalk white skin, long strands of congealed dark green mucus flecked with red spots drooling from swollen lips so completely devoid of pigment that they were almost transparent. Jack watched in horror, but unable to turn his back, as a man, probably only in his late twenties, but looking like an eighty-year-old, curled in a ball of pain upon a stained mattress stinking of fresh excrement, screamed as green bile poured from his mouth. 'Shit!' Jack gasped and saw with both horror and a strange relief that the man had died and was beyond misery. Turning he saw that the other three men in the room were going the same way. 'Bloody hell, Clare, what can we do for the poor sods?'

'Nothing, Jack. Let's get some air – this must be infectious.'

'It's certainly terminal. Where the hell is that ambulance?'

'We'll need more than one and that's for sure,' Clare said as she closed the door to the front room where the men were dying.

Outside in the snowy air they both breathed hard and deep. 'I need to speak to the Chief Super about this,' Jack said. 'This isn't just a crime scene it's also potentially a major risk to public health. I can't see any ambulance crew being prepared to carry people as ill as they are into A and E, can you?'

'I guess we'll find out in a minute,' Clare said as the blue flashing lights of an ambulance refracted through the falling snow.

While Jack was on the phone explaining the situation to Chief Superintendent Wainstock, Clare was doing the same to the ambulance crew who, after donning protective facemasks and surgical gloves entered the premises. They were still inside when Jack joined Clare by their car. 'Wainstock says that it's to be treated as a Major Incident. He says the Chief Constable will be Gold Commander, Wainstock will be Silver Commander and I'll be Bronze because Fulsome is away and we're all going to have to liaise with the East Midlands North Health Protection Unit. He asked me if I thought it might be a deliberate release of some sort of biological threat requiring immediate action – I said I hadn't a clue but I wouldn't want to take the risk that it wasn't. I asked that older WPC – the one married to Cliff - to find Bentosh's address for when we get back.'

'You're saying it's out of our hands?' Clare asked.

'Only the medical end of it; as Bronze Commander it'll be my responsibility to lead the team that will investigate the crime because as sure as hell, there's been a crime, even if we're not sure exactly what it is right now,' Jack explained as the two paramedics emerged from the buildings.

'Your lads are taking their time,' the female member of the crew said.

'Probably lost,' Clare said. 'No post code so no sat nav. What about that lot in there?'

'No one is to go in or out until the clinical lead arrives with her team,' the woman said.

'Look,' Jack said, 'we've got a prisoner in the car. We need to get him down to the station so if it's alright with you we'll leave you too it. Ah, here they are at last,' Jack said as a large white police van bumped its way towards them. It took a few minutes for Jack to tell Sergeant Cliff, who was not happy being out in the snow, and the constables what to do which was basically to ensure that no one entered or left the houses. As the police were deployed Jack turned to Clare, 'Have you seen Yuri?'

'No, he wasn't in the house and he's not outside either – I'd guess he's made himself scarce – I think I might have done the same in his shoes.'

'I just hope he was on the level,' Jack mused as he opened the driver's door.

'Where the fuck have you been?' Dimitri asked.

'And what about you?' Clare asked. 'Thought you were supposed to be in London.' She didn't need to see Jack's look of disbelief to know that she'd said the wrong thing. *Shit, that's screwing up in spades!* she thought.

'Where are you taking me?' Dimitri asked.

'Into custody,' Jack said, 'where'll you be safe and sound until we have time to interview you.'

'I want my solicitor.'

'You have a solicitor?' Jack asked.

'I am a businessman. Of course I have solicitor and an accountant. I am a success. You are a cop failure so go fuck yourself.'

As Jack and Clare drove away from the station she asked, 'Did you call that bastard's solicitor?'

'What an idiot - I forgot.'

'No you didn't, Jack.'

'I just thought Rachel could do with another night without him to put up with.'

'I screwed up, didn't I?' she asked. 'He'll know that Rachel told us that he was in London.'

'You did, but we may get away with it; he may have told someone else and he may not have picked up on what you said.'

'I don't think he misses much that affects his well-being,' Clare said. 'I'm so sorry.'

'I'll call Srench first thing – don't you think it a bit odd that a scum bag like that is represented by the oldest and most respectable firm of solicitors in Lincolnshire? You'd think he'd have some wide boy from the East End.'

'Yuri was right – it is a nest of vipers.'

'He's venomous; no doubt about that. I wonder if Bentosh will be home when we get there?' Jack asked.

'Do you know what time it is?' Jack shook his head. 'It's just gone ten fifteen and he'll probably be fast asleep in bed when we get there.'

'If he is, he won't be for long.'

'Do all these people really need to live in bungalows done up to look like something out of Texas?' Jack asked as they arrived at the entrance to Harold Bentosh's house just outside Manby.

'They probably think it looks Spanish,' Clare replied. 'But this is a first,' she said pointing at the name plaque on the gate, 'Mia Carne - though I suppose he is a butcher.'

'And an idiot,' Jack said as Clare got out of the car and opened the ornate wrought-iron gates. As they approached the house security lights burst into life but the house itself was dark. The snow surrounding the house was pristine; there wasn't a footprint in sight. 'I think we're wasting our time,' Jack said, but rang the doorbell just the same. Nothing happened so he rang it again and much to their surprise lights came on. The door opened a fraction, being held tight by a safety chain, and a woman's anxious face peered out through the crack.

'You the coppers?' she asked.

'Yes, we're police. Were you expecting us, Mrs Bentosh?'

'Warrant cards,' she said. They showed their cards and she opened the door. 'Yes, I have the bad luck to be Celia Bentosh. Better come in then – he's not here.' When she'd looked up at them through the crack in the door Jack had assumed that was because she bending over as most people did when doing the same thing; this wasn't the case. Mrs Bentosh was diminutive, not more than four feet six inches in height and wrapped in a pink candlewick dressing gown. 'He bugged off a couple of hours ago,' she said through thin lips. Her face showed no emotion; it was caked white; immobile in some sort of cosmetic face mask but her eyes glinted bright.

‘Did he know we were coming?’ Jack asked.

‘Yes. That’s why he buggered off – had a phone call on his mobile and left. He’s a bag of offal; do you know that? Offal.’

That’s a new one, offal, nice. ‘Do you know who called him or why he left in such a hurry,’ Clare asked.

‘He’s probably whimpering like the little runt he is all over her ample bosoms right now while she strokes his poor little head – well, she’s welcome to him; I’ve had enough, more than enough.’

‘He’s having an affair?’ Clare asked.

‘He’s always having affairs, delivering meat to their doors: here you are me ducks, sticking his thing up their loins, dirty little bastard.’

Loins? What’s next? Humping rump? ‘I’m sorry, Mrs Bentosh, you’re clearly very upset.’

‘I’m not upset! I’m delighted. I hate him. He’s offal.’

Is that offal or awful? ‘Yes, I see that, but are you suggesting he might be with someone in particular – if that’s so who might she be and where might she be?’ Jack asked.

‘How would I know? Even he wouldn’t be so stupid to tell me exactly who he was having it off with, would he?’

‘But you mentioned ample bosoms,’ Clare said wondering how she was managing to keep a straight face whilst saying “bosoms”.

‘He likes big bosoms – I’ve always known that. God knows why he wanted to marry me in the first place, but I know now: he wanted my father’s butcher’s business and he got it and I was desperate enough to believe him when he said he loved me and all the time he was having it off with anything with big bosoms and easy loins. I’ve hated him for years. Good riddance if he’s gone for good. Offal!’

‘You don’t know where he’s gone?’ Jack asked.

‘No.’

‘But you don’t think he’ll be back?’

‘Oh, he’ll be back. The swine always comes back to give his thing a rest – I wish he was dead. I hate him.’

‘Well, thank you, Mrs Bentosh, I think we’ll let you get back to your beauty sleep but I’ll give you my card. If and when he comes back would you please give me a call?’ Clare asked.

‘Has he done something bad, something really bad?’

‘We won’t know until we’ve had a chance to talk to him.’

‘I hope he has, then you can take him away and he’ll never come back again.’

‘It doesn’t quite work like that, Mrs Bentosh,’ Clare said. ‘You’ve absolutely no idea where he might have gone?’

‘He does have a brother in Skegness.’

‘Same surname?’ Clare asked.

‘No, Bentosh is my name – Bentosh the Butchers – he changed his to Bentosh by deed poll. His real name is Harold Larwood, his brother is Danny Larwood.’

‘Do you know where Danny lives?’

‘No. He’s the same. They’re all the same, the Larwoods, all dirty little runts.’

Back in the car Clare turned to Jack and said, ‘Well, that was fun.’

‘Yeah, a real bundle of laughs. We’ll see if he’s in Skeggie in the morning,’ and looking at his watch, added, ‘I think we’ll have to call it a night and the young laird will have to wait till the morning – do you want to pick me up at seven seeing as I’m on the way to his place? How old do you think she was?’

‘Hard to tell – fiftyish – do you think we should suggest she goes to Relate?’

‘God save me from this place,’ Jack sighed as Clare shut the gates. ‘You know what makes all this even worse, if that’s possible?’ he asked as she closed the car door and they drove away leaving the wrought iron gates open.

‘Yes. Someone tipped him off we were on our way.’

‘I’m going to have to run this past Wainstock.’

'He'll love you for that,' Clare said.

'And he really should do something about Fulsome.'

'Are you as pissed off as you sound?'

'Frankly? Yes. I seem to be back in the midst of everything I thought I could escape – it would be bad enough just having people trafficking and child sexual exploitation but these deaths are too near to home.'

'I don't understand.'

Jack was silent for a few moments as he drove. 'I think what killed those men and what's killing the others is some sort of pathogen, a virus – I don't know enough about the science – I should have paid more attention to what Anastasiya said.'

'Your wife?'

'Yes, my wife, that's what she did, does, I suppose, pathogen research – that's why I think my daughter's death was no accident. Somehow I think Anastasiya brought something home, probably by accident, bacteria, a virus, from her lab and that's what killed Tassa. For that to have been admitted would have blown the lid on stuff that shouldn't have been being going on anyway. Top secret shit and now it feels like we've got ... I don't know. We'll have to see what the autopsies show up and what the other two bodies tell us when we find them.'

What do I say to all that? Sorry doesn't seem much of an option, Clare thought as she studied Jack's face; it was hard and angry, but she said it anyway. 'I'm sorry, Jack. Let's keep an open mind till those results come in, eh?'

'Is that what they do at InVivo? Pathogen research and immunology?'

'Yes, I think so.'

'I think we'll put the good doctor Kinsey on our list for tomorrow.'

Clare's mobile started to ring. 'Yes? ... What now? ... Do you know what time it is? ... It's an order, okay, okay, we'll go straight there.' She ended the call. 'We have been ordered to attend the hospital for immediate blood tests to ensure that

we're not infectious. We, apparently, had no authority to leave the scene of the incident.'

'If they don't know what's killing them then there's no point in testing us because they won't know what they're looking for – fucking bureaucratic idiots.'

23.39

'I drove straight here from Nottingham,' Jeremy Fulsome said as he stood in his brother-in-law's front hall. 'Sergeant Cliff called me.'

'Sergeant Cliff should mind his own bloody business,' Richard Sylvester barked. 'Madge is asleep, come in the kitchen and stop shouting.'

'At least Cliff is loyal which is more than can be said for you.'

'But Sergeant Cliff, like everyone else, thinks you're on an HR course when in fact you were having treatment in a clinic to try and address your addiction to bloody gambling – I've kept that quiet; that's loyalty, Jeremy.'

'But you've made Ranger Bronze Commander in the incident. I should be doing that.'

'You would be if you were up to it, but you're not.'

'What's that supposed to mean?'

The Chief Constable sighed wearily. 'Sit down there at the table. I'll make a pot of tea.'

'I don't want tea! I want to know what you mean.'

'Alright, I'll tell you, and don't interrupt. I'm proud of what I am. I'm proud of my force and I'm proud of Lincolnshire. Don't you dare smirk ... Right now we're in the middle of an incident that wouldn't have happened if we hadn't been overrun with illegal immigrants. It was bad enough having them here in the first place but I turned a blind eye to that because of – you know why – but now they're dying and it's not something that can easily be brushed aside. My reputation is at stake. I'm

not going to be dragged into the mud when I've got a Police Commissioner who thinks he's Lord God Almighty and is just waiting for a chance to suspend me. Now let's get to you, Jeremy. You're a liability. If you weren't married to my hopeless sister I would have had rid of you before now. You have the investigative skills of a gnat. You owe money, Penny's told me, I don't want to know to who nor how much it is, but it makes you a risk. Now I'm going to tell you what's going to happen and what you're going to do. Somehow or other I'm going to keep the lid on this incident. What do I care if illegals die? What I care about is the effect their deaths and their illegal status is going to have on me, on my status. Ranger will run the criminal investigation under Wainstock who will report to me and I will manage them both to ensure that as little damage is done as possible. I won't be able to control it all because of the involvement of the Health Authorities but I'll try. You, Jeremy, are going to be my eyes and ears on the ground. You are going to keep an eye on Ranger and warn me if he's behaving like the renegade he has the reputation of being. And, if he fucks up and the investigation goes wrong, it'll be him and Wainstock that fall and not you. You'll be as white as white, clueless, blameless, useless but safe – that's what I promised Penny I would do and that's what I've done. This is my watch and you're not going to fuck it up. Got that?

'I won't take orders from Ranger.'

'Bloody hell, didn't you hear a word I just said? Obviously not. You're still a DCI and he's a DI running an investigation that you are going to secretly observe and report back to me. Do you think you can do that?'

'No one will know about the clinic?'

'Just make sure no one finds about your debts because if they do you're done for – even I won't be able to protect you,' the Chief Constable said.

Thursday 14th November

08.30

Jack had only slept for a couple of hours when he heard Clare's car coming down the lane towards his cottage. After he'd climbed into the Skoda, Clare was silent. 'What's up?' Jack asked.

'You. Last night at the hospital. You embarrassed me by being so bloody rude. They were only trying to do their job and make sure we weren't carrying bloody Bubonic plague or anthrax or some other bloody pathogen unknown to science,' she said as she reversed the car in order to drive away.

Jack bowed his head in mock shame, stifled a smile. 'I'm very sorry. You're right I completely lost it – an old wound unexpectedly opened but that's no excuse.'

'Accepted ... was it true what you said about your wife and what happened to your daughter?'

'It's not the sort of thing I'd make up, Clare.'

'I didn't mean that. I meant can it be proved to be true?'

'No, not yet, but I haven't given up on it. Can we leave it for now? We've got enough on our plate as it is; I had Wainstock on the phone at six this morning going absolutely ballistic because I hadn't arranged for Mr fucking Guraya to see his legal representative.'

'You were going to do that this morning.'

'Someone beat me to it.'

'Who?'

'Apparently Sergeant Cliff took it upon himself to act in defence of best practice while we were chasing our tails last night.'

'Did you tell him about our suspicions about someone leaking information to possible criminals?'

'I did – he said he was beginning to think that it might not have been such a good idea to welcome me back with open arms – but he'll be okay in the end, so long as we get a result on all this.'

'Fulsome was back first thing this morning looking like someone had stolen his favourite toy.'

'Nose out of joint because of me, I suppose? Who cares? Did you know there's a rumour that our new Police Commissioner is after the CC on the grounds of unsuitable behaviour – whatever that means.'

'Who told you that?'

'Gil; he knows everything. God knows how when he hardly ever leaves the café or his flat upstairs ... I wonder how Rachel's doing. Come to think of it, I'd better give her a call to warn her that Dimitri may well have been sprung if Srench gets his way - and he will.'

'Yes, you better had.'

Jack's news wasn't well received but Gil appreciated the warning.

'So the agenda for the day is?' Clare asked.

'The young laird. Get someone to find Bentosh in Skeggie. Have a chat with our good Doctor Kinsey. See what the autopsies turn up. Extend the search for the two missing bodies and hope that the CC will keep the lid on the major incident and not let the press start causing panic about some sort of plague brought into the country by illegal immigrants. Can you imagine how that would go down? Have I forgotten anything?'

'That should keep us busy until lunch time.'

'Is that him coming out of the lodge?' Jack asked.

'Yes, that's him. I was at a garden party last year – he was there with his hideous father.'

'He's in one hell of a hurry,' Jack said as Howard leapt into his Range Rover and gunned it past their car just as it was about to pull up. 'Right, so the day begins with a car chase.'

'Do you want me to put the blue up?'

'No, don't want to frighten the wild life, do we?' Jack said.

Arriving at the hall and pulling up in front of the main entrance, they saw they weren't the only visitors; besides Howard's abandoned Range Rover with the driver's door wide open there was a police car, another vehicle and PCSO Billy Swann standing on the steps in archetypal pose.

Jack climbed out of the car and walked across to the officer. 'You look glum, Billy. What's up?' he asked as Clare joined him.

'Suspicious death, Inspector Ranger, sir.'

'Explain.'

'Lord Haugham, sir, dead, sir. Doc's inside along with PC Sutton who's looking after the foreign women – right state they're in' all, but that's foreigners for you, emotional like.'

Idiot! 'Thank you, Billy,' Jack said. Inside it was dark; too much ancient mahogany for Jack's taste with a staircase straight out of a 1960s Hammer film. The elderly GP, Doctor Davis Sage, carrying a bag and a stethoscope around his neck came down the stairs. 'Doctor,' Jack said extending his hand, 'good to see you again, despite the circumstances.'

'Death is never good, Jack, even though it's inevitable,' he sighed. 'I'm not here in my capacity as police surgeon ... I was Reggie's GP ...' the doctor stumbled to a stop.

'Cause of death?'

'Without question - a heart attack.'

'The constable outside said it was suspicious.'

'It was called in as that – the heart attack isn't suspicious; he's been asking for it for years – it's the immediate cause that's troublesome. There'll have to be a post mortem; haven't seen him for weeks and the insurance won't pay out unless everything is hunky dory. I'll leave you to Constable Sutton – she seems to be well in control of events. Good day, Jack – bad business over at Falkingham Close – heard you were involved with that as well – bet you wish you'd never come home. Take care of yourself,' he concluded and walked off.

A young uniformed WPC came out of a doorway to the right of where Jack and Clare were standing. 'Constable

Sutton?’ Jack asked. She nodded. ‘We’ve not met, I’m inspector Ranger and this is ...’

‘I know the Sergeant, sir. I’m not sure what you’re doing here – DCI Fulsome is handling this case, it being the Lord, sir.’

The Lord? Biblical bollocks. ‘We were trying to talk to his son, Howard; we followed him here.’

‘He’s in a bit of state, sir, upset.’

‘I suppose he would be with his father dead. What happened here, constable?’ Jack asked.

‘It’s not for me to say, sir.’

‘What are you doing here, Ranger?’ Fulsome asked. Jack turned to see the DCI striding towards him accompanied by DC Strabble. ‘This is nothing to do with your case and from what I’ve been told you and Lord Haugham weren’t on the best of terms.’

‘Suspect am I, boss?’

‘Why are you here?’

‘Happened upon the scene, we followed the young laird - need to talk to him about his involvement with the major incident at Falkingham Close.’

‘That’ll have to wait – this takes priority.’

‘Really? The death of an aristocrat takes precedence over a major incident?’

‘Where are they, constable?’ Fulsome asked Sutton.

‘The women are in the kitchen, sir. The son is in the drawing room over there, with a young woman called Aneta.’

‘Good bye, inspector,’ Fulsome said as Sutton led him into an adjoining room.

Jack shrugged as he and Clare turned and left the way they’d come.

‘He’s an arrogant jerk,’ Clare said as they drove back up the drive and off the estate.

‘And a useless copper – no time to dwell on that right now but he hasn’t got a clue. Look, this time we do need to split up. Can you take me back to the station car pool so I can get a car then you see what you can find out about the location of Bentosh. I’ll see if we’ve got enough resources with this major incident going on to extend the search for the two missing bodies. I’m going to have a word with Dr Kinsey. And I’m going to give Wainstock a call; things can’t go on with Fulsome like it is; we need a meeting to sort things out, I’m either Bronze on this or I’m not.’

‘But why were you in his bedroom at that time of the morning?’ Howard asked Aneta for the umpteenth time. ‘I just don’t understand.’

‘You don’t understand what a servant is? No, how could you understand that? As I said – yesterday he told me to bring him breakfast in bed at half past five in the morning because he said he was going to London on the early train to meet a man called Victor Plushenko. It’s not good for me to tell you all this, Howard.’

‘The police will want to know what happened.’

‘They won’t believe me anyway – I am illegal. Remember?’

‘Put this on,’ Howard said and handed her a ring set with a single emerald. ‘It’s my mother’s. As of now we’re engaged – now I’m the Lord the police will respect my wishes and your status as my fiancée.’ Aneta put on the ring and kissed him just before there was a knock on the door. ‘Come in,’ Howard called and DCI Fulsome came in followed by Constable Sutton. ‘Chief Inspector, do come in, my fiancée and I were just wondering when you’d be here to help us,’ he continued, walking over to Fulsome proffering his outstretched hand that Fulsome shook.

‘It’s a sad business,’ Fulsome said. ‘Please accept my sincere condolences, Lord Haugham.’

‘You used to play golf together didn’t you? And my father said you liked to have a flutter at the races – both something of gamblers.’

Fulsome looked offended. 'I wouldn't say that, sir.'
'I think we can stick with Howard, don't you? Is it okay if we stay in here? We can sit together near the window.'
'That'll be fine ... this is the young lady that ...'
'Yes, this is my fiancée, Aneta.'
'I don't think anyone knew of your engagement; there was no announcement,' Fulsome said.
'It's been a secret until now – we were biding our time.'
'Did your father know of this engagement?'
'What's that got to do with my father's sudden death? As far as I know it was a heart attack.'
'That is Dr Sage's view but the post mortem will tell us for certain. In the meantime perhaps Miss ... Aneta what? I need your full name for Constable Sutton's notes.'
'Avaremenko – I'm Ukrainian.'
'But soon to be British,' Howard added.
'Quite,' Fulsome said in a whisper. 'Right, Miss Abara ...'
'Avaremenko,' Aneta said.
'Right, miss, could you please tell me in your own words what happened earlier this morning? Is it acceptable for the constable to take notes in case we need them later?'
'It's acceptable,' Howard said. 'Go on, Aneta, you can tell the chief inspector.'
'This is hard, Howard. I am not used to such things,' Aneta said and looked as if she might cry at any moment. 'Could you please let me speak to the chief inspector on my own? What I have to tell will not be good for you to hear. Please?'
'I'd like to stay – is that alright?'
'It's up to Miss Avaremenko. Miss Avaremenko?'
'You may not want to love me anymore,' Aneta said.
'I'll always love you.'
Constable Sutton smiled, moved by such sentiment.
'Take your time,' Fulsome said. 'I'm in no hurry; we don't want to be making any mistakes in a situation like this, do we?'

Aneta took a deep breath. 'Yesterday Lord Haugham told me to bring him breakfast in bed at half past five in the morning because he said he was going to London on the early train to meet a man called Victor Plushenko. I knocked on the door, he didn't answer, I went in and he was lying there on the bed, he had no clothes ... and ... he had his thing in his hand'
'Bloody hell!' Howard said.
'Do I have to tell you this? It disgusts me. Howard, I don't want you to hear this.'
'Shall I send the constable for a glass of water?' Fulsome asked.
Aneta shook her head as she looked at the floor.
'I knew he was despicable after what he did to mother – go on,' Howard said.
Aneta continued to study the floor for a long minute before looking up. 'He had his thing in his hand; it was big and stiff. He told me to come to the bed so I could hold it. I said no – he surprised me – for a fat man he moved quickly and was pulling at me before I knew what was happening. That's when I dropped the breakfast tray and he threw me at the bed. I'm a little person. I missed the bed and fell on the floor then he was over me with his thing, all stiff coming down at me. I punched him in his balls. I tried to get on my feet but he kept coming so I punched him as hard as I could on his chest then his neck, face and he just looked shocked and then he just went very red in the face, clutched at his chest, where I'd hit him and he tried to get to the bed but he didn't get that far, he fell and his head crashed into the breakfast tray on the floor and he lay there groaning and grinding. He stopped; he was silent. I knew he must be dead ... I'm sorry, Howard, I'm really sorry. I didn't mean to kill him. I was only defending myself – he was going to rape me. Then I ran from his room shouting for help.'
Howard put his arm around Aneta. 'I'm so sorry, Aneta, so sorry – how could he try to do that to you?'
'What did you do next?' Fulsome asked.
'Is that all you can say after what she's just said?' Howard demanded.

'Facts will be more useful to your fiancée at the moment rather than sympathy. Miss Avaremenko – could you please tell me what you did next?'

'I ran downstairs to where my sister-in-law Bohdanna and Marina share a room with me here at the hall – we all ran back upstairs to his bedroom and that's where we found Tammy – she's his housekeeper – she was there – Tammy said he was dead; she called the police.'

'Thank you, Miss Avaremenko. I'll get Constable Sutton to type that up later and then perhaps you can sign it?'

'I'll check it out with my solicitor first if you don't mind,' Howard said.

'Not a problem for me, Howard. Now, perhaps I could interview these other two Ukrainian ladies before I speak with Tammy – is she Richard Hitchcox's, also known as Scrote's, sister?'

'She is called Hitchcox – I don't know anything about a brother,' Howard said.

Fulsome stood up. 'Right, if you'll excuse me, I'll get on.'

Once more alone Howard turned to Aneta. 'I'm so ashamed, so sorry – how can I make it up to you?'

'You have,' Aneta said and showed him the ring on her finger before kissing him on the lips.

'I'm going to call Scrench and get him ready to help if needs be,' Howard said. 'Will you be okay in here on your own for a while?'

Aneta remained sitting on the sofa looking out of the drawing room window at the estate that would soon be Howard's, and hers. After no more than five minutes the door opened and Tammy walked in shutting the door behind her. 'What do you want?' Aneta asked.

'A quiet word,' she said sitting down beside Aneta. 'Mind if I sit 'cos I ain't going to fucking curtsey 'cos you're not her fuckin' ladyship yet, are you?'

'What do you want?'

'Haugham was a randy old goat, liked 'em young, liked me when I was young an' all, dirty bastard he was, but you know that, don't you?'

'What do you mean?'

'He showed me, on his computer, you tossing him off. We had a good laugh, just like old times it was, but that don't matter, it's the pictures of you what matters – especially if Howard were to see them, let alone the coppers, then they might be just a little bit more suspicious about what you were doing in his bedroom last night – as if we don't both know.'

'What do you want?'

'I'll bide my time – you ain't got nothing that I want as of now, but if you get away with this and marry that stupid prick, Howard, then ... we'll see. Thought you ought to know,' Tammy said and stood up. 'Like the ring. Perhaps Howard's not such a dumb bastard after all – but he's in love, ain't he? Daft cunt.'

11.23

Jack and Clare entered the station to find Sergeant Cliff standing behind the desk whistling. 'Got back safely then, did you?' Jack asked. Cliff stopped whistling and scowled at Jack. Clare carried on to their office. 'What's the situation with the Ukrainians?' Jack asked.

'Been taken off to a secure isolation unit in Leicester. The site's sealed off and we're wasting the time of two constables stationed up there day and night until we get the all clear.'

'Any news of the surviving Ukrainians?' Jack asked.

'Two more dead; don't know about the rest.'

Couldn't give a shit, could you? 'Poor sods ... do you know a chap called Harold Larwood?'

'He was a fast bowler, wasn't he? Why?'

'Just wondering, Serg, just wondering.' He turned and started to walk away, stopped and turned back to the desk, 'I forgot to ask – how's Mr Guraya doing? Did Srench show up?'

'Not old Srench, one of the junior partners, Cuthbert. He and Guraya left the station at eighty thirty this morning.'

'That was quick.'

'Guraya's papers were in order and no charges were being pressed, so what were we supposed to do? You didn't even complete the paperwork; this isn't like the Met you know, Inspector; up here we do things properly, by the book.'

'Glad to know we're on the same side, Serg. See you later, alligator.'

'What's that supposed to mean?' Cliff asked.

'It goes with your haircut, sergeant. You're supposed to say "in a while crocodile".'

As he walked to his office Jack called Gil to confirm that Dimitri was on the loose. Gil already knew this – Jack had no idea how – and said that Rachel had fled back to her own home fearing that Gil would come to harm if Dimitri found her at his place.

'I'm sorry,' Jack said, 'but I'm up to my neck in stuff right now – I can't help.'

'That's not good enough,' Gil said and ended the call.

It took the drive out to the InVivo Centre for Jack to calm down. By the time he parked in the little lay-by near the InVivo entrance and walked up to the protester's site he had his anger back under control; the place was deserted except for the woman wearing the animal hat. 'You're a bit short handed today, aren't you?' Jack asked.

'Hello, inspector, nice to see you – you're on your own as well.'

'Lot on at the moment – it's Janet, isn't it?'

'That's right – the others are ... well, I've been left holding the fort.'

'Anything out of the ordinary been going on or is it just the same dreary vigil day and night?'

'It's not dreary – sometimes boring but not dreary, such a miserable word is dreary. There's been a helicopter this morning – hovered over us and then went on up there. I've just made a pot of tea; fancy a cup on this cold morning?'

'Love one, thanks. A helicopter, what was all that about?'

'One of the locals that talks to us said it was the head honcho of the company that owns that place – someone called Angers Anderson – good name; he angers me.'

'Sounds Swedish,' Jack mused as he held the warm mug between his hands.

'There's nothing wrong with the Swedes, young man,' Janet said.

Jack laughed. 'That's not what I meant – but I agree. Anything else?'

'I don't know ... two nights ago I couldn't sleep – I think it's because I'm not busy enough in the day – it's hard to motivate yourself to go for a good long walk when you think you should be here all the time - just in case something happens. Do you find that?'

'That if I don't exercise I don't sleep well?'

'Yes.'

'Yes, I do. Could we go back a step? You were saying about not being able to sleep – did something happen?'

'Well, when you were here and when we had to make those statements you seemed to be sympathetic, on our side if you like.'

'I'm not on your side – I can't be – but I do sympathise.'

'Whether you are or you aren't ... you asked us to keep our eyes open just in case there was something that might interest you.'

Come on Janet, get on with it. 'And is there something?'

'Yes, it was about eleven thirty, midnightish – I try not to look at my watch when I can't sleep – we all go to bed when it

gets dark and at this time of year – as I said, I couldn't sleep and was inside my tent with the flap open and this big white van drove in and then later it drove out again – seemed odd for it to be doing that in the middle of the night – I looked at my watch when it came back out – it was exactly 2.35 in the morning.'

'Did you see who was in the van?'

'A man and a woman – I wrote down what was written on the van's side – would that be useful? It's in my bag.'

'Very.'

Janet handed him the piece of paper. 'Labour Logistics. Well, well. Thank you, Janet. *The Broadbeams*. I best get on – and thanks for the tea. By the way, I am on your side but I'll deny it if you accuse me of it.'

'I won't,' Janet laughed. 'Oh, by the way, Dr Kinsey arrived at half past six and though it was just about dawn there was loads of smoke coming out of one of their chimneys up there.'

As Jack drove up the drive to InVivo a hunch was beginning to form in his mind; he didn't like it.

Jack had intended to stop in the car park before going to see Kinsey but it was cordoned off and at its centre a helicopter's rotor blades were already spinning; Jack sat back in his car seat and watched as the helicopter lifted off and whirled away. Looking across to the far side of the car park he saw Dr Kinsey and twenty feet away, to her left, Wiggy leaning against a telegraph pole smoking his customary roll-up. Even at that distance Jack could see that Kinsey looked very agitated as she frantically flapped at the staff standing behind her as if they were chickens escaped from their coop. Wiggy, on the other hand, looked utterly relaxed. *I think I'll see you first and wipe that grin off your fat face*, Jack thought.

By the time the cordon had been moved and Jack had found a place to park Wiggy was no longer in sight so he set off to look for him. As he made his way between two of the buildings a shrill female voice called his name; he turned and saw Kinsey marching toward him.

'Inspector,' she repeated. 'What are you doing here? This is private property.'

'I collect the registration numbers of aircraft and I haven't got many choppers so I thought I'd pop up and see if I could get the number of the one that's just left – unfortunately it left too soon for me to get its number,' Jack said. 'Shame. You don't have its number, do you?'

'Don't be so bloody stupid! You're not a plane spotter. You're just being a deliberate nuisance.'

'So make a complaint. Who was your visitor?'

'None of your bloody business, inspector. What is it you want? Because I've just about had enough of being interrogated and bullied.'

'Angers Anderson, was it?'

'How did you know that?' she asked.

'There's a major incident site not far from here and that means that all aircraft have to be cleared for permission to land; his flight is on our bulletin board,' Jack lied resisting the temptation to tell her that the visit was common knowledge.

'How surprising. Look I'm busy, busier than you seem to be, so if you don't mind – why are you here and what do you want?'

'Aren't you curious about the nature of the major incident?'

Kinsey looked flustered. 'It hasn't been on the news.'

'We're hoping it'll stay that way until it's clear what's killing Ukrainian farm workers. I'm no expert but I reckon it's some sort of virus, a pathogen; something like *Clostridium Difficile*, but nastier than that, much nastier. The autopsies should give us some answers.'

Dr Kinsey, suddenly very pale, averted her eyes from Jack's unblinking stare. 'People are dying?' she asked. Jack nodded. 'How many?'

Jack ostentatiously counted using his fingers. 'Two ... three ... two ... seven so far, but I wouldn't mind betting that the number will go way up from that.'

'Do we have to stand out here in the cold?'

'No, of course not, I'd much rather be inside.'

'This way,' Kinsey said.

As they walked to her office in silence Jack saw Wiggy, some way off, loading black waste bags onto a little motorised three-wheel trailer. Once inside her office Kinsey made a big effort to appear calm and collected, organising a pot of tea and some biscuits. Jack sat patiently waiting watching her trying to regain control of her emotions - and temper.

She sipped from her cup as Jack dunked his custard cream into his tea.

'That's better. I needed that,' she said. 'Now, what can I do to help you, inspector? I presume you're here on police business and not to collect aircraft numbers? Is it to do with my complaint? Are you still going to pursue the charge of wasting police time?'

'I think you know that's been dropped in favour of giving you a warning.'

'Yes, just making sure you weren't here under any misapprehensions.'

'No, I don't think I have any misapprehensions. I'll cut to the chase, Doctor. I'm investigating the deaths of seven Ukrainians and the rather worrying fact that two of the bodies are missing.'

'That sounds very odd.'

'Very odd? It's not like losing a handbag, you know; it's not careless losing two bodies.'

'I didn't mean it like that,' she said, avoiding his eyes and fiddling with papers on the desk.

'Exactly what kind of research do you do here, Doctor? I know it involves the use of beagles as experimental hosts - what are you testing?'

'I'm sorry, inspector, I can't tell you that - it's commercially sensitive. All I can tell you is that it's to do with immunology, with finding ways of protecting human lives from biological risks.'

'It would be really helpful if you just told me exactly what you're doing.'

Kinsey sounded as if she was trying not to shout. 'I can't and won't do that - so there's an end to it.'

Jack dunked another biscuit in his tea. 'That's not the end of it, but let's move on. I saw Wiggy as we walked here - I thought he only worked nights?'

'Frank Ritchie called in sick so Wiggy stayed on after his night shift - I needed someone to finish off getting everything spick and span for Mr Anderson's inspection. What's that dreadful man Wiggy got to do with anything?'

'I just need to ask him if he had visitors the other night.'

'Visitors? What other night? He shouldn't be having visitors here - that's forbidden.'

'Apparently not as far as Wiggy is concerned. So, before we continue our little chat I need to clear something up with him so I'll go and do that and come back afterwards to see if there's anything I need to clarify with you. Is that okay?'

'I'll come with you.'

'No, that won't be necessary.'

'I'm coming with you and that's final,' she said abruptly standing up and slapping the desk with her hand.

'Dr Kinsey, sit down, be calm and listen. I'm here on police business investigating several suspicious deaths. You are not coming with me and if you try and impede my investigation I'll arrest you for obstruction and this time the charge won't be dropped.'

'You can't. This is private property.'

'Try me. You said you were busy, so busy yourself.'

'I don't like your attitude, inspector.'

'I'll bear it in mind.'

Wiggy was loading another black sack onto the pile on the trailer. Jack tiptoed up behind him and suddenly bellowed, 'Hiya, Wiggy!' when he was just behind him.

'Fucking hell!' Wiggy shouted. 'You shouldn't go sneaking up on people like that, not making no noise, almost gave me a fucking heart attack.'

‘What are you up to?’

‘Bloody paper by the truck load – all has to be burnt – top fucking secret or some crap like that.’

Jack nodded sympathetically. ‘Been at it long?’

‘Since first thing, all to impress that Angers git how organised the Doc is - she doesn’t half harp on.’

‘So where do you burn it?’

‘In the incinerator.’ Wiggy hesitated, ‘What’s it to you?’

‘Lead the way and I’ll give you a hand – could do with a bit of exercise.’

‘You can’t touch nothing – it’s health and safety.’

‘Bloody hell, don’t want to cross that lot do we? I’ll just watch and ask a few questions while you work. How does that strike you, Norbert.’

‘No one calls us Norbert; fuckin’ stupid name.’

And Wiggy isn’t? ‘Lead on Macduff, I haven’t got all day.’

Wiggy climbed on to the seat of the three-wheeler and the electric motor purred into life; Jack had no trouble keeping up with the vehicle as it trundled slowly along. A few minutes later they arrived in front of the incinerator.

‘That’s a cremator, isn’t it?’ Jack asked. His hunch was firming up; he felt sick.

‘Incinerator.’

‘It’s bigger than I thought it would be,’ Jack said.

‘How big did you think it would be?’

‘What’s it for?’

Wiggy looked offended. ‘Fucking burning stuff, what else would it be for?’

‘That’s what I’m asking you, Wiggy. Bags of rubbish, I can see that. What else?’

Wiggy hesitated. ‘Dogs when they’re dead like. What you want to know for?’

‘Good question,’ Jack said as Wiggy turned off the motor, lumbered down from the seat and picked up the first black bag

before hurling it into the left hand machine. ‘Here’s another question for you. Do you know Dave and Shelley Broadbeam?’

‘What’s it to you?’

‘Simple question, Wiggy. Do you know them?’

‘Shelley’s me sister,’ Wiggy grudgingly admitted as he hurled another black bag in through the gaping doors.

‘Is that why she visited you here on Tuesday night? A sibling love-in?’

‘She what?’ Wiggy asked, standing very still by the trailer.

‘Visited you here on Tuesday night.’ Jack took his report book from his pocket and flipped it open, even though there was nothing on the page from which he quoted. ‘A white van bearing the words “Labour Logistics” with two passengers on board was seen entering here at one thirty in the morning and was later seen departing. That’s Dave and Shelley’s van. So why were they visiting you in the middle of the night?’

‘Who says they was here?’

‘Why were they here, Wiggy?’

‘Spur of the moment; you know what families are like.’

‘Who was driving?’

‘Dave.’

‘Was he?’ Jack queried remembering that the Broadbeams had said that Shelley had driven Dave home from the pub because he was pissed; Jack felt no need to share this with Wiggy.

‘So fucking what?’

‘My question precisely, Norbert; so fucking what or do I mean why? Yes, it’s why. Why were your sister and brother-in-law here in the middle of the night?’

‘They was bored, felt like a drive out, thought they’d come and see me knowing as how I gets lonely out here on me own at night.’

‘You were lonely; that’s your explanation is it?’

‘Yeah.’

'Norbert Wiggles, I'm arresting you on suspicion of the disposal of a corpse with intent to obstruct or prevent a coroner's inquest and also the prevention of the lawful and decent burial of a corpse. You do not have to say anything but it may harm your defence if you do not mention, when questioned, something which you later rely on in court. Anything you do say may be given in evidence. Do you understand?'

'What's going on here?' Kinsey asked, and both men turned to stare at her.

'I'm arresting Mr Wiggles.'

'What for?'

'A serious crime. Be clear, Doctor, when I've dealt with Mr Wiggles I shall be back and continue my interview with you, and this time it'll be formal, and oh, you should expect a team from forensics – don't say it – they'll have a warrant.'

'They won't be allowed inside the labs.'

'They will be if I get a court order, but for the moment they'll concentrate their efforts right here.'

'Could I ask a favour, doc? I think it would be really useful if you was to get me a solicitor and have him down the nick for when I arrive. You alright with that?' Wiggy asked.

Kinsey was lost for words; she just nodded.

With Wiggy safely locked away in a holding cell Jack walked up to Sergeant Cliff wearing a broad smile; he wasn't happy, far from it, but wanted to see what effect his apparent good humour would have on Cliff. 'Sergeant Cliff, can you make sure that Mr Wiggles is kept well fed and watered while he's waiting.'

'Wiggy's a fucking nuisance, always has been.'

'Nevertheless – we don't want him complaining to the IPCC. There's also something else I'd like you to do. Can you send out a car with a couple of officers to the Broadbeam's place and bring them in for questioning. They'll need to be cautioned – a general caution will do because I don't want them knowing why they're being brought in. Can you do that?'

And, oh yes, I'd appreciate it if that came as a bit of a surprise to them.

Cliff bristled. 'What's that supposed to mean, Inspector?'

'Exactly what I said, Sergeant. I want it to be a surprise.'

'They may not be at home.'

Jack looked at his watch. 'They'll have done the morning run so I'd guess they're putting their feet up – but maybe you're right. Just in case, can you give Dave a call on his mobile and let him know we're asking them to come in to help us with our enquiries.'

'Yes, I'll do that,' Cliff smiled.

'Thanks ... So you have his mobile number do you?'

'Yes.'

'It's not listed, Sergeant. The last time I asked you didn't know it. Get them in asap and do tell them that trying to do a runner would not be helpful to their situation.'

'What are they accused of?'

'Mum's the word, Sergeant, mum's the word,' Jack said putting his finger to his lips knowing that Cliff would go and ask Wiggy with what he'd been charged; it didn't matter; it was all grist to the mill.

Back in his office Jack was about to call the Pathology Service in Leicester to see if they had any autopsy results when the door was filled with Wainstock's trembling bulk. His chubby face was not its customary pink but was, literally, puce. 'I've bloody had it with you, Jack!'

'Boss. Why don't you come in and sit down and tell me what I'm supposed to have done?'

'Don't try and manage me, Jack; I'm not some irate farmer who's just had his prize bull nicked ... I'm fucking cross!' he shouted and letting out a tremendous grunt of indignation, pulled Clare's chair out from behind her desk and clomped down upon it. Jack filled a plastic cup from the water dispenser; passed it to Wainstock who emptied it all in one go and held it out to be refilled. This done, Jack sat back down behind

his desk and waited. 'If you don't report to me as the Silver Commander I can't report to bloody Sylvester and he's just looking for an excuse to get me out with my pension, asp,' Wainstock said.

'Ah. Paperwork?'

'The lack of it, Jack.'

'I don't do paperwork, boss, you know that.'

'I do now! Listen – good detective work is ninety per cent sweating over reports, filling in the forms and ten per cent inspiration.'

'I don't do bureaucracy, boss. At the Met I had a DC to do that for me.'

'This isn't the Met.'

'More's the pity – can you, can I, find someone I can bring on board?'

'Sylvester is going very softly softly on this, wants to keep it as quiet as possible, adding too many bodies – sorry, that's the wrong word - to the investigation will just draw unwanted attention.'

'He'll have a problem keeping this mess secret round here – if a bloody Robin farts it's front page news,' Jack said. 'Just another DC?'

'I'll see what I can do but only if you tell me exactly what you're doing.'

'That would be a novelty,' Fulsome said standing in the doorway.

'Jeremy. How long have you been stood there?' Wainstock asked.

'Not long. I've been looking for you, sir, to tell you about Lord Haugham,' Fulsome replied as he came in, closed the door behind him and leant back against it. 'All I can say is that I'm glad I was handling it and not you, Ranger, not with your relationship with the deceased. This requires a little subtlety and diplomacy; no point in causing unnecessary distress.'

'Come on, Jeremy, get on with it,' Wainstock said.

'We're waiting for the post mortem but I think we can safely say that his death was due to natural causes; a heart attack in unfortunate circumstances. He undoubtedly attempted to sexually assault a young serving girl Aneta, who it turns out is engaged to the son, Howard, and in defending herself she repelled his unwanted advances somewhat forcefully.'

'Nice man, Reggie. A real pillar of the community,' Jack murmured.

'Jack! Shut up!' Wainstock barked. 'How's the coroner going to feel about this?'

'In the circumstances I'm pretty sure he'll see that it's not in the public interest to cause unnecessary distress to the son and Lady Haugham, who, as you know, is not in the best of mental health.'

'What about Aneta Avaremenko?' Jack asked.

'She seems to be coping very well; she's made a statement that Srench has approved so she and her fiancé are trying to get their lives back together; most upsetting for them all.'

'I'm not sure I approve of having a word with the coroner,' Wainstock said.

'The Chief Constable is giving the coroner a heads up as we speak,' Jeremy smirked.

'Then you'd better tell him that Aneta Avaremenko is under age – she's only fifteen,' Jack said.

'How do you know that?' Fulsome demanded.

'Because I'm a detective,' Jack replied.

'How dare you!' Fulsome roared.

'Chief Superintendent,' Jack said. 'I'm really sorry but I've got work to do so if the DCI wants to bend your ear about my attitude could he please do it in your office so I can get on?'

'Who the hell do you think you are? I'm the one going places, not you,' Fulsome said.

'Let's let Jack get on with his job, shall we, Jeremy?'

'You're letting him get away with speaking to me like that? I'm his line manager.'

'At the moment, as Bronze, he's reporting direct to me. Let's talk about this in private. Come on, let's leave Jack to get on.'

As they left the office Jack's mobile rang. 'Yes? Gil, is that you? ... What? ... Okay, I'll be right there.' As he was about to run past the front desk Sergeant Cliff asked him what to do with Wiggy. 'Give him another cup of tea and when the Broadbeams get here keep them apart. Understood? I'll be as quick as I can.'

Jack ran all the way to Gil's café; the door was wide open and vinyl albums were strewn everywhere; many of the priceless sleeves had been torn in half. 'Gil? Gil? Where are you?' Jack called as he looked around. He heard a groan from behind the counter. Gil was lying face down with his wheelchair wedged on top of him preventing him from moving. Jack lifted it away and hurriedly pushed it out of harm's way. 'Gil? How bad is it?' he asked as he gently put his arms under his friend and began to turn him over and saw Gil's mobile clutched in his hand.

'A couple of broken ribs, sprained wrist ... I'm alright.'

'You'll need stitches - who did this?' Jack asked as he carried Gil to his chair and gently lowered him in.

'Two of those morons that work for Dimitri - Noddy and Mouse - I think they must have been off their heads on something.'

'Okay,' Jack said. 'I'm going to call this in.' He dialled 112 on his mobile, asked for an ambulance and police and gave his name and rank. 'I can't stay here, Gil, not right now. They'll check you out in the hospital. Tell our lot who did this and I'll find you later, either here or in the hospital.'

'You're leaving me? Where are you going?'

'I need to go and see somebody.'

'Don't ruin it for yourself, mate,' Gil said. 'He's not worth it.'

'Oh, he's worth it alright.'

'Don't forget Rachel.'

'How could I?'

Jack didn't bother to knock on Rachel's front door; he just stormed in; Dimitri was lying on the sofa with a mug of coffee

resting on his chest; a new TV was on. Before Dimitri knew what was happening Jack had snatched the mug and poured coffee over Dimitri's head. 'Stop whining, you shit, it's not that hot,' he said as he pulled Dimitri off the sofa, slung him on the floor ramming his right arm up his back until his hand was touching the back of his head. Dimitri howled with pain.

Rachel rushed in. 'Jack? What are you doing?'

'Go and see to your uncle, this prick has had him beaten up and I need a word in his fucking ear - now go!'

'What are you going to do?'

'Go! Now!' Rachel left. 'Listen, arsehole,' Jack said as he knelt on Dimitri and pushed his hand even further upwards. 'You're on a warning - no, a promise - if anything else happens to Gil Robert or his niece Rachel I will fit you up and I will make sure you go down for a very long time.'

'Fuck off!'

Jack put his mouth to Dimitri's ear and whispered. 'You don't get it, do you? I've dealt with the Ukrainian mafia before; they have a code of honour of sorts that you think doesn't apply to you, don't you? I have the contacts to find out who you really are, so I'll make sure they know that you're a loose cannon who needs to be brought back into line. Beyond all that I will personally break every fucking bone in your body like this,' Jack said as he snapped the little finger of the hand he was holding. Dimitri screamed. 'Did that that hurt? Let me tell you, elbows hurt like fuck when they break. You've been warned. Step out of line again and you're finished.' Jack stood up and left without another word. He didn't realise that Rachel had been too afraid to leave her own house; she'd hid in the toilet until he'd left.

14.40

Sam and her old friend, the elderly investigative journalist, Jim Campbell, met once a week on a Thursday afternoon -

when her work schedule allowed - at his place in Tooting for a pot of tea, toasted teacakes and a gossip.

'So what have you been up to?' Jim asked as he stuck a toasting fork into a teacake and held it in front of the ancient gas fire in his study.

'This and that.' Sam said as she poured tea.

'This is supposed to be a no holds barred gossip - "this and that" doesn't qualify as gossip.'

'I know,' Sam laughed.

'Something up? Work? Love life?'

Sam sat back in the chair nursing her cup of tea in both hands. 'Jack Ranger. I'm doing some research for him.'

Jim raised an eyebrow and chuckled. 'I see ... your Jack.'

'He's not my Jack, Jim, so you can stop that right now.'

'I thought you two got on rather well?'

'It was business. It is business.'

'How is he up in the sticks? Bit of a change from SCD9 I suspect.'

'You could say that - I'm not really sure how he is.'

'How did you come across him in the first place?'

'At a party to celebrate Ian Wain's promotion to his new role at the Met; said Jack was a rising star, would go far, that sort of thing; Jack didn't fall for the flattery and from what he said over a drink, he wasn't much of a fan of Wain's,' Sam said.

'Why not?' Jim asked as he buttered a teacake and settled himself in an armchair opposite Sam.

'Jack likes coppers like Fred Ingles, the chief super who actually runs SCD9, not careerists like Wain who he doesn't think are coppers at all.'

'But Wain was pretty helpful to you, wasn't he, to me as well for that matter - without him we might never have met.'

Sam laughed. 'There's a lot to forgive ... you know we were once an item? But not for long.'

'You told me that you, as your generation say, dumped him.' Sam nodded. Jim ate some of his teacake. 'Do you ever regret resigning from the force? You would have gone far.'

'God, no. It's funny though, isn't it? I was only remembering the other day what I'd said to Lucy Fitzroy - I don't do missing persons - and now, look at me, that's what I do.'

'But you enjoy it?'

Sam drank tea as she reflected on his question. 'When I get a result and everyone is happy - trouble is - some of the people I find don't want to be found; that's difficult.'

'You could always stop - with Harry's money in the bank you've no need to work.'

'You know it's not about money, it's about feeling alive, excited, doing something useful - shit like that.'

'Language, young lady,' Jim teased. 'Going back, do you ever see Wain?'

'I try not to move in such elevated circles - I see Fred Ingles from time to time, in the same way as I see Jack, on business. I was sorry to see Jack leave the Met but by then he'd already asked me to help him find his estranged wife, Anastasiya, and that's what I've been trying to do; she's Ukrainian but has British citizenship now; dual nationality.'

'Is she hiding from Jack?'

Sam sipped her tea. 'I'm not sure, but I think so and I'm getting nearer to her.'

'What will Jack do when you find her?'

'No bloody idea. For the time being he's hiding out in the rural idyll that's Lincolnshire.'

'Not so sure it's an idyll anymore,' Jim said. 'Places like Lincolnshire aren't what they were. I was talking to a friend of mine the other day - rural affairs specialist - and he was saying that vast tracts of land are being turned over to growing bio-fuels, some new strain of miscanthus apparently - what are we going to eat if they're just growing fuel crops?'

Back at the station Jack called the forensic team and told them to take apart the incinerators at InVivo. When asked 'why' he realised he hadn't explained his hunch to anyone. Having done so he was promised that it would be dealt with as soon as forensic staff were released from their work at Falkingham Close. Jack was tempted to ask for additional support but given Sylvester's desire to keep the lid on events he thought better of it; he had no desire to lose control of the situation. *Who am I kidding? In control of the situation? Like hell I am. But more to the point why is Sylvester trying to keep this under cover? It could be to our advantage to get the media involved, but then they'd only call it a plague and then we'd really be up against it.*

Needing something to eat he went to Briggs for a sandwich. As he re-entered the station Sergeant Cliff called him over to tell him the Broadbeams were on their way in and that the Pathology Service had been trying to contact him as a matter of some urgency. As Jack was about to return to his office to call Pathology the Broadbeams came in through the double doors.

'What the fuck's this all about?' Dave Broadbeam demanded.

Jack was about to reply when the doors opened again and Clare walked in with Harold Bentosh.

'You found him?' Jack said.

'This is him. Mr Bentosh the butcher, aka Mr Larwood, the much-loathed husband of Celia. He's not a very happy bunny.'

'Well, we'll just have to see if we can make him feel even worse. Right Sergeant Cliff, I want four interview rooms and I want Mr and Mrs Broadbeam, Mr Bentosh and Mr Wriggles separated, one in each room and then we'll see what these rogues have to say for themselves.'

'Who you calling a rogue?' Shelley Broadbeam asked.

'Sorry, rogue-ess,' Jack said.

'Prick,' Shelley mouthed.

'You want them all split up?'

'Didn't I just say that, Clare?'

'You did,' she confirmed.

'There you are, Sergeant, I did say that. Get on with it, will you?'

'We want a solicitor,' Dave Broadbeam said.

'I'm sure Sergeant Cliff can organise that for you – he's used to doing that.'

As Jack and Clare walked to their office she chuckled, 'I don't think our sergeant has taken much of a shine to you, Jack.'

Jack sat down behind his desk and dialled Leicester Royal Infirmary and got straight through to the Pathology Service and Dr Deutsch the pathologist who'd been leaving messages for him. Jack introduced himself, apologised for the delay in getting back to him and listened carefully with the phone on conference setting so Clare could hear all that was said. 'Could I just summarise that back to you to make sure I've understood what you've said and what you recommend? ... Thank you ... the three men died from an unknown viral infection – you do know there have been at least two more deaths? You do ... no we don't ... the autopsies show that they died from an unknown foodborne pathogen most probably acquired through ingestion.'

'Yes. But to be accurate, inspector, it may not be unknown to a specialist but it's unknown to us. That's why I'm suggesting you contact Professor Ron Baski and ask him for his specialist support. We will, of course, provide him with everything he needs in order to conduct his analysis of the samples. He's used by the Home Office so you shouldn't have a problem getting clearance but, be warned, he's a busy man, but he may be intrigued by this; just up his street. Give me your email address and I'll send you all his details so that you can run it past your hierarchy – I know what they're like. Bureaucrats are all the same whether they're in the police or the NHS.'

'I'm sure you're right – thank you, doctor. Will you keep me up to speed on the other autopsies? I'll give you my mobile number – got rather a lot on at the moment.'

'Yes, that major incident of yours – I wouldn't be surprised if that doesn't make the national news tonight – we've had the media badgering us all day – but have no fears on that score, we've been silent on the matter.'

Jack closed the call and turned to Clare. 'Well, you heard all that. I think Yuri may have been right. Let's make a start on the conspirators and then I'll clear it with Wainstock about getting this Prof Baski involved. I've got a vague feeling I've heard his name before, in fact I know I have, but where? It doesn't matter for now. Let's go and see if our rogues have stewed enough.'

Jack and Clare went downstairs; the first interview room was empty, so was the second as were the other two.

At the front desk Sergeant Cliff was on the phone; Jack could hardly contain his anger. 'Get off that bloody phone,' Jack barked. Cliff took his time to end the call.

'That was the solicitors; they can't get anyone here for another hour,' Cliff explained.

'Where have you put them? The interview rooms are empty; where the hell are they?'

'We're short staffed, Inspector. As you know they couldn't be left on their own in case they harmed themselves, and ...'

'In case they harmed themselves?' Jack interrupted. 'That's bollocks. Put them in cells and do it now!'

'I only had one constable to spare so I put them all in the meeting room upstairs.'

'You did what?'

'They're not on their own; there's a constable with them,' Cliff said.

'You have deliberately disobeyed me and allowed them to collude; you've had it, mate. I want them all in the cells and then I want Mr Bentosh in the interview room in five minutes. Got that, sergeant?'

Now in an interview room with Bentosh and the young solicitor who was representing him, Oxley Srench, Jack turned on the recorder. 'Mr Harold Bentosh you are suspected of the manslaughter of Ilko Avaremenko and Stepan Salenko. You do not have to say anything but it may harm your defence if you do not mention, when questioned, something which you later rely on in court. Anything you do say may be given in evidence. Do you understand?' Bentosh stared straight ahead. 'Do you understand?' Bentosh nodded but avoided eye contact with Jack. 'Say you understand!'

'Are you trying to intimidate my client?' Oxley Srench asked.

'Mr Srench, we're trying to establish your client's involvement in the deaths of seven men who have died from a viral infection caused by the ingestion of contaminated food.'

'They were illegal immigrants, I believe,' Srench observed.

'What has that got to do with it? Unless, of course, you're suggesting that they were deliberately poisoned because of where they came from – is that what you're saying? Your client is involved with a hate crime – is that what you're saying? Because if you are we'll move on from manslaughter to murder – is that your recommendation to your client?'

'Of course I'm not suggesting that. I have every right to establish the parameters of this interview in order to protect my client's right to ...'

'Mr Srench,' Jack interrupted, 'unless you allow me to get on with this I will have you evicted and replace you with the police solicitor who will guarantee proper treatment of Mr Bentosh rather than getting in the bloody way! If you continue to intervene unnecessarily I will not only throw you out on your ear I'll charge you with wasting police time. Now, may I get on? Mr Bentosh do you understand the caution I have given?'

'I will want access to this recording in case I wish to make a complaint,' Srench said.

'Do you understand the caution, Mr Bentosh?' Jack asked again.

'I do.'

‘Good. Mr Bentosh, where did you get the venison?’

Bentosh looked at Srench. ‘I got a question. If I tell what happened, will it go better for me?’

‘Inspector?’ Srench said. ‘I need to talk to my client in private.’

Jack ignored Srench. ‘You know I can’t make any such promise but if you help me I’ll make sure that’s known if you come to trial.’

‘I’m not a bad man though my wife thinks I am ... anyhow, when you get a chance to make an extra few bob, well then you have to take it, don’t you? I’ve been helping them Ukrainians out, there’s nothing wrong with meat past its sell by date and they can’t afford ... we were helping each other out.’

‘So you’re a philanthropist, Mr Bentosh?’ Jack asked.

‘You don’t have to answer that, Mr Bentosh,’ Oxley Srench advised. ‘The inspector is being sarcastic.’

‘Where did you get the venison? Was it stolen?’ Clare asked. Bentosh looked at Srench, then at Jack. Clare repeated the question.

Bentosh took a deep breath. ‘It wasn’t venison ... it was dogs ... beagles; I got ‘em from Wiggy. They’d died. I gave him a few quid for ‘em ...’

It took a few moments for Jack, Clare and Srench to take this in. Jack was the first to speak. ‘You sold dead dogs from InVivo to two men under the pretence that the meat was venison. Does dead dog look like venison?’

Bentosh shook his head. ‘Not really, no, but ... I knew it was wrong when Wiggy told me what he had but then when he said as how I could sell it to the Ukrainians ‘cos they were ignorant ... I knew I shouldn’t have done it, but you know they’re here, and they’re fuckin’ everything up. Wiggy was right made up about it, laughed like a fuckin’ hyena.’

‘Jesus!’ Clare sighed.

‘You realise this is a confession, Mr Bentosh?’ Srench asked.

‘Harold Bentosh, at this stage I am charging you with constructive manslaughter. You do not have to say anything but it may harm your defence if you do not mention, when

questioned, something which you later rely on in court. Anything you do say may be given in evidence. Do you understand?’ Bentosh nodded. ‘Say it out loud!’

‘I understand,’ Bentosh said.

Jack looked at his watch. ‘Interview over at fifteen hundred hours and eight minutes,’ leant forward and turned off the recorder.

‘I shall be applying for bail,’ Srench said.

‘And I will be recommending that it be denied – do you realise that your client will be described as a serial killer by the media?’

‘You may be able to prove a connection between the sale of the dog meat to the deceased but you cannot prove that it was the meat that killed them,’ Srench said.

‘Our experts will find the evidence, present it to the Crown Prosecution Service and they will decide how to proceed; I’m a copper, not a judge and jury,’ Jack said. ‘As I understand it you’re also representing the other three in custody?’

‘I am.’

‘Can I advise you that ...’ Jack began.

‘I know what the code of conduct says, Inspector, that in cases of potential conflict of interest the duty of confidentiality is paramount. Who are you going to interview next?’

‘What happens to me?’ Bentosh asked.

‘You will remain under arrest until a magistrate decides whether you should be granted bail,’ Clare explained. ‘Would you like us to contact your wife to let her know what’s going on and so she can bring you in anything you need?’

‘She hates me.’

Back in their office for a few moments to agree on the best way to deal with Wiggy, Jack rang Sergeant Cliff and told him to send a car to InVivo and bring in Dr Kinsey as a matter of great urgency. As they were about to leave Wainstock came in looking exceedingly fed up. ‘Sylvester’s giving me hell; terrified it’s going to hit the media. And it seems our new white knight of a Commissioner has got wind of something going on. I want

a briefing from you here at seven in the morning; Sylvester has decided that we need to involve our press officer so that we're prepared if it all leaks out. You need to sort this, Jack, and you, Clare – don't let me down. I hear you've got four suspects – getting anywhere?'

'I'll brief you in the morning, boss. Right now we've got some talking to do to some rather unpleasant low-life.'

'I wish you wouldn't use that phrase, Jack – it's prejudiced,' Wainstock said.

'Damn right it is – I'm utterly prejudiced ... forget it. And by the way, I shall be making a complaint against Sergeant Cliff for disobeying a direct order and permitting collusion with suspects under caution.'

'Norbert Wiggles you are suspected of the disposal of a corpse with intent to obstruct or prevent a coroner's inquest and also the prevention of the lawful and decent burial of a corpse and additionally to attempting to pervert the course of justice. You do not have to say anything but it may harm your defence if you do not mention, when questioned, something which you later rely on in court. Anything you do say may be given in evidence. Do you understand?'

'I know me rights and I got a brief, ain't I?' Wiggy interrupted nodding in the direction of young Scrench who looked disdainfully at his client. 'Asked for your dad, didn't I, but he don't look after the likes of me.'

'Shall we get on, Inspector?' Scrench asked.

'Mr Wiggles ...'

'Wiggy, call us Wiggy.'

'Mr Wiggles ...'

'I'm reserving my rights to remain silent,' Wiggy cut in.

'You're what?' Scrench demanded. 'That is not what we agreed.'

'I changed my mind; I ain't got nothing to say, end of story. Except as how I wants bail.'

'Dream on, Wiggy, dream on,' Clare said as she and Jack stood up, followed by Scrench, and left Wiggy alone.

Dave Broadbeam was next and he was no more forthcoming than his friend and brother-in-law, Wiggy. Shelley Broadbeam was no better, also choosing to remain silent.

Jack finally sent Clare home for the evening with the words 'I think tomorrow might be a bit of a tough one; we're going to be getting it from all sides but we should at least have some concrete evidence to use by then. Try and get some rest. I'm going home for a run to clear my head or I'll go nuts.'

18.30

Rachel fled from her uncle's flat as soon as she knew that Dimitri was to be released. She spent the day riding the bus back and forth between Louth and Skegness getting off in Mablethorpe in both directions to wander on the beach; the bus was warm and it was somewhere that Dimitri would never think of looking for her. She considered her options over and over again but none seemed to offer a solution that would allow her to escape. Finally arriving back in Louth she went to the Victoria Hotel where she hid in the backroom drinking Black Russian cocktails until the alcohol began to make her feel that she was making a fuss over nothing and that she should try harder to make it work; it was not the first time an alcohol induced fantasy anaesthetised her brain from pain and reason, but she was not alone in that.

As she stepped unsteadily into the hall of her home she was surprised to hear Dimitri happily singing in the living room.

'You're home at last,' he said as she opened the door.

'Was that a Ukrainian folk song you were singing?' she asked as she leant against the doorframe for support thinking that he was as near to sweetness and light as he ever got these days. Hope welled up in her heart.

'Where have you been?'

'I went to the seaside.'

'Nice. Come here, I want to kiss you, yes?'

It's okay, he's in a good mood. She sat down next to him on the sofa where he cuddled her and then gently kissed her on the lips. 'You're very sexy,' he whispered in her ear as he fondled her breasts through her sweater.

'Am I?'

'Yes, how about we have some fun, yes?'

'What sort of fun?'

'You cook me dinner in the naughty way, yes?'

'What? When I?'

'Yes, you remove the clothes, yes, wear the apron only and I watch your beautiful bottom as you cook, then I take you over the table top, like a dog, yes? Then we eat dinner and then go to bed and we fuck properly, yes?'

'You're not cross with me for being out all day?'

'You think I'm a monster? No, we have fun, you're a good girl and know how to keep your man happy, yes?'

Rachel tried not to worry about his constant use of the word 'yes'; when he wheedled he was often intent on doing something she really didn't want to do but the alcohol made her brave. 'Not even wear my thong?' she asked.

'No, just the bare bottom, yes?'

'Okay, if that's what you want; what would you like to eat?'

'You choose; make lots, I am hungry,' he said. 'Make it a surprise. You go to kitchen, make ready, I will go and buy us a bottle of wine, yes? What would you like? White wine?'

'I'm a bit tiddly already.'

'This I can see. Chardonnay?'

'Please.'

Alone in the kitchen she stripped and put on the flowery apron he insisted she wore whenever they played this game. She closed the kitchen door; there was always a cold draught from the front door even when it was shut. She filled a pint glass they'd stolen from the pub with water and drank it all down immediately feeling slightly more sober. Having inspected the

fridge freezer, the fridge, store cupboards and the veggie rack she decided on spaghetti Bolognese with some additional chilli flakes to give it a bit more of a kick; he liked spicy things. She happily set about the cooking. It took her thirty minutes to make the ragu by which time, and after another glass of water, she was beginning to wonder why it was taking him so long to get back from the office. As she put the water on to boil she heard the front door open and shut and was glad he was back; she was starving, having not eaten all day. She turned as the kitchen door opened. 'What?' she gasped as Dimitri walked in followed by two men.

'Is this the whore?' one of the men asked in Ukrainian; though she didn't understand exactly what he'd said she recognised the sound of the word "кypBa" that Dimitri called her when he was angry.

'Speak in English,' Dimitri said, 'so the bitch knows what is happening.'

'This is your woman that you share with us?' the other of the two men asked. 'The price you pay.'

'She is a whore,' Dimitri said. 'Look at her, who but a whore would cook like that. She is asking for it, yes?'

Trying to overcome her shock she grabbed the hot pan of water and hurled it in the direction of the three men. They saw it coming and the steaming water splashed harmlessly at their feet. 'Fuck off!' she yelled grabbing a chopping knife. 'I'll kill you if you try and lay a hand on me. Dimitri! Stop this!'

The man who had spoken moved towards where she stood with her back against the stove. The heat under the pan of ragu was beginning to burn her back. She shuddered and slightly turned her head as she tried to move just a little further away from the flames. In an instant the man had disarmed her and thrown her towards Dimitri who caught her putting his hand over her mouth to stifle her screams. 'On the table or in the bedroom?' Dimitri asked.

'I like to be comfortable,' the man who'd disarmed her said. 'You should introduce us, Dimitri.'

'Rachel, meet Evgeni and Andriy Katyuk; they are brothers.'

She struggled, bit into Dimitri's hand and screamed until Andrij rammed a wet dishcloth into her mouth; she started to gag and struggled to breathe through her nose.

'Who wants to go first?' Dimitri asked.

Evgeni took a fifty pence piece from his pocket. 'Call.'

'Heads.'

Evgeni caught the coin and showed it. 'Bad luck,' he laughed, 'at least she'll be wet.'

Rachel kicked and squirmed in a vain attempt to escape from Dimitri's arms. In the struggle the dishcloth fell out of her mouth; Andrij pushed it back in. Evgeni took Rachel's feet and he and Dimitri carried her upstairs to their bedroom.

Andrij found a bowl and served himself a good-sized portion of the ragu: he was still eating when Dimitri returned to the kitchen. 'There you are, Dimitri. It was sensible that you saw your error and paid a good price with the gift of your whore ... was that a scream? Evgeni is a brutal man,' Andrij laughed.

'Will Plushenko be content now that you have spoken to me? That I've given you my woman?' Dimitri asked.

'We will see. We will speak well of you but in future you must keep a closer eye on the labour, letting them fall ill, die, exposes us to risk and Mr Plushenko is averse to risk. You have to be a proper manager not fuck around just having fun. You understand?'

'I won't make the same mistake again ... when will there be another shipment?'

'Soon, through the port of Goole, in a container. He is a greedy bastard, that Evgeni,' he chuckled. 'Good sauce – have you a whisky for me?' Dimitri fetched the bottle. 'You will need to find a new place to store the replacement labour.' Andrij poured whisky into a mug and raised it in a salute. 'Cheers!'

Two hours after her three abusers had left her home Rachel stopped shaking. She climbed painfully from the bed and showered; by the time the water ran cold she still didn't feel clean. She dressed in her best pair of jeans, her favourite shirt and big floppy jumper and finally pulled on the duffle coat that

had been with her since she was fifteen. *That's not long back*, she thought, *but it's a lifetime*. She locked the front door behind her. She turned and looked at her home.

20.05

Though running in the dark wasn't easy even when there was a clear sky and a full moon Jack's mood was better as he walked through the gate towards the Belvedere and saw someone sitting on the front door step. 'Yuri? Is that you?' he asked as he approached.

'I need to talk,' the Ukrainian said and stood up.

'Then you'd better come in.' Inside the Belvedere he told Yuri to make himself at home while he had a shower.

Changed into jeans and a t-shirt Jack returned to the living room where he found Yuri looking at the 1967 album "Tommy". 'You like "The Who"?'

'Sure do. Is this original album?'

'It certainly is. Aren't you a bit young to be a "Who" fan?'

'The same would apply to you, inspector.'

'I'm Jack. Drink? I have tea, coffee, wine – no beer or spirits.'

'Don't you want to know why I've come here?'

'You'll tell me that when you're ready – what will you have?'

'What will you drink?' Yuri asked.

'A big glass of water followed by a big glass of red wine.'

'I'll pass on the water,' Yuri said as he put the album back amidst a couple of hundred others.

The two men sat opposite each other at the dining table. 'Cheers,' Jack said and raised his glass.

Yuri chinked his glass against Jack's. 'I lied; I came to apologise.'

'I know, but only about your job and not your name, Yuri Tomenko. You're not a journalist at all but an Inspector 1st

Grade of the Ukrainian National Police Force seconded to the Ministry of Interior Affairs assigned to combating Human Trafficking.’

Yuri laughed. ‘How did you know?’

‘It’s what I did at the Met – Organised Crime and Human Trafficking - I called in an old favour – my old boss, Fred Ingles.’

‘Why are you out here in the wilderness?’

‘As someone once said – everyone’s got to be somewhere – it’s a long story and we can save it for another day. Forget the apology; it’s not needed. Tell me what’s going on.’

‘I have no authority to be here; I have broken all the rules. You should hand me in and have me sent home.’

‘Why?’

‘Why should you send me home?’

‘I know why I should do that. Why have you broken all the rules?’

Yuri took a big sip of wine. ‘Because nothing happens; it’s all bullshit; too many hands are filled with dollars and so nothing is done – it’s the mafia.’

‘Which is no one simple thing in your country.’

‘You are right, but our government is full of corruption – nothing happens ... I was tired of running in circles ...’

‘So you decided to take matters into your own hands and here you are gone AWOL, a loose canon, a maverick and a danger to all those who don’t know where the hell you are or what you’re up to – correct?’

‘More or less ... are you going to turn me in?’

‘What would be the point of that? So, Inspector Yuri, why don’t you tell me what you know about what’s going on around here? But first, late though it is, I need to eat; what about you?’

‘I’m starving.’

‘Veggie sausages, fried eggs, baked beans and toast?’

‘Thank you, Jack, and not just for the food.’

‘There is a quid pro quo in this, Yuri; I’ll help you but you’re going to have to help me – agreed?’

Yuri extended his hand across the table; Jack shook it.

Just over thirty minutes later they’d finished their meal and Jack had opened a second bottle of Montepulciano d’Abruzzo. ‘So, tell me.’

‘You know when you have a jigsaw puzzle? The first thing I do is to try and make the edge all round, then I sort the pieces into colours using the picture on the box; I have no box with a picture, I have no edge to it, I just have pieces and I don’t even know how many pieces are in the puzzle.’

‘Tell me about the pieces you do have – that’ll be a start.’

‘A Ukrainian émigré business tycoon, Victor Plushenko, organises the human trafficking into the UK. Here, in Lincolnshire his man on the ground, his enforcer, is Dimitri Guraya – who you know. He in turn employs lumpen proletariats like the Broadbeams and Scrote – but they are of no real consequence.’

Lumpen proletariat? I haven’t heard that for a while. ‘Except when they break the law and kill people ... go on.’

‘I think Plushenko is buying up big estates where the owners need the cash or just want to get out – people like Lord Haugham.’

‘Did you know he’s dead?’

Yuri looked shocked. ‘No, I have kept out of the way of the women at the hall – how did he die?’

‘Too early to say. What else? Why is Plushenko buying land?’

‘I don’t know – I know nothing for certain, Jack – but Plushenko is not the big boss – he is someone else, maybe still in the Ukraine where he is protected, maybe not. It would be good to find out who this boss is and why they keep importing illegals and buying up land – there has to be more than money profit.’

‘Do you think there’s any causal relationship between this human trafficking and the deaths? Do you think it was deliberate?’

Yuri shook his head. ‘Accidental, I think.’

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05.31

‘Anything else about Haugham?’

‘I think he was using his contacts to place the labour Plushenko imports.’

‘The profits are good but not big enough if it’s mafia – it has to be something more.’

‘But what?’ Yuri asked. ‘You see, Jack, I know so little ... to have given up so much for nothing ... what has been the point?’

‘I need to debrief you properly. Not like this over wine; something that I know from the past will fit with the here and now, but it’s too late to start that tonight. There’s a spare bed if you want it?’

‘It would be good to sleep in a clean bed, thank you.’

Jack’s mobile started to ring; it took him a few moments to realise that the sound wasn’t in his dream but beside his bed. ‘Yes,’ he yawned. ‘Gil? Is that you? ... What? ... Oh, fuck! ... I’ll be at your place as soon as I can ... where are you? Grantham? ... She’s where? ... Pilgrim Hospital, Boston. I’ll meet you there ... she’s done what? ... Shit! Gil, hang in there my friend, I’ll be right there.’ Jack tapped in Clare’s number. ‘Come on! Wake up! ... Sorry it’s me. You’ll have to brief the super this morning, you know as much as me ... Rachel jumped off a bridge in Grantham on the East Coast line ... a freight train ... no, she’s dead ... thanks, I’m going to Boston to be with Gil ... I know Wainstock won’t like it but friendship is more important than fucking duty ... thanks ... yeah, I’ll catch up with you later.’ Jack knocked on the spare room door and pushed his head around the corner – Yuri was wide awake; Jack explained the situation and told him to stay put out of sight until he got back.

‘Anything I can do?’ Yuri asked.

‘Make some notes, think, write it all down and stick in that “Who” album you were looking at last night. If anyone comes, hide, you’re not here. Got it?’

It took Jack just over forty minutes to get to the Pilgrim hospital; he found Gil outside the main entrance sitting in his chair smoking. ‘Thought you’d packed that in?’ Jack said as Gil looked up at him.

‘Like I give a fuck.’

‘Shit, Gil, you look rough, mate. Let’s get you back inside and get something warm inside you. Is the café open?’

‘Just machines,’ Gil said flicking his cigarette butt across the path, its glowing tip bright in the dark. It landed at the feet of a passing stranger.

‘There’s a proper place for that, you know,’ the stranger observed.

‘Go fuck yourself,’ Gil snarled.

‘He’s in shock,’ Jack said to the man who had now stopped.

‘Nevertheless,’ the man began. ‘There’s no need ...’

‘He’s right,’ Jack interrupted. ‘Go fuck yourself.’

Inside the hospital Jack parked Gil as far away from the drinks machines as he could to avoid him being bothered by other visitors and insomniac patients. He returned with two beakers of something hot – the button had said coffee but it might have been tea – he gave one to Gil, pulled up a chair, and sat beside his friend. ‘I’m sorry, Gil.’

‘She jumped in front of a train, Jack. How could she do that? She was beautiful. I identified her; she isn’t beautiful anymore; smashed to pieces, poor love,’ Gil said and started to sob.

Jack stood up and put his arm around Gil’s shoulders. *Nothing to fucking say, have I?* He waited until Gil’s sobs slowly subsided. ‘It may sound crass but it will have been quick.’

‘Crass? Quick?’ Gil shouted pushing Jack’s arm away. ‘It wasn’t quick. What drove her to it wasn’t quick, not fucking quick at all.’

‘The impact of the train will have killed her instantly.’

‘No, Jack, she was dead before she got there.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘This,’ Gil replied and handed Jack his mobile phone. ‘It’s under messages.’

Jack pressed the key and listened; he could hardly believe his ears as Rachel sobbed her story of what had been done to her. His blood pressure rocketed and had there been anything handy to smash he would have smashed it. ‘Can I forward this to me?’ he managed to say. Gil nodded. He also sent it to Clare with a separate message asking her to show it to Wainstock.

‘You see, it wasn’t quick, what those bastards did to her, what that bastard Dimitri did to her. Oh, Jack, what are we going to do?’

‘We have their names; we know what they did; we know that she was sacrificed to save Dimitri’s skin – what are we going to do? I’m going to track them down and make them pay.’

‘Deporting them won’t be enough, Jack. I want them to suffer; I want Dimitri to suffer.’

‘There’s the law, Gil, and there’s justice; you’ll have justice I promise.’

‘Mr Robert?’ a female voice asked. ‘I’m sorry to interrupt but there’s a police officer here to speak to you about what happened to your niece.’ Gil and Jack looked from the nurse to a young man who was standing a few yards away staring in their direction. The nurse beckoned him to come over.

‘I’m really sorry to intrude on your grief, Mr Robert,’ he said.

‘Before you go on, I’m Detective Inspector Jack Ranger and you are?’

‘I didn’t know you were in charge of the case, sir. I thought it was ...’

‘No, it’s okay. I’m a friend and you are?’ Jack repeated.

‘I’ve just ... DC Shelton, Peter Shelton, just into plain clothes, based in Grantham, sir.’

‘And because it’s a suspicious death you’re the investigating officer?’

‘Yes, sir, my first. I’ve just come from the scene in Grantham and I wanted to ask Mr Robert if he knew ... as you know a suicide is always designated as a suspicious death so that a full investigation ...’

‘Okay, Peter, I know you need to speak to my friend Gil and he does have something to share with you – is that okay with you, Gil?’

‘You’re going?’

‘I want to try and find them – did you drive yourself here?’

‘I couldn’t – I got a taxi – Jack, could you stay?’

‘Gil, Gil, my old friend – look – I need to try and find them before this gets on the news and they do a runner. Peter, tell

your bosses that Rachel's name must be kept out of the news as otherwise we'll lose catching the people responsible.'

'She was murdered?'

'No, not murdered. Not directly. Gil? Let Peter listen to that voicemail. Will you do that?' Gil nodded. 'Now, it's up to you. Do I stay here or do I go and try and find these bastards that raped your niece? Yes, Peter, it's as bad as that. Gil?'

'Go and find them.'

'I'll come to your place later. Peter, will you be gentle with him and make sure he gets home safely.'

'I'll take him there myself, sir.'

'You'll get into trouble if you do that,' Jack advised.

'Doing the right thing is more important than obeying the rules, sir.'

'You'll do, Peter. I'll see you again.' Jack leant forward and kissed Gil on the forehead and left.

Jack was right; Wainstock was angry that Jack had deputed Clare to brief him and meet the press officer in his stead but after he'd listened to Rachel's voicemail the Chief Superintendent outwardly appeared calm; internally, his main concern was what Jack would do if he found the Ukrainians for there was no doubt in his mind that his one time protégé would take justice into his own hands. He had no time to dwell on this because he was already late for the press conference.

An hour later he was sitting drinking coffee with Clare and the press officer, Jayne Rutland.

'So what do you think?' Wainstock asked.

'Oh, it's wonderful: major incident, two missing dead bodies, nine more dead, seven more at death's door, no explanation of cause of death, experts sent for, questions about some sort of illegal immigrant borne plague, anything else you've forgotten to tell me?'

'Haugham's death,' Clare said.

'What about his death?' Ms Rutland asked.

'Haugham's son, Howard, is engaged to the sister of one of the missing men and she's under age,' Clare replied.

'But foul play has been ruled out,' Wainstock said.

'And that's the best news you have?' Rutland asked.

'There's worse – a young woman from Louth has committed suicide after being raped by two Ukrainian thugs,' Wainstock said.

'The Chief Constable is right: the impression is that the force is, at best, incompetent. Where's your DI Ranger? He's supposed to be a half decent copper; why wasn't he here?'

'He's too busy working on the case and Sergeant Farmer is more than capable of stepping in for him in the circumstances – in fact, she's going to be acting up as DI and Ranger similarly as DCI in his role as Bronze Commander.'

Clare looked shocked.

'I want a daily morning briefing at seven and another at six in the evening. I don't care who does it but I won't have anything but the truth – then, as you said, it's up to me how to spin it – agreed?' Rutland asked.

'Agreed,' Wainstock said.

Clare waited in silence while Jayne Rutland left them alone. 'Thank you, boss, that came as a bit of a surprise. Does Jack know about his promotion?'

'Not yet. It's pragmatic and you deserve it – as for him – I just hope he's not doing anything daft.'

Despite Wainstock's fears Jack had no intention of running amok but he did need to calm down before he went to look for the men who had caused Rachel's suicide. He took out his phone and once more listened to Rachel. The description of what had been done to her was harrowing but he couldn't afford to let himself dwell on its horror. It was clear to Jack that Dimitri's boss, Plushenko, and that name was becoming more familiar, was angry that Dimitri had fouled up and exposed the business, and therefore him, to risk and that Dimitri had sought to placate Evgeni and Andrij by giving them Rachel as a

sacrifice. Jack's knuckles were white with rage as he gripped the steering wheel driving back to Louth. *Oh fuck!* he thought as a sudden realisation came over him. He pushed his foot to the floor and switched on the siren and flashing blue light.

He pulled on a pair of surgical gloves as he looked at the front door of Rachel's house. Quietly he turned the door handle; it wasn't locked. He opened it and, standing on the threshold, stood stock still, every sense alert and listened: silence – too much silence. He closed the door. A noise, a very quiet small noise. A slow drip, like a tap needing a washer. He waited. Drip. *A tap? No, it's not that.* Drip. His heart thudded. Drip. The door to the kitchen was closed. He opened it. Drip. Dimitri dripped. He hung, a ligature about his neck, from the Sheila Maid, his feet just a few centimetres from the floor. He was naked from the waist down. His mouth would have been wide open had it not been filled with his severed penis. His testicles were missing. Jack guessed he'd been made to swallow them while still alive as part of a ritual he'd seen before; they'd find out at the autopsy. Dimitri's last blood dripped onto the slowly drying black pool on the linoleum floor beneath his feet. Jack stared. Dimitri's legs and feet washed with blood. Silence. *Bastard!* Jack's pity was brief; it was a comfort that he would have been unable to inflict such a penance; he didn't think that even Gil would be pleased by such an outcome.

With no time to waste he dropped the catch on the front door, stepped outside, checked that it was locked and called the station. All he had to do now was to find Evgeni and Andrij.

10.00

At the pathology Unit at Leicester Royal Infirmary Dr Deutsch welcomed Professor Ron Baski with some ceremony.

'You do me too much credit, doctor,' Ron said.

'I think not, your reputation goes before you, and by the way it's Oscar, if you don't think that's too familiar?'

'I'm a scientist like you, Oscar, so I don't think we need to worry about that – you're not related to the Odeon cinema man – Oscar Deutsch educates our nation – are you, the ODEON cinemas?'

'Not even distantly, unfortunately – do you want to see the sick men?'

'Remotely, thank you. How many are still alive?'

'Two – there's no hope for them, none at all. They're in the isolation unit - you can see them on CCTV right here.'

Ron and Oscar looked at the monitor: two screens showed two men on beds surrounded by drips and machines attended by nurses dressed in anti-contamination protective suits and masks. 'Doesn't tell one much, does it?' Ron said, 'Oddly voyeuristic looking at silent pictures of the dying. Let's get to the point, Oscar, why am I here? Why are you stumped as to the cause of death?'

'At first I thought the infectious agent was a coronavirus – something like Sars – but after looking at it more carefully it might be a pathogen no one has seen before. After examining the contents of their stomachs I came to the tentative conclusion that the virus had been acquired through ingestion as the meat in their stomach contained the same elements as the men themselves.'

'You're suggesting a Zoonotic disease?'

'Yes, but apart from being familiar with the usual tables of Zoonotic diseases and organisms I'm out of my depth – hence, the call to you was my suggestion but made by the police officer in charge, Inspector Jack Ranger.' Ron frowned, the last time he'd come across a copper with that name, the man was a DCI and was in the MET, but he couldn't bring any more about him to mind. 'He's based in Louth,' Oscar said.

'Have you ruled anything out?'

'Well, we've had the meat analysed and we're pretty certain that the animal, or animals, concerned weren't poultry, cattle, goats, farmyard animals basically, nor fish or horse or any sort of ruminant like sheep or deer – at one point I even thought it might be *Echinococcus Granulosus*.'

‘From the ingestion of eggs excreted by dogs?’ Ron confirmed.

‘Yes, but the profile didn’t stack up – do you want to go through all our samples yourself? We have everything ready for you.’

‘Yes, I will, thanks. Has the scene of the incident thrown up anything useful?’

‘Nothing in addition to the results from the autopsies – you’ve seen my description of the symptoms?’

Ron nodded. ‘Yes, not pleasant and not ones that I’ve seen exactly replicated before. I’d better get started – do you have a number for the inspector? I think I need to go and see what he’s discovered.’

10.00

‘Howard, I’m so sorry about your father,’ James Srench said as he offered Howard and Aneta a seat in front of his desk.

‘I’m not sorry,’ Howard said, ‘not after what he tried to do to Aneta.’

‘No, quite ... Your fiancée, Miss Aneta, I believe,’ Srench said extending his hand over the desk to Aneta who shook it awkwardly half standing up. ‘I understand from the coroner that he doesn’t see the need to bring the matter to his court as the cause of death has been agreed and that there will be no further pathological or other investigations. That must be a relief to you both.’

‘She’s had a hard enough a time as it is without having to describe his attempted rape in open court,’ Howard said.

‘You must be very upset,’ Srench sympathised.

‘I am used to hard times,’ Aneta said, ‘but thank you, I am fine now with my Howard.’

‘Well, my boy, let’s move forward; how does it feel to be the new Lord Haugham?’ Srench asked.

‘Not a lot different to be honest – look, I may as well be honest about this. Will we have to wait long for probate? When will the estate officially be mine?’

‘Your title is secure, Howard.’

‘What’s that supposed to mean? My title is secure – I don’t understand.’

Srench sighed. ‘This is not of my making, Howard, and it flies in the face of everything I asked your father not to ...’

‘Just tell me what he’s done,’ Howard interrupted.

‘You have nothing to inherit; the papers arrived this morning; they were signed some weeks ago, unbeknownst to me, I might add. Your father has sold the estate to a Ukrainian entrepreneur called Victor Plushenko. I’ve seen the documents and unfortunately everything is legal and above board. The transaction is absolutely incontrovertible. There is no estate to inherit, Howard, I’m so very sorry.’

Aneta broke Howard’s shocked silence. ‘He hated you, Howard. Now we have nothing.’

‘Yes. No,’ Howard said as he struggled to control his emotions. ‘But if he’s sold it, where’s the money?’

‘My dear chap,’ Srench said, ‘such a shock, such a shock. It’s not straightforward.’

‘Can it be challenged?’ Howard asked.

‘In my view it would be pointless – you could, of course, mount a legal challenge. We’d have to take further advice on that, a civil action but that would cost ...’

‘A lot of money and I have none.’

Srench had no need to reply. ‘I’m also afraid to say that the provisions for your mother have been rescinded; there is no longer any money to provide for her private care. She will have to be transferred to a NHS facility after she has been formally assessed.’

‘The bastard.’

‘Yes, I think that’s fair. There was one exclusion from the transaction – the lodge, your home, was not included in the

sale; it's yours, as is your vehicle, but of course you will no longer receive an income from the estate.'

'So, I'm unemployed? ... James, you knew him for years, why has he done this to me? You must have some idea.'

Srench considered this silently. 'I do have an idea but ... perhaps it's something I should share with you in private; it's personal.'

'Of course it's personal if it's about me.'

'How can I put this? Sensitive?'

'Please, James, just tell me will you? Aneta will be my wife – we don't need to have secrets – isn't that right, Aneta?'

'No secrets,' she confirmed.

'Very well. Your mother had a short affair. She fell pregnant with you. Your father believed you were not his child. She was certain that you were because ... because precautions had been taken between your mother and her lover whereas with your father none were taken as he wanted a son and heir. No matter how much she protested he would not believe her. His constant anger and doubt, his refusal to believe her, his rage, to be frank, his abuse, tipped her over the edge - you know the rest.'

'My god ... but surely ... but surely a DNA test would have resolved it?'

'If your father had been a rational man that's what would have happened – I suggested it to him when they first became available but he would have none of it. There was nothing that would convince him that you were his son. It became an obsession ... then when his debts overtook him, when he refused to restructure the estate in an attempt to make it a going concern, along came Plushenko – his debts would be gone and he'd have an income for life.'

'There is no money for Howard,' Aneta said.

'I wish there was, my dear, but the deal was that Howard's father was to be employed as a consultant by Plushenko's company at a salary of one hundred and fifty thousand a year for as long as he lived. All Plushenko had to do was to clear the debts and pay him a salary. With his death the estate is Plushenko's and there is nothing at all for Howard and his

mother – it's terrible; I would have stopped it – he told me he'd had an offer but promised to speak to me before doing anything about it. When we had that conversation only a few days ago the deal had already been done.'

'This is unbelievable,' Howard sighed.

'His debts were considerable, Howard. If you had inherited the estate you would have been burdened with those debts for years.'

'But the land has been in our hands for generations – it's our duty to care for it.'

'I know – now you must look to care for your mother and your wife to be.'

'Did he leave a will?' Howard asked.

'No. I tried to persuade him but he would have none of it ... but he did leave you this,' Srench said as he opened the folder on the desk in front of him and took out a DVD.

'What is it?'

'I've no idea. It arrived here late Wednesday evening; it was in an envelope on the mat when I came in first thing on Thursday morning. He must have popped it in himself. There was a note saying that it should be handed to you in the event of his death.'

Aneta felt the colour rising up her neck to her face.

'Can we see what's on it?' Howard asked.

'Perhaps something we should look at when we are alone?' Aneta suggested.

'Can we put it in your computer – it may be about the estate – maybe he changed his mind?'

'Of course we can,' Srench said, 'but it's unlikely to affect the legal situation regarding the estate.' The lawyer took the disc and pushed it into the slot on the computer that was sat behind his desk and moved aside so that Howard and Aneta could see the screen. Moments later they saw Aneta performing fellatio on Lord Haugham. Aneta screamed. Srench quickly switched off the computer in some confusion and embarrassment and walked to the other side of the room. Howard gagged.

'He made me do it,' Aneta said. 'Howard? Please? He blackmailed me ... I ...'

'How could you do that?'

'I didn't ...'

'You did! He said you were a whore. He was right.'

'He hated you that's why he made me do it.'

'But you did it ... you did it! You did it!'

'Howard! Be calm!' Srench shouted.

'You said you loved me.'

'That's why I killed him,' Aneta said.

'What?'

'Sit down, young lady, you aren't going anywhere,' Srench commanded.

'He was the baddest man; I killed him so you would be free of him,' Aneta said.

'I'm going to call the police,' Srench said.

'You said it was an accident,' Howard said.

'I lied,' Aneta said. 'I wanted to be the lady, to be rich, to be free.'

Srench dialled 999.

10.00

It took Jack an hour to knock on all the doors in Sheep Street to see if anyone had heard or seen anything untoward happening at Rachel's terraced house. Half way through his investigations Clare arrived with a team of SOCOs and he let her get on with securing the crime scene after he'd had a quick word to warn her what she would find; she was grateful for that when she entered the kitchen. No one in Sheep Street had seen anything out of the ordinary; they were used to the sounds of Rachel's screams coming from the property. No one

was prepared to admit they'd seen two strangers at any time over the last few weeks, let alone that day.

This futile task completed, Jack sat in his car and considered his options. It was extremely unlikely that Evgeni and Andriy would still be in the area – why would they wait to be found? He concluded that the best thing he could do was to call his old boss, Fred Ingles at SCD9, and bring him up to date with events. He did this and also included reference to Plushenko, when asked, he forwarded Rachel's voicemail. Having done that he called Gil and told him exactly what had happened to Dimitri; Gil was horrified at the means of death but pleased that Dimitri had suffered. Jack was shocked at the depth of Gil's hatred – so much suffering so mindlessly committed when it could all have been so easily avoided; that was always it: if only, if only.

He stepped out of the car to go and see how Clare was getting on when his mobile rang; he hoped that it was Gil calling back to apologise for the tirade he'd just suffered at his hands. It was Sergeant Cliff with the news that Dr Kinsey had been found dead at her home and that there was a suicide note. He got directions from Cliff and went to tell Clare the news.

She came out of Rachel's house and was clearly pleased to be in the fresh air. 'I've never seen anything like that – have you?'

'Twice – a third time doesn't make it any better ... are you done in there?'

'Yeah, the SOCOs have got it under control and forensics will be here soon – why?'

'I think someone up there has it in for us,' Jack said pointing his finger at the sky. 'The good doctor Kinsey has killed herself; there's a note.'

'Something of an epidemic.'

'Feels like that. Have forensics been in touch about what they found in that incinerator at InVivo?'

'I haven't had a chance to tell you – they called me in a bit of a state; one of them, some new guy from the new privatised

service, was fool enough to tell Kinsey that they'd found the remains of human bones in the incinerators.'

'Shit! What a fucking idiot – well, that might go some small way in explaining her death; poor bloody woman was on the edge anyway. I was going to suggest that you come with me to Kinsey's but in the circumstances it might be a better idea for you to stay here and ensure there aren't any more cock-ups when forensics arrive.'

'Aren't you going to ask how the briefing went?'

'A million miles from my mind, yes, sorry. So?'

'The press officer is a dragon but she might breathe some fire at the hacks and give us some cover ... the Super did have one bit of surprising news – on a temporary basis I'm taking your rank and you're back to being a DCI, albeit acting.'

'Oh fuck, who needs that – good for you Clare, but it's not what I want.'

'I think you're maybe stuck with it.'

'We'll see – I'd better get to Kinsey's before some idiot fucks up that up as well. How did we find out she was dead?'

'She tried to phone you, got Sergeant Cliff instead and told him what she was going to do, he sent a car – eventually. She was dead when it got there. Nothing's been touched and they've left a PCSO on guard outside.'

'Right, I'd best get on my way.'

'Hadn't you better call in at your place first and get a change of clothes?'

'Why?' Jack asked.

'Your trousers and shoes are covered in blood.'

'Shit! I didn't notice; perhaps that's why no one on the street would ask me in,' Jack said with a disbelieving shake of his head.

'You didn't touch the body, did you?' Clare asked.

'Tried to give him the kiss of life but his dick got in the way.'

'Jack! That's sick.' Her mobile rang. 'What? What? ... Okay, keep her in a cell until I get back there ... Yes! ... No, just keep

her on her own but watch her, I don't want another suicide on our hands.' She closed the call. 'I was right; this is an epidemic.'

'What now?'

'The Ukrainian girl, Aneta, has confessed to murdering Lord Haugham – I'll have to go back and take her statement – I think we need reinforcements.'

'I knew that stunk – there's a young DC I've met, kid called Peter Shelton. I'll get Wainstock to get him on the team – the price he'll have to pay if he wants me as a DCI. Okay, Clare, let's touch base later at the station and neither of us goes home tonight until we've mapped out this mess so we can get a grip on it before we are made to look like total bloody fools – and thanks for the warning about my clothes. Shit!' Jack said pointing down the street, 'is that that journo from the Argos?'

'Yes, David Daiche. I don't think it'll take them long to find out what's happened in there.'

Driving home Jack was overwhelmed with the increasing complexity of what confronted him: at least Dimitri's death had an obvious explanation. His big question was whether they were all interrelated or just coincidences. *No, there aren't coincidences in my life - professional or otherwise - nothing is a coincidence and it has nothing to do with Einstein's god keeping secrets either.*

As he closed the little gate behind him and walked towards his cottage Jack stopped and stood very still; the door to the Belvedere was flapping open in the breeze, banging on the side of the van. Jack darted across the garden ducking down to keep out of sight until he was next to the caravan. He peeped in at the living room window; it was empty, so was the bedroom where he'd last seen Yuri. He walked round to the front door and went in calling Yuri's name. *So where the fuck is he? Bugged off again I expect, he thought as he looked around checking that nothing was out of place. I'm getting jumpy, but that's hardly surprising; it's like being in the midst of Soldier Blue.* Standing in front of the rows of albums he noticed that Tommy was not in the right place; it was amongst the Rod Stewarts, it was the sort

of thing he'd notice. He was about to pull it out to see if Yuri had done as he'd suggested and left him some hidden notes when he heard the unmistakable sound of the Lambretta's claxon horn being sounded. He smiled. *So, my comrade copper, not only do you like the 'Who' you also have a fondness for scooters – a Ukrainian Mod; is that a first?*

As Jack approached the door to the barn the horn gave a slight splutter. He opened the door and switched on the lights. 'Oh shit!' he gasped as he rushed forward as Yuri collapsed on the floor beside Jack's beloved scooter. He knew it was Yuri because he was wearing the same black leather jacket and black jeans. Looking at his broken face Jack saw air bubbles faintly moving in the bloody mucous in his nostrils. Very gently he put his fingers against Yuri's neck; there was a pulse. *Thought you were gone, my friend.* To his amazement Yuri's puffed and lacerated lips opened as he struggled to speak. Jack laid him flat on the floor and knelt beside him. 'Stay still, mate, we'll get you back into one piece – I'll call an ambulance ... what? Take it steady, try again.'

'No ... left me ... for dead ... let them think so ... then ... I ... fight ... again,' he managed to say before he lost consciousness.

Fucking Ada, what do I do with you now? You can't lie there like that and how the hell am I going to move you inside with god knows how many broken bones – you need medical help, my friend, but first I've got to get you inside and clean you up somehow. Who is there to help? Got to keep Clare out of this. There's no one. No one. Or is there? He took out his phone and tapped in Sam's number. 'Sam? It's me, Jack. No, hold your horses. I need your help and urgently. I don't know whether you can do this, it's a big ask ... okay. It's like this,' he said and explained the situation as quickly as he could. 'You will? Thank you.' He gave Sam precise directions to the cottage and told her that Yuri would be locked inside the caravan and the key would be under the bucket by the front garden gate; she reckoned that once she had got hold of Nev's wife who was a nurse she'd be straight up; she reckoned she'd be at the cottage within five

hours. All he now had to do was to get Yuri into the Belvedere; he shook his head, *what difference is little bit more blood going to make?* He stood up and looked around for something on which to lay Yuri in order to pull him to the van. He knelt back down and tried to move the policeman but every time he did this Yuri let out an agonised gasp. *This is stupid,* he concluded. He returned to the barn carrying a bucket of hot water and towels and bathed Yuri's face with immense care and gently dried him. Next he brought blankets and duvets and made him as comfortable as was possible and put a bottle of drinking water next to Yuri's right hand and then turned on the industrial heater to keep the barn warm. Finally he called Sam again and told her where she would now find the Ukrainian. By the time he'd changed into clean clothes he had completely forgotten about the fact that "Tommy" had been in the wrong place.

Arriving at Kinsey's house he found PCSO Billy Swann impatiently guarding the front door. 'They said you'd be here an hour ago,' Swann complained.

'You got something else to do?' Jack snapped. 'She still inside?'

'Strict instructions – no one goes inside until you've had first look, then I can call whoever you tell me to call.'

'Okay, Billy, thanks. Sorry to be a bit short but it's been quite a day.'

'And it isn't even lunchtime yet,' Billy said as Jack opened the front door and went in. 'Any chance of a brew? It's freezing out here.'

Jack didn't reply as he closed the front door behind him and pulled on a fresh pair of surgical gloves.

Sylvia Kinsey was sitting bolt upright in an armchair by the Aga in the kitchen; *she obviously wanted to be warm,* Jack thought as he looked at the bottle of scotch that stood almost empty on the floor beside the chair along with an empty tub that had contained tablets; he didn't recognise the name of the drug on the label. On the table there was a note she'd obviously written on her computer and then printed

off. In her right hand she clutched a propelling pencil. He read the printed note.

“Dear Inspector Ranger

I don't know how this happened to me. I wasn't a bad person. I wasn't able to find out why the dogs died because that awful man Wiggy lied about burning them in the incinerators. I therefore don't know if somehow there had been a cross infection between the dogs inside the labs and those in the kennels – but from what happened later I have to assume there was an overspill. I should have reported this but Wiggy had video on his phone of me damaging my own car and he blackmailed me – I should have told him to piss off and taken the consequences but I didn't – I wish I had, but it's too late, much too late. Then I discovered that Wiggy and the Broadbeams had burned the bodies of the first two dead Ukrainians in my incinerators. I'm sorry about all the dead – it was an accident – but I was responsible for everything including our bio-security. I can't face the idea of going to prison ... there's nothing else to say. I have no family, no relationship with another human being. I just had my job and it was too much for me. If there's one thing you can do for me it's that you close InVivo down – it's not worth the risk.' He turned the piece of paper over and found a further hand-written note; the writing was hard to read: 'nearly gone nothing innocent dangerous secret'.

Jack was sorry she was dead; a good brief would easily be able to kick the evidence in her letter into touch – after all she couldn't be of a sound mind if she'd committed suicide in just the same way that Rachel's voicemail would probably get thrown out as well. Jack stood up and looked around knowing that he needed to find Kinsey's computer so that it could be taken in for analysis; he was certain that it would provide considerable detail of what was happening at InVivo and might give him a clue as to exactly what she had meant in her hand-written note. Kinsey's home was minimalist in style and it didn't take Jack very long to discover that there wasn't a computer anywhere; there was a printer and a cable that would have connected to a PC but that was all. He opened the front door and asked Billy Swann to come in.

‘Thanks, sir, I think I must be suffering from hypothermia,’ Swann said.

‘You'll soon warm up. Did you discover the body?’ Swann nodded as he rubbed his legs with his hands. ‘Was the front door locked?’

‘No, it was on the latch.’

‘Did you check to see if there was anyone else in the house when you'd come in?’

‘No, I mean I shouldn't have really been here at all; this isn't what PCSOs are supposed to do, is it? Just not enough proper police, but it's not right; I shouldn't have to be seeing things like that,’ he said pointing at Kinsey.

‘Think of it as being a step up, Billy, like being a proper copper. So you don't know if anyone else was in the house?’

‘No, but if they had been I would have seen 'em leaving, wouldn't I?’

Jack sighed. ‘Not if they'd gone out the back door and across the fields you wouldn't ... anyway ... no one's been here apart from me, is that right?’

‘That's right – shouldn't the scene of crime lot be here by now?’

‘They will be soon ... thanks Billy, can you please wait outside?’

‘I have to go outside in the cold again?’

‘Yes, off you go.’ Reluctantly Billy closed the front door after him. Jack took out his mobile and tapped in Wainstock's number; it didn't take him long to explain the situation and his belief that Kinsey's PC had been stolen before or after her death and this raised the question as to whether the suicide was genuine or something more sinister. It took longer for Jack to agree to step back up to his previous rank but a very short time in persuading the super that Peter Shelton should be seconded to support Jack and Clare with immediate effect as a condition of his acceptance.

As he drove away the scene of crime team arrived and Billy was relieved by WPC Sutton who didn't look as pleased as punch to be asked to stand on guard in the cold.

12.15

Howard had no memory of driving back to Haugham Hall. Entering his father's study he was bent on destruction. He forced himself to switch on his father's PC even though his hands were shaking with rage. The "Windows" jingle jangled as the desktop came to life. He saw the folder icon with Aneta's name. For a moment he thought about trying to delete it but knew there was no point; the data would be on the hard-drive and it was what else was on the hard drive that he needed to see. He opened his father's email account and within a few minutes found the correspondence with Plushenko regarding the sale of the estate. A few minutes later he found the contract; everything Srench had told him was true – except – if Plushenko had completed the transaction and the money was in his father's account then even though he'd lost the land he would inherit the cash. His hopes rose. He immediately phoned Srench who explained that the deal had been that Plushenko would clear all his father's debts – which were considerable – and would then pay his father a salary as a consultant for as long as he lived; there was no cash to inherit. He'd forgotten that Srench had already told him this as he stared at the old black Bakelite phone before hurling it across the room where it shattered the glazed face of one of the double-fronted bookcases. Ripping ancient volumes from the shelves he screamed as he hurled them across the room. The door opened. Tammy stood looking at him; she was smiling. 'Get out!' he bellowed throwing a book at her. She hurriedly closed the door. 'Fucking bastard!' he shouted again. He kicked over a Chippendale upright chair, picked it up and smashed it against the fireplace until it was reduced to splintered sticks. 'If this is yours, Mr fucking Plushenko, it's not going to be worth

a lot, I can tell you that,' he said tearing paintings and prints from the walls and smashing the protective glass. Grabbing a pair of scissors from the desk he cut and hacked the exposed work to pieces.

Standing at his father's desk he was tempted to attack the PC. Instead he started to open desk drawers and empty their contents onto the floor. A colour photograph floated away from amidst a collection of old chequebooks and betting slips and landed on the floor. He picked it up. Two men stood with their arms around each other's shoulders; they looked pleased with themselves. One man was in his mid thirties or early forties, the other was older. It didn't look like the photograph had been taken in England; the light was too bright. Howard turned it over to see if there was anything written on the back. "Me with the boss - Choma." Holding the photograph Howard looked at the destruction he'd caused. His anger turned to self-pity. He wept. He dried his eyes. *Hang on a minute, I've just read something about this photo.* He sat down at the computer and started to go through Plushenko's emails once more and there it was: an email from Plushenko asking if he'd left behind a photograph he'd shown his father when they'd met at the Hall as it was an important photograph showing him with his boss who was totally averse to having his identity known. Plushenko wasn't supposed to have the photograph and was worried that if Choma Boyko ever found out he'd be enraged. His father's reply denied all knowledge of the photograph. Plushenko's response was "If you've not got it and I haven't got it, where is it? If that picture falls into the wrong hands and he finds out it was my fault I'm finished." His father hadn't replied. Howard put the photograph in the inside pocket of his jacket.

12.19

The first thing Clare asked Aneta was her age and on being told that it was indeed fifteen asked her whether she wanted a solicitor to be present for her interview or a suitable adult; Aneta chose her sister-in-law Bohdanna and a car was sent for

her. If Clare had expected that she would be able to just get on with interviewing Aneta about Haugham's death she was disappointed; all that Bohdanna wanted to know was what had happened to the body of her husband. After twenty minutes of being harried, Clare finally persuaded her that the priority ought, for the moment, to be the living.

They finally got started. 'Aneta, do you need a translator?' Clare asked.

'My English is perfect enough for what needs to be done,' Aneta said.

'And yours?' Clare asked Bohdanna.

'Good enough to protect my sister-in-law from your prejudices,' Bohdanna replied. 'You English treat us like scum.'

'Shall we get on?' Clare asked and switched on the recorder. 'You are Aneta Avaremenko?' Aneta nodded. 'You have to speak so that your reply is on the record.'

'Yes, I am Aneta Avaremenko.'

'I'm not going to charge you but I will give you a general caution.' This done Clare continued. 'You have confessed to the murder of Lord Haugham but when you were first asked about his death you assured the investigating officer that you were defending yourself against an attempted rape and that your assailant suffered a heart attack, fell, hit his head and died. You signed a statement to that effect. Before I go on I want you to know that a post mortem result is expected at some time later today and will determine the cause of death. You can, if you wish, wait until we have those results before we continue with this interview. What do you want to do?'

'Have you seen the video of me with that old man's cock in my mouth?' Aneta asked.

'Aneta!' Bohdanna said in a loud whisper.

'Yes, I have,' Clare replied, wishing she hadn't had that experience. 'Do you want to tell me about it?'

'Seeing it is not enough? You want me to tell you what it felt like as well?'

Looking down, Clare shook her head; she was unable to meet Aneta's fierce glare. 'No, I don't need to know that.'

'But you do need to know. He was the baddest of men, a disgusting pervert; I hate him even though he is dead; I hope he rots in hell.'

'Aneta! Shush!' Bohdanna urged.

Clare took a deep breath. 'Let's go back a step, shall we? Why have you changed your story? Why did you confess to killing Reginald Haugham?'

'There was no point in going on – not after Howard saw me doing that with his father ... and after Howard was told he has nothing but being called a Lord. What good is that?'

'What do you mean – what good is that?' Clare asked.

'You do not need to tell her this,' Bohdanna advised.

'Why not? I came here to find a better life. When I found Howard I knew I could take him for my own because he loves me and that he would lift me and my family out of poverty and we would have the good life. Now he finds me disgusting and he has nothing, so it is over.'

'Don't you love Howard?' Clare asked.

'What does it matter now? He is a boy even though he is older than me; he confuses love with sex – at least his father knew the difference,' Aneta said.

'Your relationship with Howard is not the central issue here, Aneta. A simple question – did you or did you not kill Lord Haugham?'

'He was abusing me; he threatened my future with Howard. Only with him dead would Howard be rich. I went to his bedroom to kill him in his bed.'

'How did you intend to do that?' Clare asked.

'There is the idea that if you blow hard instead of sucking then you can kill a man.'

'You do know that's nonsense? It's a myth,' Clare said. Aneta just stared at her. 'Is that what you tried to do?'

'No, he wasn't interested in being sucked off – he wanted to bugger me. I said no. He tried. We fought. He had the heart attack and died.'

'So it was as you said in the first place?'

'Yes.'

'Then why did you say you'd killed him?'

'Because I fought him off me and he died.'

'I see,' Clare said. 'Was he dead when you left the room and raised the alarm?'

'No, he was still groaning on the floor.'

'In your statement you said you went for Bohdanna and Marina for help and that when you got back to his bedroom Tammy was there and Lord Haugham was dead; is that right?'

'Yes.'

'Do you know for certain that he was dead when you ran from the room?'

'No.'

'But he was dead when you got back and Tammy was already there?'

'Yes.'

'Well, Aneta, I think we'll leave it there for now and await the autopsy results. I'm sorry this happened to you, very sorry. Not everyone is like Lord Haugham.'

'I could have had the good life with Howard – what will happen to me now?'

'A decision will be made as to whether you should go to trial, though personally, I think that's unlikely ... but ... I wouldn't count on being able to stay in this country.'

'What would be the point in that – there is no future for being an under age Ukrainian whore, is there?'

'One last question – the secret recording Haugham made of you having sex with him was recorded on his PC – is that right?'

'Yes. Why does it matter?'

'For many reasons – not least because we don't want it to fall into the wrong hands, do we?'

Clare switched off the recorder. Aneta and Bohdanna fell into each other's arms and whispered to each other in their mother tongue. As Clare stood up to leave Bohdanna asked, 'Can she come with me, please. We can keep her from harm, yes? Please.'

'I'll speak to my boss,' Clare said, pretty certain that neither Jack nor Wainstock would object to her being released on police bail; they were short on custody space and pre charge bail was suitable given that she was sure Aneta would never be formally charged with murder or even manslaughter – *if anyone should be on trial it should be that bastard Haugham*, she thought. She left them alone.

Clare returned to the office wondering whom she could send to retrieve Haugham's PC tower and hoping that the promised arrival of the young detective constable Jack had spoken of was imminent. She saw a man sitting behind Jack's desk. 'Peter Shelton? You look a bit old for the part of novice DC.'

'A case of mistaken identity I'm afraid. I was told to wait up here. I hope I'm not in the wrong place,' the man said, standing up.

He was surprisingly tall and even thinner than Jack, entirely bald, wearing round John Lennon style spectacles that looked as if he'd had them since they were first in fashion. 'Who are you?' she asked wondering why anyone would feel comfortably dressed in a navy blue double-breasted blazer with shiny metal buttons, a bright orange open necked shirt, light blue denims and a pair of exceedingly shiny black DMs; he was a sartorial mess.

'Professor Baski, Ron. I'm here to see Jack Ranger.'

'You're the expert?'

'That's what everybody tells me, but to be honest, I'm with Socrates.'

Clare smiled. 'Meaning that the only true wisdom is in knowing that you know nothing?'

'Absolutely. Apart from being a Socratic scholar, you are?'

'Detective Inspector Farmer, Clare,' she said relishing her new status. They shook hands. 'Well, Professor, Jack's not here – but you can see that.'

'It's Ron; actually, that's one of my great delights in life, being blessed with the name Ron; apparently people don't think professors should be called Ron.'

'Why ever not?' Jack asked as he stood in the doorway, hitherto unnoticed by either of them.

'Because people think of Ron and Eth in that radio programme "Take it from Here".'

'The Glums,' Jack laughed. 'Ron was a bit on the thick side if I remember rightly.'

'What are you two talking about?' Clare asked.

'It was a radio programme that I think ran from just after the war until 1960,' Jack said. 'Way before I was born.'

'So why do you both share this obscure piece of knowledge?' Clare asked.

Ron ignored her question. 'But not before I was born in 1946. I even think my parents called me Ron to punish me; they wanted a daughter.'

'That's it! That's why I knew your name. You told me this story about Ron years ago when we met; when was it?' Jack asked.

'1995, I think. I was supervising Anastasiya's PhD; we met at a faculty summer party. I was sorry to miss your wedding in 2007 but I was in the States at the time. How is your wife?'

'We split up in 2010.'

'I'm sorry,' Ron said. 'Business then ... I've been to see Dr Deutsch. What can I do to help?'

'A lot, I hope, but I need a few minutes in private with Clare to discuss another element of the case. Would you mind waiting in the café over the road? It's called the Tea Leaf.'

'A den of thieves?' Ron asked.

'Yeah, I know, but up here cockney rhyming slang is about as rare as hens' teeth. I won't be long.'

'Absolutely fine. I could do with something to eat and a cuppa.' Ron came towards Jack and they shook hands. 'Good to meet you again, Jack.'

'Thanks for coming,' Jack responded. 'I'll be over shortly.'

'You okay?' Clare asked a moment later when they were alone and with the door shut.

'Why wouldn't I be?'

'You looked ... it doesn't matter, sorry.'

'Yeah, well,' Jack said. 'We'd better bring each other up to date, but having done that, like I said what seems like a lifetime ago, we need to map out exactly where we are.'

'I agree. Do you want to know about Aneta?'

'Off you go.'

Clare concluded with. 'I think I need to get out to Haugham's and retrieve that PC and have a word with Tammy; I've got the distinct feeling that she's more involved with this than the beloved Fulsome imagined. I also think we should release Aneta on police bail.'

'Agreed, on both counts, but you mustn't go on your own – if Tammy is involved she'll get a brief who'll be able to run rings around us if we don't watch out step first off. My turn. Kinsey's death looks like suicide alright, but I'm not happy, there's something else going on, always has been, and I haven't a clue what it is, at best a hunch, but ... leaving that aside for the moment; someone has stolen the PC on which she wrote her suicide note which suggests to me that she may not have been alone in her last moments.'

'You think she was murdered?'

'Not exactly - maybe just left to die. Forensics are on the case; we'll see if there's any evidence of a third party in her property.'

'Any sign of Yuri?' Clare asked.

'No, not a thing,' Jack said, loathing himself for what he regarded as a protective lie. 'From what you've said I think we need to get the young laird in for a chat to see if he can shed any light on the sale of the estate to this Plushenko character. By the way, I've got my old boss Fred Ingles running a thorough check on Plushenko. Okay, that'll do for now. I'll go and talk with Ron and ...' Jack was interrupted by a knock on the door. He shouted, 'Come in.' Peter Shelton came in. 'Well done, Peter, you're a welcome sight. This is inspector Farmer, but I expect she'll let you call her Clare.'

'Thank you, sir,' Peter said and shook hands with Clare.

'It's boss, or Jack, not sir,' Jack said. 'Right, you two can get to know each other better on the way to Haugham's. I want the three of us to meet back here at seven this evening so that we can map out the entire picture. Okay?'

'Yes, boss,' Peter said and both Jack and Clare laughed at his obvious pleasure – the day had had few enough light moments.

When Jack entered the "Tea Leaf" café, Ron was the only customer. He was sitting alone at a table at the back with a pot of tea as he busily occupied himself on his smart phone.

'Sorry to keep you,' Jack said as he sat down.

'I still find it hard to believe that these little buggers,' he held up the phone, 'can do so much and I'm a bloody professor for Christ's sake – have you ever tried to play "Angry Birds"?''

'No,' Jack laughed, 'too angry most of the time. Did you order something to eat?'

'That didn't go well. I was tempted to keep the teacake and take it back to the lab just to see if it was quite as dangerous as it looked; it's surprising how some people think that by toasting something that is obviously several decades past its sell by date they will rejuvenate it rather than merely increasing its bacterial content. On the other hand if they'd used an autoclave then the bugs would be dead ... I sent it back.'

'Sorry, but this is Louth, Ron. Do you want to go someplace else?'

'I can survive without a tea cake and the tea is good so why don't you tell me what this is all about?'

'I'm hoping that you're going to tell me that.'

'Yes?' the waitress asked as she stood beside Jack. 'Can I get you anything?'

'Another cup, please. I'll share my friend's pot of tea.'

'That's a pot of tea for one. If you want tea you have to buy a pot of tea for yourself. You can't share his.'

'Where does it say that?' Jack asked.

'What do you mean – where does it say that?'

'Where does it say that two people can't share the same pot of tea?'

'It doesn't say it anywhere. If we was to sell pots of tea for one and let two people drink it then we'd be out of business in no time, wouldn't we?'

'What would happen if I ordered a pot of tea for two?' Jack asked noticing that Ron was struggling not to laugh. 'And there was only me to drink it. Would that be allowed?'

'You're that copper, aren't you, the one what came back?'

'Could be. Is that relevant?'

'Do you want a pot of tea or what?' she demanded.

'No, I think we'll go somewhere else, somewhere less litigious over the selling and drinking of tea,' Jack said. 'That okay with you, Ron?'

'How much do I owe you?' Ron asked.

'It's on the house,' the waitress said. 'Wouldn't want us to be getting a bad name with the law, would we?'

Jack put a two-pound coin on the table.

Outside on the pavement Jack asked Ron if he'd ever seen the film "Five Easy Pieces" – he hadn't. As they walked back to the station Jack explained Bobby's argument with a waitress over his order for plain toast when it wasn't on the menu. Jack made a pot of tea, brought it into his office and closed the door. 'Okay, Ron, I'll tell you what I know and see if it makes any sense to you at all.' It didn't take that long in the telling

and when Jack said, 'That's it.' Ron sat quietly thinking for some time.

'There are several things we need to do. The first is to get inside the InVivo labs and find out exactly what they're doing. I suspect you've already decided to do that.'

'Yes, but I need the scientific opinion – authority – that you can provide to get the necessary order. InVivo are seen as an asset by the powers that be round here. After Kinsey's death they'll be worried about the place being closed down. No one, as yet, has made a direct connection between the infected dogs and the deaths of the Ukrainians – mostly because we've managed to keep the dog meat issue under wraps.'

Ron nodded. 'I can do the former and the Home Office will add their weight behind me, so don't worry about that; between us we can be in there in the next few days. Secondly, it won't be long before the connection is made between the deaths and what's going on at the centre, particularly if the national press get hold of it – there are some bloody good investigative scientific correspondents these days. Looking at Louth, would I be right in thinking that secrets don't stay secrets for long and with the major incident stuff going on?'

'Dead right.'

'Is the word Zoonosis familiar?' Ron asked.

'I've heard it; Anastasiya used it, but I don't really know what it means.'

'If you want to read an excellent layman's account that has good science, but doesn't make itself unintelligible, there's a great book by David Quammen called "Spillover". You can get it on Amazon as an e-book and if you want to get a good understanding of the meaning of Zoonosis that's a great place to start. Simply put – Zoonosis refers to diseases that can be passed from animals to humans. These diseases are held in animal reservoirs where they may remain dormant until they spillover, jump into humans and kill them. Why they jump remains a mystery in many cases and there are diseases that we don't understand and new strains of old diseases that suddenly occur in human populations. The list of Zoonotic diseases

is long – AIDS, Lyme disease, influenza, anthrax, bubonic plague, rabies, Ebola and on and on.'

'Unlike the gutter press's lie that AIDS came from promiscuous gays in San Francisco rather than animals.'

'A popular homophobic myth. Yes, AIDS originally came from monkeys – you can read about it in Quammen's book. How it came to do what it's done is both terrifying and illuminating as it shows the extent of the risk from such diseases leaping the gap into humans. Nearly all Zoonotic diseases are the result of diseases caused by pathogens that include viruses, bacteria, worms, fungi, protists, amoeba, worms and prions. From what I've seen so far in the lab, what the folks at Leicester, and you've told me, I think we're dealing with a virus. Before you ask, as yet, I don't know what it is. Viruses like SARS and influenza are normally regarded as the worst enemies. Though I don't know what it is, there's every probability it's come from InVivo – we'll find out. One of the worrying things about these viruses is that they have the capacity, the need, to find hosts within which to hide. If we don't know what it is or where it's hiding it'll bide its time until it strikes again because the virus needs to move on, to live, and to survive it will mutate.'

'Bloody hell. I thought the idea was that this thing, this pathogen, virus, whatever had got into them by ingestion?' Jack asked.

'On this occasion, yes, but there are other forms of transmission such as airborne and sexual transmission; ones that go down that route become very patient and wait until everything is just right before they start up all over again and then jump some more. Once a virus has killed its host it needs to find another host as quickly as possible – the survival of the fittest.'

'But surely they can be killed?'

'Possibly. If we know what it is. Even when we do ...'

'AIDS,' Jack said.

'Precisely.'

'You think this virus that killed the Ukrainians might be like that?'

'I don't know, Jack. That's what we need to begin to try and find out.'

'You know some of the local press have been describing it as Bubonic Plague that the Ukrainians brought here with them.'

'They may well be right about it being like Bubonic Plague; they could have just as well called it the Black Death; it's a great way of frightening people and selling newspapers, there being a collective memory of such horrors. But I'll tell you one thing - they didn't bring it in with them; the virus got them here.'

'Are places like InVivo allowed to do research into such things as Zoonotic viruses and diseases?'

'Allowed?' Ron sighed. 'Who's to stop them? Cuts, more cuts, ignorant politicians, jobsworth civil servants; a cocktail of idiocy.'

'Why do they do it?'

'You know the answer to that, Jack. Money and power. What if you had a virus that could be used as a weapon? Just think of that.'

'I'd better try and get that court order - hang on - does what you've been saying mean that the people who work up there might be at risk?' Jack asked.

'Everyone could be at risk. If the dogs in the kennels outside the labs contracted the disease and died from it - but we'll never know that - then the virus could have migrated not from one animal to another but from a dog to a human - make that plural - in order to survive; only time will tell. Any human who might have had contact with the dogs that died, or even the other dogs on whom the experiments were conducted, could be infected or could be acting as new hosts with the virus biding its time before it strikes again.'

'Shit! Like Wiggy. Will you get on to the Home Office? Use my phone, just dial 9 for an outside line while I try and find the boss?' Just as he was standing up his mobile phone rang. 'Jack. Clare. How have you got on at Haugham's? ... Oh, Christ ... what is wrong with this bloody place?'

'It's been made to look like a break-in but it doesn't feel right,' Clare said. 'In any case, Haugham's computer has been stolen and the place is deserted.'

'Okay, best come on back in. Thanks, Clare.'

'Problems?' Ron asked.

'Problems? No. Just another piece gone missing from the puzzle. You know, I used to like jigsaw puzzles when I was a kid, but not any more.'

19.00

Once Jack had explained the enormity of the situation Wainstock insisted on being involved in the meeting planned for 19.00.

'Okay, Jack,' he began when Clare, Peter and Ron were seated around the table in the meeting room, 'where are we?' he asked.

The door opened and DCI Fulsome came in. 'May I join you?' he asked taking a vacant seat.

'You're not involved in this investigation, Jeremy,' Wainstock said.

'The Chief Constable sends his apologies and has asked me to report back on the outcome of this meeting,' Fulsome said. 'Shall we get on?'

Jack shrugged. 'Fine by me. Okay. Here goes. First off we need to try and get our ducks all lined up in a row. To summarise. There are now eighteen dead Ukrainians but only sixteen bodies. The two missing bodies were transported by Dave and Shelley Broadbeam from where they died in Falkingham Close to InVivo where we have evidence that they were cremated by Norbert Wiggles in the centre's incinerators. Wiggles and the Broadbeams have been charged and bailed.

There is one survivor - also missing but believed to be alive - a journalist, Yuri Tomenko, working under cover. The

deaths were subject to a major incident alert but so far press speculation at local and national levels has been kept under wraps – I'm of the view that we won't be able to keep up this secrecy for much longer.'

'Why not?' Fulsome asked. 'Have you taken it upon yourself to ...'

'Shut up, Jeremy!' Wainstock barked.

'I was just ...'

'Shut up! Go on, Jack.'

Fulsome took out a notebook and started to make notes as Jack began.

'So far all we know is that the men died from an unknown viral disease. All were illegal immigrants trafficked into the UK by organised crime.

Three women were also imported, two of whom were married to the missing men, and they worked for Haugham. The third, Aneta Avaremenko, is the fifteen-year-old sister of one of the deceased. Aneta is engaged to Howard Haugham and has confessed to killing his father, Reginald Haugham, first as self-defence then as pre-meditated murder. There is a history of sexual abuse of Aneta by Reginald Haugham. There is considerable doubt about her confession and there is the possibility that another female employee, Tammy Hitchcox, may be implicated in the death. Pornographic images of the fifteen-year-old Aneta were stored on Haugham's computer. This has been stolen after what looks like a break-in. Aneta has been released on police bail pending autopsy reports on Reginald Haugham. The widows of the two men cremated by Wiggy will inevitably be deported after the cases are closed.

Returning to the most alarming element of this mess, the deaths of the eighteen men. Professor Baski, Ron, as he prefers to be called, reasons that the probable cause of death is a Zoonotic virus originating at the InVivo Research Centre ingested by the dead man via infected dead dogs sold as venison to the victims by a butcher, Howard Bentosh, who has been charged and remains in custody. Ron also hypothesises

that this virus could jump, could already have jumped, from infected dogs to a human or humans.

A Ukrainian, Dimitri Guraya, who was in charge of the illegal immigrants has been killed, or rather executed, given the manner of his death, by two other Ukrainians, possibly Ukrainian mafia, after they raped Guraya's girlfriend, Rachel Robert, who subsequently committed suicide. These two men are missing and a national alert has been posted for their arrest. I'm doubtful, on the basis of past experience, that they'll be found.

The name Plushenko has come up on a number of occasions. Reginald Haugham's solicitor, James Srench, has informed us that Haugham's estate has been purchased by Victor Plushenko, a Ukrainian entrepreneur, who may also be involved with the illegal trafficking of immigrants into the UK. It's possible that Plushenko is the front man for another more powerful figure or organisation. Srench recalls that Haugham corresponded by email with Plushenko and that we can conclude that this correspondence will be stored on his missing computer. Howard Haugham has inherited the title and a cottage but not the estate. I have discussed this with my old boss at the Met, Chief Superintendent Fred Ingles, and am awaiting further information on Plushenko who is known to SCD9.

The Director of the centre Dr Sylvia Kinsey has apparently committed suicide but this is complicated by the fact that her computer is missing and we don't know why. Finally, our situation is that we have spoken to the Home Office and we'll receive a warrant to search InVivo first thing tomorrow morning. InVivo International – the parent company – has vigorously objected to this order but has been overruled by the government's lawyers. The InVivo CEO, Angers Anderson, is being particularly unhelpful. Ron will lead a team of his specialist staff accompanied by myself, Clare and Peter, suitably protected, into the labs. At that point Ron and his team will seek to establish the nature of the virus and its potential danger to human life. That's it,' Jack concluded. 'Anyone got anything to add? Have I forgotten anything?'

'I've got a question,' Peter said.

'Go ahead,' Jack replied.

'Aren't places like InVivo subject to strict government controls? Surely someone would know exactly what they were doing in there?'

'I'll take that,' Ron said. 'They are and they aren't. Inspection regimes have been slackened due to cut backs in government spending to a point where they hardly occur at all. This has put safety at risk, and to be frank, as these places are secure, fortresses even, no one really knows what's going on inside them. The biggest source of information is from fellow scientists but in the case of Dr Kinsey she's unknown to either myself or my colleagues in the field and there aren't that many of us. There have been no peer reviewed academic papers, no conference contributions, nothing, so whatever they have been up to in InVivo is a mystery to me. Whether Kinsey was up to the task will only be established once we get to the facts and that may take some time.'

'How long?' Wainstock asked.

'I wish I could say weeks but it's likely to be months,' Ron said.

'I knew you'd say that. What about this hypothesis that the zoo what, the virus, what's the word?' Wainstock asked.

'Zoonotic from Zoonosis,' Ron said.

'What about your hypothesis that the virus could already have jumped, not by ingestion, but presumably by other means to humans who have come into contact with the dogs or the labs?' Wainstock asked.

'It will be dogs – if they have been experimentally infected with such a virus and bio security has broken down then someone could already be infected but not showing any outward signs of illness. We need to investigate this.'

'You mean that people like Wiggy need to be put under close observation in an isolation ward,' Clare said.

'Yes, all of the people who came into contact with the infected dogs,' Ron said.

'But not everyone who came into contact with the dying or dead men?' Jack queried.

'At this point just the dogs.'

'Thank god for that, otherwise Clare and I would be off the case,' Jack said.

'That means that at least Wiggy and Bentosh need to be locked up for their own safety,' Clare said.

'And possibly any of the others who worked in the actual labs,' Ron said.

'How do we do that? Where do we take them?' Wainstock asked.

'The specialist isolation wards at Leicester Royal Infirmary at the university. I've already discussed it with Doctor Deutsch and places have been reserved,' Ron said.

'Somehow I don't think this will go down very well with Wiggy, Bentosh and the Broadbeams,' Jack said.

'They have no choice when public safety is at risk,' Ron said.

'Okay. Just getting them out of the way will be a result in itself. Look, I'm expecting a call from Fred, so Clare, could you please bring them in – Bentosh is already in custody – and set up the arrangements to get them to Leicester asp?' Jack asked. Clare nodded. 'Then in the morning let's meet at seven and set the agenda for the day.'

'Make it eight, Jack,' Wainstock said. 'You'll need to be with me when I meet with our press officer, Jayne Rutland, at seven – god knows how she's going to be able to keep the truth from the media.'

'Maybe it's time to tell the truth?' Jack suggested.

19.39

Bohdanna and Aneta had no choice but to be taken back to their quarters at Haugham Hall. They were grateful that Clare had instructed a police car to take them there where Marina

was anxiously waiting for them. They were relieved there was no sign of Tammy. They made food on the little Belling stove in their tiny kitchen and sat silently eating.

'That's Howard,' Aneta said as they heard him calling to ask if anyone was in the stable block where they lived. 'Tell him I don't want to see him,' Aneta said,

'Aneta? Are you in there? I went to the police station,' he said as he stood in the doorway. 'They said they'd let you out on bail – I've come to find you.'

'What do you want with her?' Bohdanna asked as Aneta hid her face in her hands.

'None of you can stay in this place; you must all come to my cottage where you can be warm and safe,' Howard said.

'Why would you do that for us?' Marina asked.

'I would have thought that was obvious.'

'To us nothing is obvious – we will all be locked up, yes, sent back,' Bohdanna said.

'Not if I can help it,' Howard said.

'Why are you here?' Aneta asked. 'You hate me for what I did.'

'I thought my heart ... when I saw what you ... I hated you ... that was then, this is now. I have responsibilities for you, Aneta. My father loathed me. He used you to try and make me hate you. Well, he may have disinherited me but he won't ruin my life ... I won't let him do that. I still love you, Aneta. Will you still marry me now I have nothing?'

'I am sorry, Howard,' Aneta said, 'so sorry, so sorry ... are you saying you forgive me?'

'I'm going to try very hard to do that. Come on, all of you, get your things and let's get out of here.'

'You really want us to come as well?' Marina asked.

'Of course. On Monday we'll go and get a licence to be married and you'll both be there as witnesses. Then we'll see about stopping you being sent back to the Ukraine.'

'Oh, isn't that touching?' Tammy sneered from the doorway where she had been listening to the conversation. 'All lovey dovey all over again, are we? You won't be feeling quite so fucking jolly when you see next week's Sun on Sunday.'

'What are you talking about?' Howard asked.

'Me and Scrote nicked your old man's computer, didn't we? They loved it, them journalists. Lord of the manor. Under age whore. Illegal immigrants. Fuckin' perfect – pity you weren't fuckin' Muslims,' Tammy laughed. 'We'd have got even more for it then.'

In a flash of sudden movement Bohdanna picked up the saucepan in which they'd cooked their beans, leapt to the doorway and smashed the pan into the side of Tammy's head.

'You've killed her!' Marina said as Tammy crumpled to the floor.

Aneta knelt down beside Tammy and saw that she was still breathing. 'She will live - her head is thick,' she concluded.

20.55

Jack arrived at his cottage expecting to find Sam waiting for him but there was no sign of her. Anxiously he went into the barn; to his immense relief Yuri was no longer there. Opening the door to the Belvedere he looked down and saw a note lying on the mat; it was simple and to the point. Sam had taken Yuri, who was going to be okay – eventually – to a safe place – she didn't say where. *That's prudent* Jack thought but she had ended with a phrase he'd wanted to see for a long time: "I've found Anastasiya. Call me when you can. Sam." Now that it was possible to meet his estranged wife he was immediately uncertain that he could face meeting her in order to try and reach the truth. As he poured himself a large class of Rioja and unwrapped the fish and chips he'd brought home from the chippy there was a knock on the van's door. 'Oh, fuck! What now?' he groaned as he stood up and, glass in hand, opened the

door. 'Boss! Fred. What the hell are you doing here?' he asked as Fred Ingles stood looking up at him.

'Got another glass?' Chief Superintendent Fred Ingles asked as he followed Jack inside the caravan. Jack poured him a glass, Fred smelt it, swirled the wine around the glass, took a good sip and made tasting slurping noises before swallowing. 'Very nice, Jack.'

'Pity, you'll have to keep to just the one glass – if you're driving back down tonight.'

'I've got a driver – comes with the job when I need it, new guy, called Luke. He's in the pub drinking Pepsis, poor sod. I'll call him when we're done.'

'So you've driven all the way up here just to have a glass of wine with me? Like hell you have. Want to share my dinner?'

'No, I ate in the pub with Luke after I'd said hello to Sam Ticks and that Ukrainian copper of yours – Yuri. Mind you, I don't think he'll remember much of the conversation; he was out of it. Don't look so shocked; I'll be keeping it to myself – for the moment.'

'Do you know where she's taken him?'

'Yeah, she gave me the address. My driver has it in his pocket book.'

'Why did she tell you where they were taking Yuri?'

'Probably thought someone ought to know.'

'But not me?' Jack asked.

'You weren't here; I'll get Luke to send you a text with the address. Now tell me exactly what's going on up here in the sticks.'

'Only if you tell me why you're here.'

'I want you to come back.'

'Why would I want to do that, Fred?'

'Because I need your help the same as you need mine.'

'My help – with what?'

'I'll get to that, but first, give me chapter and verse on what's going on here – you weren't very forthcoming on the phone.'

'Phones aren't always secure – okay, here we go.' Jack repeated what he'd told his colleagues at the earlier meeting and admitted that he felt guilty that he'd left Yuri's situation out of his account. Fred sympathised but understood that he was only trying to minimise risk. 'What else can you tell me about Victor Plushenko?' Jack asked. 'Apart from the fact that he's a front.'

'There's one hell of a lot of smoke and mirrors so far as Plushenko is concerned. We've done quite a bit of work on him but as yet we have no idea who, or what organisation, is actually hiding in the wood shed. We have two contending views. One is that it's the Ukrainian mafia, or an offshoot of it, the other is that it's not a Ukrainian operation at all and that it's being used as a smoke screen for what is actually being attempted.'

'You're suggesting that human trafficking into the UK is a smokescreen to disguise what they are actually up to?'

'Possibly.'

'What about the fact that Plushenko is buying up estates like Haugham's – why would the mafia be interested in English real estate?'

'It strikes me that's more about undermining the status quo than anything else,' Fred said.

'You mean it's political? Surely buying out destitute landowners isn't going to spark much of a revolution.'

'That's not what I mean, Jack. I think this is some sort of long term project and buying land is just one aspect of it.'

'What are the others?'

'FTSE one hundred companies, banks, hospitals – you can put whatever you like on the list.'

'Fred, come on, are you seriously suggesting that the Ukrainian mafia are trying to take over the UK?'

'That's the point – it's not the mafia, Ukrainian or otherwise – I just have this feeling ... Doesn't it bother you? I don't give a stuff about the Celtic nations; it's England that bothers me, we're going down the drain. I used to be proud of my country

but now I feel diminished like some fucking latter day Hercules cleaning out the fucking Augean stables.’

‘Have you joined UKIP or something?’

‘Don’t be fucking stupid, Jack. I’m serious.’

‘What’s made you so angry?’

‘A hunch – you know about hunches; you’ve had enough of them that have proved right.’

‘You must have something, Fred, something that’s set you off.’

‘Maybe ... You remember Ian Wain? He came in just as you were moving out ... anyway he’s just far too keen on the idea that everything that goes down is to do with his – as he calls it – his Human Exploitation and Organised Crime Command.’

‘Whereas it’s yours?’

‘He’s like some sort of bloody imperialist – everything that happens is for us foot soldiers in SCD9 to sort.’

‘You’re hardly a foot soldier, chief superintendent,’ Jack said as he went to refill their glasses.

Fred covered his glass with his hand. ‘He bloody well makes me feel like one. That’s why I want you back – you always could tell a wrong ’un.’

‘Isn’t thinking Commander Wain’s a wrong ’un stretching things just a tad? Are you sure you didn’t want his job?’

‘Me? No way. I’m a copper not a pen pusher ... I can’t smoke in here, can I?’

‘Thought you’d packed it in for good,’ Jack said.

‘Started again, didn’t I? I’ll go outside.’

‘I’ll keep you company; I still like the smell.’

Jack closed the door to the Belvedere. As Fred was about to light his cigarette a vast ball of exploding flame reared into the night sky immediately followed by the massive clump of a major explosion.

‘Shit!’ Fred gasped. ‘What was that?’

‘The only thing in that direction is InVivo.’ The sky glowed bright red and orange as the wind brought the sound of fire as

trails of sparks and burning debris rushed ever upward. From inside the Belvedere Jack heard the sound of his mobile ringing and rushed inside to take the call. Fred followed him in, unlit cigarette still in his mouth. Jack finished the call. ‘That was InVivo alright – it’s blown up.’

‘How very convenient for someone.’

‘I need to get there – you want to come with me?’ Jack asked.

‘It’s best that no one knows I came here tonight.’

‘I’ll call you and we’ll meet somewhere half way – I’ll need to see Yuri in the near future. Don’t forget to get Luke to send me that address.’

‘Just get on your way, Jack – and good luck – I think you’ll need it,’ Fred said as the wind from the east brought the sound of emergency service sirens.

Jack’s route to InVivo by car meant that he had to go back into Louth in order to take the back road east; he’d had too much to drink but had no choice. Munching on a packet of Extra Strong mints he drove, cursing himself for imagining that he was ever off duty. Leaving the town his way was blocked by two constables stationed beside a “road closed” sign; he lost valuable minutes negotiating his passage and yet more time when he had to pull over to let two fire engines going full tilt pass him. By the time he reached the entrance to the site the protester’s camp was in tatters and the protesters themselves were inside a large white police van. He showed his warrant card as cameras flashed in the darkness and drove up the drive as overhead a searchlight from a hovering helicopter scanned the woodland to the south of the site entrance. Three quarters of a mile from the fire he was stopped at another barrier where he saw Clare standing talking to a large fire officer dressed in uniform and high-visibility jacket – from his white helmet and the number of black stripes Jack realised that this must be the Chief Fire Officer. Beyond them, nine engines pumped water onto the now smouldering debris – the immense hedge of Leylandii that had surrounded the buildings no longer existed.

‘Hi, Clare,’ Jack said as he joined them. ‘You got here quick.’

'I was still at the station sorting out the transportation of ... you know ... when the phone call came through,' she said. 'This is Chief Fire Officer Bob Wenlock – Chief Inspector Jack Ranger.'

'Chief,' Jack said.

'It's Bob, Jack.' The two men shook hands.

'So this is no accident,' Jack said.

'Ooh no,' Bob said. 'This was as deliberate as it gets.'

'Right. Are you SIO, Clare?' Jack asked.

'Yea, the boss asked me as I was already on my way here.'

'That's good. What did the caller say?'

'It was a female voice – muffled – couldn't tell whether she was young or old. She said they had no desire to hurt anyone and that they wanted anyone on site to be evacuated – they gave us thirty minutes. We called and called but got no reply. So far as we can tell, we had to ask Wiggy, Frank Ritchie was duty officer last night. I sent two constables by car to try and get to him – they were within four hundred yards when it went up – their car's windscreen was blown in but miraculously both are okay apart from minor cuts and shock.'

'They were lucky. Unfortunately, it looks as if there may be at least one fatality,' Bob said.

'Shit!' Jack sighed. 'Poor sod – so it's manslaughter as well as arson.'

'Looks that way,' Clare confirmed.

'Is it too early to have any idea how it was done?' Jack asked.

'Far too early,' Bob Wenlock replied. 'But from experience something that causes such an immense explosion has to be something extremely flammable in large quantities. I doubt that there was a lot of liquid fuel but I suspect that they were on natural gas mains and used tanked sterile gas supplies such as propane or butane for heating and laboratory work. If the gas had been deliberately allowed to escape into sealed units and then an ignition source – probably a timed device – may have been used to set it off. We'll have to wait until we've completed a complete forensic investigation of the site – it won't be quick

I'm afraid; as ever, we need to be thorough. What is already in hand are a set of enquiries to gas suppliers to determine whether InVivo were on mains supply and whether there was an unexpected surge in usage in the hours immediately prior to the explosion.'

'Thanks. Have we got a trace running on the call?' Jack asked.

'Of course we have,' Clare snapped.

'Sorry. I saw that you have the animal rights protesters in a paddy wagon,' Jack said.

'It was for their own safety,' Bob said.

'We're not treating them as suspects, are we?' Jack asked.

'The boss thinks we should,' Clare confirmed.

'Okay, Clare, what do you want me to do?' Jack asked. 'You're SIO.'

'Yes, but only on this. Somehow I don't think this is unrelated to what else is going on – do you?' Jack smiled and shook his head; Clare's good humour seemed to have returned. 'Could you go and make sympathetic noises to the animal rights lot – you seemed to get on alright with them – and see if you can pick up anything that might dispel the boss's prejudices?'

'Will do. Any chance we three could all have a review meeting tomorrow?'

'Four o'clock might be soon enough for me to be able to give you some initial ideas,' Bob suggested.

'Good for you, Clare? It's fine for me.'

'Four o'clock it is,' Clare said.

By the time Jack got back to the entrance it was illuminated by lights fed from a generator van and a mobile TV unit was stationed with camera and interviewer ready and waiting. Jack ignored them and spoke to the driver of the people carrier in which the protesters were sitting hunched together against the cold. Jack joined them; he was met with protests about their treatment and damage to their property. He apologised and suggested that they all went back to the station where it was at least warm and where they could be given hot drinks and food. Reluctantly this was agreed. First Jack called Clare to tell her

what he was doing and then Wainstock, 'Boss, this is it. TV are here. The whole bag of worms is going to come out now – warn the CC and get Jayne on the case – it's just going to be damage limitation from now on.'

As he came off the phone, David Daiche, the young journalist from the Argos, was waiting. 'Can you tell me what's happened, Chief Inspector?'

'We won't know until the fire service have completed their investigations.'

'What about the murder of a Ukrainian national in Sheep Street – there's been no public statement which is surprising as that property was owned by Rachel Robert, the young woman who recently committed suicide. What have you to say on this?'

'Not a word. Speak to our press officer Jayne Rutland. Excuse me, I have work to do.'

22.55

'You took your fuckin' time,' Tammy said as she sat on the stairs in the grand entrance of Haugham Hall holding a bag of ice on the side of her head.

'It was that explosion, weren't it?'

'What explosion?'

'Fuckin' dog farm, blown up, ain't it? Roads is closed and when they isn't they're stuffed fuckin' full of cop cars,' Scrote explained as he walked towards her. 'What you sitting here in the dark for? Can't see a fuckin' thing. Ain't you got a quid for the meter?' Scrote attempted to joke.

'Are you fuckin' pissed or what?' Tammy asked. 'Can't you remember what I said on the fuckin' phone?'

'You wasn't making much sense, Tam,' Scrote said as he switched on the lights. 'Jesus! Fuck! What happened to your face?'

'That fuckin' bitch Bohdanna hit me with a saucepan like what I said on the fuckin' phone. The others here?'

'Waiting in the cars, Tam. Where we going?'

'To fuckin' Howard's – he's taken that fuckin' whore Aneta and the two other fuckin' ukies there.'

'What she hit you for?'

'Told 'em about us flogging the old cunt's computer, didn't I?'

'What the fuck you do that for?'

'They were pissing us off with their fuckin' lovey dovey shit – are you going to stand there all fuckin' night arguin'?''

'We was supposed to keep it secret in case they try and stop it being published.'

'How the fuck are they going to do that?'

Tammy climbed into Scrote's Peugeot 106. 'God, this fuckin' car stinks,' she moaned.

Scrote took the lead; Noddy followed with Capstick in his Focus. Mouse was alone in his Toyota pick-up.

22.55

Back in the relative comfort of the station, Jack sat with the protesters - Bethany, Sasha, Harriet, Bibby, the young man called Ra and Janet. The latter, despite their previously friendly conversations, refused to look him in the eye, let alone speak to him. 'Did any of you see anything suspicious prior to the explosion?' Jack asked.

'Of course we did,' Ra replied. 'Everything to do with that bloody place was suspicious.'

'I don't think the policeman means that, Ra,' Bibby said.

'I know that.' Ra replied. 'As far as I'm concerned even if I had seen something I wouldn't be telling him; it's good riddance.'

'That's an awful thing to say,' Sasha said. 'All those poor dogs will have died.'

'At least they've been put out of their misery,' Ra said.

'That's an interesting point of view,' Jack said. 'I thought the idea was to prevent suffering.'

'The idea was to stop InVivo doing experiments on animals – they won't be doing any now, will they?' Ra said.

'So by any means, whatever the consequences?' Jack asked.

'Maybe,' Ra said.

'Maybe?' Jack echoed the word. 'It's very likely that the night watchman was killed in the fire.'

'Someone died?' Janet gasped as the colour drained from her face.

'Looks like it,' Jack nodded.

'Oh, how terrible,' Bethany said.

'We didn't know that,' Ra said.

'Oh dear, oh dear,' Janet sighed, tears forming in the corner of her eyes.

'You do realise that some people will point the finger at you – some animal rights protesters don't have a very savoury reputation,' Jack said.

'Are you accusing us of being responsible for what happened?' Harriet asked.

'I'm not accusing you of anything but it would be helpful if you could all account for your movements today and immediately prior to the explosion,' Jack said.

'That's outrageous!' Harriet said.

'It's a fair question, Harriet,' Bibby said. 'We were all together all of the time today.'

'No, we weren't,' Janet said. 'Not all the time ... I left our camp at about half past six to go and see my daughter who,' Janet hesitated for a moment, 'who has been having a hard time at work. I got back about twenty minutes before the explosion.'

'Your daughter could verify this?' Jack asked.

'If she was needed to – will that be necessary?'

'I doubt it, Janet. The rest of you were together all of the time?'

'Yes, except when we were dealing with the call of nature,' Bibby said.

'Bloody hell,' Ra guffawed. 'Aren't we prim?'

'Don't be an idiot, Ra,' Sasha said. 'He's only doing his job – he's not the enemy.'

'Depends,' Ra mumbled.

'Is there anything you saw or heard that can help me find out who was responsible for the fire?' Jack asked.

'All the people who worked there left as usual at four on a Friday,' Bibby said. 'We should say we're sorry about Dr Kinsey, poor woman.'

'You speak for yourself,' Ra said.

'You know the one thing I'm pleased about, Ra? I'll tell you. I won't have to put up with your puerile drivel anymore,' Sasha said.

'Do you all have to be so aggressive?' Janet asked and blew her nose in a handkerchief. A mobile phone started to ring. Janet fumbled in her bag and pulled out her phone and answered the call. 'Yes, I'm alright. Can't talk now. I'll call you later,' she said and ended the call. 'That was my daughter asking if I was okay – she'd heard what's happened.'

'Has she?' Jack asked. 'Have any of you any reason to think that the explosion wasn't an accident?'

'It's only what one of your constables was saying to the driver of the van we were in – he said some one had blown the place up,' Bibby said

'That's right,' Sasha added.

Jack contained his irritation. 'Did he indeed? Is there anything at all you can tell me?'

Harriet nodded. 'I just remembered one of the InVivo people was late leaving - didn't come out until after seven.'

'Nice young woman,' Bethany added. 'Think she was admin or something, not directly involved with the nasty side of it.'

Jack wondered why Janet seemed even more agitated at the sharing of this information.

'You think there was a nice side to it, do you?' Ra asked.

'What are you going to do with us now?' Bethany asked.

'We've nowhere to sleep.'

'We should go back to our homes – it's over,' Harriet said.

'Not at this time of night; it's too late,' Ra said.

'I agree,' Jack responded. 'Would you be happy if I get someone to organise somewhere for you to stay tonight – a hotel, B&B, something like that?'

'Someone would need to bring us all our things before they get stolen,' Sasha said. 'But thank you, it would be good to have somewhere to sleep tonight.'

'You're all happy with that?' They all nodded. 'Good, I'll get on with it. In the morning I'll need to talk to you all again just to make sure that you didn't see something that might help us – it's a formality.'

'You're going to interrogate us? Pick us off one at a time. Is that the idea?' Ra asked.

'Oh do shut up, you stupid boy!' Janet shouted. 'I'm sorry,' she blurted as she started to weep.

Okay Janet, what's up with you? Jack thought as he opened the door and left.

The only officer in the station was WPC Sutton who was only too pleased to make the necessary arrangements for the protesters and suggested that she take a couple of the women back to the site to help retrieve their possessions.

23.43

'Howard! Come quick!' Aneta shouted as car headlights glared through the windows of the cottage and car air-horns blared.

Howard rushed from the kitchen where they had eaten followed by Bohdanna and Marina. The deafening roar of the horns abruptly stopped.

'Who are they?' Bohdanna asked.

'I can guess,' Howard said as he shaded his eyes from the intense light and looked through the window. 'I can't see a bloody thing.' He jumped back as a stone the size of a cricket ball shattered one of the small panes of glass that made up the old window.

Aneta screamed.

'It's okay,' he said. 'No one hurt. Dial 999 and tell the police we're under attack.' He handed her his mobile.

'Oi! Scum!' Tammy shouted. 'I gotta a fuckin' bone to pick with you.'

'I shouldn't have hit her,' Bohdanna said.

'Yes, you should,' Aneta said. 'She's a bitch.'

'Are you fuckin' deaf or what?' Tammy shouted.

'Dial 999!' Howard urged.

'Where are you going?' Aneta asked as he climbed the stairs.

'Just dial 999, will you?'

'Scared to fuckin' come out and face us, are you?' Tammy shouted.

Aneta made the call and was telling the operator where they were when Howard returned carrying two double-barrelled shotguns. He cracked them both open. 'What is post code for here?' Aneta asked. He told her as he loaded cartridges into the first gun and stood it next to the front door. Aneta gave the postcode and begged the operator to make them hurry. Howard loaded the second gun as she ended the call. 'Where did you get those?' Aneta asked.

'From my father for my eighteenth birthday – never thought they'd be much use.'

Another stone broke a further pane of the window.

'Don't go out there with those, please,' Aneta begged.

'Don't worry; I'll only frighten them.'

'Send that bitch Bohdanna out – want to have words with her,' Tammy shouted.

'I'll go,' Bohdanna said.

'No, you bloody won't,' Howard said. 'Aneta, open the front door.'

'No.'

'Okay,' Howard said and put down one of the guns as he opened the door wide with his free left hand. Even more light flooded into the room. Howard stepped out into the light, put the gun to his shoulder, took aim and fired up into the night sky. 'Now, fuck off, before I really lose my temper.'

'Fuckin' brave with a gun, ain't you?' Tammy sneered.

'That's what they're for, you stupid cow; to frighten morons like you. So fuck off before I blast those three fucking cars to pieces. Got that, boys?'

'You wouldn't fuckin' dare,' Scrote shouted.

'Try me, Scrote? Take your sister and your mates and fuck off!' Howard called and lowering the angle of the gun fired over their heads. He turned and picked up the second gun. 'The next two barrels are for the cars – I'm a pretty good shot but accidents happen – so fuck off!' Howard stood very still. The four men and Tammy argued for just a moment before the men got in their cars.

Tammy stepped forward so that the lights were behind her. 'Don't think I won't get you 'cos I fuckin' will!' she said and climbed into Scrote's car.

Aneta, Bohdanna and Marina joined Howard as the cars dipped their headlights, reversed out onto the road, turned and drove away with much screeching of tyres and roaring of engines. Howard cracked open the gun and took the cartridges out. 'I'll just go and lock these back up,' he said as he walked past them, into the house and up the stairs. Returning downstairs he found the three women still standing where he had left them staring out into the night. 'Anyone fancy a coffee?' he asked. He saw tears rolling down Aneta's cheeks and putting his arm around her took her inside followed by the others.

Ten minutes later WPC Sutton's car pulled up outside. Howard explained what had happened but didn't mention his use of firearms. 'The most important thing about all this,' he

said, 'is that Tammy and Scrote stole my father's computer. They've sold it to one of the red tops. I think you should tell someone quite senior about that because those hard drives will have stuff on them that may help the police with their enquiries into my father's business affairs with a Ukrainian called Victor Plushenko. Can you make sure you do that?'

WPC Sutton confirmed she would speak to DCI Ranger first thing in the morning even though she would be off duty by then.

Saturday 16th November

07.47

When Jack arrived in their office he found Clare talking on the phone. 'What's up? You look decidedly glum,' Jack said as she put down the receiver.

'They still haven't traced that call. I'll have to find the time to do it myself. You don't look so bright yourself.'

'I didn't get much sleep – something's been nagging away at me.'

'What?'

'You'll laugh,' Jack said.

'Laughter? That's been in short supply in the last few days – so make me laugh.'

'Somehow I don't think I will. When I talked to the protesters last night, they were all perfectly normal, a bit stroppy, pissed off in one case, all but Janet.'

'The nice woman who tipped us off about the Broadbeam's van?'

'That's right. God knows why but I have an unpleasant hunch that she knows something.'

'You were right; it's not funny,' Clare said as Peter joined them.

'Good morning,' Peter said.

'Don't take off your coat - we're going to bring someone in for a chat,' Clare said as she stood up. 'Sorry. Good morning.'

'What don't you want to laugh about?' Peter asked.

'Jack's hunch – I'll explain on the way – where is she?'

'They're all in the Sunnybank B&B,' Jack replied. 'They'll all need to come back in but get Janet in here first, thanks.'

They waited to leave the office to allow Wainstock to come in, he was holding a newspaper; he threw it onto Jack's desk. 'You were right, the cat's not entirely out of the bag, but it's on

its way. I've had Sylvester on the phone and he's prevailed on the editor to keep out names as their release will prejudice our investigations.'

Jack studied the banner headline that took up more than half of the tabloid's front page - "Ukrainians bring plague to County" 'Oh, shit!' Jack sighed.

'Would you take a look inside at the copy? It's under the by-line of David Daiche.'

'Why?' Jack asked.

'The facts are a bit sketchy they clearly don't really know what's been going on – but take a look at page two.'

Jack read. "Acting Detective Chief Inspector Jack Ranger argues that the police should tell the truth and stop trying to cover up the seriousness of the crisis because they won't be able to control the media for much longer. The explosion at InVivo was the catalyst for the revelations we now print for the first time." 'I haven't been interviewed. I didn't say that to this Daiche character.'

'Not to him. To us, not those words, but right at the end of our meeting you said we ought to tell the truth and earlier you'd said we wouldn't be able to keep the lid on it for much longer.'

'Yes, I did. Where's this going, boss? Of what am I being accused?'

'Not you, Jack. I spoke with the CC as soon as he knew it was coming out. He didn't ask Fulsome to attend our meeting and he didn't ask him to make notes of a confidential meeting.'

'Fulsome did this?'

'Looks that way. Sylvester reckons Fulsome's sold the full story to a national – thinks it's the Telegraph - we'll have to wait until Monday morning to find out.'

'Why would he do that?' Jack asked.

'Two reasons: he's jealous of you and he's up to his ears in debt.'

'Jesus Christ. Jealous! Wanker. Who's he in debt to?'

'Victor Plushenko,' Wainstock said.

'Shit! Where's Fulsome?'

'Done a runner? Sylvester only knows this because his sister came and spilled the beans to him in the early hours of this morning.'

'How did he and Plushenko know each other? Stupid question - through Haugham of course. Oh, bloody hell, it gets worse.'

'I think we might be getting an acting Chief Constable ere long,' Wainstock said. 'Brace ourselves for Monday morning. Any progress on the explosion?'

'Yeah, maybe. We'll see. I just can't believe that even someone like Fulsome could do this.'

Janet was given a cup of tea and asked to wait in an interview room while Jack reluctantly agreed with Clare that she would do the phone trace work herself while Peter would join him in interviewing Janet.

'Am I going to be cautioned?' was the first thing Janet asked as Jack and Peter sat down opposite her.

'Why would I need to caution you?'

'Because if you do I'll want my solicitor.'

'Of course you will, but why did you think I was going to caution you?' Jack asked.

'Because I feel like I've been arrested.'

'Peter, was this lady, Mrs Madeley cautioned when you and Inspector Farmer collected her from the B&B?'

'No, sir, she wasn't - we said we just needed her to help us with our enquiries.'

'That's a euphemism for being arrested,' Janet said.

'I don't do euphemisms, Janet. So why don't you relax and tell me what was upsetting you so much last night? You've always been so calm and collected in the past. And oh, do you want me to call you Mrs Madeley or would you prefer, Janet?'

'Janet,' she replied and Jack could see how much she was struggling to keep her breathing under control.

'What was getting to you last night, Janet?'

'I would have thought that was obvious - what happened at InVivo with a man being killed. All those poor dogs.' She looked at Jack who returned her gaze but remained silent as she looked away. 'It ... that ... why do you want to know why I was upset when it's obvious? We were all upset - apart from Ra who I always thought was dangerous ... it doesn't much matter now what I thought he might be capable of doing - I won't have to see him again ... could I have a glass of water, please?'

'Peter, would you mind getting Janet a glass of water, use the dispenser in my office. The water out of the tap is stuffed full of chlorine.'

'Thank you,' she said.

Jack sat back and smiled at her. She studied the table in front of her, then her hands, the floor, the walls, and the open door through but she wouldn't look at Jack. The silence was making her ever more nervous. He said nothing. Peter returned with a glass of water and silently put it on the table in front of Janet before he sat down again.

'Thank you,' she said, leant forward and with a shaking right hand went to pick up the glass, revised her approach and used both hands to pick it up but dropped it on the floor where it smashed. Janet screamed. Peter went to speak but Jack put his hand on the young constable's arm. Peter remained silent.

'I can't do this!' Janet said. 'I'm too upset,' she added taking a handkerchief from her shoulder bag and blowing her nose. 'I'm sorry about the glass - I hate broken glass.'

Jack waited for a long moment. 'What can't you do, Janet?' he quietly asked. Now she looked at him and kept looking until she took a deep breath and appeared to be about to speak. Instead she shook her head and stared at the table top. 'What can't you do, Janet?' he asked again.

'I've got nothing to say,' she said. 'Not anything.'

There was a knock on the door. Clare came in, handed Jack a piece of paper and left. Jack studied what was written on the paper. He looked up. 'The warning phone call that alerted

us to what was to happen at InVivo was made from a mobile registered to the name of Madeley – J Madeley – that’s your name, Janet. Did you make that call, Janet?’

Tears welled up in her eyes and slowly rolled down her cheeks; she made no effort to wipe them away. ‘Yes, I did.’

‘Have you got the phone that you had with you last night?’

‘Yes.’

‘Can you take it out of your bag, please?’ Janet fumbled in her bag and took out the phone. ‘Can you put it down on the table, please?’ Jack took out his mobile from the inside pocket of his suit jacket, looked at the piece of paper Clare had given him and tapped in numbers and waited. ‘The network’s not very good in here. Your phone’s not on silent is it?’

‘Why are you doing this?’

‘Just checking,’ Jack said and picked up Janet’s phone. ‘The number I have here,’ he held up the piece of paper, ‘doesn’t correspond with your mobile number. Who is J Madeley?’

‘I have two phones – I must have lost the other one when we were evicted from the camp site last night – you’ll find it there.’

‘What did you do before you became a full time protester?’

‘Before I retired?’

‘You weren’t an actor?’

‘No.’

‘I thought not - because you’re crap at it, Janet. Who is J Madeley?’

‘You know anyway, don’t you? It’s my daughter, Janice. She was Doctor Kinsey’s secretary – she should have known there’d be somebody there. I tried to persuade her not to do it but that’s why she got the job there in the first place even though she hated what they were doing – all those times she went in and out and we pretended not to know each other - she was always going to sabotage it ... but to do what she’s done ... that’s where I was yesterday, trying to persuade her not to do it, but she wouldn’t listen – I did make the call on her phone but she doesn’t know that.’

‘You’ve not spoken to her since she called you last night?’

‘I couldn’t face speaking to her even though I love her.’

‘Okay, Janet,’ Jack sighed. ‘Where does your daughter live?’

Peter took out his notebook and wrote down the address. ‘She wouldn’t have wanted to hurt anyone,’ she said through her sobs. ‘It was those poor dogs. They drove her over the edge, all that noise they used to make.’

‘Peter, could you go with Clare and bring in Janice for questioning and send a WPC in here to look after Mrs Madeley? We’ll have to take your statement later, Janet. I’m really very sorry.’

As he walked back to his office his mobile rang and WPC Sutton gave him the news she had promised to give him first thing but she’d overslept; he forgave her – at last he knew where Haugham’s missing computer had gone. He’d get Wainstock to secure an injunction against any form of publication based upon the data on the hard drive and would have the recovered PC delivered to Fred to see what his boffins could discover about the mysterious Mr Plushenko. In other circumstances he would have been a happy man.

09.31

Sandra had made sure that Yuri was comfortable and sufficiently sedated for the drive down to London. When he woke in the safety of the crypt beneath St Olave’s in Old Jewry he saw Sam talking to an elderly man with a mane of white hair.

‘Where am I? Who are you?’ Yuri asked. He tried to sit up from the bed but this tugged the cannula in the back of his hand. He laid back down looking up at the drip feeding the cannula. ‘Please? Where am I?’

Sam quickly walked to his side. ‘I’m Sam Ticks – you were a bit out of it – remember? Jack asked me to get you out of harm’s way. That’s why you’re here.’

‘I remember a little – thank you – this place, where is it?’

‘This is my dear friend Jim Campbell; it’s his secret place. He lets me use it from time to time,’ Sam said.

‘Well, young man, you’re back in the land of the living - how are you doing?’ Jim said as he joined Sam at the bedside.

‘What do I look like?’ Yuri said as he touched his face with his free hand. ‘My face, it hurts.’

‘Look like you did a few rounds with smoking Jo,’ Jim said and seeing the perplexed look on Yuri’s face, added, ‘A boxer, before your time, like the Klitschko brothers, but harder. As to where you are - this is all that remains of St Olave’s. The church was demolished in 1887- they left the tower – but everyone seemed to forget its crypt. That’s where you are – beneath Wren’s old church.’

‘This is secret place?’

‘It is. You’re safe here,’ Sam said.

‘It is as you say, Spartan, yes?’ Yuri asked.

‘You should have seen it when Jim first brought me here – I had a generator put in so there’s electricity and it’s warm,’ Sam explained. ‘Back then there was only an old French stove that Jim called God.’

‘The only way of keeping warm was with a good malt,’ Jim chuckled.

‘What are you?’ Yuri asked.

‘A wizened old geezer who helps my friend Sam here get out of one scrape after another.’

‘As for me,’ Sam said. ‘I look for people who are lost. I used to run a business that protected the rich and famous but it stuck in my throat so I packed it in. Now I do what I want which is to help people find their lost loved ones.’

‘I’m not lost,’ Yuri said.

‘You are at the moment and that’s how you’ll stay until Jack says otherwise,’ Sam said. ‘And knowing him it won’t be long before we’ll all be plotting the next move. Give it a day or two, then, when you’re feeling better, you can tell me what this is all about.’

‘You agreed to help me not knowing why?’

‘That’s what friends are for, Yuri,’ Jim said. ‘This lady is rather special.’

‘Jim is an old flirt,’ Sam laughed and gave Jim a light kiss on the cheek. ‘Are you hungry?’

‘Yes – very, but my mouth, she is sore.’

‘There is soup and a straw,’ Sam said.

‘That would be good, thank you.’

‘I’m going to leave you alone with Jim as I need to go back to my office to check on another case. I’ll be back later. Make sure you eat up that soup.’

Half an hour later, after Yuri had drunk the soup, Jim asked him if he’d like to sleep.

‘No, thank you. Can you talk with me, please? Explain this place, explain her, what she does this for?’

Jim pulled up a chair. ‘Explain Sam? That’ll be a tough one. I’ll tell you about this place first – it’s easier. When I was a young man, a writer trying to make my way, I floated the idea – to what was then “The Manchester Guardian”, that was a newspaper – of doing a series of articles that were a sort of sequel to Orwell’s “Down and Out in Paris and London” – it started off that way but, frankly, vagrants were boring so I started looking at what used to be called the underworld. I met this guy called Lenny Goessens; he was a fence and this was where he kept his stock. He was originally Dutch and his English was odd at times; he thought it funny that his crib was in a crypt though obviously of a different sort to the one in the nativity story. We got friendly; he had a kid, asked me to be a godparent, Christ knows why, but I accepted; it wasn’t a good idea. Someone spilled the beans about the crypt, Lenny ended up in prison, his wife ditched him and the boy went right off the rails. I saw the boy a few times when he was in his teens but he was a hopeless case. I think Lenny thought it was me who had shopped him, but it wasn’t. I forgot all about the crypt and then one day I found myself in the garden upstairs while I was researching an article on the Jewish Ghetto that was right here in Old Jewry and looked for the old door – it was boarded up. I wondered what was still inside so I came back that night, early

hours of the morning actually, with a jemmy and levered off the boards and broke in. It was in a bit of a mess but the stove was still in place as was the furniture. I saw it as a bolthole - a secret place that only I knew of - to be honest I'm not sure why - some sort of insecurity or a childish romanticism thinking I was some kind of Count of Monte Cristo. Utter nonsense. I had a new lock made for the door ... I didn't have a purpose in mind at the time but since then there have been people who needed to escape from public view for a variety of reasons ... then I met Sam and this became our hiding place.'

'Why was she needing to be hidden from harm?'

'I knew you'd ask that. Let me see, I met her a couple of years back but before that she used to be in the police - a detective. She got involved with another old geezer like me, a man called Harry Haitch and a criminal international secret organisation called the Apostles - she needs to tell you about all that herself. Then, purely by chance she got involved in a mystery that I helped her solve. At that time she was running a personal protection company - but she told you that - when the mystery about the Cabal was put to bed, I never thought it was solved and nor did she - then she started looking for missing persons. I don't know how she and Jack first met but he became a client - she's been looking for Jack's wife who disappeared after their little girl unexpectedly died. I don't know why, Yuri, but I don't feel comfortable telling you all this. I feel like I'm breaking her confidence. You must ask her to tell you her story herself.' Jim looked at his watch. 'Sandra will be here in an hour to check you over and to make sure those broken ribs are well strapped up.'

'Sandra?'

'You were out of it, weren't you? She went up to Lincolnshire with Sam to collect you. Sandra's a nurse; she's married to a guy called Nev who works for Sam. Do you want to tell me how you've ended up here?'

'I am rude but I think I would like to sleep until Sandra comes, yes?'

'I'll be on the sofa reading - if you need anything give me a shout.'

Janice Madeley was duly cautioned. She refused the services of a solicitor and would not see her mother. She offered no excuses for what she had done and made a full confession ~~in~~ less than an hour after she was brought in. Her misery was abject when she learnt she'd inadvertently killed an innocent person and was resigned to know she would be charged with culpable manslaughter as well as arson.

'Can you leave me alone now?' she asked as she finished signing her statement that Peter had typed. 'I'm very tired.'

'We've just got a few more questions, Janice,' Jack said.

'Will my mother be charged as well?'

'With being an accessory, yes.'

'She tried to stop me - it was only me.'

'It'll be up to the CPS ... I'll do my best ... I want to ask you about Sylvia Kinsey,' Jack said.

'She wasn't well.'

'What do you mean?' Clare asked.

'She wouldn't have killed herself if she was, would she?'

'How well did you know her? Did you ever visit her at her home?'

'Me? Where she lived? You must be joking - we were all beneath her.'

'As you can imagine we're trying to find out exactly what caused Dr Kinsey to take her own life and we're presuming it was to do with InVivo and that it was all too much for her,' Clare said recalling the note Kinsey had left with its alarming postscript. 'Because of the fire we're pretty certain that all the records have been destroyed; do you know if Dr Kinsey kept duplicates of everything on her own computer?'

'She was paranoid about that,' Janice said. 'She wouldn't have anything important stored on the computers at work - she kept all that on her own machine.'

'A PC at home?' Jack asked.

'No a laptop – if you met her you would have seen that she never let it out of her sight.'

Suddenly Jack had an image of a laptop on her office desk. 'A Sony Vaio?' he asked.

'That's it.'

'Did she use any cloud based storage for her files or were they all on her hard drive?' Clare asked.

'No, I don't think so ... I know she had an external hard drive – she brought it in once – she backed up stuff on that I think.'

'Okay,' Jack said. 'That'll be enough for now, thank you. Your mother wants to see you – will you see her?'

'I can't.'

'Can you tell us why you didn't set the dogs free?' Clare asked.

'I think Dr Kinsey thought the men that died had caught something – somehow – I don't know – from the dogs – that's why she killed herself. I couldn't let them go just in case they were infected ... I didn't want them to die,' Janice said. She fell silent clearly struggling for words. 'I murdered them along with that nice man, Frank,' she wailed; the tears flowed.

'At least we know we're looking for a Sony Vaio,' Clare remarked as they walked away from the interview room.

'That's not a problem, is it?' Jack said, 'They're two a penny - just like rocking horse shit.'

16.00

Dusk was drawing in as Jack, Clare, Peter, Wainstock and Ron Baski met Chief Fire Officer Bob Wenlock as agreed. They stood in a little group a hundred yards from a smouldering heap of rubble. A cold wind made them shiver beneath the gloom of a low leaden sky. Bob Wenlock confirmed that an explosion had in all probability caused the fire; its precise cause

would be determined when the detailed forensic examination had been completed.

'Are there human remains in there?' Wainstock asked.

'Yes, in what was presumably the night watchman's office,' the Chief Fire Officer replied. 'It looks pretty certain that it's the missing man, Frank Ritchie.'

'What about dogs?' Ron asked. 'Are there any remains of dogs?'

'Yes, it looks like there are the remains of about ten dogs.'

'That's the number Janice said were in the labs,' Jack confirmed, 'and there were none in the kennels.'

'Where does that leave us, Professor?' Wainstock asked.

'Standing here in the cold looking at absolute destruction. That's it.'

'There's nothing you'll be able to tell us?' Wainstock persisted.

'If there's anything to analyse we'll analyse it – but I think it's going to be down to the police to find out the truth – not the likes of me,' Ron said. 'Could we go somewhere warm? I'm freezing.'

At the station they continued their meeting in Wainstock's office along with the press officer, Jayne Rutland. 'I need to understand the situation,' she said, 'no matter how bad it is.'

'It's pretty certain that the fire has destroyed all evidence that might begin to explain the deaths of the Ukrainians. We have four local people under arrest but safely locked away in quarantined isolation units. I'll be very surprised if the CPS will want to follow their cases through to trial because, in the circumstances, they'll be nervous about securing convictions – not least because their trials would cause a considerable degree of public alarm,' Jack said.

'Are you sure about that?' Clare asked.

'No, I'm not sure, but you know how nervous they can be – that along with bad publicity if it goes wrong. It sticks in my throat – but that's my view.'

'Unfortunately, I agree with Jack,' Wainstock said.

'How long will they be kept in isolation?' Jayne asked.

'It's very difficult to say,' Ron replied. 'We have no idea how long the virus will take to show itself. Even after the autopsies we don't have a complete profile of the disease. But my guess is that they are neither infected nor carriers and that we'll be able to give them an all clear within a couple of weeks – mind you, they'll have to continue to have regular blood tests for the next several years.'

'They'll make a fuss, you can guarantee that,' Jayne said. 'They'll end up selling their stories to a red top.'

'Or the Daily Lies,' Clare added.

'Shall I get on?' Jack asked, his irritation evident to all. 'Those responsible for the death of Guraya are probably back in the Ukraine by now, or keeping their heads down in London somewhere. Though we'll do our best to find them, I won't be holding my breath. As to what was going on at InVivo, what they were working on, what killed the Ukrainians, well, we don't have a clue. No charges will be made in respect of the deaths of Reginald Haugham and Sylvia Kinsey. We have some progress in that we know Murdoch's minions have Haugham's computer and we know that Kinsey's laptop and hard drive contain everything we need to now about InVivo but as you know, they've been stolen. So all in all ...'

'We're at the mercy of the media who will accuse you of being totally incompetent,' Jayne said.

'You? I thought you were one of us?' Clare asked.

'A fair weather friend,' Jack said. 'If you don't want to help, if you've got nothing to contribute, why don't you just piss off?' Jack asked.

'Jack!' Wainstock warned.

'They're saying here was where that Rachel was last seen in public before she topped herself,' Scrote said. 'She was alright, was Rachel. Gave us our nickname, didn't she?'

'What the fuck are you burbling on about?' Tammy asked as she tried to set down the tray of drinks she was holding. 'Move them fuckin' glasses, will you?' Mouse and Capstick shifted the many empties to an adjacent table.

'I was saying this was the last place Rachel was seen, in here in the Victoria, before she topped herself; she was a good lass,' Scrote said as he picked up his sixth pint of Bateman's. 'A real good lass.'

'Jesus! Listen to it,' Tammy said. 'Anyone got a fuckin' violin?'

'Shut it, Tam,' Scrote said. 'I was just sayin' ...'

'A load of sentimental shite,' Tammy interrupted.

'You didn't have to deal with that prick, Dimitri, like we did,' Mouse observed. 'He was a fuckin' scary cunt, he was.'

'What's that got to do with it?' Tammy demanded.

'It was his fault she did herself in,' Scrote said.

'Did you hear what they done to him? Made him swallow his bollocks before they stuffed his cock in his gob,' Mouse said.

'And then let him drip dry,' Capstick laughed.

'Moron,' Scrote mumbled.

'You going to the funeral on Monday?' Noddy asked.

'Whose funeral?' Capstick asked.

'Rachel's, you daft cunt,' Scrote replied.

'It was his fault that we done up her uncle, Gil,' Mouse said.

'Whose fault?' Tammy asked.

'Fuckin' Dimitri's,' Scrote said. 'You two was dead lucky that Gil wouldn't press charges.'

'It was only because he was afraid of what Dimitri would do to Rachel – now he'll fuckin' press charges, I can tell you that,' Mouse said.

'Why are we talking about bleedin' Rachel when we've got them fuckin' bitches and that cunt Howard to sort?' Tammy asked.

'Cos she's dead, Tam,' Scrote said. 'Right in front of a fuckin' train – them Ukrainians had raped her.'

'You're pissed.'

'They raped her, Tam.'

'Serves her fuckin' right; shouldn't have taken up with them in the first place.'

'Ain't you got any feelings?'

'Feelings? Bollocks. You always get all fuckin' sentimental when you've had too many, Scrote,' Tammy said.

'No chance of that happening to you, is there, Tam,' Scrote said. It was as well that Scrote had set down his glass; otherwise the force of Tammy's slap across his face would have made him drop it. 'Hey, Tam. Lay off!'

'So what are we going to do about Howard and his fuckin' under age whore?' Tammy asked.

'I'm not doing nothing,' Mouse said.

'Nor me,' Capstick added. 'I've had enough of it all and with Dimitri gone I ain't got nothing to fear.'

'Me too,' Noddy added.

'Little shits,' Tammy said. 'Looks like it's down to me and my little brother, Scrote.'

'You can fuck off!' Scrote said.

'Shut it,' Mouse hissed as he looked across the room to the door of the back room that had just opened. 'Visitors!'

'Fuck off!' Scrote said to Mouse and turned back to Tammy. 'You went and fuckin' bragged we'd nicked Haugham's computer and sold it to them cunts from the Sun. I may be pissed but it don't need us to be fuckin' sober to know the cops'll know all about that by now and we'll be fuckin' charged with fuckin' theft and it's all your fuckin' fault; with my record they'll bang me up – so if you want fuckin' revenge you can fuckin' do it on your own.'

'He's right, you know,' Jack said as he and Clare walked across the room.

Scrote and Tammy span around as Mouse, Noddy and Capstick made an inelegant escape through the fire exit.

'Oh fuck,' Scrote groaned.

'Fuckin' dick head,' Tammy sighed.

19.12

Sam had expected that she would have been able to get back to the crypt much earlier in the day but an urgent lead in a case delayed her. She called in at an off-licence and picked up a bottle of Springbank malt knowing that it would warm Jim's heart and might even make Yuri feel a little more human. Walking along the dark path next to the deserted solicitors' offices she shivered; it was bitterly cold. Despite this, she stopped, pulled her coat more tightly around her and stared up at a clear night sky where stars twinkled. *It should be Christmas Eve with a sky like that, she thought, with church bells ringing – sleigh bells - presents under a Christmas tree. God, I'm such a romantic. But not Bing singing White Christmas more Kirsty and Shane – got a lucky one, came in at eighteen to one, she quietly sang, I've got a feeling, this year's for me and you.* She shrugged. *Um, Jack Ranger. What do I do about you?* Behind the large buddleia that grew in front of the door leading down into the crypt she bent over and looked for the spare key beneath the paving slab where it lived; it wasn't there. She tried the door. It was unlocked. *That'll be Sandra; she won't have known to lock up.* She went in. Though there was no point in announcing her arrival, because she wouldn't be heard down below, she nevertheless called, 'Hi, it's me, I'm back!' closed the door, switched on the little light that illuminated the stone steps, made her way down to the first corner, rounded the second to the crypt's door and pushed it open.

'I've got a pressie!' she called as she continued in and came to an abrupt halt. 'Jim?' She took her bag from her shoulder and gently placed it on the floor. *Why am I doing that? Christ! What's that smell?* Putting her hand to her mouth she moved slowly forward. 'Sandra?' She stood stock-still. *No, no, no.* There was no sound beyond her breath. 'Oh fuck!' she said. 'Oh holy fuck!' Now, still unbelieving, she saw it all and it was true. 'Jim, oh Jim, my dear,' she murmured as she stared at his crumpled body, his head at a strange angle against the stone wall and blood covering his chest. *Don't! Don't touch anything.* She turned. Sandra looked perplexed, eyes wide staring seeing nothing, her hands clasped over her stomach where she had been shot. *You bastards. Shit. Poor Nev, he'll never get over this,* she thought as she looked down at Sandra sitting with her back against the wall in a pool of her darkening blood. She walked across the room to where Yuri lay on the bed; his drip and cannula had been ripped out; that would have been utterly painless compared with what had been done to his naked torso. It had been lanced open from sternum to pubis. Sam felt bile rise in her throat as the stench of his gaping stomach fully hit her. She turned away. *Oh, Jim. I will not allow it. You will not be dead.* She knelt beside her friend. She stared. *Seeing things. No, I'm not!* She extended a trembling finger and placed it against his neck. *Please. Please.* There was a pulse, slow, faint, but a pulse. *Yes!* She tore her mobile phone from her bag; she'd forgotten there was no network in the crypt; she ran.

Beneath the starlight she dialled 999 and told them where an ambulance must come to save a life. *Come one, come on!* She waited for Fred Ingles to answer his phone. She told him where she was and what she'd found. 'But Jim's alive, just alive ... no I won't touch anything.' She sat on a bench near the gate and wept. The same stars no longer quite as bright. No one sang Christmas songs in her head. *Oh, fuck. Nev.* She called him, told him about Sandra. He screamed. She continued sitting on the bench. *Oh shit! I'd better call Jack. So much for my protection – doesn't anything ever change? Jim. Sod this.* She went back in and climbed down the stairs.

Kneeling beside Jim she stared, too afraid to touch him to seek a pulse, until her eyes hurt with the effort of seeing any movement, any sign of breath in his chest. *Come on! Come on. You're going to die.* Seconds became hours. Hours became days. *Where are you?*

'Anyone there?' a voice called from the stairs.

Sam leapt to her feet. 'In here. They're in here,' she shouted as she ran to the door. 'There's only one alive,' she said as the paramedics followed her across the crypt. 'You can't do anything for the others; they're all dead. The police are coming. You just need to save Jim. Just him, just Jim.'

'Ease off, love,' one of the paramedics said. 'Let us do our job, yeah?'

Sam watched, crouching near them, as they got a line into Jim's arm. Seconds later two police constables clattered down the stairs. Before she could say anything she was being pushed away towards the door.

'Come with us,' the second female paramedic said, 'you can't do anything here.'

Sam followed them up and out of the crypt as they carried Jim to the ambulance. She sat on the bench while the crime scene was secured and the police cordoned off all approaches to the site while the crypt was occupied by a handful of specialist officers and forensic experts. Fred had sat with her for a few minutes and suggested that she go home but she wouldn't move knowing that Nev would arrive at any moment. She still hadn't been able to face making the call to Jack. As she took out her phone she looked to her left and heard Nev demanding to be let through the red and white tape. Two constables restrained him. Quickly on her feet, she ran and pushed past the policemen and threw her arms around Nev as one of the constables spoke into his police phone.

'Say it's not true,' Nev croaked.

'I'm so sorry, Nev, it's true.'

'I want to see her.'

'No you don't, not now, not yet - they won't let you down there anyway.'

'I'm going to see her, Sam. No one's going to stop me! Not you, not anyone.'

'Have you got your car?'

'Of course I've got my bloody car - now get out of my way,' Nev said as one of the constables removed his baton from its holder.

'Don't hurt him!' Sam shouted. 'It's his wife in there.'

'Mr Jackson?' Fred asked as he joined them. 'I'm sorry but you can't go in there. You know that.'

'Who are you?' Nev asked.

'Chief Superintendent Fred Ingles - I run SCD9; Sam called me. We'll get whoever did this I promise you.'

'How did she die?' Nev asked as tears welled up in his eyes. 'Sam never said.'

'She was shot, Mr Jackson,' Fred said. 'You'll be able to see her after we've finished here and when she looks a little better.'

'How's she going to look better? She's dead.'

'I'm sorry,' Fred said.

'Come on,' Sam said. 'Give me your car keys, Nev. I'll drive us back to my place.'

'You'll be needing this,' Fred said as he held up her shoulder bag. 'I'm going to need to come and talk to you tonight but I can't be sure what time that'll be. Is that okay?'

'I'm not going anywhere,' Nev protested.

'Don't worry about the time, Fred. I don't think sleep is on anyone's agenda right now.'

'Go easy on that bottle - I need you as sharp as a tack,' Fred said.

'Do you know where they've taken Jim?' Sam asked.

'St George's. Here's the number.'

She turned and taking his arm pulled Nev away. *Bill always used to say he was "sharp as a tack" and then he was dead ... how many more?*

Sam drove and Nev wept as they went to what had previously been the offices of Tick Box Consulting but was where she now lived 'over the shop' as she described it in lighter moments. They sat together at the kitchen table; he said nothing. Staring at the table his finger traced invisible circles on its wooden surface. She opened the bottle of malt but he wasn't interested; she had a small tot herself. She made a pot of tea; he didn't drink any of that either. They continued to sit in silence until Sam could stand it no more; after nearly two hours she left Nev sitting at the table with the bottle of Springbank in front of him, went downstairs to her office and finally made the call to Jack. She had hoped that sitting behind her desk and using a landline rather than a mobile would allow her to control her emotions and be entirely business-like; it almost worked up until the moment Jack asked her if she was okay. 'No, I'm bloody not. Why did I have to involve Jim, let alone poor Sandra?'

'It's not your fault Sandra and Yuri are dead, Sam. The people who are at fault are the bastards that killed them and we'll have them one way or another, so come on ... take a deep breath, get angry and no more guilt - yeah?'

'Easily said. Jim was like a father to me. I loved the old bugger so much, so much, he was like a big friendly white haired old bear - my rock - full of wisdom and wickedness - you can't have friendly rocks, can you?'

'Stop talking about him as if he's dead. Why don't you call the hospital and see how he's doing?'

'I daren't, in case he is, in case he's died.'

Jack waited until she'd stopped crying and heard her blow her nose. 'I need to ask this, Sam. Did it look as if Yuri had been tortured?'

'Yes. If they'd simply wanted him dead they could have shot him and not pulled out half his insides,' Sam gulped, took the receiver away from her mouth and by breathing hard managed to stop herself gagging at the memory of the destruction vented on his body. 'Yes, they tortured the poor bastard. Did you expect that?'

'Yes. If this goes on, Sam, and it will go on, we'll need to be very careful. Now, ring the hospital. I'll be there as soon as I can.'

Sam took a deep breath and dialled the hospital. It took what seemed an age to get through to intensive care. 'I want to know how my father is,' Sam said, knowing that a lie would help her get the truth. 'Sorry, yes. Jim Campbell; he just came in; he'd been shot ... Yes, I can wait.' She heard the doorbell ring. *Shit. That'll be Fred.* 'Yes? ... Critical ... Unconscious ... Yes, I see. Too early to say ... Can I come and see him?' The doorbell rang again. 'Yes, okay, later. Can I call again? ... Thank you.' She ended the call and ran to the front door. 'Sorry, Fred, I was just seeing how Jim is.'

'And?'

'They don't know – the bullet missed his heart by a fraction and they think he's concussed from hitting his head on the wall as he went down; that's why he's unconscious and he's drugged up to his eyeballs.'

'Is he going to make it? We need to know who he saw.'

'He's critical, Fred. Fighting for his life and all you want is him as a witness. That's bloody heartless.'

'Wearing my heart on my sleeve won't help me bring them to justice. Where can we talk?'

'My office, Nev's upstairs and he's not in great shape – won't speak, just weeps. Come on, this way.'

Once settled in her office and having refused any sort of drink Fred began. 'We'll need to take a full statement from you in the morning – there's no need to do that right now. That crypt – how did they come to be there?'

Sam explained that it was Jim's secret place that he'd used before to keep people out of harm's way.

'It comes down to one simple question, Sam: who else apart from you, Jim, and Sandra knew of its existence? Does Jack know about it?'

'Jack didn't. Nev knew. No one else alive.'

'You sure?'

'I think so.'

'There must be – someone had to know where they were,' Fred insisted.

'Someone else had to know that I'd taken Yuri from Jack's place and brought him here to London. Could I have been followed? And if I was, how did they know that Yuri was at Jack's in the first place? Even his partner, Clare, didn't know that Yuri was at his place.'

'I knew,' Fred said.

'Why are you looking like that?'

'My driver, Luke, he knew. He saw you; he saw Yuri and Sandra.'

'But he's one of yours. Presumably he's been vetted and passed fit for duties in SCD9?'

'Oh, yes all of that.'

'You think it could have been him? Why? What do you think he did?'

'If it was Luke ... he told someone else ... and who might that be, I wonder? But even if he did, he wouldn't know it was a crypt underground and how to get in. It comes back to my previous question, Sam – who else knew about the crypt?'

'Ian Wain knew about it,' Nev said as he stood in the open doorway of her office.

'Nev – you okay?'

'I'm going to get the fuckers that did for my Sandra and I don't care who they are or where they are – they're mine,' Nev said before lifting the bottle of malt to his lips and taking a good long drink.

'Come and sit down,' Fred said. 'Are you sure Commander Wain knew about the crypt?'

'Rock solid – took him there myself when the Cabal business was all wrapped up.'

'I didn't know that,' Sam said. 'I told him about it but I never took him there – why did you?'

'He said there was no need for you to know – he was just inquisitive.'

'Was he indeed?' Fred said. 'Did he say anything when he was there?'

'Just came up with some crap about people like Jim being dangerous.'

'What the fuck was that supposed to mean?' Sam demanded.

'I didn't ask – never liked the tosser,' Nev said. 'What's he got to do with anything anyway?'

'I'm trying to find out who knew of the crypt's existence.'

'You think Wain's involved with this?' Nev asked.

'I don't know, but I'd be very grateful if you'd keep this absolutely to yourselves.'

'You can't think Ian has anything to do with this?' Sam queried. 'I know he's turned into a bit of a prick but why would he be involved with something like this – it's not possible.'

'Like I said, if it's him, I don't care who he is, I'm having him if he did that to my Sandra, having him,' Nev said steadying himself on the doorframe.

'You'll do no such fucking thing!' Fred bellowed. 'You step out of line, Mr Jackson and I'll have you locked up and I'll throw away the fucking key. Got that? We'll find them and you can help – but not by becoming a vigilante. Got it?'

Nev glared at Fred.

'Nev, sit down, please,' Sam said. 'What time do you want to see me in the morning?'

'I don't. One of my people will come here to take your statement – I'd like to keep you out of the public view just for the moment.'

'You won't be able to keep the news of Jim out of the media – he's a big figure, one of their own. They'll hunt like a pack when it gets out,' Sam said.

'It won't be getting out until I say so,' Fred said, knowing only too well that for that to be the case he'd have to have the permission of his boss, Ian Wain.

'What about your driver, Luke?' Sam asked.

'I think he'll be talking to me in the morning. Mr Jackson – can I rely on you to go along with what I need to do to catch your wife's killers?'

'As long as you don't expect me to sit on my hands doing nothing.'

'I think I may have a situation where I'll need a little help from outside of SCD9, Mr Jackson.'

'Then call me Nev.'

'Thanks, Nev,' Sam said. 'I'll see Fred out and make you up a bed.' At the front door she put her hand on Fred's arm. 'If you think Ian is involved in some way and you report to him, doesn't that give you a bit of a problem?'

'A bit of a problem? More like a mountain – I'll have to go round him and that isn't going to be easy,' Fred said. 'That's my problem. Can you keep Nev on the straight and narrow?'

'As long as you let him, us, into the picture – if you don't ...'
'Night, Sam.'

Sunday 17th November

03.48

Sam lay awake in her bed hoping the sound of Nev sobbing from the guest bedroom at the far end of the corridor would finally stop; pulling the duvet over her head hadn't worked. Perversely, she wished she could be as distraught as Nev. *Why can't I do that? Am I that hard? Keeping everything in bloody boxes. I managed it, but it took forever over Harry - Red - Bill - let alone poor Paddy - now Sandra - Jim - what am I doing? Killing by association? That's crap and you know it, Sam Ticks - I even changed my name - Tickinson - I wasn't my father's son, just the daughter he never wanted and him the father I never wanted either - so Ticks is best - what's all that got to do with this? Jim of course. Jim who was looking for a daughter and me who was looking for a dad - never forget that night when we said that to each other - I felt such a fool, so weak, pathetic - but it's not weak or pathetic to love someone and now I've probably got him killed and it's no good Jack saying it's not my fault because I asked Jim if it was okay and he was only too pleased for a new adventure. I know what he'd say - what's the point in all this fault business, Sam? What good is that going to do? Then we'd have a pot of tea and sit in front of that bloody gas fire that always seems as if it might explode at any moment and talk it all out and now I won't be able to do that and he won't be able to enjoy all that ... Come on, he's not dead ... Nev, please stop crying ... So, lying here feeling guilty, unable to sleep, sorry for myself is just perfect, isn't it? The perfect way - to do what? What is it that I want to do? Do I really want to find out why they were murdered and who did it? Why don't I just do what I've been told to do ever since I inherited H's money - bugger off into the blue beyond and enjoy ... what is one supposed to enjoy in the blue beyond over the horizon where everything is sunshine bright and light? - and all alone, all bloody alone. That's what it comes down to - being alone and I'm fed up with it - at least I had Jim for a while until ... but even that wasn't really enough, just*

pretending ... that's bollocks as well ... it's all bollocks ... oh, Jim, what are we going to do? Enough! Sam realised that Nev must have finally gone to sleep because he was silent. She turned on her side and pulled the duvet tight in around her. 'Bollocks,' she said, climbed out of bed and got dressed. Forty minutes later she was standing beside Jim in intensive care with a nurse standing beside her. 'Can I stay?' Sam asked.

'It would be easier for us if you could wait - we have a family room. I don't mean to be rude but he's not stable yet. He's fighting for his life and ...'

'I'd get in the way?' Sam said.

'I wouldn't put it quite like that,' a doctor said as he joined them. 'But yes, it would be better if you could let us get on with saving your father's life.'

'Will he make it?'

'I don't know, but we're sure as hell going to do our best.'

'I have to go ... can I keep calling?'

'Why don't you leave us your number and we'll call you - before you ask - either way we'll call, good news or bad, we'll call.'

Sam gave them her mobile number.

08.05

'Luke,' Fred said. 'I've got a couple of things I need to go through with you so sit yourself down.'

'Is there something up?'

'You might say that. After you drove me back from Lincolnshire you made a number of phone calls on your mobile. One of them was to a number unattributed to any known owner or user. Do you want to tell me about that?'

'You've been looking at my phone records?'

'Yes,' Fred confirmed and handed Luke a printout of his calls from the period between their arrival at Jack's cottage and

their departure for London. 'The one I'm interested in is the one that's highlighted in red. Whose number is that?'

'I'm not at liberty to say, sir.'

'You're what? You're not at liberty to fucking say! I'm your superior officer – who the hell do you think you are? Whose number is it?'

'I can't tell you, sir.'

'Do you realise just how deep the bucket of shit is that you've just dived in?'

Luke swallowed nervously but kept calm. 'I'm really sorry, sir, but I can't answer that question.'

'Because?'

'I'm obeying orders, sir.'

'Whose orders?'

'I want to see my police federation rep, sir, before I answer any more of your questions,' Luke said.

'Do you seriously think you can ...' The phone on Fred's desk rang; he picked it up and barked, 'Yes?' into the receiver. 'Sorry, yes I can be with you in twenty minutes – less if I can. Thank you,' he said and hung up. 'Right, Luke, by all means meet with someone from the federation but as of this moment you're suspended on full pay pending an investigation into your behaviour. Go home and keep out of my sight. And I'll have your warrant card.'

'You're taking my warrant card?'

'Don't want you pretending to be something you won't be for much longer, do we?' Fred asked as he held out his hand.

08.45

'Sorry to keep you waiting, ma'am – traffic,' Fred apologised. 'It's all hot air with the Mayor's office – traffic management – what a joke.'

Assistant Commissioner Lucinda Breake didn't look amused; Fred was uncertain whether this was because of his attempted joke or because of her responsibilities for Specialist Crime and Operations in the Met or because she lacked any sense of humour. 'It's alright, Fred, we both know that you think Boris is a prat but I don't suppose that's the reason for this urgent off the record meeting, or is it?'

'No, it's not, ma'am.'

'So, sit down, stop calling me ma'am, and get on with it.'

'Thank you for taking me seriously.'

'If I didn't take you seriously, you wouldn't be running SCD9.'

'Nevertheless, thank you – this is tricky. Okay. *Let's try the lie.* I believe Commander Wain is the victim of a criminal conspiracy that seeks to undermine his operation of the division and is consequently therefore an attack on the integrity of the Met itself.'

'You'd better unpack that, Fred.'

'I wish I could but all I've got is a suspicion that all's not well and that he's being set up.'

'By whom?'

'Possibly the Ukrainian mafia and in ...'

'Before you go on,' Lucinda interrupted, 'does Ian know about this, and if he doesn't, why not?'

'That's the nub of the problem,' Fred said and outlined the facts, as far as he knew them, of the murders in the crypt and his desire to keep those deaths quiet for a few days until he'd been able to deepen his investigation.

'So, Fred. One of your junior officers, detective constable Luke Stainforth, has refused to identify the person to whom he made a phone call after he learnt where the Ukrainian detective Yuri had been taken for safekeeping. He's said he's acting under a superior's orders and you suspect - who? Commander Wain or me?'

'Neither, but more probably an officer that the constable believes, falsely, to be in a sister organisation but who is in

reality an agent working for the Ukrainian mafia operating in the UK under the control of Victor Plushenko.’

‘This doesn’t explain – if it’s true and it seems somewhat farfetched – why Commander Wain needs to be kept in the dark about any of it. So tell me why.’

‘I ... there’s more to this than meets the eye ... *I just can’t tell her the truth* ... you’ll remember DCI Jack Ranger?’ Lucinda nodded. ‘He’s pretty much at the centre of events that have been taking place in Lincolnshire – are you aware of what’s been happening up there?’

‘I am’

‘There’s one thing that links them all – Victor Plushenko – we’re not sure exactly how but we’re intending to question him. If the media get hold of the crypt murders story then we’ll be alerting whoever is responsible.’

‘That’s perfectly plausible but I’m afraid it still doesn’t explain why you’re trying to go round Commander Wain – you’ll have to come up with a better reason than that, Fred. How about the truth?’

I should never have begun this. ‘Do you remember Lord Smike?’

‘Of course’

‘You’ll recall that at the time Jim Campbell, who’s critical in a coma, suggested, no, asserted that Smike was the organiser of what Campbell called the Cabal.’

‘It was an argument that evidenced no actual proof,’ Lucinda said.

‘What information there was was subjected to a super-injunction brought by the Home Office – the media were gagged and no one was allowed to speculate why.’

‘Except you, Fred.’

‘By accident – there was a small amount of information that fell within the remit of SCD9 – I didn’t share it with anyone.’

‘No one?’ she queried.

‘No one, until now.’

‘Fred, I do wish you’d cut to the chase; what has all this got to do with Ian Wain?’

‘There’s evidence, it’s not strong I’ll admit, to suggest that Smike and Wain knew each other. If that was the case ... if the Cabal did exist ... with an attempt on Campbell’s life and the Plushenko business I wouldn’t want Commander Wain’s position to be compromised by the matter getting into the public domain until we knew if the commander is being set up.’

‘That’s still not good enough.’

‘If the Cabal exists and it uses organisations, like that run by Plushenko, to do its dirty work then the intention all along was to kill Campbell as a punishment. The murder of the Ukrainian policeman was an added bonus that suited Plushenko as well.’ Fred said.

‘But only if there is real evidence that a, the Cabal does exist and b, that Commander Wain is somehow involved with it and c, that the Ukrainian mafia and your Plushenko character are also tied up in some sort of massive conspiracy. There are too many ifs for me, Fred. I have to say I’m very surprised that you seem to be after Ian Wain.’ She paused and watched his discomfort. ‘I can only assume it’s because of some personal dislike or perhaps jealousy of his rapid rise to prominence in the service. You asked for this meeting to be off the record and it will stay that way because of my respect for you. But, I warn you now, if for a moment I suspect you’re pursuing a vendetta against your boss then this conversation will be on the record and you will be spending the rest of your career in your garden tending the flowers. Have you got that?’

‘Understood. I’d best get on, there’s work to be done.’

‘I can’t see the purpose of keeping the crypt murders quiet for a few days – publicity will help your investigations. Take my advice, Fred, stick to your job – running SCD9. Investigating your boss is not part of your remit.’

‘I’m sorry to have wasted your time,’ Fred said and stood up.

'You're the expert, Jayne, what do I do?'

'It's a long shot, sir, but as Chief Constable you have direct access to the Home Secretary if it's matter of National Security and you will have to argue that the so-called plague may be an act of germ warfare against the United Kingdom.'

'We don't know it's that.'

'Just hear me out, sir. Do you know which paper has the story?'

'My sister thinks it's the Daily Telegraph.'

'That's a good start; they're not unfriendly to the present government. I've prepared you a briefing note for you to share with the Home Secretary. You will ask her to urgently contact the Permanent Secretary to the Defence, Press and Broadcasting Advisory Committee and insist that a "D Notice" be put to the Telegraph to prevent publication of the story on the grounds of national security and the need to prevent an outbreak of public panic. If you are persuasive she will in turn speak to the Ministry of Defence and between them and the Home Office you may get a voluntary embargo on publication - but it won't last forever.'

'Do you think she'll buy it?'

'If we rehearse you a couple of times? Yes. After all, it could be exactly what you're saying it is.'

'I should resign.'

'If you resign there'll be no escape, they'll come for you and the entire sorry mess will be in the public domain.'

'Why did my brother-in-law do it?'

'It's not for me to say, sir, but perhaps he shouldn't ever have been allowed to operate under your command because of the apparent privilege it bestowed.'

'What an unpalatable truth, Jayne. Take me through your briefing note please. I want to be - indeed, need to be - word perfect.'

It had been a small pleasure to charge Scrote and Tammy with the theft of Haugham's computer but the paperwork was tiresome and Jack's satisfaction momentary as the siblings had, as he expected, been released on police bail. Then there was Sam's terrible news. He'd slept badly and ran early fearing that it might be the last time he'd have the pleasure of solitude in the Lincolnshire countryside for some time.

Jesus! I must be really losing it, Jack thought as he dried himself after a shower while standing in front of the shelves of vinyl albums. *It was only last Friday that I left him here - feels like a month or more - and "Tommy" is still in the wrong place and I haven't even looked to see what Yuri might have said.* He tied the towel around his waist, pulled the album from where it sat in the middle of Rod Stewart, pulled out the disc and found Yuri's note inside the sleeve. Sitting at the table he read:

'Jack, here are the notes - hope you have been able to help your friend - sorry there has been another death.

- Victor Plushenko is figurehead - powerful but not the Big Boss
- Big Boss also must be Ukrainian - will be mafia but will not appear to be so - very respectable - maybe be politician, banker - even secret service - anything is possible
- Why he buys up land is mystery - it is not what they do in normal way - it will not be for a reason that will be good for anyone but their bad business
- I have one lead that I have not shared with you - I have suspicion that Plushenko, or the Big Boss behind Plushenko (who may not know of this) is shareholder in InVivo International that is same company owning the research place here
- It may have been coincidence that all men died from something coming from the InVivo place but it may not be coincidence that InVivo make something bad

to kill people with – there is rumour back home in the Ukraine that mafia expand into weapons – not to use but to blackmail – this is rumour about new Black Death, new plague – the men who died looked like that, yes?

- This is all – when we meet we can talk all through and I can give you directions to what I know then maybe we can stop them before they do more and more bad things, yes?

Thank you,
Your friend, Yuri”

Jack read the notes for a second time. He dressed hurriedly and was out of the cottage and on the road south within fifteen minutes.

09.23

A sergeant from SCD9 arrived just after eight o'clock and took Sam's statement; recounting the events of the previous night was no easier in the light of a new day. After the policeman left Sam called St George's - while she waited to be connected to Intensive Care she watched Nev through the window as he paced up and down outside smoking a cigarette. He was unaware of her watching him as his feet crunched on the gravel at the rear of her house on what was a bright sunny frosty morning. 'No change, okay, thank you,' she said and ended the call. She went outside.

'I thought you'd stopped for good,' Sam said as she joined him.

Nev stopped walking, looked at the cigarette in his hand and shrugged. 'What the fuck do I care if it does kill me.'

'Can I have one?'

'You don't smoke,' Nev objected.

'I could give it a go.'

'Don't be daft, Sam. It's disgusting.'

'If you can, I can.'

Nev shrugged, took out a packet of cigarettes, gave one to Sam who accepted a light from his lighter and took a big drag.

'Shit!' she gasped, 'That hurts,' and immediately started to cough.

'It takes practice to master the art of killing oneself.'

Sam dropped the cigarette on the ground and stamped on it. 'Your turn,' she said. 'You may not care, Nev, but I do.'

'Tomorrow,' Nev said.

'Don't blame me for trying – are you ready to go?'

'No, I'll never be ready, but it needs to be done – you'll be with me all the time, won't you?'

'Like a limpet to a rock,' she said.

'Some rock; more like a bleeding jelly.'

As they left the morgue they were surprised to find Fred Ingles waiting for them outside.

'They called me to let me know you were here,' Fred explained.

'It was kind of you to come,' Sam said.

'How are you doing, Nev?' Fred asked.

'How am I doing? God knows how many stiffs I've seen over the years – army was like that - then working for Sam there's been a few. Saw my mum and dad – that was pretty shitty; both died younger than they should but they were your parents, you expected them to die before you. Your wife, in her prime... no ... you don't expect her to die – bad enough if it was natural ... murdered in cold blood – that's another matter. They did their best – the morticians - but you can't make the love of your life look pretty when she's dead, can you? Can't make her sit up and give you a hug, can you? Just thank the good lord we never had kids – I couldn't have coped with them as well as coping with me. So, to answer your question – I'm not doing very well. Like I said before, I want the bastards that did this and I won't be doing very well until I do.'

‘That’s why I’m here,’ Fred replied. ‘Have you got your car, Sam?’ She nodded. ‘We need to have a chat and I’d rather it wasn’t here.’

‘Where do you want to go?’ Sam asked.

‘There’s a massive car boot sale every Sunday in Battersea – it has a caf – if that suits, it’ll do – no one will be listening to us there. I’m parked just round the corner so follow me,’ Fred said.

Sam carried a tray with three mugs of tea and a plate of hot buttered toast to a table at the back of the café where Nev and Fred sat silently waiting for her arrival. ‘Here we are,’ she said as she unloaded the tray.

‘So, what do you want from us?’ Nev asked.

‘Some background first,’ Fred said and repeated what he’d said to Jack about his suspicions about Ian Wain.

‘I never trusted him,’ Nev said.

‘There has to be more to it than that,’ Sam said.

‘There is – there’s evidence, albeit a bit flimsy, but evidence, nonetheless, that Wain and Smike knew each other in the period immediately before you got involved with searching for Rufus,’ Fred said.

Sam put down her mug of tea and waited for Fred to continue; he didn’t but sat silently watching her reaction. ‘You do mean evidence? This isn’t just a hunch?’ she asked.

‘Intuition.’

‘Evidence, Fred, evidence,’ Sam said.

‘None of this strictly falls within SCD9’s remit but when I was digging around I found phone records that showed that Wain had talked to someone on Smike’s number.’

‘But you don’t know if he actually spoke to Smike.’

‘It’s a reasonable assumption ... Coming up to date. There are records showing that Wain called a number we’re unable to trace on the evening Yuri was taken to the crypt. We also don’t know who Luke Stainforth called when he knew where you had taken Yuri because it’s another untraceable number. But

here’s the killer - Smike’s phone record also shows him calling the same unknown number that Wain called.’

‘I need to wrap my head round this,’ Sam said. ‘Who knows about this?’

‘Me, you two, that’s it – Jack, when I can tell him face to face.’

‘Hang on a minute,’ Nev said. ‘There’s got to have been a motive for the killings, hasn’t there? Are you coming at this the wrong way? Was the intention to kill Sam and Jim as some sort of punishment for what they’d done in trying to expose the Cabal? Or maybe for what they knew but didn’t realise they knew?’

‘I’ve no idea – it’s possible – I said as much to AC Breake. It’s certain that someone thought Yuri was a threat – Jim and Sandra could have just been collateral damage – sorry, that was tactless,’ Fred apologised.

‘Agreed,’ Nev said.

‘But we didn’t ever get to the Cabal, just to Smike, and once he was out of the picture it might never have existed,’ Sam said. ‘Why would they want to kill me and Jim?’

‘I’ve no idea,’ Fred said.

‘Look, this is all very well but it doesn’t tell me what we’re supposed to be doing to help find my Sandra’s killers, does it?’ Nev objected.

‘Okay. Put all that to one side. Last time we spoke, Sam, I said I’d have to go round Wain to get permission for a few days blackout of the news about the crypt killings and the fact that Jim was also attacked – I tried, and got a flea in my ear, but I’m still sitting on it. I didn’t dare tell Breake that Wain knew where the crypt was. I didn’t share my belief that Wain spilled the beans to a third party and that third party instigated the attack. The only thing that ties any of it together is Wain. I can’t investigate him but you two can,’ Fred concluded.

‘That’ll be a real pleasure,’ Nev said. ‘He was a prick the last time we dealt with him over Bill’s death.’

‘Hang on a minute, Fred,’ Sam said. ‘If we do this we’re out on a limb to say the least – but leaving that aside ... if Ian Wain

is up to no good he'll have put protection in place - how are we supposed to get close enough to get inside his world?'

Fred shrugged. 'Once upon a time, you two ...'

'No bloody way,' Sam said. 'That's too big an ask.'

'... were close,' Fred continued.

'That was a long time ago.'

'What are you talking about?' Nev asked.

'He's asking me to sleep with the enemy,' Sam said.

'You've got a fucking cheek, mate,' Nev said and heads turned at the sound of his raised voice.

'He could think you still have a soft spot for him,' Fred said. 'You could go and ask what's being done to find who did it. He'd expect you to be distraught, wouldn't he?'

'Does he actually know what happened in the crypt?' Sam asked.

'I don't bloody know. You need to convince Wain that as far as you're concerned you don't give a damn about Yuri, just Jim and Sandra,' Fred suggested. 'Make the point that you think they were after you and Jim.'

'Maybe. But if Luke shopped us to Wain then he'll know I was involved with moving Yuri to the crypt,' Sam said. 'And if I don't mention Yuri, won't he be suspicious?'

'Precisely - then we'll see what he does and that's where you come in, Nev - from what I've heard there's no one in civvies who does surveillance better than you.'

'When are you going to tell him about the crypt?'

'Tomorrow morning - I've already logged it in his diary - then it'll hit the news - I'll let you know when I make the announcement. That's when you go to Wain and ask for his help. If he knows you were involved with moving Yuri and helping Jack he's going to wonder why you don't mention that - hopefully he'll be suspicious. Nev, if you agree to do this, have you enough time to get set up before tomorrow morning?'

Nev looked at his watch. 'Less than eighteen hours? Maybe. I'd need a thorough briefing - home, car, social life, phone numbers the lot.'

'That can be done. Are you two up for this? Just to be clear, if you go down, I'll go down with you,' Fred said.

'That's supposed to be a comfort?' Sam asked.

'You think this is the best chance we've got to find out who killed my Sandra?'

'I do,' Fred confirmed.

'Then I'm in.'

'Doesn't leave me much choice, does it?' Sam said.

'You could just walk away, forget all about it, and pretend that it didn't happen but somehow I don't think that fits your MO, Sam.'

'No wonder Jack wanted to escape your clutches,' Sam said.

'It wasn't my clutches he needed to escape but his own worst nightmare - you ought to know that; after all, you're his friend.'

'We're going to need back-up,' Sam said.

Nev squeezed her hand.

'That's where Jack comes in,' Fred said.

'Does he know that?'

'He will when you tell him.'

'You really do take the biscuit, Fred,' Sam sighed.

'If I'm going to do anything we need to get a move on,' Nev said.

09.30

'Do you think the policewoman told her bosses who stole Haugham's computer?' Aneta asked Howard.

'Why wouldn't she?'

'Because of who we are?'

'There's no need to be afraid; you're safe now and tomorrow we'll go and get the licence so we can be married.'

'But why don't we hear anything from police?' Aneta asked.

'It was only late Friday night so there's not been much time for them to do anything has there?'

'Howard, don't you understand? If those pictures ... what he made me do.'

'Do you have to keep reminding me?'

'You said you had forgiven.'

'So why don't you let me try and forget?' Howard shouted and stormed out of the front door leaving Aneta, Marina and Bohdanna sitting at the kitchen table.

'Forgive him. He is a good man,' Marina said.

'You will have a good future here together,' Bohdanna added.

'So will the both of you with me,' Aneta said.

'What's that?' Bohdanna asked as they heard shouting coming from the front of the cottage near the road.

Aneta ran to the front door and opened it.

'No, you're not!' Howard shouted as two men and two women in uniform stood in front of him. Their two vehicles blocked the entrance to the lodge entrance hemming in his Land Rover. 'You're not police. You've no right to come onto my land without a warrant,' Howard protested.

'Back off!' a male officer said. 'We have a warrant. We're Home Office Immigration Enforcement Officers of the UK Border Agency and we're here to remove two illegal immigrants that we believe you're sheltering in your property.'

'Here's the warrant,' a female officer said. 'Harbouring illegals when there is a court order for their deportation is a criminal offence.'

'They've done nothing wrong,' Howard said.

Aneta joined Howard. 'They have suffered enough – their husbands are dead, their bodies never found – have you no mercy in you?' she asked. Howard put his arm around her shoulders as she shivered in the cold.

'I'm sorry,' a second female officer said, 'that may be true but we're enforcing a court order – it's not up to us to make the judgement, just to enforce it. They can appeal later. Are the women inside?'

'Let me see that warrant,' Howard said and it was handed to him.

'Are the women inside?' the officer repeated.

'No, we're here,' Bohdanna said as she and Marina came out through the front door. 'Can we get our suitcases, please?'

'Of course,' the female officer said. 'But don't take all day over it.'

The women went back inside followed by Aneta as the second male officer ran round to the back of the cottage.

'Where's he going?' Howard asked.

'To make sure they don't do a runner out the back,' the first male officer said.

'This isn't right,' Howard said. No one bothered to reply.

Upstairs in the small spare room where Marina and Bohdanna had been sleeping Aneta sobbed as she watched the two women quickly finish pushing their meagre possessions into their battered suitcases and snap the lids shut.

'Aneta,' Marina said, 'don't cry. There is nothing for us here.'

'You could stay with me and Howard.'

'You know we can't,' Bohdanna added. 'Home will be better after this place is behind us. We have to start again; we have no choice.'

'We would never be happy here,' Marina said. 'Never.'

'Hurry along please,' the first female officer shouted up the stairs.

Outside the front door tearful hugs and kisses were exchanged between Aneta and the women – Howard shook their hands. 'Where are they being taken?' he asked.

'Morton Hall in Swinderby,' the first male officer said.

'They've just opened a new wing for women and children; it's real nice, modern,' the second female officer said.

'Can we visit them?' Aneta asked.

'Here's a leaflet,' the female officer said. 'That tells you all you need to know.'

'In the vehicle please,' the first male officer said as the two female officers ushered Marina and Bohdanna into the second row of seats in the mini bus.

'We will come to see you,' Aneta said as the doors were closed.

As the vehicles disappeared from sight Howard took his arm from around Aneta's shoulders. 'This is wrong.'

'You must go to the lawyer – speak to him – make him make an appeal to the court.'

'You need to face it, Aneta, there are no grounds for appeal; they aren't seeking political asylum or anything like that, are they? They're just ordinary people who've been shat on and the courts won't give a toss about that.'

'But you'll still ask Mr Srench?'

'I'll ask after we've been to the registry office to get our licence,' Howard said.

12.49

As Sam drove her Audi onto the hard standing at the rear of her building Jack clambered out of his Skoda pulling on his parka as he walked towards her. Uncertain about how to greet one another they settled for an awkward handshake.

That was nice and formal, Sam thought as they walked to the front door.

'I'm sorry I asked you to get involved with this crock of shit,' Jack said. 'I should have known I was dealing with mafia soldiers.'

'You weren't to know.'

'But that's the point; I should have known; I did know – in here,' he patted his stomach. 'But not in here,' he patted his head. 'You lose the edge in the sticks.'

Sam unlocked the front door and they went in. 'From what I hear you'll be expected to get that edge back in no time at all.'

Jack closed the door. 'You've been talking to Fred.'

'More like Fred's been talking to me.'

'Look, before we get too far into this ... I only came down here to say sorry face to face about Jim. Your stand-in dad was almost killed because of me; it's the only reason I'm here.'

Come on, Sam, get a grip. 'I love Jim, yeah, I made him into a father figure ... but that's not your problem, Jack. Thanks for coming; it's appreciated ... I still have to tell you about Anastasiya.'

'She'll have to wait – there's no time for that right now. Is Jim going to make it?'

'He's a stubborn old bugger ... I don't know ... I expect you could do with a coffee?'

'Would tea be okay?' Jack asked as they climbed the stairs to her flat.

Sitting opposite each other at the kitchen table Jack dunked a gingernut in his mug of tea before popping the entire half sodden biscuit into his mouth with a guilty smile.

Jesus, you really are like a kid, but I kind of think appearances can be deceptive in your case. 'Better?' she asked.

'Terrible habit,' Jack replied and took a swig of his tea. 'Yes, better, thank you. How do you want to handle this?'

'You mean push the emotion aside and get on with the chase?'

'No, not at all; embrace it - anger's not such a bad fuel when one wants revenge.'

'Why are you taking this so personally?'

'Is there another way? I offered protection to a fellow copper. I asked you to help with that protection. People died, innocent people – I don't like it. I won't have it. Someone said to me

the other day that I'm a sort of curse – death and destruction follow wherever I go – maybe he's right; I want it to come to an end and the only way it will do that is if I finish what's been begun.'

You're not the only one to think like that. 'That's why Fred needs you on board.'

'But if I know Fred he'll have kept that to himself and will hope the enemy will think I'm sucking straws like a good old yellow belly up in Lincolnshire,' Jack said.

'How you guys intend to play it is up to you.'

'And what does he want you to do?'

Sam smiled. 'Another tea?'

'No thanks or I'll be peeing all the way home.'

'You're going back today?'

'After I've talked to you and seen Fred – I've a funeral to attend first thing in the morning. So, Sam – what does Fred expect you to do?'

Sam summarised the conversation she'd had with Fred and Nev. As she was about to tell Jack what had been agreed they heard the sound of footsteps coming up the stairs. 'That'll be Nev now,' she said.

A moment later he was standing at the kitchen door. Jack stood up and offered his hand. 'I'm really sorry about the murder of your wife, Sandra – I feel responsible for getting her into ...'

Nev held up his hand to stop Jack from saying any more. 'You must be Jack Ranger – if your reputation is right you don't do bullshit. Just help me catch the bastards that did it.'

They shook hands. 'Agreed,' Jack said.

'What's the plan?' Nev asked as he sat down at the table.

'We haven't got there yet,' Sam said. 'I was just about to tell Jack what we agreed we'd do.'

'Carry on, but unless I get some info, pronto, from Fred I'm not going to be able to track Wain,' Nev said. 'There won't be time.'

After Sam had described what they'd agreed with Fred, Jack asked, 'Did Fred say what he expected me to do?'

'I think he expected that you'd know what to do – or – that you would do what you thought best and that would do just as well,' Sam said.

'Not so sure about that ... I'm going to find him ... I don't want any more nasty surprises. Glad we're in this together, Nev,' Jack said as he stood up and the two men shook hands.

'I'll see you out,' Sam said. At the bottom of the stairs she said, 'Hang on a sec, will you?' and went into her office and returned a few moments later carrying a slim file. 'This is for you. It's Anastasiya's file.'

'Thank you,' Jack said. *Do I really want this just right now?*

'You don't seem very pleased?'

'I have a feeling in here,' he tapped his head, 'that this is only going to be bad news, whereas,' he tapped his stomach, 'I have the certain knowledge in here that this will tell me more than I really would like to know. But thank you. How much do I owe you?'

'We can save that for another day, Jack; I've a feeling we're going to be seeing a lot more of each other.'

'I think that's likely,' he smiled, leant forward and without warning briefly kissed her on the lips. Sam flushed bright red. *Oh, shit, why did I do that?* 'I'm sorry, got carried away; heat of the moment,' he said.

'There,' she said, and kissed him on his cheek. 'Now you won't feel so bad. Take care, Jack.'

Looking more than a little flustered Jack said, 'You too,' turned and hurriedly left through the front door.

15.08

Jack and Fred walked together along the canal towpath adjacent to the M25 near West Byfleet.

‘There was a French Film theorist, André Bazin, I think he said: the soundtrack invented silence,’ Jack said.

‘What are you talking about?’

‘The M25, the noise, can’t you hear it? It’s weird; a frozen canal, rural idyll with a soundtrack like that.’

‘Christ, it’s bloody cold,’ Fred moaned, his breath swirling in the freezing air as their feet crunched on the frozen towpath.

‘Why don’t we move somewhere warm and set up business there?’ Jack asked. ‘Sicily, Costa del Sol, Miami, Sofia?’

‘Cloak and dagger in the sun; now there’s a thought.’

‘Is that pub going to be open?’

‘What? The Anchor? It better had be - otherwise this monkey’s balls are for the long drop,’ Fred replied.

A narrowboat chugged through the frozen surface of the canal; sheets of ice splintered as sharp as great sheets of picture glass, skidding and juddering into the banks. ‘Just listen to that – if it’s as loud as that when it’s just surface ice just think what it’s like breaking through arctic ice – it must be deafening.’

‘I bloody hate the cold,’ Fred moaned.

A man wrapped in many layers of clothes, standing at the tiller of the narrowboat, waved and shouted hello.

‘I hope it’s warmer inside?’ Jack called as he waved back.

‘Down to me shreddies in there, mate,’ the man shouted gesturing at the inside cabin.

‘Not an image I want to conjure with,’ Jack said as the boat crunched and cracked its way along the canal. ‘Do you want to fill me in on the missing bits, boss, or do you want to wait until you’ve thawed out?’

‘When my grand-daughter eats an ice lolly too fast she gets what she calls face freeze – that’s what I’ve got, bloody face freeze. Here, hold this a minute, will you?’ Fred asked as he handed Jack the briefcase he was carrying. ‘Need a fag,’ he continued fishing out a packet of cigarettes and a lighter from his overcoat pocket.

‘What’s this? You’re not normally much of a briefcase man.’

‘That’s better,’ Fred said as he exhaled.

‘You look like a cooling tower doing that – you could go on Britain’s Got Talent as a novelty act.’

‘It’s for you.’

‘What is?’

‘The briefcase. We’ve been giving your Lord Haugham’s hard drive a going over – that’s what’s in the case – some print outs.’

‘That was quick.’

‘The lot at The Sun on Sunday are pretty fed up as it is – they were only too glad to be rid of it; didn’t want any more of the shit that’s been falling on them like rain for the last couple of years.’

‘Serves them right,’ Jack said.

‘Did Sam tell you what we’re going to do?’

‘Yes, but she didn’t enlighten me much on your expectations of me – beyond that you seem to think I ride a white horse, wear a mask and have a faithful native American helper called Tonto.’

‘Sam doesn’t look a bit like Jay Silverheels,’ Fred said through a cloud of smoke. ‘Or Johnny Depp.’

‘Was that a smoke signal?’

‘I want you back working for me but officially you’ll still be working for the Lincolnshire constabulary and it just so happens that you’re following leads here as well as there; in fact anywhere it may take you.’

‘That’s not much of smoke screen, is it? Sorry, I seem to be overdoing the smoking metaphors. How is Wainstock going to react to that?’

‘He’s happy, thinking that I’m putting the resources of SCD9 at his disposal, through you, giving you access to my experts, so that you can solve the cases on his patch. Look, the lights are on! Warmth is nigh.’

‘You weren’t certain it would be open, were you?’

‘Right now, Jack, I’m not certain about very much.’

Ten minutes later they were seated in the lounge bar with a pot of coffee for Fred and a pot of tea for Jack. Fred sipped his coffee as he watched Jack quickly thumbing through the pile of printed emails that had been stored in the briefcase and were now in a heap on the table in front of them.

‘Just in case you need to put a young woman’s mind to rest, the porno stuff has been destroyed,’ Fred said.

‘Aneta? Poor kid, she’ll be relieved. These emails between Plushenko and Haugham ostensibly show a negotiation over the sale of Haugham’s estate to Plushenko and a series of rather ham-fisted attempts to disguise discussions about the shipment of illegal immigrants into the UK. Then you’ve highlighted a missing photograph – why is that important?’

‘We think it might be Plushenko’s boss. There isn’t a single picture of what he looks like – we don’t know if the photograph referred to in the emails exists but it would be handy if it did.’

Jack nodded. ‘Yes, I guess it would.’

Fred leant forward. ‘The final envelope, the one you haven’t opened yet, explains that Plushenko, or someone behind him, is a major shareholder in InVivo International.’

‘That’s what Yuri’s note said.’

‘What note?’

‘This note,’ Jack said, pulling it from the inside pocket of his jacket and passing it to Fred. While Fred was reading the note Jack opened the final envelope.

‘I see,’ Fred said as he finished reading.

‘These are emails from Sylvia Kinsey to Plushenko that have been forwarded to Haugham. Questions: why would Plushenko do that, why was Kinsey sending research information to Plushenko and do you have any idea what this stuff means?’

‘No, it’s scientific gobbledygook to me but I thought your Prof Baski might be able to help,’ Fred suggested. ‘Is there a link between Plushenko and Fulsome?’

‘First off: Fulsome and Haugham were golfing buddies and they shared a love of racing, actually more a love of gambling on the gee gees. One theory is that the reason why Haugham

sold up to Plushenko was because of his gambling debts. If Plushenko was with Haugham at the races he probably met Fulsome and it appears that Fulsome was heavily in debt to Plushenko. We don’t know, but given Fulsome’s lack of interest in the illegal immigrants and Guraya, I suspect he was deliberately turning a blind eye and being suitably rewarded,’ Jack said.

‘Sounds likely.’

‘I’m presuming that no one has seen these apart from you and me?’

‘No, since that little shit, Luke, told someone where to find Yuri I’m not trusting anyone but you, Jack. Is there anything else I need to know?’

‘Yeah, Rachel’s funeral is in the morning but I’ll be back down here tomorrow night – or at the latest Tuesday.’

19.16

Ian Wain was nervous as he drove to The Manor to meet Simpkin. He even found the normally polite butler, Mothmann, frostier than was customary. By the time he was ushered in to see Simpkin he felt as if he was being sent into his headmaster’s study to be punished; the memory of being beaten and his sense of humiliation were only too clear.

‘Are you any closer to reaching a conclusion,’ Simpkin asked after the formalities were completed.

‘Yes, in some ways – despite it being a difficult week.’

‘Yes, quite. Let’s begin with the unfortunate events that took place beneath St Olave’s.’

Once again Wain sought to contain his surprise. *How does he know that?* ‘It’s a mess, Sir. Unauthorised – almost certainly the work of two Ukrainian hit men who also committed a quite horrific murder, an execution, rather, in Louth, Lincolnshire.’

‘I know where Louth is.’

'At this stage it has to be assumed that these two Ukrainians followed the vehicle taking the police officer, Yuri, to a safe place – the crypt at St Olave's. I was told where they were taking him by one of my people but I was unaware that Jim Campbell and a female nurse, Sandra Jackson, would also be there.'

'Along with Sam Ticks who should also have been there at the time. Pity she missed the cut; she has, as we've seen in the past, the potential to be a nuisance. Let's move on. To repeat my question of last Sunday – who is our principle protagonist?'

'The two Ukrainians are brothers Evgeni and Andrij Katyuk – their entry into the UK was through the port of Felixstowe and frankly why officers of the Border Agency let them in is a disgrace.'

'They were bribed, Ian, as is normal. Who do they work for?'

'They work for Victor Plushenko who is under investigation by SCD9, suspected of people trafficking, human exploitation, money laundering and false accounting.'

'But Plushenko's not our primary adversary,' Simpkin said. 'Distasteful little man. There's nothing worse than foreigners pretending to be English; it's very unpleasant.'

'As you suggested I have spoken to other senior officers on the pretext of overlapping investigations and what I've found all leads to one man - another Ukrainian – we only know his first name - Choma. I'm hoping that our investigations into Plushenko will reveal the identity of this Choma character.'

'Tell me about your relationship with Chief Superintendent Ingles.'

'My relationship? There isn't one - beyond a professional one, of course.'

Simpkin smiled. 'A man to be trusted? A good investigating officer? Clean as a whistle? Above venal corruption? A man of principle and integrity?'

'All those things, sir, and like a bull terrier once he has his teeth in his victim. Why do you ask?'

'Just curious – wondering perhaps if he might be a good soldier to have on board.'

'I wouldn't advise that. He's a bit too black and white,' Wain said. *Why is he talking about Ingles?*

'A passing thought, no more than that. How long before you'll know this Choma's full identity?'

'It will take some time, sir.'

'Next Sunday, Ian.'

'I can't see how that will be possible, Sir.'

'By next Sunday I'll want progress, not lame excuses.'

'I don't know how far I can get in a week; not on top of what I'm supposed to be doing.'

'And try to be on time; you were nearly ten minutes late today,' Simpkin said. 'You may go now.'

22.11

Jack was too tired to eat but not too whacked to open a bottle of Rioja; the first glass didn't touch the sides. He sat down at the table in the Belvedere with the manila envelopes Fred had given him and the file that contained Sam's report on Anastasiya. He picked up his mobile and tapped in numbers. 'Ron? Is that you?' he asked. 'Sorry to call you late on a Sunday night ... where the hell are you? Sounds like a good party ... Have you got a second ... sure, I'll wait while you go outside ... that's not a worry ... yes, of course. I need your help with some stuff we've come across relating to the deaths ... I'm back in town late tomorrow or Tuesday – any chance we could meet up? ... Tuesday, early, would be great, where can we meet? ... Good, I'll come to your office at Imperial ... yeah, I know where that is ... ten Tuesday morning would be good ... Thanks, Ron, enjoy the party – what's it in aid of? ... Your birthday, I didn't know ... sixty-seven, wow! I would never have thought it. Okay. Take care. Bye.' Jack laughed. *Keith Moon would have been proud of you, Ron. So, which first?* He

drank from his glass before going to the shelves of vinyl. *What's it to be? It has to be Rod the sod.* He slid the album out of its sleeve, moved the arm over the track and lowered the needle. As he sat down and picked up Anastasiya's file Rod Stewart began to sing Van Morrison's "Have I told you lately". "That's not fucking right!" Jack groaned and hurriedly lifted the needle from the track and turned off the deck and amp. After filling his glass he opened her file. There was a single sheet of typed paper; it was all very matter of fact.

Anastasiya Ranger (née Boyko) – married, estranged wife of Jack Ranger following the sudden death of their daughter Tassa (aged 2)

Dual nationality – UK citizen (both by marriage and subsequent UK citizenship) and Ukrainian

Born April 12 1971, Kiev, Ukraine

PhD Imperial College, London. Post doctoral research Immunology.

Current place of employment: 'Pharma-co-logical Ltd' ('PCL Ltd'), Milton Science Park, Abingdon, Oxfordshire, OX14 4RY. Tel. 01235 865509

Working under her maiden name of Boyko as Head of Research – no details of her exact sphere of research or the nature of the company's activities as both appear to be working on secret UK government contracts for which there is no information in the public domain.

Home address: 3 Blair Passageway, Sutton Courtenay, Oxfordshire, OX14 6NS - mobile and land lines ex-directory. She lives alone, apart from her cat, Breughel.

That's it, Jack. The rest is up to you. We can discuss how to find out what she does if that's of any use to you. Good luck and keep in contact, Sam.

Well, I guess you finished writing this up before ... before ... I'll have to go and see her.

Monday 18th November

07.58

Jack stood in the little passageway at the side entrance to Gil's flat above the café trying to remember where the door key was hidden; he remembered. Pushing his hand through the letterbox he found the string, pulled the key out and opened the door to see Gil coming down the stairs in his chair lift.

'You're early,' Gil said as the lift stopped at floor level.

'Wanted to see if you needed a hand,' Jack said as Gil began to lever himself from the lift seat to the wheelchair he used everywhere but upstairs where a smaller chair was his means of getting around.

'Bit late for that, isn't it?' Gil said as he rebuffed Jack's helping hand. 'I do this every day – why would I suddenly need help now?' he asked as he settled himself in the wheelchair and adjusted the jacket and trousers of the black suit he was wearing.

'Because of where we're going and what we're going to do. You're still angry with me?'

'Not with you, Jack, just the fucking world, just the world.'

'That I can understand ... why are you down so early? We don't need to be there until nine fifteen.'

'I was going to take myself round to Rachel's old house to see where they killed that bastard Dimitri – your lot have finished with it now; Clare brought the keys into the café yesterday.'

'You don't want to be going there, Gil, you really don't. Let's open the caf and have ourselves some breakfast – I'll make it if you'll do the coffee machine.'

'Are you always hungry? Silly question. I know you are – always were. To answer your question - I wanted to see. The way he was killed, was it really as bad as they're saying?'

'Being made to swallow your bollocks as you bleed to death with your cock in your mouth? Yeah, that's pretty bad.'

‘Good,’ Gil said. ‘You’re right. I don’t need to go there.’

Ten minutes later Jack had made toast and Gil had run the Gaggia coffee machine; the sign on the glass door said “Closed”.

‘I’m glad you came early – I need the company,’ Gil said. ‘I can’t eat that toast; no stomach for anything today.’

‘Are her parents coming?’

‘No – her mother said she was sending flowers.’

‘Bloody hell,’ Jack said. ‘You’d think ...’

‘Don’t think,’ Gil interrupted. ‘Don’t think,’ he repeated, desperately choking back a sob as tears formed in his eyes.

Jack put his hand on Gil’s arm. ‘I’m sorry, mate, really sorry. Go on, let it out.’

‘If I do that,’ Gil said, sucking in a deep breath, ‘I may not make it through the service ... you need to know something no one else knows – except Manny and Rosamund.’

‘That’s her parents?’

‘Rosamund’s her mother.’

Jack waited but Gil remained silent. ‘And her father?’ It was too much for Gil; he bowed his head and silently wept; his head nodded to the beat of his silent sobbing. The penny dropped. ‘Oh Gil, you were her dad,’ Jack said as he held his friend’s hands in his.

‘She was my little girl ... my little girl.’

‘Did she know?’

Gil pulled his hands away. ‘No, I never had the courage to tell her and now I never can. Never fucking can!’ Gil shouted as he hurled his cup of coffee across the café where it smashed on the floor.

Once more Jack gripped Gil’s hands. ‘Tell me what you need to tell me and nothing more.’

‘I loved her, Jack. It’s why her parents hated her – but I don’t think Ros ever really hated her; Manny, my brother, he did. We only screwed the once – it was a Sunday, she came and visited me upstairs. She was having a real bad time with Manny, they wanted a baby, he couldn’t, he was impotent, I sympathised,

she sat on my knee, we kissed ... I’ve never known if I was just being used – I suppose I was ... she fell pregnant. We all three of us knew it was mine but we chose to pretend otherwise. Then, when Rachel went a bit wild, well, then she was my kid and no doubt about that – she even lost her mother’s love because of me.’

‘Not because of you, Gil. That was down to her mother.’

‘I wish she’d known. Wish she’d known how much I loved her. Shit, Jack, life’s a fucking hard road ... What do I do now?’

‘You grieve as a father should. You lean on your friends and you travel on.’

‘I don’t have any friends to lean on – just you, Jack, and you don’t have the time for doling out tea and sympathy, do you?’

‘Wish I did, but at least ... at least I’m here right now ... Sorry to be practical but did you order a funeral car?’

‘Just the hearse that’s taking her to Alford crem from the funeral home – there was no point in having a car just for me.’

Jack nodded. ‘That’s what I thought; we’ll be going in mine. Do you want to make tracks? The roads’ll be busy with the school run traffic.’

‘Thanks for listening; now at least you’ll know why I’m bawling my eyes out when those curtains close.’

‘Did you see her at Kettle’s?’

‘Yeah. They’d done their best ... oh fuck, Jack. I can’t do this,’ Gil said and sat with his head once again bowed, eyes staring blankly at the table top.

‘Come on, mate. Let’s get it done.’

It was all over by nine forty-five. Gil was wrong; Rachel’s mother hadn’t sent flowers but he was surprised and gratified by the large number of people who had attended the service. With Jack at his side Gil sat in the entrance hall shaking the hands of mourners as they left the crematorium.

The last in line was Scrote. ‘I’m real sorry, Mr Robert. She gave us our nickname – we’re well rid of that bastard Dimitri – she were a good lass.’

'I'm surprised to see you here after what your mates did to me.'

'I came to say sorry – not that it'll do a lot of fuckin' good – I've had enough of it all. When I come out of the nick I'm not coming back here. Time for pastures new, that's me, turning over a new leaf.'

'Make sure you do,' Gil said, 'and thanks for coming. But you can tell your mates I'll be pressing charges after all.'

'They deserve it,' Scrote said, nodded at Jack and slumped away, his trainers squeaking on the polished floor.

'Right, best get you home then,' Jack said.

'You coming to mine for the wake? Can't drink a bottle of vodka on my own, can I?'

'I'll have one with you but then I'm on my way back south.'

Clare and Wainstock were waiting outside as Jack pushed Gil's wheelchair towards his car. 'Thanks for coming,' Jack said.

'Thought you might need a little support,' Clare said. 'Good turnout.'

'I thought it would be just me and Jack,' Gil said.

'Maybe we've reached the point where people don't turn the other cheek,' Wainstock said.

'I wouldn't go that far,' Jack said.

'Can I have a quick word?' Wainstock asked taking Jack's arm and tugging him away while Clare stayed with Gil. 'Good news. It's not in the paper. Sylvester got a D notice, it won't last forever I'm told but it'll give us some leeway.'

'I wonder how he pulled that off?'

'And before you go south we need to have a chat,' Wainstock said. 'When are you going?'

'Later this afternoon.'

'Come and find me before you go – say at four, and bring Clare, I want her there as well.'

Jack nodded. 'Sure thing, boss. Right now, I'm taking Gil home.'

Howard and Aneta arrived at the Sessions House in Eastgate to meet the registrar, Ms Sophie Andrews, who, though only in her mid thirties and sporting a huge Remembrance Day poppy, had the presence of an early twentieth century dowager on the hunt for traitors, communists, fifth columnists and conscientious objectors. This disposition naturally inclined her to genial deference in the presence of a member of the nobility, albeit it one younger than herself and with a female foreigner in tow.

'Lord Haugham,' Ms Andrews said shaking Howard's hand. 'So sorry to hear about your father; a tragic loss of a great man. He'll be a hard act to follow but I'm sure you've been well prepared for the job and will make an admirable fist of it. Do sit down.' Howard and Aneta sat in front of her desk. 'You do know that you can do all this on line?'

'Yes, we looked,' Howard said. 'But I wanted us to be able to speak to you face to face to seek your advice and help in making the arrangements for our marriage.'

'This is your fiancée?'

'I'm sorry, I haven't introduced her, have I? I'm ...'

'I am Aneta Avaremenko. I am Ukrainian.'

'I've never been to the Ukraine,' the registrar purred. 'Is it a nice country – one does hear conflicting reports?'

'It's a beautiful country and would be a good country without the mafia, corrupt government, poverty and Putin's interferences – then it would be nice,' Aneta said.

'But with nice weather, I expect. Anyway, you're here in England so that's alright – have you brought the necessary papers including your passport?'

'This is why we needed to see you – to ask for your help.' Howard said.

Ms Andrews visibly stiffened as she arched her back, took a deep breath forcing out her chest and simultaneously raising her chin. 'Help? What sort of help, Lord Haugham?'

'I am illegal,' Aneta said.

'But when we're married then you'll be British and we can get you a new passport,' Howard added.

Ms Andrews sighed; her look could have not been more disdainful if a powdered poodle had shat on the toes of her immaculately polished beige court shoes. 'It doesn't work quite like that,' she smiled. 'Not quite like that at all.'

'Is there a way ... is there something that can be done ... an exception made in our circumstances?' Howard asked.

'What are you suggesting?'

'Could we ask you ... I don't know the best way ...'

'I can't help you, Lord Haugham,' Ms Andrews interrupted. 'I won't bend the rules.'

'She will be sent home if they find her,' Howard said.

'Do not beg this woman,' Aneta hissed. 'She'll not help us – I said she wouldn't, you wouldn't believe me. Now we know.'

'A very sensible young woman,' the registrar said.

'What are we supposed to do now? What recourse do we have?' Howard persisted.

'Do? I've no idea. Recourse? None. You have no papers. You are an illegal immigrant.'

'Have you no feelings?' Howard asked.

'Stop it!' Aneta insisted. 'There's nothing here for us with this woman.'

'How right you are, my dear. I will, of course, have to inform the Border Agency,' Ms Andrews said.

'Don't!' Aneta said putting her hand on Howard's arm as he was about to speak. 'You are better than her – be proud, Howard; we go standing up straight.'

'How quaint,' the registrar said.

Aneta and Howard left without saying another word.

Sitting in the Land Rover, Howard kissed Aneta on her cheek. 'There's one thing for certain. We can't stay at my place not after that bloody woman turns you in. We'd better pack and be on our way.'

'Where shall we go?'

'To get you a passport.'

'Where from?'

'What I learnt from looking at my father's papers and his computer means that there's one man who can get us a passport - Victor Plushenko. He's the sort of man who could sort out a false passport in no time at all.'

'He is a criminal, yes? So why would he help us?'

'Because of what I know about him.'

'This will be dangerous,' Aneta said. 'The Plushenko sort of men – think of Dimitri.'

'What I have on him is safely stowed away – if anything happens to us he'll be in deep trouble.'

'What is it that you have?'

Howard started the engine. 'It's better that you don't know – it will be safer that way.'

'I thought you would give up. Thank you.'

'Not me. Not anymore,' he said and they pulled away out of the car park.

'You know where Plushenko lives?'

'In Blackheath, London; the address was on one of his emails to my father that I read before the computer was stolen.'

11.39

'Have we now got the media situation under control because of the D notice?' Wainstock asked Jayne Rutland.

'There are some things we couldn't include in the notice and we'll have to deal with those as best we can.'

‘Are we sticking to the line that the explosion at InVivo was accidental?’

‘No. I think the time has come to put the blame fairly and squarely on Janice Madeley’s shoulders – it’ll come out when she comes to trial anyway – running with the animal rights terrorists line will hopefully keep their attention away from the nonsense about the so-called plague.’

‘The plague thing, as you describe it, isn’t nonsense ... anyway, how is what you’re saying more aggressive?’

‘Put the emphasis on animal rights activists as terrorists, build them up as a threat to all, particularly to the rural economy ... blah, blah, blah ... take the moral high ground.’

‘How about Dimitri Guraya’s murder? Trafficking. Illegal immigrants. Suicides. Mafia hit men – how are we to take the moral high ground on these?’

‘To be frank, sir, if you had some answers it would be easier for me to create a story that has some credibility – as it is ...’ Jayne shrugged.

‘I’m meeting with Jack and Clare this afternoon to try and bring all the pieces together – after that I hope I’ll be in a better position to give you some answers.’

‘It won’t be a moment too soon but for the moment I’ll go to town on Janice Madeley – that should keep them happy for a bit,’ Jayne said.

‘Shouldn’t we also be making it very clear that we have a zero tolerance to human trafficking and will be devoting resources to stamping it out? That’s taking the moral high ground, isn’t it?’

‘Of course it is – good idea – but how will you answer when you’re asked how you’ll get the necessary additional resources to do something about it?’

Despite Gil’s encouragement Jack decided that it would be better not to have even one drink with his grieving friend but kept him company until Gil asked him to go and get him another bottle of vodka; Jack refused and the two men parted on bad terms. Jack consoled himself with the fact that Gil was already far too drunk to remember their argument.

Sitting in the Belvedere with a cup of tea, Jack took stock. He’d looked at his collection of albums but there was nothing that fitted his mood and that made him feel even more dispirited. He’d packed a suitcase with what clothes he thought he’d need for the next few days and then it dawned on him that he had nowhere to stay having given up the apartment when he’d come north. *So, it’ll be bloody B&Bs again, no kitchen, eating takeaways like the poor sods on benefits. Christ, why am I going back to all that? And Anastasiya – I could let it go ... don’t kid yourself, mate, you’re no more likely to do that than join the bloody EDL. Who’s that?* he wondered as he stood up and looked out of the window to see Clare’s car pulling up.

‘How did it go?’ she asked as he opened the door and asked her in.

‘He climbed into a bottle of vodka.’

‘He must have loved her very much,’ Clare said as Jack hung her coat on one of the wooden pegs near the door.

Jack was tempted to tell her the truth but he’d given his word. ‘They were close. Anyway, enough of that. I’ve just about had it with all of it, fed up to the back teeth. Want a hot drink?’

‘No, I’m fine, thanks,’ she said as she sat down on the sofa set at right angles to where Jack was sitting. ‘I’m sorry but I’m not going to improve your mood.’

‘What’s happened now?’

‘Not something new – something I wanted to get out of the way before we meet the boss later; it’s been getting to me.’

‘You want me to guess?’

'This isn't a game, Jack; I'm pissed off.'

'I know. It's about Yuri, isn't it?'

'Were you going to apologise? Going to tell me why you lied about where he was, what he was, and all the rest of it? Were you going to do that if I hadn't come here and confronted you with it?'

'I don't know – that's the honest answer – not the one you want to hear.'

'Why did you lie? We're supposed to be on the same side – partners; you can't just sit there all cool, calm and collected and say "I don't know".'

'You think I'm cool, calm and collected? Use your powers of observation, Clare; take a good look at me and listen.'

'You really can be a patronising sod, can't you? Listen to what?'

'My apology. When I came home and found Yuri waiting for me, it threw me. I left him here where I thought he would be safe only to come back to find him at death's door – you remember you sent me home to change my trousers after I'd found Guraya? I knew that if I reported it I'd likely be suspended for hiding a possible fugitive or some others bollocks. I was pretty certain that the same fate would have been mine if I'd been here when they came for Yuri; they must have been watching my place to know he was here. I don't know if they were after him or me. I was also pretty certain that they could have killed him if they'd wanted to. I needed time to think – I decided not to tell you. It's not very good, is it?'

'Maybe I can understand not telling Wainstock with all of what's going on - but not telling me?'

'When you have a source as important as Yuri you have to keep them safe – I didn't – so my lie ended in calamity. That's one of the reasons I'm carrying on, going back to put things right ... when I found him beaten to a pulp I didn't want to put anyone at risk. That's not an excuse, or even an apology. I'm tired of being in the midst of the dead, tired of seeing those I care about finished for no good reason. I'm tired of taking

risks with other people's lives. I'd rather just risk my own and leave it at that. But I can't, can I?'

'None of us can.'

'Am I forgiven?' Jack asked.

'No, I'm afraid you're not – not yet – not until I'm sure there aren't any more skeletons I should know about.'

'I don't think there are – at least not any that are to do with this.'

'What others?' Clare asked.

'Sam has found my wife.'

'Are you going to sort things out with her?'

Jack sighed. 'Maybe – too much on my plate as it is without unpacking all of that as well ... so what's your news or did you just come here to bollock me?'

'There's no sign of Fulsome and Sylvester's had no option but to call in the IPCC to investigate and there's a rumour that Assistant Commissioner Lucinda Breake from the Met is going to take the lead.'

Jack looked startled. 'That's a surprise. I would have thought she had too much in her plate as it is but maybe there's another skeleton waiting to be found. I'd better tell you what I'm up to.' Jack told her everything he'd discussed with Fred.

'When are you seeing him?' she asked.

'Later this evening – we're going to have a go at rattling Plushenko's cage. I also need to tell Sam exactly what I think about Wain especially as she's supposed to be ... well, you know all that; I just told you.'

'You did – thank you,' Clare said. 'Apology accepted by the way. Forgiveness may come later.'

'I won't hold my breath and in the meantime I think we ought to make a move and see if the boss can see us a little earlier than arranged – I don't want to be late for Victor Plushenko.'

'After what you've just told me, I'm not sure exactly what we're going to tell him.'

'He only needs to know the stuff that directly affects his jurisdiction – the rest will just muddy the waters. Try this for size. I'll apologise for keeping Yuri's whereabouts secret and admit it was a mistake – but I'll keep it general. The mystery pathogen that killed the Ukrainians: I'm working with Ron Baski on that. The murder of Dimitri Guraya: using SCD9 resources, to which I'm being given access, we're going to try and trace the two hit men that maybe also committed the crypt murders. Kinsey's missing laptop: you're still on the case with that but you aren't hopeful of a quick result – recommendation to the coroner is that the good doctor took her own life and that's the end of that. The fire at InVivo: he'll be happy with that as he has a culprit and if I'm not mistaken Jayne Rutland will go to town on that. The various scum bags currently locked up in hospital will be released because the CPS will back off terrified of the risk of a failed prosecution. You'll follow up and prosecute the two louts who attacked Gil and take Scrote and Tammy through to trial for the theft and sale of Haugham's computer. I'll provide copies of the e-mail correspondence between Haugham and Plushenko relating to the sale of his estate but leave the rest out for now. Is there anything else? Oh yes, I'd be very grateful if you can let Aneta and Howard know that the porn on Haugham's computer has been destroyed so they can relax.'

'What you said about Tammy – are you suggesting we don't pursue our enquiries over Haugham's death?'

'The idea that Tammy killed him after Aneta ran from the room?'

'Yes.'

'Forensic evidence?' Jack asked.

'None that would hold up in court – just circumstantial, but my gut feeling is that she did it.'

'Then go with that.'

'How? The entire Haugham thing pisses me off,' Clare said. 'Haugham had it coming.'

'Yeah, I know. Did I tell you he was trying to get me off my land here?'

'No. So you're not going for good?'

'Just till this is sorted, then I'm coming back to vegetate in the sticks – why do you ask?'

'I'd be sorry to see the back of you.'

'Really?'

'Really,' Clare said. 'Now that we have all our ducks in a row we'd best go and float them with the boss.'

17.58

Sam sat in her office waiting for PM to finish and Radio 4's six o'clock news to begin. The announcement of the attack on Jim and his critical condition had been timed so that this news would not be exposed to prolonged coverage and analysis on the PM programme; there would be enough speculation on that to come. As ever there was digital silence as PM concluded. *Why does silence sound like distant traffic? Come on! Come on! Have they delayed the chimes or something?* Sam wondered, knowing that nothing was any different from any other day – except it was.

Big Ben peeled four times.

'BBC News at six o'clock. This is James Burkmar. Good evening.'

Big Ben chimed.

'In the last few minutes it has been announced that the distinguished journalist Jim Campbell is in a critical condition after being shot.' As the chimes gradually faded, he announced other headlines. This done he continued. 'The unexplained attack on the famous investigative journalist Jim Campbell took place last Saturday but has only just been announced. Few details have been released. The following statement was made by Chief Superintendent Fred Ingles of the Metropolitan Police.'

'We are at an early point in our investigations and all I am able say is that his condition is serious. We are actively investigating the cause of this assault and the murder of a nurse, Sandra Jackson, who was caring for Mr Campbell at a location in the East End of London. That is all I'm prepared to say at this point,' Fred said.

No mention of Yuri or the crypt. So far so good, Sam thought.

'Jim Campbell is regarded as one of the great journalists of his age,' Burkmar resumed. 'First working for the Manchester Guardian, he soon made a name for himself as a fierce critic ...'

It's not a bloody obituary – yet, Sam thought as she turned off the radio and picked up her mobile phone; she didn't find it hard to sound distressed as she made the call. To her immense surprise Wain almost seemed relieved to talk and agreed to meet within the hour in a back street in Hampton insisting that they kept this strictly between themselves. Sam was mystified at the choice of meeting place but made no objection.

She arrived first. She left the engine running along with the air conditioning so that the windows didn't fog up. Ten minutes later Ian Wain walked through the rain in her direction. She flashed her headlights and a few moments later he was sitting beside her in the front of the Audi.

'Thanks for coming,' Sam said and turned off the engine and air con.

'People will think we're having an affair if they see us meeting like this,' Wain said.

'I'm not here to flirt, Ian. I think you and I are well past that, don't you?'

'Just a vain attempt to lighten the mood – sorry, inappropriate ... it must have come as a shock.'

Sam lowered her window to let in a sliver of cold air – the windows were already beginning to steam up. 'He's like a dad to me ... surely you could have given me a heads up so that I didn't have to hear it on the radio – just for old time's sake.'

'Fred only told me about it minutes before the announcement – there was no time to call you even if I had thought of it. If I'm honest it didn't even cross my mind – guess I was too bound up in the madness of it all.'

'At least you're being honest about that ... what madness? What happened? The news bulletin said nothing. Why all the cloak and dagger stuff?'

'Too many questions, Sam, not just yours but a whole heap of others: why were Jim and his nurse hiding out in that crypt? If he was ill or at risk why didn't he ask for help and protection? If he was hiding, who was he hiding from? When did you last see him?'

'Four days ago, last Thursday, on the 14th – he wasn't ill or wanting to hide then. He was as right as rain. Just go back a few steps. How were Jim and Sandra discovered? The crypt was a secret place; only a few people knew of its existence.'

'You know Chief Super Fred Ingles who runs SCD9, don't you?'

'Vaguely,' Sam replied.

'Fred got a tip off, found the crypt door open, went down inside and found the two bodies; they'd both been shot.'

'When did he get the tip off?'

'Yesterday morning, Sunday.'

'But it was only announced this evening?' Sam queried.

'I wanted to try and sit on it for longer but I was overruled. I wanted to give us the chance of a bit of clear air before the media got hold of it and started the inevitable speculation as to the motive.'

'Why would anyone want to murder Jim?'

'Oh come on, Sam; with the life he'd led – let alone what we all got involved with in trying to bring down the Cabal.'

I'm not sure I ever thought you were trying to bring down the Cabal, but let it go for now. Fencing – we both know we know more than we're letting on. Doesn't he know it was me who discovered the bodies? How long before he mentions Yuri, because if Fred's right and Luke spilled the beans he must know that I took

Yuri to the crypt. ‘The Cabal? You can’t think it was them; what would be the point of killing Jim?’

‘Why not? Revenge can be sweet,’ Wain said. ‘Or just plain vindictiveness.’

‘There has to be another reason.’

‘Maybe ... let’s get to the point shall we? Why exactly did you want to see me in secret, Sam? What are you up to?’

‘Up to? Just to be clear, it was you who wanted this meeting to be secret. I’m up to finding out why Jim was shot and Sandra murdered. What else do you think I’d be up to, for god’s sake?’

‘You’re impressive, Sam, but it doesn’t wash. It must have been a hell of a shock to go down there and find the three of them shot to bits and yet here you are coolly pretending to be ignorant of what took place. So I’ll repeat my question – what are you up to?’

‘My question, exactly. What do you really know about the murders of Sandra and Yuri – you do know he was one of your lot?’

‘A Ukrainian renegade cop running amok without authority? Oh yes, he was one of us – I don’t think so.’

‘Was the intention to kill me and Jim or was Jim and Sandra’s death collateral damage because the real target was Yuri?’ Sam probed.

‘I can’t know that without knowing what the Ukrainian cop was up to – I thought you might be able to help me with that.’

I need to give him something otherwise he’s not going to do a bloody thing to expose his own position - but I’m not sure Fred would want me to go too far. Difficult to call. ‘In the course of investigating the illegal trafficking of Ukrainian workers into the UK, Yuri discovered that the operation was being run by a respectable Ukrainian entrepreneur based in the UK called Victor Plushenko. It was Yuri’s belief that Plushenko was a front man for a more sinister figure who was the brains behind a much larger operation. Yuri had no idea who that man might be nor what the more sinister and widespread operation actually was. He was caught up with the unexplained deaths of

Ukrainian immigrants in Lincolnshire and was providing help to Jack Ranger, ex SCD9, and for his pains was beaten to a pulp at Jack’s place near Louth. Jack called me – we’d met some years back – in fact at the party to celebrate your promotion – and asked if I could provide some safe place so that Yuri could remain in secret, recover from his injuries and continue his quest. I thought of the crypt, asked Jim if that was okay, and involved the wife of one of my colleagues to care for Yuri. So if you want to know the cause of the death of Sandra – that was my fault – Yuri is another matter.’

‘Thank you, Sam – that actually sounds like it might be half-way true – it certainly explains Yuri’s injuries prior to his murder.’

‘So, who were the targets?’

‘Plushenko is already under investigation so that’s not a revelation. Yuri had probably pissed off some mafia hit men along the way but I don’t think it was about Yuri – I think the hit was supposed to include you ... the two hit men who carried out the contract thought Sandra was you – the fact that they got Yuri as well was a bonus.’

‘Oh ... I guess I’m the lucky one then ... who were they?’

‘Two Ukrainians, Evgeni and Andriy Katyuk, freelance contract killers as well as being mafia foot soldiers – clearly not the brightest stars in the firmament.’

How do you know who they are? ‘What about this Plushenko character and the idea that there’s someone above him? Do you have any idea who that might be – after all that must fall in SCD9’s remit and therefore you should know?’

‘I don’t think the murders and Plushenko are connected but just an unfortunate coincidence. There is a Mr Big, as the tabloids would call him, another Ukrainian but we don’t know anything about him – yet – but we will.’

‘That’s Fred’s case, I suppose?’

‘Of course.’

‘So what now?’ Sam asked.

‘Go on holiday and keep out of the way.’

'Whose way?'

'My way, Sam. I've enough on my plate without having to worry about you.'

'Worry about me? That sounds a bit unlikely.'

'I worry about you getting in my way,' Wain said. 'But, of course if you decide not to do that, then don't blame me if something happens to your very pretty little nose, will you? See you around, Sam,' Wain said and immediately got out of the car before she could say another word.

Oh boy! Now that I didn't expect – something's rattled the bars of his cage and it wasn't me – that's good – maybe it'll make him do something stupid, make a mistake – give himself away. Fred wanted him wound up ... but why did he tell me as much as he did? Insurance? And the names of the killers – how does he know that if Fred doesn't? She started the engine, reversed and drove away. Oh Jim, what do I do about you now? There's not a lot of point my sitting by your bedside looking at your heart monitor bleep and gazing at your life support system is there? You had better not bloody die or I'm going to have words with you ... A funeral – shit – there'd be no one else to do that except me. There's not going to be a funeral ... what if he has brain damage? I can't think about that, not ever or at least until we know who did it – come on, Sam, you know who did it but how do we find them and put them away? That's not the point anyway. The question is why?

19.11

'Sorry,' Jack said as he entered Fred's office. 'I was late getting away; the traffic was crap; I'd forgotten how bad it gets,' he continued as he started to take off his parka.

'Don't take off your coat – why do you wear that bloody thing anyway? Makes you look like something from the seventies. Plushenko's not coming to us – we're going to him on the insistence of his bloody brief.'

'Who's he got?'

'Naomi Oxenby.'

'The QC? She of the viper's tongue and the hair of the Gorgon Medusa?'

Fred laughed. 'She's had her hair cut since you last saw her.'

'She can afford to at a grand an hour. Have I got time for a cuppa before we get to push off?' Jack asked.

'That would really be taking the piss; we're an hour late already.'

'What are we trying to get out of this?' Jack asked as they left the office.

'Not a lot – more a matter of letting him know we're after him ... primarily, I want to get the measure of the man.'

'Know thy enemy.'

'Precisely,' Fred agreed. 'Bait the beast in its lair.'

It took them just over fifty minutes to reach their destination in Blackheath.

'I was expecting something more than a semi,' Jack said as they pulled the car in onto the brick paved forecourt of the nineteenth century property.

'Not exactly your average semi though, is it?'

'I was being ironic.'

'You'd have to be; he bought it for just under two million quid last year,' Fred said as he pulled on the handbrake.

As they entered the capacious drawing room it was clear that Naomi Oxenby was more than a little irritated as she paced up and down in front of the fireplace in which an ersatz log fire burned. *Nouveau riche shit*, Jack thought, *too many cushions, too much chintz ... but if those aren't fakes on the wall someone knows something about English water-colourists; maybe they're nicked?* Jack thought as he looked around. Victor Plushenko sat in a high backed armchair to the left of the Arts & Crafts tiled fireplace; the shine of his brown brogues reflected the ornate French wall lights. *My word, you think you're quite the toff, don't you?* Jack thought. He'd hadn't asked Fred about Plushenko's age so was surprised to discover he was in his early forties; he'd

expected someone older. Plushenko, dressed in an immaculately cut Harris Tweed suit, crisp sea island cotton white shirt, gold cufflinks and an MCC tie exuded the tranquil confidence of a scion of the English landed gentry opening the annual village fete despite the light rain falling on the festivities. He was lean, tanned and blonde – *is that dyed?* Jack wondered seeing traces of brown roots in Plushenko's hair. *Perhaps he's taken Melwyn Bragg as his style guide? I wonder what the accent will be like.*

'I'm so sorry to have kept you waiting,' Fred said. 'You know how it is – pressure of work, not enough staff, traffic calming – anyway, we're all here now.'

'You're over two hours late. My client voluntarily agreed to this interview to help you. In such a circumstance one would have expected a little more courteous treatment and respect,' Oxenby announced as she sat down opposite Plushenko in an identical chair. No offer of a seat was made to either Fred or Jack who both remained standing. 'My understanding was that DCI Ranger had left the Met – what's he doing here?' Oxenby demanded.

'He's an observer from another force hoping that he'll learn from the guidance Mr Plushenko may provide,' Fred replied.

'Guidance? What in God's name are you talking about? Mr Plushenko isn't here as a consultant.'

'It's alright, Naomi,' Plushenko said. 'Let's hear what these officers want to know; only then will we be able to see how we can help them. Do you agree? Pull up a couple of those occasional chairs from over there,' Plushenko indicated two upright chairs near the window. 'Do be careful; they're antique French.'

Jesus, what a prick! But you've got the accent off to a tee, Jack thought, but a bit too Home Counties for my taste.

'As you see fit, Victor,' Oxenby said and waited while they fetched the chairs and sat down. 'You may begin, Chief Superintendent – but be careful; this had better not be a fishing expedition.'

'Of course not, Ms Oxenby – it's too late in the year for salmon,' Fred said.

'Do you fish?' Plushenko asked.

'Not any more, it takes too long and it's too uncertain for the likes of me. I prefer more certain returns,' Fred said.

'Spare us your philosophy, Chief Superintendent. My client has other things to do with his evening than exchange small talk with you.'

'Of course. Perhaps I should begin by making your client aware of what we do in SCD9?'

'We know what SCD9 does – get to the point,' Oxenby said.

'I'd like you to tell me about your investment portfolio – not the detail of course – just the strategy you're following in respect of acquisitions,' Fred said.

'Why do you need to know that?' Oxenby asked.

'It's okay, Naomi, there's nothing secret about it; it's all legal and above board. As you know I was born in the Ukraine but I'm an Anglophile, a lover of the English countryside; I put it all down to my nanny, wonderful woman – nanny Brindle – never did use her first name – just nanny Brindle, but you don't need to know that. My investment strategy? When I settled here I was distressed to find that so many who held the land in trust for generations to come were on very hard times with their estates falling into disrepair. After careful consideration I decided to invest in these lands and restore them to profitability – it's a long-term project and I expect no quick returns.'

'Most altruistic, I'm sure,' Fred said. 'And one of those estates was the Haugham estate in Lincolnshire?'

'His was the first. I'm sorry his sudden death will prevent him seeing what I intend to do there – is that what you want to understand? How Reggie frittered away his money and was on the verge of bankruptcy until I stepped in to bail him out?'

'No, not really. I'm more interested in how you were able to afford to purchase it. Where does the money come from?'

'You don't need to answer that, Victor,' Oxenby said.

'It will help me understand how Mr Plushenko runs his business,' Fred said.

'Why do you need to understand my client's business? I do hope you're not suggesting Mr Plushenko is involved in anything suspicious.'

'If I thought that, Ms Oxenby, your client would have already been cautioned.'

'It's not a problem for me, Naomi. Private equity,' Plushenko said. 'Here in England you all seem to think that we Ukrainians are living in the stone age whereas in point of fact since the defeat of communism we've embraced the free market and moved very far and very fast to great prosperity.'

Not the ones I know. 'Does that include your attitude to the working class?' Jack asked and received a glare from Fred.

'I'm sorry ... I'm not following you,' Plushenko said as he beamed at Jack.

'Wage slaves – serfs - your fellow countrymen and women who slave away in the fields of Lincolnshire – those people – what do you think of them?' Jack asked.

'I thought you said DCI Ranger was here as an observer, Chief Superintendent?' Oxenby intervened.

'He is,' Fred said and scowled at Jack. 'It would be helpful if you could ...'

'Sorry, boss,' Jack interrupted. 'A philosophical question, I suppose.'

'Jack, shut it!' Fred instructed.

'I was just curious,' Jack continued, 'about Mr Plushenko's understanding of the implications of the mechanisation of agriculture for the employment of farm workers and the rates of pay they can expect especially in respect of migrant labour ...'

'DCI Ranger, stop this nonsense now!' Oxenby said.

'Especially in respect of illegal migrant labour which, unfortunately in the case of Lincolnshire, has included quite a large number of people trafficked into the country from the Ukraine to work without any legal rights or protection from exploitation. I ...'

'Stop!' Oxenby said.

'Do you have a view on that, Mr Plushenko?' Jack persisted.

'This conversation is at an end,' Oxenby announced. 'Victor, say not another word.'

'And did you know that ...' Jack continued.

'Enough, Jack!' Fred interrupted.

Plushenko stood up in front of the fire, pressed a bell button next to the mantelpiece, lifted the jacket of his suit and ostentatiously warmed his backside in front of the fire. 'They're the only two things about England that are somewhat tiresome – the weather and the police. Good evening, gentlemen,' he concluded as the door opened and an older man dressed in an Adidas shell suit came in. 'My uncle will see you out.'

As their car pulled back onto the road Jack turned to Fred and asked, 'How did I do?'

'Doesn't rattle easily, does he?'

'I didn't like the look of the uncle,' Jack replied. 'Looked the sort who'd be happy pulling the wings off wasps while being stung.'

'That's not his uncle – that's Toomy Royston – used to work for the Krays years back,' Fred said.

'Plushenko must know you'd know that.'

'I don't think he cares what we think. Speaking of which - I don't think Naomi's opinion of you has improved.'

'Shame that. I've never understood why a woman as bright as that spends her life protecting shites like Plushenko,' Jack said as they turned towards Lewisham.

'Almost as perplexing as us spending all our time trying to put them behind bars.'

'Fancy a drink?'

'Sorry, Fred, but I'm going to drive down to Oxfordshire – Sam Tick's found Anastasiya for me and it's time the two of us talked before I get any further into this and miss the chance.'

'Is that wise?'

'Needs must, sorry. Tomorrow I'm seeing Ron Baski; I need to pick his brains ... what are you going to do about Plushenko?'

'Keep digging.'

20.17

Toomy knocked on the door and came in interrupting Plushenko and Oxenby's conversation. 'There are two people here to see you, boss. One of 'em says she's a Ukrainian and the other says he's a bleedin' lord called 'or am', or something.'

'Interesting,' Plushenko smiled. 'Ask them to wait would you, Toomy? Put them in the dining room, will you? I'll come and get them myself when I'm ready. Naomi, thank you for this evening – it was a fishing trip wasn't it?'

'It was – do you want me to stay?'

'No thanks. Poor Howard. The poor lord,' Plushenko laughed. 'It'll be the workhouse next for him.'

'Do you need to be careful how you tread, Victor?' Oxenby asked.

'That's a strange question – your meaning?'

'SCD9 aren't going to go away and the combination of Ingles and Ranger,' she raised an eyebrow, 'could be dangerous.'

'I have protection in place.'

'I think you'll need more than Mr Royston if life becomes difficult,' Oxenby said.

'I have you, don't I? You worry too much. Let me assure you that I have no intention of being brought down by the likes of those two policemen and I will do whatever I need to do to ensure my continued success and survival.'

'They will dig and dig, Victor; with court orders and with their existing powers it ...'

'Naomi!' Plushenko interrupted. 'Please. I employ you as a lawyer not as a mentor – please stick to that, it's what I pay you for.'

Oxenby stood up, straightened her skirt and adjusted her jacket. 'You know where I am should you need my legal advice.'

Smiling once again, Plushenko stood, leant forward and kissed her on both cheeks. 'There, there – all's well. I'll see you out.'

Having done so, Plushenko returned to the lounge and poured himself a large whisky that he sipped as he stood in front of the fire. After five minutes he went to the dining room where he found Aneta and Howard sitting next to each other. 'Howard,' he said advancing with hand outstretched. 'We've not met. I'm Victor Plushenko. So sorry to hear about your father,' he continued as Howard reluctantly shook his hand. 'And who is this charming young lady? My man says you're Ukrainian; that must be why you're so pretty.'

'This is my fiancée,' Howard said.

'I am Aneta Avaremenko.'

'Pleased to meet you, my dear. Why don't you two come into the lounge where there's a fire? Then you can tell me why you're here,' Plushenko said and led the way. In the lounge he suggested they sat on the two chairs recently vacated by Jack and Fred while he returned to his armchair where he settled holding his glass of whisky. 'I do hope you've not come expecting a hand-out,' he said and then sipped from his glass.

'I suggest you show a little more respect,' Howard said.

'You want respect?'

'Yes,' Aneta said.

Plushenko laughed. 'Aneta Avaremenko, is that what you're called? Reggie never gave you a name when he showed me his videos of you in action but then again I suppose he had no need to; after all, you were just his little whore.'

'What?' Howard asked.

'He showed you me? Doing those things?' Aneta asked.

'Let's get out of here, Aneta,' Howard said. 'I was wrong to think we could deal with him.'

'Deal? What would you deal with?' Plushenko demanded. 'And for what?'

'I am one of your people you trafficked into England,' Aneta said. 'I have no papers. I need a passport – you can get me a passport.'

Plushenko laughed. 'And why would I want to do that? Out of sentiment?'

'Howard,' Aneta said. 'Tell him why.'

'Yes, do,' Plushenko chuckled.

'I will, but not in front of you – if you know you'll be at risk. Please go back into the dining room and wait for me there,' Howard said.

'No, I stay here with you – I don't care about the risk,' Aneta said.

'You should, my dear. Do as Lord Haugham says.'

'Please, Aneta. I don't want anything to happen to you.'

'What about you?' Aneta asked.

'I'll be okay if I know you're safe,' Howard said.

Aneta walked from the room, closed the lounge door after her and found Toomy standing in the hall at the foot of the staircase. 'I'm to wait in dining room,' she said.

Toomy said nothing in response; he just stared at her as she went into the room. He locked the door after her.

'Well,' Plushenko said. 'I'm, as they say, all ears. Your move.'

'I have this,' Howard said as he removed an envelope from his pocket. 'This isn't the original – that's safe and sound under lock and key.' He handed the envelope to Plushenko. 'This is a photocopy of the back of the photograph of you and your boss, someone called Choma.' Howard removed another two pieces of paper as Plushenko took the copy out of the envelope. 'This is the email you sent to my father asking if you'd dropped a photograph you'd shown him when you visited the Hall.' He handed it to Plushenko. 'Apparently this Choma is totally

averse to having his identity known and you weren't supposed to have the photo. You were pretty scared that if he ever found out it might not be too good for you. This is the email from my father to you denying all knowledge of the photograph; he lied; that was nothing new. Then the last one from you in which you sound even more scared. If having a photograph is that scary Choma must be terrifying.'

'This is why you think I will get Aneta a passport?'

'Yes.'

'You're a fool.'

'I don't think so. The police have my father's computer; they will have read these emails – I bet they'd love to see the photograph. That's why you'll get that passport.'

'Next you will say two things. One: the photograph is in a safe place. Two: if anything happens to you it will be sent to the police. Copy it?' Plushenko asked.

'Pretty much, yes.'

'I was right; you are a fool. You should have come alone. You have the photograph. I have Aneta. Just listen and do stop clenching your fists. You bring the photograph to me and we'll forget all about it. Aneta is an amateur whore but it's clear from the videos that she's photogenic and good at what she does - some girls can't cope having old fat men's cocks in their mouths. Sit down!' Plushenko shouted as Howard jumped to his feet. 'There are places where she can be put where she will whore full time – I might even send you a DVD of her at work. Go and fetch the photograph, there's a good boy.'

'How do I know she won't be harmed?'

'It will depend on whether I trust you not to share the photograph with the police.'

'I will give you my word on that.'

Plushenko laughed. 'I wonder if your word is any better than your father's - or will it be a case of like father like son?'

'I'm different to him.'

'I don't really care one way or the other, Howard. Just go and get the photograph and bring it here to me. On your way.'

'I need to see Aneta to tell her what's happening.'

'No, I think not. I'll explain it to her; she'll understand it better coming from me,' Plushenko said. As he heard Howard slamming the front door behind him he poured himself another large scotch; the idea that Choma might discover his stupidity was terrifying. *I should learn not to boast*, he thought. *Nor trust imbeciles like Reggie Haugham with such confidences.*

21.43

The narrow entrance to Blair Passageway in Sutton Courtenay was between two seventeenth century half-timbered houses with leaded windows and the shade of green paintwork much favoured by National Trust properties and those seeking to mimic such status. Number 3 was at the end of the passageway. Jack rang the bell and waited as a cat rubbed against his legs. The door opened. 'Remember me?' he asked as he pushed back the hood of his parka. Breughel, the cat, rushed inside, relieved to be out of the incessant rain.

For a long moment Anastasiya stood still, visibly shocked. 'Jack,' she finally said. 'What do you want?'

'I'd like to come in.'

'Why have you come here?' she asked. 'You've no right to pursue me like this.'

'Pursue you? I haven't seen you for three years; that's hardly pursuit is it?'

'You'd better come in,' she said. 'I see you've still got that coat of yours; hang it up there where it can drip on the mat ... this way.' She led the way down the short hall and into the one large room that comprised the ground floor of the cottage.

'Nice,' Jack said.

'Thank you. It cost a small fortune.'

'As a head of research I suppose you can afford it,' Jack said as noticed a photograph of their daughter standing on the front of one of the bookshelves.

'Drink?' Anastasiya asked.

'No thanks, I'm driving.'

'I meant a hot drink.'

'Tea would be good, thank you.'

In the kitchen end of the room she turned on the kettle. Jack nervously walked to and fro looking at his surroundings. At one end of the long oak table there were two lap top computers sitting side by side; one was a Dell, the other was a Sony Vaio. 'You look busy,' Jack said as he approached the two machines. Just as he looked at the Vaio its screen saver came into action but not before he'd managed the briefest of glimpses of what was fleetingly shown – a picture of the InVivo Research Centre. *It can't be. It can't be Sylvia Kinsey's Vaio. How would it be here? That's got to be wrong.*

His musing was abruptly interrupted as Anastasiya joined him at the table and shut the lid of the Vaio and then the Dell. 'Work,' she said. 'Commercially sensitive, sorry. Why don't you sit down over there?' she suggested indicating the two sofas set either side of a coffee table.

'I'm surprised you haven't dumped this,' Jack said as he patted the table he'd made them from two recycled doors when they'd first set up house together.

Anastasiya didn't reply. He waited silently until she brought him a mug of tea, a glass of red wine for herself and sat opposite him. 'You've lost weight,' she said.

'No, I'm exactly the same weight I was when you left.'

'Memories are funny things, aren't they? But I don't suppose you've gone to the trouble of finding me just to discuss your weight ... I suppose you want a divorce ... is that why you're here?' she asked.

'I couldn't give a stuff about a divorce ... You know why I'm here – to have the conversation I've been trying to have with

you ever since Tassa died; the conversation you refused to have then when ...'

'Stop right there, Jack!' Anastasiya interrupted. 'I'd like you to go, please?'

'Is it because you feel guilty?'

'Jack, we've been through all this – there was an inquiry – there was no explanation for her death; it was a tragedy – it wasn't my fault she died.'

'Then why won't you talk about it?'

'Because it upsets me – she was my child as well; I was her mother.'

'Then why don't you behave like one?'

'You must go, Jack. I will not have you treat me as a criminal. That's why I left you; I couldn't stand your silent accusations, your anger, any longer.'

'I was silent because you wouldn't talk, wouldn't tell me the truth.'

'Give it up, Jack. Go.'

'You took Tassa to work with you, didn't you, when that so-called nanny we had was off sick. You took Tassa to the lab, didn't you?' Anastasiya studied her glass of wine. 'Didn't you?' Jack shouted.

'Alright ... yes, I did. It was against the rules. No-one knew ...'

Jack sighed. 'At last. That's why you ran away; because you felt guilty, because ...'

'Shut up, Jack! If she'd been infected by anything from the lab then it would have shown up at her autopsy – they ran tests – I would have recognised it – whatever it was that killed her it wasn't something I was working on.'

'But pathogens mutate, they adapt, don't they? It might have been something unknown. You can't be sure, can you?'

'I can be sure,' she said.

'But you aren't.'

'Oh yes, I am ... it's not me I can't live with, Jack, it's you.'

'What were you working on back then? At least tell me that.'

'I can't and won't for two reasons: the official secrets act but, more importantly, whatever it was, you would turn it into the cause of her death – you're beyond reason.'

'Why wasn't I able to see her body?'

'You were away on a case; you were always away on a case.'

'You could have waited so I could have said goodbye before she was cremated,' Jack said.

'Perhaps you should try grief therapy instead of blaming me?'

Don't, Jack. Just don't. Breathe. Don't fall for that. 'Perhaps you're right ... I'd better go ... Oh, yes, Ron asked me to send you his best wishes.'

'What on earth are you talking about now? Ron? What has Ron, whoever he is, got to do with this mess?'

'Your supervisor at Imperial – Professor Ron Baski,' Jack said.

Anastasiya looked shocked. 'Prof Baski, I never called him Ron ... how come you've met him?'

'He's helping me on a case.'

'Really? What sort of case?'

That's intrigued you, hasn't it? See how you cope with the next bit. 'A minor pandemic up in Lincolnshire where I now work, where some sort of pathogen killed immigrant labourers – Ron thinks it's a Zoonotic disease.' *You always did that,* Jack thought as he watched Anastasiya's neck colour and a small red blotch appear on her left cheek, *when you found yourself in a tight spot.* 'Possibly something that escaped from somewhere called the InVivo research centre.' The red blotch got bigger.

'Really. Do give him my best wishes when you see him next, won't you?'

'I will ... perhaps you're right; we should get divorced – I'll get things started now I know where you live.'

'You really should try and get some help, Jack. You can't go on like this, can you?'

'I don't intend to,' he said and abruptly stood up. 'It's okay, I'll see myself out,' and before she knew it he was gone.

'Shit!' she said and emptied her glass, went to the front door and made sure it was locked before switching on both laptops.

Jesus, what a day, non-sodding stop from dawn to dusk, Jack thought as he drove back towards London. *I wonder how Gil's doing? Bugger! I've nowhere to stay and I'm knackered.* He couldn't make up his mind whether to go north to the M40 or south to the M4. He pulled in and Googled "Premier Inn"; there was one in Abingdon. He called, they had a room but the Mill Beefeater next door had finished serving so there was no food. He found a petrol station off-licence and stocked up with crisps, two out of date cheese sandwiches and a bottle of Shiraz. *Ain't life a treat,* he thought as he arrived at the Premier Inn and parked.

23.55

By the time Sam arrived home she was calm. She'd been threatened by more frightening people than Ian Wain. After eating a prepared meal from M&S that she called "meals for the sad and lonely" and sunk a couple of glasses of Merlot she was desperate to take things forward. She stared at her mobile willing it to ring and thought about calling St George's yet again; they were beginning to lose patience and had reminded her they would call if there was any change at all in Jim's condition.

At her computer she soon learnt that Plushenko meant "flame". *Well, that wasted a few minutes,* she thought. She discovered that Victor Plushenko had a Twitter account that contained homilies on the wonders of Englishness; she decided not to follow him. She turned her attention to the Companies House web site. InVivo Research Ltd had three sites in the UK (until the one in Lincolnshire burnt down), was an active company and had been incorporated two years previously. Its research was described as "classified/commercially sensitive" but Sam's reading between the lines suggested that its contractual income looked as if it came from HM Government though

from which department was unclear. *Someone needs to do some more work on that.* InVivo had three shareholders: the majority shareholder being Pharma-co-Logical Ltd *that's where Anastasiya is head of research,* with Victor Plushenko and Reginald Haugham having small share holdings *so who gets your shares now?* She turned her attention to Pharma-co-Logical Ltd. As far as she could tell it was a private company, registered in Malmo, Sweden and was entirely jointly owned by Angers Anderson, she scrolled down the page. *Oh my! Anastasiya Ranger! She owns both companies. She owns the company she works for but secretly. Why did you use your married name for this while you're known by your maiden name at work?* She went to the Swedish equivalent of Companies House but as PcL was not a company limited by guarantee she couldn't see how long it had been trading. Trawling the internet for references she came to the conclusion that it had been in existence for about five years. *That means that Anastasiya has been its joint owner for some time. I'd put money on the fact that Jack never knew that; it would mean that while she was working at a government research centre before she went to PcL she was also the owner of a private company trading commercially in the same sector – that's got to be dodgy; I bet she never made a declaration of interest and what's bloody obvious is that as the joint owner of PcL who is the major shareholder in InVivo she'd know everything that was going on there as well.* Without further ado she typed up everything she'd discovered, attached it to an email and sent it to Jack and Fred. She filed her findings in "Dropbox" for safekeeping.

Tuesday 19th November

07.09

Though the bed in the Premier Inn had been comfortable, Jack hadn't slept well; all he heard as he stared at the ceiling in the dark was Chrissie Hynde singing, "It's a thin line between love and hate, It's a thin line between love and hate." He wanted it out of his head; instead he tried to remember the lyrics. "It's five o'clock in the morning." *Stop it! Who needs the Pretenders?* He re-ran the meeting with Anastasiya over and over again and all the time Chrissie sang, "It's a thin line" *Was it really Kinsey's Vaio or do I just want something else to hold against her?* Finally he turned the sound back on his phone, it pinged and he saw he had an email from Sam. He read it once; tried to make sense of it - couldn't; made a cup of tea, sat on the edge of the bed and read the attachment again. It was all far worse than he could have imagined. He called Fred; there was no answer. He left a message on voice mail and sent a text to call him asp. He was about to call Sam but thought better of it – it would be best if she was ignorant of what he planned to do until it was done. He called Nev who took Jack's request in his stride; of course he'd break into 3 Blair Passageway while Anastasiya was at work and steal the Vaio. *She's lying about what killed Tassa. And now what's personal and what's professional collide. I need space to think but there's no space to be had ... I can't see the wood for the trees, just the sticks, not the trees.* He changed tack. *It's about time I admitted it – despite everything she's my blind spot – aren't you, Anastasiya? Aren't you? What are you doing? What am I doing? Not thinking straight. What is it?* Chrissie started to sing again.

07.15

Howard arrived back at his cottage on foot having hidden the Landrover in a copse a mile distant from the lodge; he'd been afraid that the Registrar would have kept her word and informed Border Control - this was not the time to be arrested with Aneta in Plushenko's hands. When he finally felt the coast was clear he crept into his home, collapsed on the sofa and immediately fell asleep exhausted.

Awakening fully clothed and with an unpleasantly stiff neck he looked through all the downstairs windows to be certain that there was no one outside before getting a shower and a change of clothes. Frustrated at the prospect of having to wait until Srench's office opened at nine o'clock to retrieve the copy of Choma's photograph he realised he was hungry; he couldn't remember when he'd last eaten a proper meal. There was nothing in the fridge in a fit state to be eaten. He retrieved the Landrover from its hiding place and set off. The only place where he could get a decent cooked breakfast at such an early hour was Gil's café.

Parking in a side street five minutes walk from the café he climbed out of his car. He pulled his hoodie up over his head, hoping this would make him unrecognisable. Arriving at the café, he was surprised to find the front door open; it was a freezing cold morning. He tentatively called, 'Hello?' as he went in, perplexed that the lights hadn't been switched on. Peering into the gloom he saw a bulky figure crouching near the counter. 'Hello?' he said again. Hearing his voice the figure sprang up and turned towards him. Howard gasped, 'Tammy? What are you doing?' She rushed at him violently pushing him out of the way. He stumbled back as Tammy fled through the café door. *Oh shit, what's she done?* His heart pounded as he walked forward to the edge of the counter. Gil lay on the ground next to his upturned wheelchair. 'Gil?' he asked. There was no reply. 'Gil?' he repeated the question. He felt a cold flush of panic. Gil was very still. *What's that? A handle. Shit!* A blue plastic handle was all that could be seen; its blade embedded

in the left side of Gil's rib cage. Howard gulped. Blood oozed and dripped through Gil's already sodden sweatshirt. *Fuck!* He hesitated. *I'd better not do that*, he thought rejecting the idea of checking Gil for signs of life. *You're dead. Shit! I should call the police but if I do I'll never get back to Aneta to stop Plushenko ... no fucking choice.* He turned and ran leaving the café door wide open just as he had found it.

He was unaware of two early morning walkers passing on the other side of the street who saw him running away; one ran after him, the other went in through the café door.

In his Landrover he tried to compose himself; he failed. He started the engine and slowly drove away; there was still more than an hour before he could get the photograph from James Srench - all he could think of doing was to drive out of the town until the solicitor's office opened.

At 08.50 he drove back into Louth. A police car pulled out from a side street and followed him. *It's just going the same way*, he thought, *just stick to the speed limit and all will be well.* *There, phew, that was scary*, he nodded as the police car disappeared from his rear view mirror. Turning the corner by St James' church, he stamped on the brakes; the road ahead was blocked by another police car and this one had its blues up and flashing. He looked over his shoulder; the first police car was now parked immediately behind him its front bumper touching his rear bumper. 'Oh, fucking hell!' he groaned lowering his head, resting it on his hands as they gripped the steering wheel.

His door opened. 'Howard Haugham, I think you need to come with me,' Clare said.

'Am I under arrest?'

'No, not as yet but you do have some explaining to do.'

'Did the registrar tell you about Aneta?' he asked as he climbed out of the vehicle.

'Yes, but this is not about that; this is more serious – the murder of Gil Robert.'

'It was Tammy; she killed him. I saw her.'

'Okay,' Clare said. 'Get back in your car and follow me to the station and don't try and do anything stupid.'

Within ten minutes at the police station Howard had told Clare everything. Twenty minutes later she and Howard had collected the photograph. Five minutes after that she had taken several copies and faxed the image and the writing on the back to Fred at SCD9. Howard had begged to be included in whatever happened next as he was desperate to protect Aneta. Clare called Fred and they agreed the way forward. Howard was released with a caution but without charge and was soon back on the road south.

Two hours later Tammy sat in the interview room with Clare and Peter.

'Do you want to tell us what happened?' Clare began after Tammy had been cautioned and the recorder turned on.

'Another fuckin' Haugham – they can rot in hell.'

'He saw you standing over Gil Robert,' Clare asked.

'Always a Haugham. Can't escape 'em. I tried. I were only fourteen. Bastard. Can I have a smoke?'

'Smoking's against the law inside public buildings,' Peter said.

'Let's go outside then.'

'Tammy ...' Clare began.

'Oi,' Tammy interrupted. 'Who fuckin' said you could use my Christian name? I'm Ms Hitchcox to you.'

'Ms Hitchcox,' Clare responded. 'You can't smoke in here and you can't go outside – you know that. We're investigating the murder of Gil Robert. You've been cautioned. You're suspected of that murder. Do you want to tell us what happened?'

'When?'

'This morning when Howard Haugham found you standing over the body would be a good start.'

Tammy sniffed and shook her head. 'Didn't start this morning. Started, like I said, when I was fourteen. Can you believe I was a looker then? Hard to believe lookin' at us now; fuckin' old slag.' Tammy stared at the ceiling. Peter was about to speak but Clare shook her head. 'Lord Reginald fuckin' Haugham pillar of the community – I must have been thick –

to have had one kid by him should have been enough but two – Jesus ... he fucked the life out of me – had enough – my boys – Mouse, Noddy ...’ Tammy paused again and started to cry.

‘Take a moment,’ Clare said.

‘Don’t want your fuckin’ sympathy, thank you very much,’ she said and wiped her face with the sleeve of her tracksuit top. ‘When Gil said as how he was going to press charges I thought no fuckin’ way – I told Gil the boys was mine, no one knew that, always said as how they was my sister’s kids what had abandoned them ... begged Gil to let ‘em off, told me to fuck off, quarrelled, it were an accident, didn’t mean to kill him, just scare him off. That do you?’

‘Not quite,’ Clare said. ‘Did you also kill Reginald Haugham after he had attempted to rape Aneta?’

‘Wondered when you’d get to that ... he had it comin’ after what he did to me – it almost made me laugh – I just sat on his face but he didn’t seem to like it – must have been my tracky bottoms – yeah, I killed the cunt. I put up with it, thought one day he’d make it right by me but when I found out he was selling it all to some Ukrainian fucker ... where was I goin’ to go? I’d lived there all them years, in his fuckin’ hall. I just waited ... took a chance ... bye bye Reggie and no questions asked.’

Clare waited to see if Tammy would say more; she didn’t. ‘Ms Hitchcox. Let me summarise what you’ve just said. Then we’ll write it all down and you can sign it, okay?’ Tammy shrugged. ‘When you were fourteen years old you had sex with Reginald Haugham and ...’

‘Yeah,’ Tammy interrupted. ‘Every day, even when I was in the club ... after Mouse was born it carried on just like before. Yeah ...’

‘And you had two children called Mouse and Noddy ...’

‘They ain’t their real names. Martin and Samuel they are; he liked Noddy books, Noddy was his hero, Samuel’s I mean. Mouse is mouse ‘cos he was quiet as one he was – never a murmur out of him ... they’re not bad lads - might have been

alright if they’d had a decent mother and a father what gave a shit.’

‘Did Reginald Haugham know that he was their father?’ Peter queried.

‘Naargh ... had to tell my mother it was one of the farm lads what did a runner – she would have brayed us if she’d known I’d been havin’ it off with the Lord of the fuckin’ manor.’

‘You used that excuse twice?’ Peter asked.

‘It were the same excuse she’d used – like mother like daughter – both slags.’

‘Did you ever tell Reginald Haugham the truth?’ Clare asked.

‘Oh yeah, in the end. He couldn’t have given a toss, just laughed at me but he weren’t laughing when I was sitting on his face that night – that fuckin’ shut him up. Now can I go and have a smoke outside if one of you comes with us? I’m desperate.’

Clare leant forward and switched off the recorder. ‘Peter’ll keep you company, Ms Hitchcox. One last question – do Mouse and Noddy know you’re their mother?’

‘Don’t be daft – think they’re my sister’s, don’t they? It’s, what do they call it – what’s the word?’

‘Ironic?’ Clare suggested.

‘That’s the word. Me killing Gil trying to protect Howard’s brothers, that would be ironic, would it? More fuckin’ sad if you asks me.’

‘You killed Gil because you’d told him the truth and couldn’t be certain he’d keep it to himself – is that right?’ Clare asked.

‘Summat like that.’

‘I don’t understand why you don’t want Mouse and Noddy to know you’re their mother.’

‘Thought you said as how us could go and have a smoke?’

09.36

As Jack drove his mobile rang; he pressed the button for hands off.

‘Jack, it’s Clare, are you sitting down?’

‘Hi, Clare, I’m driving. You sound serious.’

‘Can you pull over?’

‘I’m in a hurry to get to Ron’s.’

‘Pull over, Jack. Please.’

‘Hang on.’

Parked half on the pavement and half on the road he listened as Clare told him of Gil’s murder and Tammy’s confession.

‘Are you still there?’ she asked after a long silence.

‘Yeah – still here. Is there no end to this? Don’t answer. Can you do me a favour? ... When the body’s released please ask the undertakers to keep him until I can get back up to arrange his funeral – I know how he’d like to go and I don’t want anyone to ...’ he stumbled to a halt unable to say more.

‘It’s okay, Jack, we’ll keep him safe until you’re ready.’

‘Pity I couldn’t have done that while he was alive.’

‘Jack, it’s not your fault ... no one could have known what Tammy would do or why she would do it – it doesn’t make sense.’

‘Nothing makes sense, Clare. I need to go. I’ll give you a bell later. Sorry. Thanks for letting me know,’ he concluded and ended the call. *It’s just as well I live my life in boxes; put the nasty thing in the box, close the lid, turn the key, move on to the next joyous fucking experience and then stuff that away as well and lock it up. How much fucking longer can I go on doing this? Pete Seeger, little boxes, little boxes, and they all hurt just the same. Fucking madness, that’s what it is!*

He drove to Ron’s office at Imperial College with his mind tumbling from one event to another searching for some sort of understanding, not of the facts but of their causes; learning about Anastasiya and all the consequent unanswered questions

that produced would have been enough. *I’m like a tape unspooling, fast forward, rewinding all at the same time with the speakers blaring in my head; feedback fucked. At least Pete could smash his fucking guitar to smithereens - I’ve got nothing to hit.*

He stopped in Ealing and bought Ron a bottle of Johnny Walker Black Label (it was the best they had in the convenience store) as a belated birthday present and drove on. *At least I don’t have to pay the congestion charge*, he thought but it didn’t make him happy.

Ron thanked him profusely but ended with, ‘I think you might need a dram from this by the time we’ve finished. I’ve not been idle since we last talked; I don’t know all the answers yet and some of what I’m going to say you may find personally upsetting. You look stressed out, Jack; are you okay?’

‘Just some personal shit – bad news from back home.’

‘Do you want to ...’

‘Sorry, Ron, can we just focus on the case? My friend Sam has been doing some digging and I know that Anastasiya is somehow mixed up in what happened in Lincolnshire but I can’t say I even begin to understand a bloody thing. The big news is that she’s the co-owner of Pharma-co-Logical and that company is InVivo’s principal shareholder.’

‘Really? Funnily enough, though it’s not very funny at all, ~~but~~ it makes a lot of sense – how long have you known?’ Ron asked.

‘Only since this morning – I’m still trying to make sense of it. We won’t be disturbed, will we?’

‘Not if I use this,’ Ron said as he opened the office door and affixed a laminated sign that depicted a Dalek with the words “Disturb and be EXTERMINATED”. ‘The only people this doesn’t put off are the police and you’re inside,’ he concluded, locked the door and sat down behind his desk with Jack opposite him. ‘Let’s get to it. I’ll keep it simple. Headlines if you like, and some of this is guesswork at the moment. Let’s go back to first principles and remind you what Zoonotic diseases are. They include HIV-1, HIV-2, influenza, bubonic plague, anthrax etc. Six types of pathogen characterise all Zoonotic

diseases: viruses, bacteria, fungi, protists, prions and worms. The worst, the most interesting, the most clever and talented are viruses. Did you ever read that David Quammen book “Spillover” I recommended to you?’

‘No time, Ron.’

‘Understood. One of the things he says is that they hide, waiting for opportunity. The other is that viruses are not in our habitats; the reverse is the case – we’re in theirs. One has to think very differently about the supremacy of the human race when it comes to viruses, pathogens and Zoonotic diseases. The infection normally lives in what’s called a reservoir where it thrives, grows and replicates itself. The virus, when it fears for its life, jumps from animals to humans where it mutates and adapts to its new environment; the virus is determined to stay alive.’

‘You make them sound human, sensate; I mean intelligent,’ Jack said.

‘In a sense they are; it’s only our arrogance as humans, thinking we’re the masters of the universe, that makes us underestimate other forms of life – especially ones we can’t see with the naked eye. Anyway. For the virus, survival is everything and that means being patient. To move they need vectors – vehicles that enable the transmission of the disease. Vectors can be lots of things, for example, ticks, of which there are at least eight hundred sorts that all feed on blood. The Zoonotic disease transmitted may lie dormant or it may attack and kill straight away. It doesn’t mean to kill, and in that sense it’s quite unlike humans, but its new host can’t cope and so it has to find another and it spreads. One of the challenges of research has been to understand these processes. For some it has been the challenge of managing them for the benefit of human kind. For some others it has been how to use them for the purposes of warfare.’

‘Germ warfare. Are you saying that’s what this is all about?’

‘I don’t know, but it’s a possibility. Let’s look at the case in point. I’m nearly one hundred per cent certain that the pathogen that killed the Ukrainians is a variant of Bubonic

plague. It’s not an accidental or natural mutation but one that’s been deliberately engineered; it’s my guess that’s what they were doing at InVivo; the beagles were the proxies. It’s obvious that the ingestion of dog meat contaminated with the pathogen was accidental. If they were developing plague the question has to be – why? If we had Kinsey’s computer we might have a better idea.’

‘There’s so much going on. I haven’t got round to telling you; I think I may have found it.’

‘You have? Excellent. When can I have it?’

‘It’s in hand,’ Jack said.

‘And I shouldn’t ask any more than that?’

‘No.’

‘Let’s go on. I’ve been trying to find out what research they’re doing at Pharma-co-Logical. We knew Anastasiya was working there but we didn’t know she was the owner but that makes no difference. As far as I can see, and this is reading between the lines, because they’re very secretive, the focus at Pharma-co-Logical is on the immunological protection of humans from vector borne Zoonotic diseases akin to the flu virus H7N7 carried by birds. This would be similar to the one just discovered in China that genetically modifies itself into a more virulent form once it finds a human host. This is just thinking aloud, Jack, but if they have a new pathogen and at the same time they were developing a defence for that virus, a cure for it, that would be interesting. Again one might ask, why do that? Normally we’re seeking cures for things we don’t expect, don’t understand, not things we manufacture.’ Ron paused.

‘Viruses as weapons?’

‘God forbid, yes.’

‘And Anastasiya is involved with this?’

‘I don’t know, but it’s a possibility. I hope it isn’t true. Worst-case scenario; why did I say that? I hate that phrase. If a new virus has been successfully developed it will be safely stored somewhere until it is ready to be used – burning down the

centre in Lincolnshire will make no difference to this – the pathogen can be replicated to the quantity required and lodged in a vector that will happily carry it without risk to the new host. The big question is how it will be delivered – what will the vector be?’

‘Surely the big question is why would it be delivered?’

‘Agroterrorism? Bioterrorism? That will be for you to find out, Jack; I’m just the scientist, guessing in the dark; I can try and figure out the motives of viruses but humans are another matter.’

‘What do we do?’ Jack finally asked.

‘Getting me that computer would be a start.’

12.08

Clare wasn’t surprised that Jack’s prediction that the CPS wouldn’t proceed with a prosecution against Wiggy, Bentosh, and the Broadbeams came true; the final nail in the coffin was the destruction of the InVivo Research Centre. She was, however, very surprised when she received a call from Dr Oscar Deutsch of the Leicester Royal Infirmary saying that the four “internees” had been released thanks to the activities of their solicitor, Oxley Srench, who’d secured a court order preventing their further detention. The condition of their release was that they signed what was, in effect, the Official Secrets Act. Oscar explained it was regarded as “unwise” to release the nature of the disease that had killed the Ukrainians, adding, ‘this is what happens when you try to cover up the truth on the grounds of protecting the public.’ She didn’t disagree and wondered when she should share this latest piece of news with Jack.

In the back bar of the Victoria, Wiggy, Bentosh and the Broadbeams were already celebrating their liberty.

‘Got away with it,’ Wiggy chuckled. ‘To us,’ he said raising his glass of bitter. ‘The four fuckin’ musketeers.’

Glasses chinked.

‘I’m just hoping the wife has kept her word and fucked off,’ Harold Bentosh observed.

‘More likely she’ll be telling you to fuck off, mate – I’d put money on her having changed the locks and dumped your stuff in the nearest skip,’ Wiggy said.

‘Did that Oxley Srench tell you the same as what **as** he did us?’ Broadbeam asked.

‘How am I supposed to know that if I don’t know what he said to you?’ Wiggy asked.

‘Don’t get fuckin’ stroppy, Wiggy,’ Dave Broadbeam objected. ‘That’s no way to talk to family.’

‘Yeah, well, you still owes us that hundred quid.’

‘Stop taking the fuckin’ piss, Wiggy; think I’m paying you that after what’s happened?’

‘Anyhow, if that nutter hadn’t burnt the fuckin’ place down we’d be in the shit and that’s no mistake. What was it you wanted to know about the solicitor?’

‘Did he tell you we can sue for loss of earnings for the time we was locked up?’ Dave asked.

‘That was for our own safety,’ Bentosh said. ‘Because of the meat, Wiggy. If it hadn’t been for you in the first place, none of this would have happened.’

‘You’re saying it was my fault? You’ve got a fuckin’ cheek,’ Wiggy said.

‘It would have been better if we could’ve sold our story to the press,’ Dave sighed.

‘Yeah, but we had to sign those papers didn’t we – fuckin’ official secrets act – break that and we’re really in trouble,’ Shelley said.

‘I thought this was supposed to be a celebration not a fuckin’ wake,’ Wiggy grumbled.

‘I wonder what they done with all them dead Ukrainians,’ Bentosh said.

‘Thinking of selling ’em on, were you?’ Dave asked.

‘Piss off,’ Bentosh replied. ‘Anyone for another?’

The door opened. 'Here, it's the fuckin' law,' Shelley said as Dick Cliff and his wife Nat, walked in.

'Heard you were out,' Dick said. 'Got room for two more?'

'Not sure we should be fraternising with no coppers,' Wiggy said.

'Why break the habit of a lifetime?' Nat asked. 'Can we sit down?'

'What you drinking, love?' Dick asked his wife.

'Usual,' she replied.

'Anyone else?' Dick asked.

'I was just going to get a round in,' Bentosh said.

'Keep your money, Harold,' Dick said. 'From what I heard about your missus you're going to need it.'

'Told you,' Wiggy chuckled as Dick took their orders.

'To your freedom,' Dick said once they all had their drinks.

'Thanks for what you've done, Dick, we owe you,' Dave said.

'We had to sign the Official Secrets Act,' Bentosh said. 'Wouldn't let us out otherwise. It's odd when you think about it.'

'What is?' Dave asked.

'After all that's happened it's like as if nothing has happened.'

'That's what they do; that's what they do,' Wiggy said.

'What's that supposed to mean? You pissed already, Wiggy?' Shelley asked.

'Oh, Christ, look what the cat's brought in,' Dave said.

'Thought I'd find you in here,' PCSO Billy Swann said as he approached their tables.

'Want a drink?' Dave asked.

'Nar, ta, on duty, ain't I? Have you heard?'

'Heard what?' Wiggy asked.

'Thought you'd all better know.'

'What?'

'Gil Richard's been murdered and Tammy done it; she's confessed and to doin' in Lord Haugham an' all. Double murder.'

'Fuckin' hell.'

'What she do that for?' Shelley asked.

'Dunno,' Billy said with a shrug. 'If you see them lads Noddy and Mouse let 'em know, will you, 'cos no one seems to know where they are?'

'They've done a fuckin' runner, 'aven't they?' Wiggy said.

'They're not supposed to do that,' Billy said.

'Like they were goin' to hang around to go to court for beatin' up the fucker what's now dead?'

'That's a bit hard,' Shelley said.

'Never liked him,' Wiggy.

'Yeah, but, you know – speaking ill of the dead, it's unlucky, innit?'

'Unlucky for 'im, yeah.'

'Anyhow, thought as how you ought to know,' Billy said.

'Thanks, Billy,' Shelley said.

'Oh, and Harold, your missus has been down the station looking for you – she left a suitcase, said it had your stuff in it.'

'I fuckin' told you,' Wiggy laughed, his belly wobbling under the tight white t-shirt bearing the red cross of St George.

'Fuck off!' Bentosh said standing up and knocking over the chair on which he'd been sitting. 'I need a piss.'

16.30

Though Fred had been unhappy with Howard's involvement in rescuing Aneta, he accepted his argument that Plushenko expected him to return with the photograph. To do otherwise would raise suspicions and, in turn, would expose Aneta to even more risk.

Streetlights, stylish reproductions of lamps from a previous era, cast a romantic glow as dusk faded into night. A male road sweeper, presumably on overtime, lazily brushed rubbish

and leaves into neat piles before shovelling them into one half of his refuse cart. A mechanic worked on the engine of a car accompanied by its concerned woman owner while inside the vehicle two male passengers sat quietly chatting. Two telephone engineers worked within a protective canopy under a battery driven arc lamp. A man and a woman with their dogs – an Inuit Husky cross and a golden Lab – chatted amiably on the corner despite the cold. A down-and-out installed himself and his sleeping bag in the gateway of the house next door to Plushenko's residence and rolled a cigarette. On open land to the rear of the property four young men played an impromptu game of football. At exactly five o'clock, the road sweeper checked his watch and removed a large heavy metal object from the other bin of his barrow. Howard's Land Rover pulled into the street and stopped outside Plushenko's house.

Fred's words still rang in Howard's ears. 'The idea, Howard, is that you only give Plushenko the photograph when Aneta is with you. Then you try to leave. He may let you go but that's a long shot. As soon as you're with Aneta you immediately press the alarm in your pocket and we'll be inside within seconds. Just try and keep it simple and act the innocent – he thinks you're naïve but he won't be stupid enough to think you're not a risk. That's why you're wearing that bulletproof vest beneath your jumper; you should be okay if he thinks he's safe. Remember, we want Plushenko in one piece; there's a lot more to this than rescuing your fiancée.'

'Not for me there isn't,' Howard replied.

'Fair enough,' Fred said as he ensured that the tiny radio mike that Howard was wearing in his belt buckle was functioning correctly.

Howard rang the front door bell and all the plain clothes officers, Fred and Jack heard the sound of Westminster Chimes.

'Avon calling,' one of the telephone engineers said to his companion.

'Shut it!' Jack said over the closed radio network.

The door remained shut. Howard rang the bell once more and stood back to look at the front of the house. All the lights

were on. The road sweeper took a protective helmet from the barrow and carrying a battering ram hurried to stand just inside the gateway.

'This is it,' Fred said.

The two dogs were put in the back of the telephone engineers' van. Everyone moved forward. The four footballers climbed over the rear wall into the back garden. Howard tried the front door handle; it was locked. He rang the bell again.

'Now!' Fred commanded.

Howard heard running feet coming up behind him and quickly stood aside. The refuse collector, his face now invisible within a protective helmet, swung the battering ram. There was a loud bang as the armament mounted in its head exploded into the door. The door jam shattered and the door flew back off its hinges clattering to the far side of the hall as officers piled in followed by Jack and Fred. All the doors to all the ground floor reception rooms were closed.

'Quiet!' Jack shouted.

'What's happening?' Howard asked as he stood near Jack.

'Quiet!' Jack shouted again. 'Listen.'

'It's her, it's Aneta!' Howard gasped as they heard the almost inaudible sound of sobbing. 'She's up there,' Howard shouted running to the stairs dropping the envelope containing the photograph; the down-and-out picked it up.

'Stop him!' Jack ordered and Howard was restrained just as he reached the second tread on the stairs.

'She's up there! Let me go!'

'Howard, you're not going anywhere until we know it's safe,' Fred said.

'Let me go!' Howard shouted, struggling to escape the clutches of the two telephone engineers, as Jack was already leading the way up the stairs.

'She's in there,' Jack said trying a bedroom door; it was locked. 'Bust it in.'

The refuse collector quickly adjusted the power of the charge and the door was blown into the enormous first floor

bedroom that must have been ten metres long and six metres wide. Aneta was sitting tied to an upright chair at the far end of the bedroom. She didn't look up as Jack and the others came in. She just sobbed.

'Holy shit!' Jack gasped. A macabre tableau had been created on the four-poster bed at the opposite end of the room to Aneta. The stench was abominable. 'Can you get her out of here, please?' Jack said as he and the female officer gently untied Aneta. 'Don't touch a thing,' Jack said as the officers stared open-mouthed. The male dog handler retched. 'Call in forensics, scene of crime, the biggest team you can get. Now, everyone out,' Jack said. Standing on the landing he called, 'Aneta is coming down; she's physically unharmed but she'll need as much tlc as she can get. Fred, you'd better come and take a look at this,' he said as two officers carefully led the stumbling young woman along the landing and down the stairs where she was reunited with Howard.

'What's happened?' Howard asked as he held her in his arms.

She made no reply, just sobbed as the female officer suggested that they went outside and sat in Howard's car.

Fred joined Jack in the bedroom. 'Shit, Jack, who the fuck would do that?' Victor Plushenko was naked. He directly faced where Aneta had been placed to watch. His wrists were tied to the top left and right at the top of the four-poster bed. His ankles were fixed to the bottom left and right of the bed by the same fluorescent yellow plastic clothesline that held his wrists in place. 'It's them, isn't it?'

'Yeah, the same two that finished Dimitri,' Jack replied. 'Another punishment execution.'

'Have they really cut off his eyelids?' Fred asked.

'Yes, and his ears.'

'Is that his tongue?' Fred asked.

The sodden Persian carpet beneath Plushenko's body stank as the pool of blood congealed. His bowel hung between his thighs gleaming black, crystalline vermilion. 'That kid was made to watch,' Fred said. 'What was all that about?'

'Fucking with her head, power? Shit, I don't know. What I do know is this is exactly what Plushenko feared might happen if his boss found out about his photograph. How could his boss have known the photograph existed?'

'He'd have to have been told.'

'Who knew?'

'Everyone in SCD9,' Fred replied.

'And beyond our lot?'

'Dunno, Ian Wain knew.'

'I can't believe that Wain and Plushenko are tied up in this together. If you're right about Wain then he's up to something else, not shit like this,' Jack said.

'Guv?' the down-and-out asked from the doorway interrupted. 'What do you want us to do with the young lady?'

'Take her back to the station and make sure she's treated like royalty and take her boyfriend with you. You drive,' Fred said.

'Sure thing, Guv. The young man dropped this,' the officer said proffering the envelope containing the photograph.

'This is it, the original photograph,' Fred said as he took it.

'I haven't seen it yet,' Jack said.

'I know. No time like the present. Take a look for yourself,' Fred said as he passed Jack the envelope. 'But perhaps we could do that somewhere else other than in here – I don't think I can cope with the stench much longer.' As they walked side by side down the stairs Fred asked Jack if he would run the crime scene operation and hold the fort until the police doctor, pathologist, forensics and SOCOs had done their business.

Alone at last, sitting in the room where they had so recently interviewed Plushenko Jack opened the envelope containing the photograph. 'Oh fuck,' he gasped. *It's Choma. How could it possibly be you?* He had no time to deal with the shock as an officer came in and asked, 'Can you come and have a look at this, sir?'

In a daze, Jack followed the officer to an en-suite bathroom on the second floor. Toomy was lying face down in the bath. 'Cause of death?' Jack needlessly asked.

'Single shot to the back of the head.'

'At least it was quick, unlike his boss,' Jack said.

Back downstairs in the lounge surrounded by walls hung with the work of English water-colourists Jack paced up and down. *Choma Boyko. Shit. What do I do now?* As he took out the phone to make the call it suddenly vibrated in his hand. 'Nev? ... Brilliant. Where and when can I collect it? No, I haven't got anywhere to stay as yet – bloody homeless at my age and position,' he tried to joke. 'That would be kind, you're sure ... just until I find somewhere. Okay, so what's your address? ... Thanks, Nev. I'm not sure how long I'll be ... under a flowerpot down the side, okay. I'll let myself in if you're not home. I'm going to be here for hours yet ... Cheers, Nev.' Without prompting Chrissie Hynde started singing in his head all over again.

21.00

Sam parked at the top end of the street and walked down the hill towards the lido; she'd forgotten that Ian Wain had been a keen swimmer and a member at the heated open-air pool. His text message had been quite clear: he needed an urgent meeting, somewhere safe where they wouldn't be seen or overheard. She sent a text back agreeing to meet at nine thinking that Fred's wish that she get close to him was being realised without her doing much about it.

Standing at the entrance it was clear that the place was locked up and that there was nobody about. *So how the hell am I supposed to get in there?* There were no lights except security lights inside the building and those over the water. She carried on past the entrance for fifty yards to see if there was another way in. Coming to an emergency exit she saw that the chain and padlock holding the gate in place had been cut. Looking behind her she checked to see if there was anyone about; there wasn't. Quickly she went in and pushed the gate shut behind her. She stood very still and listened. In a slight

breeze the water lapped gently on the poolside edge. There was the faintest smell of chlorine. Looking up she marvelled at the clarity and brightness of the stars. For no reason she remembered that Isaac Newton, as a child, had imagined that their light escaped from heaven through the black shroud that surrounded the earth at night. It made her smile. She shivered; it was cold. Warmer air billowed gently rising above the surface of the heated water forming a cloud under a moon one day past full. She remembered, as a child, the joy of swimming in heated water in the depths of winter with snow on the ground and the same bright stars overhead. *Where was that? Who was I with? It was January. Doesn't matter I suppose. But it was so good. Where the hell is Wain?*

She approached the buildings to her right and walked under an overhead balcony. 'Ian,' she whispered. There was no reply. The water lapped. An owl called. Far away a police siren faded into nothing. A crinkle of rolling dry leaves caught by a sudden gust of wind tumbled across the concrete startling her. For a moment the cloud above the water was whisked away. She stood very still. *Just a trick of the light, must be.* The wind dropped. The cloud above the water reformed. Standing at the very edge, the water just touching the toes of her shoes she stared; nothing. Another sudden gust and she gasped **gaping**. *Oh, fuck.* It wasn't a trick of the light. It couldn't have been anyone else: Commander Ian Wain, in uniform, lay face up in the water. His clothes, fat air-sacks, held him gently eddying on the surface. She turned, heart racing, startled by a sudden noise; a cat scampered past oblivious to the dead body. She breathed. The cloud reformed over the water. Ian Wain disappeared. *But not out of mind, are you, Ian?* Anxiously she looked to right and left – who else might be there in the shadows watching her? Behind her more dead leaves rattled. She shuddered. She took out her mobile phone, thought of calling Fred but rang Jack instead. She took his advice and got out of the lido as fast as possible and made for home. *Jack sounds even worse than me. What's happened?*

After the last of the forensics team left, Jack locked Plushenko's house and put a constable on guard at the entrance before driving away to the lido to see what he could find before calling in Wain's death. Instinct told him that this was the best thing to do; he just hoped he was right. A media storm was not what they needed just at the moment – but did they ever need that?

Like Sam, Jack parked some distance from the lido, pulled the hood of his parka over his head and walked slowly down the hill trying to make himself as inconspicuous as possible. Arriving at poolside everything was as Sam had said, except that Ian Wain had gone.

Sitting in his car Jack called Sam and told her about Wain's missing body. She thought he was accusing her of being delusional. 'For fuck's sake, Sam, of course I believe you; it's hardly stuff you'd make up. You're at home? ... Stay there. I'll call you when I've done with Fred – there's stuff he needs to know. I may be late but we need to talk, there's things I need to tell you as well. Shit ... I need you to do me a favour. I can't get to Nev's place; he has something for me, can you call him and ask him to bring it to yours and both wait for me there?'

'What do I need to know?' Sam asked.

'Later.'

'No, Jack, now! You're not the only one under pressure.'

'Plushenko's boss is Choma Boyko.' There was silence at the end of the line. 'Sam? You still there?'

'Do you mean ...'

'Yes, Anastasiya's brother ... yeah, great eh? Got to go. See you later.'

There was no doubt in Jack's mind that Wain had been murdered; very few senior police officers committed suicide in the uniform of a Metropolitan Police Deputy Assistant Commissioner. He spent the drive back to New Scotland Yard trying to work out if Wain's text message to Sam had actually been from him or from his killers. If it were the latter, why would they have wanted Sam to find the body and then have

taken it away before it could be seen and investigated by anyone else? It sounded a lot like when she'd been set up for the murder of Julius Abercrombie; he was beginning to think that maybe it was The Cabal seeking revenge for what she'd done *but*, he thought, *she didn't really bring them down, not like the Apostles, so why would they want to take revenge?*

As he walked up the stairs to Fred's office, he turned his mind to the news he really didn't want to break to his boss.

After Jack had described everything that Sam had seen and what he had subsequently discovered Fred sat very still. 'Oh, Christ! Now the shit will really hit the fan. With me having burnt my boats with Breake over Wain you're going to have to lead on the investigation into Wain. I'll stick with the Plushenko murder.'

'I'm sorry, boss, I can't.'

'What do you mean you bloody can't – that's why you're here.'

'I can't work on this case anymore, none of it. I'll have to go back to Lincolnshire.'

'For fuck sake's, Jack, what is all this bollocks?'

'Choma Boyko, that's his name, Boyko – I recognised him. I know him. He's Anastasiya's elder brother.'

Fred was silent for a moment or two. 'Your estranged wife? Are you serious?'

'Yeah, Anastasiya's brother and that's not all. I need to tell you about what she's doing and what Ron Baski is trying to understand.'

It didn't take long in the telling. 'Shit, Jack,' Fred sighed. 'You'd better go home.'

'I could resign.'

'Don't be a fool, Jack. I don't need you out there as a freelancer. I need you as the fucking good copper you are.'

'A good copper? You taking the piss, Fred?'

'No, one doesn't suspect one's wife ...'

'But I did – whatever it was ... she killed my little girl and I want her for that.'

'But you're going to have to leave that to us – this goes way beyond SCD9 – I need to give Breake the heads up on all this.'

'You won't forget that we have a mole?' Jack asked.

'As if. Where are you going now?'

'To see Sam.'

'Do me a favour, Jack. Don't resign.'

'I'll see,' Jack said and left Fred shaking his head in disbelief at the events of the last few hours.

21.00

Before Anastasiya put the key in the lock to the door of 3 Blair Passageway she knew that something was wrong. As the security light above the door popped on, she saw that the gossamer thin thread of pale green silk matching the surrounding paintwork carefully fixed across the top right hand side of the door had been snapped. She wondered whether to make the call straight away or wait and see what had been stolen; she was pretty sure she knew the answer. With her right hand she felt in the pocket of her heavy black overcoat and was comforted as her fingers closed around the wooden grip of the Lady Smith .38 S&W Special +P. Using her left hand she turned the key in the lock. The door opened. A movement sensitive overhead lamp lighted. She saw that the burglar alarm was off, as it always was because of her cat; more alarmingly, the cables to the CCTV cameras had been cut. She shut the door, listened, sniffed the air. Keeping her right hand firmly around the gun in her pocket but with the barrel now pointing ahead she moved into the large open plan space. A noise. She turned, adrenalin rushing, heart beating fast. Brueghel, the cat, jumped down the stairs. Lamps sprang into life as she moved. Looking at the table she saw that the Vaio was gone. 'Idiot,' she said out loud. Brueghel purred as he rubbed against her legs. Though she was certain the house was empty she went upstairs to make sure she was correct; she was.

She hung her coat up and poured herself a large glass of Rioja and thought her introduction to the variety was the only good thing that Jack had ever done for her. It had been a hard task to keep up the façade for so many years. She took her laptop out of its carrying case, put in on the table and switched it on. A phone call was out of the question. Skype was now the means of choice for safe communication; it was virtually undetectable except by the brightest boffins at GCHQ and she was pretty sure that matters wouldn't have gone that far – not yet anyway.

'Is there a problem?' Choma asked without ceremony as he appeared on screen.

'Jack came to see me yesterday night apparently to interrogate me about Tassa.'

'Doesn't he know the truth?' Choma asked.

'Of course he doesn't.'

'I told you it would come back to bite us.'

'That's not the problem. It was just extraordinarily bad luck that when he left the Met he went back to Lincolnshire where we were doing the work in the InVivo labs; we should have dealt with it earlier and put someone else in there other than Kinsey. Too late now. He saw Kinsey's laptop; he'll have been looking for it ever since we had it stolen. It was on the table. I'd been working on it; he arrived unexpectedly, so he saw it. He may have even seen the screen before I closed the lid.'

'There must be thousands of Vaios.'

'Choma, you're not listening. Jack will have been looking for Kinsey's computer. He saw one here; he'll have jumped to conclusions and he would, of course, have been right – whatever else he isn't, he's a good cop. The Vaio has been stolen. My guess is that it was Jack, or someone working for Jack, who took it. We need it back.'

'The security cameras will tell us who was there. Send me the files through your secure server.'

'There are no pictures; the cables have been cut.'

'So, we will assume it's Jack and punish him.'

'Why do you still bother with all this punishment stuff when there's so much at stake, something so much bigger?'

'So people will be afraid. Fear. An attack on all fronts is the way to win.'

'But look what ... no, enough. It's too late for recriminations ... we are where we are. What we need right now is that Vaio.'

'It will be done,' Choma said.

'Be quick.'

'You worry too much, Anastasiya. By the way, you should know that Plushenko's contract has been terminated.'

'With no possibility of re-employment?'

'Permanently unemployable,' Choma confirmed. 'I can send you a picture of his exit interview.'

'No thank you. Listen, I don't want Jack to come to a similar end.'

'You, sentimental?' Choma laughed.

'For her sake.'

'Of course.'

'Don't leave it too long; he's an unpredictable bastard. If he works out what I'm doing he'll come after us all guns blazing,' Anastasiya said.

'He has one gun; I have many.'

'Don't underestimate him.'

'Why couldn't you have chosen someone with a less dangerous occupation?' Choma asked. 'I always said it was a big risk.'

'Being married was essential; being married to a policeman was the best of covers – having the child was the mistake. We don't have time for this; we need the Vaio.'

22.57

Nev was already at Sam's when Jack arrived; the Vaio was on the kitchen table around which the three of them now sat, each with a glass of Barolo.

'Let's deal with the easy bit first, so thanks, Nev,' Jack said raising his glass. 'Easy?'

'In and out, piece of piss; no point in trying to pretend no one had been there when I was nicking the Vaio.'

'No security in place?'

'The alarm was off. CCTV just a snip and gone.'

'You did check it was down?'

'Of course I bloody checked,' Nev said.

'She'll know it was me, or at least someone working for me,' Jack said.

'I'm not working for you,' Nev objected. 'I'm working with you. And what the fuck do I care if they think it was you?'

'Easy, mate, no offence meant ... after what's happened to ...'

'Take no notice, Jack ... I'm ... forget it. Let's get on with this, shall we?' Nev asked.

'Now that you have the Vaio, what are you going to do with it?' Sam asked. 'Give it to Fred?'

'I daren't. Fred's got a mole in there somewhere – he thought it was Wain, but I guess that theory is out of the window now. I'm trying to work out what was going on when you got the text to meet Wain at the pool.'

'Don't you think I am too?' Sam asked. 'Before we get to that – if you're not going to give the computer to Fred for analysis, what are you going to do with it?'

'Within the next hour I will have emailed Wainstock my resignation from the force with immediate effect; I'll copy Fred in. Then I'll email Ron and ask him to meet me back at my place in Lincolnshire where he can find out what's on that

bloody machine. After that ... I don't know; it depends on what conclusions we draw from this evening's events.'

'If she knows it's you that has the Vaio, she'll come after you,' Sam said.

'It'll be her brother's merry men.'

'I could come with you, bit of back up, you know,' Nev said.

'Thanks, Nev, but it's got to be no. I'd be much happier if you two were watching each other's backs.'

'We're just playing catch-up,' Sam said. 'We react; we're not making them, whoever the "them" are, react to what we're doing. I'd like that to change, but for that to happen we need to have a better idea of what's going on. Is everything linked? Is it all part of the same thing or just coincidence? I was forgetting, you don't believe in coincidences do you, Jack?'

'No, I don't. But that doesn't mean that I know how it all joins up, not yet, anyway.'

'I know you want to get those emails off but let's try and get the picture straight on the wall, shall we?'

'I can drink to that,' Nev said and emptied his glass before refilling it.

Jack pushed his aside. 'I'm going to need to drive.'

'Tonight?' Sam asked. Jack nodded. 'Understood. Working backwards. Fred asks me and Nev to investigate Wain because he can't.'

'I never got any surveillance set up on Wain; there wasn't any time and Fred never sent through anything I needed,' Nev said.

'Never mind, too late now,' Sam continued. 'Wain warns me off then I get a text to meet him – the message is from his phone but that proves nothing. I arrive at the pool and he's dead. Jack goes to the pool and Wain has vanished. Options. The call was from Wain. His phone was bugged and he was murdered to shut him up because someone thought he was going to spill the beans to me.'

'That could be true whether or not he sent the message himself. The question that intrigues me is if he was killed to

shut him up, or punish him, why not just let the body be found in the morning? Why get you to the pool so that you would find him?'

'That's right,' Sam nodded. 'And why was the body removed? They knew I'd call it in so whoever went to check would find Wain missing. What's the purpose of that?'

'It's a bit like the stuff that went around Abercrombie,' Nev said.

'In a way,' Sam said. 'But in other ways, no ... I suppose it might have been that his killers didn't know he'd sent me a message; they followed him to the pool, took their chance and killed him. Saw me do a runner and removed the evidence.'

'But why?'

'Why are you assuming that the same people that killed him also took the body away?' Nev asked.

'Good question,' Sam said. 'I guess it's because I thought it was directed against me because I was supposed to be getting close to him, but it could just be coincidence. Don't say anything, Jack!'

'I won't. We don't even know how he died; it may not have been from drowning and we won't know until the body is found and a post mortem conducted.'

'Let's go back to motive,' Sam said. 'If he was killed to shut him up ... put it the other way, if he was some sort of mole, to whom was he reporting? And it surely wouldn't have been the person to whom he was reporting that would have had him killed. It could have been an adversary ... what was it exactly that Fred thought Wain was up to. Can you just refresh me on that?'

Jack looked perplexed. 'You know, when it comes right down to it, it's always been rather vague, insinuations rather than facts. There was, of course what happened in the crypt; sorry Nev, I'm not meaning to be callous, but Luke, remember him? He was the one who apparently spilled the beans to Wain as to where Yuri was hiding. But I don't know that for a fact and we've no idea what Wain did with that information. I've

not seen any of the actual evidence ... but, hey, come on, Fred is as straight as a dye – where is this taking us?’

‘Come on, Jack, spit it out. What’s bothering you?’ Sam asked.

Jack noisily blew air out through his lips and then sighed. ‘I guess I’m just tired ... I remember the night when Fred came up to see me, the night InVivo went up – he was ranting about England being taken over by, it sounds crazy, by foreigners ... it was just a frustrated rant.’

‘Do you think, he wanted, even expected to get Wain’s job?’

‘Not Fred: he’s a copper not a pen pusher,’ Jack said.

‘Could he have just had it in for Wain and was trying to disgrace him?’

‘Shit, I don’t know, Sam.’

‘It might be an idea for us to try and find out.’

‘What? You two investigate Fred? That’s off the wall, Sam.’

‘Just thinking out loud, outside the box.’

‘Fuck the box!’ Jack said.

‘Look,’ Nev said. ‘This isn’t a game. I want the fuckers that killed my wife and if they’re the same ones who did for Plushenko, so what? I’m only in this to get them one way or another.’

‘You’re right, Sam, we shouldn’t rule anything out, but ... Ah, shit. Look, I only need a few minutes to do those emails and then I’ll be right back. Can I use your office, Sam?’

Jack finished the email. For five minutes the arrow hovered over the send button. *Well that’s all my bridges burnt*, he thought as he read, “your message has been sent.”

Returning to the kitchen he found Nev banging the table with his fist. ‘We keep coming back to those two Katyuk bastards. How do we find them?’

‘Fred’s looking for them,’ Jack said. ‘Now that Wain is dead perhaps he’d welcome some extra off-the record help – you ask and see how he reacts?’

‘I don’t think I want to ask Fred anything,’ Sam said. ‘I know he’s your friend, Jack, but I just feel uncertain.’

‘That’s up to you. I need to get on my way and get that laptop out of here and to a safe place,’ Jack said.

‘If you’re right and your ex reckons it was you who had the Vaio stolen, won’t they come looking for you at your cottage?’ Nev asked.

‘Probably ... but I’ll be ready.’

‘I think I should come with you,’ Nev said.

‘They might come looking for it here if they know that the three of us are working together and we have to assume they do know that,’ Jack said. ‘If they do, I’d rather you were here with Sam than following me up the A1.’

‘Do you think that’s a possibility?’ Sam asked.

‘At the moment? Anything’s possible. Why not talk to Fred in the morning and see what he says, put your mind to rest on that score or not as the case may be. After that, let’s talk on the phone and maybe then it’ll be a good idea for you both to come up to Lincolnshire.’

‘Okay,’ Sam said. ‘I’ll see what Fred has to say for himself and whether they’re going to announce Wain as a missing person – for Christ’s sake he has a wife and kids – won’t they be wondering where he is?’

Jack shook hands with Nev before he and Sam gave each other a peremptory nod; Jack wondered why they didn’t risk a kiss on the cheek.

23.49

‘Thank you for sharing your initial report so promptly,’ Simpkin said into the mouthpiece of his antique Bakelite phone ‘but what it doesn’t explain is motive ... no, I perfectly understand that. I’m asking you to give me your view ... I see

... but their modus operandi is somewhat more brutal than drowning, is it not?’

‘There’s a difference between punishment killings and those that are designed as warnings. That’s the way these people work.’

‘And this was a warning?’ Simpkin listened carefully to the explanation. ‘To me? How could they know about me? ... No, of course you don’t know. It was a rhetorical question. Why did they send a message to the Ticks woman so that she found the body? ... That’s not very helpful. And why was the body missing when Ranger went to check on what he’d been told by Ticks? ... Then speculate. This is important ... Yes, I know that Boyko’s organisation is hard to predict but normally they haven’t tried to hide the condition of their victims while on this occasion the body has been removed, why?’

‘To show us that they can do whatever they like? Isn’t that why we’re trying to bring them down?’

‘I wouldn’t put it quite like that – our purpose is to destroy them, cut out the cancer that they are once and for all.’ Simpkin took a deep breath. ‘There is something you should know: Ian Wain was also working for me.’

There was silence at the other end of the line. ‘Why didn’t I know?’

‘There was no reason you should. It was better then that you were in ignorance one of the other ... I’m sure you are ... good night,’ Simpkin concluded and placed the receiver back into its holder.

23.53

Anastasiya reduced her speed to just over ten miles an hour and turned off the car’s headlights; there was no real need but her recent experience encouraged caution. The Palmerstown industrial estate had first been constructed in the late 1960s on a wave of optimism. In the almost fifty years of its existence it

had passed through many stages reflecting the economic cycle from expectation to disappointment and always characterised by a lack of new investment. Its final condition was one of total dereliction; it was perfect for Anastasiya’s purpose and she and Choma had bought it for a song, in fact, for almost less than the price of the Q7 she was driving. The estate was made up of a number of identical factory units laid out around a grid of service roads. Anastasiya drove further into the dereliction and parked her car inside a unit with open doors. She went outside and walked the fifty metres to her destination.

Unit 9 had no other name. It was made of brick, weeds protruded from mortar, buddleia thrived and graffiti tags abounded. Generations of bored children had broken every pane of glass in every window; no one had seen fit to repair them but no one had penetrated beyond the metal shutters that had been fitted behind the destroyed glazing. From the superficial damage to the doors of Unit 9 it was evident that serious attempts had been made to break in – to no avail. Anastasiya took a penlight and a double-ended key from her pocket, inserted the key into the lock and turned it to the right. Tumblers whirred, interior bolts within the body of the door glided and clicked. She reversed the key and inserted its other end into a second lock. The thick steel door opened with a sigh. She stepped into a space measuring two metres by two metres, closed the door behind her in the dark, switched on the light and relocked the door from the inside. She waited until the air smelt clean and fresh. She took plastic covers for her shoes from the dispenser and put them on. Removing her coat she dressed herself in a white pull-on sterile suit, head cover and face mask.

The bright stainless steel door facing her had no key. She tapped in numbers on a keypad and pressed enter. She went in. The door closed automatically behind her. She smiled. There it all was. She checked the thermostat; all was as it should be – one degree Celsius. The back-up generator installed in the case of a power failure, the clinical storage environment and allied systems had been more expensive than the estate itself. The room contained ten stainless steel shelving units measuring

eight by six metres by six metres. Each unit contained four shelves and each shelf housed twenty sterile ventilated plastic storage boxes. Each box contained one hundred dormant moth larvae. Eighty thousand larvae.

Anastasiya walked down an aisle between two units checking on the condition of the moths. At the far end of the room she came to two vertical freezer units. Looking through the glazed front doors of the freezers she saw rack upon rack of phials containing her virus and beneath that the boxes containing the antidote.

There was an orange plastic chair. She sat down and stared in admiration at her achievement. Her pride welled up. She struggled to contain tears of joy. But she was angry with herself; it was far too early to celebrate victory. The journey had been long since her recruitment to the KDB at the age of seventeen. She remembered how flattered she'd felt to be chosen and made her the promise that she would play a part in changing the world. When that world collapsed in 1989 she saw no reason to change her mission, especially since the state security service had facilitated the development of organised crime and her bother Choma was doing startlingly well as a leader of the Ukrainian Mafia. Brother and sister formed an alliance; profit and terror – what could be better? She smiled. The English would have described her as a “sleeper”; this implied passivity. She had been quite the opposite of that; it made her want to laugh – even poor old Jack had been duped – about everything.

She reached up to her left and switched off the lights. She sat in the dark. Listened. Nothing but a comforting hum. Imagined metamorphosis. Cocoons crackling. Pupation. Emergence. Flight. Bats. Mice. Birds. Pestilence. Fear. She sat in the dark. She switched on the lights. She smiled. It was good. It was time to go.

She placed twenty boxes in the air lock. As she changed back into outdoor clothing she wondered if she would be the next to see her Pandora's box or would it be some poor fool who finally managed to break in and release her legacy. She collected her car and loaded the boxes into the boot.

Wednesday 20th November

04.28

Jack climbed out of the car and with the Vaio under his arm walked to the Belvedere, unlocked the door and went inside. *I only left here on Monday and it's like the bloody arctic*, he thought and fired up the little central heating boiler. *I thought I'd left that on?* Pulling his parka tightly around him he made himself a cup of tea and, because the car was warmer than the caravan, he climbed back in and started the engine to wait for the Belvedere to warm up. He'd never been one for music in cars but on this night he wished he had something on a CD to keep him company. He heard a barn owl cry and smiled as a sudden swoosh of wings flew past the windscreen only inches away. Listening carefully he heard the east wind shaking and rattling in the branches of the trees in the nearby woods. *Ooh, that's better. Peace. Home. Was that a fox bark?* He sipped his tea and heard the owl, now farther off. He sighed and before he knew it, he was asleep.

Awakening with a start, a stiff neck and an empty mug still held tight in his hand, he immediately knew where he was and what he'd done; he'd left the Vaio in the Belvedere with the door unlocked. Frantically disentangling himself from his parka that had woven itself around his knees while he slept, he tumbled out of the car door staggering stiff-legged into the caravan where he saw that the laptop was just as he had left it. *And it's warm in here.* Pulling off his parka he took a loaf of sliced brown wholemeal bread out of the fridge, inspected the few grey green spots, shrugged and popped two slices in the toaster while he stripped off for a shower. Realising that his duffel bag was in the boot of the car he slipped his feet into a pair of old trainers and retrieved the bag. Naked, he found the freezing air invigorating; he smiled, *now I wouldn't have*

the balls to do that in London. Mind you, I'm lucky to keep 'em attached in weather like this. The two slices of toast popped up out of the toaster. He made them into a little wigwam so they wouldn't go soft and put two more slices into the machine.

Thirty minutes later, refreshed, dressed in clean clothes and breakfasted on toast, honey and a piece of slightly mildewed, but tasty, cheddar, he looked at his watch; it was just after eight o'clock. He called Clare on her mobile to say he was back.

'Is it true?' Clare asked.

'Is what true?'

'Jack, don't be a prat; Wainstock called me at half past six this morning to say you'd resigned. Is it true?'

'It's true.'

'He won't accept it, you know,' Clare said.

'He hasn't got an option on that.'

'That's not what he thinks.'

'Is Gil at the undertaker's?'

'Okay, you don't want to talk about it. Yes, Gil's at the Cop. I thought he'd approve of that instead of that posh place,' Clare said.

'Thanks, he would. But who'll get the dividend stamps?'

'That's tasteless.'

'Do you know what time they open?' Jack asked.

'Nine, I should think, but maybe you should give them a call in advance so they can have him ready for you? When you know what time you're going ... would you like some company?'

Jack hesitated. 'Yeah, that would be good. Can I call you when I have a time?'

'Sure. On the other matter, don't expect Wainstock to give you up without a fight.'

'Then I think I'd better put my gloves on,' Jack said as he saw a car pulling up on the lane. 'I think he's just arrived. I'll call you later.'

'Good luck,' Clare said and ended the call.

Jack picked up the Vaio, went into his bedroom and quickly hid it under the duvet. A moment later Wainstock was hammering on the caravan door.

'Morning, boss,' Jack said. 'Come on in? Tea? Coffee?'

'Twat! Don't fucking boss me, you daft sod!'

'I don't have any twat.'

'Builder's tea, two tea bags and let it sit for five minutes,' Wainstock said as he heaved off his huge overcoat and dumped it on the sofa by the window.

'Where do you want to sit?' Jack asked.

'At the bloody table.'

'Would you like some toast?' Jack asked as he put two tea bags into a mug and switched on the kettle. 'Sorry, there's no milk.'

'I don't take milk.'

'Sorry, I'd forgotten.'

'Toast?'

'I haven't come here for breakfast, Jack. I want an explanation for your bloody stupid email telling me you've resigned.'

Jack poured the water into the mug and set it, and a spoon, in front of Wainstock. 'You can take them out when it suits you; here's a saucer.'

'No doilies? Come on, Jack, what's all this resignation crap all about? Because I'm telling you, I'm not having it.'

Jack sighed. 'I thought I'd made it clear; I can't go on as things stand.'

'That's obvious. Resignation isn't. In the circumstances you can take holiday leave, then, if needs be, some unpaid leave till this business with Anastasiya gets sorted. There's others that can get on with solving the case, or cases, as it probably is.'

'I'm not giving up on the cases; I'm giving up on being in the force. I'm going on in my own way.'

'Outside the law?'

'If needs be.'

Wainstock took the tea bags out of the mug and placed them on the saucer. 'You're not resigning,' he raised his hand. 'Do shut up, Jack. I'm a copper, an old copper ... I appreciate your desire to be straight with me so I'll be straight with you. I only got you back because of what happened to your daughter; it sounds like you might be able to find out what really happened as well as bringing some justice to bear. I don't give a monkey's nuts if you need to bend the rules, but I won't have you resign.'

Jack stood up, went to the window, turned his back on Wainstock, looked at the cottage he'd come back to restore and remembered how supportive Wainstock had been over the tragic deaths of his parents. He returned to the table and sat down. 'I copied in Fred.'

'As far as Fred Ingles is concerned I'll accept your resignation but not in writing. I'm not going to pass it on to HR and I can't see any reason he'd do that either; you're mine not his. If anyone asks, you're working under cover, that okay?'

'Clare said you wouldn't have it.'

'Did she? She was right. So?'

Jack turned back from the window to look at Wainstock. 'Yeah. You win, and thanks.'

'Find out the truth. Get the bastards that killed Rachel and get to the bottom of what the hell is going on.'

'Okay, boss,' Jack said with a broad smile. 'I owe you.'

'You always have done,' Wainstock laughed.

'Can I tell Clare?'

'You'd be a fool if you didn't; you can trust her.'

Wainstock stood up and the two men shook hands.

Jack sat quietly for a few minutes after Wainstock had left. Using his phone he checked train times from Kings Cross to Grantham and called Ron; they agreed that Ron would catch the 14.08 arriving at 15.19. Next he called Clare and they agreed to meet at the Co-op funeral home at 12.00.

Jack retrieved the Vaio, pulled on his parka, took the keys to the cottage and went outside. The wind had dropped but it was already -1C and getting colder. He stood and looked at the

front door of the cottage for a full minute before he inserted the key in the dead lock, opened that, and then the second key into the Yale above it and opened that as well. *Jesus*, he thought as the cold air hit him, *it's even colder in there than outside*. He remembered what his mother had always said about the house, "cool in summer, warm in winter", but there was always a period of transition; the walls were three feet thick and they took a long time to cool down and a long time to warm up. He went in and closed the door. Standing in the large kitchen, with its range at the far end, he studied it all as pale cold light seeped through the frosty windows. *I shouldn't have let it get like this*, he thought. Every surface, the Welsh dresser with its display plates from seaside towns – Skegness, Bridlington, Whitby, Scarborough - the table, the Windsor chairs, the kettle on the stove, the framed photograph of his graduation, the two battered leather armchairs each side of the fireplace at the opposite end of the room to the range, the footstool on which he'd sat as a child, the copy of the Lincolnshire Echo from the day before his father's suicide lying on the floor beside his father's chair, all were covered in a grey dust. He wiped his finger across the table *frozen dust, I didn't know dust could freeze*. The cottage, so they believed, had once been at least three or possible four, separate, but joined two-storey buildings, one almost certainly an animal byre, the oldest part dating from the mid 1800s. There were no corridors, one simply went from room to room which had been fine when he was a child but as a teenager had not provided the privacy he needed. He remembered the argument but he'd got his way in the end and been allowed to move from the room that led to his parents' bedroom to the far room on the top floor so that no one had to pass through his space to go to bed. His parents were then at the opposite end of the upstairs and as no one ever came to stay it was okay. There remained a staircase for each of the three original cottages but the animal byre was just an open space they had hardly ever used despite there being an open dog grate beneath the chimney. In the kitchen the York stone flagged floor contained two wooden trapdoors with brass finger pulls that were black from lack of care; once they

had gleamed like gold. One opened to a cellar with stone steps while the other was little more than an under floor cupboard in which his mother had kept dried goods. He lifted the door to the cellar and automatically switched on the electric light forgetting that there was no longer any electricity to the house. Using the torch on his phone he went down the steps and placed the Vaio beneath a pile of hessian sacks. He shone the torch around the walls and saw the little bookcase that he'd placed in front of his "secret place" and smiled at the fact that his parents had never discovered it. He unlocked the cupboard in which his grandfather's pair of First World War military pistols were kept and took them out. Unwrapping the guns from their oilskin cloths Jack was pleased that his father had treasured them and that once he'd remembered they were there he'd taken the trouble to return them to good working order; it had been for sentimental reasons. He put one gun and a box of ammunition back in the cupboard and pocketed the other weapon and the other box of ammunition. Once again in the kitchen, he used his penknife to unscrew the bolt that kept the trapdoor locked and re-fitted it on the underside of the door. He pulled the old worn piece of Axminster carpet over the trap door and locked the cottage before returning to the Belvedere where he hid the gun behind the first shelf of vinyl albums.

09.49

'Yes?' Simpkin said. 'Has Wain been found? ... Do you have news of Boyko and his murdering scum? ... Then why are you calling? ... Ranger has resigned, has he indeed?'

'Yes. He's also after Boyko and it's personal, very personal.'

'You're saying that there's a perfect coincidence of interest between us? ... Yes ... Yes ... Give me his mobile number ... No thank you, I will deal with it myself. Find Wain,' Simpkin said.

10.20

'Sorry I had to keep you waiting,' Fred said as he opened the door to his office. 'Got a lot on my plate, not least of all trying to find Ian Wain. Come in. I can only spare a couple of minutes.'

'There's been nothing in the media,' Sam said.

'No, we're keeping a lid on it.'

'What about his wife and kids?'

'They split up, months back – pressure of the job he said – why did you want to see me?'

'You asked me to get close to him to find out what he was up to. I didn't manage that ... but I did find him floating in that pool. Is there anything you want me to do? I've not even been asked to make a statement ...'

'That was going to happen this morning so now that you're here we may as well get it done.'

'Presumably you'd prefer I said nothing about our agreement about Wain?' Sam asked.

Fred studied her carefully. 'If you've got something on your mind, why don't you just say it?'

'I met Ian on Monday night – he told me not to get in his way or face the consequences.'

'You didn't tell me you'd met him.'

'There hasn't been an opportunity. He was running scared, or maybe just overwhelmed with his job ... in any case I seem to have spooked him; that's what you wanted, wasn't it? But he gave me stuff – the names of the two hit men who murdered Sandra and Yuri – the Katyuk brothers ... How did he know?'

'We'll never know, will we? Look, Sam, let's get that statement taken and ...'

'There's just a little more,' Sam interrupted. 'He told me I was the target; Sandra was mistaken for me and Yuri was just a bonus.'

'Why would you be the target?'

'You've no idea?'

'None. I don't have any more time for this, Sam.'

'Okay. Just confirm for me that you'd prefer if I said nothing about you asking me to get close to Ian.'

'I'd deny it.'

'Remember I have a witness, Nev. What about my meeting with Ian on Monday night?' Sam asked.

'Might bring you in the frame more than you'd like,' Fred said. 'If you go back downstairs there's a waiting room – it's even got a telly. I'll send someone down. Thanks for your help, Sam,' Fred smiled as he opened his office door and ushered her out.

There was no one else in the waiting room and BBC rolling news was playing on the television. Sam was so absorbed in her thoughts that she didn't realise her phone was ringing. She saw it was Nev just as "missed call" came up on screen; she called straight back. 'What? ... Just stay put. Don't do anything. I'll be there as soon as I can.'

A few moments later the detective sergeant who came to take Sam's statement found the waiting room empty.

12.00

Jack and Clare sat in the little family room at the undertakers.

'Why do they call it a funeral home?' Jack asked as he looked at the slightly dusty dried flowers displayed in a vase resembling an outsize urn. 'What's homely about it?'

'Undertakers is better – it's what it says on the tin, even if they are going to be burnt to bits,' Clare replied.

'It smells of death, not the sort of death we deal with but a sanitised cloying sort of death; a place where the respectable working class can keep their emotions under lock and key just like me. Smells like an old people's home with that weird toilet

paper smell. Have you ever smelt that?' Jack sighed. Clare didn't reply. 'When's the coroner's inquest?'

'It's not been set yet; this week I hope, latest, next.'

'Where've they put Tammy?' Jack asked.

'Lincoln. Despite everything I feel sorry for her two sons – it'll all come out at the inquest and, if not then, at the trial. Can you imagine how they'll feel? And Scrote finding out he has two nephews his own age.'

'Sorry. I haven't got room in my head to feel sympathy for that lot and certainly not for Tammy and her bastards.'

'Sympathy doesn't come from the head, Jack.'

'Yeah, well, I've left my heart behind and it wasn't in San Francisco.'

The door opened and a young woman dressed in a smart black suit and white shirt joined them. 'Mr Ranger?' she said extending her hand. 'I'm Janita. I'm very sorry about the loss of your friend. As I understand it, you're acting as next of kin? ... Good. I'm your contact point for Mr Robert. Would you like to see him straight away or would you like to discuss his arrangements first?'

Arrangements? 'I want Gil to have a proper funeral; there are people from his past that need to know and will need time to get here. It may take a while. Is that okay?'

'How long were you thinking?' Janita asked.

'To be honest, I've no idea.'

'I know you're a police officer so you'll be used to this sort of discussion,' Janita began.

'Sorry, Janita,' Jack interrupted, 'having an old friend and surrogate father murdered is not normal even for the likes of me.'

Janita flushed bright red. 'I meant having to discuss what's the best course of action ... if we keep him in a refrigerated unit his appearance will deteriorate, mummify in a way ... I would suggest that he's embalmed.'

'Like Lenin?' Jack asked.

'Yes, something like that,' Janita agreed.

'He'd love that,' Jack chuckled. 'It would really appeal to his sense of humour. Back in the day his band did a cover of "Back in the USSR", but it wasn't really their style. Embalming it is.'

'Will you be paying the funeral expenses, Mr Ranger?'

'Yeah.'

'Would you like us to send you the options for our range of services?'

'Do you mean do I want to know how much it will all cost?' Janita nodded. 'Thought so. It'll cost what it costs. I haven't made up my mind what sort of funeral he needs as yet so embalm away and we'll discuss the rest later? Is that okay?'

'I'll need to take your details and there are some forms to complete but they can wait until after you've seen your friend, Mr Robert.'

Jack stood up. 'Janita, I'm sorry. I was brusque'

'It comes with the job, Mr Ranger. People deal with grief in different ways; I've been taught not to take it personally. Please follow me if you would?'

'Fancy that drink?' Clare asked as they walked away from the undertakers.

'I sure do, but just the one; I have to pick Ron up at Grantham just after three. Fancy the Victoria?'

'You're still working on the case, or should I say, cases?' Clare asked.

'Under the cover of no longer being a copper, yes. Persuasive old sod, isn't he?'

'Who in particular isn't supposed to know you're still one of us?'

'The Met.'

'Because you don't know the identity of the mole?'

'Correct,' Jack said as they climbed the three steps up into the Victoria. 'Back room?'

'Why did you want to come here of all places? To wind up Wiggy and his mates?'

'Might be.'

'Front lounge and I'm buying,' Clare said as she pushed Jack through the door.

12.33

Sam was relieved she hadn't been stopped for speeding as she drove to Nev's house. She arrived to find him walking up and down in the neat little front garden smoking a cigarette.

'Do you want to show me?' Sam asked.

'Yeah, come on in,' he said as they went in through the front door. 'I thought I'd better come home and get some clean clothes and what not – came into the bathroom for a slash and there he was,' Nev explained as they climbed the stairs. 'In here,' he said opening the bathroom door.

Ian Wain, still dressed in his uniform floated face down in the bath.

'Shit, Sam, has someone got it in for me?'

'They certainly had it in for him but it's not just you, Nev, it's us. We haven't got much choice; we'll have to call it in.'

'But what the fuck is he doing here in my bath? I bought that special for Sandra, she loved that bath, candles, incense. Fuck!'

'There's no point us standing here. Let's go downstairs and wait outside for the police.'

'So, who will you call?' Nev asked as they stood in the front garden. 'Fred or AC Breake?'

'Neither, just 999,' Sam said as she tapped in the numbers.

Ten minutes later Sam and Nev were in the back of a police car being driven to New Scotland Yard. On arrival they were immediately put in an interview room; a police constable stood impassively by the door.

'Why did they bring us here rather than to the local nick?' Nev asked.

Before Sam could reply a uniformed sergeant came into the room. 'Miss Ticks, Mr Jackson, will you come with me please?'

Assistant Commissioner Lucinda Breake stood up behind her desk as Sam and Nev came into the room. 'Please sit there,' she said as she pointed at the two chairs that had been placed in front of her desk. 'You can go, sergeant. Stay outside the door and no one comes in, not even the bloody Home Secretary, got that?' The sergeant nodded and closed the door after him. 'Ms Ticks. Mr Jackson. Officially, you're helping us with our enquiries into the murder of Ian Wain. Unofficially, I want your help in discovering a truth that may never be made public. It will be made clear, not immediately, that you were not connected in any way with Commander Wain's death but I want to know everything you know about what led up to this. Our conversation will be off the record until I have all the pieces in place and even then what is made public will be limited for reasons of national security.'

And for the reputation of the Met who can't even look after their own, Sam thought.

'Who wants to begin?' Breake asked.

'We've not been cautioned,' Nev said.

'Because you're not under arrest,' Breake said.

'Can I be frank?' Sam asked.

'That's what I'm expecting you to be.'

'There's something up with SCD9, maybe more widely - there's an informer. I don't know who they're working for but that doesn't matter for the moment. The point is that from where I'm sitting it's not clear who can be trusted in the Met. There's something very nasty going on.'

'That's why we're on our own, Ms Ticks.' Sam said nothing as she held Breake's gaze. 'Ah, I see. Your reputation goes before you, Ms Ticks,' she smiled. 'It could even be me. That's what you're thinking, isn't it? Here's what I'll do. I'll tell you a little of what I know and we'll see if that gives you a greater sense of confidence.'

'Go ahead.'

'Let's begin with the personal and not just the disposal of Ian Wain in your bathtub, Mr Jackson. You have my deepest sympathy for the murder of your wife, Sandra, but as you might point out that doesn't mean very much unless the killers are brought to justice. It's almost certain that the Katyuk brothers killed her and Yuri Tomenko as well as Dimitri Guraya, Victor Plushenko and countless others; that Jim Campbell survived is a miracle. You already know this. What you may not know is that the Katyuks had two employers. One was Victor Plushenko's boss Choma Boyko; the other was Ian Wain acting on behalf of his unidentified employer. Wain, naively and shockingly, didn't realise that they also worked for Boyko.'

Sam sighed. 'So Ian did want me killed?'

'I think so.'

'Why?'

'It may not have been Wain's desire but that of his secret employer,' Breake said. 'Maybe that's why he's dead; because he failed.'

'Who was Wain's secret employer?'

'You've come across them before, Sam.'

'You mean the Cabal?'

'Yes.'

'You're not saying that there's a connection between the Cabal and Boyko are you?' Sam asked.

'Far from it; they're deadly enemies - I don't expect we'll ever know how it came to be that Wain employed the same men that Boyko uses in his terror killings. It might be that Boyko knew that Wain was working for the Cabal and set him up with two of his own men as a way of getting close to them. I'm certain that Plushenko was killed because of the photograph he'd kept of Boyko; what I don't know is who is now the Cabal's chief of staff; that remains a mystery. We now know what Boyko looks like but don't know how to get to him. Is that frank enough?'

'Yes.'

'Are you now prepared to trust me and tell me all that you know?' Breake asked.

'Do you know who the traitor is inside the Met?'

'No. I was convinced, just like Chief Superintendent Ingles, that it was Ian Wain whom I'd spent some time trying to befriend and get to open up, but he was a closed book.'

'Has it occurred to you that there might be two moles?' Nev asked.

'Or even more,' Breake said. 'Meaning that the Met is subject to a conspiracy that could bring it to its knees.'

'Okay, I'll tell you what we know,' Sam said.

An hour later they were driven back to where they'd left their cars outside Nev's house; the SOCOs were busy about their labours. Nev wanted to go in but wasn't allowed to do so. Standing next to Sam on the opposite side of the road he asked, 'Why didn't you tell Breake everything?'

'Oh, I think I told her what she wanted to hear.'

'So there was no need to tell her about Jack's missus being Boyko's sister or any of the stuff about the germs, any of that?'

'I didn't feel the need.'

'Do you think she knows that Jack's supposed to have resigned?'

'Depends on what's Fred's told her,' Sam said. 'Fred knows that Anastasiya is Boyko's brother but has he told Breake? And if he hasn't, why not?'

'Is she on the level?'

'Time will tell, Nev, time will tell. In the meantime it looks as if the Cabal are after me and Boyko is after Jack – never a dull moment, is there?'

'What now?'

'Pack a bag and get out of town.'

'I haven't got any bloody clothes let alone a bag to put them in,' Nev said.

'Then you'd better go shopping first. Meet me back at my place as soon as you can.'

'And then what?'

'We go and see Jack.'

Jack arrived early at Grantham station despite having stopped near the bridge from which Rachel had jumped to leave a bunch of roses in her memory. Sitting in his police Skoda in the short stay car park his mobile rang, he looked at the screen but didn't recognise the number, 'Yes?' he asked. 'Who is this?'

'We share a mutual interest, Mr Ranger,' the voice said.

'I don't do cold calls and don't need any double glazing or anything else you're trying to sell,' Jack said ending the call.

His phone buzzed as a text message came in. "My employer quite understands your position Mr Ranger. Now that you are a civilian he believes he should share intelligence concerning our mutual enemy, Boyko. He thinks you might help each other. Should you wish to explore this opportunity please text back and I will arrange a meeting with my employer."

So you know that I've supposedly resigned. Who told you? There can only be four people: Simon Wainstock, Clare, Fred and Lucinda Breake. But is that right? Who else up here would have been able to see my email to Simon? No one would even be remotely interested. The same might not be true at the Met especially if our mole has got an intercept on Fred's emails. He looked up Fred's mobile number and tapped it in. 'Fred? It's Jack ... Just don't start ... I'm not going back on my decision,' he lied. 'Listen. I've just had an anonymous phone call from someone who knows I've resigned ... Of course I'm sure. Is there the possibility that someone is hacking into your emails and picked up my resignation letter? ... Yes, I think that would be sensible ... Breake couldn't be the weakest link, could she? ... What do you mean it's none of my business? ... Put like that, I agree ... No, okay, I'll butt out,' Jack said and ended the call. *Now that's a man under pressure, poor sod.* He tapped in Clare's number and asked her if she'd run a trace on the numbers that had come up on the phone call and the different

number on the text message. She said she'd get straight to it and call him back if and when.

Jack waited on the platform for Ron to arrive and was pleased to see the scientist emerge from First Class and jauntily trot along the platform towards him. 'You've got it then?'

'Safe and sound,' Jack said. 'The car's outside.'

19.10

Ron looked tired; it had taken nearly four hours to make sense of Kinsey's files. He wired up an external hard drive to the Vaio and copied all the relevant data. 'Right, Jack, break open a bottle of something; I need a drink and so will you,' he said as he closed the lid of the Vaio.

'You know what's going on?'

'There are a few bits missing from the puzzle but I think I know what they're up to. Why is another matter.'

'Wine or spirits?' Jack asked.

'In the circumstances a glass of malt would be good.'

Jack set a bottle of Talisker down on the table along with a jug of fresh water. As he was taking two tumblers from a cupboard his mobile began to vibrate on the table where he'd put it; it was Clare. He mouthed, 'help yourself' at Ron as he answered the call. 'Hi ... no, Ron's here with me, about to tell all ... you've drawn a blank with those two numbers ... no, if you're coming up against those sort of firewalls just leave it ... don't worry, you tried, that's what matters ... and by the way thanks for coming to the undertakers with me ... yeah, I will and you, bye ... yeah, that would be good. Bye.'

'She fancies you,' Ron said.

'Clare? I don't think so.'

'At my age I notice things like that – it's called envy.'

Jack laughed. 'You haven't poured yourself a dram?'

'I thought I'd wait for you.'

Jack poured two fingers into each glass. 'Water?' Ron nodded. 'I was told a long time ago that you should add as much water as the proof of the whisky – it seems to work.'

'Cheers,' they both said and chinked their glasses.

'Do you want anything else to eat?' Jack asked.

'No thanks, the cheese on toast you made will do me until later,' Ron said and then sighed as he fell silent.

'Putting off the moment of facing up to the truth?'

'Something like that, Jack. Whatever way you come at it, it's not looking good.'

'When I was in your office I asked you if you were talking about using viruses as weapons?'

'And I said, God forbid. Now, I'm saying just that. You remember I was explaining about vectors?' Jack nodded. 'From looking at what's on that Vaio I now have a better picture. If you look at the changes in the crops being grown on Haugham's land you'll see a hugely significant move towards the production of bio-fuel crops – there's subsidy and a growing demand – everywhere you go in the countryside there are more and more fields of such crops. I had an idea about this so I got a friend of mine to look at what was being grown on Haugham's land; it's a new strain of *Miscanthus*; it's a highly hardy plant, can survive all soil and weather conditions and is pretty much immune to all diseases and pesticides. It's a genetically engineered wonder crop that's entirely slipped under the radar as it's not for human or animal consumption; it's just going to get burnt or at least that's its normal purpose; in this case it's quite otherwise. *Miscanthus* is the home to the common rustic moth, *Mesapamea Secalis*, including the Lesser Common Rustic and Remm's Rustic moths.'

'Moths?' Jack interjected. 'What have beagles got to do with moths?'

'The beagles were for testing the efficacy of the virus ... just wait ... Moths are the creatures that Anastasiya has chosen as the perfect vectors to carry the new plague. The life cycle of the common rustic moth plays an important part in the food

chain. The larvae live in the roots of *Miscanthus* over winter, caterpillars follow and then fly in July and August. Moths, in all their stages of development, from egg to adult, are eaten by bats, owls at night, web building spiders, and all birds that need a regular supply of caterpillars and insects to raise their chicks. The moth larvae, possibly the eggs themselves, carry the plague – they are the vector.’

‘Why don’t they die from the virus?’ Jack asked.

‘Because, and this is a guess, she has been very clever and designed the virus so that it can only jump into mammals. I don’t know how to describe this ... it’s like some kind of slow release terror – once the virus is in the food chain it’s on the loose. It needs to survive. Eventually, maybe even quickly, it’s impossible to tell, its new hosts will be human beings. Thousands will die – maybe millions – and what will be needed? A vaccine and who will have that vaccine? The people who made the virus, who made the vector, who made the habitat, the reservoir in which it hides, until it’s ready to attack. It doesn’t have a name so I’m calling it Plague because in that way – when it happens – people will know what they’re up against.’

‘When it happens?’ Jack queried. ‘Surely it’s if it happens.’

‘Not to my mind – it’s when – unless we get very lucky and even now we may be too late.’

‘And this is what Anastasiya has been doing at Pharma-co-Logical? Jesus! Is this really possible? Could she really have developed a virus that could be put into the larvae of moths or their eggs? How big is a moth egg for Christ’s sake?’

‘0.75mm’

‘She has the skills to do that?’

‘Oh yes. Anastasiya is one of the brightest of the bright.’

‘But why would she do it, Ron? For the money? I mean, if you’re right, you couldn’t get any money out of anyone until it had started, until people were actually dying from the plague and by then ... ah, now I understand. Once there’s death

there’ll be a clamour for an antidote and that will cost. Is that their plan?’

‘They need to be stopped, Jack. Making any of this public would be to risk a panic like there’s never been a panic before. If those poor bloody Ukrainians who perished in agony had been the good yeomen of England you can bet your bottom dollar the media wouldn’t have been so easily put off the true story of what killed them.’

‘How do we stop her? Someone in government must be told; it’s beyond us to stop something like this. You work for the Home Office – is there someone you can trust not to make a pig’s ear of this?’

‘There’s a permanent secretary who would know what to do,’ Ron said. ‘Why are you looking like that?’

‘I should have told you this before. I’m pretty sure that Anastasiya will have guessed that I arranged to have the Vaio stolen and that means that her brother will be sending some heavies after me to get it back and teach me a lesson. If they know I’ve quit the police ... because there’s an informer at the Met, they’ll guess I’m back up here which means that I need to get you and your hard drive out of harm’s way so that you can go and see your contact at the Home Office.’

‘It would have been better if you’d come down to me,’ Ron said.

‘Probably not. When I saw Anastasiya I told her you were helping me with an investigation I was conducting; I was fishing. I didn’t realise what she really was. It’s probably best if we put you somewhere safe, where you can’t easily be found. Have you got somewhere like that?’

‘I have a sister in Reading – I could go there.’

‘Call her.’

‘Is this really necessary?’

‘Yes Ron, this is really necessary.’

Ron took his mobile from his jacket as Jack stepped outside and tapped in numbers on his phone. Back inside

Ron said that his sister had been delighted. 'How am I to get there?' he asked.

'Clare's going to take you; she'll be here in twenty minutes. In the meantime I think we should get out of the van; I'll show you my cottage.'

'I'd quite like to see your Lambretta after all you've said about it,' Ron said.

'That's fine but first I want to put that computer back in the cottage where it was hidden – just in case.'

'But I have a copy of everything I need so there's no ...' Ron stopped. 'Just in case something happens to me? Is that what you mean?'

'I've been too careless; we can't afford to take any more chances. Let's go and see my scooter.'

'I thought you said you were going to hide the laptop first?'

'You look at the scooter while I hide it.'

Ron finished his whisky and chuckled. 'So that I don't know where it is – just in case.'

'The Lambretta's in the barn; you'll need your coat.'

Jack took the leads from the trickle charger from the battery; the scooter started first time.

'Can I sit on it?' Ron asked.

'Sure, I'll only be a minute.'

'Nice machine,' Ron said as they went back to the Belvedere. 'When this is all over perhaps I could have a ride as a pillion passenger?'

'It'll be real pleasure,' Jack said and poured them each a small measure of whisky. 'That'll be Clare now,' he said as headlights reflected through the van's windows.

Arrangements made and thanks expressed Ron climbed into Clare's Skoda while she stood in front of Jack. 'Why don't you come with us?'

'Best if me and Ron stay apart for the moment.'

'If they come, they'll be armed, Jack.'

'What makes you think I won't be?'

'I don't want to know about that, do I?' Clare said.

'Probably not. Send me a text when you have him at his sister's, and, can you make sure you're not being followed?' Jack asked.

'I'll call by in the morning.'

'Please just get out of here.'

23.57

Jack sat in the dark and pressed the button that briefly illuminated his watch. *So the witching hour approaches*, he thought and sipped his fourth mug of fiercely strong black coffee. *I've been waiting all my bloody life. For exam results, for the rain to stop so the cricket could start up again, for stubble on my chin and not just down on my upper lip, for that first kiss, for promotion, for seeing the enemy sent down. And waiting for Tassa to be borne. I always come back to that. And now I'm waiting for Boyko's army - wish it was "Oliver's Army"... yeah that's it, I'll have "Shipbuilding" at Gil's memorial service, Robert Wyatt's version, and for Anastasiya's it would be "Stamp the Earth Down". I have to know why she's doing this, done this to us, to Tassa, to me ... need to keep awake. They must come before dawn, must do ... things to do ... bloody "Home Alone" how did I come to see that?*

He stood up, pulled on his parka, put the pistol in his pocket, opened the door to the caravan, stepped down into the black night and walked to the barn. He opened the left hand barn door, went in, and turned the scooter around so that its front wheel was facing the open door. At the rear of the barn he quietly pushed back two bolts that secured a large hatch at an angle between the floor and wall and made sure that it opened easily. Satisfied, he went back outside leaving the barn door slightly ajar and listened; there was no wind, but from far off he heard the muted bark of a fox. He looked across the farmland; not a light was to be seen beneath the sky. *They'd*

call that lowering. He smelt the air. *Might snow,* he thought as he walked to the cottage and went in locking the front door behind him. He waited until his eyes were more accustomed to the dark, pulled back the Axminster carpet from over the trapdoors, opened the one that led to the big cellar and climbed down using his phone's torch to see the way. Going to his childhood's secret place he pushed aside the little bookcase and easily removed the tongue and groove panelling that had only been wedged in place to expose the entrance to what he had discovered when he was twelve: a priest's hole. He took the second of the loaded pistols and laid it in the secret place. Returning upstairs he pulled one of the chairs from beside the range, placed it in front of the window that overlooked the Belvedere and settled down to wait, imagining his father sitting there smoking his pipe. *I wonder why I never told them about finding the priest's hole? Perhaps we all need something secret?* He rested the pistol in his lap and adjusted the pockets of his parka that were stuffed with ammunition.

Thursday 21st November

01.11

Jack's phone vibrated in his pocket; Clare's message said that Ron was safe and she'd be on her way back up to Lincolnshire as soon as she'd had something to eat. He didn't reply, not wanting there to be any light from his phone for any longer than was absolutely necessary even though he realised that anyone watching outside wouldn't see such a small glimmer but, more importantly, he had no desire to lose concentration. It was still as black as ink outside. His eyes were heavy lidded. They shut. A sudden thunderous rattle of automatic gunfire hitting the stone walls of the cottage brought him fully awake. Crouched at the window his heart pumped hard and fast.

'Copper, we make you jump, yes?' a voice shouted through the night. 'We looked, you were not at home, we kill you if we want, but you are to be kept alive.'

Jack watched as another burst of gunfire strafed the upper storey of the cottage. Falling glass tinkled. Silence. Nothing stirred. Five minutes passed. Five minutes more. Suddenly the yard and garden surrounding the caravan burst into bright light. Jack ducked down. Bullets shattered the casement windows to Jack's left. Two men walked towards the cottage carrying automatic weapons. Two more came from behind the van – one had a pneumatic battering ram the other a pistol. *And there's probably some more of you coming up behind the cottage where I can't see you,* Jack thought. He wondered whether to take the opportunity of taking at least one of them down; he held his fire. Gunfire sent bullets through another upstairs window. Silence.

'If we wanted to kill you it would be over by now,' the same male voice shouted.

The battering ram hit the door. Everything shook. Jack stepped out of the corner where he'd been out of harm's way, raised the pistol *fire through the door* lowered the gun, turned

quickly and ran across the room as the ram hit again. The doorframe splintered. Jack closed the trapdoor over his head and secured it with the bolt he'd fitted earlier. The stone floor above his head was thick but there was no mistaking the noise of enraged shouting. There was one thing he had to do. The text message said "SOS". He pressed "send". *Fuck! No signal. Fucking floor!* It wouldn't take them long to find out that he wasn't anywhere in the house. Inside the priest hole on hands and knees he crawled forward for the first time since he was a kid. It was tighter than he remembered; he was almost flat to the ground. He gagged as he swallowed cobwebs. *Fuck, it's like being buried alive.* There was no way to see where he was going; it didn't matter; there was only one route. *It was never this far, was it?* He hesitated and heard the ram pounding on the trapdoor. The incline increased. Panting in the dark earthy air he moved as fast as he could. Rough stone ripped through his trousers and cut his knees. Voices shouted. Three steps. He pushed. The hatch door opened. He was in the barn.  It was empty. Taking out his phone he pressed "send" again, stuffed it back in his pocket and hoped. He kick started the Lambretta, leapt straight on, gave it full throttle bursting through the barn door and across the yard. The brightness blinded him but he knew where he was going. Roof top searchlights of two 4x4s blazed but beyond them the black night. A shout. Another shout. A burst of gunfire. Expecting to be hit he hunched down over the handlebars. They were firing in the air. *Come on! Darkness my old friend!* More shots in the air. Shouting. Running men. *Yes!* He was out of the light. Black. Doors slamming. 4x4 engines firing into life. Tyres squealing, spinning, turning, following. He hit the path. He knew it like the back of his hand but not at speed with no lights. He bounded and skidded, changed down a gear and gave it all the engine had. A searchlight picked him out. One 4x4 was coming straight across the ploughed field. The other was careering along behind him half on the track and half on the field the beam of its searchlights madly strobing. Gunfire shredded trees above his head. Roosting birds fled. A fox ran scared. They were catching him. The woods were the only way.

Their trucks couldn't follow there. He swung the scooter left past the oak where he'd pretended to be Robin Hood. *I could do with some fucking merry men right now.* A 4x4 crashed into the trees tyres screaming for traction, engine at maximum revs. Its searchlight pointed at the sky. The second truck found a way in until it hit a pile of timber felled a generation before but never collected. Its searchlight sought him out. Bullets whistled overhead. *They don't want to kill me.* Full throttle. On he went. It wasn't going to work. He laid the scooter on its side, kissed his hand, patted the bike, said goodbye. Running down into the dell where the stone for his cottage had been hewn he sprinted to the other side to the disused railway track and the tunnel that lay beyond and escape. He heard automatic fire destroying his beloved Lambretta. He hesitated. Their laughter at their pleasure of destruction spurred him on. Coming to a sudden halt he reached the tunnel entrance. It was blocked with rubble from floor to the top of the arch. *Shit!* Their shouts came ever nearer. Nowhere else but up. The embankment. Clinging, gripping, struggling. Nettles stinging hands and face. Brambles ripping clothes cutting skin. Barbed wire. Over the top. Run. Run. Over the bridge. Towards the town. Almost at the main road. *They aren't fit, falling behind. Done it! Got away!* At the main road. Nothing. Panting. Wiping his face smelling blood. Wiping his face with the arm of his parka not seeing the bramble clinging there - more blood. *Shit!* A car, headlights dipped. *Oh yes!* Jack in the middle of the road arms waving shouting, 'Stop!' It did. *Yes!* The passenger door swung open.

'You in trouble?' a voice from inside the car asked.

'I need to get to the police station in Louth,' Jack said as he looked in at the driver. *Who is this? Wrong.*

'Then you'd better get in,' a voice from the back suggested.

Jack hesitated. *Fuck! Too late.*

'Now!' a voice commanded and Jack saw the barrel of an automatic pistol held by a man sitting in the back of the BMW. Jack lurched back. The gun tilted down, fired, a bullet screaming between his feet. Jack froze. 'Get him,' the man said. Two men forced Jack face down over the bonnet of the BMW.

The man from the back ran his hands over Jack's parka. 'Ah ha,' he said, pulling out first one gun then the other. 'You won't be needing these,' he said as he hurled the guns into the hedge. 'In the back!'

'Take it easy, I'm going,' Jack said

The man with the gun sat beside him and closed his door. 'For a brother-in-law you are irritating, Jack. I promised my sister that you should not have a bad ending, but as you English say, promises are like pies, made to be broken. Drive on.'

'It's pie crusts, not pies, Choma.'

'It's kind you seek to improve my English.'

'My pleasure. Where are you taking me?'

'Your cottage will be good enough for what is planned. Evgeni and Anton will be cross you have made them look the fools they are,' Choma chuckled.

02.25

Sam and Clare agreed to rendezvous in the car park of the Running Duck pub about five miles from Jack's cottage; neither had any doubt about the meaning of Jack's SOS message. Clare was standing by her car when Sam and Nev pulled up in the Audi.

'I should make this official,' Clare said as the three of them stood side by side.

'You do what you like, Clare, but by the time your lot have got themselves ...'

'Okay, okay!' Clare interrupted.

'Two cars or one?' Sam said.

'One. Yours. More power if we need it. I'll drive, know the way better than you,' Clare said. 'That okay?'

'Come on ladies, let's get on with it,' Nev said as he climbed into the back of the Audi. 'Don't look at me like that, Sam.'

Clare carefully steered the car into a farm track half a mile from the cottage the other side of the wood through which Jack had tried to escape. They quietly closed the car doors. 'Are you carrying?' Clare asked in a whisper.

'He is. I'm not,' Sam whispered.

'It's legal,' Nev said. 'Lead the way, Clare.'

'We'll go through the wood; there's a path,' Clare said.

'We'll make less noise on the road,' Sam said. 'And better speed.'

'Okay, you two take the road, I'll take the path, come at them from the other side,' Clare said.

'Come on, come on!' Nev urged in a whisper.

'Good luck,' Sam said as Clare disappeared into the wood.

'How long ago did he send that message?' Nev asked.

'Over an hour.'

'Then we'll need a fucking miracle not luck. If we hadn't already been on our way then ...'

'Nev. Do shut up.'

As soon as they were out of the cover of the wood and less than a quarter mile from the cottage they could see the lights from one of the two 4x4s now back in the yard flooding the cottage with light. The black BMW was parked next to the Belvedere. As they carefully approached the lane that led down to the cottage they heard the BMW's engine start. Sam and Nev flattened themselves against the hedge. *Please god turn left*, Sam thought. It did. 'Two men, one driver, one in the back,' Sam whispered as the car pulled away.

'Boyko?' Nev asked.

'I guess. Not a good sign.'

'Confident fuckers.' Nev muttered. 'No guards, no nothing.'

'We don't know how many there are.'

'Two vehicles, must be two drivers, two more men at least, my guess six, total.'

'Jack has got to be inside the cottage,' Sam said. 'All of them must be.'

A man came out of the shattered front door, undid his flies and pissed as raucous laughter came from inside the cottage. Almost immediately five more men came out and climbed into the 4x4s. The searchlight on the vehicle that had lit the cottage switched off.

'They're going,' Sam gasped. 'Get behind the hedge and flat on the ground, we can't be lucky twice.'

One 4x4 turned left the other right and roared away into the night.

'Think they've left anyone behind?' Nev asked as they stood up.

'Somehow I don't think so ... don't say it.'

Nev took out his small Glock. 'I'll go first, just in case,' he said and they both trotted forward, through the little wicket gate to the front door of the cottage; there was no light inside. Nev went in, gun at the ready, 'Jack? Are you here?'

Sam followed him in as they both heard a muffled groan.

'Jack?' Sam asked as she took out her mobile and switched on the torch. 'Shit!' she said.

Jack groaned.

Nev turned on his camera torch. He and Sam stared.

'He's alive,' Sam said. 'It's okay, Jack, we'll get you down.'

Jack hissed, 'Careful!' from where he teetered on a wooden plank precariously balanced on two chairs with their front legs on the very edge of the open cellar. A thin steel wire hung down from the beam above his head to where it formed a noose round his neck; it was tightly knotted but not tight enough to draw much blood. His hands were tied behind his back. His naked body, except for black boxer shorts, was bruised and bloodied. The plank wobbled. A chair leg squeaked nearer to the edge. Jack's terrified eyes were wide as he struggled to keep from decapitating himself. 'Cheese wire,' he gasped.

'We have to hold him up,' Sam said.

'If we pull him away we'll cut his throat,' Nev said.

'Think,' Jack groaned, wobbling.

Clare rushed in. 'We need to cut the wire.'

'Barn!' Jack whispered. 'Toolbox.' The plank wobbled faster. Sweat ran down his chest making white streaks through the blood.

Sam rushed forward and held the plank steady as Nev and Clare ran out of the kitchen. 'Hurry!' she screamed. The chair legs moved nearer to the hole. 'It's alright, Jack, you'll make it, I promise.'

'What are we looking for?' Nev asked as they ran into the barn frantically waving his torch all around.

'His scooter tools, bench over there!' Clare shouted. They rummaged. 'Here, got it.'

They sprinted out.

Within moments they were back inside the cottage. Nev hoisted Clare up.

'Don't bump him!' Sam warned.

'Do it!' Nev ordered.

Clare leant forward. The snips shook in her hand. She cut the wire. Jack fell, thumping into Sam. They both crashed down the steps into the cellar.

'Oh fuck!' Clare gasped.

Silence.

'Better call an ambulance,' Clare said.

'No!' Jack bellowed. 'No fucking way! I'm dead!'

'Understood,' Clare nodded.

'Good idea, mate,' Nev said.

Jack rolled off Sam and lay on his back. 'Sorry about that,' he sighed. 'Are you okay?'

'Bruised but not broken – but what about you?'

'I'm dead, remember?' Jack managed a laugh. 'Shit that hurt,' he said holding his side. 'Ribs – used my dad's hammer, bastards.'

'Coming down,' Nev said.

‘Can anyone get this bloody wire off my neck?’ Jack asked. ‘I feel like a piece of Cheddar.’

‘You’re not doing bad for a corpse,’ Sam said as she got to her feet and winced.

Clare followed Nev down into the cellar. He held the phone torch as she carefully inserted the tip of the snips into the wire noose. ‘Try not to move, Jack. Sorry!’ she said as she nicked his neck. ‘There,’ she said, ‘you’re free,’ and the wire fell to the cellar floor.

‘Thanks, Clare. The cavalry came just in time. Cold. Need some clothes from the van.’ He tried to stand up but ended on his hands and knees. ‘I think I’m going to need a hand to get up those steps.’

‘You alright, boss?’ Nev asked Sam as he and Clare helped Jack to his feet.

‘Nothing that a hot shower, a large glass of malt and a holiday in the sun won’t put right,’ Sam said.

‘There’s Talisker in the van,’ Jack said. ‘Unless they drank it.’

Sam took photographs of the tyre tracks in the yard while Jack got dressed in the Belvedere. Clare went to get the car and Nev lit a cigarette.

Now fully dressed, and warm at last, Jack picked up the bottle of Talisker. ‘Oh shit!’ he said.

‘What?’ Nev asked.

‘They shot my Lambretta to bits – but why should I care? I’m dead.’

‘Have you thought how we’re going to pull this off?’ Nev asked.

‘I’ve had a couple of ideas. Drink?’ Jack asked. Nev shook his head. ‘Don’t mind if I do, do you?’ Jack took a good swig and shivered.

They climbed out of the van and found Sam looking up at the now clear sky. ‘There are stars up there.’

‘And down here,’ Jack said. ‘No glasses I’m afraid,’ he said offering Sam the bottle. She noticed that his hand was shaking, said nothing and shook her head. ‘You guys saved my life.’

‘You haven’t paid me yet,’ Sam said, but seeing his expression, quickly added, ‘That was a joke.’

‘Yeah, like living and dying in the sticks,’ Jack said. ‘Christ, I’m cold. I need my parka – think it’s still in the cottage.’

Ten minutes later they were all sitting inside the Audi with the heating on, but Jack still shivered violently.

‘It’s shock,’ Sam said.

‘You need to see a doctor,’ Clare said.

Jack smiled. ‘I know just the man, but first we need to decide where to go. I’ve had an idea of how we can pull off my premature demise. See what you think.’

‘Before that,’ Sam said. ‘What did they want?’

‘Kinsey’s Vaio, the one Nev stole.’

‘You gave it them?’ Sam asked.

‘No reason not to; Ron copied everything he needed on to an external hard drive.’

‘Anything else?’

‘Not a thing; didn’t seem to care what I knew or didn’t know so just had fun beating me up and then setting me up on that bloody plank; a prelude to an execution,’ Jack replied. ‘I was to be punished for getting in his way. Bastard. And if you think I’m not angry, think again; if I do nothing else in life I’ll do for Boyko and his sister.’

‘Do for?’ Sam queried.

‘Yeah.’

‘You’re a police officer,’ Clare said.

Jack laughed. ‘Too true; but that doesn’t mean it can’t be personal ... So let’s agree on how we’re going to get away with faking my death so that I can achieve my ambition.’

‘If you’re supposed to be dead, Jack,’ Nev said, ‘then one thing you mustn’t do is use your mobile and that goes for the rest of us as well if we’re talking to Jack.’

‘So what are we supposed to use – semaphore,’ Clare asked.

‘I got us half a dozen pay-as-you-go mobiles just in case – they’re in the boot.’

‘You’re a star, Nev,’ Sam said.

Superintendent Simon Wainstock wasn't at all bothered at being woken by a phone call before dawn and agreed that his house, being isolated, was a perfect place for Jack to hide. Mrs Wainstock had been dead for almost four years so there was no one to consider so far as Jack staying until he was ready for "active service" as Wainstock described it. Jack's proposition, put to Wainstock when they were all safely seated in his kitchen drinking hot tea and coffee, required a little more thought, but only a little.

Dr Davis Sage arrived at just after seven thirty. Jack insisted, much to Sam's annoyance, that the doctor treat her first; she had bruises from the fall and a sprained ankle that would prevent her driving for maybe ten days, maybe less, depending on her pain threshold. Jack's external wounds were painful but not life threatening. The Doctor taped his ribs and while he did so Jack asked the question that was the most important of all: would he sign a death certificate stating that Jack had taken his own life by hanging?

'Tell me why,' Davis Sage asked. Jack told him the exact truth as far as he knew it. 'Then you can count me in, Jack. Not just for you but for Ralph and Mavis.'

The summit continued in the kitchen.

'Don't worry about the coroner; he'll take my word for it,' the doctor said.

'And mine,' Wainstock added.

'What about my funeral?' Jack asked. 'I don't want any flowers.'

'Jack, that's too dark,' Sam said.

'And I want to be cremated.'

'That young woman at the Co-op was very helpful,' Clare said.

'Janita?' Wainstock asked.

'That's her,' Clare confirmed.

'You see there are some advantages for living in a place like this,' Wainstock said. 'She's my niece. I'll have a word.'

'No, that's too risky,' Jack said. 'The fewer of us that know the better and, to be frank, it wouldn't be fair to expose her to the risk. Because if I don't get Boyko there could be a lot more ... I don't need to spell it out.'

'You'll get him, Jack,' Wainstock said.

'No, we'll get him,' Sam said. 'But we need to deal with the funeral, without that and an obituary Boyko isn't going to believe you're dead.'

'He's not going to believe me topping myself either.'

'But he'll just think we're being cautious and not telling what really happened because it would jeopardise our investigation into your death,' Clare said.

'If we really wanted to convince them that you're dead I could have a quiet word with the Met to say exactly what Clare is suggesting – that Jack was murdered,' Wainstock said.

'Nice idea,' Sam said. 'Who would you tell?'

Wainstock nodded. 'I see what you mean – who would you suggest? Fred or Lucinda?'

'That depends on what we're trying to achieve,' Jack said. 'Dealing with the informer at the Met isn't the priority right now; allowing me the freedom to get to Boyko is the priority ... so, how do we deal with my funeral?'

'If you have a death certificate all you need to do is to arrange for the service at the crematorium; there's no need to go through a funeral director's except getting them to deliver the coffin,' Sage said. 'One of my patients organised that for her husband; they got a wicker coffin ...'

'Oh, I'd like that,' Jack interrupted. 'I could be the Wicker Man.'

'Stop it, Jack!' Sam said.

The doctor smiled. 'She organised a direct cremation herself where's there's no service, no hearse, nothing; the body just gets cremated. The Co-op delivered it and that was that, so,

Simon, your niece will get some business after all,' the doctor concluded.

'Sounds good to me.' Jack said.

'We need to get the cottage tidied up, get some glass in those windows and keep the press away,' Clare said. 'Otherwise there are going to be a lot of inconvenient questions.'

'I can arrange that,' Wainstock said. 'But I still want to know who I should speak to about you.'

'Do what you think best, Simon. Look, I'm sorry folks, but I feel like shit – sorry, Doc,' Jack said.

'You should be in bed asleep,' Doctor Sage said.

'There are five bedrooms upstairs so you can take your pick – except mine, of course,' Wainstock said. 'Sam, Nev, you want to sleep as well?'

They both shook their heads.

'I want to be in town in case there's a change in Jim,' Sam said.

'Do you want something to help you sleep?' the doctor asked.

'Just a bed and a pillow, thanks, doctor. You haven't got another toy swan, have you?'

'I think you had the last one, Jack. If you need me, just call,' Doctor Sage laughed as he picked up his bag.

10.28

Jack opened his eyes, unsure where he was but he'd slept and was thankful for that. It had always surprised him that when he ran the answer to a problem he'd put to one side would suddenly come to mind completely resolved. It wasn't usually the same after sleep but today it was. He picked up his phone, found the anonymous message and read: "My employer quite understands your position, Mr Ranger. Now that you are a civilian he believes he should share intelligence concerning

Choma Boyko who is our mutual enemy. He thinks you might help each other. Should you wish to explore this opportunity please text back and I will arrange a meeting with my employer." Jack copied the number to his new pay-as-you-go and sent a text: "Okay. Where? When? Who will I be meeting?"

He pulled on the dressing gown Wainstock had loaned him and walked downstairs, surprised that he didn't feel worse than he did. The house was deserted. There was a note on the kitchen table: "I called the editor of the Argos to hold back their print run until this afternoon. I wrote your obituary after you went to bed. I'll be home later with the paper. Until then keep out of sight and make yourself at home. Best, Simon. P.S. Sam says she'll call you. She and Nev have gone back to London and Clare says she'll drop by later with some grapes! Or was that a wreath? S."

Finding eggs in a rack, Jack made himself scrambled eggs on toast and a pot of strong tea. He showered and painfully dried himself; his ribs hurt like hell. He didn't bother to shave for two reasons: as a disguise and the cut around his neck was too sore to put a razor anywhere near it.

He tapped in Ron's mobile number and waited. 'Ron? ... Hi, it's me, Jack ... Yeah, I've got a new phone. Are you okay? ... Good ... You are. When? ... Today. That's fantastic ... What time? ... At six? Right, could you give me a call straight afterwards to let me know how it went? ... You do understand you're at risk and you must be very careful ... Don't be dismissive, Ron, I'm serious about this ... Yes, they came ... Let's say it's not an experience I'd like to repeat ... No, I'm fine, but you will hear that I'm dead ... No, I'm not, it's a ploy. I don't intend to make the condition permanent, not as yet, but I'd be grateful if you kept it strictly to yourself ... No, I know you wouldn't. Look, Ron, lay it on thick when you see your guy in the Home Office. Don't let them fob you off ... Sorry ... No, no ... I appreciate that. Where are you meeting him? ... At Imperial ... I don't know ... No, don't tell the police anything, just be careful ... Okay, you too. Speak later, Bye.' *I'm not sure about that, but I guess it's as safe as anywhere and no one knows what Ron's up to and I suspect that if the permanent secretary*

won't meet on his own turf then Ron is being taken seriously. That's a thought: I could call Sam and ask if she or Nev could keep a weather eye on him. Sam and Nev's new pay-as-you-go mobiles both went straight to messages so Jack sent them both a text giving Ron's address in Reading asking if they'd keep him safe and get him to his meeting at Imperial at six o'clock.

12.40

Jack looked out of the picture window overlooking the Wolds and saw Clare's car pulling up the drive. Jack put on his Parka, felt the ammunition in the pockets, and went out to meet her.

'How are you doing?' she asked.

'Pretty good for a corpse.'

'Going somewhere? You're supposed to be keeping out of sight.'

'Thought you might take me out for a spin,' Jack said.

'I brought you the Argos.'

'Am I in it?' Jack asked as she handed him the folded weekly. 'Bloody hell. Front cover. Can I read while you drive?'

'Everybody knows what you look like with that coat on. Go and see if the boss has got something less conspicuous.'

'Fair enough,' Jack said, turning back towards the front door.

'And get one of his Trilbys,' she called after him, 'and a scarf for your face.'

A few moments later Jack emerged from the house wearing an overcoat that was far too short but immense in girth, a hat, a Paisley scarf wrapped around the lower half of his face and carrying a walking stick as he hobbled toward Clare. She laughed, 'Where are we going?'

'I want to see my scooter and to collect a couple of family heirlooms that Boyko threw into the bushes, if that's ok?'

'What? I can't understand a word.'

'Sorry,' Jack said pulling the scarf away from his face and repeating his sentence. 'If we start on the road, just near the bridge over the railway cutting before we go on to find my scooter.' While Clare drove, Jack took another look at the paper. 'I'm not sure I go with the idea that I was depressed at having to come back here to the sticks; I like it here.'

'I don't think the idea was to portray you as a happy-go-lucky suicide.'

'No, I guess not. I like the statement that you're not treating my death as suspicious.'

'The Super has written the obit; it's inside,' Clare said.

Jack opened the paper and read. 'Well, that's very nice of him. Pity he couldn't have told me that when I was alive and kicking,' he laughed and then fell into silence. Clare looked at him out of the corner of her eye but said nothing. Ten minutes passed. 'You know, it's only just occurred to me – how am I going to come back to life?'

'When we've won, you'll be a hero.'

'Yeah, a real pin ball wizard but I guess we can wait until we've, as you put it, won, so I don't need to worry about how to manage my second coming ... Here will do, Clare. Just pull up on the verge on the left.'

They both climbed out of the car and Jack put the scarf over his mouth again. 'What are we looking for?' Clare asked.

He pulled the scarf aside. 'Two First World War Mark IV Webleys; Boyko threw them in here somewhere. They won't have gone far, they're too heavy,' Jack said as he waded into the tangled mass of dead cow parsley, nettles, grasses and cobwebs dripping with moisture.

'Guns, right?'

'Yeah, they were my grandfather's, given to him by the old Lord Haugham I think; they still work or they did the last time they were fired which was when Dad was still alive.'

'And you were going to try and use them to defend yourself?'

'Yeah, but when it came to it, I couldn't do it. That was then.'

'Do you have a firearms licence?'

'Don't be daft,' Jack said as he used the walking stick to thrash the foliage aside.

'You really should get them licensed, you know.'

'But then after I've killed Boyko they'll be able to trace the weapon to me.'

'What did you just say?'

The stick hit metal. 'Here we go!' Jack shouted. 'Got 'em,' he said as he picked up the first and then the second gun, wiped them down on the overcoat and stuffed one in each pocket.

'Jack. What did you just say?'

'About what?'

'About killing Boyko.'

Jack pulled the scarf away from his mouth. 'It must be this damn scarf; sorry.'

'Where are you going now?' Clare asked as Jack crossed the narrow road that led down to the railway cutting.

'To find my Lambretta. You coming?'

It didn't take them very long to get to the scooter; Clare was silent all the way. 'Oh, shit, it's as bad as I thought,' he said as he looked at the carcass of the vehicle. 'I think that's beyond repair,' he sighed.

'I'm sorry. What are you going to do with it?'

'Leave it where it is and let it rot; it'll eventually disappear into the ground – I'll come back now and then to see how it's doing; shouldn't love things, should we, only people, and there's few of them enough to love.'

They stood in silence for a few moments.

'Jack, did you say you were going to kill Boyko?'

He waited. Nodded. 'If I have to, only if I have to.'

'I can't let you do that, Jack.'

'Not quite sure how you can prevent me from defending myself, Clare.'

'If you kill him, which I hope to god you won't, I'll never be certain if you didn't set things up so that you could kill him on the grounds of self defence.'

'You think I'm that clever?'

'I think you're that angry. If it happened I'd have to say something. You do know that, don't you?' she asked.

'Don't worry ... it'll probably never come to that.'

'I'll take you back to the Super's, come on.'

12.52

'Fred? ... It's Simon Wainstock. I'm afraid I've got bad news ... No, it's about, Jack. He's dead. He committed suicide last night ... yes, I know, tragic ... he hung himself in the kitchen of the cottage, like father like son, I suppose ... Yes, of course I'll let you know when the funeral is going to take place ... It's Thursday today, so next week ... yeah, I will. Take care Fred. Goodbye.'

Wainstock waited a few moments before making a second call.

'Lucinda, it's Simon Wainstock ... Fine, thank you ... Yes, Jack is back with us up here ... I need to give you a heads up, as they say these days. I've just told Fred Ingles that Jack committed suicide last night – it isn't true. He's alive and kicking; well, not quite kicking ... Boyko tried to kill him; he was saved in the nick of time ... I thought you should know the truth ... Yes, there'll be a fake funeral next week ... Yes, I agree, perfect ... You want to meet Jack? ... Thought you would. Yes, with me ... yes, where we met when you were up here last at my place ... I will. Bye.'

13.33

Clare hadn't said a word as she drove Jack back to Wainstock's and was distinctly frosty when they said their goodbyes. It bothered him. He removed the pistols from the overcoat pockets and took them into the kitchen, put them on the

table, unloaded them and sat staring at nothing in particular. He picked up one of the Webleys. *Too heavy, too big, but what else have I got?* His mobile buzzed; there was a new message. “My employer suggests a meeting at the weekend prior to your funeral’. Is this acceptable?” *News travels fast*, he thought as he replied “yes”.

Within moments there was a further text. “For security reasons your instructions will be delivered tomorrow by courier to your home.”

Jack replied, “I don’t do instructions.”

A message came straight back, “Wrong word. Directions to the meeting.”

Jack stood in the secluded back garden; a chill wind from the east rattled leaves in the beech hedges. Overhead, rooks, their ‘kaah kaah kaahs’ raucous on the wind, wheeled to the sanctuary of their rookeries, tangled masses of sticks firmly lodged in the latticed arms of great and ancient Scots Pines on a knoll half a mile away. *How the hell do they manage to stay in one piece up in those? You’d think they’d be blown away. That’s probably true for me as well. Already true if you believe everything you read in the papers. Like those trees I seem to be a survivor.* Hearing the sound of a car arriving on the front drive Jack quickly went indoors.

Jack waited out of sight for the doorbell to ring but instead the front door opened and Wainstock came in with a cheery, ‘Hello. Where are you?’

Jack came out from behind the kitchen door. ‘In here, Simon.’

‘What did you think about my obit ... oh ... Webleys ... wherever did you get those?’ he asked seeing the guns on the kitchen table.

‘I had them when Boyko captured me; he threw them away; Clare took me to find them.’

‘You weren’t supposed to go out.’

‘I was disguised.’

‘What as?’ Wainstock picked up the guns.

‘A slimmed down version of you; old overcoat, walking stick, hat, senile.’

‘Cheeky sod. Where’d they come from?’

‘My grandfather, and no, I don’t have a licence; Clare has already given me a bollocking; they’re going back into storage.’

Wainstock took off his coat and threw it over the back of a Windsor chair. ‘Pity.’ He picked up one of the guns.

‘Pity what?’

‘Pity you couldn’t have used this on those foreign bastards.’

‘You’d better not let Clare hear you speaking like that; it’s not PC.’

Wainstock put down the Webley. ‘Good lass, but too much education and not enough anger. Cup of tea?’

‘Yeah, thanks ... what’s eating you, boss?’

Wainstock filled the kettle and switched it on. ‘What’s up? This, my country, England, that’s what’s up. I’ve spent the greater part of my life as a copper. Why did I bother? One government after another, including this lot, have ruined it. Rural deprivation? Bleeding hearts. There’s always been rural deprivation but we got on with it, people knew their place. If they stepped out of line we stepped on them and that was fine. Now ... excuses ... kids think they’re owed something when they’ve done nothing to earn any bloody thing at all. Those that do want to make an effort to better themselves can’t because of immigrants; flooding the ... Do you remember that speech of Enoch Powell – rivers of blood?’

Jack sighed. ‘Evil bastard.’

‘Evil? I think not. He was telling the truth, but we were away from it out here in the sticks. Not any more; they may not be black or brown but they’re not bloody English, are they? Immigrants! Even bloody labour politicians like Blunkett want rid of the Roma, bloody gypsies!’

The kettle boiled. ‘Take it easy, boss.’ *Jesus, you’ve kept this to yourself.*

'Jack, I've had enough. Without the immigrants would all this have happened? No, of course it wouldn't; it's all because of them taking our ...'

'Hang on, hang on – this is just a rant. I've never heard you talk like this before.'

Wainstock poured water into the teapot. 'Kept my own counsel, Jack. This disease, your wife ... she's an immigrant ... her brother tried to kill you, he's an immigrant, those that drove Rachel to her death, they were ...'

'Ukrainian mafia,' Jack interrupted. 'They're different from the poor sods who work as slave labour on English farmers' fields.'

'Yes, but whose fault is it that they're here, any of them? Now that Plushenko is dead some bloody unknown Ukrainian owns all Haugham's estate – all that land out there as far as your eyes can see,' Wainstock gestured at the Wolds beyond the kitchen windows.

'This isn't rational, boss, you don't want to ... look, maybe it would be better if you gave me a lift back to my place, I'll disguise myself, whatever, and get on with dealing with ... with them ... in my own way.'

'You need to stay here.'

'No one will know I'm back at the Belvedere: I'm dead.'

'There's someone coming to see you.'

'Who?'

'Assistant Commissioner Lucinda Breake.'

'Why?'

'I told Fred you were dead. I told her you were alive.'

'Why?'

'I thought it best.'

'Well, I'm going home,' Jack said, picked up the Webleys and stormed out to the hall, pulled on his parka, stuffed the guns in the pockets and made for the front door.

'Stop! Think about it. Your best chance is for Boyko to think you're dead; you won't stay that way going out like that

– people know who you are; this is the sticks where everybody knows everybody and everything.'

Jack stood in the doorway, closed the front door and turned to Wainstock. *You know, I thought I knew you, respected you.* 'What time will she be here?'

'Soon. That tea'll be mashed by now.'

'Well, that'll make the world a better place, won't it?' Jack said.

13.37

Anastasiya saw the message from her brother on her mobile. "Go home. Now. Speak on Skype."

Thirty minutes later she had logged on and was looking at Choma. 'Jack is dead,' he said.

She stared back at him in silence for a moment. 'Do you have to look so pleased?'

'How should I look?'

'Did you keep your promise?'

'That his death would be quick?'

'Was it?'

'I had left by then – such matters I leave to others.'

'So how do you know he's dead?'

'He's dead, believe me, Jack is dead. It's time, Anastasiya. You are ready, yes?' she nodded. 'Good. We can begin.'

'No, not yet.'

'You look worried,' Choma said.

'There is a loose end.'

'You want it tied?'

'I will tie it myself and then we are safe.'

Choma Boyko laughed. 'One is never safe.'

‘True. Come to my house; you have a key. The boxes of larvae we need are here ready for collection. The horde is safe in the unit.’

‘The loose end?’

‘I’ll call you when it’s done, then you can send the car. Go now.’ The connection went down. For a moment Anastasiya stared at the screen. Ten minutes later she was driving away from Sutton Courtenay. She parked her car at Didcot Parkway station and paid cash for a single on the 14.29 train to Paddington.

14.39

Nev parked the Audi at the rear of the flats where Ron was staying with his sister in Reading while Sam went to the door and rang the door buzzer. The intercom sprang into life. ‘Yes?’ a woman’s voice asked. Sam explained who she was and that she’d come to give Professor Baski a lift to London for his meeting later that day. ‘That’s very kind, I’m sure, my dear, but he left for London earlier today, on the train – you know he doesn’t drive. He’ll be at Imperial by now.’

Sam ran back to the car. ‘The silly bugger has gone to London,’ she told Nev. ‘Let’s just get there as fast as we can.’ As they waited at the traffic lights Sam opened the AA route planner app on her phone. ‘It says it’ll take us one hour and one minute.’

‘You’ve got to be joking,’ Nev said. ‘The M4 is down to one lane, let alone the mess on the Hammersmith flyover.’

‘Just do your best - but don’t get us pulled over.’

15.50

There was a knock on Ron’s office door. He looked up from behind his desk and said, ‘Come in. it’s open.’

‘Hello, Professor, how are you?’

For a moment he didn’t recognise her. ‘Anastasiya,’ Ron gasped as he pushed his chair back and stood up. ‘I, I didn’t ...’

‘Expect to see me? No, I don’t expect you did.’

‘It’s been a long time.’

‘Good to see you’ve still got this.’ Anastasiya lifted the Dalek sign from the top of the filing cabinet, stuck it on the outside of the door and locked it. ‘That’s better. Can I sit down?’

‘Of course. Coffee? Tea? I can’t remember what you prefer,’ he said trying to appear calm as she sat down opposite him, pulling her chair as close as possible to his desk; they were less than three feet apart. Smelling tobacco on her breath he realised he’d forgotten she smoked; it hardly mattered.

‘I won’t be long. I know you’ve been helping Jack with his enquiries ... there’s no need to reply ... and you’ve been checking out what I’ve been up to at Pharma-co-Logical. Your face is a picture; you were never very good at disguising your feelings, were you, Professor? And I’m pretty certain you’ve seen what was on Kinsey’s laptop, useless woman. Knowing what you’re like you’ll have copied it all onto an external drive and backed that up on the web, but none of that matters because you’re too late – it’s beginning.’

‘Jack may have something to say about that.’

Anastasiya laughed. ‘Jack is dead.’

Ron remembered Jack’s warning. ‘Why are you here?’

‘A present,’ she said lunging forward her latex gloved hand driving a syringe into the back of his hand. He watched, transfixed, as she emptied the syringe. She placed the syringe on the desk in front of him.

‘Is it?’

‘Of course it is.’

‘Why?’ Ron asked.

‘Why what? Why do I want you to die?’

‘No. Why did you turn to this when you had so much in front of you, so much opportunity to do good?’

‘That would be a long story, Professor, and I don’t have time to tell it,’ she said and stood up. ‘If I were you I’d think about putting myself out of my misery before it happens.’ She opened the door.

‘How long before I’m ...?’

‘At death’s door? My dear little virus will know when it needs to move on – then you’ll be about as toxic as it gets.’ She closed the door.

Just over ten minutes later Sam and Nev ran along the corridor. ‘This is it,’ she said as she looked at the Dalek sign. ‘It says don’t come in; sod that.’ Ron was still sitting behind his desk as they burst in. ‘Thank god, you’re alright.’

‘Not quite,’ Ron replied. ‘Who are you?’

‘I’m Sam and this is Nev, Jack asked us to look after you.’

‘I think you’re too late for that.’

‘What’s that syringe on your desk? Why are you holding your hand like that?’ Sam asked.

Ron looked at his hand. ‘Yes, I am holding it strangely, aren’t I? Yes, well. I’m expecting a visitor at six but you’re going to have to help me because I can no longer meet him. I need to be in an isolation unit ... I’ve prepared a dossier for my visitor and my condition will now convince him of the gravity of what it contains.’

‘What’s happened?’ Sam asked.

‘Jack’s wife has injected me with the virus so I’m dying even more quickly than I was anyway,’ he chuckled. ‘But I would like to avoid the pain. I need to be in a secure lab downstairs with some pain relief to hand. Could you take me there as quickly as possible just in case I deteriorate more quickly than expected?’

‘Of course.’

‘There’s no need to worry; I’m not infectious at the moment.’

‘I don’t know what to say.’

‘Don’t worry about that. You’ll need to be back here for six to explain the situation and bring my visitor to me; it’s only downstairs. Ironically, it’s where Anastasiya spent so much time on her doctorate.’

‘Are you sure she’s done this to you?’ Sam asked.

‘Oh, yes. Would you mind telling Jack? I need to get on with this.’

Later, Sam stood in the corridor and made the call; Jack listened carefully only asking a question when absolutely necessary as he stood in the garden looking at the rooks.

‘I’m so sorry, Jack,’ Sam said. ‘If only he’d stayed put at his sister’s.’

‘It’s not your fault at all – if you’d been there when she arrived it might have been you instead – who knows? Do as he says, but I want you to promise me that you’ll get him on the phone to me before he, before he ... *don’t fucking cry* ... sorry ... before he gets beyond it. Fuck! Fuck! Fuck! I’ve seen what happens.’

‘There are doctors with him; they’ll do their best.’

‘I was married to her. I’m still married to her – how can, how could ... she’s a monster. Was she always?’

‘I don’t know, Jack. I’ll make sure you speak to him ... yeah ... speak later.’

He put the phone back in the pocket of his parka; it was cold outside but he wanted some air after Wainstock’s tirade. *So what do I do now? Do I tell Breake and Simon. Will she know anyway? Why has Anastasiya done this now? They’ve begun. I have to find her and Boyko and stop it once and for all. I need Breake – or do I? If I get bogged down with their bureaucracy, it’ll be too late. Perhaps Tassa’s death turned her, made her the monster she’s become. There has to be some reason somewhere.* It was too dark to see the rookeries but he heard their ‘kaah kaah kaahs’ as the birds settled down for the night. *They sound like they’re bloody laughing.*

17.25

'In the circumstances you can call me Lucinda.'

'Jack,' he said, shaking her hand.

'Do you want me to leave?' Wainstock asked.

'What would be the point of that, Simon? You're as much part of this mess as anyone,' AC Breake said. 'We don't have time to waste on small talk – let's get to it. Jack, I'm here because ...'

'Because you want to use me,' Jack interrupted. 'How much do you understand what this mess, as you call it, is all about? Do you know exactly why we have to get Boyko and his sister, my wife, and get them soon?'

'And do you know who else also wants what they have?'

'So tell me.'

'You know that the murders in the crypt were carried out by two of Boyko's hit men but they weren't only working for him on that occasion but someone else who goes under the pseudonym of Simpkin; we don't know his real name. Ian Wain, under Simpkin's instruction, employed the Katyuk brothers to punish Sam Ticks for her role in the Cabal affair; Sandra Jackson was unlucky.'

'What about Yuri Tomenko?' Jack asked.

'My guess is that Boyko wanted Inspector Tomenko taken out of the equation – it would be naïve to think that the Katyuk brothers wouldn't have told Boyko what Wain was up to – we'll never know, but at that point there may have been collusion between Wain and Boyko. I also wouldn't put it past Simpkin to appear to be helping his enemy.'

'And Simpkin is what?' Jack asked.

'He was the Cabal's chief of staff; he replaced Smike.'

'Was?'

'We think he's gone out on his own,' she said.

'And what does he want?'

'The pathogen that your wife just injected into Professor Baski.'

Jack took a deep breath. 'So you know.'

'Sam called me straight after she called you.'

'Is there a warrant out for Anastasiya's arrest?'

'No, and there won't be.'

'What is it exactly you want me to do?'

'Go through with the arrangements you've made to meet Simpkin.'

'You've been monitoring the traffic on my phone.'

'No, we've been monitoring the phones of one of Simpkin's minions and there you were.'

'I see. It's Simpkin I'm meeting?'

'Yes, after you get your instructions tomorrow.'

'Then what?'

'Go along with him. He wants Boyko, what Boyko has; get him, get that virus and return it to us for safe keeping.'

'And Anastasiya?'

AC Breake held Jack's stare. 'It's certain that she's the brains behind all this and that Boyko is the muscle; it will be for you to decide how to proceed.'

'What about Ron?'

'He will meet with the permanent undersecretary, hand over the dossier, not literally, and then he'll die.'

'Jesus, you're a hard faced cow.'

She shrugged. 'You'd rather I cried, wept and beat my chest? No, this is too important for that. This bio terrorism is more dreadful than anything yet conceived.'

'How long have you known about what Ron calls the Plague?'

'Since Professor Baski first got involved.'

'So, you could have actually stopped them in their tracks ... ah ... I see it now ... you need both my wife and Simpkin ... that's why you've let it run and run ... you sacrificed Ron and you'll sacrifice me if needs be – correct?'

'I hope it won't come to that. You can be sure of one thing, the only three people who will know what you're doing are in this room right now; it will go no further.'

Oh yes it will, Jack thought. 'Are you actually a police officer?'

'That's the role I've been allocated these long years but my journey may also be coming to an end – hopefully.'

'Just for my sake – the meeting between Ron and the permanent under secretary and the dossier he'll be given will never see the light of day, is that right?'

'Can you imagine what would happen if the threat was made public?'

'So why make him go through such a farce?'

'So he didn't turn into a whistle-blower.'

'I should tell you to piss off.'

'But you won't, Jack, because it's personal for you. You want the Boykos, not least because of what you think your wife may have inadvertently done to your daughter, Tassa.'

'What sort of back up will I get?'

'None from us. But I'm sure you'll make your own arrangements.'

'What do you expect me to do about Simpkin? Find out who he is?'

'Stop the virus falling into his hands.'

Jack felt his mobile vibrate in his pocket; he pulled it out, saw who it was. 'Hang on, I'm going to take this outside,' he said, leaving them sitting in the kitchen. 'Sorry, Sam. Tell me.'

'Ron's just lost consciousness, they've drugged him up to the eyeballs and they'll keep him that way until it's over. They hope he won't experience too much pain,' Sam said. 'He wasn't up to calling you,' Sam's voiced cracked. 'He sent his ... he sent his best wishes.'

'Fuck. Poor bastard. I think my phone may be bugged. Don't say anything except, yes. Do you remember where you first met Yuri?'

'Yes.'

'Meet me there asp,' Jack ended the call before Sam could reply. He looked in through the kitchen window and saw Breake and Wainstock deep in conversation. He went in and closed the kitchen door behind him. 'Ron is unconscious; he won't wake again. Simon, have you got a whisky or something? I need a stiff drink.'

Breake stood up. 'I must go. I shouldn't even be here. Good luck, Jack.' She opened her brief case and took out a mobile phone. 'There's only one number on this, mine. Call me, leave it on, with GSM we'll find you; it's the best I can do.'

Jack took the phone. 'Where does Fred stand in all this?'

'Ignorant of your continued existence.'

'Why shouldn't he know?'

'Too big a risk,' Wainstock said. 'I'll see you out, Lucinda. Jack, there's a bottle in the cupboard in the snug, help yourself. I'll share it with you.'

Jack poured three finger measures into two cut glass tumblers and sat in one of the comfy leather chairs ranged each side of the hearth and waited.

Wainstock returned. 'Thank you,' he said taking one of the glasses. 'I think I'll take some water with mine. You?' Jack shook his head.

As Wainstock sat down opposite him Jack raised his glass. 'Absent friends.'

'And those present,' Wainstock said. 'Have you eaten today?'

'I had breakfast.'

'Then go easy on that. You'll need to be sharp tomorrow. I could order an Indian if you like?'

'Do they come this far out of Louth?'

'They do for me.'

'I suppose they would,' Jack sighed and closed his eyes.

'I'll go and do that – anything in particular?'

'Anything so long as it's vegetarian and hot.'

Friday 22nd November

02.18

Jack had enjoyed spending time with his old mentor and friend; despite Wainstock's recent rant Jack couldn't help but like the man who had done so much for him over the years. As they'd drunk whisky and gorged themselves on stuffed nans, sag aloo, vegetable vindaloo and pillau rice the old policeman had returned to his previous more benign self so that by the time they finally went to bed Jack was inclined to tell him what he planned to do next but caution prevailed.

Still fully dressed, Jack climbed off the bed and in his socks quietly opened the bedroom door and stepped out onto the landing. He smiled as he listened to Wainstock's rhythmic snoring; a deep bass rumble followed by a long spluttering sigh, silence and then a repeat performance. Jack almost choked with laughter, for, just as the chief superintendent had promised he would after curry, he let out a long resonating fart; a sleepy sigh of satisfaction momentarily interrupted the rhythm of his snoring.

In the front hall Jack pulled on his Chelsea boots and parka on top of which he pulled on the same overcoat he'd used earlier in the day as well as the trilby hat; seeing his reflection in the dark mirror on the wall he almost chuckled, *Jesus, a woolly mammoth about to be extinct*. He took a walking stick from the umbrella stand and silently let himself out of the front door. Though waning, the moon was bright and the night cold and clear as stars twinkled overhead. He walked down the slope of the drive and out onto the road where he waited listening for the sound of traffic and heard country silence. Nevertheless, he hurried the hundred yards to the opening into the bridleway that would take him across country and eventually back to the Belvedere. *I wonder why they never gave the cottage a name of its own? It was always just "the cottage" or "home" – probably because they knew who they were and where they belonged? Lucky them.*

Maybe because it was all that there was for miles, it didn't have a number either. Why am I thinking about this now? How long is it going to take me? Must be about six miles, in the dark, despite the moon, with this lot on, two and a half miles an hour, maybe three hours if I get lucky. Yea, he laughed, there she was again singing in his head, It's five o'clock in the morning, oh yes, it's a thin line between love and hate, not any more it isn't, it's hate. Shit! I've forgotten the Webleys. So why is this coat so heavy? He patted the coat above the inside breast pocket and found it lumpy; the only reason he hadn't felt it before was the padding of his parka between him and whatever it was. He pushed his hand inside and felt leather. He stopped, pulled it out and found he was holding a pocket holster from which protruded a black grip. As he pulled a gun from the holster a small paper note fluttered to the ground. He studied the gun in the bright moonlight: it was a Glock 26.9mm pistol. He pushed it back into the holster before stooping to retrieve the note. "Thought this might be more use than the heirlooms! Take care, Jack. Believe me, Simpkin won't be a pushover. S." *Okay, I owe you one, yet again,* he thought as he put the gun back inside the overcoat pocket. *Simpkin won't be a pushover? Sounds a bit familiar. Probably what Breake was telling him all about.* Now alert to what else he might be carrying he pushed his right hand into the overcoat side pocket and pulled out two clip magazines; he assumed they were fully loaded as otherwise what would have been the point in Wainstock putting them there? *And I bet you haven't got a licence for this lot either. Full of surprises, aren't you, Simon?*

05.07

Jack was right; it took him just under three hours. As he climbed into the Belvedere he wasn't certain if it wasn't colder inside than out. He turned on the Calor gas and set the thermostat for the central heating up high but thought better of switching on the lights just in case someone passed and wondered why there was a light when he was supposed to be

dead. It had clouded over during his walk and was pitch black inside and outside the van. He used his phone to check the time. Sunrise wouldn't be until 07.40. He took off Wainstock's overcoat, removed the Glock and ammunition and put them in the parka's pockets that he'd keep on until it was warm and made himself a pot of tea. A screech owl called far off and another answered. *That's near. On the cottage roof?* Same one as before? He went outside with his mug of tea steaming in the night air to see if he could see the bird. He spooked it and it flew off, wings beating in a low arc, across the yard and away to the wood. *I wish I was a fucking bird.* The wind was picking up. The phone Breake had given him vibrated in his pocket, he took it out, there was a message "Professor Baski is dead." A sudden noise. A gap in the clouds. He turned. For a second the fox, eyes bright in moonlight, studied him before it fled to the woods. He raised his mug, 'Best thing, mate, run for your life.'

Inside the cottage Jack walked from room to room unhindered by the lack of light and wondered if he'd ever be able to bring it back to a habitable state. *This might be it. The end game. Was that Sam Beckett? Krapps Last Tape. Patrick Magee – that was his name, bloody fantastic, what did he say? Spool. Spooooool.* Jack laughed. *Off my rocker. Waiting for Godot. That was someone else. No it wasn't. Who am I? Vladimir or Estragon? Always waiting. Just as absurd, like my life.* A car. Headlights strafed the cottage windows. Jack hid himself against the wall just where he'd sheltered from the bullets. He eased himself to a position where he could see through the open cottage door. Sam climbed out of the Audi; she was alone.

'It's okay,' Jack called as he walked out and across the yard. 'It's only me.'

'Only you will do very well,' she said and before he knew it she had thrown her arms around his neck and kissed him on the cheek.

'Did I do something to deserve that?'

'No, I just thought you needed a little affection – is it a problem?' she said letting him go.

'Hell, no, just ... it should be warm inside by now. We need to talk.'

They sat inside the Belvedere holding mugs of hot tea in the dark but it was now warm enough for them to take off their coats. 'Were you there when he went - fucking euphemisms - died?'

'No, he made us go. It was like seeing a dog about to be put down and knowing it; terrible, he was in such pain and his eyes told it all – the knowledge of what was to come. The doctors put him in a coma ...'

'Did he say anything about her?'

'The last thing he said to me was "Tell Jack to stop her"'

'Pretty clear then ... where's Nev?'

'Riding shot gun, somewhere near but out of sight, just in case,' Sam said. 'Tell me, what's happened?'

First Jack told her everything Ron had explained about the moths and the plague. Sam sat in silence as dawn began to break. Finally she spoke. 'You do know that this has nothing to do with blackmailing the state for money, don't you? Ron may have called it bioterrorism but it's just terrorism to me and it's about hate, nothing more than that, Jack, hate.'

'What has she got to hate? This country gave her the chance to be the brilliant scientist she could have been - is. She said she loved me. We had Tassa, she died ... does she hate herself more than ... is that why?'

'Perhaps you'll get the chance to ask her. Tell me the rest; when you got my call you were still at Wainstock's? Why didn't you wait for me there?'

'Something in my bones – a hunch I don't want to have.'

'Which is?'

'There's better stuff to talk about.' Jack told her about Breake and Simpkin and how the Cabal, or Simpkin, he wasn't sure which, wanted the virus for themselves; he omitted the theory that Wain had been commissioned to kill her.

'It must be Simpkin,' Sam said. 'Germ warfare doesn't feel like the sort of thing they'd be happy with, but if Simpkin wants power for himself alone, that might make sense.'

'You're not saying the Cabal are a bunch of do-gooders are you?'

'Christ, no, of course not.'

'We're playing piggy in the middle stuck between Simpkin and the Boykos – my wife and her fucking brother are the enemy.'

'Maybe there are advantages in being single.'

'Simon gave me this,' Jack said as he pushed the Glock across the table towards her. 'It's okay, the safety's on.'

'So what are we doing sitting here on our hands?'

'Waiting for my directions for my meeting with Simpkin.'

'I'd better move my car – don't want anyone jumping to the right conclusion.'

'Any chance you could pick up some bread or something from the garage so we can have something to eat?'

Sam nodded. 'I'll be back in under the hour; stay put and take the safety off that Glock.'

08.37

Jack looked up at the sound of a motorcycle coming into the yard; the rider's body shape suggested that it was a man but the black leather and opaque black helmet visor made it impossible to be certain. The rider dismounted, kicked the Triumph Thunderbird up onto its stand and walked towards Jack who was standing on the steps of the Belvedere with the Glock held tight in his right hand inside his parka pocket. 'Nice bike,' Jack said. The courier said nothing but pulled a white envelope out of the front zipped pocket of his leather jacket and handed it to Jack. 'Cuppa?' Jack asked. The courier

turned and moments later the bike was roaring away. Jack went back inside the van and opened the envelope and read.

"Dear Mr Ranger

My name is Simpkin. I'm very pleased you've agreed to meet to explore the benefits of joining forces against the Boykos. For reasons that I will explain we shall meet at Haugham Hall. This will come as a surprise but be assured it is for good reason. Could you be there this afternoon, say at fifteen hundred hours? You should, of course, be alone, though I would expect that you'll have some sort of back up in the delightful form of Ms Ticks somewhere near by. Until then.

S."

Jack was still staring at the letter when Sam returned; she put down a carrier bag of groceries and he handed her the letter.

'If I hide in the boot of the Audi can you take me to The Hall?' Jack asked as she finished reading.

'Sure. Why is he coming up here – won't that be exposing himself to risk being off his own territory?'

'I don't suppose he'll be alone. As to why? No idea.'

'No, listen. If Simpkin knows about the virus he may well know about Ron's theory because someone might be advising him or someone else knows what's going on ... but just say he knew about the moths and the Miscanthus ... he might guess that Anastasiya would bring the moths here just as she always planned. And why wouldn't they? You're dead. Who else knows as far as they're concerned and with Ron dead as well? So why not proceed as originally planned?'

'Can we go? I need to take a look at The Hall before Simpkin and his lot arrive.'

'But what do you think of my theory?' Sam asked as she opened the boot.

'Sounds more than likely to me – and – oh, do me a favour will you? Not too fast on the corners.'

08.40

Since the deaths of the Ukrainians there had been no work for Scrote, Noddy, Mouse and Capstick so when Anton Katyuk called Scrote and offered him and “his mates” work they had been only too pleased, despite their fear of the man. Cash in hand for what seemed like the daft idea of cutting pathways into the enormous miscanthus plantation on the Haugham estate sounded like easy money. Scrote had asked what it was all about but seeing the look on Evgeni Katyuk’s face he’d reverted to silence and warned his mates to do likewise. Having completed their work, they stood waiting for payment.

Anton handed Scrote an envelope. ‘This is cash for work, yes?’

Scrote opened the envelope and pulled out four £50 notes. ‘Where’s the rest?’ he asked.

‘What rest?’

‘You said two hundred each; we’ve been at it all fuckin’ night.’

‘Two hundred total.’

‘You’re ripping us off, mate,’ Noddy said.

Before he knew what was happening Evgeni slapped him so hard across the face that he thought he’d broken his cheekbone. ‘Fuck off while you walk away with your balls.’

‘It’s okay, we’re going,’ Scrote said. ‘Come on, Noddy, let’s fuck off out of here.’

‘English scum,’ Anton said and spat on the floor.

Capstick stood his ground. Scrote grabbed him. ‘It’s not worth it – you know what they did to Dimitri.’

‘What you just say?’ Evgeni demanded.

‘Nothing, mate,’ Scrote said as he pulled Capstick away.

The four young men climbed into Scrote’s pimped Peugeot 106. As he drove out through the gate of the field Scrote looked in the rear view mirror and saw the two brothers laughing.

‘There was four of us and only two of ‘em,’ Mouse complained.

‘Like I said, remember what they done to Dimitri; hard bastards,’ Scrote said.

‘And they were carrying,’ Noddy said.

‘Was they?’ Capstick asked. ‘Suppose they would be, though; hit men, ain’t they?’

‘You know what? I’ve had enough of this fucking shit,’ Scrote said. ‘I want to know what the fuck is going on. What are they doing to our fuckin’ country now?’

‘How we gonna find that out?’ Mouse asked.

‘God, you’re fuckin’ thick, ain’t you?’ Scrote replied. ‘We’re gonna hide the car and then we’re gonna wait for them two fuckers to piss off and wait and see what happens. See who comes next. They’re up to somethin’.’

‘What we gonna do when they turns up?’ Noddy asked.

‘Dunno, fuck ‘em up somehow. I’ll think of somethin’.’

09.20

At the rear of Haugham Hall, Sam parked in the yard next to the stable block where Marina, Bohdanna and Aneta had been lodged. Sam opened the boot and Jack climbed out. ‘Okay?’ Sam asked.

‘What was all that braking about?’ Jack asked as he dusted down his parka.

‘A rabbit; it was instinctive. Sorry. Are you okay?’

‘Straight out of Tommy,’ Jack laughed. ‘Shall we try the back way?’

‘As Plushenko owned this lot I wonder who’ll inherit it now?’

‘Presumably some Ukrainian, but remember Plushenko worked for Boyko so it’ll probably belong to the Boykos,’ Jack said with a shake of the head. All the doors providing entry to the rear of the hall were locked. ‘Let’s see if there’s a way in through the stable block; it joins the house through a

covered walkway so the lords and ladies wouldn't have to get wet if they wanted to see their gee gees when it was pissing down – tossers.'

The stable block entrance door opened as soon as Sam tried the handle. 'This way,' she said and led the way in. They closed the door behind them and stood in the dark. 'Isn't that bacon I can smell?' Sam whispered.

'Place is supposed to be empty; let's see if it is. Hello! Anyone home?'

'Jack!' Sam hissed.

'We haven't got all day. Hello!' Jack called again.

As they moved forward neon tubes flared into life. 'Stop right there!' This is private property. What do you want?' a male voice demanded.

'Where are you?'

'Here,' the voice replied. They looked up and saw that a balcony ran down one side of the space and a man was leaning over the balustrade; he was pointing a shotgun at them.

'It's Howard, isn't it? You remember me? I'm DCI Jack Ranger.'

'I remember you. What are you doing here?'

'I'd rather you put that away before someone gets hurt.'

Aneta joined Howard at the balustrade. 'Put it away, Howard, please?'

Howard snapped the gun open.

'Thanks,' Jack said. 'Shall we come up there or ...'

'No,' Howard interrupted.

Aneta put her hand on Howard's arm. 'It's okay; they won't hurt us.'

'Don't you believe it after what they did to Marina and Bohdanna,' Howard said.

'This wasn't them; that was the borders people.'

'We don't mean you any harm,' Sam said.

'The stairs are at the far end,' Aneta said. 'Come up.' She and Howard disappeared from view.

Jack and Sam climbed the wooden staircase and found themselves on a long narrow mezzanine floor that had presumably once housed stable lads but was now clearly occupied by Howard and Aneta. There were rugs on the floor, a table and chairs, two sofas, a double bed and a makeshift kitchen with a portable gas stove.

'I'm Sam Ticks. You know Jack.'

'Sit down, yes?' Aneta asked and pointed at one of the sofas. 'We live here. I couldn't go back in the house after – you know all that.'

'I'm sorry you had to see what they did to Plushenko,' Jack said. 'I know it's not been good for you.'

'She has nightmares about that and about my father,' Howard said.

'Sit down, Jack,' Sam said and pulled at the arm of his parka as she sank onto the sofa. 'What's happened?'

'We went to find Bohdanna and Marina. You remember them?' Howard asked. Jack nodded. 'They were at the deportation centre in Swinderby; we wanted to see if we could help them but they'd already been sent back to the Ukraine.'

'That was quick,' Jack said. 'When did that happen?'

'Sunday the seventeenth.'

'That's only five days ago,' Sam said.

'That's not possible,' Jack added.

'It's true. They are gone,' Aneta said.

'You should be somewhere safe,' Sam said. 'You were a witness to Plushenko's murder so you should be ...'

'Protected,' Howard said. 'Yes, she should have witness protection but none was offered. We're here; I have my guns.'

'We are trapped. We cannot marry. I have no papers. I am a witness. They will kill me. Your people will deport me and then they will kill me,' Aneta said. 'I have no hope.'

'Got the picture now?' Howard asked.

'Do the police know you're hiding here?' Sam asked.

'No.'

'This isn't right,' Jack said. 'I don't get it.'

'It's simple,' Howard said. 'Your lot can't be trusted. Your turn. Why are you here?'

'Good question. We have a big problem ... I'm going to trust you with the truth as there isn't time for much else,' Jack said.

'Why isn't there time?' Howard asked. 'Who's coming?'

'Just listen to Jack, please,' Sam said.

'We're listening,' Aneta said.

Jack told them the story as well as he knew it.

'So, Boyko, you say he killed my brother, yes?' Aneta asked after Jack had finished.

'Indirectly, yes, you could say that, along with my wife. I'm sorry.'

'You are angry?' Aneta asked.

'What do you think?'

'You are angry.'

'What do you want us to do?' Howard asked.

'Absolutely nothing. Keep out of sight and harm's way until today is over.'

'But it would be helpful if you could let us into the house so that we can get a sense of the layout of the place; can you do that?' Sam asked.

'And could you point me in the direction of the miscanthus?' Jack added.

'You think Boyko will come here, yes?' Aneta asked.

Jack sighed. 'It's just a hunch. But, yes, I think he will.'

'I'll take you into the house,' Aneta said.

'You don't want to go back in there,' Howard said.

'No, I don't, but I want Boyko more than I am afraid. I will do this with Sam. You will take Jack to where he wants to go, yes?'

'Okay, if you're sure,' Howard said, put his arm around her shoulders and briefly hugged her before standing and picking up his shotgun. 'Come with me.'

Howard parked the Landrover on a rough track near the gateway leading into the vast field of miscanthus that began about fifty metres from the field hedge.

'No one grew this when I was kid,' Jack said as they walked towards the crop.

'It's better than fossil fuels,' Howard said.

They stopped in front of a great wall of densely growing foliage. 'That must be, what? Three metres tall.'

'Three point five, some of it.'

'Does it always get that big?'

'This new strain does when it's mature.'

'Is there more than one field?'

'No, just this one; there's about twenty acres.'

'Which is what? Never was very good at acres,' Jack said.

'A premier league pitch is about two acres so I guess that's ten football pitches.'

'Shit, that's a lot of plants. Does it grow like that? I mean is it planted so that there are gaps, little paths?'

Howard frowned. 'I wasn't looking properly. No, it doesn't grow like that now you come to mention it; it looks as if someone has cut a way inside the standing; let's take a look.'

Howard eased his way into a small gap between the stout stalks of the miscanthus; Jack followed. Once inside the passageway widened to about eighteen inches and it was hard to move forward unless one went sideways on. Within ten feet they found another narrow passage to both right and left so that they were at a miniature cross roads. They went on further. There were more passages.

'This isn't right,' Howard said. 'Someone has done this ... do you think it's what you were saying?'

'Time we got out of here. I need to think and I need to be ready not only for Simpkin but for the Boykos as well.'

'I'll drive you back to the Hall.'

As Howard drove Jack sent a text to Breake telling her where he was to meet Simpkin that afternoon at three.

Aneta had drawn the line at the prospect of entering Haugham's study but had shown Sam the rest of the ground floor; Sam assumed that Jack's meeting with Simpkin would take place downstairs but as they were about to return to the stable block she changed her mind; it was better to have a complete picture of the Hall; there was no way of predicting what might actually happen. She and Aneta were just coming down the great staircase when Jack and Howard came in.

'Is it okay?' Aneta asked.

Jack shook his head. 'No, it's not. Someone has been cutting paths into the miscanthus so my guess is that they're ready to bury the larvae. How have things gone here, Sam?'

'The place is too big to know how to prepare for a meeting ... we don't even know how many are coming with Simpkin. I don't know how to make you safe. The other thing that bothers me is that if Simpkin is so conscious of his own security needs then why hasn't he checked out the Hall to make sure it's safe? It doesn't make sense.'

'You're right,' Jack said. 'Aneta, have you seen any strangers around here in the last twenty four hours?'

'No one until you.'

'When the time comes, actually before the time comes, I think I'll set up stall outside, right in front of the main entrance which will give the impression that I've not been inside and at least we'll have Simpkin out in the open. What do you reckon, Sam?'

'That could work. What shall we do between now and then? I feel in a bit of a limbo.'

'We will have a pot of tea,' Aneta said and led the way back to the stable block.

As Jack sipped his tea Breake's phone rang. Jack listened carefully and then said, 'Okay, we'd thought that was likely. I will,' and ended the call. 'That was AC Breake. An APNR camera spotted Boyko's Porsche Cayenne leaving South Mimms and heading up the A1; they're on their way.'

'On their own?' Sam asked.

'No way of knowing. My guess would be that some of his thugs, perhaps even the Katyuk brothers, may have organised the preparation of the miscanthus.'

'We must stop them,' Sam said.

'There's no way we can; we don't have the resources,' Jack said. 'Or maybe we do.'

'What if we were hidden inside the miscanthus when they arrived? Then we could surprise them,' Howard said. 'We've got my guns.'

Sam shook her head. 'Sorry, Howard. Somehow I don't think a shoot out in a forest of miscanthus would do much good.'

'What's the time?' Jack asked.

'Twelve fifteen.'

'That might get us two hours to get set up,' Jack said.

'Set up to do what?' Sam asked.

'I've had an idea. Howard, does miscanthus burn?'

'You bet it does when it gets going, that's why it's grown, after all.'

'Have you got red diesel for the tractors?'

'Yes, massive tanks of it down in the tractor yard ... you're going to burn the miscanthus?' Howard gasped.

'That ought to stop them,' Jack said.

'When were they seen leaving South Mimms?' Sam asked.

'An hour ago.'

'Then we need to move fast,' Sam said.

'Is there a tanker truck?' Jack asked.

'There is and there are lots of petrol cans,' Howard said. 'Can we get it done within ninety minutes?'

'Not unless we move right now,' Sam said.

13.38

'Won't they smell the diesel? Howard asked.

'The wind is strong and we've done our best; there are open cans hidden right around the perimeter of the standing and we've only poured diesel onto the base of some of the plants to get the fire going so we'll just have to hope that because they're concentrating on what they're doing they won't pick up on the smell,' Jack said.

Sam looked at her watch. 'Howard, you need to get that tanker out of here before someone sees it.'

'How long will it take the fire brigade to get here?' Jack asked.

'Thirty to forty minutes,' Howard said, 'and by that time it will all have gone up in smoke.'

'Good, let's go then.'

'Aren't you going to light it now?' Sam asked.

'No way.'

'You can't do that, Jack,' Sam said putting her hand on his arm.

'Come on, we can discuss this when we're back at the Hall.'

Jack took the lead in the Landrover ahead of Howard in the tanker truck. Sam sat beside Jack with Aneta in the back.

Scrote came out from behind the Hawthorn hedge along the narrow lane after he had given the two vehicles time to disappear over the rise of the hill. The other three men followed him. 'Who would have thought we'd be seeing his lordship, his tart and that fuckin' copper what's supposed to be dead dowsing that grass stuff with diesel?'

'How come they said as how he topped himself?' Mouse asked.

'Fucked if I know,' Scrote said.

'Shall we light it?' Capstick asked.

'We gotta wait to see what's goin' on to see if we can make somethin' out of it for us, don't we?' Scrote asked.

'I'm fuckin' starvin', mate,' Noddy said.

'Me too,' Mouse agreed.

'So why don't you take my car and fuck off, get somethin' to eat and bring us somethin' back while I keep an eye on this lot?' Scrote said.

'You're stayin' on your own?' Mouse asked.

'Yeah, just don't take for fuckin' ever and park a way off, come back on foot, use the footpath, just in case there's other fuckers here. Right?'

No one spoke as they waited in the tractor yard for Howard to arrive and then they all drove back to the hall with Aneta and Howard chattering excitedly in the back. Having parked the car, Jack was about to follow Howard and Aneta into the stables when Sam put her hand on his arm. 'A word, in private, please. You two go ahead, I just need a word with Jack.'

When the two young people were out of sight Jack looked at Sam, raised his eyebrows, and asked, 'What?'

'You know exactly what, Jack Ranger, and you can't do it.'

'Can't do what, Sam?'

'Find a way of setting that lot off with Anastasiya, Boyko and god knows who else stuck inside – they'll be burnt to death.'

'Along with the virus.'

'It would be murder, Jack.'

'Technically, yes.'

'And morally?'

'Dead men tell no lies.'

'Jack, that's not an answer and you know it.'

'I want an end to it, Sam. I need to get out front if I'm going to be waiting for Simpkin.'

'At least that'll give you time to come to your senses.'

'I lost those some time ago - I've been on borrowed time ever since.'

Sam shook her head despairingly. 'Have you got that Glock?'
'Yeah. Wish me luck as you wave me goodbye,' he sang as he walked off.

15.05

Jack stared at his watch as he sat on the front steps that led up to the portico entrance of Haugham Hall. Hearing a car approaching up the long drive, he looked up and frowned. *What's he doing here?* The car came to a halt and Jack walked towards it as the driver's door opened and Simon Wainstock got out.

'Simon, you need to get out of here, Simpkin will be here any minute and if he sees you here it'll blow ...'

Wainstock held up his hand. 'Stop, Jack. Simpkin isn't coming.'

'What? How can you possibly know that?'

'Because he told me.'

'You know who Simpkin is? What the fuck?'

'Easy, Jack. I'm not supposed to be here but I thought you were owed an explanation.'

'Damn right I am.'

'Shall we get in the car?'

'No, we won't get in the fucking car. Just tell me what the fuck is going on.'

'Simpkin is certain that Anastasiya and Boyko are coming here with the moth larvae. He wants them taken alive because he's equally certain that they won't have used all the infected larvae but will have kept others back for future use.'

'So arrest them when they turn up.'

'That's not what we really want; we want the virus.'

'Who is the "we", Simon?'

'Those of us who are proud to serve under a leader such as Simpkin.'

'Are you off your chump? Do you know what you sound like?'

'Yes, I do, a patriot, someone who loves England and wants an end to its enduring corruption.'

'It's bollocks, Simon, you should be ashamed of yourself. Who else is part of your "we"?'

'Ian Wain was one of the many of us who are tired of governments with no bottle.'

'So the Cabal will save us all,' Jack said.

'The Cabal is finished.'

'I thought Simpkin was supposed to be their chief of staff?'

'Was their chief of staff; we don't serve the Cabal, we serve England,' Wainstock said puffing out his chest like a latter-day Colonel Blimp.

Jack stared in disbelief at his old friend. *Why can't I laugh at this madness?* 'So what now?'

'We apprehend your wife and brother in law.'

'Are there any longbowmen or other yeoman warriors ready to help us with this because I think apprehending these people might be just a tad complicated?'

'You have the Glock; I have the Webleys.'

Now Jack did laugh. 'Simon, go home, get out of my sight and out of my way and do it NOW!' he said taking the Glock from his parka pocket, simultaneously slipping off the safety catch and pointing it at Wainstock who hurriedly climbed back into his green Jaguar and drove away without another word. Turning, Jack saw Sam, Aneta and Howard standing watching him. 'You heard that?'

'We heard the last bit,' Sam said. 'Should we go down to the field to see if they've arrived as yet?'

'Good idea,' Jack said. 'Do you two want to join us or stay here safely out of the way?'

'We should go across the fields on foot, there's an old green lane; I'll lead the way. I'll just get my guns,' Howard said.

'Okay, thank you,' Jack said and turning to Sam added, 'You alright with this?'

'If you promise not to burn them alive.'

'I promise I'll try not to,' Jack said and felt in his pocket for the lighter he'd removed from the kitchen before they'd set off with the diesel.

15.27

As Howard led the way along the green lane Anastasiya and Boyko were deep within the field of miscanthus while the two Katyuk brothers stood guard at the gateway.

'How can you handle those things?' Boyko asked.

'Because they're harmless.'

'They are diseased.'

'How many times? It's when they enter the food chain, when they get to mammals, that's when they become lethal, so just finish digging that little trench and I can bury this first lot before we move on to the next; we've got a long day in front of us.'

'Why couldn't the brothers have done this? I don't like digging holes in the ground in here; it's beneath me.'

'Well worked out, Choma, the ground is beneath you. The brothers couldn't do it because I wouldn't trust them not to screw up; the larvae need to be buried properly not just chucked on the ground; we're not ready for them to be eaten.'

'Okay, okay, don't start. How long will this take us?'

'Three hours.'

'Then, when we're done, we'll issue the ultimatum.'

'We'll see. Pass me that new box.'

'What do you mean, "we'll see"?'

'Ron will have told them what I did; they may even have guessed that we might come here; it depends on how much of the jigsaw they've put together. Choma! Pay attention to what you're doing! Don't just drop the larvae on the ground, pick them up and put them in the trench.'

'Are you changing your mind?'

'Maybe more than one old man has to die for them to get the message. With every death the value of the vaccine will increase until it's priceless, especially as we can inoculate to prevent rather than cure. And think of the fear, the disruption; England will never be the same again. Perfect!'

Scrote had spent his time very slowly and silently crawling through the thick stalks of the tightly packed grass thanking his lucky stars that he was so small and thin. Finally he was within hearing distance of the two conspirators.

'We were lucky to get away with it after our illegals died like that,' Boyko said as he opened another box. 'How many of these things are there?'

'Here? Enough. In the warehouse another eighty thousand.'

'We should have had that Kinsey woman killed earlier; she was a waste of space, yes?' Boyko asked.

'On both counts, yes.'

'How did Jack die?'

'His lack of balance killed him,' Boyko sniggered.

Scrote didn't know the name of the insect that was crawling inside his nose as he lay as still as possible listening to their conversation. He dared not move. He tried to sniff the bug out. A second bug joined the first. He turned his head to the left and tried to shake them out and found himself staring into the glistening eyes of a large rat. He choked back a sneeze, inhaled one of the bugs and gagged.

'What the fuck was that?' Boyko shouted.

With no time to waste Scrote struggled to his feet forcing his way through the tall thick rough grass that pulled and tugged at his face until it bled. There was hardly any light but

he was grateful for that and the density of the standing as he heard Boyko shouting for Evgeni's help.

'I will find what that is,' Boyko said.

'You will stay and help me here, whoever or what it is they will be found. Evgeni and Anton just need to wait, watch and listen, then when ... more larvae,' Anastasiya said. 'It's probably a badger or a fox.' A rat scuttled past. 'Or a rat choking on its dinner,' she laughed. 'Tell you what, when it's had a stomach full of these it'll really gag.'

'Noise too big for rat.' Boyko stood up, took a Smith & Wesson pistol from his pocket and fired two shots in the general direction of the noise.

'Haven't you got a silencer for that thing?' Anastasiya asked as one of the two bullets glanced the side of Scrote's head; he wet himself and lay very still.

'Gone,' Boyko announced.

'Right, let's move further in,' Anastasiya said.

Scrote waited until he couldn't hear them anymore. He checked the wound on his head; it was just a scratch; he wished he hadn't pissed himself. Very slowly he set off, crawling and easing his way through the dense foliage. After ten minutes he'd lost any sense of direction. He'd hoped to find his way back to the perimeter of the standing far away from the two brothers. Fear propelled him on. The plants seemed even bigger and thicker than when he'd set off. He kept going. There was no sound, no light. *Fuck*, he thought, *I'm fuckin' lost. It'll be dark outside soon and I gotta get out of this fuckin' ... what's that? That's the fuckin' diesel. I must be near the edge, mustn't I? Daft bastard, that's not diesel that's the smell of my piss. Wait till it's dark.* The lack of light in the standing meant that Scrote didn't realise that the sun had already set.

16.10

The green lane ended abruptly at the point where a previous lord of the manor, tired of maintaining a public right of way, had ploughed it up and planted a hawthorn barrier hedge that was now over six feet high.

'There's an opening,' Howard said.

They passed through the gap and found themselves on the top of a low hill looking down on the field of miscanthus. Though the last of the light was fading fast the Katyuk brothers were clearly visible as they prowled up and down, as were the black Porsche Cayenne and the Katyuks' battered Ford Mondeo parked near the open gate.

'Are they smoking?' Jack asked.

'Scum like that always smoke,' Aneta said.

'Not a wise move ... I'm guessing the others are inside the miscanthus,' Sam said.

'What's the plan?' Howard asked.

'All we can do is to try and stop them getting away. That means we should get as close to those cars as we can and see if we can take them by surprise. You have your shotguns and I have this,' Jack said showing them the Glock. 'If you and Aneta go left down that side while Sam and I go to the right and then we both work our way up the lane on the far side of the hedge until we cover the entrance gate from both directions. Then, as they're about to get in the cars we go for it.'

'We are to shoot?' Aneta asked.

'Only if they make us,' Sam said.

'They will make us,' Aneta said. 'We should hurry or we will be too late.'

'You're right – don't fire unless you have to,' Sam said.

They split up and set off keeping as close to the perimeter hedges as possible. In the shadow of the hedge there was even less light than in the open. The one advantage of going down the slow incline was that it was possible to see what was happening

ahead of them. Sam stumbled putting her hand in nettle patch. Jack mouthed 'Okay?' She nodded and then pointing ahead whispered, 'Who are they?' she asked seeing three figures bent double and scurrying towards the standing of miscanthus at the opposite side to where the Katyuk brothers patrolled.

Noddy, Mouse and Capstick had spent some time looking for Scrote.

'He's fucked off, that's what the fucker's done and we've come all this fuckin' way back here and he's fucked off,' Capstick whispered as they stood in the lee of the hedge.

'Fuckin' shut it. Scrote ain't like that; he'll be hidin',' Mouse said.

'Shall we give 'im a shout?' Noddy asked.

'Oh yeah, that's a good fuckin' idea that is, so them two cunts'll know we're here,' Mouse snarled under his breath.

Jack and Sam stood still for a moment and watched. 'Unless those lads are very careful they're going to get caught. Shit, who's that?' Jack asked as a car turned into the lane about half a mile from the field's gate and then reversed back and forth until it completely blocked the road.

'That's Nev,' Sam said.

'I'd forgotten about him.'

'Never forget about Nev. Come on, let's keep going. I can't see Aneta and Howard; they must be behind the hedge.'

'Let's hope so. Sam! Look! One of the Katyuks is going to that far corner where those three lads, Jesus – they're going to walk straight into each other. We need to run; this may be our best chance,' Jack said. He lurched down the hill with Sam following him. As they stumbled onto the flat ground they sprinted along the outside edge of the plantation.

Capstick walked round the corner. 'Fuck!' he shouted.

'Stop!' Evgeni bellowed and fired a salvo from the automatic weapon he was carrying into the air.

'Run!' Capstick screamed as he tore back round the corner. Bullets strafed the miscanthus above his head.

'Shit!' Jack shouted. 'It's started.' He ran on the Glock raised above his head.

Mouse and Noddy sprinted away from the standing toward the hedge and cover. Capstick kept running in the opposite direction.

'We need to get out of here and fast,' Anastasiya said. 'Push ahead, Boyko, get us out of here.' She dropped an empty moth container. 'Go back the way we came.'

'Which way? Which way?' Boyko panicked.

'Come on!' Anastasiya shouted.

Holding his automatic machine gun at his hip Anton poured forth a stream of glowing red bullets hitting Mouse and Noddy just beneath the knees. They screamed falling, trying to drag themselves forward as Anton laughed, firing rounds all about them.

Capstick kept running. Evgeni chuckled as he deliberately sent round after round just ahead of or just behind the terrified young man framed as he was against the backdrop of the wall of miscanthus.

'Fucking hell!' Jack bellowed as he emerged round the corner and could see what was happening. 'Stop!'

Howard raised the barrel of the shotgun and fired it into the air. Aneta handed him the other gun as she frantically stuffed fresh cartridges into the hot barrels of the weapon he'd just fired.

Anton spun round and fired a salvo in Howard and Aneta's direction. They jumped back into the cover of the tall plants.

'Come on! Come on!' Anastasiya shouted.

'Wrong way! This way!' Boyko shouted back.

She looked round and he was gone. 'Fuck! Idiot!' she shouted and ploughed on.

Evgeni raised his weapon to his shoulder, pressed the trigger and kept it there. Capstick leapt into the air, he fell, the bullets held him up against the grass. Evgeni laughed as he kept firing into the miscanthus. The sound of bullets hitting metal. Jack came round the corner, dropped to one knee, and fired the

Glock. Evgeni looked shocked as he put his hand to his neck. A can of diesel exploded. Jack fired again. Evgeni was flung towards Jack by the force of the explosion. The fire started.

Oh fuck! What is that? Anastasiya thought.

Boyko tried to run; it was impossible. His nostrils itched with the heat of the fire. He heard the crackle. Another can exploded. Wind fanned the flames. The air roared.

Anton sprinted for the Mondeo, leapt in, turned on the engine and frantically span the car round until he was out of the gate. A man stood very still in front of him. For a moment Anton hesitated. The windscreen shattered. Five bullets took out his eyes and forehead. 'That's for Sandra,' Nev said.

Howard and Aneta ran to where Mouse and Noddy lay whimpering and groaning from their wounds.

'Jesus!' Jack gasped. 'The heat of that.'

Sam pulled him further back from the inferno. 'They must still be inside, poor sods.'

Far off they heard the sound of fire engine sirens.

Sam hugged Nev.

Jack stood staring. More cans exploded. The fire roared, sending streams of tracer like shards into the air. They all stared.

'Oh my god,' Sam said putting her hand to her mouth.

A figure, clothes aflame, stumbled out of the cauldron of flame.

'Shit! It's her,' Jack gasped running forward too late for anyone to stop him. As he ran he tore off his parka. As she was about to fall he threw the coat about her and lifted her into his arms; her hair was till on fire, her skin puckering falling away from blackening cheekbones. He laid her down. He tried to put out the flames on her face with his hands. She screamed. He stopped. Sam knelt beside him. Anastasiya opened her mouth. 'What? What is it?' Jack asked.

The noise from her mouth was no longer human: a ripping of bark from a tree. 'Tassa alive.'

'What?'

'Tassa alive.' Her head dropped.

'What?' Jack begged.

The flames were gone. She lifted her head. A grimace. The flesh fell from her lips. Her head dropped.

Sam knelt beside him. 'She's dead, Jack.'

'She said Tassa is alive,' Jack whispered.

'Oh my God,' Sam said.

Inside the inferno Boyko frantically beat at his flaming clothes. Hot cinders took his sight. His mouth filled with burning smoke and ash. The hairs in his nostrils vaporised. His sinuses liquefied. He bit through his tongue; he spat it out. He fell to his knees. He burned, not quickly enough as far as he was concerned.

The sound of fire engines came nearer.

'How you doing, comrade?' Sam asked. Nev raised his head. She saw tears running down his cheeks. 'Come here,' she said and hugged him.

He sobbed. He got his breath. 'You know, Sam, it doesn't feel any better. It isn't going to bring my Sandra back not if I killed them a thousand times.'

'You knew that.'

'Yeah, but I hoped it would ... I'd better move my car,' Nev said.

'Take your time, we don't want them trying to damp this lot down until everything is burnt to nothing,' Sam said. 'But we'd better get an ambulance for those two,' she added pointing at Mouse and Noddy. 'That other poor sod is dead.'

'What's up with Jack?'

Jack was still sitting next to Anastasiya's charred corpse when Sam squatted down beside him. 'Why did she do all this? Why? I need to know why. Did she really say Tassa is alive?' Jack asked.

'That's what you heard, Jack.'

'How am I going to find her?'

21.15

Howard, despite having no legal right, had decided to retake possession of Haugham Hall saying that he and Aneta would remain as squatters until someone threw them out. Jack returned to the Belvedere for a shower and was in no hurry to rejoin the others; there was a lot to decide. Finally returning to the Hall's barn of a kitchen he found Sam, Nev, Howard and Aneta gathered around the large kitchen table. Howard had raided the cellar and half a dozen bottles of Chateaufeuf du Pape had been opened. Their glasses charged, he suggested a toast, 'To victory'.

'I'm sorry, Howard,' Jack said, 'but I don't think we've won yet.'

'It's a prospect, not an achievement,' Sam said.

'I'll drink to that,' Howard said.

Jack didn't drink from his glass. 'I thought Clare would be here by now,' he said.

Clare had taken some time to deal with the aftermath of the fire and taking statements from Mouse and Noddy so that it was some time before she was able to drive to Wainstock's house; though Jack had explained that Wainstock was working for Simpkin Clare was unwilling to fully believe or understand it until she heard it from the man himself. As she pulled up outside his house the security lights came on. She rang the bell, the chimes pealed. Nothing. She knocked the front door, she tried the handle, it was locked. At the rear of the property the back door was also locked. The lights were on in the kitchen. She tried to see in but the closed louvre blinds made that impossible. She knocked on the window. 'Boss! It's me Clare. Need to talk boss,' she called. Nothing. Silence. *Too quiet.* Suddenly the thud of the front door slamming shut. She turned, tripped over a bucket, picked herself up and dashed round the corner of the house only to see a figure jump into her car. 'Stop!' she shouted. She sprinted forward. The engine started. Tyres squealed. The police car raced away. She took out

her mobile phone, cursing herself for leaving her keys in the ignition, called the station for back up and reported the theft. Turning she walked to the front door, pulled on her gloves, and went in. *Oh shit,* she thought, smelling cordite.

Bright fluorescent light spilled through the half open kitchen door. 'Boss?' she called. She didn't repeat the question as she opened the door and stood on the threshold.

What remained of the back of Simon Wainstock's head was splattered over the kitchen cupboards behind where he'd been sitting when he'd put the barrel of the Webley in his mouth and pulled the trigger. He lay on his side, the gun firmly gripped in his right hand; blood and tissue drained from his shattered skull, forming a glutinous pool on the black and white checked linoleum.

Outside in the fresh air Clare called Jack and gave him the news before calling the station once again, this time to ask for the police doctor and scene of crime technicians. In the back garden she looked at the stars. Twenty minutes later she heard a car pulling up on the front drive and Jack calling, asking where she was.

She and Jack stood in the doorway of the kitchen. 'You know,' Jack said, 'no matter what they'll say, he was a good man at heart ... if you hadn't been here and seen someone fleeing the scene no one would have given his death a second thought. It would have been suicide and not a question asked. There's only one person who needed him dead, and that's Simpkin.'

'I'm sorry, Jack, he was a friend. Are you going to lead on this?'

'You aren't going to like this, Clare, but I'm not. I may not be dead but my resignation stands – if I'm ever going to get to the bottom of all this shit I'll never manage it if I've got to stick to the rules. This is all yours. Do you want me to stay and keep you company until the cavalry arrives?'

'No, Jack. I don't need my hand holding any more.'

'You never did.'

'It would have been nice if you had,' she said and kissed him on the cheek as police cars, blues flashing, and two white vans arrived.

'I'll be at the belvedere for a few days if you need to talk,' Jack said.

Jack returned to the Hall and found Sam and Nev still sitting in the kitchen; Howard and Aneta were nowhere to be seen. Jack told them what had happened.

'What are you going to do now?' Nev asked.

'Find my daughter. Stop Simpkin – that'll do for a start.'

'At the Met or from here in the sticks?' Sam asked.

'Neither. From here on in I'm freelance. Any chance I could join your gang?' Jack asked.

'What do you think, Nev?'

'Wouldn't have thought he'd want to join a gang that wanted him,' Nev said.

Sam's mobile chirruped. 'Yes?' she said. 'YES! I'll be there as soon as I can.' She ended the call. She wept.

'What is it?' Jack asked as he hugged her.

'Jim. He's come out of his coma; he's going to be alright.'

22.35

'Mr Simpkin will see you now,' Mothmann said.

'I thought he'd forgotten I was waiting,' Lucinda Breake replied standing up and nervously straightening her skirt.

'Mr Simpkin is not known for his forgetfulness, ma'am.'

Simpkin remained seated as Breake walked what seemed a mile to the desk behind which he sat. She noted that the library shelves, previously laden with antique bindings, were now entirely empty.

'Please sit down,' he said indicating the upright chair set in front of his desk.

'What's happened to the books?' she asked and immediately regretted it.

'You want to talk about books? There's no need to answer. Your nervousness is as transparent as it is understandable. You've botched it. Explain yourself.'

'You should have gone to see Ranger and not left it to Wainstock – he wasn't up to it.'

'Agreed. Are you?'

'Yes.'

'The evidence to date would suggest otherwise. Don't even try to interrupt,' Simpkin said raising his hand. 'I've put a lot of time and money into your career and I expect a dividend on that investment. You have one last chance. Fail ... I don't need to spell it out. I want the virus. Find the remaining larvae and do it quickly before nature takes its course and there is no benefit to me. Do you understand?'

'Yes.'

'Good. As to the books – they are elsewhere, as I will be by morning. I'll make sure you know where to report, Ms Breake. Good night.'

There was no wind in the gorge. Marko Wozniak climbed down the steep track trying to concentrate on his footing; his mind was elsewhere, on her reaction to his news. Shards of ice broke beneath his boots. It would snow; the sky flat grey and full. Bearded Buzzards circled overhead; a sheep must be dead. He could have called her on her mobile but that would have been disrespectful; Vika required respect. He shivered within the heavy jacket that insulated him from the piecing cold. He wasn't afraid; Marko Wozniak hadn't become what he was by being afraid. But he was anxious and why wouldn't he be? How would his mother feel if someone like him had come to tell her that he and his sister were dead?

As he reached the plateau he saw her standing waiting in the doorway of the house. He still found it hard to believe that someone who appeared to be an aged and decrepit shepherdess dressed in black, a heavy black shawl over her head and bent crouching leaning on a twisted wooden stave for support could have such authority. Many thought she was a witch but superstition was strong in the mountains. Marko knew better but that didn't make her less intimidating.

She led him inside. The little girl was sent to play with her iPad.

'Well,' Vika said, 'what brings you here, Marko? Knowing you, it won't be good news.'

'It has taken some time for the news to come to me and as soon as I ...'

'Get on with it, Marko.'

He cleared his throat. 'Anastasiya and Choma are dead.'

'How were they killed?'

Marko told her what he knew.

Sitting together with Sam in "The Strugglers" Jack toasted 'absent friends'.

Sam sat quietly for a few moments. 'Okay, Jack, now that we are truly brothers in arms where shall we begin? Tassa? Simpkin? The missing larvae?'

'Mark Knoffler has a lot to answer for.'

'What?'

'Dire Straits - the band - their song ... "Brothers in Arms". Simpkin? Do you really think he's left the Cabal and gone out on his own?'

'He won't be on his own, Jack. If he was we'd have time to waste; we don't and the clock's ticking. Imagine what could happen if the virus falls into the wrong hands.'

'Any hands, even innocent ones - that's why we need to start with that - otherwise there'll be no point in finding Tassa.'

'Drink up,' Sam said. 'Time we were getting on.'

'You remember that book "Ten Days that Shook the World"?'

'Yes - by John Reed, wasn't it?'

'That's the man. Ours lasted ten days as well.'

'Bloody hell. Mind you, time flies when you're having fun,' Sam said and set down her empty glass.

'Yeah, but we've only just begun.'

'Do you think we can really trust Fred?' Sam asked.

Jack mobile rang. He looked at the screen. 'Speak of the devil.' He took the call. 'Hi, Fred ... you've what? ... Yeah ... off the record ... sure and you'll make a copy ... I will, and thanks.' He ended the call. 'Maybe that answers the question,' he said to Sam. 'Maybe.'

'What?'

'Two things. Breake has received a letter from Anastasiya ... as we guessed there is more of the virus, lots of it. The second thing: when they examined Anastasiya's clothing the only

thing she was carrying was a key. Apparently it's for a mortise or mortises and it's double ended – they've tried it on all her locks both at work and at home; it doesn't fit anything. Fred has a hunch that it may be the key to where the rest of the virus is stored; He's making me a copy ... yes, I know, it could be on the level or we're just being used.'

'Time will tell,' Sam said. 'Like I said, best get on. He'll be as grumpy as hell if we're late now that they've finally let him go home.'

'Do you think he'll take to me?'

'We're about to find out.'

To be continued in
'The Smoke'