

# **SLEAZEFORD**

**(SLEAFORD NOIR 2).**

**© Morris Kenyon. 30 December, 2012.**

The names, characters, places and events in this book are products of the writer's imagination or have been used fictitiously and are not to be construed as real. Any similarities to real persons, living or dead, actual events, locales or organisations is purely coincidental and not intended by the author.

\* Licence Notes: Thank you for downloading this e-book. This book remains the copyrighted property of the author, and may not be scanned, reproduced, copied or distributed for commercial or non-commercial purposes whatsoever without written permission from the author except in the case of brief quotation embodied in critical articles and reviews. If you enjoyed this book, please encourage your friends to download their own copy where they can also discover other works by this author. Thank you for your support.

## **PLOT SUMMARY:**

One sleepy Fenland town. Two Polish chancers eager to make a fast buck with no questions asked. A group of businessmen with funny handshakes wanting to rake off big money from town planning contracts. A neo-Nazi bigot who'll jump at the chance of becoming Mayor seeing it as the first stepping stone on his march to global power. His bunch of thuggish skinhead hangers-on. Add a huge, abandoned industrial complex on the edge of town ripe for redevelopment. Mix them all together and what

could possibly go wrong? Except that matters soon escalate way beyond anything any of these groups expected.

Welcome to Sleazeford...

## **DISCLAIMER:**

This book is a work of fiction. It is not an accurate representation of local government in Sleaford, Lincolnshire or indeed anywhere else in Great Britain. There is no such organisation as Sleaford Urban Council. In reality, Sleaford is governed by three tiers of local authorities: Sleaford Town Council, North Kesteven District Council and Lincolnshire County Council each with their own officials, responsibilities and budgets.

Therefore, none of the events described here could possibly happen.

Although considered by many to be a far-right, fascist organisation, the British National Party is a legitimate British political party that I am sure would not openly condone the views or actions of Peachornby or his followers.

Also, everyone knows that local politics is a model of honesty, integrity and transparency. Men and women stand for election to become councillors solely in order to serve and represent their communities. These are all selfless people. Nobody enters local government in order to become involved with graft, corruption or under the table deals. Nor do they wish to grandstand in the local media, poke their noses

into other people's business or throw their weight about on committees while claiming large expenses. These are well known facts. Therefore the events depicted here are impossible.

I have also taken a few liberties with the geography of Sleaford for the sake of the story.

Remember, this book is a work of fiction and the town depicted is more accurately Sleazeford rather than the real life Sleaford...

"We must secure the existence of our people and a future for White Children."

David Lane 1938-2007, US White Supremacist



## CHAPTER 1. THE LAST DAYS OF THE WEST.

They say when you die, your whole life flashes before you. Len Weston's life must have been very short – which it wasn't – or he only got very edited highlights. Because Len was dead before he hit the floor.

Not like his death was the biggest surprise of the year. The guy was seventy, chronically overweight, smoked like a chimney, drank like a fish and loved his fry-ups. The concepts of healthy living and eating five portions of fruit and veg a day had passed him by. To top it off, he'd had two heart attacks already. After the second, he'd had a triple bypass operation.

At his follow-up examination the Consultant read him the riot act. "Cut out the cigarettes, the alcohol, the fry-ups and take-aways and avoid stress," was the core of his message. Len nodded. After the first he was worried but after the second, he was genuinely scared. Terrified would be a better word. No way did he want to meet the Grim Reaper just yet.

His wife, Glenda, sat next to him. She herself was no svelte bride any more – she looked like one of those fat, jolly matrons on a saucy seaside postcard, her body all boobs, jelly-roll belly and bum. No neck but with a laughing face on top. But not today. She sat, hatchet-faced as the Consultant laid it on the line for Len.

On the drive home, Glenda turned to her husband of over forty years. "That's it. Salads for you from now on. And you'll take some exercise..."

"I'll walk to the pub?" Len said, like many men trying to make a joke of his fear.

"No you won't. You're staying away from there. And you're keeping out of the Club House..."

"C'mon," said Len, hoping to use the skills he'd learned as a Trade Union negotiator all those years ago. "I'll stick to orange juice. And the Doctor said I could play bowls in a couple of months."

At the time, Len sincerely meant what he said. He'd looked into the face of Death and didn't want to see it again any time soon. He looked at his wife as she drove. "Don't make me give up the Urban Council. I'm certain to become Mayor at the next elections. It's not stressful or anything – mostly opening fêtes and prize-givings. And I think you'd like it, dearest."

Glenda pulled up at the lights. Despite her hard-set face, Len spotted the twinkle in her eye. He'd won. "You lose a stone by election time and I'll be your Lady Mayoress. Deal?"

"Deal," said Len. They shook hands. Len would agree to give up everything but he desperately wanted to become Mayor. That would be the high spot of his life – the prize he'd been working for all his political life. His name would be inscribed in gold leaf on the ornate Victorian plaque inside the Town Hall, there for all future generations to peruse.



Despite his age, it was easier than he thought to shed the pounds. That second attack had scared him stiff. Salads, cutting out the booze and even taking the stairs rather than the lifts helped to shift the weight. Sure, he was out of breath at the top but the exercise must be doing him some good, he thought. But he didn't like the feel of his heart racing like it wanted to fly out of his chest. It'll get easier as more weight comes off, he reassured himself.

The election result was closer than he expected. Sure, some of it was down to party politics at a national level. Politicians weren't flavour of the month – when are they ever? – but also Len Weston's ill-health had hit the local press. The *Sleaford Standard* ran several articles and Len's request for his coronary to be hushed up had been politely ignored.

If he was a younger man – and in better health – he'd like to give that muck-raking journo, Butler, a good thumping out back. Wouldn't like it would be the first time he'd used his fists to further the cause. When he was an up-and-coming Union convenor – back in the seventies, that was – he'd bashed a few scabs and blacklegs. But that was then and this is now and those days were behind him.

So the result was closer than he'd liked, but even a win by one vote is enough for victory. And Len knew he wouldn't be seeking re-election. One term as Mayor of Sleaford would be enough for him. He'd milk it for what he could take and then resign on a greatly enhanced pension.

Len enjoyed the status and respect that came with the title. He loved wearing the gold chain of office and opening things. He loved his big office at the Town Hall even more. Okay, it overlooked the car park but so what? If he craned his neck, he

could just see the spire of St Denys church. His office even came with a pretty secretary, Donna, and Len wasn't stupid enough to mention her to Gladys.

The only drawback were the civic functions and feasts. Canapés, vol-au-vents, snacks, gateaux and in the evening, as often as not, a seven course banquet. Soup, fish course, a sorbet to cleanse the palate, then the main course – usually a roast with potatoes and all the trimmings – then dessert, always richly slathered with cream. These courses were all washed down with beer or wine, depending on the company. Of course, then came cheese and biscuits.

Len had a big weakness for cheese, especially blue cheese such as Stilton, Gorgonzola or Danish Blue. He always helped himself to a large wedge. In truth, several wedges. Finally, coffee and chocolate mints to finish the meal. If there was time between announcements and speeches, he'd step outside and enjoy a whisky and cigar, the rich smoke enhancing the meal. Usually, he swapped non-PC jokes and anecdotes with his friends.

Despite Gladys's nagging and his family Doctor's warnings, Len's weight crept up and soon overtopped his previous peak. Behind his back, people started calling him Taft, after the heaviest American President in history.

However, with all the enjoyment of Mayorship, memories of his heart attack receded to the back of his mind. Occasionally, when he remembered, he chose boiled potatoes over roasties. Or soda water instead of single-malt scotch. But usually, life carried on as before and his laugh was heard at many functions and events in and around the district.

Every month, one function Len never missed was his Masonic Lodge. He was a Past Master of Eslaforde Lodge, which met every third Tuesday between September and May at Sleaford's Masonic Hall on Watergate. The name Eslaforde was taken from the old name for Sleaford. He wore a dark blue apron liberally encrusted with gold braid which showed he was an officer of the Provincial Grand Lodge of Lincolnshire. Now he was Mayor, Len secretly hoped that he'd be promoted to Grand Lodge. Should be, he thought, he'd done enough for Freemasonry over the years. He'd dug deep for all the non-stop charitable requests.

This month's meeting was fairly quiet. A lecture on the early history of Freemasonry. Having heard it all before, Len snoozed through it until the Director of Ceremonies nudged him in the ribs when his snores became noticeable.

It was at the dinner afterwards that he came into his own. Len was a born raconteur – more than one brother had told him he should have been on the telly. Len grinned modestly. As a Trade Union convenor and then a local politician, he'd made more money than most struggling comedians on the circuit. Tonight, he stood in the centre of the U-shaped tables with his Masonic brethren laughing and banging their glasses on the tables in applause.

"... and then the golfer raised his club and said..." Len's hand flew to his chest. "Ag..." was the last thing he said, a strangulated choke. Len toppled over, his free hand moving feebly to protect himself but, like a falling oak, he crashed to the floor.

As one, the brethren gasped; an indrawn hiss. As one, as if a part of their ritual, they all stood looking down at Len's body. It lay still, unmoving. One of

younger members, a Steward, dropped the raffle tickets he was flogging and hurried over. He touched his late brother's body.

"Len..., Len..., are you alright?" he asked.

"Of course he isnae." A more senior member, Dr. Collinson knelt by the body. "I think it's tae late but go call the ambulance, laddie." Under stress, his Scottish accent became more pronounced. Muttering to himself, Dr. Collinson did a brief examination before starting CPR while the Worshipful Master shepherded the others out.

Any call from the Masonic Hall is treated as top priority and the ambulance broke all records getting there. From experience, the two paramedics realised it was a hopeless job but, with Dr. Collinson's help, did their best. Still working on him, they put him in the ambulance and then full speed ahead to Grantham and District Hospital.

Forewarned, the emergency crash team stood waiting. As Len Weston was a local VIP, they did their very best for him but, after twenty minutes of fruitless labour which produced nothing but a flat-line, the Senior House Officer stood and flexed her back. She looked at the others on the team for their opinions. They all shook their heads.

"I pronounce him dead at..., " checking her watch, "...twenty-two fifty hours." Before she could say anything else, her pager beeped. "Here we go again. No rest for the wicked."

\*\*\*

The following week, it was a sombre group of men who met at the Masonic Hall's bar. Brother Len had been universally popular and his death left a big hole in Eslaforde Lodge. He'd been one of the longest serving members so there weren't many who remembered a time before Len's booming bonhomie enlivened their meetings.

Afterwards, when most had left, the Worshipful Master took a select group to one side. They sat in an alcove towards the back, beneath a painting of a magnificent stag gazing out over a Scottish moor.

"You know what this means?" Jeremy Sandiford asked. In his day job he was a senior partner at Gilbert Greene and Ellison, Solicitors.

"Fresh elections," one of the others said. This man was James Naismith, the Deputy Mayor of Sleaford. Although nominally subordinate to the Mayor, he was the man who really controlled the Town Hall. He wasn't looking forward to the extra work as his in-tray was overflowing.

"That's right. Who do you think will win?"

Naismith thought for a moment. "It's between our Brother Charles Langton-Gore for the Tories and Danielle Rice – the Labour woman. This time it's too close to call, I think."

Sandiford shook his head. "Not this time. Not the usual suspects. How about a wild card?"

Naismith frowned in concentration. "What do you mean?"

Lowering his voice until it was little more than a whisper, Sandiford said, "How about somebody who'll draw all the attention? Somebody who'll carry the can when things go wrong? We don't want Charles to get into trouble."

"Why? – I mean, what have you got in mind?" Although he had an idea what Sandiford was hinting at. Already wealthy, like many rich men, Naismith wanted more. You can never have too much money.

"There's some big planning applications coming up, isn't there? Don't worry – my practice has done the legal work on some of them so you're not betraying any confidences." Sandiford looked the epitome of the successful small-town solicitor. He was well-fed with a bay-window belly with a thick walrus moustache grown in compensation for his balding dome. He wore a dark grey suit, MCC tie and highly polished shoes.

Naismith nodded. "Possibly. So what are you thinking, Worshipful Master?"

"Somebody too dim to notice he's being set up for a fall. How about the British National Party fellow – Kenneth Peachornby?"

Naismith nearly choked on his Glenfiddich. "Peachornby! He's got no chance of winning an election – the man couldn't get elected as dog-catcher, as the Americans say. He only picks up a few hundred votes from his football hooligan friends and a handful of closet racists. That's an impossible task."

The Worshipful Master lowered his voice so even his select group of brethren had to strain their ears to hear. "Elections can be fixed – it's been done before."

"Not in Sleaford!"

"Hush, man," Sandiford said. "It's a hard charge to prove. Don't forget, all recent cases involving fraud have been postal voting in mostly Asian areas so nobody's going to suspect it in a white area like Sleaford."

Naismith thought for a minute while the others watched. One of the group, a man called Atkinson ordered another round. He passed the drinks around.

"It could be done," Naismith said. "I've got a new guy working on the Urban Council who looks like he'd be up for it. The good thing is, he's Polish so he has few contacts among the English so he's not likely to talk. I'll sound him out."

"Even better," said Sandiford. "He sounds like the boy for us."

Atkinson spoke up. "Only fly in the ointment I can see, old chap, is convincing people that a no-hoper like this Peachornby could actually win the election."

Naismith laughed. "That's the easy part. There's a lot of anti-immigrant feeling about at the moment – you know the type of thing; all the Poles coming over and taking all the jobs. Together with a dislike of the main political parties, then the BNP's win will look plausible."

"As the man on the spot, can I leave you to set it up?"

Naismith nodded. "Yes, I'll get in touch with the Electoral Commission and set the wheels in motion."

"Think of the money we'll make, brethren. And remember, not a word to anyone," Sandiford reminded them.

The group shook their heads.

"We know our obligations. Nothing goes further than these four walls,"  
Atkinson said.

"Remember, once these plans go through, we'll be in the big leagues soon.  
And this fool Peachornby will get to carry the can if it all goes wrong," said  
Sandiford.

"Which it won't," said Naismith.

Famous last words.





## CHAPTER 2. THE FREIKORPS COME TO TOWN.

Patryk took Lukasz to see the British National Party rally in Sleaford. The BNP were protesting about all the Poles and Lithuanians taking their jobs. Maybe the BNP had a point but looking at all the facial tattoos and beer bellies on display Patryk wondered how eager they were for work in the first place.

The angry white men had earlier tried to set up an English Defence League branch in Sleaford but there simply weren't enough Muslims to get angry about. Of course, there was Big Ediz who owned a Turkish restaurant and his sons but only a fool who was looking to spend three months in traction sucking up hospital food through a straw would take those bruisers on.

Further down the fast food chain were the two Cairo hustlers who ran Pyramid Pizzas. They were men who had fingers in many pies. Also, by repute, their enemies left fingers, thumbs and other bodily parts in Pyramid's kebabs. A bit of extra flavouring to go with the pigeon, rat and stray dog meat. Despite nothing ever being found when the environmental health squad checked their shop out those rumours never went away. So the EDL bunch gave them a swerve as well.

Then there was the man who ran the mini-mart and liquor store. He had brown skin, a beard and turban but he turned out to be a Sikh so the EDL chaps weren't sure if he counted as a 'muslin' or not. Lastly there was the guy who delivered the late night take-away pizzas in his clapped out Ford Fiesta. He looked a bit foreign. But

that was about it so the EDL never got off the ground in Sleaford and those who fancied a bit of racist mayhem had to travel to Nottingham or Leicester to satisfy their cravings.

For some reason, the British National Party did a little better. At the rally were about a hundred or more, mostly young and middle-aged skinheads together with some porky women, listening to a fat guy with a boozier's nose gobbing off about all the Poles. On the stage were banners saying: 'Vote Peachornby'. Noticing the coach with the Nottingham phone number painted on the side which was parked around the corner, Patryk figured most of these skinheads had been bussed in as a show of support.

On the outskirts of the crowd some elderly people watched with quiet bemusement and a journalist called Butler, who worked for the Sleaford Standard, took notes of the rally to write up for the next issue. A few of the more presentable men distributed BNP election leaflets. However, they still had plenty left to hand out. Local cops wearing hi-viz coats formed a loose cordon around the BNP men, separating them from the small number of Anti-Nazi League hecklers who had bothered showing up. Many of the skinheads had brought flags and banners with them which waved above the rally making splashes of colour against the grey skies.

Lukasz turned to his friend and pointed at some of the flags. He spoke quietly in Polish. "Why are they waving Georgian flags? I didn't know they had many Georgians in the BNP?"

As well as the flag of England – a simple red cross on a white background – there were other, similar, flags but with smaller red crosses in each corner. The flag of the Caucasian republic of Georgia.

Patryk followed his friend's finger. He smiled. "I can only think of two reasons."

"Which are?"

"The first is that they are just thick," said Patryk.

Lukasz thought for a second. "Works for me. The other?"

"They are very, very thick."

"That sounds more likely," said Lukasz.

The BNP rally broke up soon after and the police shepherded the skinheads back onto their coach while several other cops held the Anti-Nazi League lot back. Meanwhile, the fat führer and some of his hangers-on came down from their makeshift stage and crossed the square to Andrei'z' – a wine bar that before its unfortunate and misspelled refurbishment had been a solid pub known as the Fox and Geese. The two Poles watched as the police and some men from the council's highway maintenance department stacked away the crush barriers and put the square back into some sort of order while others swept up the litter.

"Come on. Let's go and say hello," said Patryk after a while.

"Why? Why would we want to meet that racist idiot?"

"Because he's an idiot. But an idiot with too much money." Patryk rubbed his thumb over the tips of his first and index fingers. A gesture that meant money. "After all, he's standing for election and he must know he's got no hope."

"I get it. We're going to help him lighten his wallet?"

Patryk nodded. "Sort of." Patryk felt a little guilty. He wasn't telling his friend everything. In particular that he'd been hired to approach the BNP leader.

The two young Poles crossed the litter strewn square and pushed their way into Andrei'z'. The wine bar had only been re-opened six or so months ago but the refurb had been done on the cheap and the joint was already looking worn and tired. The floor tiles were chipped around the edges with the grout already coming away and the nicotine stained anaglypta had merely been whitewashed over. Patryk and Lukasz made their way to the plywood bar. The mahogany stain was fading and the counter top was covered with old water marks from long gone bottles and glasses.

Ignoring the dismal British lagers and bitters on draft, Patryk ordered two bottles of *Tyskie* Polish lager from the chiller. As the barmaid uncapped them, Patryk leaned forward.

"Where's Peachornby's lot?"

Her lip curled with contempt. "In the back room," the blonde replied in Polish.

"My accent that noticeable?"

"No," said the barmaid. "It's very good. But I'm from Warsaw as well, myself, and I can tell."

Patryk nodded. "Do you think Peachornby could tell I'm Polish?"

The barmaid thought for a moment. "No. I don't think so. Especially not with the amount he and his lot are putting away."

Patryk thanked the girl and left her a decent tip. The men finished their drinks and watched as tray after tray of booze was shipped into the back room. They heard raucous singing as the door opened. From time to time skinheads, always singly, made their way to the gents before returning to their back room. This time Lukasz bought a couple more *Tyskies*.

"We've given them long enough," Patryk said. "Should be well relaxed by now."

"Hammered, you mean."

Pushing away from the bar the two young men crossed to the back room.

"Let me do the talking, okay? My accent's better than yours," Patryk told his friend who nodded. Lukasz wanted to see what Patryk had in mind as it was unlike his friend to be so cagey. Patryk pushed open the door and entered the back room.

The fat führer, Peachornby, was sitting at the far end of a long table in a pose that he'd taken from studying too many 1930s Bier Keller photos of his hero. Men sat along the table listening to Peachornby as he held forth about immigration and the evils of the European Union. More skins stood around the room, some listening to Peachornby while others talked amongst themselves. All the flags were now furled and propped in the corner.

One of the skinheads looked up as Patryk and Lukasz entered. The man put his arm out, barring access.

"Oi, where d'you think you're goin'?" the man said by way of greeting. The man was tall, burly under a black North Face quilted jacket. He looked like the bouncer he probably was.

"We saw the rally earlier and thought we'd like to know more. That okay?" said Patryk.

"You journalists?"

"No. Do we look like journalists?"

The man thought for a moment. Patryk and Lukasz almost heard the cogs turning.

"You're not undercover cops, then?"

For one moment, Lukasz was tempted to butt in and say, "Yes we are cops and you're nicked, sunshine." What did this bouncer expect them to say?

"Listen, mate," Patryk said. "These bloody Poles come over here and my boss sacked me and my mates at the yard and the next day replaced us all with a bunch of Polack monkeys on minimum wage. I heard your man and I've come to sign up."

The bouncer stepped to one side. A grin crossed his pudgy face. "You've come to the right place. Ask Mr. Peachornby for a membership pack."

Patryk and Lukasz passed a group talking about the ruck at Lincoln City's last home game against Wrexham and the upcoming scrap against Grimsby away. The man doing the talking had a black eye and was missing several teeth. Prison tattoos scrawled their way up his arms. The men scowled at the two Poles as they passed. There was a locked-down, closed in group. As the Poles waited, Andrei's manager brought in yet another tray of pints and bottles. The man looked harassed. He must be desperate for business to rent out his back room to this bunch, Patryk thought.

Up close, Peachornby looked no better than he had on the podium in the square. Maybe he'd read in a woman's fashion mag that black is a colour that makes you look slimmer. Or more likely he imagined he looked like the lean, ascetic figure of Sir Oswald Mosley, the leader of the British Union of Fascists back in the 1930s. Unfortunately, his physique owed more to Mussolini than Mosley.

The fat führer's face was jowly and dominated by an inflamed boozier's nose. He wore a hairpiece that he must have thought made him look like his hero, Adolf Hitler, but to both Patryk and Lukasz it looked like a moulting black cat had chosen his head as a good spot to curl up and die.

A grin rose to Lukasz's face but he forced it down, determined to follow his friend's lead.

Peachornby looked up from his harangue. He put a politician's smile on his face which made it nowhere near his eyes.

"What do you two want?" asked Peachornby. He had the accent of a man who was born on the Fens and never made it off. A man who knew little and cared less for



the outside world. Patryk felt more optimistic as he picked up an election leaflet from the stack by Peachornby's elbow. He passed the leaflet to Lukasz to read.

Below the BNP logo, made up from letters cut from the Union flag, there was a picture of the white cliffs of Dover. The printer had superimposed over the cliffs red graffiti style letters saying 'GO AWAY WE'RE FULL'. Below that was a picture of a street in London where every face was brown or concealed by a burqa. Lukasz wasn't sure what Dover and London had to do with an election in Lincolnshire but felt it best to keep quiet.

"Are you really going to win this election?" Patryk asked.

Peachornby bridled at this and, pressing his hands on the table, half rose in his seat.

"Of course. The people of Sleaford have had enough. The people of Lincolnshire have had enough. Now is the time for all true Englishmen to draw a line in the sand; to say enough is enough..."

One of the nearby skinheads leaned forward and gripped Patryk's arm.

"Oi, mate, I ain't seen you 'ere before. What's yer name?" The man's words were slightly slurred as if he had been drinking all afternoon. Beer fumes washed over Patryk's face.

Peachornby frowned at the interruption.

"My name's Patryk."

"Patrick? That's a paddy name, innit? You a Mick, mate?" the skinhead said. He was taller and bulkier than Patryk and leaned over the Pole. If it came to a fight, Patryk knew he and Lukasz would be torn apart.

Patryk shook his head. "I'm from Londonderry. Ulster. I hate the paddies, me."

Immediately, the skinhead and those nearby started singing, "No surrender, no surrender, no surrender to the IRA..." The song was then taken up by all those in the room, the refrain bouncing off the walls and ceiling. The only one not singing was the fat führer himself. Peachornby shook his head. There was no point carrying on with his speech now.

Patryk leaned forward and passed over a slip of paper with his mobile phone number. "If you're serious, really serious, about winning this election; give us a call," he said to Peachornby. "I can help."

Leaving the still singing skinheads to their songs and football chants, the two Poles edged out of the back room. Outside Andrei'z', they took several deep lungfuls of clean air before Lukasz screwed up and tossed the BNP election leaflet into the nearest bin.

"We've cast the bait. Let's see if he bites," Patryk said as the two men crossed the square.



## CHAPTER 3. I HOLD IN MY HAND A PIECE OF PAPER.

Patryk didn't hear from Peachornby for the next couple of days. During that time, several election leaflets from different parties were pushed through the letter box together with the usual takeaway menus. They all went, unread, into the recycling bin.

Sprawled out on the couch, Patryk aimed the remote like a gun and scrolled through the TV channels looking for something, anything worth watching. He wished he could afford to subscribe to a Polish language satellite service.

"Leave it alone, can't you?" complained Kassia in Polish. His girlfriend was ironing a stack of shirts and had been enjoying the dancing show on BBC1 before Patryk came home from work. Patryk looked up at her and smiled. Kassia was a good looking girl, not over tall but stacked in all the right places. She was blonde – and not out of a bottle, neither – with clear blue-grey eyes. He was one lucky man.

"Tell you what; stick the kettle on, love, will you and we'll have a cup of tea?" Patryk said.

Before Kassia could say anything to this, both looked at his phone on the low table between them as it shrilled and vibrated. Patryk picked the Nokia up but didn't recognise the number.

"Hello?" he said guardedly in English. Kassia shot him a look at his use of that language as he usually spoke Polish to all their friends.

"Is that Patrick?" Patryk smiled. He recognised that Fenland accent. Peachornby had risen to the bait of an election victory.

"Yes. Are you interested in what we talked about the other day?"

There was a pause. "I have a lot of enemies. How do I know this isn't a set-up?" asked Peachornby. That was a good question, Patryk thought. The only one that really mattered.

"I understand. Do you want to meet? Somewhere safe..." he started.

"I know my home's safe as I have it swept for bugs. You can't be too careful these days as I know MI6 would be very interested in what I know. Very interested. Let's meet at nine tonight. But don't waste my time or else..."

"You'll be glad we met," confirmed Patryk before Peachornby gave his address and closed the call. Fool. From watching James Bond films, even a Pole like Patryk knew that MI6 dealt with foreign threats while it was MI5 who looked after internal security. Even so, he doubted that MI5 took any more than the most casual interest in Peachornby.

"Who was that? What are you up to?" asked Kassia placing the iron on its stand. Her English was as good as Patryk's.

"Oh no-one much. A friend of a friend who needs a favour."

"You're not up to your old tricks again? I thought you'd put all that behind you."

Patryk put on an innocent look as he picked up his leather jacket from the end of the couch and checked its pockets for his wallet and keys. "Me? No, just helping out an old mate."

Kassia watched as Patryk closed their apartment's door behind him. Men! As soon as her fella was out of the room she switched back to BBC 1 to watch the dancers with their sparkly costumes.

\*\*\*

Patryk called Lukasz before sticking the key in the Ford Transit's ignition. "Game on – the fool's bitten. Have you got the samples...?" He spoke in Polish.

"Sure. Just as you asked."

Patryk drove through the centre of Sleaford to Eastgate; picked up his friend and then headed north along the B1188 to the village of Dunston. The countryside was as flat and featureless as anything he'd seen in northern Poland and the fields separated by narrow creeks stretched out to the far horizon. The wind had got up and the empty van rocked slightly in the stronger gusts. Before long, Patryk turned off the B1188 and onto a narrow single lane country road. No other cars followed and for a while they felt like they were the only two left alive in the world.

Dunston came up a few miles later and it wasn't too difficult to pick out Peachornby's property. A flagpole with the cross of St George billowing in the wind

together with a row of 'Vote BNP' campaign placards facing the road gave the game away. It was the only place with either accessory.

Lukasz eyed the house. It was a large, fairly modern brick built bungalow with wide bay windows on either side of the front door and a dormer set in the roof. Light shone through the curtains of one of the bays. A Jaguar X-Type in glacier blue crouched under a car-port to the side. Its personalised plate started with the letters BNP. Parked half on the drive, half on the lawn was a red Rover 75; several years old now but it looked well maintained.

Patryk turned up the gravelled driveway and parked directly outside the front porch. Confident. As if he owned the place. He pressed the doorbell and the sounds of 'Rule Britannia' played throughout the house. Almost instantly, the front door was opened by one of the more presentable skinheads. The man's hair was longer – maybe a number four cut – and he had no facial tattoos or piercings and wore a clean long-sleeved white shirt over black jeans. Lukasz wondered what the shirt concealed. The man stepped to one side to allow Patryk and Lukasz to enter.

"This way," the man said with a scowl as he led the two Poles through the house to what had once been a bedroom but had been converted into an office. His accent was similar to his leader's – flat as a fluke. He knocked on a white-painted door and waited to be admitted. Peachornby stood behind an old-fashioned desk and held out his hand. Both Patryk and Lukasz shook. Peachornby's grip was clammy but surprisingly strong. Meanwhile the skinhead minder stood by the door, his thickset body blocking their exit. His tattooed hands were crossed in front of him.

"Welcome to my castle..."

Castle? thought Lukasz. It's just a bungalow.

"Please sit down," commanded Peachornby, pointing to two hardwood dining chairs set before the desk. "Something to drink?"

"Sure. A beer would be good," Patryk said, looking at a bronze bust of Hitler that was being used as a paperweight.

"Fetch our guests their drinks, Mason," Peachornby commanded. Patryk wasn't sure if Mason was the man's first or last name. He didn't suppose it mattered too much.

The skinhead by the door crossed to a wooden globe in the corner, removed the northern hemisphere and took out two bottles of Carlsberg. Mason cracked off the tops and handed the bottles over.

"Carlsberg. A fine English lager," said Mason as he did so before returning to his place by the door. Peachornby himself took a Glenfiddich. His nose seemed to glow more brightly as he sipped.

Lukasz knew that Carlsberg was originally a Danish brand but thought it best to keep quiet and leave the talking to Patryk. And Glenfiddich was a single malt scotch so there was nothing English to drink.

The two men glanced around as they drank down the necks of the bottles. The office walls were decorated with a number of flags. Behind the desk, taking pride of place was a large, colourful Union flag. Opposite, in direct line of sight of anyone sitting behind the desk that cared to look up was the red, white and black of the Nazi swastika. The other walls were covered with the stars and bars of the battle flag of the



Confederacy, the red hand of Ulster, the drop of blood within a white cross denoting the Ku Klux Klan and an upside down apartheid era South African flag.

Discreetly, Lukasz kicked Patryk's ankle and gestured to the upside down flag. Patryk nodded. He got the message. There were also a couple of other flags neither man recognised but they appeared to be variants of the swastika.

"Have you filled in the membership forms?" asked Peachornby, lifting one out from under the Hitler bust.

Patryk shook his head. "Not yet."

"You should. If you care about your country. All true British patriots would if they knew what was really going on. Did you know all governments are controlled by the European Union and their aim is to put an end to all nation states – not just us but France, Germany, Spain; everyone – by unc... uncontrolled immigration and diluting out the true Nordic races by shipping in sub-human hordes from Africa and Asia? Wiping out our true genetic heritage. Did you know that over ten per cent of the population of Sweden are now muslim?"

The light of fanaticism shone out of Peachornby's eyes. Lukasz looked up and noticed the man's hairpiece was lower than it had been before making him look stupid as well as dangerous.

Patryk raised his hand. "I totally agree, Mr. Peachornby. Send them all back – it's the only answer. And the race traitors who breed with these... coloureds." He kicked Lukasz gently on the ankle. Lukasz held his silence.

"And the Poles," said Mason leaning by the door frame. "Those Slavs might be white but they're just as bad. They're all over here, taking our jobs, driving down wages..."

"Yeah, them too. Send them back on the first boat," agreed Patryk.

"And then I'd pull the plug half way across the North Sea. Drown the lot of 'em," laughed the skinhead.

"Good idea, mate," said Lukasz, getting into the spirit of the conversation. He forced himself to unclench his fist and look relaxed.

Peachornby leaned over the desk. "So what makes you think I need help winning this election?"

"You called me," said Patryk simply.

That made Peachornby think. The man was brighter than his followers but not by much. A sixty watt bulb compared with a forty watt.

"We're going to win," said Peachornby confidently. "Our time has come. It's like it's the 1930s again. The collapse of the banking system, long dole queues, the way the existing political parties are failing the people leaving space for a man of vision to step into the breach..."

Patryk leaned forwards also getting right in the fat führer's face before the man could launch into a full blown rant about the Third Reich or whatever. Sensing a threat, the skinhead, Mason, stepped forward but Peachornby waved him back.

"No you're not. You have no chance and you must know that."

Peachornby sat back. Shocked as if he'd been slapped around the face. Cold reality poured over him like a bucket of water. His mouth opened as his brain tried to find the right words that a man of destiny would say. It was Patryk who spoke next, filling the silence.

"Look at the results of the last elections for mayor of Sleaford Urban Council. Labour: 2,385, Conservative: 1,882, Liberal Democrats: 769, BNP: 361. I assume the one was your wife?" Patryk had memorised these figures.

"I'm not married."

That figured, Patryk thought. "At least you beat the Greens who only picked up 217 votes."

"That was then. Five years ago. Econ... economic conditions are different now. People will see things differently now," blustered Peachornby.

"How many election leaflets did you give out the other day?" Lukasz asked. His accent didn't matter so much now there wasn't a load of boozed-up skinheads looking for trouble in the room. Earlier, Patryk had primed Lukasz to ask that question. Peachornby knew there were box loads still out in his garage.

"Well, they're for pushing through letter boxes. Direct marketing – it's more effective," said Peachornby. Privately, he was disappointed that more hadn't been handed out at the rally.

"So. Do you really want to win or spend your money just picking up some protest votes?"

Peachornby glanced at Mason still propping up the door frame.

"How do we know this isn't a set-up? You could be two journalists from the Sleaford Standard trying to drop us in it. The Standard is owned by a multi-national pub..."

Mason brightened up at that word. He could sink a few jars right now.

Peachornby carried on. "...publishing company which is owned by the Jewish-Marxist-Masonic organisations who are determined to destroy our pure Aryan way of life..."

Once again, Patryk decided to cut off the fool before he launched into the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and how the Jews secretly control the world from their underground lair beneath a mountain in Colorado or whatever else was coming up. Patryk took out his mobile phone, unclipped the battery and laid it on Peachornby's desk. He stood up and spread his arms wide. An instant later, Lukasz followed suit.

"Search us. We're not wired. Nothing you say leaves this room."

Peachornby gestured to Mason who crossed the room and expertly patted down the two Poles. Both Patryk and Lukasz reckoned Mason had been on the receiving end of many such 'pat-downs' from the cops and had learned the techniques from them.

"They're clean, boss," said Mason after a couple of minutes.

"All right. If you think I have no chance of winning – and I'm not saying you're right – how can you fix it so I will win?"

Mason stayed close by. Alert and ready for violence if his boss ordered it. He was a veteran of countless Lincoln City Football Club terrace fights and odds of five or six to one didn't scare him none. The other week he and two mates chased a dozen Sandgrounders from Southport out of town. Bunch of posh Merseyside pansies – not even real Scousers. Mason could have taken them ponces all by himself. He knew he could take these two chancers if Peachornby ordered it.

"Let me ask you a question. On election days, what happens?"

Peachornby thought for a moment. He rubbed his nose, took another slug of whisky and set the glass down by the Hitler bust.

"Well, people cast their votes and then they're counted....," Peachornby tailed off. It was obvious to Lukasz that the fool hadn't given much thought to the actual process.

"And what happens to the ballot boxes after they're collected from the polling stations until they are dropped off at the Town Hall for counting?"

Peachornby scratched his hair-piece. It slipped a little lower over his brow making him look like a slightly retarded Neanderthal now. Silence filled the room.

"I'll tell you," said Patryk. "The boxes are collected in a council van. The driver takes a designated route....," a blank look from his audience, "... a route set by the council until he's picked up all the boxes and taken them to the Town Hall where they are signed for before the boxes are opened and the votes inside counted."

"So what?"

Give me strength, thought Lukasz. Even a toddler in Kassia's kindergarten class would have put two and two together by now.

"So who's looking after the boxes while they are being transported? The driver and an observer in the back, that's who. And that's where we come in. I'm due to drive the van that night and Lukasz here is the watcher. And while we're alone in the van, what's to stop a load of extra voting papers being pushed into the ballot boxes?" It was a little more complex than that but Patryk didn't think either Peachornby or Mason's brains could cope with very much more.

"So what you're saying is you could stuff the boxes?" said Peachornby. A light dawned in his eyes.

Give that man a bun, thought Lukasz.

"That's illegal."

Give that man another bun. With pink icing on it.

"But what are you going to stuff the boxes with?" Mason asked. Patryk revised his opinion of the young man. Maybe Mason had five, maybe ten more brain cells than he'd thought before, giving him an I.Q. well into double figures.

"Toilet tissue. What do you think?" Patryk saw Mason clench his fists with anger but the skinhead remained by the door frame. "Show Mr. Peachornby, Lukasz."

Slowly, Lukasz took a thin sheaf of papers from his jacket pocket. He spread them out on Peachornby's desk. Peachornby leaned forward and even Mason moved

closer. Peachornby picked one up, held it to the light and inspected the white paper closely.

"It's a voting paper. And it's even got the pressings in the top right corner," he said.

Patryk picked up another paper. "As you can see, all the candidates names are on as well: Conservative, Labour, the lot."

"It looks genuine. Where did you get it?" Peachornby said, amazed.

"If it looks genuine, then that's because it is. Lukasz here works for the firm that does the printing for Lincolnshire County Council..."

"I made an unfortunate error with a test batch and printed off way too many," Lukasz interrupted. "And then these fell into my lunch bag rather than the shredder and well..."

"Here we are," Patryk finished.

Peachornby licked his lips and screwed up his eyes. The man only needed one little nudge to seal the deal.

Patryk leaned forwards again. "Who was it said 'real power is never given – it's taken'? If you want to become mayor, ask yourself one question: what would Hitler have done? Would he have hung back?" He leaned back. He'd played his ace – using the magical name of Hitler.

Mason stepped up to the desk. "What's in it for you?"

Patryk looked up and smiled. He addressed his remarks to Peachornby. The organ grinder, not the monkey. Although in this case the organ grinder had barely more brain cells than the monkey. "I work for the council but I also work part-time for a 'local businessman'...", he let that phrase hang in the air for a moment. There was only one thing meant by an unnamed 'local businessman' and everybody in the room understood it perfectly. That wasn't quite true but it might scare this fool off from inquiring too closely.

"From time to time, after you win, he may want a planning application to go through or a contract to be awarded to a friend. Maybe give his wife or girlfriend a nice holiday in Italy – at the rate payers expense – visiting our twin town, Fusignano. You know how it goes."

"One hand washes the other," said Lukasz.

Peachornby nodded assent. "So that means I'll – the BNP, I mean – will win this election?"

"And when people see the BNP's success in Sleaford, you'll get more votes in future," said Patryk. "People like to support a winner." Lukasz thought this very unlikely but saw the two BNP men's eyes light up at the prospect. Lukasz reckoned Peachornby was even now rehearsing his victory speech, imagining himself standing on the Town Hall's balcony as if he was standing on a podium at Nuremberg; the massed crowds on the square all 'sieg heiling' their new führer.

"Sure – but we've got to win first, boss," Mason reminded Peachornby.

"Only say the word and it's in the bag," said Patryk.



Even Peachornby only had to think for a moment. He stood up from behind his desk, sucked in his gut, gazed into the middle distance with an eagle-eyed, far-seeing look worthy of any dictator worth his salt.

Patryk thought for a moment. This bit wasn't part of the script but he reckoned his backers wouldn't find out. It was a risk worth taking – and so far it was him and Lukasz taking all the risks, not that bunch of suited and booted wheeler-dealers. So he felt entitled to a little extra dollop of cream on top. "Won't come cheap though," he said. "That's if you're serious." Lukasz glanced over but said nothing.

Peachornby lowered his gaze to Patryk's face. "I am serious. So what's the damage?"

"A grand." Earlier, he was going to ask for a monkey but if he asked for five hundred – a monkey – then he might end up taking Mason home with him instead. Looking round the well made furniture in this room; it was obvious that Peachornby could easily afford a thousand.

Mason stepped forwards with his fists clenched. Up close, Lukasz spotted blue-inked tattoos covering the man's knuckles. "Shall I throw the cheeky beggars out, boss?"

Peachornby waved his man back. "No, that's rea... reason... okay. I've got it here." Peachornby opened a desk drawer, unlocked a cash box and took out a banded stack of twenties. "Here you are. Now, make sure I get the right result. Otherwise, I know people, you know." He held out his paw. Patryk shook.

Peachornby's hand felt hot and Patryk imagined for a moment that he was shaking with the Devil.

"Hey, boss, when we win, will you sort me out with a job on the corpy? The bins is good money."



## CHAPTER 4. DEMOCRACY COMES UNDER THREAT.

Patryk was in the yard behind the Town Hall loading up his van with archive boxes filled with old files to take onto the Lincolnshire County Council offices. He looked up as a shadow fell over him. A man wearing a smartly hand-tailored three piece business suit leaned against the Transit's side.

"Did he bite?"

Patryk stood and stretched his back. He looked up at the other man. James Naismith was the Deputy Mayor of Sleaford Urban Council. Only thirty-two or thirty-three years old, the man had made a success of his life. Nature had been kind to him and fortune even kinder. Naismith stood six-two and had an athletic, gym-toned body. He swept his hair back. No signs of grey or premature balding. Patryk wondered if Naismith coloured his hair – the man was vain enough – but decided that he had been blessed with the right genes.

Naismith smiled with a devastating grin. The man was single and Patryk knew he could have nearly any woman working in the Council offices. Even the married ones. Maybe especially the married ones. It also helped that the man was almost a millionaire. He had inherited a small equestrian centre and stud based out on his farm and on top of that, and his farming subsidies, he had his salary as Deputy Mayor. You could tell by his effortless confidence that the man had money behind him.

"Yes. Peachornby couldn't resist. His eyes lit up like Skegness illuminations," Patryk said. "But what I don't understand, Mr. Naismith, is why you don't become mayor yourself? You'd easily win so why do you want that...", he paused for a moment, "...that racist idiot to become Mayor instead?"

Naismith shook out a Lambert and Butler, lit it with a gold lighter engraved with his name in ornate script and blew smoke up to the sky. "You've answered your own question. It's because he's an idiot, that's why. He'll be the front man drawing all the flak while I'll keep a low profile making all the real decisions."

"But why him? Why not offer being mayor to the Green party or that guy standing as an independent?"

"Because they would refuse and call the cops. Only that fool Peachornby is stupid and greedy enough that he'd go for it," said Naismith. He spoke quietly as a couple of secretaries had popped out for a crafty smoke break. The women smiled at Naismith as he turned his high-wattage grin on them. He tossed over his lighter and the women made a big show of lighting their cigarettes, placing them in their mouths and drawing deep on the smoke before exhaling. It was very obvious what they were suggesting. Naismith smiled but turned away.

"Well, you know best, Mr. Naismith. I'm only a van man so what do I know? But I hope you... we're... not making a big mistake here. I wouldn't trust Peachornby further than I could throw him."

"Neither would I. But I don't have to trust him. As long as he does what he's told and doesn't realise what's going on behind the scenes, then we've nothing to fear."

"That's what I'm worried about, Mr, Naismith. What if he works it out?"

Patryk finished loading, climbed up into the cab and drove out of the yard. As he did so, he watched Naismith stub out his cigarette and go talk to the women. By now both were giggling coquettishly and flicking their hair. They stayed out after Naismith returned to his office.

"That cleft chin, Tess! and those long eyelashes – to die for!"

"And gold flecks in his eyes, that half smile. Ooh, he should be in the movies!"

"Big ear lobes, too – that tells you something."

"Oh shut up, Donna! You're always mucking in the gutter."

\*\*\*

It's not like election fever ever gripped Sleaford. Both the *Sleaford Standard* and the *Sleaford Target* tried to drum up interest if not enthusiasm but both papers found it hard going even after they ran a series of interviews with all the candidates.

The Conservative candidate, a man called Charles Langton-Gore who owned a local estate agency, emphasised cutting taxes and repealing the ban on fox hunting. Langton-Gore was after the country voters in the outlying villages but as he probably had nearly one hundred per cent support in the rural areas anyway it was unlikely he picked up too many extra votes from the town.

Danielle Rice, the *Guardian* reading lady from the Labour Party campaigned on a platform of increasing free child care facilities and better public transport. It was

probably purely coincidental that she was a single mother who couldn't drive.

Meanwhile, the Liberal Democrat was a local General Practitioner who lambasted the government over its treatment of the National Health Service and how it was grossly underfunded. He had strange wandering eyes and attractive young women usually thought it best to take a chaperone when they visited his surgery.

And then it was Peachornby's turn. Someone from the British National Party's headquarters wrote Peachornby's piece for him. They felt, probably correctly, that a misspelled rant about how the Judeo-Marxist-Masonic conspiracy was determined to eradicate the Anglo-Saxon race and that Enoch Powell was right all along wasn't the message a modern, forward looking party should be sending out.

So instead his pre-prepared blurb was about the recent influx of eastern Europeans and the pressure put on schools, housing and public services. But anyone capable of reading between the lines would understand that the sub-text was still 'send them all back'.

Nobody took much notice of or remembered the Green Party's ex-hippy or the independent candidates.

\*\*\*

On the Thursday of election day itself, cars with loud hailers attached to the roofs toured the streets of Sleaford. The Conservative preferred the traditional hymn *Jerusalem*, the Labour lady some Ibiza techno-trance tune from her teenage years in the early 1990s that reminded some people in the town of their nights loved up on Ecstasy at illegal raves out in the fields. Maybe that was her intention.

Peachornby wanted the Nazi party's anthem of the *Horst Wessel Lied* but that was overruled by the BNP's headquarters team. Instead he chose *Song to the Evening Star* by Wagner. Maybe he thought Germanic plus opera would make the association in the voters' minds with both Hitler and Mussolini. Two bites of the cherry, so to speak. If anyone understood the connection they kept it to themselves.

Last minute pamphlets were pushed through letterboxes; unsuspecting shoppers were waylaid in the town centre and asked if they had voted, infirm voters were ferried to the polling stations. Probably the only people really enjoying the day were the school children given the day off to allow their classrooms to be used as polling stations. They milled around Sleaford's town centre taking no notice of the electioneering.

The cops on duty knew they would be busy dealing with low level crimes and disturbances. A few cases of shoplifting, one drunk and disorderly and a couple of lads who got into a bit of pushing and shoving which the rookie constable decided to treat as an assault. The booking sergeant at the custody suite sent the brawling lads home after a stern reprimand. Then he took the rookie constable into an empty cell and explained a few matters to him. Forcefully. The rookie received the message loud and clear and kept his head down for the rest of his shift.

As he had to collect the ballot boxes from the polling stations at ten that night, Naismith gave Patryk the afternoon off. So he took the van to the Tesco Extra store on Northgate and had the gang of Poles usually to be found hanging about at one end of the car park wash it down and then valet the cab. Patryk knew their tricks and after he spoke to them in their own language they did a thorough job. He didn't tip them and they didn't expect one.



After getting his van cleaned, Patryk drove over to the printers where Lukasz worked, timing his arrival for the two o'clock shift change. The workers flocked out in droves, some sparking up their smokes immediately upon leaving the building, others waiting until they were outside the fence. Lukasz himself walked out, taking no notice of Patryk and hung about the bus stop with a few other non-drivers.

The printer's factory was in a complex of industrial warehouses on the north-eastern side of Sleaford, all of them painted a sort of dreary greenish-grey. The smell of distilled alcohol fumed from one the opposite units and two hard looking men hand-balled boxes into a beat up looking Luton van. Patryk had once walked over and the men claimed they were making paint thinners for a well-known commercial manufacturer. But Patryk heard the clinking of glass coming from the boxes as they were loaded and didn't think a commercial paint manufacturer would buy thinners packaged in vodka bottles.

Reversing into one of the loading bays, Patryk unlocked the Transit's back doors then walked over to the front of the printer's and slapped a receipt down on the counter top. Through the reception window, he could keep an eye on the parking lot.

He watched as a forklift truck loaded a pallet of cardboard boxes into the back of another white Transit. The boxes were marked up with the logo of one of the High Street banks and Patryk guessed they contained advertising leaflets. The forklift reversed, its banksman's siren bleeping rhythmically until it turned around before disappearing back into the unit for a second load.

Eventually, the receptionist came from out of a side door. She was young and pretty and looked flushed as she readjusted her blouse. Patryk didn't need to look at

her name badge which was pinned over her breast to know her name was Sienna. That girl had a reputation in town. Sienna looked at Patryk's receipt and hurried back into the main body of the printer's clutching it in her hand. He admired her pert bum moving under her pencil skirt. As the door opened, Patryk heard the whir and whiz and clatter of printing presses beyond.

Soon after Sienna returned. "I'm sorry, sir, I can't find your order. I've asked one of the print supervisors to look for it, if you don't mind waiting a few minutes."

"That's all right. I'll wait by my van," Patryk said, pushing his way back outside. Putting his hands in his pockets, he strolled over to the bank's white Transit. As he did so, the forklift came out of the main vehicular door and approached at speed. Its driver nodded to him. On top of the shrink-wrapped pallet was a single box. Its whiteness stood out stark against the brownness of the pallet.

The other Transit driver glanced up from his copy of the *Daily Star*. "What's that?" he asked, pointing to the box. "I'm only here for three pallets, mate."

"Dunno, mate," replied the forklift driver as he lowered the forks and guided the last pallet into the back of the Transit. He jumped down from the open cab, swung himself up monkey-like into the back of the Transit and fetched down the white box.

"Well, spotted mate," said the forklift operator. "It's not for you. He glanced at the printed address label in the document wallet. "Sleaford Urban Council. Oh, I'll take it back inside."

Patryk stepped forward. "Sleaford Council? That's me. The girl in the office said it had been mislaid."

The forklift driver took one look at Patryk's van, which was prominently marked with the coat of arms above a big logo saying 'Sleaford Urban Council'. There was no doubt in the man's mind that a box marked for Sleaford Urban Council should be taken away by a van belonging to that organisation.

"Here you are then," he said, handing the box over to Patryk who in turn stowed it in the back. Patryk locked up and then returned to the reception foyer. After waiting a few minutes, he rang the bell and Sienna hurried back out. Her lipstick appeared more smudged than before and she was tucking in the tail of her blouse.

"I'm so sorry, sir, we're still looking in dispatch but they say they've not seen it..."

Patryk smiled to himself. He knew what that print supervisor had been looking for and it had been Sienna's box, not his. He waved away her apologies.

"That's all right. It was mixed up with the bank's leaflets but I've got it now. So, if you could just stamp my receipt as I'm behind schedule now?"

The girl smiled with relief. It didn't look good for the printer's efficiency if they got a name for mislaying customer's orders. This was a family firm and Patryk had heard that Sienna was the owner's niece or cousin's daughter or something – some relative anyway – and would probably get an executive post at some time in the future. Unless she caught pregnant first.

Sienna disappeared back into the factory and once again Patryk heard the busy hum of machinery. He hoped he wouldn't have to wait too long while she renewed

relations with the print supervisor but she came back within two minutes. A big blue 'COLLECTED' had been stamped on his receipt.

Patryk looked at the form as he crossed the tarmac to his van. It was for something as mundane as a box of envelopes stamped up with the crest and name of Sleaford Urban Council together with its new slogan of 'We are a Fairtrade town'. But what filled that box was nothing as harmless as envelopes.

It was the paper equivalent of trinitrotoluene, commonly known as T.N.T. What was inside would blow a hole in local democracy in the same way as a few pounds of T.N.T. would crack open a strongbox. And in the same way that a hole in a safe will let the cracksman take the money or jewellery inside, so the papers in this box would allow Naismith to take total control of Sleaford itself.

Patryk pulled up by the bus stop and Lukasz climbed into the cab. Patryk was struck by how honest Lukasz appeared. A look that he was sure Naismith would find a use for. Lukasz was tall, slim and handsome. With his swept-back floppy hair and perfect teeth he looked like the hero of one of Kassia's favourite rom-coms.

"Got it?" Lukasz asked his friend.

"Sure. Like taking candy from a baby." Patryk drove back to his apartment, unloaded the box and then he, Lukasz and Kassia spent the most boring afternoon of their lives marking X's onto the blank ballot papers in the space next to the name of Peachornby, the BNP Candidate.

Sometimes they used their right hands, sometimes their left. Sometimes they made the X's as big as possible, filling the entire space, other times little tiny x's. Firm

dominant X's contrasted with shaky, spidery X's. Anything to make the marks look varied. Anything to make them look genuine. Anything to pass later scrutiny.

"These blanks are really good," said Patryk. "You've even put in the little hole punches in the top corner like they would have."

"That was the hard part," admitted Lukasz. "Had to set up an old-fashioned hand press one night shift to get them right. If I hadn't the returning officer would smell a rat straight away."

"Who is the returning officer?" asked Kassia as she stacked a completed pile to one side of the table. She stood, shaking her hand free of cramp.

"Who do you think? The Deputy Mayor – Mr. Naismith himself," replied Patryk. "As you're on your feet, why don't you put the kettle on, love."

Kassia glowered at her fella but was glad to get away from marking the voting slips.

"Then we're home free," said Lukasz with a grin.

"We'll have to see – this is only the start of it," said Patryk as he marked up yet another X.

Once they had finished marking all the X's against Peachornby's name then they had to fold the forms up into quarters, again trying to make the folds look different. Some neatly folded into exactly symmetrical quarters, others roughly folded as if a bored drunk had done the job. If marking the X's was boring work, then folding the papers tested their patience to the limits.

Eventually, all the completed ballot papers were placed in a box labelled 'Heinz Baked Beans' picked up earlier from the Tesco Extra. As Kassia cooked dinner, the two men relaxed on the couch watching a DVD.

It was dark when Patryk and Lukasz stood and put on their jackets. Patryk ducked his neck and slipped his Sleaford Urban Council pass over his neck. He handed a temporary pass to Lukasz. Patryk kissed Kassia goodnight. "Don't wait up – I may be late. But tomorrow we control Sleaford."

"No you won't – Naismith will. Don't ever forget that, love," Kassia said as she stretched up on tiptoes to kiss Patryk on his lips.

Kassia leaned out of the apartment window and watched the two men load the full box into the van. Patryk looked up and blew her a kiss. Then they drove off. Men, she thought, men and their stupid power games. All the same, it would be great if Patryk was able to ride on Mr. Naismith's coat tails and make some decent money for a change.

They'd be able to move to a nice house, maybe with a little garden and she'd be able to wire more money back home. Her younger sister, Dzenetta, had just had a baby and could do with a helping hand. Kassia closed the window, made a fresh cup of filter coffee then sat on the couch and enjoyed the luxury of having the TV's remote control all to herself.



## CHAPTER 5. TWO FIFTH COLUMNISTS IN A TRANSIT VAN.

Meanwhile, Patryk and Lukasz checked Naismith's map. The location of all the polling stations had been marked in red. Most were sited in local schools or church halls but one was placed in the communal centre of an apartment block.

A few minutes after ten pm Patryk pulled up outside Church Lane primary school. Easy to find as it was actually on Church Lane. He leaped out of the cab and hurried through the open fire exit which was being used as the polling station's main entrance.

The room's walls were covered with childish finger paintings and the alphabet, in both upper and lower cases, ran along two walls together with the numbers from one to twenty. In one corner was the cosy area with a set of low chairs covered with stuffed toys that looked like they'd come off second best after a car park punch-up with Mason and the rest of Peachornby's BNP thugs. Instead of which the cuddlies had taken years of beatings off reception age school kids. The room smelled of plasticine, floor polish and fruit.

Patryk crossed to the desk where a grey haired woman and a bored looking young man waited for him.

"Busy day?" Patryk asked.



"No. Turnout was low – no-one's interested in local democracy any more," sniffed the woman.

"Why bother? People know they're all a bunch of incompetent lying crooks out for what they can get so what's the point?" said the young man. His bookmark was more than half way through the latest Andy McNab thriller.

Patryk thought the bored young man's summary had hit the nail dead centre on the head.

"Martin," the woman snapped.

"I've got a lot to do tonight so I'll sign for the ballot box now," Patryk said before an argument could break out.

The box was a large black plastic crate. The slot for the ballot papers to be dropped in had been sealed as had the lid to the body of the crate. The seals were secured to plastic cable ties. The woman handed over a piece of paper and Patryk signed for receipt of the ballot box.

"I'll take this receipt to the council offices tomorrow," the woman told Patryk.

"That's great – put it in the returning officer's in-tray," Patryk said.

The woman sniffed again. "I've been the presiding officer of a polling station for over thirty years now. I know what I'm doing, young man."

Martin already had his coat on with his book in his pocket. He held open the door to let Patryk back into the school's car park. As Patryk did so he saw the lights go out in the classroom behind him.

"The lights are going out all over Sleaford. We shall not see them lit again in our lifetime," Patryk murmured in English. Where had that come from?

"What was that, mate?" Martin asked.

"Nothing. Doesn't matter." Patryk hoped that what he was doing wouldn't matter too much in the great scheme of things. After all, this was only one small English market town, not a whole country.

Patryk placed the ballot box into the back of the Sleaford Council Transit. Lukasz was crouching in the back and he pulled the box towards him. A million candle power halogen lamp dangled from a hook on the van's plywood ceiling. It cast an intensely bright but shifting light.

Lukasz held a razor-sharp craft knife and a battery powered soldering iron. A spare set of council seals lay on the floor next to his feet in case of emergencies but both Patryk and Lukasz hoped it wouldn't come to that. The Heinz Beans box lay open and Patryk caught sight of the pre-filled voting forms inside.

"We haven't much time – I can't delay more than a few minutes without people getting suspicious," Patryk reminded his friend.

"I know – I've been practising, remember? Now drive."

Patryk slammed the van doors closed, jumped into the cab, engaged first, and drove down Eastgate, south over the railway lines and then Grantham Road to the next polling station serving the Quarrington ward. Meanwhile, in the Transit's back, Lukasz carefully slit all the plastic seals securing the lid to the box and lifted it off.

The box was mostly fresh air but there were still a few hundred folded up votes inside.

Lukasz scooped up a double handful of fake votes from the Heinz Beans box and dropped them into the ballot box. A few fluttered down, outside the crate. He looked at the mound inside and added a few more for good measure. Then Lukasz jammed the lid tight onto the black crate and catching up the ends of the plastic cable tie securing the first seal he touched the tip of the soldering iron to its ends. Instantly they fused together. Moving around the box, he did the same with all the other seals.

Running the ball of his thumb over the seals, the edge of the plastic ties felt rough where they had been cut and then fused. Taking up a piece of fine grain sandpaper, Lukasz gently sanded the edges until his handiwork was less obvious. Satisfied, he lifted the ballot box and gave it a good shake to scatter the voting slips inside about.

Just as he finished, Lukasz felt the Transit slow to a stop and the handbrake ratcheting up. He flexed his muscles and allowed himself a swig of water. It was going to be a busy hour or so in the back of the van.

Patryk leaped out of the cab and trotted over to the second polling station. Another Sleaford Council van as well as a few cars were parked outside and for a moment Patryk's heart leaped into his mouth. Had someone else come to take the ballot box? No. Impossible, he told himself. Not in a well run democracy like Britain. Only he, Patryk, had the authority to collect the ballot boxes. All the same, he was worried as he hurried towards the polling station's open door.

This was in an Anglican church hall also on Grantham Road and to Patryk's eye the building looked like almost like a little brick church in its own right. Arched windows were set in both sides and through them, he saw a couple of council workmen taking down the plywood polling booths and stacking them up. That explained the other van. His heart slowed to a more normal rate.

Patryk let himself in. A stage was built up at one end and moth-eaten purple velvet curtains screened off what was behind. The polling officer, a portly guy in a brown three-piece suit that was new twenty years ago ostentatiously checked his watch.

"This is highly irregular. On all previous elections, I have always taken the ballot box myself to the Town Hall," the man said as soon as Patryk handed over the form.

"Efficiency. The returning officer wants to try a new way. This way, all the boxes arrive at the Town Hall at once."

"Bloody Naismith," the man muttered under his breath. Patryk reckoned the man was only upset about losing his overtime and mileage allowance.

The polling station officer fussily insisted that Patryk check the seals with him and the man fiddled with them, making sure that they were all tight and secure. Patryk checked and double-checked his watch. Eventually, all the same, the man signed the receipt, checked Patryk's counter-signature and folded it up neatly before placing it into a manilla envelope. Patryk lifted up the ballot box. As before, it felt light as if local democracy wasn't the biggest concern amongst Sleaford's citizens on a cold, damp Thursday. Patryk smiled and hurried out to the van. He slung it into the back.

"You'll have to hurry, Lukasz. The next polling station is only round the corner. Okay?"

Lukasz nodded and immediately cut the plastic cable ties before wrenching off the lid and stuffing in more bundles of votes for Peachornby. He swirled the forms around like a blender before slamming on the lid and resealing the ties. But before he'd finished, the Transit had stopped and a third box was thrown in.

"Hurry it, man – we haven't got all night," Patryk called.

Lukasz didn't bother replying. He hadn't got the time. Instead, he bent to his work and picked up his soldering iron.

The next couple of pick ups went smoothly. Patryk apologised for the delay, handed over the receipts and collected the ballot boxes. The polling station officers already had their coats on and were just glad to get off home. The school caretakers locked up the instant they were out of the doors.

In the back Lukasz was working quickly and efficiently. He was glad he'd put in several hours practise in cutting and soldering cable ties. The only problem was that he didn't have time to sand the soldered joins as smooth as he liked. However, he hoped that wouldn't matter if Naismith himself was responsible for opening the ballot boxes as the returning officer.

Once again, the van drew to a halt. Lukasz shook out his aching hand as he felt Patryk jump down from the cab and then heard his friend's shoes walk across the car park. He chugged down a can of *Red Bull* energy drink – the caffeine and sugar rush

hitting his stomach like an express train. Lukasz shook his head and carefully resealed the fifth box.

Lukasz stiffened and tensed. He heard two sets of foot steps approaching the Transit. Had he made a mistake? Surely Patryk wasn't bringing someone back with him? No, he couldn't be doing that! Maybe it was only the polling station staff walking through the parking lot on their way home? Lukasz's heart raced. Through the metal siding of the van, Lukasz recognised Patryk's voice. He was talking to someone. He was bringing someone back to the van! What was going on, Lukasz thought.

Working at speed but careful to make no noise, Lukasz stacked the five ballot boxes on top of each other and then crouched down behind them. In the metallic silence of the van's interior Lukasz heard his heart beating like a jack hammer.

\*\*\*

Patryk jumped out of the cab and walked over to The Jolly Scotchman pub which was serving as the polling station for the northern Holdingham ward. A drink while you vote – not a bad offer. He checked his watch and was pleased that he was about on schedule. The wind blew a skitter of dried leaves against his legs as he crossed the playground to the school.

There were two young men waiting for him, both smartly dressed in shirts and ties but wearing jumpers against the cold. There was also some guy wearing blue overalls who looked like somebody's grandfather. The old man was leaning on a broom. The three men's heads were together as they looked at a video on an iPad tablet.

Patryk heard one of the men say, "dirty slag, that. What a minger," followed by a bark of laughter. He coughed, politely, and the men turned to face him. The second young man, probably the assistant, looked embarrassed.

"Here, mate, come and have a look at this. One filthy bitch," the first chap said, pointing the iPad's screen in Patryk's direction. Despite himself, Patryk walked over and watched some girl with an artificial chest do the nasty.

He watched for a moment but knew that after the election's results he could do far better than watching some hired couple get it on.

"I've still got several stations to pick up," he reminded the men.

"Oh, sure, sure," the polling officer said without tearing his eyes away from the screen where the woman was now doing something... was that even possible? No way could he ask Kassia to do that, she'd slap him... the officer took Patryk's receipt without even glancing at the signature and stuffed it in his pocket.

As Patryk walked over to the ballot box, he felt the second young man at his shoulder. He turned just as the chap picked up the ballot box.

"Let me," said the man. "I'll carry it out for you."

"No, that's all right," said Patryk.

But the young man had hold of the ballot box and short of wrestling the chap for the box, there wasn't anything he could do. His mind working overtime, Patryk followed him out of the public house and into the wind blown car park. The man still carried the crate.

"Sorry about that, mate," the man said as soon as the saloon door shut behind them. "That Paul is a right dirty pervert. He's always showing off stuff he's downloading off t'interweb." Patryk nodded, not wanting to encourage his new best friend. Hoping against hope that the chap would get fed up and leave him alone.

Ignoring Patryk's silence, the young man carried on. "He come across this Romanian site the other week – a couple of women doing yoga while this man in a toga told them what to do. I couldn't understand what they were saying 'cos it was all in Romanian or something but you got to see everything. And I mean everything. These women were really supple and this guy – he must have got cameras all over the place because there was nothing left to the imagination..."

"Really?" Patryk grunted, trying to put off the young man's chatter.

"Yeah, absolutely disgusting. I don't think those women even knew they were being filmed. They'll get a shock if they ever log in and see themselves all wide open."

"Yeah, I'm sure. Look, I'll take it from here? You get off home," Patryk suggested.

However, the young man still kept a tight grip of the ballot box. For one wild moment, Patryk considered punching the talkative young man to the ground and snatching the box from him before jumping into the van and racing off into the night.

No. No way. Get a grip, Patryk told himself. Doing that would raise more red flags than at a communist rally.



A few more steps took them to the back of the van. There was nothing for it. Hoping Lukasz had heard their voices, Patryk took out his keys. He fumbled them out, dropped them onto the tarmac and swore loudly and then made a big issue out of finding the right key and jabbing it into the lock.

His heart in his mouth, Patryk opened the van's rear doors. Only a crack and he was thankful there were no street lights nearby. The back of the Transit was as dark as the tomb.

"Thanks," said Patryk taking hold of the ballot box. "I've got it." For one moment, he thought the young man would insist on putting the box in the back himself. But the man let go and stepped back. Using the corner of the box as a lever, Patryk opened the back door a fraction more and slid the box in. Immediately, he slammed the doors and locked them. The young man could have seen nothing.

"Thought I might go down the Town Hall and watch the count. I've put twenty quid on the Tory – I think he'll win this time."

Patryk swore to himself. He should have put big money on Peachornby. None of the local bookies thought the BNP had a snowball's chance in hell of winning. He'd have made a fortune. On the other hand, a bet like that would have raised some awkward questions afterwards. No, he'd take it slow and easy. He and Lukasz would make enough riding along with Naismith. Long term planning. That's what Naismith had told him.

The young man waved as Patryk hopped into the cab and drove out of the pub's car park and then sped south down Lincoln Road. At least traffic was quiet this time of night. Patryk breathed a sigh of relief. That could have been very difficult. If

the talkative chap had caught sight of Lukasz doing rather more than merely observing then the game would have been up. It would have been back to Poland and lying low for a while before slipping back into England again.

The next two pick ups went sweet as a nut. He handed over the signed receipts for the ballot boxes, picked them up himself and carried them out to the Transit while the presiding officers closed down their polling stations.

"You all right back there?" Patryk whispered.

"Sure. Only one more to get, yes?" replied Lukasz, cracking open another energy drink.

"That's right."

The Transit sped along Boston Road on the way to the last polling station. It was out on the edge of Sleaford and in the distance, out in the dark countryside, Patryk saw the vast bulk of the Bass Maltings.

He'd taken Kassia out there for a picnic during the summer. However, the Bass Maltings had spooked his girlfriend and they'd never gone back. Patryk remembered the Bass Maltings as a huge complex of eight massive brick buildings together with a tower and chimney standing tall in the middle of them. The frontage was almost three hundred metres long. He'd heard that the Bass Maltings had been built around the turn of the last century to replace all the other breweries in Sleaford. However, the place had fallen on hard times and gone bust about fifty years before.

It had remained empty ever since, becoming more derelict and forlorn with every year. The inside was filled with rusting, abandoned machinery. Now the

Maltings was home to rooks, starlings and the occasional vagrant seeking shelter in one of the deeply recessed doorways.

The Bass Maltings was just a huge slab of industrial architecture, totally out of scale with the town and dominating the flat Lincolnshire countryside for miles around. Naismith had told Patryk on the Q.T. that he and his backers had big plans for them. And once they had the mayor in their back pocket, there was nothing to stop their group. There were gazillions to be made there for the right people.

Patryk turned the corner and the Bass Maltings vanished from his mirrors. He shook his head. Something of Kassia's attitude had rubbed off on him and since the picnic on that summer's afternoon he'd avoided the place ever since. Not that he was superstitious or anything but that place gave off a bad vibe. Spooky...

The last pick-up now. Navigation Ward. The election officer was waiting for him outside the polling station. The woman looked annoyed at having had to wait so long to be relieved of her duties. She peered over the top of her glasses at him as if he was some naughty school boy sent to the headmistress for a telling off.

"I hope that this system isn't going to be permanent. I shall be complaining to the returning officer about this. I don't like being kept waiting this long."

"It was Naismith who brought it in." And if you could see what Lukasz was doing to democracy in the back of the van, Patryk thought, you'd have far more to complain about than having to hang about a few extra minutes.

"Sorry, I only the driver," Patryk muttered apologetically, strengthening his accent so he was barely comprehensible. "I just do as tell me."

"Of course, I'm sorry. I wasn't getting at you but I'm not happy."

"Is all right. I understand," Patryk said. The woman stopped looking like an angry head-teacher and seemed warmer and motherly. Patryk smiled at her and handed her the receipt for the ballot box.

"Do you want a drink? I've got some hot chocolate back there if you want?"

For a moment, Patryk was tempted. He would enjoy a hot drink and the delay would give Lukasz more time in the back but, no, he didn't want to raise any suspicions at the Town Hall.

"Thanks – but I need get back. Is people waiting at Hall for making count," Patryk reminded her, remembering to keep up the accent.

"You're right. Good night and God bless," the woman said. For a moment, Patryk felt pangs of guilt at the thought of deceiving her but he pushed those thoughts to one side. Naismith would sort this town out. With his planned redevelopments, he'd promised to bring jobs and prosperity to Sleaford and the area around so maybe the means justified the end. Or so Patryk hoped. But it still felt bad allowing a bigot like Peachornby anywhere near the Town Hall, even if only as a figurehead.

"Last box," Patryk whispered as he slid it into the back of the van.

"Good," said Lukasz. "I've about had enough of this."

Patryk set off, heading back into Sleaford. A few hundred yards away from the Town Hall on Kesteven Street, he stopped the van and let Lukasz out.

"All done?" Patryk asked.

Lukasz jumped down and rubbed his hands, flexing his sore fingers and working the palms. "I think Naismith and that monkey Peachornby owe me a few beers for tonight's work." Lukasz flung the now empty Heinz cardboard box to the side of the road and kicked it viciously.

"Stop your moaning. It's champagne and caviare all the way for us now," Patryk told him.

"I'd rather have an ice cold *Tyskie*," said Lukasz.

"Don't think small. We're gonna hit the big time real soon. Not bad for one night's work. I'll catch you later – after the count, okay? We'll sink those *Tyskies* then."

Lukasz nodded and Patryk drove down the road to the Town Hall, pulling up around the back. Naismith and a few other men working for the council were waiting for him. The men unloaded the black ballot boxes and carried them into the Town Hall. As they did so, Naismith raised his eyebrows the merest fraction. "Any problems?"

"All good," whispered Patryk. But somehow he doubted that any good would come from this night's work.



## CHAPTER 6. WE MARCH ON ROME.

Naismith flung his half smoked cigarette into the yard and turned about. Patryk followed the returning officer through the vestibule and into the main council hall. The floor was taken up by a number of trestle tables behind which people sat waiting to count the votes. Naismith had told Patryk earlier that the tellers mostly worked for the council or local banks.

As the returning officer, as the man in charge, Naismith made a show of inspecting the seals on the ballot boxes. He carefully cut them – at exactly the same places Lukasz had previously – and then distributed the boxes to groups of tellers. Immediately, the men and women heaped up the voting slips before them and started counting; sorting the papers into piles, one for each candidate.

As the tellers counted, the candidates walked around the room making sure that their votes were being counted properly.

"Good turnout," Charles Langton-Gore, the Tory estate agent said to the Lib-Dem doctor, who nodded. The Conservative was pleased. A good turnout usually meant a winning result for the Conservative party. Langton-Gore started mentally rehearsing his acceptance speech. The usual stuff about growth and prosperity and how he was going to govern for the benefit of the whole of Sleaford.

Danielle Rice, the Labour party's candidate was also rehearsing her victory speech. She'd run a good campaign amongst the Eastern European immigrants, most of whom tended to vote for Labour. A new dawn for Sleaford, inclusive and welcoming. With extra resources and classes in Polish for the school children. A sure-fire winner.

The Green party candidate rushed in fifteen minutes late. The woman looked like she'd been dragged through a hedge backwards several times with her bird's nest hair, mismatched charity shop clothes and dirty finger nails.

"Sorry, I'm late," she gasped. "I was making marmalade and it wouldn't set."

"That's all right," Naismith reassured her. "It's not compulsory to attend."

The tellers looked up from their counting, welcoming the distraction as a break from the monotony. The woman caught her breath, had a mug of herbal tea and then walked round chatting to the tellers. She didn't bother preparing a speech. She knew that she had no chance of winning but thought it important that Green issues were raised and maybe, just maybe, the environment would be considered by the winner.

None of the other candidates spoke to or acknowledged Peachornby or his agent, Mason, in any way. The men were pariahs to the mainstream candidates. Even the tellers avoided the BNP men's gaze and spoke only to answer direct questions keeping their replies as short as possible. Eventually even men as thick skinned as Peachornby and Mason gave up their attempts to be accepted and stood talking together in one corner.



However, there was soon a low murmur from the tellers and that communicated itself to the candidates. There were more votes for the BNP than the tellers expected. Far more votes. A woman acting as an invigilator riffled through the counted votes. There was a frown on her face as she double checked. She called Naismith over to a table where the votes for the BNP threatened to topple over. Naismith made a comment about 'the democratic process'.

Somebody must have slipped out to make a discreet phone call because soon after a journalist and photographer showed up from the *Standard*. Naismith walked over and had a word with them – explaining what snaps he'd allow the smudger to take.

The tellers mostly looked up at the distraction but then dutifully carried on, bent over their work. The journalist, a man called Butler, looked annoyed when a camera crew from BBC Lincolnshire also turned up. Butler saw his possible scoop vanishing down the plughole as the BBC crew would break the news about the electoral upset first. As word spread, the room was now resembling a three ring circus. Naismith marched over to the crew and asked them to set up quietly in the corner but not to start filming until he gave the nod. The BBC guys looked at each other but agreed.

Charles Langton-Gore, the Tory, for all his faults, wasn't a stupid man. As he walked around the tables, he saw more and more votes piling up for Peachornby and the BNP. This was not what he'd expected. Last time, the Conservatives had beaten the BNP by about five to one. There was no way that was going to happen tonight. The BNP votes over topped both his and the Labour party's.

He felt a tug on his elbow and saw Danielle Rice, the Labour lady beside him. She wore a smart grey trouser-suit and her red party rosette made a vivid splash of colour against the charcoal. "What's going on?" she said quietly. "Last time we won and, to be honest, I thought it was a toss-up this time whether you or I won today. But Peachornby and the BNP?" The disgust showed in her voice. "They came nowhere four years ago."

"I know," Langton-Gore said. "Did we really misjudge the anti-immigrant feeling that much? I caught a bit of flak on the doorsteps about all the Poles but nothing that led me to believe it was such a big issue or that everyone was going to come out and vote for that sack of sh.. man," he finished.

"You're right, Charles. Yes, I picked up on a bit of aggro from some of the estates but I can't believe that the people of Sleaford would turn out in such numbers to vote for some Nazi like Peachornby." Both of them fell silent as the hulking form of Mason walked past with a sneering grin on his face.

"The future is ours," Mason said to them. Both Langton-Gore and Danielle turned away and walked over to the other side of the room.

"If you get a chance, come round my office tomorrow. I've got a nice blend of Alta Rica coffee and we'll talk further," Langton-Gore said.

Danielle nodded agreement. "Sure. Something's not right here."

"You can say that again."

As the number of uncounted votes dwindled, it became obvious that there was a big electoral upset on the way. The BBC team approached Naismith and asked for

permission to set up early. Not wanting to upset the press, he nodded assent. In one corner, the camera crew put up a couple of lamps and silver reflective screens while the sound recorder and reporter tested the noise levels within the hall. Satisfied, the reporter adjusted his tie, brushed down his jacket with his hands and waited for the count to be completed.

One by one the tellers at the tables signalled that they were finished. Naismith walked around and collected their tallies and took all the slips up to the front. With the aid of a calculator, he added them all up. As soon as he had done so, he called up the candidates and showed them the result. Both Charles and Danielle looked unhappy. They scanned the tallies but there was no doubting the result.

Finally, Naismith invited the candidates up onto the small stage and followed them. He waited for the BBC reporter's nod that everything was in order. Naismith cleared his throat and tapped his microphone. The amplified knock sounded loud in the hall and the low murmur from the watchers died down.

"I hereby give notice that the total number of votes cast for each candidate in the Sleaford Urban Council Mayoral elections is as follows." He coughed again and Patryk missed the first part. Not that it mattered. It was only the last name that counted. "..., Green Party: 209..."

The Green's ex-hippy looked disappointed that her share of the votes had declined. Her rosette looked as wilted as a week old lettuce.

"Dr. Timothy Gilbertson, Liberal Democrat: 738."

Patryk reckoned that not too many of the good doctor's patients had turned out to support him. Perhaps they should have. If he was working on his Mayoral duties, he'd have less time to conduct the certain intimate 'medical examinations' he was notorious for, Patryk thought.

"Danielle Rice, Labour: 2,098."

Danielle's face went as red as her rosette. There were gasps from her supporters. As with the Lib-Dems, there had been a drop in the votes cast for her. Some of the Tories jeered. But they were soon also to be disappointed. As soon as the noise dropped, Naismith carried on.

"Charles Langton-Gore: Conservative....," There were braying cheers from some tweed-clad, horsey looking young men and women at the back. Forgetting there was still one more name, they thought their man had won.

"...2,110." More cheers greeted this result. Naismith held up his hand. The noise level dropped.

"Kenneth Peachornby, British National Party: 3,270. I hereby declare the said Kenneth Peachornby the duly elected Mayor of Sleaford Urban Council." Naismith stretched out his arm and offered the microphone to Peachornby.

For one moment there was a stunned silence throughout the hall. Then a cacophony of boos and jeers rang out. Their party animosities temporarily forgotten Tory, Labour and Lib-Dem joined together in anger and outrage.

Mason and the other skinheads in the hall pushed their way to the front and formed a human cordon between the hall and their man on the stage. The BNP thugs glared at the other parties' supporters.

Peachornby took the microphone from Naismith and started speaking but even his electronically powered voice couldn't rise above the shouting from the hall. Someone started it and then the whole hall started shouting ironically, "Sieg heil, sieg heil," and throwing mock Nazi salutes. But rather than looking upset, Peachornby enjoyed it. His already toad-like body seemed to swell up even more.

Patryk reckoned that the man was imagining himself on the steps of the Reichstag with all his army parading in front of him before ordering the Panzers east into Poland. A flash of hatred for what Peachornby and the skinheads stood for rushed through him. His fists clenched and it was with great difficulty he restrained himself from joining in with the angry shouts. He hoped that Naismith knew what he was doing.

As one, the other candidates made their way off the stage and through the crowd. The BBC reporter and Butler from the *Standard* drew them to one side. That wasn't difficult as they were eager to talk. Microphones were thrust in front of faces only too eager for the limelight. The themes of shock and upset were what the other candidates told the reporters. Shock, confusion, disgust but also a nod to the concept of adhering to the principals of local democracy no matter what the outcome. At this point there was no difference between the candidates whatever their other political views.

Patryk hung about the crowd surrounding the journalists. He nodded to himself, satisfied. This was exactly what Naismith had predicted would happen. In this country, people were too complacent and wouldn't suspect a fix until it was too late, by which time Naismith would have covered their tracks. No, they'd chalk it down to an electoral fluke – just one of those strange things that the democratic process throws up from time to time.

Naismith had told Patryk they'd put it down mostly as a protest against both main political parties together with disquiet against the recent influx of immigrants in the area. It would be a nine day's wonder. No not even that, as Sleaford was not in a so-called 'newsworthy' part of the country. Which in England 'newsworthy' meant only London and the Home Counties. Patryk grinned.

By this time, some of the uproar in the hall had died down and the BBC reporters and the *Standard* guy wanted to tape the first interview with the winner. The journalists sent one of their assistants up on stage to fetch Peachornby over. Apart from Naismith in his dual role of Deputy Mayor and Returning Officer, the stage was solely taken up by the BNP's supporters. Somebody must have had a word with them as a few were actually wearing shirts and ties and nobody had yet started singing their '*No Surrender*' song or throwing Nazi salutes.

Peachornby approached the reporters. Patryk thought it was like the man was contagious or a leper as everyone else in the hall backed away from him as if fearful of his touch. All the same they watched his progress, lips curled with contempt. Peachornby was accompanied by his minder, Mason, as well as a small ferret-faced man in a grey suit named Gould who looked remarkably like Josef Goebbels, even down to his slicked-back dark hair and fanatically furtive expression.

Patryk hung about to listen but Peachornby wasn't worth hearing. He guessed that the Goebbels clone might have been sent from the BNP's headquarters in order to make sure that the new Mayor of Sleaford kept his language under control and didn't say anything too inflammatory.

With Gould stuck to his side, Peachornby stuck to his script, promising to represent all the people of Sleaford and not just those who supported him. Apart from saying he would be seeking to close the centre for asylum seekers and looking into Masonic influence within Sleaford Urban Council, he didn't say anything too surprising. Gould seemed pleased.

As Peachornby spoke to the camera and the *Standard's* journalist held up an old-fashioned Dictaphone the hall gradually emptied. Many of those leaving expressed their opinion on the result by saying, "shame". Others swore.

Patryk had seen enough. He made his way out with the last of the tellers and observers and looked up into the night sky. Despite the shock result, the stars still shone and the world still turned. He told himself that what he had helped make happen didn't really matter. Not if you take the long view. But he still felt dirty – that he had let himself down by doing something very wrong and that not even Naismith could foresee all the consequences.

Meanwhile, Peachornby himself had no doubts. After he had given his last interview of the evening, he climbed into the back of Mason's Rover 75 and they drove to the BNP's campaign headquarters, which was the back room of Andrei'z' wine bar. Peachornby wished it was an open-topped staff car so he could be driven through the streets, the car nosing through the adoring crowds all throwing rose

petals, waving flags and cheering as they saluted their leader – their Supreme and Beloved Leader – as he drove through the city to take the keys of power. That the streets were empty didn't upset his fantasy.

Stepping out of the Rover into the cool night air, Peachornby was filled with a sudden exultation. This was it. He had arrived. He was going to make history. His heart leaped in his chest with jubilation as he punched the air with the violence of his happiness. "Yes," he called out to the imaginary crowds. "Yes!"

Mason grinned. "C'mon, boss. Let's get a few down our necks. You, too, Mr. Gould." The man from the BNP's head office frowned. He wanted to keep things sober and then run through the next steps of their strategy with Peachornby. Did Hitler get blotto after winning the 1933 election? No, he didn't. Herr Hitler was a clean-living teetotaler who got on with the task in hand. Unlike this idiot.

However, Gould followed Peachornby and Mason through the main bar of Andrei'z' and into the back room. They were greeted by a wall of noise and the sound of fists thumping the table tops. Men clapped Peachornby on the shoulder and a pint was pushed into both hands. Shame it was in one of those plastic beakers, Peachornby hated that, but Andrei'z' landlord knew his business and several dozen drunk hooligans was a recipe for disaster.

Peachornby stood on the threshold of the room. Life doesn't get any better than this he thought, punching the air again. Euphoria filled him to overflowing. His cup runneth over as somebody or other once said. Now he'd show them. Now he would prove himself to all those people who'd put him down all his life, all those who had written him off as a dunce and a failure.



His teachers all those years ago at Secondary Modern, that bank manager who'd peered over his spectacles and sniffed before turning him down for a loan. The secretary who'd laughed as he knocked back Peachornby's application to join the golf club. The slags who had rejected his advances. And most of all, he'd show his sneering father. The man he hated more than anyone else in the world.

But tonight was his night. Nobody was going to spoil his pleasure in his victory. Peachornby grinned and spread his arms wide. "Tonight we march on Rome," he shouted over the noise. Only Gould understood the reference to Mussolini's rise to power in 1922. The rest of the skinheads filling the room looked blank. Rome? That was in Italy or somewhere, wasn't it? AC Roma and Lazio played there, didn't they? Then one of the skins leaped up onto a table and shouted, "three cheers for Peachornby! Hip, hip, hooray!"

The room erupted with ear-splitting cheers. Peachornby drained his lagers and immediately another was pushed into his hand. He was filled with ebullient good cheer especially after one of the skins pushed a chair out in front of Peachornby and helped him up onto the table.

"Speech, speech, speech," the assembled skinheads called looking up at their triumphant leader.

"Tell it like it is, boss," Mason shouted above the din.

Gould looked around. He hoped there were no journalists or undercover cops here otherwise Peachornby would be in deep trouble. Immediately, Peachornby veered off-message as the spin-doctors would have it. First off, he said this was just the start of things, "today Sleaford, tomorrow 10 Downing Street," and then launched

into how the Judeo-Marxist-Masonic conspiracy held back the working man. This brought more cheers and yells of support. Peachornby unbuttoned his collar, puffed out his chest and struck a heroic pose, like Napoleon surveying the battlefield, before goose-stepping up and down the table top.

The rejoicing skinheads hanging on his words thrilled Peachornby and he soared to new heights of oratory. His arms windmilled and flailed as he made his points, bawling out the government, the immigrants, the European Union and always; behind them all, guiding the destruction of ye olde England he held dear: the eternal Jew. He got a huge buzz tingling through his veins as he ranted, looking down at the admiring faces of the beery, sweaty skins gazing up at him, hanging on every word.

Peachornby was happy. He felt great. On top of his game. This was just the start of things. He flicked sweat from his forehead, rubbed his toupee and accepted yet another pint. He drank deeply and laughed, a horrible sound. This was so good, the best night of his life. He knew now what it felt to be a rock-god playing in front of a packed-out arena. Holding the crowd in the palm of your hand. It felt like he'd been wired direct into the National Grid with tens of thousands of volts flowing through his veins.

"You've heard enough from me. Now, let's celebrate." He lifted his arms high in the air and then leaped down from the table. He staggered, spilling lager everywhere, normally with this crowd a challenge to fight, but not tonight; fetching up against Mason who supported his leader. To roars of approval more jugs of lager were brought in. Speech over, the crowd of skinheads broke up into separate groups, some talking football, others great terrace mayhem, still others banging on about the Poles stealing all their jobs while, at the same time, claiming all the benefits going.

Still feeling great, on top of the world; Peachornby pushed his way through the crowd over to where Gould was leaning against the wall. "That went well," Peachornby said, his face split in half with his smile.

Gould nodded but smiled thinly. "You did well, Mayor. Although maybe not yet suitable for public consumption; best to leave out the 'how Hitler should have won the war' stuff. Now, if you have a few minutes..."

Amid yet more shoulder claps and thumbs-ups, Gould led the still beaming Peachornby and Mason out of the packed room and in the quieter corridor next to the gents he told them what the BNP head office wanted them to start on. A few minutes later, Gould slipped out of Andrei'z' and into the night.

Inside, the jolly party had just started.





## CHAPTER 7. THE LIGHTS ARE GOING OUT ALL OVER SLEAFORD.

The manure hit the air conditioning sooner than even Naismith could have expected. Maybe it was otherwise a slow news day because the election result made the front page headlines of all the national dailies. The broadsheets were more restrained but the red tops used all their skills to shout out the result.

'SS – Sleaford' announced the left-leaning *Daily Mirror*. There was an old picture of Peachornby waving at an earlier BNP rally that looked remarkably like a Nazi salute. The photograph, probably bought for cash from an undercover police officer, made Peachornby look like a dangerous and threatening figure rather than the fool he really was.

The *Daily Express* came up with 'Sleep-Walking To Disaster'. The normally right wing Express expressed shock at the result, but a closer read of the accompanying text showed that, although the paper did not actually support the BNP, they were with Peachornby on his anti-immigrant stance. The Express's editorial blamed the number of Eastern Europeans flooding into Lincolnshire 'like an unstoppable tidal wave of humanity' for affecting the result and urged the government at Westminster to take firm action to prevent the result from being repeated elsewhere in England.

The *Daily Star* contented itself by giving the news a couple of paragraphs on page ten. The front page was taken up with banner headlines about some Aston Villa striker's WAG getting ripped off her face on coke at an exclusive Manchester nightclub. One of the foolish girl's so-called friends had probably made a small fortune with that mobile phone footage. And after that, all the male readers could turn to page three to have a look at Nikki from Walsall's tits in case they had forgotten overnight what a pair of breasts look like.

However, it was the good old 'Currant Bun' with its incredible talent for punning that came up with the most memorable headline of the day. It simply said 'Sleazeford'. And that was the name that stuck. But even the sub-editor at *The Sun* who came up with that name could have had no idea just how he had struck the nail dead centre on the head.

Because Peachornby's victory was just the start of Sleaford's descent to Sleazeford.

\*\*\*

Two men sat and two men stood in the Deputy-Mayor's office at Sleaford Town Hall. A beech desk took up most of one corner, behind which sat Naismith. Three windows overlooked the council's car park and watery sunlight reflected off a set of historic landscapes of early Victorian Sleaford that the local museum had been told it had no space to display. So they wound up in Naismith's office instead. Funny that.

In front of the desk sat Peachornby, his bulk overflowing the low easy chair. Naismith, no stranger to underhand business techniques, sat in a leather executive

chair set to its maximum height. Even with the desk between them, Patryk sensed that Naismith dominated the new Mayor.

Patryk stood near Naismith's desk. Although, officially, only a driver Naismith wanted him in the room. Finally, Mason lounged near the door, a scowl on his face as he tried to make sure that he didn't miss anything.

"I hope you had a good night's sleep?" Naismith asked politely and with the respect due from the Deputy Mayor to the actual Mayor of Sleaford.

Patryk knew that question was a rhetorical one – he could smell the alcohol fumes billowing off the man. Peachornby looked like he'd been out carousing all night and had only managed half an hour's sleep before coming in. He looked hungover and even more pudgy than normal. Bags the size of suitcases lay beneath his bloodshot peepers. Now he looked far more like Hitler's obese deputy, Göring, than he did Mussolini let alone Mosley. However, the man had at least showered and put on a fresh black shirt and tie.

Peachornby grinned. The smile never reached his eyes. "Fine thanks, Naismith, and now I'm ready to pick up the reins of office; to lead Sleaford to a bright and pros... prosperous new dawn; to reclaim its historic soul from the influx..."

Naismith raised his hand. "Of course, Kenneth. I may call you Kenneth?"

Peachornby looked annoyed but could hardly refuse.

"Now. Don't get too excited, Ken. The Mayor of Sleaford is mostly a symbolic role these days. You'll be expected to open buildings, say a few encouraging words; appear at church fêtes and generally fly the flag for Sleaford..."



"That's not why I became Mayor," growled Peachornby, "any monkey could do that."

Patryk wondered if even those limited tasks might be beyond Peachornby's capabilities but Naismith had not yet finished speaking.

"I know that, Ken, and as, of course, you will be aware from the recent trends in local democracy...", Naismith stopped, aware of the blank stares from both Peachornby and Mason.

"Many major cities now have their own directly elected Mayors, similar to their U.S. counterparts. London started the trend, of course, but now Manchester, Liverpool and others also have a Mayor who can cut through bureaucracy and get things moving more speedily. That's what we want for Sleaford – a man of vision...", Peachornby visibly swelled, toad-like, at this, "who can make Sleaford into one of the, no *the* premier small town of the East Midlands."

Peachornby shifted his bulk. "I want to make a victory speech on Saturday. From the Town Hall's balcony. Wearing my chains of office. And I want it advertised on local radio and a full page ad in the *Standard*."

Naismith nodded. He formed a pyramid with his fingertips and leaned forwards. Patryk was reminded of the way a clinician might inspect a particularly malevolent tumour. "Go on," he murmured.

Peachornby glanced back at Mason. "Go on, ask him," the young man hissed.

"Of course, an office as important as Mayor requires an assistant. I think the budget will stretch to funding a Senior Assistant to the Mayor," Naismith mused,

anticipating Peachornby's request. "You can also be his chauffeur. I'll claim it out of the Arts Funding – I doubt if anyone will miss not having this summer's War of the Roses exhibition."

Mason grinned hugely. This was better than a job on the bins. Not just Assistant but Senior Assistant to the Mayor. That would be a big promotion. He hadn't yet realised that he was the only Assistant.

"So, what else did you have in mind? What would you like to do first?" Naismith continued.

There was silence. Mason looked as blank faced as his leader.

"How about this? It would be popular with most people and would send out a clear message to all our more – how shall I put it – recent arrivals."

Peachornby leaned forwards and Mason stepped away from the door frame.

"Why not close the Council's Asylum Centre on Carre Street? I'm surprised you never made more of an issue of it during your campaign. It's regarded as a hotbed of crime and disorder and bringing all sorts of undesirables flocking into our beautiful town?"

Peachornby beamed. This was just the sort of thing he and the BNP believed in – right up their street. Naismith opened a desk drawer and slid a document out onto the leather topped surface. From the drawer he took his gold plated Mont Blanc fountain pen. He looked at Peachornby's clumsy fist and replaced the fountain pen with a disposable Bic ballpoint.

"What's this?" asked Peachornby.

"A document I drew up earlier authorising the centre's immediate closure and sale. Like I say, Ken, your approval ratings will soar when this hits the press."

"Sounds good, boss," growled Mason from the back.

Without looking at the document, Peachornby scrawled his signature in the places indicated by his Deputy. Patryk noticed several red solicitor's seals on the paperwork. As soon as Peachornby had signed, Naismith whisked the papers away and replaced them in the drawer. He turned the key.

Naismith stood and held out his hand. The two men shook. "Good move, Ken. Now, I know you will want to make an immediate start so why don't you go and check out your office down the corridor and meet Donna, your secretary?"

Patryk knew Donna. When she wasn't outside smoking or taking extra long lunches or knocking off early, she was usually visiting her doctor about one or another of her mysterious feminine complaints. She was the slowest, but coincidentally largest breasted, secretary employed by the council. Patryk thought Peachornby would be impressed.

As soon as Peachornby and Mason left, Naismith turned to Patryk with a grin. He unlocked the drawer, fished out the sale documents and gloated over them.

"Like taking candy from a baby – and my hands stay clean. Nobody can link us to that Cayman Islands shell company that's buying the place. As soon as the cops sling out those asylum seekers, we can go ahead and convert the building into a boutique hotel. Sleaford needs a really top-notch hotel in the town centre. There'll be

a nice bonus for you – first of many don't forget – as soon as work starts. Hey, you should set up a building firm and bid for the contract."

Patryk shrugged. "I may be Polish but I don't know anything about construction."

"Doesn't matter. As long as your letterhead looks good, I'll tell you what to bid. You can sub the actual work out after."

Patryk nodded. It was true. Once you were in the inner circle, you were on the fast track to riches. He'd get Lukasz to print up some stationery later.

"Oh, before you go, Patryk, there's one more job that needs doing," Naismith said, taking a thick sheaf of papers from behind his desk. "We'll have to make sure the number of votes cast tallies with the number of people who actually bothered turning up. Just tick enough names on these lists so they match up. If you could make sure you do that tonight, I'll get them sent off to the Electoral Commission tomorrow."

Naismith handed over the electoral rolls. There weren't many ticks by people's names. Patryk sighed. Another boring evening poring over paperwork loomed for himself and Kassia.

There was a buzz from the desk intercom. "You can send in Superintendent Donegan on your way out, please," Naismith said.

In the waiting room sat a plug-ugly copper with the *Telegraph* opened at the crossword. The policeman looked up. Patryk reckoned that with a mug like his, the Superintendent would never be selected as the face of friendly community policing. "Donkeys carry superior nuns. Eight letters," he said.

Patryk was taken aback. Was everyone mad in this country? Had the rain waterlogged their brains?

"Of course. Abbesses," the Superintendent said, filling in a crossword answer.

Patryk thought if this was a test, then he'd failed somehow though he wasn't sure how. Now the copper had finished writing, Patryk asked him to go in where Naismith would break the good news about the Asylum Centre's imminent closure.

\*\*\*

Heading northbound along the A15 highway towards Lincolnshire County Council's offices, Patryk still felt contaminated and dirty from dealing with Peachornby. It was men like Peachornby and Mason who had supported Hitler and the Nazis all those years ago. They were the same kind of people who had killed millions of Poles during the war. Of course, there was a huge difference in power between being Chancellor of Germany and Mayor of a sleepy town like Sleaford.

And, after all, Naismith had the Peachornby situation well under control and it wasn't like Naismith wanted Peachornby to kill anyone. All the Deputy Mayor was after was making big bucks and if some of that trickled his way, who was Patryk to argue? Once all this was over, he and Kassia could return to Poland and buy a nice farm out in the Siedice countryside and raise children. Sounded good to him.

\*\*\*

The following day, Naismith asked Patryk to swing by Carre Street and check out how the boys in blue were getting on with evicting the asylum seekers from their home. Patryk parked his van at one end and walked down the street. He heard the

noise before he saw any action. A crowd of bussed in skinheads, only some with Georgian flags this time, were cheering and yelling. Mason was on the front line, his face distorted with rage.

Holding back the skinhead thugs was a thin blue line of police, supported by a couple of battleship grey Operational Support Unit support carriers with their mesh window screens down. There was some pushing and shoving but it didn't look to Patryk that the elite OSU cops had much to do. There was no sign of the Anti-Nazi League and Patryk guessed that was why Naismith wanted the asylum seekers out so quickly; in order to avoid trouble and minimise any bad press.

However, the *Standard's* hard-working journalist and photographer were there, taking notes and photos and Patryk reckoned he could guess tomorrow's front page story. Butler was interviewing Superintendent Donelan, who seemed irritated, batting away his questions.

The asylum seekers themselves seemed dazed and confused. Clutching their meagre possessions and cowering away from the taunts they were shepherded towards a minibus emblazoned with a church charity's logo. A bottle sailed out from the throng of skinheads and shattered at the sandalled feet of a young middle-eastern woman who screamed. The police tried to push the yelling skinheads further away from the asylum seekers.

Shortly after, the last of the shaken foreigners was on board the minibus and it did a three point turn before driving past Patryk. Through its windows, he saw a young Indian woman comforting her two small children. Patryk wished he hadn't seen that.

As soon as the minibus was out of sight, the fury left the skinheads and gradually they furled their flags and dispersed. Patryk reckoned they'd talk over their morning's work at Andrei'z' before heading home. Not long after the last of the skinheads had left, a couple of council chippies appeared from nowhere, threw down their smokes and started boarding up the closed centre with plywood.

Patryk turned away. He felt disgusted. This was a high price to pay to make some decent money and he wasn't sure it was worth it. He hoped Kassia wouldn't find out but as she rarely read the local papers anyway, there was little risk of that. She spent much of her free time Facebooking her friends and family back in Warsaw.

\*\*\*

"Very good, very professional," Naismith said approvingly as he scrutinised Patryk and Lukasz's building quotes and invoices for the rebuilding and conversion of the asylum centre. Earlier, he'd handed them similar contracts he'd photocopied at Lincolnshire County Council's offices which the three men had adapted, with the aid of a greedy brief at Gilbert Greene and Ellison, Solicitors. The multi page documents lay spread out on Naismith's desk before them.

Patryk was amazed at the sums of money involved. Sure, even a van driver knew that building a hotel wasn't cheap but some of the costs seemed well out of line with what he would expect. Was every en-suite going to be fitted with gold plated taps on Italian marble baths? Were only the rarest, finest grained tropical hardwoods going to grace the dining room? Louis XV crystal chandeliers throughout reception and a kitchen fitted out for a three star Michelin chef? Surely, any council auditor would see the wasteful padding involved.

Sweeping his fingers through his hair, Lukasz reminded Naismith that, contrary to popular stereotypes about Poles, they knew nothing about plumbing or construction. "How are we going to recruit a team to do this work?" he asked.

Naismith smiled and looked at his neatly manicured hands. "I should have thought it was obvious. As I said earlier, of course we're not doing any work. This sum," he smiled again at the amount, "gives us a nice little cushion on top and then we can sub the actual work out to whichever cowboy firm comes in with the lowest quote."

Naismith gathered up the papers, rapped them on his desk to level the pages and then slid them into a manilla envelope. He wetted the flap and sealed it down before sliding it back over to the two Poles.

"As directors of this firm, if you could both sign across the flap to make it a sealed bid. Just to prove there's no collusion between the private and public sectors."

The two Poles did so and then Naismith locked their envelope away in his wall safe. Lukasz spotted a number of similar envelopes inside.

"When do we hear?"

"Thursday," Naismith said. "And don't forget, that's the first of many lucrative contracts to come our way."

\*\*\*

"Have you thought about that block of disused flats on Mareham Lane, Mayor?" Naismith asked, referring to a low-rise 1960s apartment complex on the



edge of town that had become an eyesore and a magnet for low-level anti-social behaviour. "There are reports that Lincolnshire County Council are looking to purchase it in order to provide a permanent home for members of the Roma and Irish traveller communities. As they are obliged to by law. What are your views, Mayor?" Naismith brushed an imaginary speck of lint from his new bespoke single-breasted Savile Row suit before glancing at his Raymond Weil watch.

"We don't want any pikeys around here. Coming here stealing anything that's not nailed down. No, we don't want that," Peachornby said, leaping to the bait.

"So what do you think we at Sleaford Urban Council should do, Mayor?"

Naismith had long since dropped his goading of Peachornby by calling him Ken. He found that Peachornby was far more malleable when his official title was frequently used. Nobody to Naismith's knowledge had ever called Hitler 'Addo' or referred to Portugal's dictator, Salazar, as 'Sally' for example. At least not in their hearing. And if a little pretend grovelling was what was needed to keep the fat führer happy then he was prepared to do what it takes.

Maybe his few weeks clumping about the corridors of power had sharpened Peachornby's intellect or perhaps he was getting advice from the BNP's headquarters because his blank look was replaced by a look of sharp cunning.

"We should buy the land ourselves, stop those commies at Lincolnshire Council dumping their problems onto us. If they want to re-home a bunch of gyppos, what they should do is take over a couple of holiday camps over by Cleethorpes and put 'em all there, away from decent folks where they can be forced to live until we can deport 'em all back to Ireland...", said Peachornby until Naismith raised his hand.

"Precisely," murmured Naismith, wiping off a few flecks of spittle with his silk handkerchief, "but until then buying that land is a very good suggestion, Mayor. Foreseeing your approval I took the liberty of requesting Gilbert Greene and Ellison, Solicitors, to draw up the necessary documentation. If you would care to place your autograph on the relevant spaces indicated?" Naismith couldn't resist using long words. But they were no longer as confusing to the Mayor as they had been. Maybe Peachornby had also been getting extra tuition from Donna, as the water cooler gossip had it.

Peachornby leaned forwards over the desk towards his Deputy. He glanced down the top page of the form. "Saveiro Canadian Inc., based in the Cayman Islands. Would that be the same bunch as bought the asylum centre the other week? No, I'd rather give the work to a more local firm. Sleaford jobs for Sleaford workers."

Naismith looked up into Peachornby's reddened boozers face. As he did so, Peachornby's Senior Assistant left his place over by the door and crossed to the desk. Despite having replaced his green bomber jacket with an off-the-rack Marks and Spencer suit, Mason was still an intimidating figure. Especially, when he stood there cracking his tattooed knuckles. Whatever his made up duties as Senior Assistant involved, Mason seemed to find a lot of time to spend working out in the gym.

"Of course, Mayor, Saveiro Canadian offered the best price for the land – and we want to get the best value for the hard-pressed tax payers of Sleaford, don't we Mayor?" Naismith said, trying to keep the situation under his control.

"Who's in charge of Saveiro Canadian?" asked Peachornby.

Turning around a sheet of letterhead, Naismith pointed to a list of three names, headed by a Lt. Colonel J. Birkett-Moore, M.C., D.S.C.

"Would that be the same Lt. Colonel J. Birkett-Moore who's a ninety-two year old res... resident of the Giles Farm private nursing home? Who can tell you all the details about the Viet Nam War..."

"Malayan emergency, actually," Naismith murmured.

"...but not what he had for dinner yesterday? A man who staff said was visited a few months ago out of the blue by two Polacks who slipped him a couple of bottles of Laphroaig in return for a few shaky signatures?"

"The same as with Mrs. C. N. Usborne, J.P., another ninety year old director and living just down the corr... corridor from Colonel J. Birkett-Moore?"

Naismith didn't let his urbane mask slip for a second. But inwardly he was fuming. He should have covered his tracks more thoroughly, but how had a fool like Peachornby found out? From Donna? Surely not, even though the girl was friends with his own secretary. When Donna bothered showing up, that is. No, it was probably someone from the BNP's head office doing some digging on Peachornby's behalf. Naismith pushed the hows and whys out of his mind until later. He would have to deal with what was in front of him now.

He spread his hands and smiled. "I am in contact with the ultimate controllers of Saveiro Canadian and I can assure you that they have the wish to do the best for Sleaford and preserve the best of our town, rather than see it overrun with undesirables, like Boston has been..."

"Bostongrad, you mean," Mason butted in.

Naismith smiled inwardly. He was sure playing the race card would work.

"Exactly. None of us want to see Sleaford go the same way. So if Saveiro Canadian buy the land to preserve it...,"

"Until you redevelop it you mean," said Peachornby.

Naismith sat back in his chair. There was nothing more he could say.

Somehow, and he'd find out how, the BNP fools had seen through his scheme. He would have to play his ace and hope the two thugs were as greedy as they were racist. "Like I say, I am in contact with Saveiro Canadian and I know they would be desirous to make a generous donation to anyone who helps expedite the sale process."

There was a blank look until understanding seeped into Peachornby's and Mason's brains.

"And they would be extremely lavish after the said land has been subsequently redeveloped."

Although they might not have understood all the words, Peachornby and Mason caught the gist of what Naismith was implying. They looked at each other and grinned.

"Told you all these Town Hall types are crooks, boss," said Mason.

"Would that be cash?" Peachornby asked. The only sensible question.

"If you want."





## CHAPTER 8. THE GRAND MASONIC CONSPIRACY.

That evening, Naismith stood in the wood panelled robing room of the Masonic Hall on Watergate. He adjusted his lambskin apron and placed a light blue collar around his neck before pulling on a pair of white gloves. A silver dove depended from his collar. As he did so, he ran through his memorised ritual for the evening's ceremony. A radiographer – nice chap, could go far – was due to be passed to the second degree so Naismith had a lot to do.

A clap on his back knocked his thoughts from his mind. He turned and pulled off his gloves. The two men shook with a knuckly grasp.

"Good evening, Worshipful Master," Naismith said.

Before him stood Jeremy Sandiford. One of the senior partners at Gilbert Greene and Ellison, Solicitors. And one of the other controllers of Saveiro Canadian Inc. Even though he wasn't, the heavy-set man looked Canadian with his balding dome and thick moustache.

"Give me a hand with this," Sandiford said, turning around. As Naismith adjusted the Worshipful Master of Esclaforde Lodge's chain of office, he whispered that Peachornby had found out about their plans to redevelop the land on Mareham Lane.

However, Sandiford didn't seem overly worried. "It was bound to happen. Everyone knows Town Halls are more corrupt than a month old carcass. So I'm not surprised even a fool like Peachornby would come sniffing."

"I suppose so, but we don't want a racist moron like Peachy as a partner, do we?"

"Of course not," Sandiford said with a shudder. "We'll keep him at arm's length. Could you imagine him applying to join our Lodge?"

"He'd never get in – have we got enough black balls to go round?"

"And we've got enough failed politicians in this Lodge." Both men turned and nodded to Charles Langton-Gore as he pulled on his Junior Warden's gauntlets. The man still looked disappointed by the election results even though the reasons for the fix had been explained to him together with a promise that his time would come. Every dog has his day, Sandiford had hinted.

The two men laughed and they walked past the Tyler with his sword drawn to keep out all intruders and cowans to masonry and then into the Lodge room beyond.

Later, during the festive board after the passing, Sandiford and Naismith got together again.

"I've been thinking. We can use Peachornby's greed against him. Keep him even further under our thumb."

"Go on," said Naismith with interest.



And so the Lodge's Worshipful Master explained matters to his Senior Deacon.

\*\*\*

Patryk sat opposite the Deputy-Mayor and helped himself to another chocolate biscuit. Something important must be going down if choccie bikkies were on offer.

"Are you busy tonight? Don't worry, you'll get overtime."

Patryk nodded, not wanting to speak and spray crumbs over the table.

Naismith took a digital Canon EOS camera from out of his desk drawer and placed it on the leather top. He then placed a 55-200mm long lens next to it. Patryk watched as a recording wire joined the camera. He picked them up and raised his eyebrows.

"You once told me your friend is interested in photography."

Patryk nodded. "Lukasz? Yes, he's good. Some of his photos have been used by the printers for brochures and the like."

"In that case, I want him to take some pics of you handing this envelope over to our esteemed Mayor. Make sure Lukasz gets a full face one of him actually holding it. Even better, one of him looking at the contents."

A large padded envelope joined the other equipment on the desk top. Naismith pulled out a bundle of used twenties.

"There's five hundred of them in there – ten thousand in good old pounds sterling. Take the rest of the afternoon off and make a note of all the serial numbers."

Patryk groaned inside. Another boring afternoon loomed. Maybe he could ask Kassia to help after she finished at kindergarten. He stood and collected all the items and slid them into an empty laptop bag.

"Don't worry – you're on overtime as from now," Naismith said with a smile. "Time and a half. Can't be bad. And think of all the money you'll make once that hotel is completed."

\*\*\*

Kassia dropped her bag and kicked off her shoes. She loved her job at the kindergarten but it was so exhausting. She wished she had a fraction of the zip those toddlers had. If you could harness the energy of a bunch of toddlers and wire them into the electrical grid then you could solve the world's power supply problems at a stroke.

All Kassia seemed to do was tidy up after them and dry their tears and try and stop a riot from breaking out over whose turn it was to play on the sand table. But that said, she loved her little charges and looked forwards to going into work every day. It was so much better than working in that depressing run-down nursing home back in Warsaw.

The money was much better, too. She was on double what she earned back home – and working with toddlers, there was no night shifts. She hated working nights. However, the cost of living in Britain was far higher than in Poland.

Everything was so expensive here – food, rent, electricity, transport. No wonder the locals all had long faces. And the weather. Ugh. The cold and damp, the rain, the lowering grey clouds. So different from the crisp, clear, continental cold she was used to.

Sometimes, Kassia wished she could go home. She missed her family and friends so much. Of course, it was easier to keep in touch these days with Facebook and Skype but it wasn't the same as actually being there. She missed her mother's hugs – and hearty home cooked meals usually starting with the traditional *borscht*, the deep red beetroot soup followed by *kaczka z owocami*, duck with fruit stuffing, or *kotlet mielony*, a mixed meat cutlet, and then to finish off *knedle ze sliwkami*, plum dumplings or maybe *makowiec* poppy cake. You couldn't eat that over the internet. Kassia could almost taste the food now.

Kassia missed foraging for mushrooms in the forests near her home – and her father's booming laugh when he found an untouched outcrop. She even yearned for her sister, Dzenetta, who used to get on her nerves so much by constantly 'borrowing' Kassia's clothes and make-up. However, if she could go home now, she would happily lend Dzenetta all her clothes for as long as the girl wanted them.

In her stockinged feet, Kassia walked along their short hallway, and pushed open the door to the open plan living room. She thought she would put the kettle on, make a mug of herbal tea and then curl up on the couch for a while and see who was online on Facebook. Glancing at her watch and mentally adding on one hour to allow for the time difference in Poland, she figured that some of her friends ought to be available for a natter. She should have a bit of time before Patryk got home.

"Hello, Kass," a voice said.

Bang went an hour or so catching up on gossip. "What are you doing home so early?"

"My supermodel girlfriend and her sister kicked me out of bed and so I thought I might as well come here."

"That's not funny, Pat," Kassia said, suppressing a grin.

"Don't you believe me? Don't you think I'm simply irresistible to women?"

"Not really – but you are irresistible to me," she said. Kassia walked over to the dining room table and put her arms around her fella. She kissed the back of his neck while her pony-tail brushed his ear. Only then did Kassia notice the piles of money stacked up on the tabletop. She straightened up in alarm.

"Where did you get all that? Did you rob a bank, Pat?"

Patryk pushed out another chair. "It might have been easier if I had. No, Mr. Naismith wants to keep Peachornby under his thumb."

"If Naismith pays that much he can have me under his fingers and thumbs. Any time he wants. Mmm..."

"Kass!"

"Well, you started it. Going on about being irresistible. Now James Naismith... mmm," Kassia's voice tailed off into a dreamy sigh. Not that she really meant it. She loved her man even with all his faults but that James Naismith, now he was pure sex

on legs. He knew how to carry himself and looked like he could treat a woman how she deserved to be treated.

Then she looked again at all that money. There must be thousands and thousands.

"So what is going on then, Pat? And a straight answer this time."

"We're writing down all the serial numbers. Then once the money's in Peachornby's possession, we've got him on corruption charges any time we want."

"Who's 'we'?"

"Well, Naismith of course."

Kassia needed time to think so she walked to the kitchen area and switched on the kettle. As she waited for it to heat up, she thought hard. She poured the boiling water over the teabags and swirled them around with a spoon far harder than she needed so that the fragrant tea slopped out onto the counter. She brought the cups out and placed them on the table next to the piles of twenties.

Patryk pushed a pad and Biro over to her. "Many hands make light work. That's an English proverb."

"I know." Her manageress at the kindergarten often used that phrase. However, that woman rarely tidied up after the little darlings. Kassia picked up the pen and the closest stack of twenties and started writing.

"Are you sure about this?" Kassia asked after a couple of minutes.

Patryk put down his pen and looked at his girlfriend, his partner, his love.

"No. I'm not sure. Not one hundred per cent, I mean. Like you I'm not happy about helping Peachornby win. I don't like him or his politics and I don't trust him but Naismith knows what he's doing..."

"You hope," Kassia interrupted.

"He does, he's very clever. Went to Cambridge – which is a top Uni over here. And listen, Kass, this our chance to make big money. Unless we win the lottery, that is. And we've got more chance of getting struck by lightning than winning the lottery. Well, I'm sick of being poor, of having to make do all the time, of not being able to have the best when the fat-cat bankers and politicians seem to have plenty of everything."

"But I'm happy as we are. I've got you, love, and that's what matters to me most of all."

Patryk raised one eyebrow. "What about those magazines you like? You're always looking at the expensive handbags and dresses and those celebs on holidays in places like Dubai or Barbados. Don't you want a piece of that? Why them and not us?" As he spoke, he carried on writing strings of random letters and numbers.

Kassia fell silent for a while. She knew she wasn't as sharp or quick-witted as Patryk. She knew that she usually needed time to think things through before reaching a conclusion but when she did, she usually got it right. Now she believed that what they were doing was wrong. And not only wrong but dangerous as well.

It felt so immoral letting a man like Peachornby take over. Already he was boasting about having closed down the asylum centre and there seemed to be more skinheads loitering on the streets than before. She couldn't put it in words but there seemed to be a tense atmosphere in town now.

She wondered if Patryk and Mr. Naismith really knew what they were doing and hoped it didn't all go wrong somehow. She doubted if Patryk would listen to her warnings because since he'd fallen in with Mr. Naismith it seemed like he had changed and become greedier and more money-oriented.

Sliding the next batch of twenties out of their band, Kassia said quietly, "yes, it would be nice to have more money. But I don't like the idea of what we're doing. No good will come from helping men like Peachornby."

Patryk snorted with laughter. "We're not helping him, Kass – we're helping ourselves. The guy's a tool. This is our chance and I'm taking it. When we're through here, we'll head back to Poland and buy somewhere nice. What do you think? Put all this behind us and live the good life."

Kassia couldn't mistake the enthusiasm in her fella's voice so she knew she was wasting her time trying to talk Pat out of this scheme. All she could do was watch and wait and see how it all panned out. That was another of her manageress's sayings.

\*\*\*

That evening, long after the sun had disappeared over Grantham way, Patryk stood by the deserted bulk of the Sleaford Bass Maltings. If the huge brick structure was eerie during daylight hours, it was downright spooky at night. He stood in a patch

of moonlight, the better for Lukasz who was crouching behind a pile of rubble, his long lens resting on the broken bricks and concrete.

The wind moaned off the Fenland flats and around the ruined buildings. It sounded like ghosts trapped in the half life between the living and dead. The rusting, decaying metalwork rattled and somewhere, a tin can rolled along a gulley until fetching up against a wall.

From behind a thicket of buddleia bushes, a dog fox barked startling the two men. It padded around a corner, took one look, and then carried on in its unending search for food. Over the railway tracks Lukasz saw a line of houses. Their bedrooms were lit up and Lukasz envied the people there living their ordinary lives. Sprawled out on their couches, watching television or on the internet; putting their children to bed or maybe having a late supper. Ordinary people getting on with their lives. Which didn't involve setting up the Mayor and his skinhead thugs.

Lukasz wore a black jacket and jeans and, in true SAS style, had smeared dirt over his hands and face. In the darkness behind the mound of junk he was almost invisible. The two Poles had arrived early and surveyed the site and between them had decided this was the best spot for the set up. Patryk was in full view from Lukasz's hide and a few test snaps had worked perfectly. You could see everything with fourteen mega-pixel clarity.

Also, Patryk was far enough away from the towering buildings so that no-one could sneak up and take him unawares. Yes, it was as perfect a spot as it could be. Now all they could do was wait for the Mayor of Sleaford to show. Lukasz thought back to the long hours spent in the wetlands along the coast, trying to photograph Red



Knots, Oystercatchers, Sanderlings as well as various species of gulls. This was no different. Except that marsh birds don't come with heavies and didn't mind having their photos taken.

Lukasz settled down to wait. A Thermos of soup would be nice but he couldn't risk the smell betraying his hide-out. From what Patryk had told him, Peachornby wouldn't come alone, he'd bring along some of his BNP hard cases. The damp chill seeped through his jacket and Lukasz watched Patryk pace to and fro. Several times Patryk kicked a lump of cement into a gully.

Then a pair of headlights bounced along the rough track leading to the Bass Maltings. Lukasz stiffened and immediately called Patryk, who felt the phone's vibrations through his pocket. An instant later, Patryk killed the call as he, too, saw the approaching headlights coming down the access road.

Patryk shifted position and waited for a red Rover 75 to barrel down the service road. It bounced over the neglected surface, swerving to avoid the worst potholes. In the darkness, the car looked more black than red, the colour of old, congealed blood. Moonlight reflected from its roof and door panels. Patryk shivered but stepped forward.

Whoever was driving made a show of accelerating until pulling a handbrake turn, sending loose grit and gravel flying towards Patryk. The Rover skidded slightly until the driver regained control and pulled up only yards away from the Pole. The driver didn't bother switching off the engine.

Peachornby eased his bulk from out of the rear seat and stood, keeping the Rover between himself and the Pole. Unsurprisingly, Mason climbed out of the

driver's seat. By the illumination of the dome light, Patryk watched Mason run his hand over his freshly shaved head. The skinhead flexed his muscles. As he did so, Patryk stepped to one side to give Lukasz a clear line of sight.

"Why here?" said Peachornby.

"You want to meet in a restaurant, somewhere anyone can see us?"

Peachornby shook his head. "We could've met at my house or at my garden centre."

While writing down all the serial numbers and listening to Kassia's moaning, Patryk had thought through a number of possible conversations. "Is that a good idea? Don't you think MI5 have your places under 24/7 security?"

Peachornby thought for a moment. "Oh yeah, I suppose so. Especially now I'm the Mayor. But it's MI6 that are watching me."

Patryk couldn't resist. "MI6 are the ones who take care of the foreign stuff."

"That's what they want you to think," said Peachornby, tapping the side of his inflamed nose. "And I'm well connected round the world. I know people. Men who know what's really going on – what the World Government don't want people finding out. There's these Serbian guys, on the run now..."

There was no arguing with that so Patryk let it go. "I've brought the money," he interrupted.

"The donation to my campaign funds?"

"No. The bribe," Patryk said loudly for the benefit of the wire.

"Whatever. Pass it over," snapped Mason holding out his hand.

This wasn't what Naismith wanted. He needed Peachornby to be snapped taking hold of the money, not his henchman. Ignoring the skinhead, Patryk walked to one side and held out the envelope over the Rover's bonnet. Peachornby fell for it and grasped the envelope with all the enthusiasm of a baby offered a rattle. A big smile crossed his face.

"Don't you want to count it? Make sure it's all there?"

"Better had, boss. This joker could've nicked a wedge."

On one level, Patryk would be annoyed but tonight he was glad of the young skinhead's distrust. Also, Mason reeked of weed which probably contributed to his paranoia.

"Oh, yeah. You can't trust anyone these days, mate. Check it out," Patryk goaded.

By the Rover's headlights, Peachornby slid out the bundled twenties and riffled through them. There was no way a moron like him could count that quickly but it didn't matter. Lukasz must be getting loads of good shots.

"Satisfied?" Patryk asked as Peachornby slid the last bundle back into the envelope.

"Yes. Tell Naismith thanks and not to leave us out of any of his future plans, okay?"

Patryk nodded. No need to speak any more. That last sentence naming Naismith would have to be deleted later. The two BNP men got back into their Rover; Mason pulled a U-ey and the Rover bounced back along the service road.

Patryk breathed a sigh of relief. That could have gone badly but as he was only there to give them money, he supposed the BNP guys weren't looking for any trouble themselves. They had nothing to gain from beating him up. But if either of them had spotted Lukasz crouched behind the pile of debris then things might have turned nasty. As soon as the Rover was out of sight, Patryk walked over to his friend.

"Got everything?" he asked.

Lukasz stood, brushing dust and grit from his clothes. He grinned and pushed back his hair. "Perfectly. There's no way he can deny receiving the money." Lukasz scrolled through the Canon's memory, showing Patryk the sequence of snaps. A few weren't very good and Lukasz also deleted those that showed Patryk's profile. But there were more than enough for any jury to convict Peachornby on bribery and corruption charges. The two men smiled.

"I'll get these to Naismith tomorrow." Glancing at his watch, "Fancy coming back? I'll call Kassia and ask her to get some snacks ready."

"Sounds good to me. Let's roll."

The two men made their way to Patryk's van which was parked around the other side of the Bass Maltings. A minute later they too were bumping along the access road. At the end, Patryk relocked the gate before making a right and heading back into Sleaford.





## CHAPTER 9. THE FÜHRER GETS AN EDUCATION.

The following day, while Naismith scanned through the camera's SD memory card; in his own office the Mayor of Sleaford leaned against the oak-lined wall and gazed out of his window, which also overlooked Kesteven Street's car park. His Jaguar gleamed in the morning's sunshine below.

Peachornby wondered if a Jaguar was impressive enough for a man of his stature. A man with his responsibilities deserved something larger. A Rolls Royce perhaps? That was British so he'd be being patriotic and supporting British jobs if the Urban Council bought him one. He'd have to look into getting one. The tax-payers would want their leader to represent them in style.

Turning away from the view and his thoughts, Peachornby spoke. "They're up to something, Mason. Why did they send us over to the Bass Maltings to pick up that money?"

"I still reckon it was a set-up, boss. Why should they bung us ten large?"

"So we can push that planning application through. I told you that before, Mason."

"Yeah, but why there?"

"Supp... supposedly because it was out of the way."

"Still seems fishy, boss – not like we were fixing a ruck. But I was thinking, boss..."

"Go ahead Mason. I'm all ears. Let's hear it," Peachornby said while fishing a glob of wax from his ear.

Mason rubbed his crooked nose, beetling his heavy brows in unwonted thought. "Well, I was thinking..." Mason said slowly, trying to get his words in order. He was more used to talking with his fists but since becoming Assistant to the Mayor, sorry Senior Assistant, he'd been trying to use his brains more. He'd moved on from the *Daily Star* to the *Express* and although he didn't quite grasp all the concepts he was making an effort. He still didn't understand why the paper was so obsessed with the late Princess Diana.

"Well, I was thinking that, I mean, if Naismith can bung you ten K for pushing through a planning application, how much could we make if we were in charge of the planning committee ourselves?"

Mason studied Peachornby's back as the Mayor turned round to look at his Jag. "Only a thought, boss, I mean..."

Peachornby slowly swivelled around away from the window. He smiled. "Just what I was thinking myself," he lied. He wondered why he hadn't come up with that when his minder had. All the same it was a good idea.

His inflamed nose itched so he picked it. "Then we've got to get Naismith out the way. Him and his Masonic pals have got the planning committee sewn up."



"How shall we do that, boss?" Mason asked, his flow of ideas having stopped after the first one.

Peachornby grinned. An evil grin that would have worried Naismith if he'd seen it. He unlocked his desk drawer, moved a USB flash drive that had been defaced with a swastika and placed his bible onto the leather top. An early edition of *Mein Kampf*; signed on the flyleaf by the Nazi's ambassador to Britain, Joachim von Ribbentrop, with a laminated photograph of Hitler himself as a bookmark.

Despite Peachornby's urging, Mason had never read Hitler's autobiography. Years ago, he'd got half way through *The Turner Diaries* about a race war between whites and the rest of the world. It had been okay but he hadn't managed to finish the book.

"How did Hitler come to power? Did he ask for it or seize it with both hands?"

"He took it," said Mason, going for the obvious answer.

"That's right. He grabbed it from those who wanted to keep it for themselves. And we all know how he did it."

Looking at Mason's blank face, Peachornby ran through the one single event that allowed his guru, his inspiration, to take total control of Germany from his enemies. After a minute, Mason's face lit up as he cottoned on.

"So when do you want us to do it, boss?"

Peachornby thought. Taking this action would be a big step and he wasn't sure he was ready. Now it came to it, he was unsure. Doing this would be a game changer

and even Peachornby knew he would need to cover his tracks. "Soon. Let me have a think."

"Just give me the word, boss."

\*\*\*

Later, there was a knock on the oak panelled door.

"Good morning, Mayor," said Naismith. "Donna said it was all right to stop by. Are you busy?"

Peachornby quickly covered his *Mein Kampf* with a copy of *The Times*. The newspaper had never been opened as *The Times* had not yet introduced topless babes on page three and the articles were rarely about reality TV celebs or footballers. Or reality TV celebs bonking footballers.

"Sure, Naismith. No probs. What can I do you for?"

Naismith opened a buff coloured folder and spread it out over the leather surface.

"If you could sign there... and there, Mayor. And there..."

"What's this one for, Naismith?"

"It's the compulsory purchase for some land, Mayor. The greenfield land Lincolnshire County Council now want to appropriate in order to house our nomadic, travelling community after we prevented their scheme by buying up those flats on Mareham Lane. Didn't I mention it before?"

"Another gypco camp."

"I wouldn't put it like that, Mayor. At least not in public."

Peachornby shrugged. "Only telling it like it is." He leafed through the rest of the file before Naismith had chance to close it. Towards the end, Peachornby spread out a large A2 size sheet of paper. On the map was superimposed an outline for a proposed housing estate of mock-Tudor executive homes, each with a double garage and conservatory. There was a small area set aside behind a high fence for social housing. These did not have garages or conservatories let alone the mock-Tudor features. They were as plain and functional as possible.

"Sav... Sav... Saveiro Canadian funding this?" Peachornby asked. He flicked through a few more pages. "Oh, I see they are. Has planning permission been given?"

Naismith shuffled his feet. "I see no grounds for refusal, Mayor. Sleaford needs quality new housing to attract young, upwardly mobile families."

"But it's slap bang by my garden centre! I never got told about it. I might've wanted to buy that land myself."

"I'm sure your notification was posted along with all those to other interested parties."

"Well I never got it. Listen, Naismith, I'm gonna object. That'll throw a spanner in the works."

"Maybe..."

"On the other hand if your mates at Saveiro Canadian were to make me another present, and I don't mean a poxy ten K..."

"I'm positive that will be forthcoming, Mayor."

"Better had be. And right sharpish. You with me?"

Concealing his disappointment, Naismith carried on. "Perfectly, Mayor. Now, don't forget that you are scheduled for the prize giving at Sydenham Private Girl's School at three pm. It was booked before the election."

Naismith slid over a sheet of paper giving the names of the girls who had won prizes and awards. The list was dominated by one name, a girl who had seemingly won almost everything going from the chess championship, several science prizes as well as the hundred metres race and athletic trophies. It was like the other girls had only been awarded consolation prizes to cheer them up.

"You're having a laugh. That's not a name; it sounds like a witch-doctor's curse," Peachornby barked. He pushed the paper to one side.

"I would recommend that it is best not to say anything too inflammatory this afternoon, Mayor. There will be some very important people present. Chidiebere Tsholofelo is a very gifted scholar and comes from a good home. She's on course for straight As and been awarded a place at Somerville College," Naismith said soothingly. His white gold cuff link glittered as he replaced the paper before the Mayor.

Peachornby looked blank. "Never heard of it. Is it near here?"

"It's a prestigious girl's college at Oxford University." Naismith talked Peachornby through the pronunciation of the schoolgirl's name until the Mayor could make a reasonable stab at it.

"Should have chosen an English girl," Peachornby grumbled.

"She is. Her family have British citizenship now."

"You know what I mean."

Shortly after, Naismith let himself out of the office and grinned. A smile that made Donna, who was just going out for a doctor's appointment, go weak at the knees. But this smile wasn't for Donna. Naismith was thinking that young Chidiebere Tsholofelo's triumphs blew Peachornby's white supremacist theories out of the water.

"Clear my diary from two thirty this afternoon," Naismith told his own secretary. "I can't miss this ceremony."

\*\*\*

By two fifty, Naismith slipped into the back of Sydenham Private Girl's School assembly hall and took his place with the beaming parents. He sat on a gym form, his knees almost up to his chin, and nodded to those people he knew. Chidiebere Tsholofelo's parents sat in the front row. Her father wore a black suit and sober tie. Naismith had heard that the man was a London barrister. He might be a useful contact if Saveiro Canadian ever went belly up and he was caught with his pants down in the wreckage. Naismith made a mental note to exchange business cards with him afterwards.

The schoolgirls all sat in rows facing the stage. The youngest and smallest nearest the front with the older girls towards the back wearing their unflattering and thus resented bottle green uniform with a yellow trim. Not wanting to get into trouble today, none of the girls had rolled up their skirts to much higher than regulation length.

Up on the stage sat the headmistress and senior teachers with a discreet distance between themselves and the Mayor of Sleaford and his Senior Assistant. Mason was tipping back in his chair like a naughty schoolboy. He lost his balance and his chair crashed forwards, his bovver boots slamming onto the wooden staging, drawing everyone's eyes. There was a titter of laughter from the assembled schoolgirls until their headmistress fixed them with a steely glare. She also frowned over her spectacles at Mason, who went red, again like a naughty schoolboy.

The headmistress stood, walked forwards to an oak lectern with a brass donor's plaque fixed to the front. She made a brief speech welcoming the parents and praising the girls for their hard work during the year. Then she reminded the parents that cheques were due for the school trip to Morocco. She hoped that those girls who were leaving Sydenham at the end of the term would carry the school's values with them throughout their lives.

With the subtext being that she hoped that when they had daughters of their own, they would send them to Sydenham as well. Naismith smiled. There was a woman who understood the value of pounds, shillings and pence.

Finally, and with a well concealed gesture of distaste, she introduced Peachornby as the Mayor. There was scattered polite applause but a few muted boos and hisses from the girls. They stopped the instant the headmistress's eye fell on them.

Peachornby stood, sucked in his gut and walked to the lectern. As always he was dressed entirely in black. His wig had been glued in place and looked almost natural from Naismith's vantage at the back of the gym.

The Mayor blew into the microphone. "Good afternoon, everyone." Like an end of pier comedian he waited for people to say "good afternoon," back to him. No-one did. He was greeted with stony silence.

Coughing, Peachornby looked at the list clutched in his hand. Deciding his best option was to press ahead, he started. "The Simkins prize for mathematics goes to...", he paused as if he was the compère on some TV quiz show.

"Frances Williams."

There was applause from the girls and especially from her parents. An undersized girl with calves like q-tips stood and made her way to the front. She climbed the few steps onto the stage and stood uncertainly. Peachornby handed over a certificate emblazoned with the Sydenham coat of arms. He held out his hand and said a few words. The girl took the certificate but ignored his sweaty paw. She turned her back and returned to her place.

Peachornby ignored the snub. He'd certainly had worse than that in his time, Naismith reasoned. The man looked at the second name on the list while his mouth rehearsed the unfamiliar syllables.

"The Strom prize for physics, which comes with a £10 book voucher, goes to Chidiebere Tsholofelo," Peachornby said making a good attempt at the name. Behind him, Mason scowled. Chidiebere stood and to wild cheering from her friends walked up to the front.

Sometimes fate doesn't play fair. And, as if to compensate, sometimes it overplays its hand. As well as being incredibly intelligent, athletic, and musically gifted; Chidiebere was a beautiful young woman. She was tall and slim and Naismith thought that if she'd gone into modelling, she would be gracing the catwalks of Milan or Paris or else her face would be on all the billboards. And if that wasn't enough she was also popular with her friends. Not an easy feat in the bitchy environment of an all-girl's school. And to top off her blessings the girl had supportive, wealthy, high achieving parents, which always helps in life.

Chidiebere mounted the steps with the lithe grace of a panther. She stood before the toad-like Peachornby and Naismith was struck by the contrast. Even the pitbull Mason leaned forwards as his eyes followed the girl's movements. If Peachornby had any brains to reason with, the girl standing before him would blow away his outdated racial theories as to the supremacy of the Nordic races.

Peachornby picked up a small trophy, an emblazoned certificate and the book token. He offered them to Chidiebere and then dropped his hand. She took them and smiled a smile of pure brilliant radiance. Then she held out her hand. Peachornby looked shocked, his bloodshot peepers making Os. After a moment, he raised his hand again and shook with Chidiebere and said a couple of polite words.



As Chidiebere returned to her place Peachornby stood isolated on the stage. He gazed at his hand and looked as if he wanted to rub his palm on his trouser leg. That was almost certainly the first black person Peachornby had touched with his hand and not his fist in his life, Naismith thought. It didn't look like he'd enjoyed the experience much.

There were a few jeers for Peachornby but they were drowned out by cheers and clapping for Chidiebere. As soon as the noise died down, Peachornby read out the next name.

"The Windrow Cup for applied biology....," that brought a smirk from Mason. Naismith knew how Mason liked applying his biological functions. How many kids had the man fathered on how many women? Looked like Mason would like to use his biology – even with Chidiebere Tsholofelo herself. "... goes to Helena Robinson."

Peachornby looked happier when a well built Anglo-Saxon blonde came up. But as with the earlier Frances Williams, Helena Robinson also refused to shake hands with the Mayor. She took her certificate as if it was contaminated, tipped her nose in the air and left the stage without speaking. Mason, being an equal opportunities type of sexist as well as a racist, tilted his head and admired her rear view as she descended.

The next two academic prizes both went to Chidiebere Tsholofelo. Her parents beamed with delight at the rewards for their daughter's hard work. Both times, the girl held out her hand for Peachornby to shake. To Naismith's eyes, it didn't look like he enjoyed the experience any more than the first time.

Linda White also refused to speak or shake Peachornby's hand and neither did the unfortunately named Doris Lott. By now, Naismith was suspecting a well organised conspiracy amongst the girls. The only one who spoke or insisted on shaking hands every time was Chidiebere Tsholofelo herself. A single prize winner for swimming called Debi Jaleel also shook hands but Peachornby looked less than happy presenting her award either.

Naismith looked up at the headmistress. She was sitting primly with her legs crossed. But a little smile played about her face and Naismith guessed she wasn't upset by the girls' show of rudeness. Naismith enjoyed the prize giving but eventually all the awards were dished out. Somehow, Naismith didn't think Sydenham Private Girls School would invite the Mayor back to give out next year's prizes.

Finally, the headmistress read out her annual report which told of all the sports trophies won by the various teams. Looking up, he noticed once again an array of glittering silverware on a baize covered table up on the stage. Then she listed all the university entrances gained and then a discreet plea of how Sydenham could not afford to lose one benefactor or grant. A not so subtle hint that: as to how this was a good school, worthy of support. Help us keep afloat next year, and the next after that.

Afterwards, Naismith mingled with some of the parents, congratulated Mr. Tsholofelo on his accomplished daughter and managed to swap cards with him; then had a chat with Charles Langton-Gore, whose gawky daughter had won an award for her essay. Charles being on the board of governors probably helped the English teacher make her decision.

Naismith saw both Peachornby and Mason heading off on a brief guided tour of the school so he slipped out unnoticed with those parents who didn't want to hang about having canapés with the headmistress and staff. All things considered, Naismith thought, Peachornby hadn't done such a bad job. He'd even made a more than reasonable attempt at Chidiebere Tsholofelo's name. Granted, not up to BBC Radio 4 standards but nothing anybody could object to.

Maybe the fat führer was under control after all.



## CHAPTER 10. SITZKRIEG.

"That was political correctness gone mad," Peachornby said as Mason drove the Jaguar back along Eastgate towards the council offices. "They had to give all the prizes to that girl or they'd have been sued by the race relations lot."

"Too right," grunted Mason as he flipped the finger at a cabbie who'd just swerved out in front of him. "Hey, where d'you buy your licence from – Budapest?"

"I suppose they had to drop the standards to let her in," Peachornby mused, without realising that if the standards had been dropped, that should have made it easier for the English girls to sweep the board. "And did you see her dad?"

Mason pooched out his lips and made monkey noises at this. With his beetle-brows, flattened nose and heavy jaw, it kind of suited the skinhead.

"I should have asked if he had any crack or blow on him," Peachornby continued. "That's the only way they know how to make money. Or mugging some white guy."

"Or football. They're good at football," admitted Mason.

"I suppose the ball reminds the apes of coconuts. They probably think they're chasing something to eat."

"Like in the jungle."

The two men laughed as Mason parked the Jaguar in its designated spot. They walked upstairs and, once out of sight of the front-desk receptionists, Mason parodied a chimp's rolling lope while scratching his armpits and grunting, "Ooh, ooh, ooh." A couple of filing clerks turning around a corner stared wide-eyed at Mason and giggled as soon as they were out of sight. Peachornby asked Mason to close his office door behind them.

"I've been thinking," said Peachornby as soon as he sat down and checked his in tray. Which was still empty.

Mason straightened up. "Oh yes, boss?"

"They think I'm thick. They think I'm some numpty you can push around."

"Oh no, boss. I don't think so," his Senior Assistant said loyally.

"Well I'm not some numpty. I won that election fair and square. The people of Sleaford chose me to be their leader and they want me to take full control. Not that Naismith. He's only the Deputy, after all."

"What about them two Polacks? Didn't they...?"

"That was a big waste of money. I'd have won without them – the people of Sleaford were crying out for change."

That wasn't quite how Mason remembered it but his boss knew best. That's why he was the boss.

A look of low cunning crossed Peachornby's face. He rubbed the side of his inflamed nose in what he thought was a gesture denoting shrewdness. "I know what's going on," he said in a lower voice.

"What's that, boss?"

"They think they can use me..."

"Who?" Mason looked confused as if the ideas were coming too fast for his brain to process.

Peachornby lowered his voice still further. Mason leaned forwards over the desk. "Naismith and his Lodge buddies. You think I don't know whose behind those planning applications I signed off on? They think they can bung me a few lousy grand and that'll keep me happy while they make megabucks."

"You've got your garden centre. You must be making some money?" Before becoming Peachornby's Senior Assistant, Mason worked as a labourer at the garden centre. He thought anyone who worked in the back office out of the rain must be coining it in.

"Not enough. And my Dad still goes through the books," Peachornby said. Even Mason could hear the note of resentment in his boss's voice.

"Well, I'm not putting up with it no more. No way. I want a bigger slice. I'm the Mayor of Sleaford after all. This is my town. I own it and it owes me." He took a bottle of scotch from his desk drawer, poured a generous slug into a plastic cup and drank it off in one gulp. He belched.

Mason furrowed his brows and thought. Both men heard the clock tick-tocking on the wall. "What are you going to do then, boss?" he asked after a while.

Peachornby stood and paced before the window. He put his arm across his chest and tucked it under his lapel in a manner reminiscent of Napoleon as he did so. "Did Franco wait for power or did he march on Madrid and seize it?"

Once, years before, Mason thought Franco played left back for Nottingham Forest but repeated exposure to Peachornby's speeches had educated him.

"What about Antonescu? – the Romanian one," Peachornby continued.

Mason's eyes lit up with vague understanding. "Oh yes, the Romanian one."

"Did Antonescu sit behind a desk waiting for someone to knock on the door and offer him the leadership of Romania? Of course not. He jumped up and grabbed it with both hands. King Carol II had no choice but to make him the Marshal of Romania."

Mason nodded like the nodding dog in the back of a car. "And Hitler."

Peachornby's eyes shone with fervour at mention of his supreme hero. He took out his old copy of *Mein Kampf*. "Hitler. Those business types in 1933 thought they could control him; that they could make him dance to their tune. And they were wrong." Peachornby thumped his fist on the desk making his pen stand and in tray rattle.



"Totally wrong. He seized power and if he hadn't been let down we would still be glorying in the Aryan Thousand Years Reich. I'm going to take over this show and this is how we're going to do it."

Peachornby lowered his voice and, drawing parallels with fascist history, explained his plan once again. Now he had finally decided to go ahead and do it, Peachornby felt the hand of history on his shoulder, guiding him to his destiny. He felt good. This day would go down in legend. Generations of future historians would write books about it – the day the white race reclaimed its destiny. As Peachornby ranted, Mason listened and smiled. This sounded like fun and something he could understand.

"If you're sure, then give me the word, boss. Make sure you get yourself a good alibi and leave it to me."

\*\*\*

A few hours later, in a different place, another group of men were meeting. Their education was better, their language was different but their motives and aims were the same. The single-minded pursuit of wealth and power.

The bar lounge was almost empty. It held a warm, comforting smell of beer overlaying roast pork and roast potatoes with gravy which is what Eslaforde Lodge had enjoyed that evening. Two old men in dark suits, black ties loosened, leaning on the polished counter, were swapping golfing tips and holiday reminiscences and joshing with the barmaid, who happened to be the granddaughter of one of the brethren. She took it in good part. She'd heard far worse at Uni.

These two men weren't worried about being done for drink driving later. No copper who had been on the force for longer than ten minutes would dare pull these men over. Apparently, there was a list of all number plates registered to the local Freemasons and their immediate families kept at H.Q. for the benefit of the dispatchers. In turn, they would advise those cops on traffic duty and tell them to leave that car alone.

And if some overzealous plod made the mistake of stopping a Freemason then one call to Superintendent Donelan – any time, he'd said, even if England are batting – would get any tickets scratched and the unfortunate copper drawing all the lousy dead-beat duties but with no overtime as compensation.

At the far end of the lounge, furthest away from the bar in an area usually reserved for Provincial Grand Officers, a group of men sat talking. One of them unrolled a blueprint and weighted it down at the corners by a couple of pint glasses and a bowl of salted peanuts. A shaded wall lamp cast a friendly yellow glow over their table and the bowed heads of the men grouped around the plans.

"So this is it? The big payola? The one that will make working with that moron worthwhile?" Naismith asked. He lifted his Glenlivet and swirled the amber liquid, studying the way the scotch adhered to the side of the tumbler.

"I was taught to be cautious," said their Worshipful Master, Jeremy Sandiford, raising a smile from the others as they recognised a scrap of ritual, "but I can safely say that when this comes through none of us will ever be on the lowest spoke of fortune's wheel. Very near the top of the wheel in fact."

Naismith glanced over at the bar, caught the eye of the barmaid and nodded. A few minutes later, she brought over a tray of drinks and set them down. Naismith dropped a twenty on the tray. "Keep the change." He knew the girl well; knew she wouldn't say anything. Discretion was an essential trait for anyone working at the Hall. Meanwhile, the two old guys at the bar were working down their fifth double scotch and Naismith heard one banging on about the European Union in a way that would have pleased the Mayor. Sadly, Peachornby's views weren't unique.

The Worshipful Master gently knocked three times on the table. Called from refreshment to labour, the men huddled closer.

Spread out on the blueprint for all the men to view were the Bass Maltings. But not the ruined, abandoned Maltings of the present. These plans showed a huge complex of duplex apartments and condos, leisure facilities together with retail and some office space. Naismith noticed that the central unit comprising the chimney and old boiler houses had been turned into an upmarket restaurant and fitness centre.

Sandiford also showed them a book of A3 sized architect's drawings showing how the Maltings were intended to look after the work was completed. On the sketches, happy, wealthy looking young couples (all white, except for one token ethnic) were dotted around. Some sat outside the restaurant sipping coffee or glasses of wine. There were trees and planters filled with flowering shrubs. And all under cloudless blue skies which made it look a little unrealistic as if Sleaford had been transported to the Mediterranean. However, Naismith has to admit that it all looked good.

Eslaforde Lodge's Junior Warden coughed. "It's been tried before, Jeremy. We've always run up against too much local opposition so it's died the death."

Sandiford looked at Langton-Gore. His brows furrowed. "And that's why we've got that... that moronic bigot in charge, Charles, instead of yourself. I thought I'd explained all that to you. He'll draw the slings and arrows leaving Naismith free to steer the barque of our plans through the planning committee. As an estate agent, you can take charge with all that side of things; the builders and contractors and the like while my practice....," there was a note of pride as Sandiford said that, "...does all the legal work and Atkinson here sources the money through the bank."

Atkinson grinned. On the wrong side of fifty-five, overweight, balding, on the edge of Type 2 diabetes, he'd been passed over for promotion at the bank once too often. He'd never make the boardroom so no big nest-egg lay in his pension pot. No stack of share options. No profit share scheme. Merely a salary that stretched thin at the end of the month. This was his chance to hit the big time and get out before his job was outsourced to some call centre in Mumbai.

However, for the time being, he could still authorise big loans and he knew that as long as the interest on them was kept up, not too much scrutiny would come their way. After all, at the end of the day, the bank was only interested in making money and as long as the cash flowed in, they didn't look too closely at how it was made.

Of course, the bank signed up to all the money laundering regulations and lending restrictions laid down in Basel II and had sent Atkinson on all the required courses. That's what they said to him. But ultimately it all came down serving the

great god Mammon. Make money. If you get away with cutting corners then senior management weren't about to object. If you got caught out, then you got your knuckles rapped.

Langton-Gore opened his mouth to speak but once again Sandiford beat him to it. "Don't worry, Charles. After our friend Peachornby has got himself into big trouble, there will be fresh elections and we'll make sure you'll win – it will be your turn after all." Sandiford turned to Naismith. "You've still got those two Polish chaps in your pocket?"

Naismith nodded, "Of course, Worshipful Master. They're fully on board and their rates are very reasonable."

"There you are, then. All sorted, brethren?" Sandiford said, waiting for the other men to nod agreement.

"Anybody talks about this and you know what will happen? Having your tongue torn out by the root and buried in the sands will be the least of your problems."

The men laughed. Eventually, after exchanging secret handshakes, the men broke apart, eager to get on with their parts in the redevelopment of the Bass Maltings.

\*\*\*

While the Freemasons were meeting, a few hundred yards away three people sat around a table in Andrei'z'. Two drank *Tyskie* and the third vodka and diet coke. Since the bar's association with the BNP, custom had dwindled still further. The girl

behind the counter was circling possible jobs in the vacancies column. Her pen scratching the paper was only sound until one of the men spoke in Polish.

"Did we do the right thing, Patryk?"

Patryk drank down the neck of his bottle. "Getting cold feet, Lukasz? You can get out any time you want."

"That's not what he meant, and you know it," the woman said. Patryk turned to his girlfriend, stung by her sharp tone. He placed his hand on her forearm.

"We're making top money now, far more than we ever could in our day jobs. Cash and tax-free. Naismith's looking after us. I don't know about you, Lukasz, but when we've got enough, Kass and I are going to buy a little farm we've got our eye on out by Siedice."

Lukasz looked at his friend. "Sure, and I want to set up an internet based printing company. But how much money is enough? How will we know when to get out and go home?"

"That's what I want to know, too," murmured Kassia. "Don't get too greedy, Pat."

"What's the matter with you two? Peachornby hasn't got the brains of a sea slug. Naismith's got him like this..." Patryk pushed the ball of his thumb down hard on the table. The next elections aren't for four years. We'll be loaded by then. And who knows? Naismith might decide to fix the next election, too."

"Ssh," hissed Kassia, nodding towards the barmaid who was also from Warsaw. "You don't know who's listening." It didn't appear that she had heard, or cared. "Listen, Patryk; and you too, Lukasz. I'm getting scared. Since the BNP's win, there's more skinheads in town now and one of them pushed me into the gutter. And didn't you hear about the Indian shopkeeper who got badly beaten up the other day? He said it was a couple of white men."

Patryk kept his voice low. "Could have been anyone. A robbery gone wrong. Us Poles are white and some of us are bad people, too."

"Yes, but these called him a... a...Paki," tears formed in Kassia's blue eyes.

"That's all right. Don't worry. Nothing will happen to us."

Kassia rubbed her eyes and sniffed. "They told him to eff off out of this country. Effing go home. No Pole would say that."

Patryk had to admit the truth of that. "No. Okay – so maybe these skinheads are liking their bit of power. But you want to go home? Really? I was a van lad working for a haulage company, you were wiping old ladies bottoms in a nursing home, Kass, and what were you doing...?"

Lukasz swept his hair back and looked up. "I was unemployed, wasn't I?"

Patryk smiled. "So who wants to go back? Me, I was crashing out in my step-dad's apartment and I don't think he'd welcome me back with open arms. Not now he's moved his latest squeeze in with him."

Lukasz shook his head. "No. I admit we're on a roll here. Let's run with it for the time being. But be careful, Pat. Let's not bite off more than we can chew."

After a moment, Kassia shook her head. But there were still tears in her blue eyes. "Okay, we'll stay for the time being. But you watch that Peachornby, Pat. He's not a man, he's a monster."

"No – he's a fat fool and Naismith knows what he's doing." Patryk raised his bottle and drank. After a minute's silence the two men started talking about Legia Warsaw's chances in the Ekstraklasa League. Bored, Kassia got up and started talking to her friend behind the bar. Men! Men and their power games. She just hoped that she and her friends wouldn't get hurt.





## CHAPTER 11. THE WANDERING NON-JEW.

Nesim Ciawar crossed Southgate by the bridge over the river Slea. He wrapped his thin nylon jacket around his shoulders. Beneath the jacket, he wore last season's Arsenal top and his collar bones stuck out. All his clothes had been donated by a charity. He was thinner now than he had been when he'd fled Mosul, one step ahead of the Iraqi Sunni gunmen who had come looking for him and his brother, Behram.

They'd fled north, crossing the final northern ranges of the Zagros mountains into eastern Turkey where they had found shelter with their mother's cousins. The brothers had been welcomed with open arms and their mother's family gladly shared what little they had. But their cousins were poor, simple people eking out a living from their stony fields and the Ciawar brothers wanted more than a sagging mattress in a dirt-floored hovel that smelled of goats. Also, they were too close to the border and it would be easy for the gunmen to hunt them down.

So they thanked their hosts who even scraped up the fare for the brothers to catch a long-distance bus to Ankara and then onto Izmir on the Mediterranean shore. The brothers knew that was money the family could ill afford and they promised to pay it back as soon as they could.

From Izmir, they walked and hitched up the coast, the Mediterranean on their left, olive groves and wheat fields on their right, the heat always pressing down. Then

one night, they bundled up their clothes in layers of bin bags and waded into the sea on two yellow inflatables they'd picked up that afternoon. It was only a few kilometres to the nearest Greek island and as they paddled they watched the lights on its hills grow closer and bigger.

Unlike many, Nesim and Behram made it. The high speed Greek patrol launch didn't pick them up and return them to Turkey. Instead they splashed up on the beach. The European Union. The promised land – or a part of it any way. Nesim pushed the inflatables back into the surf and watched them disappear into the pre-dawn darkness.

Shivering with cold and exposure the brothers ripped open the bin bags and dressed, hopping from foot to foot as they did so. Then they burned their passports before turning their backs on the sea and walking inland, into the nearest town. The brothers reported to the police, hanging about for hours in an overcrowded waiting room where the only sign of movement was the slowly revolving ceiling fan. Finally, with the aid of a translator padding out Nesim's limited English they claimed political asylum.

The Greek police inspector stamped some papers and, through the interpreter, told the brothers that they could remain in Greece for three months only but after that, they would be deported. Nesim nodded, thanked the policeman and picked up their new temporary documents. A church charity gave them some filled pitta bread and bottles of water.

Shortly after, they caught the evening ferry to the port city of Piraeus and, to save money, walked into Athens along the side of a congested highway. They weren't

the only ones walking. Other people, singly or in small groups, were also trudging along. Most carried bags and a few women also carried babies or small children.

Nesim wondered how the families had made the crossing. They passed a young woman who looked exhausted. She had a baby in a sling on her hip and a large woven bag in her hands as well as a backpack. As they passed, she staggered on the rough concrete and would have fallen except Nesim caught her before she fell.

Not to be outdone, Behram took the woman's bag leaving her free to cope with her baba. "Thank you," she said. Nesim detected a Syrian accent and, asking politely, found she came from Al Qamishli, in Kurdish Syria which was only a hundred or so kilometres away from Mosul. Leaving his brother to struggle with the bulky bag, Nesim walked alongside her, chatting all the while in a mixture of Kurdish and Arabic.

Nesim soon found out that they had a couple of acquaintances in common – one of them a dentist who had closed shop in Mosul during the Iraq War and started up in Al Qamishli. They had a laugh about his habit of screwing up his eyes and sticking out his tongue during difficult procedures.

Finding out that the brothers had nowhere to stay, the girl suggested they stay at her step-brother's house for a few nights until they found somewhere. Both Nesim and Behram thanked her politely. The house was a shared apartment in a run-down block overlooking a park that was a no-go area after dark. Bars barricaded the windows and the brothers had difficulty finding any floor space to lay their heads as the step-brother's apartment, like all the others in the block, was packed. It seemed to

the brothers as if the entire middle east was on the move, as if everyone had upped stakes and was seeking a better life in Europe.

Yet there was no better life in Athens. The step-brother warned them to beware of The Golden Dawn – a bunch of right-wing neo-Nazi thugs who hate immigrants, fearing newcomers and seeing them as a threat to Greece. Nesim and Behram nodded. They came from Mosul, after all. They had seen the bloody aftermath of sectarian violence.

Looking for casual day-labour work at the local market, they witnessed a Golden Dawn mob overturning and wrecking immigrants' stalls. They didn't need to speak Greek to know that the angry thugs wanted the foreigners out. Nesim looked at Behram. Greece would not be their long term home. Over a simple meal they asked the step-brother what they should do. Perhaps wanting a little more space in his apartment, he suggested they try for Germany or, even better, England. The locals were more tolerant and there was a large Kurdish community in both countries who would help.

More, the step-brother gave Nesim a list of contacts and fixed it for them to be hidden in the back of a lorry heading north. He told them the customs would be lax until they reached the north. The Romanians and Hungarians knew asylum seekers wouldn't be staying in their countries and didn't want the hassle of dealing with them. Instead, they'd wave the lorry through and let somebody else in the north deal with the problem at their end.

Things happened just as their friend said. The brothers wrapped up in blankets and extra sweaters and sat at the back of a refrigerated truck hauling horse carcasses up

to Bruges in Belgium for processing into dog food. With a laugh, the driver told the brothers to keep moving otherwise they'd freeze and end up in the dog food – waste not, want not. They weren't sure whether the driver was joking or not.

The brothers spent the worst forty-eight hours of their lives in the back of that Arctic artic. The cold stopped being funny after a couple of hours and then it became a matter of just holding out. Before entering, the driver had explained that he could not let them out before journey's end as customs insisted the container was sealed and there was no way he could open it. Behram took to punching the horse carcasses, making the racks of ribs sway. After a bit, the cold seeping into his bones, Nesim followed suit. It helped if he imagined that the corpses belonged to their Sunni enemies.

The duty manager of the plant at Bruges was a fellow Kurd. When he flung open the rear doors, Nesim and Behram staggered out, more dead than alive. Behram collapsed, kissing the ground in relief. In the staff room, the manager gave them tea and soup but told them they couldn't stay for long in case a government inspector showed. However, it was only one hundred and twenty kilometres to Calais and after that came England. Their final destination.

Once thawed out, the brothers set out along the busy A16 highway with their thumbs out. Their feet were aching before some guy who looked like a superannuated musician complete with a greying ponytail and leather waistcoat gave them a lift in the back of his van which they had to share with a full drum kit. With a friendly wave, the artiste let them out on the outskirts of Dunkerque and then it was just a walk of thirty kilometres to Calais.

Calais twinned with Hell. Very shortly, they found their way to The Jungle – an area of woodland to the north of the city where those nomads seeking entry to England camped out until they got lucky. The woods were crammed with temporary shelters. The lucky – or more established – had tents, sleeping bags and had scrounged or been donated cooking equipments. The others made do with tarpaulins, plastic sheeting or simply benders made out of bent branches and sticks.

The place stank of cooking and human waste and the brothers heard dozens of different languages spoken in the first few yards. Instinctively, they huddled together. To Nesim, it seemed as if all the world was on the move in an unstoppable tidal wave of humanity, all of them escaping persecution and seeking a better, safer life in western Europe.

That first night, Nesim and Behram huddled around a camp fire, sparks and wood smoke spiralling up to the stars in a scene that could have been set in the Dark Ages. Were they the vanguard of part of a conquering army advancing into the failing states of Europe or were they defeated men, hiding out away from their enemies? Nesim couldn't answer that question.

He thrust those thoughts out of his head as another man, an ex-cabbie from Kirkuk, told the brothers that they had two choices here. Either they could pay the people-smugglers thousands of dollars to get them into England. The brothers shook their heads at this. They did not have that kind of money and neither did their family as their father's mother was so unwell now.

"What's the alternative?" Nesim asked.

The other Kurd stroked his moustache. His teeth gleamed in the firelight.

"Then you must climb the fence, dodge the security guards and their sniffers and hop on a train or lorry. And if Allah smiles on you, then you might make it."

"But be careful," said another man around a mouthful of bread. "It doesn't matter if the guards catch you; all they can do is fingerprint you and then send you back here and then you can try again the next night. Or the night after that until one day you get lucky."

"They say 5,000 trucks a day go through Calais. Allah will smile on you one day," a thin Afghani muttered biting into an apple.

"No, it's the trains you have to watch. Fall under the wheels and you'll be cut in half..." said yet another.

An older man with grey in his hair and beard spoke up. "That's if you're fortunate. If not, then you'll lose your arms or legs and never enjoy the blessings of Paradise."

The conversation turned to stories of men they had known who had died beneath the unforgiving wheels of the trains or crushed underneath lorries. Nesim and Behram looked at each other. Even allowing for exaggeration the tales were horrifying.

Exhausted, Nesim and Behram found shelter under a bush, its branches reinforced with a golfing umbrella. A church group came around with sandwiches one day beyond their sell-by date and bottles of water. That was their only contact with the outside world. But that was alright. During the day, The Jungle slept. It was after



night fell that it came alive. Ghost-like, in small groups, the men made their way to the high fence guarding the port area surrounding the Channel Tunnel.

It was a constant struggle between the port's security guards and the asylum seekers. The guards rushed from place to place, but it was like a child trying to hold back the sea. As soon as the guards' backs were turned, more men scrambled over the fence and swarmed towards the train tracks or tried the backs of semi-trailers.

Nesim looked at Behram. "Shall we?"

"It's what we've come for," Behram replied.

They hugged and then set their feet into the chain link fence. Somebody had flung a blanket over the barbed wire at the top and not yet removed it. In the distance, they saw a security carrier driving away a group of men whose attempt this night had failed. Perfect for them, if not for the unknown men. Nesim and Behram scrambled up and over, dropping down onto the brightly lit concrete of the port. Crouching, they ran over to the railway sidings, keeping away from the harsh glare cast by the floodlights. A long line of wagons stood waiting, the engine at the front already revving up.

The two men stooped and scabbled over the track bed. Underneath the wagons were a forest of rods and niches. Glad that he hadn't wasted his time at the gym back in Mosul, Nesim swung up and gripped the rods, resting his knees over a convenient bar. In front of him, he saw the dark bulk of Behram also clinging on. Not wanting to attract attention, neither spoke.

Glancing to the side, Nesim saw black boots walking along the side of the track. One of the guards swung a mirror on a stick under the train. Nesim held his breath. Wearing dark clothes, he would be almost invisible.

"Hey," one of the guards shouted.

Nesim's English was just good enough to understand the man's strong accent. "I've got one! Let's be 'avin you, sunshine." Two guards leaned under the wagon and pulled Behram out and dragged him over the cinder bed. Nesim held his breath expecting at any moment to feel hands pulling him out as well. To the side, he heard Behram protesting loudly but his brother was wasting his breath. At least Behram was drawing attention away from himself. After a couple of minutes the guards dragged Behram away and then he heard a truck's engine start up and drive away. Apart from the usual sounds of a busy port, it fell quiet.

Nesim offered up a silent prayer. He prayed for Behram and hoped he was safe. But he also prayed for himself. Had he got away with it? Then he felt a jerk as the goods train started up. Taking a tight hold, Nesim clung on as the slow-moving train approached the Channel Tunnel, picking up speed as it did so.

If the journey in the refrigerated truck was hell, then this was twice as bad. Nesim's wrists and ankles and knee joints ached until he felt he could take no more strain or pain. Every nerve screamed with agony. Yet he had to. The alternative was to fall and be cut to pieces by the train's wheels. He prayed constantly, with a fervour he'd never shown before – an endless appeal for help as the train rumbled through the tunnel in its endless hellish trip.

Just when Nesim thought he could take no more, there was a change in atmosphere. The tunnel walls fell away and a wet, salt breeze flowed under the carriage. He'd made it on his first attempt. He'd made it! He was here! Despite feeling sorry for Behram, Nesim's heart soared. As soon as the train slowed and stopped, Nesim unclenched his fists and dropped to the ground.

Then he crawled out from under and stood up. Every joint ached terribly – it felt like he'd been pummelled unmercifully by the gym's wrestlers and boxers. Over to one side, across hectares of concrete and tarmac glistening in the rain, were a row of prefab buildings which were obviously offices. Nesim started walking towards them.

He was picked up within one minute and hustled towards the offices. There Nesim endured the first of a long series of interviews before, eventually when he was beyond exhaustion, he was given temporary paperwork and then put onto a minibus and taken to a nearby hostel.

The hard-pressed Kentish council, its funds drained by the constant inflow of immigrants claiming asylum, had made arrangements with other councils elsewhere in the country for them to take some of the surplus. After a few days of misery hanging around waiting for nothing to happen, Nesim and some others found themselves in another bus heading north.

Nesim and two others, a nervous young Afghan and a big Turkic man who could have come from almost anywhere between Istanbul and Kashgar in China's Uighur province, found themselves dropped off in the middle of a caravan park on the North Lincolnshire coast.

The social worker, who introduced himself as Kevin, wearily greeted them and explained that this was only temporary accommodation. They should be in a small town called Sleaford. However, the new mayor didn't like immigrants and had set up this camp instead. Nesim looked at the big man, whose name was Kasymguly, and whispered that it was still better than Mosul. The other nodded but didn't say anything.

Nesim changed his words over the following week. Safer to stay, yes; but better no. He'd never been so cold. Up in the mountains, Mosul might have lower temperatures on the thermometer but this unrelenting damp chill penetrated his clothes and settled in his bones. And this was supposed to be summertime here? What was winter like? He shivered. And where was Behram? He still hadn't heard from his brother and was getting worried now.

However, there were several other Kurds and an Iranian student in the camp and Nesim fell in with them. Without enough money in their pockets, the men loafed around Cleethorpes town centre. Even though the English mostly blanked them and avoided the refugees, Nesim and his friends noticed groups of burly young men with tattoos and shaved heads who scowled and spat curses as they passed.

Back at Kamp Kleethorpes, as it was known locally, they heard stories of how these skinheads would racially abuse, or sometimes even assault, the refugees. Kevin advised them to give the skins a wide berth. The refugees looked at each other, confused by the term 'skins'. However, the phrase 'avoid them' was obvious enough.

Their shared caravan was alright. Clean and basic but nowhere near as pleasant as his family's apartment in Mosul. How he missed it. How he missed his

mother. Nesim wondered when the authorities would get round to processing his asylum application. He was desperate to get a job so he could wire money back home. As the days and weeks drifted into each other with no news of Behram to brighten his day, Nesim and his friends took occasional day-labour jobs working in the fields.

One evening, as Nesim watched the clouds build up, Kasymguly came and said a scrap yard near Sleaford was looking for some cheap labour. Cash in hand and no questions asked. If only for something to do, Nesim said yes. Nobody said anything as a group of men walked out of the gates of Kamp Kleethorpes and caught a bus to Sleaford.

It was hard graft at the scrap yard but Nesim didn't mind. The work filled his days keeping him occupied. The pay was terrible but Nesim squirrelled away what he earned and soon he'd wire some home to his mother. His job was the lowest of the low. Hard, dirty and dangerous.

Ignoring all environmental regulations, the manager told him to burn plastic insulation off wire to salvage the copper inside. He spent his days choking in thick, toxic smoke. When he'd run out of cabling, he burned radial tyres for the wires inside. As he worked, he wondered how much the owner was bribing the council to let him ignore all rules.

Big Kasymguly, who was acting as foreman, walked past. "The boss is taking a big delivery later. He needs you to get some more gasoline." Kasymguly handed Nesim a jerry-can and two tenners. Glad to get away from the thick, black smoke, Nesim hurried out of the yard to the filling station.

It was late now and dark, but the salvage yard worked 24/7 – especially as the manager ran a number of sidelines that clearly weren't legit – and as Nesim cut through the footpath by the side of the sports centre, he heard the wailing of sirens and blue lights bouncing off the buildings. As he emerged onto East Road, more police cars and vans shot past. He smelled smoke on the air, reminding him of the scrap yard. There must have been a fire nearby, he thought, and a big one, too. He prayed that nobody had been hurt.

Carefully, looking both ways, he crossed East Road. With no warning, a speeding police van swerved across and screeched to a stop in front of him. A huge man, dressed all in black and made bulkier by his bullet-proof vest, flung open the side door and leaped out.

Nesim froze in terror. This was like the bad old days back in Mosul when anyone could be arrested and dragged away for no reason.

"You. Where're you going?" the cop shouted. His voice was angry.

Before Nesim could explain himself or run, the cop gripped his arm and slammed him up against the side of the van. His wind knocked out of him, Nesim bounced off the metalwork until the cop grabbed him, pinioning the young man in place. Nesim dropped the empty jerry-can and it fell to the pavement with a dull clang.

"Sarge. I've got the little beggar."

Another big cop with stripes on his sleeves jumped out of the van. He picked up the gas-can and shook it in Nesim's face. "What's this then, sonny? Care to run this by me?"

"I... I...", Nesim stuttered.

"Save it for the station. You're nicked, sonny," the Sergeant said. "Arson with intent to endanger life. That'll do for a start."

"Nice result, man," said a third copper who was built like a Fijian rugby player, shoving Nesim into the back of the police carrier. "You know, I reckon Peachornby's right all along. You let them into the country and then they turn round and try and burn us out."

"That'll do," the Sergeant said as the driver switched on the blues and twos and shot off down the road.

Nesim didn't know what to say. It had all happened so fast.





## CHAPTER 12. REICHSTAG FIRE I.

"Tonight, boss? Okay, I'll call Malkie. He'll know what to do," Mason said bending a paper clip back and forth until it snapped. He dropped it onto the parquet floor and fished out another from the desk tidy.

"They've let him out?"

"Last month, boss. Time off for good behaviour," Mason laughed. A harsh, jagged sound. "Imagine, Malkie getting time off. He can't have lamped any screws this stretch." This time, Peachornby joined in with Mason's laughter.

"There'll be a drink in it for you and anyone you need. And I'm not talking a bottle of Becks – I'm talking champagne," Peachornby said to his assistant.

"Don't like that Frog muck, boss. I'd rather down a bottle of vodka."

"Vodka then. Whatever you want, Mason."

Mason nodded and stood, dropping another broken paper clip. At the door he turned back. "Got yourself a good alibi, boss? After this, the filth will come looking for us. I know them." Forgetting where he was, Mason spat. The glob of spittle landed on the parquet, as out of place in the grand settings of the wood panelled Mayor's office as the Mayor's golden chain would be on the football terraces. Mason scuffed it away with the toe of his Doc Marten's.

Peachornby looked annoyed but was enough of a politician to quickly wipe that expression from his face. "Of course. I'm seeing the Cranberry Alternative Dance and Tambourine Troupe performing Offal..., er, Ophelia at the Lincoln Drill Hall theatre at eight. And then drinks after with the Director and Producer and that lesbo woman from Lincolnshire Council's arts funding. I think there's some top cop going as well. That give you enough time?"

"Sure," said Mason, leaning against the jamb. "They any good?"

"Who?"

"The people you're seeing, boss? They fit, those dancers?" The young man made a crude pumping gesture with his arm.

Peachornby shook his head. "Bunch of dykes with hairy armpits. Wouldn't touch them with yours, mate."

The two men laughed.

"Enjoy," Mason called over his shoulder as he finally left.

\*\*\*

Two men pulled up in a dark red Rover. As it came to a halt, Mason wrenched up the handbrake under a broken street light behind the business centre. In the deep shade the car was almost invisible. Malkie pushed open the passenger door and stood. He stretched his six-three frame. He hated being cooped up in a car – it reminded him too much of being called in to help the police with their inquiries – and it had been a long drive up from Felixstowe.

Malkie rolled a dark blue ski mask down over his face and adjusted it so only his eyes showed. He wore a black nylon jacket, black jeans and gloves. Opening up the Rover's back seat he zipped on black overalls. Now he was only a shadow in the darkness. Under a blanket in the footwell was a cardboard box filled with bottles of paraffin, white spirits, oily rags and old newspapers. Malkie lifted out the box and set it down on the tarmac.

"Your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. Isaiah 1:7," he murmured.

"Er, that's right, very right," Mason agreed. "Let's get rid of these strangers."

Malkie had never been the same since he'd come home from those neo-Nazi white supremacist training camps high up the Cabinet Mountains in the Montana backwoods. There, as well as weapons training, he'd been indoctrinated into their strange blend of fundamental Christianity that taught that Aryan Nordic man was God's own chosen people and Hitler was the second coming of Christ.

Mason had never read the Bible. He guessed he was Church of England, sort of, but the last time he'd set foot in a church was old Auntie Dott's funeral and that had been what; four, five years ago? That had been a good do. Loads of scran at the buffet and to top things off he'd been copping a feel up some bird's skirt when her boyfriend caught them at it. Great punch-up that had been – his family still talked about it. Mind, his Mam hadn't spoken to him for a week, she was that angry. Worth it though.

"You've got the security codes?" Malkie asked, dragging Mason's thoughts back to the present. The beanpole's Suffolk accent was comical to Mason's ears but he

respected the fire-setting skinhead too much to laugh. Every year, Malkie had the job of lighting the Ku Klux Klan style fiery cross at the BNP's rally. Just before the barbecue that was. And every year he surpassed himself, even when it was pouring with rain. Which, being held in Mid Wales during July, it usually was.

"Sure," Mason confirmed patting his pocket.

"And the security guard?"

"Like I already said, mate. The guy's sixty-eight and this time of night he's stretched out on one of the sofas in the meeting room. This is Sleaford, mate. Nothing ever happens here."

"Ye have brought into my sanctuary strangers, uncircumcised in heart, and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in my sanctuary, to pollute it, even my house, when ye offer my bread, the fat and the blood, and they have broken my covenant because of all your abominations. Ezekiel 44: 7-8," Malkie grinned, his teeth showing white against his black ski mask.

Mason winced at the reference to circumcision and gripped himself, checking that he was still intact. "Yeah, let's get rid of these foreign strangers. All of 'em. Whether they've had the snip or not," Mason agreed. "That guard's in for a big shock tonight." He'd sort of understood what Malkie was driving at here.

The two men crossed Kesteven Street. There was nobody about. Mason input the door code and let them into the council offices. There was a smell of polish and spray from the cleaners earlier that evening. Without switching on the lights, Mason

crossed to a small ante-room just by the reception desk. A bank of lights was flashing amber. Mason punched in the code and all the lights turned to green.

"That's the fire alarms switched off," Mason whispered.

"What about the sprinkler system? Have you deactivated that?"

Mason snorted laughter. "It's only for show. Winfield, the guy in charge of lookin' after this dump, keeps putting off the fire inspection. I think he's dipping into the maintenance money."

They returned to the reception area. Malkie looked around. "This is no good. Not enough combustibles. Where's the bin room or where they store paper?"

Mason wasn't sure of the word combustibles but he knew Malkie was the expert arsonist and understood that a fire needed fuel. Mason remembered when they torched that Bengali restaurant in Nottingham last year. That had been fun especially after the fire reached the opened cans of cooking oil and tablecloths. The place had gone up like a rocket. That would teach 'em to come over here and start selling that foreign muck. All the same, you couldn't beat a good vindaloo after a night on the ale with the lads.

Their boots squeaking over the tiled floors, Mason led Malkie up the stairs to the first floor. They walked through an open plan office, all the monitors except one switched off. Mason thought the place looked different by night – all the desks and chairs squat, sinister hulks in the dim light from the windows.

Using the keys he'd lifted from the Security Office earlier that day, Mason opened the stationery store. In the confined, windowless room, Malkie switched on

his torch and shone the beam over the racks. Reams of copier paper filled several shelves, toner cartridges for the photocopiers, manilla files and notebooks provided enough raw material to make Malkie smile. The firebomber took out a savagely serrated hunting knife and slashed through some of the reams of paper. Scooping up handfuls, he threw the paper over the nearest desks in the office outside. After a moment, Mason enthusiastically followed suit.

"You sure there's only one security guard here? I don't want this turning into a murder inquiry," Malkie muttered as they worked.

"Yeah, only one old geezer crashed out in the meeting room. He's right next to the fire exit so he'll be okay," Mason replied. "Don't know why you're worried as you're booked on the first flight out to Amsterdam tomorrow. Two weeks of getting your end away. Wish I was goin' with you."

Reassured, Malkie carried on until he was happy with the mounds of paper and card scattered about the desks and easy chairs. The chairs were old, left overs from earlier offices and made before modern fire regulations. They would go up like bonfires.

While Malkie sprinkled paraffin and white spirits around the office, he sent Mason round the office to open several windows to provide oxygen to feed the blaze. Even with a breeze blowing in, the hydro-carbon reek of the accelerants filled their noses. To Mason it smelled disgusting but to Malkie, well he loved the smell of paraffin at night. It was the smell of a cleansing fire.

The neo-Nazi skinhead grinned with expectation. This was going to be so good. Maybe not the biggest fire he'd ever set but probably the most important. This

would make the national news for sure. Malkie savoured this moment, drawing out the pleasure until Mason nudged his elbow.

"Come on, mate, haven't got all night."

Malkie nodded and lit the oily rag. He held onto it for a second until he hurled it into the nearest heap of paper. Mason watched as flames licked out of the pile until, with a whoompf, the pile caught fire. Looking up, Mason saw the flames reflected from the white polystyrene ceiling tiles until the seat cushions caught fire and a thick pall of acrid black smoke hid the blaze from view. All this took less than three minutes.

"Come on, hurry up," Mason said, pulling Malkie away from the sight.

Shaking his head, Mason led Malkie out of the office and down the back stairs to the basement where Mason unlocked the bin room. The two men tipped over several metal dumpsters. The bad, sour smell that filled the room instantly got worse. Shredded paperwork, cardboard, food waste and bin bags spilled out onto the stained concrete floor. Malkie and Mason poured the last of the accelerants over the mound of waste before Malkie lit it. More flames erupted, fanned by the drafts from the ventilation louvres.

Grabbing some bags filled with card, the two men ran out of the bin room and up the stairs, leaving the door open. Turning around, Mason saw the smoke billow out of the store, into the corridor and into the lift shaft. He coughed but then they rounded the stairwell return. The two men wedged open the fire door leading to the reception foyer. Tendrils of smoke followed them.

Finally, Malkie set a third fire in the staff room off the foyer. With all the old chairs and personal belongings, there was no shortage of food for this fire. Malkie chucked the last bottle of turps straight onto the new fire like a grenade laughing wildly as he did so.

Safely out in Kesteven Street the two men looked back at the offices. A flickering orange glare lit up the first floor offices.

"Gonna be a burning tonight," Malkie said with a smile. "Thou sentest forth thy wrath, which consumed them as stubble. Exodus 15:7."

"Sure, whatever. C'mon, mate, lets get out of here. Enjoy Amsterdam."

"To the labourer comes the reward." The two men got back into Mason's Rover and a few minutes later were speeding west out of Sleaford and along the A52 and then the A607 to the East Midlands Airport. Mason wished he was going to Amsterdam as well. But he knew that Peachornby had bigger and better plans for him.

Hopefully followed by much bigger rewards. Oh, yeah, bring 'em on, baby.





## CHAPTER 13. REICHSTAG FIRE II.

Meanwhile, Naismith and Donna were up in the photocopying room. They weren't photocopying. They were backed up in a corner and Naismith had his hands inside Donna's underwired bra and hers were tugging at his Calvin Kleins. His Brooks Brothers chalk-stripes were already down around his Church's brogues.

"You're marvellous – you should be on page three," Naismith murmured in her ear. "Have you ever applied?"

Donna moaned softly with pleasure. She stood on tiptoes and nuzzled his neck. Her eyes opened wide. "What's that?"

"I think you should know what that is by now," Naismith said, his voice half way between a growl and a chuckle.

"No, not that! I can smell something," she said, trying to free herself from his arms.

"Like it? *Tom Ford* aftershave. You should – it cost enough," he said in his sexiest growl. "But you're worth it, Donna. You know that," he added.

"No, not that. Is something burning?"

"Yes, my passion for you. I'm burning up inside," Naismith said, using a line he'd used on that other girl, What's-her-name, the new red-head who'd just started in the Environmental Health department. It had worked fine then.

"No, you silly. Something's on fire. Is it one of the copiers? The repair man never come out today," Donna said. She gave Naismith a harder shove and he nearly tripped over his dropped trousers. Freed from his embrace, Donna ducked under his arms and dodged around him readjusting her blouse as she did so.

Donna crossed to the large colour copier/printer which was well known amongst the secretaries as always playing up. As usual, a red paper jam symbol was flashing. Donna lifted the lid and sniffed. She sniffed again, more deeply. Naismith wished he'd brought a line or two of coke with him – they could have snorted it off the glass scanner bed. Maybe that would get the silly mare back in the mood. But all he had was a crisp fifty in his wallet.

Donna leaned forwards and switched off the copier at the socket. Naismith admired the girl's rear end as she bent over. The red light went out. Donna sniffed again. "This machine's okay. It's not overheating, I mean. I wonder if its..." She moved over to the next; an ancient black and white Xerox. It was obsolete now but it was so reliable it had never been scrapped. A bi-annual service was all the old machine needed.

Donna leaned over and felt the back of the machine. It wasn't in operation and so it was cool. Cool as a cucumber. She shook her head. "It's getting stronger."

"It sure is," said Naismith looking down at his crotch.

"Not that! The smell. There's definitely something burning." The girl sounded slightly alarmed now.

Naismith breathed in sharply himself. Perhaps it was only Donna's worries but he thought he could smell the acrid tang of smoke. Sighing, he pulled up his trousers and cinched his Gucci belt. Some you win; some you lose. Tonight was one to the latter. He walked to the door and opened it.

Immediately, the smell of smoke became far, far stronger. Naismith coughed and looked out into the corridor.

"Get out, Donna. There's a fire."

He looked back. Donna was slipping on her slingbacks and picking up her bag. Even in the few seconds delay Naismith saw smoke billowing up from the nearby stairwell. He wondered why the fire alarms hadn't gone off. When had they last been checked? He couldn't remember. That was down to that time-server Winfield in maintenance.

Naismith took hold of Donna's arm. She looked up into his face and winced. "C'mon, hurry," he barked. More smoke was eddying along the corridor. He coughed slightly into his hand. Looking up he saw the ceiling was already greying with smoke.

Donna pulled Naismith towards the lifts. She stabbed the button and stabbed it again in her panic. Remembering his training as one of the Town Hall's fire marshals, Naismith dragged Donna away, just as the brushed steel doors dinged open. Already, tendrils of smoke wisped out from around the lift's compartment.

"No – take the stairs," Naismith called, pulling her further away from danger. Donna shook her head and looked tempted to still use the lift. Using his greater strength, Naismith hauled Donna further down the corridor, past the photocopier room.

Naismith coughed again, as the fumes caught the back of his throat. Even in the short space of time between leaving the false safety of the lift and the start of the stairwell, the smoke was thicker, denser more cloying. At the top of the stairwell, Naismith pushed open the heavy fire door. The stairwell seemed clearer and he took in a deeper lungful of clean air.

"Come on, hurry up," Naismith called.

Donna stumbled past him onto the landing. The stairwell led down to the ground floor. It was lined with cheap yellowing tiles that looked like they had been fitted back in the 1960s and never replaced since.

They took the first flight down and paused on the return. A window overlooked the car park and the scene of normality brought them both to their senses. Naismith coughed again before taking Donna by the arm and down the second flight to the lower fire door. Naismith gripped the handle. It felt warm to his touch.

"Almost there," he said encouragingly. Donna smiled up at him. He was still wondering why the fire alarms hadn't sounded as he pulled open the fire door. To be greeted by a scene straight from Hell. Flames licked up one end of the corridor and black, roiling smoke billowed along the corridor. Naismith and Donna looked on in horror. The heat was tremendous, far hotter than standing in front of an open oven.

Even from several feet away, Naismith felt the hair on his head and face singe; the air as hot as a furnace's blast. He stood staring at the blaze for a moment.

"What's that?" shouted Donna above the fire's roar.

Looking at where she was pointing, Naismith saw what looked like the remnants of many cardboard boxes blocking the corridor. There was no reason why that junk should be there.

"No idea! Leave it – let's get out of here before it spreads!"

As if called by his words, the window nearest the inferno exploded outwards with the heat. Above the roar, Naismith heard glass breaking and crashing. For one instant, one instant only, Naismith considered leaping through the broken window. As soon as the idea came to mind, he thrust it away. The fire was too close.

Rejuvenated by the extra oxygen the fire blazed upwards as if it was trying to burn down the entire building in one go. The rush and bellowing of the fire grew much stronger and flames leaped out seeking the pair. For a moment, Naismith felt real fear, terror gripped his heart and his legs felt weak and shaky. Donna clung to him, trying to draw strength from his presence. Thick black smoke flooded along the ceiling. Even as he watched, the smoke pressed lower.

Naismith pulled his linen handkerchief out and with his free hand, pressed it to his mouth and nose trying to form the crudest of gas masks. Donna stood paralysed until Naismith tugged her away from the inferno.

"Other exit," he spluttered, his voice muffled by the handkerchief. The two hurried along the corridor away from the blaze. They passed a pair of red fire

extinguishers, one filled with foam the other with carbon dioxide. The blaze was well beyond that stage now. But why hadn't the alarms gone? Why wasn't the air filled with their shrill klaxon? He'd organised enough fire drills to recall their deafening sound. Why, when the alarms were needed most, hadn't they gone off? There was enough heat and smoke for even the most basic alarm. He'd wring that Winfield's neck for him tomorrow.

Donna turned around.

"Back through the basement; we can cut through there to the other exit," Naismith said. He coughed again and again. It felt like his lungs would rip free from their pleural membranes.

"I'm scared," Donna whimpered.

So am I, thought Naismith. I never realised a fire was as fierce as this. But he could never admit that to Donna. He had to play the strong man for her even if he didn't feel brave.

They went back down the stairs to the basement and along the corridor. Naismith felt heat, more heat than he would have expected from the underground storage areas. Surely the boiler and heaters weren't running at night? Unless that incompetent Winfield just left them running 24/7? No wonder the heating bills were so high.

Naismith pulled open a heavy fire door. He and Donna were greeted by a wall of flames. Enlivened by the fresh onrush of air, the fire blazed higher and hotter reaching up to the concrete ceiling. The flames flickered along the ceiling like a

vision from Dante's Inferno. For a moment, a paralysing moment, both Donna and Naismith looked on horror struck.

The heat charred their hair and Naismith felt his skin tighten. Donna screamed but Naismith never heard the girl's cries above the greedy roar of the fire. As he slammed the fire door back in place, he felt heat even through the reinforced wood.

"Back," Naismith shouted at the sobbing Donna. "Back the way we came. It's our only chance."

"No, no, I can't. Let's hide in one of these rooms. We'll be safe there," Donna cried. "Wait for the firemen."

Perhaps she was expecting some beefcake hunk to leap down and sweep her off her feet, Naismith thought. Some burly fireman stripped to the waist and covered in baby-oil and sweat who would rescue her. Though if she was expecting to be swept away, he pitied the fireman's back. Donna was a big girl after all. He pushed those thoughts aside. He was wasting time.

"No way – the fire will suck all the oxygen out of the air. We'll suffocate before anyone comes."

Donna looked at him. Naismith wasn't sure if she understood. He pushed her back along the underground passageway leading towards the staircase up to the reception area. As they fled, stumbling and coughing harshly, plumes of smoke and vapour followed them. The smoke outpaced them, thickening, getting heavier and denser. Both were choking as they reached the foot of the stairs.



Naismith leaned on the banisters. "Give me a minute," he gasped. "I can't breathe."

Donna paused a few steps ahead of him. She reached down her arm and touched his shoulder. As if refreshed by her youthful energy, Naismith pulled himself upright and followed the young secretary up the concrete steps. Every tread seemed harder work than the last. They both paused on the return. Only one more flight to go.

"Nearly there," Naismith panted reassuringly. Though whether it was himself or Donna he was cheering on, he wasn't too sure.

Hauling himself up hand over hand along the metal banisters – which felt warmer than normal – Naismith and Donna reached the fire door opening onto the ground floor corridor leading onto the reception lobby. Where they had turned back earlier. Naismith recalled the fire that had been blazing earlier in the corridor. With a bit of luck it might have burned itself out by now.

He wrapped his Irish linen handkerchief around his mouth and nose and then ripped off one of his shirt sleeves. It didn't matter – the shirt was ruined anyway. He tied it around Donna's lower face. Her eyes bulged with fear.

Shielding his eyes, Naismith opened the door. The blaze was worse than before. They were trapped. There was no retreat. Looking around wildly, he saw one carbon dioxide fire extinguisher on a red plinth by the door. Immediately, he unsnapped the blue seal and wrenched out the locking pin, tossing it to the floor. Despite his panic, Naismith remembered enough of his fire marshal's training to know not to grip the plastic horn.

Aiming the nozzle at the base of the fire, Naismith squeezed the lever. Instantly, and with a noise overmatching the fire, carbon dioxide jetted out. The high-pressure gas crystallised on meeting the hot air forming a white stream. Super-cooled ice crystals formed on the black horn frosting it white.

Naismith sprayed the base of the fire but the little extinguisher could not put it out, only clear a narrow path for them. He prayed that would be enough.

"Come on, hurry up," Naismith yelled over the roar of the fire and the scream of pressurised carbon dioxide. Donna hung back clinging to the door, terrified.

The fire fell back, shrinking from the sub-zero carbon dioxide. However, Naismith knew full well that this was the wrong extinguisher to use on this kind of fire. He should be using a larger foam extinguisher as this one was intended for small electrical fires, such as on computers or heaters. But he had to work with what he had.

"Come on, Donna," Naismith yelled again aiming the nozzle at a cardboard box. The secretary edged away from her comfort zone by the door.

The cylinder was lighter now but there was only a thinner gap of fire between them and safety on the far side. Wheeling around, Naismith grabbed Donna and ignoring her screams threw her bodily through the fire. She stumbled, her arms and legs flailing wildly but then she was through. Fire licked along the edge of her skirt and in her hair and Donna beat at the flames wildly, ignoring her blistering palms.

Naismith directed the last of the carbon dioxide at the centre of the passage but then no more ice came out – only the hiss of the last of the propellant. Flinging the

now useless cylinder away, Naismith crouched, covered his face with his arms and ran as fast as he could through the rest of the fire.

Without the carbon dioxide checking its progress the fire was now regaining its strength and ferocity. Naismith sprinted like the rugby winger he was in his youth. But his leather soled Church's were not meant for running. Naismith felt his left foot slide and slip. Desperately, he ran onwards, his arms pin-wheeling. Only another few yards to go. He ran, his feet taking impossibly long strides.

He tripped over a piece of card, now little more than ashes, took another step and then fell, measuring his length in the now enlivened blaze. Naismith screamed, drawing superheated air into his lungs. Struggling up, Naismith felt his hands, his arms start to burn. Then he felt rather than saw a shape like the Devil himself fall on him, knocking him back onto the hot cement where the paint was bubbling with the heat.

Donna, still standing where Naismith had flung her to safety watched in horror as a fluorescent strip light crashed down onto the Deputy Mayor's head and back. She took one step forwards, a small tentative step but the heat was too intense for her to bear. The young woman watched in horror for a second and then turned and fled from the nightmare scene.

And then her dreams came true. She barrelled through the final fire door opening into the safety of the reception area and straight into the arms of the hunkiest fireman on the Watch. Unfortunately Fireman Doyle wasn't stripped to the waist, his rippling torso covered with baby-oil like the fireman routine in a male stripper act but

instead wore full uniform and breathing apparatus. All the same, the look worked for Donna.

Fireman Doyle staggered backwards as Donna cannoned into him almost knocking him back into Fireman Griffith. Donna gasped and choked, her heart racing fit to burst. The young woman pointed behind herself towards the fire door. "James – he's back there. Some... something fell on him." Then she burst into tears.

Leaving Donna in Doyle's capable and comforting arms, Griffith took a firm grip of his axe and ran through the fire doors followed by a third man. Less than a minute later, they returned carrying Naismith's body between them. Immediately the firemen laid Naismith down on the tiles, ripped off the smouldering fragments of his jacket and shirt and performed emergency first aid.

Meanwhile other firemen ran in carrying hoses while the watch leader cursed as he inspected the dry riser system and wondered where the security guard was with the fire plans. The scene was one of orderly chaos as the newly arriving paramedics dealt with Naismith leaving the firemen to get the blazes under control.

The heroic firemen soon quenched the fires then checked through the building. They noticed the alarms had been disabled, which together with several separate fires, immediately raised suspicions. As well as that, they also woke up the security guard who was flat out and snoring on one of the long sofas in the conference room.

The following day, the old man handed in his resignation but as he was only serving out the last few months on his security licence before retiring, he wasn't that bothered anyway. Especially as he and his wife had a cruise around the Canary Islands to look forward to.





## CHAPTER 14. NIGHT OF THE LONG SCREWDRIVERS.

"Hey, what's this boss?" Mason called out.

Peachornby and his oppo were busy ransacking Naismith's office. They hadn't found much. Naismith's laptop was password protected, of course, so they had been told to send it by courier to the BNP's in-house computer specialist, a man named McKee. A geek whose knowledge and love of IT was equalled only by his knowledge and love of the Third Reich.

Years ago McKee had applied to go on Mastermind but even the briefest background checks run by the pinko commie-loving Beeb had led to his application form being screwed up and filed in the nearest round filing cabinet. Also known as the bin.

Peachornby knew unless Naismith was also some sort of computer genius then McKee would be in like a ferret down a burrow and all of Naismith's files would be laid bare. No way. He'd have to find somebody else to crack the code. That said, there were loads of ads in the Standard for people who could fix computers. If he pretended that he'd forgotten his password, surely one of them could unlock the laptop.

No, he didn't trust McKee and those namby-pambys at head office one inch. No way, Jose. Those guys would think nothing of ripping him off – and him the most

successful and high profile member of the BNP apart from its leader himself. They were envious of his success, he knew it. That's why they kept sending that man Gould down.

Of course, they said Gould was there to help and advise but Peachornby knew that the man was really sent to spy on him and report back. Oh yes. Well, nobody was going to purge him like they had purged Ernst Röhm and his S.A. brownshirts. And don't forget Röhm had been murdered in the end.

Well, Peachornby wasn't going to let those slackers at head office steal a march on him. So he'd keep Naismith's lappy for himself, buy a second hand one in town and send that on instead. See what McKee made of that. A thought wandered into Peachornby's brain and found it had plenty of space up there.

An empty lappy would look way too suspicious. He'd have to remember to load it up with lots and lots of boring and irrelevant council information first before sending it on. That would keep McKee and Gould busy for a while as they sifted through thousands of useless files. Load up some porno sites and give them an eyeful as well. Peachornby smirked at his own cunning. Before he could forget his ruse, Peachornby jotted it down over the *Daily Star's* page three girl's boobs; Julia from Gerrards Cross today, and then he ripped out the page, stuffing it into his pocket.

Now Naismith was out of the way, he needed something to shore up his position here, make himself unassailable, make himself too powerful to be rubbed out. If he could just find out what Naismith was up to, then he, the great Kenneth Peachornby, could take over from where Naismith left over.



Who knows? This time next year he could stand for leader of Lincolnshire County Council and – his brain swelled as he thought of this and his eyeballs bulged in their sockets – he might challenge the BNP's leader as well. After that... who knows? Number Ten Downing Street itself? Britain was ready for change and who better to lead it than Kenneth Peachornby? It had a certain ring to it. Peachornby imagined himself summoned to Buckingham Palace to have his audience with the monarch.

While he was there, he might as well get himself knighted. He imagined the steel touch of the sword on his shoulders and that plummy voice saying, "Arise, Sir Kenneth." That would do for starters. Then he'd stride into parliament, fling open the doors, march to his place behind the dispatch box and really sort out this country once and for all. Anybody who made trouble, any trouble at all; he'd round 'em up, stick 'em against a wall and shoot the bastards...

"You with me, boss?" Mason called again, snapping Peachornby out of his reverie. Mason was standing by Naismith's desk, a ten inch screwdriver in hand. He'd jimmed the lock and a drawer stood open. No way could those gouges and scratch marks be disguised but it didn't much matter as Peachornby didn't think his Deputy would be back any time soon.

Mason pulled out a heavy cardboard tube, capped at both ends. At a nod from his leader, Mason popped open the tube and slid its contents out onto the desk. The two men unrolled the plans and weighted down the corners with a stapler, a desk diary and a phone charger.

They stared at what lay beneath them. It was better than the lost map to Captain Kidd's treasure chest, the plan of Area 51 and the secret recipe of Coca-Cola all combined. Their mouths hung slack as they stared and a string of drool trickled out of Peachornby's mouth until he sucked it back up again with a horrible slurping sound. He rubbed his lips with the back of his hand.

"I don't believe it," Peachornby said.

"Wow. No wonder they rigged the election," Mason said.

"I'd have won it anyway. I didn't need their help. The good people of Sleaford were ready for a new direction..."

"Of course, boss. Sorry."

To the right people, what was displayed was the key to a fortune. Millions, multi-millions, gazillions. Peachornby imagined what he could do with that money – he could really take over the BNP with that behind him. Mason merely reckoned he could pay off his debts, get that loan-shark and his heavies off his back, get straight with the child support, move out of Mam's and rent an executive box at Lincoln City FC's Sincil Bank ground.

Laid out before their gaze were detailed plans for the redevelopment of the Bass Maltings themselves. The two men pointed things out to each other as they studied the diagrams. Also in the tube were planning applications, future press releases and financial projections. Neither man could make much of these.

Peachornby left that side of things at the garden centre to his Dad while Mason could

never make his wages stretch to the end of the week. Nowadays, he owed a serious wedge to the local money-lender. Well, if this job came off, he'd be minted.

"Wow," said Mason again. There wasn't much else to say.

Some rusty cogs moved in Peachornby's brain. "We can't use any of these people. They'd go straight to Naismith's Lodge buddies. We'll have to find our own."

"My Dad's a roofer. He's got loads of mates in the building trade."

Even Peachornby knew that a huge project like the Bass Maltings would be out of Mason's Dad's league. You'd need the big, national construction companies. The firms who bid for government contracts and were quoted on the stock exchange. All the same, it was a start.

"Cheers, Mason."

They looked some more, both of them contemplating fantasies of vast wealth coming their way. Eventually, Peachornby rolled up the papers and pushed them back into their tube. There was a tear in his eye. Now he would never be regarded as a no-mark ever again.

"Not a word to anyone, Mason. Got that? No one."

"What about my Dad?"

"Well, apart from him of course."



## CHAPTER 15. PEACHORNBYS IRON GUARD.

Happening as it did shortly after the controversial election results, the Town Hall fire made national news for a day or two and the journalists from the *Standard* and *Target* found themselves much in demand from other news hounds eager for the inside track. Butler especially basked in the attention and the pushy woman from the *Target* tried to angle herself a job with any of the nationals that would listen.

Camera crews from the BBC and ITV Yorkshire flocked into town, blocking the already congested streets of Sleaford and giving Superintendent Donelan an extra problem. He likened it to being bowled an over of exceptionally difficult googlies. In the end, he cordoned off an area of the Tesco Extra car park on Northgate and told the press pack to park there. It wasn't far from Kesteven Street, after all, and shoppers and looky-loos watched roadies lug equipment to and fro. Some of the more enterprising locals even bagged a free meal from the catering van.

Meanwhile, Peachornby ordered a podium to be erected just in front of the gutted and burned out Town Hall. Well, it was only gutted in a few places but on the advice of Gould who had driven down specifically from the BNP's head office, Peachornby and Mason insisted that they were the parts in camera shot.

The car park was full to bursting, the only clear space being between Peachornby's podium and the camera crews and banks of microphones.

Superintendent Donelan had ordered his men to push the anarchists and noisy

protesters to the far edge of the council's car park where their shouts and placards wouldn't disrupt the Mayor's speech. "Push them beyond the boundary rope. That's the ticket," he told his boys in blue.

Promptly, Peachornby mounted the steps of his podium. As usual, he was dressed all in black and closer scrutiny proved he'd forgotten to shave under his nose for a few days and stubble shadowed that area. He surveyed the cameras and blinked in the flash photography. One of the journos from the *Guardian* whispered to her friend from the *Mirror* that, "at least Peachornby didn't keep them waiting, a bit like Mussolini made the trains run on time". The girl from the *Mirror* decided to recommend that her sub-editor use that as a tag line.

Peachornby stood behind a lectern placed in front of the fire-bombed Town Hall and struck his heroic Napoleonic pose. He'd have liked his replica Luger on show but that had to stay under lock and key at home. Gould stood nearby, ready to lend a hand, but made sure he was out of sight. He was a man who much preferred to operate in the shadows.

Cameras flashed – no doubt there would be a warning against flash photography on the local news. Crews from both the BBC and ITV Yorkshire filmed his announcement. Sleaford had not received so much coverage for – well, nobody knew how long. Not since the Second World War in all probability when the RAF and USAAF planes took off on their bombing raids over Germany.

Mason and several other skinheads cleared a space. "Mayor Peachornby will make his announcement now," Mason bellowed. Immediately, the journalists and

news crews fell silent. Peachornby puffed up his chest and spoke. He was aware of the hand of history on his shoulder.

Who knows, he reminded himself, Mayor of Sleaford this year, Lord Mayor of Lincolnshire next year and who knows... maybe Prime Minister the year after? Britain was ready for a change. He would lead the downtrodden Anglo-Saxon race out of this multi-cultural hell by ethnically cleansing Britain. He would be the new broom... Perhaps he should have a word with those Serbian guys he was in contact with on the outer edges of the internet. Bring them over. They knew how to deal with muslims and other sub-humans.

Peachornby looked down at his speech. Much had been written by Gould but Peachornby wasn't going to stick to the exact script. Not now that he was a man of destiny. The Mayor raised his hand for silence. Not a stiff-armed salute – Gould had specifically warned Peachornby against that – but almost a peace sign.

"Friends and fellow Sleafordians. Today we stand amidst the ashes of our glorious Town Hall..." which wasn't strictly true as most of the Hall was untouched by the fires and the office staff were already back inside.

Peachornby began quietly and uncontroversially. He praised his Deputy Mayor's actions in rescuing Donna and reassured everyone that Naismith was in good hands in the burns unit of Nottingham University Hospital. Unfortunately, the Deputy would not be able to return to work for some time.

A journo fired a question. "Are there any suspects for this fire?"

Immediately the rhetoric changed. Peachornby launched into a prolonged harangue against the asylum seekers jettisoned by the rest of the world to wash up on the shores of his beautiful town of Sleaford. Even though the town was inland. His fists pumped the air and despite the coolness, sweat rolled down his face, dampening his collar and darkening his underarms.

Peachornby told the open-mouthed reporters that a 'muslin' male, probably linked to Al-Qa'ida – they half expected him to use the 'P' word, but a glance from Gould got Peachornby back on track – had been spotted loitering around the Town Hall. Worse, the man had been arrested while carrying a jerry can. He let his audience draw their own conclusions.

Then Peachornby made an announcement which drew gasps from the assembled news reporters and those few members of the public who had shown up on the fringes of the crowd.

"In view of this terrible fire, this assault on the integrity of our community, I have taken the decision to create a corps of men..., " there was a whisper from Gould, " and women who will dead (is that right?), er... dedicate themselves to keeping the decent citizens of Sleaford safe from these forces of Judeo-..., " a big cough from Gould, "... er, juddering, chaotic, anarchy who think nothing of torching our fine buildings and attacking decent people in their beds. "

Peachornby took a sip of vodka disguised as water before carrying on with his harangue. "And we are determined to make sure that such an outrage never happens again. Therefore, I have set up a new force, our 'Sleaford Smashers' who will take



over the duties of our parking wardens, litter sweepers as well as guarding council property."

There were loud cheers from the skinheads, most of whom had been promised jobs with the Smashers by Peachornby and Mason. They waved their flags of England, Georgia and various football clubs. With his next words, Peachornby went completely off-script. Gould looked startled. But he didn't look anywhere near as surprised as Superintendent Donelan of the Lincolnshire Police.

"Also, the Smashers will be taking over the duties of the police's Community Support Officers. They will be resp... resp..."

"Responsible," whispered Gould, inching forwards. He wondered what was going to come out of the Mayor's mouth next. Would it be something that could harm the BNP's reputation?

"...take over their duties. They will give out fixed penalty notices and keep law and order on our streets. Keep our fair city safe for decent, hard-working whi..., ahem, people."

"Have you got permission for that?" asked a reporter with the Beeb, her disbelief evident in her voice.

Peachornby clicked his fingers and Mason opened a buff file and handed the Mayor a piece of paper. The Home Office's portcullis logo was on the top.

"I hold in my hand a piece of paper from the Home Secretary..."

Mason sniggered to Gould. "Home Secretary. Sounds like a housewife working from home."

Gould nodded but didn't say anything. He desperately wanted to hear what Peachornby was going to come out with next rather than listening to this tattooed thug.

"The Home Secretary gives her full perm... perm... She says it's okay to do this," Peachornby concluded.

Patryk looked around at the crowd. Apart from the cheering skinheads, the rest of the crowd seemed stunned. Superintendent Donelan looked taken aback as if he was facing an unexpected batting slump. It was obvious to Patryk the senior copper hadn't heard a whisper about these Sleaford Smashers so he didn't look happy at this new development. However, the bulldog-faced copper only let his surprise show for an instant before he regained control of his features.

Mason stepped forwards and handed a hi-viz jacket to his leader. Peachornby shook it out. On the back forming a circle around Sleaford's coat of arms were the words 'Sleaford Smasher'. Within the circle were two jagged Ss shaped like lightning flash runes.

"Our smashing people will smash crime and disorder, smash graffiti and filth and keep our beautiful town pure and clean and fit for decent people to live in without fearing the tide of chaos and anarchy threatening to overwhelm all decent people..."

Peachornby's voice raised, his arms reached to the heavens and then lowered seeming to encompass the whole crowd. The skinheads started cheering and yelling

their support. Then, as if on cue, they started roaring out his name, "Hear Peachornby! Hear Peachornby! Hear Peachornby!..." Even some ordinary members of the crowd started clapping and cheering and voicing their approval.

Patryk caught Superintendent Donelan's eye. The copper looked worried now as he shook his head. This was not a development he welcomed. Why hadn't he been told about this? Alright, the Police Community Support Officers weren't anything he had much to do with, but he thought he would have heard whispers on the grape vine, canteen scuttlebutt being what it was.

Donelan thought some more. This must have been approved higher up the food chain – maybe even at Chief Constable level itself. It must be to do with this constant round of budget cuts, he reasoned; withdraw the PCSOs and save money which could be spent elsewhere. Treat Sleaford as an experiment. Let the locals take responsibility for their own policing needs. If it worked here then extend the experiment throughout Lincolnshire and then, who knows, nationally? To Donelan's mind, this was a dangerous development.

Donelan hadn't been a fan of the PCSOs when they were set up and he would rather the money be spent on a properly trained and resourced police force, rather than a bunch of civvies given six weeks training and a uniform that looked similar enough to a copper's to deceive the general public. However, letting a clown, a dangerous clown at that, anywhere near policing was a step too far. He would have to get rid of this team before they became too powerful – before they reached Test status. The good thing was, Donelan didn't think it would take too much to force a batting collapse on the BNP mob.

Peachornby spoke some more but even his microphone couldn't carry over the skinheads' wild cheering. Patryk caught a few phrases – something about how he will move the remaining asylum seekers and unemployed immigrants out of Sleaford to the camps on the coast; a guarantee that the town centre will be made safer and something about how he will cut the council tax bill. That last raised some more applause from the watching shoppers and non-skinheads. Tax cuts were always welcome, no matter where they came from.

There was a sudden scuffle on the edge of the crowd. A handful of anarchists and Anti-Nazi League types pushed into the skinheads, fists swinging. Superintendent Donelan pointed and a few burly coppers shouldered between the two groups. Realising they were heavily outnumbered on this occasion the Anti-Nazi bunch beat a hasty retreat.

Pointing to the lefties. "... and we will defeat the Marxist-communist threat to our communities as well," Peachornby ended with as soon as the last protester had been expelled from before the Town Hall. He turned to a tall man with a soul-patch standing next to the amplifiers who flicked a switch.

Immediately the sound of the hymn '*Glorious Things Of Thee Are Spoken*' blared out over the car park. Gould winced, his ferret-face screwed up as if with pain. Not because it was a religious hymn but because it shared the same tune as '*Deutschland Über Alles*'. Not the image the modern BNP headquarters was looking to project. That didn't worry the skinheads. They waved their flags with more enthusiasm and a few even threw stiff armed Nazi salutes. At this point, most of the non-skinheads left to do their shopping.

As soon as the last notes of the hymn died away to fall flat on the asphalt many skinheads put on their Sleaford Smasher vests and formed up in ranks on the Town Hall steps. Although only brooms and ticketing machines were handed out today, Patryk was reminded of a paramilitary force. He wondered how and when Peachornby had organised this – certainly well before the fire, he thought. After all, those hi-vizs would have had to be ordered. He walked over to his van and climbed in.

As he did so, the passenger door opened and a man in dark blue uniform with plenty of silver braid swung up next to him. The man looked like he'd done some boxing in his youth but had lost more fights than he'd won. And as the years had gone on, he'd spent too much time in the bars talking about those old fights.

"Drive," Superintendent Donelan commanded.

Patryk glanced at the man and engaged first. Releasing the handbrake, the Transit glided forwards along Kesteven Street towards Eastgate. It started spitting with rain; typical English weather.

"Which way?"

"Town," said his passenger. The van pulled out behind a white Skoda.

"Strange things happen sometimes," Donelan mused, "like when a minor country such as Ireland or Holland beat us in the one day internationals. It happens from time to time and it causes a lot of fuss on the back pages for a few days. However, these things blow over and in the long term it doesn't much matter.

"Yet, were they to play and beat us in a First Class match, that would be a very different kind of wicket. There would be questions asked in the House let alone the

*Telegraph*. And that is what's happening here in Sleaford. A bunch of agricultural no-hopers are batting higher up the averages than they deserve. I trust I'm making myself crystal here?"

Patryk looked at the senior policeman as he inched the van a few yards forward. "Not really, no."

Donelan sighed. "I forget you're Polish so you don't play cricket do you?" He made it sound like this was the worst failing known to man. "You should. Best game created by mankind."

"I follow Legia Warsaw football club, me."

"Never heard of them. I follow Notts County. Let's see if I can explain things so you understand. What I am saying is that Peachornby is a flat-track bully and his BNP team are a bunch of also-rans who got lucky."

Edging past the medical centre towards Carre Street, Patryk stalled the van at Donelan's next words. "Except we both know that the BNP didn't just get lucky. They had help, didn't they, Patryk? They didn't play with a straight bat – well, that's only to be expected from an outfit like that – but they had a few easy lobs and an umpire on their side. You know what I mean."

Patryk didn't understand the context but he knew what Donelan was driving at. He thought it safest to say as little as possible.

"Now, I've heard rumours about your role in this sticky wicket – no, don't bother denying it – and the only thing I want to know is that you're going to clean bowl Peachornby out. Shatter his stumps."

Patryk passed the junction with Carre Street and Market Place. "How do you know it was me, Superintendent? I'm only a van driver."

"Who else had the opportunity to make Peachornby 3,270 not out? A score he would never achieve even if he followed on? Only you, my friend, only you. Now, the only question is what are you going to do to restore the correct batting order?"

Patryk sighed. But something wasn't right here. "If you know the election was fixed, why don't you just cancel it and re-run it?"

"It's not that simple. My political masters don't want to do that. It would erode the public's already limited trust in the democratic process. Like Jardine's 1932 body-line tour destroyed trust in English fair play for decades. It would have been far better for cricket – and the Empire – in the long run if we'd lost gallantly, you understand.

"So rather than a disputed rematch, it would be far better for all concerned if Peachornby was bowled out – or knowing him he got leg before wicket – I think you understand my drift here, which is very possible – and then we could start a fresh Test match."

Patryk shook his head. This was utter gibberish but he understood where Donegan was going with this. "You want me to take Peachornby out?"

"Knock his bails off, that's the ticket," Donegan confirmed. "I'll head back to the pavilion now." With that, the Superintendent opened the door and stepped down onto the pavement.

"Get that pie-chucker out within the next few overs, and I'll see you get man of the match," Donelan called cryptically as he closed the door behind him. The last Patryk saw of Donelan was his burly form entering a newsagent.

Why him? Patryk thought. Why him? What was this isolated Fenland town to him? He could go home to Warsaw and put this all behind him. But as soon as that notion came to mind, he pushed it away. No. He was Patryk and his mother prided herself on having raised no fools. Naismith had trusted him and there had to be some way he and Lukasz could siphon off some real money before heading home.

Deep in thought, he waited at the level crossing until the train passed and the gates rose.





## CHAPTER 16. ALBERT SPEER'S VOLKSHALLE.

A handsome young man called Daventry pulled up at the lights. Could life get any better than this? Not at this moment, it couldn't. He was driving his brand new Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG coupé in fire opal red. Under the sunny skies, its hard-top was down. The Mercedes was powered by the top of the range 6.2 litre V8 petrol engine giving the car a much higher output and torque than the standard V6. Also, it had the cutting edge ECO stop/start technology. Nice. More than nice. Perfect in fact.

Also Daventry had a very lucrative career as an architect. He loved it at Haider-Allbutt & Associates. This was a firm going places. He even loved putting in the notoriously long hours. Sitting there alone at his draughtsman table after everyone else had gone home, the room in darkness except for one anglepoise lamp shining down on the blueprints. Listening to the night life down below and feeling above it all. Perfect. Absolutely perfect.

Especially as he knew that with a few more commissions under his belt he'd make junior partner before thirty. Hints had already been dropped. And after that, the sky's the limit. Maybe he'd try and open an office in Dubai or Oman or somewhere. Those oil-rich sheiks couldn't spend money fast enough on building up their property empires. However that was a pipe-dream for the future. Today, however, he was on his way to pitch for another job. Not his usual line of work as he preferred cutting-

edge, modernist new builds rather than refurbishments but so what! he was looking forward to the challenge of something different.

His secretary, Angela, sat beside him in the passenger seat. She shifted position, letting her mini skirt ride higher up her thigh. Despite the warm morning, she wore coloured stockings but you could still see the blonde's great pair of pins. Very nice. Angela leaned forwards, leaning through the attaché case in the footwell giving Daventry a look at her breasts. Even nicer. Daventry rested his hand on the gear stick feeling the throb of the engine.

The only fly in the ointment was the bright yellow B&M bin wagon next to him. Although it wasn't just one fly as whole hosts of bugs followed the truck. Rotten garbage fumes flowed over the Mercedes-Benz wrinkling Angela's nose. To Daventry's eyes, that little gesture made her look even sexier. She coughed into her hand, making her boobs shake and tremble under her low-cut top.

Angela looked up from her case. Daventry immediately averted his eyes from his secretary's assets and looked over his door sill at the bin wagon. Hanging off the back, in violation of every health and safety regulation were two bin men. One was older, stooped and hunched, with iron grey hair. The bin man scowled and looked away.

But Daventry's eye locked onto the younger man. This man was young, only Daventry's age, and wore his blond hair in a similar swept-back style. Feeling Daventry's gaze upon him, the young refuse collector turned and looked down into the coupé. The two men held each other's eyes for a long moment before looking away.

Perhaps both contrasted their different lives – one a bin man, the other an architect. Did it really only come down to different starts in life he wondered? Before their divorce, Daventry's parents owned a large detached house in its own grounds instead of renting one on a council sink estate; different schools – the difference between a private education or the local comprehensive, different parental expectations. Was it as simple as that? That a difference in wealth and opportunity at the start of life set people's careers on such different courses?

Lost in thought, Daventry was annoyed that it was the bin wagon that pulled away first from the lights instead of his high-powered Mercedes.

Both of the operatives wore bright yellow hi-viz jackets. On the back of the jackets was written 'Sleaford Smashers'. Daventry noticed that the capital Ss were elongated and angular – like sinister runic lightning flashes. Angela looked up from her case at the pause as Daventry slammed the gear-stick into first and stamped on the gas. His Mercedes shot forwards and Daventry swept effortlessly past the garbage truck. The young man hanging off the back looked on enviously as the coupé motored past, its engine quiet and restrained yet with more than enough horse power under the bonnet.

"He didn't get that through hard work, Shaun," said the older man over the diesel grumble of the garbage truck.

The young man, Shaun, shook his head. He sure wished he was driving that car with a beautiful woman by his side.

Daventry crossed the railway tracks onto Southgate and watched the yellow garbage truck recede behind him in the mirrors. He made a right, moving onto

Eastgate and a few minutes later, he parked in front of the Town Hall. A space had been reserved for him and yet another Smasher moved a traffic cone out of the way. The man even saluted him like a 1950s AA patrolman. You didn't get that nowadays, Daventry thought.

"I'm here to see Mr. Peachornby," Daventry said.

"Yes, sir. The Mayor is expecting you. If you care to go in another Smasher will escort you to his office," the parking attendant said as he pointed towards the front door. Daventry noted the tone of pride in the Smasher's voice. The man took off his beanie cap and rubbed his scalp. Daventry noticed the man's hair was cropped very short.

Angela took out the attaché case as Daventry fetched his laptop together with a long cardboard tube from the boot. He checked his appearance, straightened his Italian silk tie in the wing mirror and then both made their way across the car park. As they walked, Daventry evaluated the building.

There were many traces of fire damage. Smoke blackened part of the ground and first floors and several windows had plywood nailed over them. Even now, several days after the fire, he could still smell smoke and ash on the air.

Inside, the reception foyer had been cleaned up and apart from water damage streaking the walls and a few lighter gaps where paintings had once hung, the lobby looked presentable. A receptionist with dyed black hair put her caller on pause and looked up.

"Haider-Allbutt & Associates. I have an appointment with Mr. Peachornby," Daventry announced. The receptionist turned round a visitor's book for him to sign and pressed a buzzer. A burly young man, also with a shaved noggin appeared. He wore a cheap polyester shirt and clip-on tie over which hung another hi-viz marked 'Sleaford Smasher'. It was almost like Peachornby's private army, Daventry thought. The young man led Daventry and Angela over to the stairs.

"Sorry. The lift's still out of order," he told them. The man took the steps two at a time as if keen to show off his physical prowess. Daventry matched his pace – he liked to go running when he had the time – but Angela was soon left behind. Holding the charred fire door open, Daventry waited for the girl.

As she puffed up the stairs both men copped an eyeful of her boobs under her low cut top. The young Smasher grinned knowingly at Daventry. Ashamed of himself, Daventry turned away. He took the cardboard tube from Angela when she reached them and stepped between her and the Smasher, shielding her from view.

The Smasher took them left along the first floor corridor to a part of the Town Hall that was completely undamaged by smoke. The corridor was panelled with oak carved like scroll work. The Smasher knocked on a door marked 'Senior Assistant to the Mayor' and waited until a deep voice told them to, "come in".

"Here you are, Mason, that architect fellow Mayor Peachornby wanted," their guide said before leaving. Again, Daventry heard respect in the young man's voice when he mentioned Peachornby. No. More than respect. What he heard was admiration, Daventry amended.

Mason slammed a desk drawer shut and looked slightly embarrassed. Daventry wondered what he had been up to. Something nasty, no doubt. Mason offered his right hand and Daventry noticed the initials HATE tattooed on his knuckles in blue ink. He guessed that LOVE was tattooed on Mason's left but he was wrong. That also said HATE. Maybe he got a BOGOF discount? Two for the price of one, Daventry thought, suppressing a giggle. All the same, he shook with the big skinhead.

Mason then rapped on the further door of his room. A large plaque in Old English black-letter said simply: Mayor. Mason showed Daventry and Angela into Peachornby's office. He licked his lips and didn't bother hiding his admiration of the girl's boobs and bum as she passed. Angela tugged down her short skirt but it was too little, too late. Daventry laid his hand on her arms in a manner he hoped showed the skinhead that the girl was with him. But although he worked out at the gym, Daventry didn't fancy his chances if it came down to a straight fist fight with Mason.

However, Daventry forgot all about Mason when the man behind the desk stood and walked around it. My god, Daventry thought, he's worse than I'd expected. Of course, like the rest of Britain, Daventry had watched the news reports about the BNP's surprise election triumph and he'd done his internet research but to meet Kenneth Peachornby in the flesh: that was something else. Daventry didn't know whether to burst out laughing or turn and flee in horror. He did neither. Instead he bit his cheek hard until he had control of his emotions.

As usual, Peachornby was dressed all in black. This shirt was of a military cut with two chest pockets and epaulettes. The man's beer belly bulged over his wide belt and, looking down, Daventry noticed that Peachornby had tucked his trousers into

polished high-leg Doc Martens. Daventry looked up into Peachornby's doughy face. My god, Daventry, thought again, he's actually growing a Hitler 'tache. Who does this cut-price führer think he is?

They shook hands. Daventry smiled automatically but hoped the toilets in the Town Hall were well supplied with disinfectant for when he washed his hands later.

"Coffee? Tea?" Peachornby asked politely.

Nothing would induce Daventry to drink with this man – unless that was the only thing that would win him this contract. "Thanks, but no. We had something on the way up."

"Good journey?" said Peachornby, trying to break the ice.

"Slight hold up on the A15 coming up but no – not bad," Daventry admitted.

"We got stuck behind a big Turkish lorry – massive it was and the driver wouldn't let us past," Angela moaned.

"Shouldn't be allowed on our roads – these foreign drivers coming over here and undercutting the honest British working man. You know they don't have to pay any tolls to use our roads yet our drivers must pay through the nose to drive abroad? And they can buy much cheaper diesel. It's all the fault of the Marxist E.U. At this rate there'll be no British haulage business in ten years time."

"Is that a fact?" said Daventry, mildly, as he took the cardboard tube from Angela. He flashed his secretary a quick 'shut-up' glare. He didn't want to hear many more rants from the BNP man. "Would you like to see the plans?"



Peachornby nodded so Daventry uncapped the tube and slid out his proposed design blueprints, spreading them out over the desk. He'd also prepared a PowerPoint presentation but wondered if he'd made the display a little too complex for these men to grasp. Daventry smoothed down the plans and moved to one side to allow Peachornby and his henchman to look their fill.

The Mayor had requested a rebuild of the burned section of the Town Hall. It was a brief every architect's office would kill for – money no object and no hassles over planning permission. It wasn't as if the Urban Council was going to object to its own design, after all.

Daventry was surprised his submission had been short-listed. Previously, after a token tendering process, Sleaford Urban Council just went straight to a practice in Lincoln that, purely coincidentally, belonged to one of the Deputy Mayor's Lodge brethren. Usually, nobody else got a look in. Then Daventry remembered that Naismith was out of action following the fire. The Deputy Mayor must be kicking himself to have missed out on this tasty commission.

Peachornby and Mason peered at the blueprints and the computer generated mock-ups of how the place would look when completed. Daventry had chosen a traditional design in keeping with the existing building but using more glass and eco-friendly materials such as a sorghum covered roof to catch and recycle rainwater, solar panels and underground pipes to extract heat from the ground. It wasn't cheap but over time those features would pay for themselves.

It was soon obvious that Peachornby liked what he saw. Daventry wondered if he should set up his laptop and run through his presentation to seal the deal.

"Where's our flagpole?" Peachornby asked.

This confused Daventry for a moment. The design specs hadn't called for any flagpole. "Flagpole?" He recovered quickly. "If you want a flagpole, Mayor, then I can incorporate one."

Now it was Peachornby and Mason's turn to look bewildered.

"I can put one up for you," Daventry explained using words of one syllable. That brought smiles.

"We only want one for the flag of England. We're not having that E.U. rag here," said Peachornby.

After a surprisingly short discussion as Daventry pointed out the highlights of his plan, the conversation, such as it was, faltered.

"The price," Mason reminded his boss.

"Oh, yes. How much?" Peachornby said, stretching his back.

Daventry named his bid. Given the extent of the damage, it was for a few million pounds. He was launching his spiel about how this represented excellent value for money until Peachornby interrupted him.

"Not enough, my friend. That's too cheap."

Daventry looked into Peachornby's blood-red peepers before turning away. Here it comes – the inevitable scam, the rip-off. The bung, the brown envelope, the under-the-counter deal. Older, wiser colleagues had warned the young architect about

these Town Hall deals but usually, these days, the councillors were more subtle than they had been back in the Sixties or Seventies when a funny handshake secured almost any deal. But what could you expect from a BNP Mayor?

"Too cheap?" asked Daventry, pretending to misunderstand. Let this Peachornby idiot commit himself first. "The plan meets all your specifications – orders – and is fully costed."

"You know what I mean," said Peachornby with a leer. "Bung an extra quarter mill on it and we've got a deal. Hundred for me, extra hundred for the builder and fifty large for you. Sounds good?"

Daventry only had to think for less than a second. Sounded good to him and now he'd be able to afford that conservatory – no, upgrade that to an orangery – on the back of his executive detached and those two weeks in Barbados his fiancée, Rochelle, had been nagging him about for the last few months.

Mason coughed. "Oh, yeah," said Peachornby. "The building firm..."

"We usually use one of the big nationals as our preferred contractors – they're very reliable," Daventry suggested. Plus they gave some decent kickbacks to the architect's practice as well.

"I'd rather hire a local firm. Local jobs for local workers. Mason's Dad's a builder and he's very good."

Daventry doubted if Mason's father had the relevant experience and qualifications for a job of this size but what the hell... they'd cross that bridge when they came to it. For an extra hundred grand he'd persuade Haider-Allbutt's partners.

After all, they all had their own under the counter deals going on that wouldn't stand too much scrutiny.

Nodding acceptance, Daventry told them he'd email and post a revised price and make sure Mason's Dad was the preferred contractor. Didn't matter too much as he knew a competent surveyor who could oversee the work in progress. Gathering up his blueprints, Daventry shook hands and was pleased his plans had been chosen. Even if the Mayor seemed more interested in the bung than the design.

Escorting Angela back through Mason's office, they left the Town Hall. But first, Daventry scrubbed and scrubbed his hands to wipe away the stain of dealing with the two BNP men. When he was satisfied his hands were clean, he picked up Angela and then they stepped out into the car park.

\*\*\*

Meanwhile, the bright yellow garbage truck moved slowly along Eastgate blocking the following traffic until it swung into the housing estate off Ashfield Road. After emptying the bins, the men returned to the Town Hall and cleared the dumpsters from their store round the back. They were slightly ahead of schedule and had time for a smoke break.

Enjoying the sunshine, the driver and his mate leaned against the dumpsters and compared the gee-gees in the Racing Post. They were soon joined by the parking attendant. All three men fancied the same nags running in the 2:30 and 3:35 at Leicester and on the back of that the attendant went for an accumulator as well as his usual each ways. He handed the driver's mate a tenner to nip into *William Hill* and place the bets for him when they were passing.

Meanwhile, the two loaders at the back strolled around to the car park at the front. They spotted the fire opal red Mercedes and walked over to it.

"Nice motor," said the young man. It gleamed in the sunshine and the young man lowered his shades to view it.

The older man spat and ran his hand over the bristle on his noggin. Since he'd joined the Sleaford Smashers he'd gone for a number two haircut. "Wish that was yours?"

"Yeah, it's a lovely car." Shaun reached out his hand, almost but not quite touching its bodywork, his palm hovering a fraction of an inch away.

"It's not right. What right has that fancy-dan got driving something flash like that when men like us have to graft all day? People like him who've never got their hands dirty in their life? That's what Peachornby says. We'll see how Mr. fancy-dan likes this."

Before the younger man could stop him the old man took out a key and scratched along the driver's side of the Merc. The screeching rasp set Shaun's teeth on edge but he did nothing to stop his colleague. The jagged line grew longer, stretching from over the wheel arch and then along the driver's door panel, defacing the pristine beauty of the high-end motor. The old guy took away the key and rubbed its tip over his pants leg removing any flecks of red paint that could link him to the vandalism. He spat a second time onto the tarmac.

"That'll teach him to rub our faces in his money. C'mon, mate." The two men left the scene of the crime but Shaun looked back at the damaged Mercedes. What

was the need for the old guy to do that? He'd been a good man to work with until he fell under the spell of Peachornby and the BNP. But now he was always going on and on about how the rich are getting richer by grinding down the poor and blaming the politicians for bringing in all the immigrants in order to keep the working man's wages down.

Maybe there was some truth in what he was saying, the young man thought as they reached the bin wagon, but there was still no need to damage a beautiful car like that Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG coupé. To Shaun, its driver just looked like a successful man who'd made the most of his breaks. That's all.

In hundreds of ways like this, great and small, under Peachornby's malign influence respect for law and order was breaking down. Gradually, Sleaford was becoming Sleazeford.



## CHAPTER 17. VIVA THE INTERNATIONAL BRIGADES.

Willard – that wasn't his real name but it would do for government work – unlaced his black brogues, and then stepped out of his pin-stripe trousers before hanging them neatly in his locker beneath his matching suit jacket. God, he was so tired. He leaned against his metal locker and caught a glimpse of his reflection in the mirror opposite.

He'd gone from one extreme to the other, Willard thought. Until a few weeks ago he was mixed up with a bunch of Welsh environmental types – all long hair, beards and dreadlocks; hippies who found their fashion sense in a skip – protesting against the M4 extension to Pontypridd. Then after he'd gathered enough evidence to prosecute he'd been swamped with debriefings, filling in paperwork in triplicate and giving testimony in court.

Willard had infiltrated their encampment easily enough; their security was terribly lax and their background checks virtually non-existent. With the recent cold wet weather and muddy camp, the Taffs were grateful for any extra support. Even from the hated English. Within a few weeks, partly because he was the only one not permanently pissed, stoned or high, he had virtually taken over their camp. He organised their food and sanitary arrangements but didn't bother insisting they actually bathed. That would have been more hassle than was worthwhile.



Only their so-called leader, Hazel, had her doubts about him. The others were simply grateful they could disengage their brains and concentrate on getting smashed out of their gourds. And now, based on his testimony, Hazel and most of her tree-hugging group would be spending the next year or so behind bars. Not much chance of getting high for a while – although, come to think of it, given the state of British prisons they could now get wrecked 24/7.

Perhaps his role in their attempt to fire-bomb the contractor's diggers wouldn't bear much scrutiny – it could be argued that he'd exceeded his brief and acted as an agent provocateur – but that had never come out in court. And so the judge had glowered at the longhairs and sent them down the steps. Their middle class parents were in floods of tears but Willard had little sympathy with the environmentalists. If you didn't build motorways then how could you get out of the Valleys and back to the Smoke quickly enough?

Of course, Willard knew he couldn't return anywhere near Pontypridd ever again but, hey! That was no loss. He'd been looking forwards to a couple of weeks R'n'R – a beach on some isolated Greek island would have been nice. Somewhere hot with no mud and no Taffs. But on his last day of giving evidence, he'd been taken to one side by a plug-ugly copper who'd introduced himself as Superintendent Donelan of the Lincolnshire Police.

"You've not played on our pitch before?" Donelan asked.

Willard shook his head. "No, sir, I've never worked the East coast."

Donelan grinned. "Then I have a little job that will be bowling to your strengths. I have a nasty little team on my wicket that I want to have only a short

innings. Perhaps you could see your way clear to bowling for our team while pretending to bat for them?"

Like everyone else in Britain, Willard had watched the surprise victory for the BNP in Sleaford's election and then the subsequent Town Hall fire. So it wasn't a bolt out of the blue that he'd been asked to penetrate Peachornby's crew.

"I was due some leave, sir?" Willard said, making a token protest. It would have seemed odd if he hadn't objected.

"When you've finished bowling them out here, I'll make sure you get some serious time off; enough to take in the whole Ashes tour this winter. Deal?"

Willard nodded. He could care less about watching cricket but six weeks in Australia this winter sounded good to him. He nodded.

So now he stood in this locker room of Grantham's Swingbridge Road police station. Gone was the unwashed crusty look and in was the skinhead neo-Nazi look. His head was close cropped with a number two cut, he wore a buttoned-up Ben Sherman shirt, bleached jeans and Doc Martens boots. He shrugged on a green bomber jacket with Pompey, bulldog and BNP badges on the lapels. Yes, I look the part, he thought.

Outside, waiting for the bus, Willard ran through his cover story once again. A south coast tough up from Portsmouth, a member of the notorious 6:57 Crew, so called from the time the train for London Waterloo left Portsmouth station. He'd heard of Peachornby and come up to Sleaford to throw in his lot with the Sleaford

Smashers. And also to get a job after coming out of prison following a few racist attacks on Portsmouth's immigrant population.

If any of Peachornby's lot thought to check, then a couple of prisoners had been promised early release if they backed up Willard's cover. It wasn't perfect but hey! what was? From the dossiers Superintendent Donelan had given him, Peachornby's lot weren't exactly big league. The Russian Mafya or Colombian Cartels they weren't. Hell, the guy ran a garden centre of all things.

The bus from Grantham pulled up at Market Square, Sleaford. On the surface, the place seemed normal, uneventful, boring almost. Just a small English market town on a day the market wasn't running. One side of the square was taken up by St Denys church, its white stone bright in the milky sunshine.

Opposite, Willard spotted the local Conservative party association's offices. Somebody had sprayed, 'Torres Owt' on the plate glass window. He wasn't sure whether it referred to an under-performing footballer or the Tories. Either way it was a sentiment Willard could agree with despite the illiterate spelling. Loitering outside were a couple of skinheads like they were on guard – or maybe preventing anyone from entering.

As he passed, Willard spotted a determined-looking middle aged woman inside. She had a perm that made her head look like a helmet and she was answering the phone while ignoring the two young men outside. Willard nodded to the two skinheads outside who nodded back warily at one of their own.

Turning right onto Eastgate, Willard walked until he reached the offices of Sleaford Urban Council. Following the fire, the building looked like somewhere from

a war zone. Many windows were boarded up with plywood and scorch marks on the brickwork showed Willard where the fire had burned before being brought under control.

However, there were signs of rebuilding. A red architect's sign-board had been fixed to scaffolding and a gang of roofers were chucking tiles down into a skip making a noisy clatter. Other men were hacking off fire damaged plasterwork. A couple of bovver-boys loafed on the steps outside watching the workmen. One held out an arm, blocking Willard's way.

"Got an appointment?" the young man spat. The man had a bad case of acne and his face was cratered like the moon. Willard looked at the skinhead and despite the young man's muscles, he didn't rate the skin's chances. This yobbo hadn't trained with the police's elite Operational Support Units after all. Although, he'd probably been on the receiving end of the OSU's strong arm tactics in his time.

"Yeah, here it is," Willard said. He leaned forward and without warning brought his forehead down on the skinhead's nose. The man howled and both hands flew to his face. Blood streamed out from between his fingers.

The second man pushed away from the wall. He seemed unsure whether to help his mate or take on Willard. He decided he was hard enough to have a go until Willard said, "You want to see my appointment as well?" and there was a look on Willard's face that spelled pure trouble. The skin crouched by his mate as if that had been his intention all along.

"You want my advice? Take him to Grantham and District Hospital and get him checked out. Maybe his nose isn't broken and there's no shards of bone moving towards his brain."

The skin with the bloodied nose moaned again, more loudly. "Ged be an ambulance," the man said through his hands. By now Willard had entered the Town Hall.

"Mayor's Office," he called over his shoulder to the girl behind the front desk. She looked startled by his sudden presence. Giving her no time to respond, Willard took the stairs two at a time. On the first floor, Willard glanced at the signboard for confirmation but he'd already studied the Town Hall plans in Donelan's office.

He turned left and a moment later walked into an office marked as belonging to Peachornby's Senior Assistant. The room was empty. A desk was against one wall. A copy of *Readers Wives* was the only paperwork in the in-tray and a desk diary lay open. Glancing at the diary, Willard noticed that no appointments had been booked for the day. Hey! Who would want a visit from a BNP Mayor anyway? Not many.

Opposite was a door prominently marked Mayor's Office. Without knocking, Willard walked right in. Two men looked up from a DVD player showing what looked like a Panzer battle on the Eastern front.

"What the...?" said the Mayor's minder. From his briefing, Willard knew all about Mason; the guy's prison record, even down to his tattoos. "How did you get in?"

"Walked in through the front door. How d'you think?" Willard replied. "Your security's a joke – you know that?"

Peachornby stood and closed down the DVD player. Even he realised it didn't look good to be watching a film glorifying the Third Reich.

Willard smiled. To him, Peachornby looked like a fool. Sleaford's führer was dressed all in black; normally that would make the man look sinister – but that syrup perched on his head wrecked his image. And he appeared to be growing a Charlie Chaplin toothbrush 'tache.

Mason put himself between Willard and his führer. "You've got five seconds to get out," the minder said.

"Only five? Can't you count higher than that?" Willard goaded.

"Right. You're dead, mate." Now it was Peachornby's turn to step forward and hold his assistant back.

"Hey, I know you, don't I?" said Willard to Mason. "You run with the Cleethorpes Beach Patrol? D'you remember that time we joined forces to turn over that Hull City mob? FA cup third leg – what was it; three, four seasons ago?"

Mason's anger vanished as he thought. His brain couldn't hold two thoughts at the same time. "Err...", he cast his mind back over the many rucks he'd been in.

Willard decided to prompt the thug. "We were up from Portsmouth, come up a bit short-handed after the filth canned half our lads after we trashed the train. Needed a bit of local help or we'd have been pulped by Hull."

"You from the 6:57 Crew? That was fun, mate. We owned their ground and ran that mob into the river." Mason stepped forwards but this time he had his hand outstretched and he was smiling now.

As they shook hands, Willard was glad his briefing was so thorough. He knew these two jokers better than they knew themselves. Which given that their IQs probably didn't stretch to triple figures wasn't too difficult.

"So what can I do for you?" Peachornby asked.

"Come to join up. I like what's going on here so I want a job – that's if you meant it about English jobs for English workers."

Peachornby glanced at Mason who thought for a moment. "Anybody vouch for you? Anybody I know, that is?"

Willard named the couple of hooligans banged up in HMP Parkhurst who'd trade their name for early release.

Mason smiled and looked at his boss. "They're good lads, even if one of 'ems Millwall. They'll do for me. We could get him a job with the Smashers?"

Peachornby nodded, feeling pleased that he could give out patronage like some old-time gang boss. "Sure, with the Smashers. There's an opening as a traffic warden, I think."

Willard scowled and spat into a nearby waste paper basket. He looked Peachornby straight in the eye.

"Didn't come here to be no parking attendant," he said. "I guess you need a new Head of Security so I think I'll have that job. Okay with you?"

Peachornby and Mason looked at each other. Neither knew what to make of the tough, confident and capable man before them. He seemed to have more about him than most of the men they knew and that disturbed them.

It was Peachornby who looked away first. "Sure. We could do with a Head of Security. That alright with you, Mason?"

Mason nodded. After the fire, that was sort of one of his duties now but he was glad to shuffle off any work he could.

Finally, Willard shook hands with the two men. He was in with these jokers and that's what counted. Hey! Soon he'd be their best friend...





## CHAPTER 18. SPECIAL OPERATIONS

### EXECUTIVE.

He came out of somewhere far beyond the blackness between the stars to re-enter a world of hurt. Pain ate into his arms, down his left leg and chewed through his mind. He lay back, prone, immobile. Around him beeps and bleeps and more distant electronic sounds filled the silence. Soft soled footsteps passed by but didn't stop.

So he lay back and concentrated hard until he moved his arms. Only an inch or so but that was enough. The beeps became louder, faster and more insistent bringing back the footsteps and he sensed rather than felt something happening by his side. The bleeps reduced to their earlier rhythmic level.

"We woke up, ah? We in pain, ah?" a woman's voice said. She had a strong accent – Malay? Filipino? Something like that, the man thought with a burst of clarity. Yes, he tried to tell the woman. Yes, he was in pain. More torment than he believed humanly possible to endure. And the agony was getting worse, not better. Do something, he wanted to shout. Do something, anything to stop this torture.

The man felt and heard dials being reset somewhere behind and over his head.

"There there, man," the woman said. "This help you, ah."

Next the man heard a pen scratching on papers somewhere near his feet. The woman paused for a moment and then he heard her footsteps walking away leaving

the man alone with the beeping machines and his all consuming pain. A door closed somewhere over to his left.

Shortly after, the pain receded, ebbing away on a chemical tide from a morphine drip. Interstellar blackness reclaimed the man.

The following day, the man went on what seemed the longest journey of his life. Far longer than Voyager 2's journey out beyond Neptune and into the empty wastes of the Kuiper belt on the edge of the solar system. First they unclipped the machines, dials, monitors, feeding tubes, IV drips and things the man had no idea what they were used for. Then a nurse dropped a thick folder onto the foot of the bed, jarring his bad leg and making him grit his teeth against crying out.

"Time for go, now," she said.

Somebody kicked off the wheel brakes and then a porter and the nurse wheeled the bed past another bed holding a man who looked like a corpse. Out into a corridor where the harsh overhead fluorescents hurt his eyes and the noises of people hurrying to and fro shocked his ears. The procession marched into a goods lift. The doors slid closed and in the crowded space the man felt a touch of claustrophobia. The lift jolted – upwards or downwards, the man had no way of telling. And he didn't much care either way.

The doors opened onto a corridor exactly the same as the first except this had a yellow stripe painted along the walls. Then the bed turned left along the corridor, pausing only to allow a carer pushing a wheelchair to take right of way. The man licked his lips and tried to speak but no sound came out. He lay back, spent even by that tiny effort.

The bed glided along into another ward and the oriental nurse handed the notes over to another girl from the same part of the world. They spoke rapidly in their own tongue.

"You be good here, man; you get visitor now, okay," the first nurse told the man as she left. The new nurse then reattached all the various tubes and monitors and reset the dials. She fussed about the man for a few minutes. As soon she left to attend to her next patient the man closed his eyes and waited for the darkness to reclaim him.

The man's first visitors were his sister and her kids. The visit was short and filled with tears from his sister and older niece, Sarah. Young Jennie, who was only four after all, didn't seem to understand that her uncle was badly hurt and was more interested in her Peppa Pig book. The man wasn't sorry when they left.

Spent, he lay back on the pillows, eyes closed. There was a cough from the end of the bed. Wearily, he opened his eyes and in the sterile white glare of the ward saw his next visitor. He wished his family was back.

This visitor was dressed all in black, his shirt bulging over his belly. The man was reminded of a cane-toad, puffed up with its own importance. A younger man with a shaved head and wearing a cheap suit with a red ketchup stain on the lapel stood fidgeting behind him. At least, he hoped it was ketchup.

"You keeping alright, Naismith? Are they looking after you here?" his visitor's accent was as flat as the surrounding Fens.

"What do you want, Peachornby?" the man whispered. Naismith. That was his name. It was starting to come back.

"Just paying you a visit. Part of my Mayor duties."

"Mayoral," Naismith corrected automatically.

"You want me to bring in the photographer now, boss?" asked the young man by the door.

Naismith raised himself up a fraction. "No – no photos."

"Why not? You're a hero," his visitor rubbed his upper lip drawing attention to the beginnings of a toothbrush moustache. No, that couldn't be, not even... But then Peachornby's words penetrated the drugged fog in his brain.

"Hero?"

"Sure. You saved Donna's life. If it wasn't for you, she'd have burned to death in the fire."

"Crisped," the young man butted in with a nasty grin.

Naismith licked his lips. "I don't remember." Bits of the Town Hall fire were coming back, his memory recovering like a slowly rebooting computer. Smoke in the corridors, then opening a fire door but after that – still nothing.

"Yeah, you were a hero. Mason...", the young man stood to attention. "Bring in that snapper." Over Naismith's weak protests Mason left and returned with the *Standard's* house photographer. After introductions were made, Peachornby stood by the head of the bed making sure he filled the frame while the hero of the hour was relegated to one corner. The smudger fired off several snaps from his digital Leica before leaving.

"There, that wasn't so hard, was it?" Peachornby said. There was a pause.

"Don't worry, the law's caught the asylum seeking scum who did this. Mason said he saw some Ay-rab with a jerry-can hanging about earlier."

"Guy was probably trying to barbecue one of the swans they nick off of the river," Mason barked with laughter. "They eat anything, them."

"Now they've caught the bastard who torched our Town Hall we'll make the rest of these foreign scum pay for what they've done," Peachornby continued. "I'm putting my corps of Sleaford Smashers to work on driving them out."

Naismith licked his lips and tried to speak but he was so tired and the sedatives he was on were befuddling his brain, making it hard to get all his ideas in order quickly enough. But how did Peachornby know it was an asylum seeker who had burned the Town Hall? It didn't sound like the sort of thing a refugee would do as most wanted to keep their head down until they got leave to remain in Britain.

And who or what were Sleaford Smashers?

"Yes, they've caught the muslim tool who did this outrage – and those behind him; those Judeo-Masonic-Marxist conspiracy merchants who want to bring down our noble town and Lincolnshire and our glorious country. The same bunch who want to drown our Anglo-Saxon heri... heritage within the strait-jacket of the European Union and flood us with the flotsam and jetsam of the world and see us and our children...

"And our children's children," interrupted Mason who despite his youth was well on the way to becoming a grandfather himself.

"...enslaved in chains and led away to be devoured by the starving hordes of Africa and Asia; who let's be honest have contributed nothing to human advancement..."

Naismith found his tongue. He couldn't take any more, especially as Peachornby hadn't yet got onto his favourite subject of how all this was foretold in Henry Ford's *The International Jew* and how the only people in the modern world who really understood the present dangers were the backwoods Militias in the United States. He'd heard it all before.

"I need to go..."

"You're not going anywhere, pal," Mason said with a snigger.

"No, I need to go urgently – ask the nurse to fetch a bedpan," Naismith croaked.

Peachornby blinked and looked annoyed by the interruption. However, he pressed the call button by the side of the bed. Shortly after, a neat oriental nurse entered the room. She glared at Naismith's visitors. She knew who they were and thought they belonged in a bedpan, too.

Peachornby shook his head. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I've got a town to run." As there was no reason for him to linger, Peachornby left, followed by his henchman.

Naismith lay back, drained, as the nurse removed the bedpan. But not so exhausted that Peachornby's last words didn't set off the alarm bells ringing in his mind. That monster running the town? God help Sleaford if there were no brakes on Peachornby's power now. The BNP thug had to be stopped. But how?

Naismith had no sooner lapsed into an uneasy doze when he became aware of another visitor. Despite the intolerable heaviness, he opened his lids and squinted through the lashes. He raised a smile.

"Patryk. Lukasz. Good of you to come and see me."

Patryk looked down at the man in the white bandages and felt a wave of sympathy and, yes, admiration flow through him. He took off his jacket and hung it over a chair back. Until this moment, he'd never realised that he actually liked this Englishman. Originally, he'd thought of him as a snake, a charismatic politician on the make, better than some maybe, but mostly as a man just looking to fill his boots at the tax-payers expense. But by saving Donna from the flames at the risk of his own life, Naismith had proved himself to be better than that.

Patryk looked down and shuffled his feet. "I was just passing, boss," he said unconsciously imitating Mason.

Naismith was about to say something but didn't want to make the Pole any more uncomfortable than necessary. "Sure, Patryk. Please don't let me keep you any longer than necessary..., mate," he added. Was that was the first time he'd called anyone 'mate' and meant it? He thought it was.

"That's okay, boss. Haven't got much on, just a trip up to Lincolnshire Council with the stuff saved from the archive section. A lot got water damaged after the fire but the chaps at Lincolnshire reckon they can fix it."

Naismith nodded. Even that small movement brought on a fresh jolt of pain. He lay back.



"Can I get you anything, boss? A glass of water?"

"No, I'm not allowed any. I'm still on this feeding tube but the nurse informs me that hopefully it will be removed tomorrow."

"That's good." Silence filled the room.

Naismith licked his lips. "Listen, Patryk. I need you to do a little favour for me."

"Oh, yes?"

"Yes. It's down to you now, Patryk. I need you to stop him. You're the only one who can finish this madman before he goes even further."

Patryk sat back. "Me! But you wanted me to rig the election so he won."

"Not so loud, Patryk. Do you want the whole world to hear? That was then. I had no idea what the man was like. I had no idea that he was even capable of an atrocity like burning down the Town Hall. You must stop him before he becomes too powerful."

"Me? I'm just some Polish van driver. And how do you know Peachornby burned it down? The papers said it was some Kurdish guy..."

"You really believe that? Ask yourself who benefits most from this fire storm? Only Peachornby, that's who. No, Patryk. Don't put yourself down, mate. You're far more than a van driver. And I... No, the whole of Sleaford is looking to you."

"No need to make a speech, boss," Patryk said, embarrassed. "But why can't your so-called business friends stop him. What about Charles Langton-Gore? Couldn't he do something?"

Naismith shook his head. That brought on another wince of pain. "Damn these nurses. Why can't they give you enough pain relief? Is it rationed or something?" His hand, swathed in bandages, reached out and pressed the call button.

"No, mate. None of them have what Hemingway called *cojones*. No, it's down to us and I am flat on my back in this bloody bed."

"But how? What shall I do?"

Naismith grinned. That hurt but it was worth the pain.

"You'll think of something. I know you will." He better had, Naismith thought, otherwise Sleaford's really in trouble.

The door opened again and the nurse entered the room. "You tire out patient, ah. You go now, okay? You come back when patient maybe rested?" She shoed Patryk out and, as the two men left, heard Naismith complaining about the lack of pain relief.



## CHAPTER 19. MY FATHER, ALOIS.

Patryk swung by Kassia's kindergarten. The toddlers, an endless stream of chubby little legs, tottered out of the nursery. Some clutched daubs in bright primary colours that would not have looked out of place in a modern art gallery. Others had two or three cardboard boxes taped together and crudely painted which they assured their parents were a 'space-pocket' or a 'dinnosaur'. Most would end up in the recycling bin later that night. One or two clasped a book in their hands. Patryk smiled at the sight of the cute little figures and their adoring parents as a couple of harassed looking nursery assistants waved them off.

As soon as the last baby and toddler had left, Patryk hurried up the ramp and let himself in. Kassia was tidying away the last of the day's debris. It looked like a small army of Vandals and Visigoths had swept through the room ransacking everything in sight. Patryk stepped over a discarded teddy bear and kissed his love on the back of her neck. She straightened and smiled.

"Patryk. Wonderful to see you. What are you doing here?" Sarcasm and suspicion in equal proportions. Not a good sign.

"Because I love you and want to be with you," he replied. The best, possibly the only answer.

"More like he's done something wrong," said the other assistant in passing.

She also spoke in Polish.

Patryk stooped and helped pick up the toys strewn over the floor. As he did so, he filled Kassia in on what had happened earlier. She had only one thing to say. "He's right. You've got to stop him, Patryk. You and Naismith built this monster up; now you've got to take him down."

Now he had Kassia as well as Superintendent Donelan and Naismith after him to take down Peachornby.

"But how? I'm only a van driver not some politician or assassin or anything."

"I know, and I love you for what you are. But you've got to stop him; you can't just walk away and leave Peachornby to get stronger. It wouldn't be right. Why not try and find out more about him? He's lived here all his life, as far as I know, so I'm sure there's something in his past that you could use against him."

Patryk thought for a moment. A light bulb switched on in his brain. "Good thinking, Kass. You're right. A man like Peachornby must have a few skeletons in his closet."

He kissed Kassia a quick goodbye and then raced down the steps to his van. Picking up Lukasz from outside the printers, the two men headed north up the B1188 toward Peachornby's village of Dunston. Before they got there, Patryk turned off into a place marked:

Peachornby's Garden Centre.

All Your Gardening and Horticultural Needs In One Place.

Specialists in Conservatories and Hot House Plants.

5% ~~10%~~ Discount For Senior Citizens.

Coach Parties Welcome.

Tea Shop and Gift Shop.

It was a large sign. A row of Union flags flapped in the east wind. At least the man had sense enough to leave the swastika flags and other Nazi stuff at home, Patryk thought. He pulled up in a parking lot that still had many cars and even a coach parked in it.

The two men walked through the entrance and shop. It had the sickly sweet smell from scented candles and incense sticks. Passing the section devoted to gardening tools they found themselves outdoors in the area devoted to flowering shrubs. Several elderly people were fingering the bushes while talking about prices. A man in a blue windcheater was going on and on about soil pH levels with the expertise of a Cambridge don.

"What are we looking for, Patryk?" Lukasz asked as they walked under an arbour with trellis sides.

"To be honest, I don't really know. Someone who'll dish the dirt on Peachornby."

"Like what kind of boss he is?"

"Partly. Oh, I don't know but we've got to start somewhere."

Lukasz wasn't too sure about the 'we' part. Personally, he was tempted to cut and run. Take his share of the money and jet out on the first flight back to Warsaw. Let Sleaford, Lincolnshire and England sort out their own problems. What were they to them? But on the other hand, he'd not yet made enough and he trusted Patryk.

And after all, this was England not Russia and it wasn't like he'd wake to that three in the morning knock from the Secret Police or some oligarch's private security company. No. Stick with it for the time being but make sure he kept his passport close to hand.

By now, the two men were passing a display of statues set amongst flowering shrubs. An old man well into his seventies was pruning some suckers back with a vicious looking pair of secateurs. He wore the purple and green fleece jacket of the garden centre.

Lukasz looked at Patryk. This man was the only employee who looked old enough to have known Peachornby for a long time. All the others they'd seen so far looked like they were part time college students.

"Excuse me," said Patryk politely. The man straightened up and for one instant, one nanosecond of time, Patryk thought the old man would like nothing better than to plunge the secateurs deep into his belly.

To Lukasz, the man looked unwell. He was gaunt and the bones of his face stood out stark and skeletal. His hair was cropped close to his skull. The man rubbed his stubble and looked at the two Poles with washed out blue eyes.

"Can I help you?" the man asked, politely enough on the surface but underneath, both men sensed arid hostility underneath. And maybe it was his flat Fenland voice or perhaps it was something about the eyes but both Lukasz and Patryk saw some resemblance between this old man and Peachornby.

"Do you know Kenneth Peachornby – the owner?" Patryk asked.

The man nodded and looked warily at them. "I should do. I work for him," the man said. Looking at the man's name badge, Lukasz saw his name was Stanley.

"I mean – do you know him well? What's he like; not just to work for I mean but as a man. I can make it worth your while..."

The man said nothing but led the two Poles behind a row of sheds and plastic storage units for sale. Once out of sight, Stanley took out a pack of Golden Virginia and papers and rolled himself a smoke. No filters. He scratched a match against the rough side of a shed and applied flame. He inhaled deeply, holding the smoke for a minute before exhaling with a sigh of pleasure.

"Doc says they'll be the death of me. But that quack's a year too late at least. I'm dyin' anyway."

"I'm sorry," Lukasz said automatically.



"Don't be. I'm seventy-six and I brought it on myself. Remember them John Player cards?"

The two Poles shook their heads.

"Back in the Sixties and Seventies that was. Smoke yerself to death savin' up enough cards to get a fondue set or toaster. Me and the wife got enough for a wicker chair and coffee table. She also bought herself a heart attack and a hole in the ground and now I've got the big C. Can't complain; if it's good enough for the Marlboro man, it's good enough for me." Stan grinned making his face look even more like a death's head than before.

Lukasz spoke briefly in Polish. This wasn't what they had come for. They weren't here to listen to this old man's life story. They were here to find out about Kenneth Peachornby.

"Say – are you the two guys who rigged that election? The retard was boastin' he had a couple of Polack chancers workin' for him."

Patryk and Lukasz nodded non-committally. "Maybe. But do you know him well?"

"Know him well? I should do. I'm the man who fathered that retard onto the world."

"You're his Dad?" Lukasz gasped in shock. Despite this man's emaciation and Peachornby's weight, now he looked closer there were physical similarities between them. But what kind of man would call his own son a retard? Not a good father, that was for sure.

"That's what I said, wasn't it? And if I'd known how he'd turn out, I'd have had a J. Arthur instead of a shag."

Patryk and Lukasz glanced at each other. A '*J. Arthur*'? What did he mean by that?

Sensing their confusion, Stan elaborated, his voice rasping on their ears, "A Sherman Tank – bashin' the bishop, one off the wrist." Now the two Poles understood.

"Not that it's all the retard's fault he's turned out the way he has. He drew the short straw by gettin' my looks and his mum's brains. If it weren't for me, he'd have bankrupted the place years ago."

This sounded more promising. "Go on," said Lukasz.

Stanley inhaled again and then ground the stub underfoot crushing the life out of it. "See that shrub over there?" he said, pointing to a sapling with dark green leaves, orange berries and an array of sharp thorns. They nodded, wondering where the old man was going with this.

Putting on a posh BBC Radio 4 presenter's voice, like he was on Gardener's Question Time, Stanley carried on. "Firethorn, also known as pyracantha. You can plant it almost anywhere and it will thrive, even in shade. It's a hardy shrub and doesn't need any looking after even in the harshest winter. Birds like eating the berries, too, so it's good for their habitats. It's a winner and one of our best sellers." Dropping the BBC impression, the old man finished off. "But does the retard know that? Of course not." Stanley spat onto the path and then fixed himself another roll-up.

"I signed this place over to the retard to avoid death duties. Nearly seven years ago that was and only got six months to go before he'll have it free and clear – unless somethin' 'appens to 'im. Second worst mistake of my life – the worst was comin' home from the King's Arms that August night fifty-two years ago and demandin' my conjugals.

"Should never have signed the garden centre over to him. This is my life's work. I built it up from scratch. Me having to worry at the end of every month if I'd broken even – if I'd made enough to pay off the loans. Only drew starvation wages at first. Yet I still 'ave to stand over the retard's shoulder and do the orderin' and books for him as he's too dumb to work it out for himself. I taught myself Excel spreadsheets but can I get it through his thick head? No. He's too dumb to learn."

The two Poles looked at each other. They wondered how it was for the young Peachornby growing up under Stanley's thumb.

"There's a guy 'ere at the centre, Nigel, who reminds me so much of my younger self. Has a burnin' desire in his belly to make a go of things. He knows his stuff, has some bright ideas to expand and take on the big superstores at their own game. He's like the son I never had.

"People would probably think I was queer for him but if anyone could get the retard out the way, I'd change my will in a flash and leave everythin' to Nigel instead. Cut the retard out entirely."

"But what I don't get," Stanley continued, "is why a couple of Poles are workin' for a bigoted retard like my son. I should've thought he'd be the last man

you'd want to see as Mayor." Stanley lowered his rasping voice and spoke confidentially. "You know he's obsessed with Hitler, don't you?"

Patryk and Lukasz nodded. "We've seen his house."

"Then you two muckers should know better. Listen, I was a racist back in the sixties and seventies – we all were back then. It was normal. Send 'em all back; that's what we all thought even if we never come right out and said it.

"But times change and me and the wife changed with 'em, too. We was wrong. But the retard never grew up. He's always bangin' on about the immigrants and how the Jews control the world banks and hangin' about with those hooligan mates of his."

Stanley spat a wad of phlegm onto the path. He fixed them with his pale blue eyes. "So what're you two going to do?"

Patryk thought. "We fixed things so Kenneth would win but now we've got to stop him before he goes too far..."

"You mean he hasn't? Are you tellin' me he wasn't behind the fire?" Stanley interrupted. He laughed, his voice harsh. His laughter became a coughing fit. He doubled over trying to suck air into his lungs. It was a couple of minutes before he could speak again.

"If you want to bring him down, look into the retard's past. Moron tried to burn his school down, you know, and there was a lot of barn burnin's back then so he's got form. Nothin' was ever proved, of course, but there's prob'ly a file or two knockin' about somewhere. Retard used to wet the bed, too. Fire-setters do y'know."

That was information worth knowing but old unproven cases from forty or more years ago wasn't going to bring down Peachornby. Might make things even more difficult with the press but that was about it.

"Anything else?"

Stanley thought for a moment before he spoke again, even lower. His rasp barely above a whisper now. "Okay. He ever finds out I told you, he'll kill me. That said, he'd be doing me a favour. I'm not lookin' to die in some poxy hospice, not me.

"You know he's into this Aryan Nations, white supremacy rubbish? How we're better than the coloureds? As well as being a retard, the guy's a total hypocrite. Listen...," Stanley Peachornby spoke and the two Poles listened. After a few minutes, the germ of an idea came to their minds.



## **CHAPTER 20. HANG OUT THE WASHING ON THE SIEGFRIED LINE.**

Willard sat deep in thought. He'd been allocated a little side room off the main open plan offices on the first floor. His door stood ajar but few people came to see him as they all assumed he was one of Peachornby's mob. Displayed on the monitor was a spreadsheet giving details of all the Smasher's shift patterns and rotas including those who had failed to show for duty.

This was a common pattern amongst the Smashers – reliability was not their strong point. As soon as they were safely on the Smashers' payroll, most of them took it as an opportunity to spend their days down the pub or bookies instead of at work. Or else they preferred to laze away their days at home with the curtains drawn shooting things on the X-Box. Mondays and Fridays there were usually more gaps in the chart than people showing up for duty.

Willard sighed. It wasn't a difficult program to set up and operate but it had proved beyond the grasp of Peachornby and Mason. It would be like trying to explain the quantum physics of the Large Hadron Collider to them. Now the equally complex physics of the Sun's rays shone in through the blinds and outside he heard banging and thumping as some of the Smashers who had bothered showing up hauled out more fire-damaged equipment and threw it out into a skip.

Last night, Willard had seen his handler – Sergeant Fiona Wright – who, among other things, told him that Naismith was making good progress. He was now on the general medical ward and although he faced the foreseeable future filled with painful skin grafts he was out of danger. So no chance of getting a manslaughter or culpable homicide charge against these BNP jokers now.

However, the girls in the council offices were in no danger from Naismith's roving eye and wandering hands for the time being. They were missing him.

Willard spun in his chair and peered through the slats of the blinds at the white stone tower of St Denys church in the distance. He wondered what traumas and difficulties that steeple had seen over the centuries. The blitz, the agricultural revolution and the Corn Law riots; before that the Civil War. Willard knew that Cromwell recruited much of his New Model Army from around these parts.

Further back, the middle ages, the War of the Roses and the Black Death. Yes, that steeple had seen it all. But had it ever witnessed some cut-price Nazi thug like Peachornby in charge of Sleaford? Although given the always low standards of local democracy the church had probably buried far worse characters than Peachornby. Most of them were probably pillars of the community in their day.

His desk phone rang, jerking Willard back to the present day. He spun round, glanced at the number on the display and then lifted the receiver.

"Willard," he announced. He listened for a moment. "Sure thing, Mayor. I'll be right over."



He stood and ignoring the hostile glances from the outer office made his way along the corridor to the Mayor's suite. He knocked, waited for an answer but when none came he pushed open the door. There was no sign of Peachornby's Senior Assistant so Willard carried on to Peachornby's private office.

"Where's Mason?" asked Willard.

Peachornby looked up. The man looked rough, far rougher than usual as if he was harried by forces beyond his control. Peachornby looked as if he had not slept for several nights and his doughy face was pallid and waxy with dark bags under his reddened eyes. They went well with his 'tache.

The Mayor picked up a sausage and egg toastie liberally filled with HP sauce and took a bite. Yolk and brown sauce spurted out, splattering down his shirt front. Peachornby cursed, dropping the sarnie onto a paper plate and picked up a wad of tissues with which he smeared the foodstuff over his shirt. Willard watched as the Mayor then dropped the dirty tissues onto an open planning application submitted by some outfit called Saveiro Canadian and then lifted the sarnie, taking a second bite. More yolk and HP sauce squirted out either side of Peachornby's mouth. It was not a pleasant sight. Willard hoped Sleaford's Mayor wouldn't be invited to many official banquets.

"Throwing a sicky," Peachornby mumbled, talking around a mouthful of half-chewed toastie. He got in a punch-up with some men from Mansfield. They dragged him out into the car park and gave him a right hammering. One of them smashed a pool cue over his noggin and he's got conc... conc... concussion or something so he'll not be around for a few days."

Willard thought that anyone smashing a cue over Mason's bonce was wasting their time. That was a skull made of solid bone.

"Well, don't worry, Mayor. He'll be up and about before you know it and in the meantime I could take over his work?" This could be a useful way to worm further into Peachornby's crew.

The Mayor nodded. "Mason said I could trust you. Said your references all checked out. And you did a good job on the Masonic Hall and Connie Club."

Willard nodded. He sincerely hoped that his part in those two incidents would be swept under the carpet. Otherwise he'd be in deep doo-doo's.

"Listen. I need you to do a little job for me this evening. Normally, I'd get Mason to do it but...", Peachornby shrugged. His wig slipped slightly forwards.

"Sure, Mayor. What do you want me to do?" Willard was careful to keep his voice relaxed and neutral but inwardly he felt that frisson of adrenaline and excitement. Maybe this might be the opportunity he was looking for? The chance to gather something truly incriminating on Peachornby.

Willard was to be initially disappointed.

"I just need you to drop off some plants from my garden centre. A friend – sort of – owns a centre up north. Near Bolton or somewhere. What with the cold weather up there a lot of his stock's died off. So if you could just drive the van up to Woodall Services on the M1 then he can pick up the plants he's ordered from me. You okay with that?"

"Sure thing, Mayor."

"Thanks, Willard. I owe you one. Now, here's his number. When you get near the services, give him a buzz and he'll direct you," Peachornby said, sliding over a slip of paper on which a mobile phone's number had been written.

Later that afternoon, Willard drove up the B1188 towards Dunston. The radio was tuned to Smooth FM but the easy listening classics failed to soothe his mind. This was a waste of time. He was beginning to think that Superintendent Donelan had overestimated the importance of Peachornby and his BNP mob. Sure, they were an unpleasant, vicious little bunch but they'd get voted out at the next election.

In the meantime surely Lincolnshire County Council and the Home Office themselves could put the kibosh on Peachornby's wilder schemes? Even though some of them such as the Kamp Kleethorpes holiday camp for asylum seekers had proved to be very popular. Except amongst the shivering half-frozen refugees themselves, of course.

Catching sight of the array of Union flags, Willard pulled into the car park of Peachornby's garden centre and following his directions drove past the main shop and showroom and then onto the glasshouses round the back. He spotted a Transit van with Peachornby's Garden Centre emblazoned on the side within a circle of flags and parked next to it.

As soon as Willard switched off the engine, a much older man with a death's head for a face stepped out of the glasshouse. Immediately, the man plucked a roll-up from behind his ear, sparked up and drew a cloud of smoke deep into his lungs.

Willard got out of his Peugeot as the old man approached.

"Where's that other Muppet – Mason? The one that does the retard's dirty work?"

That was quite a lot of concepts to take in at once. Willard seized on the word that stood out. "Retard?"

"Yeah, my useless son Kenneth. If you've got any more smarts than the rest of his crew you'll turn around and drive back to whichever stone you crawled out from under."

"What's the problem?" Willard asked, taken aback by the old man's bile.

"I usually deal with Mason. The lad's a total moron but he's so stupid he's trustworthy. So who are you?" the old man rasped.

"Willard. Head of Security at the council now," Willard said, sticking out his hand. The other man looked at Willard's offer of friendship but didn't shake.

"Kenneth's sent me to pick up and drop off some flowers for some guy up north. Call him if you don't believe me."

The old man shrugged and fished out a set of keys from his fleece. "If the retard wants to use somebody he's only just met; it's all one to me. Me, I won't be alive for the trial. Van's already loaded." He tossed the keys to Willard who plucked them out of the air.

The old man grinned – an expression that made his ravaged face even more terrible. "Mason could never catch 'em. Too slow. Dropped 'em every time."

Willard crossed to the Transit. The cab was filthy with soil or compost on the floor and six month's worth of fast food wrappers, newspapers and betting slips littering the dash. It smelled as if someone had used the van to ferry travel-sick dogs around the east Midlands. There was an air-freshener but it hadn't been replaced any time this year.

Willard tooted the horn at the old man's back and then drove out of the garden centre and headed west towards the M1 motorway. As he drove, Willard wondered what Peachornby's father had meant by 'being alive for the trial'. That sounded like more than the usual under-the-table Town Hall corruption stuff. After all, that wouldn't have anything to do with the garden centre.

Willard drove through the darkening Lincolnshire countryside and turned onto the M1 at junction 28, heading north. The notice on the back of the van saying it was fitted with a governor limiting its speed to sixty was just for show so he drove fast, buying time. He kept an eye in his mirrors for a tail but couldn't see anyone following so soon after pulled into Tibshelf services. Hey! Nobody had told him he couldn't stop on the way.

Just in case anyone was watching, Willard used the gents and then bought sandwiches, a can of coke and a Twix from WHSmith newsagents before returning to his Transit. He walked around the back of the van and then, clumsily, allowed the coke to slip out of his hands. Crouching, Willard saw that the back of the Transit was securely padlocked with a top of the range Assa lock. There was no corresponding Assa key on his ring.

Sure, even an undercover officer had heard about plant thefts from garden centres, but this seemed a bit too much security for some rose bushes or whatever. Unless Peachornby was competing in the Chelsea Garden Show which didn't seem likely. He shook his head. He didn't have time to call his handler and arrange for a locksmith to open up. Picking the can up from the tarmac, Willard brushed off his jeans and climbed back into the cab.

Ten minutes from Woodall services, Willard keyed in the mobile number Peachornby had given him. After just one ring, a voice with a strong Manchester accent answered. In the background, Willard heard wailing middle-eastern music.

"Where shall we meet?" Willard asked after saying where he was.

"The truck park. Northbound. Furthest away from the motorway. You're Peachornby's new boy, ain't you?"

"Yes. Mason took a pasting the other day."

The Manc chuckled. "Man had it coming." He stopped laughing as if a current had been switched off. "But no tricks, my friend. And no stupid comments, neither. Okay." The man killed the connection.

Still thinking about what he had just heard, Willard drove through the night. The motorway was busy, but not congested and he made it to Woodall services. He turned off and followed the signs to the large goods vehicles parking area. He drove slowly, unsure what he was looking for but positive that Peachornby's contact would recognise his van. By a stand of trees it was pitch black making dark alleyways

between the high sided artics. A few cabs were lit up as drivers sat and relaxed before settling down for the night but most were in darkness.

Willard pressed the brake pedal as a man stepped out from behind one of the trucks and flagged him down, pointing to a gap beside a Belgian registered refrigerator semi-trailer. Willard indicated and turned in, parking next to a Fiat Ducato. This second van was badged as belonging to an outfit going by the name of Bird I'th Hand Plants and Gardens.

Willard stepped down into the petrol smelling night and, even though he thought he'd seen it all in his time on the force, he still got a shock. The man standing before him couldn't have been more of a Hollywood stereotype if he'd worked at it. Like he'd come from a drawer at central casting marked Public Enemy No. 1: Jihadi Mujahadeen. From his lacy skullcap to his sandalled feet, the man looked every inch the Islamist terrorist.

He stood five eight or nine; not tall but he appeared broad and powerful. His face was dominated by a thick, luxuriant beard beneath a strongly hooked nose and thin, cruel lips. He wore white Islamic robes and trousers which seemed to glow in the dim light between the wagons.

His only concession to the evening chill was an explosive filled suicide vest.





## CHAPTER 21. OPERATION MARKET GARDEN.

The man who had initially guided him in reappeared around the corner of the chiller wagon. He was also of South Asian origin but dressed more western-style in a grey hooded sweatshirt and chinos. He was younger than the first man; only early twenties, Willard estimated.

"Another of Peachornby's lot," the jihadi-type said in his strong Manchester accent.

Now Willard's breath came back, he saw that what he had initially mistaken for a suicide vest was actually a down filled body warmer. No Semtex and the only wires hanging from it belonged to an MP3 player. Willard breathed out, his exhalations ragged. He was glad he'd used the gents at Tibshelf otherwise there'd be a damp patch on the front of his jeans.

The younger man looked at Willard and he also saw what he expected to see; just another stereotypical BNP skinhead thug. His lip curled.

"I have a name. Willard," the cop said. He held out his hand, making up for his initial panicked reaction.

This took the jihadi by surprise. "Waqir. And this is Iblal."

Willard shook hands with Waqir. The man's hands were surprisingly soft. This was not a man who spent much time digging or hoeing or whatever it took to run a garden centre.

Waqir then passed a key to his assistant. "Should be five boxes."

Iblal unlocked the back of Willard's Transit and climbed in. A strong smell wafted out. Willard was no gardener as he was content to leave that side of things to his girlfriend, Denise. She had an array of window boxes on their apartment's sills and several potted plants cluttering up their apartment – bringing the outdoors indoors she called it. He called it a waste of time but hey! if it kept her happy he was all for it.

All the same, he could recognise the strong smell of mint and lavender. It reminded him of his Nanna's bungalow in Eastbourne. Iblal reappeared a moment later carrying three polystyrene beer coolers which had been duct taped closed. Iblal transferred them to Waqir's Ducato before fetching the last two from Peachornby's Transit.

"What about the plants?" Willard asked, glancing inside. Trays of plants took up several shelves.

"Just about to get them, white boy," Iblal snapped. He removed several trays of flowering annuals and ferried them over to the second van. A few minutes later the transaction was completed and Waqir relocked Peachornby's Transit.

Willard thought for a second. It was obvious to a trained copper what had just gone down but he wanted to play his part as a loyal, if slightly dim, skinhead. "What about payment?"

"Not your business, white boy," Iblal snapped again.

Keeping within his role, Willard raised his fist. He was larger than both Asians and in the darkness he knew he cut a threatening figure.

Waqir turned back before getting back into the cab. "Payment? Soon as this checks out, I'll wire your boss like I've always done before. He knows that."

Willard stepped back, satisfied and watched as Waqir's Ducato reversed out from the shadows between the heavy goods vehicles and then accelerated out of the services. He was happy with what he had seen and so he walked back to the brightly lit food hall and, using one of the payphones, made a call to his handler. He listened as Fiona muted her TV set but after he'd explained, she sounded as pleased as himself. At last this investigation was going somewhere. Now they had a handle on what was going on in Sleaford, Sergeant Wright told him to gather more evidence before they pounced and then Willard could enjoy that well earned break.

On the drive back to Sleaford, Willard felt wired, on top of the world. He glanced at the dashboard clock. Plenty late enough. Peachornby would be tucked up in bed reading one of his favourites – was it *Mein Kampf* or *Protocols* this week? – or dreaming of charging across the steppes in the lead Panzer, scattering the Red Army before him.

Willard turned off and headed towards Dunston along narrow country lanes. Peachornby's garden centre loomed up before him. The Union flags flapped disconsolately in the unending wind. Even the spotlights had been turned off to save money and the flags now looked black and dismal instead of their usual bright colours.

Thinking ahead, Willard switched off his headlights, dropped down to first gear and drove slowly along the driveway past the main shop and retail units and made his way to the greenhouses. Fifty yards away from the glasshouses he turned off the engine and coasted silently. Not wanting the red brake lights to come on, he pulled up the handbrake and halted the Transit.

Covering the dome light with his hand, Willard stepped out of the cab and closed the door as quietly as possible. Nobody more than a couple of yards away could have heard anything. Willard zipped up his jacket and crossed over to the glasshouses.

Something moved beneath his boot. A brittle yet rolling motion. He swore under his breath and carefully raised his foot. Perspiration broke out on his forehead. It was only a stick or piece of cane – not an unusual thing to stumble across in a garden centre – but if he'd snapped it, the sound would have echoed like a gunshot. No better way of announcing his presence.

Rolling his feet, testing every step as he went, Willard moved like a shadow in the darkness. He glanced up. One hundred per cent cloud cover. No moon or stars and the only light came from distant street lamps. Perfect for concealment but not so good for finding out what was in the glasshouses. However, if his assumptions were right then he wouldn't need his eyesight. His nose would give him all the proof he needed.

By now, Willard had reached the first hothouse. He tried the door and swore again but hey! What did he expect? The full red carpet treatment? The door was locked. Willard crept down the side of the building between it and the second

glasshouse. He was careful, knowing that these passages were usually cluttered with discarded plant pots, compost sacks, staging and general debris.

As he moved, Willard kept an eye on the inside of the greenhouse. Unusually, the lower panes were all painted black and in the pitch darkness he could see nothing. Glancing over at the second structure, he noticed that those panes had also been painted. Willard knew he was no gardener but that seemed wrong to him. Except something like this was what he half expected.

Now Willard had reached the far end of the glasshouses. A few feet ahead of him was a tall fence overtopped by razor wire. An owl hooted and once again, Willard swore as his heart leaped into his mouth. As his heart rate slowed, he wondered if there were rear doors on these glasshouses? Perhaps as fire exits or something?

There were, but the sliding doors were also locked shut. No problems, hey! What are glasshouses made of, Willard asked himself. Glass. That's what. Stooping, Willard cast his hand about until his fingers brushed against a half brick. He hefted the brick and was about to smash one of the panes. The damage could always be blamed on passing vandals.

Then, shattering the silence and making Willard jump out of his skin as the saying goes, another pane of glass shattered. A jagged, sharp sound splintering the quiet. Yet again, Willard swore. The sound came from over by his right – somewhere by a third hothouse he hadn't had chance to check out.

Clutching the half brick, Willard crept over to where he'd heard the window break. As he moved, he heard more glass fall as whoever had broken it cleared shards

from the frame. Over the wind, he heard whispering. More than one of them, then. But Willard had surprise on his side. The intruders had no idea he was there.

Slowly, slowly, making no sudden movements that would draw attention his way, Willard poked his head around the back of the hothouse before ducking back immediately. Standing by the rear of the hothouse were two men. One held a length of wood which he was using to knock out the shards. The other man held something that in the darkness could be anything but looked to Willard like a large pistol. He couldn't be sure in the darkness but they didn't look like skinheads to him. Journalists? No, even the worst hack wouldn't risk a spot of breaking and entering.

Willard peeped around the corner again in time to watch the second man crawl through the broken window. This was too good an opportunity to pass up. A chance to see what was going on inside Peachornby's array of greenhouses. Giving the men half a minute to get inside, Willard hurried around the back and followed them. He hoped that he wouldn't meet them on their way out. That could be awkward. Carefully, trying to make no sound over the broken glass, Willard ducked and scrambled through the hole.

If it was dark outside, it was blacker than the inside of the Devil's top hat within the glasshouse. Then, up ahead, a weak beam of light illuminated a length of shelving. The sort of light cast by a mobile phone's display. The light swung about, dimly illuminating the nearest plants. Now Willard had a handle on where these other two men were. Keeping low, Willard followed them. Fronds and leaves brushed his shoulders as he walked. A low, electrical hum helped cover any slight sounds he might make.

Keeping his eye on them, Willard saw the men hadn't moved. They were huddled together and in the tiny amount of light cast by the phone Willard thought they were examining the plants. He watched as one of the men stroked the leaves while he heard them whispering together.

Using their distraction as cover, Willard approached. As he got closer, he saw that he had the advantage of size and weight on both of them. Of course, they might be armed for all he knew while all he had was this half brick. His heart was racing and he felt the adrenaline rush around his system. But hey! He'd been trained for moments like this.

Now he was closer, Willard heard the men's whispers over the low electronic hum. The men were whispering in a foreign language – it sounded like some eastern European lingo to his ears – and one pulled off a couple of leaves and stuffed them into his jacket pocket. The men whispered some more and then the taller raised what Willard had thought earlier was a pistol.

The object flashed. Again and again followed by a clicking sound. It was a SLR camera, Willard realised with relief. Only a camera. But why were these men photographing the contents of the hothouse? He could understand it if they'd started smashing the place up but to start taking pictures? Were they undercover journalists looking for the scoop of the year? Or at least the month. Dishing the dirt on Peachornby's mob?

They couldn't be undercover cops as well, could they? Surely Superintendent Donelan would have mentioned that he had other boots on the ground. Although he would have dressed it up in impenetrable language like saying there were a few extra

batters on the team. Willard took a step back hoping to blend into the undergrowth but it was too late. In the sharp white flashes, one of the men glimpsed something out of the corner of his eye. Immediately, the man tugged his friend's sleeve and hissed something. The second man stopped snapping away.

"Who are you?" one of the men said. He didn't have much of an eastern accent, barely a trace. He wouldn't pass as a local but he didn't sound foreign, Willard thought. Meanwhile, his friend dropped the camera back into his bag.

Willard had no ID on him and wasn't ready to reveal his true identity yet anyway. "Willard. Head of Security. And what do you two jokers think you're doing?" He tried to make his voice even harder and deeper than normal, playing up his role as a skinhead thug for whom violence wasn't just second nature. It was first and third nature as well.

The two men glanced at each other. Even without the benefit of telepathy, Willard knew what they were thinking. What it always came down to in times like this. Fight or flight. On the one hand there were two of them. However, they didn't know who he was and assumed he was some football hooligan who loved a ruck against any odds. On the other hand, they could try and smash their way out of the side of the glasshouse.

Willard made his voice a little gentler. Personally, he couldn't care less about people breaking into Peachornby's greenhouses but he wanted to know who these two were and what they intended doing.

"It's okay. I'm not going to hurt you," he said. In the darkness he saw the pale ovals of the two men's faces turn to each other and then they spoke rapidly in their



own language. They didn't believe him. They turned and ran up the passageway up the centre of the greenhouse, obviously hoping to outpace him and then smash their way out of the front.

"Hey," Willard shouted as he ran after them.

Then the lights came on.



## CHAPTER 22. IN THE SEARCHLIGHT'S BEAM.

Then the lights came on and you could see for bloody miles. A string of bright lights suspended from the ceiling flooded the interior of the greenhouse. Willard winced and blinked his eyes as his pupils adjusted to the full glare. The two men skidded to a halt and raised their arms as they reached for the sky.

"You too, big man," a voice rasped from up front.

Willard obeyed. Peering over the shoulders of the men in front, Willard saw that the old man, Peachornby's father, was pointing a double-barrelled shotgun at them. At this range, no way could he miss. The barrel was way too short for anything legal. It looked like some 1960s bank robber's sawn-off with both barrels wrapped in black tape.

A roll-up dangled from the old man's lips and wobbled as he spoke. Under the harsh white light, the old man looked like he was the one closest to death – not the three men standing in front of his shotgun. The man still wore his purple fleece and pair of grubby jeans.

"Eight gauge. It'll blow you out of yer shoes," the old man growled, jerking the barrels up. He coughed and spat a wad of phlegm onto the floor. Willard knew that an eight gauge was old-fashioned but more deadly than the more modern twenty gauge.

Now his eyes had got used to the glare, Willard glanced around him. As he'd suspected, the shelving was filled with cannabis plants. *Cannabis sativa* to give the plant its botanical name. Arranged around the spiky leaved cannabis plants were trays of strongly scented herbs; mostly mint and lavender but others that smelled like curry. A draft wafted air down through grates set in the concrete floor. Willard reckoned that the distinctive marijuana fumes would be sucked into the sewage system where they would be lost in the stench.

What better place to grow heat loving cannabis plants than in a garden centre? The high costs of electricity for heating would be lost amid the general costs of running such a place, especially if the centre also grew other tropical hothouse plants. Very clever, thought Willard. So simple as well. He wondered whether Kenneth or his father had thought up this idea.

His thoughts snapped back to the here and now.

"I know you bunch of muckers, don't I?" the old man said. "You all teamed up or what?"

"No," said the tall, good-looking man with the camera, glancing back at Willard. His accent, although good, was stronger than his friends. "We've never seen him before."

"I have. He's one of your son's lot, Stanley," said the first.

"I remember you two. You're the retard's Polish oppos but now you're gonna take 'im down? Get the loser out of my way?" With that the old man eased his finger off the triggers and raised the shotgun's barrels to the roof panes. He grinned. It was a

horrible sight. He lifted his eyes past them and met Willard's gaze. "Only thing is – who are you?"

Willard had to make a decision. These three all knew each other and it was now obvious that they held no love for Peachornby or the BNP. That's why they were taking photos of what was going on down here. All the same, he didn't want to blow his own cover. Time to think fast but hey! That's what he was paid for.

"My name's Willard. Okay, I'm a freelance journalist currently working for the *Daily Mirror*. The paper asked me to get the low-down on what's going on here so I got a job with the Smashers. And it seems there's more to Peachornby than meets the eye," he said, gesturing to the rows of plants and the steadily dripping hydroponics system.

The old man looked hard at him. Although his face was ravaged by age and illness, his eyes were sharp and seemed to see right through him. "Journalist. Aye, sure you are. Just like I'm the Marquis of Granby. All the same, you can drop the hammer on the retard. Do the town a favour and get him out the way for good."

"Where's your camera?" the handsome young man with the SLR case asked.

Once again, Willard had to think fast. "I'm only on a recce. Just looking about for something newsworthy. Something that would go before page seventeen. I never expected to find..." he said, gesturing at the rows of cannabis plants. And he hadn't, at least until a few hours ago. He'd never have thought someone as dumb as Peachornby could have put together an industrial sized operation like this.

This wasn't some pot-head's tuppenny-ha'penny scam. A few plants in front of a two bar-electric fire. No, this was big. And well thought out. He'd heard of some operations as big or bigger than this. When he was on his firearms course, a couple of Merseyside cops told him about a Scouse scally who'd rented several disused railway tunnels in Cheshire and then stole his leccy direct from the National Grid.

The scally would have got away with it for ages if there hadn't been a big falling out amongst the gang with one of them turning Queen's Evidence. That had been a huge set-up. But if the other two glasshouses were set up the same way then Peachornby's was one of the biggest scams for ages. Lots of brownie points coming his way if he could grab all the credit for shutting it down before one of the big high-ups, like Superintendent Donegan, stole his thunder.

And then there was Peachornby's distribution network. If he had quashed his racial prejudices enough to supply British Asians in Bolton then who else was he dealing with? Yardies? Triads? The Vietnamese? Who knows. Anything was possible.

Willard held the old man's gaze. Ignoring the 1960s sawn-off he said, "this is all down to you, isn't it? There's no way Kenneth could have thought up all of this."

The old man's face broke into a smile. "Of course. And I don't care if you're wearing a wire. All the delays my lawyers'll create, I'll be pushing up the daisies long before this comes to trial. And I've got more than enough put aside to post bail."

Stanley leaned against the shelving, broke open the shotgun and pointed its barrels down at the floor. "We were doing alright until the credit crunch. Not brilliant, like, not with the retard sort of in charge. Not even with me standing over him. But we were more than breaking even and that's all that counts in the end. The bottom line.

"But then my bank – The Bank That Likes To Say Screw You, Amigo – wanted its money back. Foreclosed on the loans, they call it. Probably some computer at head office leaned on my relationship manager. I don't really blame the little bald-headed git. All the same they wanted their money back. All of it. Like I have that kind of dosh sitting about in my desk drawer!"

Stanley hawked up another wad of phlegm and spat. "Well, I wasn't worried then. Plenty of other banks out there. So I put the retard in a suit, made sure his flies were zipped up – the business was sort of in his name by then – and we went round 'em all. No dice. So we tried banks out of town – Lincoln and Nottingham – but they wouldn't deal. Even went online. And by then our credit rating was shot and our bank was making threatenin' noises. If we'd been dealin' with some back street loan-shark our kneecaps would've been long gone.

"Well, I wasn't letting it go at that. No way. For all his big talk, the retard hadn't a clue but of course I'd heard things at trade shows and the like... ways of getting yourself out the hole hydroponically. And I don't mean growing tomatoes. Can't compete with the Spanish on that front anyway..."

"Who set up the distribution network?" Willard asked, before the old man lost the thread of his thoughts. With a bit of luck he could take down several drugs kingpins round the country and not just Peachornby. Those Sergeant's stripes were within his grasp.

"Me at first, of course. But I have to hand it to the retard. When he got it through his thick skull what was going on, he used his contacts through the BNP to shift the product. And I don't just mean his Aryan Brotherhood bunch. When it comes

to...," Stanley put on a fake Jamaican accent, "... de ganja, Kenny's an equal opportunity supplier, mon. He sell de green to any bro' wid de foldin', mon. Don't care 'bout de colour of d'eir skin then."

"I thought he hated all non-whites," one of the Poles said, surprised.

"He does," Stanley admitted, losing the accent. "He really believes all that tripe. But money's money. And we soon made enough to pay off our loans, clear our debts. Was hopin' to jack it all in, me, and see out my last years on the Costas. Drink *San Miguel* lookin' out over the Med."

Stanley coughed again. His lungs weren't used to so much talk. "But then the big C bit. And I wanna leave all this....," he swept his arm round expansively. His hand held the shotgun and even though it was empty the two Poles ducked instinctively. Stanley coughed again, "...leave it all to Nigel. Else the retard will just fu... lose it big time and then all my life's work goes up in smoke. Now we're mostly in the black again, Nigel's got big ideas."

"What sort of ideas? Does he know about this set-up?" Willard asked.

Stanley grinned. "No way. Nigel's clean. If he knew about this, he'd dob us in."

But there was a look on the old man's face that Willard didn't trust. He doubted the extent of Nigel's innocence. However, he'd leave this Nigel character to dangle for the time being; see where the evidence took him.

"You've got enough for the time being," Stanley told them. "Now you three get out of here, put yer heads together an' work on bringin' down the retard for us."



Willard and the two Poles backed down the central aisle, followed by Peachornby senior. At the far end, near to the broken window was the fire exit. As he was the closest, Willard pushed on the bar and let them out into the cold night air.

Outside, it smelled much fresher than in the hothouse and a strong breeze brought salty air from the North Sea with it. Stanley came out last and he shut the fire door behind him. Reversing the shotgun, Stanley swung its stock into a couple more windows. In the almost complete silence of the countryside, the sound of breaking glass was loud; a jarring discordant noise.

"Bloody vandals. Should bring back National Service," Stanley muttered. Shouldering his piece the old man walked down the gap between the glasshouses and made his way back to his office within the main retail unit.

The three men looked at each other.

"What a strange old man," Patryk said, after introducing himself and Lukasz.

"Vicious as a weasel," said Lukasz after a pause.

Willard looked at the two Poles. He wondered how they fit in – what their angle was and what they were after. "We need to talk. Soon," he said giving them his phone number.



## CHAPTER 23. THE DUNKIRK SPIRIT.

They didn't want to meet in Sleaford or anywhere near it. Willard sent Patryk a text suggesting they meet in Skegness, in one of the amusement arcades that lined the sea front. Patryk read the text, memorised the details and then deleted it straight away.

"Fancy a run out tonight?" Patryk asked Kassia. "Get a breath of sea air? It'll do you good – you've been looking pale recently."

"So have you," Kassia replied. "I'd love to get out of this hole, even if only for a few hours. It's getting worse, you know. They've vandalised the kindergarten."

Patryk sighed. "Again? I'll have a word with these Smashers and ask them to keep an eye on the place."

"Keep an eye on the place? It's them that are doing it! The old lady who lives down the street, Mrs. Paton, she said it was a couple of skinheads."

"She could be mistaken. Not every skinhead round here is in the Smashers."

Kassia sniffed. "Most are."

Patryk stepped forward and hugged Kassia. "Don't worry. Nobody's hurt and remember why we're here. There's that little farm near Siedice with our names on it." Even so, he felt the young woman tremble beneath his arms. He felt strong, comforting his woman, letting her draw strength from him.

"This is all wrong, Pat. You must see that."

Patryk contented himself with saying nothing, merely stroking Kassia's long, blonde hair and occasionally kissing her ear. Soon after, Kassia recovered herself and hurried to the little bathroom to do her face.

Not wanting to use the council's marked van, they took Kassia's little Renault Clio. After the Transit, the Clio felt small and cramped and underpowered to Patryk but after he'd pushed the driver's seat back to its fullest extent – why do women always drive sitting bolt upright, he wondered, is it to do with them feeling smaller and less secure? – fiddled with the mirrors and changed the radio station to something a bit livelier, he felt a bit happier. Kassia looked annoyed as her girly cocoon was altered but she didn't say anything.

On their way to pick up Lukasz, he pretended he needed some chocolate and coke – diet for Kassia, of course, not that she needed it – as well as a lottery ticket and so swung past her kindergarten on their way to the corner shop. Graffiti had been sprayed over the brick built front. In blood red paint it said, 'Powls Out. Go Back 2 Poweland.' Another daub said, 'english jobs 4 english Wurkers.' Next to it was a crudely drawn swastika. Yes, Patryk thought. It did look like the work of the Smashers.

"If that's the worst they can do, then we've nothing to worry about," Patryk said, trying to reassure the young woman. "And once we've saved enough, we'll be out of here for good."

Kassia looked away. "The little ones shouldn't have to see that."

True, Patryk thought, but as toddlers can't read the slogans wouldn't bother them. They would think it was just a silly grown-up spraying paint around.

Patryk picked up Lukasz who sprawled out over the back seat before heading east along the A52 highway. As the flat countryside spread away on both sides of the road, the two men talked of many things but, as if by mutual consent, they didn't speak about their meeting even though it was at the front of their minds. Kassia said very little but watched the darkness fall over the flat fields and the glimmer of distant lights as they came out. To her, it seemed like the end of the world, the gentle English countryside turned into a post-apocalyptic wilderness by the evil of Peachornby.

And then their Clio reached civilisation. Or Skegness which is the next best thing. The darkness vanished, driven out by strings of coloured light bulbs suspended over the road from the lamp posts, flickering neon signs over the amusement arcades and faded, salt stained old illuminations which dated from decades before.

Signs advertised a seal sanctuary. Patryk joked that any seals seeking sanctuary in Skegness would have to be desperate. Even the cold, choppy waters of the North Sea would be preferable to this.

Patryk drove around the sweep of the coast road until he spotted a sign pointing to a car park. As the three stepped out of the car, the eternal wind buffeted them, dragging at their clothes, chill fingers of air finding every gap in their clothing. Kassia shivered and wrapped her scarf tighter around her neck.

Skirting the worst of the puddles, they made their way across the pot-holed sand-blown tarmac around a derelict hut and then onto Grand Parade which was no longer grand; fronted with cut-price discount stores – everything you didn't want for

one pound, amusement arcades and fast food takeaways. The night-time street smelled of fried onions, fried fish, fried chicken and doughnuts mixed in with oil.

A few groups of people meandered to and fro along the pavements. Couples wheeling squalling babies in pushchairs, an old man shuffling along searching the gutter for dog ends. A group of young men in football tops laughing too loudly – these were the only ones not wrapped up in thick coats against the wind's icy chill. A blast of recorded music from a run-down pub where the posters advertised last week's event. A low depression settled over the three. They recognised this as a place decaying into what future remained with no hope of anything better. A town whose past was all it had to live on.

"Come on," said Patryk. "Let's see what this man Willard has to say." They passed several arcades, the light flickering and bouncing off their faces as they gazed up at the unfamiliar signs making them look like day trippers on the look out for any fun they could find.

"This is the place," he said pushing through glass doors and into an arcade that looked slightly more prosperous and busier than the rest. They were greeted by a wall of heated air, rows and rows of slots jangling away, their electronic clamour luring people to part with money in return for a few hours oblivion.

To one side several machines endlessly pushed two pence coins towards the payout slots. A middle aged man with an exhausted expression watched as his young daughter, about eight or nine years old, dropped coins down the chute every couple of seconds. Patryk thought the man would have trouble in years to come because the girl had the vacant, dead-eyed look of any gambler.

Crossing to one of the machines Patryk fed in a tenner, poured the pound coins into a plastic tub and handed it to Kassia. "Here, you play on the slots while Lukasz and I speak to this Willard. We'll fill you in later."

Kassia's eyes flashed pale blue fire. "No way, you sexist pig! You got me into this mess. You had me filling in all those Xs. You're not just leaving me to pick up the pieces after you've had your fun!"

Patryk looked around. Her loud voice had attracted attention. Even the little girl with the empty eyes looked up from feeding her two pences down the chute. Fortunately, whenever Kassia got worked up, she always went back to her native language. Nobody in earshot looked like they understood what the angry young woman had said.

"Alright. Come with us, then. But let me do the talking. Okay?"

"Who put you in charge?" Kassia spat with venom.

They stood by one of the two pence slots. Now the excitement had died down, the little girl turned away and was drip feeding more coins down the slope. She sent her Daddy to the change machine for more money.

Lukasz nudged Patryk. "There he is." A lone man edged into the arcade and looked about himself. Because of the cold, the man wore a fleece hat covering his close-cropped head and a black Berghaus hiking jacket.

The man nodded to the Poles and they all made their way to the rear of the amusements, out of sight of any chance passers by from Sleaford. He raised his eyebrows in a question when he saw Kassia.

"She's my girlfriend. It's okay; she knows everything," Patryk explained.

"Everything? Wish I did. Maybe she can explain what's going on?" said Willard with a wry smile.

"Men! You're all the same," snapped Kassia.

Willard looked at the angry young woman. He realised that beneath her anger she was one frightened human. Perhaps that was why she was so wound up.

Taking charge of the conversation Willard said, "I guess we're here for the same reason. Peachornby. And what we're going to do about him and his mob."

Lukasz spoke rapidly in Polish.

"Let's stick to English. It'll make things easier. And quicker."

"What he's saying is why is this anything to do with us? We can catch the overnight ferry from Hull and the following day we're in Rotterdam. Day after that we're safely home in Poland," Patryk said. "Your problems are nothing to do with us."

Willard stroked his chin. "Let's see. Electoral fraud – that's very serious by the way – conspiracy to defraud, embezzlement... That's for starters. I could go on all the way down to outstanding parking tickets. Definitely get a tame judge to sign the extradition papers. We could bring you back from wherever you're hiding in Poland. There'd be no safe places if we really wanted to look for you. And we would. You can bet your bottom zloty on that."



Willard caught sight of their faces. "On the other hand, if you choose to help the authorities, then I'm sure any problems will disappear and we would be suitably grateful."

Patryk stepped forwards. He'd got his friends into this mess and it was up to him to get them out. "The old man was right, wasn't he? You're not some newspaperman are you? You're an undercover cop aren't you?"

Willard swore under his breath. He'd shown his hand and now had to take a decision. He was annoyed because standard procedure was to abort the operation once his cover was blown. The officer's safety always came first. His cover story had never been blown in the past but there was always a first. Willard knew he'd have to run this scenario past his handler later but for now there seemed little point denying it.

However, he felt he could trust these three even though they had already coughed to being partly responsible for putting Peachornby in power. Even though they seemed to have no love for the BNP leader or his crew. Willard thought it would be an interesting story and, hey! What was life without risk?

"That's right. But if you breathe a word of that in Sleaford, it would be the worst mistake of your lives."

Gathering round another twopenny slot machine, the three Poles and one English cop compared notes. It was Willard who learned more, that Superintendent Donelan was not exactly playing with a straight bat himself by putting the Poles on the team without telling him. Also, he was amazed at the extent of the graft and corruption within the Urban Council. Amazed but not shocked.

Eventually, just before closing time, they finished talking. Willard had lost over five pounds in twopences down the slots – a much cheaper way of meeting contacts or informers than the pub. He'd have to remember amusement arcades as a venue, he thought. Saves on expenses. They shook hands, swapped phone numbers and just to be on the safe side, Willard let the Poles leave first before heading back down the A52 himself. Using his hands-free kit, Willard called Sergeant Fiona Wright and laid it all out for her. When in doubt, refer the matter up the food chain.

Willard could hear Fiona thinking as he drove. She asked the only questions that mattered. Of course, the officer's safety came first but there was also the question of the time and effort expended so far in the operation. The high-ups worried more about budgets as well and hated to see money wasted. They were more like accountants than thief-takers these days.

"Do you feel safe, Willard? Safe with these Poles knowing you're u/c? If you want, we can pull them in – use the anti-terror legislation to keep them safely banged up for twenty-eight days?"

Thinking hard, Willard considered his response. No way did he want to be taken off this assignment. Far from being routine, this job might be the making of his career especially if he could use Peachornby to track down the other drug kingpins and suppliers.

"No – that won't be necessary, Fiona. I've got a feeling I might be needing them and they have no love for Peachornby's mob. It's not like the skinheads mix with eastern Europeans. Leave them be..."

"If you have any doubts, or suspect anything, then give me a call pronto and their feet won't touch the ground. Got that?" Sergeant Wright butted in.

"Sure. But do me a favour and leave them alone for the moment. I've got a feeling in my gut things are moving fast."

"Well, you're the man on the ground, Willard, and you've done u/c work before so I trust your instincts. But stay in touch, will you? I'm not a happy bunny with these three knowing your identity."

They exchanged a few pleasantries, items of office gossip, before Sergeant Wright rang off. Willard breathed a sigh of relief. He'd not mentioned that Peachornby's father suspected him as well. That would have raised a red flag with his handler and she would certainly have pulled the rug from under his feet.

Back in Sleaford, Willard swung past the Poles apartment. During their conversation, Sergeant Wright had searched the database and pulled their address for him. Kassia's Clio was parked outside and a light was on in an upstairs window. Of course, they could be on the blower to Peachornby but somehow, Willard doubted that very much. Sure, he'd have to keep his wits about him and stay sharp and if he saw anything that raised the hairs on the back of his neck then he'd get out. No hesitation. Just get out.

A few minutes later, Willard pulled up round the back of the flat he was sharing with a couple of other Smashers. They were both passed out in a stupor so he didn't need to bother thinking up an excuse. The gaff stunk of park bench lager and super-strong skunk cannabis. Willard wondered if it came from Peachornby's stock.





## CHAPTER 24. THE OLD CONTEMPTIBLES.

"Call yourself Head of Security? You're flaming useless," Peachornby shouted, his fist smashing down on his oak desk. His opened copy of *Mein Kampf* bounced and the gold-edged pages fluttered. "You must have seen the smashed windows when you dropped off the van last night."

Willard thought rapidly. He decided that sticking to his role as a slightly dim but violent thug would be best. He puffed out his chest. "Nothing to do with me, guv. I never went round the back, did I? Just left the keys with your Dad and went home."

A thought struck Peachornby. Willard watched as the lights came on behind Peachornby's eyes. The führer rubbed his jowly cheek and frowned. "So you never went in the greenhouses then?"

"No. Just dropped off the keys and then got off. Anyway, when am I gonna get paid for last night?"

"Soon. I might have some more work in the same line for you, if you're interested?"

"Sure, boss. Just let us know." Willard watched the Mayor's wig dip down as he picked up one of the few items in his in-tray. Interview over. He turned with his hand on the door. Best to stick to his part.

"Who else will I be dealing with boss? I didn't think you'd be selling to the Pakis?"

Peachornby looked up. An evil leer crossed the man's face. "I'll sell to anyone who'll buy. Anyway, if I can poison their comm..., communities, so much the better, you with me?"

Willard's heart jumped for joy. Was this idiot about to open up? Was this retard, as his own father called him, about to confess? Willard wished he was wearing a wire. He decided to offer Peachornby a bone to chew on.

"I knew something dodgy was going down. When they took those boxes out, well I knew you weren't selling flowers. I've been around and I've done time and I guess I'd have been in big trouble if I'd been pulled over."

Peachornby threw Willard a sour look. Maybe he reckoned his Head of Security was as dim as the rest of his thugs, Willard thought. Another bone was needed. "Don't worry, I'm not gonna grass you up."

Perhaps it was the reference to grass that helped the Mayor's thought processes. "So you've worked that out after one trip? Took Mason months."

That came as no surprise.

"Like I say, your secret's safe with me. If you've got any more jobs like that while Mason's laid up then let me know."

Peachornby nodded as he ran his pudgy hand through his syrup, rearranging the wig so it looked as if Hitler had just stepped out of a shot-up Junkers plane.

Willard didn't expect any more than that at this time.

\*\*\*

It wasn't long before Willard drove another van heavy with the smell of lavender out of Sleaford. This time it was along the M4 to meet a bunch of Jafaican so-called Yardies in their chop-shop garage on the outskirts of St. Paul's, Bristol. That could have been scary and when he called his handler, she arranged discreet back-up for him.

On the outside, the garage was run down and looked one step up from insolvency but when a rail-thin guy in a black, green and red rasta hat hauled on the chains lifting the shutters to let Mason drive in, he saw there wasn't a car worth under fifty grand in the place. Nice. He was in the wrong job, Willard thought. No, he reminded himself. He might not own a flash motor but he would always be on the outside, sniffing fresh, free air while these guys soon drew a ten stretch or more. Don't bend over in the showers, guys.

The Yardies didn't seemed pleased to see him but after he shook hands – none of that ridiculous high-fiving or those strange, complex gang signs – the men relaxed. One, a big dude in a fashionable embroidered shirt that looked more like a lady's blouse to Willard's eyes, offered him a glass of rum.

"Can't. I'm driving," Willard said.

"That's right, mon. Don't give de Feds a chance to frisk you," the big man said with a grin. "See anything you like?" he continued, pointing to the cars as his men unloaded the van. The smell of paint filled the air.



"All of them," Willard said, returning the man's grin.

"Stick wid Peachornby, new boy, and you'll make out."

No wonder Mason never left the boss's side, Willard thought as he headed out of the garage and took the ring road back to the M4 motorway.

Thinking of Mason made Willard call Sergeant Fiona Wright on the hands-free kit. "When are you thinking of pulling the plug on this?" Visions of six weeks or more relaxing on a tropical island in the Caribbean floated before his eyes.

"Sorry, Willard. Not for a while yet. Orders from high-up. You know who I mean..."

"Bowl them all out," Willard groaned.

"That's right. Now he wants a five nil series whitewash for the good guys. Which means..."

"Donelan wants me to find out and take down everyone Peachornby's dealing with. I get it."

"Stop interrupting me," Sergeant Wright snapped. "But you're right, Willard. He wants to know everyone Peachornby is supplying. And he wants watertight, copper-bottomed evidence. The sort of stuff that'll make even a top defence barrister throw in the towel."

Willard overtook a slow-moving caravan heading back to the Smoke. "Well, what about Mason? He'll be out soon – it'll take more than a good hiding to keep that thug in hospital for long – and then I'll be out of the loop."

That was a good point. "I think I know a way to keep him out of circulation for a while. Leave it to me – and stay safe out there. Peachornby may be a fool but you don't want him suspecting anything."

They arranged a venue for his next debriefing and then signed off. Sergeant Wright had hinted that there might be another job for him after this if he was interested – infiltrating a rogue security company up in Sunderland. Willard swore and thumped his steering wheel. He'd never finish. Soon as he'd wrapped things up here at Sleaford, there would be an order thinly veiled as a request, 'if he could just see his way clear to...' And then another.

\*\*\*

But Willard's problems were nothing compared with Mason's. His injuries, although painful, weren't life threatening. He lay flat on his back in bed. He was the youngest on his ward by at least thirty-five or forty years. The others were old guys who'd had strokes or bad falls or something. They sat and gazed apathetically at the telly mounted on one wall. The old men seemed to love the endless property makeover shows, the cookery programmes and the cooking dinner in other people's properties which make up daytime TV. He didn't get to watch MTV or anything worthwhile.

But the old guys seemed to be much tougher than Mason. He was the only one who came down with the dreaded *C. difficile* infection. Abdominal pain and a fever were the least of his concerns when diarrhoea kicked in so, for everybody's health and safety, Mason had to be moved into an isolation room off the ward until the virus cleared. And it showed few signs of clearing any time soon.

Mason had suffered from 'delhi belly' more than once in his time. Going for a late 'ruby' or kebab after a *Leo Sayer* – an all-dayer – on the 'sauce' with his mates and then racially abusing the staff: "what's the matter, Gandhi, can't you take a joke?" almost guaranteed a little 'extra' added to his curry.

But every few weeks, there he was again in his white shirt, sleeves rolled up to showcase his muscles and tats; in with the lads necking *Cobra* lager, all ordering Tindaloos or Phalls to prove they could take the searing, mouth-burning heat. "This the hottest you got, Gunga Din?" "This place is gash. Should've gone the Taj Mahal." "Oi, I ordered chips with that, Sabu. Don't you speak no English?"

Ripping pieces off the naan bread and throwing them in a food-fight. The respectable customers eating up quickly and skipping dessert to get away before a punch-up broke out. A spilled bottle of flat lager, the yellow liquid looking like piss as it spread over the tablecloth, drowning the poppadom shards before leaking onto the carpet.

"Oi – you – that went over my kecks, you numpty." Brays of ass-like laughter as one skin stood and pulled his soaked trousers away from his legs.

One last *Cobra* and then time to pay the bill. By this time, Mason and his mates were so paralytic they could barely stand so when the manager added a bit – or a lot – extra to their bill to cover damages and loss of trade the skins all dropped a few tenners each onto the plate. Occasionally, they got change.

Then it was out into the night again in search of a club that wasn't too fussy about its clientèle. One with dark lighting lit only by strobes and a well-worn, sticky carpet surrounding the dance floor. Preferably one where you were mates with the

bouncers so if you got into a barney, you knew you'd have back-up. Somewhere which specialised in 'grab-a-granny' and a Seventies night referred to those gyrating on the dance floor and not the music. Somewhere the local slags wouldn't laugh in your face when you asked them if they 'wanna dance'.

Another bottle in your hand, or maybe onto something stronger like a rum and coke. If your boss was good and bunged a bit of overtime your way, or you got a hot tip from someone in the know and backed the right gee-gees in the bookies, or maybe boosted a few tools from the building site then treat yourself to a couple of lines of charlie in the upstairs gents.

If you didn't have any gear on you – and the way the town was flooded with filth these days, them and their bloody sniffer dogs then you didn't wanna be carrying, not if you had previous – then a word with the doormen would see you right. A twenty slipped into the right hand – not Big Mikey, not now he's born-again – and one of the girls criss-crossing the floor selling shots would slip a little bag into your hand. Then up the stairs, shake out the white powder onto any handy shelf, roll up a note and snort it up. Wait for the bite to hit and you're top of the world, mate.

Back downstairs, feeling awesome, some git jostles you, "watch it, pal," you snarl and then stand in a knot with your mates. One of them leaning against a pillar, more comatose than awake by now. Checking your watch, the last dances of the night coming up. Knowing you need to make your move now or you'll be forced to chat up some random minger in the kebab shop on your way home.

Pushing out like a ship into the thinning crowd on the dance floor as those sober enough to care make an early dart to beat the rush for the taxis. The girls left

almost as desperate as yourself but they're all dogs. Shout over the booming house or dance music, last year's Ibiza mix thrown together by a DJ too lazy or out the swim to go to the White Isle for this year's tapes, oldies but still goodies.

Then hopefully some girl, mate of mate or completely unknown gripping you in a bear-hug, squeezing the life out. Your group you came in with broken up, gone their own ways now. Some copped off as well, others not so lucky gone for a last kebab and home. Dangerous now, vulnerable without your pals backing you up like a pack of hyenas but you can handle yourself, mate, don't you doubt it.

So, taking your new girl out into the fresh air of the rain-washed streets. Her squeals of dismay as she stumbles over her killer heels and peers around for her own group of friends. Then, if you hit the jackpot, a drunken lurch down a nearby back-alley, dodging the pools of piss and puke and then a fumble before a quick knee-trembler up against a graffiti daubed brick wall.

Of course, if you strike the double roll-over lottery it's back to her place, tiptoeing up the stairs and in bed. Perhaps she has a sister, older or younger; who cares, mate, and then you've won the Euro-millions. Mason liked to brag how he'd won the Euro-millions several times. And, then with a laugh in the bar the next day, say how he'd never gone to bed with a dog – but woken up with one.

That was enough chat about women. Time to talk football and organise where and when the next ruck was taking place. This is life. This is living and don't you forget it.

Meanwhile, back in the hospital, nobody suspected Sister Monica Davis. In exchange for her co-operation, certain discrepancies over her time sheets and the

contents of the controlled medicine cabinet were made to vanish and she was treated to a spell in rehab with the tax payer picking up the tab. Her colleagues were told she had been seconded to another hospital up north. Spreading best practice it was called. Which rather surprised the other nurses as all Sister Davis had been good at was gossiping and spreading bitchy rumours before pushing off early.

But all the same, Mason was one sick skinhead.

\*\*\*

Willard was surprised at the extent and depth of Peachornby's contacts. All the guy's Aryan Brotherhood claptrap disappeared out the window when there was money to be made. Chinese and Vietnamese, Tongs and Triads, Waqir and Iblal again as well as more Asians from the northern post-industrial cities all the way down to Birmingham and a bunch of Turks from the aptly named Shooter's Hill, London. The Mayor was an equal opportunity supplier, thought Willard. In that respect he'd get the approval of any leftie journalist from the *Guardian*. If you had the money to buy, then he would sell as much high grade cannabis as ordered.

However, it must be time to wrap up Peachornby's empire, Willard thought. We must have enough to pull the rug from under his feet by now.



## CHAPTER 25. FRIENDS, SLEAFORDIANS, COUNTYMEN.

Sleaford Urban Council wasn't out of the news for long. The country developed a morbid fascination for the place and the antics of its leader. The more over-excitable talking heads popped up on every show giving their opinions on every development. They predicted that this was the future of Britain; the failure of the two-party political consensus giving way to a fascist dictatorship and drew parallels with developments in the Eurozone following the banking collapse.

To pad out what they had to say, the pundits looked at the anti-immigrant rhetoric of some fringe far-right European parties and then tried to draw comparisons between the 1930s and now. Some of the producers at the BBC wondered if it was worth booking a suite at a local hotel and keeping a TV crew on permanent standby. It would be better than sending a crew from their new studios up in Salford. After all, it was only licence fee payers money after all.

Now Peachornby had taken control, his plan to relocate the asylum seekers was controversial to say the least. He was invited to explain his ideas on the *Today* show on BBC Radio 4 but even Peachornby had enough sense to realise he would be skewered by the presenters so he made his excuses and declined the invitation. That gave Gould and BNP's high-ups a sense of relief.



All the same, and discreetly, his concepts were studied by several other councils throughout England. Not that they approved – of course not, publicly they disavowed anything to do with Peachornby and the BNP – but if his plans worked, and if they cut costs and didn't fall foul of the European Court of Human Rights then they might be worthy of consideration. Just on the Q.T., nothing in writing at this stage, you understand.

Taking advantage of this being the low season, Peachornby had leased part of a holiday camp at Cleethorpes on the north Lincolnshire coast. Out of season, it was a bleak place where the wind howled across the North Sea direct from Scandinavia and the Russian steppes. There, he decanted Sleaford's population of homeless, asylum seekers, refugees and those families he called 'undesirables' but social workers termed 'families in need of intervention'.

That was one of his policies that was popular with Sleaford's tax-payers. Although they didn't come right out and say so. However, it was much less enthusiastically received by those he'd exiled to Cleethorpes. A handful of asylum seekers withdrew their applications and asked the Home Office if they could be sent back to Afghanistan, Algeria or through all the countries of the alphabet up to Zimbabwe. Poverty and the constant threat of violence but with hotter weather seemed a better life than the freezing cold and damp of the British coast.

Of course, the Urban Council's policy was slated by the usual suspects in the left wing press. *The Guardian* and *The Mirror* were especially scathing and compared the holiday camps to wartime concentration camps but as Peachornby never read these papers anyway he didn't care.

Shortly after the furore over the Cleethorpes camp died down to a dull grumbling things flared up again in Sleaford. There was a second fire. The local Conservative Party Association went up in flames. It was a defenceless plate glass fronted shop on Market Square, the easiest of targets.

Later on the following day, when the cops trawled through the night's CCTV footage, they saw two black clad figures running through the streets. The men came down Eastgate, coincidentally from the same direction as the Town Hall, crossed Carre Street, and paused for a moment before the Conservative Association building.

Then one of the men pulled an iron bar from out of his trackie bottoms and swung it at the plate glass window. In silence, the cops watched as the window shattered, shards glittering in the street lights as they fell to the pavement. Then the second one took a bottle from out of a Tesco carrier bag, flicked his lighter and held the flame to a wick jammed into the bottle's neck. He paused a second and then lobbed his petrol bomb through the shattered opening. The two men then legged it.

Changing CCTV views, the cops saw the men run around the corner and jump into a dark Honda. The vehicle's numberplates had been removed. Switching back, the cops looked on as the blaze took hold in the Conservative office.

"There'll be hell to pay," said a female constable as she sipped on a sludgy coffee.

"No need to inquire too hard as to who did it," said the other woman. "We can start and finish at the Town Hall. Pound to a penny says it's the BNP lot. This is just up their street."

"I'm not betting against you," said the first. "But we'll rack up some overtime before it gets shelved as an unsolved crime."

\*\*\*

Peachornby had been determined that no expense should be spared. Especially as he was saving the taxpayer a fortune by decanting those illegals to Kamp Kleethorpes as the press dubbed his scheme. So he was entitled to splash the ratepayer's cash a little, wasn't he?

Especially now that plans were well under way for the Bass Maltings themselves. Young Daventry of Haider-Allbutt & Associates had adapted the designs found in Naismith's desk and put his own twist on them – enough to avoid any accusations of plagiarism and costly lawsuits. Even to Peachornby, it was obvious Daventry had burned the midnight oil preparing these plans. Not that he could make head nor tail of them himself, but some of the computer mock-ups looked impressive.

Then a thought broke through his skull. Rather than calling them the Bass Maltings, wouldn't the refurbished buildings sound better as 'Schloss Peachornby'? His legacy to Sleaford. He'd have to remember to speak to Daventry about how you get a building's name changed. Not that there would be any problems with planning consent.

However, today was his day and the restored Town Hall was ready for unveiling. Peachornby stood before the full-length mirror he had installed in the Mayor's private bathroom. He sucked in his gut, struck his favourite Napoleonic pose with his left leg out and his hand gripping his lapel. He raised his head, gazing into the middle distance, trying to minimise his double-chin.

In honour of the importance of the day, Peachornby was dressed in his full rig: a black military-style shirt, black trousers with a razor-edge crease (he'd specified that at the dry-cleaner's), brightly polished high-leg Doc Martens and his Sam Browne belt. Peachornby clicked his heels and flicked a stiff-armed Nazi salute and admired his reflection. Then he made a tiny adjustment to his toupee and stroked his toothbrush moustache. Peachornby knew the hand..., no both hands of destiny were on his shoulder. He felt the shades of Mosley, Franco, Mussolini and, yes, Hitler approving of his rise to power. And one day the name of Peachornby would rank amongst those greats.

There was a knock on the door and then it opened a few inches. Peachornby turned putting his bulk between his caller and the half-empty bottle of scotch on the desk. Now was his moment and he was determined to savour it.

"They're all ready for you, Mayor," said Mason as he opened a velvet-lined wooden box and took out the ornate golden chain of office. It gleamed heavy and yellow and, not for the first time, the younger man wondered how much he could pawn it for. Mason still looked thin and pale and washed out but nothing would keep him away from this grand reopening.

"Good crowd? Lots of people?" Peachornby asked imagining ranks upon ranks of people all gazing up at him with complete adoration.

"Well, sort of," Mason said, shuffling his feet and looking down at the carpet.

Peachornby took no notice as he placed the chain over his head and adjusted it. "Lets get on with it then, I've got a lot to do today." Sucking in his gut and making

last minute adjustments to his uniform, Peachornby followed Mason down to the car park.

He stepped outside and was greeted by cheers from the Sleaford Smashers, drawn up in two lines over by the dustbins. His podium had been put up by the new flagpole, at the base of which stood a Smasher holding a furled flag. Peachornby was relieved that the flag showed red and white. At least somebody could be relied on to get things right. He'd dreaded seeing the blue of the hated European Union's snot-rag.

"Hear Peachornby! Hear Peachornby! Hear Peachornby!" yelled the assembled Smashers. He acknowledged them with a wave. Gould had told him several times not to salute as it would give a bad impression on the Ten O'clock News later. Just keep it to a wave, nothing else. After several explanations, Gould had pounded that concept through Peachornby's skull.

Peachornby himself paused, savouring this moment. Willard, standing over by the Smashers, thought the Mayor looked like Charlie Chaplin – if an overweight, out of condition Chaplin had ever been offered a residency at Las Vegas. He shook his head.

The sun was shining out of a clear blue sky. One of the skins hit the play button on his boom-box and a medley of far-right Oi! music blared out. Gould winced but at least it was a step-up from the Third Reich marching music which had been the original play list.

Peachornby stood in the sunshine as a barrage of flash lights went off. Now the journalists started calling out, "Peachornby," as they asked questions. The Mayor ignored the journalists and goose-stepped over to the podium. It had been draped with

the red cross of England and a rack of microphones had been fitted to the front.

Followed by Mason, Peachornby crossed to the podium and mounted his soapbox.

Looking around, Peachornby was pleased with Daventry's design. The young architect had done a good job and the Town Hall looked much better than before. Daventry himself stood at the far left of the line, as far away from the skinhead Smashers as possible. His secretary was nowhere to be seen. Shame, that.

Sitting behind the rows of newshounds, were all the Town Hall staff themselves. They had been given time off and told to attend. They had been reminded there were annual appraisals to be completed shortly so the workers knew which side their bread was buttered. Apart from those who had taken the day off sick – and they would be dealt with in due course – they sat there; the brown-nosers among them clapping and cheering while most sat mute with their arms crossed. Those were the types that needed re-educating, Peachornby thought.

He picked out the faces of those he knew. There was Donna pouting as she reapplied lip gloss. Oh, and there was that Polack driver, what's-his-name, Patrick? Naismith's pal and probably still feeding him gossip as Naismith recuperated. Patryk was leaning back and talking to some guy with floppy hair. Wasn't that the other Pole who'd showed up that night offering to fix the election?

Further back there were some members of the public but fewer than Peachornby wanted. Where were his fans? Where were the thousands of people who had voted for him? They should be out here, too, showing support for their Mayor. When this was over, he'd have to look at passing a by-law making it compulsory for Sleaford's residents to attend these rallies. They had something like that in North

Korea, didn't they? Those Norks might be a bunch of commies but they knew how to run an orderly society.

Right at the back, standing by himself, Peachornby saw the grinning death's head of his father. The man he hated most was leaning back and enjoying his smoke. Seeing that he had caught his son's eyes, his father gave him an ironic thumbs-up sign.

Gould coughed, dragging Peachornby back to the present. He gestured to the lad manning the boom-box and immediately the song shut off mid-note. In the sudden silence Peachornby spread his arms wide, an all encompassing gesture.

"Friends, Sleafordians, Countymen," he declaimed. Then he had to look down at his notes. He could never remember what came next. Gould had looked for an Autocue at head office but couldn't find it. He reckoned some toe-rag had swiped it and flogged it on ebay. Perhaps it was as well because he doubted Peachornby would manage anything like an Autocue.

"The rebuilding of our beautiful Town Hall is sym... cymbals symblic... no symbolic of the rebirth of Sleaford following the win, the inevitable win of the British National Party at the elections..."

Peachornby shuffled his papers, looking for the next part where he got to run through the achievements of the BNP since taking office. Real or imaginary, it didn't much matter. The assembled journalists looked at each other.

"Martin Singer. *Jewish Chronicle*," one called out taking advantage of the quiet. He was a tall, young man with a roundish face, curly hair and bushy eyebrows.

He wore a Berghaus fleece over a blue Oxford shirt. Peachornby sighed. "Here we go again. Some Yid asking about our anti-immigrant policies."

"Ssh, I've got it covered," whispered Gould.

It was worse.

"I have been researching the costs of this rebuilding, Mayor," Singer said politely. He sounded well spoken, like he had come straight from BBC Radio 4's studios. "The costs seem well out of line with other urban council's similar rebuilding work. Also, perhaps you would like to comment on why you used Haider-Allbutt & Associates as well as certain payments made to these offshore accounts?"

Singer fished a printout from his jacket pocket and unfolded it. This caused a stir amongst the other hacks. This sounded more interesting than the expected attack on Peachornby's anti-Semitic or racist views.

Mason growled like the well trained attack dog he resembled. Gould laid a hand on Mason's forearm. "Easy," he whispered. Also, Gould wanted to hear what had been going on. Had Peachornby been skimming? Head office was not going to like that. That sort of thing could reflect badly on the whole of the white race.

"Err..., there were unexpected costs, and our designers had to order things in from..., from wherever they had to order them," Peachornby explained. Under the hot sun, a film of sweat stood out on his forehead and he resisted the urge to scratch an itch under his toupee. He looked around for Daventry for help but couldn't see him.



"What sort of things had to be ordered in from abroad rather than sourced here in Britain? I understood you believe in using local suppliers?" Singer asked. He pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose and looked respectfully at the podium.

"Err..., marble? I don't know. I'm not a builder. You'd have to ask our building surveyors."

"Your signature appears on the purchase orders."

The other journalists sat up and started taking notes. Town Hall corruption? This would be way more interesting than a Town Hall reopening.

Peachornby opened his mouth to respond. Singer threw in his next question leaving Peachornby's mouth flapping in the breeze. "Fair enough. You're not a builder. However, I'm sure you can confirm that your garden centre supplied the flowers and plants for the re-laid gardens?"

Peachornby's mouth opened and closed as he tried to think of something to say. He looked like a stranded lungfish gulping for air. He had a horrible feeling what was coming next.

"Perhaps you would care to comment, Mayor, as to why the plants cost at least three times and in some cases ten times the normal price?"

Now all the journalists were leaning forwards and either scribbling in notebooks or whispering into high-powered smart phones.

Peachornby gulped again and ran his fingers around his collar, pulling it away from his shirt. How had this happened? How had this... this Jewboy got this info?

Who had been talking? He'd wring their neck. It couldn't be his Dad, could it? Surely Hitler never had to put up with such disloyalty.

"For instance – these rose bushes." Singer pointed to the rose beds. "How can they possibly cost £150 each when just this morning I saw identical ones in your garden centre for £9.99 or two for £14.99?"

Peachornby licked his lips. He was on surer grounds here. "Ah. To the untrained eye they may look the same but the ones for the council are extra special ones imported especially from..." he paused, his brain working overtime until he said the first country that came to mind, "Germany. Yes, German engineered roses. You can't get better than that. But you have to pay for them."

"What's so special about them?" asked another woman he recognised as a stand-in for BBC Lincolnshire. "Are they more disease resistant or do they have a longer flowering season?"

"Yes," glad that she'd supplied a possible answer to her own question.

"Do you have invoices from Germany? Something we can verify?" another hack shouted out.

Gould leaned over and whispered in Peachornby's ear. "There will be a press pack where everything will be fully covered," Peachornby shouted over the din. He shuffled his speech, found his place and carried on, ignoring any further questions.

The newshounds were in turmoil. Cameras flashed, arms raised as they fired questions at him.

"Ignore them," Gould advised. "Just carry on."

Eventually, Peachornby reached the last page. How, under his inspirational leadership, Sleaford would go from strength to strength, a place where all Britons (Gould had blue-pencilled the words: white, indigenous and Aryan) could live and work safe under the shelter of the British National Party.

Phew. Peachornby was glad that he'd finished. Knowing that their questions weren't about to be answered today the journos had subsided. Before they could start up again, Peachornby turned to the Smasher standing by the flagpole.

"And now let us stand for our national anthem," Peachornby declaimed. There was a scraping sound as everyone pushed back their chairs and stood more or less at attention.

That was the cue for the skinhead to press the play button on his ghetto blaster.

As the Smasher hauled on the lanyard, the white over red bicolour of Poland ascended the flagpole and as the breeze caught the flag it opened and flew bravely overhead. Meanwhile the rousing tune of *Dabrowski's Mazurka*, Poland's national anthem, boomed over the car park:

*Poland has not perished yet,*

*As long as we still live,*

*What the foe has seized by force,*

*Sabre in hand we'll take back.*

Nobody stood taller or prouder than Patryk. That was the best fifty quid he'd ever spent. There was a moment of stunned silence and then as one everyone burst out laughing. Some pointed at Peachornby and laughed all the harder. Even the Smashers, when they realised they weren't saluting the red cross of England started guffawing.

The only ones who didn't see the funny side of things were Gould and Peachornby.

"I'll see what head office have to say about this latest cock-up," Gould muttered as he stalked off to his car.

Peachornby didn't say anything. His face turned puce – as red as the Red Flag itself. With his blood pressure, he came very close to dying of apoplexy.

Sensing the show was over, the council staff returned to their offices while the Smashers milled about at a complete loss. The journalists were kept busy writing everything down while their memories were fresh. Okay, this might not make page one but today should be worth a good few column inches near the front.

Stanley Peachornby was one of the last to leave. He made his way to the front and stood before the podium. He stubbed out his cig on Peachornby's speech leaving a black spot in the pages. When he had his son's undivided attention, Stanley spoke, his voice a harsh, uncompromising growl.

"If I'd had any idea how you'd turn out; I'd have drowned you at birth, you retard. You couldn't run a piss-up in a brewery." Stanley spun on his heel and walked away.

"Says it all really," Lukasz said to Patryk in Polish as they passed by.

Only then did Peachornby speak. "Get that rag down. Now!" he screamed at the Smashers.



## CHAPTER 26. V FOR VICTORY.

A Polish flag was the least of Peachornby's irritations. A few days later, he stepped out of his newly leased Rolls Royce Phantom. Painted black with tinted windows and two little flags mounted on the bonnet; the flag of England and Sleaford's coat of arms. The Roller was already well known around town. The führer-wagon it was nicknamed.

The limo pulled up outside the newly refurbished Town Hall. As soon as it stopped two Smashers unrolled the red carpet down the steps (costing £14.99 a square yard from CarpetWorld, but Peachornby had adjusted the receipt and charged the Urban Council £44.99). All available Smashers formed up an honour guard on either side.

Mason opened the passenger door and saluted the Mayor. One of the Smashers called out, "three cheers for Mayor Peachornby. Hip, hip, hooray..." On cue, the others all cheered their führer. After all, he had given them their jobs.

Peachornby eased his bulk out of the back of the Roller, checked his syrup, belched and surveyed his bodyguard. Clutching his red ministerial despatch box with the gold portcullis embossed, Peachornby walked up the red carpet like a Hollywood A-Lister closely followed by Mason. He'd got the case second hand off a retired Tory minister who secretly agreed with Peachornby's views and thought Sleaford's Mayor was the breath of fresh air the country needed.

Peachornby nodded to some of the Smashers he recognised. Two of the receptionists held open the double doors for him. A chore they both loathed, having to open the doors and curtsy as Peachornby waddled past while Mason tried to cop a look down their fronts.

However, something else caught Peachornby's eye. Something that hadn't been there yesterday. It was a poster pasted onto the brickwork. He strutted over to it. Which of his admirers had put up posters glorifying their Beloved and Supreme Leader? He would have to remember to promote the man who'd done this. As he got closer, Peachornby's steps faltered.

What? What was this, this... abomination? The poster showed a snap of Peachornby taken at a World War Two re-enactment some years ago. Unsurprisingly, Peachornby was wearing a replica SS uniform and throwing a Hitler salute. But it was the words that shocked the Mayor. 'Peachornby cheated: Get him out NOW.' Leaning forward, he ripped the poster from the wall.

He turned to the assembled Smashers. "Who put this up? Who? Who?" Spittle frothed from his lips. The Smashers looked down and shuffled their Doc Martens. "I want them hunted down," Peachornby flung out before stalking inside.

Or would have stalked inside except the two receptionists had let the glass doors close as he studied the offending poster. Peachornby bumped off the door, his face smacking into the glazing an instant before his belly and, rubbing his boozer's nose, he swore furiously as the Smashers suppressed their laughter.

The Smashers out on traffic and street-cleaning duties soon reported that there were loads of these posters all over Sleaford. From the Holdingham roundabout in the



north, which was encircled with them making it impossible for any driver to miss the message, all the way south to the Four Seasons Garden Centre on London Road, Sleaford was festooned with anti-Peachornby and anti-BNP posters.

"Rip them down. All of them," came the order from the Town Hall.

Up in his office, Peachornby poured himself one treble scotch after another. "That's another thing. Why have I only got Tesco own brand whisky? I should've something decent – in case I have visitors."

Mason and Willard stood before Peachornby's desk. Willard thought it very unlikely that Sleaford's Mayor would be receiving many dignitaries in the near future.

"I want the sub-human subversives responsible for this..." words failed Peachornby.

"Atrocity? Outrage?" suggested Willard. Mason flashed him a grateful look. Mason didn't like having to think up words. He preferred to let his fists do the talking.

"Yeah. I want them caught. Put up roadblocks, nobody leaves Sleaford without being searched. Can we borrow the force's chopper? Get onto that Superintendent Donelan and find out. Can we call in the army?"

Willard coughed politely. "I don't think we'll get the helicopter. Not for a few posters." He saw the look of fury suffusing Peachornby's reddened face. "I could check the CCTV cameras, though." he suggested.

"Yeah, do that. Find these traitors," Peachornby said, gulping down the last of his scotch. "While he's doing that, you organise some road blocks, Mason."

"Organise?"

"Sort out," Willard supplied.

"Yeah. Go and see if there's any planks or scaffolding left over from the rebuilding. Get your Dad to knock us up some barriers," continued Peachornby.

Understanding dawned on Mason's face. "Will do Mayor," he said, snapping off a fascist salute.

Down in the Town Hall's CCTV suite – in reality a dingy room smelling of sweat and microwaved ready meals – Willard leaned over the shoulder of the Smasher who had responsibility for monitoring the cameras covering the town centre. The man, Timmins, had been an underpaid contract security guard in his forties and had simply transferred over to the Smashers when they took over, lured by the pay rise that took him above the minimum wage for the first time in years.

Despite joining the Smashers, Timmins had little time for Peachornby's politics. All he wanted was a quiet life, deep in the bowels of the Town Hall, feet up while keeping less than half an eye on the CCTV cameras.

"Can you go back to last night?" Willard asked.

"Sure," said Timmins. He put down a blackcurrant and apple pie and input passwords into the computer. "What time?"

"Try midnight. Then fast forward."

Timmins did complex things with the mouse and then the daytime scene on the monitor vanished to be replaced by darkness. Willard saw he was looking at the

Post Office on Station Road. The traffic was still driving past, but it was nowhere near as congested as during the day.

"Fast forward a bit, mate," said Willard.

Timmins left-clicked the mouse and the image sped up; two, six, twelve times. The cars and pedestrians moved jerkily, appearing on the screen one second and vanishing the next. So far, so routine. Then a group of pretty girls in short skirts and high heels came into focus. Two of the girls were leaning on each other, using the other for support. Although there was no sound, Willard could imagine their squeals of laughter and drunken shouting. The camera panned down, following their progress.

As the girls approached Station Road, Willard watched as one of the women – a leggy girl with dyed pink hair – raised her arm and pointed to a group of bins lined up along the side of the street. The girl broke away from her friends and ducked behind the last of the bins, out of sight. The others formed a protective barrier screening her from sight of any passers-by.

The CCTV camera zoomed in as the girl hitched up her skirt, wriggled her thong down her thighs and squatted.

"Thought you weren't allowed to spy on people like that?" Willard said.

Timmins shook his head. "I've told Davey before about doing things like that. He'll lose his licence if he's not careful."

"Not worth it," Willard commented as they both watched the girl finish and readjust her clothing before rejoining her friends.

"Dirty mare never even wiped."

"Carry on. Let's see who put those flyers up."

After the girl, there was little activity until an unmarked white van pulled up opposite the Post Office. One man – at least the figure moved like a man – leaped out of the Transit and rapidly pasted a section of brickwork. He then unrolled the poster, stuck it up and then raced back to the van. Immediately, it zoomed off up along Southgate towards the town centre.

"At least two of them – the fly-poster and a driver," said Willard. "Can you wind it back? Let's have another dekko." This time Timmins played the video in slo-mo. Willard saw that the man had taken precautions. He wore a ski mask and black hoodie, giving nothing away. Willard guessed that he was a thin male and taller than average but that was about it.

"Can you zoom in on the number plates?" Willard asked.

Timmins did so and Willard made a note of the registration. After that, they followed the van as it progressed through Sleaford with the man jumping out to stick up posters. After Willard had seen enough without learning anything of value, he thanked Timmins and left him to his dreary room. Back outside, Willard breathed in the fresh air and then called Sergeant Wright and asked her to check the police's national computer to see who that van's registered owner was.

"Everything okay your end?" she asked.

"Sure. But I think Peachornby is falling apart. To be honest, I'll be glad to wrap up here."

"Trouble?"

"Not really – but I think he's more dangerous than you're giving him credit for."

Sergeant Wright laughed. "I saw him on the news the other night; the guy's just a fool. A flaky nut-job, that's all. A nine days wonder."

"You're not on the ground, Fiona. Hey! Peachornby is an idiot but you should see the way his Smashers adore him, even when he cocks-up. It's his ideas that are dangerous, not him. I've seen notes on his desk from other councils. Some of them are thinking of copying his policies – but not his language. It only takes someone with more smarts than a jellyfish and then this country could be in trouble."

There was a pause. "I'll escalate your concerns, Willard."

So nothing would happen, then. Willard stood, looking out over the car park towards St Denys church. He didn't think his handler was taking his worries seriously. Hey! Okay, this wasn't like infiltrating the Mafia or the cartels but in his own way, Peachornby's ideas might be more dangerous to the fabric of society than class A drugs or unrestricted alcohol.

All the same, he'd flagged up his concerns and now it was the responsibility of people like Superintendent Donegan and those at the top of the tree to decide what to do about Peachornby and his Smashers. A few minutes later, his Nokia rang.

Sergeant Wright's news wasn't unexpected. The man had taken care to conceal his appearance so it seemed as if he knew what he was about and it turned out that the Transit had been bought for cash in Nottingham a week ago. However, the new buyer

hadn't yet filed the change of ownership. The seller said that the buyers were young men with eastern European accents but in the East Midlands that didn't exactly narrow things down. The seller had assumed they were fly-by-night, cash-in-hand builders or plumbers, similar to countless other outfits in the area.

Willard smiled as he closed the call. He wasn't going to say anything but he had a good idea as to the identity of the man defacing the town with his posters. If he caught up with the man, hey, he'd just tell him to be careful.

\*\*\*

Meanwhile, in an apartment over on the far side of town, a small group of men and women met. They called themselves the resistance. One of them had designed a new poster with a World War Two V for Victory theme which was the next stage of their campaign. None of them expected the posters to do too much – at least at first – but it was a start. No-one was happy about letting their adopted home descend into fascism without striking back. Some of them were old enough to remember the sufferings of their own country under communism before the Solidarity movement broke its iron shackles.

Unfortunately, the English seemed content. Whether they were happy or plain apathetic, they just seemed to plod along without noticing, or caring, what was going on around them. The *Standard* had initially raised a few issues but since Peachornby's Smashers had intimidated shopkeepers against stocking the paper, the *Standard* had dropped its open hostility to the new regime and concentrated instead on less controversial stories – such as the price of agricultural feed or traffic congestion.

## CHAPTER 27. CHECKPOINT CHARLIE.

"Hey, you! Let's see yer papers."

Lukasz wound down the van's window and looked at the beetroot red face of the Smasher. The man's mate, who in keeping with the agricultural theme, had a round, lumpy head like a turnip, hung back. A line of cars and vans were pulled up along the pavement of Grantham Road, their drivers showing all the symptoms of frustration or anger. Some were leaning against their vehicles with their arms crossed, others were pacing up and down speaking into mobile phones. One driver, more resigned than the rest was reading the *Daily Express*.

Looking up the road, wondering what was the cause of the delay, Lukasz noticed a temporary red and white barrier slung across the road blocking the exit from Sleaford. Yet another Smasher leaned on the counterweight and raised the barrier. The first van pulled away from the kerb but before the second could get started, the barrier dropped into place. The stranded drivers looked at the barrier wistfully and then went back to what they were doing before.

"Papers, I said," the Smasher demanded. He was sweating and a rank, beery odour pulsed off his body. The skinhead's pupils were unfocussed and he looked hot and pissed off. Lukasz saw a blue-black spider web tattoo on the man's neck – a traditional prison design.

"What's going on?" Lukasz asked.

"What's it look like, pal? It's a roadblock, innit?"

Lukasz couldn't argue with that. That's what it was all right. A roadblock.

"What's happened. And who's ordered this?" Lukasz asked. He made no move to show these men his papers. He'd heard all the stories from his parents about the inconveniences of life in communist Poland and he didn't see why he should knuckle under to these men. After all, it wasn't as if these guys were the police. They were just Peachornby's half-baked thugs.

"We ask the questions," said Beetroot, having picked up that line from some war flick where the Gestapo get to question the resistance fighter. Beetroot identified more with the Gestapo interrogator.

Lukasz watched a drop of sweat trickle down Beetroot's boozy face. He thought it best not to antagonise these men. Like everyone in Sleaford he'd heard ugly stories about the Smashers. Slowly, hating his lack of resolve, he took out his wallet and handed over his driving licence. Beetroot passed it back to Turnip.

Now he'd got Lukasz's co-operation, Beetroot relaxed a little. "The Mayor's really pissed off about those posters. He wants those commie anarchists found and dealt with. Somebody's printed them..." he broke off when he spotted that Lukasz's van belonged to a printers.

Just at that moment, Turnip stepped forward. "Lukasz Kwiatkowski, he stumbled over the pronunciation. What's that – a Polack name, innit?"

"I've lived here four years now," Lukasz said.



"Still ain't lost yer accent 'ave you? Sound like some bloody immi fresh off the boat. Me, my family's lived 'ere ten thousand years. One hundred per cent English, me," Turnip said proudly. "My granddad fought in World War Two. Beat your lot, didn't we?"

Lukasz couldn't be bothered explaining that Poland also fought and suffered on the side of the allies.

"He's a printer, innit. Let's check out his van."

"No," said Lukasz. "No way. Have you got a search warrant?" Knowing full well they hadn't.

"Search warrant?" said Turnip, mimicking Lukasz's accent.

"Don't need one. You're gonna invite us to look. Mate," Beetroot said. The threat was there.

Lukasz shook his head. "Give me back my papers. I'll go a different way."

"Do you no good. All the main roads are being checked."

Lukasz wondered where the police were. Who had allowed these thugs free rein here? He leaned out of the window, trying to snatch his licence back. Turnip jerked it out of reach.

"Not so fast, Polack."

Lukasz opened the door and stepped down. The sun's glare made him squint. Turnip took a few steps back, holding the licence up in the air. Lukasz followed, snatching at it.

Lukasz wheeled around as he heard Beetroot plucking the keys out of the ignition. "Hey," he shouted out. Beetroot's bovver boots hustled round the side and the bonehead unlocked the back of the van, throwing the doors open. Some of the other drivers by the side of the road watched incuriously. They just wanted to get on with their own journeys and were fed up with the delay.

Panic gripped Lukasz. He told himself that he had nothing to fear. It wasn't as if these Smashers could do anything about it. All the same, he didn't want these thugs finding what he had in the back of his van. He followed Beetroot up into the van's rear compartment. It was hot and stuffy inside. Then Turnip stood on the footstep, blocking Lukasz's exit. There was a shrink-wrapped pallet at the far end of the van together with plenty of taped boxes of envelopes and stationery. And at the far end, one box among many contained the incriminating stuff.

"You want to get out," Lukasz said, pulling on Beetroot's shoulder.

It was too late. Beetroot picked up the box, pulled off the lid, tossed it to one side and looked at the contents. His lips moved as he read, "Peachornby Cheated! Demand A Fresh Election." The picture was one of those taken that night at the Bass Maltings. A clear one of the Mayor counting money and looking shifty with a red and white 'STOP' road sign superimposed over his face.

"Election?" said Turnip with a leer. "That sounds like erection..."

"That don't matter. Wait till we take you back to the Town Hall, you commie."

"Find out who your mates are," Turnip said, remembering why they had stopped the traffic in the first place. For emphasis, he pounded his fist into the palm of his left hand. The sound echoed in the confines of the van.

"No way. You can't make me go with you."

Beetroot's face broke into a smile. He made a sound like a game show's buzzer when a contestant gets the wrong answer. "Eeh-Aww. By-law seven requires all members of the public to obey every order given by a Sleaford Smasher in pursu..."

"Pursuance?" Lukasz hazarded.

"That's it. Pursuance of his lawful duties." It sounded as if Beetroot had committed to memory that particular by-law. Resuming his usual tone, the Smasher said, "so you're coming with me."

Behind him Turnip guffawed. There was no way, Lukasz thought, that he was going to the Town Hall. He'd heard rumours about what went on down in the boiler room. He knew he couldn't fight the two men – both outweighed him and both looked veterans of many Friday and Saturday night punch-ups. But with their beer-bellies, he reckoned he could outrun them.

Suddenly, with no warning, he pushed Turnip out of the back of the van. The Smasher squawked, taken aback and fell, his Doc Martens leaving the ground. Lukasz made a break for it, the square of light at the back of the van offering freedom and safety. But before he'd taken two long steps prior to jumping out, Beetroot grabbed Lukasz's collar and yanked him back into the van. By this time, Turnip had got up and

was scrambling back into the goods space. Holding Lukasz in his strong grip, Beetroot's face was inches from his ear.

"You'll pay for that," he said. Lukasz didn't need to have his senses heightened by the adrenaline rush to smell the beer on the man's breath.

Or to see the glint of a gold sovereign ring on Turnip's knuckles as the skinhead drew back his fist and then pistoned it into Lukasz's nose. A bolt of red-white shot through him, lighting up his brain.

"Clumsy. Must've tripped," Lukasz heard Beetroot say from behind him as the man pinioned Lukasz's arms behind him. Blood poured down Lukasz's face and chin, staining his pale-blue work shirt red. Turnip drew back his fist and let fly a power drive into Lukasz's stomach.

"Whoomph," grunted Lukasz as the air rushed out. It was all Beetroot could do to keep the young Pole upright and not let him collapse onto the van's plywood floor. Lukasz felt sick. Turnip planted another fist into Lukasz's stomach. This was too much for his body to bear. Lukasz threw up, his half digested tuna pasta salad lunch sprayed out all over Turnip, splattering the man's hi-viz and slopping down his jeans, covering his Doc Martens and onto the floor. A sour smell filled the small enclosure.

"Ugh," shouted Turnip, mirroring Lukasz's grunt of a moment ago.

Beetroot had a sense of humour. He burst out laughing at the expression on his mate's face. He let go of Lukasz's arms and the young man fell to the floor. Turnip's

sense of humour wasn't as well developed. He gave Lukasz a good leathering, vomit flying off his boots as he kicked and kicked the prone Pole.

A third man entered the van. "What's going on here?"

Dully, on the edge of his hearing, Lukasz recognised the voice. Willard. Lukasz heard Willard say, "That's enough. You can't take 'im in now. Not lookin' like that – there's journos hangin' around the Town Hall. Anyway, we've got what we need. The Mayor'll be made up with us."

"Us?" said Beetroot. "We found the posters not you."

"As Head of Security I'll make sure you get a bonus," Willard said, backing out of the van.

One last kick from Turnip and then the thug slouched out of the van. With his one good eye, looking up, Lukasz watched Beetroot pick up the box of posters and tuck it under his arm. As Beetroot passed Lukasz's body, he stepped on Lukasz's hand, crunching the bones under his heel. That brought a fresh howl of pain from Lukasz.

Once he had Lukasz's attention, the Smasher crouched down on his haunches and glared at Lukasz. "You weren't much sport." He sounded disappointed. The Smasher opened Lukasz's wallet and took out the cash. Only a score and a couple of tenners. "That's yer fine for not obeying us Smashers." Then Beetroot took out Lukasz's licence from its holder in the wallet and looked at it, his lips moving as he read. "You think about goin' to the law; don't forget we know where you live." He dropped the card and thinned out wallet into the puddle of vomit by Lukasz's head.

We know where you live. The ultimate threat.

Lukasz lay back and groaned. Gingerly, he felt his arms and legs and flexed his hand. Apart from his nose, nothing seemed broken. And they'd only taken forty quid so he guessed he'd got lucky. If being robbed and beaten of an afternoon counted as being lucky.

Eventually, Lukasz picked himself up off the floor. Even that movement made his head swim and he greyed out for a moment, leaning against the plywood siding and groaning. He spat out a wad of blood, exploring his mouth with his tongue checking for lost teeth. He was lucky. When he felt he could move without keeling over, Lukasz hobbled out of the van.

Another stroke of luck, the keys were still in the lock. He closed the rear doors and with one hand on the bodywork giving support, he made his way to the cab. Opening the door was an effort, swinging his bottom onto the seat and then swivelling his legs inside was a Herculean effort. Lukasz sat there for a while leaning his arms on the wheel, gathering his strength. He couldn't see straight but he made out more of the Smashers going through other people's cars and vans. However, now that Beetroot and Turnip had confiscated his posters the other Smashers were only going through the motions. Just being offensive and in-yer-face and showing who ruled Sleaford now.

The driver's door opened. Lukasz flinched away, expecting Beetroot or Turnip ready to give him his lumps. Instead, it was Willard. "Slide over," Willard said. "You're in no fit state to drive. I'll take you to hospital – get you checked over. Sorry I didn't stay with you – a bunch of them were trying to help themselves to a brewer's van!"

Lukasz was about to protest but his body hurt too much and he felt beyond tired. Willard drove up to the barrier. Seeing who was driving, the Smasher lifted the bar and Willard drove along the B1517. They talked on the way, Lukasz's replies monosyllabic at first but growing more animated as the van sped on its way. Willard suggested Lukasz press charges against the two Smashers but Lukasz didn't want to. The Smashers knew where he lived.

Half an hour later, Willard parked outside Grantham and District Hospital and told Lukasz he'd wait. Inside, Lukasz told the triage nurse in Accident and Emergency that he had been a hit-and-run victim as he was unloading his van. The other driver hadn't stopped. The nurse said nothing. She had seen lots of similar 'accidents' since Peachornby's Smashers had taken over the nearby town.





## CHAPTER 28. ONE LONE EVACUEE.

"Hey! What are you doing? Why're you packing your bags?"

"What's it look like? I'm leaving. I'm getting out."

"C'mon, Kassia. Tell me what's wrong? Listen, why don't you put the kettle on – make us a nice cup of tea."

"That's your answer for everything now, Patryk. A nice cup of tea. You're even turning into one of these stupid English fools."

"Well, we chose to come over here, didn't we? Nobody forced us. Look, come and sit down and tell me what's wrong."

"What's wrong? What's wrong? He asks me now what's wrong?"

"Well, I'm not a mind reader, am I? How can I know unless you tell me, Kass?"

"All right, Patryk. You want to know then I'll tell you. I'm getting out before the pogroms start."

"Pogroms? What are you jabbering on about? What pogroms?"

"The pogroms that'll start any time now."

"Are you off your head woman? This is England. They don't have pogroms here."

"Have you heard your fat mate Peachornby? He's been sounding off on the local radio all day going on and on about the asylum seekers in Kamp Kleethorpes and all those illegal posters going up. He's blaming the Polish community for them."

"So? What's that to do with us? We're E.U. citizens, not asylum seekers that he can force out."

"What do you mean by 'so', Patryk? That monster's taken over, no-one seems to be stopping him – not even your mate, Willard – and I'm getting out before he really starts gunning for us Poles."

"He's not going to do that?"

"You've seen his latest leaflet... the one saying: 'Is this Sleaford or Sleafordgrad?'"

"Oh, that. He's only playing to the gallery, Kassia. Just building up support among the English doleys. You must know that."

"Well, I'm not staying to find out as I'm taking the first flight back to Warsaw. If you haven't lost all your brains you'll come back with me."

"You know I can't do that. We're making way too much money here to just give it up and walk away. We'll never make this much back home in a hundred years. And in a few months time we'll have enough to buy that little farm you've got your eye on."

"I don't care, Patryk. I'd rather be poor but alive than rich and dead. Come on Patryk, take your cash and come back with me. Today. Look at what's happened to Lukasz. He's been beaten to a pulp."

Patryk said nothing about Lukasz. He knew what he and Lukasz had been up to and he certainly wasn't about to tell her about their fly-posting. That was strictly between the resistance. Instead, he blew on his tea, cooling it.

"You're over-reacting, Kassia. Sure, Peachornby is a nasty – no, a Nazi – racist bigot. But it's not like he's going to start rounding people up and putting them in concentration camps, is it? Well, apart from those asylum seekers he shipped out, of course. I mean, this is England after all. They won't let him. And stop loading up that suitcase, will you?"

"That's what they said back in 1939. And look what happened? Do you know how many of us Peachornby's guru, Hitler, killed during the war? Over two million Poles. That's how many. And they'd have killed us all if they could."

"Oh, come on, Kass. The man's only Mayor of Sleaford, not Chancellor of Germany. Someone from Lincolnshire Council will take over soon. Or maybe he'll go one step too far and get himself arrested."

"You're a bigger fool than you look, Patryk. Your boss, Naismith, thought he could control him and look what happened. He's in hospital covered with third degree burns from Peachornby's fire."

"Well, you don't know one hundred per cent Peachornby's lot started it. And don't forget the cops arrested that Kurdish guy for it, didn't they?"

"And he's denying it."

"Well he would, wouldn't he? He's not gonna put his hands up to torching the Town Hall, is he?"

"So you believe what that fat führer's saying?"

"Well, no, of course not. But you're over-reacting, Kass. I really don't want you to leave – stay here with me. Please?"

"Sorry, Patryk. My mind's made up. I'm off to the airport and flying out this afternoon. If you've got the brains you were born with, you'll come with me. Please, Patryk, I love you; you know that. Come back with me before it all goes too far. Please?"

"Sorry, Kass, I love you too. But give me a few months and then I'll be back. With enough to buy that farm for us."

"I don't care about that farm any more. I'd rather have you. One last time – please come back with me."

Patryk thought. It was tempting but he didn't want to walk away. He'd helped build up Peachornby and it was partly down to him to knock him down. And after Lukasz's hiding, that was something he really wanted to do. "No, I started this and I'll see it through. Don't worry about me – I can take care of myself. But if you're really going I'll see you in Warsaw. Good luck."

"It's you who'll need all the luck, Patryk. But if you don't come now you're as big a fool as Naismith was."

"But a rich fool. I'll drive you to the airport if you want, Kass."

Patryk loaded her cases into the back of his van. Both were deep in thought and neither said much on the journey there.

On his lonely way back to Sleaford, Patryk felt a sense of relief. Although he'd miss her, Patryk was glad that Kassia was safely out of the way. Now he could concentrate on taking Sleaford's führer down without worrying about her.



## CHAPTER 29. STAUFFENBERG'S BRIEFCASE.

Willard replaced his phone in his hip pocket. He smiled and rubbed his mitt through his suede-cut. For a moment, he looked like a heavier, more thuggish, more dangerous version of Stan Laurel. Looking out of the window, Willard exhaled with relief, expelling hot air from deep in his lungs. It was hot. That humid and sticky heat as the sun boiled the wet ground turning the place into a sauna. Britain. It was usually cold and damp – but sometimes it was hot and sweaty. Willard wasn't sure which was worse.

His shirt stuck to his back. In this sticky heat, Willard was glad he was using *Sure For Men*. You needed something good and with *Sure's* 24 hour antiperspirant and deodorant you couldn't beat it on a day like this. Outside, a bunch of Smashers ambled around the car park. One was idly pushing a broom while two more leaned against a tree trunk and smoked. Over on the far side of the lot, another filled in a betting slip while the man who was supposed to guard the entrance and open the doors had vanished from sight. Probably he'd slipped off down the pub. Nice work if you can get it.

But the atmosphere was heavy and oppressive – and not just because of the approaching thunderstorm. Since the roadblocks, Sleaford seemed to have shrunk in on itself, turning its back on the world – separate in a way from the county of Lincolnshire let alone the rest of the country. Willard was surprised more hadn't been

made of those roadblocks but he guessed that what with the police's budget cuts, the Chief Constable was glad to shuffle off responsibility for policing Sleaford and let it go its own way.

And Willard had to admit that crime had dropped since Peachornby and his Smashers had taken over. In his experience as a constable on the beat before going undercover, Willard knew full well that most crime is perpetrated by a handful of prolific individuals who are 'well known to the police'. It's not a case of many people committing a few crimes each, but usually a handful of active young men pulling lots. Once Peachornby felt a bit more secure – and finding that his Smashers wouldn't be disbanded straight away – there had been a handful of dawn raids.

Groups of masked men armed with baseball bats, tyre-irons and hammers had gone round certain individual's houses or flats, kicked in the door and given them all 24 hours to leave Sleaford. Seeing the way the wind was blowing, the men left their mum's or baby-mothers and looked for some out of town relly or mate who would let them kip on their couch, play on their X-Box and smoke weed.

Inevitably Sleaford's crime rate fell like a stone. Of course, some of the lads weren't happy about being kicked out. One thought the mob was all mouth and no trousers so he made like a limpet and stayed put. That was a mistake. The following night the vigilantes caught up with him outside the boozer. Willard heard the tea-leaf was enjoying a long stay at the Grantham and District. With the injuries to his legs and knees, it will be a long time before he climbs through other people's windows again.



Of course, that was too much even for the laissez-faire attitudes of Lincolnshire Police's top brass. However, Mason and the rest of his likely lads were all alibied up. Not that the cops investigated too hard – their attitude was that the tea-leaf had it coming and the man didn't wish to press charges anyway. So the investigation ended up buried in file thirteen.

Another lad with a bit more nous than the rest called the *Standard* to have a moan – and he thought there might be a few squid in the story as well. Willard had heard the story of how the journalist; an honest type called Butler who was getting fed up of writing about the Women's Institute bake-offs, allotment flower shows and school plays – which was the only news permitted by Peachornby – did some digging and found that, yes, the crime-beat regulars had all vanished.

The newshound's last interview was with a seventeen year old mother of two called Cheryllyn who was still wearing jammies at four in the afternoon. The poor girl was crying that her Lukey had vanished. However, she had recorded the scene on her mobile when the Smashers came and wondered what the footage was worth? And who was going to pay for a new front door?

As Willard had heard the story; the girl, no more than a kid herself, was surrounded by mounds of washing and her babby was busy crawling after the family's Staffie and both baby and dog were drooling all over the ironing. Privately, Butler had thought that Cheryllyn's life would be greatly improved without her Lukey – but that should be her choice to make and not the fat führer's.

After thanking Cheryllyn and making vague noises about her fee and expenses, Butler had made his way down the front path, stepping over the abandoned

toys and nappies littering the front garden and out to his old Ford Mondeo. As he stuck the key in the lock – no central locking on this clunker – three men stepped out from behind the overgrown privet hedge. One leaned against the driver's door while his oppos flanked the journalist.

"You don't wanna believe that little slag," the Smasher said. Butler vaguely recognised the skinhead from when he used to cover the crime columns. Mason, Massey? Something like that.

The other two shook their heads. They looked like bouncers playing more macho versions of Tweedledum and Tweedledee. "She's always lyin'. Can't take no notice of her." Butler, who had studied English at Uni all those years ago, recognised a double negative when he heard it. Although Cheryllyn might not be the brightest or most accurate witness, he thought that on this occasion, he could believe the girl.

"You wanna give us that?" Mason leaned forwards and plucked the journalist's digital voice recorder from his paw. Mason dropped it to the pavement and ground it underfoot. "Clumsy," he said. Tweedledum and Tweedledee bellowed laughter as if this was the funniest thing they had seen all week.

Butler clenched his fists but catching Mason's eye immediately relaxed. There was no way he could take on these three. He was the wrong side of fifty and had a dodgy ulcer that flared up now and again. They'd flatten him and then stomp him into the ground and think nothing of it.

"Any notes?" Mason asked.

With watering eyes – grit, he told himself to preserve some self-dignity – he shook his head and gripped his laptop more tightly. He knew he would delete his notes and not run this story. Visions of a Pulitzer prize faded away. He knew he would go back to covering the Women's Institute and Sleaford Town Football Club's matches. Sadly, that was more his level these days – not crusading, investigative journalism.

"Right-o, mate. Just remember, the Mayor won't be happy if any lyin' stories come out. Got that?" Mason said. "We'll be watchin'."

The journalist nodded sadly. There would be nothing appearing in the *Standard* under his by-line – that was for sure – but he might tip the wink to that ambitious young girl he'd trained for a few months before she'd moved on to BBC Lincolnshire. Fearless, she was, like a terrier with a bone. And a scoop like this would help her career.

"Sure. We all want to present Sleaford in the best light possible," Butler agreed.

Mason looked blank for a moment as he processed the thought. "Glad you see sense." The three men walked away. The journalist waited until they'd turned the corner before he breathed out with relief. He'd half expected a beating and knew that there was nothing he could do. Back in his Mondeo, he locked the door behind him. Only then did he feel safe.

That's how Willard had heard the story. Not from the journalist himself – his lips were sealed – but from that hard-nosed ball-breaker on BBC Lincolnshire. Willard shook his head. The place was going to the dogs.

As Willard breathed, a few verses of poetry came into his mind – something he'd learned for his GCSEs all those years ago. It was funny how some things stuck in your mind when other rubbish the teachers had tried to drum in – quadratic equations for example – had totally vanished. Not that it mattered in the case of quadratic equations or the foreign policy of Henry VIII. Who cares about that? But these lines had stuck. How did they go again? Something like:

*'A thirst to spend our fire and restless force*

*In tracking out our true original course;...*

*But hardly have we, for one little hour,*

*Been on our own line, have we been ourselves.'*

By some dude called Matthew Arnold – whoever he was, Willard thought.

Maybe they had resonated in some way with his teenage self, but from the vantage of ten years on Willard couldn't see that. He'd spent his fire and restless forces all right. Active little sod, he was. Played football and rugby union for the county – but sadly not at a level good enough to impress the talent scouts. Was a powerful swimmer and not a bad batsman either. Willard knew enough cricket jargon to be able to talk to Superintendent Donelan as more-or-less equals.

And it wasn't just on the sports field that Willard did alright, even if he didn't excel academically. He'd been a hit with the girls at Alderman Allsop's High School.

It was a grim 1960s bog-standard comprehensive buffering a corpy estate from an area of private housing. The high school was earmarked for redevelopment and its playing fields had long since been flogged off by the Tories but the buildings continued to cling on – a sad relic of more optimistic times.

Not that he was the best looking lad there – an Irish bhoy called Declan claimed that honour – but Willard gave off an air of devil-may-care recklessness that attracted the girls better than any pheromone. The girls all thought that they could be the one to tame him and lead him up the aisle. But none of them ever had. After he'd left Alderman Allsop's Willard had carried on with his activities – both sporting and amorous – at the police training college at Hendon. So Willard never understood why those few lines of poetry had stuck in his brain.

Except possibly for moments like now. It felt like he hadn't been on his own line or been himself for one little hour for far too long now. Yes, he was getting fed up of acting undercover and would be glad to finish this job and take that much needed leave. Go somewhere far, far away where he could recharge his batteries and find his real self again.

Willard cast a glance at the door marked 'Mayor'. "If only you knew, chum. Hey! Make the most of the good times while they last," he said under his breath.

That call had been Superintendent Donelan himself. "The light's failing – so let's get a quick win rather than a draw," Donelan had said. Willard knew by now that the Superintendent wasn't actually referring to the day. Although, looking out the windows it was true the light was fading outside.

The sunlight had taken on a peculiar hazy, brownish cast to it and the clouds were cumulonimbus building up into a massive incus – the anvil-shaped thunder-head that promised violence in the heavens. Unless Willard was very much mistaken, there was going to be a storm later. A big one. That should clear the air.

No. What Donelan meant was that the funding for this undercover operation was coming to an end and it was time to close Peachornby down – by any means possible. Willard watched the loafing Smashers until he came to a decision. He picked up the desk phone and dialled the dispatcher's extension. A few minutes later, Patryk stood before his desk.

Willard slid a file into a multi-use transit envelope and wrote a name and address on the next free box.

"Can you deliver this to Superintendent Donelan at Lincolnshire Police's H.Q.? It's quite urgent – and nothing I want to trust to an email or anything. If anyone asks, just say it's a report on traffic congestion."

"About Peachornby?"

Willard nodded. "A bit more gen for the Superintendent. Hey! Between you and me, I think it's the last piece of the jigsaw Donelan needs to take Peachornby down."

As if summoned by his name like an evil genie, the Mayor's door opened. Peachornby waddled out followed by his henchman. Patryk got a shock. Peachornby's toothbrush 'tache was neatly clipped and drew the eye away from his reddened nose. He'd upgraded his toupee and it looked almost natural. As usual, Peachornby was

wearing his Johnny Cash – man in black – outfit and his boots were so highly polished, Patryk imagined he could see his face in the leather. However, it was Peachornby's massive belly that stood out, the buttons straining under the pressure. Patryk reckoned the Mayor had made full use of his expense account.

"I'm just going out," Peachornby said unnecessarily. "I'm off to a meeting at the Cogglesford Mill restaurant with some err... investors. Back later." Peachornby looked at Patryk. "Didn't know we were still hiring Poles here. Sleaford jobs for Sleaford workers, that's what I say." Which was the slogan headlining his latest flyer.

"I live in Sleaford," said Patryk.

Peachornby thought but couldn't think of anything to say to that.

"Can we stop off at McDonald's on the way?" Mason asked as they left.





## CHAPTER 30. INTO THE TANK TRAPS.

As soon as they were out of the office, Willard stood and disappeared into the Mayor's private office. A moment later, he returned tossing a USB flash drive from hand to hand. Patryk noticed that someone had painted its side with tippex liquid paper and then scrawled a swastika on it. Subtlety was not a characteristic associated with Peachornby.

"What's that?"

"This, my friend, is what will put Peachornby away for a very long time. All the evidence that will enrage even the most lily-livered liberal judge."

Patryk raised his eyebrows. All the stress he'd been under, he felt he was entitled to know what else Peachornby was up to. With a nod Willard leaned down, stuck the flash drive into the PC's tower under the desk and waited for the drive to boot up. Patryk moved around to the other side of the desk to watch.

Initially, one icon only popped up. A briefcase symbol allowing the user to keep documents up to date when switching between two computers.

"He must do some work at home," murmured Willard as he clicked on the briefcase. He wondered who the Mayor had got to help him.

It was all there. Everything. Names and numbers of the cannabis buyers, inflated expense claims – together with the real costs. Scans of the originals and his altered planning applications for the Bass Maltings as well as letters and emails to and from the architects.

Scrolling down, there was reams of race-hate material that even the BNP's leaders would have disowned. It looked as though Peachornby had been in direct contact with foreign right-wing terrorists. Patryk recognised the name of one Polish loudmouth bigot. Willard had heard of a few more but he didn't say anything.

Patryk looked away in disgust. Willard copied all the documents and then pulled out the flash drive and dropped into the envelope. "Make sure you give this to Superintendent Donelan personally. Nobody else. I'll call ahead so he'll be expecting you."

Patryk took the envelope, nodded and hurried out of the Town Hall towards the van park. A few minutes later, he was heading north up the A15.

As soon as the door closed behind the young Pole, Willard crossed to the window and watched Patryk cross the car park and walk over to his Transit. He wasn't happy about sending Patryk off without so much as a warning but orders had come down from on high – from one cricket-obsessed Superintendent in particular.

Donelan didn't just want Peachornby – that memory stick guaranteed him Peachornby's head – but he wanted all the Smashers rounded up as well. Donelan wanted them ground into the dust, a five-nil whitewash, trampled so low that nothing like them could ever rise again. So if that meant risking a couple of Poles, hey! it

wasn't like they were angels. All the same, Willard didn't like the idea but he had been overruled.

\*\*\*

Later that afternoon, Peachornby rolled back supported by Mason. It smelled as if the Mayor had enjoyed his lunch. Willard stood and watched them enter the Mayor's office. He started counting in his head. One... two... three... By the time he'd reached fifty, there was a yell from the Mayor's office. Wiping the grin from his face, Willard knocked and went in.

"You called, Mayor?"

In front of him Peachornby was standing behind his desk with the drawers wide open and their contents spread all over the leather top. Mason was kneeling underneath the desk, his mitts casting ever-widening circles over the rug. His rear was presented to Willard and for one moment he was tempted to draw back his steelie and kick the skinhead right up the arse.

"You seen my memory stick?" Peachornby said. He thumped his fist onto the desk making the objects bounce. One or two fell onto the floor. Mason's hands darted to those things.

"What memory stick, Mayor?"

"My special one – my private one. Have you seen it?"

"The one with the swastika?"

"Yes!" shouted Peachornby, his eyes lighting up with desire.

"No, sorry, Mayor. Last time I saw it, it was sticking out your computer. But I'll keep my eyes open."

Peachornby's face slumped with disappointment. He thumped the desk with rage again even harder.

Willard couldn't resist rubbing it in. "Surely you made back-up copies, Mayor?"

"No. It was too important to have loads of copies lying about. MI6, y'know."

Hiding a grin, Willard turned to go. What a fool. With his hand on the ornate brass doorknob, a thought came to him. He rubbed his chin. "That Polish guy who was here earlier? I saw him pick something up off the floor. Didn't think anything of it at the time."

"Call yourself head of security! You're useless! You're fired! Get out!" Peachornby screamed, spittle flying over the desk.

Startled by the sudden noise, Mason jumped up and cracked his head on an open drawer. He dropped back onto all fours. "Ouch!" he said, rubbing the back of his bonce.

Willard winced. That had to hurt. Although Mason's skull being as thick as it was, he doubted if Mason was too badly injured. On the other side of the door, Willard grinned. What he'd done wasn't exactly kosher, wouldn't stand too much scrutiny, but it would put the cherry on the icing on the cake. It would send Peachornby after those Poles. Excellent.

Turning around, Willard rapped on the door. Mason was still grovelling on the floor making increasingly desperate circles with his hands. Peachornby looked up from the pile of rubbish on his desk. "Oh. Nearly forgot, Mayor. I overheard Patryk say he was meeting some guy down by the Bass Maltings tonight. Could be one of those scumbag journos – or a different developer, who knows? Might be worth going down there and catching him before the meet."

Peachornby's face lit up as if he was a baby offered a sweet. "Excellent. You're hired again."

Smiling, Willard backed out of the Mayor's office. Now all that he needed was for Superintendent Donelan to put together a team – an eleven to use the Superintendent's phrase – to take down not just Peachornby but all his Smashers.

\*\*\*

Willard's call puzzled Patryk as he stood outside Lincolnshire Police's Nettleham headquarters. He frowned as he wiped the sweat from his forehead. The nerve centre was out in the countryside and in the distance a tractor trundled through the fields followed by a flock of rooks all cawing loudly. Closer, a police cruiser was going through its paces on the test track, its tyres squealing on the tarmac oval as the driver flung the car from side to side.

What was Willard playing at? The man had never come out and actually admitted he was an undercover cop but it was almost certain that was what Willard was. Patryk's mother had raised no fools so now Patryk wondered what was really going on behind the scenes.

Surely Willard had more than enough on that memory stick as well as evidence of Peachornby's other activities to have him arrested? And once you'd chopped off the snake's head, the rest of the body and tail would die away. There was no way someone like Mason could organise anything more than a Saturday afternoon punch-up. And as for the rest of the Smashers, they were even less capable of independent thought. So what was Willard after? Surely, the law didn't need any further proof?

So what was the real reason why Willard was asking himself and Lukasz to spy on Peachornby at the old Bass Maltings? Willard said he'd heard that the architect from Haider-Allbutt & Associates wanted to discuss some problems on site with Peachornby; some difficulties to do with the outlook from the Maltings over the nearby estate. Willard wasn't too sure of the exact details and so he wanted a witness to the meeting.

So it was another mission like he and Lukasz had undertaken on behalf of Naismith all those months ago. Take a camera with a low-light lens and a good microphone capable of picking up a bat's squeak from a kilometre away. Then Willard would have everything – the cherry on the icing on the cake. And that yuppie Haider-Allbutt architect would also find himself dragged down into a world of hurt. All the same, Patryk didn't like it. Once, he and Naismith had underestimated just how dangerous Peachornby and his Smashers would prove to be and was Willard making the same mistake now?

Also, something didn't ring true about Willard's request. Why didn't the two men meet in a top restaurant and put the meal down on expenses, as usual? That would be more usual. It had to be something that didn't show up on the blueprints,

something that could be best explained on site. Or, more likely, the young architect was offering the Mayor an extra bung or sweetener. That had to be the case, Patryk decided.

Not for the first time, Patryk wished that Kassia was there to advise him. She was a very astute young woman. She would have seen through Willard's games and would have suggested what he could do about it. However, after a recent row as to when he was coming back home, she was not taking his calls at the moment. Kassia hadn't yet gone as far as defriending him on Facebook but she wasn't replying to his messages neither.

A nasty thought came into his mind. What if he and Lukasz were being set up? What if Willard was using them as a sacrificial goat, a lure to draw the tiger out of the jungle so it could be killed. Patryk shook his head. No, Willard must have enough ammunition to kill the tiger without that. But a dull kernel of unease lay deep within his belly. Patryk thought deeply as he walked around to the police HQ's car park and edged out into the traffic. He wasn't happy. This had better be Willard's last request.

\*\*\*

Lukasz stood waiting for Patryk when he pulled up outside his friend's flat. Lukasz wore a fisherman's multi-pocketed canvas vest filled with lenses, filters, spare batteries and accessories and his camera was in its bag slung around his neck. A second bag contained the microphone and an extra-long lead. Over his shoulders was a black backpack.

Patryk grinned. "You going on safari? We're only out for the evening."

Lukasz shook his head and winced. Following that beating at the roadblock, Lukasz had withdrawn into himself and had dropped out of the resistance group. And that was another bone of contention for Patryk. If it wasn't for the impossibility of getting such a well paid job back home, Patryk knew that his friend would have taken the first Wizzair flight to Warsaw. Lukasz was Polish after all; descended from generations of the bravest of the brave. The man should toughen up and seek revenge. However, Lukasz wasn't the only one to disappear from view as, after the beating, the resistance group's meetings had become sparsely attended.

"You can't be too careful. I hope that this is the last job as I'm getting sick of Peachornby and his mob," said Lukasz, breaking into Patryk's thoughts.

"Aren't we all? So let's do something about them and help Willard finish them off."

Lukasz dug two fruit bars out of one of his many pockets and offered one to his friend who chewed slowly as he drove back to Sleaford.

"Shall we go straight there?" asked Lukasz as Patryk turned off the Holdingham roundabout and then south down Lincoln Road towards the town centre. They were trapped in a long tailback as people headed home. "We can find a good spot to set up before the rain comes."

Patryk nodded. "Good thinking. We don't want to be caught out in this."

Even as he spoke, raindrops splattered onto the windscreen; a few at first, then more and more, outliers of the approaching storm. He flicked on his wipers and sidelights. The van inched through the town centre, caught up in the daily snarl-up



and it was full dark by the time they crossed the railway tracks and over the junction onto Mareham Lane.

The rain was heavier now, pouring down, and the wipers were putting in a double shift. They heard it drumming on the metal roof and cascading down the sides. Patryk switched on the heater to stop the condensation building up.

Water splashed up from under the Transit's tyres as it bounced down the rutted lane. Then from the forecourt in front of the block of flats undergoing renovation a bank of headlights switched on, lighting up the storm-driven night like a lightning bolt. One, two, three vehicles at least.

"I knew it! We've been set up! That bloody Willard – he's set us up...," exclaimed Patryk as Lukasz threw his arm over his eyes.

Involuntarily, Patryk swerved and then recovered. He put his foot down on the accelerator and the Transit surged forwards. The headlights pulled out behind them, washing the back of the van in white light. Patryk recognised Mason's red Rover in the lead.

"Step on it," called out Lukasz.

Patryk needed no encouragement. The Transit wasn't a Ferrari Testarossa but he still cracked on speed. He rounded a bend in the lane, the hedges blocking out the pursuing skinheads. Too late Patryk spotted another skin crouching under a tree by the roadside verge. The skin threw a plank of wood studded with nails like crocodile's teeth into the road. At the speed he was doing, Patryk had no hope of avoiding the cobbled together stinger.

His tyres shredded, ripped to ribbons by the nails. Through his mirror, he saw the skinhead quickly withdraw the stinger. Round the bend came the small convoy of skinheads. Patryk was driving on the rims, sparks flying and dying in the driving rain. There was no way he could control the Transit on the wet road. It lurched from side to side, veering across the tarmac like a drunken skinhead after a heavy night on the sauce. It sideswiped an oak and leaned against the tree as if it needed a rest. In the sudden silence, they heard the rain beating against the sides.

"We can't stay here. Bring that crowbar and get out," shouted Patryk. Lukasz was ahead of him, flinging open the passenger door stepping onto the verge and edging around the front of the van. The two men looked back down the road and into the headlights of Mason's Rover. Within seconds, they were wet through. A lightning bolt ripped across the sky for one instant of time making everything stand out in stark relief.

There was only one way to go. They couldn't retreat into the path of Peachornby's oncoming thugs, they couldn't escape to the side as they were hedged in. So the two men ran down Mareham Lane towards the vast bulk of the disused Bass Maltings.

"We'll lose them in there," Patryk shouted, but his voice was drowned out by the first deep rumble of thunder.



## CHAPTER 31. TRAPPED INSIDE THE TRACTOR

### WORKS.

There had been a time of burning. Now was a time for floods. Patryk and Lukasz sprinted around the bend in Mareham Lane. For a moment they left the pursuing headlights behind until they hit the gates barring entry to the Bass Maltings. As always, the gates were chained shut with a heavy padlock so Lukasz crouched and made a stirrup with his hands. Patryk placed his foot in the stirrup and Lukasz boosted his friend up over the gate.

Patryk's hands slipped on the wet metal at the top of the gate. He swayed and nearly fell from his narrow metal frame. Recovering himself, he swung his right leg over and landed on the far side, his trainers splashing up a puddle.

As soon as Patryk was over, Lukasz tossed over the crowbar, leaped up and scrambled over the gate. He jumped down, landing in the same puddle.

Headlights swung around the bend, their light blurred and diffused by the driving rain.

"Come on," Lukasz shouted over the sound of the deluge. He hauled on his friend's arm and together they ran across the cracked concrete forecourt. Sheet lightning – a million, billion volts of electricity streaked across the sky and the rain

fell in a cloudburst. Thunder rolled overhead. Already wet, within seconds, the two Poles were soaked to the skin.

Glancing behind him, Lukasz saw several cars pull up before the gates. Men jumped out and stood before the gates. In another blast of lightning, the men spotted the fleeing Poles and several pointed. Yet their shouts were drowned out by the boom of thunder. The storm was directly overhead.

Stumbling through the torrential rain, Lukasz and Patryk ran towards the first block of the Bass Maltings. Rain streaked down their faces, water stinging their eyes. Another electrical burst above and they saw Peachornby's BNP thugs scrambling over the gate, impatient to tear the Poles' heads off. One of the skinheads had come prepared and was attacking the chain with a bolt cutter. The thug rammed open the gates and one of the skinheads already climbing over lost his grip and face-planted the concrete.

Despite their danger, Patryk paused his flight and smiled. Slowly he raised both middle fingers and flipped the skinheads off. Then he turned and ran. An instant later, the two men stood in the partial shelter of a recessed doorway. Lukasz jammed the tip of the crowbar and levered ajar the corrugated iron covering the door. Holding it open for his friend, first Patryk and then Lukasz slipped inside the abandoned industrial space. The sheet metal snapped back plunging the two men into near total darkness.

Another and another lightning bolt split the sky and in the white flashes lighting up the roofless space, the two men saw the vast hall was filled with rusting,

antiquated machinery. Rain fell in torrents, pouring down through the fire blackened rafters and empty upper storeys.

"We can't stop here. Those Nazis will break in any time now. Come on," Lukasz said. The two men ducked around a huge vat. Thunder cannon-boomed overhead. In the enclosed space of the hall, it sounded as if the sky had been ripped in two. Deluges of rain fell, cascading like waterfalls off the machinery. The two men legged it round the vat to the far wall. More rain streamed down the brickwork. They fetched up against a rusting iron staircase set against the wall. Several treads had been lost over the years and the handrail pulled away. But there was nowhere else to go – all the other doors and windows were securely boarded.

The two men ran up the steps passed the return and carried on. Another roar of thunder, more rain bucketing down. Lukasz shivered – with chill as much as fear. As he climbed, he looked down and saw the first of the skinheads push through the corrugated iron shutter. More and more followed and Lukasz recognised Mason and a taller dude dressed all in black. One of the skins called the man 'Malkie'.

Another million volts of lightning split the sky, that split second flash starkly illuminating the two Poles. In that burst of light Lukasz saw Malkie point their way. Then, in total contrast, the ruined interior was plunged into darkness. Thunder roared directly above them as if this was the end of the world. Doomsday, Armageddon and Ragnarök all rolled into one. And still the rain sluiced down.

Lukasz shoved Patryk on the small of his back. "Move, man. They've spotted us."

Patryk needed no further encouragement. Despite the slick steps, despite the deluge, he quickened his steps. Looking down Lukasz saw the skinheads running around the vat. Patryk and Lukasz hurried their steps. A moment later they were at the top of the iron steps. Above them was only the roofless void, the rain making the two men squint. Old fire blackened beams and rafters traced lines against the sky.

Down below, the first of the neo-Nazis had reached the foot of the staircase.

Another brilliant burst of light revealed an upper-storey walkway leading to the next unit. Like the stairway, this walkway was also in a poor state of repair. Standing on the small landing, Patryk kicked open the rotten wooden door. It sprung away from its frame but its crash was drowned in another burst of thunder.

The walkway was as rotten as the door. Planks were missing from the floor and in the intense white light from the lightning they saw the cobbled ground a long way below. On the far side of the walkway the two men saw another wooden door leading to the next factory unit. They looked at each other. Neither fancied crossing this treacherous, crumbling floor but they knew they had no choice. Coming up from behind them were the BNP thugs. One was yelling something but they couldn't make out his shouts.

"Keep to the sides – it'll be firmer there," Patryk shouted.

Lukasz nodded and crept, crablike, along the edge of the wooden walkway, keeping his back to the wall. Rain pelted the wooden sides and slashed in through a broken window. The two men edged past the opening. Lukasz shivered as the rain splashed his back and neck. Another bolt of lightning split the air outside and in the sharp, white light they saw the maelstrom outside. The storm looked like it was the

end of the world. The access road below was underwater and looked like the Vistula in full spate.

The two Poles jumped as the thunder roared directly overhead, shaking the walkway. For one moment, Lukasz thought it would split in two and they would crash, screaming to the cobbles below. Hurriedly, they picked up the pace until they stood before the further door. Patryk tried the handle, more than half expecting the door to be locked.

The handle moved, but the old door had swollen with the damp. The door only opened an inch, scraping over the wooden floor. Patryk stepped away from the safety of the side of the walkway and kicked hard at the door. It scratched open another few inches but not enough. Lukasz crossed over the walkway, ignoring a creaking sound and a sagging board beneath his feet.

He joined his friend at the door and together they rained kicks at it, every blow forcing it open another inch at a time. A few more kicks and then Patryk squeezed through the gap into the next factory unit. Lukasz sucked in his already flat belly and wriggled through after his friend. His jacket snagged on a splinter or nail, pinning him between the door and its frame.

"C'mon," Patryk yelled from beyond the door, his voice muffled by the wind and driving rain. From the staircase behind him, Lukasz heard the shouts of the BNP boot-boys. They were getting louder as they climbed up to the walkway. Now Lukasz could even hear their booted footsteps.

With a wrench, he ripped himself free from that nail, his jacket tearing and the nail gouging a bloody furrow in his back. Blood mixed with sweat and rainwater. Like



a cork from a bottle, Lukasz popped into the next factory. It seemed to be an exact counterpart of the first with massive, rusting machinery with rainwater dripping or pouring in through the holes in the roof.

The instant Lukasz was through the door, Patryk shouldered it closed. He rammed it shut and then cast around. There was another flash outside, making everything leap forward in stark contrast to the darkness. Another peal of thunder but there was a second or two between the flash and thunder. The storm was starting to move away.

"Give me a hand," Patryk called to his friend as the rumble died away. Patryk picked up one end of a baulk of timber and started dragging it over the floor.

Seeing what he was doing, Lukasz bent his back and between them the two men hauled the beam to the door. They stood, panting hard. No way could those skins push open the door now. They'd have to batter it down now, which would waste time. Even as the two Poles got their breath back, they heard a thud as the first skinhead slammed against the door. The two Poles looked at each other, their faces pale ovals in the gloom. They drew in a last ragged breath and then moved away from the door.

The skins were now hammering on the door with their fists. They were wasting their time, the door was unmovable, but sooner or later a skin with fractionally more intelligence than a sea-slug would fetch a beam or heavy length of iron and batter the door down. No time to waste.

Carefully, avoiding the worst of the debris scattering the floor the two men picked their way over to an ironwork spiral staircase. It led both up to an attic space

and down to a dark, cavernous lower floor. More rain fell in torrents through the holes in the roof and the charred ceiling beams.

"Which way?" gasped Lukasz.

Patryk looked both ways. Unsure which way was best. He came to a decision. Not much point going up. Sure, there were hiding places in the loft area but the skins would be sure to find them eventually. Down; down to the ground floor and then out. With a bit of luck they should be able to find a way into one of the other eight massive factory units and there was no way Peachornby's skinheads could search the whole of the Bass Maltings for them. The site was simply too massive with far too many hiding places for anything less than an army to search thoroughly.

In another lightning blast, the two men ran to the spiral staircase. Rainwater trickled down the ironwork. It was rusted from decades of water damage and neglect. Moss and algae slicked the treads.

"Careful, Lukasz," Patryk called over his shoulder as he made his way down. He gripped the handrail, his fingers scraping away flakes of rust and grime. Lukasz followed him. They followed the spiral down, almost reaching the bottom when Lukasz's foot shot out from under him and he fell, crashing and cursing the last few steps fetching up in a heap on the concrete floor. Patryk turned back.

"Stop fooling about down there," Patryk said to his friend with a smile.

Lukasz tried to stand. He cried out with pain. "My ankle. I think it's broken." He sat on the bottom step and gripped his ankle.

"No it's not – only a sprain," Patryk said optimistically. "C'mon, Lukasz, we can't stay here. Those skins'll be through the door soon. We can't let them catch us sitting here – they'll kill us."

Lukasz looked up. "You go on, get out of this mess. Draw them off and I'll find somewhere nearby out of the way to hide."

"No way, I'm not leaving you. No way."

Lukasz winced. "Thanks, mate. You know, Kassia was right. We should have cut and run before all this got out of control." He put out his arm and Patryk helped him stand.

"Too late to worry about that now. Come on, lean on my shoulder and we'll get out of this." Lukasz stood, leaning on his crowbar as a temporary crutch, grimacing with pain as his left foot touched the floor.

From above, there was a booming sound as the skins started in on battering down the door. Supporting his friend, Patryk crossed the ground floor. It was littered with rubble and tiles dislodged from the roof far above. The whole layer was covered with pigeon droppings and in the rain the surface was slick and treacherous. Patryk knew they could not falter. If the Smashers caught them in here, out of sight of anybody, they would be killed. Savagely and brutally beaten to death.

Unless Willard was on the ball, it might be months before anyone found their bodies in the Maltings. A sudden vision of their skeletons, their bones bleached white – no, he amended, covered in pigeon shit – were found. By which time, even the most

pea-brained Smasher would have come up with some alibi. The two men hobbled over the floor towards another boarded door.

"Give that here," Patryk called over another boom of thunder. With difficulty, he wedged the tip of the crowbar between the stone jamb and the corrugated iron. Using his full strength, Patryk leaned on the bar. Flakes of rust showered down. Straining his muscles, Patryk heaved with all his might. One screw popped out, then another and another.

One last crash immediately followed by a splintering sound came from up above. This was followed by a hoarse yell. A great beam of wood sailed down towards the two Poles. Lukasz watched in horror as it fell tumbling towards them. The rafter crashed with a dull clang onto a ruin of rusting machinery of no obvious use before bouncing away.

The wind dropped for a moment and in the sudden hush, Patryk shouted up, "that the best you can do, you morons?"

One of the first skins through the smashed door was Malkie. He took something that looked like a deodorant aerosol from his pocket flicked a lighter and an orange flame, about a metre long, rushed out lighting up both the top of the stairs and Malkie's ecstatic expression.

"When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, 'Was there ever a city like this great city?' Revelation 18:17-19," Malkie roared out.

There was nothing to say to this – the guy was obviously a complete nut-job – but as if in response the storm renewed its violence, buffeting even the solid Maltings.

The skinheads ran down the iron stairway but one or two looked anxiously overhead. It wouldn't take much to dislodge the remaining tiles and send them whirling down in lethal shards.

"I'd hurry it up, mate," Lukasz yelled down Patryk's ear.

Patryk said nothing, but kept labouring at the obdurate sheet of corrugated iron, pulling its edge away from the door frame. A couple more rusted screws lost their grip.

Lukasz looked back. Malkie and Mason had reached the bottom of the staircase and were hurrying as quickly as they could over the treacherous ground. They disappeared momentarily, out of sight behind a huge iron container.

"Now," Patryk said, pushing open the corrugated iron. Lukasz didn't need a second invitation. He shoved past Patryk and out into the open air. An instant later Patryk joined him. There was no point trying to replace the corrugated iron sheet. It banged as the wind caught it, smacking it against the door frame. Patryk cursed in Polish – they'd left the crowbar inside. No way was he going back for it, though. Blinking against the storm's raging fury, Patryk and Lukasz looked about.

Far away, on the other side of a ditch and a high chain-link fence and over the muddy fields, they saw the friendly lights of a housing estate. It might as well be on the other side of the moon as far as the two men were concerned. Even if they could climb the fence with Lukasz's twisted ankle, they had no hope of reaching the estate. Peachornby's Smashers would be on them within fifty metres and beat them to a pulp.

"The cars! Can we reach their cars?" Lukasz said.

It sounded like a good idea. Still supporting his friend, Patryk stepped out of the shelter of the huge brick building. The wind and rain caught him, knocking him off balance for a moment. His jacket billowed like a sail. His foot slid on a loose tile, blown off by the howling gale. He was immediately soaked again.

Shielding his eyes from the blown rain Patryk squinted down the service road running the length of the Bass Maltings. He saw the Smashers' cars pulled up by the opened gate. Even Peachornby knew enough to leave a couple of men on guard. There was no way out that way. Even if Patryk and Lukasz felt up to fighting a couple of bruisers – and they didn't – then the rest of the Smashers would be on them within moments. Then the outcome would be a foregone conclusion.

Turning away from the service road, Patryk put his shoulder under Lukasz's armpit and helped him stumble through the storm to the third massive block in the row. It wasn't far but they slipped and slid over the slick cobbles. A dislodged slate crashed down shattering by their feet. Lukasz smiled weakly at his friend. If that tile had hit either one of them, they could have been killed. He shuddered as another peal of thunder grumbled overhead. The storm was definitely moving away to expend its fury over the Wash.

No way out over the fields, no way out down the lane. So that left only one option. As more lightning tore through the sky, the two men had a stroke of luck. Fetching up against the third massive unit, they saw the metal shutter had already been wrenched open.

"In here," Patryk called over the gale.



## CHAPTER 32. GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG.

Lukasz ducked through the gaping hole followed by Patryk. Neither man thought it worthwhile trying to jam the rest of the sheet iron back into the opening. It wouldn't keep out the Smashers for more than a few seconds.

Outside, the wind dropped and in that moment of stillness they heard the skinheads shouting, cursing and yelling as they searched for the Poles. Both men knew that even the dimmest most drunken skinhead would soon stumble across this doorway. Turning away from the door, the huge room was in total darkness. Fumbling out his mobile Lukasz switched on its flashlight function.

Patryk joined him and by the light of the two beams they saw that this room seemed more solid, less damaged by decades of neglect. At some point in its history, it must have been a storage depot for a builder's merchant. Everything had now been removed except for rows of huge concrete tubes. Most lay on their sides but some stood on end against one wall like Doric columns.

As he'd told Naismith all those months ago Patryk had never worked in construction but he reckoned these must have been intended for a sewer system – possibly for a housing estate. They must have been too heavy and not worth the effort of shifting when the merchant moved out so they lay abandoned and forlorn in the Maltings.



A crash from behind made the two men jump. "They'll be in any time now," called Lukasz. Patryk looked around desperately. "Nothing for it – we'll have to hide."

The two men scrambled up the pyramid of drainage pipes and then crawled into one near the top. Lukasz backed to the far end giving Patryk room to hide as well. The pipe was damp and chill inside with a thin skein of dirty water at the bottom covering rubble and broken bricks. Only just in time. Over the roar of the wind they heard the door below kicked open and then booted feet trampling on the concrete floor.

"They here?" they heard one of the Smashers call.

"Dunno. Us four'll search this building. The rest of you, check the next," Mason's Fenland voice came up to them.

"Yes, guv," one of the skins said. To Lucasz, it sounded like his old friend Beetroot's voice. He shuddered at the thought of meeting either Beetroot or Turnip again.

Although they heard some of the men leave, to their horror they heard a couple of Smashers climbing the mound of drainage pipes. It could only be a matter of time before one of them spotted them cowering within the tube. Lukasz tugged on Patryk's ankle. "We've got to get out," he whispered.

"Wait," Patryk replied.

They both heard at least a couple of the Smashers coming closer. One swore as he lost his grip and slipped back.

"Wait. Go when I give the word," Patryk said.

Knowing that his friend could see what was happening, Lukasz had to trust the other's judgement. All the same, Lukasz felt his skin crawling with fear. Here he was, cowering in an abandoned sewer pipe waiting for a bunch of violent neo-Nazis to kick the living daylights out of him. With their blood up and their steel toe-capped boots, he wondered if he would make it through the next quarter hour.

It was a long way from Warsaw and Lukasz wondered if he would ever see Sigismund's Column or the Old Town Market Place again. The prospects didn't look good. He hoped he would die like a man and not screaming and begging for mercy. It wasn't much to ask from life – or death.

Then over Patryk's shoulder, Lukasz saw a face in the pipe's opening. It was too dark to see who it was. But then the skinhead spoke a line of gibberish. "All the nations will ask: 'Why has the Lord done this to this land? Why this fierce, burning anger?'"

As he did so, the skinhead flipped his lighter to his aerosol's nozzle and sent a jet of flame towards Patryk. The interior of the pipe lit up orange and even at the far end, Lukasz felt the blast of heat. There was a stink of chemical deodorant.

From below, Lukasz heard Mason's voice. "That's right. Burn 'em out Malkie. Burn the..." That was as far as Mason got. Patryk lifted a half brick and chucked it at Malkie's head. His throw was limited by the confined space but it was good and at that range, he couldn't miss. The brickbat clunked on Malkie's forehead and the tall skinhead squawked, waved his arms in the air and toppled back.

From his position at the base of the pyramid where he was checking the lower pipes, Mason looked up when he heard Malkie shout something from the bible. That was one strange mother, Mason thought. Strange but scary. Then he saw fire shoot into one of the pipes near the top. "That's right. Burn 'em out Malkie. Burn the....," Mason shouted encouragingly.

Then it all went horribly wrong. Holding a lighter and aerosol in his hands, Malkie wasn't supporting himself. Only his feet were resting on the lip of the pipe below the Poles. Mason heard a squawk and then Malkie toppled back like a felled Montana redwood. A brick clattered down the stack.

Mason watched, mouth wide open as Malkie fell through the air. He thought about moving but too late. Malkie's body crashed into him, knocking Mason to the ground, winding him. Mason's thick skull bounced off the concrete floor and he saw stars. Stunned, he was trapped by Malkie's dead weight. Then he saw the two hunted Poles wriggle out of their pipe and climb down. Mason pushed himself up to one elbow. "Hey! Here," he called out to the two remaining Smashers searching the far end of this building.

Mason was too late. Before the others could reach him, the two Poles were on top of him.

Patryk looked down at the sprawled chief Smasher. He remembered all the things that had gone wrong since that rigged election. All the indignities leading up to Lukasz's beating and Kassia leaving him. Patryk knew Lukasz even now wouldn't do this – the man was too gentle for that. But he wasn't.

Patryk drew back his foot and, only wishing he was wearing steelies like the Smashers, he kicked Mason right in the pods. The man's scream descended down the scales into a desperate, gasping whine as his hands flew between his legs and his body took on a strange, twisted comma shape. Even in the near darkness, Patryk saw Mason's face go pale as the blood drained away. That felt so good. No way would that poor excuse for a man be fathering any babies in the near future.

Grabbing Lukasz's shoulder, Patryk pushed the horrified young man towards the door just as the two other Smashers rounded the corner of the stack of pipes. They stood confused, unsure whether to help the moaning Mason and Malkie or take after their quarry.

That was all the time Patryk needed. He gave Lukasz another shove towards the door and then they were both outside in the rain again. Leaning back, Patryk drew the heavy door closed and then in one distant lightning flash, he spotted a rusting iron bar lying on the ground. Patryk stooped and dropped the bar through the padlock's hasp, locking those Smashers in the building.

Noticing the wild look in his friend's eye, Lukasz grasped Patryk's arm. "You shouldn't have kicked him like that. It must have hurt."

Patryk grinned and in that look, Lukasz saw countless generations of heroic Poles who fought valiantly against Prussians, Austrians, Russians and Swedes until they fell beneath their conquerors' swords. But they died as heroes. Death before dishonour.

Patryk shook his head and the light of battle faded a little. "No. Didn't hurt me a bit. Hurt him though. Now, let's find somewhere before the rest of the skins show up."

Lukasz looked around. Between the Bass Maltings themselves and the chain-link fence were a few brick outhouses. Splashing through the puddles, keeping as low a profile as possible, the two men ran to the nearest hut. Adrenaline masked some of the pain from Lukasz's ankle. The hut was locked tight. Running for the exit wasn't an option as there was still a knot of skinheads sitting in several cars and 4x4s which blocked the road. However, Lukasz couldn't spot the huge black bulk of Peachornby's Phantom. It looked like the fat führer had sense enough to keep away from the kill.

Wind blown rain lashed against them as Lukasz pointed to a thick stand of buddleia bushes that edged a slope between the huts and fence. "Wouldn't it be better to hide down there?" he asked.

Patryk shook his head. "In this? We'll catch pneumonia. And they'd see us easy."

Lukasz was about to argue the point but then both heard yells and curses as more Smashers came round the corner from the next unit of the Bass Maltings.

"Shit. They've called their mates. C'mon, man," Patryk swore, dragging Lukasz out of sight to the next hut. Patryk pushed open the door. The wood had swelled with the damp and its base scraped over the concrete floor pushing leaves, litter and debris out of the way. From the dim light filtering through the grimy window, Lukasz reckoned this hut had once been an office of some kind. The room was L shaped with a small fireplace on the short wall.

At some point in the past, a tramp had found his way into this building and broken bottles and filthy rags nested in the corner. It stunk of old ashes, stale booze, body odour and urine. The two men crouched gasping in the darkest corner of the L out of sight of both the window and door. It wasn't great but there was nowhere else to run now.

Outside, they heard the skins kicking off. It sounded like they'd released Mason and his friends. They heard Mason's voice over the rainfall. He was going on about what he'd do to Patryk when he caught up with him. All the same, his voice didn't sound quite right.

"It was still worth it," Patryk whispered. "It wouldn't have changed anything – they'll still kill us if they catch us."

Lukasz nodded. He didn't trust himself to speak.

The hut's door was kicked open. A fugly skinhead stood in the entrance, blocking what little light came in. He flashed a beam of light from his mobile around the room. The two Poles shrunk back against the wall. "Nah, not 'ere," the Smasher shouted back over his shoulder.

"Sure? You checked?" they heard Mason call back.

The Smasher took one, two paces into the small room darting beams of light around as he did so. "Nah. Deffo not 'ere." The man's voice died away as he retreated to the doorway. He cast one last beam back, the light splashing over the graffiti scarred plaster. It also caught the hem of Lukasz's jeans.

"Fu...," the Smasher said, taken by surprise. The man strode back into the hut. He was a big man; like Mason the veteran of many terrace battles and far-right demos. He had no fear.

Patryk jumped to his feet. He gripped a charred length of wood, the remnants of some vagrant's camp fire. He swung the cudgel at the skinhead's bonce. Warned by the rush of air, the Smasher leaned back and the wood narrowly missed and smashed into the wall. The shock vibrated up Patryk's arm and he dropped the wood.

Having leaned backwards, the Smasher jerked his head forward, his forehead knocking on Patryk's nose in a near perfect Glasgow Kiss – a head-butt. Patryk cried out with shock and pain and staggered back. He lost his footing on the litter strewn floor and fell back with a crash. Bottles clattered

This Smasher had double the brain cells than most of his crew. Before wading in, he shouted out, "Ere they are. Them two Polack wazzocks."

Then, switching his flashlight to his left hand, the thug stepped forwards. In the backwash of light, Lukasz noticed the man's fleshy, pockmark scarred face around a scorpion tattoo. Patryk stood up again next to Lukasz. But before he did so, he picked up a sherry bottle and shattered it against the wall. Vicious shards glinted in the light from the Smasher's mobie.

In fairness, the Smasher didn't look scared. He made a beckoning gesture with his free hand. "Go 'ead, if yer 'ard enuff," he invited.

From outside, over the wind and rain, Patryk and Lukasz heard Doc Marten boots hurrying over the cobbles. Patryk stuck out his free hand and sought Lukasz's.

They shook hands. "It was good knowing you. Guess we won't make Poland now," Patryk said in Polish.

Summoning up his courage, Lukasz said, "See you in Warsaw. Mate." He felt like crying. This was the end. The end of it all. There would be no quarter given by the Smashers. Then Lukasz stiffened his backbone. He was Polish after all – his great grandfather had died in the Warsaw uprising of 1944. And his great-great grandfather against the Reds in the Civil War. No way was he going to disgrace his ancestors or his nation. If he was going to die tonight, then he'd go down fighting.

"Oi. Speak English," snarled the Smasher. He lunged at Lukasz. Who kicked the thug hard on the shin.

"Ouch, that hurt!" the man cried. "Dirty rotten fighter." Beating up people who were intimidated by his size and didn't fight back was more his line.

But then reinforcements thronged the doorway and a couple more skinheads pushed their way into the hut. It was getting crowded now. Patryk lobbed an empty bottle at the reinforcements. Catching a glimpse, they ducked and the bottle bounced off somebody's shoulder. Stooping, Patryk snatched up another, smashed it against the brickwork and stood, like a stag at bay, with his back to the wall. Lukasz stepped back, joining his friend. He put up his fists like a boxer while Patryk jabbed out with his broken bottle.

Mason was one of the men who had entered the hut. His teeth shone in the darkness. "I'll teach you," he snarled, stepping forwards. He was going to enjoy stomping these two jokers into the concrete. He punched his fist into his palm. Apart



from the sound of the wind and rain outside it was the only sound in the enclosed room. A small moment of calm before the storm of violence that would follow.

Except it wasn't. Another noise impinged on the men's focussed adrenaline fuelled concentrations. The rise and fall of sirens wailing and following on from that, the thrum of tyres racing over the wet cobbles. Then blue light bounced into the room through the open door.

The skinheads looked at each other. The Poles looked at each other. The two groups had very different expressions on their faces. As the veteran of too many terrace brawls and late night pub punch-ups Mason had quick reflexes. He knew when the going gets tough, the tough get going. Out the door and away on your toes like greased lightning. Mason turned and ran followed by the rest of his gang.

"Not so tough now, are you," Lukasz jeered as they ran. Patryk dropped his broken bottle and trod on it. No way did he want some over-zealous constable mistaking him for a Smasher and giving him a good wellying.

Supporting Lukasz, Patryk made his way out of the hut and stood outside. Gulping down fresh air, they watched the Smashers run. They may be fast but they were no match for the OSU's grey Mercedes Sprinter vans. Already several skins were lying face down on the cobbles with their hands clasped behind their necks.

One policeman kicked apart a skinhead's ankles. Even as they watched, two cops made bulky by their body armour and equipment dragged Mason out from behind the stand of buddleia bushes and threw him down to rejoin his mates. Face down, the Smashers looked a sorry sight, stripped of their swaggering, bullying power. Just a group of social misfits.

Behind the line of OSU vans an ambulance drew up. A couple of green-suited paramedics hurried over to the Maltings to treat Malkie and any other injured Smashers. One of the police sergeants saw Patryk and Lukasz by the hut and stepped towards them. "You two, get over here," he ordered. His voice brusque and terse.

The sliding door of the lead OSU van opened. A big man with a lot of silver braid on his dark blue uniform stepped out. Having come direct from a meeting with a senior civil servant from the Home Office, he was not in riot gear and on his epaulettes was a crown denoting his rank as Superintendent.

"What a sorry sight," he said, looking down at the row of skinheads. "Third eleven at best." Superintendent Donelan beckoned Patryk and Lukasz over. "Don't worry – these bat for our team," he said. He looked again at the row of skinheads. One of them was wriggling, trying to find a drier spot.

"Where's Peachornby?" he asked. "You. Mason. Where's your captain?"

"Dunno, do I?" said Mason, sulkily.

"You won't add to your score card with that attitude, lad. Now, I'll bowl a second ball and hopefully you'll bat it my way..."

"Huh?" said Lukasz to Patryk.

"Don't ask," Patryk whispered back.

"...You understand, lad. I'll bowl you a nice and simple full toss. Where's Peachornby."

This time, Mason cottoned on. "He couldn't come. He's at home. Said he was seeing some backers."

Superintendent Donelan pointed at Mason. "Have you called him? Let him know about your innings collapse here?"

Mason raised his torso up off the stones and shook his head. "No. No time."

"Excellent. Sergeant Brent, pick your finest and come with me."

Sergeant Brent, the brusque officer from earlier, shouted out three names and swung up behind the wheel. Superintendent Donelan got into the shotgun seat. Before he closed the door, Donelan leaned back. "You two, get in the back. You opened the batting, you might as well see this debacle through."

Patryk and Lukasz glanced at each other. "Might as well," Lukasz said.

The OSU carrier turned in a tight circle and then headed back down the access road, past the line of police vehicles towards the gate.

Once out of the Bass Maltings, Sergeant Brent switched on the blues and twos and stepped on the gas.



## CHAPTER 33. THE FÜHRERBUNKER FALLS.

Sergeant Brent sped through Sleaford and then headed north along the B1188 to Peachornby's home village of Dunston. After the storm, the countryside was soaked and the fields were waterlogged with standing water lying in the furrows.

The back of the van was crowded with three officers bulky in their Kevlar body armour together with masses of equipment such as helmets and riot shields. A red enforcer battering ram was propped up between one seat and the van's side. As well as that, there were several pizza boxes and the back of the van stunk of cheese, pepperoni, garlic overlaying sweat, testosterone and air freshener. There was a confusing mass of noise from the front, police jargon breaking through the static mixed with Test commentary coming from BBC Radio 5 Live.

The three cops eyed the two Poles suspiciously and muttered amongst themselves in a language heavy with jargon and in-jokes. Feeling a bit overwhelmed and wondering why Superintendent Donelan wanted them, Patryk and Lukasz sat back and talked quietly in their own language.

Donelan swivelled round in his seat. Everybody sat a little straighter, wondering what he was about to reveal. "Do part of a meal for a multitude. Nine letters. Third letter N," he said. Apart from the radio the van fell silent. Lukasz wondered what this cryptic sentence meant. The three cops also looked puzzled.

"Concourse," said Brent enigmatically.

"Thanks," said Donelan scribbling something down. "That's why Brent here's a Sergeant, lads. Able to think outside the box. Not confined within the boundary ropes. That's what's needed in the modern police service."

Once again, Patryk and Lukasz looked at each other. They would never understand this country. They're all completely mad. By now the carrier was approaching Dunston and an air of tense expectation filled the interior.

"Here we are," Patryk called out when he saw the England flag flapping wildly in the gale. It was a splash of white against the night sky. Sergeant Brent did a macho handbrake turn and the OSU carrier sprayed gravel in all directions as it raced up the drive until Brent stood on the brakes and the vehicle came to an abrupt halt directly outside Peachornby's bungalow.

The three cops had been driven by Sergeant Brent before and knew what to expect so they braced themselves. Patryk and Lukasz hadn't and were flung forwards ending up in a tangle of arms and legs on the floor. The enforcer toppled over and the three cops laughed.

"When you two have finished, pad up and let's start play," Donelan commented, folding up his *Telegraph*.

The cops leaped out of their carrier, two of them carrying the enforcer battering ram. Patryk and Lukasz followed more slowly, struggling into their spare Kevlar vests.

Peachornby's bungalow was in complete darkness and under the storm clouds it looked sinister and malevolent. As his eyes adjusted to the night, Lukasz noticed the black Rolls Royce Phantom parked under the car port. A spark of red glowed brighter in the darkness and then arched away, shedding little sparks as it did so. He smelled tobacco.

"You won't need that, I've got a key," a harsh voice said. "Anyway, the retard's not in."

The cops pulled up and the two holding the enforcer looked disappointed that they wouldn't get the chance to smash down the front door and rush inside shouting, "Police! Police!" at the top of their lungs.

Stanley Peachornby flipped open a packet of cigarettes, pinched off the filter, stuck the cancer-stick in his mouth and struck a match. The flickering flame made his hollow, underlit face look demonic, as if Stanley had risen straight from Hell itself.

"Whereabouts on the field of play is he, then?" Donelan asked.

In response, Peachornby jerked his thumb over his shoulder, past the Rolls Royce Phantom towards the back garden. "In his shed. I'll take you."

The party trooped past the Phantom and then down a path running between a neatly clipped lawn and flowerbeds towards a large concrete outhouse.

"The sheriff's come for yo'," Stanley called, putting on a dodgy Deep South accent. "They're gonna throw yo' ass in the slammer, boy. Yo' gonna ride the lightnin' fo' sure."

"That's enough, Mr. Peachornby," said Donelan.

Stanley Peachornby stepped to one side, onto the lawn, to let the police up to the shed. Lukasz noticed an evil grin on the old man's face as he smoked. It looked as if he was having the time of his life.

A line of light shone around the shed's metal door.

"The retard calls that his bunker," the old man said. "He keeps most of his Nazi stuff in there. Weapons too, he says."

Donelan looked at the man. Just then Peachornby's voice boomed out of the shed before ending on a quaver. "I'm armed. I want a helicopter, ten million quid and a flight to... where don't they have extradition again?"

"North Cyprus," his father shouted back. "That's where you said you wanted to go." Under his breath, he muttered, "retard".

Superintendent Donelan waved his men and Stanley Peachornby back. Reluctantly, they obeyed. Sergeant Brent looked as if he'd rather order them to smash their way in and drag Peachornby out by the scruff of his neck.

"Have you any hostages, Kenneth? I may call you 'Kenneth'?"

There was a silence from inside the shed.

"No, he hasn't," Stanley said, drawing deep on his cig.

"Kenneth? Are you alright in there?"

"I'm thinking," Peachornby shouted.



"You'll be 'ere all night then," Stanley Peachornby commented.

"Sir, shall I set a perimeter barrier; call up a negotiator?" asked Sergeant Brent. With such a senior officer on site, he thought it best to play it by the book. "Do you want to request the firearms squad, sir?"

Superintendent Donelan looked at Stanley Peachornby. "Do you know what weapons he has in there, Mr. Peachornby?"

His father was saved from answering when the metal door screeched open. Revealed in the light stood the Mayor of Sleaford himself. As usual, he was dressed in his favourite colour. A holster was on his left hip and in his right hand he clutched a Luger pistol. He raised the pistol and held it to his head.

"GUN! GUN! GUN!" yelled Sergeant Brent as he had been trained.

"I'll do it. I'll shoot myself. Get me a chopper or I'll kill myself," Peachornby said.

Patryk opened his mouth. "I think it's only a replica."

As soon as Patryk said that, Donelan himself stepped forwards and plucked the weapon from Peachornby's sweaty, nerveless grasp. He pushed Peachornby forward towards Brent and his men. Immediately, Brent dropped Peachornby onto the lawn, face down, while one of the constables grabbed Peachornby's wrists, wrenched them behind his back and cuffed him. One of the others searched him finding an SS dagger tucked down his boot. As soon as he was secured, Sergeant Brent read him his rights.

Meanwhile, Donelan checked the Luger, making sure it was safe and then dropped it into an evidence bag supplied by a second constable. It was only a dummy, after all.

Through the open door of the concrete shed – the führerbunker, Lukasz reckoned it was called – they saw that it was filled with Nazi regalia, flags and posters. A big map on one long wall showed the Eastern Front at the greatest extent of Germany's conquest in 1942. In a corner stood a mannequin wearing a SS-  
Standartenführer's uniform. As well as that, there were blood red swastika flags and a bookcase filled with books glorifying the Third Reich. On top of the bookcase stood a model of a Tiger tank with its gun barrel aimed at the door.

Stanley Peachornby took one look. "You couldn't even manage to top yerself like yer hero, could you? You retard."

At a glance from Superintendent Donelan, Patryk and Lukasz led the old man away.

Now he was secured and no threat, Donelan helped Peachornby over to the carrier. Now that all his dreams had turned to ashes, his life as devastated as Berlin in 1945, Peachornby burst into tears.

However, Donelan looked happy at the quick, clean resolution that didn't bust the overtime budget. Trying to cheer the Mayor up, he said, "Look on the bright side, Kenneth. We've got New Zealand on the run. Last I heard, they're eighty-five for six. And Coney's out LBW. Only scored fourteen." That didn't seem to lighten Peachornby's mood. "You don't follow the game? I thought every true Englishman followed cricket."

As Peachornby was bundled into the back, Patryk looked at Lukasz and shook his head. "What a crazy, crazy country," he said in Polish. Lukasz nodded.

And that was that. Peachornby's Reich ended that night.



## CHAPTER 34. THE NUREMBERG TRIALS.

**Kenneth Peachornby** – The guilty verdict was a blow, even though his barrister had explained that with the overwhelming evidence against him, any other result would be a bloody miracle. The barrister, a youngish chap with a cut-glass accent and double-barrelled surname who harboured aspirations to become a Conservative MP in the near future, just like his papa and grand-papa, suggested a plea-bargain to the prosecution. In between his studies, he watched far too many American courtroom dramas. The Crown Prosecution Service laughed that notion out of court. They wanted blood and gallons of it.

At sentencing the judge was harsh. "People who fall short of the standards expected in public office must expect to be dealt with in an exemplary way."

Peachornby's face brightened. Exemplary – that sounded like excellent. Did this mean he was going to be let off? Maybe a fine or suspended sentence? After all, it wasn't like he'd killed anyone, was it? The judge frowned at Peachornby as he stood smirking in the dock and mentally tacked an extra couple of years onto the sentence.

However, the severity made the court gasp and once it had struck Peachornby's brain, he crumpled up and burst into tears. Even with parole, he would be knocking on old age's door by the time he breathed free air again. The court security guards gave Peachornby a moment to recover – and to allow the Old Bailey

time to enjoy the spectacle of the ex-führer's downfall – before they hauled him to his feet and took him down the steps.

Afterwards, in his oak-panelled robing room, the judge offered an expensive amontillado sherry to a plug-ugly copper. "Did that sentence satisfy you, Superintendent?"

"Perfectly, Godfrey, perfectly. Clean bowled. That's his innings over and out."

The judge draped his horsehair wig over its stand. "You'll be coming to Grand Lodge on the twenty-fifth? I'm getting promoted to Senior Grand Deacon?"

"Of course, Godfrey. Already cleared my diary. Wouldn't miss it for the world."

The two men exchanged a complex, knuckly handshake and then, making sure the corridor was empty, Superintendent Donelan left the Old Bailey by the back door. On his way out, he watched a white prison van drive away.

\*\*\*

Peachornby does not enjoy prison life. Especially when he was taken under the wing of a con called Warwick Marinville. In return for protection against the cannabis dealers who were looking for violent revenge after Peachornby's supply network was wound up, Peachornby became Warwick's 'special friend' inside, gaining the nickname of KRC which stood for Kenny Raw Chicken.

Warwick was six foot four of pure muscle and testosterone. He had been the golden hope of Birmingham's boxing scene, known as the 'Haitian Hitter', even

though he'd never been to Haiti in his life. One August evening, when the heat was too much to bear, his temper got the better of him in a bar-room fight over some lubricious ho and her sister and he smashed his right fist into a concrete wall. A split second earlier his homie's head had been right in front of that wall but the man, another boxer, had faster reactions than Warwick.

After that, Warwick's right was never the same again and rather than merely working part time for the local gangstas as before, he had ended up overseeing their cocaine imports from the Caribbean. Which was a good life bringing everything a man like Warwick could desire until he had been ratted out by a rival hoping to get his own sentence slashed.

When the armed cops burst into his expensive Gas Street Basin apartment overlooking the Birmingham Canal at six in the morning they found him sleeping like a baby. The cops knew full well that Warwick never got up much before eleven so it was an easy take down. Looking under the bed for his toys, the cops found half a K of pure china white, a thousand tabs of E and an Ingram Mac-10. The perp had become too overconfident and forgotten the first rule of crime – make sure you are never in the same room as the product.

So Warwick drew a long stretch and he gets lonely inside. Peachornby hates keeping his cell-mate company. Especially after lights out and he and Warwick are banged up together. Every month, Peachornby puts in a transfer request and every month it is refused.

**Mason** – Mason also got sent down but nowhere near as long as his boss. While adjusting to life inside, he was befriended by members of Al-Muhajiroun and

converted to Islam a few months later. A Turkish inmate recommended he change his name to Salak Ingiliz. They said it meant 'Strong Englishman' but he wonders why some people snigger when he tells them his new name. Nobody has yet told him it really means 'Stupid Englishman'.

Now he's grown out his beard, wears eastern robes and only chooses food from the Muslim menu. Sometimes he wishes he could eat a bacon sarnie or pork pie again but he squashes those impious thoughts when they come to him.

In his long, rambling, badly spelled letters home, Mason, sorry, Salak Ingiliz denounces the ways of the 'coruppt and infiddle west'. He tells his family that they will 'burn in a see of mollten bras' unless they convert. Of course, his letters are censored, but he is of concern to MI5 and Special Branch. Mason is high on their top ten list of converts to Islam who need watching.

They are fully aware that extremist organisations target vulnerable young white men of low intelligence with the aim of turning them into Martyrs. Suicide bombers in other words. With his background in the BNP Mason would make the ideal candidate to attend a crowded EDL rally or a soccer match with a couple of kilos of Semtex strapped to his waist next to a few more kilos of nails from any B&Q hardware store and then... Kaboom!

However, Special Branch and MI5 have a difference of opinion as to whether or not to simply de-program Mason once he is released or – and this is more MI5's view – then reprogram him and use him as a double agent against the sinister figures running Al-Muhajiroun.



Salak Ingiliz himself wants only to get out of prison and then attend the Hajj in Mecca itself.

**The Sleaford Smashers** – Unsurprisingly, the organisation was closed down the day after an administrative team from Lincolnshire County Council was seconded to Sleaford Urban Council to run the place until fresh elections could be organised. The ex-Smashers can now mostly be found signing on at various Job Centres around the East Midlands. As soon as they've cashed their giros then it's down the boozers and the bookies. When their dole money runs out, then it's back to dossing with whichever skanky ho they're with this week. Or mum's. Back to normal in other words.

**Patryk and Kassia** – After what happened, Patryk didn't see much point in staying on in Sleaford. Although he hadn't made as much as he would have liked out of Naismith's schemes, Patryk knew the gravy train had pulled away from the platform, was gathering speed and wouldn't return for the likes of him. Two days later he took the Wizzair flight to Warsaw.

Despite their recent quarrels, Kassia welcomed him with open arms, and not solely because she saw what he had salted away. She still loved her man and realised she'd missed him. Although they didn't have quite enough cash, they still bought their little farm near Siedice. The seller was getting old, and desperate, and in this recession there wasn't a queue of buyers so they were able to knock the price right down.

In her spare time Kassia enjoys modernising the old farmhouse and bringing it into the twenty-first century but mostly they raise pigs for pork... and children. Patryk cannot believe how much money they are picking up in E.U. subsidies – like pigs with their snouts in the trough, he says – while Kassia can't believe how much more

difficult her own children are to manage than those at the kindergarten. She loves them far more though.

One night, Patryk came home from a meeting in Siedice town and said he fancied running for the town council. He knows he could run Siedice better and more profitably than the bunch of corrupt old men currently in charge. Admittedly, he had stopped off for a few *Tyskies* on the way back. They argued long into the night and Patryk put that idea to bed for a while. Unlike himself as he slept on the couch that night. Sometimes they still quarrel about it – and Patryk knows Kassia will hit the roof when she finds out that he has thrown his hat in the ring.

**Lukasz** – Not long after Patryk went home; Sienna, the manager's brother's wife's cousin's daughter or something like that spotted the tall, thin handsome Pole bent over a machine clearing envelopes from its paper feed and liked what she saw. She slapped his rear and dragged him into the first aid room. By the time they'd finished, Lukasz reckoned he'd need a splint on it. So he decided to stay on in Sleaford and is now a senior production technician at the printers. He reckons if he plays his cards – and other things – right, he might be in with a chance of promotion to shift supervisor any time now.

The only problem is, Lukasz wonders, will he last out long enough to see that day?

**James Naismith** – When Sleaford Urban Council's insurers saw the size of the compensation demanded by Naismith's solicitors, they almost passed out. It didn't get better on the second or third reading. The fourth made them wince as well. However, the insurers knew they hadn't got a leg to stand on. Naismith had been on

the premises for legitimate reasons – with a reputation to protect, young Donna claimed they actually had been working late photocopying – and what with the fire alarms being disabled things were looking bad for them. So the insurers settled out of court and were glad of it. They could always ramp up their premiums next year.

While he was recuperating from his injuries, Naismith made contact over the internet with a lady called Heather from St Louis, Missouri. They got chatting and feelings developed between them, helped by Naismith telling her that his burns came from a special forces operation in Helmand province, Afghanistan. "Not SAS. No, not them," Naismith said, hinting at membership of a secret unit even more elite than the SAS. "No, we never get medals or appear in the papers. There are things no government cares to admit to..."

Previously, he spent some time researching military operations in Afghanistan so he could impress Heather and then as soon as he was well enough, Naismith flew out and within a few weeks he married Heather. Soon after, he got his Green Card and now works as a very successful realtor in St Louis specialising in high end properties.

**Superintendent Donelan** – another one who came out ahead was Donelan himself. Using his contacts, he wangled himself a position as head of security at Nottinghamshire Cricket Club's Trent Bridge ground. It's only part time but for now he spends his summer watching county cricket from the pavilion.

**Willard** – After that debacle, Willard got his leave. One night in a top hotel overlooking Yarra Park and Melbourne Cricket Club's ground was one too many so he changed his plans and went backpacking through the Outback and Northern Territories for a couple of months staying in flea-pit hotels and student hostels.

Despite Donelan's recommendation, he didn't bother seeing any of England's Ashes tour of Australia. Instead, he went well off the beaten path, grew out his hair and beard and recharged his batteries while soaking up the scorching sun and seeing the wildlife. No Taffs and no skinheads. Perfect.

Now he's back with a new name and identity. He could be anywhere. He could be standing next to you.

**Nesim Ciawar** – Another man who vanished under the radar was Nesim. After Peachornby's downfall and Malkie's arrest, it was obvious that Nesim had nothing to do with the Town Hall fire. So he was released from remand and told that his asylum application would be processed as soon as possible. However, Nesim had developed a morbid fear of the authorities and, using contacts he'd made inside, disappeared deep into the Kurdish community in Birmingham. Eventually Behram also made it over. The brothers are now working as dishwashers in a Turkish restaurant but Nesim's heart jumps into his mouth whenever there is a knock on the door.

**Stanley Peachornby** – In the end, the Crown Prosecution Service decided it wouldn't be in the public interest to try a man at the end of his life. It doesn't play well in the media. Also, Superintendent Donelan had a word with CPS lawyers and suggested it made an easier case to blame Kenneth for everything.

So Stanley put on his suit and appeared for the prosecution and, in a weak and quavering voice unlike his usual rasp, played the part of a confused and doddering old man who trusted young Kenny with everything. One of the lady jurors was seen dabbing her eyes as Stanley spoke about how his son terrorised and bullied him. After

the verdict, Stanley went back to his hotel and ordered up a call-girl and a magnum of champagne celebrating the last time he'd ever see the retard in this life. From time to time he sends Kenneth a postcard – just to remind his son that Dad is still alive and kicking and breathing free air.

Stanley continues to defy the quack's prognosis. Those who work at his garden centre say Stanley's only alive because God won't have him and the Devil doesn't want the competition.

**The Bass Maltings** – are still standing on the outskirts of Sleaford, empty and abandoned, home to pigeons and rats, and awaiting redevelopment. A new consortium from Eslaforde Lodge are considering drawing up fresh plans.

In the end, the more things change; the more they stay the same...

**THE END.**



## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Freedom fighter, jungle explorer, international mercenary, Riviera jewel thief, jet pilot and gigolo. I've done them all. In my dreams.

You can contact the author, Morris Kenyon, on my email address:

[morris.kenyon@ymail.com](mailto:morris.kenyon@ymail.com) and I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you.

## **OTHER BOOKS BY MORRIS KENYON:**

Morris Kenyon is rapidly establishing himself as an acclaimed writer of fast paced, exciting thrillers. However, he likes to challenge himself and write in other genres as well.

### **\* *SLEAFORD NOIR 1:***

McTeague's once trusted friend and associate, Wheelan, has broken off part of the older mobster's crime empire around the east Midlands. Far worse, Wheelan has also taken McTeague's much younger second wife, Claire, away with him.

Knowing the rest of his empire will fall away or defect to Wheelan if he fails to act, McTeague sends his trusted and lethal enforcer, Hennessy, to Sleaford to show

Wheelan who is chief and to take Claire back home. So Hennessy starts a campaign of violence until Wheelan has no choice but to return Claire. But that is only the start of both gang boss's problems...

**\* *SLEAFORD NOIR 2:***

One sleepy Fenland town. Two Polish chancers eager to make a fast buck with no questions asked. A group of businessmen with funny handshakes wanting to rake off big money from town planning contracts. A neo-Nazi bigot who'll jump at the chance of becoming Mayor as his first stepping stone to total power. His bunch of thuggish skinhead hangers-on. Add a huge, abandoned industrial complex on the edge of town ripe for redevelopment. Put them all together and what could possibly go wrong? Except that matters soon escalate way beyond anything any of these groups expected.

Welcome to Sleazeford...

**\* *BULLETS DON'T LIVE FOR EVER***

**A ROUNDUP OF SHORTER STORIES, INCLUDING WAVERTREE  
CHRISTMAS:**

Christmas 1855 promises no cheer for Walsh and Finnan. Living by their wits has left them hungry, cold, penniless and living in a freezing attic. With no prospects they are not enjoying any of the festive season. However, Walsh has come up with a



cunning idea that may solve all their problems. The only trouble is that his plan involves a long walk in the snow and then helping themselves to someone else's Christmas. Will they carry out Walsh's plan or learn the true meaning of Christmas?

## ***HORROR SERIES***

### ***\* THE HORROR FROM THE BLIZZARD.***

Any scientific expedition to the Arctic expects plenty of risk. However, Dr. Welham of Miskatonic University's survey uncovers far more than the usual geologic and ethnographic samples. In the severe blizzards of the far north, the team comes across a hideous object from an elder age. A relic that brings earth shattering terror in its wake...

This story is loosely inspired by H. P. Lovecraft's short story from 1918, *Polaris*.

### ***\* DINING AT LENG***

To celebrate their first anniversary, Abe Roseman decides to treat Julia to a special meal in Leng's – the new restaurant that's opened in town to rave reviews. Perfect. But Leng's is not all it seems on the surface and hides dark secrets inside. Unwittingly, the young couple stumble into a vast realm of horror unlike anything they have experienced before where their only hope of salvation rests on the unexpected...

### ***\*KRILLAZ***

You'd need a good reason to visit Hancox 1 – a tide-locked world infested by biological terror weapons – Krillaz – a nightmare genetically modified cross between rats and hi-mans. Even hunters avoid the place. However, interplanetary recovery agent Vic Vargo has one million reasons to go. In line to collect a million Hydrans if he rescues a playboy from the talons of the Krillaz, he teams up with a group of executives on a management bonding exercise and heads out to an abandoned city.

There, Vargo realises they have all bitten off far more than they can chew. Unlike the Krillaz...

Also, includes the bonus short story: 'Sideways Through Time'.

***THE NICU CARAMARIN SERIES FOLLOWING THE  
ADVENTURES OF A ROMANIAN GANGSTER AND HARD  
MAN:***

\* **WARNING:** These books contain scenes of a sexual nature, graphic violence, strong language and drug abuse. They are not intended for those easily offended or persons under eighteen years. You have been warned, so if you read them, don't blame me.

\* **200 STEPS DOWN:**

When his crime boss in Odessa, Ukraine, decides to up his game by getting involved in people trafficking, Nicolae Caramarin must make a choice. Should he turn a blind eye to the horrors he witnesses and carry on being a good soldier for the gang; or take his stand and bring them all down in the only way he knows how?

### **\* *LOOKIN' FOR TROUBLE:***

With little choice but to flee his home city of Odessa, Nicolae Caramarin must recover a gang boss's missing valuable painting if he ever hopes to return. He follows the trail to the windy and rainy city of Manchester. There, he soon falls into his bad old ways with the local underworld. But things soon escalate out of control. Who can he turn to for help? Who can he trust? Soon Caramarin finds himself relying on his strength and wits in a battle for survival where just staying free is a bonus.

He follows his misadventures in Britain in the next story in the series:

### **\* *TWO WAYS OUT:***

Having fallen on tough times, hard-bitten ex-con Nicolae Caramarin is lying low. However, he's thinking of going back to the only life he knows – crime. Yet when an old friend asks him for a simple favour, he has no idea of the trouble he'll soon be in. Hours later he's standing in front of a murdered Prosecutor's body – and dead centre in the sights of a group of corrupt cops from Romania's Black Sea port of Constanta.

Only question is how will Nicu Caramarin get out from under and clear his name?

**\* *SNOWBIRD*:**

The fourth in the series. To be written...