

Twice in a Blue Moon

Wilf Voss

Copyright Wilf Voss 2011

<http://www.wilfvoss.me.uk/>

License Statement

This ebook is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This ebook may not be re-sold or given away to other people.

Cover Photo Credit: Stephen Davies – <http://www.picturewales.com>

Prologue

"I want something sorted out; you know something you are good at." He smiled briefly.

"Oh yes?" She sipped her coffee.

"Someone who crossed me, some years ago, before my..." He paused. "...enforced holiday. It's just that we think we have found a way to get her."

"You think you have found her? I'm intrigued."

"No, we don't know where she is yet, but, we have found her brother and our sources say she is working with him, albeit under an assumed name. She thought that she could vanish. Stupid girl!" He smiled. "Anyway, I need you to ensure we have the right person, and then I want to have a word with her."

"A word?" She looked up.

"In a manner of speaking. I want her to be my guest for a short time. However she may not be so willing."

"A little gentle persuasion then?" She smiled.

"I am glad we are on the same wavelength". He reached for a brown envelope. "Here are the details. You can ride can't you?"

"Ride?"

"Horses?" He smiled slyly. "I thought you were a Pony Club girl?"

"I was thrown out of the Pony Club." She frowned.

"I know. That's why you are so perfect for this job..."

~~~

## Chapter 1

Rain clattered against the window dripping slowly through the leaking roof, plopping gently into the bucket that sat on the dusty carpet. Monday morning had come, as it did so often, too soon. The sky was dark marking the prelude of a day that would remain rainy and dull. The only sound was the expectant kicking of hungry horses.

\*\*\*

The sign at the end of the drive had once proudly announced the presence of 'The Redbridge Riding School', now it stood at an angle, its letters faded. The pride had gone, and as the water ran across the muddy yard, it was easy to see why.

Here was a place that prided itself on not being special; it was just 'another' riding school. With all the common factors, the riding school horses and ponies. A team of staff, living in uncomfortable and damp accommodation, working long hours for little money and a head girl, Amanda King, who at twenty-four years old was a perfect host to her customers. The staff however felt that she was bossy, but generally fair. Amanda had bought the yard from the previous owners some years before.

\*\*\*

The alarm clock beeped loudly announcing the unwelcome start to another week. Adam reached up and clutched the small clock, staring at the faint green numbers through bleary eyes.

Six o'clock, it was time to drag himself out of the relative warmth of his bed and into the real world.

Adam Bishop was nineteen years old and had worked at the yard for two years. He was an instructor and by his length of service and instructor's status, he was supposedly second in command. The rank meant that more often or not he was the one who had to take most of the customers' lessons, whilst Amanda sat behind the large desk in the office. She was always there to supervise, but as she was the boss, she believed that she was fully in control. However, today she was not.

\*\*\*

He shuddered as the shower drenched him in freezing water. This was not one of the better mornings. Towelling himself dry Adam quickly put on a clean pair of jodhpurs and sweatshirt. He couldn't think what he had done the night before, but he imagined that it had involved rather too much alcohol. Snippets of the evening came back to him briefly. . .

Adam walked into the kitchen and filled the kettle, the door opened, Kate Grimshaw walked past him.

Kate was eighteen. She groaned, rubbed her bloodshot eyes and sat on one of the long bench seats beside the wide pine table, the kettle clicked, steam rose clouding the inside of the window.

"Coffee?"

"Thanks. . . No milk please, I'll have it black." Kate took the mug and gingerly sipped the hot liquid.

"You look as bad as I feel!" Adam slurped his coffee.

"Thanks! I'll take that as a compliment!" Kate grinned weakly.

"What did I drink last night?"

"Too much. . ." Kate frowned. "I can't remember a thing about last night. I don't even know why we went to the pub!" She glanced at her watch. "The others are late getting up this morning."

"Never mind them, I suppose we had better start feeding, I'm sure they will come down when they're ready." Adam took his mug and walked down the hall, grabbing an old wax jacket on the way. He plunged his feet into a pair of well-worn green Wellingtons before going out into the blustery rain.

Adam unlocked the office, normally at this time of the morning Amanda would be sitting in the office, today the door was locked and there was no sign of the head-girl.

"Isn't Amanda there?" Kate stepped into the office, sweeping her hair back from her eyes.

"I don't think that she was with us last night. I'm sure I would remember if she had been." Adam smiled. "But. She's the boss, and if she wants a lie-in, that's up to her!" He picked up the feed room key.

"What's her car doing here?" Kate walked towards the rusty red car that was sitting in the middle of a muddy puddle. She peered through the frosty glass. "Well she's not in there!"

"I didn't expect that she would be! That car is terrible; it's probably broken down again. She'll walk in soon, no doubt mad as hell!"

\*\*\*

The feed room was little more than a badly built shed, which offered little shelter against the elements. The musty smell of bran and pony nuts filled the room as Adam opened the steel bins and started to scoop bran into the first feed bucket.

"Hello. . ." Caroline stepped through the open door. Caroline was seventeen years old, with scruffy brown hair and a fair complexion.

"You're late. . . Where are the others?"

"They're on their way down. . . Is Amanda cross?"

"Cross? No, she's not here yet. . ." Adam noticed that Caroline was frowning. "What's up?"

"Is she not here? Now that is odd. . ." She paused. "Are these feeds ready to take?" Caroline grabbed a pile of buckets and dashed out of the feed room.

"She's acting strangely. . ." Kate laid out another line of feed buckets on the floor.

"I would ignore her if I were you. . ."

Slowly the rest of the staff appeared and started taking feed buckets round the yard. The horses became quieter as they ate. The rain started coming down with more vigour.

There was no sign of Amanda.

\*\*\*

Before the first lesson of the morning, Adam stepped out of the office. Amanda had not made an appearance. In the centre of the yard, there was a gaggle of staff standing, staring into the distance. Adam closed the office door and slowly walked towards them.

". . .No. . . I didn't want to get involved in the first place. Now look what's happened." Caroline shook her head.

". . .Didn't want to get involved? That's rich. You were there! You can't say that you weren't involved." Karen, one of the younger grooms, span on her heels. Seeing Adam standing there, she stopped dead and smiled nervously.

". . .I wasn't the one who came up with this idea. . ." Caroline ranted.

"Caroline." The other staff edged away from her.

". . .It was you lot that did this. . ."

"Caroline. . ." One of them tugged her sleeve.

". . .But what should we do about it. . .?"

"Do about what Caroline?" Adam stepped forward. Caroline stopped "Come on Caroline. Do about what?"

"Shall we go inside and talk about this?" Caroline put her hand on Adam's shoulder.

Kate walked towards them and stopped.

"Hi Kate. Caroline is just about to tell me what is going on." Kate froze and pointed.

"What's up?" Adam stopped and turned round. Suddenly it all became clear...

~~~

Chapter 2

Sunday afternoon, Adam had spent most of the day standing in the outdoor school whilst he taught his pupils. The school was a fenced square of sand, which in the summer was hot and dusty, and was now saturated. Adam had been standing in a deep puddle since it had started

raining about two hours before. He was sure that one of his boots was leaking, but since his jacket and jods' were completely soaked, it didn't really matter. One of the riders pushed their horse into a canter and over the small jump. There was a splash as the horse made contact with the puddle on the other side.

"Very good!" Adam tried very hard to sound at least interested in what was going on. He saw Kate ride towards the gate that led from the moor back onto the yard. She leant down unlatched the gate, and pushed it open, waiting until the other riders had come through before she swung it shut. They made their way down to the main yard. "Hi Kate! How's it going?"

"Don't ask."

"You're covered in mud. . ." Adam laughed. "I know mud packs are good for the complexion, but I can assure you that you don't need it!" Kate scraped a handful of mud from her jacket and threw it at Adam. It splattered across his face. "Come on what's up? Can't you take a joke?" He wiped the mud from his face.

"I'm not in the mood. . ." Kate frowned and dismounted.

"Oh Kate. . ."

"Don't 'Oh Kate' me!" Kate handed the reins of her horse to Caroline who had come up to the school. She limped across to Adam.

"What have you done to yourself?" Adam opened the gate to the school.

"I came off." Kate frowned.

"What..?" Adam tried to stop himself smirking.

"Don't laugh! My horse slipped."

"Are you all right?"

"I'm fine. . . I've just bruised my leg." Kate sniffed.

"Come here." Adam held out his arms and gave her a hug. "Do you want me to take your next hack? This is the last lesson I'm teaching today."

"I can't ask you to do that." Kate wiped her eyes.

"Of course you can." Adam smiled. "I would have a hot bath if I were you."

"Thanks Adam. . ."

"Are you sure you don't need to see the doctor?"

"No. . . I'm fine. I'll see you later." Kate limped off across the yard.

The rain had stopped by the time Adam returned. Caroline took his horse.

"Thanks Caroline." Adam looked around the silent yard. "Where's everyone else?"

"Everyone else?" Caroline smiled nervously.

"Yes Caroline. There's no one around, and where's Amanda? She said she would come out and tell me if I was teaching tomorrow."

"Amanda? She's gone home." Caroline paused. "Yes, she went earlier."

"Oh! Okay." Adam took his hat off. "Can you make sure that these horses are dried off?"

"You go. I'll get the yard sorted out." Caroline watched as Adam walked away.

"Has he gone?" Karen looked round the corner.

"Yes." Caroline frowned. "I'm not happy about this."

"Well, did he see anything?" Caroline shook her head. "So he doesn't know what's going on."

"I don't think so. But. . ."

"But what?"

"We just can't leave her there. . ."

"We're not going to." Karen pointed over her shoulder. "She deserves everything she gets. We'll leave her for a while, just worry her a bit."

"So long as you know what you are doing?" Caroline started to walk away. "I want the horses dried off. Can you get your cronies to do that?"

"It'll be done." Karen smiled. "Relax Caroline. . . It's only a bit of a laugh."

"I don't think that everyone will be laughing."

Adam sat next to Kate on the sofa.

"Was there enough hot water for you?" Kate smiled.

"I think I just about got the last of it." He paused. "The others are acting a bit strangely this afternoon."

"How do you mean?"

"Well when I came back to the yard, none of them were around. And Caroline was being a bit defensive."

"I think they must just be tired. It's been a long week. They were probably all in the tack room." Kate smiled. "It's not worth worrying about."

"I'm sure you're right!" Adam put his arm around Kate. There was a clatter as the front door opened and the staff stomped noisily upstairs.

"Oh sorry are we disturbing anything!" Karen smirked.

"No! We were just waiting for you lot to arrive. . . Who's cooking tonight?"

"I'll check the rota." Karen disappeared into the kitchen. "It's Caroline!" She yelled loudly.

"What is?" Caroline appeared through the doorway. "I've not done anything. . . It was the others."

"Done what Caroline?"

"She's joking. . ." Karen leapt out of the kitchen. "She just doesn't want to cook tonight!" She whispered to Caroline. "Shut up! Don't give the game away!"

"Yes. . . I didn't want to cook tonight." Caroline laughed nervously.

"So what are we having Caroline?"

"Well it is Sunday night. What do we have every Sunday night?"

"Not leftovers again." Kate sighed loudly.

"I think it would be nice to go out for the evening." Karen took the last of the dirty plates off the table and handed them to Adam who was washing up.

"Go out?" Caroline frowned.

"I think that's a great idea!" Adam looked over to Kate. "Do you think you would be up to it?"

"I'm sure I could manage to limp down to the pub."

"What about the rest of you?" Karen looked across the expectant faces. "Well that's settled then."

"Do you think we should? Don't we have things to do tonight?" Caroline stood up.

"Things to do?" Adam shook his head. "Like what? You'll enjoy a night out. It'll do you good. After all, it has been a busy week for us all."

"Let me have a word with her." Karen led Caroline into the living room.

"What are you doing suggesting that we go out. . . What about..? You know!" Caroline hissed.

"Caroline, we can't just disappear onto the yard. Adam and Kate would get suspicious. If we all go out. We can leave them at the pub and nip back here and sort everything out."

"But.."

"Please. Caroline it is just a joke. But Adam and Kate would get annoyed. They just don't have a sense of humour!"

"Shall we go then!" Kate stepped into the living room. "Is there anything wrong?"

"Wrong? No, nothing is wrong. I was just saying that someone should stay back at the yard, make sure everything is okay."

"And I had said that everything will be fine." Karen stepped forward. "Caroline is a real worrier!"

"Yes. Come on Caroline. I'm sure we can all go out for an hour or so with no problems."

"Okay. I'll get my coat."

Karen watched as she left the room, quickly she pulled out a mobile phone and dialled a number. It rang once before she spoke softly.

"It's me. Everything is ready..." She paused sniggering. "Pre-packaged as well!" Karen shut down the phone and thrust it into her jacket pocket.

The village of Redbridge was little more than a church, post-office stores, phone box, pub and a couple of houses. If you wanted any more excitement than a quiet drink you had to go the fifteen miles to the nearest town, and without a car there was no way to get there except on-foot.

The collective staff of the Redbridge Riding School filled the small saloon bar of 'The Horse & Groom' public house. Karen took out a ten-pound note and handed it to the landlord.

"Keith. . . I need a favour." Karen whispered to Keith Bevan the landlord of the small pub.

"Yes. What do you want?" Keith was a portly individual who enjoyed a good drink as much as his patrons did.

"We are having a bit of a celebration." Karen paused. "Erm. . . Its Caroline's birthday."

"How nice for her."

"I wondered if you could pep up her drinks a bit. She says she only wants an orange juice. . ."

"I understand." Keith added a large shot of vodka to the glass. "It will help her enjoy herself."

"Thanks Keith." Karen laughed. "It will. . . I think she needs to enjoy herself more!"

Karen walked over to the table and placed the last drinks down.

"Your orange juice, and a pint for you Adam."

"Thanks Karen." Caroline took a sip of her drink. "Oh. . ."

"What's up Caroline?" Karen bit her lip.

"That tastes very nice!" Caroline took a large gulp.

"Good! I'm sure you will enjoy it." Karen chuckled into her drink.

"It's getting late. . . I think we should go back now." Adam glanced at his watch.

"Okay." Karen smiled, possibly a little too much. Her speech was slightly slurred.

"What about her?" Caroline was fast asleep on the floor.

"What do you want me to do with her?" Karen beamed.

"I think you had better take her with you. If you can wake her up that is!" Kate shook Caroline's shoulder. "Come on Caroline, it's time to go home."

"I don't want to go to school. . ." Caroline rolled over.

"Don't wake her up. . ." Adam stood up. "I'm sure a couple of you can drag her back." The staff groaned. "I'm sure she would do the same for you. We'll see you in the morning!"

"Aren't we going home now?"

"I think there's time for just one more drink, don't you?" He walked to the bar.

"I see Caroline is enjoying her birthday." Keith nodded towards the door.

"Her birthday?"

"Yes Karen told me it was Caroline's birthday, that's why she spiked her drinks."

"Really. . . I must talk to her in the morning."

Soon afterwards, Adam and Kate walked home, along the quiet road back to the yard. The moon shone lightly allowing them to see their way and the stars glistened like diamonds. All too soon, they were back at the yard. Adam fumbled with the front door key before letting them into the flat. As the door closed, he caught sight of the two cars sitting out in the darkness, and ignored them. Not that he knew it then, Adam would live to regret his eagerness to hurry into the warmth of the flat.

~~~

### Chapter 3

Unusual traditions are rife in many establishments, none more so than the yard of the Redbridge Riding School. For some unwritten rule states that when a person either has a birthday or leaves a yard they should be part of a form of celebration. The exact form of the celebration had been handed down through the ranks of grooms and instructors for years. The 'lucky' person is grabbed by the assembled staff and thrown onto the stables muck heap. There are many variations of this dire treatment. However, most of them involve the victim getting out, having a nice hot bath and change of clothes and pledging revenge on the person who organised their 'downfall'.

However somewhere along the line, tradition had gone horribly wrong. Therefore, as Adam and Kate stood staring at the muck heap they could quite clearly make out a worrying form. Adam turned to Caroline, who was standing quaking.

"It shouldn't have happened like this. . . I wasn't me who did this to her. . . Please don't get too angry. . ."

Adam ignored her and strode towards the steaming heap. He climbed to the top and knelt next to Amanda who was buried up to her neck and not looking very happy.



"Hello Amanda!" Adam looked down towards her tear stained face. Straw was matted into her long brown hair and a strip of brown parcel tape prevented her speaking what was undoubtedly on her mind. "I just want to apologise on behalf of all the staff and say that what has happened here is no doubt an unfortunate mistake." Amanda raised her eyebrows and looked up towards Adam. "I would also like to say, that given time I will no doubt be able to discover who is responsible for this and will bring them to justice, and that you shouldn't worry at all." Amanda made a muted squeaking noise followed by a low mumble. "Now if I remove this tape will you be reasonably restrained?" Amanda stared at him. "I know you're angry but I just want to know that you won't get in a state about it too quickly." Amanda shook her head. "So you're a little calmer?" Amanda nodded. Adam pulled the tape off. "Oops! Sorry. . . I hope that didn't hurt too much."

"Please just get me out of here. . ." Amanda spoke in slow, well-controlled tones.

"What's it worth?" Adam laughed.

"Come here. . ." Adam knelt closer as Amanda whispered to him. He shuddered.

"Okay. . . I suppose it is worth getting you out of here." Adam paused. "You wouldn't do that. . . Would you?"

"Do you want to find out?"

"No. . . . No, we'll get you out of there right now. Caroline fetch a pitchfork. Kate can you give me a hand?"

So the digging began. Amanda was normally a very careful dresser, she always ensured that she wore a white blouse and tie with a v-necked jumper. Her long brown hair brushed or in a hair net and white jodhpurs topped off with brilliantly shining leather riding boots. When she was finally removed, her soaked hair riddled with straw, her blouse torn, her white jodhpurs anything but white and her boots were missing entirely.

Adam took his penknife and cut through the bandages used to tie her wrists and ankles, and carefully helped Amanda step down onto the yard. She rubbed her wrists and looked around the assembled staff. Suddenly there were none of them who thought this had been funny. Caroline was on the brink of tears. Karen who had finally realised that this was a mistake, took a step forward ready to apologise but stopped when Amanda threw her a particularly bitter stare.

"Adam I want to see you in the office!" Amanda yelled.

"Actually I have things to do right now. . ."

"Now! Get into the office!" Amanda noticed that Caroline had burst into tears. "What are you snivelling about? Do you want to take Adam's place?" Caroline was silent, she looked pensively at Adam. "Well shut up then!" Amanda stormed into the office with Adam closely behind.

\*\*\*

Amanda waited until Adam had stepped into the office before slamming the door and closing the blinds. The kettle that someone had switched on some minutes before was boiling. Adam walked towards it and poured a mug of coffee.

"Do you want some coffee?" Adam held out the mug.

"No I don't!" She knocked the mug out of Adam's hand, spilling hot liquid across him. He yelped in pain dropping the mug, which smashed, on the floor.

"There was no need for that!" Adam clutched his scalded hand.

"Do you know how long I was left there?"

"Look I didn't know you were there until this morning. You may not believe me but I really didn't know what was going on. If I had, I would never have let it happen. I'm very sorry." Adam sat down opposite Amanda at the desk. She held her head down, tears dripped slowly onto the green blotter. "Oh Amanda. . ."

"They all hate me!" Amanda looked up. Her eyes red with tears. "Last night I had time to think about it all. I know I've been hard on them. But don't they understand, we just aren't making enough money. You must have noticed, there aren't as many lessons, more people are either keeping their own horses or just not riding at all. And as for the holidaymakers, they're all going over to that new holiday centre. You know I would love to have a hotel or a posh equestrian centre, but we just don't have the money. I'm just treading water to keep us ticking over."

"It's not that bad!" Adam took Amanda's hand. "We still have quite a few lessons. We are the only stables and livery yard for miles, and as for the holidaymakers. Well who needs them? This isn't like you. Not after all we've been through. There's something else isn't there. What's really worrying you?"

"It's nothing. . ." Amanda looked up into Adam's eyes. "Look at me. . ." Adam glanced away. "No look at me. I'm a figure of fun. I have no respect on this yard; the staff enjoyed doing that to me last night. . . They deliberately left me there. As they were tying me up, they were laughing, saying how this would be 'really funny'. Is that all I am?"

"Look. Don't be so stupid." Adam stood up. "It was a mistake that you got left. But you must admit that it was a bit of a laugh. At least it would have been. . ."

"I knew it! You are always on their side. . .-" Amanda started crying again.

"No listen! If they had left you there for only a few minutes would you have thought that they hated you?"

"Well, maybe not."

"Of course not." The clock ticked loudly in the background. "It was just a show of youthful exuberance. They are all young. They saw that they could get you back for all the shouting and arguing that they have had to put up with over the last few months. Just it got out of hand. I think they would have dug you out earlier, but they all went drinking and. . . . You know what I mean. I know there was no malice intended. But I would take it as a warning."

"A warning?"

"Yes. Try not to take it all out on the staff. You've been a real cow for quite a while now. They work really long hours and its all hard work. They just get frustrated when they're told off at the end of a hard day's work. Please try and be a little more restrained. They don't hate you, in fact, they really respect you, but you are upsetting them when you shout at them." Adam took a box of tissues from the shelf. "Here dry your eyes; you can't go out looking as if you have been crying."

"Thank you Adam. Do you think I could change, for the better?" Amanda tried to smile.

"Of course you can. Now I think you had better go home and have a nice long bath and change. Don't bother coming back to the yard today, I'll look after everything."

"Do you think I should have a word with the staff?"

"No. I'll make sure they know that they don't do that to you again."

"Or anyone. . ."

"Well I don't think that I can dissuade them, if they have their minds set on it. Remember it's my birthday next week."

"I'll have to make sure we have enough parcel tape!"

"I really wonder why people don't like you!" They both laughed. "Right are you ready to face the masses?"

"I think so. . . Ah! Only one thing." Amanda looked down at her bare feet.

"Oh! I'll get them to find your boots, and I think that there is at least one person who could do with boot polishing practice." Adam slid off his Wellingtons. "But here, you can have my wellies for now."

"Are you sure?"

"Go on! I can borrow some others later on."

"Oh you're great!" Amanda smiled. "Is your hand okay?"

"I'll live! Anyway when you get back home you'll find a little surprise waiting for you. . ."

"What is it?" Amanda rubbed her hands together.

"That would ruin the surprise. . . I'll come round later before I do the late check."

Amanda pulled the door open. The staff were standing around outside the office. They scattered as she stepped outside.

"I'm going home, Adam is in charge." She strode off through the mud and puddles to her car. Adam watched as she drove off, Kate walked towards him.

"She looked like she was in a fierce mood." Kate caught sight of Adam's hand. "What has she done to your hand Adam?"

"That's nothing. . . Just an accident, I dropped my mug of coffee." Adam paused. "Can I ask you a favour?"

"Yes of course!" Kate smiled.

"Can I borrow your spare wellies?"

"Why? Oh Adam! Did she take your boots as well?"

"She borrowed them for a short time." Adam smiled. "Could you get all the staff together in the tack room. I would like a word with them all."

"Sure!" Kate kissed Adam on her cheek. "You're so brave you know."

"If only you knew everything. . ." Adam whispered under his breath as he walked away.

\*\*\*

Amanda drew up at the cottage. She had bought it with the yard those years ago. It was a stone cottage with two small bedrooms. The garden at the back of the house was filled with herbs and vegetables; Amanda was not one for flowers or fancy plants. She didn't have the time to look after them anyway. So she would plant up hardy things that would have a use. She had good lettuce, potatoes, tomatoes and many others; often yielding so much that she would gladly donate any surplus to the staff at the stables.

Walking inside it was in the same state as she had left the week before. Across every surface were scattered papers and documents. She had not realised that running a stable would involve so much paperwork; she was always filling in this form or providing that document. Amanda paused to pick up some papers from one of the tables and knocked a calculator tally roll that fell and unrolled itself across the carpet. She sighed and threw the bundle of papers back down.

Catching a glimpse of herself in the dressing table mirror, she thought of her sleepless night. But perhaps Adam was right; in fact, she knew he was, Adam was so often right. Perhaps she had been a bit rough on people. Amanda always seemed to be screaming at the staff. She had

lost count of the number of times she would leave some of them in tears just to drive home and reduce herself to the same state out of pure frustration.

Amanda stripped off her filthy clothes and considered washing them. Looking again at her ripped blouse and mud splattered socks she put them into a pile to throw away. She had expected some sort of problems, it being her birthday and all, so she had worn her oldest clothes. Her only regret was that she had worn her leather boots and not borrowed a pair of Wellingtons. No doubt, Adam would get them back.

She ran the hot water and added a copious amount of bath foam. This was the way to get over these problems. Slowly she immersed herself in the fragrant water.

\*\*\*

Adam strode across the yard, approaching the tack room he heard a number of expectant voices, each trying to blame each other for what had happened, they became silent as he walked into the room.

The rain had stopped, but the air was still cold and damp, and so the tack room with its warmth and shelter was a favourite place. Saddles lined the walls, each with a bridle hanging beneath it. The heady smell of leather and horses was intoxicating; Adam strode to the front of the room and looked across the silent crowd.

"I do hope you are satisfied with yourselves." The staff all looked down at the floor. "Caroline, I expected more from you than this. You deceived us yesterday and now look what has happened."

"I'm sorry. . ." Caroline whimpered.

"However I think that there is one person who is more to blame than the rest of you. Isn't that so Karen?" Karen looked up sternly. "I hope you got Caroline a card for her birthday."

"I'm sorry. It got a little out of hand." Karen frowned.

"I have a job for you. . ." Adam smiled. "You may have noticed that Amanda was not wearing her boots a little earlier. I don't suppose you know where they might be. . ."

"Someone buried them on the muck heap."

"Oh how pleasant of someone. Well I want you to find them, and when you have found them, get some boot polish, because before I bring them back to her I want them absolutely sparkling." Adam smiled. "Okay?" Karen muttered under her breath. "Oh as you have some much to say you can clean out the yard drains. . ." Karen was silent. "Thank you." She stormed out of the room. "Oh dear perhaps we have upset her." Adam nodded and Kate left the room. "Right here's the deal, I have spoken to Amanda, or rather I have been spoken to by Amanda, but I managed to ask her to be a little nicer to you lot. So hopefully she will be a bit better. So please let's not have this happen again. Okay?" The staff nodded and agreed. "But, here's the nasty bit!" Adam laughed. "I'm sorry but I think you had better have some jobs to do. . . So I want the paddocks skipped out, the muck heap thrown back, and some of you can help with the drain cleaning. After that, I want all the tack cleaned. Off you go."

Kate was waiting outside the door.

"I'm worried about Karen."

"Worried? What about?"

"No Adam I'm serious. I'm worried about her. I am worried about what she is saying she would do to you."

"What she would do to me? Like what?"

"She is really mad about what you have made her do."

"A little hard work never hurt anyone. She had it coming to her. I wouldn't worry about her, of course, she's mad; I think I would be in her position. But it will wear off" Adam hugged Kate.

"I just hope you are right."

"Of course I am."

\*\*\*

Amanda had just stepped out of the bath when the doorbell rang. She swore to herself and unlocked the bathroom door. The bell rang again. She grabbed her bathrobe and put it on.

"I'm coming. Have some patience. . ." Amanda ran down and across the living room. When she opened the front door there was a man standing on the doorstep his finger poised to ring the bell again. "I heard you the first time."

"Miss Amanda King?" The man spoke with a local accent.

"Yes."

"Sign here please." The man handed her a clipboard with a delivery note attached.

"What for?" Amanda looked at the paper and then back at the man. She noticed that he was slightly balding and that he had tried to cover the patch by brushing the hair over it. She smiled quietly to herself.

"I have a delivery for a Miss Amanda King."

"Yes that's me, so what is it?"

"If you would just sign please madam, I have other deliveries to make this morning." Amanda signed the form. "Thank you madam. I will just get your package." The man walked back down the path, leaving the front gate open, he appeared a moment later carrying a brown cardboard box. "There we are madam, one litter tray, one sack of cat litter, five cans of cat food assorted and various sundries."

"But I don't have a cat?" Amanda frowned as she put the box down on the doorstep.

"Oh! I am sorry." The man walked back up the path, again leaving the gate open and appeared again, this time carrying a pet box. He handed it to Amanda. "Good day madam." Amanda peered into the box and saw a tiny black and white kitten. She took it out of the box and put it on her lap.

"Oh! Aren't you beautiful?" The kitten purred softly and settled itself down in her lap. She noticed that there was an envelope attached to the box. She pulled it off and opened it. Inside there was a birthday card inscribed. 'With lots of love, Adam.' "Well what do I call you little kitten?"

\*\*\*

Karen growled as she waited for the phone to be answered.

"Come on, come on..." She glanced out of the office window. "Yes, what happened?... Look shut up! I went to a lot of trouble..." She paused. "No you look here!..." She paused frowning at the phone. "Alright. Don't screw up..." Slamming the receiver down she walked out of the office."

\*\*\*

The day had passed. The staff got to work doing their tasks and had finished them with few complaints, apart from Karen who had not appeared at dinner and was sulking in her room.

Adam put his jacket on.

"Where are you going?" Kate looked across to Adam.

"I promised Amanda I would get her boots back to her before I did the late check. I'll be back soon I promise." He picked up the now gleaming boots and went downstairs.

It was only a short distance to Amanda's house. As he reached there, he saw through the windows that she was sitting on the living room floor playing with her new friend. Adam tapped on the window. Amanda looked up, and blushed. She ran to the front door.

"Oh Adam! Thank you!" Amanda rushed forward and hugged him. "Come in, please." The kitten walked majestically out into the hall to see who had arrived. Adam picked him up and stroked him.

"He's a lovely little thing isn't he?" Adam smiled. "What have you called him?"

"Pinkerton." Amanda announced proudly.

"Pinkerton?" Adam paused. "Oh I remember now you had that fluffy elephant called Pinkerton. I think it's a very nice name. It suits him." Adam handed the kitten back to Amanda. He clawed his way onto her shoulder and sat watching. "I only came round to drop your boots off. I have to get back to the yard."

"Oh can't you stay for a drink?"

"I'd love to but I think I had enough last night, anyway I don't want to leave the staff alone tonight."

"Are they okay?"

"They're fine. I think Karen has held a bit of a grudge against me though!" He laughed.

"Oh do be careful Adam."

"What do you think she's going to get a gang out to ambush me?" Adam laughed. "Anyway I'll leave you and Pinkerton alone. See you tomorrow."

"Of course." Amanda smiled and closed the front door.

\*\*\*

As Adam returned to the yard, Kate was waiting on the drive for him.

"Hi Kate. Anything wrong?"

"No I just thought I would get out of the flat, you can cut the atmosphere up there with a knife!" Kate put her arm round Adam's waist. "Anyway I wanted to be alone with you for a while!"

"Promises, promises." Adam laughed. "Let's check the yard first!"

The late check involved walking round the yard ensuring that all the horses each had adequate water and that their rugs were fastened. Adam and Kate went round the main yard together.

"Let's do the one of the back yards each. It will be quicker that way." Kate smiled.

"Okay." Adam watched as Kate went off into the darkness. He went off to the other yard. As he was checking one of the horses, he heard a slight noise, something he couldn't describe. He left the stable he was in and went round to the other yard. As he turned the corner he saw that the lights were off, Kate would have switched those on, he thought to himself. He flicked the switch but there was nothing. "Damm lights! Kate are you okay?" Adam paused there was no response. "Kate!" He saw a vague movement in the shadows. . .

~~~

Chapter 4

"No Pinkerton, you can't come with me." The kitten meowed loudly. "I'll be back soon." Amanda wanted to get to the yard early this morning; she had fed Pinkerton, but would be back later to play with him. She edged her way out of the front door and closed it quietly behind her.

The morning was dry and bright, there was a crispness on the grass as she walked towards her car. The mist rolled across the valley forming great grey shrouds of the fields and hedgerows. She thought that it would be a nice day to walk to the yard. She wouldn't need the car after all. So she set off down the country road.

The yard was very peaceful. Amanda stood on the driveway trying to ignore the mud and puddles and imagine this place being an impressive holiday equestrian centre with five star hotel and restaurant. That was a stupid thought; she couldn't even run this small yard without any other complications. She walked towards the main yard; one or two horses had their heads lazily hanging over their stable doors. She went up to a big grey and rubbed his ears, it wickered and rubbed its nose on Amanda's chest. Walking towards the back yard, she noticed a bundle of rags lying in the mud. Amanda walked towards it and was suddenly hit by a sense of foreboding. As she got close, she suddenly realised what it was.

"Adam? Adam! Oh no! What's happened?" Amanda knelt in the mud next to Adam's silent body. His breathing was shallow and laboured. "Oh no! Wait here. . ." She ran across the yard to the office, fumbling with the lock she eventually pushed the door open. Picking up the phone, she dialled 999. "Hello. . . Hello?" There was nothing but silence, she tried again, there was no dial tone. Amanda ran out of the office again and back to Adam. He was still lying still on the yard. "Adam. . . I'm going to get some help for you! Adam!" Amanda rushed across the yard; she saw her car wasn't in the car park. "No!"

Amanda ran down the drive and out onto the yard. There was a payphone in the village, she didn't have a phone at home, she told herself that there was nobody who would want to call her. At the payphone, again there was no dial tone. She slammed the handset down. The only option was to get her car and drive Adam to the nearest hospital. She ran back to her house and picked up the car keys.

Opening the car, she sat inside and fumbled with the ignition key, turning it the engine turned over but would not start.

"Come on! Come on!" Amanda yelled, turning the key again, the engine came to life. She drove as quickly as she could to the yard and stopped her car next to Adam. "Come on Adam I'm going to get you to hospital." Adam was silent. Amanda grabbed him under his shoulders and dragged him across the yard, she wrenched open the back door of her car and pushed him onto the back seat. "Oh Adam why do you have to be so heavy?" Amanda slammed the door and leapt behind the wheel.

Amanda pulled up in an area marked for ambulances, and ran into the casualty unit.

"Please help me I have an injured person in my car."

"Yes, one of the porters will help you." The receptionist pointed to a person in a white coat.

"But he's unconscious! I need help. . . Don't just sit there! "Amanda grabbed the telephone handset from the receptionist."Please. . ." A nurse appeared from a side office and ran towards

the desk. They both went out to Amanda's car. Adam was placed on a trolley and wheeled into the casualty unit.

"Miss King" The nurse came through to reception

"Yes, that's me. . . Is Adam okay?" Amanda stood up knocking over the cup of vending machine coffee.

"He's fine, he has slight concussion but he'll be okay." The nurse smiled. "Don't worry. . . Would you like to see him?"

"Oh yes please. . ." Amanda followed the nurse through into a cubical. Adam was lying flat out on the bed; he was wearing a light blue smock with 'Hospital Property' stencilled across it.

Amanda walked towards the bed, "Adam. . . Are you okay?"

"Amanda? Is that you?" Adam stared directly upwards.

"Yes it's me!" Amanda turned to the nurse.

"As he has sustained a blow to the head and has concussion. We would like to keep him in for observation for a couple of days. Do you know how he sustained the injury?"

"I'm sorry I don't know. I found him on the yard this morning, he was just lying there. I don't know how long he had been there. I tried to ring for an ambulance but the phone wasn't working. . ."

"That's okay. . . I think we should let him rest for a while."

"Okay." Amanda took Adam's hand. "I'll come and see you soon. Now you rest."

Back at the yard, everything seemed normal. Caroline was sitting in the office as Amanda walked in.

"Hello Amanda. . . What's wrong?"

"I've just had to take Adam to hospital, I found him lying unconscious on the yard this morning." Amanda shook her head.

"That's why he didn't come down this morning, we thought him and Kate had run off together."

"Kate?"

"Yes Kate isn't around. She's not in the flat, or on the yard."

"Have you checked her room?"

"Yes Karen checked Adam's and her rooms when they didn't come down to work. Their beds hadn't been slept in. What's happened to them?"

"I really don't know? I really wish I did."

"Perhaps Adam had an argument with Kate; she could have hit him and run off." Caroline shrugged her shoulders.

"I really don't think that is very likely?" Amanda stepped into the office and sat down. Perhaps Kate had argued with Adam. She might have hit him with something in her temper; she may have easily got frightened and run off. Amanda looked down. Suddenly she saw something that made her blood freeze. She reached down and picked it up and placed it gingerly in her pocket, things started to click into place, Amanda shuddered. This couldn't be what had happened. . .

"Amanda?" Karen crashed through the office door. "You're here!"

"Karen. Were you not expecting me to be here?"

"No..." She paused. "I found this." Karen put a copy of the local paper in front of Amanda.
"Look at this!"

"Look at what? What's up?" Amanda looked down at the paper.

"It has just arrived, look at this." Karen pointed to the obituary column.

"Who's died? Anyone I know?" Amanda read down the column. Her blood ran cold.

Amanda Jane Bishop

Age 24

'Taken so suddenly from us all.'

"Is this some kind of joke?" Amanda's voice quaked.

"No Amanda. . ." Karen shook her head.

"Can you leave me alone for a minute . . .?"

Karen and Caroline left the office silently. Amanda looked at the page in front of her. This might be just a joke, she shuddered, or it could mean a lot of trouble. There were things to do; she had to contact the police for one thing. Amanda stood up and left the office. The sun was shining, but the wind was cold, so she zipped up her jacket, she ignored her car and walked down the driveway and on towards the village. As she passed the pub, she saw a grey Telecom van parked up on the pavement. Amanda walked towards the engineer who was sitting on the edge of an open manhole.

"Hello." The engineer looked up, still clasping bundles of cables. "I had a problem this morning; I had to call an ambulance. The phone at my stables up the road was out of order; the payphone wasn't working either. . ."

"I'm sorry about that." He picked up a bright yellow test meter. "You see this lot." Nodding down to the huge bundles of brightly coloured wires. "Someone has cut through them."

"Cut them?" Amanda looked down at the damaged cables.

"Yeah, it's wiped out phones in Redbridge and for miles around. It must be vandals, they are so stupid." He frowned.

"I agree." Amanda crouched down in front of the manhole. "How soon will it be fixed? I need to ring the police about something." The engineer looked up.

"Well the cables will take a few hours to fix. But if you want you can use my mobile, it's in the van. The door is unlocked."

"May I? Thanks." Amanda opened the door and sat in the driver's seat. She picked up the mobile phone and dialled 999. The operator answered. "Police please. . ." The line clicked and a person answered. "Hello I would like to report an attack. . . In Redbridge. Yes, at the riding school. Adam Bishop. My name? Amanda Bi. . . Sorry Amanda King. Thank you." She put the phone down, and stared at the receiver.

"All okay?" The engineer stood in the open doorway.

"Yes. . . I suppose so. Thank you for the use of the phone."

"That's fine. . ."

Amanda stepped out of the van and started walking back towards the yard.

Detective Inspector Bailey had just arrived at the station. Currently he was trying to open the door with a cup of coffee in one hand and a pile of buttered toast in the other, when his phone

started ringing. He kicked the door and stepped into the office dropping a slice of toast, butter side down on the lino. He put the coffee down on the desk sloshing liquid over an opened file, and picked up the phone.

"Bailey." They had cut down on the staff in CID at Ashburton, everything was dealt with at the larger station in Taunton. There were now only two officers, himself and a detective constable who was now late. The duty sergeant had called there had been an attack. He sighed, what the world was coming to. . . But soon he wouldn't care about any of this, he was due to retire before the end of the year, only about another month and then, well a nice police pension and. . . . He brought himself back to the phone call, spending a moment to jot down the name and address. He saw Lucas run through the door, step on the slice of toast, and slip, landing heavily on the floor. Bailey put the phone down. "Good morning. . ." Lucas picked himself up off the floor.

"Who put that there?" He grabbed the remains of the toast and threw it in the wastepaper basket. He brushed the seat of his trousers and took off his jacket.

"I wouldn't bother taking that off, we have work to do." Bailey picked up the car keys from the desk.

"Not another school visit. I wouldn't have worn my suit if I had known. Not after the last time, I never got that paint out you know."

"Lucas your problem is that you spend too much time complaining." Bailey ripped the top sheet off his notepad. "We have to find a Miss King regarding an attack at a stable yard."

"Great. What's happened? Someone was bitten were they? They're getting in CID to find which horse did it?" Lucas grabbed his jacket and opened the office door. "I want something more interesting. . ."

"Go back to London if you want excitement." Bailey was going to say something about townies, but he stopped himself.

Kate woke, her head throbbing. She could hear muffled voices...

"You have the goods?" There was a pause. "Undamaged I hope... You had better ask her about our property."

Rolling over onto her side Kate realised that she couldn't move any further, her ankles were lashed together with rope and her arms were tied behind her back. She edged towards the wall and tried to sit up.

After what felt like hours Kate had managed to struggle herself into a sitting position. She saw that she was in a dark room, its walls roughly built in local stone. Kate gulped, what was going on? Why was she here? Where was here?

"Help!" Kate shouted as loudly as she could. "Please somebody help me!" she stopped as the door opened. A large man walked towards her.

"I see that you have woken up!" He had a London accent. "I'm so sorry that you have to be here like this, but my associates would like to know about the money."

"Money?" Kate frowned. "What money?"

"Don't play the fool with me! You thought that you could just steal our money and go? You didn't think that we would let you get away with it?"

"I don't know anything about any money. I hardly have any money; I earn just enough to live." Kate shook her head.

"Make it easy on yourself. . . Tell us where the money is."

"I told you I don't have any money. . ." Kate screamed.

"Shut it!"

"No!.. Help! Please someone he-. . ." Kate was silenced as he shoved the rag into her mouth. Kate gagged and tried to spit the material out.

"I told you to shut it Miss Bishop. . . Sorry." Kate watched as he left the room, leaving her in darkness again.

Amanda watched through the office window as the blue Metro made its way slowly up the drive. It stopped and two men stepped out, the younger in a grey suit, slammed the car door and was complaining about something. Amanda smiled and left the office, the younger man was quite attractive. . . She pushed the thought from her mind.

"Can I help you gentleman?" Amanda smiled warmly, catching the eye of the younger man.

"Detective Inspector Bailey, Detective Constable Lucas. We are looking for a Miss King." The older man showed a police badge; Amanda looked at it briefly before catching eye contact with Lucas.

"That's me. Amanda King." She held her hand out. Looking down she saw it was dirty. She rubbed her palm on the back of her jodhpurs and offered it again. The older man ignored her and walked on. Lucas took her hand firmly and shook it.

"Can you tell me exactly what happened?"

"I don't really know. I came to the yard early this morning.-"

"At what time?" Bailey looked up from his open notebook.

"Eh?" Amanda looked towards Bailey.

"What time did you arrive here this morning?"

"I suppose about six. Yes it must have been six o'clock, I had woken up early, not that I always do of. . ." Amanda paused, Bailey sighed. "Sorry. I walked across the yard, just to check the horses really, and when I came across the back yard I saw Adam.-"

"Adam?" Bailey held his hand up.

"Adam Bishop. He is..." Amanda paused. "He is a member of my staff. I saw him just lying on the yard. I went over to him, he was unconscious. I thought for a moment that he might be dead. Anyway, I ran to the office, to phone for an ambulance, but the phone was out of order. I ran down to the village, I had left my car at home. I tried to use the payphone but it was out of order too. So I drove the car back here, picked him up and drove him to hospital.-"

"Which hospital?"

"Ashburton General. . . They've kept him in for a couple of days for observation." Amanda smiled at Lucas.

"Can we see where you found him?" Lucas smiled back.

"Yes of course. Would you like to come with me. . .?" Amanda walked round with the two officers' to the back yard. Karen was standing in the middle of the yard forking muck from the ground into a barrow. "Karen! I thought I told everyone to stay off this part of the yard until the police had been."

"I'm sorry. . . I clean forgot." Karen smiled sheepishly.

"And what have you done here?" Amanda scowled.

"I'm sorry the barrow just tipped over."

"Well this was where I found Adam. . . Just about where that muck is now. . . Look I'm sorry."

"So, you are telling me that the scene of the crime is now just under a pile of muck. I really think that forensic is going to have much to work on. . . Look there really is very little we can do. . . I'll log the details." Bailey turned away.

"Wait. . . There is something else. Another member of staff went out to do the late check with him, Kate Grimshaw. She's missing..-"

"Really?" Bailey raised his eyebrows. "That might make things a lot easier." Bailey started walking away.

"But they were." Amanda grabbed Bailey's shoulder. He stopped. "They were very close. . . You know what I mean?"

"Lover's tiff. They argued, she hit him and panicked. So she ran off. I've see this many times before."

"No. . . It's not like that. . ." Amanda shook her head.

"We'll take the details and talk to the rest of the staff."

Amanda watched as they walked back towards the office. If only she could tell them the truth. She shrugged her shoulders and followed them.

The officers spent a couple of hours asking each of the staff if they had seen or heard anything, in each case the answer had been the same. That they had been too tired after working all day and had either been asleep when Adam and Kate went out or went to bed shortly afterwards without seeing anything. None of them had seen anything and they certainly had not seen any reason why Adam and Kate might be fighting. It was late afternoon when the car finally pulled away leaving Amanda sitting in the office. She flipped the card she had been given by the police officers, on the back Simon, Detective Constable Lucas, had written his home telephone number. Amanda picked up the receiver and dialled the number, it rang. She looked at the phone before placing the receiver back down. Now was not the time to involve anyone else.

Amanda locked the office and walked to her car. She drove back to her cottage. Opening the door she was pounced on by Pinkerton who had been sleeping on the stairs.

"Oh hello Pinkerton!" The kitten purred loudly. "Are you a hungry little kitten?" She carried the kitten into the kitchen and watched as he ate its food.

~~~

## Chapter 5

Amanda walked through the corridors. She had forgotten how much she hated hospitals, the sickly smell of disinfectant. She took a deep breath and pushed open the double doors. She saw Adam at the end of the ward.

"Hi Adam!" Amanda smiled. Adam looked up. "How are you feeling?"

"I feel as if someone has used my head as a football." He groaned and tried to sit up. Amanda rushed forward and helped him, plumping up his pillows before placing them behind his back. "Thanks! You'd make a great Florence Nightingale. . ." Adam looked deeply into Amanda's eyes. "The police visited me yesterday."

"I tried to get in contact with you. To warn you perhaps." Amanda pulled up a chair.

"What's happened to Kate?" Adam looked back to Amanda, she noticed that he had tears forming in the corners of his eyes. "I know she didn't do this to me. The police tried to get me to say that she had hit me and run away. She wouldn't have done that to me. . . -"

"I'm sorry Adam, I think that this is my fault." Amanda moved her chair closer to Adam's bed.

"What do you mean?"

"Do you remember when I first bought the yard?" Amanda looked down at the floor.

"Yes. I remember it well. You wrote to me, that's why I came down here."

"Did I ever tell you how I could afford to buy a riding school?"

"No. . ."

"Didn't you ever wonder how I could have bought a yard when I had just been a stable hand? Didn't you ever think?" Amanda frowned.

"Of course I didn't think. In the circumstances it was the last thing on my mind. . ." Adam paused. "Where is this all leading anyway?"

"I've done a very stupid thing Adam. And I think that I am just about to pay the price." Amanda gulped. "You remember when I left the home, I went to a yard in London. It was not out of choice, I just wanted to work with horses. So I bought a copy of Horse And Hound and just picked the first job advert I saw. I can still remember it now, 'Girl Groom required, to live in at London yard.' I applied and went down for an interview, they said that they would take me on so I just started work. You were the only person who really knew where I was, I wrote to you from the yard. I had just run away, and that was just the start, I've been running every since.

The yard was right in the centre of London. We used to ride in Hyde Park. I was really excited at first, you have to remember that I had never been to a big city. London was so different to the country, the noise and the traffic and the people. There were always so many people. We were always busy, starting work early in the morning, we used to ride across the busy roads just to trot and canter down the sand tracks in the park. It was the same ride, time after time, hour after hour, day after day. I joined in the summer, I remember the heat and the smog, the yard was so small. We were packed into this courtyard, behind a whole row of garages, it was always hot, everyone was always on edge, no one was friendly at all. You know that I had no friends at that yard, working was hell, but it was worst at the end of the day. Oh so much worse.

..

I lived in a flat that was above the stables, it was really where the hay would have been stored once. There were ten of us in this flat, all the grooms and instructors. I used to sleep in the bottom bunk in a room no bigger than the office at our yard, shared with four other girls. We lived in such a small space, the kitchen was filthy and crawling with cockroaches. You just can't imagine the conditions. Because of this we never got on, the other girls all hated me. I was a country girl, I didn't know what I was doing. . . I was stupid, I was the one who could be the butt of everyone's jokes. I hated every minute. But I was trapped, I had signed a document when I had joined the yard. When I tried to leave the head-girl told me that I had signed a three year contract and that I couldn't leave the yard. I was stuck there, I hadn't read it, it had just been put down in front of me. They had said, 'Don't worry about that, its just a standard contract.' I didn't know any better than, I can't imagine how many people they tricked with that, it was no wonder that all the staff were so miserable. It was as if everyone blamed everyone else for the state they were in. If we had all got together we could have done something. . . Maybe we might have been

able to get out, but no one there cared. They were all trapped and instead of fighting they just put up with it.

As I was the last in, I was at the very bottom of the chain. If there were ever dirty or dangerous jobs to be done it was me who had to do them, I prayed for someone else to join the yard. I know it sounds awful, but I just wanted to be left alone for a moment, you never got any time alone, no peace. You were always there working, eating and sleeping with these terrible people. The only freedom was when I got to take out a ride. They let me do that because I was supposedly someone who wanted to become an instructor, so why not get the practice in now? There I was, virtually untrained taking ten or fifteen horses and riders across those main roads and round the park, it was so frightening. I remember once someone fell off. It wasn't a very bad fall, just some bruises, but they told the head girl when they got back to the yard. . . She dragged me into the office and yelled at me. Threatening me with what she would do if it happened again. I was constantly living in fear of those threats. You have to remember I was younger then, vulnerable.

So it went on. I was there for three months before the accident happened. The head-girl used to drink, I see now that she was in just a bad a state as the rest of us, probably worse. She used to go out at lunch times and often come back slurring and breathing pure alcohol over anyone in the way, she was in a terrible state that day. It was something that had been waiting to happen. No one really knows what actually happened to her. She had gone in to see one of the horses, and. . . She was very rough when she had been drinking. Perhaps that was what had happened, she was rough on people and even worse with the horses. . . They didn't find her until it was too late. I suppose no one had see her go into the stable, perhaps those that had conveniently forgotten that she hadn't come out. She often would sleep off a particularly bad lunch before emerging again to hit the town and the local pub. But someone went into the box, saw her lying there. . . She had stood no chance. The horse had kicked her in the head. . . We were told it was painless, but in the state she was in she wouldn't have felt anything. . . They put the horse down you know.

That shook things up on the yard. Suddenly everyone started to panic, we had the police in, they just put it down to an accident. None of us went to her funeral. I had never liked her. I didn't think that I could go to her funeral and feel anything different.

One of the other instructors became head girl. So we all had to take on her clients, I had a couple myself, on top of the other work. . . But it was okay, because that was when I met James. James made everything all right.

He was James Simpson. He had been riding at the yard for quite a while, I'd seen him before, but only in passing, I saw him arrive and leave in his bright red Porsche. But now I was riding with him. He was so handsome. No you can't imagine, he was tall and slim, with a lithe muscular body and straight blond hair. He used to arrive with his tailored shirts and jodhpurs. I must admit that I really liked him, I would have given anything to know more about him. But I had resigned myself to the fact that I was just a stable girl, I was so far out of his league, all I could do was to admire him from a distance. I was shocked and delighted when he asked if I would like to have a drink with him.

We were to go out the next day, I was in a world of my own. It was only at lunch time I realised that I had nothing to wear, I only had the clothes I stood up in and a pair of ripped jeans. I went into the office and called him on the number he had given me, I told him that I couldn't make it, that I didn't have anything to wear. He sounded a little upset. I thought that

that was my chance gone, the next time I saw him, if there was a next time, it would just be back to normal, just back to the cold, harsh reality.

So I just threw myself into my work. I must admit that I cried as I groomed my horses, crying for what could have been, but it was stupid, impossible. So you can imagine my surprise when he arrived on the yard at about four o'clock. He came over to me and said that we were going shopping. I just didn't know what to say. He took me in his Porsche to Harrods, I'd never been inside there before, it was just amazing, all these wonderful things. He took me to a boutique, I had a bath in a wonderful bath with gold taps and rich bath oil and then I had a complete facial and had my hair done. When it was finished I was given a whole wardrobe of expensive clothes, dresses, I never wore dresses, but these were so beautiful, flowing silk. I told James that he couldn't do this for me, but he just smiled and paid the bill!

We left the store and went down the road. It was only a short trip to the Blue Moon wine bar. I was really impressed by this place, it was so beautiful. I was even more impressed when James told me he owned it! We wined and dined the evening away. I don't remember all of it, quite frankly I had never really had wine before. I woke up the next morning in a beautiful room, it was certainly a world apart from my bunk at the stables. Breakfast was waiting, and there was a letter from James. He had to go on a brief business trip, he would be back soon, so he would see me in a few days. He had thrown away my old clothes, there was a really expensive pair of jodhpurs and a wonderful shirt lying at the end of my bed.

I went into work, I was a bit late, and the reception I got was certainly very frosty. The other girls hated me even more because of James, they were all so jealous. One of the girls took it particularly badly, and gave me a black eye. I told James about her, it was quite strange, she had a nasty accident a few days later, she walked into a door and broke her nose. Living in the flat was hell, everyone hated me even more. When James came back he said that I could live with him for a while.

Well, to cut a long story short, I lived with James. He drove me to work every day in a posh car, wearing tailored clothes. It was like being in heaven! James insisted that I open a bank account. I'd never had a bank account before, so James set one up for me. I never really did anything with it, I didn't actually have any money to put into the bank. Anyway, everything was perfect.

One morning while we were sleeping there was a crash, suddenly a load of police officers rushed into the room, they took James away. I was devastated. I didn't know what to do. He was taken to prison, they wouldn't give him any bail. He had been arrested for drug trafficking and money laundering. I saw him in prison. He said that he hadn't done it, I believed him for a while. He told me to wait for him. . . He got eight years. . . Eight years that finished a few months ago. . ."

"Where is this all leading?" Adam frowned.

"I haven't told you everything yet. . ." Amanda sat back. "After he had been arrested I went to the bank. I thought that I had better close down the bank account, I didn't know why James had set it up, and I certainly wasn't going to use it. Anyway I went to the bank and told them that I wanted to close the account, they asked me to wait and the manager came out to see me. He asked how I wished to take my money. Of course I asked what money? He said that there had been a transfer of ten million pounds made to my account. I didn't know what to do. . . I mean what would you do? I just asked them to give it to me in cash. They said that to do that would be

impossible, so they gave me a bankers draft, one single piece of paper that was all that money. I just took it and ran, I didn't go back to the yard."

"What did you do?"

"I did nothing for a while, I had the keys to James's flat so I stayed there for a while. Then I just happened to read an advert for a yard near Dartmoor. I thought that if I could just buy a small place, it was only a small amount of money compared to the full ten million. I was so sure that James wouldn't mind if I used a little of the money, after all if I was going to wait eight years. Anyway I bought it. I must admit that I made some mistakes in my first year before I got myself a solicitor and an accountant. . ."

"So did you spend all the money?"

"Oh no! I could never do that. . . I sort of lost it. . ."

"What?" -

"My accountant told me that I should invest such an amount. I just left it all to him. It all seemed to be going well for a while. He kept giving me reports and charts and things, and then it stopped. I went to see him, but I found that he had moved out of his office, there was no forwarding address and no money."

"Oh Amanda!"

"How could I tell James that I had lost all his money. That was when I changed my name, I thought that if they couldn't find me I would be safe."

"Safe?"

"I found out about James and his organisation, they thought nothing of wiping out someone who got in their way. I never believed it when I was younger. My goodness I was so stupid, I never saw it happening. Adam I thought that he loved me. He had just used me as a dupe, I was an innocent fool used to hold onto the money. I was just a stable girl who wouldn't mess up his plans, the police wouldn't be able to get hold of his money. That was until the point when I lost it all. What do you think he would do to me if he found me?"

"But what about what happened to Kate?"

"Consider the situation. . . If they found out that I was working at some yard in the West Country. Now if they just happened to be waiting round a dark corner..."

"But they took Kate?"

"Perhaps they have made a mistake. I don't know. I only know we have to try and get Kate back." She sighed. "Before it is too late."

"But do you know that it was them?"

"I found this in the office, just after I had taken you to hospital." Amanda handed Adam a small match book.

"What's this?"

"Turn it over and read what it says."

"What? Oh my. . . The Blue Moon Wine Bar."

"Then I saw this in the local paper the day after Kate had been taken." Amanda took the newspaper out of her bag and handed it to Adam he read down the obituary column. "You see they think that they have me. I asked the newspaper, I was told that the advert had been phoned through to the offices."

"What are they going to do to Kate?" Adam wiped a tear from his cheek.

"I'm sorry Adam."



"There's nothing you could have done about this. It could have been me. It could have been you."

"But if I hadn't been so stupid in the first place."

"It's all done now." Adam sat up and swung his legs out of bed.

"What are you doing?" Amanda stood up.

"Pull the curtains closed please. There's nothing I can do while I'm lying here."

"But Adam!"

"No! I need to help Kate. . . And you."

"Thank you Adam. I really don't know what I would do without you."

"Can you get my clothes out of the bedside cabinet."

\*\*\*

A few minutes later Adam and Amanda were walking out of the hospital. They got into Amanda's car.

"So what do we do now?" Amanda started the engine.

"I think we go down to London and face the staff of The Blue Moon wine bar."

"What will that achieve?" Amanda frowned.

"It will let us see if they are really behind this. Perhaps you can sort this all out, perhaps James will let you pay the money back in instalments."

"Oh don't be stupid, ten million pounds in instalments, I'd be dead well before I got there."

"Kate might be dead if we do nothing. Can you think of anything better to do?"

\*\*\*

Kate was resting. It was the first time she had been left alone in hours, constantly being shouted at, they were still talking about the money. What money..? And why did they keep calling her Miss Bishop? She wished she could be anywhere else.

~~~

Chapter 6

Amanda looked sternly ahead as they drove, they were just reaching the outskirts of London.

"You're very quiet. . ." Adam looked.

"I'm thinking." She didn't take her eyes off the road.

"Penny for them?"

"I don't know. Are we doing the right thing? I mean facing them like this, what are they going to do? What is going to stop them just grabbing me and you and that would be it. . ."

Amanda was silent, she indicated and moved into the inside lane.

"This is a wine bar in the middle of London. I don't think they can just bump us off without anyone noticing."

"Thanks Adam but you haven't convinced me."

"I haven't even convinced myself. Here we are with no one knowing where we are just attacking the cobra in its den. I just hope we can catch them unawares. Perhaps if you can reason with them, maybe we can save Kate." Adam stopped. "Look we have to do something, even if I get killed. I couldn't just let myself sit back while they. . ."

"You really love her don't you?" Amanda looked briefly across towards Adam.
"Above everything else. . . She's not going to die is she?"
Amanda remained silent.

The yard was quiet. Caroline sat in the tack room polishing a saddle. The door opened and Karen walked in.

"Hello Caroline." Karen smiled.

"Oh it's you. . ." Caroline shook her head and went back to work.

"What sort of welcome is that for a friend?"

"Friend! Friend? Where? I only see someone who got me deliberately drunk just to get me into trouble. If it hadn't been for you Kate would still be here!"

"What the hell do you mean?"

"Adam and Kate wouldn't have gone out together, they wouldn't have argued."

"What are you talking about?" Karen sat on the floor in front of Caroline.

"It's what the police said, that Adam and Kate argued, that she hit him. They think she must have thought that she had killed him, so ran off. . . They were so happy together. The only thing they could have argued about was what you did to Amanda."

"And did you tell the police that?" Karen snarled.

"I. . ."

"You did, didn't you?" Karen stood up sharply. "You had better be very careful Caroline. You know what happened to the person who cried wolf. . ." Karen raised her voice.

"What are you telling me?" Caroline shuddered.

"I wouldn't help the police with their enquiries, because people have a strange way of disappearing from this yard. Now we don't want that to happen to you, do we." Karen spoke softly, close to Caroline's face.

"No. . ."

"Good. . . What did the police say. . ."

"They said that there was very little they could do. Unless they found Kate." Caroline whimpered. "I didn't want to get you into trouble. . . Honest."

"I know. . . I'm just a little on edge, what with Adam being attacked and all that. . . I'm sorry I shouted at you." Karen smiled warmly and left the room, leaving Caroline on the verge of tears."

"We're almost there. . ." Amanda parked the car beside a parking meter in a side street and switched off the engine. "We can walk to the wine bar from here."

They got out of the car and walked along the busy street, completely ignored by the crowds who pushed past them. Within a few minutes they arrived. The front of the bar had been blacked out, except for a neon sign whose cold blue neon letters flickered "The Blue Moon" in a scrolling script.

The interior was dark, small lamps on each table formed glowing circles of light. There were very few people around, the lunch time rush had come and passed and now the mid afternoon was running slowly. Amanda stepped towards the bar. The bartender opened a hatch in the bar and walked towards them.

"Look I'm going to have to ask you to leave, this is a high class establishment."

"I need to speak with James."

"He certainly will not speak with you. Now can you leave!" The bar tender reached under the bar and pushed a button. A door at the back of the room opened and two large men in dinner jackets and black bow ties appeared, they walked slowly towards Amanda and Adam.

"He will talk to me. . . Just tell him its Amanda." At that moment she one of the large men forcibly picked her up. "Put me down! Adam do something." Amanda looked towards Adam who was being held by the other man. They were dragged towards the front door. Just as they reached the door, it opened. "James?"

"Do I know you?" The man looked towards Amanda. "You! Put her down!" The bouncer dropped Amanda like a hot potato. "Are you all right? I'm so sorry about this. Please come with me. . . I think we should talk."

Adam and Amanda were escorted to a small office at the back of the wine bar.

"You can wait outside." James nodded to the two bouncers. He stepped back into the office and sat down behind his desk. "What are you doing here? I had heard that you had been kidnapped."

"No. . ." Amanda paused. "One of my staff has been kidnapped. I think the kidnappers must have thought they had me." She stopped. "I thought it might have been you." Amanda laughed nervously.

"What! Please Amanda I am a gentleman." James smiled and took her hand.

"But the money?" Amanda paused. "You know the bank account. . ."

"That was a mistake. . . An error, the funds were processed to the wrong account. I hoped that you would be able to just look after it for a short while. While I was unavailable." James smiled. "We saw that you had closed the account, my people were worried that you had left us. I knew that you would come back though. . . Where are you now?"

"I am running a. . ."

"Nowhere in particular." Adam cut in. Amanda stared at him. "No we're all over the place, never in the same place twice. Isn't that right!"

"Is he your bodyguard?" James laughed.

"You haven't met my brother. Adam this is James. James this is my brother Adam." They stared at each other, but did not shake hands.

"I see that your dress sense hasn't changed much. . ." James smiled. Amanda looked down at her jodhpurs and boots. "You didn't take any of the clothes I bought for you."

"I couldn't take those.."

"Amanda they are no use to me.. You can come and collect them, perhaps you would like to join me for some lunch. I own a wonderful little place just down the road."

"Well James. I really would. . ."

"We haven't got the time." Adam stepped towards the desk.

"We're not in any hurry." Amanda stared at Adam.

"I think you will find that we are. . ." Adam scowled.

"That is a shame. . . You see we have so much to talk about." James stood up and picked a book off the shelf above his desk. "You see, our people made an unfortunate mistake in transferring a large amount of money to your bank account. Now I am a very patient person, so

when you disappeared and took the money with you I was willing to wait for you. But some of my people have not got the patience that I have, they are beginning to ask questions about that money. You see it was to be used to pay a debt. A debt to some rather unpleasant people, it's an unfortunate business. But of course if you just pay back the money, the debt can be recovered and everything can be sorted out in a business like way."

"James. . . I have a little problem. . ."

"Please Amanda, I know you are going to tell me that you have the money for me. You are just going to hand it to me and I will let you leave this room. . . Please don't disappoint me, because I don't want to have to pass you to my associates"

"Please let me tell you. I did have the money. . . But."

"But?. . . Let me make this simple for you. I will just ask you, do you have my money?"

"James. . ." Amanda frowned.

"Let me ask you again. . . Do you have my money?" James sat down.

"No. . ." Amanda turned away.

"Oh dear!" James frowned.

"I can get your money. . ." Amanda stood up.

"I'm sorry Amanda. . . I would like to help you, but my associates are very persistent." One of the bouncers burst through the office door.

"It's the police!"

"You two stay here, I haven't finished with you yet!" He ran outside the door.

"Come on!" Adam grabbed Amanda and ran out of the office.

"Are you trying to go somewhere?" The bouncer slammed his hand into Adam's shoulder knocking him back against the desk. Adam grabbed a paperweight and ran towards the bouncer. He bowled the paper weight towards him, catching the man on the side of the head. The bouncer collapsed to the floor, dazed.

"Let's get out of here!" Adam put his shoulder against the fire door at the end of the corridor and smashed it open. He jumped onto a dustbin and swung his leg over the wall. Grabbing Amanda's arm he dragged her to the top of the wall before they both tumbled onto the pavement on the other side. They both ran down the street as fast as they could.

Amanda lent against the car with her hands on her knees breathing heavily.

"Are you okay?" Amanda puffed. "You're bleeding."

"I'm fine. Let's get out of here!" Adam pulled the door open and leapt inside. Amanda pulled sharply away, she sped off down the street, attracting a cascade of car horns. Adam handed her a tissue. "It's okay, wipe your eyes. I think we just won the chance to live for another day."

"Simpson here. . . She wasn't lying, the girl you have isn't the right one. I know what I said, but I've just had them both here today. . . Yes Miss Bishop and her brother. . . Yes, in London." He paused. "No, they got away. Look shut it! I just want this sorted." He clattered the phone down.

It was dark when Adam and Amanda pulled up at the yard. "Are you sure you would like to stay here tonight?"

"It's okay. . ." Adam stepped out of the car.

"You can stay in the cottage tonight if you would like. . ."

"Go on I'll see you tomorrow. We can discuss things then." Adam closed the door.

Amanda drove away. She was nervous about going home alone. She sighed as she pulled up outside the cottage. Opening the door she was sure that she was not alone. There was a sound from the living room. Amanda froze.

"Who's there?"

Adam tried to go upstairs as quietly as he could. Caroline was sleeping gently on the sofa, he crept past her and into the kitchen. Opening the fridge he took out a bottle of milk. He popped the lid and started to drink the cold liquid. Looking out of the window there were only the grey silhouettes highlighted by the full moon that shone above. There was a gentle movement from the living room. He watched as Caroline yawned and stretched.

"How's it all going?" Adam spoke softly. Caroline jumped and turned round.

"Adam?" Caroline stood up and looked into the shadows. Adam stepped forward. "Oh it is you. . . You gave me a fright!" Caroline paused. "I thought that you would be still in hospital."

"I discharged myself this morning. . . I spent the day with Amanda."

"Oh thank goodness. When she didn't come back this morning. . . Well we thought. . ."

"I am sorry, we should have told you what we were doing, but we didn't want to worry you." Adam sat on the sofa next to Caroline. "How is everyone here?"

"No one really knows what's going on. We're all worried about what's happened." Caroline turned towards Adam. "Kate didn't just run away did she?"

"I don't think she did. . ."

"Will she come back?" Adam stood up and walked back to the kitchen, he stood silhouetted in the light of the fridge. He put the half empty milk bottle back inside and closed the door.

"Come on we both need some sleep. . ." Adam paused. "I'll see you in the morning. . . Things might be better then."

Amanda picked up an umbrella she kept in the hallway and edged towards the living room.

"I'm not alone! There are five of us out here. . ." Amanda tried not to show fear as she slowly opened the door. There was a loud crash from the other side. Amanda leapt into the room and was brought down. She fell heavily, knocking her head on the fire-place.

~~~

## Chapter 7

"Wake up!" Kate was shaken roughly awake. She was tied in a sitting position on a wooden chair, her captors had removed her gag. "Good morning!" Kate was surprised, normally she had

been treated more roughly than this. "We have been told that you are not the person we need. .  
."

"So are you going to let me go?" Kate's voice was weak, she stammered out the few words.

"No. . . I'm sorry but now you know too much. I'm afraid that we can't just let you go straight to the police."

"I won't talk. . . ." Kate smiled briefly.

"If only it was my decision. You are going to keep us company for a while."

"And then what?"

"Believe me you don't want to know!" He walked out of the room laughing. Kate sighed. She was past being upset now, she was even past tearful outbursts, the panic had subsided, and now this was just a painful realisation of the inevitable.

Now she knew that it was too late. She hadn't even spoken to her parents for at least three years. It had started a long time ago, after an argument at home, only something silly really. She had crept out of the house the next morning and just run away, never to go back. She now regretted her childishness, and thought of her parents. Now more than ever she wished she could turn the clock back.

\*\*\*

Adam walked back to the office. His first clients would be soon be arriving for their lessons. Amanda hadn't turned up yet, but it was still early and she was probably tired after the long drive yesterday. The first car appeared along the driveway, Adam recognised the driver as one of his clients, grabbing his riding hat he stepped outside to greet her.

He would have liked to give up all his normal work, but things had to carry on, if they didn't the bank would reprocess. It was strange, Amanda had been a millionaire. She could have bought anything she wanted, but she settled for a small rural riding school and a modest cottage. She wasn't someone who felt good about possessions, they had both started with none. Adam shuddered as he remembered the home. They had been abandoned, he was just a baby, Amanda had been a few years old. He knew nothing about his mother, not her name or even a description. They had almost been separated, but fate had thrown them back together again, now Adam knew why she had left and what she had done. She had never spoken about it before, never even told her brother what she had been through.

Now he knew. But back then there had been tears, she had left him. He only knew where when she wrote back to him some days later. Addressed to a shop in London, she used to collect the letters from a friendly newsagent. That way no one would really know where she was, and so she couldn't be taken back to the home. Then there had been the letter telling him that she had bought a yard, he was to meet her at a railway station at a certain time if he wanted to get away. .

Adam remembered waiting on the cold platform at a silent station miles away from anywhere. Clutching the letter, constantly checking and re-checking the time and place. Amanda had been late, so late that Adam was about to get onto the next train, go back and give up hope of ever seeing his sister again, when she arrived. After the hugs and welcomes, she told him that she was now Amanda King, and that he should tell nobody that they were brother and sister. He had argued, but she would not tell him why, and would not let him join her unless he agreed. . .  
A small price to pay.

\*\*\*

He stood by the car door and smiled.

"Hello. . . You're riding Pegasus today. . . Do you know where his stable is? Good! If you get him out I'll see you up in the school."

Adam walked up to the sand school.

\*\*\*

Amanda sat up. Her head was spinning. She rubbed her temples, there was a lump on the side of her head, she touched it briefly sending a stabbing pain across her brain. She looked down and saw that there was an electric flex wrapped round her feet, she looked around and saw that behind the door was a fallen standard lamp. Now it was becoming clear, something had knocked over the standard lamp and she had tripped over the cable. But what had knocked it over? Something pounced on her shoulders, Amanda squealed. Pinkerton jumped down from her shoulder into her lap.

"Oh Pinkerton! Did you knock the lamp over?" The kitten purred as it rubbed his head on her knee. Amanda clutched the mantelpiece to steady herself as she walked to the kitchen. Fumbling in one of the cupboards she took out a bottle of aspirin. After swallowing some tablets the pain in her head dulled slightly. Amanda walked back through to the living room and picked up the lamp. "Come on then Pinkerton. . . Do you want some breakfast." The cat meowed.

\*\*\*

Adam tramped across the school and back onto the yard. He saw Amanda step into the office. Adam followed.

"Hello!" Adam sat down in front of Amanda. "Oh what's that lump on your head?"

"I tripped over a cable last night, banged my head. I'm fine, really I am." Adam stood up and walked to a map of the moor on the wall, coloured map pins were dotted across it. Blue showed pubs and hotels where they could take hacks for lunch. Yellow showed nice outlooks and views, and red, there were red pins across the map. The red pins were the most important, they showed the danger areas, the cliffs, the bogs that could drown a horse and rider, and the military areas. Everyone who took rides out across the moor had to know where every single danger was, and how to look out for them. . . Adam looked across the map, he toyed with a spare red pin before sticking it in the centre of the stables on the map.

"You have to be more careful!" Adam shook his head.

"Don't patronise me!" Amanda yelled. Adam remained silent. "Sorry. . . I'm sorry. . . I'm frightened Adam. . . They're going to get me. . . They'll kill me. . . I don't want to die."

"They can't get you. . ." Adam held her tightly. The office door opened and Karen stepped inside.

"I'm sorry I didn't mean to disturb you. I just needed to know what horses are being used for the next lesson."

"Of course, that's fine. . . Adam handed her the diary, Karen flicked through it and put it back down on the desk.

"Okay. Thanks." She walked out of the office.

"I have to teach another lesson. . . Are you going to be okay?"

"I'll be fine. Really I will!"

\*\*\*

Adam picked up the tack for his horse and walked from the tack room. The rain had started to fall steadily. Stepping into the stable Adam was engulfed by warmth, he stroked the horse's ears as it snuffled in his jacket pockets for pony nuts and mints. As Adam led the horse out of the stable, Caroline walked past leading a horse out onto the yard.

"Hello Caroline!" Adam smiled warmly. "I thought Karen was going to be escorting this ride with me?"

"She said that she didn't want to do it."

"You shouldn't let her push you around you know."

"I didn't. . ." Caroline paused. "Okay. But I really didn't want to argue. I could do with getting out of the yard."

"So long as you're sure. . . How many customers do we have?"

"There are three booked to come out, but the weather might put some off." Caroline turned round in her saddle and saw three other horses being led out. "Of course I may be wrong." She chuckled quietly.

"Never mind. We still have to ride for two hours whether we have one or three, so we had better make the best of it." Adam turned round and faced the other riders. "Right. Are we all ready! Girths all tightened? Okay? Right lets go!" They rode out onto the moor. They trotted out of the yard and up to the top of the hill. Adam paused for a moment and looked around, Caroline rode up beside him. "I was just wondering where we might ride to today?"

"I don't know? What about going to the river and back?"

"That's a great idea." Adam pushed his horse into a canter and the ride went down the hill.

\*\*\*

Amanda watched the ride come back onto the yard.

"You're running a bit late?" Amanda walked over to Adam who dismounted and handed his horse to Karen. "We went a bit further than we expected." Caroline blushed. "I think our navigator needs a few more geography lessons!" He laughed.

"I'm sorry!" Caroline handed her horse to one of the younger grooms.

"Don't worry. . ." Adam smiled. He walked with Amanda to the office. They both stepped inside and sat down. "What do we do now?"

"What?" Amanda frowned.

"What are we going to do about Kate? We can't just sit around." Adam shook his head. "What can we do?"

"You tell me. . . What do we know?. . . We're presuming that she has been taken by James's associates. But where are they? And how can we find her, and if we do find her what do we do then?"

"Tell the police!"

"I did, just after you were attacked. You know what they thought. They just said that Kate had attacked you."

"Tell them everything. . . Tell them about the money, tell them about James."

"They wouldn't believe us. And what if the gang have access to the police, they would kill me. . . They would kill or you." Amanda sobbed.

"You can't run forever. . ." Adam paused. "What made you think that they had Kate, why didn't you believe what the police told you?"



"Well the obituary. . . And this." Amanda held out the match book, Adam took it and looked at the writing on the outside. He threw it back down on the desk. "It's from the Blue Moon."

"I can see that. . . Where did you find it?"

"I came into the office, after I had taken you to hospital, I saw it lying on the floor."

"What in here?"

"Yes it was just lying on the floor here. By the filing cabinet." Amanda pointed to the floor.

"But why? How could it have got in here." Adam looked round. "What do you keep in there?"

"That's where I keep the personal files for everyone on the yard, all the staff." Amanda stood up. "I always keep it locked.." She pulled the drawer which slid open. "What? I'm sure I'd locked it." Adam looked through the tabbed files. Each tab had a name typed onto it, the name of a staff member.

"Your file is missing."

"I don't keep my details in here, just in case this ever happened. Everyone else's are in there." She sighed. "It didn't help though..."

"We have to stop them?"

"But how? I mean, how do we even find them?"

"I don't know. . ." Adam held the office door open. "Come on I'll walk you home."

\*\*\*

When they reached the cottage Adam waited at the front gate.

"Aren't you going to come inside, just for a moment?" Amanda unlocked the door.

"No thanks, I had better get back to the yard." Adam smiled. "You'll be okay."

"See you in the morning Adam." Amanda watched as he walked off into the darkness. She stepped into her cottage. She clicked the light switch, but nothing happened. "Oh!" Amanda stumbled forward. She heard a noise coming from the kitchen. "Pinkerton? Is that you?" In the half light Amanda saw a person standing, waiting for her. "You? What are you doing. . .?" Amanda's sentence was cut short.

~~~

Chapter 8

Adam had not been able to sleep, he stood watching the lightning streak across the dark sky. The rain fell heavily, chilling the air. He thought only of Kate worrying that she would die, he hadn't even had a chance to say goodbye, or to tell her that he loved her.

Adam thought back to the first day that they had met. Kate had come from Cornwall, where she had spent her life working on her parents farm. She was pretty, blond and slim. Adam had been attracted to her from the very beginning. He remembered the first time her had talked to her, the way she had smiled coyly. The time he first took her to the pub, and how they walked home together.

Now she had gone. If only he had looked after her more, if only he had walked round to the back yard with her. If only. There were always so many ifs and buts. He glanced at his watch, three o'clock. Perhaps he should try and get some sleep. Adam walked across the yard, just before he got to the flat he saw a shadowy figure go upstairs. Adam paused, perhaps someone

else couldn't sleep either, as he went upstairs there was no one around. Adam shrugged his shoulders.

Adam went down onto the yard. The other staff had started feeding already. He went into the feed shed.

"Hi Adam!" Caroline clattered a feed bucket down onto the floor and started filling it with pony nuts and bran. "Did you have a good night?"

"I didn't sleep much." He looked outside the door. "No Amanda again?"

"No. Not yet."

Kate woke up. There was another person in the room. Bound with a large quality of nylon rope. Currently the person was lying on the floor facing the opposite direction. Kate gasped as the woman rolled over.

"Amanda what are you doing here?" Kate tried to shuffle her chair towards her. Amanda's eyes widened, a cloth gag stopped her from saying anything. The door of the room burst open.

"Ah! I see you have met your friend again." He smiled at Amanda. "I'm so glad you could join us. We have been expecting you. . . "

Adam paced up and down. It was lunch time and Amanda had not turned up for work. He decided there was only one thing to do. Grabbing his jacket he started off down the driveway. He ran nearly all the way to the cottage, slamming the door-knocker hard when he arrived, there was no response, he rattled the door again. Still no response.

Pulling out his bunch of keys Adam found the one that opened the front door of the cottage, Amanda had given it to him, in case of emergencies. He was sure that this was an emergency. Opening the door he saw Pinkerton rushing towards him, meowing loudly, he picked up the kitten and put it on his shoulder, Pinkerton clawed him.

"Amanda! Are you there?" Adam looked through the kitchen and the living room, and then he dashed upstairs. Amanda's bed had not been slept in, he looked in the cupboard there were her clothes hanging up ready to be worn. "No. . . No!" Adam yelled. He ran back downstairs. As he stepped off the stairs he saw a small white cloth pad, he picked it up and sniffed it, the powerful chemicals made his head spin. Looking down he saw a line of muddy footprints, Amanda always took her boots off before she came into the house, she got paranoid about people making a mess of her cottage. He could only presume the worst. They had put two and two together, and quite frankly it would not have been too difficult to work out. Adam felt so guilty. He sat down. Pinkerton leapt from his shoulder and meowed again. "Oh I'm sorry are you hungry?" Adam walked through to the kitchen and dished out some cat food from an open tin. As the kitten ate, purring quietly Adam sat beside it. "If only you could talk. . . You could answer this. . . If only." That famous 'if' again. . . It was always if. Adam waited for the kitten to finish before picking him up again and grabbing some cat food. "You're going to have to live with me for a while. . . I hope it's only a while." Adam sighed.

Adam opened the door, looking down he saw a plain white envelope lying on the doormat. He picked it up, shuddering when he realised that it was addressed to him, he ripped it open roughly. The letter consisted of newspaper cuttings.

Adam Bishop,

If you want to see your sister alive you had better find ten million pounds. You will be contacted regarding collection.

Adam almost laughed, ten million pounds, that was stupid. He looked at the envelope, perhaps the postmark would give him a clue. . . There was a stamp, but no postmark. He folded the letter and put it in his pocket.

Adam picked up Pinkerton and some tins of cat food and started to make his way back to the yard. As he returned he saw Caroline standing outside the office.

"Hello Caroline." They both walked inside.

"Hi Adam.. And who is this?" Caroline took Pinkerton off Adam's shoulder, the kitten purred loudly.

"This is Pinkerton he is Amanda's kitten. . . I wonder could you look after him for a couple of days you see Amanda is. . ." He paused, watching the change of expression on Caroline's face. "She is a little unwell, so I think she has enough to do looking after herself."

"Okay! I'd love to!" Caroline beamed. Adam opened the desk drawer and placed the letter inside.

"That's strange?" Adam frowned.

"What's up?"

"I had a book of matches in here, and they seem to have gone."

"Oh sorry about that." Caroline pulled the match book out of her jacket pocket. It was open and there was a match missing. "The pilot light on the gas cooker isn't working, I know there are usually matches in the drawer."

"Don't worry about it." Adam looked down at the match book. On the inside there was a set of letters and digits written onto the cardboard in biro. "Now that is strange." Adam looked at the writing. "S..X..6..2..0..6..3..5. Does that mean anything to you?"

"What? No.. It doesn't mean a thing to me?" Caroline shook her head.

"Never mind. . ." Adam sat down at the desk. Caroline left the office. Adam toyed with the matchbook. Perhaps the writing was a clue? But a clue to what? He put it back in the drawer. Now he had to work fast to try and save Amanda and Kate. . . But he had to know where to go, and what to do

Amanda's gag had been removed, her hands tied above her head. She strained against the ropes.

Adam had to take out another hack. Caroline led out a horse.

"Why are you riding out today? Where's Karen?"

"It's Karen's day off." Caroline mounted.

"I really wanted you to stay back here and look after the yard." Adam sighed. "But I suppose that it will be okay running itself. . . I need someone good escorting this ride, we've got a load of people. I really don't know where they all come from!" Adam smiled warmly.

"Lets go then." Caroline walked her horse out of the yard.

The weather had been fine when they started out, but by the time they had ridden for two hours the rain was pouring down. Adam dismounted and handed his horse over, he walked into the office with Caroline. Lighting the gas heater.

"I hate this weather!" Adam dragged his wax jacket off and hung it on a hook. It dripped, forming a puddle on the floor. Caroline pushed her hair back. The office door opened and one of the customers walked in.

"Excuse me?" The woman walked into the office. "That was a great hack Thank you!"

"That's fine, I'm sorry that the weather wasn't so good."

"I was just wondering? Could you tell me where the pub we stopped at is? I would like to take my husband there, but I don't think he would like to ride there!" She laughed.

"Well, let me show you on the map." Adam stood up and walked over to the large map on the wall. Adam traced his finger across the green and grey until he found the small pub. "Ah it's not really close to much.. How can I explain where it is."

"I'll take a map reference for the place, I can find it on one of my maps." She wrote down an eight digit number. "Thank you. . ." Adam looked down at the paper.

"Could you explain that to me?" Adam pointed to the number.

"Yes of course. There is a grid running across the entire country, it's marked on the Ordnance Survey maps. It allows you to find any place using a reference number. If you look at this number, the first two digits, 'SX' tells me what map to look for. In this case 'SX' is the Dartmoor map, the next six digits correspond to the grid on the edge of the map."

"If I gave you a reference could you point it out for me?" Adam smiled.

"Yes of course!" The woman smiled.

"Could you look at this?" Adam showed the woman the number written on the matchbook.

"Of course. Let's see, it's in the Dartmoor area, because of the SX. And so it is. . ." The woman looked across the map and then pointed to a small box on the map. "There it is! It's that small farmhouse."

"Oh great!" Adam reached across and put a green map pin onto the map. "Thanks that's really great." The woman smiled and left the office.

"What was all that about?" Caroline looked at the green map pin.

"It might be something I'm looking for." Adam smiled.

"Come on. . . Let's have some dinner!"

~~~

## Chapter 9

Adam woke early, dressed quickly and went down to the yard. Pausing at the feed room, he made up a single feed and silently walked across the yard to feed his horse, before walking back to the office where he started to write a note.

About an hour later, Adam was mounting up. He glanced at his watch; it would be at least an hour before the rest of the staff would come down. That would give him a good head start. He knew most of the way and could guess the rest. Adam rode off into the darkness. . .

\*\*\*

Caroline unlocked the office and stepped inside, she saw the envelope addressed to her, picked it up and opened it. There was a sheet of paper inside and another envelope.

*Caroline,*

*I have something to do. I have taken a horse and will be out on the moor for most of the day. Please do not try and follow me, I don't want you involved in any heroics.*

*If I don't return by the end of the day please give the enclosed envelope to the police. Otherwise, please don't open it.*

*Thank you Caroline. I know I can trust you to do the right thing.*

*Adam.*

Caroline looked at the second envelope. There was the temptation to open it, to discover what was going on, but Adam had trusted her she folded the envelope and placed it in her pocket.

"Hello Caroline! What's up?" Karen stepped into the office and sat down at the desk opposite Caroline who shrugged her shoulders and handed her the letter.

"I think he's trying to find Amanda and Kate. . ."

"What?" Karen went pale. "Why would he think they would be on the moor?"

"Well, it's strange. He found some sort of map reference on a match book."

"A match book?"

"Yes. . ." Caroline opened the desk drawer and started fumbling around. "It's not here. Adam must have taken it with him."

"What did it look like? Do you remember?"

"Yes, he showed it to me. It was black and had blue writing on it. What did it say?" Caroline sat down at the desk. "I remember it was the Blue something... The Blue. . ."

". . . Moon?" Karen turned round and looked out the window.

"Yes! That's right! How did you know? Did Adam show it to you?"

"Yes. . ." Karen paused and turned round. "This is very serious; Adam could be in a lot of trouble. . . We have to go after him."

"What! But Adam said that we shouldn't!" Caroline picked up the letter and waved it at Karen.

"We would be helping him. We have to do it!" Karen frowned.

"Well if you're sure that is what he would want us to do. . .?" Caroline stood up and looked across the map. "But where do we find him? The moor stretches for miles."

"What was the map reference?"

"I don't know. Wait he put a pin in the map. It's a green one." Caroline scanned across the pins.

"Don't worry about that, can you tack our horses up." Karen watched as Caroline walked across the yard. She picked up the telephone. ". . . Come on! Come on. . . Yes, it's me, there's a problem. You have a visitor on the way. Yes. . . That's right. I have another one here who wants

to act like a hero." She paused smiling. "No don't worry, I'll deal with her." Karen put the receiver down.

\*\*\*

Caroline ran to the deserted tack room. She stepped inside and paused, what was she doing? Sniffing she pulled a tissue out of her pocket to wipe her eyes. "Pull yourself together girl." She told herself aloud and grabbed the tack for their horses. In her rush, she didn't notice the envelope falling from her pocket as she stepped out of the tack room.

\*\*\*

"I found the pin!" Karen smiled as Caroline stepped back into the office.

"Are you sure that is right?" Caroline frowned. "Are you sure you've got the right place?"

"I am sure that it is right. What are you saying?" Karen scowled. "Do you want to help Adam or not?"

"I'm sorry. . . I'm just on edge. . . You understand, I'm sure."

"Of course. . . Shall we get ready?"

"Okay! Let me just leave a note to the rest of the staff." Caroline opened the bottom drawer of the desk. "What's this?" She pulled out a newspaper. "Someone's cut a whole load of letters out of this paper?"

"Oh! Someone must be having a joke!" Karen took the paper, screwed it up and threw it into the wastepaper basket. "We should be getting ready if we want to catch up with Adam. . ." Karen held the office door open.

"Okay?" Caroline grabbed her riding hat.

"You go on. I'll be out in a moment."

\*\*\*

Adam folded the map and put it back in his saddlebag. The place he was looking for was on the other side of the moor. He just hoped that he wasn't going to be too late.

\*\*\*

The rest of the staff had wanted to know what was going on when Caroline and Karen had ridden off onto the moor. They galloped over the hill and into the valley on the other side.

Karen slowed her horse to a trot. Caroline pulled up beside her.

"You're going a bit quickly." Caroline breathed heavily.

"We have to get going. If we hang about it might be too late for them. Could you live with that?" Karen clicked her tongue and pushed her horse into a canter. Caroline shrugged and pushed her horse on.

Caroline was wondering about Karen. She had told her that they should ride out alone and not bring along the rest of the staff. She watched as Karen cantered on in front of her, she seemed to know exactly where she was going; she hadn't looked at the map once.

Caroline sighed, she had been bullied again, she hadn't wanted to go riding across the moor to try to save Adam. Her first instinct was to call the police, let them deal with whatever was going on. Caroline was normally more apt at ducking out of trouble, back when she was at school she had been bullied constantly by the older girls, every day without fail they would steal her dinner money. That had been why she had played truant, she had started by just hanging

around, but then she had started to help at a local riding school. That had been where it had started, she spent more time at the yard than at school.

She could still remember the arguments on the day that the truancy officer had arrived on their doorstep. Her parents had shouted and yelled, Caroline had sat silently in her room, listening to the argument filtering through the floor. She had been forced to go back to school, soon after she had left again and started working with horses. Caroline wiped her eyes. Perhaps she had made a mistake, but then perhaps she was happy being bullied. She had known nothing else. She pushed her horse on.

\*\*\*

Amanda still had her arms tied above her head. She couldn't tell how long she had been tied like this because she had blacked out many hours before. They were still in the tiny stone built room; Kate was lying on the floor, her hands and ankles tightly bound. Amanda felt tears welling in the corners in her eyes. It was not for herself, she had cried tears for herself before, and it hadn't done anything for her. These tears were for Kate, she was here for a reason she would probably never understand, or know. Amanda shuddered, if they were killed, she would have condemned Kate to death.

There was no way out of this situation. No one knew where they were, including herself.

\*\*\*

Adam rode on as fast as he could, checking the map once more. If he had everything right, there should be a small farmhouse on the other side of the next hill. He galloped up the slope until he was on the brink. He stopped his horse and dismounted, tying its reins to a small tree. Slowly he edged down through the heather until he was crouching within fifty yards of the farmhouse.

Built from the native grey granite, one storey high and slightly ramshackle. Perhaps this was the wrong place; maybe he had ridden across the moor just to find an empty farmhouse. The door opened, Adam lay flat against the ground and peered through the heather. The person went back into the building. Adam breathed a sigh of relief. There was a click, and something was pushed into the nape of his neck.

"Don't try anything stupid. Just stand up and turn around with your hands up." The voice was rasping and harsh. Adam stood up slowly and turned round. He shuddered as he saw the gun.

"Please I'm only riding here. . ." Adam pleaded. The man sneered and swung the gun towards Adam's head.

\*\*\*

Karen dismounted. "This is it."

"This is what?" Caroline dismounted and walked to the edge of the quarry where Karen was standing.

"I'm sorry Caroline. This is where it all ends, for you at least."

"What? You're making no sense."

"Perhaps I should explain." Karen grasped Caroline's shoulders and pushed her towards the edge of the quarry. Caroline glanced behind her, below her a dizzying drop with only rock and a small clump of brambles to stop her if she went too far.

"What are you doing?" Caroline shuddered. "This isn't funny you know."

"I liked you Caroline. Don't get me wrong, if you hadn't got involved in all of this we could have got on quite well. But no. . . . You got involved. You know too much!" Karen sighed.

"What do you mean? Got involved in what? You're frightening me Karen!"

"I can't tell you Caroline, you just made a mistake. A mistake you will never know about. It's better that way." Karen turned Caroline towards the quarry. "It's a lovely view isn't it?" Caroline gulped. "What's up Caroline? Are you afraid of heights . . .?"

"No. . ." Caroline whispered.

"I'm glad. Goodbye Caroline." Karen pushed Caroline back, she screamed flailing trying to grasp at anything to stop her fall... "Pleasant dreams. . ." Karen watched as Caroline slipped over the edge and tumbled down into the quarry below.

Karen re-mounted and galloped off across the moor

~~~

Chapter 10

Adam groaned as he tried to get to his feet. He put both hands flat on the ground and slowly opened his eyes.

"Adam!" Kate shuffled towards him. "Oh thank God! We were so worried. They just threw you in here, we thought you were dead."

"Am I alive?" Adam shook his head. "Where am I?"

"I don't know. This is where I was taken after being kidnapped." Kate frowned. "Then Amanda joined me." Kate nodded towards a darkened corner. Adam strained his eyes and looked into the darkness. He saw Amanda hanging from her wrists, tied to one of the roof beams.

"Amanda!" Adam rushed over to her and untied her gag. "Are you okay?"

"Stupid question. . ." Amanda looked up and smiled slightly. "I'm sorry Adam, Kate. It's my fault that you are here."

"Don't be stupid. We've been through more than this, sis."

"No we haven't. . . Adam this is it. You don't understand these people." Amanda sniffed. "I've been stupid. I just hope they will listen to reason. . ."

"What does she mean?" Kate stared at Adam.

"It's a long story. . ."

"I think we have the rest of our lives to tell it. . ." Amanda paused. "So you had better make it quick."

Adam told Kate the whole story.

"Why didn't you tell me that you were brother and sister?" Kate shook her head.

"I was worried that this might happen." Amanda sighed.

"It didn't help much did it?" Kate snarled.

"Kate! Please. . ." Adam frowned.

"Look. . . She is going to get us both killed. Don't you even care?" Kate nodded towards Amanda.

"Of course I care! But she is my sister. I'm sorry that you are here too. But Amanda didn't do this on purpose." Adam sighed. "Please Kate, understand me. If I could have done anything to keep you out of this. . . I only found out about what Amanda had done a few days ago. . . Perhaps if I had known earlier" Amanda looked down. "But one thing it has made me realise that I have never told you how much I need you. . . I love you Kate." Adam took Kate's hand. "After you had gone my life was empty. . . I'm happier here, with you, no matter what is likely to happen, than without you. . ." Adam paused, wiping a tear from his eye. "If we get out of this alive. . . Will you marry me Kate? I know it may come as a surprise, maybe even a shock. . . But I need to tell you how I feel."

"Adam?" Kate sighed. "Oh Adam! Of course I would!" Kate kissed him warmly. "But will we get out of here alive?"

"I don't know? But we have to try. . . If we die, we die fighting!" Adam looked across to Amanda. "I'm sure you agree?"

"I don't know if I have the strength." Amanda looked up to her hands.

"It will take brains and brawn. . . I know we can do it." The door opened. Adam lay back on the ground. A large man walked into the room. He took out a large knife. Amanda gasped as he stepped towards her.

"You have to be ready to meet someone." He brought the knife up and sliced through the rope. "I have to make sure you are ready." Amanda arms dropped to her side.

"For who?" Amanda shuddered.

"It's not my job to know that." He walked towards Adam. "I see lover boy is still out cold. He's a heavy sleeper." He gave Adam a kick in the ribs. "Don't worry! It won't be long now. . ." He left the room, bolting the door from the outside.

"You can get up now." Kate walked over to Adam and touched his shoulders. "Are you okay?"

"I'll survive!" He hugged Kate gently.

"I hope that's true." Amanda sat on the stones. "I really hope that it is true. . ."

"Where are they?" One of the staff looked around. Adam had left early that morning; Caroline and Karen had left soon afterwards. Now the evening had drawn in and none of them had returned.

"I don't know? They leave a note or something?"

"There was nothing in the office or anywhere that I've looked."

"I just can't think they would just leave without even saying anything?"

"They have. So I think we should just leave them to it."

"We can't just leave them. . ."

"But what do we do? We don't know anything. If only there was someone who could help?" The staff reluctantly went back upstairs to the flat. It was going to be another sleepless night.

"Get up!" The man kicked Amanda. She groaned and opened her eyes. "I said get up!" Another kick this time to her stomach. Gasping she slowly stood up. "Get the others awake." The man turned and left the room.

"Come on I think we have to get ready." Amanda gently shook Kate's shoulder; she shrugged and looked around her.

"Oh! I was dreaming, for a moment I thought that I was out of here." Kate frowned. "I see that I'm not."

"Not yet." Amanda hugged her. "I'm sorry Kate."

"It isn't all your fault." Kate smiled faintly. "Do you think Adam was serious about marrying me?"

"He loves you. I don't think that he has been surer of anything in his life." Amanda smiled. "You better look after my little brother."

"That's only if we get out of here alive." Kate sighed. Adam groaned and slowly sat up, clutching his chest.

"I feel awful. . ."

"You have every right to feel awful." Kate helped him to his feet. The door burst open.

"Right you three. Put your hands on your heads and walk through here slowly." Amanda stared at the gun, edging through to the other room with her hands on her head.

"And what are we doing here? Playing Simon say's?" Karen smiled coldly.

"So it was you at the cottage." Amanda hissed.

"Of course it was me. You made it easy for us you know. . . Going down to the wine bar. They didn't realise that they had made a mistake, which was when they told me to sort it out for them again. If they had done their jobs properly, they could have taken you ready for collection.

You see, they are very good at the heavy stuff. But anything involving their brains?" Karen tapped her forehead. "Well it goes without saying. I mean, I told them where they could find you and still they screw it up. But no they just went off and presumed and ended up getting the wrong person. I mean, Kate looks nothing like you. . ."

One of the bodyguards grunted.

"Anyway it was simple for me to get you, a quick drop of chloroform. And of course Caroline. What happened to her was a great shame."

"What?" Adam stepped towards Karen. "What have you done to her? She has nothing to do with any of this."

"Wouldn't you like to know? Let's just say that she won't be saying anything about this anymore."

"Why you!" Adam lunged towards her. One of the men grabbed him before he could hit her.

"Don't lose your temper. . . Or else you will lose your life with it." Karen snarled. "Anyway, you're spoiling the atmosphere."

"You were always a miserable little runt!" Amanda shook her head.

"Thank you for the compliment." Karen smiled. The front door opened and two large men stepped inside. Karen's smile faded slightly. Amanda gasped.

"James?" She ran towards the man. "Oh thank you James. I knew you would come and save me." She was dragged back and thrown to the ground.

"Hello Amanda. . ." James smiled. "I do believe that you are mistaken. I'm not here to save you. Unless you have my money, I'm afraid that I am going to have to do the very opposite."

"Please James. . . ." Amanda fell to her knees and sobbed. "No! Please I'm sorry! I deserve it, but not the others."

"How pathetic!" Karen laughed.

"You think that this is funny do you?" James smiled.

"Yes. . . I do. I enjoy watching people suffer."

"I am so glad." James glanced towards the bodyguards. "Throw her in with the others; I will deal with them all later."

"What!" Karen kicked and struggled against the bodyguards grasp. "What are you doing?"

"You have reached the limit of your usefulness. You see Karen your problem is that you enjoy your work too much. And I'm afraid that our organisation can't afford to have someone like you, there's no controlling you. A very complicated situation, so you have to understand, this is for the best. Goodbye Karen." James paused. "I will have to go now, my... colleagues here will make you as comfortable as possible, but I am afraid that you will not be our guests for long." He sighed. "I wish there was a better way. I liked you Amanda, you do realise that? This is just business. I do hope you will all co-operate?"

"Of course we will co-operate." Adam smiled. Amanda and Kate stared at him in disbelief."

"I am glad..." James smiled. He slammed the door and clicked the padlock shut.

"What the hell are you doing?" Amanda snarled. "Of course we'll co-operate! What are you talking about? He wants to kill us!"

"Shut up!" Adam grabbed Amanda's shoulders. "Do you want to get out of here or not? What I'm going to suggest is a long shot but it might just work. . . ." Adam whispered. Karen cowered in the corner of the room. "We will need your help. If you want a chance to get out of here."

"Why did he do that to me...? I brought you all to him... I did everything he wanted?"

"Haven't you worked it out yet?" Amanda shook her head.

"He told me he loved me?"

"Years ago he told me the same. It means nothing to him. He's a liar and a cheat. This could be your way out."

"But after all I did to you? You would help me?"

"We will all have to help ourselves, as a team."

"I am going to get back to London. I want you to deal with our guests quickly." James paused. "Just let me have a chance to say goodbye to them".

"You fancy her don't you?" The bodyguard laughed.

"No I don't and I suggest that you keep your comments to yourself. If you want to keep your job". James unlocked the door. "I just thought I would say a final farewell..." He stopped. "Where is he?"

"Who?" Amanda smiled.

"Your brother!" James collapsed as Adam leapt from the roof beams and smashed into James's chest. Amanda grabbed his gun. Two of the bodyguards stormed towards the door.

"Stay back!" Amanda held the gun in front of her. The men stepped back out of her way.

"Run!" Adam screamed, smashing through the front door and out onto the moor.

"Stop them!" James yelled. "No wait.... Get back here!"

"What are you doing?" The guard grabbed James's lapels. "We almost had them!"

"You don't seem to realise what they are running into. If you had bothered to read a map, you would see that we are on the edge of a huge bog. There is no way out for them. How fitting, locals drown in a bog. What a very clean way to get rid of all our problems in one go." He smiled. "Let's go..."

"They aren't following us! Why the hell have they stopped?" Adam looked down. "No!"

"What's up?" Kate looked across to Adam.

"We're sinking! Don't you realise. . . They aren't following us because we've run right into a bog. . ."

"This is it. . ." Adam had sunk up to his waist. "I'm sorry Kate. . . Looks like we won't get married. . ."

"I love you Adam. . ." Kate smiled.

"Look shut up!" Amanda screamed. "We are all sinking fast, I'm up to my armpits and you are telling each other how much you love each other. . . You should be thinking how we get out of here!"

"We don't!" Adam snarled, "I thought that was simple. . . I really thought that, was simple." Tears glistened across his cheeks.

"Look stop arguing!" Kate shook her head. "This really is it. . ." She tried to struggle against the cold mud. "There's isn't anything we can do."

~~~

## Chapter 11

Adam clutched Kate's hand; she had sunk up to her shoulders.

"Wait!" Amanda looked up.

"What?"

"I thought I heard something?"

"Like what?"

"I don't know?" Amanda paused. "It sounds like a. . . Look!" Amanda pointed up; a yellow RAF helicopter came into view. She waved her arms. The helicopter paused overhead and a person started coming down on a hoist. "Oh thank God! We're saved. . . Kate?" Amanda looked round. "Adam! Kate's gone!" She screamed. Adam ducked under the surface and tried to feel for Kate; grabbing hold of some of her clothing, he pulled her back above the surface. The man on the hoist hung just above the ground.

"Grab her for God's sake!" Adam forced one of Kate's hands into the arms of the RAF man. He grabbed her and hoisted Kate towards the helicopter.

"She's safe now. . ." Amanda sighed. "At least I saved her."

"What? No Amanda...! Grab hold of me. . ."

"Let go of me! Save yourself." Amanda cried out. "Please Adam! You still have a chance!"

"No! If you go so do I!" Adam clutched hold of her arms.

"Adam no!" Amanda screamed. "I deserve this!"

"Shut up!" Adam slapped her across the face. "Please!" The man came back down on the hoist. "Take her! I'll be okay, but please hurry!"

"Adam!" Amanda screamed. "Please!" She yelled as she was hoisted towards the hovering helicopter.

Adam felt the mud seep across his chin and towards his mouth. He held his arms in the air as the mud crept up, feeling its coldness against his teeth and seeping into his nose. Everything went dark.

"You'll be okay now mate!" Adam found himself flying thirty feet above the moor.

"Oh! What's going on?" Adam groaned. Amanda hugged him as he stepped onto the metal floor of the helicopter.

"Adam! I'm sorry! I'm so glad that you're alive. . ."

"What about Kate?"

"I'm here!" Kate lay in the corner of the helicopter. Adam embraced her. "I thought that I was a goner. . ."

"How did they get to us? How did they know that we were there?" Adam looked around the cockpit.

"I would thank your staff for that. . ." Sergeant Lucas removed his head set and shouted across the cockpit. "and you Adam, they found the note you left Caroline."

\*\*\*

"What have you found there?" The man walked briskly after his dog, who was barking vigorously. "Oh my God!" He looked down at the silent body lying in front of him. He ran back towards his cottage.

The Land Rover pulled up and the paramedics stepped out.

The first man knelt beside her and felt for a pulse. "Good grief she's still alive. Let's get a drip in here." Caroline knew nothing about those who were trying to save her as her life slipped away at the base of the cliff.

\*\*\*

"We don't have to stay." Adam and Kate walked arm in arm down the ward. Amanda frowned.

"It's okay for you. . ." She sighed.

"How long do you have to stay in for?" Adam sat down beside the bed.

"A couple of days!" Amanda snorted. "I'm okay. . . Anyway I want to get back to the yard."

"Look, you need some rest. Think of this as a holiday. The yard will be okay." Adam smiled. "You heard about Caroline? She's in a bad way but they say she'll survive. We haven't been able to see her yet; she's still in intensive care."

"She didn't deserve what happened to her."

"She'll be okay in the end." Adam paused, he looked down the ward. "Who's this?"

"Hello Amanda. . . Adam, Kate." Sergeant Lucas handed the bouquet of flowers to Amanda. "How are you feeling?"

"We'll leave you to it." Adam walked back down the ward.

"Who is he?"

"A police officer. A police officer I think we will be seeing a quite a lot more of!" Adam laughed; he walked up the ward with Kate in tow. As they reached the end of the ward, two uniformed police officers stopped them.

"Excuse me. . . Are you Mr Adam Bishop?" The first officer consulted his notebook.

"Yes that's me. . . Is there a problem?" Adam frowned.

"Do you know a Miss Caroline Jones?"

"Yes. . ." Adam paused. "Is she all right?"

"Please come with me. . ." The officer walked briskly towards one of the lifts and pressed the call button. The doors opened with a metallic grate and they all stepped inside. The police officer pressed the button marked 'B', the lift whirred to life.

\*\*\*

"I wonder what they wanted?" Amanda watched as Adam and Kate walked off with the police officers.

"I don't recognise those Police officers. . ." Lucas frowned.

"Are you sure? They must be from another station. . ."

"They had ID numbers from our section..." Lucas stood up. "I'm just going to make a quick phone call."

\*\*\*

The lift lurched and the doors opened. The police officer stepped out into a dim corridor, there was the noise of heavy machinery running. They walked past ceilings lined with hissing pipes and dripping valves. The police officer stepped through a door to the side of the corridor. Adam and Kate were ushered through into a large room with a stainless steel operating table standing in the centre. There was a putrid stench in the air; Kate put her hand over her mouth. Adam turned; the second policeman stood blocking the exit.

"What is this place?" Adam looked around.

"This?" The policeman pulled out a pistol. Kate gasped. He screwed a silencer onto the barrel. "This is the morgue. I think it will become rather fitting for you." He laughed.

"So you're going to kill us. . ." Kate sighed loudly.

"You don't sound surprised. . ." The man raised his eyebrows.

"No. . ." Kate suddenly ran forward, ducking her head down, she hit the man solidly in the stomach. He fell to the ground gasping. "Come on Adam!" She yelled as the other officer ran towards him. He turned and kicked the man in the shin's. Kate ran and pulled the door. They ran down the corridor.

"Great move! I won't ask where you learnt that! Where now!"

"Here!" Kate ducked through a set of double doors and into the kitchen. She knocked a person and a pile of china plates flying, they clattered to the floor with a loud crash. Kate kept running, looking behind her she saw that the two police officers were coming through the doors. "Hurry up Adam! Here!" Kate pulled a large steel handle and pulled open the heavy door. They both dived into the room, the door slammed shut. Kate skidded along the floor and crashed behind a set of shelves.

"What is going on here officer?" A woman in a white chief's outfit approached the two officers.

"Nothing to worry about Madam. We are looking for a couple of suspects, we have reason to believe that they came through here."

"Yes. . . I think I saw them go into the freezer." The chief pointed towards the white steel door.

"Thank you. . ." The officers walked towards the freezer and opened the door, he stepped inside. Adam pushed himself against the wall. The man walked down the central aisle. "They aren't in there." He slammed the door and took a pair of handcuffs from his belt, which he threaded through the locking hasp on the catch. "I have to keep this door locked until my colleagues have checked for fingerprints and the like. . ."

"Oh!" The chief looked surprised. "Are you sure they aren't in there?"

"No there's nothing but frozen meat in there. . . They may have doubled back and left the kitchens. . . If you can keep this area clear. Just so that you don't lose any forensic evidence. . ."

"Okay. . . . ." The chief watched as the two officers left the kitchen. She went back to work.

"What was that about?" The man pushed through the double doors.

"Shut up." The other man had a mobile phone in his hand. "Yes. . . I'm sure that the job will be completed. . . Yes, it will look like an accident. Thank you." He switched off the phone. "I saw the girl in there. . . They must be together."

"So why didn't you stop them there?" The other man frowned.

"Why bother? They aren't going anywhere!" He laughed.

"Very good!" The other man smiled and pulled his tunic off, he threw it in a dustbin in the corridor.

\*\*\*

"What's up?"

"Bad news. . . Those two officers aren't who they say they are. . ." Lucas frowned.

"What do you mean?"

"The numbers they had on their shoulders, their ID numbers. They don't exist. . ."

"What?"

"I've called for backup. . ." Lucas took Amanda's hand. "I'm sorry but I think that Adam and Kate may be in some trouble."

\*\*\*

"I'm cold. . . Let's get out of here!" Kate stood up and walked to the door, she pulled the handle. "It's stuck. . ."

"Come on!" Adam grabbed the handle and pulled as hard as he could. "Oh dear!"

"What do you mean? Oh dear?" Kate looked up at him.

"I mean Oh dear we can't get out" Adam walked back to the back of the freezer. "Stand back Kate!" Adam ran towards the door and rammed his shoulder against it. He bounced back and fell onto the floor.

"Are you okay?" Kate knelt down beside him. Adam grimaced. "We're in trouble aren't we?"

"Yes Kate. . . I really think that we are in a bit of trouble." Adam smiled. "Never mind. . ."

"What! Never mind!" Kate yelled. "How can you be so bloody cheerful?" Kate started sobbing. Adam put his arm round her.

"I'm sorry Kate. . . I don't know what else to do. . . I've been knocked out, tied up, shot at, nearly drowned in a bog and now I'm going to freeze to death. I really don't care anymore. I'm just trying to be realistic."

"Oh Adam what are we going to do?"

"I really don't know Kate? We can't get out. I think that we had better try and keep warm." Adam stood up and took his jacket off. "Here have this..."

"No Adam! I can't take your coat." Kate handed it back.

"Kate take it. . . Please. . ." Adam smiled. "It will give you a better chance." Adam helped Kate put the coat on. Her tears were freezing as they ran down her cheeks.

"I really hope we get out of here. . ." Kate hugged Adam. "Because I would really love to have a husband like you."

"I'm flattered. . ."

"No after all we've been through. . ." Kate sobbed.

"Come on Kate. No more tears. . ." Adam glanced up at the thermometer on the wall, minus twenty-five degrees centigrade, Adam shuddered.

\*\*\*

". . . Here is a photograph of them both. We are presuming that they are somewhere in the hospital. I want this place searched from top to bottom. Look everywhere, even if it is their bodies we found, I want them found." Lucas watched as the officers split up and started looking through the hospital.

"What you said about their bodies. . ." Lucas span round and saw Amanda standing behind him.

"You should be in bed." He put his hands on her shoulders.

"I need to find him. . . He's my brother. I can't just lie in bed. . . Please Simon."

"Okay. . . I shouldn't do this but okay. . ." Lucas smiled. "I'll see if I can find you some proper clothes."

"Thanks!" Amanda hugged him warmly.

~~~

Chapter 12

Adam knocked on the door of the freezer.

"I don't think anyone can hear us. . ." Kate shook her head. Her hair was frosted.

"We have to do something. . ." Adam slumped down on the floor. "I'm cold. . ."

"So am I. . ." Kate shuddered. "Come here. . ." Adam sat down beside Kate. They hugged each other.

"Come on. . ." Lucas looked at his watch.

"Okay. . ." Amanda pulled the curtain back; she was wearing a set of green overalls from the hospital's operating theatres. "Where do we start?"

"Well we have officers searching everywhere except for the basement." Lucas pointed to a plan of the hospital.

"What's down there?"

"The morgue, kitchens and the incinerators."

"Great. . ." Amanda frowned.

"They'll be safe, I'm sure. . ."

"Now say it like you mean it. . ."

"I can't do that without lying." Lucas walked down the ward. "Let's go."

"I'm frightened." They walked out into the corridor and into the waiting lift. Lucas pressed the button and the lift whisked them down into the bowels of the hospital. They stepped out into the corridor below and walked into the morgue. Amanda gasped as she breathed in the stale air. "Ugh!" Lucas pulled open the refrigerated drawers.

"They aren't in here."

"Thank goodness." Amanda sighed. "Can we get out of here. . . ?" She held the door open and walked back out into the corridor. "What's in here?" Amanda pushed through the double door and stepped into the steaming kitchens.

"What are you doing in here?" The chief turned round.

"Detective constable Lucas." Lucas showed his identity card.

"Not more of you..." She frowned. "Look there is no one here, and perhaps you can let me have my freezer back!" She frowned and started walking away.

"What do you mean?" Lucas stepped closer.

"Two people ran through the kitchen earlier, followed by two police officers." The chief walked towards the freezer. "He locked the door, said that someone else needed to look for evidence."

"And what about the two people?"

"He said that they had run out of here. Strange really, as I certainly didn't... "She stopped as she watched Amanda's shocked face." "What's going on here?"

Lucas ran to the freezer and pulled at the handcuffs.

"Get me a piece of steel, a knife sharpener, something like that!" Lucas followed the chief and grabbed the sharpener. He forced it into the freezer's door handle and forced it. The catch snapped.

"I hope you are going to. . . ." The chief stopped when the door opened, Adam and Kate crouched together in the centre of the freezer. Amanda screamed and started sobbing; she ran towards Adam and clutched him in her arms. He was silent and cold, his hair white with frost and his skin a shade of blue. Kate moved slightly.

"He gave me his coat." Kate whispered, her teeth rattling. "He gave me his coat."

"Get them out of here! Please get them out of here!" Amanda tried to pull them both out of the freezer.

"Miss Bishop." The nurse bustled into the waiting room. Amanda stood up. "Can you come with me please?" She followed the nurse into a small room. There was a white coated doctor waiting for them.

"I'm sorry to keep you waiting." He smiled. "Your brother was very brave. He gave away his coat to save the young woman, she wouldn't have survived otherwise. He is also very lucky." Amanda gasped. "His metabolism slowed down as hypothermia set in. In simple English, his heart and breathing slowed down but it kept him alive." The doctor paused. "He is very weak, but he is alive."

"Thank god!" Amanda wiped her cheek.

"The nurse will take you to see him." The doctor smiled. "Your brother is lucky, another couple of minutes..."

Amanda followed the nurse through the wards until they came to Adam lying silently on a sea of white sheets. His skin was back to a warm pink. He was attached to a series of heart and breathing monitors. "Adam. . ."

"Hello sis. . ." Adam's voice was rasping and quiet.

"How are you feeling?"

"Warmer. . ." Adam smiled briefly. Amanda sat on the edge of the bed and hugged him.

"You frightened me. . ."

"I frightened myself." Adam looked up at the ceiling.

"You saved Kate you know."

"It was nothing. . ." Adam whispered. "How is she?"

"I haven't seen her yet."

"Tell her I love her. . ."

"She knows. . ." Amanda whispered. "I'll tell her." She added aloud.

"Thanks sis. . ." Adam put his head back on the pillow.

"He's tired. I think you had better let him rest." The nurse smiled.

"Okay. . . I would like to see Miss Grimshaw."

"Of course." They walked to one of the other wards. Kate was sitting up in bed. Her eyes were red. She smiled when she saw Amanda walk down the ward.

"Hello Amanda." Kate smiled. "How's . . .-?"

"He's okay. Weak. . . But okay. He asked me to tell you he loves you." Amanda paused. "Have your parents seen you yet?"

"They don't know I'm here." Kate looked away.

"I told them you are here."

"Amanda please!" Kate pleaded.

"Kate. Tell them. Please tell them everything. They were concerned about you; they have been trying to get in touch with you for a long time." Kate lay back on the bed. "I don't know why you haven't called them, and I don't really care, but now is the time to tell them about everything Kate." Amanda stood up. "It took me a long time to find your family Kate, please, at least talk to them." Amanda glanced at her watch. "They'll be here soon. Tell them about Adam." Kate watched as Amanda walked away...

Kate lay back and sighed. Her parents wouldn't understand what she had done.

"Kate! How are you?" Kate sat up; her parents were standing beside the bed. Her mother rushed towards her and hugged her.

"Hello Mum. . . Dad." Kate smiled briefly. "I'm sorry."

"What for?" Kate's mother sat down beside the bed.

"For everything, for not contacting you. . . For running away, for everything!" Kate sobbed. "I didn't know what to say, or do. . ."

"Kate you can always talk to us. . . Please remember that. . ." Kate's father took her hand. "We respect you. . ."

"I'm sorry. . . I was frightened, I needed to do something. But I had nowhere to turn. That was when I met Adam."

"Adam?"

"Adam is my. . ." Kate paused. "I'm going to get married."

Kate's mother smiled. "I hope we are invited."

"You mean that you aren't angry about it?"

"Why should we be angry? If you are sure that you have made the right decision. . ."

"I have. . . He's saved my life twice and we love each other. . ."

"Tell us about him. . ."

"Caroline. . ." Amanda sat down. Wires and tubes surrounded Caroline. "I have to apologise." Caroline lay silently. Amanda took her hand.

"I'm very impressed." James smiled and turned his chair back to the two men. "It was a very interesting way to get rid of them. Something even I would be proud of. You are sure that the job is completed this time."

"No one knew that they were in there, by the time anyone had realised what was going on they would be just a pair of frozen turkeys." The man laughed. "And the money?"

"Of course. . ." James reached into his desk drawer. "You have done very well." The door slammed open, a group of police officers stormed into the room.

"Mr James Simpson, I am placing you under arrest for murder, attempted manslaughter, fraud, precession and sale of category A drugs, need I go on?"

"I really don't know what you mean?" James smiled.

"You're going to be going down for a long time. . ."

"How are you feeling?" Kate smiled. She watched as Adam did up the last few buttons on his shirt.

"All the better for seeing you. . ." Adam picked up his bag. "Shall we go?"

"I'll be glad to leave this place. . . I really hate hospitals."

"It's not been that bad!" Adam paused. "Actually? Yes I think I agree with you." He started walking down the ward. They reached the corridor and pressed the lift button, the door slid open and they stepped inside, Kate shuddered as Adam pressed the floor selector.

"Not the basement please. . ."

"Don't worry it's the ground floor we're going to." The lift doors shut and the lift went slowly downwards. The doors opened again on the ground floor. Kate gasped as she saw the two police officers standing waiting outside. They stepped past her into the lift. "Come on calm down Kate. . . It's all over now. Trust me!"

"Are you sure?" Kate frowned.

"James has been arrested. They say he will be in prison for a very long time."

"He was in prison before, he'll be out again." Kate frowned.

"Not for a good few years, and who knows where we'll be then. He can't harm us now." Adam pushed the doors opened and stepped out into the sunshine. "Oh wow! Fresh air, how I've missed it!" He looked around. "Where's Amanda? I thought that she was going to give us a lift back?"

"I'm here. . ." Amanda stepped out from behind Adam. "I have to take you shopping."

"Shopping?" Adam laughed. "What do I need to buy?"

"Adam. . . I'm not going to escort you down the aisle in jodhpurs and wellies!"

"What?"

"You need a suit. . . That's if you still want to marry me!" Kate smiled. Adam hugged her warmly, tears spilling from his eyes.

"I do!" Adam sighed. "Thank you Kate. . ."

"Miss Amanda Bishop." Amanda span on her heels. She stared at the police officers standing in front of her.

"Yes. . . Can I help you?"

"Miss Amanda Bishop I am arresting you for handling stolen money."

"What?"

"If you would like to come along with me please."

"No!" Amanda screamed the officer clicked handcuffs on Amanda's wrists. "Adam!"

"Please Miss Bishop." She was ushered to a waiting police car. Adam turned round and watched in shock as she was driven off screaming.

"Oh my God! They've taken Amanda." He ran across the hospital car park after the police car.

~~~

## Chapter 13

Adam ran across the car park as fast as he could until he was level with the car. Grabbing the driver's door handle he yanked the door open. The officer gasped as Adam took the steering wheel and forced the car to veer onto a flowerbed at the side of the road.

"What the hell are you doing?"

"Don't you dare try and take my sister! I'll rip you apart!" Adam tried to hit the police officer, but the other police officer grabbed him and wrestled him to the ground. Forcing his arms behind his back, they roughly handcuffed him.

"Get him in the back!"

\*\*\*

"Tell me that again. . ." The detective frowned. Amanda went back over the story. She had been in the interview room for a number of hours, but she really couldn't tell how long she had actually been there. The door opened, Amanda didn't look up until she heard the familiar voice of Simon Lucas. He smiled briefly at her and then took the other detectives out of the room. Amanda laid her head on the table.

"This really doesn't seem fair." Amanda looked up and saw a young WPC step out of the shadows. "I mean after all you and your brother have been through."

"How is Adam? Do you know?" Amanda realised that she must be slightly younger than herself. Just think, if she had become a police officer, none of this would have happened. And she could have had a good pension. Amanda sighed.

"I'm sorry. . . I might be able to find out later when they come back. I can't leave you alone."

"I understand." The door opened again. The two officers stepped back inside.

"We have been told about your situation, and we know that this is difficult for you, we are sorry but you have to understand. In essence the ten million pounds which you took had been raised by a money laundering process, and you were an accessory."

"But I don't have the money. . . You know that. I've told you it all before."

"We understand that, but we still have to prosecute you." The officer frowned. "If there was anything else we could do. . ."

"What happens now?" Amanda blinked away her tears.

"I'm afraid you will have to go to court. We will allow bail."

"What does as yet mean?"

"It means that, although you will not be kept in prison until your trial, you may still be looking at a few years' imprisonment."

"Can I go now?"

"You will be contacted with a court date as soon as possible."

"I want to see Adam. . ."

"Of course. He can leave with you. In the circumstances, we will not be pressing charges."

"Thank you. . ." Amanda stood up. She was led down to the cells, she saw Adam's name chalked on a small blackboard outside one of the cells. When the door opened, she saw him sitting glumly on the end of a plastic bed. "Adam. . ." He looked up.

"I can't take this anymore. . ." Adam looked back at the floor. Amanda sat down beside him. "I thought that they were going to kill you."

"I know. . ." Amanda took his hand. "Shall we go home?"

\*\*\*

Kate ran towards Adam when he stepped out of Amanda's car. She hugged him warmly.

"Please Kate. . ." Adam smiled briefly. "I'm a bit delicate at the moment."

"I was worried. . . What happened?" Kate took his hand.

"I'll tell you later."

~~~

Chapter 14

"All rise." Amanda stood in the dock; three months had passed waiting for the trial. She just wanted this to be behind her now.

"I have now had time to consider this case." The judge wheezed. "I have looked at the whole situation. I must point out that you Miss Bishop, handled stolen money and used it for your own gains. I understand that you were young and maybe you didn't realise the full implications of what you were doing. However you did break the law and you must be punished for this." Amanda wavered; she grabbed hold of the edge of the dock to steady herself. ". . . I understand that you went through great difficulties, and indeed you and your brother were almost killed in the process of Mr Simpson's organisations 'revenge'. I have to take this into account and the fact that you run a thriving business that is of use to the local community. . ."

Kate gripped Adam's hand tighter as they looked down from the public gallery. They had been told that Amanda could be sent to prison for at least five years, she could never survive like

that. She was used to working in the open air, riding out on the moor, living in her own cottage, having her own life.

"So I therefore have decided to sentence you . . ."

Amanda knew that she deserved everything that she got. She had resigned herself to that fact for many years now. If she had never run away from the home she would have never had this happen to her, if she hadn't taken the money that had been put in her bank account. It was all her fault, she had complete control over her own destiny, now as she stood in front of the judge she deserved five years, maybe even ten.

"- . . . To sixty hours community service. I have decided not to have you imprisoned, as I believe that. . ." Amanda didn't listen to the rest of the judge's speech. She almost laughed aloud with relief. She turned and looked up to Adam and Kate's smiling faces in the public gallery. Perhaps this was a turning point. Amanda paused. This was a turning point. She convinced herself that from now on things would be for the better. "And because of the successful conviction of Mr Simpson there is a substantial reward which will be payable to yourself, your brother and Miss Grimshaw." Amanda snapped back to reality. A reward? See, things were getting better already. She smiled to herself and walked slowly out of the dock. As she stepped out of the courtroom, she was met by Adam who hugged her.

"Well done!" Amanda looked up and saw Simon watching her from a distance.

"Excuse me Adam." She freed herself and walked over to Simon. "Thank you."

"You deserved the judgement you got." He smiled. "I have a gentleman with me who would like to talk to you."

"Oh yes?"

"I think he may have an interesting proposition for you." Simon led Amanda to a small room. She waved to Adam and Kate before he shut the door.

"How long is she going to be?" Kate paced up and down the corridor.

"I don't know? I don't think this was a planned meeting!" Adam chuckled. The door opened and Amanda stepped out, smiling warmly. "All right! You look like the cat that got the cream."

"Something like that."

"What was that all about?" Kate stepped towards her smiling.

"You'll find out soon enough. Now I don't think that we ever got you that suit did we?"

"Not as yet. . ." Adam gripped Kate's hand.

"Well while we are in town. I'm sure Kate can find some shopping to do." Amanda chuckled.

"I have a few more things to sort out." Kate kissed Adam and walked off down the corridor.

"What did they say to you to make you so happy?" Adam stared at his sister. "It can't be the reward money; I know you never really cared about that."

"You're right Adam. . . It's not the money." Amanda paused. "Come on, we have to get you a morning suit."

"Okay. . ."

"Oh that is very you sir!" The salesperson brushed down the lapels.

"I don't know?" Adam looked down at the grey pinstripe.

"Oh Adam its great!" Amanda smiled warmly.

"And the top-hat sir." The salesperson brought the grey top hat out of its box and placed it lightly on Adam's head.

"I'll think we'll take it." Amanda took out her chequebook.

"Amanda. . . Can't we just hire it?" Adam frowned.

"No Adam you should have your own suit. Anyway I can afford it now. . ."

"A very wise choice sir." The salesperson took the jacket and put it in its suit bag.

Adam walked out of the shop with a suit and top hat in a set of carrier bags. They saw Kate walking towards them.

"Hi!"

"Did you find what you wanted?"

"Yes! Are you going to organise the rest?"

"Yes. . . I'll do it over the next few days. . ." Amanda nodded.

"Great!" Kate hugged Adam. "I think everything is going to be fine!"

"But when is it all going to happen?"

"The local vicar isn't that busy, and there aren't all that many relatives who need to be invited. . ." Kate tapped the points off on her fingers.

"So when is it going to happen?"

"I hope you don't have anything planned for Saturday morning. . ." Kate looked at Adam. "You've gone very pale. . ."

"You two don't half hurry with these things. . ." Adam shook his head.

"I had to have something to take my mind off my trial. . . I hoped that you could have your wedding before I was sent to prison, but now." Amanda paused. "Now that really isn't necessary."

"Anyway, we don't want to give you time to change your mind. . ." Kate laughed. Adam kissed her warmly.

"Don't worry there's no chance of that!"

The staff gathered round Adam and Kate as they stepped back on the yard. They bombarded them with questions.

"Please, please. . . We've all had a long day." Adam smiled. "We'll tell you everything later." Amanda stepped out of the car. The staff swarmed round her. She smiled and ignored them before going into the office.

"Well at least something is back to normal!" Kate laughed. "Adam. . . I'm not going to be staying in the flat tonight." Adam frowned. "We're getting married in a couple of days; I have a lot to do. Anyway it's unlucky to see me in my wedding dress before the big day."

"Where are you going?"

"Amanda is going to put me up for a few days." Kate paused. "I hope you understand. . ."

~~~

## Chapter 15

Adam grimaced. His stag night had been the evening before, only a simple affair, just a few drinks with Amanda and some of the staff. Now it was Saturday morning and he was due to get married in a few hours' time. He grabbed his clock and stared at the figures.

"Oh no!" It was eight o'clock already; he had to get to the church by eleven. There was so much to do.

\*\*\*

"Your hair looks great." Amanda walked into the bedroom and put the mug down on the dressing table.

"I'm nervous. . ." Kate sipped the steaming coffee.

"I bet you are!" Amanda smiled. "You're getting married in a few hours time. I would certainly be nervous if I was in your shoes!"

"Am I doing the right thing?" Kate turned round and looked directly at Amanda.

"I don't think you could do anything better!" Amanda hugged her. "You're very lucky. . . I hope I can find someone like him when I get married."

"Thank you Amanda!"

\*\*\*

Adam put his jacket on and stepped out of his room. No staff bustling around, only a note pinned to a pair of riding boots standing outside his room. He picked up the note and read it.

*To get you to the church on time, your transport will be leaving at 10.30am. . .*

*Meet it downstairs.*

It wasn't signed but he recognised Amanda's flowing script. He picked up the top hat and walked down onto the yard. Outside Caroline stood waiting wearing a beautiful pink silk bridesmaid's dress.

"Caroline!" Adam hugged her. "I didn't know that you were out of hospital?"

"Amanda collected me early this morning; I wouldn't miss this for the world!" She smiled. "I have to show you to the transport."

"Thank you. . . I thought that I would have to walk to the church." Adam gasped as he saw the two sparkling grey's, groomed to perfection with pink ribbons plaited into their manes and tails. They were pulling a delicate carriage that too had been dressed with pink ribbons. "I'm amazed."

"Shall we go?" Caroline smiled and held her arm out towards the carriage.

\*\*\*

The entire village and all the customers of the riding school were assembled outside the church as Adam and Caroline drew up outside. He stepped down and held his hand out for Caroline.

"I'll see you later; I have some other duties today." She kissed him briefly on the cheek. "Good luck."

Adam walked into the church and down the aisle. Amanda was standing near the altar.

"Hello. . . I thought that you would be looking after Kate?"



"I've left Caroline to that task. I'm going to give you away remember. . . If you pardon the phrase. Anyway her mother is with her now." Amanda wiped her eyes. "I'm sorry. . ." Adam looked away briefly and saw people filling the pews.

"Have you got the ring?" Adam smiled.

"Yes. . . You chose a nice one. . ."

"I had some money to use, Kate deserves the best."

"You'll go far Adam. . ."

There was a sound of movement in the church. The organ started playing the wedding march. Adam gasped as he caught sight of Kate in an immaculate white wedding dress, she was being escorted by her parents and Caroline was holding the train. The rest of the stable staff were there. Adam sighed; he couldn't believe that this was happening. Kate stepped beside him.

\*\*\*

"You may kiss the bride." Kate lifted her veil, Adam kissed her warmly. The congregation applauded. Adam took Kate's hand and they walked back down the aisle. When they stepped back out into the brilliant sunshine, the staff were in a line facing each other forming a guard of honour with their riding crops held high in the air. The photographer set up his camera on a tripod.

"Now can we have the bride and groom together, and all the brides' maids!" The photographer smiled. "Lovely now, can we have the bride's family, that's right. Just behind them. . . Great." Amanda smiled as she stood beside Adam and Kate. "I suppose this makes me your sister-in-law." She laughed, the camera clicked.

\*\*\*

After copious numbers of photographs the wedding group returned in the carriage with many others walking behind, they turned into the driveway of the riding school. Amanda smiled.

"Now for the reception. . ." She helped Kate down from the carriage. Kate gasped at the tables that had been set up on the yard, each laid with brilliant white linen and silver cutlery.

"Did you organise all of this?"

"Nothing but the best for my little brother! Take a seat." She pointed to the top table.

"I'm very impressed." Adam hugged Kate.

\*\*\*

The caterers took away the last of the plates as Adam stood up and started his speech.

"I would like to thank everyone who is here today, not only the villagers and the customers of the riding school. But especially to the staff and their parents, Kate's parents and of course my dear sister, Amanda. I know I speak for both Kate and myself when I say that this has been one of the best days of my life. I wish I could say that we will be going off to honeymoon in sunny climes. But I imagine that tomorrow we will be still working on the yard and still sleeping in the stables flat."

"- . . . I'm afraid that, that isn't quite true." Amanda stood up. "Things will be changing when you come back from your honeymoon." She handed Kate an envelope, she ripped it open and looked at the tickets.

"Oh thank you Amanda, you shouldn't have. . ." Kate smiled and hugged her.

"But that isn't all. As I said, things will be different when you come back. I have run the Redbridge Riding School for a number of years now, maybe too many years. . . ." Amanda sighed. "I was beginning to think that this was not the job for me anymore. Therefore, when I was approached after my trial by the chief instructor of the mounted division of the Dorset police, I was rather receptive. I have been offered the position of training instructor, and I am very glad to say that I have accepted. The position includes a cottage within the grounds of the training establishment. There is also a Riding for the Disabled centre on site also, which will allow me to carry out my community service at the same time. This does mean however that I cannot run the riding school as well as working full time at the training establishment, so I'm afraid I will be handing over the running of the riding school. . . ."

"What?" Adam stood up. Kate took his hand.

"Adam. . . Please let me finish. . . Where was I? Oh, yes. . . I will be handing over the running of the riding school to my brother and his wife." Adam sat down. "The ownership of the stables includes the cottage, so by the time you return; you will have a proper place to live. I do hope this is okay?"

"What can I say?" Adam smiled.

"I think yes would be a good idea." Amanda laughed.

"Oh yes! What do you think Kate?"

"Oh Amanda! Are you sure?"

"Of course. . . I think I'll be safer working for the police. Anyway, I will be working with Simon."

"Oh yes?"

"Don't be like that!" Amanda laughed. "He's transferring from CID to work in the administration for the training centre."

"Thank you Amanda." Adam hugged her as she sat down. "I owe you for this. . ."

"No you don't!"

\*\*\*

The party continued well into the night.

~~~

Epilogue

Adam woke and rubbed his eyes. He looked round the room he had slept in for many years. Frowning he got up and quickly dressed. Perhaps the wedding had all been a dream. He smiled as Kate sighed and rolled over beside him. Quickly dressing he left the room and went down onto the yard. He looked across and saw Amanda leaning against one of the stable doors wearing a pink silk dress.

"Hello!" Amanda turned round and smiled. Her eyes and cheeks were red from crying.

"What's up?"

"I really don't want to leave this place."

"You don't have to leave you know. Turn the job down..."

"No Adam... I have to do this. I have to make the change..." Adam kissed her on the cheek.

"What's this?" Kate laughed. "I'll have to keep an eye on you! We've only just got married and you are kissing another woman!" She kissed him warmly.

"I have to go." Amanda started walking away.

"Wait..." Adam turned towards her.

"I'll look after the yard for the last two weeks. Then you can move into the cottage."

Amanda smiled. "Oh I have something for you Kate." Amanda held her hand out and gave Kate a small package. Kate watched as Amanda walked away down the yard.

"What's this?" Kate tore open the small parcel and took out a small wooden chess piece. She showed it to Adam.

"That is the chess piece I was found with when we were left at the hospital. Amanda was only a few years old and I was too young to remember much about our parents."

"Oh?" Kate raised her eyebrows.

"What piece is it then?" Adam started walking down the yard.

"It's a bishop..." She paused. "Is that why..."

"Come on Mrs Bishop... We have to pack."

"Okay Adam..." They hugged each other and walked back to the flat.

Amanda watched as the taxi took Adam and Kate away. She smiled as they waved to her in the office. This was the beginning of a new stage in her life; she took down the small wooden sign from the notice board.

*The Redbridge Riding School
Proprietor - Miss Amanda King*

...And placed it in the wastepaper basket. It was time for a change. New faces, especially a certain detective, well it was a large cottage, and it seemed so wasteful to have it all to herself. The sun shone on another Sunday morning... A very different Sunday morning.

###

A note from the author:

I hope you have enjoyed this short adventure! When I originally wrote this novella in the 1990's I was a keen horse rider and was soon to start working with horses for what would turn out to be a short time. Now, many years on, time and money has meant that my writing is about my only involvement with the equestrian world. I am in the progress of writing more, keep up to date on my website: <http://www.wilfvoss.me.uk/>

About the author:

Wilf lives with his wife, Jane and his son, Sam in rural Wiltshire. As well as being an author (with credits such as this novella and a range of websites, marketing materials and books on business communications) he is a trainer and event manager.