

Suzy

by

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Chapter One

Opening the hot oven door Suzy puts her gloves on and takes out the cooking joint of beef. Putting the hot tray onto the top of the oven Suzy turns the meat over and adds potatoes and parsnips to the tray.

Putting the tray back into the oven she frowns as she stands up and thinks if all this effort is worth it; Doug, her partner had been very moody lately. Sometimes he came home with a smile, but that was rare these days.

Doug's behaviour towards her recently had become nasty, aggressive and he was constantly accusing her of being unfaithful and calling her a liar.

Suzy had not done anything wrong and could not understand why he had changed so much recently. Hoping that cooking his favourite roast dinner would make the evening a pleasant one Suzy lights the gas under the vegetables as she hears Doug's car pull up out front.

Checking herself in the mirror Suzy shouts a cheery welcome as Doug opens the front door. Hearing no reply the frown returns to her forehead as she busies herself with getting two plates out of the cupboard. Doug slams the front door and stomps down the hall into the lounge as Suzy's stomach tightens in anxiety. Too frightened to go and talk to him she puts a knife and fork onto a tray and sits at the table and reads her book whilst the dinner cooks.

"Here you are," says Suzy as she walks into the lounge carrying Doug's dinner; "looks like you have had a hard day." she says as she sees the frown on Doug's face.

"Hard day? You don't know the half of it." he snaps as he stares into her eyes not attempting to take the tray from her

hands.

“We are not going to argue are we? Come on, I have cooked your favourite roast dinner.” Suzy replies holding the tray out towards him.

Doug stands up and knocks the tray out of Suzy's hands slapping her on the face before the tray hits the floor; “What are you after?” he demands in a cruel voice.

“I want a quiet evening for a change.” she screams back.

Doug punches her hard on the shoulder as she turns away and only succeeds getting as far as the fireplace; when he grabs her hair, twisting it viciously. Trying to grab hold of the mantel piece her fingers touch the long silver letter opener and Suzy's hand curls around it instinctively.

As Doug pulls her towards him she lashes out with the opener stabbing it into his throat below the right jaw, she hadn't meant to stab him, and she just wanted to hurt him back.

Pulling the silver letter opener out of Doug's throat as the blood pours out over her hand Doug slumps to the floor. She must have stabbed him in the main artery, the blade penetrating into his windpipe as he makes no sound. Suzy looks down at his dead body as tears fill her eyes; now she is in big trouble.

With tears coursing down her cheeks she goes into the kitchen and washes the letter opener and her hands under the hot tap. Evening is approaching and she draws the curtains and turns on the light. Washing her face under the cold running tap she dries it using the kitchen towel and thinks as to what to do next.

Get rid of Doug's body is the dominant thought and her mind races as to where she is going to dump him.

Regaining her composure Suzy walks back into the lounge and looks down at Doug's still form lying on the floor. Blood has flowed out of his neck and soaked into the carpet; she had never liked that carpet anyway and her now ex-husband has ruined it.

A cold smile forms on her red lips as she sees her life

improving without Mr Jealous keeping her prisoner in her own home. It feels as if a great weight has been taken off her shoulders as she looks down at him as she starts to appreciate her freedom.

Walking back into the bathroom she looks at herself in the mirror; Suzy is an attractive middle aged lady aged in her late thirties and has always prided herself on her appearance. Since she had been young the boys had flocked around as she has always been attractive to look at. Tidying her hair gently, as her scalp is still tender from where Doug had pulled her hair; she applies make-up to her face and puts fresh lipstick on. Satisfied with her appearance she smiles at herself in the mirror and walks into the kitchen to make a hot drink.

Suzy lives in a small bungalow on the edge of town and has no worries about unexpected visitors. Doug's grip on her life had been strong and dominating and she had lost most of her friends years ago. Making a sweet milky coffee Suzy sits down at the kitchen table and wonders what she is going to do. To drag out the body, dig a big hole and bury him at the bottom of the garden is a good idea. His heavy weight would be too much for her to drag and she wonders if she has the stomach to cut him into pieces. The idea of cutting him up into pieces appeals to her sense of revenge, her dislike for her domineering partner had grown over the years; and with each beating the dislike *had* turned into hate.

Smiling, Suzy sips at her coffee imagining herself cutting Doug's arms and legs off. Putting her cup onto the table Suzy stands and walks across to the rack of carving knives. Picking up the biggest knife she checks the sharpness with the edge of her thumb. The knife slices into a couple of layers of skin and Suzy pulls her thumb away with a laugh. Putting the knife down onto the worktop Suzy picks up the chopper and lays it beside the knife; she knows the chopper is sharp as she had to sharpen it to prepare Sunday's dinner. Searching under the sink Suzy finds her rubber gloves and puts them on and taking a final sip of her coffee, picks up the knife and chopper and

walks into the lounge.

Doug looks very pale due to the loss of blood as he lies motionless on the floor. Putting the knife and chopper onto the coffee table Suzy starts to remove Doug's clothes. He is heavy and she struggles with the weight of him and after ten minutes of hard effort she finally manages to remove it all.

Exhausted she sits back and catches her breath. Doug, in his nakedness looks peaceful lying on the floor and she looks at his still form remembering the happy days; as tears flow down her cheeks. Standing up quickly she goes back into the kitchen and sits at the table, removing her rubber gloves she drinks the last of the now cold coffee. Silently she sits and tries to remember the horrible way he has been to her and how her life has been so unhappy with him. This thinking helps and with a determined look on her face she puts the gloves back on and goes back into the lounge.

Picking up the chopper she walks over to Doug's body and kneels beside him. Raising the chopper above her head she swings down as hard as she can, aiming for the upper arm. The chopper chops through the flesh and into the bone; making a strange animal noise in her throat Suzy chops away at the arm until it falls away and continues with the other arm. The bone is hard and takes several swipes before she is able to cut them off. Looking at the legs she chops into the knee joint which cuts through after two firm hits. She follows this using the knife, cutting the leg muscles at the top of the thighs and then chopping into them.

Looking down at Doug's peaceful face she is unable to cut his head off and goes back into the kitchen to get some black dustbin sacks. Finding the sacks in the cupboard under the sink she goes back into the lounge and puts Doug's arms and legs into separate sacks. Doug's body is still heavy and she struggles as she puts a sack over his head and slides the sack down over his shoulders. Using another sack she puts the lower half of his body into this and does her best to completely cover the dismembered body. Wearily she sits down on the

floor and leans her back against the wall.

It will look too suspicious if she was to dig the garden in the dark so she decides to put Doug in the shed. Carrying out the arms and legs in their plastic sacks is easy and she puts them in the corner of the shed. Picking up Doug's torso and head is difficult as it is heavy and the two bags that she used immediately start to separate. Pulling off the bottom bag she clasps the body in her arms and struggles out to the shed; dropping it down onto the floor she slams the door shut and bolts and locks it firmly.

Now totally exhausted Suzy goes back into the lounge and covers the blood soaked carpet with old newspapers. Going into the bathroom she runs the water for a bath. Stripping off her clothes she walks to the kitchen and puts them in the washing machine. Putting it on a very hot wash she turns it on and goes back into the bathroom for her bath.

The morning light wakes her, as does the noisy dog three doors away. Frowning in annoyance Suzy buries herself in the bed covers and sleeps for another half hour before the postman, pushing letters through the door wakes her. Throwing back the covers Suzy stares up at the ceiling; Doug's face had kept appearing in her dreams in the night giving her a restless sleep.

Getting out of bed Suzy puts on her gardening clothes and goes into the kitchen for strong coffee. She feels far too upset to eat and sits at the table drinking her coffee; remembering the sound of the letter box she stands and goes to the front door. The gas and electric bills are not what she needs.

Walking back into the kitchen Suzy throws the letters down not having opened them and ignoring her coffee picks up the key to the shed and goes outside.

The morning is a little damp and chilly and Suzy looks up to see a blue sky forming. The lawn is covered in early morning dew and a Robin sings from the top of the flowering cherry tree at the bottom of her garden. It looks like it is going to be a wonderful day, after she has done some work!

Unlocking the shed door she opens it wide and props it open with the old yard broom, looking inside Suzy sees that some of the plastic bag that she used to cover Doug's torso has been ripped and torn.

Rats! It has to be. Leaning in Suzy picks up the spade and fork that are just inside the door and walks round to the side of the shed. Sadly it will mean digging up her Daffodil patch; but will make a good place to grow runner beans.

Looking around for nosey neighbours Suzy sees that all is quiet and wasting no time starts to dig.

One and a half hours later a tired, but happy Suzy, locks the shed door and walks slowly back to her bungalow. Turning at the back door she views her handiwork and cannot help a smile as it looks so neat and tidy. The bean poles are tied into five wigwam shapes and are ready for the beans.

Going inside Suzy kicks off her muddy trainers and puts on clean ones; walking into the lounge she wastes no time in moving the furniture. Using her sharp carving knife she cuts away the blood soaked carpet and underlay. Dragging the carpet outside she tucks it behind the shed deciding to burn it tonight, along with the blood soaked plastic sacks; and the clothes she is wearing!

Stripping her clothes off in the kitchen down to her underwear Suzy goes into the bathroom and turns the hot water on for a bath. Walking into her bedroom Suzy opens her old fashioned walnut veneered wardrobe and thinks what she is going to wear. Picking a bright pink sweatshirt and faded blue jeans she throws them on the bed and goes back into the bathroom to enjoy her bath.

Suzy slams the front door and strides quickly along the path, unlocking Doug's car, which is now hers; she jumps in and starts the engine. This is the first time that she has been out since Doug's death four days ago now and she needs vital shopping. Coffee and sugar and milk mainly as her appetite has been poor. Suzy had been busy cleaning the lounge and trying to scrub the floorboards that were soaked in blood.

The blood remained impregnated into the floorboards as a black stain and Suzy realised that a new carpet is needed. Suzy had measured the room but could not risk carpet fitters coming into her bungalow. She had scrubbed and scrubbed but the blood had soaked in, staining the timber and she decides to leave it for a few more days.

Pulling up outside the corner shop Suzy is pleased to see it empty of customers inside and gets out the car quickly; locking it she enters the shop and makes her way to the coffee and sugar. The supermarket seems too much for her at the moment and Suzy picks up a large jar of coffee and two bags of sugar. Taking them to the till she puts them on the counter and walks over to the fridge picking up two large bottles of full fat milk and returns to the counter as the lad who is serving, totals them up on the till. Paying her money Suzy says a polite 'Thank you' and arms loaded with her shopping walks out to the car.

Putting the milk down onto the pavement Suzy unlocks the car and puts the coffee and sugar onto the back seat. As she picks up the milk a Volkswagen Polo pulls up close to her car and parks. Suzy looks up in irritation as the driver, parking so close has made it difficult for her to drive away as a car is also parked in front of her.

"Hello Suzy." says the driver as he opens his door and gets out; it is her university friend Lewis.

"Hello Lewis, long time no see." she smiles.

"Yes been a while, how are you?" he answers with genuine pleasure at their meeting. Lewis still had long hair as she remembered and had gathered a few grey hairs and wrinkles as he has aged. But Suzy remembers him as if it was yesterday; not the fifteen years it has been.

"Fine thank you; and you?"

"All the better for seeing you, where's Doug?"

"We split up about a week ago."

"Oh, sorry to hear that, but a week is not very long you will get back together again."

“No, not this time he has moved out, gone to live with his fancy woman.” Suzy lies.

“So you are on your own now, no boyfriend?” asks Lewis hopefully, as he had always fancied Suzy.

“Yes all alone now, going to leave it a while before I get involved with someone again.”

“You sound positive about that, all right if I visit you?”

Suzy looks at Lewis, she had always liked him and could do with some company; “Yes that would be nice.” she says her smile broadening.

“What you up to now? I got the day off today if now is not too soon?”

“Be good to see you; as long as you move your car back.” answers Suzy with a big smile as she opens her car door and gets in and puts the bottles of milk on to the passenger’s seat.

Lewis holds her door open until she is settled and shuts it firmly; “See you in about five minutes, I gotta get some baccy.”

“Ok see you in five.” smiles Suzy as Lewis walks back to his car and gets in behind the wheel. Starting the engine with the car door open he reverses the car about two metres and watches Suzy as she reverses and pulls out into the road.

Giving her a wave Lewis drives his car forward and turns the engine off. Smiling broadly and thanking his god for starting the day off well he optimistically goes into the shop.

Chapter Two

Suzy hears Lewis pull up in his car, coming out of the kitchen she opens the front door to a smiling Lewis who is walking along the path towards her.

“Hi Suzy, gotta admit it is good to see you.”

“And to see you, come in I'm making coffee in the kitchen.”

Lewis follows Suzy along the hall and enters her large brightly coloured kitchen of yellow painted walls and darker yellow kitchen units topped with a pink granite worktop; “Sit down I'll pour your coffee.”

Lewis sits down at the table in a hardback chair; “So what you been doing since you became a free woman?”

“Nothing really, just enjoying myself having the place to myself.” smiles Suzy as she puts a mug of coffee in front of Lewis.

“Nice one thanks, yes, living on your own has a lot going for it and I have been doing it for quite a while.”

“What no girlfriend?”

“No not since Holly, she will take more than a few years to get over.”

“You were with her a long time and I know you loved her deeply, but I always knew it would not last.” answers Suzy as she sits down at the table opposite Lewis, aware of the age gap that had been between them; Holly was twenty two years of age and Lewis forty four when they got together.

“I was always of the thought that it should never have happened in the first place, but love does strange things to you.” says Lewis with a sad expression on his face.

“What was that I heard about you throwing her out of the car in Wales?” asks Suzy with a stern face.

“Yes I lost a lot of friends over that, bit unfair really as no one would listen to my side at the time.”

“I am listening now.” Suzy says firmly.

Lewis looks at Suzy sharply, he knew she and Holly had been the best of friends and she would only have heard Holly's

side of the story. Suzy had been one of the people upon hearing Holly's tale had either totally ignored him or made rude comments at the time. As the years passed Lewis knew that Suzy and Holly had fallen out and not been friends for years.

"Does it matter now?" asks Lewis despondently.

"It does to me; I have always wondered what really happened between you two."

Lewis takes a sip of his coffee and puts the mug down onto the table, not looking at Suzy he starts to talk;

"As you know it took us a couple of months to split up, we had applied for these jobs in Wales at a research facility about six months before we started to disagree about things. I wanted to work in the laboratory and as luck would have it the company needed a translator and Holly could speak five languages including Chinese."

"At the time we saw it as almost magical that we would be working together in the future and in the wilds of Wales; it would have been a dream come true. The interviews were even on the same day and even though we were not getting on very well at the time I drove us there."

"All that way, who paid for that?" demands Suzy.

"I paid most, I even paid for the bed and breakfast; in separate rooms so that cost a bit more. My interview went well and within five minutes I knew I had got the job, I spent the next half hour talking about the birdlife that is in Wales. My interviewer, a Mister Jones was a birding enthusiast and we became instant friends."

Lewis pauses for breath and takes a sip of his coffee before continuing; "Holly's interview did not go as well as she was interviewed by six different people all at once. Her two weak points they told her was speaking properly in front of a group, meaning themselves; and her Chinese. It seems there are thousands of dialects in China and Holly had learnt the wrong ones."

"She took the interview very badly and was convinced she had failed; which was my entire fault of course. She started having a right go at me for suggesting the job, for taking her

there and making her endure such a bad interview.”

“Do you want more coffee?” asks Suzy.

“No I am fine thanks, anyway, the drive back from the research headquarters was through the mountains. This place was well hidden away, even with the map we drove right past it three times before we found it. The mountain roads were really narrow and wound up and down the valleys and I really had to concentrate on my driving. But from the moment we drove away Holly started moaning and having a go at me for making her suffer such humiliation at the hands of those six awful people.”

“For over an hour she moaned and cried and I could see the hatred she now felt towards me growing and growing. She became particularly abusive and I nearly smashed the car, I saw a sign pointing the way to some waterfalls and thought it would be a good idea to stop and rest for a few minutes.”

“We had only walked along this path for about a hundred metres with Holly crying and moaning all the way when she decided she wanted to pee. The path we were on was quite open and there were no real trees or bushes about.

The place was deserted when we got there so Holly made me walk back to the car while she pee'd on the path. No sooner had she started when this man and woman came walking along the path. Pulling her knickers up quickly she wet herself and when we got back to the car all hell broke loose.”

“You sure you do not want more coffee?” persists Suzy.

“I have nearly finished, that is unless I am boring you?”

“Far from it and I can tell you are not lying to Me.” assures Suzy.

Lewis gives Suzy an odd look as he continues; “Oh yes,” he says as he remembers where he had stopped talking; “When we got in the car Holly went totally mad, screaming at me that it was my fault she had got wet knickers and what an awful place to bring her! I could take no more so started the car and drove as fast as was safely possible to get her home; and away from me!

Trouble was she did not shut up, when she started having a go at me for upsetting my Mum when I became a motorcycle hooligan at the age of sixteen I started to retaliate a bit. Shouting at her to shut up just made her worse and she turned really nasty. I needed petrol so pulled into this garage. Holly had made no contribution towards the petrol costs but had agreed to help pay before we had left home the day before.

When I asked her for petrol money she went berserk as if I was demanding money with menaces, a tenner would have made me happy. No way was she going to give me any money so I pushed her out. She demanded her clothes, which I threw out the window and drove off. It took me over an hour to calm down and by then I was on the motorway and couldn't remember where I had left her so I went home."

"That was not the way that I heard it." says Suzy staring Lewis in the eyes. Lewis stares back and Suzy can see he has told her the truth, as he sees it.

"Sorry to have to ask and really it is none of my business, but if I am going to have you coming around and we go out somewhere; I would hate it if you dumped me in the middle of nowhere." smiles Suzy.

"Holly had a horrible way with words; it used to really annoy me when she would have a go at me for something I had done wrong years before I met her. Yes that was me then, not me now; and she wouldn't accept that I could learn and change. Well not when she was in one of her hateful moods."

"I hear she upset your sister?" asks Suzy innocently.

"You must have heard that from Holly," replies Lewis angrily; "Yes, I heard that to, about six weeks after it happened Holly decided to tell me. She did not tell me too much, but by what I understand she had a right go at my sister; as if I had said the words. I did not think too much about it at first as I didn't think my sister would have believed her. But believe her lies she did; and I have not spoken to her since."

"How long ago was that?"

"Ten years, maybe more." answers Lewis the sadness in his voice very obvious.

At the time I was so filled with grief for my Mum, who you know died of Alzheimer's disease? And what a horrible way to go that is."

"Yes I know, I remember you visiting her at the home."
answers Suzy

"But Holly used to get on well with your Mum?"

"Yes she did and they used to sit for hours and talk, Mum being Mum would tell her all the family secrets about me. I was a bit of a ruffian when I was growing up, had a motorbike and dirty Levis, until my Mum would sneak in my room when I was at work and wash them!" smiles Lewis; "a dirty greaser with newly washed cut-down and creases in his Levis did not fit the image. Holly tried to make me feel guilty for that; the amount of stress I caused my Mum."

"You probably did, I would not want my son to be a dirty biker." agrees Suzy.

"I was a punk kid who was not aware of such thoughts, how was I to know?" asks Lewis defensively.

"Well I expect your Mum and Dad told you." states Suzy in a deadpan voice.

"They probably did, but I never heard them and I thought my sister knew me better than that." shrugs Lewis with a sad smile.

"It is better to have loved and lost than never have loved at all." quotes Suzy hoping to lighten the mood.

"Yes, and it was because I loved her that we had to split up." smiles Lewis.

"That makes a lot of sense Lewis."

"It does when you think to another ten or twenty years ahead, even to now. As our physical differences would be enormous and as you've noticed I go a lot slower now."

"I hadn't noticed." lies Suzy; "I always wondered if that was the reason, as you were devoted to each other."

"Yes it would have been most unfair to her; she would have ended up being the carer to an old man husband."

Suzy regrets bringing up sad memories and quickly changes the subject; "You still living in that little flat by the old

gas works?" she asks.

"Yes still there, it's a bit noisy at times but I can shut the door and lock the world out and I usually find something to do; either watching telly or playing about on the computer."

"You still write those books, how many have you done now?"
"Only five but I have got a couple of others on the go which helps stop the madness, or is maybe the cause of it, good way to try and stop smoking." laughs Lewis.

Suzy is glad to hear him laugh and see his smiling face and is glad of his company. They talk for an hour or more until Lewis needs to answer the call of nature. As he stands up from the table and starts to walk out of the kitchen Suzy realises that she has not removed Doug's toiletries.

Anxiously she stands and walks over to the kitchen window and looks out at her back garden. The new runner bean patch looks neat and tidy as does the rest of the garden and she returns to the table and sits down.

Lewis comes back into the kitchen a few minutes later and as he sits down he looks Suzy in the eyes; "Doug left in a bit of a hurry; what happened you have a fight?"

Suzy stares back into Lewis's eyes her mind racing as to what to say as she realises *all* of Doug's possessions are still here, but is saved from answering as Lewis's face colours slightly; "Sorry Suzy that is none of my business, please ignore the question and I will ask you another." he smiles reassuringly.

"What is that?" asks a nervous Suzy.

"When you have drunk your coffee would you like to get out of here and come for a drive down to the beach?"

Suzy smiles in relief; "Yes thank you, I would like that it's a nice sunny day." she answers as she looks out of the window at the blue sky above.

Lewis pulls into the deserted car park and switches the engine off; "Looks like we got the place to ourselves, let's hope it is the same when we get down onto the beach.

Suzy nods in agreement appearing lost in her thoughts as

she opens the car door and gets out, shutting it firmly she walks towards the sea and looks along the seafront. A lonely dog walker maybe a kilometre away is the only sign of human life and she looks out to sea. The tide is out showing the vast mudflats and may explain why the beach is empty of people. Lewis walks up to Suzy and stands beside her saying nothing as he takes in the awesome view.

Far out on the tide line he can see a line of white gulls paddling in the water searching for food. On the mud oyster catchers and curlews search for worms and shellfish with their long beaks; the eerie call of a curlew breaks the silence seeming to add depth and a vivid atmosphere to the scene.

“Come on then.” says Lewis excitedly caught up in the joy of the smell of the sea and the freedom it offers and he hurries along the little path towards the beach.

Suzy follows quickly behind caught up in the same excitement, this is the first time she has been to the sea this year and she hadn't realised how much she has missed it. Walking down onto the beach Suzy hurries towards the mud and stops on the border with the pebbles of the beach and the mudflats. Lewis noisily joins her, his size ten trainers crunching on the loose stones until he stands beside her.

“What a fantastic place this is, it feels like my soul is floating on the breeze.” says Lewis as he smiles broadly.

“Yes, I know what you mean and it's been ages since I have been here.” agrees Suzy.

“Shall we go for a walk?” asks Lewis.

“Good idea, can we walk that way, away from the town?” she asks looking towards the beach that stretches away until it meets the horizon.

“Whatever, I am just happy to be here, lead on.” smiles Lewis.

Suzy, keeping close to the mud walks slowly along looking into the little rock pools and occasionally bending down for a closer look. Tiny little fish scatter at her approach and hide themselves in amongst the rocks and seaweed in the pool.

Suzy laughs and points at a small green crab that is trying to hide amongst the rocks as a larger crab keeps pushing it away from *its* hiding place.

“How old are you Suzy? You’re like a little kid.” laughs Lewis looking down at the crabs.

“That’s what it feels like, come on let’s see what else we can find.” says Suzy as she stands and hurries to the next rock pool.

Several hours later and walking hand in hand Suzy and Lewis arrive back at his car. Unlocking the doors Lewis opens the drivers' door wide and sits on the seat behind the steering wheel with his feet touching the ground outside. Glad to sit and rest Suzy gets in and sits in the passenger’s seat beside him. Letting out a tired contented sigh Suzy closes her eyes and leans back in the seat.

“I enjoyed that, let’s sit here for a couple of minutes and then I will get you home, you look worn out.” laughs Lewis.

Suzy opens her eyes grinning broadly; “Do not want you to get too big headed; but that has to be the best time I have had this year.”

“Glad to hear it, yes I really enjoyed the walk as well so that means you will do it again?” Lewis asks hopefully.

“Yes, we must.” smiles Suzy as she closes her eyes again.

They sit in the car enjoying the silence for about a quarter hour before Lewis finally shuts the door and turns the engine on. Suzy slams her door shut and puts on her safety belt. Taking a long final look at the sea she sighs contently and relaxes as Lewis drives her home.

Lewis pulls the car to a stop outside Suzy's bungalow; “Thanks for a wonderful time Suzy, I hope you meant what you said and we can do it again soon.”

“Aren't you coming in for coffee? It is the least I can do after you have taken me to the seaside and I am really thirsty.”

“When do we get to do it again then?” asks Lewis expecting Suzy to say she would 'ring him'.

“How about tomorrow, late morning?”

Lewis is surprised and it takes him a few moments to answer; "I'll be here." he smiles.

"Sure you will not come in?" Suzy persists.

"I want to but I got a few things I have to do, thanks again for a wonderful time."

"Ok see you tomorrow." smiles Suzy as she unclips her seat belt and opens the door; "Do not let me down." she finishes as she shuts the door and watches Lewis drive away.

Smiling, Suzy walks along her path to the front door, unlocking it she steps inside as memories of Doug flood into her mind. Frowning she walks into the kitchen and puts water on to boil, looking out of the window she looks at the new runner bean patch and smiles. It feels good to have him lying where she can see him.

Chapter Three

Lewis drives slowly along the road, his thoughts on the beach and Suzy rather than where he is going. Glad to have met her again he smiles with the happy memories of today and of the days when they first knew each other at university.

They had both been dating different people then and their friendship started on a good basis of no sex. During their years at university they had studied hard and played hard, Lewis laughs at the memory of a Halloween night in the city. Suzy had painted her face a pale white with black eye sockets and worn shredded blankets and looked really scary. He had worn a long red velvet cloak and a rubber mask of an ancient old man.

Lewis frowns at the memory of the first few hours; he had eaten about fifty magic mushrooms before they went out and wearing the rubber mask had proved to be a big mistake.

As the mushrooms wielded their special power Lewis had begun to overheat in the mask. Luckily he had arrived at Suzy's by then and passed out on her lounge floor. Suspecting that was the reason for his collapse Suzy had stripped the mask and cloak off and washed his face in cold water, bringing his temperature down.

After telling him what she thought of him Suzy painted his face in the same white as hers. After several cups of strong coffee he left the mask behind. A weird evening followed as they wandered around the town, meeting ghouls and witches and still being under the influence of the mushrooms it all appeared to Lewis, to be very real!

Parking his car around the back of his flat Lewis locks the doors and walks around to the front of the building. All is quiet as always and he makes his way to his flat, entering the kitchen he puts water on to boil to make tea as he remembers Doug's shaver, toothbrush and the male toiletries that were scattered about the bathroom. Out of curiosity he had looked

in the big wicker wash basket and seen some of Suzy's bloodstained clothes and Doug's Pink Floyd T-shirt underneath.

Suzy was not being truthful with him is obvious he thinks as he pours hot water into his cup. He knew Doug and Suzy had terrible fights, but he had never seen blood drawn. Stirring his tea he puts the used teabag into the bin and adds milk from the refrigerator. Sitting at the table he sips his tea and tries to recall what also felt out of place when he was at Suzy's bungalow.

Suzy was nervous when he first arrived and Lewis had just put it down to nervousness of him as she was there all alone. At the time he *did* think it was a bit unlike Suzy; they had known each other for more than fifteen years now and he had never made any improper advances towards her.

It had been years since they had seen each other; the last time was years ago at James' birthday party. Before the party they had been close friends and often he would go round and have dinner with her and Doug.

Getting up from the table Lewis makes more tea as he ponders Suzy's attitude at that party; yes she had been subdued and it had looked like her and Doug had had an argument. Frowning as he sits back down at the table Lewis closes his eyes and tries to re-live James' party. Now he thinks about it and recalls her face he realises she was scared, very scared.

Guilt floods through him as his reaction had been to keep his distance and Suzy had tried to talk to him several times that night. The memory makes him shift uncomfortably in his chair as each time Suzy had tried to speak to him; Doug had interrupted and physically pulled her away.

He had let her down there, and for the years between them they drifted apart as Lewis felt that it was none of his business. Deciding to talk to Suzy tomorrow he drinks the last of his tea and goes into the lounge and switches on the television.

Suzy lights the fire in the back garden as darkness arrives;

the fire consists of old garden rubbish and whatever wood she could find lying around. The fire catches quickly on dead grass and twigs setting light to the varnish that covers the old chest of drawers that was in the shed. Looking around she can see no spying eyes and reaches into a black dustbin sack pulling out Doug's jeans. Throwing them on the fire she watches them burn and adds more of his blood soaked clothes. The carpet from the lounge burns well, along with her old clothes and more of Doug's new ones.

Suzy spends most of the evening destroying any evidence of her ex-partner; all of his clothes, boots and shoes along with his driving licence and any paperwork with his name on it went onto the fire. Watching the fire until only embers glowed Suzy goes back indoors for a well earned bath, as she walks into the bathroom she sees Doug's toothbrush, razor and toiletries. Cursing aloud she gathers them up and returns to the fire outside. Only the toothbrush, comb and flannel will burn and she puts the rest in the dustbin.

Going back into the bathroom Suzy turns on the hot water for her bath and looks around her bungalow for anything of Doug's she may have missed. Looking in every room she can find nothing more and smiling, returns to the steaming bathroom.

"What's happened to Doug? This is his third day off." Darren asks his boss Adam.

"Haven't heard anything yet, if he hasn't contacted us by lunchtime I was going to ring his home."

"Unusual for him to take time off, let alone not let you know, any idea what's going on?"

"Yes it is unusual and now you've mentioned it we are quite worried about him." replies Adam.

"Why wait until lunchtime it's nearly tea break now."

Adam looks Darren in the eyes and sees the deep concern he has for his friend; "Ok, I'll do it now." says Adam as he turns away and walks to the office. Shutting the door he looks through his telephone numbers until he finds Doug's number,

picking up the phone he dials the number.

Suzy is in the lounge trying to remove the blood stains from the floorboards with little success when she hears the phone ringing. That has to be Doug's works she thinks, well it has been two days. Standing up she goes out into the hall and picks the phone up; "Hello." she says into the mouthpiece a little nervously.

"Hello, Susan isn't it? This is Adam, from Doug's works, and we were wondering what has happened to Doug?"

"Doug? Hasn't he told you then, that's typical of him." answers Suzy scornfully as she hates being called Susan.

"No, we haven't heard anything from him, what do you mean?" asks Adam as politely as he can as he does not like the tone of Suzy's voice.

"He's gone to live with his fancy bit in Manchester and reckons he's got a better job to go to as well! Good riddance that's what I say." shouts Suzy into the phone.

"I am sorry to hear that, well we have heard nothing so I guess we will have to wait until he contacts us, sorry to intrude." says Adam in that same polite voice.

Suzy says nothing and hangs up the phone with a slam.

Adam stares down at the telephone offended by Suzy's attitude and rudeness towards him; well it was hardly *his* fault. Putting the telephone down onto the receiver Adam opens his office door and goes to look for Darren.

"Ahh there you are, I have been looking for you." says Adam when he finally finds Darren who is at the back of the factory smoking a cigarette.

"Sorry about the smoking Adam, got to admit I am a bit worried about Doug, any luck?"

"Yes, I got through to his wife Susan isn't it?"

Darren laughs; "I hope you did not call her that?"

"Yes I did, why does she not like it then?"

"No she does not, bet she got the right hump with you, any news on Doug?"

"That explains her attitude then," smiles Adam; "She reckons he has gone to live in Manchester with his fancy bit;

and got a better job.”

Darren frowns deeply; “What fancy bit? This is the first I have heard of it.”

“Unless he has been doing it on the quiet without you knowing?” suggests Adam.

“No way, he would have told me, we have been mates for ages.”

“Well whatever is going on I do not think it is for us to interfere.”

“Will you let me know soon as you hear anything?” asks Darren politely as he throws his cigarette butt down onto the ground and puts his foot on it.

Lewis rings the bell on Suzy's door, looking up at the sky which is covered in grey cloud and he thinks of somewhere else they can go.

Suzy opens the door; dressed in an old navy blue sweatshirt and faded blue jeans makes Lewis wonder what she has been doing.

“Hiya there was no need for you to dress up for Me.” he says as Suzy smiles a welcome and stands to one side to allow him to enter.

“Well I thought I would make the effort,” Suzy laughs as she looks down at herself; “I have been busy cleaning, I am sorry I did not realise what the time was.”

“No worries, I am only joking anyway as you look great.” smiles Lewis reassuringly as he walks into the hall.

“Go into the kitchen I will get changed.”

“No hurry I do not want to stop you in your work, can I use the Loo on the way past please?”

“Yes sure, if that is what you have come round for.” laughs Suzy as she watches Lewis's retreating back.

Lewis enters the bathroom and shuts the door, looking around he sees that all Doug's possessions have gone from the window sill. Looking in the wicker laundry basket he sees that Suzy's blood splattered clothes and Doug's sweatshirt have gone also. Lewis had not wanted to use the toilet; his

main interest had been Doug's possessions, as overnight his suspicions of Suzy have grown.

Flushing the toilet he stands still for about twenty seconds before opening the door, pulling it to, he walks along the hall into the kitchen.

"Better now?" asks Suzy with a soft sarcastic voice.

"I see that you have cleared Doug's stuff and done your washing."

Suzy stares at Lewis dumbfounded by his words; awkwardly she looks down at the floor her face pale. Unsure what to say, she says nothing and waits for Lewis.

"I have known you a long time Suzy and I know things are not right with you and Doug, do you want to talk about it? I am your friend and I have to admit I feel guilty."

Suzy looks up at him; "Guilty, what have you got to be guilty about?"

"James party, you tried to ask my help then, yes?"

Suzy looks Lewis in the eyes as she remembers back to the birthday party; "Yes I did want to talk to you but you did not want to know."

"That was only because I thought you and Doug had had a fight or something and I did not want to get in the middle, you being married and all; and he did keep pulling you away."

"I felt quite angry towards you for quite awhile after that, I have to admit." replies Suzy with a touch of sadness to her voice.

"That was years ago, what was it that you wanted to talk about?" asks Lewis in a friendly voice hoping to calm her.

"I wanted to tell you that Doug was beating me and virtually keeping me a prisoner."

Now it was Lewis's turn to look dumbfounded and he stares into Suzy's eyes as the guilt builds inside him until he feels as if he is going to explode. Angrily he stands up and walks across the kitchen and out of the back door. Leaving the door open he walks along the path towards the shed breathing deeply. His mind whirls with a cascade of thoughts and images; of Suzy's pleading face all those years ago; and of

Doug keeping her a prisoner.

Lewis knew that the first time he saw Suzy he had fallen in love with her, the rapport and familiarity they instantly had between them made it feel like they had known each other all their lives. They both had partners already which had not seemed to matter as it made the love between them very pure, and he knew that Suzy felt the same way about him.

Moodily Lewis stares down at the ground as Suzy comes up behind him; "You usually do that, run away." she says scornfully in his ear.

"I only run away when I get hurt."

"Hurt you? What are you going on about?"

"That hurt, you made me feel really guilty though I did not realise it was so serious. I thought you just wanted to be happy with Doug."

"Quite the opposite, he was smothering me back then; and you were the only one who could help."

"Why only me? You have got lots of other friends and family."

"They all had the same attitude as you and Doug had the opportunity to lie to them, which he did for years." answers Suzy in a distressed voice.

"Maybe we should go back inside in case you got any nosey neighbours." advises Lewis softly.

"I do not care." shrieks Suzy, the strain of the last few days has finally got to her and here was someone she could let it out on; in any way!"

"Come on." says Lewis in that same soft voice and holding her arm gently leads her back into the kitchen. Sitting her down at the table Lewis picks up her half empty cup in front of her; "I will make you a fresh one." he says as he turns and walks over to the kettle.

As Lewis fills the kettle with cold water from the tap Suzy's grief overwhelms her and she starts to cry and sob loudly. Lewis switches the kettle on and walks over to Suzy, putting his hand on her shoulder he bends towards her speaking softly in her ear; "Let it out, then we will talk."

Lewis stands as Suzy, putting her head between her hands starts to sob uncontrollably. Lewis squeezes her shoulder gently realising that Suzy is lost in emotion and appears unaware of him. Feeling uncomfortable Lewis removes his hand and turns and walks slowly out of the back door. Closing it gently behind him he walks along the path until he reaches the remains of Suzy's fire.

The fire has not burnt completely and Lewis picks up a piece of blood stained carpet and looks at it closely. Recognising the carpet as the one they have in the lounge Lewis looks at the stains and realises they are blood stains!

Looking around for any nosey neighbours Lewis can see none and drops the piece of carpet into the middle of the ashes. A small puff of smoke escapes and Lewis watches as the carpet starts to melt, realising the fire is still alight he gathers more carpet fragments and throws them onto the now burning carpet. Raking all the unburned remains of twigs, branches and clothing into the centre of the fire Lewis watches it all burn.

Sitting on the little wooden bench that is beside the shed, Lewis looks around Suzy's neat garden, noticing the new 'bean patch' Lewis stands up for a closer look. The soil is still fresh and moist showing Lewis that the patch was only dug yesterday or in the past few days. Somehow Lewis knows that Doug is buried there, maybe he can smell him but he knows he is there. By burning the carpet, technically he is aiding and abetting, if that is what happened. Turning around he strides quickly to the back door and opens it wide as he enters.

Suzy looks up at him, her eyes red and sore from crying, her face is ashen and she clings on tightly to a soaking wet handkerchief. Lewis looks at her feeling a deep love inside him that makes him tremble; "Do you want more tea, the kettle should have boiled now?" he smiles.

Suzy smiles weakly in return; "Coffee would be better."

"Coffee it is." Lewis smiles broadly as he opens a cupboard and takes out a jar of coffee; "You want sugar?"

“Yes please lots, you want one?”

“Yes, I will sort you first.” he says as he spoons coffee into the cup, pouring the hot water into the cup he takes out a bottle of milk from the refrigerator. Putting the bottle onto the table in front of Suzy he passes her the cup of coffee and bag of sugar; “Help yourself.” he laughs.

“Thank you, kind sir.” Suzy smiles as she pours milk into the cup.

Lewis turns away and getting a large mug from the cupboard makes himself a strong cup of coffee and sits opposite Suzy; “Start talking.” he commands gently as he pours milk into his cup. Standing up again he puts the milk back into the refrigerator and sits back down opposite Suzy with a questioning look on his face.

Suzy looks scared and nervous and looking Lewis deeply in the eyes she tells him of the nightmare years spent as a prisoner with Doug. How she had been beaten and many times locked in the bathroom when Doug went off to work. She had dreamt of escape and James party appeared a good opportunity to get Lewis to help her escape.

“Hang on there.” interrupts Lewis in a loud voice; “Why me? I asked you that before and you did not answer me; and why did you not just walk away or go to the police?”

“Because he said he would kill me if I ran away or went to the police.”

“Why only me?” Lewis persists in a firm voice.

“I told you he had the opportunity to lie to my family and friends and he turned them all against me.” replies Suzy a mad edge to her voice.

“What do you mean he lied?” demands Lewis; “Do not tell me half of it tell me everything.”

“He lied to them the same way your wife lied to your family, making me out to be some kind of mad monster, just like was done to you.” replies Suzy as the memory makes her angry.

Lewis feels the same anger and recalls how lies had been said about him; how supposedly he had been violent and aggressive during his divorce and of even been accused by

his now ex-wife of molesting his own daughter!

The memories make him very angry but also very sad; he had loved his daughter in the same way that he had loved his son. There were no sexual feelings or perversions towards his family; it was the love of a father for his son and daughter. There had been no aggression on his part either, a year previously he had his lung collapse (which made aggression very difficult to perform) and was why he found himself getting divorced.

An invalid was no good in supplying a wife with a prosperous future!

Looking at Suzy he feels his heart go out to her. People you thought were your friends were so eager to believe anything nasty said about you; especially if told by a good liar. Feeling the anger flow out of him like water out of a tap Lewis smiles reassuringly at Suzy; "I know where you are coming from, I remember how most turned against me; people who I had been friends with for years and who so readily believed the outrageous lies said about me."

"What am I going to do Lewis?" asks Suzy helplessly.

"Is Doug out there in the garden where you have put the bean poles?"

Suzy nods her head saying nothing staring deeply into Lewis's eyes.

"By telling me that you put me in an awkward position, you are now making me an accomplice." Lewis says with disapproval in his voice.

"I know you will not go to the police," replies Suzy; "you are the only one I can trust and it was fate yesterday when we met at the shop."

"The timing is strange I have to admit, as I have not been to that shop for about two years so it does feel more than a coincidence."

"You will help me then." Suzy says it as more of a statement than a question.

"Tell me what happened." Lewis demands.

Suzy looks down at the table and tells Lewis of the accusations and Doug getting rough, of her grabbing the letter opener and plunging it into his neck. As Suzy relives the moment her face turns pale and she starts to cry, burying her head in her hands she starts to sob again.

“He cannot stay there; we will have to get rid of him properly.”

Suzy looks up her face streaked with tears; “Why not? I can keep an eye on him there.” she says smiling weakly with a touch of madness in her eyes.

“People will come looking for him, have you contacted his work?”

“They phoned me this morning and I told them he had gone to live with his fancy bit in Manchester and would not be back.”

“He has been there a long time, if they do not hear from him they will be back.”

“You think so?”

“Yes I think they will, first off we had better sort you out some carpet for your front room.”

“That sounds good, I have always wanted new carpet for in there.” smiles Suzy.

“New is out, will be best if we can find some old carpet or a big rug.” advises Lewis.

Suzy's face drops, “Old carpet? I do not think I will like that.”

“Comes down to choice, if you get new carpet it will be noticed if the police ever come round investigating.”

“Investigating, what are you going on about?”

“Just thinking ahead, if his works report him as missing then you can be sure the authorities will be round.”

Suzy stares down at the table her face pale, she had hoped that with Doug dead and buried that would be the end of it. Lewis is right, the authorities and friends and family are likely to call looking for him and every trace of him must be destroyed or hidden.

“Got a tape measure? We will measure your carpet and get that sorted now.”

“I have already done it.” says Suzy as she gets up and walks

out of the kitchen, returning almost immediately with a piece of paper in her hand she puts on the table in front of Lewis; "I measured it a bit over but the room is three metres by three and half metres."

"Have you pulled all the carpet up?" asks Lewis.

"No not all of it mainly the area where he made a mess." answers Suzy looking in the direction of the lounge.

"My thoughts are; if we cannot get a second hand carpet then we will have to get a big rug, got plenty of money?"

"Not a lot, Doug kept hold of the purse strings and rarely let me have money of my own." replies Suzy in an angry voice.

"Grab what you have got and we will go have a look round, is that Doug's car parked out front?" smiles Lewis hoping Suzy's anger will soon fade.

"Yes, it's his."

"We'll get rid of it on the way."

Chapter Four

Three hours later Lewis, tired and a little irritable pulls up outside Suzy's and switches the engine off; "That was hard work, best leave it in here until it gets dark in case the neighbours are looking."

"So what if they are? It is none of their business." replies Suzy angrily. The looking around the carpet warehouses and second hand shops *had* been hard work. Tired, dusty and dirty from looking at dirty carpets all Suzy wanted to do was sit down and sleep for a few hours.

"Yes, but they might mention your new carpet if the police ask them." warns Lewis.

"You think of everything, have you done this sort of thing before?" asks a smiling Suzy, glad that Lewis is with her.

"Yes loads of times, especially to pretty young ladies who won't get out of my car." replies Lewis in a monotone voice as he opens the driver's door.

"Suppose you want to come in for coffee?" asks Suzy as she opens the car door.

"Only if you want me to, I could go home and come round later." laughs Lewis happy that Suzy is cheering up.

"You had better not." warns Suzy as she gets out of the car and slams the door shut; "I will put the kettle on." she says as she walks along her path to the front door.

Lewis shuts the car door, locks it and hurries after Suzy; "Two sugars please, I need the Loo." he tells her as he follows behind her into the bungalow and shuts the door behind him.

Suzy gives no answer as she walks wearily along the hall and into the kitchen. Putting water on to boil she sits down at the table and holds her head in her hands and closes her eyes.

Lewis looks down at Suzy as he enters the kitchen; "Why not get your head down for a few hours? it must have been a while since you slept properly."

"Yes you are right there, sure you do not mind?" asks Suzy

as weariness fills her body.

“As long as you do not snore, then I might.” smiles Lewis.

Suzy stands up slowly using the table for support; “It would be nice I feel so tired.”

“Do not worry about me I will be here on guard and will let you know if anyone shows up.”

“Thanks Lewis, help yourself to food or whatever.” invites Suzy as she trudges out of the door.

Lewis washes a mug in the sink and makes himself a coffee, hearing Suzy's bedroom door close he carries his coffee outside and sits on the bench next to the shed.

Thick cloud covers the sky and Lewis can feel the rain on the air. Looking at the runner bean patch he realises that Doug should be moved and hidden tonight. If the police were to call, they would not fail to notice the freshly turned soil.

Going back to the kitchen he finds the shed key on a hook and goes and unlocks the shed. Taking out a rusty metal rake and equally rusty spade he goes outside and leans the tools against the outside of the shed. Grabbing hold of the bean poles he pulls them out of the ground and also leans them against the shed.

Taking hold of the rake he starts to scrape the soil gently away, not sure how deep Suzy has buried Doug he takes his time scraping away the soil and only scrapes a little at a time. When he has gone down about sixty centimetres the rake catches on a black dustbin sack and Lewis pulls it out of the ground.

Lewis is puzzled as he expects to find Doug's body in one piece and is shocked when he picks up the plastic sack and sees that it contains Doug's right arm and hand. Putting the arm in its plastic sack next to the shed he bends over and throws everything up that he had eaten that day.

The feel of Doug's cold arm in his hands remains even after he has put the arm down on the ground and he retches repeatedly and painfully on a now empty stomach.

Returning to his grim task when the retching has stopped

and the pain eased, he scrapes away with the rake revealing more of Doug. His left arm is next and deeper below that are Doug's two legs. After repeated retching as he puts the arm and legs next to the shed Lewis stops for a breather.

His stomach is now extremely painful from the retching and he sits on the bench and doubles over, holding his stomach. Five maybe ten minutes later as Lewis loses track of time he reluctantly stands and walks back to the now quite large hole in the garden.

He admires Suzy for digging such a deep hole as it must have been very difficult as the ground is dry packed and hard. Scraping away with the rake he soon unearths Doug's torso and head, bending down he takes a firm hold of Doug's head and pulls him out of the hole. Dragging the body over to the shed he sits down on the bench shocked and exhausted.

Imagining Suzy cutting Doug into pieces makes Lewis shudder at the macabre scene and he wonders if he is doing the right thing. To cut someone into pieces like that would take a strong constitution and stomach; and Lewis was not so sure that he could do such a thing.

The hatred that Suzy had for Doug must have been intense and grown stronger over the years; maybe giving her the strength and fortitude to do it, he hopes. Standing up Lewis walks along the path and opens the back door and enters the kitchen. Suzy is sitting at the table ashen faced and watches him intently; "What have you been doing?" she asks in a frightened voice.

"Digging up your husband as we have to put him somewhere else, why did you cut him up like that?"

Suzy shows a weak smile; "He was too heavy for me to pick up, I only did it so I could carry him out there."

"Guess I am panicking a bit but we need to shift him now before it gets dark."

"Whatever you say Lewis, where are we going to put him?"

"I know of an old deserted Well out near the woods. That is why we have to go when it is still light as it will look well dodgy if we arrive in the darkness. The road near where we can park

is quite busy and it would look better if we parked up in daylight.”

“How are we going to get him there? We need to wrap him so he cannot be seen.”

“Yes I have been thinking about that, have you got a couple of big winter coats?”

“Yes I got just the thing.” replies Suzy as she stands up and goes into her bedroom.

Lewis takes the opportunity to wash his hands several times noticing that he has blood staining his shirt sleeves. Suzy comes back in carrying two large black coats; “Will these do?”

“Perfect, have you got any string?” asks a grim faced Lewis; “As we need to tie him inside them so he does not fall out.”

“Yes there is plenty of string in the shed.” answers Suzy reflecting his sombre mood.

“Bring the coats then, let us do it now.” orders Lewis as he walks out of the back door to the shed, opening the shed door he looks inside and finds a ball of green plastic string. Backing out of the shed he sees Suzy standing by the dustbin bags holding the coats, Suzy looks pale and Lewis wonders if she is going to be sick.

Suzy looks round at him and straightening her back she looks Lewis in the eyes; “Do you want me to do it?”

“No we will have to do it together; we need to tie the coats tight and make a kind of rucksack with them as it is quite a walk.”

Suzy smiles in appreciation as she was not looking forward to handling Doug's body on her own. They put Doug's torso and head, still in its black plastic rubbish sack, inside one of the coats and bind it tightly. Making a strap from several lengths of green string Lewis tries it over his shoulder; finding it a little loose he adjusts the strap until Doug is comfortable on his back.

Taking him off and laying him on the ground he and Suzy bind Doug's arms and legs together and wrap them firmly in the coat. Tying it tightly Lewis makes a similar strap for Suzy and tries it on her for size; “How does that feel?” he asks grim

faced.

“The string is cutting into my shoulder,” complains Suzy “I do not think I will be able to walk far without cutting off my blood supply.”

Lewis goes into the shed and looks around with no joy as he can see nothing suitable. Coming back out of the shed he looks at Suzy and the string strap; “You can wrap that area with a tea towel to act as a bit of padding, we will need two.” he smiles reassuringly.

Suzy puts the coat containing the arms and legs onto the ground and walks to the kitchen, Lewis looks around him while he waits and walks over to the remains of the fire; much unburned carpet and clothing still remain around the edge of ash. Lewis notes it in his head to have another fire this evening. They will have to burn everything they are wearing when they have got rid of Doug anyway. This reminds him that he will have to stop off at his flat on the way back to get a change of clothes.

Suzy comes out of the kitchen carrying two blue chequered tea towels, walking up to Lewis she asks; “Will these do?”

“Those will be perfect.” smiles Lewis; “You had better come give me a hand to take the carpet out of my car.”

“I had forgotten about that, what about the neighbours?”

“We will have to take a chance as we are running out of daylight.” says Lewis looking anxiously up at the sky which already has the feel of evening to it.

Using the path that runs alongside of the bungalow they go out to Lewis's car; all is quiet and they can see no one at all. Unlocking the car and opening the back door Suzy helps Lewis drag the carpet out, the carpet is old and heavy with a thick pile and is Hessian backed. Suzy sneezes from the dust and Lewis pushes her to one side, grabbing hold of the carpet he slings it over his shoulder and hurries along the path. Suzy looks around her and still seeing no one hurries after him, catching up with him as he approaches the back door; “I will help.” she says as Lewis starts to lower the carpet; grabbing hold of one end she helps Lewis carry it into the kitchen.

“Put it down here.” orders Lewis as he starts to drop the carpet down onto the kitchen floor.

They put the carpet down and Lewis walks over to the sink, taking a cup out of the cupboard he runs the cold tap for a little while before filling the cup. Taking a long drink he looks at Suzy; “Have you got an empty bottle or something in case we get thirsty when we are out?”

Suzy nods her head and takes the cup out of his hand, drinking the remaining water she puts the cup in the sink and opens the cupboard above. Taking out a small bottle that will hold about two cupfuls she fills it from the cold tap.

“Let us do this.” says Lewis firmly as he walks out of the door and along the path to where Doug is laid.

Suzy locks the kitchen door behind her and joins Lewis; “How shall we do this?” she asks nervously.

“Best you go out and see if the coast is clear, I will bring him along.” answers Lewis as he bends down and picks up the coat containing the arms and legs.

Suzy hurries along the path and out the gate, she looks nervously up and down the road and around at the surrounding bungalows and gardens. A man with a black and white Staffordshire terrier turns the corner at the end of the road and starts walking towards her. Suzy shuts the back door of the car which had been left open when they took out the carpet and walks back to the bungalow as Lewis comes into view; “Go back, there is a man and a dog coming.”

Lewis steps back around the corner and puts the coat down; “How far away?” he asks.

“He will be walking past in a couple of minutes; I did not want to take the chance of him seeing you.”

Lewis leans against the wall of the bungalow and catches his breath while he waits, the man and dog soon walk past and nodding his head towards the road he indicates to Suzy to go and look again.

Suzy walks slowly along the path and reaching the car she turns and smiles and opens the cars back door. Lewis picks up

the coat of arms and legs and walks quickly to his car, bending down as he reaches it he throws the coat onto the back seat and after looking up and down the road hurries back for the other coat.

Chapter Five

Pulling up in the little parking area in the woods Lewis puts the brake on and switches the engine off; "Let us have a look round first, make sure there are no hikers or walkers." he says as he gets out of the car. Leaving the door open he approaches the wooden gate that leads into the field, leaning casually on the top he surveys the field for any movement.

Suzy joins him in leaning on the gate and looks out at the huge field of grass spread before them; "What a beautiful place is it private land?"

"No, this is in fact a nature reserve, a herd of cows get put out here in the summer to keep the grass down, apart from that it remains undisturbed; and should remain that way forever."

"That is a nice thought, until they want to build houses on it or use it to grow crops."

"That should be at least a hundred years away, maybe." smiles Lewis.

"Where is this Well then?" asks Suzy looking around at the field and surrounding woods expecting to see it.

Lewis laughs and points to the far corner of the huge field; "It is all the way down there, I told you it was a bit of a stomp."

Suzy looks to where Lewis is pointing and guesses it must be a kilometre away; looking around again Suzy can see no signs of life; "We doing this then?"

"Yes, we will have to hurry as its getting dark." replies Lewis looking up at the darkening sky. Not waiting for an answer he goes back to his car and opens the back door. Leaning in he pulls out the coat with Doug's torso and head and lays it on the ground. Pulling out the coat of arms and legs he passes it to Suzy who reluctantly takes it from him.

Shutting the back door Lewis walks around to the driver's side, slams the door shut and locks it. Walking back round to Doug's body he picks it up and slings it over his shoulder as Suzy passes him a blue tea towel. Tucking the towel under the

rope strap, where it presses on his shoulder, he moves Doug's body to a comfortable position.

Suzy picks up the other coat with its grizzly contents and puts it over her shoulder, tucking the towel under the strapping she nods her head that she is ready and follows Lewis over the stile.

A green sign indicating it is a public footpath points the way Lewis is walking and Suzy follows him out into the field.

Lewis sets a fast pace and after a few hundred metres Suzy shouts for him to stop. Lewis frowns in annoyance as darkness is approaching quickly, but acknowledges Suzy needs to rest and catch her breath.

"We have to hurry Suzy if we leave the car too long parked in the dark I will get robbed."

"Sorry Lewis this is hard work." puffs Suzy. Standing a few seconds more Suzy controls her breathing and starts to walk again.

Saying nothing to preserve their breath they make their way to the corner of the field, as a stream three metres wide blocks their way; "We will have to use the bridge, it's only up there." says Lewis pointing to a wooden bridge made of old railway sleepers about fifty metres away.

Wearily they make their way to the bridge, the water beneath only looks to be about fifty millimetres deep and Lewis looks down at the flowing water; "Should have brought our wellies and we could have waded across."

Suzy follows him across the bridge too tired to answer as they must have walked nearly a kilometre with their heavy loads. Lewis follows a faint trail through the grass that leads into the trees. The trail as it enters the trees becomes waterlogged and they find themselves in thick gooey mud about one hundred millimetres thick in places. The mud sticks to their trainers and makes them heavy and awkward to walk in.

Lewis steps off the muddy trail and starts to make his way deeper into the trees as Suzy follows, not sure where he is going. After about five minutes weaving themselves amongst

the twisted trees Lewis lets out a laugh; “Here it is, even got a new fence around it.”

Suzy looks towards Lewis and the new shiny barbed wire fence that forms a square of about two metres a side; “You're joking, there is no Well there?”

“Yes there is, come and have a look.” invites Lewis waving his hand towards the wire.

Suzy un-shoulders the coat of arms and legs and lays it gently on the ground. Walking slowly forward she approaches the fencing and can see several planks of very old wood lying across a circle of bricks. Leaning forward against the fence she looks down and can see the circular formed bricks disappearing into the darkness.

“I do not believe it, how on earth did you find this?”

“Went up here for a pee must be twenty years ago now, there was no fence around it then just them bits of wood laid on top; and they look like they are the same ones.” Lewis says in surprise.

Putting Doug down onto the ground he steps over the barbed wire fence and moves the moss covered wood out of the way. Taking a torch out of his pocket he turns it on and shines it down the Well; “Here come and have a look at this, you will be amazed.”

Suzy steps over the fence and looks down the Well; she can easily see the bottom of the Well in the light of the torch beam shining down. The Well has to be ten metres deep and is very narrow, hardly enough room for a man to turn around; let alone lay bricks. The light from the torch shows that the bottom of the Well is dry, which does not make any sense. The stream, about two metres wide and half a metre deep, flows slowly past about three metres away! Suzy looks around in confusion at the marshy surroundings and in the distance about thirty metres away she can see a large pond hiding in the shadow of the hawthorn bushes.

“This is insane,” she laughs “why is the Well dry when it is surrounded by water?”

“Not a clue, will you go and gather up as much sticks and

branches and whatever else you can find to chuck on top of him?” asks Lewis as he starts to untie the coat containing Doug's torso and head.

Suzy wipes the smile off her face and looks around for old branches and twigs. Grim faced, Lewis unties the coat and slides Doug's body out of the plastic dustbin sacks. Picking up the naked body he throws it down the Well. Untying the other coat he throws the bare arms and legs down after the body and using a plastic sack puts the coats, string and plastic sacks into one. Tying it tightly he puts it to one side as he helps Suzy throw branches, clumps of grass and even some old bricks down the Well onto Doug's remains.

Darkness closes in fast making it difficult to search amongst the trees and after shining his torch down the Well, Lewis is finally satisfied that the body is covered; “That will have to do we will come back tomorrow just to make sure.” he tells Suzy as he puts the old planks of wood on top of the Well.

“Be taking a chance coming back?” says Suzy with fear in her voice.

“Better to be sure or I will not sleep, anyway I need to go to the fishing shop and get some maggots.”

“Maggots, what on earth for; you are not going fishing are you?”

“No,” Lewis laughs “going to throw them down the Well on top of Doug, they'll help destroy the body.”

Suzy shudders at the thought of hundreds of maggots eating their way into Doug's body, feeling sick she follows the trail away from the Well and waits for Lewis when she reaches the field. Lewis takes his time and after what appears to be five minutes later he finally emerges from the trees carrying the black dustbin sack.

“You took your time; I was getting worried, thought you might have fallen down the Well after him?”

“No such luck, I have been trying to cover up our footprints and is this yours?” Lewis asks passing Suzy a small white handkerchief.

Suzy feels her face go pale; “Yes that is mine, where did you find it?”

“About ten metres away from the Well, you must have dropped it when you were collecting wood, now you can see why we need to come back in the morning. It was lucky your handkerchief is white or I would not have seen it.”

Suzy puts the handkerchief in her pocket and starts to walk with Lewis as they make their way back to the car.

Lewis comes out of his flat carrying a bag of spare clothes and a stack of newspapers. Opening the back door of his car he throws them on the back seat and goes back inside. Suzy looks at the pile of newspapers in confusion as Lewis reappears carrying an old hardback chair which he also puts on the back seat. Slamming the door shut he gets in behind the wheel and turns the engine on. Putting on his seatbelt Lewis puts the car into gear and drives slowly along the road.

Curiosity gets the better of Suzy and she cannot resist asking; “Why the newspapers and chair?”

“We need to burn those coats and bloody dustbin sacks; and your fire the other night did not completely burn everything. Have you got any old wood or cardboard we can burn?”

“Not sure if I want to burn my furniture.” answers Suzy looking round at the chair on the back seat.

“Be in a good cause, we will have a look round when we get back to yours.” Lewis tells her.

“Do not put too much on, we need to keep it small in case the neighbours think your shed is alight.” advise Lewis as Suzy attempts to throw her coffee table onto the fire.

The fire has been burning well for about half an hour and Lewis is pleased that everything is burning, hopefully by the morning all that will remain will be a fine ash.

Suzy had done well in finding wood for the fire; apart from the coffee table she had supplied two badly painted stools, the wicker laundry basket and about a dozen wooden tomato boxes from the shed. Along with the newspapers and clothes

they had kept the fire burning well and the paint on the stools had helped. They stay with the fire until everything is burnt; raking the edge into the centre of the hot flames to ensure all the evidence is burnt.

Cold, hungry, and wishing she had drunk an extra cup of coffee, Suzy trudges through the wet grass behind Lewis as they make their way back to the Well. The grass is soaking wet from the early morning dew and Suzy's trainers are soaked down to her socks. There is no one about this early in the morning as they had arrived just before the dawn. As they reach the end of the field the sun starts to shine weakly. Suzy looks up at the cloudless sky; it sure is going to be a wonderful day!

Lewis crosses the bridge of old railway sleepers and looks down at the flowing stream; "It is amazing don't you think? There has not been any rain for over a week, makes you wonder where all the water comes from?"

"Shows how much the woodland holds onto, but it still doesn't explain why the Well is dry?" answers Suzy looking around at the surrounding trees.

"I do not know the answer to that one, but it is weird with all this water surrounding it."

They follow the faint trail into the trees and approach the Well cautiously. All looks the same as it was last night and Lewis looks around in dismay at the amount of footprints they had left behind. Stepping over the barbed wire fence that surrounds the Well Lewis removes the old planks of wood and looks inside. Darkness shows about three metres down and Lewis takes his torch out of his pocket. Switching it on, he shines the beam down into the darkness. The torch beam is powerful and shines all the way to the bottom showing the twigs, branches and clods of grass they had thrown down.

Lewis can see below the rubbish Doug's arm; seeming to point upwards towards him. He can also see a part of his leg and the hair on his head.

"We did a bad job of covering him up last night, lucky we did

come back this morning.” he tells Suzy in a despairing voice.

“I will go and find some more wood and stuff.” Suzy replies walking past the Well into the trees beyond.

Lewis reaches into his deep coat pocket and pulls out a plastic sandwich box container. Opening it, he looks at the thousands of white maggots wriggling in the box he had bought from the fishing shop early this morning. The smell of rotting meat drifts up into his nostrils from the maggots and in disgust he holds the container over the Well and tips the maggots in. Stepping back over the fence he joins Suzy in looking for anything to throw down the Well to cover Doug's remains.

Suzy soon returns with an armload of moss covered branches and drops them down besides the barbed wire fencing. Walking in another direction she heads deep into the trees looking for more. Lewis gathers several arm loads of branches and puts them beside Suzy's pile.

Hearing Suzy coming back he waits for her and sees that she has done well in gathering a huge amount of old branches and some wooden planks. The wood and planks look to be fifty years old; being covered in moss and lichen and she drops them down at Lewis's feet. Several of the planks and branches break under the force of the fall and Lewis can see they are wet and rotten.

“They are perfect Suzy; will you go out and have a look in the field in case someone is walking their dog?”

“Sure, do you need any more to chuck down the Well?”

“No, this should be enough.” Lewis replies as he starts to throw the wood down the Well.

Suzy leaves him to it and walks slowly along the trail until she can see the field; all looks quiet, apart from a fox on the other side of the field walking along the edge of the woods. Suzy stands still and watches the fox which appears oblivious of her presence. The sight of the fox walking along casually also tells Suzy that there are no humans around and she turns and walks back to Lewis.

Lewis has finished filling the Well and has replaced the old

wooden planks on top. Using a large branch he sweeps the ground attempting to disguise their footprints in the soft earth. Using the dead leaves that are scattered about the ground he sweeps them into their footprints and tries to cover these with a thin layer of soil.

Standing back to survey his handiwork he looks pleased with his efforts; "Let us get out of here." he orders as he starts to walk away from the Well.

They make good time walking back to the car and arrive just as a dark blue hatchback pulls in beside them. The driver stares at Lewis and Suzy with obvious hostility as he gets out of his car. Walking to the back of the car he opens the tailgate allowing a huge German shepherd dog to leap out. The dog runs over to the nearest tree and squats and pees with a contented look on its face.

Lewis and Suzy get into the Volkswagen and shut the doors; "Let us hope he is just being hostile as we are invading his space." says Lewis as he turns the ignition key and starts the engine, putting the car into reverse gear he backs slowly out of the little parking area into the road. All is quiet along the road and Lewis puts it into first gear and drives slowly away back to Suzy's bungalow.

Pulling up outside the bungalow Lewis puts on the parking brake and looks at Suzy; "I have to go and do some work, will you be all right here on your own?"

"Yes fine thanks, I have got plenty to do to keep me busy, will you come round for supper when you have finished work?" Suzy asks hopefully.

"Depends what you're cooking; have you improved since the last time?" asks Lewis referring to Suzy's last attempt at a roast dinner, where the potatoes were as hard as rock, the pork had been baked dry and the vegetables over cooked.

Suzy laughs; "Yes I remember that, Eastenders was on and I forgot all about it, do not worry I will not turn the telly on."

"Ok then," agrees Lewis reluctantly; "see you about six o'clock."

“Six it is then.” smiles Suzy as she gets out of the car and shuts the door. Standing on the pavement Suzy watches Lewis drive along the road until he turns the corner and is out of sight.

Walking along her path she reaches her front door and putting the key in the lock opens the door and steps inside. On the floor just inside the door a plain white envelope lays on the mat, picking it up Suzy sees that the envelope is blank and opens it by sliding her thumb under the join. Inside is a roughly scribbled note from Darren saying that he will call this evening about seven o'clock.

Suzy's stomach twists in agitation and wonders what she is going to say to him; apart from repeating the tale of Doug having a fancy bit and moving away, she is at a loss what else to say.

Chapter Six

The sound of Lewis's car pulling up out the front is a relief from the cleaning and washing Suzy has been doing all day. Lewis's attitude and warnings of future problems made Suzy remove every trace of Doug's presence, even washing the windowsills, cupboards and doors to remove any fingerprints. Lewis knocks gently on the door and Suzy throws her cleaning cloth in the bucket of water and disinfectant.

Wiping her hands she hurries along the hall and opens the door; "Hi Lewis, I hope you have had a good day?" she asks with beaming smile.

"Bloody awful to be honest, hope your day has been better?"

"I have been cleaning and polishing, but I did get some bad news this morning when I opened the door." she admits as she takes the letter from Darren off the shelf and hands it to Lewis.

Lewis takes hold of the letter and opens it and reads it quietly to himself, looking Suzy in the eyes he warns; "This sounds like the first trouble to come, what are you going to say to him?"

"Only what I said to his boss Adam, on the phone." she replies with no emotion to her voice.

"You reckon you will be able to do that, face to face?" Lewis asks harshly.

Suzy's face colours a pale shade of pink and she stares back at Lewis with fear in her eyes; "I do not know; especially if he uses the same tone of voice as you just used on me."

Lewis laughs; "Yes, I was testing you to see how you would react under pressure, not very good are you?"

"Darren coming round has stressed me out a little," Suzy admits; "Would you like a coffee while I finish cooking your dinner?"

"Yes thanks, I will sit in the lounge if that's Ok?"

"Sure, wherever." Suzy agrees as she walks into the kitchen.

Lewis enters the lounge and can see that Suzy has dragged the carpet in which they bought yesterday. Sitting down in a

soft armchair Lewis realises that with Darren coming round they will need to lay the carpet in case he comes into the lounge.

Suzy comes in a few minutes later carrying two mugs of coffee; not able to put them on the coffee table as they had burned it yesterday, Suzy puts Lewis's mug onto the floor next to him and sits down in the other armchair. Taking a sip of coffee she sighs contentedly and settles back in the chair.

"Make the most of your rest, will be best if we get this carpet laid before Darren comes round." he tells her.

Suzy pulls a face; "He is not coming in here, I am not going let him in." she says firmly.

"You have known him a long time it will just make him more suspicious if you are hostile towards him. If you invite him and give him a bit of a sob story he is more than likely to go away happy."

"Yes I see what you mean, but I am not happy about it."

They sit and drink their coffee in silence lost in their own thoughts, as Lewis drinks the last of his he stands up and walks into the kitchen. Suzy can hear him put the mug into the sink and walk along the hall to the toilet. Drinking her coffee quickly Suzy stands as she hears the flushing of the toilet and walks into the kitchen. Putting her mug into the sink she goes into the lounge and helps Lewis move the furniture so they can lay the carpet.

A half hour later Lewis sits down in the armchair, tired, irritable and dusty, he stares moodily down at the 'new' carpet. The carpet looks like it had not been moved for years and Lewis stands up quickly to wash the dust off his hands and face. As he shuts the bathroom door he hears the doorbell ring and realises it must be Darren. He had not realised how long it had taken to lay the carpet and he washes quickly. Opening the bathroom door he forces a smile on his lips and goes into the lounge and sees Darren sitting on the couch. The sound of a cupboard door slamming in the kitchen indicates Suzy is making Darren tea or coffee.

Darren looks up at Lewis as Lewis walks in; the look on Darren's face is one of total dislike. They had never really got on in the past and Lewis assumes that with Doug out of the way Darren thought he was in with a chance with Suzy.

Lewis walking in the door and appearing so friendly with Suzy by being here puts a stop to that way of thinking. Angry at Lewis's presence Darren scowls at him and asks in a harsh voice; "What are you doing here? You are the last person I expected to see."

Lewis stares Darren deep in the eyes reflecting his anger; "I have known Suzy for years mate, just here to help, if you do not mind?" Lewis challenges.

"Yes I do mind." says Darren as he stands up and walks towards Lewis. Staring him deep in the eyes he raises his fist and punches Lewis hard on the right cheek.

Lewis is shocked by Darren's aggressive behaviour and without thinking punches Darren back harder on the nose.

Darren's nose bursts in a shower of blood as he tries to step back. Tripping over the edge of the 'new' carpet Darren falls backwards onto the floor and bangs his head on the hard tiling that makes up the fireplace.

Knocked unconscious Lewis puts his foot onto his neck; stopping any chance of him breathing. Darren regains consciousness as he fights for breath; Lewis's foot on his neck feels hard and rough and he cannot move it. The rubber of the trainers, feeling as hard as concrete, is his last sensation as the breath is forced out of him.

Suzy walks in the door and in a state of shock stares down at Darren's obviously dead body; "Why did you do that? Have I got enough problems?" she shouts in a scared voice.

"We never did like each other and he walked over and hit me hard; seems he wanted you for himself so I hit him back."

"Are you serious? Whoever won or lost it's down to me who I hang around with, you are just saying that, why did you do it really?"

Lewis holds his hands up in a sign of defeat as he takes his foot off of Darren's neck; "The truth is what I said, you are

worth fighting for.” he smiles looking her up and down in a sexual manner.

Suzy blushes a deep red; “Don't you lie to me, I thought we were friends *tell me the truth.*” she demands raising her voice to a shout.

Lewis, deeply embarrassed himself tries to look Suzy in the eyes but loses his nerve and looks down at Darren; “That is the truth but don't flatter yourself we were just fighting over you.” he answers finally looking her in the eyes.

“What else were you fighting over?”

“He never has liked me and always pushed me around, hurt me loads of times. Must be this bungalow, or what you have just done in it that gave me the courage to have a go back. All those years of pain just kind of exploded, he hit me, so I hit him back as hard as I could.”

“You were not hitting him for long.” condemns Suzy.

“I made sure he stayed on the floor is all; if he got up he would have killed me!” Lewis smiles coldly.

“What are we going to do with him, put him down the Well too?” asks a pale faced Suzy.

“Best we stay away from there. His car is outside, he will have to have an accident and I will drive him off the cliffs at Bayside.”

“I guess it is my turn to help you; what do you want me to do?”

“You can follow in my car and park up about half a mile away, there is a parking place in some trees but keep your eyes open for the police as they like to try to catch the kids smoking the weed.”

“And that is a good place to park?” asks Suzy incredulously.

“Today is Wednesday, they usually only patrol Fridays and the weekends, be the ideal place.” smiles Lewis looking down at Darren's still body.

Suzy pulls into the little parking area amongst the trees; all is quiet apart from the sound of Darren's engine fading in the distance. Suzy looks around her and in the rear view mirror

and smiles in relief as she can see no signs of life. Opening the car door she listens to the sounds of the night and hears the engine noise increase as Lewis drives the car into the wooden gate at the end of the road. The gate smashes open with a splintering of wood and Suzy hears the car engine roar as Lewis drives it towards the cliff.

The engine noise changes to a higher pitch as the car takes off; and fades almost instantly as it drops below the cliff edge. The sound of the car crashing into the pebble beach below breaks the silence and Suzy steps out of the car and looks around nervously. Seeing car headlights in the distance on the road driving towards the town she relaxes.

The sound of footsteps hurrying up the lane towards her makes her spin around fast and she is relieved to see Lewis running towards her.

“I will drive, get in the car.” orders a breathless Lewis as he approaches Suzy.

Suzy leaves the door open and hurries around to the other side, as she opens the door Lewis jumps in behind the wheel and starts the engine; “All went well then?” asks Suzy as she gets in beside him and shuts the door.

Lewis shuts his door and puts the car in gear as he answers; “Yes, no problem, and we got lucky as the tides coming in, give it an hour and the sea will cover it.”

Twisting the steering wheel hard he turns the car around and drives back up the lane, turning his side lights on before turning on the main beams when they reach the end of the lane.

“You coming back for coffee?” asks Suzy in a shaky voice.

Lewis looks at her and sees her face is white and pale; “You feeling all right? You look like you are going to be sick.”

“I think I am; can you pull over please?” Suzy asks as she puts her hand to her mouth.

“No I cannot.” Lewis tells her firmly. Putting his left hand behind the seat he pulls out a crumpled plastic carrier bag; “Use that, otherwise you will leave your DNA at the side of the road.”

"I had not thought of that, they are bound to find the car when it gets light." replies Suzy as she opens the bag; "I will try and keep it in, you do not look so clever yourself."

"Thanks, I cannot get his face out of my head and he seemed to give me a final nasty look when he went over the edge."

Suzy shudders and clinging onto the plastic bag tightly stares grimly up the road, car headlights shine back at her and she panics thinking it is the police. A battered dark blue van passes them on the other side of the road and Suzy relaxes and closes her eyes. Lewis drives quickly and the sound of the engine and Suzy being bumped along in the seat makes her feel sick again and she snaps her eyes open.

"You all right?" asks a concerned Lewis.

"Yes thanks, closing my eyes did not help at all made me feel worse."

"Be home soon, and then you can chill out." says Lewis as he concentrates on the road ahead.

"You never did answer me; are you coming in for coffee?" asks Suzy as Lewis pulls the car to a stop outside her bungalow.

"I need to wash and change my clothes as well as give the inside of this a wipe down." Lewis answers, staring deeply into her eyes.

"You can do that here, I can give the car a wipe while you're having a bath." answers Suzy firmly. Staring into his eyes she sees his resolve waver as his eyes flick away from hers for a split second and she continues; "Anyway your neighbours will not like you having your washing machine on this time of night and I have no neighbours."

"Ok, I hope you have got something for me to wear?" asks Lewis as he opens the car door.

Suzy opens her door quickly and jumps out; "Do not lock it I will clean it now." she tells him as she shuts her door.

Lewis takes the keys out of the ignition and gets out shutting the door gently behind him; following Suzy along the path he

looks around and smiles as the road and pavement is empty of people and cars.

Suzy opens the door wide and walks into her bedroom as Lewis makes his way to the kitchen. Filling the kettle with water from the cold tap he switches it on to boil as Suzy walks in carrying a large red pullover and a white fluffy dressing gown; "These will do until your clothes are washed and dry, should only be a few hours and we will not be disturbed."

"I am glad to hear that." laughs Lewis as he takes the bright pullover out of her hands and holds it up for a better look; "I would get beaten up if I wore that down the street; and that" he laughs taking the fluffy dressing gown from Suzy.

"I will go and give your car a clean; it is your seat and side that are your main worry?"

"Yes, I know that you think I am DNA mad, but better be safe than sorry. I will put my clothes to wash if you do not mind?" asks Lewis indicating Suzy should leave him to get undressed.

"I just need to get the bucket and cloth, I will fill it up in the bathroom." she laughs walking over to the sink and taking out a bright yellow bucket and a new packet of kitchen cloths giving Lewis a smile as she walks out of the kitchen.

Chapter Seven

Suzy throws more weeds into the bucket as she clears the flowerbed ready for planting when she hears the car pull up out front of her bungalow.

Several days have passed since Darren's visit and she had been keeping herself busy cleaning and polishing until she thought she would go mad. The escape into the garden was proving to be hard work and she had planted weeds and grass in the 'new' bean patch trying to cover her tracks.

It now looked good as if it had not been disturbed for months, the ashes from the fire had been bagged up and taken away by the dustcart yesterday and Suzy felt no alarm at the slamming of the car doors.

Hearing her front gate open Suzy stands up and walks quickly into the kitchen, shutting the back door as she hears the doorbell ring.

Taking off her gloves she throws them onto the table and walks along the hall to the front door; "Who is it?" she shouts.

"Hello I am PC Willmott and with me is WPC Davenport, would you be good enough to open the door please?" asks a male voice politely.

Suzy frowns realising she has to open the door. Putting a brave smile on her face she opens the door and peers out at the black uniforms before her. Recognising *they* are the police she opens the door about half way; "What do you want?"

"We would like to talk to you about your missing partner Mr Culley if we may, can we come in please?" asks the WPC in a polite voice as her male partner.

"Why do you want to come in? He cleared off and left me over a week ago now."

"Yes, that is what we heard that you told them at his place of employment, but we would like to confirm his whereabouts. May we come in, or would you prefer to talk about this down at the station?" the WPC asks in that same polite voice.

Suzy's heart sinks at the words and almost mechanically she

opens the door wide and stands to one side to allow them to enter. The smell of them as they walk into her home makes her want to throw up and she can feel them already getting under her skin; "Go in, second on the left." she invites, in as a polite voice as she can muster.

The police walk down the hall towards the lounge and Suzy can feel WPC Davenport's eyes watching her.

Suzy shuts the door and turns locking eyes with the WPC even though she is walking away from her. Suzy smiles; "Go in, go in." she orders in a friendly voice. The two police enter her lounge and Suzy walks in behind them and sits down in the armchair by the fireplace.

Taking out his note book PC Willmott starts to slowly turn the pages as WPC Davenport looks around the room.

"Take a seat, would you like a drink of something tea, coffee?" asks Suzy politely though their very presence makes her want to scream.

"No thank you." replies WPC Davenport as she sits down in the armchair opposite Suzy.

PC Willmott still turns pages in his little notebook appearing lost in thought; Suzy takes the opportunity to calm herself down and to breathe properly.

Appearing suddenly aware of their presence PC Willmott suddenly looks up from his notebook and stares Suzy in the eyes; "No, not for me thank you." he says as he breaks the gaze and sits down in the middle of the large couch.

"We are sorry to interrupt your day but we need to know the whereabouts of your partner Mr Culley?" asks WPC Davenport.

"As I told you, he left me about a week ago now."

"Do you know where he has gone?" asks the WPC.

Suzy shrugs her shoulders seeming unconcerned; "Manchester somewhere, gone to live with his fancy bit." Suzy replies with an edge of bitterness to her voice.

"Do you know this other lady's name?" demands PC Willmott looking her in the eyes and appearing impatient.

"No I do not." snaps Suzy; "And I do not care either."

The two police officers do not appear to believe her and Suzy is forced to tell them of the repeated beatings; and of the big fight they had the night Doug left, (she leaves out the part about the letter opener). Suzy had suspected that the authorities would be round to locate Doug and she had rehearsed her story in her head lots of times. Putting the right inflections in her voice at the right time she soon gave them the impression of an abused wife.

Well it was true; Doug was not as bad as she made out, but in the telling she had managed tears to roll down her face. Looking at the two police officers in front of her Suzy tells them she is glad he has gone. Glad that she will suffer no more abuse and appearing to finally convince the police lady of her innocence in any wrong doing.

WPC Davenport is very sympathetic and understanding and Suzy feels she has an ally; except for PC Willmott who stares at her hard faced and makes notes in his little notebook. After nearly two hours of questioning the two police officers finally stand up to leave. Suzy has managed to put herself in a very emotional state and WPC Davenport tells Suzy that they will leave her now; but may come back!

Suzy ushers them out of the door as fast as she can and getting a can of air freshener from the kitchen she sprays the lounge and hallway. Going back into the kitchen she puts the kettle on to boil and thinks back over the past two hours of questioning. Satisfied that she has appeared to convince them that Doug *had* left her, she smiles, as she makes herself a cup of coffee.

Suzy spends the rest of the day in the garden, her mind constantly going over her two hour conversation with the police. The more she thinks about it the more worried she becomes; maybe things had not gone that well for her. The reference to her last fight with Doug she realises was discussed many times.

She had not seen Lewis since the night of Darren, after he had washed and dried his clothes he had gone home and she

had not heard from him since. Suzy was too scared to phone him. She still could not believe her luck in meeting him at the shop as she would not have managed without him. Thinking it best to wait until he contacted her, Suzy waits impatiently. Tidying the garden helped her forget, but a deep worry would keep returning at least every half hour and Suzy could feel her stress levels rising.

Convinced that the police would return Suzy recognised the importance in keeping calm. She needed to be able to carry on her act and knew she would have to repeat her story many times. Being stressed would make her forgetful and even force her into telling more lies. Bottling up her problems was not helping and she realised she needed to talk to someone and 'let it out'. The spoken words would bring it back to reality; rather than the dark dream world she was creating in her head.

Thinking of her friends, though many she had not seen for years, she wondered who she could really trust. Faces pass through her mind and one keeps returning; Sharon, her best friend from secondary school and university. It had been about two years since she had seen her and Suzy hoped she had the same telephone number.

Going back indoors Suzy picks up her mobile phone from the kitchen table and searches for Sharon's number. Dialling the number she is relieved to hear the phone ringing indicating it is still a live number. After five rings the phone is finally answered by a cheerful Sharon; "Suzy, how wonderful to hear from you. I have been wondering how you and Doug are getting on, all good I hope?"

"Hi Sharon, it is good to hear your voice, sorry to ring you when I need something, could you come over and see me I could really do with your advice?"

"That sounds serious, are you Ok?"

"Not really, can you come over please?"

"Yes sure, got a few bits to do and can be with you in about an hour if that is Ok?"

“That is brilliant, thank you so much.” replies Suzy in an over emotional voice.

“You need me to bring any shopping or anything when I come over?”

“No I am fine thanks see you soon.” answers Suzy as she disconnects the call.

Suzy answers the ringing of the doorbell fifty nine minutes after the phone call and she opens the door to a smiling Sharon.

“Sharon, great to see you, come in.” Suzy greets as she opens the door wide.

“You sounded a bit stressed on the phone, you sure you want *my* advice?” asks Sharon as she enters Suzy's bungalow and stands a few steps in waiting for Suzy to shut the door.

Suzy walks outside and walks to the front gate, looking around casually she looks up and down the road and up at the sky as if checking the weather. The road is empty of people and she can see no strange cars parked; the sky above is overcast and grey with the feel of rain in the air. Taking a long look at Sharon's shiny silver Fiesta she turns with a smile and walks back along the path; to a confused Sharon, who still stands a few steps inside the front door.

Still smiling Suzy shuts the front door; “I will make you a coffee if you want one?” she asks as she walks past Sharon towards the kitchen.

“Yes, that would be nice.” answers Sharon as she follows Suzy into the kitchen. Taking a seat at the kitchen table Sharon puts her leather handbag onto it and watches Suzy as she makes the coffee. Suzy remains silent focusing her attention on making coffee, after several minutes she turns with two large steaming mugs in her hands and still smiling puts them onto the table.

“Which is mine?” asks Sharon.

“Anyone, they have both got two sugars as the coffee is a bit strong.”

“Thanks.” replies Sharon as she picks up the nearest mug

which has an imprint of a travel book cover printed in cream and black.

Suzy picks up the other mug which also has an advert of a book in purple with silver writing. Sharon asks no questions about the strangely designed mugs and sips her coffee waiting for Suzy to speak.

Suzy stares into her mug of coffee appearing close to tears, the strain of the last few days was taking its toll and Suzy felt a tiredness that reached to her bones. Putting a determined look on her face she looks up from her coffee and stares Sharon in the eyes. Starting with the fight and death of Doug she tells Sharon everything that had happened since then.

Several times Suzy stopped her story and made more coffee, the hours pass as Suzy had a lot to say. After three hours she finally stops talking and gives Sharon a questioning look; Sharon is shocked by what has happened to Suzy and stares back trying to give a suitable answer though her mind is in a whirl.

Standing up, Sharon picks up the empty mugs and walks over to the sink to make fresh coffee. The truth is she does not know what to say, Suzy's behaviour to a certain extent she could understand.

Lewis's involvement however was a different manner and she felt a deep distrust of his motives. The killing of Darren she could not understand and wondered why he had taken such a violent attitude, especially so soon after Doug's death. Suzy had explained how she had seen him with his foot on Darren's throat and the cold bloodied way he had disposed of the bodies.

Admittedly Sharon had also known Lewis a long time, since their university days, but in that time she had never really got to know him; how he thought and his beliefs. She had always viewed him as a bit of a threat, though she knew that he would not force her to do anything she did not want to. His manner towards her had always been polite and respectful but underneath she felt that given the opportunity he would have sex with her if she gave him the chance.

She had considered the possibility many times and in some cases had wanted him to make advances towards her, but something had held her back.

“What am I going to do?” asks a worried Suzy.

Turning towards her Sharon smiles broadly; “Keep your cool and stick to the same story, whoever asks you. Really you are making a mistake telling me as you should have kept it to yourself; and Lewis.”

“If it wasn’t for Lewis I reckon I would be in prison now. The worrying thing is that he seemed to know what he was doing, almost as if he had done it before.”

“Yes, I was going to come to that, his timing seems a little too perfect and as you say he seemed to know what he was doing, do you trust him?”

“I do not seem to have a lot of choice in that, as I have to now.”

“He does appear a gentleman in all of this as he had the opportunity to spend the night with you. I guess you were a bit emotional after Darren’s death? By the way you said it you wanted him to spend the night; and you were disappointed that he did not. Yet for all his obvious interest in you he does not take advantage of you. He seems emotionally cold getting rid of those bodies, which the way you said it seemed to him to be just a day’s work.”

“I have known him for years and have never seen him like that, I helped him to get rid of Doug and the way he treated him was as if he was getting rid of the rubbish. Darren was the same; it was more like just dumping a car than a dead body.”

“What is he after then?” asks Sharon staring into Suzy’s eyes.

“I do not know, but after seeing him with his foot on Darren’s neck I do not think I want to get too involved. Doug was a vicious bastard but he just wanted to dominate, Lewis scares me but I may be wrong; if Darren had got up he would have killed him.

Maybe Lewis did it because he could take no more and feared the next beating from Darren would be his last.”

Sharon stares at Suzy thinking over her words as she could be right; Lewis had made no attempt to contact Suzy. If he had any emotional feelings for her he would have at least telephoned to see how she was. Maybe he was paranoid and too frightened to phone. The police could trace his number even if Suzy did not answer it and Sharon thought that maybe she had misjudged him. Lewis had shown a high degree of intelligence, especially his dread of leaving DNA traces; he would know the police would call on Suzy and best he does keep away.

Talking to Sharon had helped Suzy unbottle her thoughts and she felt calmer inside. Much of what she had said was her own paranoia and speaking it out loud had made much of it appear ridiculous. Sharon stayed for another hour talking of her life in her flat with her two cats, her job at the ball bearing factory and how awful it was.

Suzy reminded Sharon that she was lucky to have a job; with Doug gone she would have to find a job as no money was coming in and the electric bill had already arrived, with the gas bill. They talk of job prospects in the area, which are poor and Suzy realises that even with her university degree she will find it difficult to find work.

After a promise of visiting Suzy again tomorrow about midday, Sharon stands up and puts her coat on, the dark of evening is approaching and along with it the cold; "The car will not really warm up until I get home, I do not want to freeze." explains Sharon and giving Suzy a kiss on the cheek walks down the path to the gate.

Suzy follows quickly and holds the gate open for Sharon who walks over to her car and unlocks it. Suzy looks nervously up and down the road and giving Sharon a worried look and a brave smile wave's farewell as she shuts the gate and hurries back indoors.

Suzy walks quickly along the hall to answer the ringing of the doorbell. It is only eleven o'clock in the morning and she is

pleased that Sharon has decided to call early. Opening the front door the smile on her face disappears instantly when she sees PC Willmott and WPC Davenport and a nurse standing there; “You are back soon, what is the problem?” asks a now worried Suzy.

“May we come in?” demands WPC Davenport.

Suzy reluctantly opens the door; “If you must, you know where the lounge is.” she says waving her arm in the direction of the lounge.

The two police lead the way as the nurse follows behind; Suzy shuts her front door and walks down the hall to the lounge. The police and the nurse stand in the middle of the room and Suzy invites them to sit down.

“We have been going over your statement since our last visit and there are a few things we need to clear up.” WPC Davenport tells Suzy sternly.

Suzy is unbalanced by the sudden visit; and even more unbalanced and frightened of the police woman’s words; “Statement? I was not aware that I had given any statement.”

“Our talk yesterday is considered as a statement of the facts; you kept referring to being constantly abused by your partner Mr Culley and volunteered to show bruising he had caused. You were upset enough yesterday, so I thought it best to leave your examination to today. This is Nurse Vanderpool, who will carry out the examination.” WPC Davenport explains as if Suzy has no choice in the matter.

“I will go and sit in your kitchen or stand outside.” PC Willmott tells Suzy and not asking permission turns and walks out of the door.

“This will not take long.” assures the nurse; “Could you remove the clothing that is necessary to show us these bruises please?” the question appears to Suzy to be a demand.

Not arguing Suzy removes her pullover and her blouse putting them on the couch and stands self consciously in front of the WPC and the nurse.

“Can you show me where he hurt you?” asks the nurse politely. She can see several bruises on Suzy’s upper arms as

she takes off her blouse where Doug had held her hard. The nurse's attitude changes towards her and Suzy can see the sympathy in her eyes as she turns slowly, showing the bruising on the back of her forearms. Marks made by the overhanging trees from when they put Doug's body down the Well give the appearance of deep finger scratches. Suzy turns around to face them feeling no need to do any acting; she stands still in front of them with her face serious.

WPC Davenport and nurse Vanderpool looked shocked and angry as Suzy puts her blouse back on. As she starts to do the buttons up WPC Davenport stops her; "Before you put your blouse back on we need to take photographs of your bruising for the record."

"Record of what? You will be wasting your time; as if you are trying to build some sort of assault case against him you can forget it." Suzy almost shouts.

"But you have said in your statement that he hurt you and we have seen the marks and bruising; these facts cannot be ignored." WPC Davenport tells Suzy in an angry voice.

"Facts?" Suzy replies scornfully; "they were spoken under duress and I will deny saying them."

"You can be prosecuted for giving false information and wasting police time." warns an angrier police woman Davenport.

"As far as I was concerned yesterday was just a friendly conversation; not a *statement*. I want you all to leave now, I will not be pressing charges against Doug, no matter how much you push me."

"We have no intention of pushing you Suzy, by what you have told me and PC Willmott, this man has abused you for years; do you not you think he should pay for his crimes? In the eyes of the law he can be put in prison for many years." WPC Davenport says in a calmer voice, seeing her case slipping away before her.

She held a particular hatred for wife beaters as she had been an abused and beaten wife herself for many years before she plucked up the courage to fight back. The court's had

been sympathetic towards her and sentenced her now ex-husband to nine months in jail. By taking over the payments she became the owner of their house and it seemed a natural progression to join the police force.

Suzy appears frightened and stares hard into the police woman's eyes; "And what happens when he gets out? Are you going to guard me day and night when he does get out what; in more like five months time?"

"He would have learnt his lesson and there will be a restraining order against him." WPC Davenport assures.

"What planet is it that you live on? Certainly not this one." Suzy shouts, her anger and fear rising.

The lounge door opens and PC Willmott puts his head just inside the door; "Everything all right?" he asks appearing genuinely concerned.

"No it is not, I want you out; *now!*" Suzy demands in a firm voice.

"We only want to help you Suzy." says WPC Davenport.

"I do not want your help, please leave." Suzy asks politely walking across the room she opens the door wide and stares at them expectantly.

Nurse Vanderpool looks confused and WPC Davenport looks angry as they walk out of the door. PC Willmott looks unsure what to do and after a long stare at Suzy he walks along the hall and out of the front door. WPC Davenport and Nurse Vanderpool stand by the gate talking quietly. As PC Willmott approaches them they stop talking and make their way to the police car.

Chapter Eight

Suzy shuts the door, scared, frightened and elated at her outburst and in throwing the police out of her home. Walking into the kitchen she puts water on to boil for coffee. Her hands are shaking and she realises the pain in her stomach is due to the need to urinate. Hurrying into the bathroom she relieves herself with a contented sigh, as she stands she hears the ringing of the doorbell. Pulling her jeans up quickly she zips and buttons herself and without washing her hands walks quickly to the front door; "Who is it?" she shouts.

"It is Sharon; open the door, will you? I have been hanging around for ages waiting for your visitors to leave."

Suzy smiles in relief and opens the front door; "Come in I need to wash my hands." she invites as she turns and walks back into the bathroom.

Sharon shuts the door behind her and hearing the kettle boiling in the kitchen walks in and switches it off at the plug. Getting fresh mugs from the cupboard she starts to make the coffee as Suzy walks into the kitchen.

Sharon turns at the sound of her footsteps and asks in a worried voice; "You Ok?"

"Am now, those bastards have gone."

"They were here quite a while; I thought you answered all their questions yesterday?"

"They wanted me to make charges against Doug for abuse and whatever; they even brought a nurse to examine me. I let them examine me and then I came to my senses and told them to leave. If I make no charges or even show that I want to have anything to do with Doug they might leave me alone."

"You hope, I have been thinking over what you told me, in fact I have been thinking about nothing else; as long as Doug's body does not get found you will be in the clear. They do not seem to connect you with Darren's death. Telling them you have never liked him and he had never visited here went in your favour I think. Who worries me is Lewis, he put his whole

life in jeopardy helping you and you have not seen or heard from him since. You think he is all right?" asks Sharon showing real concern.

"I hope so; I have been too frightened to phone him in case the police are monitoring my phone."

"Why not phone him from a phone box?"

"I had not thought of that, do you fancy a drive, or we can always walk? The closest phone box is about a half kilometre away."

"Walking sounds good, be able to see if someone is keeping a watch on you as well."

"Watching me?" asks a shocked Suzy.

"Maybe you have not convinced the police like you think, they might think you have done away with him."

"Why are you saying that? I told you word for word what they said."

"And I have been thinking about it as I told you; and I do not think you are going to be able to relax properly for a long time yet." Sharon tells her with a wry smile on her lips.

"Thanks, I hope Lewis is all right." Suzy says worriedly as she stands up and going out into the hall puts her dark blue coat on.

Sharon leaves her coffee on the table and follows her out and then waits patiently as Suzy readies herself. With a final look in the mirror she opens the front door and they step out into a grey cloudy day. Suzy is glad of her coat and buttons it up tightly, walking slowly she opens the gate and stands on the pavement. Looking up at the sky and casually up and down the road she smiles with relief at Sharon as they walk along the road.

Suzy peers into gardens and houses as she walks, at times making it obvious she is looking for someone or something; "Take it easy will you? Try and be a bit more casual about it." Sharon snaps in a worried voice.

Suzy smiles; "Just want to make sure I am not being watched."

"Well if you are, anyone seeing you behave like that is going

to keep out of the way until you have passed.”

“Yes I guess you are right, I do not like this, and it scares me.”

“Scares me too.” agrees Sharon as she puts her arm in Suzy's and pulls her away from a high privet hedge Suzy is staring into and forces her to walk along the pavement.

As they turn the corner at the end of the road Suzy cannot resist looking behind to see if they are being followed. An old man wearing a flat cap and long grey trench like coat walks with his dog towards them. The old man looks to be in his seventies; as does the scruffy wire haired black and white dog! Suzy relaxes and smiles, if this old man was sent to follow them he would have no chance in keeping up.

They turn the corner losing sight of the old man and his dog and Suzy tries to quicken their pace; “Slow down a bit will you? Plenty of time.” Sharon complains.

They walk slowly along the pavement with Sharon keeping up a constant chatter mainly about the good old days at university. Suzy notices that amongst the happy chattering Sharon is looking around them as Sharon rarely looks directly at Suzy.

They see the grey and silver telephone box in the distance when they turn the next corner and Sharon stops and looks at Suzy; “Stay here for a little while, give us a chance to see who is about.”

“You are as paranoid as Lewis, or I am a bit stupid?” asks Suzy in frustration.

“You have led an honest life, that is your only problem.”

“Meaning that you and Lewis are criminals? I always knew you and him got on well have you done any jobs together?”

Sharon laughs; “No we are not criminals, well not in the way you put it. I have never stolen anything in my life. I have smoked a bit of weed and popped the odd pill now and then but I do not think that makes me a criminal. A policeman would think otherwise and I would get arrested and have a criminal record, which would mess up my life especially if I ever wanted

to work with kids; which is really stupid.”

“I see your point, smoking weed is not exactly a crime except for the damage you do to your health, and booze is a lot worse. They should change the law, most people I know when they get drunk get aggressive. And how many unwanted babies are there in the world because the parents got drunk?” asks an excited Suzy, she had been a drinker when younger and got herself pregnant one drunken night.

The father was a right bastard and when he found out she was pregnant he left her. Suzy was only eighteen and had been accepted for university and her parents had persuaded her to have an abortion.

Which made sense in some ways, as she was on her own with no means of support other than government handouts; and it had been her lifelong dream to attend university.

With university now many years in the past and the promises of getting a fantastic job at the end of it proving false, Suzy hated herself for agreeing to kill her baby. Doug's beatings on her usually happened when he was drunk and she felt a deep anger at the way of the world; especially when alcohol was involved.

“Where is the next phone box?” Sharon asks looking at Suzy's blazing eyes; “you all right?”

“Yes thanks; just a few ghosts appeared in my mind, brought back some unhappy memories, what is wrong with the one down the road?”

“If you look past it on the other side of the road in the blue car; pretend to look at the phone box and you can see him out the corner your eye.”

Suzy does as she is told and looks along the road to the telephone box; parked on the opposite side of the road is a dark blue saloon car. Inside the car a man pretends to read a newspaper which is unfolded in front of him. Suzy can easily tell the man is pretending to read as she can feel his eyes watching her; and she is not getting the feeling of being watched in a sexual manner like she normally feels.

“What are we going to do?” asks a worried Suzy.

Sharon smiles; "We are going to walk to the phone box and when we get about five metres in front of it we will cross the road to that car and have a look at this geezer. We will split up just before it and walk either side so we can have a look inside and then we carry on walking along the road."

"You sound like a spy, you are enjoying this aren't you?" smiles Suzy.

Sharon smiles back; "In a way, it is a shame this is so serious. We must walk slowly to the phone box, then cross the road quickly and try and catch him by surprise. You walk straight towards him as if you are going to ask him something and I will go the other side."

"Sounds good," laughs Suzy; "let us do it." she says as she starts walking towards the phone box.

Sharon hurries to catch her; "This bit we do slowly." she reminds Suzy grabbing hold of her arm and making her walk slower.

"Sorry getting carried away, what are we going to do if it is the police?"

"Keep walking." says Sharon firmly.

As they approach the telephone box, Sharon, looking behind her for any traffic on the road, pulls Suzy off the pavement; "Give him a serious look as you approach him, then walk past." Sharon laughs as she lets go of Suzy's arm.

Separating as they approach the car the man inside looks up from his newspaper with surprise in his eyes. Not sure what to do as Suzy approaches him he stares at her making no move. He watches Suzy so intently they he does not see Sharon walk past the front of the car and look inside the passengers' window.

Sharon sees the strange radio with its microphone on its coiled lead and the walkie talkie type radio lying on the passenger's seat. The man inside is suddenly aware of Sharon's presence and quickly lays the newspaper over the radio on the car seat. Glaring at her with obvious hostility Sharon gives him a wave and shows a broad smile as she turns away and walks along the pavement.

The policeman (for that is obvious what he is) turns to look back in Suzy's direction; Suzy has gone and he curses in embarrassment at being caught out.

Suzy puts her arm in Sharon's and they walk casually along; "What are we going to do now?" asks Suzy.

"Keep walking, we will wander down the town and see if we get followed." answers Sharon as she turns and looks behind her at the policeman in the car; who appears to be talking on his radio!

Sharon hopes they must have put a rookie on the job; unless they think Suzy and Sharon are really stupid. If her suspicions are correct though, it means the police must suspect Suzy of doing away with Doug, or having something to do with it.

They spend several hours wandering in the shops and sitting in cafes as they watch the people around them. Sharon being the most paranoid spots one of their 'tails' when they enter the second clothes shop. She is a casually dressed woman wearing a bright yellow T-shirt under an expensive looking denim jacket. Designer worn jeans cover her legs reaching down to her air-soled Nike trainers.

Sharon tries not to smile at her as she looks so obviously '*Police*' she might as well have worn a uniform! Sharon says nothing to Suzy waiting for her to notice their new companion.

Suzy feels stressed; she had noticed the woman watching them in the last shop they had visited and thought she was just being paranoid. Suzy could see that she was watching them as she moved the clothes along the rail!

Suzy felt her heartbeat increase and panic fills her mind, she wants to shout a warning to Sharon but instead thinks she will be certain first.

Suzy wanders the store looking at blouses and dresses and suddenly turns and gives Sharon a strange look. Holding a dark blue blouse towards Sharon she gives the police woman an even stranger look; "I am going try this on, I do like this shade of blue." she says in an extra loud voice.

Sharon gives her a knowing smile; "I am going to have a

look at the jeans if you wonder where I am.” she tells Suzy as she walks away slowly looking at blouses and skirts seeming unconcerned at Suzy's now agitated condition.

Suzy hurries into one of the changing rooms as Sharon, keeping half an eye on the policewoman walks down to the jeans. Walking past the first rack of blue denim Sharon enters the aisle of jeans and turning to look at the policewoman she absent mindedly 'looks' through the jeans.

The policewoman is as bad at her job, like the rookie in the car. Sharon suddenly turns to look at the woman. Suddenly she seems to find a plain black baseball cap very interesting. Picking it up she looks inside and Sharon can see her face is flushed slightly, aware that she has been seen.

Suzy comes out of the changing room wearing the blue blouse and looks around for Sharon. Seeing their follower looking intently at a baseball cap Suzy stares at her with hostility and anger on her face; she does not like to be followed!

Sharon steps away quickly from the racks of jeans, fearing that the way Suzy looks at the policewoman she is likely to say something to her. Raising her arm in a wave she shouts at Suzy; “That looks good on you, are you going to buy it?”

Suzy turns and looks at Sharon seeming annoyed at the interruption; “You like it? I was thinking about it but it will have to wait.” she replies looking back at the police woman as if it is her fault she is not buying it.

The policewoman puts the baseball cap back where she had got it from. Looking embarrassed she looks at the floor as she turns and walks out of the shop.

Hardly before the front door has closed Suzy says to Sharon in a loud enough voice for the whole shop to hear; “Did you see her? She was following us, do you think she is the police?” she asks stupidly.

Sharon holds her finger up to her lips for Suzy to be quiet and frowns at her in disapproval; “Yes I saw her and now thanks to you she knows she has been seen.” Sharon lies angrily (as the police woman had crossed eyes with her when

Sharon had suddenly turned round). Sharon could tell that Suzy had led a fairly innocent life and she badly needed her to be more secretive.

Suzy, looking annoyed at Sharon's angry reply goes back into the changing room. Emerging holding the blue blouse in front of her Suzy puts it back on its rack as Sharon stands beside her; "Sorry to be angry with you, but now they will replace that one with someone else. Someone who might be better at it and we might not spot them so easily." says Sharon in a soft voice.

"I was not thinking; when I was changing into the blouse I got angry as being followed makes me mad."

"Yes I know how you feel."

"I am not very good at this sorry, do you reckon they will put another woman to watch us?"

"Be a bit difficult for a bloke to follow us into the women's shops, think we would spot him easier. Maybe we are just imagining it all and the woman thought we might beat her up, that's why she left in such a hurry."

"Pull the other one, I may be a bit slow here but I am not stupid." Suzy replies the anger rising.

"You are bloody stupid letting them know you have seen them." snaps Sharon.

Suzy looks embarrassed; "Well I will not the next time, come on I want a cup of coffee." she says as she starts to walk out of the store.

Sitting in a booth at the back of the coffee shop Suzy and Sharon stir their coffee; both are calmer but nervous as each time the front door opens they both look to see who it is. "We will drink these then take a wander back to yours if that is good with you?" asks Sharon.

"Yes, sounds good, this is getting on my nerves a bit as I think everyone around us is the police." replies Suzy in a whisper.

"We need to talk but not here, the woman with the black leather handbag who just walked in has 'police' stamped all

over her,”

“How can you tell?” asks a puzzled Suzy staring at a tall blonde woman aged about thirty, who has just walked through the front door and takes a seat at an empty table.

“I can smell them.” laughs Sharon.

“Hey!” Suzy exclaims; “I know what you mean but that is when they are up close, she must be five metres away.”

“It is like a sixth sense smell, they can be fifty metres away it would not make any difference. I can smell them on the air.” smiles Sharon broadly.

“There is more to it than that, what else gives them away?”

“Well, let us start with her.” Sharon indicates with her head not taking her eyes off Suzy.

Suzy keeps her eyes locked with Sharon's; “Go on then, tell me.”

“Without looking at her directly, watch her out of the corner of your eye and tell me what you notice.” orders Sharon.

Suzy moves her head slightly so that it appears she is looking at the menu on the counter.

“Well?” asks Sharon impatiently.

“Give us a chance will you?” replies Suzy as she stares at the menu, after a long thirty seconds she looks Sharon in the eyes; “You are having me on, she is no more the police than I am she looks totally normal. My guess she is a Mum who has got to go pick her kids up from school, so she is killing time.” says Suzy looking up at the clock on the wall which shows the time as 14.33 hours.

“Maybe.” smiles Sharon; “Have you noticed how nosey she is? She is eavesdropping on the conversation between that old boy and his misses sitting behind her.”

Suzy looks back up at the menu and notices that the woman has her head tilted slightly back as she listens to them talking behind her.

“And she has had a good hard look at everyone in here except for us, is another give away. You must have noticed before how the police look at you and other people? How they look at you like you are a criminal and they have that look in

their eyes of how superior they are?”

Suzy looks back at Sharon; “I know what you mean but she is still a long way away how can you see her eyes from here?” asks a puzzled Suzy.

“I can see them but it is in her posture as well, it looks like she is sitting at attention, how spotlessly clean she is no engagement ring and look at her clothes; they are not cheap.” Sharon says firmly convinced she is right.

Suzy is not so convinced but does notice how the woman looks at the people around her, the front door opens and a 'Hoodie' walks in. A young lad aged about seventeen who is also wearing along with his dark blue hooded fleece jacket, torn jeans and white trainers with bright green laces, walks up to the counter to order a drink.

The woman looks at the lad with obvious disapproval and suddenly Suzy understands what Sharon means. The superior look is in the eyes and Suzy can see that the woman has made up her mind the lad is a criminal.

Suzy hears the Hoodie order a coffee in a soft educated voice that is all politeness, the lady behind the counter asks him to take a seat when a waitress will serve him. The Hoodie nods in politeness and turns and sits at an empty table behind the police woman. Suzy is now inclined to agree with Sharon and she drinks the remaining coffee quickly and stands up; “I need to get out of here.” she says as she puts her jacket on.

“I am right behind you.” replies Sharon as she also stands; carrying her jacket she follows Suzy out of the coffee shop.

They walk for about twenty metres until Sharon tells Suzy to stop; “Keep an eye on the coffee shop see who comes out, while I put my jacket on.”

“She is already out, if that is who you mean?” replies Suzy in a scared voice.

Sharon twists in the direction of the coffee shop and sees the woman looking across the other side of the road. Sharon follows her gaze and sees a casually dressed man in his late forties nod his head slightly towards her.

Suzy is still staring at the woman; “What are we going to

do?"

"Thought we had agreed to go back to yours?" smiles Sharon.

"What are we going to do about *her*?" asks Suzy impatiently.

"Show her the long way home if you are up for it?"

Suzy smiles, her eyes glinting with mischievous thoughts; "I know a few alleys, bet you we can lose her."

"Let's go for it, lead on." laughs Sharon as she follows Suzy along the busy pavement.

Suzy weaves her way amongst the shoppers and young Mums with their prams and small children. Sharon has difficulty keeping pace and shouts to Suzy to slow down a bit; "Do not want to make it look like we are running away?" she asks breathlessly when she catches her up.

Suzy looks disappointed but does slow down a little, looking behind her she suddenly grabs hold of Sharon's hand; "Quick, let us cross before the bus gets here." Suzy says as she starts to pull Sharon across the High Street.

Sharon follows as she sees the big green double Decker bus heading towards them. Quickly they cross the street and Suzy pulls Sharon into an alleyway that is between a Charity shop and a butchers. Out of sight of the High Street Suzy starts to run along the alley; "Go left." Sharon orders when they approach an alleyway that runs parallel to the High Street.

"No let's double back on her." Suzy disagrees trying to pull Sharon to the right as they still held hands.

"Then you will run right into her partner who was standing opposite the coffee shop." says Sharon as she pulls Suzy to a stop.

Suzy looks confused and alarmed; "I never saw her."

"Her was a him, come on." Sharon pulls Suzy to the left and they run along the alley to the end of the building as Sharon pulls Suzy into the alley to the left; leading them back to the High Street.

"What are you doing?" asks Suzy in alarm.

Sharon laughs; "It is all a game you know, we will hide in the

shop.” she says as she drags Suzy out into the crowd and into another Charity shop.

Still holding Suzy's hand Sharon leads Suzy to the book shelves, letting go of Suzy's hand she takes a book from the shelf and opens it. Suzy takes a quick look at the front cover before she takes a book from the shelf; *Colditz* by P.R. Reid in hardback. She had seen the black and white film dozens of times and smiles when she sees the price inside; 25 pence. Closing the book she looks along the shelves but nothing else catches her eye; “Are you going to buy that? Asks Sharon as she reads the back cover.

“Definitely, they only want 25 pence, you got one as well? Suzy asks looking at the red bound cover of the book Sharon clutches to her bosom.

“Too right, they only want twenty five pence for this as well.” she smiles.

Suzy takes it out of her hand; “I'll treat you as you bought the coffee.” not giving Sharon a chance to reply she walks quickly to the counter.

Sharon follows and watches the tired old man behind the counter take the books from Suzy's hand. Patiently he peels the little stickers off displaying the price and sticks them in a large A4 size book along with fifty other labels. Closing the book he rings up 25 pence twice and says in a squeaky voice; “Fifty pence please, would you like a bag?”

“Yes please, if you don't mind.” replies Suzy handing the man a fifty pence piece.

The old man takes the money from Suzy's hand and totals the till as he puts the money in. Leaning under the counter he rummages around and pulls out a crumpled supermarket plastic bag. Putting the books in the bag he hands them to Suzy; “Thank you.” he says pleasantly as she and Sharon turn to leave.

Looking through the window the policewoman frowns in their direction and turns and leans her back against the glass of the window.

Sharon laughs; "I wonder if she enjoyed her run around the alley?"

"By the look on her face I would say no." smiles Suzy though a worried look covers her face.

"Just ignore her when we go out, you can ask me what book I bought and then we'll have a slow walk along the High Street to home Ok?" Sharon asks though it is more of a demand and she walks to the front door of the shop.

Suzy hurries to keep pace with her as Sharon steps out onto the pavement and starts to walk past the police woman, who is still leaning against the glass of the shop.

"What did you get? You never did show me." asks Suzy as she walks beside Sharon.

"Only the best science fiction book ever written, it's a bit battered but looks clean and it was only 25 pence!" she exclaims with real enthusiasm.

"What is it then?" Suzy asks impatiently.

"Starship Stinedern - it is an amazing story."

"I have been thinking about the police when we have been walking around," says Suzy; "they seem very determined to watch what I am doing and that puts you in an awkward position."

"Talk about it when we get to yours." Sharon tells Suzy in a low voice.

Suzy nods her head in agreement and they slowly walk back to Suzy's bungalow; their 'tail' changes when they reached the edge of town as the policewoman changes places with, who can only be described as the 'sergeant'.

The man is in his mid-fifties and by his upright manner and the almost militaristic way he walks gives him away and he keeps a discreet distance. Suzy and Sharon ignore him and try to look casual as they laugh and joke along the way.

Turning the corner into Suzy's road they both stop in their tracks as the pavements along either side of the road appears filled with Girl Guides!

Suzy laughs nervously; "Nearly gave me a heart attack when I saw all those uniforms until I saw the size of the girls wearing

them.” Suzy says as the laugh turns slightly hysterical with relief.

“It looks like they are cleaning the neighbourhood and gardens, bet they have been knocking on your door.” Grabbing hold of Suzy's hand Sharon pulls her along the road; “All the same they are making me nervous.”

They reach Suzy's door and as Suzy is turning the key in the lock a young Girl Guide aged about eleven years nervously opens the gate behind them. Sharon turns at the noise of the gate opening; “Hello, you all look busy, I hope it is all for a good cause?” she asks the Girl Guide in her sweetest voice.

The girl visibly relaxes at Sharon's pleasant manner; “Yes our hut is leaking and we have got to have a new roof, are there any jobs I can do in your garden or sweep your path?” asks the Guide hopefully.

“I do not live here; I will go and ask the lady inside.” Sharon tells her as she walks inside, hearing noises from the kitchen Sharon walks along the hall into the kitchen; “There is a Girl Guide outside who wants to know if you have got any jobs for her to do?”

Suzy smiles; “Girl guide? I was one of them, yes she can pull the weeds up that are growing alongside the house.”

“I will tell her, cannot imagine you being a Girl Guide.” Sharon laughs.

“And a good one I will have you know, it was really good fun, I will put a bucket outside for her to put the weeds in.”

“I never joined, went once and this big girl kept pushing me about, so I never went again.” Sharon tells her as she walks out the door and along the hall; “Yes please, the lady would like you to pull the weeds up that are growing alongside the house. She is just getting a bucket for you to put them in.” she tells the Girl Guide who is patiently waiting outside the front door.

The Guide's face lights up at the news; “Thank you, I will go tell my leader and be back in a few minutes.” she says happily and not waiting for Sharon to answer, she turns and runs along the path.

Chapter Nine

"You have to calm down." Sharon tells Suzy firmly.

"I am so scared I am glad you are here, thank you." Suzy reaches out and squeezes Sharon's hand giving a weak smile.

Suzy has made the coffee and they sit at the kitchen table, the sound of a collared dove singing in the pear tree in the garden sounds loud through the opened back door. The sun shines weakly as it heads for the clouded horizon, dusk is about an hour away and the quiet of the approaching evening, apart from some sparrows squabbling in the guttering, can already be felt as the temperature drops a few degrees.

"The way you have been followed I think you are in a lot of trouble; unless you *have* covered your tracks completely."

"Yes I am sure; Darren is considered to be a suicide according to the local newspaper and I cannot see them finding Doug."

"I have never heard of that Well before, how did Lewis know about it?"

"I think he came across it by accident when he was walking the dog."

"It does sound a good place." smiles Sharon as she takes a swig of her coffee.

Paris, the Girl Guide had worked hard and filled the bucket with weeds, on her way to ask where to empty the bucket of weeds she hears Suzy and Sharon talking in the kitchen. The kitchen door is wide open and she can hear every word, the word 'suicide' makes her stop still in shock, Paris had read about a suicide in the newspaper and the mention of a Well makes her listen intently.

Wells have been a fascination of hers since she could remember and unashamedly she eavesdrops.

"Yes it is, but I would not describe it as good, weird would be a better word." confirms Suzy, her voice firming as she talks, gaining strength from Sharon's friendship.

“Weird? Why weird?”

“Well the Well is surrounded by water; and it is dry.” Suzy laughs at the repeat of the word 'Well'.

“How can you have a dry Well?”

“This one is; and you have to cross a deep stream that is about two metres away from it.”

“That is strange; I would like to see that one day after the maggots have done their work.”

“Urgh do not remind me though I do not feel as much remorse as I have done, over the years I came to really hate him and now he is gone I feel happier.”

“I bet you do, keep thinking positive and you'll get through this, and do you want another cup of coffee?” Sharon asks as she stands up.

Paris sees the top of Sharon's head and backs away quietly until she is around the corner. Breathing quickly in anxiety Paris cannot believe what she has heard. Maybe it is because that is what she wants to hear argues the voice in her head; but Paris knows what she has heard.

Going around to the front of the bungalow she checks that she has done the weeding correctly and picks up the bucket of weeds. Nervously she knocks on the front door holding onto the bucket firmly as if it will protect her.

The door opens wide; “Are you all right?” asks a smiling Sharon.

“F-Fine thanks.” stammers Paris; “Where shall I put these weeds?” she asks holding the bucket so that Sharon can see it is full.

“You have done well, follow me and I will show you the compost heap.” Sharon says as she steps out of the door shutting it behind her. Walking around the side of the bungalow Sharon can see where Paris has pulled the weeds as soil is exposed on the concrete of the path; “I had better get you a broom, it looks like you have pulled all the weeds up, Suzy will be pleased.”

Paris smiles in embarrassment and follows Sharon to the back of the garden to the compost heap. A small compost

heap surrounded by rusting corrugated iron and covered with fresh weeds from Suzy's gardening efforts sits in the shade of an old apple tree.

"Throw it on there." Sharon orders as she opens the door to the shed, leaning in she pulls out an old soft broom and hands it to Paris; "Just sweep the dirt onto the garden and come and knock on the back door when you have done please." smiles Sharon.

Paris takes the broom from Sharon's outstretched hand and passes her the empty bucket.

"I will put this in the shed." she says and throws it in the shed and shuts the door; "See you in a few minutes, take your time."

Sharon walks back into the kitchen shutting the door behind her, Suzy is staring into her cup of coffee looking very unhappy; "You have to stop worrying, everything's going to be all right." reassures Sharon.

"I got things to worry about, what will happen to me if they find out I killed Doug?" replies Suzy in an hysterical voice.

"Calm down will you just because they are following you does not mean they know anything, do not let them wear you down or you will make mistakes. Wait until the Guide has gone then we will talk about it, you want more coffee?"

"No I am good thanks, or I will be peeing all night."

"Well I am going to have one, it is lucky you do not smoke or you would be chain smoking, the stressed condition you are in." says Sharon as she fills the kettle with water.

"I never liked smoking as it made me cough too much."

"Made me sick when I tried it, mind you I was only eleven years old." laughs Sharon as she turns the kettle on to boil; "you sure you do not want one?"

"Go on then, but I am going be up all night."

Sharon takes Suzy's cup from her outstretched hand as the Girl Guide knocks gently on the back door; "That must be the Guide, you got any money for her?"

Suzy frowns as she stands and walks out of the kitchen into the lounge, coming back in carrying a few pounds in her hand

she passes them to Sharon; "Give her that please, I need the loo." not giving Sharon a chance to reply she turns quickly and makes her way to the bathroom.

Sharon opens the back door smiling broadly; "You have done a good job, thank you, I hope this helps towards your new roof." she says as she hands the Girl Guide the money.

"Thank you." smiles Paris as she takes the money; "Bye." she says as she hurries away.

Sharon shuts the door quietly; there was something odd about the young girls behaviour and Sharon wonders if she had overheard anything. Thinking back over the time spent with Suzy when the Girl Guide was in the garden Sharon realises that they had the back door wide open. The chances of the girl hearing what they were talking about are quite high and Sharon blushes a deep red in realisation.

"What is the matter with you?" asks Suzy seeing Sharon's red worried face.

"I think your paranoia is brushing off, I feel as worried as you."

"Those police following us has got me really scared I cannot even talk to a Girl Guide."

"I wondered why you ran away, the trouble is you are bottling it all up; I know you cope very well on your own because you have had to with all your family dead. Losing Doug has put you completely on your own and I bet you feel like you felt when your mum died. I know how you feel my mums' been dead nine years now and I miss her terribly. But you are not on your own, I am here and Lewis is around somewhere, the sight of the police has probably kept him away."

"I have been wondering about Lewis as he has not called or even tried to phone Me." replies a worried Suzy.

"You meeting him at the shop and the way he helped you is a sign, I think you should trust him. When you first told me about him I did wonder about his motives as you said he fancied you, but I cannot see you getting involved with him in that way. Killing Darren the way he did and the way he got rid

of the bodies makes him appear to be a cold bastard; if you upset him.”

“Yes, he has been really nice to me all the time I have known him and I cannot ever remember us arguing about anything.”

“The more I think about it the more I am convinced that Girl Guide heard us talking about Doug being down the Well. She appeared nervous, if not scared of me when she told me she had finished.”

Suzy's face turns pale as her jaw drops open; “What are we going to do?” she asks in a scared voice.

“We need to talk to Lewis; you must phone him.” answers Sharon nervously.

Paris waits her time to ask her Dad about the Well, waiting until he had finished his dinner and is smoking a cigarette she joins him in the back garden.

“Dad have you ever heard of an empty Well in this area?”

Breathing out a cloud of smoke her Dad looks at her; “Who have you been listening to?”

“I was weeding this lady's garden this afternoon and I could hear her friend and her talking about it; and there being a dead body there.”

“Yes I know where there is a dry Well as it happens, though it may not be the one they were talking about.”

“Can we go and see it please Daddy?” asks Paris in her politest voice.

Her Dad looks up at the sky; “It is nearly dark, can you wait until the morning?” he asks, not believing a dead body is there.

Paris buries her impatience and would make a bad Poker player, as her face betrays her feelings.

“Have you ever been out in the woods in the dark before?” asks her Dad, knowing the answer.

“No I never have, but I would like to.” replies Paris excitedly.

“Not tonight, we will try and find the Well in the morning and if the weather stays nice I will take you to see a Badger set in the evening.”

Paris's face lights up with excitement; “Can we go really

early please Dad?"

"If I get up in time, it is my day off after all."

Paris runs forward and kisses her Dad on the cheek;

"Thanks Dad, I do love you."

"You will not think that tomorrow, it is a long walk to the Well."

"It will be fun." says Paris with a huge smile on her face.

Paris opens the door as quietly as she can without dropping the tray of breakfasts. Admittedly it was only six thirty in the morning and she hoped the bribe of breakfast in bed would work.

Setting the tray down on the unit next to her Dad's head the faint noise makes him open his eyes; "What is all this then?" he asks in mock surprise as he had been awake for about an hour and had heard Paris moving around.

"I thought that you and Mummy would like breakfast in bed." smiles Paris.

"Your Mother did not sleep well last night, best I eat it downstairs so we can let her sleep."

Paris nods her head in silent agreement picks up the tray and walks softly out of the bedroom.

An hour later Malcolm, Paris's Dad pulls up beside a large gate that leads to an ancient meadow.

Hardly waiting for her Dad to turn the engine off Paris unbuckles her safety belt, opens the door and runs to the gate. Standing on the bottom rail Paris eagerly looks out across the field. All is still and quiet except for the sound of a green woodpecker as it noisily searches for food.

Joining Paris at the gate her Dad looks across at the silent field; "Looks like we have got the place to ourselves, this is the way in." he tells her as he walks to the right of the gate. Beside the large gate a pedestrian access has been built in the form of a wooden stile which they clamber over. To the right of the stile a faded notice almost unreadable shows the name of the meadow and some of the wildlife that can be seen in the area.

“Where is it Dad?” asks Paris excitedly.

Pointing to the far corner of the field Malcolm says; “In that far corner, please do not go running off especially when we are down there as it is boggy and can be treacherous.”

“Ok Dad.” laughs Paris as she runs in the direction of the Well, when she is about two hundred metres from her Dad she turns around and looks at him impatiently; “Come on Dad, we want to get there today.”

“Watch your lip, do not forget it is a long walk home from here.” he jokingly replies.

Paris continues towards the Well at a much slower pace and her Dad catches up with her as she reaches the stream.

“We will have to cross over using that bridge.” he tells her pointing at the bridge made of railway sleepers.

“Are there any fish?” asks Paris hopefully as she stares into the clear water.

“I have never seen any, but this stream does dry up in the summer.”

Giving up looking for non-existent fish Paris runs over the bridge and makes her way towards the woodland.

Hurrying after her Malcolm catches up with her at the edge of a large patch of thick mud. Hoof prints from the cows penetrate twenty centimetres into the mud highlighting the thickness and Paris looks at her Dad in dismay; “How are we going to get past that?” she asks disappointment filling her voice.

“We will go this way.” laughs Malcolm as he walks along the edge of the trees. Twenty metres further on a faint trail leads into the trees, the incline is slightly uphill and they are soon walking on dry ground.

A few metres into the trees the smell of rotting flesh drifts towards them, Malcolm turns and looks at Paris, his face slightly pale; “Sure does smell like someone has died.” he says grimly as he makes his way deeper into the trees.

The rotting smell gets stronger as they approach the Well and Malcolm is not too happy with having his daughter along. The shiny barbed wire surrounding the Well shines in the

gloom under the trees and Malcolm stops to look around.

“What is it Dad?” asks Paris in an excited voice, apart from the awful smell all of this is just a big adventure to her. The thought that it may be a dead body that is producing the smell; and the murderer may still be around had not occurred to her.

“That smell is making me feel sick, I was looking in case I tread on anything horrible.” says Malcolm as he looks around amongst the trees. A blackbird the other side of the shiny barbed wire appears and starts to look for food as it searches through the dead leaves. Turning the old leaves over and scratching the ground with its feet it finds what it is looking for as it pecks at the little insects.

Malcolm relaxes and starts to walk towards the Well; the blackbird looks up at him sharply and bounds away behind the trees.

Five metres from the Well Malcolm can see a dead fox lying against one of the posts that supports the barbed wire. The fox looks squashed and bloody and it appears to move as thousands of flies swarm above it.

The body looks badly damaged and Malcolm wonders what could have happened to it, there were no lions or tigers in the English countryside or any other animal that he knew that could have inflicted such wounds. The smell of rotting flesh has him putting his handkerchief across his nose as he approaches closer.

“That is horrible.” says Paris when she sees the fox, feeling like she is going to be sick she backs away and watches her Dad as he approaches the corpse.

As Malcolm approaches the dead fox, a thousand flies take flight and swarm around his head. The smell of rotting flesh is almost too much for him and he can feel himself start to gag. The fox looks squashed, more as if it had been involved in a car accident than a fight with another animal.

The flies and maggots had done their part in opening the wounds, yet the rotting smell appeared to emanate from the Well. Bending forward Malcolm puts his face closer to the dead fox and removing his handkerchief from his nose smells

it cautiously.

The smell is definitely different from the overpowering smell that seems to fill the trees. Malcolm realises that there is more than one dead body here.

“Stay back Paris, this fox could be covered in disease.”

Standing upright he replaces the handkerchief over his nose, looking at the ground around the Well he can make out recent footprints in the soft mud. The other side of the Well looks to have been covered with them and the signs of someone trying to disguise those looks obvious.

Malcolm can see where leaves had been thrown into the footprints along with moss covered twigs and branches. The litter thrown about on top of the footprints can only have come from under the deep shade of the trees.

Backing away from the Well, Malcolm turns and looks at Paris; “That is where the awful smell is coming from, that poor fox he must have got tangled up in the wire, best stay away from it.” he says as he walks up into the trees.

Paris is disappointed at not being able to see down the Well and no longer interested in dead bodies makes her way back to the field assuming her Dad is going for a pee.

Malcolm looks down at the ground as he walks; more footprints show in the soft ground and he can see where someone had gathered sticks and leaves. Below where the sticks had lain the ground had become pale due to the lack of light and could easily be seen. A few more days and most of this would become invisible as it darkened, making Malcolm realise that this was all done recently.

Deep concern for his daughter's safety parallels this thought and he turns quickly and walks out of the trees. Not seeing Paris immediately he panics and looks around anxiously; the movement of her head down by the stream catches his eye and he walks quickly over to her.

Paris is throwing sticks into the slow flowing stream trying to get them to flow in an orderly line when she hears her Dad approaching. Her Dad looks pale and appears a little scared as his eyes look around the field that surrounds them.

“You all right Dad?” asks Paris as she stands, throwing the rest of the sticks into the clear water.

“That dead fox has made me feel a bit ill, there were thousands of maggots eating it.” he says.

Paris is not convinced by his reply and gets the feeling her Dad is lying; “Did you find anything else?”

“No, nothing” lies Malcolm; “Shall we get back to the car now and breathe some fresh air?” he smiles weakly at Paris.

“Ok.” she simply replies and starts to walk towards the wooden bridge.

Having a final look around them especially behind at the trees, Malcolm follows Paris to the bridge.

Paris on reaching the bridge suddenly turns and looks her Dad in the eyes; “There is a man watching us.” she says in a quiet whisper.

Malcolm stops and looks Paris in the eyes, the fears that had filled him since his discovery in what he knew to be a dead body in the Well rises to the surface. Close to panic and filled with fear for his daughter and not taking his eyes from her he asks just as quietly; “Where is he? I have not seen anyone.”

“There is a stile leading into the woods behind me, he is sitting on it.”

Trying not to move his head he looks over Paris's shoulder at the trees behind and it is several seconds before he sees the stile; and the man sitting on it.

Putting a smile on his face and not taking his eyes off her he says; “Probably just a birdwatcher, us being here has probably scared them all away, shall we get back to the car now?”

Paris smiles and nods, not aware of the danger she is in she skips across the bridge.

As Malcolm starts to cross the bridge he moves his head slightly so that he can get a better look at their watcher.

Dressed in army camouflage clothing Malcolm is not surprised he did not see him. The man was sitting so still on the stile he had merged perfectly well with the background of shaded trees. Looking to be in his late twenties or early thirties

he looked to be a rough unshaven character with long hair. Malcolm knew he was no birdwatcher by the way he stared at him.

He had the look of a predator about him, apart from the eyes they were the only part of him that moved as he watched Malcolm cross the bridge.

“Come this way Paris.” Malcolm says as he turns left and heads towards the other side of the field to their watcher.

“Why is that Dad?” asks Paris as she catches up with him.

“There is a very old oak tree that must be a thousand years old I want to look at before we go home.” he says not being entirely truthful. Admittedly he did want to see the oak tree as he had known of it for more than twenty years from when he first came here.

The real reason was to get as far away from the mysterious person on the stile and to make it appear they were on a nature ramble. Taking their time they wander to the other side of the field and Malcolm leads the way through some large bushes.

Beyond the bushes the ground drops away several metres leading to a small secluded meadow. The stream that runs past the Well emerges from the trees here and meanders its way through the soft green grass and hawthorn bushes.

Paris gasps at the beautiful scene before her, the grass cropped short by the rabbits that live close by make it look magical. The ancient oak tree with ninety percent of its branches dead overlooks the quiet scene. Being slightly lower than the surrounding land the meadow felt ten degrees warmer and Paris hurries forward to look at the stream.

Malcolm takes the opportunity to look back at the stile; there is no sign of the watcher and the woodland looks peaceful.

Joining Paris at the stream Malcolm looks back towards the ancient oak tree; “What do you think of the oak tree Paris?”

Paris looks up from the stream at the dead branches of the tree; “It looks dead.” she replies not in the least bit interested.

“It has always looked like that for as long as I can remember, yet it is still alive. We can come back here in the summer and

you can see the leaves if you want?"

"Could do I suppose." replies Paris in a bored voice; "Can we go home now?"

"Yes of course." replies Malcolm as he turns and walks out of the little meadow into the field. Looking across at the stile all is quiet and with Paris by his side they hurry back to the car.

Lewis walks quickly through the woods, he had seen the car parked at the entrance to the footpath and wanted to check who they were. Reaching the stile he had looked out across the field and not seen the owner of the car. Admittedly they could be walking the trails in the woodland behind him but all had seemed too quiet for that.

Settling himself comfortably on the edge of the stile he sat patiently and watched and listened. The only sounds he could hear was a small bird singing in the distance. He did not recognise the song and usually would be more interested.

The sound of voices in the trees near the Well drifts on the wind towards him and he moves on the stile in agitation. Hoping that the raised voices are due to the thickness of mud or finding the dead fox he waits patiently.

Paris appears at the edge of the trees and stands still looking about her. Her face looks pale, even as far as Lewis is away from her, he can see that she does not look at all well. Grinning broadly he watches as she walks over to the stream and stares into its clearness. Guessing she had found the fox Lewis looks anxiously back at the trees; whoever was with her had made no appearance and Lewis worries as to what they are doing.

He does not have to wait long as Malcolm appears where Paris had come out of the trees.

Looking at the man's face Lewis can see that he also looks pale and watches him nervously. The man appears tense and looks around the field as if he is searching for something. Suddenly the man walks over to the girl by the stream and says something to her.

Getting up from where she was crouched by the stream

Lewis watches them intently as they walk towards him. Suddenly he feels as if he has locked eyes with the girl for a few seconds and Lewis's heart beats in anxiety.

The girl carries on walking until she reaches the bridge where she stops and waits for the man, who must be her father, to catch up with her. Softly she talks to her father and Lewis can sense that she is telling him about seeing Lewis.

The man gives no indication that he is being told anything alarming and even smiles in return at his daughter. As she turns to cross the bridge the man looks directly at Lewis and Lewis looks down at the ground.

When he looks back up again he can see the man and his daughter walking across the field towards the old oak tree. He had hoped by putting the road-kill fox he had found the other night by the Well would put off any curious rambler's. The man's body language told him otherwise; he had looked scared and very wary, along with looking ill.

Jumping off the stile Lewis heads back into the woods until he reaches a trail that parallels the field. Walking quickly he follows the trail until it reaches the road, stopping about five metres in the woods Lewis stands still and listens. The sound of a car driving away in the distance is the only sound he can hear. Stepping out into the road he runs to Malcolm's car, walking around it slowly he looks inside hoping to find some identification of the driver.

The inside of the car is clean and empty of any useful evidence. Walking to the rear of the car Lewis looks out across the field to see the man and his daughter walking towards him. They are still at the far end of the field and Lewis estimates it will take them another ten minutes to reach him.

Walking around the car Lewis makes a mental note of the make and colour, having no pen or paper with him Lewis copies the number plate onto his mobile phone. Satisfied he can gain no more information he picks up a stick about thirty centimetres long. Carefully lifting up the windscreen wiper on the drivers' side Lewis places the stick underneath it and drops the wiper back down.

Seeing that the man and girl are now halfway across the field Lewis runs along the road until he reaches his car. Jumping in he switches the engine on and putting the wheel on full lock he pulls away and turns around in the road. Putting his foot down he races down the road and then slows as he reaches the corner and the man's' car. Quickly looking as he drives past he can just make out their heads as they reach the edge of the field.

Breathing a sigh of relief Lewis slows down until he reaches a small lay-by about two kilometres further on. Pulling over he switches the engine off and watches his rear view mirror. Lewis assumes that the man and his daughter live locally and to get home they would have to pass him, then it would be just a simple matter of following them home.

Malcolm climbs over the stile and walks around his car, all looks well apart from the stick that has been placed under his wiper blade. Lifting up the wiper blade Malcolm picks up the stick and looks at it closely. Looking like a normal stick he throws it down and examines his wiper blade. The blade appears undamaged and Malcolm lays it back down.

"What was that Dad?" asks Paris as she reaches the car.

"Just a stick that must have fallen out of the tree." he lies.

That stick was deliberately put there by someone; and Malcolm had a good idea who that someone was.

Unlocking the doors he tells Paris to jump in. Starting the engine as he puts on his safety belt Malcolm drives slowly forward and turns onto the road.

"Dad, you are going the wrong way!" exclaims Paris.

"I thought we would have a little drive in the country as it is such a nice day, I will drive to the end of the road and then we can turn onto that road you like that ends with the sweet shop." replies Malcolm.

Whoever had placed that stick under his windscreen wiper must have driven here to these woods like he had. Many kilometres away from town along a windy country lane was not a safe route to walk along so the man must have arrived by

car.

By driving in the other direction Malcolm hoped to see where the camouflaged man had parked his car. Further along he knew there were several lay-by's and a woodland car park.

Slowing down as he reaches the first lay-by Malcolm pretends to look up into the trees. Glancing down at the road as he reaches the lay-by Malcolm can see wet tyre tracks where someone has turned around in the road recently.

Continuing driving he hopes that he gives no indication of his behaviour to Paris. The last thing he wants to do is frighten her and fill her with paranoia; a squirrel runs out in the road in front of them and provides a good distraction. Malcolm slams on the brakes as the squirrel, terrified out of its wits, runs around in circles on the road.

"What is it doing?" shouts Paris; "it will get killed if it does not get out of the road."

"It is so scared it does not know where to run, all squirrels seem to act in the same way that is why so many get killed." replies Malcolm in a sad voice.

The squirrel finally stops running around in circles on the road and jumps into the long grass growing by the side of the road. Putting the car in gear Malcolm drives slowly forward increasing speed when he passes the second lay-by. Slowing down at the woodland car park Malcolm peers through the trees and can see no parked cars; "Looks quiet today." he says when he sees Paris looking at him.

Paris returns her attention to looking out of the window hoping to catch sight of a badger, she had only seen badger's on the television and hoped that one day she would see one for real.

Chapter Ten

After twenty minutes waiting Lewis starts the engine and checking his mirror's carefully he turns the car around in the road and heads back towards the woods. Driving past the place where Malcolm had parked his car Lewis curses his luck. Hoping that the two ramblers' did not live in the next town in the direction he is heading, he puts his foot down.

As he reaches the end of the country lane and with no sign of the ramblers' Lewis turns right and heads back home. This route was longer and he would arrive at the wrong end of town but was wider than the country lane; and a lot safer to drive on.

Filled with thoughts of how he is going to find the ramblers' Lewis has driven twenty metres past their car before he realises. Slamming his breaks on, much to the annoyance of the lady driver behind him he stares into his rear view mirror.

The ramblers' car is parked opposite a shop and as he watches he sees the girl come out carrying a white plastic bag. Not believing his luck Lewis watches her get into the car and put her safety belt on as her Dad drives away.

Letting them get thirty metres in front of him before Lewis pulls out onto the road Lewis keeps his distance as he follows them along the road.

Oblivious of the car following them Malcolm tells Paris about all the jobs he will have to do when he gets home. Hoping that she will volunteer to help, he talks of cutting the grass, weeding the flowerbeds and cleaning the fishpond.

Paris lets him talk as she looks out of the window; as she has got her own plans for when she gets back home. Not happy that her Dad would let her get close to the Well she had decided she would go for a bike ride and go and look for herself.

Not on her own of course, she had been disappointed about not being able to look down the Well as she had bragged to her friends about going to find it.

Malcolm soon gave up trying to enlist her help and concentrated on his driving. Still not noticing the car that had been following them for the last five kilometres Malcolm pulls into his drive and switches the engine off; “Did you enjoy that?” he asks as Paris opens the car door.

“Yes thank you, that is a nice place, though I did want to see the Well.” she answers disappointedly, appearing to forget about the awful smell and possible risk of disease.

“Maybe we will go again in a couple of weeks, the flies and maggots would have finished by then and there will probably be only hair and bone left.”

Paris pulls a face at the thought of all those maggots and unbuckles her safety belt as she gets out of the car; “I am going to see what Becky is doing.” she says as she slams the door and runs down the drive.

Parked fifty metres along the road Lewis sees Paris come running out of their drive and run along the road. Now he knew where they lived he felt more relaxed and looked forward to his return later that night.

Lewis drives back to the woods to see what had made the man so suspicious; parking further along the road he takes a meandering trail through the woods towards the Well.

Approaching the Well he could see the road kill fox he had lent against the fence. The body had not moved as Lewis knew that the only large scavengers would be rats; as it is well known that foxes do not eat their own.

As Lewis gets closer he can smell the rotting flesh of the fox and Doug and he covers his mouth and nose with his handkerchief. Looking around he can see the badly disguised footprints and scatterings of moss covered twigs and wood.

Walking around to the other side of the Well he could see where Suzy had gathered the leaves and sticks; now so obvious in the daylight. Walking about a hundred metres from the Well Lewis pulls out his pocket knife and cuts himself a branch from a thick bush. The branch will make an effective broom as it is covered in side shoots.

Returning quietly back to the Well he looks inside and can only see the rubbish he and Suzy had thrown down. The swarm of flies hovering a few centimetres above the pile of wood make it obvious there is a good food source down there.

Sweeping away his footprints and a large area where Suzy had collected the sticks, he tries to cover their tracks. Though the leaves and soil had been turned over and mixed in with the other leaf litter the area looked uniform; and Lewis hoped natural.

Throwing the branch away deeper into the woods Lewis walks back to his car feeling more secure that any other passing rambblers' would not be so suspicious.

He would also have to try and find another dead fox as the smell of Doug would probably remain for a few more days. If he was lucky enough to find one he intended to throw it down the Well on top of Doug.

Sharon pulls up next to the telephone box; "Hurry up. I will drive around the block and be back in about three minutes." she tells Suzy as she gets out of the car. Slamming the car door Suzy runs into the telephone box and dials Lewis's number.

Leaving Suzy's earlier in Sharon's car they had been forced to drive around to lose the 'tail' they had following them. It was a two year old Ford Escort that looked immaculate in its dark blue paintwork. Sharon had seen it pull out behind them before she reached the end of Suzy's road and with a bit of reckless driving managed to lose it in the heavy traffic of the town.

The telephone box where she had dropped Suzy was situated on a busy industrial estate, many of the factories were open and there was a constant flow of people between the buildings.

Arriving back at the telephone box two minutes later Sharon sees the door open as Suzy steps out. Hurrying across to Sharon she opens the passengers door and jumps in; "Can we get out of here? Some of those dirty men walking around give me the creeps." she says as she shudders at the thought of

one of them touching her.

Sharon puts the car in gear and drives away from the telephone box; "Did you get through to him?"

"Yes he was at home, he will meet us tomorrow at eleven o'clock at the Seafront Cafe, and he did not sound very happy."

"What do you mean; he was not happy with you phoning him? or generally unhappy?" asks Sharon hoping for a bit more enlightenment.

Suzy stares out of the window appearing to think carefully before she replies, frowning she looks at Sharon; "Unhappy is not what I mean, scared would be a better word."

Sharon makes no reply as she turns onto the main road and concentrates on the busy traffic around her.

Malcolm cannot wait any longer, all the family have gone to bed and at last he can smoke a cigarette. He had been trying to give up for years and usually did well during the daytime but night times were the problem. If he did not have a cigarette before he went to bed he could not sleep.

Taking his keys from the mantelpiece and his cigarettes and lighter from the cupboard he quietly makes his way to the front door. Opening the front door he puts the key in the lock and turns it so that it will not 'click' as he shuts it.

Shutting the front door he takes the key from the lock and puts it in his pocket and sits down on the little bench in the corner of the garden.

Screened by a large fir tree, that was getting far too big for the small front garden, he takes a cigarette out of the packet and lights it. With a satisfied sigh he breathes the smoke in deeply making him cough. Holding the cigarette at arm's length he tries hard not to cough; as with a lungful of smoke it stings terribly.

Regaining his breath and with eyes watering Malcolm takes a tentative drag and is relieved it does not make him cough. Gaining confidence he drags on the cigarette again and settles back onto the bench. Sitting there quietly smoking he listens to

the night sounds of mainly car engine noises and slamming doors.

Regretfully the cigarette is soon gone and Malcolm stubs out the butt in a small flowerpot on the ground. Feeling that the one he has just smoked is not enough he contemplates lighting another one as a small van drives slowly past.

Malcolm hears the van pull to a stop maybe fifty metres along the road as the engine falls silent. Hearing the door opening and being quietly closed makes Malcolm wonder who it is.

He thought he knew all of the neighbour's cars and he does not recognise the van and stands for a better look.

Walking towards him is a scruffy looking man wearing a camouflaged jacket and worn jeans. His hair looks wild and windswept as he passes under a street light and slows down as he approaches Malcolm's house.

Malcolm's heart beats fast followed by a sick feeling in his stomach as he realises it is the watching man from the morning. Slowly sitting himself back down Malcolm is in deep shade and watches the rough character approach.

Reaching the front of his house the scruffy man stops and looks up and down the road. Satisfied he is all alone he takes something from his pocket and approaches Malcolm's car. Walking around to the front he lifts up the driver's side windscreen wiper and places a stick underneath it.

As he drops the wiper down onto the windscreen Malcolm steps out of the darkness; "Why have you done that?" he asks in a soft voice.

The scruffy man turns quickly towards him pulling out of his coat a long bladed machete. The weapon gleams in the weak light as the man stares at Malcolm; "Just letting you know we know where you live mate." he replies in a gruff threatening voice.

"Why would you want to do that then mate?"

"I watched you and your daughter this morning when you visited the Well, I noticed that she did not stay very long but you did. Nice looking kid by the way and so young, how old is

she ten or eleven?"

Malcolm feels a deep rage grow inside him as he is aware that the man is threatening his daughter. The words 'we know where you live' that the man had said when he placed the stick under the windscreen wiper stops Malcolm from rushing towards him to kill him. The machete the man is waving at Malcolm he hardly registers, as his fatherly rage nearly consumes him.

"Take it easy mate," the man warns; "you do not want to do anything you will regret later."

"What do you want?" asks Malcolm angrily.

"For you, and your daughter, to forget about the little walk you had this morning."

"Already have, if I was going to do anything I would have done it by now." replies Malcolm putting a positive tone to his voice. The smell of Doug's rotting corpse drifting out of the Well had convinced Malcolm there was a dead body in there.

The fear for his daughter's safety especially as they had been seen by one who he believed was involved, had made him keep his mouth shut. He had little faith in the police and his hopes had been their watcher just took them for rambles'.

The man standing in front of him waving a machete made Malcolm realise he and his daughter would never be safe. How he knew where Malcolm lived, and that Malcolm knew about the body was a mystery.

For him to identify himself this way appears to Malcolm, to be absolute foolishness.

Walking backwards with the machete still pointing at Malcolm he warns; "Forget about this morning, you cannot watch your back twenty four hours a day." turning quickly he hides the machete under his coat as he hurries back to his van.

Malcolm follows him out into the road and stands behind his neighbour's jeep as he crouches down and watches him through the rear window. Before the scruffy man gets into his van he looks back in Malcolm's direction. Not seeing Malcolm hiding behind the jeep he gets into his van and starts the

engine.

Malcolm stands upright so that his head is above the jeep hoping to see the number plate. The man puts the van in gear and pulls out into the road without turning his lights on until he is fifty metres further down the road.

All that Malcolm can make out is that it is an old light coloured Renault van that had squeaking back doors. Sitting back on the bench he lights another cigarette and tries to think calmly. Why the man had just not killed him with his machete Malcolm could not understand. The man would be in constant fear that Malcolm would go to the police and it would have solved the problem completely.

Malcolm was glad he still lived, as he had a deep desire for revenge and to secure the safety of his family. Finding him would not be easy and he would have to be careful how he asked Paris where she had heard about the Well, without raising her suspicions.

Lewis drives slowly along the road until he feels he is far enough away and turns his lights on. Keeping to the speed limit he makes his way home by avoiding the town centre and its security cameras.

That man coming out of the darkness had unnerved him and he knew he should have used the machete straight away. Not being one hundred percent certain that he could have killed him quickly; and quietly, in such a built up area had made him hold back.

Driving down to his lock-up garages he gets his car out and aware that he would not be able to use the van again for quite a while he locks it in the garage.

“Dad me and Becky are going for a bike ride.” says an excited Paris, who is already wearing her safety helmet.

Malcolm has a sinking feeling as to where they are going; “Where to?” he asks trying to keep his voice calm.

“I am going to show Becky the Well as she wants the fox’s tail.”

“What is she going to do with it?”

“Hang it on her wall I think, she said she has always wanted one.”

“You can catch diseases off dead things, especially if they have been lying around for a while like that one. You will have to think of somewhere else to go.” Malcolm tells her firmly.

Paris looks disappointed and stares back defiantly at her Dad.

With a sinking feeling Malcolm knew that even if he did forbid her not to go Becky would be more persuasive and get her to defy him. The warning he had from the scruffy man last night he took very seriously and his mind races for a solution.

“Would you prefer to see a live one? Becky can come too.”

“A live one, where?” asks Paris excitedly.

“We will go up to Wildwood as your mother is working today, let me finish my breakfast and we will go, twenty minutes Ok?”

Paris runs over and kisses her Dad on the cheek; “I will go and tell Becky, I love you Dad.” she says as she runs out the door still wearing her cycling helmet.

Malcolm sips at his tea; he could not really afford a day out as the entrance fee would add up to a fair bit with the three of them. But this would give him the ideal opportunity to ask Paris where she had heard about the Well. The distraction of the animals and being with her friend would put her at ease and he felt confident he would know by the end of the day.

Chapter Eleven

“They are still behind us.” says Sharon as she looks in her rear view mirror. They had been followed since leaving Suzy's and she had not been able to lose them.

“What are we going to do? It is nearly eleven now.” asks Suzy worriedly, still being followed by the police had started to get on Suzy's nerves and she felt trapped.

“You will have to meet him on your own, they are far enough behind and you will have to jump out when I go around the next corner. There is an alley you can hide in and then you can run back to the cafe.”

“How will I get home?”

“Get Lewis to drop you a few streets away and I will come round to yours at one thirty.”

“What are you going to do if the police see only you in the car?”

“Jam that cushion under the headrest and I will be the other side of town before they realise.” smiles Sharon confidently.

Suzy jams the cushion under the headrest making it look as head shape as she can.

“Unbuckle your belt; the alley is about twenty metres around the corner.” Sharon says as she drops down to third gear as she goes around the corner. Unlatching the door Suzy readies herself to jump out as Sharon pulls to a stop at the entrance to the alley.

Suzy leaps out slamming the door behind her as Sharon races away; stopping about ten metres along the alley Suzy turns and watches the police car drive by.

Relieved, Suzy stands and catches her breath, making sure the police are still following Sharon she runs to the entrance to the alley and sees them drive away along the street.

Stepping out of the alley Suzy hurries along the road to the cafe; looking at the time on her mobile phone she sees it is five minutes to eleven. Wanting to get off the street she enters

the cafe and orders a coffee at the counter.

Taking the coffee to a table near the window she felt she could look out; and no one would be able to see her if they looked in. The path is busy in front of the cafe as people make their way to the seafront. It is still early in the season and Suzy is surprised to see so many enjoying the sunshine.

Lewis walks slowly past peering in through the window; meeting eyes with Suzy he makes no acknowledgement as he continues walking.

Suzy finishes her coffee and waits patiently as she watches the passersby.

“Put these on, we can talk outside.” says Lewis who has suddenly appeared at her side, holding out a large felt hat and large pair of sunglasses he looks at her expectantly.

Suzy looks up at him in surprise as he is smartly dressed in a shiny black 'Bomber' style jacket, new jeans and trainers and has his hair tied back tightly into a pony tail. Suzy then looks down at the awful hat and horrendous sunglasses he was passing to her. The sunglasses are huge and she is convinced she will look like some kind of weird caterpillar with them on.

Not saying anything Suzy takes the hat and sunglasses and puts them on. Holding his hand out towards her Lewis leads her out of the cafe and turns towards the seafront.

Letting go of her hand he looks at her and laughs; “You look really funny in that get up.”

“Why are you making me wear it? I feel stupid and why are you all ponced up like that, I cannot remember ever seeing you look so smart?” asks Suzy not appreciating the humour.

“Do not want any passing police recognising you or me?” he smiles as he takes a pair of designer sunglasses out of his pocket and puts them on.

“They are still watching me, Sharon drove all around the town trying to get rid of them and she ended up having to drop me off.” confesses Suzy.

“I did wonder where she was, I see that you have teamed up with her.” he says looking Suzy in the eyes.

“She is a good friend and I had to talk to someone.” Suzy

replies defensively.

“The more people who know the more chance you have of ending up in prison.” warns Lewis an edge of anger to his voice.

Suzy is surprised at his tone of voice and makes no reply as they continue walking towards the beach.

The sun shines in a practically cloudless sky which is why the seafront is so crowded. Most are walking along the promenade, as though the sun shines, the sea breeze has a definite chill to it.

Suzy looks at Lewis and tells him about Sharon's suspicions of the Girl Guide overhearing them talking about Doug's body being down the Well.

Lewis does not look surprised and the angry outburst Suzy was expecting does not occur. In a similar situation if it had been Doug standing in front of her he would have become very angry and probably would have struck her.

Suzy feels her heart warming to Lewis as he takes the bad news so calmly.

“We need to get out of this wind.” says Lewis as he jumps down onto the beach and makes his way towards one of the old wooden groyne.

Suzy jumps down after him and joins him as he is sitting down getting himself out of the wind; “That is better it is surprising, that wind is really cold.”

“Well it is only springtime, I do know about your Girl Guide by the way, I had a few words with her father last night.” he tells Suzy in an apparently bored voice, though inside his heart is racing.

“What do you mean 'you had words' with her Dad?” asks Suzy in alarm.

“The Girl Guide did overhear you and took her Dad down to have a look at the Well yesterday morning.” Lewis replies trying to keep the same tone of voice.

Suzy listens in horror as Lewis tells her that the father knew a body was down the Well and of the conversation they had the night before.

“He knows what you look like now, you had the machete you should have used it.” says Suzy scornfully.

“I told you why, if he had screamed out I would have been caught.” replies Lewis shocked at Suzy’s cold attitude.

“You are so stupid, if you are not going to do it I will; and his brat of a kid.” screams Suzy her face purple with rage.

Lewis makes no answer as he stares at Suzy’s angry face; he had never seen her behave like this in all the years he had known her. Maybe he was seeing a side of her that had made Doug behave the way he had.

“Where do they live then?” asks Suzy in a demanding voice.

“On the other side of town; and what is it exactly that you intend to do about them?”

Suzy stares out to sea but her eyes have a distant look; “You let me worry about that, I cannot believe you are so stupid, you will show me tonight.” she demands as she stands up.

Lewis stands up beside her and looks at the comparative stranger next to him. He knew he had made a mistake in not killing the man, but to go back seemed a bigger mistake. Also with the police following Suzy, being seen with her could cause big problems and the last thing he wanted was to be followed himself.

Suzy starts to walk across the beach to the promenade, as she steps up onto the concrete she turns to face Lewis; “You will have to give me a lift home, you can drop me where you are going to meet me tonight.”

“Maybe I think that is a bad idea.” replies Lewis defiantly.

“All we need is for that man to open his mouth and we are finished, I still cannot believe how stupid you have been.” says Suzy her eyes flashing in anger.

“He will not say anything, if he does he knows his daughter will be hurt or killed.”

“I am not going to jail because of your stupidity; maybe he will think with you locked away he and his daughter will be safer.”

“I disagree; I think he will keep his mouth shut.”

“It does not matter whether you agree or disagree, you will

show me tonight where they live and it will not be your problem anymore. Where is your car? I want to go home.”

“This way.” replies Lewis in resignation as there was no point in talking to Suzy in the mood she was in.

Suzy answers the gentle tapping on the door, knowing it is Sharon by the style of knock she smiles as she opens the door,

“All right?” asks Sharon as she steps inside.

Suzy shuts the door quietly behind her; “Apart from Lewis being a complete idiot, yes I am fine thank you.

Sharon walks towards the kitchen, needing a drink she pushes the kitchen door open and walks over to the sink.

“I was going to make a coffee, do you want one?” asks Suzy from the doorway.

“Yes thanks, will be better than water.” turning around she walks across the kitchen and sits down on a hard backed chair next to the table.

As Suzy fills the kettle and prepares the mugs she tells Sharon of the conversation she had with Lewis. Constantly referring to him as stupid Suzy tells Sharon that once Lewis had shown her where this Girl Guide lived she was going to get rid of him as well.

Sharon does not appear surprised and agrees when Suzy says she is going to get rid of him; “How are you going to do it then?”

“Invite him round and make him a wonderful meal filled with sleeping tablets and then smother him.”

“How will you get rid of him, you are not going to cut him up like you did Doug?”

“No, you can help me throw him off the jetty.”

“I am not helping you with anything like that, sounds to me like you have lost it” says Sharon in a loud scornful voice.

Suzy's face colours in embarrassment as Sharon's words hit home, she had been so annoyed with Lewis and very scared about going to prison. She had seriously considered making Lewis a deadly meal as she felt due to him she would end up

behind bars.

"I think Lewis acted right last night in just threatening the man, if he had killed him without getting caught it would have brought trouble straight to you."

"To me, how do you work that out?"

"The daughter, the Girl Guide would have told the police all about our conversation and you would not be sitting here."

"Yes, I see what you mean, but Lewis did not do it because he was scared." replies Suzy angrily.

"Why does that upset you so much? Whether he was scared or not he was still brave enough to help you when you needed it." says Sharon reflecting Suzy's anger.

"My nerves are shot to hell with all of this and when he told me, I just felt so angry at him."

"Sounds like you have fallen in love with him; the way you and Doug have been all these years maybe the only way you know how to express love is with anger."

"You are the one who has lost it; you think that after Doug I want to get involved again with someone else?"

"There is a thin line between love and hate and when you get stressed the two become confused." says Sharon with a certain amount of bitterness to her voice.

The way you say that it is as if you are talking from personal experience? I always wondered why you have stayed on your own." replies Suzy appearing to return to her normal self.

"People are strange," answers Sharon with a distant look in her eyes; "you go from being happy and of almost one mind when you first meet. We used to know what each other was thinking and it hurt to be apart. Then over the years you drift apart, the love dies, and you seem to end up hating each other."

"Well, where I am concerned anyway, he told me one morning that he wanted us to split up as he hated me; and for years he had hated me and I never knew because I loved him. I never saw the hatred, yes, we used to argue, but it never used to get nasty. As they say love is blind and I used to see the good and ignore or adjust to the bad."

"Is that why you stay on your own, so that you will not get hurt again?"

"In the beginning it was but now things are different and I stay on my own because I like it." says Sharon with a smile; "What are your plans? I think you have blown it with Lewis."

"Like you I do not want to get hurt, I tried my hardest to make Doug happy and I do not want to try anymore, with anyone." Suzy replies sounding tired.

"What are you going to do about Lewis?" asks Sharon.

"I told him to meet me near Skinner's Alley tonight at eleven."

"Knowing Lewis he will not show, especially after what you had to say to him."

"You are probably right, did you notice the police when you came here?" asks Suzy with a coy smile.

"Thinking about it I do not believe I did; I just assumed they would be there. It is good news if they have stopped watching you, apart from giving them the run around a couple of times you have behaved normally. They will be back, maybe in a week or so, as long as Doug is not discovered."

"Lewis was very nervous about that which is why he is going to meet me later."

"It is a shame you have got no money to bet with, I could take all your money off you as he will not show tonight." smiles Sharon.

"I have got five pounds I can bet with." Suzy replies confidently.

"I will not take your last five pounds, talking about that what are you going to do for money?"

"I have got an interview down the Jobcentre tomorrow, maybe they will have something to offer as the newspaper has not got anything."

"If not you should be entitled to some money, has this place got a big mortgage?"

"No it is mine."

"What do you mean it is yours; with no mortgage?" exclaims Sharon.

"It was left to me by an Aunt."

“Before or after you married Doug?”

“Before, but I was already dating him and Auntie had a clause put in the Will that I would be the sole owner, even if we got married.”

“Surely Doug would have had to agree to that? As I thought once you became married you both would have owned it?”

“He did, as we were already married when she died, he was not happy about it but if he did not sign I would not inherit the bungalow.”

“At least he got to live rent free then apart from the council tax and the utility bills, what did you do for money?”

“In the beginning all I had to do was ask Doug and he would give me what I needed. The past six to nine months he has not given me anything. He still paid the bills but I was not allowed to go shopping on my own.”

“What food shopping or clothes shopping?” asks a horrified Sharon.

“Any shopping, he said I was not allowed to go out on my own, only with him.”

“Why did you let him treat you like that?”

“He scared me and said he would kill me if I ever left him; and he meant it!”

“I am sure he said that just to frighten you, once you give in to a control freak the more they want to control you; as you found out.” says Sharon with disappointment in her voice, as she thought Suzy had a much stronger character.

“It sounds worse than what it was, yes he used to hit me sometimes but it was not all the time and he could be so nice when he wanted to be. It was the past few weeks where he became constantly violent and was convinced I had slept with someone else.”

“Yet when you first got together that thought would not have entered either of your heads. See what I mean, the love and trust seems to go so quickly.” replies Sharon with real regret in her voice.

Closing the garage door behind him Lewis switches on the

light and walks to the back of the garage. Pouring some bottled water into a kettle he plugs it in and turns it on to boil. Picking up a mug from the wooden bench he wipes his finger around the inside to remove the dust and cobwebs.

Spooning in coffee, sugar and powdered milk he waits patiently for the water to heat up. Turning it off just before it boils he pours the hot water into the mug and stirs it briskly.

Looking at the van he decides the best thing is to change the colour slightly; the colour on the registration just says 'Blue' as it is currently a light blue changing it to dark blue would be no problem.

Lewis needed to hole up for a few days, he had no work until next week and painting the van would keep him busy; and out of the way. The only time he needed to go out was this evening to buy the paint and get some food and coffee. He had used household paint before when he had painted his Transit van using a radiator roller. Some of the paintwork had an 'orange peel' effect when seen in bright sunlight, but apart from that it looked a professional job.

Searching the back of the bench Lewis finds three sheets of 240 grade wet and dry rubbing down paper. Finding the bucket in the corner of the garage he realises he will have to go back to the flat for water.

Chapter Twelve

Malcolm sits on the bench in the darkness listening to the sounds around him; the noises are the same as last night, of shouting voices and slamming doors. A gentle breeze blows the sound towards him and he cannot help but smile when he hears a Dad being told off for eating the last packet of crisps.

The shouting continues as to how is he going to cure the problem of their son having no crisps to eat?

Hearing a front door slam and the sound of a car engine being started as the car door is slammed; Malcolm assumes 'Dad' is going to get more crisps. The car speeds along the road until the sound of its racing engine is lost in the distance,

Paris had told him exactly where the bungalow was where she had heard the two women talking about the Well. Deciding to take the day off work tomorrow he decides the direct approach is the best. The thought of having to look over his shoulder for the rest of his life held no appeal. With his thoughts whirling through his head he lights a cigarette; which makes him cough.

It was getting late and Lewis had done enough rubbing down; troubled by Suzy's attitude and regretting his involvement he had rubbed the shine off of just about all of the paintwork on the van.

The shopping trip to get the paint and food shopping had been uneventful and he had enough supplies to last until the end of the week. He had wanted Suzy to cut his hair but her change in attitude towards him would force him to go elsewhere. That would not be until the end of the week, as he had no intention of going anywhere else until then.

Suzy put her big coat on and the big felt hat Lewis had got her, looking in the mirror she adjusts the hat to a jaunty angle; "How do I look?" she asks Sharon with a smile as she keeps staring into the mirror.

“You are wasting your time and mine as he will not show.” replies Sharon impatiently.

“It is nice of you to offer me a lift but do not feel as if you have to stay.” answers Suzy still smiling at herself in the mirror.

“And be up half the night worrying if you got home safely going out this time of night? No thank you.”

“Lewis will give me a lift home, you ready then?” she asks as she walks to the front door.

“I will not wear my coat as we will not be getting out of the car.” replies Sharon annoyingly as she takes her coat from the hangar.

Suzy opens the door and walks along the path, hearing Sharon shut the front door she reaches the gate and looks up and down the road. All is quiet and it does appear the police have got better things to do. Opening the gate she stands beside Sharon's car and looks along the deserted road, feeling herself relax she smiles a thank you as Sharon unlocks the door and Suzy gets in.

Sharon pulls up outside Suzy's bungalow, Lewis had not shown and Suzy had not spoken a word on the drive back.

“I will see you tomorrow evening, if my day is not too tough.” Sharon tells her as Suzy opens the door.

“Thanks for bringing me back; I hope you have a nice day.” Suzy replies as she gets out and shuts the door.

Watching Sharon drive away Suzy looks up and down the deserted road, with a worried face she turns and opens the gate. Lewis should have met her; she did not think that she had been that horrible to him as Sharon had said she was. Thinking back to the time on the beach she realised that Lewis's attitude had changed towards her. She had been too angry to notice it then.

Now angry at him again for not meeting her she suddenly felt as if she did not want to know him anymore. He was the one who had been seen at the Well and it was him who threatened the Girl Guide's father. If Doug's body was discovered it would be more than likely that Lewis would get the blame.

Smiling coldly Suzy opens her front door and steps inside; it feels good to be alone again.

The alarm buzzing in Malcolm's ear at six thirty in the morning is far too early he decides as he angrily shuts it off. What a way to start the day!

His decision to take the day off work he had kept to himself as he wanted to get to this lady's house early in case she had work to go to.

After a quick cup of coffee Malcolm steps quietly out of the door, the rest of the family are still in bed and that is fine with him. He feels nervous and tense as on waking he considered the bold approach would be the best.

Starting the car he lights a cigarette which makes him cough violently for a few seconds, swearing to himself he puts the car in gear and drives out into the road. Sucking on the cigarette again he smiles in appreciation when he does not cough.

Driving slowly past Suzy's gate Malcolm looks along her path to her front door which fits Paris's description perfectly. All is quiet and whoever lives there appears to be still in bed. Turning the car around Malcolm drives back down the road and turns around at the end so that he is facing the right way. This was the main route into town from Suzy's bungalow and if anyone came out they would more than likely come in this direction.

Sitting comfortably and feeling a certain amount of privacy provided by the high Privet hedge he had parked next to he nervously watches the road. After about five minutes a dog walker comes out of one of the houses opposite Suzy's and walks in Malcolm's direction.

Pulling his mobile phone out of his pocket and putting it to his ear he makes it appear he is in deep conversation as the dog walker, a man in his late fifties ignores him as he walks past.

The next half an hour Malcolm keeps the phone to his ear as many people come out of their houses on the way to work. The

school kids are the most curious as they stare in at Malcolm as they walk past; and one even has the nerve to tap on his car!

Soon silence returns to the road and the dog walker along with his Staffordshire terrier appear from around the corner. Noticing Malcolm still sitting there the man frowns and crosses the road pulling his dog behind him. He is obviously suspicious of Malcolm; as he lives on the other side of the road.

Slowing down as he approaches Malcolm's car he stops and looks down at his dog. Malcolm can see him clearly in the passengers' door mirror as he moves slowly forward trying to hear what Malcolm is saying on his phone.

Malcolm smiles and says in a loud voice; "Yes dear, if you do not get off this phone you will make me late for my meeting."

The man has stopped about a metre from the rear of Malcolm's car and has probably not realised that Malcolm can see his every move. Trying to get the dog interested in Malcolm's car fails miserably as the dog is restless to move on. Frowning angrily at the dog the man allows himself to be led away and Malcolm gives him a 'Yes dear' as he walks past.

Looking at the time and a bit irritated by the nosey dog walker Malcolm sees he has been sitting here for an hour. Not seeing anyone come out of Suzy's bungalow he waits for the dog walker to go back inside his house before he starts the engine.

Driving slowly along the road Malcolm pulls up outside the front of Suzy's bungalow, still seeing no signs of life he puts on the brake and switches the engine off. Wishing he had urinated before doing this he opens the door and steps out onto the road. All is quiet as he shuts the car door quietly and walks around the front of the car.

Feeling tense and nervous, with his stomach appearing to be filled with butterflies and really wishing he had urinated, he opens Suzy's front gate. Leaving the gate wide open he walks along the path and pounds on the front door.

The pounding seemed to have the right effect as Malcolm hears something being dropped inside and a female voice

swearing. Pressing his advantage he pounds on the door again and takes two steps backwards.

Hearing the door being unbolted, Malcolm rubs his tongue around the inside of his dry mouth to try to provide some moisture in readiness to speak. The door opens slowly and Suzy, who had obviously been asleep by the state of her hair looks at him with bleary eyes.

“Your bloke there?” he almost shouts.

Suzy looks confused; “Bloke, what bloke?”

“The one who has got the same hairstyle as you and wears a camouflage jacket.” replies Malcolm staring at Suzy’s dishevelled hair.

Almost subconsciously Suzy flattens her hair as she stares at the angry man in front of her. This is obviously the father of the Girl Guide, the one Lewis had threatened.

“I don’t see him anymore, what do you want him for?” asks Suzy regaining her composure as she stares back.

“He paid me a visit to let me know he knew where I lived, I am returning the call; and if I see you or your friend in my part of town, it will not be the police you have to worry about.” Malcolm smiles as he turns and walks away, not giving Suzy the opportunity to say anything in return.

Walking quickly along the path he shuts the gate on his way out and walks around to the drivers’ side of his car. As he opens the door he looks back at Suzy’s pale face standing in the doorway. Meeting her gaze he gives her what he hopes is a threatening stare as he gets into his car.

Starting the engine he puts it into gear, sighing in relief he drives quickly along the road and away from Suzy’s. He only intended to keep quiet for a week or two to give the time for someone else to find what was down the Well; if no one found it the police would be getting an anonymous call.

It was a big mistake on that fella’s part to threaten his daughter.

Suzy stares back at Malcolm as he gets into his car and watches him drive away. In shock she stands in the doorway

listening to the car engine as it fades into the distance. Suddenly she slams the door shut and runs down to the bathroom, putting her head almost in the toilet she is violently sick. Having had nothing to eat for nearly twelve hours she retches painfully, mainly bringing up bile.

Thoughts rush through her head as she remembers Doug's attack and killing him. Heaving again is painful and she only brings up about a teaspoonful of bile. Standing hurriedly she backs out of the bathroom and walks into the kitchen. Walking over to the sink she fills the kettle with water from the tap and lets it run. Switching the kettle on she returns to the sink and washes her face in the cool water.

Using the hand towel she dries her face and puts a teabag into a cup and sits at the table as she waits for the kettle to boil. Fear flows through her and makes her shake, the kettle finally boils and she walks over and makes the tea.

What is she to do?

She needed Lewis.

Putting her mobile phone in her pocket Suzy opens the front door and steps out into the early morning sunshine. Collared doves squabble in the Maple trees that line the road as sparrows chirp happily. It is a lovely morning but Suzy barely acknowledges her surroundings; she had been trying to ring Lewis for over an hour. It appears he has his phone turned off, as all she gets is the answer machine saying the line is busy; as it eats up her credit.

Stepping out onto the pavement she looks up and down the road and can see no watchers. Buttoning her coat as she walks she decides to go the long way round to see Lewis. Suzy had lived in this area for a long time and learnt her way around; planning the route in her mind she imagines the roads and alleys she is to walk.

It is midday by the time she reaches Lewis's flat and she rings the bell expectantly.

No answer.

Ring the bell again she looks along the street for Lewis's car, not seeing it she decides to check out his garages at the rear of the building. Looking around, with paranoia filling her mind, she is relieved to see no obvious watcher's; apart from the purvey bricklayer's who ogle her from the building site across the road.

Hurrying around the side of the building Suzy is relieved to see Lewis's car parked around the back. Approaching the lock-up garages Suzy slows down as all the garage doors are shut. Knowing that Lewis has several of the garages here and aware that he may not want to see her, she stands still and listens.

Faintly she can hear music coming from a garage further along and Suzy walks quietly forward. As she approaches the garage a smile covers Suzy's face as she recognises the song; it is The Faith Healer by The Sensational Alex Harvey Band. Lewis had played it to her over twenty years ago now and she can remember her amazement at hearing such an amazing song. The song and the group had a strong influence on her in her younger days and she taps gently on the garage door.

"Who is it?" shouts Lewis's voice.

"It's Suzy, can we talk?"

The garage door slides up as Suzy steps back to avoid getting hit by the huge door as it comes out; as well as up.

Lewis stares coldly at her; "What do you want to talk to an idiot about?"

"I am so sorry, I know I can be a real bitch but you frightened me when you told me about seeing the Girl Guide's father."

The Faith Healer comes to an end and Lewis's eyes harden as he stares at her. Alex Harvey is right on cue as he sings about having a 'Gang Bang' and Suzy sees a change in Lewis, Suzy can see by his eyes and the way that he is staring at her that he is remembering their earlier times together.

'Gang Bang' is especially relevant and Suzy can remember many times when he used to play it to unsuspecting visitors. Standing her ground as the song continues Suzy meets

Lewis's gaze; "The Girl Guide's father paid me a visit this morning."

Lewis takes the news calmly; "You had better come in and tell the idiot all about it" he says coldly.

"You can't be that much of an idiot if I am coming to you for advice?" asks Suzy desperately as she steps into the garage.

"Maybe I am more of one by letting you in." he answers as he shuts the door behind her.

Walking to the rear of the garage Lewis mumbles a 'sorry Alex' as he turns off the music. Picking up his keys, his mug and bottle of milk he turns back towards Suzy; "Best we talk in my flat." he says as he walks back to the door.

Suzy stands to one side to give him room to pass; "Give me those." she says indicating to the mug and the milk.

"Thanks." Lewis replies as he hands them to her and opens the garage door, Suzy follows closely behind and watches him as he shuts and locks the garage door.

Opening the front door to his flat Lewis glances casually back at Suzy; "Excuse the mess, I live here." he says with a wry smile as he steps inside; "Go into the front room, I'll put the kettle on. Here give me those." he orders as he takes the mug and milk from Suzy's hands.

Suzy walks into the front room; gold framed pictures of Lewis's book covers adorn the walls and Suzy wondered why he said 'mind the mess' as the place looks neat and tidy. Sitting down in a deep armchair Suzy anxiously waits for Lewis as she stares out of the window at the blue sky above.

Lewis enters the room carrying two steaming mugs and walks over to Suzy; "Take this," he says handing a mug of coffee; "and tell me everything."

Lewis pulls in behind Sharon's car and puts the handbrake on; looking along the road in both directions all seems quiet as apart from his and Sharon's car the road is empty. Shutting the door he locks it and with a final look along the road he steps through Suzy's gate.

The front door is already open and Lewis walks in and shuts it behind him; "Where are you?" he shouts.

"In here." shout Suzy and Sharon from the lounge.

"Evening ladies, hope you are well?"

Suzy and Sharon look up at him as they are on the floor with a multitude of candles in front of them. Many look like unwanted gifts as they are still in their fancy wrappers, most are scented.

"One would be enough." continues Lewis as he sits down on the couch.

"I was just showing Sharon my collection." replies Suzy defensively.

"How many you got there? And I bet they all stink when you light them?"

"About fifty; and yes, they all smell nice." replies Sharon backing Suzy up.

"One will do it, which one is it to be?" asks Lewis impatiently as he sits forward.

"I thought that I would use these three." says Suzy pointing to three candles lying beside her.

"Why three?"

Suzy shrugs her shoulders; "I just thought it would look better, do you want a coffee before we light them?"

"Three is fine, I was winding you up and no to the coffee, we will be busy in about an hour when it gets fully dark." answers Lewis as he looks at the darkening sky out of the window.

"How long will it take to sort out afterwards?" asks Sharon.

"Depends on how quick the fire brigade get here." replies Lewis with no emotion to his voice, looking at Suzy's sad face he tries to reassure her; "It is the only way Suzy, hopefully I will be able to put the fire out before they get here. At least you will get a new carpet out of it; are you going to light those?"

Suzy nods her head and puts the candles in a straight line in front of the fire, striking a match she lights all three.

"Put two of them over the place where the stained floorboards are." orders Lewis in a gentle voice.

Carefully picking one up Suzy puts it onto the carpet and

puts another one next to it; "Is that all right?"

"Yes, looks good, wait until it gets good and dark and then you can knock one over." smiles Lewis.

"Aren't we going to watch them burn all the way down?" asks Sharon in disappointment.

"You are going home and Suzy will ring you either way." replies Lewis.

"Either way or what?"

"Whether she needs to stay at yours tonight; it is only if things get out of control."

"I don't want my bungalow burnt down." says Suzy sharply as she stares into the flames.

Sharon stands up and looks at Lewis; "I hope you know what you are doing Mister." she says trying to put a hard edge to her voice, failing miserably as it makes her sound foreign.

"Admittedly there is a lot of prayer and water when Suzy fills the bucket up." he smiles in reply.

"Phone me, soon as." Sharon orders Suzy as she walks out of the door.

"See you tomorrow Sharon." shouts Lewis to her departing back.

Chapter Thirteen

"It's dark enough now, knock it over please, Suzy." Lewis orders in a stressed voice.

"You are sure about this Lewis?"

"You have no choice; you don't honestly think the father of the Girl Guide is going to keep quiet do you?"

"Well with threats exchanged I thought he might leave us alone and forget about us." Suzy says hopefully.

"Would you?" answers Lewis impatiently; "get on with it please, have you messed the bed up?"

"No I haven't." she replies as she stands, knocking the candle over she hurries to the bedroom.

Lewis stares at the candle as the flame re-ignites after being flooded with molten wax when Suzy pushed it over. The flame gets larger as the wax above the wick melts quickly catching the carpet alight underneath.

Suzy appears in the doorway her face pale; the room is quickly filling with toxic smoke and she can hear Lewis coughing. Looking in the direction of the sound of the cough Suzy can barely make out Lewis under the cloud of black smoke; "Get out of there Lewis, it is getting out of control." she shouts.

Lewis appears out of the black cloud and with eyes streaming grabs Suzy's arm and pulls her into the kitchen. Coughing badly he tries to speak but cannot manage it as he breaks into an almost continuous cough.

Suzy holds his arm tenderly, the concern for her friend outweighing the need for her home and her own safety; "Lewis what do you want me to do?" she almost screams, her voice is so shrill and loud.

Lewis holds his hand to his ear shaping his fingers to impersonate a phone, smiling and coughing he indicates Suzy to phone the fire brigade and pushes her towards the hall.

Reluctantly Suzy lets him go and hurries along the passageway to the front door, picking up the phone which

rests on a small table she dials hurriedly.

The phone rings twice and a calm female voice answers; "Emergency; what service would you like?"

"Fire, fire brigade." shouts Suzy hysterically into the phone as the hall starts to fill with smoke making her cough.

"Fire brigade," says a male voice; "what is the address please where the fire is?"

Suzy screams her address into the phone as black smoke now fills the hall making her cough again.

"Get everyone out of the building we are on our way." replies the male voice sounding calm but firm.

Suzy throws the phone down as she opens the front door. The black cloud rushes past her and out of the front door. Suzy can take no more and joins the black cloud in its hasty exit from the bungalow.

Coughing badly Suzy falls to the ground a few metres outside the door and continues to cough as tears stream down her cheeks.

Finally the coughing stops and she stands and walks towards the front door intending to go back inside for Lewis.

The black cloud does not look so thick and she calls out for Lewis.

"Behind you." shouts Lewis as he starts to cough.

Suzy turns and sees that Lewis has come around the side of the bungalow; "Are you all right?" she asks as she joins in with Lewis with the coughing.

Thirty seconds pass before either of them are able to speak; "The fire is out." says Lewis with a smile as he breaks into another fit of coughing.

Suzy smiles weakly back at him; her mascara has smudged and her face is pale, making it look like she has just got out of bed!

Lewis manages to laugh between the coughs; "Sorry I didn't get time to take your knickers out of the bucket, why did you put them in there?" he manages to ask before coughing again.

"It is not my habit to have buckets of water lying around the house." she answers between her coughs.

“Good thinking, do you want to stay at mine tonight?” Lewis asks slyly as he looks down at her breasts.

Suzy laughs; “One thing I have got plenty of is knickers; hey! listen.”

Lewis can here the siren on the fire engine as it races towards them; “Stay here.” he orders as he stands and hurries around the back of the bungalow.

As he enters the kitchen Lewis grabs the overflowing bucket of water in the sink and hurries to the lounge. The smoke is a lot thinner and he throws the bucket of water accurately to where the fire was. Backing out he runs into the kitchen and out of the back door as a fit of coughing overtakes him.

The coughing is intense and Lewis starts to feel a great pain in his chest as if he is having a heart attack. Realising his lung is collapsing, he starts to swear as anger fills his face.

The pain in his chest is intense and Lewis falls to the ground cursing and crying.

Lewis must have passed out for a few seconds as the next thing he is aware of is a very concerned fireman asking him if he is all right.

Looking at the fireman in all his bright protective clothing makes the situation feel unreal, wheezing badly Lewis tries to answer but only manages a very painful cough.

“Ambulance is on the way sir.” the fireman tells him as he gently holds his shoulder.

Lewis leans into it, grateful for the support; “Collapsed lung, happened before.” he manages to say before coughing again.

“Peter,” shouts the fireman to his mate who has appeared from around the corner of the bungalow; “need the medics around here mate.”

“The ambulance has just pulled up.” Peter replies as he disappears around the corner.

“Take it easy fella, medics are on their way.” assures the fireman as he helps to support Lewis, who is coughing badly.

Two medics hurry towards him and exchange places with the fireman; assessing the situation quickly one of the medics

steps forward as he pulls out a plastic mask from his holdall; “Get the small bottle of oxygen will you please Bill?” he asks of the other medic who hurries away back to the ambulance.

“Have you sorted in no time sir, bit of smoke inhalation, will have you back to normal in no time,” he tells Lewis confidently.

Lewis shakes his head; “Collapsed lung.” he manages to say between coughing.

The medic looks at him with that superior look seeming offended at Lewis’s diagnosis; “Collapsed lung; what makes you say that sir?”

“Had one before.” replies Lewis as he coughs to avoid any more talking.

Bill the medic appears before Lewis as he feels the mask slipped over his mouth and nose. Connecting the mask to the oxygen cylinder Bill switches it on and Lewis breathes in gratefully. The rush of oxygen clears his head and he feels instant relief as a fresh fit of coughing has him pulling the mask off.

“Better get the trolley round here, is the young lady all right?” asks the medic of his partner Bill.

“Yes, she is breathing well now.” Bill answers as he stands and walks back to the ambulance.

“Won’t be long now sir.” the medic assures Lewis, still seeming to be annoyed.

Lewis does not answer as he puts the mask back over his nose and mouth and breathes in gratefully. The pain in his chest has eased but the lung has collapsed further making it difficult to breathe. It feels like there is a big tennis ball in his chest that is preventing him breathing, every breath he can feel it move and he curses his god silently.

The trolley soon arrives and Lewis is carefully picked up by Bill and Tony. Holding the oxygen bottle Lewis is taken around to the front of the building. Suzy is being cared for by a large female medic and looks towards him as she hears the sound of the trolley approaching.

Suzy looks fine, apart from her smudged mascara and tangled hair, when she sees Lewis on the trolley her face turns

pale.

Lewis gives her a weak wave as he is pushed past and along the path. The police appear as they reach the gate; a sergeant and what looks like a young trainee; "Everything all right?" the sergeant asks Tony as he looks down at Lewis with obvious concern.

"Bit of smoke inhalation, he will be all right in a few hours." replies Tony as he continues towards the ambulance.

Suzy almost wets herself when she sees the policemen at the front gate, watching the interchange between the policeman and the medic Suzy tries to calm herself.

Carol, the medic treating Suzy notices her change; "Are you in any pain Suzy?"

Suzy nods her head and coughs violently as the police sergeant walks towards them. The trainee remains by the gate and watches as Lewis is being loaded onto the ambulance.

As the sergeant approaches the door a fireman comes out from inside the bungalow; "Do you need us for anything?" asks the sergeant.

"No, a candle got knocked over, the fella there," as he nods towards the ambulance; "had managed to put the fire out. We will stay here for a while and dampen it down more just in case."

The sergeant smiles; "We won't get in your way then." he says as he turns and walks back down the path.

Suzy feels like screaming in relief as she watches him walk away.

Lewis pulls the mask off his face; the smell of the new plastic mask is getting to him and making him feel sick.

"Everything all right sir?" asks Tony.

The ambulance has been mobile for about ten minutes and Lewis prays for the journey to end. The pain in his chest when they go over bumps in the road and the smell of the plastic makes him wish he was home.

Knowing the medic would want some kind of answer Lewis

quickly replies; "Feel sick." as he replaces the mask.

The medic remains silent as he monitors Lewis's heartbeat and respiration.

The bright lights of the hospital are a welcoming sight and Lewis smiles when the ambulance finally stops. The doors of the ambulance are quickly opened and still clutching hold of the oxygen bottle Lewis is wheeled into the Clinical Decision Unit.

Pushing Lewis into a side ward Tony and Bill help the nurse as she removes the oxygen mask and replaces it with one that is connected to the hospital. Bill nods his head towards Lewis as he walks back to his ambulance carrying the oxygen cylinder and mask.

Tony looks at Lewis awaiting thanks.

Lewis raises his hand; "Thank you so much." he says through the oxygen mask.

"Take care now." replies Tony in a superior way as he waves and walks out of the ward.

The nurse immediately appears by his side and holds his wrist as she checks his pulse. Making him get out of his clothes Lewis is forced to wear a white gown that ties at the back.

"Can I have a pillow please?" asks Lewis as he had been laid on a bed with no pillows and only one tiny blanket at the bottom of the bed.

"There are no pillows." answers the nurse as she checks his pulse again; releasing his wrist she walks away.

It is impossible for Lewis to lie on his back as the pain becomes too intense, laying on his right side his head falls down towards his shoulder; pulling on the left lung and nearly causing him to scream out in pain.

Sitting upright takes Lewis time, as each movement causes waves of pain to pass through his chest. Eventually he manages it and leans forward and grabs hold of the little blanket at the bottom of the bed. Rolling it up as best as he can, Lewis lies back down and slips the badly rolled blanket underneath his head.

The shock of the collapsed lung also affects his mind and Lewis closes his eyes as he feels 'out of it'. Drifting off into unconsciousness Lewis is woken by someone pulling the blanket from under his head. A young orderly carefully folds the blanket and puts it at the bottom of the bed.

“Have you got any pillows?” asks Lewis.

“No they are all being used.” replies the young orderly as he walks away.

Annoyed with the orderly for taking his blanket away Lewis manages to sit up and retrieve the blanket from the bottom of the bed. Making a better job of rolling it Lewis lies back down and slips it under his head. Feeling more comfortable Lewis drifts off again.

Lewis is awoken by the doctor and her team as they cluster around his bed, once again someone tries to take the rolled up blanket from beneath his head. Holding onto it tightly Lewis opens his eyes as a nurse steps back. Finding himself as a bit of an education piece for the trainees, he is examined by the doctor who recommends an MRI scan.

The doctor and her team depart hurriedly and Lewis and his bed are pushed out into the main ward and put in a position three beds down from the door. It is a bit noisier in here and Lewis notices the clock on the wall; he had been here for three hours.

Lying back down on the bed on his right side Lewis tucks the rolled up blanket under his head and drifts off again.

Someone pulling the blanket from under his head makes him snap his eyes open as he clutches onto it desperately.

Looking into the face of the same young orderly who had taken the blanket earlier he says in his most aggressive voice; “Leave it alone.”

The young orderly releases his hold of the blanket but changes his mind and holds it again as tries to pull it from underneath Lewis's head!

“Get away from me.” he says in a low angry voice, quite prepared to use violence, even with a collapsed lung!

The orderly looks at Lewis's face; he knows by the tone of voice the next move will be a fist in his face. Still not saying anything the orderly lets go of the blanket and goes to find someone else to annoy.

“Suzy, you all right?” shouts Sharon into her phone as she answers Suzy's call.

“They have taken Lewis to the hospital with smoke inhalation.”

“That sounds serious, are you all right?”

“Yes, fine thanks, it all went like Lewis said it would apart from the smoke. Luckily I had shut the bedroom door so I got a smoke free room to sleep in.”

“You sure you don't want to come here? You are very welcome you know.” Sharon asks as she had been looking forward to Suzy visiting for a few days.

“I would not be able to sleep worrying about my possessions. The fireman said the fuses are blown and I will have to have an electrician check the wiring before I turn it on.”

“What, you got no electric?”

“Not for a few days, the fireman said something about having to let the place dry.”

“No electric? You will go mad sitting there in the dark, what are you going to do with yourself?”

“I can read, I have a big box of candles do not forget.” Suzy says laughing nervously into the phone.

“Do you want me to come over and keep you company?”

“I do, but it is getting late and you have to get up for work in the morning. Be good to see you tomorrow evening if you are not doing anything?”

“Do not remind me about work! No, I am not doing anything I will see you tomorrow about seven.”

“Nice one thanks Sharon see you tomorrow.” says Suzy as she disconnects the call. Worried about Lewis she phones the hospital and is put through to the Clinical Decision Unit. Told by a tired sounding nurse that Lewis was being kept in overnight for observation Suzy hangs up the phone and

prepares for the night ahead. Putting the candles on plates Suzy spreads them around only lighting one by the front door and one in her bedroom; the last thing she wants is burglars!

“Can you turn onto your back for us please Lewis?” asks the attractive nurse in his ear.

Lewis looks around him and realises he is next to the huge MRI scanner and tries to lie on his back. The pain is too intense and he is forced to return to lying on his right side; “No I cannot the pain is too much.” he manages to say as he lifts the mask off his face.

“Keep your mask on Lewis.” she says as she walks into the little operating booth to talk to the operators. Coming out with another nurse they approach him and she asks; “Are you able to get onto the machine for us?”

“I’ll try” replies Lewis as he lifts himself up and with a helping hand on either side from the nurses Lewis manages to lay on the bed that goes into the machine. They try to get him to lie on his back which nearly causes him to pass out. Needing him conscious they allow him to lay on his right side and he finds he can lie on his chest.

The image is taken as Lewis is pushed into the machine and his next real awareness is finding himself back in the Clinical Decision Unit. More time passes and Lewis and his bed are finally pushed into the treatment room. Lewis notices the time on the wall as he enters and sees he has been here for five hours.

A few minutes later a lady doctor enters with paperwork clutched under her arm. Walking to Lewis she looks down at him; “Hello Lewis, it appears you have a pneumothorax.” she says as she takes the MRI scan negative and holds it up to the light to look at it. Seeming satisfied she puts the scan back into its envelope. Looking at Lewis she wheels a small stainless steel trolley around to the right side of the bed.

“What are you doing?” asks Lewis as he tries to sit up; “It is the left lung that has collapsed.”

Looking down at her paperwork she replies; “I have the right

side written down here.”

“It is my lung; I should know if it has collapsed or not.”

Taking the scan out of its envelope she holds it up to the light again; “The scan shows the right side, wait there.” she orders as she puts the scan back into the envelope and walks out of the door.

Lewis does not have long to wait as she returns looking slightly embarrassed; “You laid on your front when the scan was taken, yes?” she asks.

“Yes that's right.”

“That is why the scan shows the collapse on the right side.”

“Lucky I am not unconscious.” replies Lewis in a sarcastic voice.

The doctor blushes a deep red as she returns to the trolley, not trusting herself to speak she readies the trolley and asks Lewis to sit up as much as he can.

While Lewis is struggling to sit upright she prepares the needle and tubing. Lewis can see the 'bucket' on the bottom shelf which he will have to carry around for the next week. The container receives the other end of the plastic tubing that is to be inserted into Lewis's chest cavity.

Fitted to the container; which contains a small amount of water is a non-return valve. When the tube is inserted into his chest and Lewis coughs; forcing air out of the cavity along the plastic tubing, the non-return valve in the water prevents the air from returning. Slowly in the week ahead the lung will re-inflate itself back to its normal condition.

Approaching Lewis from the left side she holds the hollow needle in her hand; “Lift your arm up please Lewis?” she asks with a slight edge of resentment towards Lewis reflected in her voice.

Obediently he obeys and the smell of body odour from his armpit drifts up his nose. Embarrassed at the smell Lewis looks away and prepares himself for the pain that is to come.

The doctor wipes his skin clean with an antiseptic rub and looks towards him; “Ready?” she asks; “I am going to insert this needle into your chest which should release the pressure

for you.”

“Yes, thank you, I would appreciate that.” replies Lewis putting on a brave smile.

The doctor inserts the needle into his skin just below the left armpit. Lewis feels the pain of it going in and is delighted to hear an outrushing of air; bringing instant relief.

“Thank you.” gasps Lewis as a large smile covers his face; the pain has magically gone and the relief makes his head spin.

The doctor smiles in return as she connects the needle to the container by the plastic tubing. Putting the container of water onto the floor beneath Lewis's bed her smile widens when she sees a stream of bubbles.

“I am sure that feels better Lewis, the porter will be here soon to take you to your ward.”

“Does this mean I have to stay in here all week?” asks Lewis gloomily.

“Yes you will, do not worry they will take good care of you.”

Lewis is bored, not having slept at all due to the infernal noise of steel trolleys being pushed past the ward all night he feels tired. Just as he would be drifting off to sleep the rumble and clatter of a trolley would wake him up again.

Lunch was a surprise, as it was his first day he had to take what was offered. When the plate of roast lamb, roast potatoes, runner beans and carrots was put in front of him he stared at it suspiciously. The strawberry jam sponge and custard for dessert looked inviting as he bit into a piece of lamb. The meat had been cooked to perfection, as had the rest of the meal and Lewis nearly manages to eat it all.

Still tired from the lack of sleep he closes his eyes and listens to the noise of the busy ward.

“Lewis.” says a familiar voice by his side.

Opening his eyes he is delighted to see Suzy standing before him; “Suzy, nice one.” he greets with a big beaming smile.

“Are you all right?” Suzy asks him with obvious concern.

“There is no more pain, but I have to stay in here for a week.”

“A week!” Suzy exclaims; “Why so long? I can see a bandage under your arm did you hurt yourself last night?”

“Yes, inhaling the smoke and the violent coughing put extra pressure on my lungs and one developed a hole; look.” says Lewis as he bends down and picks up the container containing the water from beside his bed.

Suzy's face turns pale as she sees that the container is connected to Lewis by a long plastic tube. Horrified she asks; “What is that?”

“Clever this, you watch.” he orders as he makes himself cough. A small stream of bubbles comes out of the plastic tubing and floats to the surface.

Suzy thinks she is going to be sick.

“Got a non-return valve fitted.” he smiles and appears proud somehow.

“What is that for?” asks Suzy still confused.

“Will help my lung expand, I am glad to see you, how did you get here?”

“I used your car, I hope you don't mind?”

“Not at all, at least I know where my keys are now.” he replies smiling in relief.

“Yes, you had left them on the dressing table in the bedroom.”

“Would you mind going round to my flat and getting some books for me please? I am going mad here.”

Suzy looks around the busy ward seeing that every patient had visitors; “I am not surprised.”

Staying for over an hour Suzy tells him of last night's events and promises to return in the evening with Sharon.

With Sharon helping, Suzy has a busy week trying to clean the bungalow of the smoke damage. The smoke had caused a lot of damage and was difficult to wash off and Suzy realised with sinking heart that she would have to completely re-decorate.

A lot of the carpets had to be washed and luckily, with the money Lewis had lent her, Suzy had hired a carpet shampooer. Washing the carpets was still hard work and without Sharon's help she would have been hard pushed to finish in time for Lewis's return.

The day had finally arrived when they were going to unattach Lewis from the water container; and remove the plastic tubing.

Bubbles had stopped being produced two days ago indicating that his lung had re-inflated, but it did not feel that way to Lewis.

This had been the second time the left lung had collapsed and a specialist team had come down from one of the major London hospitals as they intended to 'stick' the lung to the lung lining.

Lewis did not know what to expect, all that he knew was that they are going to use talcum powder. He watches the doctor, who first inserted the tube, and the specialist team approach him and along with several nurses and more trainees they crowd around his bed.

As the doctor removes the tape that is holding the tube to his body where it enters the chest cavity Lewis notices the plastic tubing is kinked.

No wonder the bubbles had stopped!

That explained why his chest felt strange; as if it had not re-inflated properly. More intent on getting out of this nightmare of a hospital Lewis says nothing.

The doctor notices the kink in the plastic tubing and comments saying; 'no air will get through there' but does not suggest anything. Disconnecting Lewis from the water container the doctor moves out of the way.

One of the specialist team holds up a small brown bottle filled with liquid and thick sediment. This was the talcum powder, sterilised of course, the specialist informs his team. Shaking the bottle vigorously the specialist changes places with the doctor and explains his procedure to his team.

Filling a large syringe with the mixture from the bottle the

specialist slowly inserts the needle into some of the plastic tubing that remains. The plastic tubing is still attached to the hollow needle that remains in Lewis. The feeling is strange to Lewis as he feels the cool fluid flow into his body. The specialist is soon finished and asks the doctor to cover the wound.

Lewis does not feel good at all; initially the cool fluid entering his body had come as a relief. But now inside him it felt like it was getting hotter and hotter and Lewis starts to moan aloud as the pain was becoming too much!

“Is he all right?” a concerned nurse asks the specialist.

“He will experience some pain; and then it will pass.” he replies as if he is describing something of no importance.

Lewis begins to moan louder and louder as it feels like his chest is on fire, with a red hot poker inserted into his left side.

The specialist team and the doctor hurriedly leave as the moans turn into screams and Lewis screams in pain like he has never screamed before.

A group of concerned nurses gather around his bed trying to calm him, with no effect as by then the pain has become unbearable. Screaming helps ease the pain and Lewis screams as loud as he can.

An elderly nurse appears in the doorway of the ward and hurries over to Lewis and the crowd of nurses. Asking one of the nurses why Lewis is screaming so much the nurse tells her of the talcum powder injection.

“That is the worst kind of pain anyone can endure, have they given him any pain killers?” says the nurse with a worried look on her face.

All the nurses shake their heads and the elderly nurse requests morphine to help him.

By the time they had located the qualified nurse who had the key to the medicine cabinet and loaded the syringe more than ten minutes had passed.

Those ten minutes was the worst ten minutes of Lewis's life, as was the following thirty five minutes. Due to the delay in

administering the morphine it had no effect on Lewis. He continues to scream until the unbearable pain subsides to an acceptable level and to everyone's relief (especially to Lewis) he finally falls silent.

Suzy looks at the time when she hears the phone ringing; it is nine thirty in the morning, who could be calling her this time of day?

Getting out of bed she hurries along the hall and picks up the phone; "Hello?" she asks a little nervously.

"Good to see you are out of bed so early in the morning." says Lewis's sarcastic voice.

"Why are you up so early; wet the bed?" is her snappy reply.

"Oh very good, please come and get me eleven o'clock would be great." Lewis pleads.

"They are letting you out? On me way, nice one." replies Suzy happily.

"Yes, they are going to take the tube out in about an hour, and then I will be ready." confirms Lewis as he hangs up the phone.

The staff nurse in crisp dark blue uniform approaches Lewis's bed carrying a kidney dish with a syringe and ampoule in it.

"Good morning," greets Lewis cheerfully; "I am glad you are here."

"I have got a small injection for you, in the left leg please." the nurse smiles in return.

Lewis obediently lifts his leg out from the bed cover and lays it on the top of the bed. Having being forced to wear a gown he had no pyjama bottoms to remove.

The nurse fills the syringe with the contents of the ampoule and wiping part of his leg with an antiseptic wipe she looks at him; "Ready?"

"Please do." laughs Lewis glad that he is finally getting out of here. The injection should reach its maximum effect in about twenty minutes and by then; he will be free.

Not flinching, Lewis happily lets the nurse inject him with the pain killer.

Thirty minutes have passed since the nurse gave him the injection and Lewis's leg is starting to hurt where she had injected him. Getting impatient Lewis gets up and walks over to the nurse's station. A young nurse is sitting behind the desk and Lewis complains bitterly to her about the delay in having the remaining plastic tubing removed.

The nurse seems unaware of Lewis's condition and is not really concerned in helping him. She assures Lewis that the doctor must be on her way and for Lewis to go wait by his bed. Seeing it is useless to pursue the matter Lewis returns to his bed.

Twenty minutes pass and Lewis can take no more, walking over to the nurse's station Lewis sees it is attended by the same nurse; "I am getting fed up of waiting around here for someone who is not coming, I'm going home." he states firmly as he turns and walks back to his bed.

Having already put on his trousers and trainers Lewis takes the robe off. Several centimetres of the plastic tubing still protrudes from his body and Lewis looks at it closely. Where the tubing enters his chest several stitches had been sewn into his skin to keep it in place.

Frustrated that he cannot remove it himself Lewis puts his shirt and jacket on. Picking up his bag of possession's Lewis walks out of the ward and makes for the hospital's main exit. Hearing running feet behind him as he reaches the lift Lewis presses the down button as he enters, not looking behind him.

Hearing the doors slide shut Lewis turns around and prepares himself for a quick exit. The lift comes to a halt on the ground floor and the doors slide open and Lewis steps quickly out of the lift.

As he reaches the end of the corridor and with the main doors in sight Lewis is prevented from going any further. A nurse, in her mid-fifties and from the ward he was on, stands in his way.

“Where do you think you are going Lewis?”

Lewis is furious with the nurse for barring his way and answers calmly; “I am going home.” he says as he tries to walk past her.

Grabbing hold of his arm she says with real concern; “You cannot, the doctor has not finished with you yet.”

“I have been waiting for nearly an hour, the pain killer injection was a waste of time as my leg is hurting now!” he exclaims in frustration as he tries to free himself. He has no wish to hurt the nurse, for apart from the young one at the desk, the nurses had tried as hard as they could to make him comfortable.

Lewis stares at the nurse as the doctor approaches, annoyed with the pain and mistakes and for her almost putting a hole in the wrong side of his chest he expresses his feelings; “You.” he screams; “I have been waiting an hour for you.”

“I am here now.” she replies angrily and turns and makes her way to the lift.

“Come on.” says the nurse as she pulls Lewis along behind her as he allows himself to be led back to the ward.

Sitting on the bed Lewis angrily watches the doctor prepare needle and thread and organise her tray of medical equipment. With his top removed he feels vulnerable and looks down at the floor.

“Right lift your arm up.” the doctor orders.

Lewis obediently lifts his left arm up so she can remove the tube. Expecting a lot of pain he is surprised as after the snipping of the scissors cutting the stitches he experiences little. Slowly removing the long tube Lewis is amazed at just how much is inside him as it looks to be fifty centimetres long.

A relieved smile covers his face as the doctor stitches him back up and unwraps a large plaster. Placing it over the wound she gives it a little slap to firm it; “There you go.” she says with little emotion.

Nodding his head Lewis replies with a very cold ‘Thank you.’ and puts his shirt on as the doctor picks up the tray and walks

away. Putting his jacket on Lewis wastes no time in getting out of there.

As he steps out of the hospital he sees Suzy staring anxiously about as she has parked in a twenty minute time zone. Seeing Lewis walking towards her she lets out a 'Whoop' and runs towards him.

“Lewis, good to see you out of there at last.” she says as she runs up to him and kisses him on the cheek.

“Glad to be out; and good to see you too, please take me home?” he asks wearily.

“Right away.” laughs Suzy.

Chapter Fourteen

“What are we going to do now?” asks Suzy as she hands Lewis a mug of coffee.

“Thanks” he says as he takes the mug from her hand; “I cannot do a lot for about a week, but it does not matter really we have done the important part.”

“By setting my bungalow alight and destroying the evidence?” asks Suzy in a humorous condescending voice.

“When they find Doug, which they will, I expect they will take you down to the police station and question you for hours, if not days. Are you ready for that?”

Suzy nods her head as her face pales at the thought and looks down at the floor. Looking up after a few seconds she looks Lewis in the eye; “Yes, I am ready.” she answers quietly.

“That will be the hardest bit as they will try to break you, but once that is over you will be free.”

“I look forward to that moment, I have hated every second of this; and all I did was defend myself.” she says with anger in her voice and returns to staring at the floor.

“We have destroyed all evidence of violence in your place, there will be no way they will connect you with what will be reported as a 'Grisly murder' when they find his dismembered body. You will be put under a lot of pressure; and make sure you have a solicitor with you.”

“A solicitor, I don't know any.” answers Suzy in dismay.

“You do not have to; they will appoint one to you to defend you.

Suzy's face drops and she turns almost white with fear; “To defend me? What do you mean by that?” she almost screams.

“Calm down, calm down will you? I am sure you have seen enough police programmes on the TV with people in your position.” laughs Lewis trying to calm her.

Suzy looks him in the eyes again as she remembers; “Yes, you are right, I am scared Lewis.”

“No need to be, Doug's car has been broken up and does

not exist anymore. That will always remain a puzzle to them, which will help confuse the issue. Stick to exactly the same story as you told before when they paid you a visit.” Lewis advises.

Suzy nods her head in agreement but makes no reply.

“Do you remember what you told them before?” asks Lewis.

Suzy looks up from the floor; “Yes, I remember.”

“Keep it to that, do not expand on it and if you cannot remember, do not say anything. You will be all right; in the meantime while you are waiting you can start on the lounge. I will be able to cut the new floorboards next week and you can nail them down.”

Suzy had told Lewis about her and Sharon cleaning the bungalow, apart from the living room.

Looking at Lewis in surprise she exclaims; “Me to nail them down?”

“Yes it is easy, trust Me.” smiles Lewis.

The following week passes slowly for Suzy as she waits for the police to take her in. Sharon helped a lot with clearing and cleaning the living room as everything inside was totally ruined. Smoke had damaged the three piece suite beyond repair and she ended up throwing it out into the garden.

Once they had finished cleaning, Lewis measured the damaged floorboards. Getting Suzy to drive him to the builder's yard he gave the yard man his measurements of the flooring. Lewis got them to cut the pieces to size as he only needed to replace an area two metres by one metre.

Loading it all into his car they take it back to Suzy's and put it all in the living room.

“When do you think you will be able to put the new floorboards in?” asks Suzy.

“I have got some masks, I was wondering if you would help me?” he asks innocently.

“Of course I will help, what is it that you need me to do?”

“Have you ever used a circular saw?”

“Never.” replies Suzy positively.

“Do you fancy giving it a try? I will help you with the first one and show you what to do. It is still a bit too early for me to breathe in that amount of dust.”

Suzy looks doubtful, she had seen a circular saw in action before and it looked a terrifying tool.

“You must be joking; I cannot use one of them.”

“Yes you can, it will be real easy, we need to go to my flat to get some tools, and do you fancy a drive?”

“How else are you going to get there?”

“Nice one Suzy.” smiles Lewis; “All right to go now?”

“If you feel it is important, of course I am.” replies Suzy as she puts her jacket on.

Lewis retrieves his jacket from the kitchen and they leave together.

Suzy looks on in puzzlement as Lewis, with up-ended circular saw makes adjustments to the machine. Setting the blade to protrude twenty two millimetres beyond the saw bed Lewis tightens the retaining nuts.

“Best we go outside to test it as it will produce a lot of dust.” informs Lewis; “Have you any spare wood in the shed?”

“Not so sure it is spare but there is some in there under the bench.”

“Can you find the biggest piece? I can carry the saw.”

“I will get the key.” replies Suzy as she walks away from the kitchen table where Lewis had been adjusting the blade.

Taking the shed key from the hook by the door Suzy opens the back door and steps outside. Spring is definitely on the way as Daffodils and other flowering bulbs are starting to appear. The Daffodils look unreal as the bright yellow of the flower sticks out vividly against the brown of the soils.

Suzy unlocks the shed door and steps inside; coming back outside, carrying a darkly varnished wooden part of furniture about fifty millimetres square and a metre long she asks; “Will this do?”

“That is ideal.” smiles Lewis; “What is it; it looks like a table leg?”

“Yes it is, from our old table, I use it to prop the door open.”

“I am not going to cut all the way through, you can have it back when I have finished.”

Suzy looks doubtful and hands it to him reluctantly.

Taking it from her, Lewis lays it by the shed door, going into the shed he plugs in the circular saw and puts on a pair of ear defenders and pair of goggles.

“Where is your mask?” asks Suzy.

“Trouble is when you wear safety goggles and a mask the goggles steam up and you cannot see what you are doing. It will only take a few seconds, I will hold my breath.” he replies as he puts his foot onto the table leg.

“Best you cover your ears.” he advises as he leans forward and positions the circular saw.

Holding his breath Lewis turns the saw on and pushes it quickly forward, the cut taking less than a second. Holding the saw at arm’s length Lewis waits for it to stop spinning before laying onto the path.

Using a metal ruler he pushes it into the slot he has made and measures its depth.

“Perfect.” he smiles taking off the ear defenders and goggles, handing them to Suzy he asks; “You want to have a go, it is easier than it looks.”

Suzy shrugs and puts the ear defenders and goggles on and approaches the table leg. Putting her foot on it like Lewis had done, she picks the circular saw and pushes it against the piece of wood.

“Hold the blade about ten millimetres away from the wood and then turn the saw on, when it is going at full speed then push it forward and keep going until your through. Then let go of the switch and hold the saw away from you until it stops spinning.”

Suzy does as Lewis tells her and turns the saw on, the 'kick' as it starts makes her hand twitch moving the saw to the right and she lets go of the switch.

“Hold it as firm as you can, use two hands if that is easier.” advises Lewis.

Suzy turns it on again and cuts through the timber in a second, with a surprised look on her face she holds the saw away from her until it stops. Laying it down gently onto the path she removes the ear defenders and goggles.

“See easy wasn't it?” smiles Lewis.

“Easy as cutting a piece of bread.” Suzy agrees with a relieved smile.

“Do you want to try the floorboards now?” Lewis asks with a bigger smile.

A quarter of an hour later Suzy is feeling proud of herself; cutting the floorboards has been easy so far as Lewis had set the cutting blade to the thickness of the floorboards. Having only eighteen millimetres depth to cut, using the saw was indeed easier than cutting bread. Holding her breath each time she would cut along the line Lewis had pencilled on the floorboards. The cut only took a few seconds to slice through each of the five floorboards Lewis was going to replace.

Holding the saw at arm's length and still holding her breath Suzy waits for it to stop spinning before laying it on the floor. As she walks out of the living room she shuts the door and breathes out with a big sigh.

“You all right?” asks Lewis from the kitchen.

“Holding my breath is the worst part, I have got one more to do once the dust has settled.” Suzy smiles. Regaining her breath for a few minutes she returns to the living room and cuts the other end of the floorboard and comes back into the kitchen.

Lewis has made her a cup of tea and she drinks it gratefully.

“Let the dust settle and then you can fit your new floorboards.” he smiles.

“It will feel cold in there with no carpet.” Suzy says despondently.

“New carpet will be coming tomorrow; the fitters will be here about nine o'clock.”

Suzy looks at Lewis in shock; “I cannot afford a new carpet.” she replies in a scared voice.

“Luckily you got a few friends around you who can help, will be only a loan, with no interest.” smiles Lewis.

“When you say friends, do you mean Sharon as well?”

“Yes, she will pay half, lucky for you we are a couple of cheapskates and it is only a cheap carpet, so you won't owe us much.”

Suzy is taken by surprise at the generosity of her friends as even a cheap carpet will still cost a lot of money; and she is not forgetting that Lewis has paid for the floorboards as well.

“I do not know what to say, for so many years I have been on my own. Living with Doug was generally unpleasant and I could not regard him as a friend. Now I have two good friends and I am finding it difficult to accept that I am no longer alone.”

“I can only speak for myself, but because I am lending you money that does not mean you are obliged to me. If you cannot afford to pay me back this year, or even next, don't worry about it. If you are unable to get a job in the next six months consider the carpet and floorboards a gift; with no strings attached.”

Suzy is stunned by Lewis's offer and cannot help but feel obliged to him, deep down she feels a strong emotion towards him and realises she is falling in love with him.

The carpet fitters arrive the next day as promised and fit her new carpet within a couple of hours. Suzy is delighted and wishes she had furniture to put into the room to match.

A busy week follows for Suzy as she burns the old floorboards and rubbish. The three piece suite was too much for her as she was unable to break it down and decided to wait for Lewis to help.

Lewis, though recovering well, needs to rest from his operation and has spent most of his time at home. Suzy has kept busy by washing the entire bungalow from top to bottom, much of the wallpaper has been ruined and will have to be replaced or painted.

Expecting Doug's body to be found anytime now, Sharon and Lewis had stayed away. Suzy kept in contact with them

using her mobile phone which was not registered to her; and helped reduce her paranoia.

Malcolm knew it was time, two weeks had passed since seeing Suzy and he had hardly slept. The worry he felt for the safety of his family prevented any relaxed sleep; most of his time had been spent in looking out of the window or sitting in the front garden.

He had not seen any strangers hanging around and the strain of the past two weeks has become too much. Driving down to the town he parks in a narrow street, locking the car he walks along an alley that leads between two large apartment blocks.

The public telephone he needs at the end of the alley is empty and with his heart in his mouth he opens the door and picks up the receiver. Pulling a piece of paper out of his pocket with the telephone number of the local police station he dials the number.

A young lady answers and asks how she can help.

With his handkerchief held over the mouthpiece Malcolm speaks in a gruff voice; "If some of your officers were to take a walk and look at the empty Well at the edge of the woods; they will find a dead body." he finishes with a rush as he hangs up the phone.

Wiping his fingerprints from everywhere he touched, Malcolm makes a hasty exit and runs along the alley. Unlocking his car he jumps in and starts the engine with a roar, taking his foot off the accelerator he tries to calm himself down. Putting the car in gear he drives slowly forward and heads for home.

Someone pounding hard on Suzy's front door awakes her with a jump; looking at the clock she sees it is six-thirty in the morning and a Sunday!

Leaping out of bed she puts her dressing gown on as the pounding is repeated. Knowing that it can only be the police at that time of the morning she tries to stay calm.

Approaching the front door Suzy shouts in a scared voice; "Who is it?"

"Suzy, it is WPC Davenport and PC Willmott, can we talk to you please?"

Suzy nervously opens the door with shaking hands but manages a false welcoming smile; "You are early, I hope you are bringing good news?"

"Quite the opposite, we need to take you down to the station." replies WPC Davenport.

"Down to the station; what on earth for?"

"I am sorry to inform you but we have found your husband's body and need you to answer a few questions."

"His body." asks Suzy in apparent shock; "You, you mean he is dead?"

"Yes, I am afraid he is, his body was found yesterday. Would you please put some clothes on and we will take you to the station." orders WPC Davenport.

"Why do I have to go to the station? I have answered all your questions many times." Suzy protests, the fear she feels making her voice high-pitched as she starts to cry.

"There are still some questions we need to ask you."

"Why not ask them here?" Suzy demands.

"We must insist you accompany us to the station." says PC Willmott firmly.

Suzy looks in his eyes and can see by the expression on his face that he wants her to refuse; so that he can restrain her by force!

"You had better come in while I put some clothes on then." she answers in resignation as she opens the door wide.

Suzy walks quickly to her bedroom as WPC Davenport follows her in and stands by the door watching her as she gets dressed.

"Where have you found my husband?" asks Suzy as she continues to cry; "The way you are standing there gives me a bad feeling, am I under arrest?" she asks as she puts her jeans on.

"No, unless you are able to answer our questions to our

satisfaction.” threatens WPC Davenport.

Suzy thinks she is going to be sick and tries to keep calm. Lewis had assured her that she had nothing to worry about; and it was this thought that prevented her from breaking down.

“May I use the toilet please before we go?”

“Of course.” replies WPC Davenport.

Suzy puts her thick woollen jumper and trainers on and makes her way to the toilet, with WPC Davenport following closely behind. As Suzy attempts to shut the bathroom door WPC Davenport puts her foot in the way preventing her from closing it; “You will have to leave the door open Suzy.” she commands.

Suzy is furious at this invasion of her privacy and to have someone watching her makes the anger grow.

The only satisfaction she has is that she wanted more than a pee and she hoped the WPC enjoyed the noise and the smell.

Chapter Fifteen

Opening her front door Suzy breathes a sigh of relief as she steps inside. It had been a very tough twenty-four hours since she had been taken to the police station. Initially the police had been most unfriendly towards her by accusing her of killing Doug.

Suzy had cried appropriately at the death of her husband and denied all knowledge of it. Keeping to her story which she had told previously, she felt after almost fifteen hours of continuing questioning that they believed her denials. Her appointed solicitor was not much help being a young inexperienced lady in her early twenties and seemed unsure what to do.

Many times Suzy asked her advice and when she seemed uncertain as to what to reply Suzy would say to the police 'no comment'.

Walking into the kitchen Suzy notices that many of the cupboard doors are open; someone has been here!

Running into her bedroom she sees that her bed has been moved to the left slightly and the wardrobe door remains open. Finding her money box in the bottom of the wardrobe she pulls it out and puts it on the bed.

The box is unlocked, with no sign of forced entry and Suzy opens it quickly. Her money lies on the top of the paperwork contained inside; not exactly where she left it. Counting the money she sees that it is all there and looks through her paperwork, relieved to see that nothing is missing, Suzy puts the box back in the wardrobe and shuts the door.

Obviously while she had been at the police station the police had searched her bungalow. Anxiously she opens the living room door and peers inside and Suzy can see that they had lifted the carpet and tried to replace it as it was before. The carpet appears looser to Suzy compared to the perfect job the carpet fitters had done.

Saying a silent thank you to Lewis, Suzy shuts the living

room door and goes into the kitchen to make coffee. Realising that the remaining milk in the refrigerator will not be healthy Suzy goes to find her coat as she will have to go to the shop.

Taking some change with her so that she can telephone Lewis from a public call box, Suzy steps out of her front door and shuts it quietly.

On the third ring Lewis's familiar voice answers; "Hello." he says in a pleasant voice.

"Lewis, it's Suzy I am free now, can we meet somewhere please?"

"Suzy! Great to hear from you, have they let you out?"

"Yes a few hours ago, I really need to talk to you." replies Suzy in desperation.

By the tone of her voice Lewis can tell Suzy is deeply upset; "I cannot meet you anywhere as my lung is giving me some problems in this damp weather. If you can get here without anyone knowing is the best I can offer."

Suzy looks around her and can see no one loitering around; "I think so." she replies a little uncertainly.

"Where are you now?"

Suzy tells him of the telephone box in the town and listens intently as Lewis explains a route to his flat. By using back alleys and quiet streets Suzy would have to detour about a mile making her end up at the back of Lewis's flat. Suzy knew the roads that Lewis was explaining but had never noticed the many alleys he mentioned.

Relying on trust and with Lewis's assurance that he would remain by the phone if Suzy got lost she hangs up.

One and a half hours later Suzy is ringing the bell to Lewis's flat. Impatiently she waits for him to answer as she feels vulnerable in plain view standing on the front steps.

Lewis opens the door and lets her in, stepping outside he looks along the road and at the surrounding buildings; "You weren't followed then?"

"Not a sign, I stopped and waited at the end of some of

those long alleys you got me to go down and not a sign.”

Lewis smiles in relief as he steps back inside and shuts the door; “Go in, I will make you a drink.”

“Water first please, I am really thirsty.” answers Suzy and not waiting for permission walks into Lewis's kitchen. Getting a mug from the draining board she rinses it out with cold water from the tap and fills it to the brim. Putting it to her mouth she drinks deeply and sighs in relief.

“How on earth did you know about all those back alleys?” asks Suzy with a tired smile as it had been a very long walk to here.

“Have lived here for a while; make it my business to know my way around, lucky I do.”

“Bit of a long walk I feel really tired now.” admits Suzy.

“When you have had a rest you can tell me what the police had to say to you; everything they said.”

“You do know I was in there for twenty-four hours, I hope you have plenty of food I am starving?”

Lewis laughs; “Not really as I have not been able to get out properly, my lung hurts a bit and I do not want to take a chance. I will phone the takeaway in about an hour when they open, if you can wait that long?”

“I can wait.” replies Suzy with a relieved smile. Even though Lewis was still ill she felt safe and secure with him; “I will make the drinks, you can go and sit down, what would you like?”

“Tea would be great please, Suzy.” Lewis answers with a smile as he walks out of the kitchen into the front room.

Suzy jumps at the ringing of Lewis's doorbell; “Who is that?” she fearfully asks.

Lewis laughs; “You sure are jumpy, that will be Sharon.” he replies as he stands up from the couch.

“Sharon? What is she doing here?” asks Suzy with a touch of jealousy.

“Probably come here to find out about you.” he answers as he walks towards the door.

“How does she know I am here?” she asks in alarm as Suzy

thought no one knew she was here.

“She phoned me when you were in the Loo.” says Lewis as he walks out of the front room and opens the front door.

Suzy can hear a muffled conversation between Lewis and Sharon as they stand inside the front door. Not being able to hear them properly makes her suspicious and she wonders if they are becoming lovers. Jealousy rises within her like a hot flame.

Sharon bursts in the door with a huge smile; “Suzy, fantastic to see you.” she shouts as she runs over and gives Suzy a big hug and kiss on the cheek; “We were so worried about you I drove past your place yesterday morning and there were police cars everywhere.”

“They kept me in for twenty-four hours questioning me, but they were decent enough to give me a bed until daylight arrived.”

“A bed, you mean they locked you up in the cells?” asks Sharon in shock.

“They put me in a cell; by the time they finished questioning me it was three o'clock in the morning. They didn't lock the door but told me to stay in there until someone came and got me.”

Sharon stares at Suzy imagining the terrifying experience Suzy had just been through; “How did you get home, did they give you a lift?”

Lewis laughs from where he was sitting on the couch; “What planet do you live on Sharon?” he asks sarcastically.

“You mean they made you walk home?” Sharon asks in obvious anger.

“After they had given me breakfast, of cold fried bacon, egg and fried bread; and the tea was cold as well.” Suzy confirms.

Sharon colours a deep red; “I hate the police.” she says in an angry voice.

“Sit down Sharon, calm down will you?” asks Lewis, “Suzy was telling me a story.”

Sharon sits down on the couch near to Lewis, much to Suzy's annoyance. Suppressing her jealous feelings she

continues telling of her interrogation by the police.

Several hours pass with continuous questioning by Lewis as he explores every reason in their line of interrogation.

Very tired Suzy calls a halt as she can take no more; "Please stop Lewis, we can talk again tomorrow but as a final word I never thought that I would say thank you to you for setting my bungalow alight."

"Anything to help, you know that; but why the thanks now?"

"When I was at the police station they searched my bungalow, by the looks of it they lifted the carpet up in the living room. If you had not got me to replace the floorboards I would be in prison now."

"The blood stains would have been a bit obvious." confirms Lewis; "You can stay here tonight as it is only a few hours until dawn."

"What!" Suzy exclaims as she looks at the clock on the wall which shows it is four-fifteen in the morning.

"Where has the time gone?" asks Sharon; "I might as well stay here, I have no work tomorrow."

Suzy says nothing as she is annoyed that Sharon is going to stay, she had wanted Lewis to herself.

Suzy found the following month very lonely and frustrating. It made sense that Lewis and Sharon only visit her rarely, for as predicted by Lewis, the police still watched her.

Lewis had told her that Doug's death, which was obviously murder, remained unsolved and would be periodically reviewed; and as Suzy was the main suspect she could expect to be watched occasionally.

Understanding that Lewis is right Suzy spends much of her spare time at home. She had been forced to join the unemployed as she had no income now that Doug was gone. Her visits to the Jobcentre were frequent and were her only means of escape from the drudgery of house cleaning and keeping her garden tidy.

Each time that Lewis visited her he was accompanied by Sharon. Suzy wondered if they were romantically involved;

they appeared no more than friends when they were together and Lewis tended to spend most of his visiting time close to her.

Waiting her opportunity, it was their third visit, before Sharon used the bathroom and Suzy could express her desire for Lewis to take her out. Talking of their visit to the beach all that time ago Suzy hoped Lewis would suggest he take her again. He appeared to like the idea and Suzy was positive he was going to agree as Sharon returned from the bathroom and he made no comment.

They were restricted to sitting in the kitchen as Suzy still had no furniture for the living room. Sitting on hardback chairs for any length of time proves uncomfortable and Suzy wished Lewis would help her get some more, like he had promised. A tense few hours follows as Suzy and Sharon compete for Lewis's attention. Lewis appears unaware of the girl's behaviour as he watches the portable television.

Sharon is the first to suggest they leave, much to Suzy's dismay, they had only been here for an hour and a half. Lewis appears reluctant to leave but Sharon gives him little choice in saying she has to get home to prepare dinner.

Knowing it would be a waste of time suggesting they eat here Suzy says nothing; suddenly feeling very alone she looks Lewis in the eyes. He says nothing yet his eyes say everything; he feels trapped by Sharon!

Determined to visit Lewis when Sharon is at work Suzy thanks them for their visit and asks when she may visit them?

Sharon confirms Suzy's suspicions by answering for them both, saying they had a busy week ahead of them.

Two lonely days past for Suzy, not even having to go to the Jobcentre makes her feel isolated and her bungalow has become a prison. With no rain forecast for the day she puts her jacket on, ensuring the bungalow is locked and secure she takes the long walk to Lewis's flat.

Following the route she had taken before she arrives at Lewis's tired, but guaranteed alone. Suzy had seen no

suspicious characters and was positive no one had followed her.

Ringling the doorbell she anxiously waits at the doorstep. Suzy does not have to wait long until a dishevelled Lewis answers the door almost immediately.

“Suzy!” he greets loudly; “Come in, you were lucky I was just about to get in the bath.”

“Thanks.” smiles Suzy as she steps inside; “Do you want me to scrub your back?”

Lewis looks happy at the suggestion; “That is a good idea, give me five minutes then come in, help yourself to tea or coffee.” he says as he walks into the bathroom pushing the door partly closed behind him.

Suzy returns to the front door and locks it and walks into the living room, taking off all her clothes she walks slowly back towards the bathroom. Hearing Lewis splashing about in the bath she pushes the door open and steps inside.

Lewis looks up at her as his jaw drops in amazement; “Suzy, you look so beautiful, you have to be the most beautiful girl in the world; well you are the best I have ever seen.”

Suzy blushes a deep red in embarrassment, Doug had never spoken to her like that before and she could tell by Lewis's face he was not lying. He really meant it.

“I thought you wanted your back scrubbed?”

“Not anymore, if you do that I will not be able to see you.” he smiles not taking his eyes from her face.

“What about Sharon?” asks Suzy as she stands by the doorway.

Lewis looks down at Suzy's body and the desire he feels for her almost overwhelms him; “Sharon has become a problem, strangely I find myself in the same situation as you and Doug. Except that I am you and Sharon is Doug.”

“What you mean she beats you?” asks Suzy becoming outraged.

“Not physically as in punching or kicking me but she does push me, usually against a wall.”

“Why are you putting up with this? You are usually made of

stronger stuff than this.” asks Suzy with an angry frown on her face.

“You are forgetting that my lung collapsed recently, I know I look fit and healthy and have even been declared fit enough for light duties. I am convinced my lung has not inflated properly as I get out of breath so quickly. Sharon had been a great help until recently.”

“But you were fine when we did my floorboards, what has happened?”

Lewis points to his chest; “It has become very painful since then, last week Sharon got a bit pushy with me so I pushed her back. She either pushed or punched me in the chest as the next thing I remember was laying doubled up on the floor. Sharon helped me into bed and that is where I stayed for the next two days while she looked after me.”

“Why haven't you thrown her out?” snaps Suzy the anger and jealousy she feels becoming too much.

Lewis smiles weakly; “I did and ended up in bed for two days as she got a bit rough. Her mouth was quite bad as well as she threatened to go to the police. Are you going to scrub my back after all? Sorry there is not enough room for two in here.”

“Yes of course.” replies Suzy seeming unaware of her nakedness. Rubbing his back gently with a soap filled flannel Suzy washes the soap off and hands Lewis the flannel; “Don't forget to wash behind your ears.” she says as she turns to walk away. The anger and rage she feels towards Sharon makes her forget all about having sex with Lewis.

“Yes mum.” smiles Lewis as he watches Suzy walk out of the bathroom.

Since she had seen Lewis two days ago Suzy had been unable to think of anyone else. She knew she had fallen deeply in love with him and saw Sharon as a serious obstacle to her happiness. Forgetting that Lewis has become a very sick man and not appreciating the long term difficulties this would involve, she thought of a way to get rid of Sharon.

Sharon had been a good friend to her over the years, but

usually only when it suited her. Not considering the help and support Sharon had given since Doug's death Suzy considered the best way was to poison her.

As it was late spring there would not be a good source of poisons; in the form of toadstools and poisonous mushrooms. Suzy racks her brains to think of another way.

Of course! For starters she could begin with a thick curried soup impregnated with ground glass. For the main course she could have chicken stew (infected with salmonella) and hot sauce laced with rat poison.

Her mind races with excitement at the planning ahead. Getting her diamond nail file from the bathroom she returns to the kitchen and looks under the kitchen cupboard for an empty jar.

Finding a small jar that once contained a yeast extract she takes it outside and drops it onto the pavement. The jar breaks into several pieces and Suzy carefully picks up the largest one. Putting it on the kitchen table she sweeps up the remaining broken glass with a dustpan and brush,

Returning to the kitchen Suzy finds the TV guide and spreads it out onto the table. Using her nail file and holding on to a smooth piece of the jar she rubs a sharpened edge of glass along the nail file.

The diamonds, impregnated into the file and manmade, do the job admirably as a small pile of dusty glass accumulates onto the TV guide. Smiling happily Suzy continues filing until a small mound appears on the paper.

Anxious not to lose the glass dust Suzy pours it into a brightly coloured striped vacuum flask and tightens the lid.

With summer fast approaching the days warm quickly, Suzy had visited Lewis on several occasions when Sharon was at work. Sharon by all appearances had moved in with Lewis as many of her clothes and possessions were spread around the flat.

Lewis admitted that he was not happy with the situation, but felt obliged to Sharon for looking after him when he first came

out of hospital.

“What are you going to do now?” asks Suzy.

“My lung is greatly improved now; there is still some pain that feels weird. I think there is some air trapped between the lung and the lining, which still likes to move about.” Lewis replies giving a weak smile.

“What about Sharon?” asks Suzy a little annoyed that Lewis has not answered her fully.

“Sharon is proving to be a big problem, we have had quite a few big arguments and I have tried to throw her out but it does not work.”

“Why don't you just lock the door when she goes out?”

“Because she knows about you and Doug and something else about me and she threatens to go to the police.”

Suzy is shocked, she thought she knew Sharon better than that and the last thing she would have thought was Sharon would use blackmail and threaten going to the police.

“What is this 'something else' she knows about?”

“If I was to tell you then you might be tempted to blackmail me like Sharon is.”

Suzy is annoyed at Lewis's lack of trust in her until he sees that he is smiling.

“Just winding you up Suzy, it was something that happened a few years ago now.”

“No, do not tell me,” interrupts Suzy; “I am not Sharon.”

“Thanks Suzy, Sharon will be home soon, are you sure you want to be here when she walks in the door?”

Suzy looks Lewis in the eyes; “Damn right I do.” she answers as she stands up picking up the empty coffee mugs in front of her; “Do you want more coffee?”

“Yes please, as long as you are sure, Sharon will not be pleased to see you.”

“The feeling is mutual.” answers Suzy as she walks into the kitchen.

Thirty minutes later the sound of Sharon putting the key in the lock of the front door penetrates the silence. Suzy and

Lewis had not spoken since Suzy had made the coffee as they nervously await Sharon's arrival.

As Sharon enters the front room she sees Suzy sitting on the couch; "What are you doing here?" she asks as she puts her keys on a small shelf.

Suzy stands and walks over to Sharon and gives her a big hug; "Sharon, how wonderful to see you," she lies; "have you had a good day?"

"Not really I was at work." answers a surprised Sharon.

"I came round to see how you are getting on; you are certainly doing a good job looking after Lewis. I would say he even looks normal." laughs Suzy.

Sharon stands in the middle of the room trying to gather her thoughts, Suzy's welcome was unexpected and she wonders why Suzy is behaving like this.

Not giving Sharon too much time to think Suzy continues; "As the weather is so nice I was wondering if you and Lewis would come out for a picnic tomorrow? I know a great place where hardly anyone goes."

"Lewis has to go to work tomorrow, they want him in the office for most of the day." replies Sharon appearing glad to make the excuse.

"You have a day off tomorrow don't you?" asks Suzy.

"Yes and the day after." Sharon smiles.

"Why not you and me go? It has been ages since we had a good natter; and you can fill me in on all the scandal." smiles Suzy in her friendliest smile.

"That is a good idea, there was a time when you two were nearly inseparable, we used to think you were Lesbians." Lewis laughs.

Sharon blushes showing her inner feelings as Suzy joins in the laughter.

"I will bring sandwiches and drinks." Suzy tells Sharon enthusiastically.

Burying her jealousy, Sharon has no choice but to agree, the way the offer has been presented she would cause a deep insult if she refused. Suzy appeared pleased that Sharon was

looking after Lewis which was a puzzle as Sharon knew Suzy was in love with him.

The evening follows pleasantly with no sign of animosity from Suzy towards Sharon, even when Sharon puts her arm around Lewis, Suzy appeared happy.

When the time came for Suzy to leave Sharon offered to give her a lift home, concerned that Sharon and Suzy may argue on their own Lewis said he needed to get out; and could he sit in the back seat?

Sharon did not appear to like this idea but with Suzy's enthusiasm with him joining them she had little choice but to accept.

Suzy chattered happily all the way home mainly of the good times they had all those years ago.

Lewis had come to know Suzy very well and the involvement with Doug had brought them closer together. He wondered why Suzy was putting on this act; he knew that Suzy no longer liked Sharon. The expression on her face when he told her Sharon was almost keeping him a prisoner proved that.

Arriving at Suzy's front gate Sharon puts the handbrake on and keeps the engine running.

Suzy leans over and kisses Sharon on the cheek; "Thanks for the lift, see you tomorrow at about one o'clock?"

Sharon blushes a little from the kiss confirming Suzy's suspicions that Sharon liked more than men.

"Yes that will be fine." smiles Sharon.

"See you later Lewis." Suzy says as she gets out of the car, not looking backwards she opens her front gate and steps inside as Sharon drives away.

The alarm buzzing at 5 a.m. wakes Suzy with a jump; leaning over she switches the alarm off and gets out of bed. Only putting her slippers on she makes her way to the kitchen and the freezer. Opening the freezer door she takes out a piece of chicken breast in its sealed bag and lays it on the draining board. Shutting the freezer door on her way past Suzy

walks back to her bedroom and gets back into bed. Picking up the alarm clock she resets the alarm to go off at 8 a.m. and puts it on the bedside table. Burying herself in the covers she closes her eyes and goes back to sleep.

Suzy awakes a few seconds before the alarm goes off at 8 a.m. but still waits for the buzzing sound before she turns it off. Getting out of bed she puts her slippers on and walks into the kitchen, picking up the now defrosted chicken breast she returns it to the freezer and goes back to bed.

Hearing the postman pushing letters through her letterbox has Suzy opening her eyes. Looking at the time she sees it is nearly ten o'clock and quickly gets out of bed. Putting her slippers on she goes into the bathroom to wash and prepare for the coming day.

Preparing a thick spicy soup, Suzy hums happily as she cooks; taking out the frozen chicken breast in its sealed bag Suzy puts it into a large bowl of warm water. Preparing her sandwiches she uses the chicken breast that she has kept in the refrigerator.

Dicing it she mixes it with mayonnaise and an oriental spicy dressing stirring it vigorously. Noticing the soup is now hot enough she pours half of it into a bright red vacuum flask. The remaining soup she pours into the striped flask that contains the glass dust.

Putting on a pair of surgical rubber gloves Suzy takes the chicken out of the bowl of warm water and lays it on the draining board. Throwing the water from the bowl into the sink Suzy puts it onto the table and picks up the bag of chicken breast.

Looking closely through the clear polythene Suzy can see no traces of mould or fungus, the meat appears lighter in colour and seems to be the only difference. This surprises Suzy as she had been freezing and defrosting the chicken for two days now; and she hoped it was infested with salmonella.

Opening the seal of the bag cautiously Suzy opens it wide

and can smell no unpleasant odour escaping. Feeling brave she leans towards the bag and breathes in gently, apart from a strong chicken smell all seems normal. Tipping the chicken breast into the bowl on the table Suzy steps outside and walks to the pile of rubbish that is to be burnt in the garden.

Wrapping the bag in a sheet of newspaper she puts it onto the ground and sets it alight with a lighter from her pocket. Waiting until the paper and bag have become ash she walks back to the kitchen and starts to prepare Sharon's sandwiches.

Cutting the chicken breast into small pieces in the big bowl Suzy adds mayonnaise. Going to the refrigerator she takes out a small plastic container with a similar oriental spicy dressing she used earlier. This dressing is different as it has an added ingredient.

Several days ago she had paid a visit to a large DIY outlet and bought some rat poison. On returning home she had poured the poison into a small saucepan, using the minimum amount of water she had brought the mixture to the boil and simmered it for five minutes.

Pouring the hot contents through a fine meshed sieve into a heatproof glass bowl she allowed it to cool. An hour later when it had fully cooled Suzy held the bowl up and looked inside. Two definite layers had formed; a clear liquid at the top and a light blue liquid below. Suzy wanted the blue fluid and carefully removed the clear fluid using an egg cup. By the time she had finished barely an egg cupful of blue fluid remained and she hoped that it would be enough. Mixing the blue fluid with the spicy dressing Suzy felt confident that Sharon would not notice the added ingredient.

Preparing Sharon's sandwiches Suzy puts them in a separate container and puts them in the refrigerator. Smiling happily she makes herself a cup of coffee and waits for Sharon to call.

Chapter Sixteen

“Hooray” says Suzy softly as she hears the ringing of the doorbell, walking quickly to the front door she opens it wide to see Sharon looking at her garden.

“Glad you could make it.” greets Suzy.

Sharon looks up at her not appearing as happy; “You keep your garden nice and tidy.” she says in a monotone voice.

“That's what keeps me sane; everyone thinks it is great when you are able to spend all day at home. Far from it, the television drives me mad with the repeats and I have already cleaned and washed the bungalow inside twice this month.” she smiles, ignoring Sharon's tone of voice.

“I will go get the sandwiches, come in if you want?” Suzy asks her as she walks to the kitchen. Putting the flasks and sandwiches into a large bag Suzy picks up her door keys. Locking the back door she checks the bungalow for any windows she may have left open. Satisfied all is secure Suzy walks to the front door to see Sharon standing by the gate. Shutting and locking her front door Suzy forces a smile on her lips; “All ready, I got us some great sandwiches.” she tells Sharon happily as she holds the large bag up for Sharon to see.

Sharon does not look impressed, even bored as she walks towards her car. Opening the door she gets in and puts her safety belt on.

Suzy gets in beside her, putting the bag between her legs; “What a lovely day.” she enthuses as she puts the safety belt on.

“Where are we going?” asks Sharon as she starts the engine.

“Not far, if you keep going straight on for about a kilometre and I will show you where to park.”

“A kilometre, is that all?” answers Sharon scornfully; “We might as well have stayed in your back garden.”

Suzy suppresses her anger and forces a smile as she tries

to keep her voice calm; "You will be amazed at this place as the scenery is a lot better."

Sharon looks at Suzy in a way that shows she does not believe her and returns her attention to driving.

Just over a kilometre further on Suzy tells Sharon to slow down as she looks for the little entranceway. The woodland that bordered the road had only just started to appear and Suzy watches intently.

"There it is." she shouts and Sharon slams the brakes on. She can just make out a faint trail that leads deep into the trees.

"You cannot be serious? My car won't fit down there." Sharon says angrily.

"Yes it will believe it or not there is a tarmac road just past them stinging nettles." says Suzy as she points at the stinging nettles which bar their way.

"You are lying." says Sharon her anger rising.

"Go and have a look, I will come with you." replies Suzy as she unbuckles her safety belt and opens the car door. Stepping outside she walks towards the stinging nettles as Sharon comes up behind her.

Suzy stands on some of the stinging nettles and makes a little path through them. Two metres further on and past the stinging nettles she turns around in triumph; "Told you, come and look."

Sharon follows Suzy's path through the nettles and is amazed to see Suzy standing on an old tarmac road. The road has not been used for years as weeds grow, as the woodland reclaims its land.

"This leads to a big field the other side of the woods; I think there was a house there a long time ago. Once you get through the nettles it will be easy driving." assures Suzy as she walks back to the car and gets in.

With a final look into the trees Sharon walks back to her car and gets in and starts the engine; "If my car gets damaged, you will have to pay for it." she warns as she puts the car into gear and drives forward.

The stinging nettles flatten before them offering no resistance and Sharon finds herself driving along a smooth road. The trees that crowd around and above make it appear like some magical tunnel as they drive slowly along.

A few minutes later the trees end and welcoming sunshine covers the car, Sharon finds herself in a large open grassed area that must be the size of a football pitch. Surrounding the grassed area are huge trees that finish at the far end where a vertical cliff looks down on them.

“What is this place?” asks Sharon in awe as she stares at the huge cliffs before her.

“A well kept secret, most people think this area is private, so they keep away. You might want to park your car over at the cliffs as this place is a heat trap. Doug came here with me last time and parked the car in the sunshine and it became too hot to touch, let alone drive. He really suffered.” smiles Suzy.

“Where shall I park then?” asks Sharon captivated by this beautiful place.

“Drive to the left of those cliffs and you will see a big cave, well it is more of an overhang that leads to a cave. If you park it in there it will be in the cool.”

Sharon nods her head and drives towards the cliffs, seeing the cave she turns the car around and reverses into it. The cave appears deep and Sharon cannot see the end as it disappears into the blackness.

“How deep does that go?” Sharon asks eager to explore.

“About fifty metres before you have to bend down and then get on your hands and knees. Doug reckoned he could not find the end one time he went in there.”

“What a great place, you sure have kept this quiet.”

“Too right.” smiles Suzy as she gets out of the car and walks into the sunshine.

Sharon is fascinated by the cliffs; made of limestone, the rain and the weather had shaped it into many odd looking structures. Walking forward she can see some formations resembled ancient buildings, maybe thousands of years old. One formation was especially fascinating as from a distance it

resembled an oak tree in summer.

Suzy calls for Sharon that the food is ready and reluctantly Sharon walks back.

Suzy has spread a bright red tartan picnic blanket out on the grass just in front of Sharon's car. The sun shining down on such a tranquil place and Suzy sitting on the tartan blanket makes Sharon think it all is a dream.

Suzy picks up the striped flask and pours the contents into a large mug, picking it up she hands it to Sharon; "I hope you like it, I mixed a couple of tins of soup together."

Sharon takes the mug from Suzy's hand and looks at the half empty contents; "Are you sure you can spare it?" she asks sarcastically.

"That is only the starter, I don't want to fill you up in case you do not eat your sandwiches." she smiles as she pours her own soup into a mug from the red flask.

Sharon takes a small sip of her soup; "That is quite nice, what is it?"

"Game soup with a bit of chicken soup added to lighten it." answers Suzy with a false smile as she takes a drink of her soup.

Sharon does not take long to drink all her soup and finishes before Suzy. Putting her bowl down Suzy reaches into the bag and takes Sharon's box of sandwiches out.

"No hurry, wait until you have finished your soup." offers Sharon, the friendliest she had been towards Suzy for weeks.

"It is Ok." replies Suzy as she hands Sharon the sandwich box. The glass in the soup would start taking effect very shortly and Suzy needed Sharon to eat the chicken sandwich before that happened.

"You will like them; I made your favourite; chicken, mayonnaise and an oriental spicy sauce that should make you smile." Suzy says as she picks up her soup. Drinking it all in one go she puts the mug down and reaches for her sandwich box.

Opening it quickly, Suzy takes out a sandwich and bites into it, sighing contently she chews several times; "That is better, I

was starving.” she says with a big smile.

Sharon opens her sandwich box and reaches in taking out a large sandwich; “Big enough are they?” she asks with a trace of sarcasm.

Suzy smiles and makes no answer as she wants Sharon to eat the sandwich quickly.

Sharon bites into the sandwich and chews on it thoughtfully; “There is a lot of chicken in here and are these spices I can taste? Are there mushrooms mixed in as well?” she asks as she swallows the sandwich.

“It was an oriental spicy sauce from the supermarket, I cannot remember the name as it was on special offer, and normally I cannot afford it.”

“If you still have the jar at home I will have a look, this is quite good.” says Sharon as she takes another bite of the sandwich.

Suzy forces her first sandwich down as fast as she can and starts on the second to encourage Sharon to eat her second one.

“Haven't you eaten today?” asks Sharon as she puts the last piece of sandwich in her mouth.

“Yes, I had a big breakfast, but these sandwiches taste amazing I wish I had made more.” replies Suzy with a smile.

Quickly finishing her sandwich Sharon lays back with a contented sigh; “I did not realise how hungry I was, I feel bloated now.”

Suzy finishes her sandwich and collects the empty boxes up; putting them into the bag along with the flasks she returns them to Sharon's car. Needing to pee she walks into the trees and finds a secluded area.

Relieved, she steps out into the sunshine and walks towards Sharon; Sharon is still lying where Suzy had left her and Suzy thinks she is asleep, or unconscious.

“Sharon.” she calls; “Wake up, you will get sunstroke laying there.”

Sharon slowly opens her eyes; “What is going on? Suzy I feel really rough.”

“That is because you fell asleep, it must be ninety degrees out here in the sun, best you get in the shade.” Suzy advises. The last thing she wanted was for Sharon to die out here, the trouble she had trying to move Doug; and Sharon is a similar size!

Sharon tries to stand up but the effort is too much and she doubles up in pain, stepping forward Suzy grabs her arm and pulls her upright. Putting Sharon's arm around her shoulder she manages to get her back to her car.

Putting Sharon in the driving seat proves more difficult and Suzy is soaked in sweat by the time she succeeds. By all appearances Sharon has passed out and Suzy smiles in triumph.

Going back outside Suzy picks up the tartan picnic rug and brushes over the area where they had sat. Covering their footprints and retracing the route Sharon took alongside the cliff, Suzy erases any trace of them being there.

Returning to the cave Suzy puts the rug into Sharon's car and sits in the passengers' seat. Keeping the door open she releases the handbrake as the car slowly rolls backwards. Not wanting to go to fast Suzy applies the handbrake a few times until she is about twenty metres into the cave.

Pulling the handbrake on she leans over for Sharon's safety belt, pulling it towards her she clips it into position securing Sharon's body. Suzy can hardly hear Sharon's breathing and thought for a split second that she was already dead.

Reaching into the bag of empty sandwich boxes Suzy pulls out a small canister of lighter fluid suitable for cigarette lighters. Opening the plastic top Suzy squirts the fluid over Sharon and the seat she is sitting on. Using the rest on the passengers' seat and bag as she gets out Suzy throws the empty can inside the car. Shutting the door she walks to the entrance to the cave and looks outside.

All is quiet except for a blackbird singing softly in the distance. Aware that time is short Suzy hurries back to Sharon's car and looks inside. Sharon looks to be in a deep sleep, or dead.

Taking the cigarette lighter out of her pocket Suzy opens the passenger door and leans inside. Using the lighter she sets fire to the bag of empty sandwich containers and flasks, which ignites immediately due to being soaked in lighter fluid. Suzy withdraws her hand quickly and can smell her burning hair from the back of her hand. Putting the flame to Sharon's arm Suzy smiles as the arm erupts into a mass of flame. Throwing the lighter at Sharon, Suzy shuts the car door and runs to the entrance to the cave.

Looking out she can see no sign of life, except for the blackbird which reassures her that no one else has visited. Following the cliffs to the left Suzy follows a faint animal trail that leads between the trees.

As the cliffs end the trail leads along the side of them and takes Suzy to a large field. Suzy smiles in triumph as the field is empty of people, following another trail Suzy hurries along until she has reached her back garden.

Walking along the high fence Suzy sees the two boards she is looking for, bending down she slides them to one side and steps inside her garden. Putting the boards back she walks to her back door, unlocks it and steps inside. Several minutes pass before she hears the siren of the fire engine and she hurries to the lounge window so that she may see it pass.

Suzy laughs when she sees the fire engine with its blue flashing light racing along the road. By the time they get there, if the fire engine is able to get along the tarmac road, they would be too late. Stepping outside Suzy can see the plume of black smoke that is billowing in the air indicating the petrol tank has caught alight.

Pleased with her success Suzy goes into her bedroom and strips off changing into her gardening clothes. Taking her clothes she wore when she was with Sharon, Suzy makes her way to the back garden and the pile of furniture that is still to be burnt.

Putting the clothes down on the ground Suzy clears a small area near the furniture, going into the shed she comes out carrying an old newspaper. Starting a small fire with the

newspaper, Suzy adds small pieces of wood until the fire is burning well. Putting one item of clothing onto the fire at a time and periodically adding wood she destroys all traces of her clothes. Satisfied she sits and watches the fire until the flames disappear and goes back indoors.

The ringing of the doorbell two days later wakes Suzy from a deep sleep; looking at the clock she sees that it is seven o'clock in the morning.

Knowing it has to be the police Suzy swears repeatedly as she puts her dressing gown on. Walking quickly to the front door she shouts; "Who is it?"

"Hello Suzy it is WPC Davenport, may we come in and talk to you?"

"What at this time of day, can you come back in a couple of hours?" she shouts.

"Sorry Suzy, it is urgent we talk to you now."

Opening the door Suzy reluctantly opens it wide; "What is so important?"

"May we come in and talk to you please?" asks WPC Davenport in her sweetest voice. Standing behind her are two more police women and a policeman, who stands three metres from the front door.

"What all of you?" asks Suzy in a scared voice.

"No only me and WPC Levit if we make you nervous." smiles WPC Davenport; "Are you here on your own?"

"Yes I am." answers Suzy in a firm voice; "You had better come in then." she invites as she turns and walks to the kitchen.

The two police women follow in shortly and Suzy can hear them as they walk slowly along the hall. Stepping into the kitchen their eyes look everywhere as they wait for Suzy to invite them to sit down.

Making them wait Suzy keeps her back to them as she fills the kettle with cold water from the tap and switches it on. Taking three mugs from the cupboard above the worktop Suzy turns around and finally acknowledges them; "Do you want a

cup of tea or coffee?" she asks politely.

"Yes please, thank you Suzy." replies WPC Davenport; "May I have tea with one sugar?"

"Of course you can," smiles Suzy; "and what about your friend?"

"Tea as well please Suzy, no sugar." replies WPC Levit.

"Take a seat." invites Suzy as she turns back to making the tea.

As Suzy puts the tea in front of the policewomen and sits down opposite them WPC Davenport looks her in the eyes; "You have not had a lot of luck recently have you?" she asks in a friendly sympathetic voice.

"You heard about the fire then?" replies Suzy.

"Yes, I heard that you nearly lost your bungalow, it was lucky the fire brigade arrived quickly."

Suzy did not like to correct her in saying that Lewis had already put the fire out before the fire brigade arrived. Instead she decided the best option was to lie; "Yes, I was so scared and the firemen are so brave." she feels she says convincingly.

"I understand that it was started by a candle being knocked over?"

"Yes, I knocked the candle over when I went into the bedroom. It must have been burning for ten minutes before I smelt the smoke." Suzy replies, continuing to lie.

"What has happened to your friends Sharon and Lewis?" asks WPC Davenport unexpectedly.

"I have not seen them for quite a while now, thanks to your people." replies Suzy putting an angry tone to her voice.

"Why thanks to my people?" asks WPC Davenport.

"Your people have been following me since Doug's death. They stuck with me until you found him down that Well. When you started following me again they thought that maybe I was involved in some way. Now I do not see them anymore." says Suzy in a condescending voice as she stares WPC Davenport in the eyes.

The policewoman looks away, unable to meet Suzy's accusing stare.

Her partner WPC Levit breaks the silence; "Did you see the fire further up the road the other night?"

"I saw the smoke and the fire engines going past, but I stayed here at home what happened?"

"A car had been driven into one of the caves and set alight; unfortunately someone was inside and died in the blaze."

Suzy hopes she looks suitably shocked at this bad news; "Who was it, kids?"

"No, I am sorry to tell you it was your friend Sharon." the WPC says rather coldly.

Allowing her jaw to drop she remembers her pet cat Petal who had died horribly when she was a child. The memory always makes her cry and with tears filling her eyes she asks; "Are you sure it is Sharon?"

"Yes it is; the dental records confirm it."

"Dental records, why did you need dental records?" asks Suzy in pretend confusion.

"The fire damaged her badly, I am sorry."

Suzy looks at the two policewomen; "Was it suicide?" she asks in a shaky voice.

"Forensics are still working through the wreckage, it may take some time before we can answer that."

By the sounds of things the car must have been nearly completely destroyed and they had found no evidence connecting her to the fire. If they had they would be arresting her rather than talking to her.

"Did your husband Doug know Sharon very well?" asks WPC Davenport.

Suzy thought carefully before she answered, she knew she was taking a chance killing Sharon so close to home but it did ensure she got home safely.

With Doug obviously being murdered, could Sharon have been murdered by the same person?

Is that what the police were thinking?

Suzy was convinced that the police did not suspect her anymore of killing Doug and Sharon being killed so close to Suzy's home was maybe a warning to her?

“I would not say as close friends, but I know Doug used to do some work for her at times.” answers Suzy finally.

“Do you know what kind of work he did?” asks WPC Davenport.

“He never said; he beat me once after I questioned him about why he had stayed out one night, as I got jealous.”

“Do you think he was having an affair with Sharon?” asks WPC Levit.

“No I do not.” she snaps; Suzy frowns and thinks of her cat and starts to cry. She feels that the police are being insensitive towards her. She had just been told that her friend had died and she felt it would be out of place not to show grief at her loss.

“I think it best that we leave you now, we will come back and talk to you some more when you are feeling better.” says WPC Davenport.

Standing up they start to walk out of the door; “We will show ourselves out.” WPC Davenport says as they walk away.

The police left Suzy alone for only two days before they returned. Suzy had not left her bungalow or used the telephone in that time as she was convinced the police were watching her.

WPC Davenport and WPC Levit called on her on the afternoon of the second day. Appearing sympathetic and friendly they try to put Suzy at her ease, which has little effect. Suzy does not want them here in her home and with little encouragement she makes herself appear depressed.

The policewomen only question her for an hour as Suzy continuously cries in grief. Making herself appear slightly unbalanced she talks of the death of her husband and friend as if it was yesterday. Also talking about them as if they are still alive, the policewomen feel disturbed and out of their depth.

Getting nowhere with their questioning they decide to leave Suzy to grieve in peace. Promising to return when Suzy feels better WPC Davenport looks most concerned at Suzy's 'supposed' mental state. Touching her on the shoulder WPC

Davenport tells Suzy to rest and that if she needed any help to call her.

Passing Suzy a business type card with her telephone number, WPC Davenport leans forward and speaks softly; "If you need me anytime day or night call me Suzy, I am here to help." she says with genuine concern.

Suzy sniffs loudly as she takes the card from the policewoman's fingers, wiping the tears from her eyes she looks up with bloodshot eyes; "Thank you, I will." she assures as she looks down at the floor.

"We will let ourselves out." says WPC Davenport softly as she turns to leave.

Suzy feels really guilty at WPC Davenport's concern and continues staring at the floor until they leave.

Putting her jacket on and putting her phone in her pocket Suzy opens her front door and steps outside. The day is overcast with a chilly wind blowing from the north-west. Zipping her jacket up Suzy shuts and locks her front door. Opening her gate she looks along the road in both directions; the road is empty of parked cars and Suzy smiles in relief as she walks to the town.

Using back roads and alleyways she makes her way to Lewis's flat, certain she has not been followed she puts her hood over her head and approaches Lewis's main door and rings the bell.

A few seconds later she hears movement inside and Lewis opens the door, his face drops in surprise when he sees Suzy standing on the doorstep.

"Suzy!" he exclaims; "You are taking a chance coming here, come in, come in." he invites as he opens the door wide.

Suzy steps inside as Lewis goes outside and looks up and down the street.

"I was not followed if that is what you are worried about, it has taken me two hours to get here through the back alleys and side streets." confirms Suzy with a tense edge to her voice.

Lewis steps back inside and closes the door; "Go in to the front room." he orders.

Suzy turns and walks into the front room and sits down on the couch as Lewis sits down in the armchair.

"How are you coping Suzy?"

"I am a lot happier now that Doug has gone; life goes at my pace now and not his."

"I heard about Sharon, you did that didn't you?" he accuses in an unfriendly voice.

"How do you know about that?" asks a mystified Suzy as the news had not been in the local newspaper or on the television."

"The police came round here and arrested me." he replies angrily.

"Arrested? Why would they do that?" asks an alarmed Suzy.

"They have been watching me as well; they must have traced me from my number plate when we paid you a visit. They knew all about Sharon practically living here, looks like we have not been as smart as we think we have."

Suzy's face turns slightly pale; "What did they say?"

"Asked me a lot of questions about Sharon and about you but they could not hold me as I was at work that day she was killed." Lewis angrily replies as he stares Suzy in the eyes.

Suzy meets his stare reflecting his anger, Sharon had made Lewis a prisoner and by killing her; she had set him free. He should be grateful, not angry.

"Why did you do it Suzy?"

"I saw the way she was treating you, I couldn't let her do that as you would have lived the same life I lived with Doug."

"I thank you for setting me free but I would have preferred less drastic action. Thanks to you I am now a prime suspect in Doug's murder; and you are the prime suspect in Sharon's murder."

"They can suspect what they like, they will not be able to prove otherwise." answers Suzy appearing bored with the subject.

"You scare me Suzy, what would happen to me if I upset

you?”

“We would probably have an argument nothing more. I love you Lewis.”

“I am not so sure you do; yes you are grateful to me for helping you with Doug and from keeping you out of jail. But you are forgetting one thing, I am very sick as you know. That is the second time my lung has collapsed and now any physical effort has me struggling for breath. I can only get worse and in a few years I will be almost housebound, you will have to nurse me and become a prisoner yourself.”

“I don't care about that, all I want is to be with you, you're fine now, why are you saying these things?” asks Suzy a touch of anger to her voice.

“I am not fine; I know you do not believe me so I will show you.” Lewis replies angrily as he stands up.

Suzy's eyes widen in fear by his sudden movement as memories of Doug standing quickly and striking her across her face fill her mind.

Lewis stares at her angrily as he notices her fear, lying down on the floor on his front he looks up at Suzy; “How many press-ups can I do?”

“Ten, easy, I have seen you do them before.” answers Suzy in a slightly bored voice as Lewis starts to do press-ups.

Suzy stares down at him with an angry expression until he reaches the fifth press-up and his breathing changes. Gasping for breath Lewis continues until he reaches the count of ten. Falling to the floor with a thump Lewis breathes like he has just run a one hundred metre dash.

Sitting up Suzy sees he is covered in sweat and continues to breathe quickly as he tries to fight for breath.

Suzy walks over to him and bends down in front of him, the concern on her face appears one of anguish.

Lewis slows his breathing and holds his wrist towards Suzy; “Heartbeat.” he says pushing his wrist forward.

Suzy holds it between her forefinger and thumb and searches for a pulse. At first she cannot find it much to her frustration until she locates it under her forefinger. Lewis's

pulse is racing, as must be his heart. Looking at Lewis in shock Suzy is at a loss what to say.

“Now you know why Sharon could push me around so easily, trouble is, so the doctor's tell me that I will become as exhausted as that in a few years time just making a cup of tea!”

“What would happen if you stopped smoking?” asks Suzy as she knew Lewis was a heavy smoker.

“They say I will not get any worse.”

“Why don't you stop then?”

“You don't think I have tried, even when I am coughing my lungs up I still have to have a smoke.”

“Would you stop for me?” asks Suzy hopefully.

Lewis laughs and starts coughing, when he regains his breath he looks Suzy in the eyes; “I cannot stop for me, let alone anyone else.

Suzy stares deeply into Lewis's eyes as she imagines her life living with someone disabled. The thought holds little appeal as now Doug has gone she wants to make up for all those lost years. Looking at Lewis as he still struggles to breathe Suzy realises he will not be able to live the active life she wants.

“I cannot offer you a good future Suzy, unless you want to be a full-time nurse. I really care about you and I hope that we will remain friends for the rest of our lives. You will always be welcome in my home.”

Suzy understands what Lewis is telling her, coming as a bit of a relief she realises Lewis is offering her a friendly way out.

Lewis pulls himself up off the floor and sits down heavily on the couch, reaching for his inhaler Lewis breathes in the gas gratefully. Several times he operates the inhaler and Suzy can see the relief spread out across his face.

“That is better, I should have used this before I did the press-ups.” he smiles.

“You had me worried there for a while, are you sure you are all right now?”

“I do not intend to dig the garden or anything.” smiles Lewis;

“I will take it easy for the rest of the day and I will be fine.”

Suzy stands up; “Best I make my way back as it will be dark in a few hours, I will call and see you again.” she says as she bends down and kisses him on the cheek.

Turning quickly she starts to walk away as Lewis realises she has not even stayed long enough to take her jacket off!

Hearing the front door slam as Suzy walks out of the building Lewis quickly stands up and walks over to the window. Standing quietly he watches Suzy walk along the pavement and turn the corner in the direction of home.

Smiling broadly Lewis walks back into his front room and sits down. Picking up his tobacco tin he opens it and rolls himself a cigarette. Putting the cigarette in the ashtray Lewis stands up and walks to the middle of the room. Laying down on the floor on his front he puts his hands in the right position and starts to do push-ups. Going a little slower than he did in front of Suzy he reaches the count of twenty before stopping.

Breathing normally he laughs as he stands up and walks over to the couch and sits back down. Taking the cigarette from the ashtray he lights it with his bright yellow lighter and breathes in the smoke gratefully.

Thanking his god for helping him escape Suzy he reaches for the remote control and turns the television on.

Suzy arrives home tired and irritable; she had been shocked at Lewis's poor physical condition and had no desire to spend the rest of her life with him.

Considering her situation later that evening Suzy realises she is in a good position, she has her own bungalow and is free and single.

She would have no difficulty in finding another man.

The End

The Author

Gary Beer born in Kent, England and of English and Welsh descent became a traveller at an early age. The travels to the mountains of Wales with his parents as a child instilled in him a wanderlust that has remained to this day.

After raising a family a new life was forced upon him and taking up the challenge Gary went to university and achieved a BSc in Pharmaceutical Chemistry following this with a Masters Degree in Chemistry, studying nano-particle science at the very cutting edge of technology. Able to turn his hand to most things in life he has worked as a Carpenter, Steeplejack, Car Mechanic, Panel beater, Chemist and Teacher.

Gary has written two popular travel books; Journey Thru America My Quest For Peace and Journey Thru America The Way Home.

Gary has also written a very popular crime thriller; A Good Find and a Science Fiction novel; Starship Stinedern.