

Norfolk Noir

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WINTERTON BEACH

It was one of those glorious summer mornings that make Winterton beach one of the most entrancing places in the world at sunrise. As the sun gently creeps up from where the horizon and the sea conjoin it slowly bathes an increasing amount of water with a reddish yellowish tinge. This then merges with the wide expanse of golden-yellow sand at low tide creating a beautiful riot of reds, yellows and ochres.

Michael Bates stood looking at the sun rise, basking in the warmth of its rays, whilst shielding his eyes with both hands. Meanwhile his golden Labrador, Poppy, frolicked in the softly overlapping wavelets. The sky was clear and the only sounds were those of the incoming tide splashing gently on the sand, garrulous gulls and warbling terns: apart from Poppy's playful barking.

Bates turned away and looked at the undulating dunes sprouting gorse bushes and a healthy array of sea wort and other coastal grasses.

His mind switched to thoughts of returning home later that day. Returning home to deal with the incessant ravages that this interminable recession was inflicting on his businesses. He had a meeting scheduled for that evening with his accountant. They were going to thrash out tactics for dealing with HMRC. An organisation that seemed to be populated by staff with no understanding of either business or basic economics. The ex-Chancellor Gerald Black had turned the department into a vicious organisation: a reflection of his own twisted personality. Its modus operandi revolved around hoovering money in with scant regard for the human cost in terms of unemployment and the long-term health of the economy. Of course it was alright for Black who had stepped down to spend more time with his family. He was cushioned by his MP's salary, expenses and the generous pension that would no doubt come his way when he left Parliament in the near future.

Bates was jolted out of his reverie by the abrupt change in poppy's barking. The playfulness had given away to an agitated and distressed yelping and whining. The dog was about sixty yards ahead of Bates. It circled and then stepped closer to, and then anxiously barked whilst backing away from, what appeared to be a large piece of light coloured flotsam at the high tide mark. The dog repeated this process whilst its anxiety level grew.

Bates hurried across to the dog whilst simultaneously ordering,

'Here girl, here girl'

The distressed dog ignored its owner and continued with its distressed behaviour.

When he reached Poppy, Bates stopped abruptly. His eyes bulged and his heartbeat accelerated with shock. He felt his breakfast rising up through his body. He turned and violently retched. He wiped his mouth with his handkerchief and struggled to spit out the remaining goblets of bile in his mouth.

He turned around. The 'flotsam' was the body of a naked and shapely formed young blonde woman lying face down. The dark roots showed that her hair colour was not natural. A few pieces of seaweed had wreathed themselves around the corpse.

Bates pulled himself together. He had to get to the phone. He grabbed Poppy and snapped the leash on her collar.

He gazed around the beach, thankfully noting that it was still empty, and hurried off in the direction of his holiday cottage.

On the way he met another dog walker with an Alsatian that circled and barked aggressively at Poppy.

'Get the thing on a leash' he snapped at the burly, elderly female owner.

'What the...' she started to say.

Before she had time to finish Bates breathlessly interrupted

'There is a dead body down there' he pointed towards the corpse. The woman emitted a high pitched sound and put her hand to her mouth.

'Are you local?'

She nodded in assent whilst leashing her dog.

'Get home and ring the police and tell them there's a dead body on the beach. I'll go back and stand guard until they arrive'

The woman scuttled off.

Within half an hour the beach around the corpse had been cordoned off. The police were attempting to keep the gawkers at bay. As a precaution they had also cordoned off the beach car park near the café.

Within a short while a crime scene officer arrived at the site soon followed by an irritable young pathologist: he had got lucky on a date the previous evening! The former took numerous photographs whilst the latter determined that the body exhibited no external signs of violence in the original position. He turned the woman onto her back noting the shaved pubic area. Again he could see no discernible signs of violence to the body. He indicated that the body should be bagged and taken to the mortuary so as to determine the cause of death.

Simultaneously to all this happening three police officers were conducting a linear search of the beach around the corpse.

In normal conditions the details of a crime scene must be carefully recorded and preserved. However, three things mitigated against that in this instance. Firstly, the tide was coming in. Secondly, the lack of any signs of violence to the body indicated that it may have been a drowning. Thirdly it was a Sunday morning and the police were mindful of their budgets

Within an hour and a half the beach was clear of everything to do with the young woman's corpse. Few of the many dog walkers were aware of the earlier drama that had unfolded on the beach. The local media had quickly interviewed Bates and the woman.

Their interest had quickly evaporated when it appeared that it may just be a drowning and not a murder.

BLUNT

It had been a pleasant August late afternoon. Blunt had taken advantage of the weather to go on a two hour exploratory walk of the Stalham countryside. It left him mentally relaxed and in need of a little liquid refreshment. That need had been sated at Huggies café in the High Street. There was one empty bench left outside. The rest were occupied by chattering holidaymakers taking advantage of one of the few sunny days so far that summer. The owner was a stocky and talkative little man who gave him the lowdown on some of the aspects of the small market town.

He pointed out the unit next door 'Uncle Bill's'. It looked like a second hand type of shop. He learned that if anything went missing in the town and surrounding areas the first place anyone looked was next door. Huggie jokingly stated that he hoped Blunt had nothing to do with the law. The policeman thought it wise not to comment. The little man pointed out another two characters walking up the street. One with shorts and long grey hair kind of lolloped along. The other individual about six two in height and several stone overweight, judging by his chins, wore an overcoat and a trilby. Their nicknames were dumb and dumber although some called them the Blues Brothers. The Café owner pointed out a dowdily dressed woman walking by clutching a cloth shopping bag. On closer inspection Blunt suspected that she could be a he. Huggie confirmed it. The person Michael Loveday had decided to be a woman several years ago. He had walked out on his wife and two children and rented a flat above the Chemist shop a little further up the High Street.

He had enquired as to what Blunt was doing in the town and Blunt had been very circumspect with what he revealed.

John Blunt's journey to living in Stalham, Norfolk had been circuitous in more ways than one. Nine months ago Internal Affairs had grilled him to see whether he had any knowledge of the events that led up to the suspected murder of the former Chief Executive of Aktion fur Arbeit and the disappearance of the businessman Marker. The latter was suspected of killing the former. The matter had been dropped due to lack of evidence of any wrong doing on Blunt's part. However, the investigating officers had informed Blunt that they believed him to be as guilty as hell.

Blunt's investigation had led to the successful prosecution and imprisonment of numerous establishment figures. Judges, QC's, cabinet ministers, MPS, senior police offices, senior civil servants and many others. As a result he had created many enemies not least the former Chancellor Gerald Black. However, the new Commissioner of the Met, Moyles, had stood up for him and facilitated his move to Norfolk. It probably helped that Blunt knew a great deal that Moyles would prefer to remain out of the public domain. Moyles, ever the consummate political operator had made sure that the powers that be knew the threat posed by Blunt. However, Blunt remained convinced that Moyles had let him swing in the wind. A tactic that had resulted in his nervous breakdown. He would never forgive the man for the distress that he had caused him. A further bone of contention involved Moyles' treatment of Debbie Flint who had worked alongside on the

Aktion case. He had threatened, and carried out his threat, to bust her to traffic and other similar duties.

Blunt's task in Norfolk was to set up a new experimental anti-people trafficking unit. Norfolk had been chosen for three reasons. It seemed to be a major centre for the dissemination of illegal immigrants to other parts of the country. The case concerning the German multinational Aktion fur Arbeit had served to reinforce that view. The second was that the Chief Constable Bill Strumpshaw had been to university with the current Home Secretary and to school with the senior civil servant in the department. Finally, Moyles, the new Metropolitan Police Commissioner had also thrown his hat into the ring in support. The new unit had presented him with the ideal opportunity to be rid of Blunt. The further he was away from London the better.

After leaving Huggies the policeman took a gentle stroll up the High Street and window shopped in a distracted fashion.

On getting home he settled down to watch the early evening news with a glass of McAllan.

The plunging pound on world currency markets featured highly together with the predictions that it would take another tumble when the markets opened the next morning. That lead onto a look at how the recession seemed to be tightening its grip on the economy with no end in sight.

The next item caused Blunt's heartbeat to quicken and his upper lip to involuntarily curl.

'Rafique Khan the MP for Wath and Dearne Valley has been invited by the Prime Minister to join a new security committee. Mr Khan was recommended by the leader of the opposition who stated that because of his links to the world's flashpoints he could bring a unique perspective to Britain's security.', intoned the news reader whilst the screen cut to pictures of Khan doing a walk about in an area that had witnessed rioting by Muslim youths. Khan was one of the rising stars of the labour movement. He was being tipped as a highly probable first non-white leader of a major political party'.

That gave the news team the chance to make a link with what commentators called, 'a simmering situation' in those towns and cities with large Asian populations. The Asian youth were amongst the worst affected by the recession. They lacked education and job opportunities and felt alienated from society in general. What they perceived as the West's lack of interest in the fate of the Bosnian and other Muslims fuelled that alienation. As a result they were turning towards their religion. Unfortunately many of them, influenced by firebrand clerics, were turning to an extreme form of Islam. The commentators considered that this would result in outbreaks of violence in many of the country's towns and cities.

The world news followed. This presented an altogether different picture. Bill Clinton the Democratic challenger had built a big lead in the opinion polls ahead of the Republican Party Convention. It did seem as if the American voters were ready to dump George Bush the man who had saved Kuwait from Saddam Hussein.

Another item featured the worsening situation in the old Yugoslavia where as one commentator put it, the Serbs were redrawing the boundaries in blood and ink'. The news cut to pictures of Muslims in makeshift camps and went on to describe the Serbian and

Croatian atrocities against their erstwhile Bosnian neighbours. It went on to describe how volunteers from across the Muslim world were volunteering to fight on the side of their Muslim brothers. They stated that a fair number were arriving from the UK.

The last item concerned the inflation rate in Russia and how it had risen to three thousand per cent. The commentator standing in Red Square said that resentment was building in the country as people believed that a number of the old nomenklatura and KGB had colluded with criminal elements to take control of many of the country's assets. Furthermore, their ready access to cash had allowed them to take advantage of Yeltsin's liberalisation programme.

Blunt turned away to pour himself another whisky. He needed it! Mention of Khan brought back memories. Memories that only recently had partly caused his depression.

He just caught part of the local news that mentioned that a body had been found on Winterton beach. The police stated that there were no suspicious circumstances. They would be releasing a picture of the deceased shortly for identification purposes.

Blunt switched off the news and turned his attention to his meeting on Tuesday morning with the Chief Constable. Strumpshaw had kept his word....but told Blunt that he must keep his nose clean and to keep him aware of everything that was happening.

Blunt had experienced a nervous breakdown. He had managed to conceal that fact by taking extended leave. By God he needed it! The ordeal at the hands of Internal Affairs and the security services had left his confidence and psyche shattered. On top of that had been the letter from Anjii.

He had reached the stage where he did not want to get out of bed in the morning. He awoke in the middle of the night in cold sweats. The remainder of the night he occupied himself by envisaging how sweet it would be to plunge a particularly sharp and thin knife from his kitchen drawer into his heart. He also looked up what plants in his garden could also help him to bring his life to an end. The oleander in his living room appeared to be the most effective. He found the battle raging in his head sometimes almost impossible to deal with. At such moments the knife and the oleander had an increasing attraction.

In the end he had dragged himself to the doctor. He had been prescribed citalopram and a simultaneous course of cognitive psychotherapy. He had found it hard to forgo his passion for malt whisky and fine wine whilst undergoing the course of treatment. The psychiatry stuff he had found to be a load of old codswallop. He had finally weaned himself off the tablets the previous evening and by god he was enjoying the whisky

He poured himself another glass of McAllan and started to make a shopping list of what he needed for the unit.

Communication lines to be established with EU police forces, communication lines to be established with the police forces, close liaison with the 'border folk'. The latest in computer technology, software and hardware. He needed to be able to sift, cross reference and combine data quickly and efficiently. Determining patterns at an early stage could give the unit an advantage. He also wanted people to be trained as undercover agents, so that they could infiltrate the gangs. Again it was about trying to be one step ahead. About being proactive as opposed to reactive.

It took him half the night to map out his wish list. He determined to have an early morning walk the next day and then to finish his recommendations ready for his Tuesday meeting.

SAEED

Ahmed Saeed was one hacked off individual. Here he was on a Sunday evening in the Maids Head Hotel in the centre of 'god forsaken' Norwich. His 'bust' rate was one of the highest in the Met yet he was being pushed off to Norfolk. The arse-end of beyond as far as he was concerned. The place had lots of grass and trees and people with weird accents that he could barely understand.

Ahmed was a city boy. He'd been born to Pakistani parents in the wrong end of Walsall: as far as one could say that there was a wrong end. He had been brought up a Muslim, faithfully going to the mosque and by and large living according to the precepts of the religion. In the schools he attended most of the pupils came from a similar background to himself. Therefore the only views that he really came across were those of the community and its religious adherence

He had worked hard at school and obtained some reasonable exam results. He was one of only two in his class that gained a university place. He went to Brunel University to study law. He had chosen that university because it was sited in the midst of a large Asian community: a fact that also pleased his parents. There he discovered and experienced a whole new world. His eyes and mind were opened by the diversity of cultures that co-existed on the campus.

Unfortunately the strident views of some of his fellow students in the Asian Society convinced him that Islamism had to come to terms with the Twentieth Century. It had to evolve like other religions and embrace toleration. He had discovered that education has the power not only to liberate minds but also to shackle them and slam them shut! A group of hotheads dominated the society and they treated Ahmed like a pariah. They constantly ridiculed his views and branded him a traitor to his religion at every opportunity. The other members fell into step behind his persecutors and willingly supported his expulsion from the society.

Their behaviour and attitude had a profound effect on the young student and he gradually grew away from a strict observance of his religion and the Asian community. This even led to arguments at home with his father in particular.

After graduating he decided that he wanted to be a trailblazer. He wanted to be a law enforcement officer: a coloured law enforcement officer. He was clever and he let people know it. Unfortunately, the Met still had significant pockets of misguided amateur ethnic experts. They tried, unsuccessfully to frame Ahmed for all manner of misdemeanours. His response was to throw their failure back into their faces and to rub their noses into his successes. It meant that he continually lived on a high wire

So what the hell was he doing here? Thought a disgruntled Ahmed. A place bearing little in common with his usual hunting ground! Hell, they even seemed to walk slower! He had been informed by his senior officer that on assuming the Commissioner role Moyles had been requested from on high to recommend that Saeed be moved to Norfolk with a promotion. Bill Strumpshaw the Chief Constable of Norfolk had not disagreed once he had read Saeed's file. Moyles knew that the Met had some racial problems, and as ever

his political and survival antennae were in overdrive. He had clambered to the top of the police force's greasy pole and was determined to cling on for as long as he could. Saeed's departure was a trade-off for two senior officers' support. To cover his rear Moyles planned to promote a whole raft of officers from Asian and West Indian backgrounds once Saeed had gone.

He threw himself onto the bed in the room and switched on the TV with the remote. He caught the tail end of the local news. The dead body on Winterton beach barely registered with him.

STRUMPSHAW

Ahmed rose early and decided to see what Norwich had to offer. He strode up Elm Hill and took in the picturesque mixture of half-timbered Elizabethan and the quaint Georgian brick buildings. He cursed the cobbled street as his slip-ons were not the ideal footwear for such a surface. 'Easier to walk in Pakistan' he grumbled to himself.

Three quarters of an hour later he found himself back at the Hotel. He sat in the foyer and waited for Strumpshaw's driver to pick him up. He had walked down by the rivers and then back through Cathedral Close to the Maids Head. He admitted to himself that Norwich could possibly be the 'fine city' that the signs on the outskirts boasted. However, he could not see how a Pakistani city boy like himself could fit into such a place. But....then police work was police work. He would probably be the only non-white face in the place. But then that hadn't bothered him before so why should it now? Well back in London he may have been the only coloured face within a district but within five minutes he could be in a more multicultural area. Here, it would take him hours!

'Sergeant Saeed, sir' a constable with a broad Norfolk accent snapped him out of his reverie

'I'm here to take you to see the Chief Constable'

Once in the car he attempted to quiz the driver about Norwich and Norfolk. A difficult task as the chap was quite taciturn.

'So the buggars at the station were right' thought Ahmed as he remembered the ribbing he had got from colleagues when he said he was going to Norwich. Some had wittered on ad nauseam attempting to imitate the Alan Partridge character on the radio programme 'The Day Today'.

'Well at least Partridge was somewhat garrulous and didn't speak in the local dialect' he thought.

However he did manage to tease out of the constable that he had rarely been out of Norfolk and even took his holidays in the county. He had a static caravan on a park in Hemsby. Pride tinged his voice as he spoke about it.

'What the hell are they trying to push me into?' thought Ahmed. 'I can hardly understand the buggars, not just the constable but the folk in the hotel as well'. 'How the hell can I do any detective work here when not only can I not understand the public but probably my colleagues as well?'

Bill Strumpshaw the Chief Constable was totally different. He spoke clearly even though he had a slight Norfolk burr. Ahmed warmed to him. It also helped that his office was functional. His confidence in himself and his abilities was such that he did not need the support of power props. Or then again it could be that this was Norfolk's equivalent of power props!

Strumpshaw even poured the coffee and allowed him to settle into one of the 'armed' wooden chairs before addressing him.

'You are probably wondering why you are here?' the Chief Constable looked at him and waited,

Realising what was expected of him Saaed responded in the affirmative.

The other continued, 'For quite some time I have thought that law enforcement is almost fighting a losing battle against international organised crime. They have the money, the motivation and the ruthlessness. Morality and human dignity are concepts that are alien to organised crime. That has been brought home to us here in Norfolk in the most forceful way possible. For some years we have had gangs operating in the county who have been involved in people trafficking for the agricultural industry. These were fairly low level gangmasters and we found it relatively easy to keep a degree of control over them. Gradually these people began to be superseded by traffickers of a more general and vile nature. Traffickers who represented international organisations. I am sure that you are aware of the recent business up here with Aktion fur Arbeit and the extent of their pernicious web of activities?'

Ahmed nodded. Indeed the fallout from that whole affair had claimed some of the people in his own Newham Operation Command Unit. They were scumbags who he was pleased to see getting their come-uppance. He wondered whatever had happened to the guy Blunt who had been behind the investigation. There had been all sorts of rumours. Blunt had been interviewed, by the Secret Service, Internal Affairs, had been fired, had retired was in a nut house. No-one seemed to know. His sidekick Flint had also been interviewed by all the powers that be. He'd heard that she had been busted to traffic duties.

'All that reinforced my view that we need to have some sort of unit that will allow us to keep abreast of what all these people were doing. A unit that would liaise across the board and allows us to start anticipating what these people were going to do. Maybe it is a pipe dream BUT I sold the idea to the Home Office. They have given me the finances, albeit not much, to set up an experimental unit under my command in Norfolk...'

Ahmed's heart rate increased. That's why he was here. No! No they couldn't be wanting him to head up such a unit.

'...I want you to be part of the team that will be led by Chief Inspector Blunt'

Ahmed's heart sank. Blunt was someone that no-one wanted. Someone with whom, he had heard, that it was notoriously difficult to work. Someone, who left his staff demoted and busted back to the beat!

'Thank you sir and thank you for thinking of me BUT it is not something that is for me'

'Ahmed, I urge you to think about it. You are highly recommended for this position that will give you a promotion. Commissioner Moyles has championed you as has a member of the new Security Committee'

'The only thing Moyles champions' thought Saaed 'is his own career. And he had a shrewd idea who the Security Committee member was'.

'What you are saying is that I really have no choice'

The Chief Constable smiled amiably,

'No I am not saying that. I am just pointing out how advantageous it would be for your career to capitalise on this opportunity. Unlike many others I do try and look after the people who do a good job for me'

'Are you saying that you want me to report to you direct?'

'No! I am most certainly not' Strumpshaw was stung by the comment.

'I do not, will not and never have undermined my officers. If I put someone in charge it is because I trust them.' He glared at Saeed.

'I understand sir. Do I get any time to think this move over?'

'Of course, the next ten seconds'

The other knew the situation only too well. Furthermore, he had to admit to himself that it was an exciting prospect although one fraught with a myriad pitfalls.

'Ok, when do I start?'

'My secretary will take you down to personnel, sorry Human Resources as they call themselves now. They will get things sorted. I am seeing Blunt tomorrow. You start then' he got up, waited for Saeed to reciprocate and then extended his hand that the other shook.

THE BODY

Liz Tester the Human Resource Manager was a squat lady about 5 feet tall. She was extremely pleasant and came across as most efficient. Unfortunately, Ahmed could not stop looking at her chin and wondering how many times a day she shaved.

A telephone call for Saeed from Strumpshaw's secretary interrupted their meeting. She informed him that he was to go to the mortuary immediately. A Sergeant Steve Cushion would come and collect him from Human resources. The object of their attention? The body washed up on Winterton beach the day before. He vaguely remembered the news item from last night. So there must be something to link her with trafficking.

When they arrived at the mortuary the chief pathologist, John Snelling, marched Cushion and Saeed into his office. He plonked himself into the large chair behind the equally large desk. The two policemen stood like two errant schoolboys in front of a vengeful headmaster. Cushion introduced the latter as being from the Met, and was not contradicted. He certainly did not feel as if he belonged here. Snelling's disdainful look also spoke volumes for his thoughts regarding the Met. He'd had brushes with them in the past and found them to be arrogant semi-educated morons in the main.

'Ok, I'll skip the detail and give you the overview.' Snelling started in his clipped tone tinged with a Norfolk burr, and continued in the same abrupt manner. 'Caucasian female about twenty two. No signs of violence inflicted on the body. No bruising, no nothing. She has sea water in her lungs that indicates that she died of drowning in the sea. If she had been held down forcefully then there would be signs of slight bruising. There is nothing. The fact that she was found face down naked on the beach also indicates that she died in the sea.'

'How do you explain the fact that she was naked?' interrupted Saeed.

The medical man turned to Cushion and raised his eyebrows before swivelling round to face the Asian detective with a withering look

'I am the forensic investigator. My job is to examine and investigate the body on that slab over there' he pointed out towards the corpse being discussed before following up acerbically 'your job is to investigate and discover how she came to be there!' He paused for effect before continuing 'If we both understand what our respective roles are we will get on fine. Now let me continue'. Cushion could not help smirking at Saeed's discomfort. Here was another wide boy from the smoke getting a touch of come-uppance.

'As I said she died in the sea. What is interesting from your point of view is what we found in her body. She has semen, in her mouth throat, stomach, anus and vagina....'

'From the same person?' interrupted Saeed

'Young man, I do not know what things are like in London. However, here, in what you would call the sticks it takes a little longer for things to happen. Let's face it, it was not regarded as a suspicious death and the body was found on a Sunday! Therefore, not exactly a scenario for which all the stops would be pulled out, not least ruining my Sunday lunch! Are you aware that the stagecoaches only stopped running here last week?'

came another disdainful response. 'Oh and by the way, here it is considered bad manners to interrupt people!'

'I apologise. But what about time of death?' a slightly flustered Saeed came back.

'I was beginning to despair of you ever getting to that point' another sarcastic reaction laced with caustic. 'I'm going to go for between 1 and 3am on Saturday morning. Now if you will forgive me gentlemen I now have other work to do. Good day' He stood up and waited for them to leave.

Outside in the car park Saeed turned to Cushion,

'Thanks for warning me'

'If you are going to work here then it helps that you get to know what it is like. It isn't London. Anyway if it's any consolation Snelling's like that with everybody. Always sarcastic but he's good at his job.'

'Ok, Ok. Look he reckons that the floater died between 1 and 3 on Saturday morning. So the body was probably in the water for over 24 hours. So the questions are. Who is she? Where did she fall into the sea? Was she pushed? Is she a suicide? Have you got an office?'. Ahmed just slipped into investigatory mode so easily, despite the fact that he was in strange territory.

'Don't know, don't know, don't know, don't know. Yes, a cubby hole'

Saeed let the others attempt at sarcasm ride, 'Then let's get over there and start asking some questions'

'Hey, we can't just take this over, it's nothing to do with us, well not me, I don't know about you. There are channels we've got to go through and who are you? All I know is that word came that Strumpshaw wanted me to take you to the mortuary to ask about the body. I've done that. So as far as I'm concerned that's my lot unless someone tells me otherwise'

'God' thought an exasperated Ahmed, 'I've got a goddam jobsworth as a chaperone!'

'Fine. Have you got a mobile? '

'Yes' from Cushion.

'Give it to me'

'What is with you lot? Don't you ever say please?'

'**Please** will you let me use your mobile?' a response laced with annoyed sarcasm.

Cushion got the brick from the car and handed it to Saeed. After getting the headquarters number from the Norfolk man he rang it and asked to be punched through to Strumpshaw. After a brief exchange with the former he was asked to put Cushion onto the phone.

The Asian witnessed the Norfolk's man's expression go from hope to extreme disappointment with each, 'yes sir', 'of course sir'. 'I'll do my best sir' that he uttered. Finally he handed the phone back to Saeed with a distinct lack of grace. Strumpshaw had obviously asked to speak with him.

'Saeed, I know that the situation is not ideal. However, I spoke to Snelling this morning and he thought that this might be a case for the new unit....'

'The pathologist thought that this may be a case for the new unit..... what the hell is going on here?' Ahmed thought to himself whilst Strumpshaw carried on. He nearly asked the question of the Chief Constable but decided that it was best to keep quiet.

'Sorry sir, I missed that last bit. These damn mobile things do tend to cut out'

'As I said Snelling said that it may be one for the new unit. Blunt does not start until tomorrow but I wanted to get a start on this one. Cushion will help you for the moment and he will do a lot of the legwork. You will be a lot more organised when Blunt starts tomorrow. However, do not say anything about Blunt to Cushion or about the new unit. Oh, by the way we have extended your stay at the hotel until the end of the week'

'Thank you sir' he rang off

'A lot more organised!' he thought to himself 'not difficult as they hadn't even reached the heights of being disorganised yet! He handed the phone back to Cushion.

'Cushion it appears we are going to be working together, for the moment at least. I don't know your first name, mine's Ahmed'

He thrust out his hand. Cushion reciprocated and they shook hands.

'It's Steve....and I'm probably as excited by things as you are. What are you doing here anyway? '

'Good question Steve. I'm as much in the dark as you. How well does Snelling know Strumpshaw?'

'They are close friends and attend the same Lodge'

Once they got back to Headquarters and Cushion's cubby hole they started to hit the phones.

Saeed rang the Coastguard in Great Yarmouth. He explained about the body where it was found and the estimated time of death. He wanted to know whereabouts the body needed to have gone into the water to end up where it was yesterday morning. That would help them to decide whether it had come from a ship, whether she had walked into the sea at Winterton at high tide, whether she had walked into the sea somewhere else. Of course each question raised further questions. If she had walked into the sea herself, where were her clothes? If she had taken a dinghy or whatever, where was it and her clothes? If she had jumped off a ship they then had to find details of all the ships that had been in the rough area that the Coastguard guys might identify. The Coastguard said that they would do what they could but it wouldn't be easy and would take a fair bit of time. They bridled when Saeed attempted to push them.

After he had come off the phone Cushion told him using 'Great' in front of Yarmouth marked him as an outsider. No-one used the word 'great' with Yarmouth as the place was an acknowledged shit-hole. Lowestoft folk liked Yarmouth because it made their town look good.

Cushion had organised for photographs of the body to be taken. They were going to be Photoshopped to look more lifelike. Anglia Television and BBC Norfolk were going to run the pictures on the news bulletins starting that evening. The Norwich Evening News was going to run the pictures from tomorrow starting with its late morning first edition.

The number given out for any calls was one of the ones the force reserved for such situations.

Strumpshaw's secretary had called Saeed whilst they were arranging everything. She stated that the Chief wanted no mention of the experimental unit, at this moment, in time. The press release was to go out as a normal missing persons/identification brief. They had to avoid mentioning any kind of misdemeanour. It was to be kept anodyne.

'The CC wants to keep everything about the unit under wraps. Why? Is he being coerced into setting this unit up? Is he being landed with Blunt, and even me, so that he can take a fall?' Saeed wondered to himself. 'Shall I tell them to stuff the assignment and take my chances back home with what I know?'

'Well we've done everything we can for the moment' said Cushion 'It's now just a question of waiting for things to happen'

'Why wait?' queried Saeed

'Well, because there is nothing that we can do until we get some information' answered Cushion.

'That's a load of bollocks Steve. There's lots we can do. She had semen in every orifice. We can go around all the brothels you know and kick ass and ask if anyone recognises or knew her. Up here you are riddled with illegal immigrants, with people trafficking. We can go around all the agricultural sites asking whether anyone has seen or known her. Given the semen she may have been used as a sexual reward. That's what we can do Steve as opposed to sitting on our jacksies'

'What's a jacksie?' enquired Cushion.

'Arse Steve, arse. So what do you say? Let's say you and I get out there and start kicking some scumbag ass'

'Jesus wept Ahmed do you know how many brothels there are. Have you any idea how big this county is and how many gang masters and illegal immigrant sites across the county there are. It would take you and I six months to get around those that we know about. Then, of course there's all those we don't know about. If we were to involve others from the force it would take all our manpower and budget to get around them all within a couple of weeks. Strumpshaw would not be a happy bunny'

'My god' thought Ahmed. 'I've managed to get several sentences out of a Norfolk man, And I have got to admit he is right. So what chance has the new unit got to succeed?'

'You've got a point' replied Saeed, 'but lets you and I get out there. It doesn't do any harm to let these towrags know that we are out and about.'

'Ok, said Cushion resignedly. 'We'll first of all go down to King Street where it meets Carrow Road near the old waterfront warehouses. The ladies will already be out there.

We'll question them and then we'll go up into the Golden Triangle and roust a few out whilst they are still half awake. I don't know what it will achieve though'

'Steve, we will be doing something and we may find something out. By the way is it called the golden triangle because it's a red light area?'

'No, it's just the name of the area. It's a triangular shape with the tip at the city centre. Estate Agents were the main users of the term during the property madness of the eighties. Ever since then its stuck and has nothing to do with sex.'

'Ok you lead the way. By the time we get back something may have come in from the TV pics'.

Cushion parked on the hill just past the ? pub. The shadow cast by the old redundant riverside warehouses loomed menacingly over the road. Walking slowly and expectantly up and down the pavement were four rather scantily clad females. You could see that they looked hopefully at each car that went past.

'Is this the early shift?' asked Saeed.

Cushion nodded.

'Let's stay here for the moment and look to see if we can spot the pimp'

They waited for ten minutes. The only vehicle that they clocked was a taxi. Obviously a driver waiting for details of a pick-up from his base or deciding whether or not to indulge in some lunchtime extracurricular activities.

They drove slowly towards then first woman. Her eyes lit up with expectation when she saw the car coming to a halt beside her. However, it quickly dimmed when she realised that there were two men in the car,

Saeed wound the window down. She bent in towards the window exposing a good deal of cleavage as she did so.

'It's extra for two'

Saeed pulled out his warrant card. She immediately started to pull away. But the detective grabbed her before she could.

'Hey' she shouted.

The other girls had been watching and within seconds they had melted away from the street.

Saeed sat with the girl in the back seat. The interior of the car was enveloped with the sweet cloying odour of the girl's excessively administered cheap perfume. Her face was caked with make-up, her eyes over darkened and her lips had slightly too much scarlet lipstick that was smudged at the edges.

'I've done nothing wrong' the girl whimpered.

'Not looking to arrest you' said Saeed in a calm voice 'I just want to know whether you have ever seen this girl'. He showed her the picture of the floater.

'No' she immediately responded, 'what do you want her for?'

'None of your business' He looked at her face. Under all the crap she was just a kid.

'How old are you?'

Fear registered in the girl's eyes quickly replaced by wariness as she shuffled on the seat.

'What's it to do with you' a petulant report

'We can always take you down to the nick and charge you;

'I'm eighteen' she averted her gaze from the policeman as she whispered her age.

'I need proof'

'Leave her be' said Cushion 'We have other things to do'

'No, we are taking her to the nick. I think that she is under age'

'Please let me go' pleaded the girl and tried to get out of the car. Cushion, pressed the central locking button then took a pair of handcuffs from the glove compartment and threw them to his colleague.

Cushion slammed the car into gear and drove off screeching the car's tyres on the pavement. The girl meanwhile sobbed on the back seat.

They did not notice the taxi pull away shortly after they had left.

THE PATELS

Cushion's desk had piles of messages stacked on it. All from people responding to the request for information. There were those who claimed to have known the floater, seen the floater, spoken to the floater etc. Experience had taught the detectives that ninety nine percent of the calls would eventually be discounted.

'You get on well with Strumpshaw. Can't you get him to get us some help with this lot?' The Norfolk man grunted whilst pointing at his desk.

'Great' thought 'Ahmed 'I'm saddled for the foreseeable future with this Neanderthal yokel. Once the unit is up and running I'll be rid of him!'

They started sifting through the paper in as organised a manner as they could muster. A task not made easy by a young policewoman, Leibnitz, bringing in new piles every half hour or so. After about two and half hours of soul destroying shuffling and sorting through Cushion threw a piece across the desk to Saeed,

'This one looks interesting'

The other read it and responded 'Let's go'

Half an hour later Saeed and Cushion were parked on Gladstone Street just down the road from a newsagents and general store owned by a Mr Patel. Patel had left a message to the effect that he was sure that the floater had visited his shop on several occasions over the last few weeks and he thought that she lived in a house a few streets away.

Gladstone Street marked the boundary between a poor and a more affluent area. The Patel's shop delivered newspapers and magazines to the more affluent. The shop itself however catered for the poorer area or so it seemed from the customers going into the shop. The staggering gait of several of them indicated that they relied heavily on alcohol to get them through the day. An old and faded sign hung above the shop, 'Richardson's Stores'. Obviously a relic of some bygone owners.

There was nothing fancy about the shop. The fittings were old and the linoleum on the floor had cracked and wrinkled along the main walkways. A curry smell pervaded the air. Handwritten signs proclaimed special deals on quantities of cheap obscure brands of beer. A row of large bottles of cheap cider. Rows and rows of quart bottles of spirit on the wall behind the counter along with an impressive display of cigarettes and loose tobacco. It made Saeed think of his parents' shop.

The man behind the counter looked to be in his early thirties. Height probably about six feet two, cropped hair and a body that looked to be athletic. He carried himself with a confidence verging on haughty. His gold necklace, gold bracelets and aftershave also struck an incongruous note in such surroundings. He seemed almost like a caricature of one of the stereotypes of Asian shopkeepers depicted by a popular TV soap. A fact that would have struck Cushion was it not for the fact that Saeed had a taste for clothes and aftershave.

'Mr Patel?' enquired Cushion.

'Yes' came the reply devoid of any accent.

'Officers Cushion and Saeed. You rang in about the girl on the TV and in the newspaper'

Cushion took out the photograph of the girl and showed it to Patel.

'is this the girl?'

'Yes, that is correct. I am pretty certain that I have seen her.'

'When and where?' interjected Saeed.

Mr Patel cast a contemptuous glance at Ahmed which he did not fail to notice.

'She has been in here on several occasions over the last few weeks. She bought cigarettes and some chocolate. She was always very well dressed. Her clothes looked expensive I have also seen her at a house that has some other girls in it'. He hesitated before continuing, 'I don't know how to say it.....' he hesitated again, 'but men with expensive cars go into that house'

'What are you trying to say Mr Patel?'

They were interrupted by a customer coming into the shop,

'Do you stock bleach?' she asked Patel

'Excuse me a moment' he strode to the curtain that covered the doorway to the back of the shop.

'Anaa, can you come and deal with a customer' Patel ordered rather sharply.

'All I need to know is whether you stock bleach?'

'Grandmother is coming to deal with you' said Patel. A condescending tone accompanying his hauteur

A small old woman in traditional dress came through the door and looked warily at Patel.

'Anaa deal with this lady please'

The old woman nodded compliantly

'Sod it I'll go somewhere else!' The woman stormed out of the shop.

'Mr Patel, can we perhaps go into the back. We can leave your grandmother to look after the shop' requested Saeed who received another withering look from Patel.

They were taken to the upstairs living quarters. Although, Cushion enjoyed curry as much as the next man he found the ingrained smell in the Patel sitting room overpowering. It seemed as if the aroma had permeated the very fabric of the room. For Saeed it brought back memories of his childhood. The woman upstairs wearing an hajib, they took to be Patel's wife. Like Patel she glared at Saeed in a manner that almost bordered on hate, or so he thought. She disconcerted Cushion because he could not see her face.

The room was sparsely furnished with a three piece suite a TV and a large rug in the centre of the floor. This had a few dishes on it. An old teak veneer sideboard completed

the furniture. On this were some photographs of children and other people. Obviously family thought the policemen with barely a glance at them.

Mr Patel gave them a full and signed statement about the woman and the house she lived in. His fear expressed, more than once, concerned what the people attached to the house may do to his family and himself. Eventually, the two policemen had satisfied him that they would ensure that nothing would happen to him and his family. Although Saeed thought that Patel did not seem the sort of man that scared easily. He shrugged the thought off with the rationalisation that Patel's fear centred on his family.

However, a flicker of concern momentarily crossed the shopkeeper's face when the Asian policeman stated that they may have to return to get statements from both Mrs Patels.

They slowly drove past the house on Pitt Street, number 27. A road of stately Victorian semis with portico'd entrances: reflecting that era's fascination with all things classical. Being sited on a hill each villa had stairs leading up to the portico.

Cushion explained that the residents of the street reflected the diversity of uses to which the houses were being put. Those that were not so well maintained had been divided into flats and bedsits. These were occupied by young people who were either students or unemployed. The well maintained properties had been purchased by young aspiring middle class families.

The remainder, reasonably maintained, contained a variety of offices ranging from accountants to the odd unheard of charity.

'An area then that sees lots of comings and goings. Ideal for an upmarket brothel. It's never been on your radar?' asked Saeed

'No. It must be relatively new. There is a lot going on at the moment. It seems that many groups, Russians, Poles, Lithuanians and Albanians are fighting for a share of the criminal activities that were controlled by Aktion fur Arbeit. It's difficult to get a handle on it.

Although it does appear that the Russians seem to be getting the upper hand from what we hear and from the odd bust that we have achieved'

They decided that they would return later that evening and keep an eye on the house for a few hours. Cushion readily acquiesced commenting that he would have to dig out his overtime forms

FLINT

It had been a bitch of a Monday; hot and sticky. Flint had had enough. The lights had failed on the Great Cambridge Road just before the rush hour. She had directed the traffic for over two hours. It had been unremittingly hot stood in the middle of the road.

She thought long and hard whilst taking a shower. Since being busted to the beat and uniform she had made a number of changes in her life. First of all she had left her husband. Secondly, she had decided that she wanted to do something other than directing traffic and general dogsbody duties. 'Traffic' was not the most riveting of assignments and together with the other things it certainly did not provide her with job satisfaction.

Crime and women's studies work appealed to her. As a result she had enrolled on a distance learning course and was already working through it in her spare time. She was most interested in date rape drugs and their increasing use. She hoped it would allow her to transfer to a police unit that specialised in crimes against women. It was Blunt who had persuaded her that she needed to broaden her horizons and to aim for promotion. Not that being busted back to the bet could be regarded as a promotion after being a detective. After being heavily involved with one of the biggest scandals in recent years resulting in many high profile prosecutions she felt bitter about her current situation.

Bacon and Skinner had made sure that she had been skewered for insubordination. They couldn't get Blunt so they had got her instead: knowing that it would affect the former. Trouble is that she didn't even know whether Blunt had any idea of what they had done to her. That bastard Moyles had done nothing to help her. But then that was to be expected. Bacon and Skinner were his boys and she was the price for their loyalty. Thankfully the transfer to uniform had taken her out of the firing line of that randy little shit Skinner?

She was surprised when her phone rang and even more surprised that Blunt was on the other end of the line.

'Debbie, it is John Blunt. How are you?'

She felt a slight frisson of sexual tension and embarrassment, 'Shit' she cursed 'I thought I'd got over this'.

'I'm fine' came the guarded response 'how are you? There's been all sorts of rumours going around about you, nervous breakdown, left the force, left the country. Which is true?'

'I am fine now and I did have a breakdown after internal affairs and the security services had finished with me! I am living in Stalham in Norfolk. I start a new assignment tomorrow setting up a new unit. Do you fancy coming to Norfolk if I can swing it?'

'What do you mean Sir?' from a confused Flint

'What is all this sir business. It was always John'

'Ok John. I put myself out for you in more ways than one. What did I get for it? Sweet fuck all. Where were you when I was getting beat up by Bacon and Skinner?'

'I could not do anything at the time Debbie. We had upset a lot of powerful people...'

'No John you upset a lot of powerful people' she interrupted. Blunt thought she had changed. She seemed to have a harder edge tinged with bitterness.

'Not me! And anyway it's a long way from home and the kids. All my family are here. I don't know anyone up there in bloody Norfolk. Those that I did meet on the Aktion case were not exactly friendly'.

Blunt refused to get dragged into the blame game argument.

'Debbie I doubt that you enjoy what you are doing right now. It is probably not made any better by that shit of a husband of yours'

Flint stiffened. Blunt was not someone that got personal

.I have never said anything before but you really ought to leave that shit you are married to. If I can swing it Norfolk would be a fresh start for you'

'What are you saying? And before you say anything I kicked him out several months ago'

' Well done. You should have done it ages ago' she had certainly got harder. The thought pleased him. It would make her a much better asset 'It is purely work. I feel bad about not being able to protect you and this is a way of making up for it. I doubt whether you like what you are doing right now. No doubt Skinner if he comes across will rub your nose in it or try to take advantage' he continued

'I don't know. You're not the easiest to work for'

'That will not change'

'Another reason that I cannot join you is that I am doing a course on Women's Studies.'

'That is even better. My new unit would help you with your studies. You can switch to distance learning!'

'I don't know. I don't think that I can work for you again'

'Think about it. I am making no promises but I will ring you again tomorrow'

BLUNT STARTS WORK

Strumpshaw welcomed Blunt into his office with a smile and a firm hand shake. He told him how he was looking forward to them working together to make the new unit a success. When they moved onto dealing with a number of specifics an edge crept into the meeting. Neither of them really knew what each other expected of the unit or the other.

'Sir, I have produced a report here that outlines what I would like the unit to achieve, in terms of objectives for the first six months, twelve and eighteen months. I have put down how we are going to achieve those objectives and the resources that we will need. I have even put down Key Performance Indicators for the unit and the individual roles within the unit'

'Christ' thought Blunt as he was running through this 'I am beginning to sound like that idiot Tickbox Bacon'

'I would like to start recruiting for the team straightaway. I would like to advertise internally, as per Human Resources protocol (which Blunt actually thought was a load of administrative claptrap but he did not know where Strumpshaw stood on all that rubbish. Besides Blunt had decided that given the recent past and his hopes for this assignment it would be best to be diplomatic and play the game: initially anyway). In case there is no-one here then we could advertise nationally'

'All good thoughts John but let me stop you there' interjected the Chief Constable 'I have got you the nucleus of a team'

'Pardon'

'I have got you the nucleus of a team. Your number two is one Ahmed Saeed from the Met. I had no choice but to take him. His name was put forward by a prominent Asian politician, Rafique Khan'

'That prick' Blunt blurted out taking the Chief Constable aback.

'John I would never have put you down as a racist' Strumpshaw responded.

'I am not but I have no time for him'

'Khan is a rising star and has just been appointed to the special security committee. He does a lot of good work in promoting harmonious race relations and encouraging Islamic moderation. Goddamit the Chief Rabbi has showered him with fulsome praise on more than one occasion. Anyway, Moyles also threw his weight behind Saeed....' Blunt's body language was betraying his feelings 'John I have fought hard for this experiment to be under my command. To get it I have had to make concessions. I wanted you to lead it despite opposition from every quarter. When you had your breakdown I was being pressured to dump you. I didn't! Now whether you or I like it we have to make concessions. Alright?'

'Ok it is just a disappointment'

'I understand. Now where was I....yes...Moyles threw his weight behind Saeed because he felt that the unit should be seen to have cultural diversity. The other member of your team is Steve Cushion..'

'What' Blunt exploded 'Are you trying to get rid of him from your normal payroll. Is there any point me staying here?'

'John do you want to give your many naysayers that satisfaction? If you do go. If you don't then let me explain why you have got Cushion, despite having issues with him on the Aktion case'

Blunt remained seated

'Have you forgotten that Cushion knows more about people trafficking in this force than anyone else. Have you forgotten how useful he was to you before?' Strumpshaw sighed before continuing 'Therefore, his knowledge will be invaluable to you now. Another plus is that he is a computer nerd. I have got Saeed's and Cushion's HR files here. I want you to read them before you talk to them individually.' He paused, ' You may find that you are just as popular with them as they are with you.'

'Sir, you stated that you and the powers that be want a degree of cultural diversity, yes?'

'Ye.....s' said a cautious Chief Constable

'Well, most of the people trafficked are women therefore should we not have a woman member on the team? I would say that we could bring criticism onto ourselves if we are an all-male unit'

'We have not got the budget for another person'

'Maybe not, but I am sure that you can sell it on the grounds of cultural diversity. Again we will not have to waste time advertising because I have someone in mind that can fill the role perfectly. She is also doing a course on Women's Studies which means that she is even more suited'

'I take it that you mean that woman that worked with you who was disciplined, what was her name, Stone or something?'

'Flint. And you know as well as I do that the whole disciplinary thing was really a way of getting at me. Can I at least ask her if she is interested?'

'Ok. Let me know what she says' Strumpshaw responded with a resigned air.

'Sir, please may I be brutally honest'

The other nodded his assent

'Have you thought that one or other of us, or both of us, are being set up for a fall? The failure of this unit would finish me . It would also severely curtail your career. Perhaps Moyles or someone else sees you as a threat.' Opined Blunt

'I think you are being a tad alarmist. It is an experimental unit. It starts small and as you prove yourselves it will grow organically. I have been assured when that happens more resources in money and manpower will be made available'.

'With all due respect sir that does not mollify me. You have me as damaged goods to lead the unit. Then let me guess Saeed did not volunteer but was volunteered.' he stared at the chief Constable who stared back but did not contradict his subordinate.

'That leads me to ask why? Cushion is not the brightest bunny in the burrow. It would make sense that you see this as an opportunity to get rid of him as I have already said'

'No he isn't but as I have said he's the most knowledgeable on trafficking plus he's a grafter. With respect to Saeed why not read his file and then make a decision.'

Blunt reluctantly accepted. Strumpshaw could see that his junior remained unconvinced. He wondered how he would take the next topic of discussion.

They then moved on to discuss where the unit would be sited: A new unit on the Business Park near the City Hall. Location ideal because of the easy access to A11, A47 and all other major roads leading to all parts of the county. Computers, software and an internet connection would be set up. There would also be a special link to Headquarters.

'So we will not be in headquarters. We are going to be hidden away. How convenient! If we fail or if we become an embarrassment we can easily be swept under the carpet. I am underwhelmed with the confidence that is being shown in the unit.' Blunt couldn't hold back on the sarcasm.

Strumpshaw refused to respond but moved onto current concerns.

'You may have seen on the news the item on the female corpse washed up on Winterton Beach?'

He waited for the other's nod before continuing 'Well semen was found in nearly every orifice of her body. I felt that it could very well be a case for your unit. So I sent Saeed and Cushion off to the mortuary and let them start on the preliminaries of the case. It could be of course that it has nothing to do with trafficking. In which case you will hand it back to the appropriate team'.

'You may be aware that we also featured her cleaned up portrait in all the local media...'

Blunt nodded and Strumpshaw continued

'...well we have had a fair response. So I put a young female graduate on sifting the information. She has done a good job and Saeed and Cushion have followed up what they thought looked like a promising line of enquiry. I am sure that they will fill you in on the details when you talk with them'

'Let us hope so' responded Blunt.

'Here are Cushion's and Saeed's files and also the reports on the floater. Until your offices are ready in a couple of days you will be using Cushion's office and my meeting room next door. I will try not to interfere but you can get me at any time. We both have a lot riding on this John'

Strumpshaw hesitated for a moment and then continued.

'Oh John, we have not mentioned the new unit in any of the press releases and don't intend doing so'

The other gave him a withering look 'Why am I not surprised sir!'

'John, I think that you are a little paranoid. You are looking for issues where none exist' Strumpshaw came back calmly and continued, ' as I have already said if it is not a trafficking issue it will be handed over to the appropriate department. What is the point of letting the people we are after know that a special team has been set up. That could only make them a little more vigilant and careful when it comes to covering their tracks. Wouldn't you agree?' he looked at Blunt for confirmation.

The other nodded, albeit reluctantly. Strumpshaw, on his part, had to admit that some issues had been raised that gave him cause for concern. Policing at his level was all about politics, politics and yet more politics. Promotion did not just concern doing a good job. It concerned letting others know that you had done a good job BUT in such a way that it detracted from what your competitors may have done or be doing! So, was someone setting up Blunt or him to fail?

A TEAM OF MISFITS

Blunt sat looking out of the window contemplating his recent meeting with the Chief. One of the symptoms of depression is a kind of paranoia. You cannot see anything good in any situation. You are in the constant grip of an all pervading darkness. You see lights where none exist. You see plots against you where none exist! An optimist views things through rose tinted glasses. A depressive peers through shit tinted glasses! And the irony? Depressives have rose tinted highs! And boy when you get them they are HIGHS! It is what makes the lows bearable. However, he had enjoyed precious few highs over the last eighteen months. Perhaps he had come off the tablets too quickly? Should he be leading this team? Could he lead this team? Was the team being set up to fail? He chided himself mentally for succumbing to paranoia again. He turned back to contemplate the room.

He had to give it to Strumpshaw, reluctant though he was. The meeting room had been set up as an office. At one end of the conference table sat two computers a Mac and a PC together with two telephones and a fax machine. Several flip chart stands had also been set up around the room replete with boxes of marker pens.

He picked up Saeed's file.

Joined the Met straight from Brunel University. Performed well at Hendon and fast tracked not just because of colour but also for sheer ability. Mainly put into areas with a high Asian immigrant population. He had a very good conviction rate that applied fairly equally across all the racial groups Annual assessments consistently good although a regular theme was 'self-opinionated', 'mouthy' and 'the occasional tendency to cut corners if he feels that the results merit it'. He could imagine how that translated into everyday life in the Met: an organisation not noted for its racial tolerance either internally or externally. All the information until 1990 was quite voluminous and meaty.

In 1990 it appeared that Saeed had been put forward for the Met's SO10 unit. Blunt's interest was now intensely aroused.

This was the special undercover unit that had been the brainchild of two, then, sergeants who had amassed a wealth of experience of undercover work. They had been highly critical of the haphazard fashion of most undercover work that had been conducted It involved placing officers in more danger than was necessary and resulted in intelligence that was of little if any use. In many instances the few prosecutions that resulted were only of low-grade criminals. In other words the viability of such operations as then organised was questionable.

The two sergeants argued that for such work to be viable it had to be properly planned and executed. They recommended that only certain types of people be recruited. People with the correct psychological profile. Once chosen they were to be trained to understand and withstand the rigours of the undercover role. Also on the agenda was regular communication with all the other bodies, official and unofficial, who were involved in covert operations.

The view was that a good deal of information regarding criminal and other activities was intimately conjoined. Blunt had to agree. His experience on the Aktion fur Arbeit case

had brought that home to him. That is why he had included covert operations in his plan for the new unit.

So, Saeed had volunteered or been recommended for SO10. Apparently, he had only spent three months with the unit. There were no assessments or anything of his time there. Only the stark phrase, *'Ahmed Saeed and the unit mutually agree that Sergeant Saeed will leave the unit forthwith'*.

Saeed then spent three months on a straightforward desk job before going back to the front line. Still a good conviction rate but not as good as before SO10!

He needed to question the man on SO10. What had happened there? What had made Khan and Moyles push for him to be part of the unit? Just as importantly why had Strumpshaw agreed?

The more these thoughts swirled around his head the more his motivation and enthusiasm seeped away. God if he did not take care then the Black Dog would be back with a vengeance.

He wearily reached for Cushion's file.

It contained what he expected. A man who it appears made sergeant because of long service and resitting the exams on numerous occasions. The word 'plodder' sprang to mind when looking at the file. Everything about him smacked of 'average'. The one oddity was the internal affairs investigation into alleged corruption. Here the name 'Blunt' appeared. Blunt had raised the question of whether Cushion may be in the pay of the Norfolk gangmasters. A suspicion raised by the fact for a time the criminals always seemed to be one step ahead of them in the Aktion case.

The investigation had completely exonerated the Norfolk Detective.

He called down to Cushion's office and asked Saeed to come and see him.

The two men shook hands and eyed one another warily. Blunt waived the other towards a chair at the side of the table as opposed to one directly opposite. He had moved his own chair to the right so that there was no barrier between the two.

He picked up the file and noticed the other visibly tense.

'May I call you Ahmed?'

'Yes sir'

'Call me John. For what we hope to be doing together I think that being excessively formal will be a hindrance to freedom of thought rather than a help.'

'Interesting choice of words' thought the other. Most of his seniors had seemed afraid of freedom of thought'. He looked at Blunt and detected a weariness in him.

'Strumpshaw will have advised you that you are 2ic and will soon be promoted to Inspector. Ahmed I do not know what Strumpshaw may have told you about what we are looking to do here and what we are hoping to achieve. People trafficking in all its multifarious forms ranging from farming people for body parts to supplying children to paedophile groups is more and more becoming the mainstay of internationally organised criminal gangs. They are finding that it is easier and more profitable to deal in people

rather than drugs. Having said that they do tend to indulge in both activities as well as a host of other criminal undertakings.

This part of the country became a centre for trafficking first of all because of the labour needed for the farming industry. Secondly, it has a large coastline where people can easily be landed. Thirdly, it has many remote properties where people can be held without anyone noticing or knowing. It was for these reasons that Aktion chose it for basing the majority of their illegal operations in the UK. They have now gone. Nature abhors a vacuum so others out there are no doubt rushing in to fill the void. Our job is to find out who they are and stop them. We have to accept that it will always be a losing battle. Crime is like the mythological Hydra. Chop off one of its heads and another will spring up. It is like a virus that manages to evolve and defeat the drugs that combatted the original virus. '

'That's a bit defeatist' interrupted Ahmed

'Not at all. It is being realistic. We can only hope to contain or to reduce things like trafficking. We will never ever eradicate it unless the nature of mankind changes. Now, sometimes we have to fight fire with fire.....'

'Where is this beginning to go?' thought Saeed tensing. Images of being suspended by his bound ankles, blindfolded and naked. A harsh voice by his ear whispering that he was going to detach one of his testicles with the knife that was gently stroking his upper thigh and drawing blood. He knew that because he could feel it trickling into his groin.

His eyes took on a faraway look and he began to slip down in the chair.

'Are you Ok?' asked a concerned Blunt

The other slammed the door shut on his mental images and tried to pull himself together. Blunt had noticed the haunted look that monopolised the sergeant's facial expression and the defeatist posture that his body had assumed.

'Yes...yes....sorry I just felt a little odd. Must have been something I ate last night'.

'Ok, where was I?.....Yes, sometimes we have to fight fire with fire. That brings me to your file. Some great stuff there. Good detection rate, good prosecution rate. Good knowledge of the criminal law obviously, with your legal degree.....'

Saeed knew what was coming next. He concentrated hard on steeling himself so that those images, those memories of that cold cellar and the memories of the beatings he had endured, lying in a pool of his own vomit and blood., would go away.

'Are you sure you are ok?' Blunt again picked up on the emotional turbulence in the other that manifested itself in that haunted hunted look that he had witnessed a few moments ago.

'Yes, yes I am sure' stammered the other once more stretching every sinew of his mental strength to pull himself together. *'If this were an ordinary interview I'd be fucked!'*
thought Ahmed

'Good.' responded Blunt 'However, there is one thing in your file that interests me most and that is your time with SO10'. Again Blunt picked up on the inner turmoil and mental turbulence being experienced by the younger man.

'SO10 is what is giving him the jitters. Something happened there. That explains the brief entry in the file' thought Blunt

'Anyway we can talk about that some other time.' Blunt felt the relief emanate from Saeed although he tried not to show it and continued with something else he needed to know, 'How did you come to be here?'

Ahmed felt happier

'Orders were given to me on Saturday evening over the phone to report to the Chief Constable on the Monday, yesterday morning. It came out of the blue. I asked why but got no answers. I was told that everything would become clear when I spoke to Strumpshaw.'

'Did it?' Blunt probed

'Kind of

'Did you have a choice whether you joined this unit or not?'

'Where is this going?' thought Ahmed *'he's got as much choice in all this as I have'*

'Not really. But we have a great opportunity if we make it work' the none too convincing response

'Ah, someone striving to be an optimist' thought Blunt.

'What are your plans for the unit?' Saeed wanted to know

'I will go through those with you and Cushion'

'Cushion?' an incredulous interruption

'Yes Cushion. He is part of the team' a less than enthusiastic response that the other picked up 'As I said I will go through those with you both soon. However, I believe that you and Cushion have been looking at the Winterton beach body case' the other nodded 'After I have seen Cushion you can both update me on what is happening. We can then see where we will go with it. Ok?'

'yes sir, we have quite a bit of information'

Blunt noticed the use of 'sir' but said nothing as Saeed seemed calmer once they got off the SO10 topic.

'Can you ask Steve Cushion to come up?'

'Yes sir' replied Saeed who departed the room without his usual jaunty gait.

He immediately headed for the gents and one of the stalls. He bent over the bowl and wretched his guts out.

'Jesus, is Blunt that bad?' exclaimed Cushion who had just come into the room.

Saeed quickly pulled himself together

'No, I think something that I had for breakfast might not have agreed with me. Anyway Blunt wants to see you now'

Blunt's meeting with Cushion was as strained as that with Saeed but for a different reason. Blunt had been responsible for the other man being reported to and investigated by Internal Affairs. In a frank exchange of views, that ensued when the senior officer stated that all questions of rank were to be put to one side, Cushion had stated that the other had nearly ruined his career.

Blunt apologised and stated that the other would be a valuable and valued member of the team. His knowledge of computers, the local area and his quiet tenacity would bring a much needed quality to the team and its efforts. When Cushion asked whether he had a choice he was informed that he probably didn't. Although he could ask if he wished. No he didn't and would give the new unit a whirl. It couldn't be any more boring than his current duties.

Cushion was not a man to bear grudges and preferred a quiet life that allowed him to just get on with the job. He was sufficiently assuaged by his now commanding officer's blandishments to leave the room reasonably contented.

Blunt's final words were that he and Saeed were to come back to the room in an hour's time and to provide a full report on the Winterton case. They were also to give thought as to the direction or directions in which the investigation was to move.

INTERVIEWING THE TEAM

Blunt sat at the head of the table. He looked at his team and inwardly groaned. Little did he know that Ahmed shared his concern. Saeed and Cushion faced one another on either side of him.

They provided a description of everything that had gone on at the morgue, their chasing up with the coastguard and the interview with Patel.

The senior man had only a few questions on these parts of the investigation;

'Irrespective of it being Norfolk we need to chase forensic regarding the girl's DNA. Yes, it is likely that she is East European but we need to be a little more precise. That could provide us with a handle as to how she came into the country. Again we need some DNA regarding the semen found in her body. Might yield nothing to help the investigation but then again it might. At the moment it is case of gathering whatever information we can.'

Blunt agreed that the girl picked up on King Street would probably generate nothing of significance on the Winterton case. However, their job was to look at people trafficking.

'As far as I am concerned our remit is people trafficking in the widest sense. Trafficking is not just about foreigners it is also about individuals born in this country. We need to find out how young the girl is you brought in from King Street, who she is and how she came to be on King Street. Steve, ' he turned to Cushion 'Can you sort that out. What about getting back down to King Street and seeing if there are any more youngsters'

'I haven't got the time John. I can't get others here to do it either. They're all on tight budgets. Don't forget that we are still living with the consequences of that prat of a Chancellor. That's something that you will have to sort with Strumpshaw'. He saw the frown flit across Blunt's face before continuing, 'but I can probably call in some favours and get it done'

Not the answer that Blunt wanted to hear nonetheless Cushion did seem to be showing a little bit of spark.

'Ahmed..' he turned to the other, '..regarding Patel we are going to need statements from the rest of the family. I do not know why he is so reluctant for them to help. Do you?'

'It's a bit extreme but then the Asian community is very reluctant to engage with the police or anyone that they see as the authorities. They, or we think that the authorities are never on our side. They think that we. The police, are reluctant to protect them against white racist thugs. That we are too keen to prosecute them for bringing in family or marrying people from back in Pakistan. Again for all we know the grandmother may not be legal. Who knows?'

'Ok, what happened when you staked out Pitt Street?'

Saeed as the senior took the lead.

'It's fairly certain that sexual activity is taking place there. It's a fairly substantial residence. Four beds, three receptions and a kitchen. I reckon that there is also an attic flat. We clocked eight guys and one woman. They were driving an assortment of BMW's

Mercedes and Jaguars. We have taken photographs of them all. The most interesting guys were these two'

Ahmed put two photographs in front of Blunt.

One was of an individual who possessed the height, build and head shape of a Neanderthal. There the similarity ended. His eyes were small and hooded by heavy brows that were almost hairless.

The other showed a tall and gangly individual with spindly legs. Long arms and a head that seemed too large for his body. His crew cut hair was white as were his eyebrows. His face was heavily lined and made him look ten years older than his probable physical age.. Like the Neanderthal his eyes were continuously on the move. Unlike his colleague he attempted to dress in a more fashionable manner. Ahmed reckoned Paul Smith.

'We think that these guys are the front men. We followed them last night to three other properties. One in Newmarket Road, Unthank Road and Keswick Road. The one thing all these properties have in common is that they are secluded. That makes it easy enough for them to run high priced girls and for them not to be noticed for doing so. We noted again a succession of high end motors going into and out of the properties. The other thing that we researched was ownership of the houses with the Land Registry. All of them have been purchased in the last six months by a firm of accountants, Darcy and Darcy, on Thorpe Road.

'Good work gentlemen. We need to get around there and to put some pressure on them. Find out about their finances to see whether they could have funded the deals themselves.'

'That's not all ' said Ahmed, 'we followed the two of them going out into the countryside. They were probably going to a more substantial site. Unfortunately, we don't know where...'

Blunt cocked his head and raised his eyebrows,

'...I admit that we lost them. I think that they clocked us. It makes me think that they may have had some kind of training. However, I am sure that they didn't notice us when they returned to Pitt Street after dark. That seems to be their base.'

'If that's the case and they clocked you then you better get round there pretty damn quickly. Otherwise there is the possibility that they will just melt away. Have we got anything on them?'

'No they are not on any of our registers. We telegraphed the photos to Interpol this morning' replied Cushion

'What about their car?'

'Registered to a dealership in Winchmore Hill. London. The dealership is owned by a firm of solicitors in Enfield, Gribben and Gribben. They bought it about six months ago' Cushion again.

'There seems to be a pattern emerging ' this time from Ahmed. 'Assets owned by or registered to third parties'

'I know that firm. They sail very close to the wind and represent and have represented a host of shady characters.' Blunt added and continued to elaborate 'They are razor sharp and know criminal and company law inside out. The last time I came across them they were in the process of opening offices in the West End. They are probably open now. Therefore, it is safe to assume that their business is booming. However, we digress. Apart from the Patel statement we have nothing to go on regarding the dead girl. No sighting, no clothes, nothing!.

He sat back in his chair and steeped his hands.

'Get around to Pitt Street and shake up those two characters, do it during the day. Hopefully they are still around' he instructed.

'Oh, by the way' Cushion commented before leaving 'I know the woman we photographed. She is a senior partner in Clutterbuck and Lozenge on Bank Plain'

'Thanks Steve that is something we may be able to use at some stage'.

VISITING THE BROTHEL

The attitude of Norwich City Council towards providing parking spaces meant that Saeed and Cushion had to park three streets away. Cushion was not a big fan of walking. His love of using his feet was in inverse proportion to his love of cheeseburger and chips. Saeed's pace left the older man panting and perspiring in equal measure by the time they got to the bottom of the stairs leading to no 27 .

He took a breather bending over with his hands on his knees. After a couple of minutes he stood up straight and the two mounted the stairs and rang the polished brass doorbell.

An attractive dark haired woman about five foot six tall answered the door. She had cornflower blue eyes, clear skin and a slightly aquiline nose. She had a body shape that, in common parlance, most women would die for.

'Yes?' she enquired of the police officers in a haughty tone that had a hint of an accent.

'Police' responded Saied, showing his warrant card and simultaneously putting his foot inside the door.

The woman did not seem surprised to see them or she had sufficient presence of mind to hide it well.

'How can I help you?'

'We have reason to believe that this young woman lived here' Cushion took out the photo of the floater and showed it to the woman. Subtlety had never been the Norfolk man's strongpoint.

'I have never seen her before.' She looked Cushion straight in the eye with an unwavering gaze and started to push the door to.

Saied noticed a slight simultaneous tightening of her grip on the door and gently pushed back on it and half stepped inside the hallway,

'We've been told differently. We want to question you and the other girls and the two guys that are here, where are they?'

'This is a school of English...'

'We may be from Norfolk but we are not stupid' interrupted Cushion, 'where are they?'

'This is a school of English, have you got a search warrant..'

At this point Saeed noticed the look of consternation flash across his colleague's face followed by a furrowed brow and a slight slumping of his shoulders. The woman picked it up too.

'I must ask you to leave if you have not a search warrant' she straightened her back and defiantly thrust her face towards Saeed.

'Where are they?' the Asian asked more firmly and moving closer to the woman 'We do not need a search warrant when we are investigating a murder'

'The attic rooms at the top of the house, the ones to the left and the right' she decided to comply.

'How many girls are here?'

'We have four students'

Saied, gave her a sardonic smile before he and Cushion ascended the plushly carpeted stairs

Saeed took the attic room on the left and Cushion the one on the right. They were locked.

They both gave them a good kick and tumbled into the rooms.

The occupant of Saeed's room quickly awoke and reached for a pistol laying on the bedside cabinet.

'No you don't' Ahmed shouted, grabbing the pistol with his left hand and shoving the man sharply on the temple with his right hand, knocking him back onto the bed.

'Police!'

He noticed that he was dealing with the Neanderthal. The man's eyeballs were constantly on the move. It was as if he did not trust the space he occupied: always looking for threats real or imaginary.

Saeed nearly gagged as the man's odours began to get to him. The acrid smell emanating from him attested to both his glandular problem and his twin aversions to deodorant and the cleansing effects of soap and water.

'Name?' demanded the police officer standing over the prone Russian. The man's eyes looked backwards and forwards to Ahmed's face and the gun in his left hand. He tried to get up. Ahmed pushed him hard on the temple again, forcing him back onto the bed.

'Fuck off' the heavily accented response accompanied by a hostile glare.

As soon as he opened his mouth Ahmed was assailed by a most vile and putrid odour that made him want to throw up.

'What manner of creatures were they that both sired and spawned the lump in front of him' thought Ahmed.

'Hands behind your back'

The Neanderthal glared at him quizzically

Simultaneously, Cushion had smashed into the other room. The tall gangly one had been caught in the act of dying his hair grey. The dominant odour in the room was deodorant and its overuse. The man was a little more intelligent than the Neanderthal. He gave his name as Filip Pidrik and even volunteered the other's name Leszek Morski.

Pidrik and Morski, hands cuffed behind their backs were frogmarched down the stairs to the entrance.

The woman and four other attractive but apprehensive looking young women were peering from the doorway of one of the front rooms.

'Get me a phone' Saied barked at the 'headmistress'.

Pidrik shouted something at the woman and Morski grunted threateningly at her.

She paled at what they had said.

Cushion grabbed Morski by the throat, 'Shut the fuck up'.

He immediately let go of the man. Not because he realised that he had done wrong. But because the man in front of him not only had a glandular problem. As soon as he opened his mouth one was assailed by a most vile and putrid odour that made anyone within ten paces gag. And boy was Cushion gagging

'We want a lawyer' said Pidrik with a sly smirk, taking in the policeman's discomfort.. 'It is the law'

'We're only taking you to the station for questioning'

'But you told us that you were arresting us. You put cuffs on. That's not asking. That's arresting. We want a lawyer. We know rights.'

'Yeah, lawyer' guttural sounds from the Neanderthal.

'You'll get a lawyer, when we get you to the nick. Now shut up' Saied ordered.

'Steve, here' he threw the phone to Cushion, 'ring the station and get us some back up for these two and the 'headmistress' and her 'students'. We'll probably need interpreters as well'

After the Ford Transit and car had taken the two males and the females to the station Saied and Cushion had a quick look around the 'school', starting with the attic rooms.

The window of Morski's room was flung open so as to dissipate the concentrated stench of the man. Morski's room contained a number of body building magazines in German and what looked like Russian. His bedside cabinet contained a number of jars of vitamins and a small bottle of clear liquid. It was bagged together with one of the vitamin jars. Prints could be lifted off each item and sent to Interpol and the liquid could be sent to the lab for analysis.

Pidrik obviously fancied himself. Hair dye, deodorant and designer clothes, especially Paul Smith and Ted Baker, featured in his room.

The third room obviously belonged to the 'headmistress'. It was neat and tidy and contained the usual things that a woman's bedroom would contain. Interestingly enough it contained books by Emily Bronte and Anais Nin. More interestingly and less feminine it contained a locked safe. Her passport, German, identified her as one Halyna Medvedskaya.

The thing that struck them was the German Passports for Pidrik, Morski and the 'headmistress' Halyna Medvedskaya

Yes there was one spartan bedroom with five beds crammed in and five lockers just like a dorm. However, there were four other bedrooms luxuriously furnished, with well stocked drinks cabinets. The wardrobes featured an array of lingerie and dresses ranging from the erotic to the fetishist. This was no backstreet dive it catered for a clientele that could afford to pay. A clientele that would keep its mouth shut.

* * *

Saied looked in on Morski in the holding cell. The man just sat there as if in a trance. His colleague Pidrik was the exact opposite. The man's feet were bouncing up on the floor and he was constantly biting his finger nails.

It would be another hour before they could interview them. Their solicitor was driving up from London. They had refused to be interviewed without a solicitor present.

However, Medvedskaya had agreed to be interviewed alone.

'Halyna, may I call you Halyna?' asked Saied

'Of course you may' the confident reply.

'What can you tell us about the girl. We know that she was at your 'school'. We just want to know who she is so that we can inform her next of kin'

'I don't know who she is. If one of my students have met her then it certainly will not have been at my school. So, there is not much more that I can tell you. I would like to go home now'

'Halyna, you have a German passport but were born in a Russian town. How come?'

'My mother was East German and my father Russian. He was stationed in the DDR then Russia and then the DDR. I was brought up in the DDR and when we became part of West Germany I became a European citizen. Is that a crime?'

'Mmm' responded Saied 'We both know that you are running a brothel. What have you got in the safe?'

'I am running a school of English. What is in the safe is of no concern of yours'

'It is if we think that it may be evidence of crimes that have been committed or are being committed'

'Then you will need a search warrant and you will have to charge me'

'In the dormitory you have five beds but only four....students? What jobs do Pidrik and Morski have in your....'school''?

'Recessionary times. Not everyone can afford to learn in an establishment like mine. So like any other school or an hotel we are not entirely full. They are caretakers. Now can I go now please?'

'They have German passports and were born in Russia the same as you. Can you explain that?'

'Of course. In a strange country one is always drawn to one's own. Surely, don't you find that?' she threw the question back at Saied.

'I'm asking you're answering!'

'I cannot think of anything else that I can help you with. So, if I may leave now?'

'We need to talk to your....'students' first. The interview has ended at and officers Saied and Cushion are leaving the interview room '

He turned off the tape recorder and they both left the room.

'She is one cool cookie' Saied said to Cushion as they stood in the corridor.

Let's go and see our two friends and see what they have to say.

They took Morski first. His solicitor, from 'Gribben and Gribben', sat at his side. They were conversing in Russian when the two policemen entered the room.

As soon as the tape started the solicitor swung into action.

'Detectives Saied and Cushion on what grounds did you arrest my client?'

'Illegal possession of a firearm, suspicion of being involved in the mysterious death of a young woman who lived at the same house and participating in the operation of a house of ill repute' the Asian detective responded.

'Let's deal with each of these separately. Firstly, my client assures me that he has a licence for the firearm. On the second count he has no idea of who you are talking about. Thirdly, he is a caretaker of the property. Therefore, may I suggest that my client is released right now. And by the way he will be looking to sue you for unlawful arrest and criminal damage. Furthermore, he will look to have you arrested for...'

'Whoah, hold on. How does your client know that he does not know the woman. We have not showed him a picture'.

The solicitor hesitated only slightly.

'Be that as it may my client is adamant that he knows nothing. However, because my client is always willing to help the police he will look at the picture'. The solicitor conversed in Russian with Morski who vigorously nodded his head in assent.

Cushion took the picture of the dead girl out of his folder and passed it to the Russian who looked at it and then shook his head. He then spoke in Russian to the solicitor and followed it up with a bale yet smug glare at the two policemen.

'Well gentlemen my client states that he has never seen the girl. He also asks if you can get him something to drink. Coffee the colour of you' he nodded at Ahmed 'with one sugar. Thank you. Now when do you wish to interview my other client Mr Pidrik? I think you have also arrested him but also failed to mention why and on what grounds. Can you also confirm that you have spoken to Miss Medvedskaya without my being there. Finally, have you arrested my other four clients and if so what for, and if not why are they being held in cells?' the solicitor ended with a self-assured smile.

'The conceited bastard' thought Saied 'He's made sure that he's got a wrongful arrest in on Morski and Pidrik and a strong implication that we have failed to follow procedures on the woman for good measure. Then of course the lack of a search warrant is bound to be thrown in for good measure.'

'We will get Mr Morski a drink as requested. We will interview Mr Pidrik very shortly. When you want to see him just knock on the door and the officer outside will take you to him. The interview with Mr Morski in the presence of his solicitor Mr Hewett conducted by Sergeant Saied and Sergeant Cushion terminated at...'. He switched off the recorder and he and Cushion left the room.

Once outside Saied turned to Cushion with outstretched palms up and shrugged his shoulders,

'Steve, my friend we are in deep shit. I have screwed this up from the start. These people are not dumb. I think we better go and see Blunt before we interview Pidrik'.

'Yes' replied the Norfolk man 'you did' the other expected a hail of criticism from his partner and tensed himself for the same, 'but I should have stopped us when that woman brought up a search warrant!'

Ahmed looked at Cushion and smiled wanly. 'Let's go and see Blunt'.

SCREWING UP

An incensed Blunt sat silently as his two detective sergeants filled him in on the cock-up over the arrests at Pitt Street. What a great start for a new team, being sued for wrongful arrest and imprisonment by people who were as guilty as hell. They did not need someone to set them up for a fall. They were more than capable of achieving it themselves he surmised. He also thought that he had to let Strumpshaw know what had happened. He could only imagine how the Chief Constable would react. Nevertheless a glimmer of a solution began to form in the recesses of his mind.

Meanwhile the two errant policemen stood silently watching their boss like two delinquent schoolboys standing to attention in front of the headmaster's desk. They were bracing themselves for an explosion. The longer the silence the more their discomfiture grew.

Finally Blunt broke the silence, 'Ok Ahmed how do you suggest you go about interviewing Pidrik?' he asked softly, managing to restrain his anger.

'Well we can start by stating that we have arrested him for sexual trafficking, running a house of ill repute'

'You mean that you are going to lie?' from an increasingly irritated Blunt

'Well what else can we do?'

Blunt slammed his fists down on the table. Both it and the men opposite him jumped

'You can think' hissed Blunt, 'You can think! Lying will get you precisely nowhere. The Gribben guy made sure that your misdemeanours are on tape. Can you tell me what the custody sergeant put down when he booked in all your guests?' he continued through gritted teeth.

The two detectives looked at one another sheepishly.

'Just as I thought. You have not got the faintest. You!' he pointed at Ahmed 'know precisely what happens to cover ups once they are exposed to the spotlight of publicity! You and I both have seen plenty of examples in our time with the Met and Hertfordshire. ' the Asian nodded in agreement and Blunt continued 'I doubt whether the Russians and their solicitor will be rushing to the press about this cock up. Whoever is behind their business probably has more to lose from publicity than we do. Who is interviewing the four girls?'

This time the pair diverted their gaze towards the floor. They had quite simply forgotten about the girls languishing in the cells.

'And whilst we are at it what is the score on the girl you picked up on King Street. The one that you think is underage?' with no answer forthcoming Blunt let them stew in silence and took some solace from their nervous shifting of weight from foot to foot. After what seemed an eternity to the pair, but what was in reality only two minutes, Blunt continued.

'We are still no further regarding the dead girl. However, one witness states that she lived at 27 Pitt Street. A house that appears to be a high class brothel. That house and two others are registered to a local accountancy firm. However, they appear to be high-end brothels run by Russians with German passports. The car driven by two of the Russians came from a dealership that is registered to Gribben and Gribben a North London law firm. What a coincidence that the solicitor representing our three Russians is from that self-same law firm Gribben and Gribben and just happens to speak Russian '

He paused and looked out of the window before continuing,

'Right let us have a look at what we can do to get something positive out of this mess. '

He went on to outline what their next steps should be before finishing with,

'You will now interview Pidrik and try to be as nice as possible. Do everything by the book! I will have to let Strumpshaw know what has happened. You do realise that when we release them they will all melt away like snow in the Sahara at midday. So drag it out a little. Before you go into Pidrik let vice know about the other brothels and the necessity to act quickly. Release Morski but keep him waiting for his possessions we do not want him warning the other brothels.'

Blunt had already worked out how the situation could be used to his advantage. He needed extra bodies: and he needed them fast. He wanted Flint and he wanted at least one other. This mess had been created by two officers who had been foisted on him. Now he wanted at least two of his own choosing. And he felt confident he would get them.

He sat back in his chair and wondered whether Ahmed's gung ho approach was an example of the phrase from his file, *'the occasional tendency to cut corners if he feels that the results merit it'*. Perhaps he had overstepped the mark during his time, albeit brief, with SO10. Conceivably it had landed him in a situation where he had endangered himself and perhaps others. That would account for the haunted, tortured look that appeared when SO10 was raised.

Blunt knew more than anyone that operating on the edge and the methods involved had their place in an imperfect world. A world where a small guy could be prosecuted but the ex-Chancellor of the Exchequer could ruin an economy through fiddling the figures for his own self-aggrandisement and spending money the country did not have to bolster the vote in his party's heartlands. 'Surely' thought Blunt 'that constituted fraud and criminal negligence. There must come a day when those over preening narcissists were prosecuted for negligence in office'.

He walked next door into Strumpshaw's office and within half an hour had hammered out a deal. Flint would be reassigned to his team and would report for duty the next morning; she could hang up her uniform. He was also asked if he would interview a disenchanting young graduate, Melanie Leibnitz. She had a first in Mathematics from Durham indicating a good relationship with numbers. Unfortunately she did not relate as well to people, both colleagues and the public. Notwithstanding that drawback, she had one of the sharpest minds that the Chief Constable had ever come across and a capacity for hard work if something interested her. Blunt had reluctantly agreed and requested an immediate interview.

He struck an instant rapport with the young Constable. She liked the idea of what the new team wanted to accomplish and he hired her on the spot. Once she had tidied up her in-tray she would join the team.

He picked up the phone to Flint and got her first time. He gave her the good news and recoiled from her extensive use of expletives! How dare he take decisions for her. She had said that she would think about joining him in Norwich. What gave men the right to think that they knew what was best for women. She'd had it to the back teeth of pricks such as her husband, Skinner, Moyles and worst of all Blunt himself! Eventually he managed to pacify her and she apologised for her outburst. Yes she would give it a try but she didn't know whether she would stay. Yes, she knew that not staying probably meant the end of her career as a police officer. She would let him know what train she would be on.

He put the phone down. Yes, he felt that he had let her down. But he had been in no position to do anything for anyone. Yes, he knew what her feelings had been towards him. He had done everything he could to gently discourage her whilst attempting to build her self-confidence on the job.

A knock on the door jolted him from his thoughts. It was Leibnitz.

'Sir, this was dropped off earlier today' she passed him an envelope addressed to 'The officer in charge of the Winterton Beach Girl case'

It contained three grainy 4"x2" colour photographs taken outside of 27 Pitt Street.

'Get Sergeant Saied for me, now. Hopefully, he will still be in one of the interview rooms or he may be in Sergeant Cushion's office. Bring them both. NOW!'

Ten minutes later all three officers were sat in Blunt's office.

'How long ago did you release them?'

'About five minutes ago, why?' asked a quizzical Saied.

Blunt threw the photographs across the desk.

'Oh fuck' exclaimed the Asian as he passed the pictures to Cushion.

Before he had chance to say anything Blunt ordered,

'Get back to Pitt Street. I want them all back here and quick. Get the arrests correct this time. Obstructing the police with their enquiries, and something special for him' he pointed to a figure on the photographs. And I want a search warrant to get into the safe you mentioned.

'We may be able to catch them in the foyer. They were ringing for taxis'

They jumped up and raced out of the door.

THE RUSSIANS RETURN

They clattered down the stairs to the station foyer. Saied slipped twice. The leather soles of his shoes provided no grip on the polished stone floors. The first to burst through the double entrance doors was PC Leibnitz. She saw a taxi disappearing round the corner,

'Shit' her instinctive reaction.

Cushion grabbed a uniformed colleague

'Bob, did a load of women and some guys get in taxis'

'Four young women did'

'Shit'

'What about the others?'

'They're over there' he pointed towards the loos.

The three men were just coming out of the gents. They looked at Saied and Cushion

'You come to say goodbye. How nice' smirked Pidrik

'Yeah. How nice' grunted Morski sticking out his barrel chest.

The lawyer looked a little embarrassed and put a hand on Pidrik's arm.

'Let's just go and get a taxi'

'What is going on?' Medvedskaya had just come out of the ladies.

The three officers moved to block the entrance door. Saied took a couple of steps towards the Russians and their solicitor

'Whoah. You're going nowhere' He raised his arm palm forward in a 'stop' motion.

'have we not exhausted everything' officers said the solicitor.

'Mr Morski you are under arrest for obstructing the police in their enquiries. We also want to question you about the young woman found on Winterton beach....'

'What the hell is this? You stop him' interrupted Morski turning to the solicitor.

'You have the right to....'

'This better be good' the solicitor attempted to talk over Saied

'...remain silent...' he failed as Saied proceeded to finish with the correct arrest procedure.

He then turned to Pidrik and Medvedskaya.

All three were led back to the interview rooms.

'I want Morski first' snapped the Asian detective.

Back in the interview room the solicitor waited until the tape was on before stating'

'On behalf of my client I wish to make an official complaint about your treatment of my client Mr Morski. I trust that this time you actually have some information'

'Mr Morski. Just so that we can get the record straight can you just reiterate for the tape that you do not know this girl and have never met this girl ever'

He nodded to Cushion

'Sergeant Cushion is showing Mr Morski the photograph of the young woman found on Winterton beach'

The Russian's eyes were darting all around the room. Anywhere but at the photograph. He looked at his solicitor.

'My client has no comment'

'Just for the record Mr Morski, under guidance, from his solicitor, has no comment regarding the body from Winterton beach. A young lady that he previously said he had no knowledge of whatsoever. Given that Mr Morski, what is your comment regarding these photographs?'

Cushion slowly and purposefully laid out three photographs in front of Morski.

The man looked at the photographs, tensed, drew in his breath and then exhaled. The power of his halitosis caused both Saied and Cushion to instinctively cough and to push their chairs back.

'No comment' the Russian spat out.

'For the record Sergeant Cushion has shown Mr Morski three photographs that feature Mr Morski with the young lady from Winterton beach. In photograph number one Mr Morski is grabbing the young lady by the arm. In photograph number two Mr Morski is raising his arm and the young lady can be seen flinching. Photograph number three shows the young lady's head being knocked back by the force of Morski's slap across her face'

He paused and allowed Cushion to take over.

'Mr Morski are you sure that you have no comment?'

'No comment'

Cushion then explained that under existing legislation Morski would be held for a another 24 hours pending further enquiries and questioning.

They then moved onto Pidrik

'Mr Pidrik you have seen the photographs of your colleague, Mr Morski, with the girl from Winterton Beach outside of 27 Pitt Street. Do you still maintain that you do not know the girl?'

'No comment' the smirk had disappeared'

Pidrik was also advised that they would be holding him for a further 24 hours.

The photographs were shown to Medvedskaya,

'So what do a few photographs prove? Where did they come from? All they show is Mr Morski having an argument with some woman. Maybe she was trying to get into the house'.

She was also advised that she would also be held for a further twenty four hours.

Saied asked Cushion for the suspects to be formally photographed and fingerprinted. Also swabs were to be taken from inside their mouths for DNA purposes.

REALITY STRIKES

'How did it go?' Blunt enquired of the three officers

'They have all declined to say anything' responded Saeed.

'Have you got the SOCOS to get off to Pitt Street and the other addresses?'

'Yes, Steve got that organised. What about the warrants?'

'Strumpshaw pulled some strings and everything is in order. What about the photos and prints, have you got those off to Interpol yet?'

'Yes' Ahmed responded again 'Steve did that as soon as we got them'

'Good. We need something over the next twenty four hours'

The senior man turned to Melanie Leibnitz

'You know Steve but you do not know Ahmed here. He has joined us from the Met. He is shortly to be promoted to Inspector and is 2ic from now on.'

The young woman raised her right arm and gracefully flicked her long hair away from her face. That simple action once again wrenched images back from Blunt's memory. Bitter sweet memories. Sweet when he thought of the young woman and happy moments. Moments of laughter and hope. Bitter when he thought of a particular man: the bitterness of betrayal and the extinguishing of hope.

The three subordinates sat in silence wondering what the hell was going on as Blunt appeared to have slipped into a trance. They exchanged quizzical glances with one another as the silence uncomfortably continued. Eventually Ahmed coughed. It was sufficient to rescue Blunt from his reverie.

'Gentlemen, Melanie has been assigned to us on a temporary basis. Her primary task will be to collate all the information that we have. She will act as the main point of contact regarding all the outside bodies that we deal with. Her job will be to chase, chivvy and curse them to get what we need.'

He turned to the young woman,

'Melanie, you will be going to the station shortly to pick up the final member of our team, Debbie Flint. Can you book her a room at the THF Hotel on Hall Road? Better book it for a couple of weeks.'

He turned again to the two men;

'Gentlemen, although in some ways there is not much more that we can do may I suggest that we hit the phones to chase up the people who may be able to provide us with information.

Our problem is that we really do not have very much on which to hold the three bunnies currently occupying our cells. We must stress to the lab and others that we need information and we need it fast. So Ahmed chase up the coastguard again. Steve get onto the lab. Melanie I want you and Flint to chase up what the SOCOS have come up'

'Ahmed, you better take some time to sort out your accommodation needs. Perhaps, now might be a good time

FLINT AND LEIBNITZ

Melanie Leibnitz stood on the station concourse waiting for the London train to arrive. She had written in marker pen on an A4 sheet of paper, 'Debbie Flint': she felt like an airport taxi-driver. She wondered what the woman would be like. When she had left Blunt's office Cushion pulled her to side and whispered that Blunt and Flint 'had history'.

'Great' she thought 'he's brought in his bit on the side to work with him'.

Cushion also said that Flint could be a 'hard bitch' and she was to be careful.

So it was with some trepidation that she awaited the arrival of Debbie Flint.

The announcer heralded the arrival of the train and it duly disgorged its passengers: most of them business folk anxious to get home after a trying day in the Capital.

'Hiya' a middle-aged woman dressed in white tee shirt and jeans strode towards Leibnitz. She had a Nike sports bag slung over one shoulder and a handbag over the other. She was relatively thin and tall but had what men would call a good 'rear'

She thrust out a hand 'I'm Debbie Flint'.

The younger woman was taken aback. She put it down to the other being a Londoner.

'Hi, Melanie Leibnitz. Chief Inspector Blunt asked me to collect you and take you to your hotel. I'm then to take you to meet him later on'

'Good, let's get going' Flint strode towards the exit leaving Leibnitz to catch up.

On the drive to the hotel Flint thought that Leibnitz could not be long out of training; she looked so young. But she was also attractive and obviously bright to boot. Her heart missed a beat when she realised that they were heading to the THF hotel; the place where she and Blunt had shared a room but not their bodies. Surely, he couldn't have been that insensitive.

She booked into the hotel. Once in her room she quickly freshened up and put on a striped blouse. She approached Leibnitz waiting in the foyer. The girl was certainly attractive. A great figure and she wore clothes that enhanced it. Long auburn hair, green eyes and a pleasing olive complexion.

'Let's have a coffee before you take me to the nick'

They settled into some easy chairs and ordered coffee from the young waitress.

'So what made you join Blunt's team?' asked Flint

'He asked me if I wanted a temporary assignment and it seemed less boring than what I was doing'

'In what way' Flint gently enquired mirroring the younger woman's movements.

'Well, I've just finished the graduate scheme. It's been the biggest mistake I ever made...' she paused

Flint just nodded, slightly leaning towards the younger woman

'...I thought it would be interesting but it's not. My parents did not want me to join the force. They wanted me to be an actuary...but there were no jobs. All the insurance companies were cutting back in the recession. They said that I should have been a teacher as everyone is saying that there is a shortage of maths teachers. However, the more my parents went on about what a lousy job being in the force was the more determined I was to join.

Interesting it has not been. I get given all the shitty jobs, filing, writing up interviews. I don't call dealing with drunks crawling out of the Prince Of Wales Road pubs and clubs on a weekend and spewing up on the pavements exciting. And the guys in the office are all out of the ark positively antediluvian Nothing but sly innuendos all day. Mock requests to go to bed. It seems that their brains are in their trousers. There's one prat in particular. Fancies himself and as thick as shit.'

'Yes, there are some officers like that' Flint agreed remembering Skinner.

'Basically I've had enough. Going into work each day is like a living hell. Trying to act normally puts such a strain on me. When I get home I'm shattered. I just go to sleep. Then when I get into work I find it difficult talking to people. I've been applying for jobs as a maths teacher. Should make my parents happy. I've got two interviews coming up.'

'What's your boyfriend's view?' the older woman leaned in a little further towards the younger.

'Boyfriend, hah' Leibnitz laughed mockingly, 'That tosser got fed up with my shifts. Said that being in the force mitigated against having children and a family life. He was on the graduate scheme with Norwich Union. Chose them because I was here. Now he has buggared off to their branch in Sheffield. We took out a mortgage together on the flat we shared. I can't afford the payments and he wants us to sell it. So crappy job, crappy life and soon to be homeless And now those idiots in the office are making comments about whether or not I am a dyke. What about you?'

'Does Blunt know about all of this?'

'Why should he? You won't tell him. He may throw me off the team, then they will take the piss about that.'

'Why should I tell him?'

'Well, you know because...'

'Because what?'

'Well you and he, you know, know each other. '

'Whoah, I see what you are trying to say. We know each other because I worked for him in Enfield. I've never slept with him if that's what you are trying to say.'

'Omigod I have put my foot in it.' She flicked her hair back with her right hand as a blush spread from her neck upwards, 'I'm, I'm sorry' she stammered.

'It's all right' Flint gently touched the others arm, 'Part of being in the force is that your colleagues will always think that a woman officer is sleeping with someone or other,

usually a more senior colleague. And there will always be someone who spreads the rumour. Who did it in this instance?'

'It was Cushion' Leibnitz continued whilst Flint nodded, 'Are you married?'

'Yes. I should never have married him. We only stayed together because of the kids. I have an eighteen year old son and a seventeen year old daughter'

'Are they going to move to Norwich?'

'I doubt it. They are both looking for work in London. They are living with their gran and granddad, my mum and dad. I don't know whether I will move here yet.'

'What about your husband?'

'As soon as the kids finished school I walked out. We had not seen much of each other. He is a security officer. He prefers to work nights for the money and probably because it meant that he saw less of me'

'I'm sorry'

'Don't be. I've felt a lot better since I walked out on him. I've even taken up studying. Blunt had been trying to get me to do it for ages. Anyway, I think we had better get off to the nick and see the man himself. He gets pissed off if he's kept waiting'

'What's he like, as a boss I mean?'

'Do your job and he's fine. Screw up and he will give you hell. Come on let's get going'

When they got to the nick it was after five. Blunt had left a note saying that he had to go and see the CPS and then he was moving onto Darcy and Darcy, the accountants. He was going to have a meeting with all the team at 11am sharp in his office. Leibnitz was not to forget to have a SOCO report by then.

The two women decided to have dinner together at Flint's hotel.

Leibnitz thought that she had better quickly check her desk for messages before leaving. She found one from the lab concerning the bottle of clear liquid found in Morski's bedroom.

Flint enquired whether it was something about the Winterton body.

'Yes, but it doesn't seem important. Here look' she passed the fax over.

Flint looked at it for a moment

'Shit. Get onto the pathologists now! Let's hope that they are still at work. Tell them to check the corpse's hair.'

Over dinner Flint explained to Leibnitz the importance of the fax. The other then filled in Flint on Saeed and Cushion.

THE WHOLE TEAM

Blunt opened the meeting, 'Let me introduce Debbie Flint, who is the final member of our little team. We are going to leave most of the formal interviews to Debbie. Not to put too fine a point on it she is one of the best interviewers I have come across....'

'I can't disagree with that' thought Leibnitz 'She sucked me dry last night. She knows everything about me BUT I know very little about her'.

Ahmed's face puckered in distaste, '*Thanks Blunt I am supposed to be 2ic. You bring in your ex bit on the side and tell us she'' be doing most of the interviews. Thanks a million for not discussing it with me or letting me know*' he fumed inwardly. Blunt's words just floated over him..

'I am sure that you are all well aware that our arresting of the Russians, with German passports is on very tenuous ground. We need something and we need it quick. Last night I met with the CPS. I did not go into Darcy and Darcy but incidentally and interestingly your friend Hewett from Gribben & Gribben was there. I will brief you on my meeting but first have we got anything new?'

Flint spoke up, 'Apparently the bottle that Morski had in his room contained Gamma-Hydroxybutyric acid or GHB'

The others looked a little sceptical, especially Ahmed but she pressed on.

'It has been used and is being used increasingly as a date rape drug. It is preferred to Rohypol because not only is it colourless and tasteless but it leaves less trace than Rohypol. It's difficult to detect the stuff in a urine sample after a day. To be able to get it to register it has to be tested for within 8-12 hours of the victim taking it. Our floater was in the water and was dead for longer than that according to the pathologist. That is why it wasn't picked up.'

'So no link to Morski on this stuff then' interrupted Ahmed in a sarcastic tone designed to put Flint down.

'On the contrary' Flint responded with a hint of irritation, 'if you'll allow me to finish'.

'*She's a lot sassier, got a harder edge since leaving the husband*' opined Blunt. He wondered how Saeed would deal with Flint. He had no desire to interfere at the moment. If Saeed was to succeed as his 2ic then he would have to handle Flint. He had spoken to a friend in the Met who informed him that Saeed had a reputation as a lone wolf. Given his colour and the institutional racism at the heart of the Met Blunt felt that to survive Saeed had no option but to act in such a way. Anyway he turned back to Flint letting them know about GHB.

'GHB can be detected in the hair for months after it has been taken. Melanie here' she nodded towards the younger woman 'used her feminine wiles on old Snelling. He stayed on late to do the tests and gave them to us this morning.' She hesitated and then looked at the younger woman, 'Melanie what were the results?'

The younger woman was a little taken aback, flicked her hair back with her right hand. Again that little movement brought back memories for Blunt. Painful memories that he attempted to push into the furthest recesses of his mind.

'Traces of GHB were found in the floaters hair.'

'We do have a link then. Good work Melanie All we have to do now is to put him and Pidrik around the scene where the coastguard said the body could have been put into the water' said Ahmed praising up Leibnitz at the expense of Flint.

The others waited for him to continue.

'The coastguard said that given the tides it was possible that the body was put into the water between Cromer and South Repps. They also came back to me with a list of forty seven vessels that they reckon were within the rough area at the times in question. Unfortunately, all of them that night were out of European ports and sailing to various ports in the North of England. So we have to trace Morski's and Pidrik's movements from Friday evening to early Saturday morning. ' he concluded.

'Not so fast' interjected Blunt, 'That takes a lot of man hours. Hours we have not got. The question is are we falling into the trap of assuming that the two Russians with German passports are guilty? Who is not to say that it was not a punter or punters? That would maybe account for all the semen found in her.'

Ahmed shaped up as if to interrupt. However, he desisted when Blunt gave the police stop signal. 'We appear to have made that decision and now we are looking for every opportunity to support our conclusion. So let us try and work it another way. You are going to attempt to convince me about these two and I will act as devil's advocate. Steve, convince me that we even have a murder on our hands'

Cushion shifted uncomfortably on his seat

'Well, she's obviously had this GBH stuff....

'GHB' interrupted Flint

'GHB ' continued an irritated Cushion 'She worked in Pitt Street. We have the photographs that show Morski hitting her outside of the house and Morski has this GBH, GHB stuff.'

'Anything else?' asked Blunt

'Well she probably wanted to get away from being a pro, knew too much about the operation and so they had to kill her.' Cushion sat back.

'What evidence have you got that she actually lived there? The photographs do not prove that she lived there.' Cushion started to squirm in his seat 'What evidence have you got for your supposition that she wanted out etc.? None!! Debbie, how common is this GBH, sorry GHB stuff?'

'It is difficult to know how many date rape cases it has been used in. But it is sold in the smart shops in the Netherlands. It is used in Germany, Italy, France and other European countries to help those with sleeping disorders and as a pain killer in childbirth.' Flint answered.

'In other words it is readily available.'

Flint nodded in agreement.

'We have forensics crawling over Pitt Street and Morski and Pidrik's car. I imagine that they will take some time to come back to us. Unfortunately, it will probably not be before our twenty four hours are up. So that still leaves us with the problem of proving that the girl lived at Pitt Street. Ahmed, Steve' Blunt turned to the two males,

'You, kept watch at Pitt Street on Monday evening.'

Ahmed knew where this was going and felt like kicking himself. It was as if he had been gung-ho ever since he set foot in Norfolk. He now shifted uncomfortably in his seat. He noticed a wry smile on Flint's face. 'The cow' he thought. 'She's enjoying it. She's meant to be my subordinate!'

'You took photographs of the people going into Pitt Street? Did you notice anyone you knew. Have you chased any of them up? Have you traced the number plates of the vehicles you photographed?'

Ahmed's face went a ruddy brown. Flint looked down, to hide her smile. Leibnitz looked on with interest. Cushion's face was blank.

'Unfortunately not. We wanted to get moving on the case as we felt that this team had something to prove.'

'Cut the bovine ordure' Blunt interjected sharply

'Point taken. Steve recognised a solicitor. If we get to her in the next hour we will have some proof to take into the interview room. We'll get onto tracing the plates right away. We'll then get to the owners straight away even if we have to work all night'

'Fair enough. Furthermore, you made the error and therefore I do not expect an overtime claim'

Cushion groaned

'You have a problem Steve?'

'Well, the union'

Blunt looked at him challengingly. Almost simultaneously, Cushion yelped in pain and stared at Ahmed who had kicked him on the shin.

'Good, let us continue. I have no doubt that we will establish that the girl lived and operated at Pitt Street. However, everything is still circumstantial at this moment in time.'

'Yes but we will be able to prosecute for running a brothel etc.' piped up Flint

'Scant reward for a team set up to combat people trafficking. Perhaps all we will have achieved is to warn off a major new trafficking player. Hardly a result to gain us plaudits from the powers that be!' A withering response from Blunt.

Gloom descended on the four sitting in front of Blunt. The silence was punctured by Cushion's stomach rumbling.

A nervous laugh followed from his colleagues.

'Right, be that as it may we must crack on' a more upbeat tone from the senior man,

'Where did those photographs come from? Who dropped them off?'

'I chased that up' Leibnitz jumped in.

'And?'

'After looking over the videos it appears that it was probably a motorcyclist. Unfortunately, he or she was wearing a helmet and gloves. The cameras picked up the motorcycle leaving. Unfortunately, the number plates had been obscured'

'Well done. It is not your fault that whoever they are did not want to be traced or identified'

Leibnitz blushed and flicked her hair back with her right hand.

'I would love to know who is watching the Russians and I would love to know what they know. However,.....'

Blunt noticed that Debbie Flint was becoming increasingly agitated.

'Debbie, is something bothering you?'

'Yes. Look I know that we are supposed to combat people trafficking. But we have a dead girl. I personally think that she has been murdered. We are talking about rights to arrest, whether it is worth arresting and all the rest. I just think that.....'

He put up a hand to stop her in mid flow

'I know what you are saying and you and I need to talk after this meeting. OK'

A reluctant 'yes' followed.

'Debbie, I would like you and Melanie to interview the solicitor. See if you can get a signed statement regarding seeing the floater at Pitt Street. Get back here as quick as you can so that we can confront our three German Russians with it. Can I ask you a favour?'

'Depends' came the answer

'Can you get hold of your friend Beaumont in MI5 and ask him if he has anything on those three?'

'You're pushing it. He didn't score any brownie regarding the last time he helped us! In fact the opposite. He got caught up in some of the fall out. But, I'll try.' She didn't sound too hopeful.

'Ahmed, you sort out the questioning of the girls from the houses, especially Pitt Street. Take Steve with you. We need them to make statements that the girl lived at Pitt Street. And question them about Morski and Pidrik regarding the girl and the time frame that we are talking about. However, let us face it, those girls will probably try and give them an alibi.'

'No problem' answered Saied, 'You said that you would mention the CPS'

'Yes. I laid out what we had in front of the CPS and they informed me that for them to stand a chance of prosecuting our three friends they need proof that they are selling sex. Regarding the girl we have got nothing for bringing either a murder or manslaughter

charge that will hold water. All we have is supposition and coincidence. Remember they have to be able to prove guilt 'beyond reasonable doubt'. A brief would drive a coach and horses through any case brought on what we have. Regarding the accountants we are in exactly the same position. We cannot prove that the accountant knew that Pidrik and Morski were laundering money and we cannot prove that they are using money from ill-gotten gains. We could make trouble for them by saying that we are impounding everything on 'suspicion'. However, we then have to prove it. If we do not then we could be sued. That would not do our budget much good. So, in a nutshell, we have expended, are expending and will expend a good deal of time effort and money running around over a floater. An exercise that will yield little of concrete value with respect to the objectives of this team. Let us carry on wasting time and money. Welcome to the brave new world of policing. Debbie you wanted a word'

The others left the room and Flint and Blunt occupied an awkward silence.

She broke it

John you engineered my coming here without my say so. When we spoke a couple of days ago I told you I would think about it. Instead I was ordered here! I know that you probably did it for the best of intentions but I don't like how you did it. Yes being busted back to the beat and all the shit I was being given did my head in but I wanted to sort it myself! The other thing is what's happened to you?'

'How do you mean?' Her forcefulness had taken him aback

'You are talking about budgets, about how arresting those two scumbags may have lost us leads into trafficking gangs. At times you are beginning to sound like tickbox Bacon. We have got a dead girl. She probably has parents, a family somewhere. For all we know she may have children. You, we, seem to have lost sight of the fact that we are dealing with a human being. Someone, who laughed, smiled, cried. Someone, who hopefully had hopes and dreams. And we seem to have lost sight of all that, you especially. Is it now all down to statistics? Down to whether we can winkle out the big fish? Is it because with your promotion you've now turned into a tickbox? If it is I don't want to be part of this team, your team.'

'I have not changed Debbie but I have had to come to terms with modern day reality. There is not an infinite supply of money. Yes, we have to prioritise. Yes we have to go after the big fish. Putting the likes of Pidrik and Morski out of action achieves little, it is an inconvenience no more. It is similar to chopping off a tentacle. A new one quickly grows back. Chopping the head off. Putting the person at the top of the tree out of action that causes damage. Today too much of our time effort and money is spent pursuing the little guy. Why because it easy. It looks good. It massages the statistics and simultaneously assuages the public, the press and the powers that be! '

'So people like the girl are sacrificed? In the past you would have gone after those two. You would have wanted to put them down. You used to talk to me about justice.'

'The girl is not being sacrificed. Did you not hear what I said earlier?'

'Yes I did. I also heard the resentment in your voice about it.'

'*God, she has changed. The catalyst was probably dumping her husband*' thought Blunt

'Debbie. We are going to go after them. I want you as part of this team and I am pleased that you are here'

'I don't know whether I want to be part of it. I'll think about it and let you know tomorrow.'

'You will not forget Beaumont will you?' Blunt finished the conversation.

SHAKING UP THE LAWYER

As they walked towards Cushion's cubby hole Leibnitz couldn't stop herself asking 'Who is Beaumont?'

'Someone who reminds me of you' the wistful response'.

'Are you going to stay?' the younger woman continued. A hopeful tone to her voice.

'Maybe. I don't know'

'I hope you do'

'Let's get on with the job. You check to see whether anything has come in from Interpol. If not give them a chase. Meanwhile, I will get hold of my friend. Then we will go and see the solicitor lady'.

A little later as they walked past Tombland Flint commented on the attractiveness of the houses on either side of the road and the fact that the area seemed almost continental with all the outside seating for the cafes and restaurants. Leibnitz gave her a potted history of the buildings commencing with the medieval specimens.

She did not have time to offer too much of a description as they reached the offices of Clutterbuck and Lozenge. Whereas Tombland expressed historical charm Upper King Street oozed Nineteen Fifties drabness. They walked through the sliding entrance doors and down a corridor that opened onto a cavernous and dimly lit reception area.

The young girl behind the desk enquired as to whom they were coming to see and whether they had an appointment to see that person.

They stated that it was Jane Sharpe they wanted to see and that they had no appointment. They registered the officious look that began to creep across the girl's face before Flint added authoritatively,

'Let her know that DC Flint and DC Leibnitz want to see her.'

'Of course' a slightly flustered response followed.'

After a couple of minutes they could hear the brisk clack of leather shoes on stone approaching from a corridor behind and to the left of the reception desk. The Clutterbuck and Lozenge offices with their thin frontage and cavernous space beyond resembled a Tardis.

Jane Sharpe emerged from the corridor and looked down her nose at the two policewomen. She considered that their dress sense denoted a pair of oiks.

On their part Flint and Leibnitz were confronted by a well-dressed woman roughly five foot seven in height and about Flint's age

Her obviously long hair was pulled back tightly from her face and fastened as a bun behind her head. Her make-up had been applied so that her skin appeared flawless. She wore a dark grey trouser suit, burgundy blouse with a grey and burgundy polka-dotted scarf at her neck.

She carried herself in an assured manner that befitted a woman who had made her way in a man's world. Her tone was husky and her manner of speaking precise and abrupt. Probably it was a way of speaking dictated by the billing clock. Walked like a soldier, a mannish walk, stiff backed.

Her reaction to being told that they wanted to speak about Pitt Street was simultaneously aggressive and defensive. However, she obviously did not want to discuss the matter and led them back down the corridor, along which she had come, to her office. Leibnitz thought of soldiers as she followed the solicitor. Like a soldier on parade her walk was mannish precise and stiff backed.

Once in the Solicitor's office and sat in two not very comfortable chairs in front of the desk, Flint started her questioning.

'Mrs Sharpe....'

'Ms Sharpe' came the interruption.

'Ms Sharpe we just want to ask you a few questions about Pitt Street. We know you visit the establishment, we have photographs showing you entering the premises

'I am not a criminal lawyer but is the taking of photographs without my knowledge strictly legal?'

'We weren't taking photographs of you specifically. You and others were collateral but useful damage'

'Detective Flint I am a busy woman and I am expecting a client so if you could please get to the point you would save us all a great deal of time.' A clipped and curt response

'Ms Sharpe, I need to know whether you have seen this woman on any of your visits to Pitt Street?' Flint took the photograph of the floater from Leibnitz and held it out for the solicitor.

The other did not move and an awkward silence ensued.

'Sod these power games' thought Flint and placed the photograph on the desk in front of the other woman. Although she did feel like slapping it down.

'Never seem her before. So if that is all I have work to do' she started to rise from her chair.

'Not so fast' Flint came back 'You've hardly looked at the photograph. I am sure that you are aware that it is not a crime to sell sex but it is to buy it.'

'You would have to prove that. I think you would find that hard to do. I only went there the once on an invitation. So as I said...' again the curt and clipped response.

'Oh we will' interrupted the policewoman who was beginning to get irritated, 'and we will prosecute. However, before we go you did hear about the Aktion fur Arbeit business?'

'Of course.'

'Well we are sure that the Pitt Street people were tied up with them in some way. Mel can you wait outside the office for me?'

Once the door clicked shut Flint put both hands on the desk and leaning towards Sharpe and hissed,

'Now listen bitch I'm busy and I'm hacked off. I've got a dead girl who we know operated out of that house. For all I know you paid to fuck her. It is highly probable that the two male pricks you've seen at Pitt Street killed that girl. To be able to progress against them I need someone to state that they saw her. I couldn't give a damn about who you screw, what sex you screw or whether or not you paid for it.'

Only momentarily taken aback the solicitor's face blanched and her thin lips tightened with rage;

'Who the he.....'

'Shut the fuck up! If you don't give me a statement I am going to arrest you for procuring sexual services. Then I'm going to a deal with someone from Pitt Street who'll testify against you to save their own skin. I'll make sure that we'll issue a press release about you. I'm sure that your partners and your clients will be delighted at the publicity. Now solicitor lady what is it to be?'

The solicitor slumped into her chair, Flint walked to the door and called in Leibnitz

'MeI, Ms Sharpe would like to make a brief statement. Can you take it? I need to go to the loo.

Walking back to the station Leibnitz asked her colleague how she had managed to get the solicitor to make a statement. 'Experience' came the simple response. Leibnitz gave her colleague a questioning look.

Back at the station each of the women had a message.

Leibnitz's concerned Interpol. They had nothing on either Morski or Pidrik.

Brevity also characterised Flint's message from Beaumont, 'Ring Me'

Her contact in MI5 informed her that Morski and Pidrik were ex KGB. They had operated in the Soviet Union, Switzerland and latterly East Germany. They had been involved in 'wet actions' across Europe, particularly against Soviet dissidents living in Western Europe and the US. Other assignments had included 'babysitting' Soviet shot-putters and bodybuilders at various international events. It was rumoured that the Soviet boys and girls had bulked up using a substance known as Gamma-Hydroxybutyric acid or GHB. Great for the purpose, as all traces of it disappear within a few hours. Even more interestingly he relayed the fact that Morski and Pidrik had apparently used the drug in their 'wet' actions. He stressed that no pun was intended as he explained that rumour had it that the pair used GHB to drown their victims as it left no trace, apart from in the hair. It was assumed that many of the victims had committed suicide. Most pathologists did not carry out tests on hair in such circumstances. Thus GHB was the ideal death drug!

He advised Flint to be careful as the two were mixed up with some powerful and extremely dangerous figures. He explained that when the Soviet Empire was in the throes of collapsing in on itself senior KGB figures met with Russian crime lords in East Berlin. Rumour had it that the discussions centred on how the state's assets, senior jobs etc. were to be carved up. He asked if she remembered the previous year's attempted coup in the

Soviet Union. The KGB and the crime lords had made sure that it collapsed and in doing so had consolidated their grip on Russia.

Morski and Pidrik's worked for Viktor Banderovski. He had been a KGB colonel and together with a friend Vladimir Putin had attended the aforementioned summit meeting. Intel suggested that the pair were cunning in the extreme, aggressively resourceful and masters of creating and then benefiting from chaos.

Banderovski had also been involved with the Schonman's of Aktion. He currently resided in Bishop's Avenue, London and again rumour had him laundering money from Russian state assets through car dealerships, property and nightclubs. Some in MI5 had even suggested that he had taken over a large chunk of Aktion's people trafficking, prostitution and body parts business. Beaumont thought that Flint and Blunt could be interested to know that Banderovski's solicitors are Gribben and Gribben. A little bird told him that they had both crossed swords with them in the past.

The rumours were that Putin was to be groomed for the political arena. Beaumont's parting words on hearing that she was with Blunt again were,

'I'm surprised Blunt hasn't been in touch with his Israeli friends. The one's responsible for our problems before. After all a good few of the Russian crime lords are Jewish' she detected a bitterness in his parting words.

After finishing her call with Beaumont Flint told Leibnitz that they now had a good deal to relay to Blunt and the others about Morski and Pidrik's. She had watched the former's televised interview and seen the photographs of him striking the dead girl. She took an instant dislike to Morski. That photograph and his whole demeanour made her think of her husband. She also made a mental note to ask Blunt about the Israelis.

SAEED AND FLINT SETTLE THEIR DIFFERENCES

Saied and Cushion returned to the nick foul of temper and empty of hand.

The questioning of the girls at the house had been a fruitless and costly exercise: the cost involved the employment of two interpreters from the UEA.

Four of the girls stated that they were with Morski and Pidrik for the whole of the crucial Friday evening and Saturday morning timeframe. Ok, they couldn't have been at two separate houses simultaneously. BUT all the other girls stated that they had seen the two of them in the hours concerned.

Breaking the girls down would be well-nigh impossible. They had more fear of their employer(s) than of the British police. No doubt they would all soon melt away into the murky grey underworld of society's underbelly only to resurface at some other brothel in another town. Blunt, after his tirade on expenses and budgets would certainly not countenance holding them all in custody.

Saied's mood further darkened when he bumped into Flint who stated that she had received some interesting news that could possibly take the case forward. He had not taken kindly to her amusement at his discomfort in the meeting with Blunt.

Given that he was supposed to be 2ic to Blunt he felt that she should show him more respect. He determined to have it out with her.

'Debbie, can I have a word with you'

'Not a problem, but we need to move on interviewing our two bunnies'

He bridled at her attempt to try and take control.

Once settled into Cushion's tiny office he did not bother with any niceties but launched straight into his criticism.

'I was really pissed off when you seemed to revel in my cock-up over the reg numbers. And now you seem delighted that you have got something to take into the meeting and I haven't. Shouldn't you be telling me what you've got. After all I am 2ic to Blunt'

'God' she started to think, *'another one out of the same box as tickbox Bacon. He expects respect because of his rank'*.

'I know that I have to earn the respect of the team, including Blunt. However, we might start to really get somewhere if we acted as a team and not as people vying for Blunt's approval. He should've told me about you coming and that as 2ic you reported to me. I know that we've kinda got off on the wrong foot but for the sake of ourselves and the team can we try and get on and can you accept that I am the senior?'

He spoke slowly and she could tell that it was taking a great deal of effort on his part.

'Maybe I got him wrong' she thought before responding. 'Look I'm sorry. I don't know what made me buy into the boy games.' She shook her head, 'Shit I do. Look I've always been used to reporting to Blunt direct. He brought me here without my say so. Doesn't tell me that you are 2ic. The girl Leibnitz is the one that told me. So yeah I'm pretty

pissed off. I was sort of trying to show that I am better than you. I'm sorry ' she smiled awkwardly.

Ahmed put his hand out towards Flint. She accepted the gesture and they shook hands.

'What about if we push for us to carry out the interviews together' he suggested

She filled him in on Beaumont's information and said how she had got to know him. Ahmed said that he also had a kind of contact in security. She seemed impressed when he informed her that it was Rafique Khan, the well-known MP.

A knock on the door brought their chat to a close. It was Cushion. Forensics had found hairs of the floater at Pitt Street and in Morski and Pidrik's car.

Ahmed and Flint glanced at one another and smiled. Cushion noticed it and felt like the proverbial gooseberry.

'It's alright, Steve. Your news together with what Debbie has told me means that we have got something to take to Blunt and more importantly something that we can have ago at those two toe rags with. Let's see what that bastard Hewitt has to say about this!' a broad smile spread across Ahmed's face. He couldn't be sure but had Flint winked at him.

A few moments later Leibnitz appeared at the doorway.

'Sergeant Saeed uniform have just let me know about the girl that you brought in from King Street. She's called Carly Jones and she is underage. Three months off fifteen left home about nine months ago. Comes from Ipswich. Her parents said that she had taken off after her Asian boyfriend who they believed lived in Norwich. She's been passed over to Social Services'

'Probably couldn't find the boyfriend. Didn't want to go home and so hit the streets. Anyway let's hope that Social services can straighten her out. Ok let's go and see Blunt and then get at those bastards.' came Ahmed's response.

INFORMATION AND THE RUSSIANS

Saeed and Flint strode into Blunt's room followed by Leibnitz and Cushion and settled into their, now customary, chairs in front of his desk. He noted that the initial coolness between the first mentioned appeared to have substantially dissipated.

He took quiet satisfaction from the fact that Saeed introduced the presentation of their findings. He listened patiently whilst each team member launched into their findings. It impressed him that Cushion and Leibnitz participated fully in presenting information about the hair samples and the solicitor

'Damn it' he thought, *'each time she flicked her hair back with her right hand it reminded him of Anjii and brought back the memories'*. Memories that were infused with happiness, sadness, anger, confusion and the will for revenge.

He complimented Flint on the information provided by Beaumont. He commiserated with Saied and Cushion regarding their frustrating time spent with the women at the 'educational' establishments managed by Pidrik, Morski and Medvedskaya.

'We have certainly moved on. It is obvious that Banderovski appears to be wanting to, and is in the process of, taking over from where Aktion left off. I am sure that they wish to build a substantial people trafficking network and perhaps a lot more besides. Perhaps one of the most interesting things is how they are looking to spread the risk. They are utilising native solicitors and accountants to purchase properties and businesses. Classic ways of laundering money. As always we are behind the curve. There is legislation currently being drafted that will allow us freer rein to investigate such movements. Unfortunately it is at least two years off becoming law. We have to operate with the law as it stands, imperfect though it may be.

However, I digress. Our problem is that we cannot use any of Beaumont's information in court....'

'But surely we can hit them with some of it when interviewing!' Flint interrupted

'I don't know Debbie. You have got Hewett in there with them. He's bound to scream foul play. At the moment he has plenty to beat us over the head with' he sat back and waited whilst his words hung in the air.

'Fair enough but we can use it to shake em up. What've we got to lose?' Ahmed backed up Flint, 'We've also got the fact that she lived at Pitt Street. We have the evidence from Patel, her hairs found on the premises and Jane Sharpe's statement. Her hairs in Morski and Pidrik's car. The photographs of Morski slapping her outside the Pitt Street house. The GHB found in her hair and in Morski's room.'

'And from a defence point of view?' enquired Blunt

'The fact that Morski had it in his room is purely circumstantial' Flint drily commented, 'and none of the rest proves that they murdered the girl.'

'Yeah, but surely it is part of the case we are building up against these towrags' Saeed came to Flint's defence.

A wry smile crossed Blunt's face.

'All good stuff Saeed but let us consider what we do not have.' He paused, for effect before continuing

'We do not even know who the girl is yet! Her clothes have not been discovered. All the Russian's properties have been searched. Nothing has been found. What evidence do we have that places Morski and Pidrik where the body went into the water. Yes we have her hairs in the car and in Pitt Street. However, I will wager that you will find hairs of nearly all the girls in the car.

What about motive? Why should they kill an asset? We can speculate but that is all...'

'Beaumont said that a common KGB tactic involved killing as a lesson to others, to bring them into line' Flint interjected

'Yes I agree. It is a common tactic with all those who trade in violence. However, it is just as easy to make the opposite point. Why kill an asset? It is better if we now concentrate on what we do not know.' Blunt concluded before turning to the younger woman.

'Leibnitz, you are to arrange for the media to ask if anyone had seen Morski and Pidrik's car during the crucial time frame and where. Debbie and Steve you are to interview the three again...'

Flint and Saied fleetingly exchanged glances before the latter interrupted,

'I thought that it would be a good idea if Debbie and I did that together'

'Ordinarily I would agree with you. However, I need you to go with me to the Patels. I think that it would be useful to question more members of the family regarding seeing the girl. Always better to have more than one statement. '

He turned to Flint and Cushion

'We need you to try and wheedle as much as you can out of Morski and Pidrik and do not forget Medvedskaya. At the very least you are to charge each of them with obstructing police enquiries. But also throw in running a brothel, immoral earnings etc. etc. Let them know that we will fight tooth and nail to oppose bail. Ok we all know what to do. Ahmed I will see you down in the foyer in ten minutes. Melanie, can you hang back a moment'

Their chairs screeched on the wooden floor as they all, apart from Leibnitz, got up and left the room.

'Melanie, not only do I want you to get the local media on side regarding the car I also want you to...' Blunt simultaneously reached for a newspaper, The Times, and passed it to the female detective, '...see if you can chase up these two reporters' he pointed to the two names on the by-line for a half page article, 'you can then get onto the Weybridge force and find out what you can'

She took the paper

'How do you find Flint?'

'I like her. You worked closely with her didn't you. Is she going to stay?'

'I do not know. I hope so. Anyway, you are not to say anything about that..' he pointed to the article, '..until I say so'

Meanwhile, Cushion had disappeared to his cubbyhole of an office. Saied and Flint were at the coffee machines commiserating with each other over the vileness of the coffee and the fact that they were not going to carry out the interviews together.

INTERVIEWING THE RUSSIANS

Flint led the way as her and Cushion's leather soled shoes clack clacked on the polished tile floor as they strode towards the interview rooms.

On entering the room the smell emanating from Morski hit them with the force of a punch to the solar plexus. He had obviously not availed himself of any of the washing facilities. Instinctively, she reached for and used an aural spray in her pocket. She hoped its peppermint odour would provide some protection.

Flint wondered how Hewitt, what a strange man, could withstand such a violent nasal battering. She considered the man for a moment. She knew that he held a partnership position within Gribben and Gribben: one of the fastest growing law companies in North London. If Gribben and Gribben could turn a fast buck from some legal work they piled in with the voraciousness of a piranha. Dodgy dealers, shady corporations, known criminals and those suspected of all manner of dark dealings were Gribben and Gribben's stock in trade. Rumours abounded about the purchase of shiny new offices in the West End.

Hewitt acted as an uncomfortable coat hanger for an expensive suit. He really should have worn something that hid, or at least lessened the impact of, his paunch. She put him at about fifty. He had a thin, pinched type of face, strange for a man with such a paunch. The elaborate construction of hair was the most distinguishing feature of the man. He obviously admired and wanted to outdo the American fellow. The way the hair had been grown long at the sides and back, then brought forward in such a way that not just defied but comprehensively defeated gravity amused her.

Once more Cushion went through the motions of switching on the tape machine. When Morski opened his mouth to grunt an answer to Cushion's question of whether he knew why he was there, a most vile and malodorous stench violently assaulted the air in front of him. The man must be rotting from the inside out. Flint applied some more spray before gently leaning towards the Russian seated on the other side of the table.

'Mr Morski the last time you were here with my colleague Sergeant Saied and Sergeant Cushion here you stated that you had no comment regarding these pictures'

Flint laid the pictures on the table

'At the interview before that you stated that you did not know the girl'

Morski sat immobile and just stared at Flint

'Our forensics team have found her hairs in your car and on some of your clothes. A great quantity of her hairs have also been found at Pitt Street and two of the other houses that you and Mr Pidrik provided the money for. So we find it difficult to believe that you didn't know the girl. Can you give us an explanation?'

'No comment' Morski malodourously spat out.

'Constable Flint' where are we going with all of this?' enquired Hewitt

'Mr Morski can you explain why you had a bottle of GHB in your room?'

'Medicinal, helps me to sleep'

'Mr Morski, I am sure that you are aware that GHB is a date rape drug. Used by those in the know because after a few hours it is untraceable by the regular tests. However, it remains in the hair of victims for much longer. Traces were found in the hair of the Winterton woman The woman whom you claim that don't know.'

She paused and looked expectantly at the Russian

'No comment'

'That's fine Mr Morski, let's continue. We have it on good authority that you are, or were, a KGB operative.'

The Russian visibly tensed and he averted his gaze from Flint to somewhere on the wall.

Hewett quickly objected, 'detective Constable Flint I must object at this line of questioning.' She ignored him.

'I am told that you were in *wet* operations. I am told that you and Pidrik used to use GHB to drown so called enemies of the Soviet State. A large enough dose rendered them unconscious. You just gently pushed their head underwater in the bath and hey presto another enemy of the Soviet Union had committed suicide'

Again Hewett butted in, 'Detective Constable Flint this has to stop. It can be construed as intimid.....'

Before he could finish something snapped in Morski. He jumped from his seat, leaned over towards Flint with both his hands on the table,

'I did not kill girl. She disappear. We know not where. Other girl's frightened. We think best say nothing and try sort ourselves'

Cushion jumped up and put his arm in front of Morski to protect Flint.

'Mr Morski is assuming a threatening stance towards officer Flint. I have put my arm between the two to protect Officer Flint. I am asking Mr Morski to sit down again'

Flint smiled

'That was a cheap shot' Hewett intervened with so much indignation that the construction on top of his head wobbled. Flint momentarily deliberated whether gravity could regain the upper hand. The solicitor realised the direction of her gaze, His hand shot to the top of his head to check that the construction remained intact. Having, reassured himself he continued

'You have no proof and it will never hold up in court'

Flint ignored Hewitt.

'Mr Morski I don't believe you. We are still looking for evidence and hope soon to be able to place your car at one of the sites where we consider you and Pidrik put the body of the girl in the sea. Would you like to take us through the sequence of events. Whilst you are at give us her name. Also where is her passport?'

The Russian stayed standing, the veins on his neck bulging, whilst he shouted at the policewoman.

'I tell you we no kill. Not put body in seas. She go missing. Name Seraphim Gruberova, from Latvia. Talk Medvedskaya'

She hated to admit it but what he shouted had a certain ring of truth to it.

Cushion informed Morski that was being charged with murder, prostitution, kidnapping and obstructing the police with their enquiries. He would appear before the Magistrates court the next day and the police would oppose any attempt at bail. Hewitt, feeling that he needed to justify his presence, and no doubt his more than ample fees, retorted that he would fight tooth and nail for bail for all his clients. Their kak handed arrest procedure at the start would be referred to in the court and passed onto the press.

Meanwhile, Saeed and Blunt were setting off for the Patel's shop at Gladstone Street. The junior man questioned why they needed to go to the newsagents again. Blunt, somewhat enigmatically, refused to say anything other than that a hunch had occurred to him in all their deliberations. He needed to check it out and required Saeed's knowledge of and fluency in Pashtun.

Flint and Cushion interviewed Pidrik and Medvedskaya. Hewitt had demanded that he be allowed to spend some time with his clients. When Cushion tried to object the clever sod hit them with a string of sections, sub sections and subsections of subsections concerning various EC directives appertaining to human rights and the rights of EC citizens. The police officers acquiesced even though they knew that a certain degree of collusion and story straightening would occur.

Pidrik and Medvedskaya , no doubt under orders proved to be immeasurably more amenable, as well as infinitely sweeter smelling, than Morski. They even attempted, unsuccessfully, to engage the two police officers in idle chatter.

However, they basically repeated what their colleague had said. Yes the girl worked mainly at Pitt street, yes she had suddenly disappeared. There had been no indication of unhappiness or leaving for pastures new. They believed that when her body had turned up on Winterton beach someone had kidnapped her for sexual purposes. No, they could not explain why she had semen in virtually every orifice of her body. She had not been working at the time she had disappeared. Furthermore, all the girls were kept scrupulously clean. Everyone had the best interests of the clients in mind.

Medvedskaya insisted that Gruberova did not have a passport and had just turned up on the doorstep one day. An incredulous Flint asked her whether she really expected the police to swallow such a story. Medvedskaya coolly stated that Flint and Cushion could believe what they wanted. The truth was the truth and that was it. The pair received the same charges as Morski. Neither Flint nor Cushion believed most of what the Russians. They hoped that Leibnitz's talking with the media would give them the result they needed about the car.

Simultaneous, to the unfolding drama in the interview rooms Saied and Blunt were heading for Gladstone Street. Leibnitz was busy dealing with the media and talking to colleagues in Weybridge.

Her chats with the Times' journalists and the force in Weybridge revealed a number of facts. She felt instinctively that the information she had garnered could potentially have

an explosive impact on the case of the Winterton girl and the unit she had just joined. She excitedly awaited the return of Blunt so that she could appraise him of the situation.

GLADSTONE STREET REVISITED

The Gladstone Street shop was full of schoolkids who were being dealt with by old Mrs Patel. A younger woman, perhaps a daughter or daughter-in-law kept guard by the door and watched the adolescents like a hawk. The local school suffered from a reputation of schooling, if that were the word, some pupils who were quick of finger, deep of pocket and fleet of foot. Anglo Saxon was also their most common language after an understanding of the mere rudiments of their native language.

On seeing Ahmed old Mrs Patel's eyes opened wide with apprehension. Her body visibly stiffened and her ruddy brown face drained. Her English with the schoolkids was more than adequate. After spotting Ahmed her voice assumed a tremulous tone accompanied by a nervous stuttering.

'She seems a tad agitated by our presence Ahmed, I wonder why' Blunt said enquiringly.

'She is no different to when Cushion and I came. Although I got the impression that she could only grasp basic English'

'Seems that her comprehension of the language has come on apace since then' responded Blunt with a hint of sarcasm.

'Many of the less educated people in our community trust the police less and less, especially after the riots. They feel that we are on the side of the racists and drag our feet when it comes to prosecuting those who rob them and attack them.'

Blunt nodded in agreement. He had come across the sentiment several times over the years.

They waited for the rush of adolescents to abate and then approached an increasingly agitated Mrs Patel.

'Mrs Patel, is your son about? We would like to have another word with him.'

She replied in Pashtun, feigning a lack of knowledge of English.

'Mrs Patel I saw you dealing with the children and your English is pretty good. If I may be so bold, I would even say that it surpassed that of some of your native born customers. Now we can talk in English or Ahmed can translate into Pashtun and vice versa. I am easy so long as you co-operate. Now where is your son who provided us with a statement regarding a missing girl the day before last.' Blunt requested.

'He has had to go away to Pakistan on family business.' The nervous reply in Pashtun that Ahmed translated.

'He did not say anything about that when we spoke to him' Ahmed responded a little doubtfully.

'Death, like life is Allah's to give and take. Our duty is to live our lives according to his laws and any demands he may make on us. You...' the young woman had silently come up behind the policemen and as Ahmed turned around to face her she pointed her finger at him, 'you should know that, understand that and obey. Unless of course you are a

traitor to your people and to Allah'. Her eyes blazed and then he recognised her. It was the young Mrs Patel without a Niquab. Maybe she didn't like wearing it when her husband wasn't about.

Ahmed visibly blushed

'Everyone is entitled to their beliefs in this country as long as the practising and preaching of those beliefs remains within the confines of the law. When did he go back to Pakistan and whom has died?

Blunt stepped in. He drew a withering look from the young woman.

'He went this morning. It was a distant uncle who has helped the family in England. It was Ashraf's duty to go and pay our respects'

'I understand' said Blunt gently, 'are you and your mother willing to give statements about the girl from Pitt Street'

'Of course but my mother in law doesn't often serve in the shop. I don't think that she can tell you anything' came the response in English whilst she looked at the old woman.' Also I hope it will not be too long as we have to pick up the children'.

'No thank you for your help. Sergeant Ahmed will take your mother's statement down here whilst you and I have a chat upstairs.'

'My mother in law is not well she should have me there when she gives a statement.' There was now a worried tone to the young woman's demeanour. It did not escape Blunt.

'No she will be alright. She looks quite sprightly for her age. What is her age by the way?'

The woman slightly hesitated before saying 'seventy six'.

The young woman gave Blunt a similar statement to that of her absent husband. Blunt noticed the photographs on a sideboard and asked if the children were hers. He asked whether the man in one of the photographs was her husband. She hesitated slightly before saying that the man was her brother in law. Blunt noted her eyebrows being drawn upwards towards the middle of her forehead, causing short lines to appear across the skin of her forehead. She then went onto volunteer that her husband didn't like photographs.

Blunt commented that she obviously shared that trait with her husband. She agreed adding that Niquabs didn't photograph very well.

On the drive back to headquarters Saeed informed his boss that the old lady had said very little and insisted that she spent most of her time looking after her grandchildren. Blunt had not said much. However, he did say that perhaps Saeed and Flint should return to London to sort out their affairs.

A SURPRISE MEETING IN LONDON

Ahmed opened the door to his flat and nearly tripped over the pile of letters, circulars and local papers. He cursed silently whilst stooping to scoop up the paper detritus. As he mounted the stairs it struck him that the place smelled faintly musty. 'Hell' he thought 'I have only been away a few days and this is how it smells-empty!'

On walking into the sitting room he noticed the red blinking of the ansaphone. He strode over to the small desk that occupied the bay window overlooking the street below. He threw the pile of paper onto the desk and tutted at the layer of dust on the surface: the beauty of London air. Although not as toxic as Beijing it still carried more than its fair share of filth.

His next port of call: the coffee machine. He grabbed a bag of bins from the oak cupboard above the coffee machine and toaster. Within seconds the gurgling had commenced and the aroma of freshly ground beans and brewing coffee commenced replacing that empty dank smell.

He looked in the fridge and took out the small carton of milk. A riot of emotions and thoughts rattled around his head: Blunt, Flint, Norwich, Cushion, Leibnitz, the Russians the dead girl, the Patel's shop. Did he want to stay in Blunt's new unit? Did he think that Blunt's new unit had a future? What did he think of Flint? Did he really want to be taken away from the comfort zone of London?

'Shit!' he audibly exclaimed when he looked at the heavy lumps of sour milk in his mug. He emptied the remainder of the foul smelling contents out of the carton into the sink, turned the cold tap full on and flushed the white lumpen mess down the plug hole.

Another cup of black coffee poured he went over to, and sat in the armchair next to the ansaphone. He pressed the 'play' button and waited for the messages.

His mother's voice, quiet and soft, spoke to him;

'Ahmed, your mother. How are you? You haven't called home for a little while. We worry if we do not hear from you. Things are not so good at the shop. Let me put you onto your father...' a pause ensued followed by his father's booming heavily accented voice, 'Son how are you? Have you started going to the mosque again yet? It would be good if you could come home and help run the shop. I bought it for you. When are you going to get married. Mr Iqbal's younger daughter would be good. You know Mr Iqbal has the wholesale business the Leeds side of Wakefield....' He heard his mother quietly interrupt in the background in Pashtun, 'Ali, leave the boy alone'...His father then continued 'You should come home more often. We could go to the mosque together. Goodbye'

His mother came on for the next message:

'Your father is sleeping. He won't say anything to you. Some of the children from the St Ignatius' call us Paki bastards and steal things from the shop. Your father he will not go to the police. It is making him ill. You know he has heart problems. Can you do something? Come home son and see us. All my love your mother'.

The last call was from his ex-girlfriend, Angela. She asked about the possibility of arranging a meeting, say over dinner. She ended by asking him to give her a call.

Ahmed leaned back in the chair and closed his eyes. The Patel shop in Norwich reminded him of his parent's shop. He wondered whether the reasons for the unease and reticence of the Patel's, and others of their background, with the police could be lain at the door of their experiences with the law enforcement officers in the Pashtun province. He remembered the bitter arguments with his father when he had informed him of his own decision to join the police force. He further recollected how he had always been at loggerheads with the old man. Over religion and the mosque...as soon as he attained a sufficient age he had refused to go to Friday night prayers. At university he had little to do with religious Asians. Already he could see that some of them were moving in a direction that could lead to some form of extremism. As in the unions these people usually had the loudest voices and drowned out and scared away those of a moderate disposition.

He decided that he would call his parents when he returned to Norwich, probably tomorrow. First though he needed to look through the mail, arrange for an Estate Agent regarding renting the flat, throw some clothes together and then call Flint. His thoughts then settled on his colleague.

At first they had bristled in each other's presence. Then they had warmed to one another. The car trip to London had further cemented a growing relationship. He felt a sexual attraction towards the woman and felt that it was reciprocated. However, he needed to know the nature of her relationship with Blunt. He strongly sensed that there was something there. However, he did not feel confident enough or feel that he knew her enough to broach the question of her relationship with their boss. Perhaps he could gently raise the matter on the return trip to Norwich. Then again not, he reasoned. They were colleagues and therein lay the obvious problems and pitfalls: things that could cost both of them their careers, not to say jobs.

Saied thrust himself up from the chair and strode over to the table by the bay window. He briefly looked out of the window before picking up the pile of papers and returning to the armchair. He failed to register the dark Jaguar parked behind his car and that it blocked his car in!

Junk mail of one description or another comprised three quarters of the pile. The remainder contained gas bills, electricity bills and a circular from his CD club. He put those three to one side together with the circulars from a couple of estate agents.

He rang the agents, informed them what he wanted and agreed to drop off a set of keys to one of them.

Once more he sprang from the chair and walked briskly into the kitchen. He opened the cupboard beneath the sink and delved inside until he had retrieved a black plastic sack.

He went to the fridge freezer and systematically threw the contents into the sack. He switched the appliance off and left the doors open. Shortly afterwards the junk mail was thrown into the sack. Saied systematically emptied his flat of everything that he now considered rubbish of one form or another.

Finally, he threw a selection of suits, shirts, slacks, jumpers underwear and socks into his large Antler suitcase. A collection of shoes and assorted toiletries completed the task.

He carried the suitcase and the black sack into the living room and made a phone call to Flint stating that he would be with her within the hour. Her pleasure at hearing his voice sent a little frisson down his spine. He mentally chastised himself.

Whilst depositing the black sack into the bin the closeness of the Jaguar to his car struck him. He looked at the gap between himself and the car in front and inwardly groaned. It could take him at least half an hour to get out because of how the prat in the Jaguar had parked. He glared at the offending vehicle whilst putting his suitcase into the boot of his own car. He kicked the Jaguar's wheels in frustration. He then noticed two shapes through the tinted windows and gulped.

He heard the nearside rear window gently swish open. A voice from within spoke, 'Inspector Saeed, Ahmed Saeed your presence please' ordered a mellifluous but also unctuous sounding voice.

A mixture of thoughts sped through his mind. 'What the hell' thought Saeed 'And how the hell do they know I am going to be promoted. Shit that voice sounds familiar'

He walked over to the Jaguar, leaned into the open window and recognized Rafique Khan!

'Join me for a moment or two' the voice purred.

As he clambered into the seat alongside Khan, Ahmed's nostrils were assailed by the intermingling of leather, cigar smoke and expensive aftershave. The latter two emanated from the older man leisurely and affectedly puffing on the remains of a fat cigar.

Khan had attained the dizzy heights of the highest ranking, and most respected, Asian in Parliament. The political pundits reckoned that if his party won the next election he would be the Secretary of State for the Ministry of Defence, or, even the Home Office. He stood five foot eight and possessed a distinct politician's paunch: a tribute to the subsidised fine dining to be found in the Houses of Parliament. He had a large head made larger by his jowly features and the thin silvery hair that fringed a shiny bald crown. On meeting Khan for the first time most people's eyes were drawn to large fleshy nose with a slight kink (the result he claimed of a rugby injury) and the thin, almost non-existent lips. This slightly oddly packaged man exuded an animal magnetism.

He thrust his hand out towards Ahmed who reciprocated so that Khan could demonstrate his firm handshake.

'Good to see you again. We did meet about two years ago on your home turf, in Walsall'

Ahmed nodded.

'You' re probably wondering why we are having this meeting?' Ahmed nodded again, 'I recommended you for the post with the new unit in Norfolk and recommended that you be promoted'

'So, I have you to thank.' a slightly sarcastic response

Khan took a long draw of his cigar, lowered his window slightly and blew the blue smoke gently in the direction of the window.

'Do I detect that you may already have some issues with our friend Blunt and after such a short time?', he commented to the back of his driver's head.

A sixth sense warned Ahmed to be careful. 'No I do not. The suddenness and the apparent lack of choice pissed me off'

'The opportunity arose to put you in there because of my position on the new security committee. If I had not moved quickly then someone else, an Anglo Saxon, would have got the job.'

Khan saw Saeed beginning to stiffen and take a defensive posture. He continued before the younger man had chance to say anything. 'And you were not put in there because of your colour. I threw your name into the ring and you came out because you were the best man, and that was despite your SO10 cock-up''

Saeed stiffened and glared at the other man.

'But I will not deny...' Khan took a long slow pull on his cigar, rolled the smoke around his mouth and then turning to the window exhaled before continuing, 'that having one of my own so to speak in a position of reasonable authority in a new unit is a bonus. The more there are of us in such positions then the better it will be for us'

'I thought that you believed in a multicultural multiracial society?'

'And so I do' the unctuousness in Khan's voice came to the fore. 'But we can only have that when more people from the non-white, non Anglo-Saxon, communities assume positions of responsibility and prominence in the wider society. Surely, you cannot disagree with that'

'I suppose not' responded the other bristling slightly.

'However Ahmed, discussing politics was not my main aim for wanting to talk with you. The unit you have joined has the capability to become extremely important and especially from a security point of view. You can see where I am coming from?'

Ahmed nodded. He could most certainly see the direction of Khan's thoughts; a direction that held no appeal for him.

'The only problem is that the unit is led by a deadbeat that no-one wanted, that has pissed off most of what could be called the establishment and who, we are all sure, will almost certainly screw up this assignment. The other members of the team, apart from you, are a Norfolk hick sergeant, a cop busted to the beat with a predilection for sex with superiors and a disillusioned graduate.'

You are well informed as to the personnel but I cannot agree with your assessment' responded Ahmed beginning to take more of a dislike to Patel. However, he decided to hold his tongue and see where the discussion ended.

'Your loyalty is commendable.' He drew long and hard on his cigar and exhaled through the window once more. 'However, the plan is that when Blunt comes unstuck there is someone around who can pick up the pieces. You!'

The younger man remained silent.

'When that happens, I can promise you that you will get more and better resources in the way of equipment and personnel. How come it is taking so long to get the Russians charged?'

Ahmed's antenna slipped into overdrive 'You seem well informed'

The older man picked at some imaginary lint on his trouser knee before looking at Saied with a half-smile. 'Being in the new security committee I am party to a great deal of information. Between you and me it would appear that the Russians are looking to take over Aktion fur Arbeit's network. The other thing is that many of the Russian gangsters are Jewish. Now from a security and world peace standpoint we have to ascertain whether there is an Israeli connection. I do not need to tell you that the Middle East is a powder keg. And the rogue element is Israel. Who knows what will tip them towards using their nuclear weapons...and then where will we all be?'

'You can't be serious' expostulated the younger man.

'I am' the peevish response, 'however, when are you going to see your parents?'

'What the hell has that got to do with you?'

'I am very close to every one of our communities. Someone has told me that your parents are experiencing some racist difficulties. I am having it seen to. It would be good if you could go to the Norwich mosque. Let our people in the area know that one of their own is about'

'You mean like the Patel's whom we have interviewed for a second time?'

Rafique shifted in his seat, took another long and deep draw on his cigar and exhaled in the direction of Ahmed 'Precisely! Anyway, I would be grateful if you could keep me informed of what our friend Blunt's thoughts etc. are, how he is managing this affair etc., whether you think he is capable. The quicker he goes the better. Then you will be running the show.'

'You don't like Blunt do you? Why not?'

'Liking or disliking someone is immaterial. All that counts is whether they are up to the job. So, keep me in the picture'. He reached inside his jacket and pulled out a Mont Blanc pen and a business card. He used the former to write a number on the latter and held it out for Ahmed to take, 'You can reach me at any time on this number'.

'Thank you'.

'Now you better get off and pick up the beat bobby. No doubt you have both got things to do in Norwich. We will speak again soon'.

Ahmed got out of the Jaguar and watched as its engine sparked into life and the car effortlessly glided away from him. The Escort would certainly seem down-market he mused.

Confusion reigned in his mind. What the hell was going on? What was Rafique Khan after? What the hell did he have against Blunt? Should he tell Blunt about the

conversation? Khan was not a man to cross. He could ruin Ahmed. Did he read an implied threat against his parents if he didn't do what Khan wanted?

THE FIRE

For whatever reason, Emily Fisher had neglected to take her sleeping tablets. Perhaps it was because she had treated herself to one drink too many. As a result her sleep had been fitful. She just could not settle. In a fruitless attempt to induce sleep she switched on one of the interminable early hours chat shows on Radio Anglia. She hoped that the dull discussion would lull her to sleep.

She glanced towards the window and thought she detected a faint red glow. She shook her head and closed her eyes and attempted to listen to some caller prattling about street lights. For some reason she opened them again. There was a definite red hue on the window and it sort of waxed and waned.

Curiosity got the better of her and she walked to the window. She gasped, and put her right hand on her heart. She gulped and momentarily stood transfixed.

Flames engulfed the downstairs of the Patel's shop across the road. Suddenly, she could hear popping sounds like fireworks going off. She thought, but was not certain, that she could see a terrified face at the upstairs window. But it looked as if the upstairs was full of smoke. She couldn't be sure if she had seen a face or whether it was the swirling smoke that appeared to be getting denser by the second.

Then all of a sudden, the shop windows exploded with a loud bang. Her windows rattled and she jumped back. She saw that lights were coming on in other houses in the street. People were running out onto the street and shouting. Some ventured towards the shop stepping over the shards of broken glass from the exploded windows.

Emily ran to her phone and dialled 999. They informed her that the fire and ambulance services had been alerted and were on their way. She quickly threw on a dressing gown and went down onto the street. People were milling around the shop, albeit at a safe distance.

Popping sounds like fireworks were still erupting from within the building. Now one could hear screams and smell burning plastic. Sirens wailed in the distance and drew closer and closer. Someone in the crowd picked up a stone and threw it at the upstairs windows,

'Come on' he said 'if we manage to break the windows the smoke can escape and then they can be rescued'.

Others joined him and found bricks to throw. They managed to smash the windows and thick acrid smoke billowed out of the top windows. The acrid smell of burning plastic intensified. They heard screams once more. Then bright orange flames leapt through the windows. The screaming stopped.

Silence descended. Everyone knew that their neighbours had perished. No-one could have got out of that blazing inferno alive. All that remained was to wait for the emergency services. No-one envied them the grim task that awaited them.

As the night progressed both the police and the local media arrived. They questioned people. At times they got in each other's way and tempers frayed.

'When you see a fire like that you just freeze. You don't know what to do. It's terrifying'

'There were loads of people trying to help. Our first thoughts were could anyone get out?'

'When the flames burst through the upstairs window we knew that no-one would get out. No one said anything. It was deathly quiet. I had tears streaming down my face but I couldn't cry'

These were comments made by some of the residents of the street.

Later that morning the local news bulletin transfixed John Blunt as he breakfasted on his two boiled eggs and marmite and toast. A police spokesperson said 'The circumstances and cause of the fire are currently under investigation and officers would ask anyone who has information regarding the incident to please contact them'.

Blunt grabbed his phone and dialled the Maid's Head. Ahmed was neither in his room nor breakfasting. He left a message in case the other had gone for a walk. He then snatched his car keys and raced to the Gladstone Street. He couldn't give a damn about the road rats as the traffic police were known!

One of the joys of living in Norfolk is the preponderance of tractors on the road. You must be prepared to meet one of these beasts at any time on any stretch of public tarmac. If you were not patient when confronted by a huge piece of farming machinery you quickly had to learn to be patient. If not the risks of a coronary could increase exponentially.

On the way to Gladstone Street Blunt had run into three of the damn things. Patience had not been at the forefront of his mind.

When he eventually arrived at Gladstone Street the newsagent's end of the street had been cordoned off. The rumble of the fire engines could be heard as the fire officers were carrying out the last few checks on the building and beginning to pack their gear away. The Socos had been given the all clear and were commencing their work on the inside of the house. The fire brigade's own investigation team had already begun their own inquiry.

A Sergeant McNally met Blunt and escorted him to the fireman,

'We think that there were at least five people in the house sir, two were children.

Blunt nodded whilst recalling his visit to the property with Ahmed only a couple of days ago.

A stocky man with a florid face was carefully sifting some of the downstairs debris,

'Morning, John Blunt' the policeman extended his hand

'Morning, fire officer Hurst' came the broad Norfolk reply as they shook hands.

'Any initial ideas or thoughts' and then on seeing the other's eyes narrow, 'we will not hold you to anything. We just need to get a handle on this as soon as we can. The people in this house provided evidence in a case we are pursuing,' enquired the policeman

'Well, my view is that it appears to be deliberate. It appears that the fire started at the rear of the house in the storeroom. That in itself indicates to me that we are looking at possible arson. The strong alcohol would have certainly helped to intensify the blaze. All the cardboard packing would have helped the blaze get off to a good start. Then when the bottles of spirit began exploding and spraying the contents around the room they would have intensified the blaze.

The door to the storeroom appears to have been left open. That would have enabled the flames to leap into the shop and to be pulled up the staircase towards the living quarters. The staircase is so badly damaged that we are having to use ladders to get to the first floor. Just as important the amount of toxic smoke produced from all the plastic bottles and cartons would also have spread up to the living quarters. The only saving grace for the occupants is that they would have died from asphyxiation rather than burned alive'

'Any evidence that can be utilized at this moment?' from Blunt

'None. We have to sift through this lot which can take time. However, because kids are involved I'll try and push it through for you so that hopefully it will help you catch the bastard or bastards sooner'

'Thanks' responded Blunt who turned around as he heard the crackle and squelch footsteps behind him.

'Morning Sir' from Ahmed Saeed

'Morning Ahmed'

The two walked to one side of the charred building, dodging the drips of water as they did so

'Well, we won't be getting any further information from the Patel's... that is for sure.'

'How did it happen?'

'The fireman is pretty certain that it is arson'

'Could it have been kids with a grudge?' Ahmed thought of his mother's message on his ansaphone.

Blunt responded with a melancholy laugh 'No, it is doubtful whether kids would have the wherewithal to light a fire in a storeroom with lots of spirit.' he paused then wistfully continued, 'No it had to be someone who knew how to light a good a blaze'.

'The Russians?'

'Possibly' a pensive response from Blunt, 'Go and see the SOCOS try and find out what you can, although they will be reluctant to say much, and understandably so?'

'Ok sir. Who is organizing a search of the back yard and the alleyway?'

'Good point. Find that out and also ascertain who is interviewing the neighbours . Get the rest of the team here. It will help if they carry out some of the interviews.'

Blunt looked around and saw a detective wearing a white bulletproof vest talking animatedly to some colleagues

'Who is that poser over there. See what he is doing and what his rank is. He appears to think he is important'

A team of eight uniformed officers were given the task of combing the back yard on hands and knees to collect anything that may be deemed to be evidence, no matter how unlikely. A task that did not appeal to them one whit. The yard was dirty, wet and littered with shards of glass. However, the sergeant whipped them into shape by asking them to imagine that the incident had involved their own wife or children. Their job involved helping to get the bastards responsible. They carefully sifted through the debris putting anything that may look useful into bags and stating what part of the yard they were found. Into the bags went waste paper, bottle shards, or what appeared to be bottle shards, bottle tops, sweet wrappers, crisp bags, pieces of cloth, whatever. Following the search of the yard they would move into the alleyway. They would employ the same meticulous and painstaking, in more ways than one, method.

The many bags would find their way to the station and be sifted through once again to see if they contained anything that would yield vital information.

Flint, Leibnitz and Cushion arrived during the search. The number of police at the scene and all the attendant activity alerted the media to the fact that they were not dealing with a simple house fire. A request from the police that the media broadcast as a priority a plea for anyone with any information whatsoever to come forward, only confirmed their supposition.

All their attempts, and there were many, to engage the officers were rebuffed. A uniformed inspector advised the media that a press release would follow at some stage. He also requested that the media did not attempt to get to the residents of the streets before the police did. However, he knew that this was a forlorn hope.

The police extended the cordon to not only include Gladstone street but also the street on the other side of the alley. Whilst the search and interviews were going on they had decided to stop any one from leaving the two streets until they had been interviewed. The only exceptions being those that were sick and had important hospital appointments. Much grumbling and heated complaints sprinkled with a good deal of Anglo Saxon filled the air from those that were on the street.

Leibnitz stood alongside Flint and surveyed the scene. 'Isn't it a bit over the top?' she questioned..

'No' re-joined Flint, 'if this had happened in cases like the Ripper and it had all been properly collated on computer then probably he would have been caught a look quicker and perhaps at least two lives would have been saved.'

Leibnitz just nodded and Flint continued, 'It's boring, its time consuming and 99.9% of what we collect and what we hear is just dross. However, that .01% could give us the information we need'

'And what if doesn't?' questioned the younger woman

Flint looked quizzically at her before answering, 'Then we're fucked and have to hope for breaks.'

'Oh no' Leibnitz groaned. She had spotted Gayde approaching.

Flint turned and spotted a male about 5 foot 9 inches tall with sparse curly hair marching towards them. The main feature of the man being his bullet proof vest: it was white!

'Leibnitz it looks as if you and your colleague are part of my team., This is what I expect you to do....'

Before, he could finish Flint interjected, 'Who are you and what's your rank'

'Detective Constable Gayde and Inspector Simmons put me in charge. So come on girls here is your list of addresses. Report to me immediately if you come across anything that looks useful.' He puffed out his vested chest before turning and marching off towards his next victims.

'What a tosser!' Flint spat out

'In more ways than you can imagine' agreed the younger woman

Let's go. We have got our addresses. Have you seen Blunt?' the older woman started walking.

'No, I wonder if Ahmed has?' rejoindered the younger woman struggling to keep up.

Six hours later the police had completed their interviews and the ground search. Now the mammoth task of collating and attempting to make sense of all the information gathered and garnered would begin. No-one looked forward to it: apart from the criminals on the streets. They knew that police resources would be stretched and the probability of pulling of a successful crime rendered more likely.

Not many people had known the Patels. They were a very private family consisting of a young boy and girl, mother, father and grandmother. One interviewee whose children attended the same Primary School as the Patel's said that she believed that they regularly attended the mosque. Others stated that they seemed to be good people. Ok, yes incidents occasionally occurred with some of the rowdier and more stupid pupils from the secondary school. Apart from that the Patels were always polite and for a small shop the prices were good. No-one had any idea who might want to burn the house down.

Before heading back to the station the two women met up with Ahmed and Cushion and compared a few notes.

It appeared that several people mentioned that not long before the flames appeared they thought they had heard a motorbike sparking into life and driving off. However, the accounts provided conflicting evidence of the sort of noise the machine made, if indeed there was a machine. The sounds described ranged from the noise made by a moped to that made by a Harley Davidson. Flint thought it may have some bearing but couldn't quite get her head around it at the time.

Ahmed provided the information that it seemed likely that all the victims were hand tied. If that were the case then it was almost certain that the Patels were murdered because the perpetrators had to have been inside the house before the torching of the place. However, the tying and the torching, however unlikely, could have been done by different people.

So that led to motive. And as it stood only one group of people appeared to have that!

A LITTLE THOUGHT

Where had Blunt gone? He had returned to the station some hours earlier. He felt that he couldn't achieve much at the fire scene. He wanted time to think.

He had sat down in his chair, swung it round and looked out of the window.

He just sat there staring out of the window. His mind blank for a few moments. He leaned back, closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose.

He pictured the burn out house at Gladstone Street. He pictured the dead girl's body in the morgue. Six deaths that they knew of. And to what end? Something nagged him; just a little voice in the back of his mind.

A knock on the door kick-started him from his reverie.

The custody sergeant came into the room.

'What shall we do about the Russians sir'

'How do you mean?' enquired a slightly disorientated Blunt.

The desk sergeant wondered why everyone thought the guy in front of him was a good detective. He didn't seem all there.

'He's running a case and hardly seems to know that we have his main suspects banged up in our cells with their solicitor screaming blue murder.' The sergeant thought

'Well sir, we've just about reached the limit for holding them and if we don't charge em we have to let 'em walk'

'Charge Morski and Pidrik with first degree murder, running a house of ill repute, acting as pimps, people trafficking and remand them in custody. The woman charge her with running a house of ill repute, false imprisonment and people trafficking. Remand her in custody. The other women get immigration and let them deal with them' Blunt responded warily.

'Ok sir' the custody sergeant replied and left the room.

Ten minutes later Blunt's phone rang,

'Sir, the Russians solicitor is going ape-shit. He's creating a scene saying that we have no real evidence regarding murder to charge his clients and that it is an abuse of police powers to remand his clients in custody'

'Sergeant, charge them. Put reasonable cause down and tell their solicitor that he should know what to do if he wants to change matters'

'Yes sir'

After Blunt put the phone down he glanced at the flip charts that contained some of the team's thoughts to date.

He looked long and hard. Again the nagging thought returned.

He felt that the tectonic plates of the underworld were beginning to shift. Imperceptibly maybe; but they were beginning to shift.

They needed as much information about the fire as soon as possible.

He sat for a few moments and then got up walked out of the building. As he left the custody sergeant attempted to waylay him.

'Sergeant, you are an experienced man deal with it' he shrugged the man off.

'Fuck you too' thought the sergeant his eyes boring into the other man's back as he left the building.

Fifty minutes later Blunt parked his car at the Winterton car park. £1.00 it cost him to attempt to find a space. He didn't remember a thing about the drive. He walked up onto the dunes and looked out over the beach.

He heard the playful screams and laughter of children and adults frolicking on the sand and in the sea. The odd bark of dogs joining in the fun. Blue sky, blue sea, golden sands and a warm breeze. Almost idyllic. Without noticing he had stumbled across and startled a courting couple.

He walked on so as not to disturb them further. They caused his mind to flood with memories of Anjii. Thoughts of what might have been but maybe could never have been. He wondered what she had thought when she died, if she had thought at all. Had she thought of him or had she thought of Rafique?

He snatched his mind back to the present and surveyed the beach once more. A young woman had been found here a few days ago. Her body had been sexually abused and she definitely worked as a prostitute at the Pitt Street house. She had been enticed to England by the hopes and dreams of a better life. What did she get? A life of being sexually abused with no hope realizing her dreams. And if she had reached old age, she would have been discarded like the leftovers of a meal.

His mind then wondered to the interview he and Ahmed had conducted at Gladstone Street. He made a mental note to question Ahmed about SO10. The haunted look that had crossed his face intrigued Blunt. However, that could come later. Something niggled him and niggled him. He couldn't nail it.

'Damn', he expostulated out loud and strode off to his car.

A traffic car had pulled him over just south of Acle for speeding and got an earful for their pains. Blunt was not making many friends in Norfolk.

Once in his office he hit the phones. After two hours of chasing and harrying and awaiting return phone calls he got the answers he thought he was looking for.

He sat back and deeply exhaled. Then he sprang forward and dialled Cushion's extension. It did not ring for long 'Cushion' came the response.

'Steve, are you all back from Gladstone Street?'

'Yes, a few minutes ago. We were all wondering where you were'

'I want you all up here now!' he slammed the phone down before Cushion had chance to respond. He jumped out of his chair and began pacing around the room.

THE MEETING

Shortly afterwards they arrived at Blunt's office and assumed their usual seats for meetings. Blunt asked Leibnitz to get water for them all. He asked Flint to take down their notes on the flip charts and to blu-tak them on the walls so that they could all see them. He noted, as did Cushion, that Ahmed got up to help her. Blunt said nothing.

Once Leibnitz had returned Blunt poured himself a glass of water, sipped at it then spoke.

'Ok let us see where we are, what we know, what do not know and where we should go next. I want each of you that were working on separate items to present your findings and then summarise them on the flip charts.

Ahmed you go first. What have you found and what are your views?'

Saeed looked around at his colleagues and then addressed Blunt'

'I haven't got much BUT' and he emphasized the conjunction 'the SOCOS at the Gladstone street fire informed me that the bodies had probably been hand tied. The sick bastard or bastards that started that fire wanted them to suffer, and by all accounts they did! I helped with some of the interviews and not a lot came out of them. Some people thought they had heard a motorbike, some a moped, some a car and some a van. That's my lot.' He then stood up and summarized on the flip chart.

Steve and Debbie what about your interviews with the Russians?

Cushion allowed Flint to do the talking.

'The Russians deny that they killed the girl. They state that they cannot understand why Gruberova had semen in every orifice as she was off-duty and the girl's regularly and religiously douched themselves. Although they have been charged we really need more to go on to be able to make the murder charge stick.'

She paused and then continued,

'Regarding Gladstone Street I go along with what Ahmed said.' she glanced at him 'However, I found that more people mentioned a two wheeled engine as opposed to a four wheeled. Another thing that may be of note or not' she paused for effect 'a couple of people mentioned that Mr Patel's brother had visited them in the last week or so. The Pate's said that he was the brother....'

'Interesting' Blunt interjected 'Go on Debbie'

'Not much else I am afraid apart from one very interesting snippet. This afternoon I received the information that the semen in Gruberova's body came from different men BUT...' she paused for effect like Ahmed, 'It was several days old and there were no signs of recent sexual activity'.

No-one said a word for a few moments whilst the impact of what Flint said began to sink in.

'So what the pathologist seems to be implying is that she had semen injected into her. Fine anything else Debbie?' commented Blunt

'No that's it.'

'Ok get it up onto the flip chart'

When Flint had finished Blunt turned to Leibnitz.

'Melanie your turn'

The young woman coughed and fidgeted with her notes before starting.

'Like Debbie I carried interviews at Gladstone Street. As we did them together I have nothing to add to what she said' she looked at Blunt and continued when he nodded.

'You asked me to find out about the Weybridge incident' she paused whilst she passed photocopies of The Time's article, less than half a column long, to the others.

'As you can see it concerns a high class Russian brothel being discovered in Weybridge. It says that a local shopkeeper had been suspicious of the number of luxury cars going in and out of the secluded house. I rang the Weybridge station and they told me that the shopkeeper's name was Sharif. '

'A Pakistani or British of Pakistani origin' sighed Ahmed

'Pakistani actually' rejoindered Leibnitz

'Anyway, when the local guys and the reporters went round for a fuller statement, other than the one he had made on the phone, the bird had flown the coop. A family bereavement in Pakistan had necessitated his flying out. He still hasn't returned. This would not have even been in the newspaper ordinarily. A constable let the story slip to a reporter friend. He didn't get much space for the story, basically a filler. However, it has alerted us to the fact that there is possibly another case similar to ours. That's it'

'Thank you Melanie get it up on the chart'

Once she had finished documenting her summary Blunt asked her to get ready to do the same for him.

'When Ahmed and I went to Gladstone Street I got the distinct impression that the family seemed uncomfortable about things. I just felt that they had something to hide. Old Mrs Patel has a good grasp of English yet pretends to us that she does not. The young woman displays not one iota of affection, loyalty or affinity with the old woman. In fact she did not know the old woman's age. Furthermore, the old lady hesitated about giving us her son's age and that concerned me. One final thing struck me. When Ahmed and I arrived children from the local secondary school were in the shop. That secondary school is further away from the shop and finishes later than the primary school that the Patel's children attend. Where were the children?'

Blunt paused and turned to Ahmed and Cushion

'Ahmed, Steve, were the children there when you went? You went out of school hours. And if the children were not there how usual is that in a Pakistani family Ahmed?'

'The children were not there when we went and the old lady seemed almost afraid of Patel now that you mention it?'

'That is ok it probably did not strike you as odd because is it not a fact that Pakistani or Muslim households are very male orientated?'

Ahmed nodded in agreement.

'It niggled me and niggled me. That is why I had to leave Gladstone Street. Eventually something clicked and all afternoon I have been chasing up some records. The Mr Patel registered at Gladstone Street is thirty nine and his wife is thirty six. The woman you and I saw Ahmed was certainly not thirty six: late twenties at the most. Now, what about the Patel you two saw?' Blunt looked at Saeed and Cushion again

'Again he looked a lot younger than that' responded Cushion

Blunt continued,

'The young woman came across as very religious. When you were all interviewing did anyone say anything about how religious or otherwise the Patels were?'

'Some said that they went to the mosque but no-one said that they were overly religious'

'Melanie get that all up on the charts'

When everything was up on the charts Blunt spoke looking at each of his team in turn as he did so,

'Any initial thoughts about this mish mash of information?'

They looked at one another in silence before Ahmed volunteered,

'I want to start with the fire. At first glance it appears that the ones with motive are the Russians. They want to get their own back on the Patel's for shopping them. That then leads as to how they found out? Unfortunately the people at Patel's, apart from the old lady, were patently not the Patels. Why were they there?'

'If we take the Weybridge case' Flint interjected, 'then it would appear that something is going down between the Russians and some Pakistanis. These two seem to be fighting over the corpse of Aktion fur Arbeit. However, no-one was killed in the Weybridge case. So why kill the whole family here? What is the difference? Or did a third party torch the house and murder the family?'

'Doesn't it depend on whose bodies are in the house?' threw in Leibnitz

'Good point Melanie' Blunt stated quietly 'The way we go next is dependent on what the pathologist estimates the ages of the bodies to be. Apart from the semen have we got any more news regarding Gruberova?'

Silence ensued

'Ok so at this moment our likeliest suspects are Morski and Pidrik. Therefore, we have to hope that someone is going to come forward with information that will allow us to nail them.'

'Ahmed, I want you to set up the photofit guys to talk you Steve and I so that we can get a picture of the two 'so-called' Patels. Then I want you to get it circulated around the UK Pakistani community, Interpol and get onto the Pakistani police as well. Debbie will help you.'

He turned to Cushion

'Steve I want you to help with setting up a programme to collate all the information from Gladstone Street. I want to know about anything that pops up'

He turned to Leibnitz

'Melanie, I want you to chase the pathologists and the fire brigade investigator. I want them to complain to me that you are making their lives a misery.'. Do you all understand'

When they nodded Blunt finished with

'Then let us go to it!'

Ahmed and Flint hung back as Cushion and Leibnitz filed out

'John can we have a word with you?' enquired Ahmed slightly tremulously

'Certainly' replied Blunt warily. It momentarily crossed his mind that they were about to resign

'When I was in London yesterday I had a visitor'

Blunt narrowed his eyes quizzically

'That visitor was Rafique Khan', Saeed and Flint felt the pure hatred emanating from Blunt as his body perceptibly stiffened. He did not say anything

'He asked me to keep him informed about what the unit was doing...' still Blunt said nothing

'I talked about it with Debbie and we both agreed that I should tell you. I don't like him'

For a moment Blunt occupied a different time and space. For the second time today images of Anjii filled his mind. A playful Anjii laughing and joking. A tearful, sorrowful Anjii saying that their relationship had to end and that they could not see each other outside of the lecture room. Then there was the letter he had received after the Aktion case hit the headlines

'John, John Are you alright' Flint's concerned voice brought him back to the present with a jolt.

'Leave it with me Ahmed I will give it some thought. Then we will decide what to do about Rafique Khan.'

LEIBNITZ

Joining Blunt's team had filled Leibnitz with renewed vigour. It made a difference to how you felt when someone showed sufficient confidence in you to let you get on with something. And Blunt seemed to show that confidence in her. He seemed totally different to all the stories and gossip she had heard. If he were that bad, she surmised, then why had they given him this new unit?

As for her colleagues, she liked Flint. Although she had been taken aback by her ferocity with the solicitor: it had just come out of the blue. She wondered whether she herself would ever possess the presence of mind to do something like that. Or, indeed whether or not she could get away with it. Again she had heard all sorts of rumours and gossip about Flint and Blunt. The more far fetched of which she discounted. However, looking at the body language between them, slightly strained, and considering her colleagues words she felt sure that ??

Now, Ahmed. What a smoothie! An original mutual antipathy between him and Flint appeared to have given away to the opposite. She pondered as to the cause of the almost damascene shift.

And Cushion? Well, he was just Cushion.

Enough of the meandering Leibnitz chided herself. She needed to get her thoughts together for when the team held their next meeting. She had decided to make notes so that she would miss nothing out. It took her back to her student days and her preparations for tutorials.

She had hardly started to bash away at the keyboard when an interruption came in the form of the phone.

An agitated social worker insisted on talking to her about the girl...(fill in) brought in by Cushion and Ahmed and interviewed by Leibnitz.

Apparently, the girl had opened up to the social worker. Yes a boyfriend of Pakistani origin had been involved in her move to Norwich. BUT and it was a big BUT things were a lot more complicated than that.

Firstly, the girl had been abused by her stepfather from a very early age, about eleven. The man drugged her mother with sleeping tablets and then sexually abused young Carly.

A combination of threats and rewards were used to ensure that her mother never found out. Carly detested her stepfather and as early as twelve had turned to alcohol, tobacco and most probably drugs. She could not manage a double lesson at school and had to nip out for a cigarette.

Her teachers found her difficult. Instead of attempting to find out what lay at the bottom of her aberrant behaviour they found it easier to pander to her whims. The Social Worker said that teachers were not to blame as the deluge of legislation had rendered their job almost impossible. And, let's not forget the job of a teacher is to teach.

However, notwithstanding these facts she felt that the police should be made aware of what had happened to the girl at home.

Before Leibnitz had chance to respond the social worker continued with even more disturbing revelations.

According to Carly, She and others are being run by a gang of British Pakistanis and a couple of Afghans. The girls are run out of taxi companies, takeaways and shops. Those that they trust, such as Carly, were allowed to go out on the street. Before that she was driven to various locations and made to have sex with men either singly or in groups. If she did not agree she was beaten, put in a small dark room and starved; no sex no food. In one encounter she was plied with vodka until almost senseless and raped by a number of men, she lost count of the exact number. The modus operandi involved recruiting girls like Carly at places where youngsters congregated, take aways and other fast food outlets in the poorer parts of the city. Trusted girls acted as recruiters and had procured others as young as 12. They first of all befriended the girls found out about their home life and concentrated on the more vulnerable ones with problems at home and school. All the girls were sweetened with food, alcohol, money and drugs. The 'Honey Monsters' as Carly and her colleagues were known as then gradually introduced them to having sex with their 'masters'. Another way of tying the girls into the gang involved introducing them to harder drugs such as heroin.

The girls were all imprisoned in flats above the takeaways and taxi offices.

Whilst the social worker seemed intent on giving Leibnitz the low down on this sordid operation the young constable was increasingly mindful of the fact that she was preparing for the team meeting.

She interrupted the social worker,

'Look I am sorry to interrupt you but it is not my department. If you give me a moment I am going to put you back to the switchboard. They will then put you through to the correct department'

'Well they told me that you were the person to speak to!' came the miffed response

'Who told you?'

'A constable Gayde'

Immediately, Leibnitz pictured in her mind the 50 year old deadbeat that she had worked with for a while. A hissy, fussy, posturing little shit who always liked to wear a white bullet proof vest. Leibnitz had accused him of thinking he was the lone ranger. That always used to agitate him. Another of his peculiarities was cuffing folk as often as he could. 'Nowhere man' accurately described Gayde as did the words 'hero in his own mind'.

'Well, I apologise for him making a mistake. I'll put you back to the switchboard'

'Ok, no wonder fewer and fewer people have confidence in you lot'

Leibnitz refused to rise to the bait and put the woman back to the switch board.

She then dialled another number,

'Gayde, why did you put that social worker through to me?' she asked

'Well you lot and the wonderful Blunt seem to be dealing with all this sex stuff so I thought this'd be one for you'

'Grow up 'Lone Ranger' the silence informed her of his bristling at his nickname; it caused her to smile with satisfaction. It was nice to get a little of your own back on such a shit!

'Fuck off' and a slamming of the phone his curt response.

She continued to bash away at the key board: this time uninterrupted. She put down all the facts she had discovered from talking with the officers at Weybridge and the journalists from the Times. She could not wait to let the rest of the team know what she had discovered.

BLUNT AND ANJII

His heart ached as he remembered Anjii.

It was the Saturday that they were checking into the halls of residence. Cars of all descriptions were attempting to park in the college drive: as close as possible so that they did not have as far to carry their little darlings' belongings. It had seemed to Blunt at the time that the bigger the vehicle the closer to the hall they attempted to park.

Both he and his mother had felt a little out of things. Their battered Mini struck a discordant note amongst the Volvo's Jaguars, Mercedes, BMWs and the odd Bentley and Rolls Royce.

He had noticed her alighting from her father's anthracite Volvo estate. He was immediately struck by her. She seemed possessed of a luminous vivaciousness. He hoped that she would be on his landing, or even better, next door to him. She had long and lustrous black hair parted in the middle and falling gently off her shoulders. Her skin the colour of caramac chocolate had a healthy sheen. Her lips were full and her face symmetrical apart from the slightly upturned nose that enhanced the prettiness. Like all males Blunt was also drawn to her perfectly proportioned body, especially the breasts, in a five foot two high package.

Another that forced his attention on Blunt and drew the approbation of his mother, was a large blustering Asian in an ancient Bentley. He barged his way to the staircase oblivious of both anyone in his way and his son, a short skinny lad, whom he continuously chided to hurry up. The poor boy looked positively embarrassed by his father.

As luck would have it Anjii, the Asian girl's room was situated between those of Blunt and the Asian boy, Rafique. Anjii's father was dentist from Braintree. A Pashtun he had come to England in the early fifties. He had worked in factories and saved enough money to pay his way through a dental course at Leicester University in the early sixties. Anjii was his pride and joy in more ways than one. Not only was she pretty but she was also a bright and conscientious worker. This had won her a place on the History of Art course. Although her father would have preferred law or even dentistry he opined that he was more than grateful for what he and his wife had achieved.

Rafique's father by way of contrast had arrived in the UK in the late fifties and with money. Also from a Pashtun background he had arrived with ample funds donated by his tribal leader family. They had noticed that the first wave of immigrants was investing in small shops. The Khan's were going to establish a wholesale business to service these shops. They were devout Muslims and would use this and their position as tribal leaders to ensure that the Asian shops did business with the. The Khans were not used to being denied: and for whatever reason it transpired that they were not!

When all the parents had disappeared the 'freshers' emerged from their rooms and began to excitedly explore the facilities. Blunt, fortuitously bumped into Anjii who invited him to her room for a coffee: he jumped at the chance.

They soon found that they shared many interests, literature and music. Blunt preferred the progressive rock bands whilst Anjii had a penchant for the melancholy folk of Leonard Cohen and others. However, they both took delight in discovering and appreciating each other's choices. As time went by they also took delight in discovering and appreciating each other's bodies.

On that first day Rafique had also been smitten by Anjii. However, she did not really have much time for the short and ugly boy, even though he was Asian. Her nature dictated that she was polite to him and even accepted his company. In some ways he reminded her of one of Charles Dickens's characters, Uriah Heep, more in manner than looks: although he did possess the same scant eyebrows as that fictional character.

He constantly asked what he could do for her, whether she wanted a coffee, whether he could carry her books, whether she would go out with him. She gently refused to go out with him but she did allow him to make her coffee and to occasionally carry her heavy art books.

He had never met an Asian girl like her and expressed even more surprise when she informed him of her Muslim faith. He chided her for not saying prayers on Friday evening instead of indulging in alcohol with Blunt. Although relatively quiet he was exceptionally persistent: he stuck to her and Blunt like a leech. That persistence had enabled him to sail through the college interview and to achieve four good A level results and win a place on the law course.

Blunt often asked her why she tolerated him and why she allowed him to often play the gooseberry. The simple answer: she felt sorry for him. For her sake Blunt also tolerated Rafique. So much so that the Asian boy often referred to Blunt as his friend. Although what friend would attempt to steal the other's girlfriend? It did not bother Patel as he believed that Anjii should not be associating with a non believer.

Over the first two years of their studies Blunt and Anjii had grown closer and frequently discussed getting married. Still they were dogged by Rafique. Over the two years he had outgrown his quiet shyness. He had founded the Muslim society and joined the Labour Party society. He had persuaded Anjii to attend a couple of meetings of the former without Blunt: she found the members a little too earnest and sexist for her taste.

On being informed of their intentions he profusely congratulated the couple. However, inwardly he vowed that he would put a stop to it: the girl would be his. He informed his father of the state of affairs. The man was horrified. He couldn't abide the thought of his son losing a Muslim girl to a non-believer. How had her parents allowed her to act in such a way?

In the Pakistani community Mr Patel generally got his way: and he cared little for how he did it. He always rationalised that he was acting in the best interests of his faith. He discovered that most of Ashraf's dental patients were Muslims. That determined his next step, it gave him leverage. Initially, Ashraf was not receptive to Patel senior's overtures. Yes, he would like his daughter to marry a Muslim but he wanted his wife, daughter and himself to pick the bridegroom. And anyway he found Patel obnoxious.

Unfortunately, the young Patel had acquired his persistence from his father. He informed Ashraf that unless Anjii and Rafique were betrothed he would lose all his Muslim

customers. Thus at one fell stroke the dentist would lose seventy five percent of his business. No surprise then that the two Muslims became betrothed!

Blunt, oblivious to the new state of affairs, meanwhile carried on planning for the European rail trip the lovers were to shortly embark on. However, a phone call from Anjii's aunt appraised him of the situation. The aunt had been ostensibly ostracized by the family not only because she had married an Englishman but also because she had turned her back on Islam and converted to Anglicanism. The two lovers had regularly used her as a go between. And it is where he rang Anjii when they were apart and vice versa.

The aunt explained things to the distraught young man and advised him of the perils and futility of attempting to intervene. She outlined to him some of the customs of Islam and the Pashtun region. Her situation had been different as she had not been involved with people such as Rafique Patel's family.

The young man's mother continually upbraided him for moping round, telling him to pull himself together and asking why he didn't find himself a Jewish girl for example. That shocked him as his mother had never said anything like that before; he never picked up on it. He could not wait for the final year to start. He would be able to see Anjii and have it out with her.

On the weekend before term Blunt was at college early on the Saturday morning. He discovered Anjii's room and resolved to catch her shortly after her arrival. His impatience mounting with each passing minute he kept look out until dark on the Saturday, all day Sunday and was about to give up at dusk.

Then as the gloom deepened a newish Bentley, headlights ablaze, swept into the car park, scrunching to a halt on the gravel. He watched in horror as his ex-girlfriend stepped out of the car wearing a veil and sari and ushered by Rafique and his father. Her body language indicated that she had lost that vivaciousness that spark that made her such a joy to be with. He vowed to confront her in the morning.

He attempted to confront her several times over the next few weeks, all to no avail. She refused to answer his questions and with teary eyes and a resigned air pleaded with him to leave her alone for both their sakes. Eventually Rafique confronted Blunt and advised him that if he did not cease stalking and pestering his fiancé then he would report him to the college and university authorities. Blunt exploded and punched Patel in the face with as much power as he could muster. Blood splattered over both young men from Khan's broken nose. The latter wailingly collapsed to the floor in a crumpled heap.

The upshot Blunt was sent down and told to think himself lucky as Patel did not wish to press charges. After much pleading the college and university authorities allowed him to return the following summer to sit his finals. He scraped a 2.2 and heard that Anjii, his bright Anjii, had got a third. Rafique on the other hand won a first. That led to traineeship with a leading chamber in Lincoln's Inn. Thus began his rise in law progressing to his inexorable drive towards the political summit. Each time his face appeared on the television or his name mentioned on the radio or in the press, Blunt's stomach churned and he thought of Anjii.

He had never formed a close relationship with another woman but had experienced a numerous unsatisfactory relationships over the years. All of them asked if he had another

woman: if only they knew the half of it. Indeed over the last five years he had been celibate.

Then a year ago out of the blue he had received a letter from Anjii a week or so after the news reported the death of Khan's wife. The sod had milked it for every single political advantage available; and then more.

The letter rekindled his hatred whilst simultaneously breaking his heart once more. She had said how when he received the letter she would be dead. She told him that she had always loved and always would love him. She asked for forgiveness for hurting him but explained that the Patel's had put pressure on her family that left her with no choice.

She often dreamed of the life they could have had, the children they could have had and then growing old together. She had vowed that she would never give Rafique or his vile family the satisfaction of bearing children with him.

She explained that his public persona as dutiful husband was as much a sham as his unctuous political persona. He indulged himself with his Muslim maidens and more besides. She ended by saying sorry once more and how she could no longer bear to live. Her beloved father had died recently. Therefore the Khans no longer had a hold over the family.

AFTER THE MEETING

As they walked towards Cushion's tiny office Ahmed turned to Flint

'Have you any idea what that was all about?'

'No' responded Flint, 'you will have to tell me more about Rafique Khan'.

'Over dinner perhaps' the other threw out semi seriously but with a hint of hope.

'Ok' came the coquettish response as she fingered her hair

'Friday?' the immediate response.

'No, I'm going back to London to see my kids'

'Thursday?' hope beginning to disappear.

'You're on, let's get started on our tasks. John is fine as long as you do the job'

He noted her use of Blunt's first name and resolved to ask about the rumours and Khan's comment.

When they got to Cushion's office they found Leibnitz already hitting the phones and in mid-flow to the fire department's investigator.

'Yes I appreciate that you have only just got back from the fire- scene BUT if we are to catch who did it we need answers quickly.....yes I appreciate there are only so many hours in a day.....yes I appreciate that it takes time for forensic tests.....many thanks that's much appreciated'

Mrs Fletcher's telephone number popped into Blunt's head unbidden. He automatically dialled the number. Surely she could not still live at the same address and have the same number, apart from code changes, after all these years.

Remarkably Mrs Fletcher answered the phone fairly quickly. He recognized her voice although it sounded decidedly older and much shakier. Stunned for the moment he said nothing,

'Hello, Hello is anyone there?' the voice became a little concerned

'Mrs Fletcher?'

'John, John Blunt is it you?'

'yes'

'I have been expecting your call for years. I almost called you but then the news said that you were being investigated over irregularities in some of the things you did to bring those awful people to justice'

'I have toyed with the idea for years but each time I stopped because the pain became too much'

'I understand' she said gently, 'you probably want to talk about Anjii'

'Yes, I do but I also want to ask you what you know about Rafique Khan'

He heard a slight intake of breath at the other end and he waited for her silence to end

'Ok I'll tell you what I know BUT and I emphasise BUT I will never state what I have to say publicly. Most of it is conjecture and what my brother and Anjii had to say.' She paused again, 'John I must ask you whether you are speaking to me as Anjii's boyfriend or as John Blunt the policeman?'

'Mrs Fletcher...'

'Please call me Robyn. It is the anglicized version of my name'

'Ok, I am talking to you as both BUT and I also emphasise BUT your name will never come up in anything or anywhere'

'Thank you. I am getting old and I have a weak heart that they tell me may give up at any time. So I wouldn't like to spend the last of my days either in a courtroom or looking over my shoulder expecting the Khans or one of their troglodytes to tap me on the shoulder'

'I appreciate that. Tell me about Anjii'

'I only got to see her a few times over the years but my brother and sister in law were distraught about what was happening. He wished he had never agreed to the marriage and had let the Khans do their worst. He believed that they would all have been much happier, although poorer. As time went by and he saw the torture that Anjii was experiencing he began to look more and more haggard'

'What do you mean torture?' Blunt questioned through gritted teeth, 'What did he do to harm her?'

'Rafique did not abuse her physically. He abused her mentally because she would not bend to his wishes apart from marrying him. She would not give him a child. He sent her away to a mental institution in Pakistan for a couple of years. She lost weight and became skeletal and gaunt. She developed all sorts of respiratory and intestinal problems. No doubt a great deal of it caused by the stress of the situation. She also worried about her father because his health began to rapidly deteriorate. In the end a couple of years ago he committed suicide. Anjii was distraught and began to lose even more weight. Khan goaded her about how she had lost her looks, how you despised her and how he took comfort from real Muslim women'

'The bastard!' Blunt exploded

'Her mother was lost without my brother and came to live with me. She converted to Christianity and I like to think it gave her a measure of comfort. However, I saw her melt away. She hardly ate and then at the beginning of last year she went to sleep and didn't wake up. I saw Anjii at the funeral and Khan allowed her to come to the little party that I gave afterwards. We managed to have a chat'

'How did she look?'

'A mess. She told me to tell you that she had always and would always love you. She gave me the letter and instructed me to get it to you when she had died. I asked her what she meant and she told me. I tried to argue with her to no avail'

'Why did she not go to a women's refuge and get hold of me'

'John. John you're meant to be a policeman don't be so naive. You know as well as I do what happens to Muslim women that go into those places. You know that within twenty four hours the place is surrounded by Asian men and even women looking to 'liberate' their own kind. Windows are smashed, fires are set and the buildings are stormed. Some of the poor women then disappear, forever. You know as well as I do that these things happen all over the country where there is a significant Muslim population. And it is never reported!'

Blunt signified his agreement with a quick 'yes'.

'You know that Anjii would never have even got anywhere near one of those places. And anyway when she came to the funeral she had two of Khan's goons with her. It was a miracle they allowed her to go into another room with me'

'Why did she not contact me or get you to contact me?'

'She thought that you would never forgive her and that you would hold her to blame for you being sent down. And don't forget Khan had convinced her that you hated her. She also hated herself for how she looked. What you don't understand John is that for a great deal of the time she couldn't think straight and from what my brother told me she drifted in and out of lucidity'

Despite his heart thumping and his mind now in a total state of turmoil he now wanted to know more about the things that Anjii had alluded to in her letter.

'In her letter she said that Khan's public and private personae were at odds. What did she mean by that?'

'You know that Rafique became involved with the defence of the Bradford Eight as they were known?'

'Yes, it helped make his name as a barrister' responded Blunt.

'True BUT it brought him into contact with the radical Muslim element and their Imams in the mosques. When the Russians invaded Afghanistan Rafique went to Pakistan to visit his family. When he returned he persuaded his father to insist that all their customers paid money towards a fund to help the faithful fight the infidel. He also set up a collection procedure at all the mosques. People were shamed into giving money. My brother said that he had heard that people who showed dissent or did not give were put in purdah, I mean the English not the Muslim sense of the word'

'Anything else happen to them?'

'Yes, I believe that some of them were beaten up'

'Instigated by Khan?' enquired Blunt

'I couldn't possibly say. BUT don't forget he implemented this with his extremist friends. In the mosques calls went out for volunteers to go to Pakistan to train to fight with the Mujahedeen. Many did. Sometime in the early eighties he went to one of these camps. He came across a man that entranced him. A man that acted as a paymaster for the cause and apparently possessed of great courage. In addition he also possessed phenomenal organisational and administrative skills. He came from a wealthy Saudi family and also contributed his own money to the cause'

'What is his name?' interjected Blunt

'I think his name is Osama Bin Laden'

'Never heard of him' said Blunt

'Neither have I' responded Robyn 'but he was considered important enough for Rafique to meet him in London with his brother in 1986 to discuss arms purchases for the Mujahedeen. He bragged to Anjii that he had become part of the establishment. Not long afterwards he stood for a safe Labour seat'

Blunt remembered seeing something on the news about the incumbent Asian MP standing down to spend more time with his family.

Whilst Blunt talked with Robyn Fletcher, Ahmed and Cushion quickly got onto the photofit guy and shot down to the basement where he resided. They went through the paraphernalia of being shown a myriad, noses, ears, eyes lips, skin shades etc. Finally after an hour he had come up with Ahmed's version of the Patel in the shop. After another half an hour he had come up with a photofit for the girl. Cushion took half the time, probably because the guy already had a template of sorts to work from.

Ahmed dragged a protesting photofit guy up to Blunt's office. The man winged about it being past his 'finish' time. Ahmed witheringly threw at him that they were trying to find the people responsible for the horrific death of two small children as well as two adults. How would he feel if it were his children and no-one could be bothered to make a little extra effort. That shut the guy up.

He knocked on Blunt's door and entered as bidden. God the guy looked a mess. He looked as if he had the weight of the world on his shoulders? He wondered what the hell linked him and Rafique Khan. He consoled himself with thinking that he would find out soon enough.

Thirty minutes later Blunt had finished and the photofit guy went off to produce a composite of the three views. Half an hour later Ahmed put a copy on Blunt's desk

Blunt looked at Ahmed

'Get this out to the media....and include the national media this time. I want to know what those two bastards were doing with the Patels and what they were doing generally!'

'Ok. I'll get onto it right away' responded Saeed starting to turn away.

'No wait' came a sharp retort from Blunt

He leaned back in his chair, closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose with the thumb and forefinger of his right hand, his left drummed the desk.

'No, do not do the nationals just yet. Get hold of Rafique and tell him that we are thinking of going to the nationals. Ask him to make an announcement as well. A direct appeal to the Asian community and the mosques. A good multi-culturist he should not have a problem with that!'

Blunt looked at his watch

'It is late and it has been a long day for us all. No doubt there will be many more long days before we get to the bottom of this. You and the team better knock off. Get some rest. I will see you in the morning'

'I want to get this out to the local press. AND then I want to get hold of Khan.'

'Ok tell the others to knock off'

'They're staying late to get as much done tonight as possible'

'Jesus,' retorted Blunt 'We have no overtime budget!'

'That's ok boss. None of us are going to claim it. We just want to get this business sorted. The same as you'

Blunt wearily shook his head as Saeed left the room.

Simultaneously to Blunt and Saeed going about their business Flint and Leibnitz had been far from idle. They had decided that once they had a photofit picture it would be a good idea to go around all the Asian shops, takeaways, restaurants and taxi firms in the city. However, they had first of all had to get a list of the same. Leibnitz suggested that they contact the council rates department and pester them for the names of the such businesses. The employee at the other end of the line informed them that home time was fast approaching. They used the same tactic as Ahmed to shame her into helping them.

She tried to wriggle out of helping them more than necessary when she advised that the names would only take them so far. Many businesses that were Asian owned kept the original English names; takeaways and restaurant's mostly the exception. Flint then stated that proprietors resided at the premises, or at least some of their relatives did. Surely, for the sake of two small children the woman could run a programme that put the residents to the addresses. The council employee grudgingly acquiesced. They had their list.

They split the list three ways when Steve Cushion returned from the photofit session and steadily worked through it. They were coming to the end when Ahmed came in.

Flint explained what they had come up with and asked whether they should make a start on some of the establishments. Saeed checked his watch and said that they had all better call it a day. They could start on it in the morning.

When they had all gone he rang Khan on the number he had been given, a mobile. It went straight into answer mode. He left a message. Within five minutes Khan came on the line.

'Well Saeed what have you got for me' Khan purred, 'I haven't got too long we are in session'

'Not much. Blunt has got a photofit of two of our people who may have burnt down a newsagents here in Norwich. He is wanting to go national with it tonight!'

He heard the laboured breathing at the other end of the line. Then Khan responded

'Hold it back as long as you can. I'm not bothered what excuses you use. You know as well as I do that something like this could have race relations implications. You know as well as I do that some of the more hot-headed elements in our community see racism in the most strange of places'

Saeed had to hand it to the oily bastard. The usual platitudes and political spin were coming out ten to the dozen. He obviously did not want this to go national and why not?

The policeman could not help now throwing in Blunt's suggestion.

'Mr Khan I have way in which we can potentially defuse such a possibility and enhance your reputation as a peacemaker and a multiculturalist.'

'And what is that?' a cautious response from Khan.

'Well sir why don't you make a direct appeal on TV and radio tonight or tomorrow morning asking our people to come forward if they know or have seen either of the people we wish to question as part of our enquiries'

'Don't get clever Saeed. Don't say a word to Blunt about what you have just suggested. Keep me informed' came the pithy response followed by the phone being cut off.

'Goodbye to you too' Ahmed said to himself.

He returned to Blunt's office and let him know about the rest of the team and more importantly his conversation with Khan.

'Do you think he will make an announcement?' he asked his boss

'Hard to say' responded Blunt

'Sir, I think you have something you're not telling us all. I also think that you have something up your sleeve. It would be good if you could tell us. It would be good if you would trust us'

'I'll tell you tomorrow. Go back to your hotel and get some rest'

THE TAKEAWAYS AND RESTAURANTS

Saeed, Flint, Cushion and Leibnitz traipsed into the police headquarters just as the sun's first rays struck the cathedral spire. The streets were relatively quiet and empty. They had grabbed coffees in polystyrene cups from a greasy spoon café illegally parked in a small layby just beyond the large roundabout close to the headquarters.

'What?' Ahmed had exclaimed in mock indignation when Flint looked on quizzically as he ordered a bacon and sausage sandwich with an extra helping of tomato ketchup. 'I've told you I'm not religious!'

She smiled benignly and informed him that hers was a cappuccino no sugar and that as he seemed to be in the driving seat he better get coffees for Cushion and Leibnitz.

They sat at the small desks and surveyed the debris of paper from the previous evening.

'You're worse than a kid' Flint playfully laughed as Ahmed sunk his teeth into the bacon and sausage monstrosity and squirted a large dollop of ketchup over some of the previous evening's work.

As luck would have it Norwich was not especially well endowed with Indian restaurants takeaways and taxi companies. However there were still fifty one. They managed to halve the number geographically. Within an hour they had sorted out their itineraries and had hit the road. Saeed and Leibnitz took the east side and Flint and Cushion the west side.

By lunchtime Flint and Cushion were wet and miserable. Their shoes were sodden from constantly having to run from the car to a building and sometimes having to wait for minutes before someone came to the door.

They had covered ten of the addresses on their list. It had been a chastening and a frustrating morning. They had been met with a gamut of responses ranging from the suspicious to the downright hostile. The latter had been from a youngish group of males in a taxi company on Magdalen Road.

As Cushion and Flint walked through the door she felt the piercing gaze of the five males on her. A mix of contempt and lust crossed their faces as she almost physically felt their eyes ripping her clothes from her shred by shred. Their mood changed to hostility when the warrant cards were presented.

They barely looked at the photofits before stating that they had never seen the man and woman before. They thrust the pictures back at the police. Flint held onto the picture of the man and thrust it back out to them again

'Look again please! We are looking for these people as to help us with our enquiries into the fire in the early hours of yesterday morning in which five people died'

No-one took the picture. They stared silently at Flint. The incessant chatter from the firm's car radios intermingled with the sound of the traffic from the busy road outside and the constantly ringing phones.

'We do not know these people. We have already told you. It's good you people do something about what happens to our people. But always too little too late and half hearted! We are busy. We have nothing to say'

With that he turned around and answered one of the phones and signalled to one of the others to answer the drivers' radio. He then turned to one of the others and told him to be at the station in ten minutes for a fare to Costessey.

Flint strode further into the office and picked up a piece of paper and pen from the desk and asked each of them to write their names on it.

The ring leader informed Flint that they didn't have to comply and her behaviour could be construed as harassment. However, they would comply. He spoke to the others in a language other than English and each of them took the paper and wrote on it.

'In English, please' an irritated Flint threw the paper back on the desk

The young man, with the beard, smirked

'You should have said so'

In the car Cushion and Flint discussed the scene in the taxi office. They then continued to complete what would prove to be a fruitless task.

Meanwhile Ahmed and Leibnitz encountered similar responses but with one crucial difference! The younger Asians regarded the former with more contempt than they had Flint. At one takeaway on Queen's Road Ahmed and Leibnitz both felt that the occupants, again bearded young men, had something to hide. When they asked if they could look around a curt 'no' came as the instant reply. Followed by, 'You would need a search warrant'. They both knew that a search warrant wouldn't be issued on the grounds of two officers' gut instincts.

At a taxi office on Dereham Road the religiously bearded occupants were even more hostile. As well as leering lewdly at Leibnitz they spat in front of Ahmed. All the while telling him that a fate worse than death awaited him as he had obviously betrayed Islam, the one true religion. They also made lewd and rude remarks about what they would do with Leibnitz. Of course they spoke in Pashtun: Leibnitz could not possibly be a witness as she understood nothing. Through clenched teeth the policeman held out the pictures and asked if they had recently seen or knew the couple. They barely glanced at them before throwing them back in Ahmed's direction: knowing they would fall to the floor. Seething he stooped to pick them up. These guys knew the limits and were careful to stay just the right side of them

Something niggled Leibnitz during the play acting. Her brow furrowed as she fought to drag it to the forefront of her mind. Then she got it!

'Gentlemen' Leibnitz interjected well aware of the atmosphere 'What can you tell us about Carly Jones?'

They whirled around looking at the policewoman with utter contempt. Ahmed also turned towards his colleague wondering what the hell she was talking about.

'Don't know what you talking about police lady. We don't know a Carly Jones' retorted the ring leader jutting out his chin. Tall and wiry he towered over the others at about 6'4".

Leibnitz noted that he did not say 'who' but used Carly's name.

'Really. Then can you explain why she mentioned that you ran her from here and other underage white girls?' she attempted and succeeded in keeping any trace of sarcasm out of her voice.

Ahmed saw the hesitation in the guy's eyes before he recovered

'Lady, I don't know what you are talking about. Me and my boys' he motioned towards the others with an exaggerated sweeping motion of his arm. 'just run a taxi business. We don't have nothing to do with white trash whores'

'She says differently. Do you mind if we take a look around?'

Ahmed noticed a scrawny kid of about twenty two look nervously at the guy next to him

'Get a search warrant lady' spat out the leader with a burst of bravado

.The two sides stood looking at each for what seemed an eternity. All the while the relentless chatter of the speaker relaying messages from the drivers and the ringing of the phones formed a noisy backdrop to the stand off. Ahmed broke the deadlock.

'Come on Mel. These guys know nothing. We've got a load of other places to get to'

As they left one of the other guys intoned to their backs in Pashtun 'These reasons would make someone's blood permissible to spill and his wealth permissible to usurp because he is no longer a Muslim!'

'What the hell was all that about?' asked Leibnitz

'It doesn't matter' responded her thoughtful colleague 'but more to the point what the hell were you on about?' he demanded.

'Remember the girl you and Cushion brought in?'

'Yeah'

'Well the social services officer dealing with her told me.....' she went on to recount what the social services woman had told her. Ahmed listened in silence.

'What do you think?' Leibnitz enquired

'I don't know, I really don't know'

'There's a mosque down here. Let's go and pay it a visit'

When they found the place, a non-descript turn of the century redbrick former small school, Ahmed managed to barge his way in. Again a barrage of latent hostility hit the pair. The few males in the mosque stated that they had never seen the couple in the photofit pictures. A furtive glance between two of them made Leibnitz doubt the sincerity of their responses. She asked for and eventually extracted their names and addresses.

Whilst she was doing that Ahmed had wondered over to the notice board.

Old posters from a few weeks previous announced a talk by the Imam from the Finsbury Park Mosque. This was to be followed by a session on Islam in the modern world.

Another poster announced the attendance of Abu Salif, who had fought the Russians in Afghanistan.

On a table there lay a pamphlet entitled 'The Struggle'. He flicked through it. The views in it disturbed him.

They arrived back at the tiny office late afternoon wet and disconsolate. They shared their findings: meagre pickings at the most. However, they all thought it worth investigating further both the takeaway, the two taxi firms and the mosque. However, when it came to the underage prostitutes vice should be the ones covering the case. He gave Leibnitz the task of checking whether that squad had done anything yet or not: he suspected not!

'Debbie and Steve I want you both to check up on the names that we have taken. Find out their background, see if we have anything on them. Melanie can you remember where on the list the scrawny little bugger at the Dereham Road taxi office wrote his name? He knows something and I think he could be the weak link. Whether it is anything to do with our investigation who knows. But something is happening and whatever it is it will be useful to some of our colleagues, if not us'

Flint took out the piece of paper she had picked up from the other taxi office that had been overly hostile and unfolded it. As she did so Saeed caught side of the printing on the other side

'Let me look at that' he held out his hand.

His face blanched when he saw the subject matter. He asked and was told where the material had come from. He told her to get a photocopy for him. He then said that they had better get on with their tasks

'What are you going to do Ahmed?' enquired Flint

'I am going to make a few phone calls' came the short reply.

After they had left the office Ahmed rang an old Imam that he knew. Ashraf did not have a violent or aggressive gene in his body. He did not criticize Ahmed and he did not attempt to cajole him to return to the ways of Allah. If Allah wanted Ahmed to return to Islam then it would be so. Ashraf believed that Islam in modern democracies had to adapt. He held no truck with those who espoused the belief that women were inferior: after all the prophet had never said any such thing. Ashraf's guiding principles came from Sufism, which is based on mystic Islamic traditions and tolerance of all religions and peoples.

'Ashraf, Ahmed Saeed here, how are you?'

'Getting old my young friend. And how are you?'

'I'm so so. I need some information from you'

'Do you ever call for anything else? I didn't think that you desired a learned discussion regarding the teachings of the prophet'

'Now you make me feel guilty'

'It is not that that you should feel guilty about. When did you last see your parents?'

'I know, I know. I do mean to go and see them but I have a new assignment and I have been busy and I need some information from you about some people. If you know anything that is'

'About whom do you require information? I trust that you are not making an, how do you say, informer of me? The old man gently laughed

'No, of course not. I need to know about Saleh Hussein'

A highly audible sharp intake of breath came from the other end of the line, followed by a long silence.

'Ashraf, are you still there?'

'Yes. Dear boy it is obvious that you have very little to do with your own people. Are we your people anymore?'

Ahmed ignored the question

'Who is this man?'

'A dangerous man, a charlatan who poisons the minds of our young people here and in other Western countries. There is a battle raging in our communities and mosques for the hearts and minds of our young people...'

'That's a bit dramatic Ashraf' interjected Ahmed

'Not at all and it is something that you would have seen if you had not become divorced from your own people. The Young Muslim Organisation follows the tenets of Abul Ala Maududi. His brand of Islam is highly politicized and anti-western. He believes in waging an all out war against non-believers. The young women who espouse his beliefs wear the niqab. Maududi's brand of Islam believes in waging war against all non-believers until the world is Islam, or their form of Islam. They particularly believe in waging war against Jews, homosexuals and Muslim women who do not wear the Niquab.

Now Hussein has taken Maududi views even further. To the outside he attempts to present a moderate view but you only have to look at his writings to see what his true colours are. Then there are his activities in the new mosques that they have set up such as the 'East London Mosque' . There they preach Jihad in its most extreme and virulent form. They believe that anything justifies the goal of Islamic world domination. I spoke to Hussein and he told me that he had offered religious guidance on the permissibility in Islam to kill the women and children of the kaffur. We won't stop jihad but we don't intentionally target those people. But even if we intentionally target them . . . we have a religious legitimacy in doing that .How many Muslims have been killed? How many of our children have been killed? If they kill one of us it is our duty to kill thousands of them. There is no such thing as an innocent unbeliever'

'They are preaching that in our mosques?' Ahmed stated with horror

'That is not all. They justify bank robbing activities from usurious/infidel institutions on religious grounds because the stolen funds will be re-directed for the jihad cause.'

'Have you or anyone else said anything about this? What about Rafique Khan?'

'It has been made plain to us what will happen if we say anything about it. We will be regarded as enemies of Islam and the Jihad and it will be their duty to mete out to us the same punishment, death as to the Kaffur!' he paused to catch his breath 'You asked about Khan. I do not know where he stands. All I know is that he encouraged our youngsters to wage holy war against the Russians in Afghanistan. They came back radicalized and energized. They spoke of another great believer in Maududi, one Osama Bin Laden. I am told that Bin Laden made a great impression on Khan. But one thing Ahmed'

'What is that?'

'You never heard any of this from me'

'No you're fine and many thanks. Look after yourself now.'

'You too and don't forget to go and see your parents'

Ahmed sat and pondered for a while. He then picked up the pamphlet he had taken from the mosque, 'The Struggle'. He flicked through the pages with a heightening sense of disquiet.

Siddiqui the author espoused the same world view as the other extremists. The book advocated using a variety of methods to destroy the non-believers. One method involved eliminating and destroying western Democracies from within by enslaving the women and children of the unbelievers and using them as weapons against them.

Other methods involved Muslim lawyers bringing actions against anyone that said anything detrimental about Islam. All the infidel's laws were to be used against them, race etc. Simultaneously, the press were to be targeted by any means necessary including fire bombs intimidation of journalists and their families. On and on went the methods that were acceptable and most of them were illegal. Siddiqui could be prosecuted for incitement to crime.

BLUNT AND THE RUSSIANS

Blunt suffered a troubled night beset with nightmares of a dead and decomposing Anjii running towards him and away from a knife carrying Rafique Khan with a niqab over his arm. He awoke on several occasions with a dry mouth and drenched in sweat. Each time he took a swig of the bottle of water he kept on his bedside table.

He started the day his mind suffused with feelings of remorse for Anjii and feelings of revenge towards Rafique Khan. Not exactly the best of moods in which to start a new unit. Or to determine whether several murders fell within the purview of the new unit.

His team would no doubt be pounding the pavements attempting to determine whether anyone in the Asian business community had seen or knew the man and woman in the photo fits.

He assumed that was the case when he arrived at headquarters and none of his team were in their small office. No sooner had he sat down at his desk than he received a call from the fire investigator.

'I've pulled out all the stops on this one and thought I'd let you know the first scrap, excuse the pun, of information that I have discovered. Miraculously a small scrap of cloth from close to where we believe the blaze started survived. Every piece of cotton contains the imprint or DNA, as it were of where it originates from. This particular piece of cotton hails from Uzbekistan. This ex-Soviet Republic supplied 99% of the Soviet Union's cotton and it now supplies 99% of Russia's cotton. I'll let you know when I have more.'

Blunt thanked him and rang off. His brow furrowed as thoughts of muddied waters crossed his mind. He grabbed the phone and punched in the number of the pathologist. He managed to get hold of Snelling himself. The miserable old bugger stated that ordinarily he would not provide info at this stage but he considers these to be special circumstances. All the people died from asphyxiation. They were unable to get out of the house because their hands and feet were bound.

Blunt extrapolated that the killer or killers had intended that the occupants die such a slow and horrendous death. Snelling retorted that he had no evidence of that but it did seem as if that were the case.

Blunt enquired as to the ages of the deceased. Snelling's answer advised him that the two Asians they were seeking were not amongst the deceased. Where were they? Someone somewhere had to know of them and their whereabouts. Again did any of this have anything to do with his unit?

A knock on his door preceded the entry of the desk sergeant clutching several pieces of paper.

'These came through last night and earlier this morning' the officer handed the documents to Blunt.

'What are they?' came the instinctive response

'I believe that they are the details of several people who claim to have seen the two Russians at some time or other.'

Blunt examined the documents. They did indeed contain statements from people who had seen the two Russians, Morski and Pidrik, on the night of the girl Gruberova's death.

GATHERING STATEMENTS

Blunt drove down Hall Road and turned left at the roundabout that met Lilac Road. He turned left again and then drove into the MacDonald's car park: there being nowhere to park at the Q8 petrol station.

On entering the shop he noticed a young man tall, thin and sharply dressed speaking down to someone in staff uniform. His patronising explanation of how things should be stacked on the shelves and other matters grated with Blunt. The object of the dressing down, a dumpy young man in his late teens, exuded resentment. The other pretended not to notice, or more probably was so impervious to others' feelings and body language that he could not detect, the brooding antipathy.

'Mr Bell' Blunt enquired

The young man swung around

'Yes, You must be Chief Inspector Blunt'

'Correct'

'Good, Good, Good.' He strode over to Blunt thrust out his hand and gave him an over firm handshake. A tactic probably taught on a company management course thought Blunt.

'We're only too happy to help the police with their enquiries. Its in all our interest that we all do our bit'

Blunt nodded in agreement

'Good, good, good. If you come this way, Tommy Evans the member of staff is waiting in the back office'

As he led the police officer to the office he turned to the youth and said that he wanted everything done as said when he came back out of the meeting.

Tommy Evans was a callow youth, again late teens or early twenties, afflicted with acne. Probably, caused by not washing enough. He didn't feel comfortable in Blunt's presence: maybe his previous encounters with the law had not been pleasant. However, he provided a statement that put Morski and Pidrik at the station between 11.13pm and 11.28pm. They both alighted from the BMW at the same time. Pidrik to fuel the car whilst Morski browsed the food section.

The manager couldn't control himself and cut in,

'We've got a copy of their bill and CCTV of them both...' a harsh look from Blunt silenced Bell.

'Mr Bell, I will come to that later. I want to conclude taking a statement from Mr Evans first. Whilst I am doing that it would be useful if you could get the video ready so as to save time'

'That's fine. Yes, yes, yes. Good good, good. We managers are always busy'

'What an irritating prick' Blunt thought to himself. 'No wonder the staff were bordering on revolt'

Blunt finished with Evans, watched the video and asked if he could have a copy if required. The obsequious little sod Bell said he would have a copy done that day and dropped off at the station.

On getting into the car his phone rang. An unhappy Strumpshaw, the Chief Constable ordered his presence immediately! The urgency emphasised by the slammed down phone.

Finding the address of Shinton and Ransome had proved more difficult than Flint had imagined; even with the aid of a map. Poringland was a large estate on the southern outskirts of Norwich. As with many developments that had looked to maximise on the housing boom of the eighties the houses were crammed into too small a space. This meant that there were lots of twists and turns and cul-de-sacs. A recipe for getting lost.

Eventually she drew up outside a newish bungalow. A small Nissan Micra old style was parked on the drive down the side of the house.

A diminutive male with a relatively high pitched voice and fluttering hands answered the door and introduced himself as Bobby Ransome. He ushered Flint into an untidy sitting room. A large dark haired man about six foot seven in height and weighing probably 22 stone stood by the sofa. He had piggy eyes and an exceedingly neatly trimmed goatee beard and moustache. Something about the pair made Flint's flesh crawl. She couldn't put her finger on it. He shook Flint's hand and motioned to one of the armchairs.

Ransome, also had a trimmed goatee and moustache, although not as neatly trimmed as that of Shinton. He sat on the sofa, close, very close to Shinton.

Flint first of all covered the formalities and asked the pair to bear with her as it would take her some time to make notes. She took their names, ages and expressed surprise when Shinton stated that he lived at a Paxton House at 23 Dereham Road.

She did not ask them to elaborate on nor was any information volunteered regarding their living arrangements.

She dealt with Shinton first and took out the photographs of Morski and Pidrik that had featured in the media. He stated that he remembered seeing them both at the Attic.

'My Daniel, fancies the little tart that was with em' Ransome excitedly butted in.

Flint thanked him for his contribution and stated that he would get his turn and that she needed to take down statements from each of them independently. Shinton admitted that he found the young man with Morski and Pidrik somewhat attractive. Simultaneously to expressing that opinion he patted Ransome's hand. He remembered looking at the clock because he had noticed the three of them sometime before and thought that they had been together a fair while. Yes, he and Ransome were regular visitors to the Attic and had seen that young boy and several others there on a regular basis. In fact he and Ransome had thought of maybe trying for a threesome with that particular boy. He squeezed Ransome's hand again as he said it. The smaller man smiled with pleasure at the physical contact. Flint asked him whether he had seen Morski and Pidrik again. He answered in the affirmative and gave a time of about 2am.

Ransome added very little to the information provided by Shinton, although he embellished his statement with various catty remarks about people fancying 'his Daniel'.

When she had finished and they had both signed their statements she asked if it would be ok to contact them again if she needed some further information. Both answered in the affirmative.

She thought about their statements as she drove to Stalham where her next interviewee, Michael Loveday and Blunt resided. Not that they resided together. She reckoned that Loveday's flat should be relatively easy to locate as it was Flat 2, The Pharmacy on the High Street.

Meanwhile, Saeed found himself on the Larkman estate interviewing the man from behind the counter of the Pizza Takeaway on the Prince of Wales Road. A straightforward assignment. Yes, he recognised the two of them. They had ordered bacon pizzas with extra anchovies. He remembered the time, just after 3am because things had been slow and he had been clock watching. If necessary the time would be confirmed from a copy of the till roll. He signed his statement and Ahmed returned to the station.

Cushion and Leibnitz stood outside The Attic on Rose Lane. The establishment billed itself as the premier establishment in East Anglia for the Gay, Lesbian, bisexual and transgender community.

Like many nightclubs it lost all intimacy and felt stark and cold when all the lights were switched on. The manager greeted them but with a total lack of enthusiasm. Their request that all the staff be at the club in the morning had gone down like a lead balloon. The staff looked morose, tired and pissed off. What Cushion and Leibnitz didn't know was that they had been ordered in and told that they would not be being paid. The proprietors and managers of all clubs knew the sense and value of keeping on the sweet side of the police.

The manager then reiterated their commitment to staying on the right side of the law. After all they could not help but do so as some of the brave boys and girls in blue frequented the club. Cushion and Leibnitz exchanged glances wondering which of their colleagues attended the place. The manager noticing gave them a couple of cryptic clues. 'Happy by nature, happy by name'

Leibnitz caught on immediately and struggled to stifle a giggle at the thought of the hissy little shit, Gayde, wiggling his arse at another hissy little shit! Cushion looked at her quizzically. She said she'd tell him later.

The staff all agreed that Morski and Pidrik visited from time to time on a fairly regular basis. They remembered seeing them on the Saturday evening and two of the bar staff recollected serving them with vodka. They couldn't be sure about the time that they arrived, or when they left. However, one thought that he had seen them about 12ish. What made him think about that time. Because he had caught part of a programme on the TV in the staff room. That programme ran between 11 and 12. However, he couldn't be sure.

No-one could remember whether or not Morski or Pidrik spoke to anyone else and if so to whom. Leibnitz did not feel comfortable with their answers on this point but held her tongue.

Steve Cushion asked the manager what the two bedrooms were for?

The 'pat' answer concerned the prejudices of society at large when it came to those who were not heterosexual. In many places their presence was frowned upon in establishments that offered accommodation. The Attic provided two tasteful rooms where those of a non-heterosexual nature could stay in Norwich in a stress free and relaxed environment. A romantic haven for non heterosexual couples.

Cushion asked whether the rooms were ever utilised by gay or lesbian prostitutes. The manager feigned mock horror. He emphasised that The Attic was an establishment that scrupulously kept on the right side of the law. Cushion did not press the matter he knew only too well the difficulties of attempting to prove prostitution in such a place.

The two police officers then commenced the tedious and time consuming task of taking statements from the manager and the recalcitrant staff. Towards the end of their taking statements they received a phone call from Ahmed informing them that Blunt required everyone's presence at base as soon as they had finished taking statements.

When Blunt arrived back at the headquarters Saeed asked to speak with him. He informed him that he had to see Strumpshaw and they arranged to talk immediately afterwards. Blunt suggested they meet at a pub. Ahmed volunteered the Adam and Eve situated not too far away on Bishops gate.

Strumpshaw ordered Blunt to sit on the chair the other side of his desk in an abrupt manner. The latter expected the worst. And it came, piece after piece. It transpired that the Asians interviewed by Blunt's team were creating a media storm. They had used influence with the Asian Network in the Midlands to get across a story that managed to put the police in an exceptionally bad light regarding the Gladstone Street fire. This had gone viral with the mainstream BBC picking up the story and sensationalising it. Strumpshaw had been tipped off that some of the interviewees were going to feature on that days six o clock news. The Evening News, Radio Broadland, BBC Norfolk, Anglian Television and BBC Norfolk were all clamouring for a comment. If they didn't receive one they were going to descend on mass and camp outside the headquarters.

Strumpshaw had also been berated by Rafique Khan in his position as a senior spokesperson for the Muslim Community. Khan is saying that the Asian areas are like a tinderbox due to the invasion of Iraq. The last thing anyone needed was Blunt and his team of misfits blundering about upsetting the delicate balance in Muslim areas. Strumpshaw nearly lost his temper and retorted that Khan had personally recommended one of the 'so-called misfits and nodded through the appointment of Blunt.

Shortly afterwards senior representatives from both the Home and Foreign Offices were on the line dressing the Chief Constable down for the ineptitude of the new team. Khan fulfilled a vital role in the new security team. He kept the security services abreast of developments in the world of Muslim extremism.

As the deluge of criticism deriving from representatives of the great and good continued to be dumped on him Strumpshaw saw the chances of promotion being buried under the mountain of ordure. His mood was black and his temperament turbulent.

'Well John what have you got to say for yourself?' demanded Strumpshaw

'How do you mean?' rejoindered a baffled Blunt

'What the hell do you mean asking how do you mean? You and your team have stirred the shit up well and truly over this Gladstone Road fire. I am told that your team have gone into Asian businesses and even a mosque accusing them of running a prostitution ring of underage white girls, barged or broken their way into a mosque and stolen documents. And that's just for starters'

'Sir, my team and I are due to meet later to debrief. So, at this moment I have no idea of the veracity of these claims.'

'The Muslim community is complaining that the police are racist and that instead of hunting down the killers of a law abiding and innocent Muslim family who have helped the police with their enquiries.' Blunt's senses heightened. How did the complainers know about the Patels helping the police?

Strumpshaw continued fulminating

'Furthermore, we are looking for another two Asians and implying that they may have something to do with the fires. What the fuck is going on John?'

'That is a good question sir. I need to debrief my team. Something is going on and I think that we are getting closer and closer. I apologise for all the flack you are taking and I will keep you in the loop regarding what we find. We need your PR skills to keep the media sweet'

'Are you patronising me Blunt?' demanded the Chief Constable.

'No sir. You are bloody good with the media. And for what it is worth I am grateful for your courage in giving me the task of this new team. I believe that you will not be disappointed.'

A slightly mollified Strumpshaw grunted an acknowledgement but then threw at Blunt

'A way of defusing this would be to use Saeed to front up the press release'

Blunt had to give it to the man. Using Saeed would be a masterstroke

Blunt marched into Cushion's office

'Right let us get off to the Adam and Eve. You can fill me in on yesterday. The shit has hit the fan and we have to start getting some kind of results. Strumpshaw is taking flak. We are taking flak. This unit may be finished before it has started. Come on.'

Ahmed followed in his superior's slipstream.

Once settled on the outside benches of the Adam and Eve out of earshot of other drinkers blunt asked Ahmed to fill him in on the events of the previous day.

Ahmed expressed his concerns and described the extremist material found at the Mosque. He also described the reaction at the taxi office when Leibnitz brought up the question of underage prostitutes.

Blunt said nothing but sat there sipping at his beer.

Ahmed jumped in to break the silence

'We have a lead on the two at the Patels'

'What' Blunt exploded splattering some of his beer over Ahmed.

"Yup, call came in when you were with Strumpshaw. The woman is Ayesha Saddiqe. Apparently from Bolton. Our informer states that she is one of the few women t5o have fought with the mujahedeen against the Russians in Afghanistan. She earned the nickname *She Wolf* because of her bravery in going behind Russian lines and planting mines and explosive devices. She became radicalised by Imams such as Abu Hamza. Her father owns two small newsagents and he's heavily indebted to the Khan's wholesale business. She volunteered when Khan recruited people for the holy war. She then spent time training with a guy forming what the informer says is a new and dangerous terror group. A guy called Osama Bin Laden'.

'What!' Blunt exploded 'what was that name again?'

The other drinkers looked around at the pair, one half of their minds hoping to witness a row. The other half expecting to turn away in faux embarrassment.

'What was that name again? Hissed Blunt as he remembered his chat with Robyn Fletcher.

'Osama Bin Laden. Do you know it?'

'Carry on' Blunt collected himself.

'Ok Well Ayesha is supposed to be wanting to plan actions against the US because they had troops stationed in Saudi. And against all the allies except the Muslim countries who were involved in the action against Iraq. She believes that Shariah law should be declared in the UK. Now the literature that I picked up from the Dereham Road mosque basically espoused the same sentiments and beliefs'

'What about the man?'

'Zafir Sheikh from Keighley. Father is a solicitor and regarded as a moderate in the mosque. Zafir graduated in Law from Leeds University. Again he came under the influence of Saleh Hussein the man whose pamphlet I took from the Dereham Road mosque. Zafir went down a similar route to Ayesha Saddiqe. Trained in a mujahedeen camp in the Pashtun financed by Osama Bin Laden and was seen there with Rafique Khan. Apparently, after the Russians left he stayed behind and did further training with Osama Bin Laden: that training also included Islamist indoctrination. How does our informant know all this? Because he went down the same track before he realised that it led to nowhere. '

'What about the informant, will he give a statement?'

'He will not give his name. He is adamant that he will not give his name. He is fearful for his parents and siblings well-being as well as his own life. He says that Saddiqe and Hussein are the tip of the iceberg and that something is happening.'

Saeed went on to explain to Blunt how the Islamists would not let anything stand in their way. Their Imams justified anything that would take them towards the universal imposition of their version of Shariah law. That included robberies for finance and the murder and enslavement of any non-believer and even the punishment and murder of

Muslims who got in their way. He recounted the information provided by his old friend Ashraf.

Blunt listened in silence: not a single interruption until Ahmed had finished. At several points his brow furrowed and a look of consternation clouded his visage.

'Ok have you got your brick with you?'

'No I left it in the office'

'We need to get back quickly. I want you to ring the others. I need everyone back as soon as they can'

'What do you want me to do?'

'Nothing. Just sit and think'

'What?' Ahmed had never heard of such a thing. As far as he understood policing was about action

'Just sit and think about everything we know to date. I am going to try and see Strumpshaw again and then I have other things that I wish to do'

Flint had no difficulty finding the Stalham address. Basically, Stalham's High Street comprised its total shopping experience apart from an optimistically named Loke Parade shopping centre. Walking up the High Street she paused to answer her brick. Blunt wanted everyone back at base as soon as possible.

On arriving at 2b The Pharmacy she had a shock when a woman answered the door and invited her into the tiny flat. The woman had a chunky looking face heavily made up, a short ginger bob, and wore an old fashioned floral print dress. The large hands and the 9'0 clock shadow by the ears made Flint realise that the individual in front of her was none other than Michael Loveday. However, he preferred to be addressed as Miss Loveday. She accepted the offer of a tea and asked if she could use the facilities. She noted that all the toiletries were female. Hanging from a line on over the bath were false bras, other items of women's' underwear and a dripping ginger wig. The last had obviously just been washed.

On returning to the small lounge she thanked him/her for agreeing to give a statement and explained what the procedure would be. Loveday did ramble around the houses a little. He felt as if he had to justify going to The Attic. He went to great pains to explain that he was neither a transvestite nor a homosexual. He used to be married and had two grown up children. All his life he had suffered from being trapped in a man's body. The only place where he could go and feel that he was not being vilified was The Attic. Everyone there suffered from some sort of discrimination when in the outside world. The venue provided an oasis where no-one accused and people that were regarded as 'not normal' could be themselves. Where they could let their hair down and enjoy themselves.

However, there were things about the club that he did not agree with. He felt that there were some male prostitutes there. One young man had asked for money just to provide company for Loveday. Flint let him get all this off his chest before she brought him back to the purpose of her visit. She showed him the photographs of the two Russians and reminded him that he had come forward to state that he may have seen the two on the

evening in question. Yes, he had and it had been about 1'ish. How did he know that? Well because he had to leave to get the last bus home. He had noticed the two Russians talking with the barman. On being asked how certain he was he responded that he was fairly certain as they both did look a little odd. Hark at the kettle calling the pot black thought Flint.

WHO KILLED WHOM?

When the team were all seated Blunt explained that shortly the brown stuff would hit the fan. Everyone, including the Chief Constable, would be caught in the media storm that was about to engulf them. The very existence of the unit could be threatened as could the careers of each and every one of them.

They all turned and started to stand as the Chief Constable Bill Strumpshaw came into the room. He motioned to them to stay seated and took a seat himself.

Blunt explained that Strumpshaw's attendance was vital. He needed to know how they were progressing and what obstacles if any were being thrown in their way. The Chief Constable then informed the unit that he supported them and wanted to see them succeed. He would do whatever he could to ensure that would happen. To enable him to provide the maximum support he needed to be kept abreast of everything they were doing.

Blunt thanked him. Moving on he asked each member of the team to present their findings over the last two days and then to summarise on the flip charts.

After they had finished Blunt asked them all to sit back look at all the charts around the room and to ruminate for a few minutes. Cushion asked whether the word had anything to do with eating. The guffaws of the others, including a not un-noticed wry smile from Strumpshaw, released the tension.

After a few minutes had elapsed Blunt asked Cushion to put two fresh flip charts at the head of the table. At the top of one he wrote 'The Russians'. At the top of the other he wrote 'The Islamists'.

'Let us take Gruberova first' Blunt started 'Morski and Pidrik were seen at the Q8 petrol station between 11.13 and 11.28pm. In many ways it does not matter what they were doing before that. The amount of time the body was in the water tied in with the tides means that it is not feasible that the deed was done before 11.00pm. The next sighting of the two occurs in the gay club, The Attic. They were seen at 1pm and 2pm by three witnesses not connected with the club. One witness connected with the club says he may have seen them earlier but he is far from sure. We then have them at the Pizza Paradise on Prince of Wales Road at just gone 3am.

The question is could they have got to Overstrand and back in just over an hour and a half? I am inclined to say not. However, it is not impossible. '

'But they could have still administered the GHB and perhaps some of the women at the brothel could have taken her to Overstrand ' volunteered Flint.

'Yes that is possible. It could also be the case that there are more Russians here than we realise and they could have done the deed. After all we believe that they are tied up with Bondarevsky who by all accounts is attempting to take over the Aktion empire That means that Morski and Pidrik and the madam would know who disposed of Gruberova.. Therefore all we can say with regard to Gruberova is that the Russians killed her. But which Russians? Another problem of course is that there has not been a single sighting of any activity in the vicinity of Overstrand with respect to either a vehicle or a boat.

Let us move onto the Patels and who killed them. Ahmed what is your view?

'All the evidence points to the Russians. Although not Morski and Pidrik who were in custody. We have the cloth and the part of a cigarette packet. The Patels shopped them and therefore a revenge killing is possible.'

'True' Leibnitz interrupted 'But it's too pat. Are the Russian that inept? I doubt it! Again how would they have known that the Patels provided information about Gruberova? Did any of us let it slip?' she looked around the table at all her colleagues shaking their heads.

'Ok' continued Blunt 'therefore there is nothing in it for the Russians to kill the Patels unless they were trying to send a message to anyone that attempts to shop them or meddle in their business. But and I emphasise BUT that is a pretty long shot. Now let us move onto other things about the Russians. It would appear that The Attic may be involved in male prostitution'

'Shinton is a paedophile!' Cushion forcefully interrupted causing the others to look at him in amazement. He has obviously just been released because that Dereham Road address that Debbie got is a hostel for released sex offenders. Shinton was convicted of raping an eight year old boy'

'Ok the question is why do Morski and Pidrik go to the Attic? Melanie get hold of the land registry and find out who owns the Rose Lane building. Steve get onto companies house and find out whether The Attic is registered and all the details'

Leibnitz and Cushion left the room.

'Ok' continued Blunt let us take a look at the Pakistanis. Ahmed has provided us with a great deal of information about what may be happening with some extremists. It could be that they are looking to muscle in on the Russians attempt to take over the Aktion empire. They may have killed Gruberova'

'True' butted in Flint, ' but the same applies no-one saw anything, no sightings, nothing!'

'We may have missed something vital here.' Blunt came back, The others looked quizzically at him 'what if the body was put into the water from the sea? When we have finished Debbie can you chase that angle up. '

Flint nodded in agreement.

'The other thing is how would the Pakistanis know about GHB?'

'They could have found out in Afghanistan' stated Ahmed 'and that points us straight at anyone involved in that affair.' He paused before continuing, 'that includes Rafique Khan'

Strumpshaw broke the silence

'Steady on! You are talking about a man who is a leading politician and Muslim and also on the new security council'

'With all due respect sir you told me that the Muslim community knew about the Patels informing us about Gruberova. How did they know? We did not tell them and I doubt whether the Patels did. Blunt retorted in Ahmed's defence.

'Fair point' admitted the Chief Constable

'Thank you sir. Let me continue to extrapolate' said Blunt 'What if Saddiqe and Hussein informed us about Gruberova. By disposing of the Patel's they may think that they are killing two birds with one stone. Got rid of the Patels and implicated the Russians to boot.'

'Then what about Gruberova?' Ahmed butted in.

'The Muslims killed Gruberova as well'

'John' the Chief Constable came in again 'there are so many ifs and buts and I can see what your problem is. You have no concrete evidence of anything'

'I agree. At the moment we seem to be feeling our way through a fog. It reminds me of a chapter in Plato's Republic that considers the problems of Appearance and Reality. The more information we are getting the more confusing it becomes. All we can do is keep chipping away and carving out new pieces that allow us to piece the puzzle together'

'I sympathise but it does not help us with the press conference that we have to give. Have you informed Ahmed that he is taking the lead?'

'What!' exclaimed Saeed 'I can't! We've all heard today what these Islamists are capable of. I'm concerned about my parents.'

'Ahmed' said Blunt 'they already know that you are involved. If they were going to do anything then they would have done it by now. I think that we can feed the information about Saddiqe and Hussein back to Khan'

'Am I missing something?' questioned Strumpshaw.

CUSHION AND LEIBNITZ RETURN TO THE MEETING

Before anyone could answer Cushion returned to the room. Leibnitz followed shortly after. Blunt looked at her. She nodded imperceptibly to him as she entered the room and looked away.

Once they were seated Blunt looked at his superior and answered in the affirmative.

'In a way.'

He noted the body language and the twitching of the Chief Constable's mouth as he summarised Khan's role. It presaged his mounting anger. Eventually it erupted.

'John, my office NOW!'

Strumpshaw pushed himself up from the desk and marched into his office followed by Blunt.

A palpable silence descended on the room broken only by Strumpshaw's loud voice from his office next door.

The Chief Constable berated Blunt for not letting him know about Khan's attempt to use Saeed as a spy and also for attempting to turn the tables on Khan. However, as he calmed down it transpired that Khan was the main target of his anger. He had considered the man an ally. And here he was indirectly undermining his authority.

Blunt allowed the other man's ire to blow itself through. He then considered the time auspicious to advise his Chief of some of his own issues with Khan: however he only provided the edited highlights. Remembering the earlier outburst when he had appeared to question Khan's probity he mentioned neither Anjii nor her aunt's comments regarding the MP.

Strumpshaw advised Blunt that he trusted that there were no more skeletons because if there were now was the time to come clean about them. If there was anything that could cause and did cause the Chief Constable embarrassment then woe betide him!

The Chief Inspector made the conscious decision to also withhold any information regarding Leibnitz's slight nod to him.

They then spent a few minutes deciding how they, or to be more precise Strumpshaw was going to play Khan.

A knock on the door interrupted their deliberations. The Chief's PA came in. She thought it appropriate to let him know that matters appeared to be escalating. She had it on good authority that, so called, Muslim leaders across the country were coming out to condemn the Norfolk police over their failure to bring to justice the racist murderers responsible for the heinous slaughter of the Patel family. They were using this as a hook on which to base a broader attack on the police and British Society. A society that refused them the liberty to practice their religion to its full extent. A society that treated them as second class citizens when it came to employment and the opportunities for betterment.

After his PA had departed the Chief turned to Blunt and expressed the fears that were on both their minds. Namely, that this could turn into full-blooded riots across the country. An alienated Asian population could be further alienated if riots erupted across the country. Unemployment was endemic across the Asian youth: they had some of the highest rates in those towns and cities with large Asian populations. Stir into this toxic and volatile mix the effect of the Russians in Afghanistan, the coalition in Kuwait and the new breed of Imams trawling the mosques. The result - trouble with a capital and underlined **T!**

Strumpshaw instructed Blunt to rejoin his team whilst he dealt with Khan. On seeing the look of surprise on his subordinate's face he assured him that he would let him and the team know the outcome of the conversation.

Shortly afterwards Strumpshaw returned to the room. He did not look too happy. He explained why. Khan had been unwilling to play ball. Giving reason after reason as to why it would destroy his credibility and how that would prove detrimental to good race relations in the long run. The more Strumpshaw threatened him with the dire consequences that could ensue from doing nothing the more the other dug his heels in. Throwing back the man's own words regarding the Asian areas being a tinderbox failed to move the man. Khan's intransigence did not surprise Blunt as he cast his mind back to student days!

Gloom descended on the team. They and Strumpshaw could see that events were conspiring to turn them into the fall guys. Each member of the team knew that if an Asian Armageddon erupted their careers were effectively finished!

Blunt attempted to rally his team.

'We know there is a link between the deaths of Gruberowa and the Patels. We just do not know what that link is...' he paused for effect, 'yet. All we can do is keep on plugging away. Steve, Melanie what did you find?'

Cushion went first and explained that the club had limited status. Two directors with Russian sounding names, Kobalevsky and Pomidorsky. Their addresses were the same as the accountants Darcy & Darcy, as was the registered office.

Leibnitz followed. Her information revealed that the Rose lane building, a prime piece of real estate, belonged to a property company registered in Lichtenstein. And, lo and behold the managers of the property were the aforementioned Darcy & Darcy. No surprises there then!

That led Blunt to opine that the statements of The Attic staff could be suspect. And if that were the case Morski and Pidrik did have the time to get to Overstrand and back! However, they still needed evidence to place them in the vicinity of Oversstrand if not on the beach as well.

Blunt turned to Strumpshaw and asked whether they could get a search warrant arranged immediately. The Chief readily acceded to the request. They all knew how easy it was to trump up the reasons for a search warrant. You did not need anything substantial. A selection of a number of tried and trusty stock phrases such as 'reasonable suspicion' 'protection of the public' etcetera etcetera nearly always sufficed.

They were interrupted again by Strumpshaw's P.A. She informed him that a Mr Khan wanted to talk with him. Strumpshaw leapt from his seat and strode into his office. He neglected to close the door. The team heard what little he had to say. They did, however, notice the perceptible loosening of his posture and the change to a less strained tone of voice.

'As you may have gathered Mr Khan has changed his mind. He informed me that he reflected long and hard on what I had said. In the end his conscience persuaded him that he had a duty to attempt to defuse the situation. He is going to make an announcement within the next two hours. He will use his influence with his community to get them to see sense and that there is more than one side to every situation. He will also feature the photofits of Saddiqe and Hussein. Apparently the Norwich community has a new leading light, a Mr Sharma. He only moved here about two months ago and he will be opening a couple of new shops in the near future. All in all we can take heart from the fact that sense appears to have prevailed with our Mr Khan'.

All the team broke into smiles of relief, apart from Blunt. He knew Khan. He wondered what had made him change his mind and why had it taken him forty minutes or so? The reason would not be to help either Strumpshaw or Blunt. There had to be something in it for Khan. But what?

THE MEDIA

Ahmed and Strumpshaw appeared on the early evening news. They provided a resume of what the police had done and what they hoped to do. They put up photofits and said that they believed the man and woman were called Hussein and Saddiqe. They appealed for help from all communities.

They were followed by Mr Sharma. A middle aged gentleman with thick dark hair, clean shaven and dressed in smart fitting suit with a red silk tie. Perfectly modulated English allied to a calm demeanour made him an ideal spokesperson for any community. The man made an immensely favourable initial impression.

Mr Sharma, thanked the police for what he believed were their herculean efforts in attempting to track down the perpetrators of the Patel murders. He asked for patience on behalf of the Asian community in the City. He explained that gathering evidence and tracing the killers was a tedious, time consuming and thankless task. He asked for the two photofits of Saddiqe and Hussein to be shown. He made a direct appeal to them. He read out the phone number to ring slowly, clearly and carefully. He did it three times.

Again there were smiles all around the room from Flint, Cushion and Leibnitz. Sharma had performed well. Once more Blunt desisted from smiling.

Then the main event arrived, Rafique Khan. So as to emphasise his importance he had elected to be interviewed on College Green outside the Houses of Parliament. It made it seem as if he had rushed out of the House to deal with more important business... the well-being of the nation as a whole.

He picked up on and extrapolated from the comments made by Sharma on the Norfolk local news. Blunt suspected the hidden hand of orchestration. God he did not trust Khan. Could his detestation be clouding his judgement?

Khan appealed to all the Asian Communities to practice restraint. He explained how police work took time. He alluded to the fact that he had conducted lengthy conversations with Chief Constable Strumpshaw of Norfolk. Indeed so keen was the aforementioned on solving the horrific killing of the Patels that he had assured him, Rafique Khan, that he had taken personal control of the investigation. Not only that but the Chief Constable would keep him abreast of all developments.

He had the news teams show the photofits of Saddiqe and Hussein. Blunt noticed he made a point of not revealing their names. He stated that they were probably related to the Patels or were friends of theirs. They appeared to have gone to ground. The cause could be that they knew who the killers were and were hiding in fear of their lives. He appealed to them to give themselves up to the police immediately. He felt sure that they had nothing to do with the deaths. No-one from the Asian community would inflict such an atrocity on their own, or anyone else for that matter.

He then went on to say that Strumpshaw had informed him that some evidence had been discovered that pointed to a possible Russian connection. He had then paused for effect

before looking straight at the camera and saying clearly and firmly, ' A criminal Russian connection'.

'What the hell!!' exploded Blunt banging his fists down on his desk causing the others to jump. 'Strumpshaw should not have given him any specifics apart from the photofit images!!'.

'So instead of riots across the country we now have the possibility of Asian vigilante gangs hunting Russian gangsters....' Said Flint

'Or what they think are Russian gangsters' butted in a livid Blunt.

They continued to watch as the BBC continued to film Khan conducting (for that is what it was) interview after interview. In each the Russians were carefully inserted into his statements.

The BBC then cut to the studio where they were holding a video link interview with the editor of the Guardian. He was extolling the virtues of Khan and emphasising how fortunate the country was to have him in a position of influence. A man who not only preached peace and multiculturalism, but practiced it personally. He, the editor had enjoyed the privilege of meeting Khan's English rose girlfriend over dinner on many an occasion. A wonderful woman she had helped Rafique come to terms with the tragic death of his wife. Given everything that had preceded Khan's intervention the man had taken a great risk in coming out as he has had just done. The journalist then ventured that when a change of government took place, hopefully soon, Khan would make a great Home Secretary at the very least! He even expressed the wish that we could see a Prime Minister from an Asian background.

The interviewer asked the journalist what he thought of Khan's revelations about the Russians. Putting on a grave face he launched into a denunciation of how the Soviet Union had split asunder. He pointed out that Russia was in the throes of being hijacked and its assets stripped by a bunch of bandits laughingly labelled 'oligarchs'. These people were criminals and it would appear that they were using the capital from their ill-gotten gains to fund the establishment of a world-wide criminal network. This demonstrated that unfettered capitalism could only lead to misery for the masses. As evidence he gave the Norwich and Weybridge brothels as examples. He surmised that these were probably the tip of a very big iceberg.

Rafique Khan had to be thanked for opening the public's eyes to this threat.

Ahmed arrived back from his 'press' stint in the middle of the broadcast. The Press conference had left him with a very dry throat. Therefore he had detoured by way of the coffee machine.

He stood in stunned silence watching the events unfolding on the screen.

'Have you seen Strumpshaw?' demanded Blunt.

'I left him in the press room. We were pleased with the Sharma interview, it struck just the right note. But Khan's fucking stitched us from what I'm looking at!'

'Have you....' Blunt tried to ask again

'John, Strumpshaws on the screen now. He's still in the press room' butted in an agitated Flint.

And so he was.

They could tell that he was livid. The smile was a little too forced and the body posture a little too tight.

He was being asked to eulogise Khan and he didn't like it one bit. He quickly cottoned onto the fact that even the slightest hesitation would be seen as a criticism of the politician. That would result in the police being seen as ungrateful and possibly racist. He thanked Khan for his help and stated that he looked forward to working with him to find the murderers as quickly as possible. However, one must bear in mind that the presence of a couple of Russian items did not provide conclusive proof or proof at all of Russian involvement.

When he was asked about the Guardian editor's comments he felt on safer ground. He pointed out that the man's task was to sell newspapers. His task was to maintain law and order and to try and protect the public from criminal elements. He couldn't possibly comment on the wider aspects of what the journalist had said. Our priority is to apprehend and charge those responsible for the death of the Patels.

As he attempted to leave the room the press attempted to waylay him. He brusquely pushed past them.

Within minutes he had joined Blunt and the team.

'That prick has got us trussed up like a rafter of turkeys' spat out an obviously angry Chief Constable.

'A what?' asked Cushion

'It's the collective noun for a group of turkeys' the pithy response from Strumpshaw

'Yes sir I agree' commented Blunt, ' He is aiming to push us in a particular direction. And if we are not seen to be going down that direction we lay ourselves open to all sorts of opprobrium'

'And that leftie shit from The Guardian has only made matters worse' added Strumpshaw.

'We haven't said anything about the underage girls yet.' piped up Leibnitz

They all fell silent and turned towards the youngest member of the team

'What about underage girls?' enquired Blunt

Leibnitz went on to explain what the social worker had told her. She then described the response to the questions she asked in one of the taxi offices. Ahmed backed her up.

Strumpshaw did not look pleased.

He looked even less so as Leibnitz explained how she had taken the initiative to ring a few other stations. Each of them was sited in conurbations with large Asian populations such as Rochdale, Oxford and others. She had been advised, strictly off the record of course, that they suspected something similar was happening in each of those areas.

Unfortunately, they had no proof and after discussing matters with the community liaison people they decided to let sleeping dog lie.

Blunt asked her to follow up on it. They needed to see whether vice had acted upon the information received and what they had uncovered. If the Asians were involved in trafficking then it had to be dealt with.

He asked for Strumpshaw's help with getting vice to act, and act quickly. He advised Leibnitz that he wanted to know if she experienced any problems with colleagues in other departments.

The Chief Constable realised that this case involved complication piling upon complication. What is it Winston Churchill had said, he thought, 'a mystery wrapped in an enigma enclosed by a riddle', or something to that effect. What an appropriate description of this business. How in heavens name did such complications belong in his sleepy Norfolk? Given everything that had gone on how would it play if they now accused the Asian community of widespread slavery and prostitution of white girls?

Regrettably Blunt had not finished.

'Melanie, can you fill us in on the other matter I asked you to look at?'

'Certainly' she came back with.

She shuffled amongst her papers before holding up two photographs for them all to see.

'What the hell!' exclaimed Flint 'they look just like the photofits. Where did you get them from?'

Blunt looked over at Strumpshaw to gauge his mood. The man appeared to be mulling things over.

'I followed up on the lead that said the two people were Sharique and Hussein. These are photographs from their final year at university. I also managed to get these' she took out another set of photographs and put them on the table so that everyone could see them. 'These are Sharique and Hussein coming through customs at Heathrow two months ago. They were both on a flight from Dubai'.

Each of the officers who had seen the two people at the Patel's shop were convinced that these were the photographs of the same people.

Blunt, remembering his previous conversation with the Chief Constable, looked over at Strumpshaw. He wondered what his reaction would be. BUT before the man had a chance to respond he turned to Cushion,

'Steve get onto the switchboard. I want to know what response we have had from the news items. I want to know what names have been coming in'

It did not take Cushion long.

'The phones are going crazy. Not one of the names that they read out to me were these two and none were from either Bolton or Keighley.'

'What a surprise' a smug response from Blunt 'I feel that obfuscation is the name of the game.' he turned to Strumpshaw, 'Sir, when you spoke with Khan did you give him the names 'Saddiqe' and 'Hussein'.

'No, I did not. It completely slipped my mind because he was being so damned uncooperative'

'Did he ask whether we had any names?' probing further

'No, he did not' a tentative reply followed by 'Where is this leading Blunt?'

'I find it revealing that of all the calls that have been flooding in not one has named these two.' he pointed to the photographs before continuing 'Statistics show that when we release photofit images and ask if anyone can put a name to them etc a lot of dross is trawled. Those same statistics also show that 3.2% of the calls contain the right details of the people shown in those images.'

'Sir' interrupted Ahmed 'with all due respect we are only talking about a small population, as the number of calls increase then probability dictates that we will get closer to the 3.2%'

'Steve, ring back and ask them what the score is now and how many calls have been received' Blunt instructed Cushion.

'Four hundred and twenty five and still not one positive naming'

'Thank you Steve. It is what I expected. We will get some positive namings. But we will find in this instance that the early statistics do not match what we would normally expect'

The others looked at him quizzically

'Work it out' came his response, 'Now let us get those search warrants and give the Russians and their accountants a rousting'

IF YOU GO DOWN TO THE WOODS TODAY

They had been ordered to go to a safe cottage located in Thetford Forest. It was situated off a main road at the end of a dirt track about a mile long: obviously ideal as a hideout. She wondered how they had come across it. They were to wait at the cottage for someone to collect them. Events had moved on.

They had been provided with a motorcycle and safety helmets. They had been shown a map and given verbal directions to the cottage. They had to repeat the location and directions back to their helpers three times. That ensured that they would not get lost.

They left once darkness had descended. When they arrived at the dirt track her companion switched off the headlight. They drove down the track by the light of the moon. The cloud that had brought all the rain had been blown to another unfortunate part of the country. That rain had left large puddles on the surface and in the many potholes. As they bounced over the track and through the puddles both their trouser legs got a thorough and uncomfortable soaking.

When they saw the cottage looming out of the gloom they knew they had reached their destination. Her companion cut the engine and signalled for her to go inside whilst he hid the bike out of sight around the back: as their helpers had instructed. She unlocked the door and as she pushed it creaked as if it belonged in some Hollywood horror b movie.

It smelled disagreeably fusty. Looking around in the scant light cast by the moon, to which her eyes quickly became accustomed, she noted that the living room was sparsely furnished. When her male companion came into the cottage she asked him how long it would be before they were collected. He stated that it could be anytime. However, he expected it to be during the night. Less people about and therefore less likely to provoke suspicion.

She admired her companion and had always found him to be supremely adaptable whatever the conditions. And they had experienced some widely varying situations over the last two years. Who would have thought that a provincial girl such as she would have undergone what she had.

They scouted the place. The kitchen had an empty fridge that was not switched on. The kitchen units were empty apart from a few old tea bags and a couple of battered pans. They attempted to switch on the calor powered cooker: to no avail. Her companion went outside. The canister was empty. However, he found a woodshed. He brought the dry wood to the cottage and lit a fire: thankfully they had found some matches in one of the kitchen drawers. They managed to boil some water and make a mug of tea. He had also discovered a generator but they decided not to switch it on. They felt the noise may draw attention to the cottage.

Dust everywhere. She had seen nothing but dust in many of the places that she had been in. However, in those places it was the norm. Here in England it bothered her. She felt a compulsion to clean the place. She knew her companion felt the same as her. Wiping the surfaces helped them to pass the time.

The girl kept on interrupting her dusting with looking out of the window. She divined that they would hear their colleagues scrunching over the dirt road and splashing through the puddles.

He told her to calm down. Constantly looking out of the window would not make them come any quicker. However, it would make time drag. It did not mollify her. Having tired of dusting she continued pacing fretfully from the fire place to the window every few minutes. She could sense her companion's mounting agitation. However, it did not stop her.

Suddenly she thought she had seen something out of the window. She didn't say anything because she wasn't sure. Yes she had seen something!

Four dark shapes were weaving their way silently to the cottage backlit by the clear moon! If they were their colleagues then why were they acting so suspiciously?

Before she had chance to alert her companion the door had been kicked in and two canisters fizzing smoke rolled across the floor. She could just make out shapes shrouded by the CS gas fumes walking through the door.

She put her hands across her face and dove through the bathroom door, locking it behind her. She scrambled onto the toilet seat. And groped for the catch of the small window. She could hear the intruders creeping about the sitting room and whispering to one another. She hauled herself up to the now open window and wriggled through it. As luck would have it she fell onto a rose bush. Her involuntary cry of pain drew the attention of the visitors to her location. Fighting through her pain she scurried across the open yard towards the comparative safety of the undergrowth.

Just as she reached the edge of the forest she heard something fly by her ear and lodge itself in the tree trunk just in front of her. It was a knife!

The thought that that they intended to kill her gave her an added impetus. She lunged into the undergrowth. Picked herself up and scampered into the forest. She crashed through bushes, some with thorns and some without. Branches whiplashed her face breaking the skin and drawing blood. Each a minor irritant in the general scheme of things. Although running for her life her mind still registered more mundane matters. She thought how wet she was from plunging through the sodden forest. Perhaps thinking of such matters helped to keep the mind sane.

It did not take her long to cotton onto the fact that her pursuers were not only following her but gaining on her! Closer and closer they seemed to be getting!

Sodden though the ground may have been it did not prevent the twigs on the forest floor from snapping with the racket of a whiplash, or so she thought! It did not stop leaved branches she pushed past springing back with substantial swishing and swooshing sounds.

Sometimes with people in her situation a heightened rationality kicks in that brings a degree of order to the sense of self-preservation.

That rationality told her she needed to be quiet. She stopped. Heard her pursuers following her for a moment. Then silence ensued. She carefully fumbled around the forest floor and found a sizeable piece of rock.

She threw it towards a large tree. She heard a grunt. It did not make her feel happier. They could work out her location from the direction that the rock had traversed.

She caught on quickly. She moved slowly, silently and stealthily from where she had previously stood.

She lost her footing;. Fell underneath a bush. The earth formed a kind of crater and in the middle was a hole. Too big to be a rabbit hole she divined that it was a fox hole.

She heard her pursuers stalking her as quietly as possible. Even more ominously they had some high intensity torches. Very gently she scooped some leaves over her body until she was completely covered.

Closer and closer they came. The beams from their torches touching the ground nearer and nearer. She felt sure that they would be able to hear her heartbeat. To her it sounded like the amplified heartbeat at a Pink Floyd 'Dark Side of The Moon' concert she'd gone to: an age and a lifetime ago.

Three of them stood not too away from the bush. They whispered to one another. Their conversation told her that they were so called comrades. Why did they wish to kill her and her companion? After all they had always done what was asked of them. They had been loyal servants. To what end?

After what seemed an age they moved away, gently knocking the branches and bushes and shining their torches. They had said that they did not have much time. They had to get back to her comrade and deal with him before getting back to London.

She deliberated what to do. Wait until light. She would then make her decision. She curled into a ball in the damp leaves and fitfully dozed.

Meanwhile, the young woman's pursuers had returned to the cottage. They had her companion to deal with.

They had opened the windows so as to dissipate the CS gas fumes. They cursed the mosquitoes that seized the opportunity to rush into the building attracted by the odour of human flesh and blood.

They irritably swatted the irksome culicidae.

Once the gas had dispersed they shut the windows and shuttered them. They did not want to take the risk of any chance passer-by looking in nor did they wish for any sound to get out.

They turned their attention to the woman's comrade.

They had sealed his mouth with gaffer tape and seated him in a chair in the centre of the sitting room. They had nailed the chair to the floor. His hands and arms were tied under the chair with handcuffs. A respirator was put on his head and the respiratory tube shut closed. He began to suffocate because of the lack of air. He struggled to take off the handcuffs and as a result seriously injured himself. A strong pressure began to build in his head. He felt as though his eyes had popped out. Gradually, the voices of the butchers, his comrades? advising him "to take a deep breath", and their laughter seem to move far away from him. He flew into an abyss of darkness. He awoke slowly and heavily. Some

incoherent sounds become words. ... Gradually, he understand that he had just died, visited the other world, but then again risen from the dead.

They questioned him further as to whether anyone knew who he and the young woman were. Each time he cried out a denial they did not believe him. They replaced the gaffer tape and cut off a finger. They were immune to his muffled cries and bulging eyes.

Three times he answered in the negative and each time they severed a digit. Dawn approached and they needed to be on their way. One took a pair of pliers, ripped away the gaffer tape and crushed his tongue to a bloody pulp. They delighted in his pain. Finally, another slit his throat. They left his broken body and mind to slowly die.. And die he did, very.....very.... slowly. Nonetheless, he had sufficient time to wonder why? He had sacrificed everything. He had been an obedient servant. Why? Why? Why?

They also left the pliers and the knife on the table.

The young woman heard their car start up and the engine noise disappear into the distance.

She waited a few hours until daybreak before leaving her foxhole. She had decided what she was going to do.

THE TEAM GET CLOSER

A ray of sunshine sneaking through a gap in the curtains awoke her. She half opened her eyes and became a little disorientated. The window was not where it should be, nor the TV. She felt a weight on her chest. She looked down and took in a sharp intake of breath. A brown arm lay across her naked breasts!

'What in heaven's name have I done? She thought to herself 'Should I move his arm and get dressed?' A quiet sigh escaped her lips as she remembered the night before.

* * *

She and Ahmed stood on the pavement outside the office and he had asked her if she fancied going for their agreed dinner date a little early. Although she had looked curiously at him she had not needed any persuading. They ummed and ahed about where to go. In the end he had recommended the restaurant at the Maids Head. When she quibbled the choice he asked if the restaurant at her hotel was superior. That simple question quelled her 'pretend' doubts.

An hour later found them seated in the hotel's restaurant. She commented on the stone floor and was informed that the restaurant had originally been the stables and the courtyard. As long as they didn't serve meals in a bag she didn't mind what the place had been.

When the menu came she commented on the variety of food. His response, a big grin that said 'I told you so'. She chose the duck confit and he chose the steak and chips. She took the mickey out of him for not choosing the curry. He said that his mother made the greatest ever curry. He had always been left disappointed with the curries in every restaurant he had been to. That included Indian restaurants; most of which he informed her were actually Bangladeshi! So now he never ordered them in restaurants.

He asked her if she would like wine and if so she better look at the 'Wine List'. She chose Pinot Noir and asked him whether he liked it too. He responded that he did not drink alcohol. On being asked whether that was to do with his religion he answered in the negative. He elaborated by revealing that his father, a devout Muslim in all other respects, had been an alcoholic. The pain and suffering his father's affliction had caused him and his mother made the young Ahmed vow never to touch the stuff.

A slight tension existed between the two of them: a slight uncomfortableness. They both knew what it was but neither of them was prepared to articulate it.

Once the meal had arrived Flint decided to lessen the nervousness by steering the conversation to a neutral topic. She asked him what he thought of the case so far. He admitted it made him uncomfortable as it brought him into direct contact with the Asian/Muslim community...yes he had that in the smoke but it was more normal policing. Here he was looking in an accusatory way at everyone in the community...and that made him feel uncomfortable. Not only that but everyone here looked at him with hate in their eyes. They treated him as a traitor!

Before he could continue they were interrupted by a diner who peered at Ahmed and then commented 'You're the detective that was on the TV earlier today. I hope you catch the bastards responsible for those young kids dying in that fire!'

A murmur of approval went around the room.

Ahmed had replied that they were doing all they could. The man wished him all the best. Flint commented that everyone seemed to have forgotten Gruberowa. Ahmed shared her opinion but commented that these things happen. News items are ephemeral. Once they have been superseded by something else they quickly move to the back of people's minds and then out of them as time passes. What counted was that they had not pushed her to the back of their minds. He asked her for her gut reaction with respect to the girl. She came back a little too strongly that Blunt didn't believe in gut reactions. He responded in like manner snapping that he wasn't asking Blunt he was asking her.

An awkward silence ensued before Ahmed broke the tension by apologising. He then asked about Blunt's view. She attempted to explain that he believed in something he called the falsifiability method. If everything else is disproved then what is left is what happened however improbable.

She noted Ahmed's sardonic look followed by asking why their boss kept on saying 'There is nothing to put Morski and Pidrik at the scene' She explained that you needed facts to test a theory to destruction. At the moment they didn't have enough facts to put them there or not to put them there.

Ahmed moved things on by asking what she thought of Leibnitz's boat idea. They kicked it around and one idea came to them. Everyone knew that a great many people were shipped into the country by truck. However, what if the Russians were also doing it by trawler. Everyone had become used to seeing their factory ships cum trawlers over the years. Norfolk had miles upon miles of isolated coastline. Wouldn't it be easy to drop people off from one of the many trawlers.

The tension had eased and Flinted rested her right elbow on the table and cradling her tilted head in her hand whilst gazing at him. Ahmed though was in full flow and quite animated. He expounded the theory that perhaps they had been looking in the wrong direction.

What if Morski and Pidrik had taken Gruberowa to say Great Yarmouth to a factory ship that had docked in the harbour. Yarmouth could be reached much quicker and easier than Overstrand. If that were the case then the time frame altered considerably. The two Russians would have time to spare.

She moved her elbow from the table and slowly stroked the rim of her glass whilst pointing out that in the that case Morski and Pidrik could not have drowned Gruberowa. He had to admit the validity of her point.

They both agreed that they needed to find whether a Russian trawler had been in the harbour on the Friday evening and if so where it had sailed to and when.

He asked her how she felt about the raid on the Accountant's office. She expressed the fear that something similar would happen as occurred in the Aktion case. She explained that somehow the Nazi bastards had found out, or worked out, that they were onto them.

When they arrived at their vile body farm all the personnel and most of the papers had gone.

She stated that if they found anything the next day regarding properties and businesses this time they do not want to alert the Russians. They did not want to give them the opportunity to move everything out. They had to ensure the accountant didn't get a chance to ring anyone. They then had to move fast and get to the properties. She decided to mention it to Blunt so that they could have teams ready. They probably had a window that equated to the amount of time that they could hold the Accountant.

Ahmed agreed. He also added that in that case perhaps they better put off raiding The Attic. The more places they raided the more people would be there and the chances of something getting out would increase exponentially.

The waiter interrupted their conversation when he excused himself and asked if they would like to order dessert. They both ordered cheesecake to be followed by coffee.

Ahmed asked her if she could go back to traffic if Blunt's unit went tits up. She had said no. The breakdown of her marriage had made her independent in more ways than one. She felt a lot more adventurous. As a result she would leave the force and look for something in the in the usual police second career....security work.

He chanced his arm and asked whether she would ever get into another relationship. She became slightly twitchy then suddenly she bit her lip, and then licked her lips before saying that it all depended.

Whilst she played with her gold necklace she asked him what he would do if it went tits up. He replied that he would look to return to the met...although he would maybe look to sign on for a law degree. That would please his parents. She then asked him about relationships. One night stands mainly. His parents wanted to choose a bride for him but he gave that idea short thrift. The job made it difficult to form relationships. Yes he'd had one night stands but none of them were the sort of person that he'd want to let into his life.

They had decided that they were both a pair of sad cases. Somehow at some stage they had ended up in Ahmed's room and then in his shower and finally in his bed.

Some hours after falling asleep Flint was wakened by Saeed whimpering beside her. Furthermore, he had curled himself into a tight protective ball. She gently shook him awake and patiently waited for him to say something. All the while she gently held his hands. Eventually he spoke, very quietly and told her the story...

Many rumours had been circulating in the Asian community about the rising tide of extremism starting to engulf the younger members. Some put it down to the influence of the returnees from the Afghan war against the Russians others to the general alienation of Asian youth from British society. Whatever the reason it was a fact. He and other officers had also heard whispers that these extremists were looking to raise money by becoming involved in organised crime, or to be more correct, organising crime! He had enquired about joining the undercover unit, SO10. He thought that his background and intelligence would make him a natural.

He had been welcomed with open arms and given a two week crash induction course. He had been given an assumed identity with a ready made history, a passport and a flat in Leicester. A ready-made cousin also came along as part of the package. The cousin operated on the fringes of some of the extremist groups in the city. Saeed's task was to go to Bradford and to insinuate himself into a small group of Islamists who had access to weapons. They had all fought with the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan. The introductions to the group were being effected by another ex Mujahedeen who had been 'turned' by SO10. Ahmed had to get these guys to a location, where they could be filmed, in flagrante, handing over the weapons for cash.

It had all gone terribly wrong. Saeed had been rumbled. The Bradford gang kidnapped him on his way to the meet. They had bundled him into the back of a transit van. They had gagged him with a filthy rag, blindfolded him stripped him, and cuffed his hands behind his back. they had driven for about half an hour. He remembered the sharp stones cutting his feet as he was frog-marched to a building.

He had then been bundled down a flight of stairs and thrown him into a dark, dank and cold cellar. He lost track of time. He floated in and out of consciousness. Eventually, a sharp kick to his stomach brought him around. He realised that several men were in the cellar. They made fun of his shrivelled penis and his sniffing and whimpering. They removed his gag and kicked and punched his prostrate form delighting in his screams of pain. He had vomited and excreted. However, he had refused to give them anything other than his cover story. They had left him lying in pools of his own vomit, excreta and blood.

He believed that he had endured about three beatings. However, he had no idea of time scale. Then came the moment he had shuddered with dread. He had heard the sound of a chain being run through some metal fixing in the ceiling. His mind ran amok with all sorts of wild and morbid imaginings such as he was about to be hanged. He wet himself! His gaolers laughed and kicked him again. They then tied the chain to his ankles and hoisted him up off the floor. The sudden rush of blood to the head caused him to pass out. They brought him round by throwing a bucket of icy water into his face.

As he revealed more of the story he gripped Flint's hands and pulled her towards him in a tight hug.

When he came to his captors were laughing and joking. He could tell they were smoking as he could smell it and hear the inhalations and exhalations as they puffed on their cigarettes. One of them with a very English accent asked him who he was. He provided his assumed identity. Another with a deep guttural laugh slapped his rump and told him not to be stupid.

Each time he slipped out of consciousness they revived him with a bucket of cold water. He didn't know how long he lasted BUT then they started to get more serious. The well-spoken one informed Ahmed that they were beginning to get bored. He stated that his colleague Tariq could be a bit of an animal. He advised that if Ahmed did not start talking, and talking quickly, Tariq would detach one of his testicles.

As if to reinforce the point. A harsh voice whispered in his ear that he was going to detach one of his testicles with the knife that was gently stroking his upper thigh and

drawing blood. He knew that blood had been drawn because he could feel it trickling into his groin.

Whilst the gentle stroking continued the other voice advised him that they would find his family and exact Allah's revenge on them for having such a relative. He had broken down and told them everything that they wanted to know.

Flint hugged him back as he began to sob. She wondered how he had got out of the situation. She did not have to wait long.

Once he had told them everything they stopped interrogating him. He waited for them to finish him off and emptied his bowels in dread of the final moment. Nothing happened! They let him down gently and took him into the warm and carpeted main house. They put him in a room and removed the cuffs and gently closed the door. He stood in shock for a few moments before tentatively removing his gag and blindfold.

He was in a pleasant bedroom with an en-suite bathroom. On the bed lay a selection of clothes for him to choose from. He was totally disorientated. A voice advised him to shower and to put on the clothes. He obeyed without thinking. A short while later there was a knock on the door. A young lady stood there with a tray containing food and a jug of water.

Half an hour later found him sat in an easy chair facing three men. They asked him how he felt he had performed in the test. He had lost his temper, partly out of embarrassment at succumbing in the cellar. The men had let his tantrum blow itself out. They had explained that the situation he had found himself in could very well happen, and indeed did happen. They had asked whether he thought he could go through with something similar again. He had been honest and they concurred with his view.

Flint also agreed and consoled him by saying that not many people would or could have withstood the torture he had been subjected to. They then hugged one another and fell back to sleep in each other's arms

* * *

No, she quite liked the intimacy of his arm across her chest. She lay there for a few moments, saw the time on the clock and poked Ahmed in the ribs.

'We have to get going. You have to ring Blunt so that we can put off the Attic and I need to get back to my hotel for a change of clothes'

The phone rang as they were getting dressed; Blunt. He informed Ahmed that the search warrants were ready and that Strumpshaw was in the process of arranging manpower. Ahmed had turned to Flint and put his digit finger to his closed lips.

Ahmed explained that a better idea involved just hitting the accountants. His boss accepted the logic and thanked him for his foresight. He nearly said that the idea had come from he and Flint mulling it over. Just in time he thought the better of it. It may have led to a number of awkward questions. And he couldn't be dealing with those right now.

Before ringing off Blunt mentioned that he had contacted Cushion and Leibnitz but could not get hold of Flint. The reception at her hotel said that her key was still there and had been all night.

Ahmed replied that perhaps she went back to London and was now on the way back. What did it matter as long as she was in the office at the same time as the rest of them. Blunt had seemed satisfied with that answer and agreed.

A STROLL IN THE WOODS

She had dozed fitfully and roused herself when the sun began to rise in the sky. Her parched throat informed her that she needed water. Not having water would slow her down. She dare not ask a householder she may come across for a drink. In her dishevelled and muddy state they would take one look and run indoors to phone the police. She was only interested in one policeman. Others would only complicate matters.

She decided to return to the cottage. Her mind was awash with awkward thoughts. What if they were waiting for her? What if they were still in the cottage? She would have to use all the skills from her training. Even though the terrain was very different the principles remained the same.

She cautiously crawled from her hidey hole. The daylight enabled her to avoid stepping on noisy dead twigs and branches. Every so often she stopped, picked up a large stone and threw it as hard as she could. She then crouched down and listened intently for any sound that would betray the presence of other humans. There were none.

It took her a while to retrace her steps back to the cottage, albeit in a circuitous route.

She crouched in the bushes scouring the cottage and all around it for any signs of life. None! From the safety of her cover she lobbed a large stone onto the deck of the holiday home. It struck the wooden platform with a thud and rolled noisily across the floor for a few seconds.

She waited anxiously for a few what seemed an age. Nothing! She moved location and lobbed another stone.....Again nothing. She cautiously approached the rear of the cottage. 'Shit' she silently cursed to herself, 'The bastards have taken the motorbike!'

She couldn't do any more to flush anyone out. Now she had to take the gamble. Still cautious she approached the front door and tried to open it. Locked! No matter she went to the rear where the bathroom window was unlocked, How unprofessional of them she thought. Unless, it was a trap. She wondered whether paranoia was taking over. To hell with it she had to try.

She opened the door into the sitting room. The foetid smell hit her immediately as did the buzzing of the flies and the scratching noise and high pitched fast chattering. Sensing her presence, the chattering and scratching eerily stopped. Then frantic scurrying sounds ensued as dark shapes jumped from the table and ran across the floor.

She approached the table. Rats had bitten off her companion's nose and eaten his eyes out. They had also feasted on his finger stumps. The flies had welcomed the open feast that the killers and the rats had laid before them. The warm air would speed the incubation of the maggots. She gulped slightly her companion had been reasonable company. However, she had seen worse corpse. She remembered a stoning and how the red pulpy human carcass had looked after being left in the market place for a couple of days.

She went into the kitchen and gulped down a cup of water. She found a container and filled it with water.

She washed her face and hands. She felt better with the mud removed. However she could do nothing about her clothes that were still slightly damp. They would dry in the heat of the day, as long as it didn't rain. Now she just felt hungry. Too bad she would have to wait.

Now to get out of here. She still felt that she could not take any chances. Best not to walk along the track. They may be waiting at the end. Best to trek through the forest and find another road. Which way to go?

The sun rises in the east. The track is west facing....if she walked due north she should eventually hit another road. A different road because she remembered that the track had been straight. There was no way the attackers could guard everywhere or guess which way she would go. They would probably think that she would head south for the safety of London. After all there was nothing for her in Norwich, to the North. BUT for what she intended Norwich was the best option

She started walking. After about an hour and a half she came across what appeared to be a minor road.

She walked in the forest parallel to the road: they had trained to be careful and she didn't wish to take any chances. Her heart lifted and beat a little faster when after a couple of hours of walking she espied a welcome red telephone box in a parking bay. She ran towards it. She hoped that it had not been vandalised.

It had not! It even had a telephone directory! What luck! Her heart sank when she saw that chunks of it had been ripped out. Obviously people who needed a crap had torn out sheets to utilise in the bushes. That explained the little bits of paper that sprinkled the bushes close to the box. No matter her luck was still in. The sheet containing the police number was intact.

She searched in the pocket of her cargo pants and found a selection of coins. Yes she had enough to make a call. Now for the moment of truth. She lifted the handset from its cradle. Even before, she put it to her ear she heard the reassuring loud purr.

She dialled the number in the book. She asked for Blunt. Shit he wasn't there. She told the switchboard she needed to speak to the policeman urgently about the cases in the media. She read the number off the notice in the box and advised that she would only be there for another ten minutes.

On receiving the message the policeman thought, indeed hoped, that the first big break had arrived. He took out his brick and dialled the number.

The girl had waited impatiently in the box. Each time a car approached she turned inwards towards the corner of the box shielding her face from the road. She couldn't be too careful. After what seemed like an eternity the phone rang loud and clear.

She refused to answer Blunt's questions regarding her companion. She would tell him what she could when she saw him. She wanted to do a deal. The policeman said that they needed to pick her up and then they could talk about deals. She readily acquiesced stating that she needed to be picked up quickly as she feared for her life. Again she refused to answer from whom. All she would say is that she would tell him when she met him.

Finally she gave him the location of the call box. When asked if she was armed she advised him that she had neither gun nor blade.

On finishing the call she found herself a well hidden spot amongst the bushes that afforded her a good view of both sides of the road.

Blunt delegated the organisation of the pick-up to Leibnitz. Two squad cars, an armed response unit in an unmarked car and accompanied the two of them to the phone box location.

Each squad car lights flashing blocked off the road 100 yards ahead of the phone box on either side. Two officers from the armed response unit stood at either end in readiness for anything that might occur. In full regalia they resembled creatures from a science fiction movie. Blunt and Leibnitz put on their flak jackets. As Blunt climbed out of the car he ordered a disappointed Leibnitz to stay put.

The girl watched all this activity intently from the relative safety of her hiding spot. She would have to be careful. One careless move and she could be blown away.

She recognised Blunt. He called out loudly asking her to step out into the middle of the road with her arms above her head.

She shouted back that she would do so. She sensed the armed officers tense as she slowly walked into the middle of the road. She stood there waiting for them in an almost defiant manner. They cautiously approached her. One of the armed unit, a female officer frisked her, found the container of water in her waistband and threw it away. She was cuffed and led away to Blunt's car.

Luckily there had been no traffic on the road. Therefore the chances of the media knowing that there had been an armed response incident was minimal. The two squad cars remained awaiting further orders from the detectives. The armed response unit returned to Norwich: their presence required at another incident.

She asked whether they had anything to eat. Leibnitz rummage in her pockets and came up with half a packet of mints. The girl devoured them. Blunt asked for the whereabouts of her companion. She told him about the dead body.....who killed him she does not know...but it was not her. She laughed at Leibnitz taking notes. She gave them the location of the cottage.

Leibnitz jumped out of the car and strode towards one of the squad cars. She asked for and was given the radio mike. She got hold of Cushion.

Within minutes Cushion had organised an armed response unit and another two squad cars. He had also managed to delegate the task of investigating the ownership of the cottage to a pliable young wpc.

THE SEARCH WARRANT

Nice bright day. Flint, Saeed and Blunt stood with a team of officers just round the corner from Darcy & Darcy's offices on Thorpe Road. The policewoman had felt uncomfortable when her boss looked at her with a sardonic half smile. 'What' she had responded in a manner that made her think of her teenage daughter when she had been found out doing something Flint disapproved of. Blunt's response had been an amused 'nothing'. He then turned to Ahmed who avoided his gaze.

They were distracted by DC Gayde clutching in his hand the Search Warrant for the Accountant's premises. Blunt and his team could see the others laughing behind their hands as Gayde explained what they were going to do. It was hard to take seriously an idiot who donned a white bullet proof vest! He deliberated whether someone had trusted him with leading the raid because they liked the man. Not a chance! If everything went tits up then the front man would carry the can. Gayde the fall guy made a lot more sense. Of course Gayde did not possess the intelligence to work it out.

Off they went, Gayde to the fore. He rang the doorbell and stated that he had a package to deliver. On being buzzed in the whole group of seven police rushed through the door and into the reception area. He thrust the document in front of the young receptionist's face and demanded that she call her boss, Mr Willoughby. 'Tell him it's the police' he smirked.

Blunt strode over and pushed himself between the idiot and the receptionist putting his hand on the receiver. The phrase 'bull in a china shop' a gross understatement when applied to one of Gayde's limited intelligence.

'Just tell him that someone has a special package for him. That will do fine. Now before you do so who are the three most important people after him?'

Relieved at dealing with someone other than Gayde and who was also somewhat avuncular she readily provided the names. And even volunteered to ring them down.

'Thank you very much' Blunt said gently.

Behind him Gayde girmed in anger and frustration whilst tapping his feet rapidly on the floor.

'You deal with Willoughby and the others when they come down CONSTABLE' ordered Blunt.

The other did not reply. However, when Willoughby and his three lieutenants entered the reception Gayde sprang into action.

'Mr Willoughby'

'Yes' replied a perplexed Willoughby a small stocky man with a beard that hid a slight facial disfigurement.

'This is a search warrant to for these premises. We believe that you may be involved in organised crime.'

'Wh...Wh...What are you talking about?' stammered the discomfited accountant.

Blunt leaned over to Saeed and Flint and whispered

'Ahmed, get Willoughby and take him to another room, Debbie you get one of the lieutenants and do the same. I will deal with the other one. Get in there now I will sort out this idiot before he does any more damage'

'CONSTABLE. You are doing a great job. I think you and your colleagues are doing a great job. What I think you should now do is interrogate the filing cabinets and the paperwork.'

One of the support team could not suppress a giggle. Once again Gayde ginned and his right foot started to involuntarily bounce on the floor. Unfortunately for him Blunt was the senior officer and he had to obey. He determined to register a complaint. If he could bring Internal Affairs down on the prat all the better.

'Constable, before you commence working out how to interrogate the paperwork can you get one of your colleagues to deal with sending the staff home for the day? Maybe this wpc here' Blunt motioned to a neatly attired young woman, the one who had giggled.

Willoughby still with a slight stammer started to object. Blunt silenced him with a curt threat of arrest if he did not comply and help them with their enquiries.

Blunt, Saeed and Flint had discussed the raid before they set out. They had decided that if they found anything of substance they needed to be able to act quickly. They needed to be able to investigate out of the way properties almost immediately. The Russians, if it were indeed the Russians, were not to be alerted, that any raids were about to occur.

The most effective way of standing any chance of achieving these objectives was to isolate Willoughby and his two main employees. They could not be allowed to make any phone calls that may raise the alarm. Risky though it was they also had to detain these three for at least twenty four hours. After that they either had to charge them or to let them go.

Again they decided to forgo another standard procedure in these matters. The computers were not going to be seized and carted off to headquarters. Instead Willoughby and his lieutenants would be interviewed in situ. They would help Blunt and his team to access the files they needed. If they refused they were to be charged with obstructing the police in their enquiries. Again risky but the team were playing for high stakes!

Blunt, Ahmed and Debbie Flint accompanied their respective interviewees to separate offices.

Willoughby was a truculent mixture of nerves and defiance. He could not decide whether to be afraid or angry. Nevertheless both he and Saeed knew that he had something to hide. The only question he had to decide concerned from whom he had the most to fear, the police or the Russians.

Saeed's first question struck at the heart of the matter immediately. He asked Willoughby to point out on the computer the location of the files appertaining to properties and registered businesses. To ensure that no slip of the finger on a 'delete' button could occur Saeed himself sat at the computer, an Amstrad.

Blunt and Flint enacted similar scenes with their interviewees. Only Flint's woman exhibited any signs that she may know what the raid and investigation were all about. The policewoman wondered whether Willoughby and the woman were having an affair. If they were it could provide some sort of leverage over the pair. Not entirely ethical; but then what did ethics have to do with modern day policing! Flint had become increasingly cynical over the last few years.

She threw the question about an affair at the woman; she blushed. 'Bingo' thought a delighted Flint and followed up with the question about whether their respective spouses knew of the affair. The blushes once again informed the policewoman about a direct hit. After that the woman was most accommodating about helping Flint to navigate the files. She even volunteered to copy the pertinent files to disk.

Meanwhile the 'warrant' team were searching through filing cabinets and desks looking for any information regarding registered companies and property management. When someone asked for a little more information as to what they were looking for Gayde's stock answer was 'You'll know when you see it'.

After two hours or so they had a list of potential properties and businesses. None of Darcy and Darcy's senior staff wished to comment on the list or to volunteer any information regarding the list or its contents.

Blunt informed Strumpshaw of the developments and asked if they could have further resources for two things: extra staff to print off all the information and to help with search warrants for the properties chosen to raid. The Chief Constable agreed although Blunt detected concern in his voice. After that call Blunt rang Cushion and asked him to send Leibnitz over to collect the disks.

Ahmed collared Gayde, thrust a printout at him then asked him whether he had found any files yet relating to the list of companies on the printout. He hadn't!

Willoughby opted for silence when questioned on the whereabouts of the paper files. No amount of threats would make him change his mind. Not a surprise really. The police could threaten him with prison BUT the Russians could threaten him with torture and death. And to make matters worse the Russian didn't threaten they made statements of intent.

It was Willoughby's paramour who gave the game away. There was a secret cupboard in a box room full of old files in the basement. Ahmed retrieved the files and passed them and the disks over to Leibnitz when she arrived at Thorpe Road.

Not long after Leibnitz had left Blunt received the phone call from headquarters that a young woman wanted to speak with him. Immediately he heard the name he took an adrenalin hit. Bit by agonising bit they were starting to get information and what he hoped were significant breaks. Hopefully, the momentum would now build.

If he were disappointed with his conversation with the girl Blunt didn't show it. He called Leibnitz and told her what she had to do. He would meet her back at headquarters a little later.

He explained to Saeed and Flint that they had found the girl. Unfortunately, as to the man, they had no idea. And the girl refused to say anything until she met Blunt. He

advised his two colleagues to get Willoughby and his two lieutenants down to the station and into cells. BUT they were to leave as late as possible so as to allow themselves more time for the searches the next day. They were then to trawl through all the information they had. They had to make a decision as to which places they were going to hit.

Saeed brought up the question of The Attic. He considered that they should hit it simultaneous to the chosen properties. Blunt readily agreed. He stressed that they had a twenty four window. When they asked about the search he stated that they probably had what they needed and to just leave the rest to Gayde.

As he left them he threw out a sardonic parting comment concerning budgets being shot to hell.

DEAL OR NO DEAL

The Custody Sergeant booked in Saddiqe. She considered him a gross cocky infidel. She emptied her pockets removed her watch, a present from her parents: another life never to be regained. All her possessions were put into a sealed plastic bag that she signed. A policewoman frisked her to make sure that she had no sharp objects, drugs or similar on her person. They made her take her shoes off and searched them to ensure they contained no sharp objects or drugs. The policewoman accompanied by a policeman then marched her to another room where they took her fingerprints, her photograph and her DNA.

A walk then ensued through a succession of heavy metal doors. They came to a longish room with a narrow corridor flanked on each side by cells. Each had a solid grey door with a viewing hatch at head height and a waist high serving hatch. They stopped outside one with the door ajar.

'Shoes off!' ordered the policewoman

'What?' asked a shocked Saddiqe

'Shoes off now. Otherwise we'll take them off. If you resist we will restrain you and you can sit cuffed in this cell. It'll be fun watching you on the CCTV trying to shit with cuffs on. The choice is yours.'

'Does Chief Inspector Blunt know how you're treating me' the girl spat out

'We couldn't give a damn whether he knows or not. We're in charge here not Chief Inspector Blunt' came the immediate and aggressive response. 'So, shoes off!!'

The girl took off her shoes reluctantly and placed them in a cupboard by the cell.

The cell was 12ft by six foot and 11 feet high. One small window 8ft up was situated opposite the solid door. A toilet pan with no seat stood in the right hand corner. No paper. The parting shot of the policewoman informed her that the loo only flushed once per half hour.

She'd be damned if she would let them see any weakness. She sat up on the plastic mattress covering the bunk. She folded her arms and meditated, only moving to stretch her legs or refold her arms.

Every so often the duty sergeant looked in on her on the CCTV. Finally, after four hours, as she would later discover, she was taken to an interview room.

Blunt took Leibnitz with him. He felt that it would be too provocative probably to use Saeed in the interview. And anyway he had too much on with the results of the Darcy & Darcy raid.

He switched on the tape and advised her that she was helping the police with their enquiries into the death of Gruberowa, The Patels and Sheikh.

She said that she wanted to do a deal. Blunt advised her that deals were not on the agenda. However, if she cooperated he would see what he could do. Unfortunately he

could not make any promises. She said that she wanted a lawyer. Blunt advised her that would come later. First of all he needed answers to questions.

'What made you and the Patels let us know that Gruberowa worked out of a Russian Brothel'

'We had seen your broadcast and all the stuff in the media asking if anyone had seen her. As good citizens we wanted to help'

'Come on' a cynical Blunt said 'what do you take us for?'

'That is the truth'

'Who is the *we*?'

She clammed up.

'Ok, what were you doing at the Patel's?' Blunt changed tack

'We'd been asked to go there by the Patels' the unconvincing response

'We do not seem to be getting anywhere Miss Saddiqe. Now we can play this game ad infinitum or what if I release you and announce to the media that we will be releasing you from here at a particular time'

Her face blanched and she bit her lip until she drew blood.

'You fucking bastard'

'I thought so. Whoever, killed Sheikh wants you dead as well. The point is why?' Blunt calmly countered before continuing, 'So let us start again. Why were you at the Patels?'

'Our job was to make sure that you found out about the Russians'

'Who told you go to the Patels and how did they find out about the Russians?'

'We were ordered by our cell leader?'

'Do you know Rafique Khan?'

'I have heard of him. I do not know him personally'

'Did you see him in Afghanistan or Pakistan with a gentleman called Osama Bin Laden?'

Her eyes opened wide with shock

'How do you know?'

'Just answer the question.'

'Yes, I have seen him there'

'Who is your cell leader?'

She gave the name of one of the extremist Imams in the Finsbury Park mosque. She laughingly advised them that he had already left the country

'How did you get to find out about the Russians?'

'I don't know. We follow orders'

Blunt accepted that she probably didn't know how someone had found out about the Russians. On being asked again who had killed the Patels she again professed innocence. She and Sheikh had been told to get out. Who told them to get out she didn't know. They had received a telephone call and carried out their instructions.

Again Blunt probed as to whether they suspected that something was going to happen to the Patels. He followed up with what was the point of killing the Patels?

Once more she denied any knowledge of anything. All that she knew is that they were told to get out. He enquired as to Sheikh's whereabouts when he and Superintendent Saeed went back round to the Patels'. He had been sent to do something else...she did not know what?

Blunt then moved onto asking her about the cottage.

'What made her kill Sheikh?'

'Don't be stupid. Whoever it was wanted to kill us both. You've already said that. When are we going to a deal?' a defiant answer

Blunt felt frustrated. Saddiqe refused to give straight answers.

'Who were the people that came to the cottage and killed Sheikh?'

'I don't know I ran away'

'What made you run away?'

'I just felt that they were going to kill us'

'How did you get to the cottage?'

'We were on a motorbike'

'Where did you get the motorbike?'

'Someone gave it to us'

Blunt's frustration boiled over. He turned to Leibnitz. 'DC Leibnitz is just leaving the room to get Miss Saddiqe and myself a coffee. The tape is being turned off at....'.

When they were alone he turned to Saddiqe

'Ayesha. At this moment in time we are getting nowhere. You are giving me nothing. If I do not start getting something soon then I will do everything in my power to ensure that your colleagues whoever they are will harm you.' Blunt whispered enunciating every word clearly.

The girl sat silently staring at him. Obviously deliberating as to how much she should cooperate.

'Obviously I will not release you. But I can have you detained in Norwich prison. You will be alongside other Muslims. At the same time I will issue a press release stating that you are providing us with a wealth of information about a whole range of issues'

Once more she blanched.

Blunt turned to Leibnitz as she entered the interview room.

'What a welcome sight Melanie. I am absolutely parched as is Miss Saddiqe.'

The tape was restarted.

'Where did the motorbike come from?'

'It was brought to us by two guys who also told us that we were to stay at the cottage until we were picked up'

'Did you know them?'

'No....but I can give you a description'

'Good we will sort that out later'

Leibnitz passed Blunt a piece of paper he unfolded it, digested its contents and continued.

'We have just heard that the pliers and the knife left on the cottage table are Russian. Furthermore, we are told that the manner of the murder replicates the torture and murder methods used by the Russians in Afghanistan. What have you got to say?'

'I don't know anything about the Russians apart from what I have already told you. I have never been in Afghanistan when the Russian were there!.'

'Miss Saddiqe you know more than you are letting on. It is blaringly obvious to me that your colleagues want you dead one way or another. It does not matter what prison you end up in, and you will end up in prison. You know as well as I do that they will find some way to get at you. If you provide me with something substantial then we will have to do everything in our power to protect you.'

She sat in the chair. Covered her face with the palm of her hand and stared at the wall. The silence began to scream inside Leibnitz's head after about 4 minutes. As she turned to look at Blunt her chair squeaked. He did not move. He just looked straight at Saddiqe.

Finally, after what must have been nearly ten minutes Saddiqe turned to Blunt.

'I have something but it is not about your case directly. I won't tell you everything right now. I want it in writing from someone senior, perhaps the Home Secretary, that I will be protected. Then I will tell you what else I know but I need another coffee'

Once again the recording machine was switched off and Leibnitz went for coffee.

Saddiqe then leant towards Blunt and whispered the briefest of outlines. The magnitude of what she was intimating left him stunned.

He thrust himself out of the chair and dashed from the room. He nearly bumped into Leibnitz in the corridor. He ordered her to wrap up the interview and then to find the others. He hurried down the corridor. 'Christ' he thought 'if she is telling the truth the consequences do not bear thinking about.' Leibnitz had never seen him move so quickly and couldn't understand why.

A TWISTING OF ARMS

Flint Saeed and Cushion ran into Blunt outside Strumpshaw's office. They attempted to fill him in on what they had found out from the Accountant's files. He abruptly interrupted them saying that he needed to see Strumpshaw first. As he entered the reception area of the Chief's office he turned to Saeed and told him to get planning to hit whatever properties they had identified as targets. He would catch up on them later. They wondered what the hell was going on. They had never seen their boss so agitated.

Of course the Chief had gone home or to some function. Blunt picked up the phone and dialled his home number. Luckily he got the man himself. He explained that he would need his boss to get onto the Home Secretary that evening. He would prefer to explain why in person. Would it be better for him to go to his house or wait for him to come into the office. A not too happy Strumpshaw said that he would be in the office in 20 minutes.

As Blunt waited for his boss he had time to think. The more he thought the more he realised the pitfalls of letting him know the truth. The Home Secretary or some such Minister would be advised and would request more information. They would then need to discuss matters with their civil servants and political advisers. Then the whole paraphernalia of state security would become involved, including the new security Committee. The propensity for leaks increased exponentially with each new state organ added to the mix.

No he was going to try and keep this to himself and one other person that he needed to ring. He would do that when he got home. He didn't want any calls to that source to be traced back to the office. If it blew up he knew that he was finished. The number of the so-called establishment that would like to see him take a fall were too numerous to think about.

Now he had twenty minutes in which to construct a credible story for Strumpshaw. One that would also pass the scrutiny of the Home Secretary and all the others.

A grumpy Strumpshaw bundled through the door wearing a red Pringle jumper, red dominated tartan shirt, grey slacks and black loafers: he was obviously in mufti. I have probably pulled him away from dinner, thought Blunt. Blunt was told in no uncertain terms that his story had better be good. Mrs Strumpshaw was not a happy wife. This evening had been the first in weeks that they were going to sit down together and dine at home. Blunt had ruined it!

Blunt commenced weaving his tale comprising a judicious mixture of truth and his extrapolating from that to what he considered to be logical supposition. The range of the Chief's facial expressions as he progressed told him that he was winning: thank God. The tale put the girl at the centre of the whole business. She had information about the Russians people trafficking activities. How they brought people in, where they 'stored' them and how they used them. She also knew details of their drug trafficking activities. Furthermore, she was part of an Islamist vanguard that intended to take over from the Russians in whatever way possible. She would not provide the details unless she had a document promising that she would be provided with protection.

Strumpshaw stated that a good deal of the information that she could provide would be of use to more than one agency. The security services, the new National Crime Agency just to name a few. They would all ask for the girl to be handed over. Blunt said that they could have her when they had finished with her. She had more than enough information regarding their unit for them to justify keeping her. Fortunately the Chief agreed with him.

He took a small black book out of the top drawer of his desk. Leafed through a couple of pages and then rang a number. He asked for the Home secretary. The man couldn't have been there as Strumpshaw put the phone down. He paced around the office until the phone rang a few minutes later. He recognised the voice with the ever so slight Nottinghamshire intonation in the background. He could hear some jazz in the room. Obviously a night at home for the Home Secretary. He could imagine him having slipped off his Hush Puppies, sipping from a glass of whisky, puffing at a Hamlet whilst reading a book on bird watching

He explained the situation and what he wanted. The Home Secretary stated that he was asking rather a lot on the say so of a slip of a girl and a terrorist to boot. Surely the best course of action was to hand the girl over to the security services. Life would then be much easier for everyone not least Strumpshaw himself. Not for nothing did he have reputation for candour. After all he had been the one to tell Margaret Thatcher that the game was up.

The Chief Constable agreed but countered with the fact that it didn't say much for his backing of the new anti-trafficking unit if he kicked it in the teeth before it had properly emerged from the womb. The Home Secretary picked him up on his mixed metaphors whilst taking a puff on his cigar. He could imagine the wry smile that the Minister often affected.

Eventually the Home Secretary agreed to write a note and said that he would get it faxed over to Strumpshaw within the hour.

The Chief Constable turned to Blunt and said that perhaps they better get Saddiqe into the interview room and start getting the details from her. No time like the present. He would sit and listen to the interview in another room.

'Shit' thought Blunt 'this is not what I need'

'That would not be a good idea sir. The girl has been through a traumatic experience over the last twenty four hours. She has been in custody with us and decided to betray her friends and colleagues. I think that it is best if we leave her to get a night's rest first.'

Blunt could see that he had not entirely convinced his boss.

'Not only that sir. If we continue to put pressure on her now all the do-gooders could come after us. In any court case we could be accused of obtaining evidence under duress. The force has had enough opprobrium heaped on it recently I am sure we do not want any more.'

'ok' Strumpshaw reluctantly agreed. 'Unfortunately. I won't be able to listen in tomorrow I am going to meet some of my peers in Rugby. After speaking to James Simmons the Surrey Chief Constable regarding the Weybridge brothel we decided that it would be a

good idea if some of us got together to see whether the same thing is happening in their areas and how we can work together. It should help the new unit if we can get them on side.'

Blunt nodded in agreement.

'How did Leibnitz get on with the Surrey folk by the way?'

'I have not had chance to talk about it with her yet. We have all been rushing around like bafs all day. And we still are. I think that we are going to be going for a number of search warrants first thing in the morning. We could be making some big demands on manpower' replied Blunt

Strumpshaw nodded. More relaxed now than when he had come in.

'If you have any problems with manpower then go to the ACC I have already briefed him to give you every assistance. As long as it produces results that we can trumpet as successes and follow through to successful prosecutions then leave the budgets to me. If your girl comes up trumps then I don't think that I am going to have too much trouble with increasing our budgets or getting bollocked for going way over'

The last part filled Blunt with trepidation. If he did not produce then god help him because he would have drowned Strumpshaw and himself in ordure. Everything, in some ways, depended on the phone call he would try and make later that evening.

'Good. I will be getting off now. Otherwise I will be in even more trouble. If you need me for anything urgent don't hesitate to call. You can fill me in on what's happening when I get back from Rugby. That fax should come through soon. I'll leave you to deal with it. Goodnight'.

Once the Chief had gone Blunt went into his office that had now become the team room. They were all there waiting for him. It transpired that Leibnitz had filled them in regarding Saddiqe. She had also covered what the SOCOS had discovered at the cottage.

Saeed informed him that Willoughby and his lieutenants were complaining loudly and bitterly at their incarceration. At every opportunity they were demanding legal representation. Blunt said that as long as they were told that all that would be dealt with when they were in a position to question them he was happy.

The onus lay with the team to get the warrants and get out to the properties and The Attic. Saeed would run the show and needed to keep him informed. Had they thought of taking any armour. No! in that case they had better liaise with the ACC. Had they all forgotten that Morski and Pidrik had been armed? Leibnitz would continue questioning Saddiqe with Blunt in the morning.

Ahmed brought up his and Flint's discussion re Leibnitz's point about Gruberova being put into the water from the seaward side. Despite the raised eyebrows of his boss he went onto say that they had looked into it. On the night in question a Somalian registered vessel and a Russian factory ship had left Yarmouth harbour. The former had had put into the harbour the day before: ostensibly because of engine trouble. The latter had also docked the night before to let the crew have a little rest and recreation. They were awaiting details as to whether the routes of both had been logged.

'Have you checked with the coastguards at what points out at sea the currents could have taken Gruberowa's body to Winterton beach.. You can then compare these figures to the Somalian boats route' came Blunt's response.

'He's always one step ahead' thought Saeed

'The John Blunt of old. The clever bastard' opined Debbie Flint

Blunt thanked them for following up Leibnitz's idea. He then asked Debbie Flint whether she intended travelling back to London that evening. Her blush, a crimson red, spread from her neck to her face. She answered in the negative whilst averting her eyes from his gaze.

Blunt looked at his watch and thought that it would not be too bad. Israel was only two hours ahead of the UK.

SHALOM

On the drive back home Blunt's mind ran over the questions he wanted to ask Lefkowitz. He also wondered how the Israeli would take the information that he had been given by the girl.

Once in the house he headed straight to the dresser in the dining room and chose a Woodforde Reserve from his selection of whiskies. He never ceased to take satisfaction from the gold colour and the aroma released when he splashed it into the glass.

He took a sip, swirled it around his mouth to savour the taste and then swallowed it. He opened the top right hand drawer of the dresser and took out a little black book and flicked through the pages. Having found the one he wanted he took the book and the whisky over to his favourite chair in the lounge-diner. He sat down and dialled the number. Nothing! The phone advised him that the other phone was switched off and maybe he should try later.

He sprang up from the chair and paced about the room. He tried to call Lefkowitz three more times before banging the phone down in frustration. He knew that he could not really move forward without the Israeli's input. Well, he could! But if he revealed the truth to Strumpshaw immediately then there was little chance that he could settle some old scores. And God did he want to settle some of those scores!

Two hours later Lefkowitz returned Blunt's calls.

They exchanged pleasantries. Lefkowitz said that he had heard that Blunt had had a few problems with respect to his turning a blind eye regarding the Schonmanns. Blunt said that it had resulted in an internal investigation. However, they had not been able to prove anything. If he had to do it again then he would.

Lefkowitz said he found it gratifying to hear that Blunt now had a new unit. Blunt did not need to ask how the other knew things. Mossad didn't have a fearsome reputation for nothing.

On enquiring about Lefkowitz's nephew and family he was told that the boy and the family were doing fine. They lived in Tel Aviv and the nephew did research work for Mossad.

Blunt raised the question of the problems facing Israel. If anything was guaranteed to get the other going then that topic was a surefire winner. The words tumbled out of his mouth.

The new Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, a great man, a great soldier, a great politician, had caused a furore with the Ultra-Orthodox. He had imposed an immediate ban on all settlements. Rabin understood that Israel had to come to terms with the fact that it was surrounded on three sides by Arab states. Its survival depended on coming to some accord with its neighbours. Again it also had to be mindful of American opinion. He enquired whether Blunt had seen the July 25th edition of the New York Times. On being informed 'no' he went on to elaborate some of the points contained in the article.

Secretary of State James A. Baker III had hailed Israel's decision to freeze all new settlement building in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, but said more details would be required before the Bush administration decides whether this action meets its conditions for granting Israel loan guarantees. Israel needed the loan guarantees. However, Rabin's version of real-politic did not garner universal acceptance in Israel.

Then of course we have the Islamists spewing out their bile regarding Jews, Americans and any so-called non-believer.

Blunt asks whether he has come across the name Osama Bin Laden. That set Lefkowitz off again.

Osama Bin Laden is the creation of the Americans and all the other powers that supported The Afghan fight against the Russians. They supplied them with materiel and funds and taught them how to fight. Bin Laden volunteered to help the mujahedeen. He became a master organiser and because he also used some of his own wealth he gained a great deal of influence. He saw all the youngsters from the West and other countries volunteer for the fight. He managed to influence a great many of them towards Islamist extremism.

Mossad believed that he chose the best and the brightest to join his organisation called Al Qaeda. They were all inculcated and indoctrinated with the most virulent form of extremist Islam. One thing that many of them have in common is middle class backgrounds and university degrees. They are engineers, doctors, chemists, computer experts and other specialists. Bring all these people together, add money and an irrational hatred of Jews and Americans wrapped up in the most extreme Muslim dogma on earth and we have a recipe for murder and terror on an unimaginable scale. These are not poor Palestinians or Arabs out of the desert. They are managing to utilise the internet to send each other messages. Mossad believes that they are planning a whole host of activities. Indeed Mossad already knows about a number.

He asked Blunt whether he has seen any of their literature. The policeman answered in the affirmative.

'Then you will know the sort of hate that they are peddling! You will remember that when I got involved with my nephew and Aktion I was keeping an eye on the Islamist extremists, particularly those at the Finsbury Park mosque. We knew that something was going on. We are still keeping an eye on these people. We know that youngsters are being encouraged to go to Bin Laden's training camp' responded the Israeli.

'Notwithstanding that Avram I have got one of those type of people in one of my cells: a girl. She says that she knows an attack is being planned in the USA for when an Israeli big shot visits New York. She says that they have people who have been training in the USA for just such a marquee statement. They want to announce their presence with a bang. They want every western nation, and particularly America to know that none of them are safe. Not even in their home countries. What big shot is going to the USA in the near future?' from Blunt

'My friend they all say that. Only one in a hundred actually has something of import. However we take seriously all 100. That is why we have the best strike rate of all the intelligence services! I will look into this'

'Whilst you are about that I want some information on another name, if you have it'

'What name my friend?'

'Have you or your people come across the name Rafique Khan?'

'Why do you want to know about that name, my friend?' enquired Lefkowitz cautiously

'That one has a personal element to it' came the answer.

The Israeli advised Blunt that he would try and get back to him before morning.

The policeman couldn't settle whilst waiting for his friend to ring back and he certainly couldn't sleep' Instead he put on one of his Leonard Bernstein Mahler CD's. Then went over to his bookcase and decided to reread Bulgakov's The Master and Margarita. He must have dozed off because he thought he could hear a telephone ringing. He had. He rushed to the phone and grabbed it just before Lefkowitz thought of ringing off. He looked at the clock... 4am!

'My friend I have an answer for you. Our Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin is going to give a talk to the UN in two days time. It is all very hush hush. I had to get clearance to tell you. He will visit various Jewish Community centres in Brooklyn and the Lower East Side. He will meet up with Dan Quayle the vice president and James Baker The secretary of State. They will hold a press conference on the roof of the World Trade Centre at which Baker will announce the extension of the Loan Guarantee. They chose the World Trade Centre because the Loan scheme is all about trade and Rabin has never been to the building. If the weather is inclement they will hold it in the restaurant at the top.

We realise that there are many opportunities for a terrorist attack on such a trip. Ourselves and our American colleagues have got everything covered. We have examined every street and every building where an assassin could try and take a shot at Rabin. It all costs a lot of money but everything is covered. We have looked at every street etc. where someone could attempt to leave an explosive device. Every single one has been covered. A ring of steel is being put around our Prime Minister and Baker and Quayle. Goddam it John the security operation is probably costing more than the Loan Guarantee!! '

'It all sounds very impressive and thorough Avram BUT could you have missed anything?' cautioned Blunt

'Everything is possible my friend. Neither we nor the Americans are infallible BUT are you sure she is not stringing you along. That is not impossible either. Get more information from her. Then we can look at everything again. They will do so now anyway just to make sure that they have not missed anything.' commented the Israeli.

'What about Khan?' remembered Blunt

'An interesting subject for a whole variety of reasons. He makes me think of a chameleon. He helped the west against the Russians in Afghanistan. He makes all the correct noises in the UK as a Muslim moderate. Yet he made friends with Osama Bin Laden during the Afghan business. Apparently he has seen him a few times since the conflict ended. We don't know which way he swings and your security services won't tell us; and I wouldn't expect them to. The situation is made difficult by him being a big time

MP and a member of this new Security Committee thing? May I ask why you are so interested in him?

'Ok. If I had told my boss the truth about what she said then my fear was that it would have got to the Security Committee. If Khan has been compromised then the information may not have got to you. He may have managed to block it by all sorts of means. One of which would have been to question the source; namely me!' explained Blunt before continuing 'The girl has more, or so she tells me. If what she has is vital then my doing it this way will give you time to do something. If the terrorists were alerted, they may pull out before you have had chance to catch them. They will then be free to plan something else. Or you may never know for the reasons I have already said'

'You two have history I think!'

'I will get back to you later today. Oh by the way see if you can find anything out about a Bondarevski, from Petersburg I think. Regarding the other that is my business. Shalom' the policeman refused to be drawn.

'Shalom, my friend.' From the Israeli.

Blunt made himself a coffee, black and strong. He would need the caffeine, and lots more besides to get through the day. He wondered whether Flint was sleeping with Saeed. He would have to ask them. However for the moment he would let things lie. They both had important tasks regarding the two cases and the people trafficking aspects. He needed to be left alone with the girl again when he asked her about the rest of her information. He then had to stall giving his boss the information so that Lefkovitz had enough time to utilise what he had given him. Only when the Israeli told him that they had succeeded could he risk telling Strumpshaw. That way they could stop Khan from passing information on. That of course assumed that he wasn't kosher. And Blunt hoped to hell that he wasn't!

He looked at the clock, nearly 5.20am. The team had to be hitting the first properties in forty minutes or so. And of course he couldn't forget that they had to start interviewing Willoughby and his staff by mid-afternoon at the latest. He wondered whether the chosen solicitor would be the same as for Morski, Pidrik et al: Mr Hewitt whose hairstyle made Donald Trump's look almost normal.

He decided to get into the office early. He wanted to interview Saddiqe again before headquarters began to come to life.

THE PLOT THICKENS

The almost eerie emptiness of headquarters at 6am provided him with a sense of relief. Another stroke of fortune concerned the duty sergeant. The raids had drained the place of manpower which left Sergeant Evans putting in a stint of mandatory overtime. After a long night his thoughts were on sleep and his young daughter's birthday party later that afternoon.

He hardly batted an eyelid when Blunt told him to bring Saddiqe up to interview room 1. He explained that he needed to go over a few things with her. He emphasised that he ought to put it in his log that Blunt had ordered him to do so. Evans had nodded his agreement.

In the confines of the interview room the Chief Inspector dispensed with any formalities. He had no time for such niceties.

'Miss Saddiqe. Here is a faxed copy of the document you requested. As you can see it is signed by the Home Secretary. The original is on its way. I trust that it will suffice?'

She grabbed the document and studied it for a moment before placing it on the table.

She nodded.

'Now what do you have to tell me. This document is only of value if what you have to say is of value. If not then quite simply we rip it up and throw it away. So, what have you got?'

She paused for a while and then started

'I don't know all the details. It is only stuff that I overheard. Members of a specially chosen team have been in the USA for quite a while. They are all fluent English speakers. Many of them have studied engineering and suchlike subjects at English and American universities. The plan had always been to organise and execute a spectacular strike against our most hated enemies. This is one that will strike hard at the great Satan and Jews. All I know is that our people have enrolled with flying schools because they are going to carry out something from the air. It's going to take out some of the most important world politicians.'

'Christ' thought Blunt 'are they going to try and strafe the World Trade Centre with jet fighters?'

'Can you be a little more specific, are they going to use jet fighters, helicopter gunships or some suchlike?' he urged incredulously

'I don't know. They kept everything fairly secret. Some of us only got to know because we had overheard snatches of conversations. So I've told you all I know. '

'Ok' disappointment in Blunt's voice. He rang for the custody sergeant to take the girl back to her cell.

Once in his office he dialled Lefkowitz. He felt a tad silly because he did not really have that much to tell.

This time the Israeli answered immediately. He couldn't hide his disappointment at what the Englishman told him.

'My friend. What is this? This is something I am supposed to take back to my people?'

Blunt could imagine the exaggerated shrug of the other's shoulders.

Avram I know it does not sound very much. But did you ever think that they would attack from the air?'

'Please my friend don't humour me. The whole thing is too far fetched. This girl is pulling your foot or leg.

Blunt thought he would give it one more try.

'Avram, your organisation has been so successful because they consider everything. Look at all the possibilities. Look at the Entebbe operation. On a wider level what about the victories in the Six Day and Yom Kippur wars. In the latter you achieved things that people would never have dreamed of...'

'Where is this going my friend? We are running out of time on your schedule' the Israeli interjected

'Avram, keep an open mind. Let's think of what these people have done in the past. One they have hijacked airliners...you know that only too well! Secondly they believe in suicide bombing, again you know that only too well. All that rubbish about ninety two virgins or whatever being their reward in the afterlife'

'My friend, I still do not see where you are going. I know what you are trying to say. BUT and I stress BUT it is all too far fetched' came the sceptical interruption from the Israeli.

Allow me to finish. If a strange aircraft attempts to fly into the airspace around New York then the Americans would down it or shepherd it away immediately. Think how can they get through the air security cordon? What about hijacking an airliner from either Newark or JFK? The security services will not be looking for a commercial aircraft following its correct flightpath. What if the plan is to hijack aircraft with flightpaths over New York? Not only that but they choose internal flights. They have no security checks. They can easily take weapons on such flights.'

'That would take one hell of a lot of planning. Do you really think that these people are capable of that?' the scepticism had slightly reduced

'Avram do not close your mind. Let me give you an example of something with my own team'. Blunt went on to elaborate how they had all thought Gruberowa would have been driven to a point on the coast and taken out in a small boat. However, one of the team got them to look at it in a different way. What if she had been taken out on a ship and been brought in towards the coast. The policeman then went onto say that that the Israeli himself had just said that these terrorists were not Arabs who had just walked out of the desert. They were sophisticated and educated young people from middle class backgrounds. In other words they were probably not much different from young Israeli and English people. Apart from their extremist beliefs of course.

Lefkowitz remained silent for a while.

'Ok, Ok I understand what you're saying Leave it with me'

'Avram you have 48 hours to make headway. After that I must inform my boss. Oh can you tell me anything about a Bondarevski'

'Ok quickly...Bondarevski is an ex KGB Colonel. He is a friend of a deputy mayor in Petersburg, Vlad Potin. He and Potin are directors of a company called SPAG. The name turned up in a probe by Germany's foreign-intelligence service, the BND, of alleged money laundering in Liechtenstein. It would appear that they may be laundering funds for both Russian organized crime and Colombian and Afghan drug traffickers.

Furthermore Potin is reputed to have entered into legally dubious contracts with obscure firms to export raw materials abroad in return for food. The contracts were awarded without tender. These raw materials - oil, timber, rare metals - were duly exported. But the food never turned up. A Jewish city councillor, Salye and another city councillor, Anatoly Sherbitski, discovered conclusive proof that \$92m handled by Potin's department had vanished. She had suspicions about another \$900m of city money but was unable to prove them. It is reckoned that all this money provided the seed corn for Bondarevski's burgeoning criminal empire. One last thing Salye has gone into hiding and Sherbitski's body has been discovered. I must go if I am to meet your deadline. Shal...'

Lefkowitz started to say.

'Hang on. One more question' from an anxious Blunt 'Would our intelligence and security people know any of this?'

'I would imagine that they would have. And your asking me about Bondarevski tells me that you got the name from somewhere. May I ask where?'

Blunt declined to provide the information to his Israeli friend. They wished each other Shalom.

He then noticed a piece of paper on his desk. It concerned a phone call from last night regarding the information that Saeed had asked for. He had obviously managed to get something on the local media last night.

A CASE OF RUSSIAN DOLLS?

When Leibnitz arrived Blunt instructed her to get Saddiqe brought up to an Interview Room. He then switched on the tape, said the necessary preliminaries. She declined requesting a solicitor to be present. Therefore, Blunt got straight to the point

'Miss Saddiqe, what was your role in the death of Gruberova?'

She looked shocked at the question 'We're not going to carry on from this morning'

Leibnitz looked taken aback and looked quizzically at Blunt.

'No we are not! We will save that for later. So once more what part did you play in the death of Gruberova?'

No answer

'Miss Saddiqe, Gruberova was taken to a Somali ship by Morski and Pidrik. What would a pair of Russians be doing taking a girl to a Muslim ship whose registration can be traced back to Osama Bin Laden's Al Qaeda group?' Blunt was chancing his arm with this question.

'No answer'

'Miss Saddiqe I do not think that our friends Morski and Pidrik would stick up for you if the tables were turned.'

After a few moments contemplating the situation she told them what she knew about Gruberova, Morski and Pidrik.

They then had her escorted back to her cell. Leibnitz attempted to question Blunt about what Saddiqe had meant about the earlier interview. His baleful look warned her to discontinue her questioning.

Morski was the first to be brought up from the cells. Hewitt the solicitor waited patiently for him. He asked for a few words alone with his client. He used the time to attempt to get Morski to only answer when he gave the go ahead. When he felt sure that the Neanderthal understood he consented for the interview to go ahead.

'Mr Morski, your car has been identified as being on Yarmouth dock at the same time as a Somalian and a Russian vessel. The former vessel then left the port shortly before midnight. We have managed to put it in the vicinity required, at the time required for Miss Gruberova's body to be put into the sea and to end up on Winterton beach on the Sunday morning in question. What have you got to say?'

'No comment' Morski's eyes began to rapidly roam over the room. His right foot started to tap the floor.

Hewitt looked inquiringly at his client. The deepening frown on his face testimony to the fact that the direction of the questioning didn't please him.

'I put it to you that you and Pidrik dosed Miss Gruberova on GHB and took her in the boot of your car to the Somalian ship.'

'No comment' Morski looked anywhere but at his solicitor. A slight sheen of sweat appeared on his brow. His opening pores started to discharge a most unpleasant stench. Leibnitz thought she was going to gag on it. It didn't affect her boss too much as he suffered from sinusitis. An affliction that had an effect on the olfactory sense.

'You wanted to get rid of Gruberova because she knew that you and Pidrik were cheating on your bosses. You had been selling her and some of the other girls on the side and pocketing the money. Is that not correct Mr Morski?'

'No comment' Morski shifted uncomfortably on his seat. He wiped the sweat from his brow. He began to assume a haunted look and his face had drained of colour. The stench intensified.

The solicitor was getting decidedly uncomfortable. He knew where all this would place him vis a vis Morski's boss. He had no allegiance to Morski. None to Pidrik either.

'Mr Morski you and Pidrik did a deal with Sheikh and Saddiqe, again for money that involved the murder of Gruberova. Her being washed up on the beach gave them the perfect opportunity to draw our attention to the brothel. A fact that caused trouble for and potential embarrassment for your paymasters. Is that not so Mr Morski?' Blunt remorselessly questioned the increasingly hapless Russian.

'No comment' whispered this time.

Leibnitz looked at her boss and wondered whether he felt the same as her. Soon the Russian would crack. They were helped by the solicitor who seemed to have no interest in protecting his client. If indeed he were Gribben and Gribben's client any longer.

Blunt made Leibnitz think of a wildlife programme that she had recently seen on TV. There a lion played with its prey. Seemingly taking delight in its frantic and ultimately futile squirming.'

Blunt leaned over the table so that his nose almost touched Morski's 'I believe that you and Pidrik put all your money in two accounts, one with Lloyds and one with NatWest. What have you got to say to that Mr Morski? Or better still how will Mr Bondarevski deal with you when he finds out how you have double crossed him?'

Silence ensued

Finally Morski broke, 'We didn't know that they were going to kill her. The rest was Pidrik's idea' the Russian blurted out.

The confession hung in the air. The silence shattered by the screech of Hewitt's chair being pushed backwards

He had heard enough. Gribben and Gribben could not countenance a conflict of interest between its paymaster and his minions, He pulled himself to his feet and addressed the Russian

'Mr Morski. You had better get yourself another solicitor. I need to ring my office to take instructions' and on that note he walked out of the room.

The Neanderthal collapsed into the chair. He knew what Bondarevski would do. Of course he did. He himself had disposed of and maimed enough people for his old KGB boss.

Blunt nodded to Leibnitz.

'Mr Morski I presume you will want another solicitor?' smirked the policewoman.

Morski was returned to the cells whilst they waited until a duty solicitor became available to offer advice to the Russian Neanderthal. Leibnitz welcomed the break from the interview room and the stench of Morski. She remembered Flint's comment about the same individual and how she had doused herself with cologne. It helped to immunise her from his disgusting odour.

They only had to wait half an hour before Morski spent ten minutes alone with a duty solicitor. They then resumed in the interview room.

There Morski began to spit everything out.

When they had sucked him dry Blunt and Leibnitz then decided to have a go at Pidrik.

He looked rattled when informed that his solicitor, or rather his boss's solicitor had refused to represent him. Leibnitz couldn't help but throw in that he had also walked out on Morski. Again they had to wait whilst a duty solicitor could be found.

'Mr Pidrik, Mr Morski states that it was your idea to dispose of Miss Gruberova. What have you got to say to that?'

'No comment'

'Mr Pidrik why did you agree to do a deal with Saddiqe and Sheikh? I reckon it was greed. Can you confirm that?'

'No comment'

'We know all about your bank accounts and your selling heroin and cocaine on the side.'

'No comment'

'Mr Pidrik whilst in East Germany you worked for Cols Potin and Banderovski' the eyes widened, the jaw slackened, 'I am sure you know what happens to people that cross them. What about Anatoly Sherbitski who tried to prove that Potin and Banderovski had embezzled \$900 million dollars earlier this year. He died of a mysterious illness, with his internal organs collapsing one by one. His skin went blotchy and he lost all his hair. Mr Pidrik I note that you take a lot of care of your hair. How do you fancy Mr Banderovski planning a nice slow and painful death for you?'

'I want to do deal?' hissed a fearful Pidrik

'What sort of deal?'

'I will tell you what I know and you set me up with a new identity and money'

Blunt laughed long, loud and incredulously.

'Mr Pidrik you have defrauded your employer, sold cocaine and heroin, indulged in pimping and living off immoral earnings. That of course is to say nothing of being an

accessory to the murder of a young woman. You have the cheek to ask to be freed. I think not'

Pidrik's face started to crumple with disappointment and dread. Like Morski he knew what manner of creature his boss was and how he dealt with those who crossed him.

The duty solicitor looked blankly whilst these exchanges were going on. He wondered what he in heaven's name he had stumbled into. His usual fare involved dealing with low level thugs, the odd drug dealer and drunk drivers. He just sat there wide eyed listening to all the talk of hundreds of millions of dollars, KGB colonels, Muslim terrorists and a murdered woman. And he was getting paid for it to boot! Well it would make for a good story at the pub.

'Now Mr Pidrik whose idea was it to dispose of Gruberowa and why?'

'It was Morski. He thought that she would shop us to our bosses so that she could get home. She always bleated about wanting to go home. Morski used to slap her when she got on his nerves too much. Anyway she found out about our little habits. She blackmailed us for money. You'll find that she has a bank account.'

Blunt nodded encouragement to the Russian, he continued

'Then things got worse'

'How so?' Blunt intervened

'The Asians collared us in the newsagent's shop and said that they knew that we were involved with the brothel and selling cocaine and heroin on the side.'

Blunt nodded at Leibnitz

'How did they find that out?' the young policewoman was growing in confidence

'We sold to one of the guys at a taxi office'

'What taxi office?'

'One in Dereham Road'

Leibnitz asked the Russian to describe who they dealt with at the taxi office. She felt a certain satisfaction when the description accorded with that of the wiry rat she had thrown Carly Jones' name at. She must ask Ahmed what the man had said to him.

They told us that they wanted one of our girls and that they would pay for her. If we didn't do what they said then they would make sure our bosses knew what we had been doing. '

'So where did the GHB come in?' Blunt took over the questioning.

'They said that they wanted her drugged and for us to take her to the Somali ship in Yarmouth '

'Didn't you think that the girl may be killed. In fact isn't that what you hoped. Wasn't it the case that Gruberowa dead removed a threat to you'

'No, No. We thought she was being taken for the sailors and hoped that they would take her away'

Blunt let the answer lie, 'Who administered the GHB?'

'Morski. He is more experienced than I am.' No hesitation from Pidrik.

Blunt had the measure of the man. He would send his own family to death to save his own skin.

Blunt knew that what the Russian said would be hard to disprove. In court they would not be able to prove beyond reasonable doubt that they knew she was going to be killed. But he would still charge him for accessory to murder by person or persons unknown as well as all the rest.

'Mr Pidrik do you have any idea who killed the Patels?'

The Russian looked confused, 'Who are they?'

'The family that owned the newsagents on Gladstone Street' responded Blunt.

'No. Why should I. It couldn't have been me. You had me locked up. And I didn't know who had told you about the brothel and Gruberova.

The policeman had to acknowledge that the Russian had a point.

Leibnitz tapped him on the arm

'Can I have a word sir?'

They switched off the tape and went out into the corridor.

'Sir what if he is telling the truth?. We didn't tell anyone anything' Leibnitz whispered.

'No, we did not' thought Blunt 'but what if someone else had. What he had heard earlier told him that Bondarevski would have no qualms about killing anyone'

'Why don't we ask him about when Saddiqe and Sheikh collared the two of them in the shop? The policewoman had a glint in her eyes.

'Melanie I will sit and watch' Blunt took satisfaction in her thought processes.

Once the tape recording resumed Leibnitz jumped straight in.

'Mr Pidrik when Saddiqe and Sheikh confronted you in the Patel's shop was anyone else present' she enquired

'I don't think so' he thought for a moment, 'No there were no customers there'

'What about the Patels. Were they there?' the young policewoman persisted

The Russian thought for a moment and then hesitatingly came back, 'I vaguely remember seeing an old lady by the counter from the corner of my eye and..... a young girl'

'Thank you Mr Pidrik that will be all'

They both knew that Pidrik's answer meant that more than one person now had an interest in the death of the Patel family.

THE RAIDS

Blunt sat waiting for his staff. Saeed had accompanied the team hitting The Attic, Flint had gone to Riverview Heights near Happisburgh, Cushion to Sefton Manor not far from Dereham, and Leibnitz was finishing off some Morski and Pidrik paperwork.

Saeed when he informed Blunt that they would all be back soon alerted him to the fact that Flint seemed a little off. When she walked through the door he knew all was not well. Her pale face, dark bags under her eyes and hunched shoulders screamed a silent distress.

He walked over to her and ushered her into Strumpshaw's office next door. Before he could say anything her eyes welled up with tears and her face began to crumple. He put his arms around her and she burst into tears. Then it all tumbled out bit by bit, between sobs, what she had experienced at Riverview Heights. Her tears mingled with a mix of emotions: sadness, anger, frustration. She veered constantly from one to the other. Her description affected Blunt. He tensed with anger and total lack of comprehension regarding what she told him. He asked her whether she wished to go back to her hotel and take a little time to recover. She pulled away from him, wiped her face and eyes with a damp tissue and stated that she wanted to stay.

The others sat waiting for them. Flint's face told them that they had better tread carefully. Blunt asked each of them to state what they had discovered. Flint asked to go first. He noted the look of concern on Ahmed's face as he looked at her.

In a tremulous voice she described how they had burst into Riverview Heights catching the staff, if you could call them that, unawares. On first entering everything had looked normal. It looked like a children's home. However, the look and extremely nervous reactions of the staff alerted them to the fact that they may find something a great deal more sinister. Some of the staff tried to run away. The team's first task had been to attempt to secure the building.

As they worked their way through the property the team became increasingly agitated at what they were uncovering. The property contained in excess of fifty children. Their ages ranged from about three years old to fourteen. You didn't need to be a psychologist to figure out that these youngsters were emotionally damaged. When the team had entered one of the dormitories they had all cowered in silence on their beds. They were so traumatised they were unable to cry.

In the one of the rooms they had discovered forty copying machines. The tapes they were copying were of the children being sexually abused in vast variety of vile ways. All the faces of the children and adults had been blurred. This would make identification, and therefore prosecution, difficult.

The property also contained a studio fully equipped with modern recording apparatus: a totally professional set up. In an office they had found printed video covers in English, French, German Italian and nearly every language on the globe. Furthermore, the videos had also been dubbed into all the languages.

If that were not enough, they had also discovered fifteen guest bedrooms. Obviously the sickos with money could indulge in live performances with the children. Five of the rooms had been occupied. In one of them they had found a presenter of BBC children's programmes. Flint had lost it at that moment. She had not been able to stop herself and had dragged the shocked sicko out of the bed and kicked him in the bollocks. She just kept on kicking the figure writhing and moaning on the floor. Members of the raid team had to drag her off him. He screamed that he would lodge a complaint of police brutality and make sure the press knew.

She informed Blunt that she would probably be on a disciplinary when the bastard lodged a complaint. He stated that he would fight any attempt to do so. He doubted whether her colleague in the guestroom would say anything. And as for James Prescott the press would be more interested in his sick tendencies. Indeed they would probably crucify him.

In one of the offices they found computers containing a large number of files. Unfortunately these were encrypted and they needed someone to break the code to open them. She suspected that they contained details, names and addresses and perhaps predilections, of customers.

In yet another office they had found packages ready to be sent out. All the packages were addressed to PO Boxes and no doubt the names on the packages were false. The correct names of course would no doubt be in the encrypted files.

The children themselves all spoke Russian. Therefore one could assume that they had been imported from Russia. Blunt said that most of the countries of the old Soviet Union spoke Russian and that it was unwise to assume.

Flint concluded that a team was still at the building collating everything. The original team needed to be relieved. They had become so overcome with emotion at the filth they had discovered that they couldn't carry on.

Cushion then outlined what they had found at The Attic. The young men were Russian and were male prostitutes. There were ten of them living at the attic. The bedrooms were obviously for sexual encounters with the boys. The boy's ages ranged from fourteen to eighteen. Obviously The Attic specialised in young meat. Listening to Flint's account of what had been found at Riverside Heights made sense of what a couple of the boys had said. It would appear that they had probably graduated from Riverside Heights.

In the office they did find some paperwork that listed some of the customer's predilections and peccadillos. They had found a file on Shinton and Ramsome. This seemed to intimate that the younger the boy the better for that pair!

Cushion who knew of Shinton's crime asked whether he could go and arrest him. The information proved that Shinton had not just broken but bust open and trampled on the terms of his parole! Flint requested if she could go with Cushion. Blunt did not disagree but asked her whether or not she could manage to refrain from detaching his testicles from the rest of his body. It elicited a small smile.

Cushion concluded by questioning the testimony of the witnesses from The Attic. If it could not be trusted then Morski and Pidrik were surely in the frame. Flint countered with the testimony of Loveday and the fact that nothing had been found on him/her! Cushion

countered with 'Not yet'. Blunt allowed them to argue the point for a moment before asking Ahmed to describe what had been uncovered at Sefton Manor.

It would appear that the manor operated as a fully functioning body farm. Parts were obviously lopped off the inmates to order and shipped around Europe. The inmates or the amputees were from all over the world. Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Africa. They were obviously set up to cater for the wealthy across the globe.

Ahmed commented that Bondarevski had organised things exceptionally well. All the properties had been let to the people in them. Therefore the landlord company could always claim that it knew nothing of the nefarious practices for which the buildings were being used. Of course that meant that in any court case the buildings could not be confiscated. Therefore, Bondarevski, if it were indeed he, kept all his most valuable assets. He could always sell the properties and set up the operation again somewhere else: and no doubt would.

Blunt informed them that Leibnitz had some important information to convey.

SPOILT FOR CHOICE

'The result is that Morski and Pidrik can be prosecuted for abduction, unlawful imprisonment and accessory to murder regarding Gruberova. Ms Saddiqe will also be prosecuted for the same crimes with respect to Gruberova' Leibnitz concluded her description of the day she and Blunt had spent together.

The others sat stunned for a few moments.

'What about the Patels?' Ahmed broke the silence looking from Blunt to Leibnitz and back to Blunt.

'I have my suspicions as to who is responsible.' Blunt curled his right hand into a fist, raised it to his face and put his thumb under his chin and covered his lips with the forefinger, and looked around the room.

'Yes but who killed them?' Ahmed again, 'That will determine whether your suspicions are well founded or not.'

'Are we missing something here John?' this time from Flint.

Blunt took his time before deigning to answer, 'Who had the most to gain from the Patels' deaths? Melanie you put up on the chart each of the people or groups of people that we have in mind. On one side put gain and on the other put lose. Let's start with the Bondarevski group. What did they have to gain?'

'It would send a message to anyone that tried to cross them.' volunteered Cushion.

'True. But we never released any details of the source of our information.' countered Blunt, 'So, if they did do it, then who provided them with the information?'

'Someone, who wanted the Patels out of the way.' from Flint.

'True but then why leave bits and pieces all over the place that can be easily identified as Russian?'

'Because it will let everyone know that they have killed someone who shopped them' again from Cushion.

'I don't buy into it' retorted Saeed, 'If we have strong suspicions that it is them then we come down on them like a ton of bricks. We kick the stones over so that the spotlight shines on their filthy enterprises. That's one hell of a big risk for them. Their money making activities will be seriously curtailed whilst we dig around.' He paused, looked around and continued, 'They had too much to lose!'

No-one disagreed.

'Ok, what about Morski and Pidrik?'

'They certainly had a good deal to gain. Mrs Patel had seen them talk with Sheikh and Saddiqe. But they were in custody!' Ahmed skewered the suggestion.

'True BUT did they have any accomplices?' countered Blunt

'What about Medvedskaya? Could she have been in on their scam?' suggested Leibnitz, 'She couldn't have failed to know that they were up to something, especially with Gruberova'

'Good point. Underscore Medvedskaya.' Blunt instructed.

'Surely, she cannot have tied the family up alone and done all the rest alone?' interjected Flint.

'Good point. But if she is tied up with Morski and Pidrik may she not have carried out the killing with Saddiqe and Sheikh?' questioned Blunt.

'Saddiqe and Sheikh had something to gain from the Patels' deaths.' contributed Saeed, 'Bondarevski is the type who would want to know how the Patels pinpointed the brothel as being Russian. That could lead to Saddiqe and Sheikh and from there to whoever is behind them.'

'There is another reason that is related to that one' commented a thoughtful Blunt who paused before continuing, 'They knew the game was up when Ahmed and I returned to the Patel's. Whomsoever, is behind Sheikh and Saddiqe knew that we were onto the pair of them. The Patels were the weak link and disposable. They had to be killed. That left Sheikh and Saddiqe as the weak links. Whomsoever is behind this feared that there is a possibility, however slight, that investigation of the pair could lead back to them'

'The two of them are tied up with Islamists who are prepared to go to any lengths to achieve their aims of Muslim domination' interjected Saeed.

'Yes, I agree' his boss responded, 'Who would know that the brothel is owned and operated by the Russians?.....Someone trying to muscle in on the operation...Who?...Muslim fundamentalists...How did they get to know? The security services probably knew from what Beaumont told you' Blunt turned towards Flint, 'Now, who is connected to the security services? Who would be party to some of their information?.....Khan!'

'Why Norwich John? Why did they choose Norwich? Why Khan?' questioned Flint.

Her boss didn't answer for a moment.

'Because we are seen as a team of losers in the last chance saloon, if we have not already passed through it. Whosoever is behind this took the risk that we would fuck up. Unfortunately for them and fortunately for us, they were too sure of themselves and made mistakes. As for Khan I know why'

'Why?' asked Saeed

'It does not matter at the moment. We still have a loose link: if it is still about. That may lead us back.....'

'The prat in the taxi office' piped up Leibnitz.

'Correct Melanie' a grateful acknowledgement from Blunt. She had diverted attention away from Khan....for the moment.

He knew why Norwich. It had everything to do with him and Khan and..... Anjii. Khan knew about the letter. Why did it concern him so?

He collected his thoughts, 'First thing tomorrow Melanie and Saeed get round to the taxi office. Get your man in. Get him in front of an id parade for Saddiqe to look at. Get a search warrant for his home address. See if he had a motorbike.' He turned to Flint and Cushion, 'Get a search warrant for Ransome's house and get there first thing in the morning. Get a search warrant for Shinton's hostel and go there after you have arrested the pair of them'

'Why don't we go there now?' a surprising intervention from Cushion.

Blunt's eyebrows raised in surprise. This from the man who seemed more interested in overtime than catching criminals.

'Without a warrant?' questioned Blunt.

'We don't need one we have enough evidence from The Attic to arrest them' argued Cushion.

'I hope you the pair of you are not getting personal' cautioned Blunt.

PUNISHING THE PAEDOS

On the drive to Framingham Earl Flint questioned Cushion as to why he was so keen to get at Shinton. At first he refused to be drawn. Yet she persisted. At some stage she must have touched a nerve because it all came tumbling out.

Cushion himself had been a victim of abuse from his father. He had been eight when it started: the same age as the boy Shinton had raped. He had thought that his father was just being friendly. What else would an eight year old boy think? The adult had made it sound like their special secret when he instructed his son to say nothing to his mother. However, he had felt slightly disturbed when his father forced him into oral acts.

Cushion had said something to a so-called friend. The shit then revealed what he had said to some of the other boys. The youngster had been teased unmercifully by his classmates, debagged in the playground and his trousers thrown over the school wall and into the road.

The whole thing had come to the attention of the teachers. No-one believed Cushion. His father had earned respect from the hierarchy with his voluntary work at the school. The headteacher severely castigated and beat the young boy for his wicked attention seeking. Not long after Cushion was bundled off to a special school. Thereafter holidays were spent with his maternal grandparents. They had never approved of his father. He finally returned home after his father had been imprisoned for molesting his sister. He had never spoken to his father again and celebrated on hearing of his death.

He asked why Flint wanted to arrest the two suspects. Her answer concerned what they had found at Riverview Heights. That, together with being a mother, made her want to put people like Shinton and Ransome away for such a long time. In fact Riverview heights made her want to kill the scumbags and all of their ilk.

They discussed how they were going to handle the two suspects. Blunt would not have been overjoyed if he could have heard them; especially not given his earlier warning.

On clambering out of the car Flint stopped and looked around at the bungalows lining each side of the street. Their mostly well tended and neatly trimmed front lawns presented a picture of suburban tranquillity. She could hear the incessant hum of an electric lawnmower in the background. In the foreground the leaves on the trees gently rustled and the birds serenaded one another for the last time before dusk descended. The juxtaposition of such an idyll with the despicable desires of two men they were after forcefully struck the policewoman and strengthened her resolve.

Flint gave the front door three sharp raps. No effect. The two police officers looked at one another. She gave the door another three but more forceful raps. If she knocked any harder the glass would break.

Eventually they heard a sound inside and a large dark shape loomed through the glass on the other side of the door. The bulk told her that the shape belonged to Shinton. He opened the door a little and peered through the gap. His eyes widened with dread and

apprehension, sprinkled with not a little guilt, when he realised who stood before him. His clothes were somewhat dishevelled.

'Daniel, who is it?' Ransome's petulant voice floated from the sitting room.

Flint and Cushion wondered what he had been up to with his little friend Ransome.

He did not want to let them in. Cushion kicked the door hard enough so that it hit Shinton in the face. He grunted and took his hand off the door to grab his face. Flint seized the opportunity pushed her way past the big man and marched through the hallway. Cushion ordered the big man to stay put and closed the front door behind him as he stepped into the hallway.

On hearing the door shut Ransome shouted, 'Daniel come on it's a good bit'

Flint kicked the door open. Ransome's jaw dropped when he saw who stood at the entrance. A flurry of emotions chased one another across his ugly face. Shock, horror, fear. His hands flew to cover his excited genitalia. Then he reached for the video remote.

Flint looked at the pathetic naked little shit lying lewdly on the floor. Her eyes though were attracted to perverted filth on the video screen. It featured two young boys and five men.

Rage welled up inside the policewoman. As soon as she saw the prostrate creature reach for the remote she raced across the room and kicked his wrist hard. He yelped and the remote slipped from his grasp. She placed her foot on his inner forearm and pressed it to the floor. She ignored his yelps and snivelling.

Flint reached into her pocket and fished out a pair of surgical gloves. She put them on whilst maintaining the pressure on Ransome's forearm, all the while oblivious to his piggish squeals. Indeed she felt a strange delight in the welt her foot had caused.

She yanked him up and made him crawl on all fours to the video machine.

'Get the video out you disgusting little fucker' she kicked his bare and fat dimpled arse.

'Here' she held out her hand for the video tape and continued, 'Put your underwear on'

She watched as the pathetic creature struggled into his underpants and then ordered him into the kitchen to get some black rubbish sacks into which she could put the video.

On hearing her call Cushion brought Shinton into the sitting room. The big man's eyes were red and tears were streaming down his face. He blubbered that he was sorry, that he and Ransome did not know what was on the video. He didn't want to go back to prison. It wasn't his fault. He'd been molested as a child.

'Shut the fuck-up!' Flint screamed at him. The big man's eyes shot up in shock and his blubbing immediately ceased. The policewoman knew that child molesters used feigned tears and sadness as ways to get at vulnerable young children. Looking at the two perverts Flint's mind flooded with the mental pictures she had retained from the raid on Riverside Heights. She wanted to, she needed to make someone pay for what had been inflicted on the poor children at the building and on the videos.

When she screamed at Shinton Cushion realised that they had gone too far. They should have waited until the morning to arrest these two and taken the time to arrange back up.

They were both guilty of allowing their emotions to take charge. Both of them fresh from witnessing things that would turn the stomach of sane people. He was the senior and would carry the can.

How were they going to get these two to the station? He turned to Flint and said that they needed to arrest the two of them and then call for back up.

The policewoman asked Cushion for his cuffs. She looked incredulously at him when he confessed that he never carried them. They looked at one another for a moment.

Flint was the first to come around. She ordered Ransome and Shinton to sit on the sofa and hold out their right and left hands which she then cuffed. She ordered them to stay put and motioned Cushion to follow her into the hallway. They decided that they needed to call Saeed and Leibnitz.

* * *

As soon as Ransome saw fresh faces he started with,

'She attacked me and humiliated me. Look at my arm she stood on it. Look at my bruised fingers she kicked them!' he screeched.

Ahmed couldn't deny that Ransome's inner arm had red welts and that the fingers of his hand were definitely swollen and crimson.

Shinton caught on and with his free arm he pointed at Cushion, 'And he attacked me in the hallway. Look at my face!'

The bruising on the big man's face was rapidly growing and changing to a darker hue. They had less chance trying to explain that away.

Saeed motioned Flint and Cushion into the hallway and hissed, 'Debbie, what the fuck are the pair of you up to? No back-up, one pair of cuffs. The suspects with highly visible bruising! Blunt will do his fucking nut when he finds out about this cock-up!'

The pair looked sheepish

'Get 'em cuffed separately. Debbie you and I will take Shinton. You drive I'll sit in the back with him. Steve you do the same with Mel and she'll sit in the back. I don't want to risk either of you with those two wankers! We'll have them charged with possession and use of prohibited pornographic material. Once we have got rid of them in the station we come back here. We'll then decide what we're gonna say about the arrest. Let's go!' Ahmed ordered.

* * *

Meanwhile Blunt, oblivious to the events unfolding in Framingham Earl, had taken the country road back to Stalham, the B1152.

On arriving home he had poured himself a whisky. His thoughts were consumed with Anjii and Khan. He picked up her letter and read it again. He stood at the kitchen window looking out over his garden. He felt its presence and shuddered. A dark insidious cloud of gloom approached him from the left. He felt it insinuate itself into his mind, gradually from left to right, until it had completely and swirlingly engulfed his thoughts. The black

dog had snared him again. The phone saved him from the increasing intensity of his dark thoughts. It was Lefkovitz.

The Israeli quickly picked up on Blunt's mood and asked if he was Ok. Blunt's perfunctory answer gave tiredness as an excuse. The other, not entirely convinced, put his suspicions aside and informed his friend that the Americans had moved, quickly, efficiently and effectively. He expressed admiration in the way that all their law enforcement bodies had acted in unison, for the first time that he had known.

They had apprehended eight men. Three were students doing further degrees in Engineering, Chemistry and computer science. The others had gained short term work permits in a variety of companies that had links with defence companies. All of them came from prosperous middle class backgrounds. No way were they the type that you would expect to be terrorists had been Lefkovitz's view.

There then followed some good natured banter between the men. Blunt hit the Israeli with Lenin, Trotsky, Mao Tse Tung and a host of Israelis to boot. They finally agreed that people who were regarded as the most effective terrorists were in the main educated and middle class. The Israeli then joked that perhaps people like Adams and McGuinness could one day share power in Northern Ireland. Blunt agreed that stranger things had happened. Perhaps one day Neil Kinnock may manage to say something in a hundred words rather than his usual overblown thousand! Lefkovitz asked if Pinnock, Pillock, whatever his name is, had been the leader of the Labour party. Blunt had agreed saying that Israel had Rabin as leader of the Labour party and Britain had suffered Kinnock!

Lefkovitz then described how the Americans had traced the terrorists. They had devised a computer programme to weed out all the Asian and Arab sounding names on all the internal flights into and out of New Jersey and JFK. They had also tapped into similar flight details of all the flights from mid-east countries: places that Israel also confirmed as being lax on boarding security.

They had then tapped into all the computer records of flying schools in the USA and Canada. These had then been cross referenced with the flight details to look for name matches. They had identified eight such individuals. On interrogation three of them cracked and confessed.

'John, my friend' continued the Israeli, 'if it had not been for your information then heaven knows the carnage that could have taken place. I have been instructed to invite you to Rabin's reception at the World Trade Centre. We will pay for first class travel on El Al out of Heathrow and put you up in our hotel. Are you up for it?'

'Yes, post the details to my home address. I will take some leave. Can you tell me anymore about Khan?' Blunt responded

'My friend leave that one alone. You may be treading on many toes that you do not wish to tread on. That is all I will say'.

Blunt had already decided that he would not. In the morning he would set out for an almost pre-determined meeting.

A NORTHERN SURGERY

The drive to Thurnscoe had been uneventful. A47, A19, A1 A635. Throughout the journey he had played a dolorous combination of Sibelius and Nielsen on the car stereo. It suited his mood and fed the black dog. He thought of who would miss him if he were not there. The simple answer....No-one! He led a solitary existence that revolved around two main things: his work and his Masters Degree. Khan had destroyed his one hope of family life. He had never got over Anjii. It was now possible that Khan would destroy his professional life! Well, if that were the case at least he would have a say regarding Khan's professional life!

As he drove into the outskirts of Thurnscoe he thought that the town dovetailed the music and his mood. The devastation wreaked on Thurnscoe by the ravages of the miners' strike and its aftermath was plain to see. Rows of red brick terraced houses devoid of any windows or doors lined both sides of the road. They were all boarded up with either ugly grey corrugated iron sheeting or grey concrete blocks. The rust on the former contributing to the general feeling of decay. Nearly every house had been desecrated or decorated, whichever took your fancy, with graffiti. It ranged from the locals' thoughts on Margaret Thatcher to their views on matters sexual: and sometimes a combination of both.

Every so often a gap appeared in the terracing exposing a plot of waste ground overgrown with grass, weeds and litter. Also visible were those other examples of the detritus of urban deprivation: old sofas and chairs. All the metal, if it had ever been there, had been removed: it had a scrap value.

The scene worsened as he reached the centre. Shell suited residents occupied the street. They moved at a speed that indicated that they had nothing to hurry for; and they didn't. No education, no jobs and certainly no prospects beyond the state's hand-outs. Most of the shops were boarded up apart from a couple of charity shops, a newsagents and a couple of fish and chip shops. Also inhabiting the street were two large boarded buildings that had obviously been respectively a cinema and a sizeable super market. No doubt when the mine had been open this had been a thriving community. Every board a testimony to, and nail in the coffin of, a once relatively prosperous past!

Rafique Khan's constituency surgery occupied a room in the local community centre. One of the few buildings without boarding and graffiti! He knew he had arrived because Khan's dark Jaguar XJ8 presented a discordant juxtaposition with its surroundings. Blunt wondered how the deprived residents viewed such a symbol of a lifestyle at odds with their own

Blunt's ploy was to act as a local constituent from one of the more affluent small villages in the Wath and Dearne Valley constituency. He would be a Mr Murgatroyd wanting to question his MP on the Council Tax he had to pay.

The small waiting room contained a gaggle of elderly women in headscarves, a couple of men with flat caps, trainers and shell suits and a young woman with a squawking child in a battered pram. Blunt took his seat amongst these people who could be termed the great

unwashed. Eventually his turn came and he was shown into the room in which the great man sat.

On walking into the room the policeman immediately noticed the two heavies sitting in the far corner of the room. He thought it silly of him not to realise that a member of the security committee would have bodyguards.

Khan instantaneously recognised Blunt and his stomach churned. Of all the things that he had expected of Blunt this was not one of them. He had also not expected the trouble that the man had just caused him. He was having to expend a good deal of time and energy in a damage limitation exercise.

Seeing his old college 'friend' after all these years brought back the physically painful memories of his broken nose: not to say the indignity of rolling around on the floor. What had he come for? To talk about Anjii? To talk about his approach to Saeed? Or had he found out about his other interests? Best to send the bodyguards away as soon as possible: to hell with the risk.

Blunt had to give it to Rafique. A slight stiffening in the chair had been the only discernible sign of surprise at seeing the policeman.

'Well John. What a pleasant surprise.' Khan said smilingly as he rose from his chair and extended his right hand.

'The unctuous bastard' thought Blunt as he walked towards the desk. He could tell that Khan was still not quite comfortable. Did not know what to expect. The policeman ignored the proffered hand. Felt the doubt in Khan's mind. Divined that the bodyguards had also picked up on the tension as they had started to move towards him.

'Take a seat John and have a look at what we need to discuss' he motioned towards the chair in front of the desk. He then turned to the bodyguards and instructed them to wait outside. Noticing the concern on their faces he assured them that he was fine and would shout if he needed them.

Once they had gone he turned again to Blunt, 'To what do I owe this pleasure John? I assume it's not a social visit'.

'Tell me about Anjii, Rafique' came the quiet order with a slight sibilant inflection that added a touch of menace.

'What is there to tell John?' the MP paused 'she chose me over you. We had a happy life together until she became ill. Then unfortunately whilst of unsound mind she took her own life'

'Bollocks' hissed Blunt.

'I presume you are referring to a letter that she wrote to you. John, she was completely out of her mind at the time. She wrote one to me as well saying that you had made her life a misery' an emboldened response.

That momentarily took the policeman aback. What if it were true? A thought immediately dismissed when he considered the comments of Anjii's aunt.

'You are a piece of work Rafique'

'John, John' the other raised his arms as if in supplication 'I will post you a copy of the letter. We both loved Anjii.' He then started to twist the knife, 'But she chose me over you. Why can't you accept it?' Seeing the haunted look cross the other's face he continued, 'If she thought anything about you, she would have tried to contact you before she fell ill. Not after!'

'God Rafique, knows how to wind me up!' the policeman thought to himself.

'Now John. I have to bring this to an end I am a busy man. Greaves, Coleman' Khan ended by shouting to his bodyguards.

As they came back into the room Blunt recovered,

'I will get you Khan. Believe me I will get you.' stated quietly through gritted teeth.

They eyeballed each other for a moment before the MP broke the silence

'John, I will ignore that remark. I think the pressure of dealing with the failure of your new unit is getting to you. You better be careful that you don't have another breakdown.' Blunt gripped the arms of the seat as the man goaded him, 'You haven't found out anything about the Patel murder yet. You have hardly dented the Russian operation. But you have caused a lot of trouble. Your chickens are coming home to roost John and sooner than you think'. The MP ended with a patronising sneer.

'I will get you Khan. I am part of the way there' Blunt flashed back, 'and if I do not manage it there are others who will'

'Gentlemen escort Mr Blunt from the premises' Khan instructed his bodyguards then turned once more to the policeman fixing him with a patronising glare, 'I think that you better leave John. I believe that you are in more than enough trouble as it is. And there's more to come!'

THE WORLD TRADE CENTRE

It was a cool but fine sunny autumn afternoon in New York. Lefkovitz and Blunt stood in one of the viewing alcoves on the South Tower's viewing floor. The vista of the Hudson spread out into the distance. The glass floor of the alcove gave the policeman a strange feeling. Looking down at the busy streets four hundred metres below your feet made you feel as if you were floating and may plunge to your death at any moment.

'My friend' from Lefkovitz 'have you ever looked into your family history, especially your mother's?'

'No' came the guarded response.

'Do you want to know?'

'Not particularly'

'Would it surprise you to know that she was Jewish, that she was in Theresienstadt?'

'No it would not.' Blunt stiffened.

'Why do you want to deny your past, your history? History is what defines us as individuals and as a people?' argued Lefkovitz

'I cannot agree with you Avram. I think that we should try and learn from history. I do not think, and I cannot accept, that we should be prisoners of history, prisoners of the past. If we accept that, then history is little better than religion. Religion is used to divide people, divide groups, tribes and nations. Is history as currently propagated any better? Do you not think that Jews, Palestinians and all the Arabs are prisoners of history? Prisoners of a history of shared differences!'

'What are you suggesting my friend?'

'I am suggesting that Rabin has started a process that perhaps is beginning to learn from history as opposed to being imprisoned by it. I think that the process should be continued. If Israel does not come to terms with the reality of being nearly surrounded by and outnumbered by the Palestinians then I can only see that Israel will cease to exist. However, I also see that if Israel does come to terms with and addresses the reality as it should then it could also cease to exist as a Jewish state. Israel is impaled on the horns of a dilemma.' explained Blunt

'The destruction of Israel, is that what you want my friend?' questioned Lefkovitz

'No I do not. My heart tells me that Jews must have a bolt hole in case a collective madness descends upon the world again'

'Keep hold of that, my friend. Your rational views will only have meaning if everyone shares them simultaneously. They are not just rational but also idealistic and therefore given human nature they are irrational. What a contradiction? What would your philosophers make of that?'

'Good point Avram. Yet it does not negate my central point that I do not wish to be a prisoner of my family's past. A past that in some ways attempts to determine how I view

other human beings. A past that attempts to determine how I should act. I wish to live in the present and to judge people as I find them now. A Muslim will get on with someone until they discover he or she is a Jew. That cannot be right'

'Surely, in your ideal world you then end in a Humean existence in which you only know that you exist in a particular moment in time'

'Not quite'

'Of course. My view of that resembles Dr Johnson's dismissal of Berkleyan philosophy when he kicked the stone'

'Ah the good old *argumentum ad lapidum*. A facile dismissal as opposed to a reasoned refutation' countered Blunt.

'So why did you call me about Saddiqe and a threat to Israel? Why did you provide us with information about Schonmann?' questioned Lefkovitz

'Because, I thought it was the right thing to do at the time. And because I want to see Israel continue to exist as a Jewish state. A safety net, a bolthole that is there should it ever be required.'

They were interrupted by a tall silver haired guy with a distinct southern drawl who greeted both Lefkovitz and Blunt with a loud and clear 'Hi'. He put his left hand on Blunt's right shoulder moving it to his arm as he pumped his right hand with a vigorous handshake. He complimented the Englishman on averting a disaster and saving the fine building they were in and all the people working in it. He then moved on to skilfully work all the others in the room. Avram commented that Blunt had just been complimented by the probable next President of the United States. Shortly after Blunt briefly spoke with Yitzhak Rabin and James Baker.

These brief meetings and what had been said had not gone unnoticed by one or two others in the room. They later reported back to their seniors about their countryman who had been at the function. A countryman who obviously got on well with a known Mossad agent.

THE END

On his return home Blunt noticed his ansaphone blinking in the dark.

There was an urgent message from Flint and Saeed. He decided to call Flint immediately. Within an hour she and Saeed were sat in Blunt's sitting room.

Flint spoke first,

'John, Beaumont has been in touch'

Blunt nodded

'He has advised me to distance myself from you. He says that it is believed that you passed on information to the Israelis that you should have discussed with our Security Services or at the least informed Strumpshaw. They're going to throw the book at you. When you return to the office you're going to be arrested.'

Blunt got up and poured himself a whisky and sat back down before responding. 'is that all?'

'No said Saeed' pausing

'Go on' said his boss

'Saddiqe has been whisked away by the security services. We've been ordered to wrap up any action against her. In fact we've been ordered to act as if she never existed.'

'What about her testimony regarding Morski and Pidrik?' Blunt asked wearily

'Never existed. A deal is apparently being stitched together whereby they are tried for prostitution etc. and then transferred to a Russian prison. Banderovsky will then no doubt deal with them.' continued Saeed

'Why am I not surprised?' whispered Blunt

'And there's more' interrupted Flint looking at her boss who just stared into space considering the fickleness of fate, 'We've all been suspended. The two paedos have complained about us and we've been accused of a cover up'

'And that smug bastard Khan rang me to tell me that he had warned me how it would all end if I didn't do what he wanted' Saeed butted in.

'I think he meant for you tell me' answered Blunt quietly.

He struggled to hold his thoughts and his emotions together whilst sitting in front of his team. The depression had taken such a grip on him that he found it difficult to speak clearly and in whole sentences. His tear ducts interrupted the process. He knew that he could not complete a whole sentence before his voice would quiver with the emotional strain of the depression.

His team sensed his agony but felt powerless. He got up from his chair and walked to his dresser and poured himself a drink. He didn't look at any of them. In halting and strained

words, interspersed with sips of whisky, he briefly informed them that he would look to sort things.

He then asked them to go. Afterwards he sat at his dining table. His head ached with pressure and all sorts of thoughts tumbled around his head. He did not feel like doing anything: all motivation to do anything had seeped away. He couldn't concentrate and he couldn't relax. He seemed to be in a constant state of flux. He felt a husk of the man he had been.

He forced himself to concentrate. He had to try and do everything he could for Flint, Saeed, Leibnitz and Cushion. He wrote through the night and attempted to exonerate each member of his team. He wrote that he, and he alone, was responsible for their actions. He had bullied and ordered them into doing things that they objected to.

The blackbirds singing heralded the dawn and the beginning of a new day. He carefully placed the sheets of paper in a brown envelope, sealed it and wrote 'TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN' on the front. He then left it in a prominent position on the table.

He walked into his conservatory, looked out over the garden and pondered over the last twenty four hours. He had been shaken by the hand by two of the most senior statesmen in the world and someone who would probably be the most powerful man in the world come the end of November. And here he was in Stalham. His world.... his life... in tatters. The Black Dog had won. It had been coming for years. It had never been a case of 'if', it had always been a case of 'when'.

He went over to his oleander plant. He plucked a handful of leaves. He knew what he had to do. He knew that it would always end this way. It had just been a matter of time. He had no fight left and indeed he had nothing to fight for. Every day felt like a struggle. Every day was devoid of any enjoyment. At least the battle in his head would now cease. He would have some peace now. If there was an afterlife he would join Anjii.

Within half an hour of taking his concoction Chief Inspector Blunt slumped in his conservatory easy chair and slipped out of consciousness.