

**OPPRESSION**

**By William Haycock**

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## Chapter 1

I'm reclining in the living room. It seems that my mind, my body, my senses, in fact *everything*, has left me. I am just a lost soul, rendered effectively unconscious: a state of apathy which is such that it is equivalent to inertia.

I've realised something of fundamental importance: the results of the election are on, and I'm missing it. I switch on to Channel 2. My eyes behold a sight which they cannot believe. I blink twice, then I try and mentally adjust to the situation.

*It's him.*

It's none other than Simon Evans, that jerk from sixth form college, who I always despised. He was such a 'look-at-me-I'm dead-'ard-puff-my-chest-out-I-want-everyone-to-know-about-it' type of guy. I knew he had become an MP, somehow, but *this*? I can see him shaking hands with the Queen, smiling smugly. Next to him is a woman who I vaguely recognise. Once he has done this, he crosses his arms and announces 'I'm proud to be the new prime minister of the United Kingdom. May good fortune come to the British people. I will be doing my best for their future' he puts a fist to his mouth and coughs, while furrowing his brows, 'for, after all, it is me and my government in which they are invested. Thank you.' I do have to admit that his new approach is vaguely convincing, but I can't help thinking that he has an ulterior motive. Maybe I shouldn't let paranoia affect me: maybe he has turned over a new leaf. My disbelief turns to forgiveness for a second. Perhaps I had better keep watching, anyhow. The woman is introduced as Mary Evans, wife of the Prime Minister. I remember now: it was that awful girl he went out with just before he left. No-one could fathom what he - even he - saw in her. And, now, they're married? I cough with disbelief. He is now talking to the royal family. He is smiling with his mouth, but not with his eyes. Suddenly, a flashback overtakes me. I remember, only too well, the gaze. I saw him use it, over and over again, to try to influence people who he was on friendly terms with, and to intimidate and coerce those who he wasn't. Though, to be honest, the line between friendly and hostile was very unclear. Once he tried it on me: it was a cold autumn afternoon, and we had just finished Media Studies. I was getting very disillusioned with the way the subject was taught, and wondering what to do. I knew that it would be too late to change subjects, but that I would get very bored if I carried on with it. At the end of the year, I did not care, as I had become absorbed into the cocoon that occurs in the late teens, when one's primary interest in life is alcohol: in a dubious and temporary way, the problem was solved.

I was in the garden of the college, seeking some sanctuary while I put my thoughts together as to what to do next. Present matters were consuming my mind as much as future matters, as I had two hours until the next lesson, and I had recently discovered that the college was a very boring place to be in one's spare time. Perhaps I could try to sneak into one of the pubs? Suddenly, a familiar figure emerged from what seemed like nowhere. For the first

time, it was just me and him. I was truly petrified. I thought that he had arrived with violent intent: I had heard tales of his severe bullying of the other students, even those who he was 'friends' with. My imagination stretched even to the idea that this day would be the last day of my life. He stopped half a foot away from the bench where I was sitting. At this point, he gave me a look which will remain etched in my memory like a scar on a person's skin. I truly, try as I might, could not tear myself away from it. I found myself gazing into his sparkling brown eyes, as if a magnetic force were dictating where I rest my eyesight.

'Holmes.' he uttered 'Simon Holmes.'

'Yes. That's right.' I uttered.

It was at this moment that I decided to turn his gaze back on him: I looked straight into his eyes, in the most penetrating way I could muster, acting as if I were trying to see what lied beyond them. Not for a second did I shift my gaze away. I backed this up with an air of defiance which I had taught myself to adopt: the indestructible spirit that lies within. You think about all the inhumanity which has occurred over the centuries, and you focus entirely on it until a flame rises within your very heart and soul: one which refuses to wane. He seemed like he was about to open his mouth when, suddenly, he stopped. After a few seconds, he spoke: 'Sorry, I don't know what I was thinking. And, with that, he went on his way. I was very relieved at this point, not to mention amazed! I truly could have not imagined his reacting like this. Astounded by this phenomenon, I fell into a state of near-catatonia. When I came to, I jolted as a concept occurred to me: one that I didn't want to deal with at this time, nor in the near future, in fact: *never*.

*Everyone is going to be talking about this.*

I looked to the future with trepidation. At this moment, the same trepidation which I had experienced then is coming back to me.....

\*

'Ha! Ha! People will believe anything you tell them.' Simon Evans comments to himself as he looks out of the window of 10 Downing Street. 'It's great, this new approach. Treating them rough works for a while, but when you leave college you get the pigs onto you, don't you? They have their uses, mind. And, now, they are on my side.' He rubs his hands with glee. 'Soon, the palace will be mine. I don't even need to use persuasion anymore.'

His monologue is interrupted by the entrance of Jason Bennett, one of his friends at college, who is now working under him. In exchange for no salary and the performance of menial tasks, he is allowed to live in the same house as the Prime Minister.

'Sir, there is someone who wishes to see you.'

'What now? Ok, go and get her, you little pigshit.'

The last time Jason told him this was rude, he found his head in the area that he is required to clean with his tongue, so instead of saying anything to do with this, he frowns and pouts. However, he offers the words:

'It's actually a he.'

'Oh, for fuck's sake! Ok. Hopefully we can send him away soon. Run along, now, twat.'

While making his way downstairs, Jason exhales sharply. 'Why did I agree to this?' he mutters under his breath.

The man enters with Jason in tow.

'Hello.'

'Don't talk to me like that. Call me "Sir".'

'Hello, Sir.'

'Yes,' Evans comments, glancing at the man disdainfully, 'I think some of us are.... happier... than others.' He puts his hand to his crotch, and makes a gripping movement. 'Want to know what I was doing last night?'

The man says nothing.

'Well, I'll tell you. I was snorting so much coke I was shitting it! And, while I was doing that, I was getting sucked by eight hot, horny bitches. Choking them, I was! I *rule!*' he makes a celebratory gesture with his fist. 'What were you doing? Bet you were moping. Wish you could have what I got.' He shrieks with mocking hysteria for a moment, then he leans closer to his visitor. His expression changes from amusement to something far more sinister. 'Probably wanking your little dick: if you actually have one, that is.' He spits out the last word in a jeering manner: the visitor can actually feel saliva touch him briefly.

'So, your point is?' A trace of resentment is shown, but the Chancellor tries to stay in control.

'Why are you here, you sardo?' Evans continues with his spitting style of speech, but it is becoming increasingly hostile in tone.

'I'm the Chancellor of the Exchequer..'

'Oh, are you? I didn't realise that.' He clenches his fists. 'Well, you're fired. Worthless piece of shit. Get out of here before I beat you up.' Every word is spoken with total venom. Although he has only just met the Chancellor, he seems to consider him an arch-enemy.

A human Minotaur suddenly looms before the Chancellor. He finds himself edging away a couple of yards. However, he is very upset at the tirade he has just received, and his pride

has been dented severely by the insults. Before he can stop himself, his wish to reclaim his self-esteem overtakes him:

'You fucking asshole! I don't believe...'

'Oi! Oi! Oi! No swearing!'

'Don't tell *me* what to do!'

'I'm Prime Minister, remember? You're not welcome here anyway, you little shit. Get the fuck out.'

'But, why are you doing this? I can't just....'

'Enough of your fucking lip!'

He grabs the Chancellor by the back, takes him to the top flight of stairs, and pushes him. As he rolls down the stairs, one by one, Evans' lips pucker into a smile which is so frightening it could freeze a bull in its tracks. He laughs, sadistically.

'Silly old twat. That's what you get for trying to argue.'

He makes his way downstairs, and leans over the Chancellor, who is groaning and clutching himself. Evans relaxes slightly.

'Nah, I'll let you off this time.'

He makes his way back to the room upstairs, where he sees Jason.

'I beat him black and blue. And if you tell,' he leans closer to Jason 'I'll do that to you.'

Jason has never previously been threatened in this way. He decides that this is too much; he will throw in the towel now.

'I've had enough of this. I'm quitting.'

'What do you mean, you're quitting?'

'Well, I am, so there.'

'You're not going anywhere!' He lunges at Jason, but it is too late: he is at the stairs.

'Sod it, it doesn't really matter.... but, hang on, he'll tell. What do I do?'

He can hear the hammering of the familiar staircase with footsteps.

'It's ok. There's a way of dealing with this.'

Suddenly, Jason returns. 'Actually, it's ok. I won't quit after all.'

‘Well, if you did, I’d break your legs. So I think you did the right thing.’

Jason smiles wryly. ‘Erm... thank you, Simon.’

‘Sir!’

‘Thank you, Sir.’

‘Fuck off to your room now.’

<editing>

\*

Anne is reclining in the living room of the semi-detached house which she shares with her parents. She has poured herself a cup of blackcurrant tea and is waiting for the five minutes, between now and the finalisation of its brewing, to elapse. A croissant rests on the small, white circular plate next to her tea. This plate, in turn, resides on the wooden table next to the couch on which she has positioned herself. It shares the table with its neighbours: a remote control, a box of Smarties, a copy of the *Radio Times* and a pot which hosts a group of marbles. Anne’s left hand lifts the remote control: this is no coincidence. She is left-handed, knows it, and consciously lets this guide her. She points it towards the television in the far corner of the room, and presses the ‘On/Off’ button. The screen changes to a fuzzy, grey picture. Her index finger moves over to the ‘2’ button, which it pushes. This results in the same fuzzy, grey screen.

‘What exactly has happened?’ she wonders, out loud.

As neither of her parents will be returning home until the evening, she knows that her wondering is to no avail. She suspects that it is a technical fault, and that it will be fixed soon. For now, all there is to do is wait... but she can find something else to do. Once she has finished her croissant, she takes her tea and exits the living room. She makes her way up the staircase, while considering whether to investigate her parents’ room. Although it betrays ethics, she would love to satisfy her curiosity. In fact, if there is something untoward in there, she will have the information to divulge to the police, which will help to keep Sidborough safe. So, perhaps, it doesn’t go against ethics after all...

The only obstacle is the issue of when her parents get back. But now she has the opportunity to investigate the room. While the cat’s away, the mouse will play. But she’s no mouse, and she knows that if there is a secret which shouldn’t be a secret, there will be a trouble. She opens the second door on the right, where the lair so known to her, yet previously unexplored, lurks.

\*

Michael Turner, the shadow Education minister, is up on the first floor of the television centre giving an interview. Before he has time to answer the interviewer's pressing question about his latest proposals and his analysis of the recent election, he can feel the temperature rising in the room. He turns to face the other side of the room, to find that he is surrounded by flames. He flails about, desperately searching for a fire extinguisher. He realises that there is one in the corridor that he came through. Did he notice any in here? In despair, he tries to make his way through the flames, trying not to let them suffocate him.

'I'm sure that someone will call the fire people.' he mutters to himself. He is instantly reassured by this idea.

The fire people have arrived, but have been strictly instructed not to enter the building until the allowed time. Despite their disagreement with the orders, the threat of redundancy encourages them to comply. By the time they make their way into the abyss to put out the inferno, no-one in the building can sense this.

\*

'Who was responsible for the fire?' asks the reporter, from the newspaper *The Chronicle*.

Henry Reeves, the Minister for People, pauses for a moment. 'It was an accident. Don't worry, we're doing what we can.'

'The entire country is complaining about the loss of two major channels. How are you going to resolve this?'

'We'll build a new station in its place...'

'And when do you think that'll happen?'

'Perhaps in the next two years. No, it will happen. It'll happen soon. Plans are under way already.'

The reporter moves on: 'Could you explain more about your new programme on social values in Britain?'

'Which one? Ah, yes. We basically want to get Britain back to a Golden Age, when traditional family values were respected and appreciated. The shift from this way of life to a more individualistic one has caused the moral decline of society. It has led to adultery, drug abuse, prostitution, and other such evils. First, we will eradicate these problems at their source: we will encourage husbands and wives to stay faithful by offering them an incentive....' he waves and tuts '....I mean, teach them that the family is at the centre of everything they do and if they don't respect this, everything falls apart. We take a firm pro-life position and plan to make abortion illegal within the next three years. We will introduce stricter penalties for drug dealing and for possession. We will make certain that prostitutes are arrested and introduced into decent, honest work.'

'Thank you very much. That is all from me.'

'Goodbye.' Reeves smiles obsequiously.

'Hello, Sir. I'm from the *English News*. Do you mind answering a few questions?'

'Not at all.'

'Why do you think the fire at the independent television station took place?'

Reeves ponders for a moment. 'Because....' He takes a piece of paper from the upper pocket of his suit, and examines it. He scrunches it up and puts it back into the pocket. The reporter frowns with puzzlement. 'It was because the people in the vicinity are so discontented. There's not enough truly stimulating, appealing programmes any more. People are bored, and when they are bored they become angry. And that's when destruction happens. What do you expect? Arrests will be made, but I promise that sentences will be lenient owing to these pressing times.'

'Will you be working on a replacement?'

'Um... yes. Work is under way already. We hope to build it as soon as possible.'

'And when do you think that'll be?'

'There is no definite estimate, but I promise it will be done as soon as possible.'

'Tell us about your new social values programme.'

'Basically, we want to move Britain into a Golden Age. People will be more liberated than they ever were before. We plan to experiment with legalising drugs, and to promote rehabilitation of offenders. We accept adultery as human nature and believe that adhering to family values is a primary cause of stress in the home and workplace. We take a firm pro-choice position. We will be lenient on prostitution and hope to legalise it within the next three years.'

'Ok, I'm going to have to wrap it up there. It's been nice speaking to you.'

'Anytime.'

Another reporter appears. 'I'm sorry.' Reeves tells her, 'I've got to go and attend to the scene of the fire.'

'Surely you can spare five minutes?'

'No, it's all got to be sorted out now.'

'OK, that's fine.'



He makes his way over to the taxi rank, waving away a crowd of eager reporters. One of the drivers sets down the window and asks him where he would like to go. He leans closer to the driver and in *sotto voce* asks for a journey to 10 Downing Street. Just when the taxi sets off, he receives a text from Mary Evans, asking him to arrive at a meeting at the secret headquarters near St. James's Park. He is slightly annoyed at having to change his plan so suddenly, but looks forward to the meeting with great anticipation: this is the first he has known about it and he wonders why they are secret.

## Chapter 2

They are seated around a large, oblong wooden table. Simon Evans begins the process:

'Today I call a meeting for us to discuss the implementation of a general test in place of the GCSE exam. That decision is made by me. The issue I will discuss is: how will this be done? Mrs. Evans will be taking notes.'

She smiles at him, obediently.

Mr. Stant, the Minister for Justice, is the first person to respond: 'I have spoken to the police about this matter and they are ok with it. They totally understand that, if they wish to keep their jobs, they must ignore what is happening.'

'Good good.' Evans says, smugly.

'Why are you planning to introduce this test?'

'That is not for you to ask.'

'Well, it is. I'm Minister for People, I'll need to let them know.'

'Drat.' Evans mutters to himself. He speaks louder, and directly to Reeves: 'Well, I'm Prime Minister, which means I'm higher up than you. I decide what the people get to know.'

'One day I'll decide.' Reeves mutters. He has always wanted to oust Evans so that he can be Prime Minister himself: at this very moment, he decides this is now something he has to do. He wonders if he can expose the location of the headquarters, and blame it on him.

'How will this test work?' asks Stant.

'It consists of a set of questions to find out their views. Anyone who doesn't get enough correct answers will be eliminated from society. I considered arresting them, but that will be too much hassle and, besides, there is not enough space in the prisons. The alternative is a force more powerful even than that of law: social stigma.'

'Are you sure that'll work?'

'Do you want to leave?'

'No....no.'

'Right, then. Don't question my proposal.'

'I have a proposal myself.' Reeves pipes up. 'I want to change our national sports a bit. I'm thinking of introducing a new one: gladiator fighting. Perhaps we could use anyone who doesn't fulfil the criteria required in the test?'

'Yes, that will be fine. Reeves, you are Minister for People after all. It is your entitlement as to what you do with them. The only thing is that if you make it too obvious people will get touchy and start a revolt.'

'Well, if they do that, we can draft them into the contests as well.'

'Reeves, you're a star.'

'Thank you, Mr. Evans.'

'Oi oi oi. Call me "Sir".'

'Thank you, Sir.'

'Fuck off, loser.' He gives Reeves a 'V' sign and blows a raspberry.

Reeves starts to seethe. 'How can he speak to me like that?' he mutters.

Mrs. Evans makes a gesture by putting two of her fingers together, while looking at Reeves.

'Now, where was I? Oh yes. Everyone must agree with the policy to have it passed. That has been sorted out.' He points to his wife, who ticks a box on her notepad.

*'How can you speak to me like that?'* screams Reeves, now unsure of the real reason for his indignation.

'Like what?'

'Telling *me* to fuck off.'

'Oh yeah. Well, you asked for it. Now, as I was....'

*'I called you "Sir"!'*

'That's the idea. I don't have to show *you* respect, do I?'

*'I just don't believe it, I don't...'*

Evans rolls his eyes.

'You'd better believe it because if you complain about it, you won't even be a minister any more.'

'Huh. Now you have to make threats. Going to sack me are you? Is that it? You can't do that.'

Evans walks over to where Reeves is sitting, puts his arms round his waist, and lifts him out of the chair. Stant and Smith both guffaw. With Reeves in his arms, he makes his way over to the far end of the room, from which the Thames can be seen. He opens the window. The guffawing immediately turns to gasping.

'No, no!' he mutters to himself. 'No. They'll tell on me.' Reeves can make out the sound but not the words.

'Ok.' He says, louder. 'I won't take it that far. I'm sorry.' He mutters an expletive. Reeves starts to struggle, but Evans restrains him.

'Oh fuck!' he mutters 'Fuck!'

**If I throw him into the lift, someone will tell. Someone will have their revenge. And it won't get him out of the building anyway. The same if I chuck him out of the window on the lower floor. Maybe I could kill the others... the trouble is, I need them.**

He puts Reeves back down.

'Ok, you can stay. But if you challenge me again, that's final.'

Reeves smiles, gratefully, and makes his way over to his place. Evans takes his place again. Smith and Stant look at each other with disturbed expressions.

'Right. We've solved that issue as well. We've done very well today. The very last thing to discuss is elections. I would like to scrap them, but if we do that, then the people will not think that they live in a free society. Any suggestions?'

'We could get people into the polling booths, then arrest them.' Says Stant.

'Yeah, the trouble is that it will be all over the news.'

'We can set the news.'

'That's true. But really, I meant international news.'

'Drug the reporters.'

'Excellent! But we also need to prevent the arrested getting away.'

'Execute them.'

'Ah, Stant, you're a marvel!'

Stant opens his mouth, and then decides not to say what he was going to, fearing humiliation. Smith notices this and smirks. 'Loser.' She chants, just loud enough for everyone to hear. Evans laughs out loud. Reeves sticks his tongue out at Stant, glad that this time it is not him. Stant is unsure what to do: he now knows that no-one is really on his side, but he wants to stay with the group. He hopes that eventually Evans will depart and he can become Prime Minister. Then, he can have his revenge.

'Right.' Says Evans. 'Meeting over. You can all fuck off now.' He leans closer to Mrs Evans. 'Except you. I want to discuss a deal with you.'

\*

She found nothing of note in the room, and is now trying to deal with the boredom which is consuming her like a parasite. The familiar sound of the lock lets her know that her parents are back.

'Well, that was quite an evening!'

'Anne! Where is she?'

She knows that there will be news, but is not certain whether or not it will be good. The handle of the door to the living room turns clockwise, causing it to open.

Her mother's voice sings to her: 'Hiya, pet. We've got something to tell you.'

'Yeeesss?' She leans back slightly, and rolls her eyes.

'We've found you a new school.'

'Why can't I choose my own school?' she asks, trying not to sound resentful.

'Well.... we think it'll be the best place for you. You'll have to be dedicated: we want nothing less than As.'

'Alright, alright. I'm sure it'll be great. What's happened to the TV?'

'Oh, that. It's been like that for a few days. We've tried to get in touch with the council, but no-one can explain it. Our old friend Keith up in Shropshire was having the same problem. He said that the other channels work though. Absolutely baffling. Maybe there is a technical fault at the station. Who knows?'

'Well, I'd like to get this fixed before long.'

'It's not up to you, is it? We could do without the TV for a while.'

'We could do without Channel 2!' Says Mr. Tyler, jokingly but at the same time indicating his disapproval. Anne smiles at him.

'It is a bit suspicious though.' Says Mrs. Tyler.

'Nowt we can do about it. I'm sure they'll get it fixed.'

\*

The light of the day in the room lets Simon Holmes know of his surroundings. He groans, first of all, but the few seconds after this are followed by a sigh of satisfaction. He's clearly slept well and has no hangover. He gets himself up, gets some new underwear and socks from the drawer, and changes. He looks at the alarm clock on the bedside table: 10:23. He wonders if the post has arrived? He makes his way downstairs, and walks over to the front door. No sign of the post. He makes his way back, and turns to the left, into the kitchen. He makes himself a cup of tea and get himself corn flakes with sunflower seeds. He thinks about what he's going to do today: maybe he'll get a newspaper and head off to a museum. He's wanted to check out that one in Fort Goldfax for a while: today he will absolve himself of his duties and go for it.

When he's finished his tea and his breakfast he makes his way out. He'll hit the shops for that paper first. He walks along Broad Street, where he lives, to the row of shops: a chemist, a barber, an off-licence and a newsagent (the place that he has in mind). The newsagent has a spacious layout with a major stand in the centre of the room and two shelves of magazines to the far left and right. The floor is a dark blue colour, and the ceiling is white. The lights on the ceiling are an oblong shape. The newspapers are located on the stand. Holmes takes a copy of the *Sidborough Herald* as usual, and considers a national newspaper: normally he would buy this another day but this *is* election time. It would be worth keeping in touch with what's happening. Not accustomed to buying the same newspaper, he always makes a choice at the time. Today, he has the choice of *The Sun*, *The Times*, *The Independent*, *The English News*, *The Chronicle* and *The Messenger*. *The Messenger* is a newspaper that came out around six months ago. He has never tried it before. It clearly has some election coverage so he opts to give it a try.

At the counter, Mr Smith greets him:

'Good day, my friend.'

'Hi.'

'What did you make of the election, then?'

'I was very surprised. A bit disappointed as well, to be honest.'

'Ah, why?'

'I didn't particularly want the New Way to get in, that's all. To tell you the truth, I don't like any of them. How is anyone supposed to trust a politician?'

'Well, they're the best deal that Britain can have. They're going to be doing a lot more for society than any of the other parties. You should appreciate it. Yes, I know what you mean about politicians, but don't knock their policies until you're sure.'

He pauses for a moment.

'Yes, I guess that you're right. They may not be empty promises. I should be more patient, and I recognise that. I just get fed up sometimes.'

'Don't we all? That'll be £1.60 for the two papers.'

Holmes hands Smith the money, announces his departure, and leaves. He carries on, turning into Maple Road.

'Scoundrel!' He looks around, but can't find the owner of the voice. He tries to ignore it. Just as he is passing the local branch of Dreams, he registers a group at the traffic lights. They seem to be glancing in his direction. He tries not to glare at them, but a few of them seem familiar.

'Dissident!'

'Take that rag out of your hands!'

It is not clear to him what they are talking about. He walks a little faster than usual, looking around him. Suddenly, he is startled by a shattering sound. He turns around very briefly, just in time to see part of the window of the church showering onto the pavement. At once, he realises it is the newspaper they were referring to: he throws it towards the mob, and breaks into a run, not caring where he's going. He holds onto his pocket, hoping to take his phone out in time, but he can't concentrate, he knows he's got to....

'Holmes!'

'I knew it was him!'

**Oh shit.**

He finds himself at the police station, hoping they are not right outside, at the same time not particularly caring: there simply isn't time for that.

\*

### **Chapter 3**

'Buckingham Palace has been captured for you, sir.'

'I don't want it any more.' Says Evans, 'It was just an idea.' He is speaking to the Minister of Defence, Tim Anderson.

Mr. Anderson looks absolutely exasperated. 'Do you realise the work that went into that operation? Why do you have to be so ungrateful? Why do you want the palace anyway?'

'In response to the first question: yes, I know, and I don't care. To the second, you are there to serve me and you do what I tell you, so why should I have to be grateful? To the third, that is none of your business, so go fuck yourself.'

Anderson inhales sharply, and continues: 'I commanded the operation for you, so it is in my interest to know.'

'Look, I've already told you. I haven't got all day, so you can fuck off now.'

'What are we going to do with the palace?'

'Call me "Sir!"'

'I said: what are we going to do with the palace?'

'You will call me "Sir!"'

'Why should I when you won't even answer my questions properly?'

Evans throws his hands up and starts shouting: '*I've listened to you, and you... You have the fucking nerve to disrespect me!*'

**I need him to fulfil my dreams of conquest. But I can always find another minister....**

'When you treat others the way you do, why should they respect you?'

'Don't you answer back! I'm your leader, you do what I say!'

'Well, I think that you need to change your attitude, or let someone else be the leader.'

Evans screams. '*How dare you! How dare you say that! Get the fuck out right now!*'

'What happens if I don't?'

'I'll give you a serious hiding, that's what! So get out of here!'

'You realise that other people will know about that?'

Evans twitches for a moment. Suddenly, he smiles. He throws his hands up as if he is pushing something away. 'I'm sorry. I just had a bad day, that's all. I get angry when we have these arguments because I want the best for all of us and it upsets me so when there is a dispute between us. You can be in charge of the palace, as you have been so faithful to the government. Also, I promise: no more arguments.'

Anderson stares at Evans, trying to decide whether he is serious or whether he is making this up.

'It's fine: I'll do without the palace. If I organise another campaign for you, I don't want to be told that you are no longer interested in the goal of it. Is that clear?'

**I can't guarantee that. However, it may be a laugh to pretend to just to get on his nerves. Trouble is, he'll leave. Maybe it's time to find a new minister...**

'Well, no it's not. That'd be organising it on your terms, and I don't think that's appropriate.'

Anderson ponders this for a moment. 'Well, in that case, I have no option but to resign.'

'Of course. Off you go then.'

Anderson raises his eyebrows, but he makes his way out of the room. He can't help thinking that something like this is not supposed to happen; although he is becoming dissatisfied with it, he will remain in the political world a little longer, just for surveillance.

\*

'Surname?'

'Holmes.'

'First name?'

'Simon.'

'You are arrested on suspicion of making a false claim.'

He can hardly believe it.

'I'm sorry.... you what?'

'Rules are rules. Everything you say from now on will be taken down in evidence.'

'But you.... you just can't....'

He feels the iron grip on his wrists. He know what's going to happen next.

'No way! *No fucking way!*'

'That's another year for you, you swearing bastard.'

'Don't I get a trial?'

'You'll get a trial, alright.' The officer guffaws. 'Just not the kind you thought.'

As his coerced parade to the van takes place, the mob appears.



'Go! Get him!'

'No, no!'

'Bloody pigs! Go on, fuck 'em up!'

'No! No!'

Six hands grab the potential attacker, pulling him back. The back doors of the van are opened, and Holmes is thrown in. As the doors slam shut, his fate is sealed.

'Let me out!'

'Let me out, you cunts!'

'Fucking *let me out!*'

He starts banging on the doors, but soon he is no longer in denial about what is happening.

\*

The room is around 10 metres by 8 metres. There is a bed at the far right corner which resembles the kind you might find in a psychiatric ward. It does at least have some colour: blue and white stripes.

'You can make yourself useful and clean that crap off the floor.'

Holmes is disgusted by this blatant abuse of authority. However, there seems like no way out at this moment.

'Is there a bucket? A mop? Anything like that?'

'You clean it off with your tongue, douche bag! What do you expect? Get that outfit off first, though. You don't want you getting it wet, do we?'

He sighs and peels the thing off. There's no way he's cleaning blood with his tongue though.

The two guards guffaw.

'Look at him! I could swear he's actually got shit on his arse. If you look closely, you can see. It's alright, you little fucker, you can clean it off with a toilet brush. But you're cleaning that floor like this.' He moves his tongue upwards and downwards while sticking it out in an exaggerated format, and closing his eyes. His lips contort into a sarcastic grin.

'Don't you realise that I could get AIDS from licking blood?'

'Yes, I realise that.' Says the guard, who he has been speaking to. He is not one Holmes has seen before. He has curly black hair, which is shoulder-length, and vaguely round features.

He is relatively thin, but has some sturdiness to him. 'I don't fucking care. Do you think that you have rights? Clean the fucking floor *now!*'

There's something about the way he says this that suggests that he means trouble. Holmes decides that AIDS is the lesser of two evils. Reluctantly, he lowers his mouth to the floor and begins to lick the pool of the dead in a spiral motion. He hears further guffawing and 'ahem-aheming'. One of the guards steps nearer to him. He hears the sound of a zip and feels something spilling onto his back. He turns around and sees something that he instantly tries to forget. They say that a picture paints a thousand words, but this one paints only two: shame and humiliation. He knows, at this very moment, that what he has just seen will haunt him forever.

'Alright, that's enough!' he shouts, raising himself up.

The guard tries to push Holmes back down. Holmes overcomes the force easily, but the other guard, who has recognised the situation, comes over his way. He has blond hair, which is shaved to grade 4 or so, and oval features, which are spotted with freckles. He has a little more mass than the other guard. They both pin Holmes' arms to the floor. Holmes kick out with his heels.

'Oh no, no, no. There's no need for that. We know that you fuckers try and struggle. We have reinforcements.' He laughs, smugly.

'And we're willing to call them in.' Says the other one.

Holmes stops kicking out. 'Let me finish the job.' He sighs.

'Ok, I will. I'll leave you in peace: once we've got the cack off your arse. I'm going to get the brush, and when I come back I expect you to have cleaned all the blood. Otherwise it'll be yours getting spilt.' He utters, in a menacing tone. 'My friend will watch you.'

Holmes tells by the knowing smile that erupts on the face of the silent one that, in actuality, they both hate each other, but they are working together for a common cause. He continues with the spiralling motion, enduring the guffaws, which is just as difficult as the task itself. He puts the acrid taste, and the cold, rough sensation, to the back of his mind, and focuses on the end of this task, when he will be free. As he drifts into a daydream, he hears footsteps. These are quickly followed by another rough sensation on his anus. He keeps on, focusing on the portrait of azure blue sky and ignoring the much more real, tangible happenings. The judge in him is trying to decide the most tortuous of the messages which his sense of touch is sending to him.

'Ok. I reckon you've cleaned enough. I'm sorry for pissing over you by the way, but it has to be done. We'll give you a wash, ok?'

He nods. He makes his way out. His sentry looks nonchalant. He focuses on the dark brick wall ahead of him, trying not to accept that this may be his future. He is interrupted by a very cold, wet sensation. He shivers, uncontrollably.

‘Ok. Done. Now, piss off to bed. Lights out in fifteen minutes.’

For seemingly hours, he stares at the ceiling, planning an escape route. He wakes, suddenly, only realising that he has been asleep for some time at this very moment. Soon, he drifts off into the same deep, meditative slumber which he has experienced before. As the light shines into the cramped room, it occurs to him that he now has an addiction to sleep.

\*

The first reading of the new Education Act results in considerable disapproval among the members of the House of Commons, including two MPs from the New Way. Evans glares at them, menacingly. The following day, he asks the suspects, Keith Anderton (the Minister for Costs) and his wife Joanne (the Minister for Debt) to be summoned to his personal office in Westminster.

They find themselves in a room which seems to be totally bare, except for a generic desk, four seats, and a few posters on the wall: the first shows a picture of Simon Evans with a halo above it, with a crowd of people smiling and cheering and looking up at him. The second is a world map showing two hands grasping it: a caption in a strange blood red sans serif font reads ‘New Way, New World’. The third shows what appears to be the corpse of Michael Turner, with a caption in size 20, orange capital letters: ‘RIP Dickhead’. Evans swiftly removes the last two posters and throws them into a corner. He points to the first: ‘What do you think?’

‘Uh..... ok.’ Says Joanne.

‘OK’ he screeches, mockingly. ‘All you can say about that is ok. And that’s why you’re here today.’

‘What is it?’ asks Keith.

‘You don’t ask me questions. Call me “Sir”.’

Keith shakes his head. ‘No way.’

‘Either you fucking call me “Sir” or the meeting doesn’t continue.’

‘I can’t stand anymore of this...’

‘Call me “Sir”!’

‘I resign.’

*'You won't fricking call me "Sir"! That's all you have to do!'*

He looks over at Sheila, then at Evans. In front of him is someone who, he suspects, would not hesitate to do some serious damage to his skeletal structure in a dark alley. But here.... they're safe. And there is no way he can let his pride be diminished like this, not when she's here.

'I resign.' He repeats.

Evans stiffens for a moment, and clenches his fists.

'You can't do that. I have to dismiss you.'

'Well, there's no need. I resign, so you don't have to dismiss me.'

Unnoticed to the others, a tear falls from one of Evans' eyes. *'You sodding twat!'* he blurts out.

'Uh... so what? What's the matter with that?'

'It's ok... go on. You can resign after all.'

'Well, thank you, Mr. Evans.'

'Bastard.' Mutters Evans.

'So why am I here?' asks Sheila.

'Well, I called you both in, because you're both fired. But your little friend has decided to resign. I suppose you're going to tell me you are too?'

'Well, in the circumstances, I have no choice.'

*'You fucking bitch.'*

'Alright, there's no need to insult me!'

'Yes, there is. Well, I don't care. You both go on, go!'

They look at each other with puzzlement, but they get up and depart.

Once they are gone, Evans starts to sob. 'Why isn't this approach working?' he moans. 'I never thought it would be this difficult. If I can't subjugate anyone, there is no point in this, no point at all!'

He starts to wander up and down the room. He finds the two posters and puts them back on the wall. Eyeing the 'RIP Dickhead' poster, he cheers up.

'Now, that's an idea. Well, actually, no. Too boring.'

His shoulders slump down, and he carries wandering around, aimlessly. 'What is the point? Just, maybe, I'll just give up. Maybe that twat's right. But what I will do instead?'

\*

'Something tells me they aren't going to have elections. They promise them in a certain number of years, but I know Evans, and, to be honest, I think he is simply trying to convince everyone that they will take place because that's what everyone wants to think.'

'But, how? He just wouldn't do that.'

Tim Anderson is at the home of Michael Butler, his friend, and his wife, Sheila. They are having an evening meal: sausages, roast potatoes and asparagus. However, the main reason why Anderson is here is to discuss his plan.

'In public, he is amicable. When I am alone with him, he shows something very different: he is argumentative, disrespectful and fickle. He also likes to turn it all onto you. Apparently, you are disrespecting him if you ask him anything. He tried to make a plea but I got so fed up that I decided to resign.'

Michael & Sheila listen, with concern.

'Once I made the decision to resign, he suddenly became very dismissive. I thought that this was very unusual behaviour. I want to know what it is with him. Why does he act like that?'

'I'm not certain.' Says Michael. 'It certainly seems strange.'

'I know all the mental health disorders,' says Sheila 'I'm always reading about them. This doesn't seem like anything I've found.'

'Why are you so preoccupied with mental health disorders? What's supposed to be wrong with me?'

'I never said there is anything wrong... I'm just interested.'

'Well, it's got to be for a reason. I know you prefer him. Always glancing at him like that. He's the sane one, isn't he? I'm not!'

Tim raises his hands. 'Please.'

'I do not want to leave you! How many times have I told you! Come to think of it, yes, perhaps you have paranoid personality disorder!'

'Oh, do I! So, there's something wrong with me, is there?'

'No!'

'Don't you try to deny it!'

'Ahem' coughs Tim. At once, the couple pay attention to him. He continues: 'I've thought of forming my own political party, but with the election not being certain, I wonder if it is worth it. We will have to see what happens in the future, but I want to know what to do now. I'd like to stay in the political world, and I'm certainly not willing to go back to the New Way! What do you suggest?'

'I really don't know.' Says Michael. 'I still can't believe that Evans is not what he seems.'

'He really seems to want the best interest for all of us.' Says Sheila. 'The only issue is that since they have taken over, the television is much worse. Neither of us can bear to watch it any more.'

'I wonder if anyone will find the solution?' wonders Tim, out loud.

'We'll just have to see if the elections go ahead.' Replies Michael. 'I'm sure they will.'

Tim decides simply to carry on eating. If he leaves enough time, perhaps a plan will formulate in itself. At the very least, he can follow what is happening politically. He wants to pay attention to it 24/7, but he knows there are other things to do. He would consider becoming an officer in the army once more, but he does not wish to belong to one which attempts to fulfil the New Ways' wishes. Perhaps, for the time being, he will find another political party to join: even though the threat is overwhelming to the resistance offered by this option, it will offer him the opportunity for meaningful employment and to keep watch of what is happening.

\*

At the secret headquarters, it is now accepted that the cohort of Simon Evans, Mary Evans, Henry Reeves and Nigel Stant will attend every meeting. This particular meeting also has a guest: Angela Robinson, the Minister for News, Media, and Blogs.

'I am here today,' announces Angela 'as I would like to propose the possibility of a new national newspaper.'

'And what is the point of that?' snaps Simon Evans.

'It will send people the message that they should vote for New Way in the next election, without their even so much as realising it.'

'Ah, I'm with you now. That's a great proposal. I entirely accept.' As he leans towards her, Mary Evans can sense a trace of meekness mixed in the more obvious signals. She looks at her husband in disgust, before moving away from him slightly.

'In that case, I'll start looking for staff from next week.'

'Could I...' says Reeves.

'*Shut up!*' roars Simon Evans. 'I go first!'

'But you let her...'

Realising that his wife is in the room, Evans has no idea what to say in reply. Instead, he simply ignores Reeves: 'So, are there any other proposals?'

Reeves speaks again: 'I was just going to say that after that disastrous first reading, it is bleeding obvious...'

'*No swearing!*' commands Evans. Mary points her feet towards him.

'...it is obvious that there is no chance of passing any of the laws that we want to create through the current process. I therefore propose that we abolish the House of Commons.'

'And how exactly are we going to do that?' asks Evans, contemptuously.

'We abolish it by burning it, like we did with the television centre.'

Evans turns bright red. 'That's just a fantastic idea!' he shouts. Reeves assumes that he's being sarcastic, before he sees Evans rub his hands and start sweating, while the rest of the attendees burst into applause. Reeves wonders if he'll be promoted, then he remembers that there's nowhere to be promoted to, except for the role of Prime Minister. Perhaps he could ask for a new role to be created?

'Would you like to take on a Deputy Minister?'

'No.' Evans would normally be infuriated by the question, but is simply too jubilant at the proposal to care.

'I'll organise it.' Says Stant. 'We can get the police to keep shtum. Perhaps, if anyone asks, they can pretend it's people rioting.'

Once more, Evans' skin turns a roseate hue, but this time it's for a different reason: '*But why in fucking hell would my fucking people want to riot?! How dare you disrespect me and my fantastic government!*' He clenches his fists again, by now so familiar to the others that it is regarded as a trademark gesture.

'OK, ok!' protests Stant.

'*I'll keep you on, but don't be so bloody cheeky! How dare you say that!*'

Stant can barely get a word in edgeways.

'*Don't insult me ever again, otherwise I'll.....I'll.....*'

**I can't get rid of this guy, or I'll have to execute my plans myself.**

*'...I'll get very pissed off!'*

Reeves is becoming infuriated about the rules. 'Can I go now?' he asks.

*'No, you can't! Sit down and shut up!'*

Reeves sulks, but does as he's told. Mary edges closer to her husband, and starts to stroke his back. He pushes against her.

*'Don't do that!'* he yells.

Mary looks very put out, but obliges. Stant is becoming extremely fed up. 'What happens next?' He asks.

'Nothing.' says Evans. 'You all piss off now.'

'But before we go...'

'Before we go,' echoes Evans, mockingly 'before we go, before we go, before we go!'

'But how...'

*'Oh just go away!'* he shouts. The rest of the attendees are getting up and leaving. Stant gives up and joins them. He is tempted to hand in his notice, but he knows there will be no chance of advancement in the hierarchy if he does so. He hisses at Reeves, suspecting now that he also has designs on the most senior role within it. If Reeves takes over before him, he will have to wait forever. He simply cannot let this happen.

\*

It is another day in the House of Commons. The second reading of the Education Act is to take place later on. For now, everyone is making themselves comfortable: a number of them converse to MPs that they know, but no-one is too concerned about going about their business until later. As they fill their seats, they wonder why there is no-one from the New Way in here.

'We'd better telephone them: they must have forgotten.' Says Keith Anderton, now an independent MP. He is here with a view to joining a new party, as he is tiring of campaigning.

'Maybe they have given up on it, unprofessional though that is.' Responds Sheila.

'I just don't find this right. Maybe we'd better go and find out what's happening.'

The couple announce to everyone that they're leaving, and that they should be back within a couple of hours. Everyone carries on chattering, mainly about the latest issue of what is happening with VAT: the New Way promised to abolish it, but this does not seem to have



happened. Half an hour, there is still no sign of anyone else, so they commence the second reading.

Suddenly, the fire alarm goes off. Everyone lines up and prepares to go to the assembly point: they all get out through the fire exit. Looking behind them, they notice a fire engulfing the west side of the building. Gradually, it spreads to the south, growing denser. They are visited by the fire team, who tell them to go home.

\*

While Reeves is riding in the speeding taxi, which he has taken to avoid the angry throng of reporters and civilians who are demanding, via vocal questions and placards, to know what has happened to parliament, he receives a phone call.

'Hi, it's me: Nigel. It's alright, you can hide at mine.'

'Great!' exclaims Reeves. 'Where are you?'

On being given the address, he eagerly tells the driver where to go. On arriving, he gets out and considers underpaying the driver by a few pounds, but decides that it is not worth it. On paying, he waves, and wishes the driver a very nice day, which he doesn't really mean. He sneers at the dwelling that Stant seems to have chosen: some semi-detached, probably built in the 1930s. He is puzzled as to why he has not moved into one of the special government residences. There are rumours that some of the ministers are beginning to live at the secret headquarters.

He keenly makes his way up the driveway, until he meets a dark blue door, with a black letterbox somewhere in the centre, reading: 'Letters'. He raps his knuckles on the door. Almost at once, it is opened.

'Hello, come on in!' says Stant.

He steps into a hallway with a marble-coloured carpet, an umbrella stand and a wide mirror, into which Reeves flexes his arms, and poses with his hands on his hips. Stant gives him a withering look. 'Are you finished yet?' he asks.

'Err... yes. Of course.'

They turn to the right, into a room with the same carpet, a coal fireplace in the centre of the room, a sofa to the left, and a television which is blaring a rather familiar sound. With haste, Stant takes the remote control and mutes the television before switching it off at the wall.

'Sit yourself down.' he says, somewhere between a request and a command.

'Sure.' He takes his place on the sofa.

'Would you like anything to drink?'

'I'll have a coffee or something.'

'Of course. I'll go and get one.'

Reeves considers switching the television back on, but decides perhaps it will be too obvious. He simply watches the world from the window: leaves fall from their unforgiving providers, traffic makes its way to unknown directions, the sky....

He hears a thud, and turns round to look. Suddenly, he sees Stant charge towards him with a baseball bat in his hands. Desperately, Reeves makes his way up off the couch, and runs out of the room. Stant takes a swing at him, but hits the wall, which resounds with another thud. Quickly, Reeves turns the lock, opens the door and runs to the end of the driveway, not caring that the door is open. Stant thwacks the door, causing part of it to splinter onto the porch, wood spraying like solid blood. On seeing that Reeves has got away, he decides not to give chase.

\*

With no clear process for the introduction of new laws, there is now nothing to curb the government's power. Police suspicion is dealt with by bribes and threats of redundancy. At the next meeting, it is decided that the general test will be introduced. A plan is drawn for its implementation in all schools and colleges in the country by the following year. Any that refuse to replace GCSEs with the new test will suffer the same fate as the House of Commons. A few people notice that Reeves is not here today, but assume that perhaps he is away on business. The election issue is temporarily put on hold. The issue of economic policy is also brought up:

'In order to compete with other global superpowers,' announces Evans 'we need to promote economic growth. There must be no limit to this. We will aim for an increase of GDP by 5% in the next year. To encourage this, we will check on people's spending habits.'

'What are they meant to buy?'

'I don't know, do I? It's up to them. Actually, it is best if they put money in our coffers so we'll take over as many businesses as possible. That's another point.'

'Um.... ok.'

'For that reason, we'll also introduce a tax which will apply regardless of income. Let's just pretend that it contributes to their pension or something. That should get them to cough up.'

'I'm not sure I quite agree....'

'If you don't agree, feel free to leave.'

Robinson ponders how important her job is to her. She decides the best thing for now is just to tell a little white lie.

'In that case, I agree after all.'

'Good good. Fitting in.' Evans rubs his hands together. 'Ok, meeting closed.'

Robinson has started to form a less than flattering opinion of Evans. Stant looks around him, suspiciously. He hopes that no-one knows about what happened. He breathes a sigh of relief as he notices that the others are not paying him attention.

## **Chapter 4**

Holmes is out in the courtyard of the prison. They've been summoned here for no clear reason. He's in the state of constant vigilance which is now so familiar to him: it brought him out of the inertia, which he welcomed, but now he finds it so difficult, and so tiring. He appreciates the original inertia more than ever, in fact he craves it. He knows it will never be possible to truly relax, so it is the most satisfactory plane he can find himself in. They're lined up in single file, proceeding towards a desk in the middle of the courtyard. There are three guards lined up in front of it. The one on the left, who Holmes now knows well, is filling in details on a form. The other two were there when he had to clean the blood: the one in the middle is handing out some kind of card, and the other is keeping watch. Everytime he glances at them, he can see the pool of blood, clearly as daylight. It has no mercy: it is everywhere. He's haunted by their voices, which has kept him awake until finally, from exhaustion, he collapses onto the foreboding residence that he takes for the night. He believes that they're watching him, waiting for him to make mistakes, which they will gain satisfaction from. All they want is for him to suffer, so they can thrive.

As he gets closer, he considers escape, but he has considered that many times before. It seems so pointless even trying, and he's becoming convinced that if they comply with them, regrettable though that may be, it will save them from something worse. Over at the desk, he notices the card being fixed to that of the prisoners. it is obviously some means of identification: nothing to worry about too much. He sighs with relief.

'Holmes, Simon. You are number 2000-243. Allow us to place this sign of identification.'

The card is attached to his clothes before he can examine it.

'You must wear this card at all times.'

'Ok.'

**Shall I ask them?**

'What happens if I don't?' He wonders out loud.

'We don't know. And don't answer back. Go to your cell.'

The two guards get up and accompany him across the grass, recently mown: the brief opening of paradise in an otherwise desolate situation. He is constantly staring into the future, his only friend in this place, his only hope.

When they are into the cell, the door is shut behind him and locked.

'Enjoying yourself here?' the first guard asks.

Before Holmes has time to answer, he receives a kick somewhere between the stomach and the ribs. Gravity pulls him to the ground, but he keeps up.

'It's ok. We'll look after you.'

The guard kicks at Holmes again, but he manages to cover. Some pain is received on the forearm.

'What is your problem? Can't take a beating?' He leans closer to Holmes. 'That's what you're made for, you useless, pathetic, little piece of shit.' The spit travels onto Holmes' forehead and the guard exclaims his words with venom. His hand travels towards the back of Holmes' neck, but it is gently pushed away.

'Why the fuck are you resisting? You can't do that: you're not good enough.'

He has to keep on telling himself not to believe the guards' words, to keep on going. It is his only hope.

Suddenly, he's stunned by a force directed at his back. The pain shoots through it like a tidal wave. He falls on the floor with a thud. He feels a stomp, once again on his back. Tears start to form in his eyes as he's overwhelmed by something, something that he doesn't care to think about now, but it has gripped him like a vice. He knows that there's no turning back from it now. He needs to stop this, somehow. He just doesn't know how. And that's a serious problem because right now, right at this very moment, he knows that he could be maimed if this continues.

'No more!' he shouts. He doesn't like having to do this, but it seems like the best choice in the circumstances.

The guards step away.

'There. It does have some effect on him after all. So much for the tough guy.' He spits: the projectile hits Holmes somewhere between the chin and the lips. 'Ok. We take your point. But we can't let you get away with it just like that. If we don't stomp you, you're going have to do what we tell you. Do you agree?'

Holmes cannot resist grimacing as he utters the words: 'I agree.'

'Good. And, in that case, you can make yourself useful. I think I forgot to wipe properly when I went. Do you mind finishing off the job?'

**You bastards.**

Faced with the alternative of serious harm, Holmes utters some words which are not his: 'Of course not.'

The guard mimes with his tongue: Holmes realises what he's getting at. He unzips his trousers: they fall to the floor. The guard deliberately sticks his posterior out as if Holmes cannot guess what he's referring to. He leans forward to it. Diligently, he moves his tongue in the same way that he was taught to use to clean the blood, and everything else it has had to touch since. The taste and texture is indescribable. However, that is nothing compared to the pollution overtaking his heart and soul: nothing seems the same any more. He's startled by a flash of light.

'That'll give you something to remember.'

He's so shocked, he nearly passes out, but he wills himself to stay awake. If he doesn't finish the job, he doesn't know what will happen, but he doesn't want to find out. He cannot believe that they would actually photograph this: it seems that they know no boundaries, that they will do anything to punish him and his allies, to keep them down.

'Don't you tell anyone about this, or someone else'll be cleaning your blood.' The guard straightens up. 'Shit, I need a slash. I guess there's a place I can go here.'

Holmes is so used to this now that he immediately removes his clothes, so that they don't get wet. The urine runs down his face, to his mouth, his neck, right down to the floor. He closes his eyes tightly, and pretends that he's not here. If he shuts out the sight, he won't have to see it in his mind's eye, again and again.

'You can clean that up as well.'

The other one speaks: 'If I shit on him, will anyone find out?'

'Bit risky. Maybe leave that one out.'

'I guess this'll be alright.' Holmes feels something familiar pressed against his mouth. The sensation of gas follows, and something he does not want to remember infiltrates his senses. He feels nauseated, but that is nothing compared to how appalled he is that this is happening.

'Maybe you could shit in his mouth?'

'No, I'm not sure. We don't want the fucker dying. We need to cover ourselves.'

‘Just no more beatings.’

‘We’ve made sure of that.’

They don’t even bathe him anymore. No-one ever finds out. He wonders who else this is happening to, and whether there are even any laws to protect them anymore. When the door slams shut, he opens his eyes. He knows that they will be back to check that he has cleaned the floor. He sets himself to work. It doesn’t upset him as much as it did at first: it is just a routine now, another thing that has to be endured. When he has finished, he rests on the edge of the bed. He knows that it will be soon be time for his injections, so there is no point in doing anything; not there is anything to do here anyway, but they are not here for long. Soon enough, the others are here. The guard who was on the left of the table, and the one and only doctor. The guard laughs in a hostile manner when he sees that Holmes is not wearing anything. Holmes puts his head in his hands: he just wants to get this over with. Antagonistic laughter becomes apparent.

‘Oh my word. I think he’s actually been bathing in piss!’

‘What’s been happening?’ There is concern in the doctor’s voice.

‘Oh, oh nothing. Some of them are a bit nutty, that’s all. Environment, you know. Anyway, you’re here to give an injection, not to ask questions. So get on with it.’

Holmes still refuses to look up. He doesn’t want to be reminded of anything: just to let this happen. He feels a sharp sensation in his right arm for two seconds or so. Emptiness and silence takes its hold for around ten seconds, then he hears footsteps growing quieter and quieter. Finally, the sound of the door creaking, and closing. Further footsteps which eventually fade away to nothing. He straightens up, looking into the wall, seeing a dark, massive abyss. He concentrates his eyesight deep into it as possible, hoping to find something. A warm, floaty sensation overtakes his nerves and senses. He doesn’t care where he is anymore, because he knows that where he is is fabulous. Golden honey adorns his skin; everything that he has experienced makes suddenly perfect sense to him as it is all for a higher purpose; nothing that has happened here is any big deal: it was all just for a joke, because they’re his friends after all. Everyone’s his friend. Straight ahead of him is a tunnel to the edge of the world: he knows he can’t go through but he can experience the journey vicariously from where he is. One day he will go through this tunnel, and whatever happens between now and then does not matter. Nothing matters, because everything will be alright.

\*

Across the whole country, book retailers are closing as the industry moves into the public sector. The new national book distribution network is split into four regions: North, South, West and East. The number of books being published is cutting back and several are being

rendered out of print. However, the bookshop in Maple Road, Sidborough is keeping quiet. Steve Johnson, the manager, has changed the layout of the building to resemble a cafe, and is telling his customers to avoid letting the general public know, as private bookshops are being destroyed. He also knows that he will be in trouble for selling rare books: this label applies to any book which has been purchased from a private retailer. A black market has been created for the sale of these types of books. There is also a private news network which is operating from the other side of the town: he goes there every week to find out what is going on. A perturbing event has happened recently: a raid of a bookshop in central London, which ended with the four staff, who were there at the time, being beaten so badly that they all died from their injuries before medical treatment could save them. It seems to be a set of mobs who are doing this but it is uncertain exactly what is motivating them. The rest managed to escape via an emergency fire exit and found that every shelf was bare.

‘What do they do with the books?’ he asks, incredulously.

‘That is uncertain. I recommend that you find someone to keep watch in case you’re raided. It will be interesting to find out what they actually do with them.’

‘What about the store itself?’

‘No-one dares to return there. Do you realise what could happen if they find us? And yet, the police do nothing. There doesn’t even seem to be a legal system anymore.’

‘I don’t know... I don’t know if I can go through with this anymore. I wonder whether to join one of the mobs, just to spy. I can let you know when I’m not there. How does that sound?’

‘I’m not certain of that. You’ll have to find out.’

‘In that case, I will.’

\*

As Tim Anderson makes his way to another meeting of the Centre Party in Clapham, he realises that he is growing bored. He is now Defence Minister for the relatively new organisation, which came about when a group of restless people in Gloucester decided that the Liberal Democrats, the closest to a centre-wing party in Britain, were not satisfying their aims. However, he has decided that they do not have what it takes to fight back against the New Way. At the meeting, he politely offers his resignation.

The day after this, he regrets it. Although what was said at the meetings was of little interest to him, they did offer some insight into the events happening in politics in general: the important thing. He ponders whether to form a private army to deal with the mobs, which he suspects to be controlled by the New Way. However, with no definite evidence that this is the case, there is currently no justification for the use of force. He could join the New Way to investigate, but deems it unlikely that Evans will have him back. He is aware of a private

news network, but he thinks it unlikely they will manage to prove who is behind the mobs. However, there is one last cause that is currently feasible.

\*

In the same day, an entire group of electronic retailers, including Currys, Richer Sounds and Bang & Olufsen, is given an ultimatum: they can accept a takeover by the state or cease trading within a year. A few bravely decide to resist: the next day, it is announced in *The Chronicle*, which has now been taken over by the New Way, that these particular businesses are the enemy. In the next week, staff at stores up and down the country, make their way to work in the morning only to find that windows have been smashed and their former workplace is completely empty. Everyone wonders why no-one is doing anything about the increasing crime and violence, unaware that it is not being regarded as crime and violence at all. With the alternative of rapidly losing custom, each of the companies who resisted now decides to accept the takeover.

\*

In all of the 35 years of his life, Steve Johnson could never have envisaged himself doing this: and now he is. The MP, unknown to him, is on the ground, receiving kicks and blows to every part of his body. He had the misfortune to be separated from the fleeing Centre Party, who have been targeted in a planned attack.

'You going to join in or what?' someone asks. Steve has never met him before but clearly he belongs to the mob.

'Uh.... maybe we should just go after them.' He is reluctant to let on about his unwillingness to engage in physical violence.

'Well, I think it's a bit late now, mate. Maybe we should just give this fucker the punishment he needs.'

'No. Leave him alone: he's had enough.'

'Well, if you're not going to, I'm giving him a kicking. So there.'

He cannot bear to look at the scene unravelling before his eyes. He is not spared the sounds: the pathetic wails of surrender that emanate from the man who lies beneath them, the thuds over his being, destroying him. And, at this very moment, a force known to him begins to rise from his adrenal glands. It is this combined with the idea in his conscious mind that creates the unbearable tension; all this happened just because he was on the wrong side. He hadn't done anything to them, he was just in the wrong place at the wrong time: this shatters his perception of the way the world is; he wonders if justice exists in actuality anymore; and he realises, with humility, that this could happen to anyone, at any time.

'Oi, Steve! Why are you hanging around?'



'Are you...'

'Look, it's as simple as this.' He finds himself being pulled along by his arm, which is then manipulated to produce a punch which lands right onto....

Steve closes his eyes. He has never seen anything like it. He hopes that it can be erased from his memory.

'His heart's not beating anymore. Shall we give him a bit more?'

'Nah, I'm bored. Let's go.'

They begin to depart, a few pausing to admire the work of destruction that they have done, before following suit.

\*

A search round Anderson's home town reveals more disillusionment with the current government than he imagined. But there is a greater grievance still: interactions are simply not the same any more. Apparently, someone was turned away from a shop just for buying the wrong newspaper. It has since been found that this shop now sells only *The Chronicle*. People have become boastful and arrogant: one resident explains that everyone has to do this just to fit in. Sports clubs, art galleries and community centres have shut to make way for big houses. No-one risks going to the wrong part of town for fear of crime and ostracism from their neighbours. Anderson is surprised at this as it has always been a relatively safe area. In his much-loved local, the *Red Lion*, he finds out from a former police officer that the amount of violence is being vastly exaggerated, to help discourage people from going there. It turns out he was sacked from the police when he refused to take part in the destruction of a local bookshop. Several followed suit: that's why they have the mobs now. Anderson has the opportunity to inform his new acquaintance of his latest plan:

'Would you like to join a new police force?'

'I'd like to go back in but while.... hang on, a new one?'

'I want to set up a private police force to take on the...'. He looks round.

'It's ok. You can say anything here: we're all pissed off with this system.'

'To take on the mobs. And that's just to start with. There's a lot more to be done than that.'

The stranger's eyes light up. 'That'd just be amazing. But what are the hours? I need to fit it round my other job, just for the moment.'

'We'll have to decide that later, I'm afraid. For now, we recruit. You can help me do this.'

'Well, sure, there's a lot of people who I expect would be interested. The issue is that those who have left the police have other jobs now.'

'Well, see what they think. I should be in the area for a while. Perhaps we can meet up next Friday to discuss it?'

'Not a problem. Remember, here you can say anything.'

They agree to meet in the early evening of the following Friday.

\*

As Johnson smashes the windows of a local store, he realises that he is so used to this he has forgotten what it's like. It's not that he enjoys it, it's more that he simply doesn't care: this is just what they do. They have rapidly attacked several businesses in the town, and he is beginning to wonder why. They have also spied on meetings of Labour, the Centre Party, the Liberal Democrats, and the Conservatives. A few of the meetings were forced to end when the mob was found outside. Minority parties have been left alone. But isn't there another major political party in Britain?

'Why don't we spy on the New Way?' wonders Johnson aloud.

'Well, we can't. They're in government.' Replies Dave. Johnson has now found out the stranger's name.'

'But what's the difference?'

'Uh.... well.' Dave whispers to himself. 'Well, it's too much trouble.'

'Well, yes, perhaps.' He takes a brick and throws it through another window. The mundane scene of shattering glass takes place before him. A panicking clerk suddenly collapses to the ground. Johnson is perplexed, but he knows he can't watch. He has to keep on with the mission. As he turns to the door, he notices people going in. The manager seems to have appeared. Almost immediately, Johnson sees him grimacing in pain as his arm is twisted behind his back. Suddenly, he reels back, clutching his jaw. At this moment something that Johnson has not felt for some time returns.

'Come on, Steve. Let's finish them off.'

The anger builds up slowly but surely. Johnson has to make a decision before it can overwhelm him.

'There's no point. There's just no point in this.'

'Yes, there is. They're the enemy: they deserve it. You never join in this, do you?' He takes a brief look to what's happening but stops for a moment, looking back. 'You know what? I don't think that your heart's in this.'

'No. You're right.'

He starts gesticulating wildly. 'Well, why don't you do us all a favour and fuck off! You're no friend. Go and join them.' He jeers.

He can hear cheers from nearby, followed by a chant: 'Go on, get into them!'

Johnson freezes: he simply doesn't know what to do. Dave is already in there now, booting one of the clerks in the anus before grabbing a bottle from the shelf and throwing it. He knows he just can't join this, because at the very least, there is no reason to. His conscience starts telling him something. Careful to avoid the gathering crowd, he makes his way down the street.

\*

The meeting between Tim Anderson and his new acquaintance, who he now knows as Pete, reveals the possibility of 50 candidates for the new police force. Anderson knows that he will need to start recruiting, but is not fazed by this. The only question is will there be any motivation with the lack of crime? He will need to let people know of the real scourge, but it is such an irrelevance in this area he doesn't expect that anyone will really be affected by it. He is already making other plans when he waves goodbye to Pete and exits the cosy tavern.

As he turns the corner of the street, he can barely recognise the ruins that he is now navigating his way through. He checks that nothing is happening. Once he has established this, a closer examination of the wreckage tells him all he needs to know.

\*

With no-one suspecting that a political party may have been behind the fire at the House of Commons, parliament takes place as usual in the House of Lords. Indeed, there have been promises by the New Way government to rebuild the House of Commons, and an explanation that it was a group of angry revolutionaries who could be compared to Guy Fawkes. Unbeknown to them, a meeting is taking place in the remaining chamber over the weekend.

The leader of Labour makes his announcement: 'I apologise for the fact that you have had to give up your weekend but we all know the reason why we are here. It has become apparent that our meetings have been infiltrated and we would like to know if anyone else has had the same problem.'

'This has also happened to us.' Replies the leader of the Centre Party. 'We are in touch with a private news network, who have let us know that this is happening to all major political parties, except the New Way. There have even been physical attacks taking place. It is being presumed that, with the New Way's installation in government, it is too risky to attack them at this stage.'

'We can concur that this has taken place.' Agrees the leader of the Conservatives.

The leader of the Liberal Democrats speaks: 'We have certain evidence that spies have encroached upon our meetings, and we have had to terminate some of them.'

The Labour leader takes his turn: 'We would like to make a proposal for an alliance with the three other major political parties. This will involve sharing news of what is happening and taken action against those who are involved in this.'

Each leader votes in favour of the new alliance, which will now take place from the following week.

## Chapter 5

Pam Smith, the newsreader for the *Chronicle Televised*, announces the latest story: 'The grass is becoming greener. Experts have measured the colour of grass from eight different regions in the UK, and are finding that the hue of the grass is becoming a more distinct green than it ever used to. And now, for the next story: Henry Reeves has announced at his latest signing that he is at one with all the people. He has been handing out free copies of his latest memoirs, and has personally signed these. He is now chairman of 10 football clubs, presents four shows on national television, and is planning to appear in the film *Critically Acclaimed*. His signing tour will be continuing tomorrow in Birmingham.'

Reeves suddenly appears.

'What makes you at one with the people?'

'I represent them. All they have to do is listen to me, and I will be at one with every single one of them. Including you.' He points towards the edge of the camera. 'I know that they all need an icon that they can worship. And that's what I am.'

'What are you going to do next?'

'I'm going to do more of these, then I'm going to hit the road. Going on a world tour, where I'll be telling everyone how wonderful our memoirs are. Then I'll come back and appear on TV again. Someone'll have to replace me while I'm away.' He spits on the ground. 'That's my life, that's what I do. Do you know I'm in all the magazines? They gossip about me. I read the other day that they saw me at the beach. Um... I don't remember what happened.' He flexes his arms. 'I expect they enjoyed it anyway.' He throws his shirt over his shoulders. 'As you can see, I've got the cool bod. Hooray for me! Anyway....' He puts his shirt back on. 'Getting a bit cold now. So, as I was saying, oh yeah, we might have an election in three years time, no four years, I mean five. Will you still be here then? Getting a bit old, aren't you?'

'Ahem. I don't think that's appropriate.'

'Well, we need to know. Say it for the people.' He wipes his hand on his posterior. 'So, yeah, election in four, five, six years time, no polls, we don't like any of that, reform education a bit, um, I mean it's not up to me but, yeah, sorry I'm a bit...' He mutters under his breath. 'Don't do drugs, drugs are bad. We're outlawing them all, no they're outlawed already aren't they.... er.... no, none of them....'

'You're becoming very incoherent, Mr. Reeves. I'm aware that the Government is becoming tougher on drugs. Can you tell us more about that?'

'How do you know that?' He farts loudly. 'Well, yeah, it's got to be done. May allow them a bit. Oops. Edit that out. Please. You old bitch. I'm begging you.' He drops to her knees and holds her.

Simon Evans appears. 'Can you turn the camera off, please?'

The screen goes blank for a few seconds, then Pam Smith reappears. 'A recent scientific report has announced reading newspapers helps to lower the risk of heart disease. It is believed that concentrating the eyes in the way that is required of newspaper-reading causes arteries to be cleared through a synergistic process. This benefit cannot be obtained from reading other forms of written word, because they do not use the eyes in the same way. We cannot presently disclose the actual results of the experiment but when they are available, they can be found online, at our website [www.nwnews.uk](http://www.nwnews.uk)'

The following item starts: 'Simon Evans, the Prime Minister, has announced that every service is now under state ownership. He has taken this measure to prevent competition from stagnating the economy, and because he believes that these services will be safer under government control. The New Way's popularity has helped this to happen: they are at their highest in opinion polls since their formation. However, some people are concerned about the rapid increase in crime, particularly vandalism, theft, GBH and murder, since they were elected.'

The camera switches to Evans speaking to an unknown minister.

'The people, they are angry. Angry people will do angry things. We have to go through this period of destruction before we can have the renaissance.'

'But, aren't you concerned about this?'

'I am. I'm extremely concerned. But how do you deal with them? We've tried increasing police resources, but there are just so many of them to take on at a time. I think we're just going to have to let it mellow, which it will eventually.'

'Managers across the country are having their stores ransacked. They accuse you of being flippant.'

'Well, they should try being in government. Don't they realise what hard work it is?'

'It is really ruining local communities. People are trying to move away, but they have nowhere to go.'

'We'll repair the communities.'

'But what are you going to do now?'

'I've told you. Just let it mellow.'

'That will affect your results in the opinion polls....'

Evans falters for a moment. 'OK, we'll put a plan in place. But it won't be easy.'

'When do you plan to have elections?'

'We're not decided yet. Perhaps five years.'

\*

As news reaches Steve Johnson regarding the state takeover of businesses he knows that he cannot cover up what he is doing any more. There is only one thing for it: he has to move the business into his home. He is concerned that, now known to the mob, reprisals may happen. He would recruit security but he does not know where from. His worst fear is that they will find the private news network. What can be done about all this? For now, he takes priority: he will make the trip back to Maple Road.

When he arrives, what he takes in of his surroundings barely surprises him; yet, at the same time, something moves him: something to do with the fact that this is his building, his business. And, now, the reality really hits home. He considers looking round the ruins, but decides that he just has to get on with it. As he leaves, something that he doesn't want to acknowledge gnaws away at him: where are his staff?

The penny drops.

'*You fuckers!*' he screams, shaking his fist. '*You utter, utter, cowards!*'

He doesn't know if he wants to go on with this anymore. At this rate, it'll probably be him next. For now, all that seems possible is that he watches and waits, hoping that the storm will pass.

\*

Much to the delight of the alliance, the attacks have ceased for a month. The next stage is to decide what to do in the next election. It is not hopeful for any of the major political parties, who are still being beaten significantly by the New Way in the opinion polls, and the minor ones have virtually given up. There is a general consensus among the alliance that trying to

obtain popular support is the best way to improve. How will they find out what these mobs wanted? Once that is done, how will they appease them?

The following week, a meeting of the Centre Party in the Elephant & Castle area is forced to cancel when a protest takes place outside. The alliance appeals to the New Way government to provide extra policing around the area. A letter from Henry Reeves arrives, stating that the resources of the Metropolitan Police are overstretched and this cannot be done. A day after, the Conservatives have to cancel a meeting in the same area. The protests soon spread to Southwark and Kennington, where Labour and the Liberal Democrats find out just how difficult it is to hold meetings at the moment. Everyone wants to know if anything has happened to the New Way since they have been in government. Reeves replies, explaining in his letter that there have been two disrupted meetings, and the New Way are doing what they can. Everyone is relieved.

No-one is amused when the attacks grow at an increasingly alarming rate. Soon, people are moving out of London just to escape the constant violence. But they find that elsewhere nothing is any different. A series of letters begin to reach Reeves' desk. Tired of reading them, he places them in the bin. Soon, the New Way are facing the first protest that actually happened.

'Go on, kill them!' commands Evans.

'But we can't do that!' complains Anderson. 'They'll vote us out.'

'We're-not-going-to-have-elections are we?' growls Evans.

Stant joins in: 'What are we actually going to kill them with?'

'Er... dunno.' Says Evans. 'Just kill them anyway.'

'*Are you crazy? How can you expect us to...*' Stant finds himself being marched towards the exit of the venue.

'We can just call this off.' Says Anderson. 'Then they'll leave us alone.'

Evans glares at her. 'Yeah, but then we can't have our meeting.'

'We can hold it later. When they've gone.'

'I still want to kill them. It'll be fun.'

Anderson gasps. 'I cannot believe you said that!' She is hating him even more already.

'Uh...I didn't mean that. Joke.'

She relaxes slightly 'I'm glad.'

**Sucker.**

Stant suddenly bursts in. 'It's ok! They're all gone!'

'There's no point in having a meeting anyway.' Says Evans, 'Now bog off.'

'Oh right. That's it, is it?'

'You..... you.....'

'Oh, alright! I get the message! I'm going!' With that, he quickly makes his way out.

'I'm leaving too.' Says Anderson.

Mrs. Evans and Reeves also make their way out.

'Oi! Oi! Oi! I decide when the meeting ends! Wait! Wait a minute!' Evans suddenly realises he is talking to himself. 'Well, they're no use to me anymore anyway. While I'm here I can do what I like.' He spits in the plate of biscuits in the centre of the table, and sticks his fingers up at a painting of Michael Turner. He makes his way to the painting and starts gouging at the eyes.

'Doesn't fucking work! There isn't anyone around to torment. What can I do?' He waits around for a while. 'Oh, come on, please come back!'

With nothing to occupy him, he waits around the rest of the evening, before failing asleep. He is startled by a dream where everyone is laughing and smiling, and he is joining in. He wakes up in a panic, but completes the rest of his sleep uninterrupted.

\*

'It is our destiny on Earth to act in the name of the Lords who created us. And they mean for us to go that place elsewhere that will offer us a refuge from all the problems that face us here on Earth.

The first part of the destiny is to act in righteousness. If an act seems wrong to you, bear in mind that you are doing that in a good cause. The Lords would be proud of you if you did such a thing, for you are serving that purpose. The second part of the destiny is that you will be kind and helpful to anyone who matters. Shower them with affection, share your wealth with them, keep them involved in a meaningful structure, and cherish them for who they are. Be aware that there are people who choose not to follow the destiny set for you, or perhaps those who have not been blessed with a route into the galaxy that beckons at the end of the tunnel. These people cannot know why we must show such kindness, and as a result they cannot feel its benefits. The third part of the destiny is you will avoid the unearthing of secrets. This would lead to upset at first, and eventually to unrest. We must keep a positive ethos on Earth, so that we can be rewarded in the galaxy. Honesty was a



concept invented by those who wish these secrets to spread, thus leading to the dissolution of society. If anyone encourages you to take this policy, they will not be going to the galaxy, and are exempt from the destiny, so do not follow their example. The fourth part of the destiny is that you must follow the only path chosen for you. Do not give into temptation and follow your path, as that leads you to the depths of the Great Abyss. The same applies for following the path of others. They are wicked tempters, sent from that place to deter you from the path that is correct. For this reason, they also have no right to be on Earth, and their annihilation is essential to preserve the fate of the believers.'

He clenches his fists, infuriated at the idea that he would be led from the destination that awaits him at the end of his life. A customer enters. He looks up. She seems very refreshed, as if she has been in a sauna. She walks over to the counter and picks up a copy of *The Chronicle*, now the only newspaper. He is aching to carry on reading his copy of *Your Fate*, the book issued by the government to inform people about the currently nameless religion that has spread throughout the land. However, he knows he will not have the time.

'Good read?'

'Very. If only I had known all this before.'

'I'm still not very convinced that the Earth was created from asteroid matter by one of these Lords. And why are they are not named? It all seems new as well, which is suspicious. Apparently, it has spread from London, but I'm beginning to wonder who implemented it and why....'

He gets lost in the words, before something suddenly registers.

'Heretic!' he shouts. 'You are not welcome in this shop!'

'You can't stop me buying a paper.' She complains.

'Yes I can! I just won't serve you! You must not even stay here!'

She's personally seen him take something from a shop. Will it teach him a lesson if she makes away without paying? She decides to ask him something first:

'Where else can I go?'

'No questions! Just go! Scram!'

She quickly tucks the newspaper under her jacket, and walks over to the door. 'Byeeee!' she calls to him, teasingly. As she gets out, she feels slightly guilty, but acknowledges that it would be difficult to buy the newspaper elsewhere. Remembering the time when she had her handbag stolen, she also realises that it is unlikely she will be arrested for shoplifting. The police have other priorities these days.

\*

'One more!' They chant. 'One more!'

The lead singer of the Mallrats shouts into the microphone in reply: 'No, sorry, that's it guys.' He looks sombre, despite the glow of the strobe lighting. He has enjoyed the set, but just wants to get back home. The band begin to make their way to the back of the stage.

'Oh!' They chant again, this time in disappointment.

Suddenly the band come rushing back and once more assume their positions on the stage.

'Yeah-hey!'

They launch into 'Paradise Is Outta Here'. Everyone goes manic, headbanging and jumping into each other. It as if an electric current has been sent into their brains, and they are responding accordingly. The atmosphere is filled with energy and also a platonic kind of love. Everyone is together. Midway through the song, the band stop playing. Everyone looks to see the lead singer, wide-eyed in terror.

'What is happening? Stop fighting!'

At the back, a couple is on the floor, being kicked and beaten repeatedly by a group. They are unable to resist the tyranny that rains down on them. Among the group is someone reading from a book and shouting something incomprehensible. The security personnel are at the edge, ready to spur into action but uncertain if the odds will be in their favour if they go in now. A few people at the edge, who are now watching, prepare for the possibility. However, no-one has ever been in anything like this: they don't even know the risks, and they suspect the risks aren't worth taking. Almost immediately, they find themselves being grabbed and shoved into the melee. A security guard dials 999: he is just about to make the call when he is rugby-tackled by someone in a Mallrats t-shirt. He is so astonished that one of the fans would do something like this that he cannot see it coming: he is now on the floor, being punched in the stomach. Another of the group, in similar garb, approaches and stamps on him repeatedly: teeth and blood sprays everywhere. Enraged by what is happening before them, the rest of the security team attempt to get hold of the assailants. Immediately, they run off. The first one falls, tripped up by a fan. The second, on realising this, attempts a knockout: he has no time to see the results of his work before he is confronted by an angry throng. Everyone is now so pissed off with what is happening that the uncertainty, inhibiting violent retribution, is a thing of the past. It is obvious to him he has no chance. He tries desperately to escape, but there are eight pairs of hands on him....

At the back of the venue, a brawl is now taking place between security, the mysterious invaders and the fans. No-one knows who's who amongst the sea of sprawling limbs. A

certain amount of blood is spilling onto the floor, but no-one can feel the pain: they just keep on going, not even knowing, or caring, what their end goal is. There isn't time to think about that.

'You wankers! Fighting at our gig!'

'We're not fighting!' shouts one of the fans.

'Well, what the fuck *are* you doing?'

Everyone takes a step back from the confusion: it becomes apparent that all the invaders are wearing Mallrats t-shirts, something which had previously gone unnoticed. They are now surrounded by a crowd of angry, baying, vengeful people. Simultaneously, they break into a run: two get away, but the remaining are pinned down.

'Hang on! Look at this badge!'

'That's the you know.... those guys on telly. Who is it?'

A tall fellow with his hair shaved in a Mohican style steps up. 'I've seen that. That's the New Way badge. What the fuck are they doing here?' His voice is like acid to the stranger lying on the floor: he knows he is in trouble.

The guy puts his hand on his victim. 'It's alright. Just tell us why you're here and we'll let you go.'

'It's....it's....I can't tell you....'

'Come on, you've got to do better than that.'

He starts to tremble. There is some muttering from the other downed invaders: among the words are 'Don't tell them'.

'I-I-I.....'

'OK. Suit yourself. We'll leave you here then.' He takes his hand off and turns away.

'I was sent to disrupt the concert!' the downed one blurts out.

There is an echo from the crowd: 'A-ha!' He finds himself being yanked up by his sleeves, and pushed forward. Suddenly he is the middle of a mad stampede. It spills over into the street, causing passers-by to divert. It's as if he's on a conveyer belt to nowhere.

'What are you doing?' he yells, repeatedly.

The commotion halts, just outside a branch of Argos. He recognises his interrogator, who is clearly preparing to make an announcement.

'Today, our gig was infiltrated by a group of people pretending to be our fans. It has never kicked off before, so it all seemed strange. Turns out, as a matter of fact, that the government has been attacking us! Look at this!'

He is helpless as he is moved to the fore. 'Show us your badge.' The interrogator commands.

Reluctantly, he follows the order.

'That is the badge of the New Way. I am surprised that they are behind all this, but there you go. Anyway, I've a question for you. Why did you do this?'

An unfamiliar voice arrives: '*Shut up! Shut the fuck up!*'

An irate crowd is moving towards them. After the mobs, this all seems like nothing. Nevertheless, everyone turns in their direction, watching cautiously.

*'You have no right to protest!'*

'Why not? Just because of this?' The interrogator looks down at his leather-and-tartan costume, to make his point. 'Leave me alone!'

*'You criticise them, you criticise us all!'*

'Bollocks!' He spits out in reply, clenching his fists.

*'Off our streets! Off our streets! Off our streets!'* They chant.

'We're not going anywhere.'

*'Off and out! Off and out! Off and out!'* The throng moves to surround them.

He turns back to his audience. 'As I was trying to say....'

The chanting grows louder and faster: *'Off and out! Off and out! Off and out!'*

He tries to speak, but the chanting drowns it out. Soon, he gives up.

*'Off and out! Off and out! Off and out!'*

Nothing happens, except the chanting, for around half an hour. By now, everyone is bored. The interrogator signals to his crowd. 'Come on. Let's go.' They gradually start to follow one another through an exit formed by the opposition. 'You can go.' He says to the captured man.

When no-one is near, he utters: 'We'll be back.'

\*

All across the country, people are watching the same news on the same channel, whether at home, in cafes, bars, or pubs: anywhere there is a television.

‘Under the proposed Public Order Act, all instances of live music between 7pm and 10pm will be banned. The act began to be debated when a fight took place at a showing of the Mallrats in Surbiton last week. A recent experiment has shown that trouble is more likely to take place in a public enclosed space that allows live music to take place at these hours, then during the same hours at home, and this has helped to support the introduction of the Act. And, now we move to the next item.

It has been alleged that three Labour MPs have collaborated to block the opposition in the next election. As yet, we are unable to name them. The work they have done in the community has been very commendable, improving the vicinity in a way that cannot be forgotten. It is atrocious that this would be brought to light, but it has long been suspected. A recent poll suggests that the areas they are responsible for are considerably more pleasant places to live than they were under previous local governments.

An unnamed Conservative MP has been accused of plotting to put GHB in the water supply. He is extremely well-respected by the general public, and has even been dubbed ‘The Saviour’ by the local church. On finding out the news, he has been excommunicated. He is known to have had several affairs, which influenced the decision. Local churchgoers describe him as a ‘nice man’.

The grass has stopped becoming greener, because it cannot get any greener, say scientists at the University of York. However, they are continuing research, before considering the possibility of analysing trees for changes in hue.

The New Way is still by the far the most popular government: a survey of 933 respondents showed that 87% of the population agreed that policies on policing, taxation and agriculture under the New Way are the best since 2000.

Currently, the world is so wonderful that there is nothing else to report. Goodbye.’

\*

Tim Anderson can only thank his lucky stars that it is still possible for him to enter the political scene. However, as he draws up the new constitution, he is plagued by a lingering doubt. He knows that this is really just a gesture, that so much more than this is needed to become serious opposition. He begins to wonder: *why am I bothering?*

He keeps his doubts to himself as he draws up the constitution, and prepares for the internal election: each position within the new party will be decided by a secret ballot. There is nothing left to do now, except to wait. And that is exactly what he does.....

\*

For weeks now, none of the major political parties have held meetings. Almost as soon as they take place, mysterious people come in and throw bottles, tins, and rocks. Some even have knives. No-one even knows what to do any more. The police have been called several times, but it makes no difference. However, some recent news on the grapevine has changed everything. Everyone at the secret meeting of the alliance, in Hertfordshire, now knows who is behind it.

There is a vote in favour of forming a vigilante force to defend against the attacks, but everyone is divided as to whether to proceed to further action. Can retribution be the only means? The alliance is split into those who believe that it is a last resort, and those who deem it necessary to act now. Everyone is in favour of a spy network to track down the mobs, and everyone, but everyone, is now determined to oust the New Way by means other than the electoral process.

At the end of the meeting, it is decided that each party can decide on their own agenda, while joining together to fight the newfound enemy....

## Chapter 6

\*

There seems to be a new woman at this place: I've seen her in the courtyard. I tried to make eye contact with her, but I was made to go back to the cell. They've been trying to prevent us communicating nonverbally, because a number of friendships have been formed between inmates. What they don't know is that we talk to each other in the corridors, just before we go to sleep. It's not just casual chat but a way to discuss our plans of how to get out of here. I've been meaning to for so long, but now I'm serious, and I know I'm not the only one. It's strange how you think about something and you realise that other people around you have been thinking exactly the same thing. The plan is that next time we are summoned out for our tasks, we form a mass exodus and just go for it, get out of there. Sure, they'll shoot at us. But we don't care about that anymore. We know that we'll never be free, and we'd rather risk death than stay imprisoned. If we're lucky, we'll finally be away and then we can set about the process of reclaiming society. We can also find out why this all had to happen. Besides, we're not safe here. The only thing is that I'm going to have leave some good friends behind, and some friends who I have yet to make. I'm assuming that my life is already over, and I'm wondering where I'm going to. They've tried to get us to believe in this galaxy far away. A few of us resisted: what a waste of time. They just ended up in the maximum security area. I just lied to them; told them that I'd be willing to serve the purpose of this panel of lords. They haven't even named them. I'm now bound by the principles of *Your Fate*, but that is only official. They can break our bodies, shatter our wills, manipulate us and coerce us, but they can't change what's inside us.

\*

Anne looks around the classroom, pensively. She knows that she will miss this place, but she knows that the most important thing is to decide her future and the primary judge of that will be the test that she does today.

‘Ok, can I have your attention, everyone!’ announces the teacher. ‘Including you, Julie. And what exactly are you doing?’

Julie smirks. She has been stabbing Emily in the back with a compass. She has not invented any reason for this other than her own sadistic pleasure. She quickly puts the compass in her pencilcase and smiles sweetly. ‘Nothing, Mr. Burnham.’

‘If it’s what I think I saw, I want to speak to you.’ He is reluctant to give this talk, as, although he is almost certain what she is up to, there are plenty of papers to be marked later on in the evening, and he simply wants to relax at the end of the day. ‘But you’ve been polite, so I’ll let you off this time. Now then: the test. You will be the first students to take the general test which, as you know, is to be completed along with your A-levels. You will have an hour to complete the test. Silence is expected but, if you wish to ask any questions, you may raise your hand. We have a break now, then we do the test. Is there anything else that you would like to know now?’

No-one says anything.

‘Good. Ok, everyone, go and get a cup of coffee and make yourselves comfortable.’

All the students saunter out of the class, except Anne.

‘Aren’t you going for a break?’ asks Mr. Burnham.

‘No, I’m ok here, thanks.’

‘Anne, stop being so difficult. I’m not asking, I’m telling. It’s for your own good.’

‘Why can I not take a break here?’

Mr. Burnham pauses for a while. Suddenly, he softens.

‘We want students to buy coffee. In particular, we want them to buy NL Cafe. They have offered us sponsorship money, in return for a quota of increased sales.’

Anne smiles. ‘So it’s not really for my own good.’

‘Anne, you are a very difficult student. To be frank, I don’t think you are going to succeed in your test. I am concerned about you. Perhaps we can have a talk?’

‘Yes. That’d be good. What happens if we fail the test?’

‘I cannot tell you that.’

Anne laughs. 'And why is that?'

The skin on Mr. Burnham's face turns to a markedly pallid hue.

'You ask too many questions. Ok, I'll admit it. If I tell you, I'm in for the chop... I mean... literally. Please don't let on. We'll be done for.'

'Its ok, it's ok. I won't tell any of the other students. I just wanted to know, that's all. I accept that this is a troubling situation, Mr. Burnham. Perhaps we can work out a plan when we have our chat?'

'Yes, yes, that'd be good. I'll let you know when I'm available.'

'Mr. Burnham: one last thing. Given what you have told me, can I avoid taking the test today?'

At this moment, a few other members of the class make their entrance. Mr. Burnham points to the right. Anne reads the signal and follows him out of the class.

'I feel light-headed today.' Says Jim. 'Just when I've got to do this crappy test, and all. What is the point?'

'The point is to learn.' Says Tim.

Emily has tactfully moved to a different seat in class, but Julie has decided to sit behind her again. She gets up and ambulates to the desk in the far south-west of the room, so Julie decides to sit next to her.

**If only Mr. Burnham could show up.**

'We don't learn anything from this test. We just do it. It's all bullshit government hype. I just get so bored with it: I just want to piss off to uni and do what the fuck what I like. No more of mum and dad and teachers and fucking authority breathing down my neck.'

'It seems that it's a general test. I think it's to do with citizenship, kind of teaching you to be a respectable citizen and that. But you can't find much out about it. No info on LookUp or the college boards or anything. I guess we'll find out for sure when we do it.'

Mr. Burnham returns. Emily prepares to put her hand up but Julie pulls it down. She puts the other one up but that one is pulled down too. This goes on for around 10 seconds, before Mr. Burnham shouts:

'WILL YOU TWO STOP IT AT ONCE!'

Julie does her surreptitious trademark smile. 'Sorry, Mr. Burnham. We were just playfighting.'



He is now confident that he knows what Julie is doing. He decides to play the human chess match by meeting stealth with stealth.

'It's best that you two sit separately.'

Julie creases the skin on her forehead, pulls down her mouth, and turns her hands out in an offended manner.

'Oh, I don't believe you. You just can't do that. *We're friends.*'

**That must be the biggest bullshit she has ever told me,** he thinks.

Tears form in Emily's eyes. Wishing to maintain her dignity, she looks down at the desk in front of her.

'Well, while you do the test, it's best that you sit separately.'

As Emily gets up, Julie whispers 'That was all your fault. Next time it's going to be worse.'

'Julie! If you have something to say, you share it with me.'

'I just saying "See you later", that's all.'

'Well, that's enough. Let her concentrate on her test.' Something about him projects what he is thinking: **I know what you're up to.** Invisible to the distant observer, Julie pulls a sneer. She now hates Mr. Burnham. The fact that he has seen through her facade makes her feel unimportant. From now on, she will be watching him closely and looking for weaknesses that she can exploit to her advantage.

'Ok.' He makes his way to the main desk and collects the pile of test papers. He chooses the order of the students to hand out papers to by unifying the desks into rows: each row will receive a paper each. As he hands the paper to Emily he whispers 'I know what's happening. I will keep you two separate.' Julie looks at them both with unbridled resentment, while taking care to keep it discreet. There is one desk that is unoccupied, but everyone is too concerned about the test to notice.

\*

Simon Evans is behind the podium on the stage of the NW Theatre. Next to him is his wife, who has an arm on her husband's shoulder, and is smiling proudly. Henry Reeves is on the other side, posing with his hands on his hips, glancing at Evans repeatedly. From a distance, it seems that he is pleased to be with his idol, but no-one can detect the envy in him. One day, he hopes to lead the New Way, but for now he must let someone else be the centre of attention. He daydreams that Nigel Stant will make the decisions for him, and the rest of the ministers will do all the necessary drudgeries while he performs his tour in every capital city around the world.

### **I wonder if I could make it all happen a bit sooner...**

'Are you all listening?' announces Evans, through the microphone on the podium. 'Because if you aren't, you are required to leave.'

A few people in the audience try to suppress their laughter. They know a fact unknown to the rest of the world: 'leave' in this context means something different from what it seems like initially.

'As you all know, we are doing well, very well. And it's all thanks to you: the people. Except you.' He points towards a seemingly random place in the crowd. 'Get lost now, you're not welcome here!' A section of the crowd boos and jeers. Evans' lips pucker into his trademark smug smile.

### **I am just so proud of my popularity.**

'That brings me to what we will do with the heretics. Basically, the simplest solution is to get rid of them. The ultimate way to do that is to ensure that there are no more of them. Now, you have to remember that we passionately believe in upholding that quality which is essential to a successful society: freedom. So, from next month, we will be offering a choice: either they go in for a special operation, which will be entirely paid from your... the government's funds, or they will have the privilege of...um.....' He pauses for a moment. 'Being in a show. It's a real good one, it is. It's all private at the moment, but we're planning to introduce it as national entertainment.'

There is an almighty cheer from the crowd, and a few snorts of derision as everyone tries to find the offending person.

### **How can I make them hate these people?**

'You may have compassion for them....but they are not people: they are below that. I urge you to abstain from such remorseful feelings. They have been branded for a reason: they are evil... and I know that each and every one of you is innocent. And I will not take this crap any more!' He begins to flail about maniacally. 'They have brought shame upon society ! I care about you, the people! And I must protect you from these scourges! They bring the wrong music, the wrong plays, the wrong films to a grateful audience. If they dwell in the most vicious slums, they are rats, and if they dwell in the most luscious mansions, they are thieving from the earth. All in all, they deserve nothing but extinction!'

A huge section of the crowd begins to copy the flailing, furious at what they believe is happening.

'If you see one in the street, go and put it out of its misery! This is a civilisation and is no place for it!'

### **I wish I hadn't said that. All this killing is getting boring.**

‘Actually, that is strictly not necessary....’

**But if they do a bit of killing themselves, they won’t be bothered by the executions....**

‘Do so if you feel like it, but generally do to them what you please. Anyway, I have something else to announce.’ He pulls Mrs. Evans closer to him. ‘Mary I have got married, and she is planning on popping out plenty of sprogs, who will inherit the....uh....’

**....the throne.**

‘... the earth. For they will be meek and gentle and will wait their turn gladly. Because I have done such a brilliant job, it is only right that there are more people in the world like me, which is why I am very keen to replicate myself through my little baby factory here.’ Mrs Evans puts on a smile which seems extremely false to those in the row in the front, but everyone else sees someone beaming with affection. ‘I want to have more than 100 children! Each and every one of them will be your descendents as well as mine! I want to have the largest family of all: the NW species.’

‘Finally, I have the answer for the future. We all going to a wonderful place, which will not be shared by our opponents. It is in a galaxy, far from planet Earth. It is ruled by a number of lords, who will judge us at the end of our lives. It is so important that you all partake in this venture, that I am making it compulsory. We are still working on what it will be called, but we have converted a cinema in London to a building fit for the purpose of worshipping these lords. Everyone must be there on Thursday, no matter what. We will be checking every house and home in the country! If you are not there, you are not a true citizen! You will be punished in the here and now, and in life after death, because you are a traitor to our nation, our species, our world! And it belongs to us, and we shall take back what is rightfully ours! We have already succeeded in achieving possession of the nation, but that is not enough!’

‘**YEAH!**’ echoes the crowd, in unison.

‘If we cannot possess it by persuasion then we shall claim it back from these traitors! Those who do not believe! Those do not follow our principles! Those who have no place in the destination to which we are bound, all of us! We shall it claim it by the spilling of their blood! We cannot save their souls if they will not convert!’

Everyone begins to jostle each other in the frenzy which has taken place.

‘And finally: for our good the heretics will not be allowed into the political process. This is now a one-party state. I’m leaving now.’ announces Evans. Intoxicated with the roar of the crowd, the audience notices the words but not the meaning. His wife and Reeves follow him. No-one notices that they have just gone.

\*

The owner of Independent Entertainment, the last remaining private news channel, agrees to sell his business to the New Way. He is disappointed about this decision, but, on reflection, it is better to lose his business than to lose his head. At the end of the meeting with Mr. Reeves, he asks what else he can do. He finds himself being carted in a van across an unfamiliar motorway. By the end of the day, he is in an abattoir, suspended to a conveyer belt. He wonders why this had to happen before the whirring blade before him obliterates his life.

The following day, fragments of his body are labeled as mutton and make their way to the supermarkets, in order to capitalise on the demand that has taken place owing to the *E.coli* scare that has affected other meats. Protestors have made public the question of what the government are doing about it, but they were soon forced to quit by the opprobrium around them. A number of people became sick, but the hospital refused to treat them on the grounds that they were heretics. An article at the front of the *Saturday Chronicle* explains that 'heretic' is Britain's new dirty word. All across the country, they are hated.

\*

They line up in single file outside the classroom, anticipating their results.

'I just want to get this over with.' Moans Jim. 'I expect I got it right. Can get this sorted out then get out of here.'

'Yes, the wait isn't all that enjoyable, but it is exciting getting the results. This decides our future!'

'Which uni are you planning to go to?'

'Durham is my first choice but it depends on my results.'

'Bit far away, isn't it?'

'Yes, but I'd like to live up there.'

'Fair enough.'

Suddenly, they are in the cramped room known as the exams office; the room that they have never previously been in.

'One person at a time!' commands the clerk, who is evidently handing out the results.

Jim and Tim look at each other.

'You were here first.' Says Tim. 'So you go first.'

'Sure.'

The clerk shuts the door behind them.

'Can you show me your Student ID?'

Jim fishes around for his wallet, and goes through his cards. After putting his NUS card to the back of the pocket, he uncovers his Student ID card. He takes it and puts it in the palm of the clerk, who reads the card. On receiving the information required, he searches a pile of papers on his desk. He finds the appropriate document and scans it with his eyes.

'You will need to go to room 103.' He states.

'Uh... have I passed?'

'You passed all your A-levels, but you failed the general test. The staff will need to have a talk with you.'

'Ok.' Jim looks petrified. 'I hope it's good.'

'I don't know anything about it.' Says the clerk, dismissively. 'But good luck.' He adds, with a more encouraging tone.

'Thank you.'

Jim opens the door, and makes his way through. 'You next.' He tells Tim.

'Any luck?'

He shakes his head. 'Got to go to room 103, apparently. Clearly the new system. Will tell you how it goes.'

'Ok. Good luck with it.'

He makes his way up the steps to the first floor and goes through the dark blue double doors, which now seem to resemble a portcullis. He has never been to the room before, so he has to look around a bit: it turns out to be the second door on the right.

'Hello?'

'Come in. Close the door behind you.'

Jim looks around, nervously.

'We've got some good news and some bad news. Which would you like first?'

'Uh...I'll have the good news.'

'The good news is that you'll be taking a holiday.'

'That seems good. Where am I going?'

'Erm.... we don't know yet.'

'Ok, well I'll look forward to it.'

'We also have to tell you the bad news: you've failed the general test.'

'Well, these things happen I suppose. Do I get to retake it?'

'No.'

'Well, ok. I guess there's nothing I can do then. What happens next?'

'We'll let you know.'

'Ok, cheers.'

\*

Sidborough is now ours! With no military presence, all they could do was watch helplessly as we got them out of the town hall. And now I'm back home. As I look around, I realise that it is empty. You mean to say that all that time.... Never! What would be the point of taking me away from there if they're not even going to occupy it? Suddenly, a siren announces itself from across the street. I quickly make my upstairs, find the nearest room I can and shut myself in. It is at this point that I wonder if any of this is realistic: how can we take over with our bare hands? How we are going to get hold of the resources that we need? We could try the barracks, but they'll slaughter us. I hug my knees to my chest, and just wait. There's nothing else to do. I wonder about looking out of the window but do not want anyone to notice me. Around half an hour later, I'm startled by a knock on the door.

\*

'You are under arrest.'

He knows there is no point in resisting. Only when he is at the police station will there be any purpose in discussing his fate. He smiles and nods.

'Ok.'

His colleagues, scattered across the edges of the table in a circular fashion, look at him in a deploring manner.

'Mr. Tyler! What have you done?' asks Susan.

He considers replying by raising his middle finger at her, but decides against it. If the police were not here, would he risk it? It seems his reputation is such that his behaviour would make no difference, unless it were an extreme, which would serve to make it worse. How can he make it better? It seems that it is impossible to do so, so all he can do is to try to keep in the frying pan, which is better than the fire.

'Oh, just the usual I expect.' He winks. 'I expect I'll find out.' He looks at her with a glint in his eyes.

'Isn't he scandalous?!' Susan asks, and exclaims.

The rest of the board stare at him intently, showing disapproval in every conceivable way.

Mr. Tyler feels the anger within him building to a crescendo, one which, if uncontained, would threaten to erupt like a volcano and obliterate their pathetic world, where the most trivial of matters are regarded as a major event. He sees the car outside the building, which serves as a reminder that this is serious, that there is not simply a threat this time: he is to be punished. He guesses it is inevitable. For so long, he has tried to resist the rule of the boring, but he knows now that this cannot be done.

'Can I tell my daughter about this?' he asks.

'No, don't worry. We will tell her.'

'How do you know my daughter?'

'We know your whole family.'

'How?'

'We cannot disclose that, Mr. Tyler. Everything you say from now on will be taken down as evidence.' The policeman smiles with his eyes, in a bittersweet manner, the crux of which is the message 'I've got you nailed.'

Mr. Tyler takes his place on the seat on the car, and puts his head in his hands. 'Fuck, fuck, fuck.' he mutters to himself. He doesn't bother to pay attention as the car drives down the road, even though his favourite tree is here: although one of the many Cypress trees in the area, this one holds special meaning for him. He pretends to fall into a slumber, hoping that this will encourage the others to tell the truth.

Once they are in West Street, the driver speaks: 'We're here.'

### **So much for that option.**

They all proceed to the building which Mr. Tyler has seen so many times, but has never entered. The glorious two-storey invention before him seems like it could be used for any purpose: he wonders whether it was built for use by the police. He admires the arch, and marvels at what must have gone into it: the determination to make a dream true, the bravery to create at such an altitude, the painstaking effort, the hours devoted...

They take him to a room to the side of the hall; he barely has time to inspect his surroundings. He is invited to sit down in front of the desk, while the others take their places on the other side. He takes a closer look at them. The one on the left has oval features.

There is a scar on his cheek. Tyler's prejudices cause him to guess that perhaps he has been on the other side of the law previously, and made 'good'. His hair is arranged in a pompadour style, much like that of James Dean. He has sharp, green eyes that seem to be currently communicating menace. He has very broad shoulders and a wide, firm-looking chest that suggest he is no stranger to physical effort. The uniform seems different from what it used to be: it is a paler blue than the previous uniform, and has a red collar. Interestingly, there are also medals pinned on the right: they mean nothing to Tyler, but there are three of them, all a greenish-orange colour, and with a disc that shows a picture of someone vaguely familiar. Tyler thinks he may have seen this person on television, but he is not sure of the name. The officer on the right has square features, several freckles located near the nose and jaw, and short, blond hair. He has blue eyes. His body is so nondescript, so lacking in distinctive features, that it can be described only as 'average'. He has the same uniform and number of medals, suggesting that they are the same rank. The pale grey walls exactly match the colour of the desk. There are four fluorescent white lights on the ceiling, ominously shining onto the desk below them. A row of plastic seats is set at the back of the room: the officers take them and position them so that there are two on the side of the desk, and one on the other.

'What is it I'm supposed to have done?' he asks.

The others hesitate, and mutter among themselves.

'Well?'

'You have been arrested on suspicion of collaborating to depose the government. You will now be helping us with your enquiries.'

'How am I supposed to have done that?'

The officer on the right launches a backfist which seems to give Mr. Tyler no time to react.

'We ask you the fucking questions, not the other way round.'

'Do you care for a drink, Mr. Tyler?' asks the other.

'No.'

'Wrong answer. You'll fucking have one whether you like it or not. Now, what's your tittle?' He gets up and saunters over to a cupboard. On opening it, it becomes apparent that it contains various bottles of spirits. 'Brandy? Vodka? Gin? Whisky? Go on, enjoy yourself. It's all yours.'

'I know what you're trying to....'

Mr. Tyler gets another backfist.



'Honestly. We're your friends. We want you to enjoy yourself. Now, come on. Let me know which, or I'll make the decision for you.'

'Brandy.' he decides, as this is his favourite alcoholic drink, though this situation is making him change his mind.

'Brandy it is.' The officer smiles with his mouth, but not with his eyes. He takes the bottle from the cupboard. It is a generic, supermarket version: Mr. Tyler despises this, but he has made the decision now. The officer unscrews the bottle, tips the glass to the right, and pours in the dark brown liquid. A generous amount flows into the glass, and Tyler thinks of objecting, but decides instead to raise his hand.

'Yes, I can tell what you're thinking. But we want you to relax.' He winks at the other officer. 'All or nothing for you this evening.' He walks over to the desk and glides the drink onto the desk. The other officer grabs Tyler by the neck, and tips it back. His mouth is held open and the brandy is poured into it.

\*

Jim is on the stage of what seems to be a theatre, with several others. They are seated on the hard, wooden, floor while a crowd of what seems like several thousand jeer at them. A guy whose face he recognises, but whose name he cannot identify, approaches him. He looks away, hoping that he will not be beaten: the bruises on his skin tell the closest in the audience all that they need to know about his recent past. There are scars on his lower legs, his wrists and his right cheek: every time he sees them he is reminded of what happened. He just looks ahead, straight into the crowd, but even that is painful. He can't look them in the eyes: he has no confidence. He wants to spend the rest of his days alone, which seems like the only way he can live in peace.

'This is going to hurt a bit.' His recently-made enemy says to him.

He grimaces as he feels the scraping against his lower back: he thinks that he's going to pass out, but as he has told himself before, he must keep on going.

'Expect this is the only way in which you've ever been touched.' The marker mocks. Finally, the implement is lifted from Jim's back. He breathes a sigh of relief: all done. He gets up, but is pulled down.

'Wait. I haven't finished yet.' The marker spits out. Jim catches sight of a blade, which quickly disappears from view. He tries his best to keep consciousness; he remembers the last time he lost it only too well. The scraping continues on his forehead. Every moment of it seems like an external manifestation of the pain that he keeps inside: that caused by the world, the entire world, turning against him; that which will take a lifetime to heal.

He finds himself being marched to the back of the stage, with the booing of the crowd in the distance, which seems like a harbinger of his demise. He finds himself in a grand room with a number of posters on the walls, but he doesn't have time to look around. Soon, he is in a corridor. The double doors at the end are opened and he is yanked through them. The lorry is outside. He is marched into it, before being left in isolation. He sits down and waits, wondering at the destination at which they will arrive.

\*

We are now in a town known as Camberley. I have never been here before, but I remember that it is somewhere in Surrey. We haven't dared to use the railways, so we have got here entirely by letting the roads guide us. Some of them are busy, mainly with freight vehicles. Whenever there is a passenger, we edge away from the road slightly and break up so that they think we are individual pedestrians. The most daunting thing was going over a level crossing in Farnborough: the country is sparsely populated these days, but there were a few citizens going over. We knew that they would tell something about us. They stared at us, but I guess they must have decided that they were outnumbered, and simply kept away from us. Sooner or later, someone will know: but we are getting towards London, where we can take on the rulers themselves. What we really need is armaments; all we are at the moment is a militia. Regardless, we will go for it: if we don't take the risk, we are back in captivity. We march along Park Road, prepared for a confrontation. As we reach the centre of the town, several people stare at us, but they are not armed, and decide to back off. I decide that we could approach someone and ask where the barracks is. Everyone is retreating, so it is difficult to ask them.

I hear the words: 'I'll kill you! I'll kill you!'. I turn round, quickly, to be greeted with the sight of someone running towards us with a meat cleaver.

**I haven't planned for this.**

I take a stone out of my backpack and throw it in his direction. It misses, but I continue to concentrate on him. Every one of us is beginning to retreat, except me.

'Are you crazy?!' I shout. 'There's power in numbers. We all need to get him!'

I get lost in a daydream about what life used to be like here, what it will be like afterwards, and the amazing contrast between these times. You realise that change is a necessary part of life. I'm distracted from this when I notice that the attacker is running *from* us.

'Huh? Why's that happening?'

As a number of familiar people pile onto him, pull him to the ground, and take the meat cleaver off him, it all dawns on me.

'You will all pay for this!' I hear someone shout. I look round to spot the sellers at the market, chanting. They're poised, ready to join in but unwilling to act.

'Go! Get them!' I shout.

We are all running towards the market, destruction at the forefront of our minds, and we don't even know why: it's just a job that has to be done, whether we like it or not. The sellers start to retreat. The one nearest us, selling weaponry, seems to fall over, seemingly of his own accord. It all happens so quickly that no-one could appreciate that it is human force that is causing it. We are all jumping on him, choking him, kicking him, punching him, doing everything imaginable to a person. I have a look round to make sure that the coast is clear: everyone seems to have gone away or inside. The guy now has blood pouring out of his neck; someone is scratching it with the meat cleaver.

'No! Don't!' I wail.

Something's just caught up with me, but I can't put my finger on what it is. Everyone just keeps on. I look away, hoping that it will sink in. As I look back, I notice everyone has edged away, except for Lee, who is checking his pulse. The atmosphere is unbearable.

After a few seconds, a cheer erupts from the group. Registration 80 knives disappear from the stalls, followed by axes, Kalashnikovs, Uzis, 9mm pistols, and VZ-52s.

'Hey! What are you doing?!' I shout.

They are now ransacking the stalls. I know at this point that nothing will make any difference. I just watch, in despair. Everything leaves the stalls, just like that. Some of it gets thrown onto the street.

'Hey! Holmes!'

'What?!'

'Come and get some of this gear.'

I make my way towards the stalls. I am stopped by the sight of the second nearest one going up in flames.

'What?! You what?! How did that happen?!'

'We poured petrol over it. John did the rest.' Lee now has a hand on my shoulder.

'I...what.....' I shake my head.

'Don't worry.' He speaks to me directly, in a reassuring tone. 'We can just burn down this fucking bullshit, and get out of here.'

I break away. 'That's not what I intended!' I shout.

He laughs. 'You're just having a funny turn. Look' he takes something out of his backpack. 'Here's an Uzi.'

'I don't know how to operate it!'

'Oh, come on, Si. You must know.'

I sigh, and put a hand over my forehead. 'I don't know...I don't know if I can do this. I'm sorry.'

His voice becomes strained: 'What do you mean you can't do this? You're just going to leave us all? Is that it?'

'No, no. Just forget it. I want to carry on, but it won't be worth it.'

I'm distracted by the familiar sound of sirens. I shake my head.

'Ok, we're going to have to carry on.' I shout at everyone who is still around. 'We'll carry on up the road! Don't let them get us!'

Half the group just seems to have gone of its own accord. The remainder of us carry on to the North-East, along Upper Park Road. Every building is on fire. I never realised that this would be so difficult. I just hope to get out of here, and just get these fuckers in order: that's the least that can be done. But, as for the prospect of overthrowing our oppressors, I realise now that there's a lot to learn.

'Hang on! There's a button on here!'

'Don't press it!' I scream.

'It's ok, Si. It's an extinguisher. I never knew you could do that.'

'Ok, cool.' I relax slightly. 'But there isn't time to put the flames out. We've got to evacuate this place.'

'But the town'll burn down, man. Can't we just stop that happening?'

'There's no time.' I insist.

The car appears from nowhere. It whizzes down the street before it grinds to a halt. We simultaneously start to run towards the exit, not caring where the fuck the exit is, so long as there is one. The way is blocked by a vast armoured vehicle, which I recognise from a book I read in the library, many years ago. But it's changed a lot since then. I promised myself I'd fight on to the bitter end, but that was from the confines of a dark, cold cell; being in a place like that suddenly seems so easy. I take a deep breath. They all surround me before I know where I am: handcuffs grip my wrists like a vice. A sleeve is rolled up, and a sharp sensation

takes place in my arm. It seems so familiar, so painful, so relaxing, so luscious..... I no longer care what it is, or where I am....

\*

'Ok. I think you're ready to answer our questions.'

Tyler is now bound to his seat by a system of ropes. He attempts to untie himself, but his hands are also bound. The desk is gone and the officers are seated directly in front, staring at him menacingly.

'Is it true that you falsified the results of the general test?'

'No.'

Tyler feels a slap across his cheek.

'Liar: of course you did.'

'He's pissed though, so he can't be lying.' The other points out.

'Ok, well you can answer this one.' This is said in a very aggressive manner. 'Did Anne Tyler, your daughter, take the general test on June 6<sup>th</sup>, this year?'

'No. She was exempt from it.'

The officers smile at each other and give each other high-five.

'But she was supposed to take it, so why was she exempt?'

'She was given permission not to take it.'

'By who?'

'I don't know.'

Tyler gets another slap across the cheek.

'Honestly... I don't know.'

'Well, that was a breach of the rules, and that must be punished. But we can negotiate the punishment. What else has she told you?'

'She said that the exam was rigged. If people don't take it, they're in trouble.'

'That is serious misconduct. This is a liberal regime, and any suggestion to the contrary is not allowed. It undermines the ethos of the state. That, added to the offence of breaching the rules of the general test, must be punished severely. A fact that you may not know is that

the prisons are full, so she cannot go there. I think we will need to decide between house arrest and execution, for both of you. Which do you choose?’

‘No, no!’ Tears start to form in Tyler’s eyes, but he attempts to suppress them. ‘You just can’t do that!’

‘I’m afraid we have to, Tyler. It is our job to enforce the law, and what you and your daughter have done are serious crimes. And they deserve serious punishment. Don’t you agree?’

‘Yeeessss’ Tyler sighs. ‘What about house arrest?’ he slurs incoherently.

‘You will not be allowed to leave the house under any circumstances for a certain number of years: that will be decided by the court. You will be regularly visited by the police. As you are both criminals, you will not be protected by any the laws which apply to citizens. You will find it so depressing that you will probably wish you were executed after all, so you may switch to that option whenever you wish.’

Before Tyler can answer, the other officer says:

‘We will need to visit your house to speak to your family about this possibility. We can also see if your daughter is good meat. I don’t think that piece of mutton you are probably married to will do, but we can give her a bit of an examination as well.’

Tyler is too sedated to be angered by this statement. ‘Alright.’ he moans. ‘How do you know I’m married?’

‘It’s shown on your records, you dipshit. Anyway, the interrogation’s over. It’s time to go for a ride.’

The officers get up and Tyler follows them, knowing that resistance is futile. He just hopes that nothing too ghastly will happen. Before he knows it, he is back in the car, in a pensive frame of spirit. The journey seems like a dream, which he suddenly wakes from. The officer knocks on the door. It is opened by Mrs. Tyler.

‘Oh!’ she gasps.

‘Sidborough Police.’ He takes an ID card from his pocket and shows it to her. ‘Mr. Tyler has been arrested for collaborating with his daughter to bring down the government.’

‘Oh, I never, I don’t believe....’

‘Shut up you bitch!’ he slaps her across the neck. She reels back in shock.

‘I’m going to report you for that. You don’t have the right to do that.’

‘Yes we do. Now, are you going to let us in or not?’

Mr. Tyler looks at his wife imploringly. 'Please, please, please!' he mutters.

She picks up on the cue her husband is sending. 'Ok, you'd better come in.'

'Good.' The officer beams in a manner which makes Mrs. Tyler want to throw up.

'We'll ask the questions in the living room, I guess. Nothing to hide, I hope.'

By now, Mr. Tyler and the other officer are in the house. They all proceed into the living room. The officers take their positions on the couch. Mr. And Mrs. Tyler, not daring to go the other room, simply sit on the floor.

'The decision is final: the arrest has been made. So now is time for you to choose your punishment. Technically, there are two options: house arrest or execution. As we are feeling generous, we will also allow you a third option.' He makes an outward gesture with his hand in Mrs. Tyler's direction. 'As suspected, this sow does not make the grade, so we will need to speak to your daughter about it.'

'Excuse me?!' Mrs. Tyler asks, and exclaims, unable to believe that someone who is supposed to be protecting the community could utter the words she has just heard.

Mr. Tyler puts a hand on hers. 'It's best not to question them.' He sighs.

The officer continues: 'Where is your daughter?'

'We don't know.' Mrs. Tyler shakes her head while speaking.

The officer throws up his hands. 'Oh, sod this. I can't be bothered.' He walks over to the window and draws the curtains. The other officer, knowing what is expected next, manoeuvres himself to the end of the room. Mr and Mrs. Tyler hug each other, in fear, knowing that there is nothing that they can do about the fate that awaits them in the near future. Before they know it, sleeping gas is released into the room.

'Let's search the house.'

They make their way from room to room, looking for Anne, and also for things to take. They are in the dining room when they hear the door being opened. They rush to the hall, but the door closes before they get there.

'Shit! Fuck! She's got away! What are we going to do?'

'Let's go after her.'

'Yeah, but if we do that, these two'll wake up.'

'But we can get her, then come back.'

'No, I'm not sure. We need someone to mind the place.'

'Oh, sod this. Let's just stay here. We won't even recognise her anyway.'

'But she'll tell on us.'

'She won't have seen us.'

'Actually, good point. Ok, we'll let her go. But what are we going to do now?'

'I know. Let's wait here.'

## **Chapter 7**

No-one ever told me about this. I'm resting on this kind of platform, and there's this whirring blade above it. I don't even want to examine it. A crowd has gathered round, jeering and cheering. A shot is fired, causing them to back away for a moment, before they carry on. I take a trip down memory lane: the first time I played on the swings, at harmony with gravity. The time I gave a rose to Julia, who I was in love with at secondary school. Beer with my mates in the pub, only just underage. None of that matters any more. I can sense the blade fall, tear at the skin, the muscles, the bones, the nerves. The pain is indescribable. I find myself thrown to the ground right in front of the crowd. They all whoop for joy, cheer, point and laugh. My brain is separate from the rest of my body.

At least...I died....fighting....

\*

Having waited for a few hours, the officers are getting bored. Suddenly, the phone rings.

'Yes?'

'Can you get to 100 Parchment Street? Someone has not attended temple for the last two weeks.'

He sighs.' Yes, ok. We'll be there straight away.'

He turns to his accomplice, known as Eric. 'Fuck this. We'll just go and deal with this one now. Actually, if you stay here and I go, that'd be better.'

Eric's phone is now buzzing. He answers it.

'Someone's just been jogging in Maple Road. Your urgent attention is required.'

'Ok. I'll see what I can do.'

'We'll just have to leave this place.'

Just as they are driving, they are interrupted by another phone call.

'Someone's just bought a can of Schweppes from the Asda in Fort Goldfax.'



'I didn't realise they were still around.'

'They're operating illegally. We're going to put them out of business, but it's your job to stop it on the street.'

'Ok, I've got another case to deal with, but I'll be there soon as I can.'

They turn into Parchment Street, looking around frantically for 100. Not all the houses are numbered. They only so have much time to find their way through this labyrinth. The moon is out in its full glory. The officer longs to admire it, but avoids it.

'It must be that one.'

He leaves the car while Eric stays to make sure it isn't stolen. The phone continues:

'It's ok. The jogger's been beaten up now. Case cancelled.'

'Can-buyer last seen in Maple Road.'

'Can you help? Someone bought some bread at 7.26pm.'

He looks round to see Eric dragging some bins outside. He takes what seems like a decapitated head and sticks it onto one of the railings, before entering the car again.

'That was a bit much, wasn't it?'

'It's a grade A offence: it's ok to do that. Let it be an example to the heretics!'

'Yeah, I can understand why you'd do that.'

'Any phone calls?'

'The can-buyer's in Maple Road.'

'Right. Let's go!'

As they make their way to the right, they notice a fleeing person with a mark on their forehead. Angrily, Eric turns the steering wheel around. The fugitive notices what's happening. In desperation, she changes direction, but it's too late. They high-five each other. Suddenly, a car comes towards them.

\*

Across the country, unexpected visits are paid to random houses to ask about the residents' spending habits. As no-one has been told about the survey, they are unable to avoid the interrogation that takes place. As soon as the questions finish, they are asked to sign a confidential form. Following this, rumours are spread that those who failed to meet the target are heretics. In some places, further visits are made on which the doors are marked.

Knowing what will happen, a number of them become frightened to go out. Those who do are bombarded with verbal abuse, threats and home-made missiles. Some receive excrement through the letterbox. Some are even murdered.

\*

Jim ambles forward, nervously. It seems like everyone is staring at him. As he looks around in all directions, he realises that this is true.

'Traitor!'

'Scoundrel!'

'You piece of shit! If I just got your hands on you, I'd...'

'Heretic!'

'Heretic!'

'Heretic!'

He tries to block it all out, which goes very much against his nature. However, this is not the first time he has been bombarded with such hostile language, and it is becoming meaningless. He figures that there is nothing that he can do, that the only way is to give up listening to people: to avoid getting hurt, and because they have nothing to offer him. He is now in Broad Street: he decides to go into the newsagents. He will get a paper and some tobacco, to cheer him up. He looks round the place. He wonders if there is any food here: he is getting very hungry, but cannot find a place to buy it. The familiar dark blue floor is there, and the layout exactly the same. However, as he looks to the counter, the staff seem to have completely changed. John was always there, whenever he went in. What has happened to him? There are several copies of a newspaper known as *The Chronicle*, on the stand in the centre. He decides that he will choose what's on offer. He drags it along to the counter. The tobacco range is the usual anywhere: every packet has the familiar NW emblem on it.

'Excuse me! What are you doing?'

He raises the newspaper up in his hand. 'I'd like to buy this and...'

'We're closed.'

'Well, why is it possible to go in then?'

'We're closed to you. You must go to another shop.'

Jim sighs. 'Why do I have to....'

'It's not something to be questioned. Just leave, now!'

Jim goes to the stand, and puts the newspaper back.

'What are you doing? You were trying to steal it! I'm going to call security!'

Jim quickly makes his way out of the shop, and back onto Broad Street. He makes his way into the official NW off-licence, which is not distinctive as they are all NW now. It is quite similar in decor to the newsagents, suggesting that they were designed and built at more or less the same time, except that the floor is a lime-green colour with swirls of red, carpets to each side of the rack in the middle of the room, and the ceiling is a mad fluorescent blue colour, which Jim finds mesmerising. He stares at it for a moment, before suspecting that it is a trap and carrying on with his business.

'Good day, Sir. May I help you?'

Jim has not been used to being spoken to like this. He reels from the shock, hoping that the shopkeeper doesn't misinterpret this.

'Uh...uh...hi. Yes, I was looking for some beer. Is there anything you can recommend?'

Suddenly, the shopkeeper's pupils dilate and he starts breathing heavily.

'Heretic!'

Jim doesn't argue. As he exits the building, the sight of a mob approaching him tells him all he needs to know. He just has time to register that one of them is examining the mark before the adrenaline kicks in. For a brief moment, he freezes, uncertain what to do, before instinct takes him over. He is sprinting down Broad Street, not caring where he goes. He feels like he could end up anywhere, and wherever it is, it doesn't matter, so long as he escapes the fate that potentially awaits him. That's something that....

A sharp pain invades the area just adjacent to his spine. He wonders as to the source of it. However, none of that matters, as long as he gets out of here. He is now at the gates of the park. He pushes past a young mother with a pushchair. Shame hits him like a well-executed hook, but he knows he has no choice. Annoyingly to him, the park is primarily an open space. At this point, he realises what it is next to his spine. He doesn't know where the nearest hospital is. He thinks of giving himself up, just so that he can find it, but compared to that, he doesn't care if he dies. He tries to find somewhere to hide. A piercing scream echoes from somewhere near the gates, and a number of people look round.

### **If someone calls an ambulance, will that get me away?**

There is still the risk of arrest. He is on the verge of collapse: if he falls unconscious, they'll catch him. If he throws the can, perhaps it'll work as a distraction? He turns round and it leaves his hand, before the pain stings him again: this time it is somewhere just below the ribs. The can falls somewhere on the ground before him...so much for that idea. Suddenly, his surroundings disappear.

\*

'Here' says Mrs. Evans 'is the point where we will attack.'

She is pointing to the area just north of Caen, in France.

'Once we take over, we have a base in Europe. It will also provide people for the army. From there, we will split the army into two regiments: one will go south-west, towards Rennes. The other south-east, in the direction of Paris. If the government finds out, it is likely that they will escape further south, so this must all be done quickly and insidiously. Once you have completed this mission, I will advise you again.'

She is facing Jason Bennett, who has just been made Chief of Defence Staff.

'Here is the map, on which I have drawn the plan. Show that to the generals, and they will enact it. And, one more thing: there are to be no atrocities. There is much more in the way of reporting over there: if anyone finds out, our reputation will be tarnished. You shall enact the plan as soon as possible. Agreed?'

Jason nods. 'Agreed.'

Mary blows a sigh of relief. 'Well done.' She wonders whether she is saying this to Jason or herself.

\*

Caen has now been captured, and the people are rounded up, though several have escaped further to the east. Half of those who are left are randomly selected and given a choice between military service and slavery: all of them choose the former. The rest are allowed to carry on life as normal. It was planned that they would be given a briefing on the new regime, but no-one knows the native language. In his own tongue, General Andy Patton lets his comrades know his opinion of Mr. Bennett. He gasps, realising that his career could be over very soon. He tells them that, if word gets round, the army will be disbanded. Deciding that this is a bad idea, he tells them he was just having a laugh. He commands them to go forth in two different directions. News does not get round to rest of the country, as citizens have been ordered to stay in the city, and a patrol has been formed on its outskirts. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade marches into Rennes, and adds to its numbers with the same method employed as that for Caen; the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade reaches Paris, where General Shaun Smith orders a search for government buildings. After many hours of deliberation, they find two buildings suspected of government activity. Trying to avoid being accused of atrocities, Smith demands a search, followed by capture of anyone in the building. He also moves a quarter of the brigade to the outskirts, where they are to prevent citizens and ministers from leaving. Barracks are found in the city: a selected group from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade march in with flamethrowers, setting alight

every corner of the building, and every occupant. Two of the group receives wounds from rounds fired by Uzis, but they keep on going. Having destroyed the barracks, they douse the fire with the extinguishers, accessible by a trigger at the back of the weapon. The next day, the mission is declared complete, and a temporary military government is installed. Evans punches the air when he receives the e-mail about the news. He sets about his reply quickly: he demands that a quarter of the womenfolk are sent over the Channel, so that they can perform domestic duties. He outlines that he will give further orders when he has discussed the issue with his cabinet, but for now they must make sure no-one knows. He urges anyone who tells to be killed in cold blood. Realising his policy on atrocities, he quickly e-mails again to say that they must be taken prisoner somewhere. Having finished his e-mails, he walks over to the window. Something fundamental dawns on him: the view from here is not remarkable anymore. He is ready for something greater. He wonders where else he could live: but that is a hypothetical question, because he will have to conquer it first.

\*

Evans can barely contain his excitement as Martinsen prepares to sign the deed that will mark a historical occasion. He rubs his hands together, staring at the clock, practically shaking at the prospect. He doesn't notice his potential new ally reading through a clause just before the signature, pausing and frowning. After a few seconds, he shakes his head. He says something in Norwegian, the other main language of Scandinavia besides Swedish.

The translator speaks to Evans: 'No. This can't be done.'

'What do you mean it can't be done?'

Martinsen speaks very firmly and clearly to the translator, who sends the message to Evans: 'There is a clause here which requires me to be a subordinate in your parliament. I am not willing to accept this.'

Evans throws his hands up and lets out a sigh which suggests abject frustration to anyone in the same room. 'That's the whole point! Oh, just get out of it. You're not welcome here anymore.'

The translator sends this message to Martinsen. He nods. He gets up and prepares to make his way out of the backroom in the NW Theatre, where the meeting is being held. As soon as he is out of the door, Evans speaks again: 'If he's not going to help us, we can start to blow his country to smithereens. Shit! I just remembered that Finlandish guy is arriving. I'll just tear up the contract and have him killed.'

'Killed?' The translator asks, wide-eyed with panic.

It'll be fine, don't worry. It's only the soldiers who should be ashamed.'

'That's a bit harsh.'

Evans goes over to the area behind the bar. He asks the translator if he would like a drink. Suspecting what might be happening, the translator declines the offer. No sooner does he think about leaving, than he hears something hit against the wall. He is out of there before he can even find out what it is.

‘How am I going to get hold of the little shit?’

A phone call to the police leads to a promise for a search for the traitor, but Evans suspects that it’s futile.

‘Still, maybe he’ll go over to Scandinavia, which we’ll take over. He won’t have a hiding place then. The only trouble is that people will still get to know.’ He puts his head in his hands. ‘It’s lost. It’s all over. I can’t continue with this anymore.’

\*

Having just put the remains of the visiting Prime Minister in a sack, and buried it in a nearby cemetery, Evans takes a taxi over to 10 Downing Street, where he e-mails Jason Bennett, asking him to start bombing cities in Scandinavia and Finland. He offers the possibility of Bennett’s becoming the Prime Minister if he successfully carries this out. Bennett is astonished that he is being offered a reward rather than a punishment. He suspects that it’s a trap, and considers ignoring the order. However, he decides that it’s best to carry on with it. The next day, military aircraft is sent out to Bergen. The patrol at Rennes is broken through by a group of fleeing civilians. 1,000 die from wounds received by bullets before they receive medical treatment. The remainder reach Angers, which is still not held by troops. 250 are treated at the hospital, with 20 in a critical condition. With the lack of central government, trade between the cities has ceased, but militias are being formed in each, ready to take on the invaders. A new government is being formed in Toulouse, with is currently under siege by British forces. The militia, armed with bottles, rocks, shotguns (which now require no licence), and anything else they can find, is so great in number that the army are being forced back. Although the militia are depleted rapidly by the army’s superior weaponry, they keep on arriving from all over the country. General Smith announces the news to Jason Bennett. Bennett sends an e-mail to Evans the following day. Evans is at a flat in London with a war captive, who has arrived there on his orders. He spends the day watching television with her, before giving her a severe beating, after which he lets her go in a state of distress. When he finally gets home in the evening, he reads his e-mails. He is furious at the news. He automatically types in the message ‘Fuck off, you’re fired.’, before deciding that perhaps the other campaign may go better. He replies to Bennett, enquiring as to what is happening. Bergen has now been virtually destroyed, but civilians escape further east. The news reaches Bennett a few days later. By now, Evans has announced the decision to keep him on. Anxiously, he plots his next move.

\*

As the assault ship *HMS Bennett* lands on the coast near Stavanger to unload the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade, everyone is fired up, promised with the prospect of a lavish retirement if they complete their mission. They are equally motivated by the possibility of life in the Great Abyss if they do not. Just south of the city, they unexpectedly meet an army of what seems like 40,000. Tanks designed to fire Hypersonic lasers, which can melt armour with minimal contact, tell them all they need to know. If the reconnaissance mission is to be believed, the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade will be virtually destroyed if it continues. If they go back home, the consequences will be even worse. The general, Rowan Jones, is just about to make the decision to turn back when a laser, turned up to full force, burns a hole right through his stomach: he dies instantly. The soldiers near him are so horrified by the spattering of blood, which forms a trajectory seemingly of the speed of light, that they do not even pay attention to the lasers that take them next. Those on the flank have seen the lasers and charge forward, hoping that their afterlife will be a satisfying one. One of the tanks is set alight by a flamethrower. As the gun of the tank rotates around, everyone within sight is reduced to a corpse. The driver of the tank suddenly freezes as his vision registers how they die. He has been told some stories, but he never knew it would be like this. He knows he has only a matter of time to save himself from the inferno which was once the vehicle he was assigned to. Desperately, he looks away from the carnage showing on the screen, climbs out of the tank, and runs to nowhere. In a panic, someone from the left flank launches a flamethrower right into the group: he watches in disbelief as a human bonfire takes place right before him. He has seen this in towns and cities, but he never knew he would see this happening to his own. Artificial lightning terminates his life before he can regret his blunder, and its considerable consequences. With nothing to douse the fire, the rest of the left flank follows him in his footsteps to the bitter end, some of them destroyed by the lasers before being roasted. The guns gradually cease, as everyone realises that there is no-one left to shoot. The regular soldiers have already gone north: the tanks did the work for them before they were needed. There is one thing everyone is certain of: this will never happen again.

\*

Jason Bennett e-mails to Evans outlining that Toulouse has fallen, and that he would like further instructions on where to direct the military effort. He also explains that he has not heard back anything about Scandinavia, and lies that this is probably because it has gone so well that no-one has time to write back. Just at the very moment he is typing his message, the roof of the NW Temple crashes down, crushing everyone inside before they realise what is happening. Only those outside take in the fireball that suddenly forms, and its source in the darkened sky. At once, they commence a journey round the area, knocking on each door, letting them know that demons have attacked.

While this is happening, one of the statues, in the west of London, suddenly catches fire. No-one is in the magnificent park which has been created alongside it at the time, so they do not notice the fire engulfing the entire area. The ruins of the television centre, which

have still not been built on, deter the menace in the sky from carrying on further, as it acknowledges that someone else is already doing what they were planning. Evans instructs Bennett to split the armies into two again, one going south into Spain, and the other east through the rest of France, towards Italy. He also asks him to keep him posted on the Scandinavia campaign. A week later, he finds the site of his latest speech in ruins.

‘Just as well. Was a shit place anyway. Gets me out of having to do this speech. What do they want now?’

He travels back home, where he sends an e-mail to Bennett, asking him to keep some soldiers back home to patrol the site of the temple. The following month Bennett reports that Montpellier has been captured, while Marseille and Barcelona are under siege. He still has no idea what is happening in Scandinavia. Something dawns on Evans: it wasn’t protestors who destroyed the temple.

‘There’s no way we can win this war.’ He sighs. ‘May as well just quit. Though maybe with outside help it’ll be possible. Pretend to be their friends for a while, then we can launch a sneak attack. The trouble is, who are we going to get on our side?’

Following the devolution across the Atlantic and in Asia, there are no global superpowers left. Evans imagines the possibility of his empire stretching across the land he has already conquered.

‘No....it just won’t do.’

He sends e-mails to the leaders of every country outside Europe, complaining of terrorism in London from his neighbours, and urging them to help out. He has received 40 replies by January, all in the affirmative.

‘It’s on!’

\*

Newspapers across the world announce the death of Henrik Martinsen: ‘He got what he deserved’, ‘The death of terrorism’, ‘Take that, you brute!’. It took 15 to 25 minutes for the President, hiding near Stockholm, to be taken to the occupied city and roasted by a flamethrower squad before a jubilant crowd. His last words were ‘I don’t deserve this’, ‘You’ve got this wrong’ or ‘Well done, it serves me right’.

Bennett learns that Spain and Portugal have now been taken over, while Rome is under siege. Evans asks him to concentrate on the effort further north: perhaps it is time to capitalise on what has become a global situation and take over countries in that region, such as Denmark, which will be easier to accuse of terrorism? He admits that the Central European Federation is somewhat out of bounds. He sends an e-mail half an hour later ordering a bombing of Rome, and an invasion starting in Denmark, pushing forward into the



CEF. It is explained that there will be a number of allies helping, so only around 10,000 people will be needed. Forces from Primorye, Yakutia, Pennsylvania and Michigan land near Skagen. Just as this is happening, Lille is descended on by an army from across the border...

\*

The backroom at the NW Theatre has dark grey walls and a ceiling with a strange abstract pattern drawn on it. There are several posters of both Evans and Reeves, with slogans written on them in bright red letters: 'The Saviour of Freedom', 'We Shall do Our Lords' Duty on Earth', 'The World is Rightfully Ours', 'There Is Only One System of Beliefs, and That is Ours' and 'Elected By The People, For The People'. In the middle of the room is a wide, white circular table with a number of coasters on it, all with the NW symbol. There is a bar to the right of the room, with the now-familiar NW products: Pub Beer, Pub Spirits, Pub Wine and Pub Coffee. All the drinks are kept in an oak cabinet with glass panels, except for the coffee, which is extracted from a machine.

'All new, aren't they?' asks Mary, while gazing at the posters admiringly.

'That's right. We are putting them up in all public places.'

'Wow!'

'So, why are we here?' asks Reeves.

'First, to let you know that under no circumstances will you be Prime Minister, so don't ask me questions, you pathetic wanker.' Mary smiles at her husband, flirtatiously. 'Second, to discuss some new proposals.'

There is silence, and he carries on: 'I would like three statues of myself to be constructed in London, and one each for Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool. You will be responsible for that.' He points to Reeves.

'But...but...'

'No buts, just-get-on-with-it-you-fuckhead.'

'I RESIGN!' shouts Reeves. He gets up from the table and marches off.

'Yeah, and where are you going to go, you little dipshit?'

Reeves turns around. 'I'll form my own party. I'll do what I like and we'll trounce you in the election.'

'We're not going to have elections.' Evans' smug smile appears again. However, as soon as he has said this he regrets it.

'Everyone will know now, won't they?' retorts Reeves. He blows a raspberry.

**First, you're going to tell everyone our secret, and you had the chutzpah to blow a raspberry at me in front of my wife. I have no choice now.**

'It's ok. You may have the role of Prime Minister.'

'Really?' asks Reeves, enthusiastically.

'Yes, really.' He points to the seat next to him. 'Come and sit down again. I'll discuss it with you.'

Reeves' eyes dart around for a few seconds. He decides to go the place at the table. He wanders over, casually, full of cheer at the news he has just been told. Just as he is about to sit at the table, hands grasp his throat. He hesitates, before grabbing at the arms. He can't get them off him. He is gradually growing faint, and knows that he has no time. All that matters now is saving his life. With grim determination, he tries harder, but it is to no avail. The grip on him tightens. Desperately, he kicks out at Evans, not caring about where he hits. Evans is struck in the thigh, and winces slightly, but does not release the grip. At this point, Reeves realises that the force left in him is utterly insignificant: he simply has no choice except to perish, unless he does something drastic. Mary restrains Reeves' legs, before the chair falls over. Evans takes his hands off Reeves' neck quickly. Reeves doesn't even notice where he is. He is busy concentrating on the future: what will happen when....

'It's best not to tell anyone about that.'

'But we're always killing people....'

'Yes, but we don't want anyone knowing, do we? It'll ruin our reputation.'

Mary falters for a moment. 'Ok, I'll keep shtoom.' She says, meekly.

'Good girl.'

She stares at him intently, and wonders what it would be like to be Prime Minister. She wonders if she could make it happen but, somehow, her admiration and love for him is too substantial for her to carry out the means required for the end. There is only one thing that can allow it:

'Simon,' she has learnt that uttering his first name is the best way to get his attention, 'when you retire, who will be the Prime Minister?'

'My children will fight amongst each other for the position, but it will be definitely be one of them. That's why I want you pregnant.' He stares at her abdomen, and begins to fondle it. Mary begins to smirk, which she attempts to disguise by forcing a less sinister smile.

**I'll take the morning-after pill and he'll be none the wiser.**

He takes his hand away from her abdomen and straightens up. 'Shit! Who's going to order these statues to be built for me?'

'You don't actually need someone to order, you just need them to be built for you.'

'You know, that's a good point! I advise you to keep your pretty little mouth shut when we're around other people, though. I can't be seen listening to *you*. Now the trouble is, there's going to be all this nonsense about planning permission. I guess if they don't allow it we can sack the mayors: that'll solve the problem. Also, I want some arms, but I don't have a Minister for Defence anymore. I'll have to get a new one. Before I do that, I need to keep an eye on what the people are up to. But, of course,' he slaps himself 'I don't have a Minister for People anymore! We'll need to recruit someone. It'll be a real hassle though. I tell you what... could you do it?'

'Recruit the ministers or do the other things?'

'Well, actually, if you could do those things.... that'd be marvellous!'

Her lips burst into a radiant smile. 'Of course I will!'

'Great! Just.... don't tell anyone. Otherwise I'll.....'

**This must be the only person I wouldn't kill.**

'I'll divorce you. Agreed?'

'Agreed!' The smile stays there for what seems like centuries.

'We're going to need to dispose of this corpse. Where can we keep it?'

Simon taps his fingers on the table. 'I've got something else to sort out now.' He mutters to himself. He keeps on looking around while he waits, as if he is going to be ambushed any minute. A strange moment occurs where he finds himself regretting all the enemies that he has probably made. As soon as he starts to reflect on this, Mary is back with a number of bin bags. Simon raises his eyebrows in astonishment.

As if answering a question, she says: 'He's probably not going to fit into one. Is there anything to cut him up with?'

'I don't think so. Not here. Look, I know what. I'll go to my place and get something. We can always leave him here, and no-one will know.'

'I'll come with you.'

'Uh....there won't be any point. It's not your place, is it? Besides, it's a mess. I need to clear it up, get everything fixed, then you can move in.'

'Well, where will I meet you?'

'Um....um.....I don't know.'

'Well, I'd better come with you, then.'

**You know....she may actually be impressed. But if she meets Jason, it'll be a total embarrassment. No, I just can't let it happen.**

'As long as you wait outside.'

'Ok. That's fine!' She gives her lustrous smile once again.

They make their way through to the corridor, then out via the fire exit. Simon dials a private cab; there is silence between them as they wait, and it arrives after ten minutes. The driver tries to initiate a conversation, but neither of them are interested in it, and act nonchalant. Soon, it arrives at the destination. Simon presses £50 in the driver's palm, and he and Mary depart the car.

'Wait here.' He commands, and enters the house. He is back quickly, with a camping bag.

'Needed something to carry the saw in.' He explains. He dials the cab again. The driver murmurs something about their not being popular. Simon explains that they are never popular with anyone who knows them, and that it doesn't matter. The driver tells them that it has something to do with the death of a citizen. Simon waves away the driver, contemptuously, but when he is told that this means someone who is not a heretic, he straightens up, and asked how this happened. The driver mentions that it happened in Sidborough, but that is all he knows. Simon is startled: he tells the driver that is where he lived for a while. The driver tries to play the news down, pointing out that it may be an exaggeration. The conversation is broken off by their arrival, Simon pays, and the couple go back through the fire exit and the corridor. Simon takes a saw from the camping bag, and slices Reeves' limbs off, grimacing slightly at the result of his work. Both the limbs and the rest of him go into the bin bags. He hopes that there will not be too many witnesses around. He decides to leave the remains in the far corner of the room, after tying them up: perhaps someone will assume it is regular rubbish and will put it out. He makes a signal to Mary and they go back out through the fire exit. They decide to return to her place, which is nearer to the theatre. She tries to seduce him, but he is too transfixed by the news to be interested. Having dismissed her, he settles in front of the television. He can find nothing on the NW News archives: there must be some alternative news station which is broadcasting all this. How did they set it up without his knowing? He will need to find it and destroy it, or maybe infiltrate it, as it could be a useful source for what the people turning against him are planning to do. That could be part of the surveillance program. Regardless, he now has the perfect excuse to follow his original plan.

\*

On a visit to Stockholm, the Prime Minister of Primorye, Vladimir Smirnov, begins to suspect something: why have British forces been stationed in the city for so long?

'Don't tell anyone about this, it's top secret.' says Nigel Williams, the Foreign Minister, who he is having brunch with at the new restaurant in the middle of the city. He goes on to explain: 'There isn't really a terrorism problem. Those bombs in London were done by planes from Scandinavia. Some onlookers got some pictures: you can tell by the logo where they are from. We were in the business of trying to take over, so it was probably retaliation for that.'

Fluent in English, he asks: 'Why did you kill Mr. Martinsen?'

'It means that we now have control of Scandinavia, though there are some rebels in the east who we are dealing with. We're doing this in other countries. We need to take them over, so we can all go to the galaxy. No telling, ok?'

As they tuck into their brunch, they discuss trade possibilities but arrive at no conclusion. At noon, Smirnov thanks Williams for his time, and prepares to leave the city. Meanwhile, the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the British Army retreats from Lille as it is realised that carrying on defending the city is a lost cause.....

\*

An amphibious assault ship lands on the coast of Cornwall, before making its way back over the Atlantic. The residents of Penzance are busy celebrating Simon Evans day: when they realise what is happening, they are helpless to prevent the ship's inhabitants occupying it. They flee towards Devon. The invaders are astonished to see a group of citizens roasting alive on a fire. They quickly use the extinguisher on their flamethrowers to douse the fire, but it is too late. The sight that greets the 5<sup>th</sup> regiment causes a few of them to start weeping, which gradually spreads to the rest of the group, as retching begins to take place in the stomachs of the few who started the process. The general has been casually glancing away: he has seen some terrible things in war, but this is more than he can handle. As vomit splashes the ground he cries out: 'We will have our revenge!' He goes unnoticed: a rare turn of events for a man chosen for his charisma and firm, paternalistic style of leadership. Even he becomes queasy at the environment forming around him. Suspecting that the soldiers will be too traumatised to continue, he decides he will station them in Penzance, hoping they can be rehabilitated before anyone can find out that they're here. Everyone is now retreating from the flood which has formed. No time is set for the next day, as everyone tries to recover from what has been happening in the country that they had been negotiating with and helping just a few months earlier. It can only be presumed that they are prisoners of war: but where have they arrived from? Why would they be so keen to bring them back here?

\*

When Jason is gone, she looks over to the telephone on the corner of the table. She has the numbers of the mayors written down on the notepad in front of her. She wonders whether to save them in the phone's memory, before getting lost in a daydream about how they created phones so you can save numbers. This had previously been possible on mobile phones but, somehow, they adapted it to include landline telephones. She imagines a group of people in a laboratory, tweaking an SIM card. Perhaps it was adapted from this, before being transferred to landline. However, the daydream flashes to another laboratory where, now, a relatively large oblong card is having various cylindrical metal objects put on it, before being decorated with spirals. She snaps back out of the daydream, takes the telephone nearer to her, and lifts up the receiver. She decides against saving the numbers, deciding that they will not be needed again. Her fingers press against the buttons, in the manner of a traditional phone.

'Yes?' The Mayor of London answers. He looks out of the window, thinking how strange it must have been for there to be all those wires put in place, just so that someone can make a call.

'Hello.' Mary wonders what to say next.

'Hello. And who is this?'

'I'm Mary Evans, wife of Simon. The PM.'

His eyes light up. 'Ah, yes, of course! It was a pleasure to meet you at that speech! And how is the lady today?'

She frowns without really knowing why. 'When did I meet you exactly?'

'Well, you were there, were you not? What can I do for you?'

**You didn't meet me, you were just there, you little creep.**

'I'll tell you what you can do.' She says, barely concealing her annoyance. 'You can build some new statues. The PM wants three of them built in London. You go and find a place for them.'

'But, honey, no can do. There isn't space....'

'Either you have those statues built or we find a new mayor. Which do you prefer?'

'Uh... you just can't do that.'

'Yes, we can. Go and knock down some houses or something. Or some offices. Or maybe build on a park. It doesn't matter so long as you build them. We'll be checking that it's done. If construction hadn't begun within a month, you're fired.'

'But... but...'

She hangs up, before deciding whether to phone or to write a letter. The phone rings again. She lifts up the receiver.

'I'll report you for this, I'll....'

'Fuck off!' she exclaims, before putting the receiver to the touchpad. She decides that she will write letters to the mayors of Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool. The first thing to do will be to cease all communication between the government and the mayor: that will require a series of chain letters to each MP, instructing them to follow the procedure that was outlined to her. The next is to decide who will write the article in *The Truth*. Maybe it could be in the name of Henry Reeves? After all, no-one will know. Demote him to articles, and make someone else the Minister for People. Or perhaps Stant could do it? Where is Stant now? Once again, she lifts the receiver and begins dancing with her fingers.

There is a pause before someone answers. 'Hello?'

'Hello, this is Mary Evans. Wife of the PM...'

'Oh, uh, hello. What do you want?'

'Would you be willing to write an article for *The Truth*?'

'Depends how much I get paid.' Yawns Stant. 'Oh ok, I suppose I'll do it. Got time on my hands. What do I need to do?'

'Could you say that the Mayor of London has agreed to build three new statues of the PM? Actually, don't say it's the PM. Say it's someone who contributed something. Actually, no, wait. He should be so popular by now after that speech, people may actually want a statue of him. The next thing to put in is that they will all be built within a month. Can you do that?'

'Of course. How exactly did he agree to it?'

'He decided it was the best option.'

'Ok. I'll put that in. Never made it to the speech. Was it cool?'

'He got everyone on our side, just as I knew he would.' she gushes, admiringly. 'Bet you couldn't do that, could you? You're just a bottom feeder, Stant, let's be honest.'

Although he can feel the rage building inside him, he changes the subject: 'Haven't seen Reeves for a while. What's he up to?'

'He's his usual self. Last saw him in the theatre.' She puts her hand to her mouth, hoping that she hadn't give away too much. 'He's been on holiday, so that's why you haven't seen him about.'

'Ok, cool. Well, I hope he has a good one.'

She tries desperately to stifle a snigger.

'Are you going to write the article or are you going to bore me? Get on with it, you little jerk.'

'Ok.' He says, feebly. 'I will.'

'Good.'

'Bye bye.' She hangs up, then drops to a whisper. 'Wanker.'

She puts her head in her hands. 'I really hope they know what they're doing.' she says to herself.

\*

'It was that bastard I appointed as the Foreign Minister. I knew he was dodgy. There wasn't anyone else though. That is the last time I appoint a minister again!'

Simon Evans has just received an e-mail from the President of Pennsylvania, announcing a declaration of war. He replies:

"Fuck you, motherfucker, you sad, pathetic little worm. I'll kick your arse into orbit!"

He takes hold of the monitor, and throws it at the window. The glass smashes, showering the carpet nearby like artificial snowflakes. He slaps himself.

'What did I do that for?! It's all his fault. Little turd, he made me do that. I'll wring his neck before I slice it off!'

Mary appears at the door.

'Get the fuck out of here, you ugly little slag!'

She disappears as fast as she appeared.

'I didn't mean it, did I?! Come back, you worthless little whore!'

He storms out of the room. 'I can't even bring myself to beat her. I'm getting myself a new bitch. Nah, it isn't worth it, I don't know what I'll do.'

He catches sight of her, and leans down, grabbing her ankle. 'I didn't mean it. I want you, need you, please stay here. Please don't go.' He looks up at her, pleadingly.

She smirks at him. 'I can make you do anything I want, can't I?'

He straightens up and tries to compose himself. A hand reaches out, slapping her across the face. 'You disgusting little fucker. Don't ever talk to me like that.'



Instantly, she changes. Just a moment in time earlier, she was so confident, so clear about what she wanted. And she knew that someone so violent, so cruel, would never raise a hand against her: that's what kept her sane. Now, she cowers.

'Please don't hurt me.' She speaks to him directly, pleadingly, hoping that she can appeal to any sense of shame that he has.

'It's alright, I don't care. It's only the Foreign Minister I want to hurt. I'd never even hit you.'

'You just have.'

'I didn't mean it. Look, forget it, it's not important. We just need to destroy everyone.'

She doesn't even utter a word. All she wants is to avoid inciting his fury, so that she can stay safe.

'The only other thing left to do is to get that...' his fists clench and shake. Mary thinks of running out of the room, but decides that may provoke him. '...piece of shit to turn things around. But, to be honest, I couldn't even share the same room with him without breaking his kneecaps... but how am I going to do the diplomacy? I've lost all the addresses.'

Mary realises what the noise in the next room was. 'Oh, Simon. You haven't...?'

'It wasn't my fault, was it? You keep quiet now. I'll tell you what we can do.'

\*

As Nigel Stant pours the wine, beer, spirits, and juice that are required for the evening he realises that he'd overlooked just how much power there is in performing such a task. He decides that the glass he is holding right now will belong to the man that he hates most: the man who is in the way of his dreams. He'd been planning this for months, but he never had the courage to act on it, until now. He looks around briefly, before opening his briefcase. He extracts a portion of hemlock which he picked by the river a few days ago. It leaves his hand and settles in a pan on the stove. He keeps looking around, anxiously, while he puts the kettle on.

'You doing alright in there?'

'Yes, yes.'

To his relief, he hears footsteps away from the door. The kettle has boiled, and he pours the water over the plant matter in the pan. He sets the stove to a medium heat, and starts to pour the rest of the drinks, making a note of the glass he selected. After a few minutes, he pours the substance which has formed into the pan into the glass, until it is half full. He then takes the 565ml bottle of NL beer and pours half of it into the rest of the glass. The rest of the solution of the pan, and the beer, goes into the sink. He smirks while he pours the rest

of the drinks exactly as he was told to, before taking them into the main room of the House of Lords, where the meeting is being held.

'There you go.'

Evans takes his drink without even acknowledging its provider, who he waves away, contemptuously. 'Tonight,' he announces 'we will stay here and relax. We've got one more day in this place and then, we're going to have to escape.'

'But, why?' asks Mrs Henderson.

He takes a sip of the beer. 'The President of Pennsylvania has announced a war. That's why I decided to clear the people out. We're safe here for the moment.'

'You could have just evacuated them.'

'Well...' He pauses for a moment. 'It wouldn't have made any difference.'

'What are we going to do once the war's over?'

'I'm just going to leave behind this place for good.' He takes another sip of the beer, casually. 'We've taken over all that territory on the continent so I can go sun myself somewhere.'

'But that's what you're going to do. What are we all going to do?'

'I don't know. Do what you like. It doesn't matter.'

He sips the beer again, noticing this time that there is something different about it from usual, but not caring. He takes a gulp.

'That's not an adequate answer. If you can't offer us a plan, then you cannot lead us.'

'So. What are the consequences?'

Stant starts to giggle. He looks over to the television but can't find anything particularly funny. In desperation, he gets up and goes in the direction of the lavatories.

'You will be ousted from your position as Prime Minister.'

'Yeah (!) You, and whose army?'

'All of us will oust you.'

'Well, go on then. Prove it.' He takes the next sip.

'There's no need to prove it right now.'

'Well, I don't want to know then. Let's just watch the box, shall we?'

Henderson sighs. She turns her attention to the television, knowing it is futile. Everyone either chatters among themselves or watches the by now familiar, stale, uninteresting scene of armoured vehicles zapping anyone who happens to be around. Even Nigel Williams, who Evans has failed to notice, is here. He is discussing his future with Jason Bennett.

‘You travel to so many different places doing this job. I want to carry on when I retire, maybe have a world tour like that of Stant.’

‘Well, by the time that happens it won’t quite be the same. You may as well stay here, because everywhere will be the same.’

‘What is that supposed to mean?’

Bennett shrugs his shoulders. ‘It means whatever you want it to mean.’

No-one notices Evans holding his stomach. Something within his body doesn’t feel right. ‘The snacks must be off.’ He carries on sipping the beer. However, the crippling nausea gets the better of him: he goes over to the bench to take a lie down.

‘Evans? You ok?’

Suddenly, the ceiling shatters. A fire erupts on the ground. Everyone in the room looks round, startled. Another hole is torn in the ceiling: everyone looks up. Bennett catches fire.

‘Help!’ he screams. ‘Help! Help! Heeellllppppp!!!’

Everyone looks round in horror. As the ceiling cracks, they know they have to get away. Henderson runs into the fire by mistake. As the fire rises from her calves to her thighs to her hands, she just stays still, unable to believe what has happened. Bennett throws off his jacket and vest, and starts to tug at the belt on his trousers. He is suddenly hit by fragments, followed by an explosion which throws his head, left arm, stomach and liver into the south-west corner of the room, and the rest into the south-east. Henderson screams as she is spattered with the blood ejected in trajectory from his dismembered remains. Evans is now asleep. The fire is now spreading to the table in the centre of the room. The ceiling shakes. Evans open his eyes, then shuts them again. The ceiling is now giving way: as every piece of it falls to the ground, crushing everything in its path, everyone in the room wants to escape but everyone knows that it’s too late.

Everyone, that is, except the few who’ve just lived to tell the tale.

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