ONE

Sunday 8 August 2010

Jimmy Fisher stood on the goal line and stared into the eyes of the man ten metres in front of him. Paulo Rubio was a central defender and not known for his goal scoring skills but Jimmy had learned a long time ago that you could never assume anything in the game of football. There were good days and bad days; anything could happen. Rubio placed the ball on the penalty spot and made the sign of the cross on his chest. Why do these South Americans always do that? Jimmy thought. It always unnerved him; it was as if they thought they had the power of God on their side.

Jimmy was tired. Ninety minutes of regular time plus extra time had taken its toll. The crowd were booing now; they were getting restless. York City were up four three on penalties and if Jimmy saved this penalty they would be promoted to league one. It would be the first time in ten years for York City. Everything would change after that. It would mean more money, more status and for Jimmy it would mean an opportunity to break away from York once and for all. Nobody bothers with the players from the lower leagues, he thought, the scouts don't even look at them any more.

Paulo Rubio walked away from the ball and looked up at the crowd. Thirty eight thousand people were waiting to see what would happen. More people than either player had ever played in front of before. Jimmy thought about the three men in the bar in town the week before. He thought about what they had offered him; what they had told him to think hard about. He had not liked the look of any of them. Eastern European types, he had thought, maybe former Soviet Union.

Paulo Rubio started his run up. His eyes were pointing towards the left hand goal post, Jimmy's right. He could be bluffing, Jimmy thought, or he could be wanting me to think he's bluffing. Jimmy looked at the ball. Rubio was approaching slightly to the left of it. Either he was going to tap it to the right or he was going to blast into the left hand side of the net. Rubio's foot struck the ball. Jimmy dived to his right. The ball went right. Rubio had not been bluffing. Jimmy's hand made good contact with the ball and it was sent flying over the crossbar into the crowd behind the goal. Rubio had missed. York city were going to be playing in League One the following season.

The other ten York City players rushed towards the goal. Jimmy was picked up by three or four of them and raised in the air. The sound from the crowd was something he had never heard before. This was a huge moment in the history of the club. Jimmy found himself being paraded up and down the pitch. He was a hero. He would be in all the papers the next day. The noise from the crowd was getting louder and louder. The sun was shining down on the roof of the stadium. It caught something metal on one of the houses behind it and a bright glint could be seen for a second or two. Jimmy Fisher was on top of the world. He did not want this moment to end. He would be remembered for years to come as the goalkeeper who saved the penalty that secured promotion for York City.

The crowd were showing no sign of calming down. The silencer on the Dragunov SVD rifle had been unnecessary. The heavy calibre bullet hit Jimmy Fisher in the chest, exited out his back and pierced the shoulder of one of his team mates. It took a few seconds for the men who were carrying him to realise what was happening. Blood was

gushing out of the huge hole in Jimmy's chest. Jimmy Fisher was definitely going to be in all the papers the following day.

TWO

Monday 9 August 2010

Detective Sergeant Jason Smith ran down the stairs to answer his phone. He swore as his foot hit the nail that was sticking out of the bottom step. He was in a terrible mood. He had suffered with toothache all night and had hardly slept. Theakston, his Bull Terrier was waiting to be let out of the back door. Smith let the dog out and picked up the phone.

"Smith," he said.

"Good," it was Detective Inspector Bob Chalmers, "you're up."

"What's going on?" Smith said.

"Be at the station as soon as you can," Chalmers said, "I've called an emergency meeting."

"What's happened?" Smith said.

"I'll fill you in when you get here."

Chalmers hung up.

"Great," Smith said, "just what I need on a Monday morning."

Chalmers rarely called emergency meetings unless something serious had happened. Smith's tooth was throbbing so he decided not to risk drinking any coffee and went upstairs to get dressed. He glared at the nail sticking out of the bottom step and made a mental note to hammer it back in when he had the chance. He brushed his teeth and winced. I need to see a dentist, he thought. He hated dentists.

Fifteen minutes later, Smith parked his car in the station car park and got out the car. The car park was full. Everybody seemed to be there. Smith had a feeling that something really bad had happened. PC Baldwin was manning the front desk inside the station when Smith walked in. DS Thompson was talking to DC Bridge next to the counter. Both of them had grave expressions on their faces.

"Morning," Smith walked over to them, "who died?"

Thompson glared at him.

"That's not funny," he said.

"Why all the miserable faces?" Smith said, "I know its Monday but it could be worse."

"You haven't heard have you sir?" Bridge said.

"Heard what?" Smith said.

"Jimmy Fisher was killed yesterday," Bridge said, "shot through the chest in front of thirty eight thousand people."

"Who's Jimmy Fisher?" Smith said.

"Only the best goalkeeper York City has ever seen," Thompson said, "he could have gone all the way to the top."

"Goalkeeper?" Smith was none the wiser.

"Football," Thompson said, "they do play football in Australia don't they?"

"I hate football," Smith said, "what happened?"

"Fisher had just saved a penalty," Bridge said, "brilliant save. It means we'll be promoted to league one next season. The team were celebrating and a shot came from nowhere. There wasn't much left of his chest."

"You say he was shot in front of thirty eight thousand people?" Smith asked.

“That’s right,” Thompson said, “biggest crowd in years.”

“Then interviewing witnesses is going to be a bit of a problem isn’t it?”

“Everything’s a joke to you isn’t it?” Thompson said.

“Not at all,” Smith looked him in the eyes, “I’m merely stating a fact.”

Thompson was about to say something else when DI Chalmers walked in.

“Ten minutes,” he barked, “main conference room in ten minutes. We’ve got some special guests joining us.”

He walked off down the corridor.

“What did he mean by that?” Smith said, “Special guests?”

“Could be anyone,” Thompson said, “when a high profile footballer gets murdered things have to be done differently.”

“High profile?” Smith said, “I’d never even heard of him. If he’s been murdered, I’ll investigate it like I would any other murder.”

He walked towards the canteen. DC Whitton was sitting in her usual seat by the window. She was one of the few officers Smith enjoyed working with.

“Morning Whitton,” he sat opposite her.

“Morning sir,” she said, “you look awful.”

“Toothache,” Smith said, “kept me up all night.”

“You should see a dentist.”

“I hate dentists,” Smith said, “do you know who this Jimmy Fisher is? This ball keeper?”

“Goalkeeper,” Whitton laughed, “of course I know who he is. I’ve lived in York my whole life. He was supposed to be the best we’ve ever had.”

“Why do people keep saying that?” Smith said.

“Saying what?”

“We,” Smith said, “us and our team. It’s as if a stupid football team are part of your lives.”

“Don’t say that too loud sir,” Whitton said, “people take their football very seriously in this country. I suppose we’d better get to the meeting.”

The conference room was packed to the brim when they walked in. Superintendant Jeremy Smyth was sitting on a chair at the back of the room. Chalmers was sitting next to him. Everybody seemed to be there. A man and a woman Smith did not recognise were sitting to the side of the room. Outsiders, Smith thought. He did not like the look of either of them. Superintendant Smyth stood up.

“Can we have a bit of hush?” he said.

He was not using a microphone for a change.

“You’re all probably aware;” he began, “that an awful shooting occurred yesterday afternoon. Now, football isn’t really my thing so I’ll hand you over to DI Chalmers.”

Chalmers stood up.

“Thank you sir,” he said gravely, “Jimmy Fisher was shot once in the chest in front of a packed crowd. From the size of the hole in his chest, he must have been shot with a very high calibre weapon. As a lifelong supporter of the Minster men, I’m taking this one personally.”

“Minster men?” Smith whispered to Whitton.

“It’s their nickname,” Whitton said.

Smith shook his head.

“Jimmy Fisher,” Chalmers continued, “was a keeper in the prime of his life. He was going all the way to the top. I don’t have to tell you that all eyes will be on us now. The people of York will want results.”

Smith looked at the man and the woman sitting at the side of the room. He could tell at once they were not part of any local police force. The man was dressed in a suit he obviously did not buy from any high street store in York. His hair was cropped short. He looked like a marine. Smith did not like the look of him one little bit. The woman sitting next to him was also dressed in a suit. Her hair was cut in a short bob. She had a small pointy nose and dark brown eyes that were full of suspicion. She was scanning the room around her. Smith found himself staring at her. She caught his gaze and he broke off eye contact immediately.

“As this is a rather delicate matter,” Chalmers said, “we have a couple of observers here today. You will have no doubt noticed them. I must point out that they are here to help and you are to let them do exactly that.”

“I knew it,” Smith said to Whitton, “I knew those two were bad news.”

He said it louder than he had intended. Chalmers glared at him. Superintendant Smyth stood up again.

“May I take over from here?” he said.

Nobody said a word.

“As DI Chalmers has stated, our two esteemed guests are here to help. For the time being, they will be merely observing.”

“Who are they?” Smith stood up.

The woman looked over at him.

“You do not need that information at this moment in time,” she said directly to Smith.

“Who are you?” Smith ignored her, “MI5? MI6? You’re not police are you? We all have eyes in our heads.”

“Like I said, you don’t need to know that yet.”

“What have you got to do with the death of some sportsman?” Smith was not giving up.

“Like your superintendant said,” she was clearly starting to get impatient, “we are here to help.”

Smith’s mouth was starting to hurt again. He stood up and left the conference room.

THREE

"I've heard all about you detective," the woman found Smith in his office.

He was holding the left side of his face with his hand.

Smith turned round and looked at her.

"Don't believe everything you read in the papers," he said.

"I don't get my information from the papers," she said, "Sarah Proud. It's a pleasure to meet you."

She held out her hand. Smith did not accept it.

"Like I say," Proud said, "I know all about you. I've read all the reports. The man who shot you in Whitby, the Fulton twins, the Ladybird killer. All very impressive."

"Not really," Smith sighed, "I just seem to end up in the wrong place at the right time."

"What's wrong with your face?" Proud asked.

"Toothache," Smith said, "started last night. I've got a date with a bottle of Jack and a pair of pliers when I get home today."

"Tough guy," Proud said, "you should see a dentist. It looks like it's your wisdom teeth."

"Thanks for the concern," Smith said, "what do you want?"

"I heard you could be a bit bull headed."

"What are you really doing here?" Smith said, "A football player gets shot; it's a big deal but we can handle it. What's the real story?"

"I'm afraid I can't tell you that," Proud said.

"Then can you close the door on your way out? I'd rather suffer this toothache in peace."

“Detective sergeant,” Proud said. The tone in her voice had changed completely, “you’ll soon find that it is much easier to work with us than against us.”

Smith stood up. He realised that Sarah Proud was almost as tall as he was.

“How am I supposed to work with you?” he said, “When I don’t even know who you are or what this is all about.”

“I’ll leave you to suffer in peace. I’ll be seeing you detective sergeant.”

Smith watched as she turned round and left the room. She left the door open. Smith looked down and saw that she had left her business card on his desk. He was about to throw it in the bin but for some reason he changed his mind. He picked up the card and put it in his pocket.

The pain in Smith’s tooth was getting worse. He remembered there was a bottle of aspirins in his desk draw. He took them out and read the label. They were a couple of years old but they were all he had. He popped four in his mouth and crunched them between his teeth.

“Popping pills now are you?” It was Thompson.

“What do you want Thompson?” Smith said.

“I never pictured you as a pill popper,” Thompson said, “I always saw you as a whisky drinking bum.”

“What do you want Thompson?” Smith asked again.

“It’s not what I want,” Thompson said, “Chalmers wants us to get over to forensics. Grant Webber has found something interesting.”

“What’s that?” Smith said.

"If I knew that I wouldn't be here talking to you now would I? After that you're in for a real treat. The two of us are off to Bootham Crescent."

"Bootham Crescent?" Smith was confused.

"The home of the Minster men," Thompson said.

"The football team?"

"You're catching on," Thompson said, "we'll go in my car though; yours always seems to have a funny dog smell to it."

The pain killers had numbed the ache in Smith's tooth as they drove to the forensics department on the outskirts of the city. Thompson's driving was erratic at times but today it was so bad that Smith had to say something.

"Have you got a license for this thing?" he said.

"I've been driving since before you were born," Thompson said.

"You drive like a schizoid," Smith said, "back there you were idling along like an old lady and then you floor it away from the lights. Next time we're going in my car, dog smell or not."

"What did you make of the suits at the meeting?" Thompson changed the subject.

"Bad news," Smith said, "very bad news. Something's going on that we don't know about and I don't like it one little bit."

"What do you mean?" Thompson said.

"Open your eyes Thompson. A football player is gunned down after a game. It happens all the time in Africa or South America but it doesn't happen here. Why shoot the guy in front of a crowd of people? Something else is happening here and we're being kept in the dark about it. We had special guests at the meeting today for a reason."

“Who do you think they are?” Thompson said.

“I don’t know,” Smith said, “from the way the woman spoke, Sarah Proud or whatever her name is, she’s not from around here. I’m no expert on your English accents but I’d say she was from down south somewhere.”

“London you mean?” Thompson said.

“Could be,” Smith said, “wherever she’s from she’s bad news for all of us. I hate this cloak and dagger stuff; this need to know bullshit. If you ask me, they’re government.”

“I think those pain killers have numbed your senses,” Thompson said.

He parked the car in the car park outside the new forensics building. He broke the wing mirror off a parked car in doing so. Smith was about to say something but changed his mind.

Grant Webber was sitting in his office looking at something on a computer screen when Smith and Thompson walked in. He had a huge grin on his face. Smith was taken aback. In all the years he had known Webber, he had rarely seen him smile.

“Are you alright Webber?” Smith asked, “You’re smiling. It doesn’t suit you.”

“Detective Smith,” Webber said, “once in a while you stumble across something that makes all the other hours of tedium worthwhile. This is one of those moments. Let me enjoy it.”

“What’s that?” Thompson pointed to an image on the computer screen.

“This,” Webber said, “is the ballistics report of the bullet we pulled out of Craig Standen’s shoulder.”

“Craig Standen?” Thompson said, “Random Standen. The striker?”

“That’s him,” Webber said, “I’m not a city fan, I was born in Middlesbrough and I’ll be a Boro fan until the day I die but I must admit when Standen’s on form he’s brilliant. He was standing behind Fisher when he was shot. Luckily Fisher took the brunt of the impact otherwise Standen would be missing an arm right now.”

“What are you talking about Webber?” Smith said.

“The bullet entered Fisher’s chest,” Webber said, “it shattered his rib cage and exited through his back. The broken shards of the ribs pierced the heart and lungs on impact. He was dead before he even knew what was going on. Standen got what was left of the bullet in his shoulder.”

“What sort of bullet are we talking about here?” Smith said.

“This little beauty here,” Webber pointed to the screen.

Smith and Thompson looked at the screen. There was a photograph of a rifle cartridge.

“Seven point six two,” Webber said. His hands were shaking.

“Fifty four mil,” he continued, “of course what we found in Standen’s shoulder was what was left of the bullet but I happen to be a bit of a buff. Rifles are fascinating.”

“What’s so special about this bullet?” Smith said.

“It’s not so much the bullet,” Webber said, “It’s the rifle that fired it. It’s not your average stock standard rifle if you’ll excuse the pun.”

Neither Smith nor Thompson got Webber’s joke.

“Stock standard,” Webber said, “rifle stock. Anyway, I searched the data base and the only rifle that fires such a cartridge is the Dragunov SVD.”

“Dragon Hoff?” Smith said.

“Dragunov,” Webber said, “designed by Evgeny Dragunov in nineteen sixty three.”

“So it’s an old gun then?” Thompson said.

“Not at all,” Webber replied, “they’re still in production today. It is an exceptional rifle. They were used in Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq, you name it.”

“Ok Webber,” Smith said, “where can you get your hands on one of these rifles?”

“That’s just it,” Webber said, “you can’t. It’s strictly Russian military issue. You can’t just pick one up on E bay.”

“I don’t get it,” Smith said, “why would someone go to all the trouble of getting a supposedly unobtainable weapon to shoot a football player from a mediocre team?”

Thompson glared at him.

“Smith’s right,” Webber said, “I’m not a detective but even I can see that it doesn’t make sense. This rifle has a range of over a kilometre and it takes a trained marksman to be able to use it properly. This weapon is designed for one thing and one thing only.”

“What’s that?” Thompson said.

“It’s a sniper rifle,” Webber said, “Surely if you’re going to kill a football player, you’d use a much less elaborate method. It’s like taking a Rolls Royce to a drag race.”

“You say the rifle is Russian?” Smith said.

“That’s right,” Webber said, “although in sixty three it was still the Soviet Union. A lot has changed since then.”

“So where do we start looking?” Thompson said.

“That’s not my job,” Webber said, “I’m just an underpaid forensics technician who just happens to be a rifle fanatic.”

“That would explain the suits at the meeting,” Smith said.

“Suits?” Webber said.

“Nothing,” Smith said, “thanks Webber. Me and Thompson have to get going. We’re going to pay a visit to Boot Crescent.”

“Bootham,” Thompson corrected him.

“Whatever,” Smith said, “let’s go and see if we can figure out who would want to kill a goalkeeper.”

FOUR

Bootham Crescent was a five minute drive from the forensics building. Smith did not know why but he had expected the stadium to be much more impressive than it was. Having been forced to watch a couple of games during the world cup in South Africa earlier in the year and being impressed by the grandeur of the stadia there, York City's home ground was a bit of a let down.

"The theatre of dreams," Thompson said as he parked his car in the parking area, "I've been a season ticket holder here for years."

"I still can't see what all the fuss is about," Smith said, "it's just a stupid game."

"It's the beautiful game," Thompson insisted.

"Look at all the flowers," Smith said.

Wreaths of flowers of all shapes and colours had been placed all around the stadium. Photographs of Jimmy Fisher were all over the concrete.

"What a loss," Thompson said, "best keeper we've ever had. We've got to get the bastards who did this."

"Let's make a start then," Smith said, "how do we get into this place? Everything seems to be locked up."

Thompson led him past the flowers and stopped next to a side door.

"The grounds man is expecting us," he knocked on the door.

The door opened and an elderly man with a bald head peeped out. He looked Smith and Thompson up and down.

“It’s closed,” he said, “if you want to pay your respects leave flowers or you can make a donation to the fund.”

Smith took out his ID. Thompson did the same.

“Sam Vernon?” Thompson said.

“That’s me,” Vernon said, “You must be the police. You’d better come in. What took you so long?”

He did not wait for an answer. He led them down a long corridor. Old photographs lined each wall. They were photographs of football matches over the years. Thompson stopped and stared at one of them.

“Come on Thompson,” Smith said, “this is no time for nostalgia.”

The photograph was black and white. It looked very old. It depicted a man in an old York City shirt. He was holding a football and he had a huge grin on his face.

“He looks familiar,” Smith said.

“Ernie Thompson,” Thompson smiled, “nineteen thirty nine. Just before the war. He was my granddad.”

Vernon stopped and turned round.

“Ernie Thompson was your granddad?” he said, “My dad used to talk about him all the time. One of the best forwards York has ever seen. Bit before my time though. Come on, I’ll show you through to the pitch.”

He unlocked a door that led to another corridor. There was another door at the end of it.

“After you,” Vernon said to Thompson as he opened the door, “any grandkid of Ernie Thompson’s is welcome here any time.”

Thompson walked onto the field and he felt like he was in a dream. The pitch was in a state of disrepair but Thompson did not seem to notice. Brown tufts of grass gave the pitch an unkempt look.

"We can't afford the maintenance like we used to," Vernon said, "when I started here thirty years ago the pitch was like a golf green but things have changed a lot since then. The club nearly went under a few times."

"Where was the player shot?" Smith said.

"He was over by the goal in front of the Longhurst stand," Vernon said, "they were parading him up and down. It's a big thing for us you know. I might even get a pay rise out of it."

"Longhurst stand?" Smith said.

"He's not from around here is he?" Vernon asked Thompson.

"How can you tell?" Thompson said.

"The David Longhurst end is over there," Vernon pointed to the goal posts at the far end of the stadium.

"That's where the home fans sit," he added, "poor buggers got an eyeful of the whole thing."

"Where were you during the game?" Smith said.

"In the club office," Vernon said, "I don't normally watch the games. There's usually too much other stuff going on for me to have that luxury."

"So you didn't see anything?" Smith asked.

"I came out onto the main stand to watch the penalty shootout. My nerves were shot by the end of it. Like I said, promotion for us is a big deal. I'll show you."

He walked to the left hand side of the field.

“I was standing right there when Jimmy got shot,” he pointed to the tunnel leading to the dressing rooms.

“And where was Jimmy Fisher?” Smith said.

“Over there,” Vernon pointed to the goalposts, “they had him in the air. Nobody knew what was happening. The crowd was making such a noise. It was Craig Standen that fell to the ground first.”

“The one who took the bullet in the shoulder?” Smith said.

“He fell to the ground pretty much in the middle of the penalty area,” Vernon said, “the noise was deafening. It was chaos. The lads who had Jimmy in the air had blood all over them.”

“The shot could have come from anywhere,” Thompson said.

“How would someone get a rifle into a football ground?” Smith said, “Somebody must have seen something.”

He looked across to the other side of the stadium.

“What’s behind there?” he pointed to the other goal.

“Grosvenor Road,” Vernon said, “it’s where the away supporters stand.”

Smith walked over to it and climbed the steps to the top. He looked over the advertising banners. There was a row of terraced houses behind the stadium. Thompson and Vernon caught up to him.

“These houses,” Smith said, “you could probably see the whole field from them.”

“You can,” Vernon said, “Tight buggers watch the games from there every weekend. There’s nothing we can do about it.”

“How long is the pitch?” Smith asked.

“One hundred and five metres exactly,” Vernon said.

“And these houses are another twenty metres away,” Smith said, “that’s easily within range of the weapon used to shoot Fisher.”

“What are you thinking?” Thompson said.

“I’m thinking that whoever killed Jimmy Fisher was watching the game from one of those houses. That would explain why nobody saw anything.”

“So what now?” Thompson said.

“What do you think?” Smith said, “We find out if any of the people living in these houses had a special guest yesterday during the game; a special guest with an unusual Russian rifle.”

FIVE

Thompson drove round the stadium and parked his car directly behind the Grosvenor Road stand. They were about to get out of the car when Smith's phone started to ring in his pocket. He took it out and answered it.

"Sir," it was Whitton, "where are you?"

"Still at the football ground," Smith said, "it looks like our sniper shot the goalkeeper from one of the houses at the back of the stadium. What's wrong?"

"There's been another one sir," Whitton said.

"Another what?"

"Another dead football player," Whitton said, "Paulo Rubio. He was the one who missed the penalty before Fisher was killed."

"You're kidding me," Smith said, "when did this happen?"

"This morning. He was walking back from the shop round the corner from his house. He was shot in broad daylight. They only knew it was Rubio from the clothes he was wearing. Most of his head was blown off."

"My God," Smith said," where did this happen?"

"Rubio played for Darlington," Whitton said, "He had a house in Richmond. Did you find anything out at Bootham Crescent?"

"Only that Thompson's grandfather was a football player," Smith said, "we're about to start knocking on doors now. What the hell is going on here? Who would want to kill football players?"

"I don't know," Whitton said.

“I want you and Bridge here now,” Smith said, “there’s quite a few houses to check out.”

“Chalmers wants all of us in Richmond,” Whitton said.

“We’ll go after we’re finished up here. This is where it all started. You should know by now that the first one is almost always the most important one; the one we should look most closely at. Remember the ladybird killer? She was one of the first people we spoke to.”

“Chalmers isn’t going to like this sir,” Whitton said.

“Chalmers never does,” Smith said, “I’ll see you in ten minutes.”

He rang off.

“Let’s get started then,” Smith said to Thompson, “we’ll start at one end and work our way along. All these houses look the same to me.”

The door of the first house was opened almost immediately by a young man in a tracksuit. He had a permanent scowl on his face. Smith took an instant dislike to him.

“What do you want?” he said.

“Police,” Smith said, “can we have a word?”

“Depends on what you want,” the man said.

“Were you home yesterday,” Smith asked.

“All day,” the man said, “I watched the game from upstairs. It’s not against the law is it?”

“Not as far as I know,” Smith said, “can we come in and have a look around? We just need to see the view of the pitch from your house.”

“Have you got a warrant?” the man asked, “I haven’t done anything.”

Smith was getting impatient. They had a lot to get through.

“Listen,” he said, “we’re not interested in you. We just need to look upstairs. What’s your name anyway?”

“Chris,” he said, “Chris Jenkins. Like I said, I haven’t done anything. You’ve got no right to be harassing me like this.”

“Mr Jenkins,” Thompson intervened, “we’re investigating the murder of Jimmy Fisher. You wouldn’t want to be known as the man who got in the way of that investigation would you?”

“Why didn’t you just say that?” Jenkins said, “Come in. The place is in a bit of a state though. We had a bit of a party after the game yesterday.”

He led them inside. The living room was filthy. It smelled of stale tobacco and body odour. There were empty beer cans all over the floor.

“Can you show us where you watched the game from yesterday?” Thompson said.

“I watched it from my old lady’s room,” Jenkins said, “Her room has the best view.”

“Where’s your mother now?” Smith asked.

“At work. Somebody has to bring some money into the house.”

He walked up a narrow staircase and stopped outside a door at the top.

“What are you looking for?” he said.

“We just need to see the view,” Smith said.

“You can see most of the pitch,” Jenkins said, “There’s a bit by the Longhurst Stand you can’t quite see. You have to lean out a bit but its better than paying eight quid every weekend isn’t it?”

Smith ignored him and went inside the room. The bed was made and the room was much cleaner than the rest of the house. He walked to the window and looked outside. From

here he had a view of the top of the stadium and most of the pitch. Jenkins had been right, he thought, the angle of the house made it difficult to see the goal in front of the Longhurst end, the goal Jimmy Fisher had been in front of when he was shot. Jimmy Fisher's killer had not shot him from Chris Jenkins' mother's bedroom.

"Thank you for your time," Smith said, "we may need to speak to you again."

He walked down the stairs, through the squalor of the living room and into the fresh air outside. For some reason he felt like a cigarette. He did not smoke but he had a craving for a cigarette. He shrugged off the thought. Whitton and Bridge had just parked behind Thompson's car.

"Chalmers isn't happy," Whitton said as she got out the car, "Smyth is breathing down his neck. It's all very well when an English footballer gets killed but when a Colombian is murdered in broad daylight it's a whole different ball game. It takes priority. You know what it's like in this country. The press are already all over it."

"Colombian?" Thompson said, "Do you think this is a drug thing? You know what these Colombians are like."

"Chalmers wants us in Richmond right away," Bridge said.

"Its going to have to wait," Smith said, "I'm positive that Fisher was shot from one of these houses. The one we had a look at didn't have a clear view of where Fisher was shot. We'll start in the middle of the terrace and work our way out. Whitton, you can come with me."

An hour later they had ruled out all but two of the houses.

"I knew this was a waste of time," Thompson said, "Chalmers is going to have our arses for this."

“You and Bridge take the one on the left,” Smith ignored him, “and we’ll try the other one.”

Thompson walked off shaking his head. Smith knocked on the door of the house. There was no answer. He knocked again. Nothing.

“There’s nobody home,” a voice came from the upstairs window of the house next door. It was the woman they had just finished talking to.

“Are you sure they’re not here?” he said.

“Of course I’m sure,” she said, “they’ve been away since last Wednesday.”

“Where are they?” Smith asked.

“Holiday. Greece I think.”

Smith looked through the window into the house. He could not see anything out of the ordinary. The house was exceptionally neat and tidy.

“Let’s have a look round the back,” Smith said to Whitton.

“What for?” Whitton said.

“Just humour me,” Smith walked up the street. He counted the houses as he walked. Whitton walked after him. They reached the corner and came to an alleyway at the back of the houses. Smith counted the houses as he walked along the alley.

“I think this is it,” he stopped outside a red wooden door.

He tried the handle. It was locked.

“Give me a lift up,” he said to Whitton.

“Sir,” Whitton said, “don’t you think we should call it in?”

“It won’t take two minutes,” Smith said, “I just want to have a look in the back yard. Help me up.”

Whitton sighed and helped Smith over the wall. He got one leg over and landed on the other side with a thud. Moments later the gate opened and Smith stood there with a huge grin on his face.

"I knew it," he said, "The window in the back door has been smashed. Somebody has broken in."

"We need to call it in," Whitton said.

"Not yet," Smith said, "besides it'll take too long. I'll just go in and have a look. I'll be careful."

The back door was slightly ajar. Smith pushed it open.

"Whoever broke in wasn't too bothered about covering their tracks," he said.

He walked upstairs and looked around. Whitton walked slowly behind him. The house was laid out exactly the same way as the others they had looked at in the street. He came to the door that he knew led to the room that afforded the best view of the football field and pushed it open. He peered inside the room. The curtains were drawn and a slight breeze was moving the curtains back and forth. The window was open. Smith walked inside and looked around. He spotted something on the bed.

"Whitton," he shouted back to her, "you were right, I think its time we called this one in."

SIX

Grant Webber parked his car in the alley behind the house in Grosvenor Road. Smith sighed when he saw Chalmers in the passenger seat. Another vehicle pulled up behind them. It was a Land Rover or a Range Rover, Smith could never tell them apart. Sarah Proud and Craig Friedman got out.

"What are they doing here?" Smith said to Whitton.

"Detective sergeant," Proud said before Whitton had a chance to answer, "right place at the wrong time again?"

"Something like that," Smith said, "what are you doing here? This is a crime scene."

"As of now," Proud said, "this is our crime scene. We'll take it from here. Webber is going to help us. Stay down here and don't go anywhere. You'll need to be debriefed when we're finished."

"Debriefed?" Smith could not believe what he was hearing, "I hope that doesn't have anything to do with the removal of my underpants. You're not really my type."

Whitton started to giggle.

Proud ignored his comment and walked inside the yard to the house. Webber followed her. Chalmers walked up to Smith and Whitton.

"How do you do it Smith?" he took out a packet of Marlboroughs, put one in his mouth and lit it.

"Do what sir?" Smith said.

“You seem to have this sixth bloody sense,” Chalmers said, “you disobey a direct order and just when you’re in line for a bollocking, you find something like this. How do you do it?”

“Just lucky I suppose,” Smith said, “can I have one of those?”

He pointed to the cigarette in Chalmers’ mouth.

Whitton looked at him as if he had gone mad.

“You don’t smoke,” Chalmers said.

“I’m thinking of starting,” Smith said.

Chalmers handed him the packet and a lighter. Smith put a cigarette in his mouth, lit it and inhaled deeply. He coughed, took another drag and felt the nicotine spread through his body like a wave.

“Thanks sir,” he handed the pack back to Chalmers.

Grant Webber stared at the sniper rifle as if it were an exhibit in a museum.

“My God,” he said, “this is really a Dragunov. I’ve only ever seen one in a photograph before.”

Sarah Proud was looking through the gap in the curtains. The window had been opened slightly.

“Mr Webber,” she said, “I know you are one of the finest forensics technicians in the country but before you start I need to explain a few things to you.”

“Go ahead,” Webber was still staring at the Dragunov.

“What you find in this room stays in this room ok?”

“I will make my report as I usually do,” Webber said, “what’s this all about?”

“You will not make your report as usual,” Proud said.

Webber stopped staring at the rifle and looked at her.

"Your report will be sent directly to me," Proud continued, "and you will not mention a word of this to anybody. Do I make myself clear?"

"Miss Proud," Webber took a step closer to her, "I am a professional. Do not insult my intelligence. I do not make a habit of divulging my work with people it does not concern. I don't know what this is all about but could you please let me get on with my job?"

Proud was looking at something on the window sill. It was an ashtray full of cigarette butts.

"Carry on," she said, "I'll leave you to it."

She left the room and walked back down the stairs.

Webber started to unpack his equipment. His heart was pounding in his chest. This was the stuff of forensics' dreams. Usually, he had a team to help him but on this occasion he had been told in no uncertain terms that he would be working alone. He set his case down on the floor and looked at the rifle on the bed. That would be his first priority. The initial thing that had struck him when he walked in the room was why did they leave the rifle behind? Surely, if whoever shot Jimmy Fisher had managed to get into the house unseen with a Russian sniper rifle, they could have taken it out with them again. It did not make sense. Webber knew from his research that a Dragunov could be disassembled and packed away into a case not much bigger than a briefcase. Why had they left it here?

Webber put on a pair of gloves and got to work. He carefully picked up the rifle. He was surprised at how light it was. It could not have weighed more than five kilograms.

The magazine was still attached. Webber's hands were shaking as he removed it and placed it on a sheet of cellophane on the floor.

"Get a grip," he said to himself.

He put the rifle back on the bed and started examining the magazine. He took out his fingerprint powder and lightly dusted the magazine. Before the powder even hit it, Webber could see there were at least three good fingerprints. This is all wrong, he thought, less than twenty four hours after a brutal murder we have the murder weapon with prints all over it. Somebody is either very stupid or very clever.

Webber finished with the prints and placed the magazine in an evidence bag. He walked over to the window and opened the curtains. The window had been opened slightly. Just enough to accommodate the rifle, Webber thought. He dusted the window latch for prints. Once again, a clear thumb print was visible. The killer did not seem to care about leaving evidence behind. From where Webber was standing he had a clear view of the whole football stadium.

"This house was carefully chosen," he said out loud.

He looked at the ashtray on the window sill. It was full of cigarette butts. There was a partially smoked cigarette in amongst them. Webber took out a pair of tweezers and picked it up. The word 'Steels' was written on the cigarette just above the filter. He put it in another evidence bag.

None of this makes any sense whatsoever, Webber thought. He took off his gloves and left the room. Smith and Whitton were in the back yard of the house when Webber walked outside. They were talking to Sarah Proud.

"Smith," Webber said, "I never thought I'd say this but I need your help."

“I knew you’d grow to like me sooner or later,” Smith said.

“I don’t like you,” Webber said, “I just need you to have another look upstairs and tell me what you see.”

“That’s out of the question I’m afraid,” Sarah Proud said, “The jurisdiction in this case has changed.”

“The jurisdiction may have changed,” Webber said, “but the crime scene is the same. Smith happens to be one of the best. We all want the same results don’t we?”

Nobody said a word.

“What harm can it do?” Smith said eventually, “I already know what’s up there anyway.”

He walked back inside the house without waiting for Sarah Proud to say anything else.

She stared at him. Her mouth was wide open.

“Let him go,” Whitton said, “he’s going to do whatever he wants with or without your permission anyway.”

Webber followed Smith into the house.

“What do you make of this room?” Webber asked Smith.

Smith looked around. He walked over to the window and looked across at the football stadium.

“This house was carefully chosen,” he said, “whoever did this didn’t just break into any old house. I’d say they’d been here long before the game yesterday to check things out.”

He looked at the ashtray full of cigarette butts.

“And from the look of this,” he added, “our sniper is either a serious chain smoker or he was in this room for a very long time. Do you know what kind of cigarettes they are?”

“I don’t smoke,” Webber said, “filthy habit, but I found one that hadn’t been smoked all the way down. It had the word ‘Steels’ on it. It shouldn’t be too hard to find out where it came from.”

“This doesn’t make sense,” Smith looked at the rifle on the bed, “the location was carefully chosen; the rifle is an expensive and hard to come by weapon and it must take a skilled marksman to be able to use it, why leave the weapon at the crime scene?”

“I got prints off the magazine too,” Webber said, “and more off the window latch.”

“What do you think about all this?” Smith said.

“I’m not a detective,” Webber said, “I collect evidence but in all my years in forensics this has to be the most paradoxical crime scene I’ve ever been to.”

“Paradoxical?” Smith said.

“There are too many inconsistencies,” Webber said, “you’ve already hit on some of them. The unusual rifle. Whoever did this brought it in without being seen. Surely they could have got out the same way with the rifle. Why leave it here?”

“Are you done here?” A voice was heard from the doorway.

It was Sarah Proud.

“You know what’s going on here don’t you?” Smith said.

She shook her head.

“I have a good idea,” she said.

“Let’s hear it then,” Smith said.

“I’m afraid you are no longer to have anything to do with this matter.”

She looked at Webber. Her eyes bored into his.

“And remember what I said about the evidence,” She said, “it is to be sent directly to me. I need a report as soon as possible.”

“You’ll get it as soon as I’m ready,” Webber said.

“What now then?” Smith said.

“You go back to work,” Proud said, “but this case no longer concerns you. Have you got that?”

Smith was about to say something but changed his mind. His toothache was returning. He left the room and walked down the stairs.

SEVEN

Smith, Whitton, Bridge and Thompson sat around the table by the window in the canteen at the station. Nobody said a word. A rain cloud was drifting in from the east.

"Looks like rain," Thompson said.

"We need it," Whitton said.

It had not rained for weeks and the authorities were threatening a hosepipe ban if the situation did not improve. Smith stood up and walked over to the coffee machine in the corner of the room. He got some coffee, took one sip and threw the cup and its contents in the waste bin. His tooth was in agony.

"This is bullshit," he said when he returned to the table, "how can these suits just waltz in and take over? This is our patch."

"Forget about it sir," Whitton said, "There's nothing we can do about it."

"Yes there is," Smith turned and walked out of the room.

DI Chalmers was not in his office when Smith barged through the doors. Smith had an idea where he would be. He found him in the car park at the back of the station. He was smoking a cigarette.

"Can I have one of those?" Smith pointed to Chalmers' cigarette.

"They'll be the death of you," Chalmers took out the pack and handed it to Smith.

"Thanks," Smith took out a cigarette, put it in his mouth and lit the end. He handed the pack back to Chalmers.

"If this is going to be a regular thing," Chalmers said, "you'd better start buying your own."

“What’s going on sir?” Smith took a long drag on the cigarette.

“Do you know how long I’ve been in this job Smith?” Chalmers said, “Over thirty years. I learned a long time ago not to take things personally.”

“This is our case sir,” Smith said.

“Not any more. Get over it. SOCA have got it now.”

“SOCA?” Smith said.

“I’ve said enough,” Chalmers said.

Smith took another drag of the cigarette and winced. His tooth was throbbing now.

“Who are SOCA?” he said.

“Government,” Chalmers said, “police in fancy suits and expensive shoes. Believe me; you don’t want to get in their way.”

“Its not right sir.”

“Forget about it; we’ve got other things to worry about.”

He finished his cigarette and flicked the butt across the car park.

“I need a few hours off,” Smith said.

“I told you to leave it alone,” Chalmers said, “I know you, you’ll go off and get involved in something that will only end in trouble.”

“I need to see a dentist,” Smith said, “this tooth of mine is getting worse.”

“You’ve got two hours,” Chalmers said, “and you come straight back here when you’re finished. Have you got that?”

“Loud and clear,” Smith said, “I’ll see you later.”

As Smith parked outside the dental surgery in the centre of town he realised it had been over five years since he had last seen a dentist. He walked through the door into the

reception area and a wave of nausea engulfed him. Dentist's offices always smelled the same. He took a deep breath and tried to think of something else. He remembered why he had not been to the dentist for so long. The last time he had passed out before he had even sat down in the dentist's chair. He took another deep breath and walked up to the reception desk. The man there looked up from his computer and smiled.

"What can I help you with?" he asked.

"Pint of Theakstons please," Smith said.

The smile disappeared from the man's face.

"Sorry," Smith said, "I get a bit nervous when I come to the dentists. I've got a tooth ache."

"Name?" the man said.

"Smith, Jason Smith."

The man typed away on the keyboard.

"Nope," he said, "you're not here."

"I know," Smith said, "I've never been here before."

"Then you'll have to fill these in first," the man handed Smith two forms, "if you can fill them in in three minutes Doctor Rice will be able to see you straight away."

"Have you got a pen?" Smith asked.

The receptionist shook his head and handed Smith a black biro.

"I want that back though," he said, "you wouldn't believe how many pens we get through in here."

Smith took the forms and sat down on one of the plastic chairs. The sound of a child crying could be heard from one of the doors. The door opened and a boy of around eight

years old walked through. He was holding his hand to his mouth. Poor kid, Smith thought. He finished filling in the forms, stood up and handed them back to the receptionist.

"Pen," the man said.

Smith took the pen out of his jacket pocket and handed it to the man.

"You can go straight through," he said, "Doctor Rice's room is the third one on the right."

"Thanks," Smith opened the door and walked down the corridor.

Dr Rice's room was open and Smith went inside. A large woman in her forties was washing her hands in a basin in the corner. There was a funny smell in the room.

"Have a seat," Dr Rice said without turning round, "I'll be with you in a second."

Smith did as he was told. He stared at the various instruments in the dish next to the chair. Instruments of torture, he thought. Dr Rice turned to face Smith. He thought she had a very friendly face. She had large droopy brown eyes and a very large mouth that always seemed to be smiling.

"What can I do for you?" she said.

"I have a toothache," Smith said.

He touched the side of his mouth and winced.

"When was the last time you saw a dentist?" she said.

"Last time I had a toothache," Smith said, "about five years ago."

"I see," she said, "let's have a look then shall we."

She walked over to the chair and turned on the light. Smith clenched both fists.

"Relax," she said, "it's not too bad. Open your mouth."

Smith slowly opened his mouth. Dr Rice looked inside. She found what she was looking for immediately.

"Oh dear," she said.

Smith gazed up at the lamp and his eyes were blinded for a second.

"What's wrong?" he said.

"You've got a hole in your back left molar," Dr Rice said, "looks like the hole is down to the pulp cavity. Does it hurt when you drink?"

"Like crazy," Smith said.

"The nerve is just below the pulp cavity," she said."

"Can you fix it?"

"Of course."

She took a syringe from a small cupboard next to the chair and filled it from a vial of clear liquid. Smith watched her the whole time. He remembered one time when, as a child, he had been at the dentist for a filling. The dentist, a man with the worst halitosis Smith had ever experienced, had made a mistake with the injection. He had injected in the wrong place. Smith still remembered the pain as the drill had bored into his tooth.

"Open your mouth wider please," Dr Rice said.

Smith felt something cold on the side of his mouth. The sensation was not too unpleasant but he still closed his eyes and waited for the prick of the needle to hit his gum.

"Ok," Dr Rice said, "let's give it five minutes for the lidocaine to hit home and then we can get to work."

Smith was amazed.

"I didn't feel a thing," he said.

He could feel the anaesthetic starting to work already.

"Dentistry has come a long way in the last few years," Dr Rice said, "in the old days something like this would have meant gas and that would have knocked you for a six for a good five hours. This will be over in a few minutes."

She picked up Smith's file.

"Ah," she said, "I see you're a policeman and I knew that accent wasn't from around here. You're Australian."

Smith nodded. His mouth felt completely numb.

"I have a sister in Australia," Dr Rice said, "I haven't seen her for years. I keep meaning to take the plunge and get out there but it's such a long way to go isn't it? She lives in Melbourne."

Smith nodded again. This chatty dentist was starting to make his head spin.

"Ok," Dr Rice said, "we're all set. It'll be over and done with before you know it."

Smith closed his eyes and opened his mouth. His senses were playing tricks on him. He could not feel what was going on in his mouth but his hearing seemed to be enhanced. It was as if everything he heard was being played over a loudspeaker. Every click of the various tools Dr Rice was using was clear. The small drill started up and it rang through Smith's eardrums like a guitar tuner on a concrete floor; an A flat, shifting to an A sharp as the drill increased its speed. He opened his eyes and, seeing Dr Rice's mouth moving, could tell that she was still talking. The words were blocked out by the sound of the drill which was now making Smith's ears ring.

The drill was switched off and for a brief moment there was silence in the room. Dr Rice was preparing a white cement like substance in a small metal dish.

“Terrible business about Jimmy Fisher,” she said, “what a horrible way to die. In front of all those people too. My husband is still in shock.”

Smith tried to picture Dr Rice’s husband. He wondered if he was ever able to get a word in with this woman around. He tried to talk but the lidocaine had numbed his mouth so much that the words that came out were inaudible.

“Who would want to do such a thing?” Dr Rice continued, “Who would want to kill a football player?”

“There are some sick people out there,” Smith tried to say but the words were all mingled together.

“You’re right there,” Dr Rice seemed to understand him perfectly well.

She must be used to people speaking like this, Smith thought.

“Are you working on the investigation?” Dr Rice asked him.

“No,” Smith replied.

It was partly the truth. He had been told to stay away.

“I wanted to join the police,” Dr Rice said, “if it wasn’t for my parents I probably would have done. Dentistry’s in the blood you see. I would have made a good police detective.”

She started to fill the hole in Smith’s tooth. Smith still could not feel a thing.

“I read a lot of crime novels,” she said, “After a while you start to see patterns. Do you know what one of the most common mistakes the protagonists in crime books make?”

Smith shook his head. He was sure she was going to tell him whether he wanted to know or not.

“They complicate things too much,” she said, “They always overlook the obvious.”

Smith sighed but Dr Rice seemed unperturbed.

“It’s all so simple really,” she was starting to get quite excited.

Smith was hoping this would not take too long.

“Have you ever heard of Occum’s Razor?” she finished filling the hole and was now pressing the cement inside.

Smith shook his head.

“Occum’s razor,” Dr Rice took a strange tool from a silver dish and started to press tightly on Smith’s tooth.

“William of Occum was a philosopher in the fourteenth century,” she said, “he devised a brilliantly simple but effective problem solving principle. When you look at it it’s actually just a matter of stating the bloody obvious if you’ll pardon my French.”

Smith had a sudden urge to get out of there as soon as possible.

“Occum’s razor states that if there are various possible reasons for an event or chain of events it is the one with the fewest assumptions that should almost always be selected.”

Smith shook his head. Dr Rice had finished with the tooth and was starting to pack away her equipment. She walked over to the basin and washed her hands. Smith stood up. He was starting to get the feeling back in his mouth.

“Let me give you an example,” Dr Rice dried her hands on a small towel, “it’s a very crude one but I’m sure you’ll get what I mean. Let’s say, for instance that you leave a frozen chicken on your windowsill to defrost. Too hours later you come to get the chicken and it has disappeared. There’s a tabby cat sitting underneath the windowsill with a smile on his face. He’s still licking his lips. Now let’s say there are three possible explanations for the disappearance of the chicken. Reason one: the chicken suddenly woke up and ran away. Reason two: the chicken was abducted by aliens and, reason

three: the cat was passing by and smelled the chicken and decided to eat it. Which one would you pick?"

"The cat of course," Smith sighed.

"Of course," Dr Rice said, "the other two are just absurd. Look for the obvious first."

"I have to go," Smith said, "thanks for fixing my tooth."

"Occum's razor," Dr Rice said, "think about it. You can pay at the reception desk and don't leave it too long next time."

EIGHT

Smith drove away from the dentists and smiled. His tooth felt strange but the pain was gone. Dr Rice had done a good job. He had forgotten everything she had told him about the old philosopher. He could not even remember the man's name. He parked his car outside the station and got out. He went inside and headed straight for the canteen. He got a cup of coffee and took a small sip. The coffee tasted terrible but there was no pain when the warm liquid hit his tooth. His phone rang in his pocket. He took it out and looked at the screen. It was a number he did not recognise.

"Smith," he answered it.

"Is this sergeant Smith?" a man said.

Smith thought his voice sounded vaguely familiar.

"DS Smith," he said, "who is this?"

"We met earlier," the man said, "Sam Vernon. I'm the grounds man at Bootham Crescent. Can I have a word?"

"What's this all about?"

"It's about the Jimmy Fisher shooting," Vernon said, "I might have a bit of info for you."

Smith thought hard for a second. He had been told to leave the investigation well alone.

"Where are you?" he said anyway, "At the football ground?"

"No," Vernon said, "I'm at a pub round the corner. The Old York. This is a bit delicate."

"Give me ten minutes," Smith said and rang off.

He finished the rest of the coffee and walked back through to the front desk. Baldwin was there by herself.

“Where is everyone?” he said to her.

“Richmond sir,” she said, “they’re questioning people about the shooting of the Colombian.”

“When will they be back?”

“No idea sir,” she said.

“I have to go out. Something has come up.”

He walked out of the station before Baldwin could say anything else.

Smith found the Old York pub quite easily. From the outside he could tell at once that it was a favourite haunt of York City fans. The red and white of the Minster men hung in the windows in the form of flags and banners. Smith went inside and looked around. More football memorabilia hung on the walls of the pub. The place was almost empty and he spotted Vernon straight away. He was sitting in the far corner of the bar with another man. The man looked very young. Smith thought he could not be more than eighteen or nineteen.

“Sergeant,” Vernon said when Smith walked over to their table, “have a seat. Can I get you a drink?”

Smith felt like a drink. He felt like more than one drink but he knew what would happen if he had just one beer. Besides, he was not even supposed to be there.

“I’m fine,” he said, “what’s this all about?”

He sat down opposite Vernon.

“And who’s this?” he pointed to the other man.

Smith looked closely at him. He was very tanned and his eyes were dark brown. He was definitely not a Yorkshireman but what struck Smith most was the expression in his eyes. He looked terrified of something.

"Sergeant," Vernon said, "this is Rico Sanchez. He's been with us since he was sixteen. Last season was his first in the main squad. He's got a bright future ahead of him. One of the best defenders we've ever had."

Smith nodded to Sanchez.

"What's this all about?" he said.

"Tell him what you told me," Vernon said to Sanchez.

Sanchez looked at Smith and then looked around the pub as if he was expecting someone to walk in at any minute. Smith's phone started to ring in his pocket but he ignored it.

"What's on your mind Rico?" Smith said.

"I don't know what to do," Sanchez said in a strange accent.

It was definitely of Spanish origin but the intonation had a slight Northern twang to it.

"Take your time," Smith said.

"Tell him," Vernon said.

"I don't think they knew what they were getting themselves into," Sanchez said, "I've seen it before. Somebody was bound to get hurt."

"What are you talking about?" Smith said.

"Jimmy's dead," Sanchez said.

"I know," Smith said, "do you know who did this?"

He had a feeling he was about to learn something important but he also knew he was not supposed to be there.

“We met them just over a week ago,” Sanchez said.

“Who’s them?” Smith said.

“Them. They didn’t give their names. There was me, Jimmy and Tommy.”

“Tommy?” Smith said.

“Tommy Pike,” Vernon said, “on his way out I’m afraid. Can’t keep up with the younger blokes anymore.”

“What happened?” Smith said.

“Tommy and Jimmy were drinking,” Sanchez said, “I don’t drink but I still go along with them for the team spirit thing. They were quite drunk and I saw them talking to these three men in the bar of the club.”

“Did you know these men?” Smith said.

“No, I’d never seen them before but they didn’t look nice.”

“How do you mean?” Smith said.

“Mister Sergeant,” Sanchez said, “I’m from Uruguay. I grew up in one of the worst parts of Montevideo. I’ve seen plenty of men like these before. Un Peligroso. Dangerous people.”

“Do you know what they were talking about?” Smith said.

“I was sitting at one of the tables overlooking the dance floor,” Sanchez said, “Tommy, Jimmy and these men were talking at the bar. I couldn’t hear what they were saying.”

“So what is it you want to tell me then?” Smith was confused.

Sanchez looked around the room. Apart from an elderly gentleman reading a newspaper, the pub was empty.

"It was what I saw," Sanchez said, "not what they said. Jimmy suddenly stood up and walked away from the bar. Tommy was still talking to the men. Jimmy had an angry look on his face."

"I still don't get it," Smith said.

"One of the men with Tommy smiled," Sanchez said, "it was the most evil smile. I'll never forget it but its what he did afterwards that scares me."

"What did he do?" Smith was wondering if this was a complete waste of time.

"He watched Jimmy walk away and then he did this."

Sanchez raised his hand in the air and made the shape of a gun with his thumb and forefinger. He pointed it at Smith's head and pulled the imaginary trigger.

NINE

Smith got back in his car and looked at his phone. The message alert light was flashing. He remembered he had missed a call when he was talking with Vernon and Sanchez. He pressed the message retrieve button and listened.

'Jason Smith," a man with a strange accent said, 'this is your first and last warning. Stay away from matters that don't concern you.'

The message ended there. Smith saved the message and listened to it again. The voice was vaguely familiar. Where had he heard that voice before? He thought. He put the phone back in his pocket and turned the key in the ignition. He drove towards the river. Sam Vernon had given him Tommy Pike's address. Smith knew the area well. He was surprised that a football player would live in such a poor area. He knew that he had no business speaking to Pike but the detective in him knew he had to get to the bottom of all of this. The sun was beating down on the roads now. The weather forecast had predicted heat wave conditions for the rest of the week. Smith smiled as he passed children dressed in shorts and T shirts. It reminded him of Western Australia most of the year round. Unfortunately in York these bursts of hot weather were very rare.

Smith parked outside Pike's house and got out of the car. He realised he was sweating quite badly. He thought again about the voice message he had received earlier. Where had he heard that voice before? He knocked on the door and waited. There was no answer. He knocked again. The door was answered by a young boy wearing a football kit. Smith thought he could not be more than five or six years old. He had unusually large ears. They stuck out from his head on either side at angles of ninety degrees.

“Hello,” Smith said, “does Tommy Pike live here?”

“He’s my dad,” the boy said.

He had a very deep voice for his age.

“Is he home?” Smith said.

“He’s watching telly,” the boy said.

He was staring at Smith the whole time. Smith found it quite unnerving.

“Can I come in and speak to him?” he said, “I’m a policeman. I need to talk to him.”

“He’s watching Countdown,” the boy said, “He doesn’t like it when people bother him when he’s watching Countdown.”

“Who is it?” a voice was heard from inside.

“Police,” the boy shouted back.

As soon as Tommy Pike stood in the doorway, Smith could see who the child had inherited his unfortunate ears from. Tommy Pike had a very thin face and the way his ears protruded from his head it lent him a comical look. He would not have looked out of place in a twenties silent comedy.

“What do you want?” Pike said.

“I need to talk to you,” Smith said, “can I come inside?”

“Alfie,” Pike said to the boy, “go to your room.”

The boy did as he was told. Pike walked off down the hallway. Smith took this as an invitation to come inside the house. He closed the door behind him.

Pike’s house was not at all like he had imagined it to be. He had expected a football player, even a lower division player to live in far more luxury than Pike seemed to.

“The wife took almost everything,” Pike seemed to read Smith’s mind, “left me over a year ago with nothing more than this place and a kid to look after when she gets tired of him.”

Smith did not know what to say.

“What do you want?” Pike said, “Is this about Jimmy?”

Smith decided to come straight to the point.

“Who were the men you were talking to at the nightclub last week?” he asked.

Pike looked like he had been hit in the face.

“What are you talking about?” he said.

He started to scratch one of his huge ears.

“You were seen talking to three men,” Smith said, “you and Jimmy. From what I’ve heard they were pretty unsavoury types. Who were they?”

“Who told you all this?” Pike said.

“That’s not important. What were you talking about?”

“I can’t remember,” Pike scratched his ear even harder.

Smith knew at once that he was lying.

“I don’t know what’s going on here,” Smith said, “but I have a nasty habit of digging until I get to the bottom of things. Why do you think Jimmy was shot?”

“I have no idea,” Pike said, “Jimmy was alright. I don’t know why anybody would want to shoot him.”

“Were you and Jimmy friends?” Smith decided to try a different approach.

“We played on the same team,” Pike said, “You get to know a person well when you both play for the same side. You stick together.”

“That wasn’t what I asked,” Smith said.

“I wouldn’t say friends,” Pike said, “he never invited me round to his house if that’s what you mean but we’d have a few drinks after the game sometimes.”

“Like that night at the club?” Smith suggested.

“Like I say, I can’t remember. What’s this all about?”

Smith was starting to get irritated.

“Let me spell it out for you shall I? You and Jimmy Fisher were seen talking to three men at a night club. From what I heard, Jimmy didn’t seem to like the topic of conversation so he left the bar. One of the men pointed an imaginary gun at him. You know, like they do in mafia films where a threat is implied. A week later, Jimmy is shot dead in front of thirty eight thousand people. That’s quite a coincidence isn’t it? I hate coincidences. I’ll ask you again, what did you and these men talk about?”

“I can’t remember,” Pike was adamant, “I can’t help you.”

“Can’t or won’t?” Smith said.

“I think I should call my lawyer,” Pike said.

Smith’s heart sank. He hated lawyers and he was not even supposed to be there.

“That won’t be necessary,” he said, “if you suddenly do remember anything, give me a call.”

He handed Pike one of his cards.

“I’ll see myself out,” Smith said.

Smith sat in his car outside Tommy Pike’s house and thought hard. Pike knows something, he thought but how am I supposed to find anything out when I’m not even supposed to be on the case? He started the car, engaged first gear and drove away from

the house. He turned right onto the road that led to the dual carriageway. The car did not feel right. Smith did not know what it was but there was something wrong. He had owned the Ford Sierra for six years and it had not given him a day's trouble but now, Smith knew that something was wrong. The car was not responding to the steering wheel as it should do. He took his hands off the wheel and the car veered to the right. He quickly steered to the left and slowed down to thirty miles per hour. He felt something go clunk on the right side of the car and he swerved onto the other side of the road. He had no control of the car. The steering wheel was not working. He could only watch as the white van parked on the side of the road came closer and closer. He seemed to be watching it in slow motion. There was a loud bang and everything went black.

TEN

The waves were crashing down on Smith's head. He looked around but his surfboard was nowhere to be seen. He had nothing to hold onto and he was forced below the surface. He tried to stick his head out of the water to take a breath but the waves were too powerful. His lungs felt like they were about to explode. He needed air soon or he would drown. He spotted something under the water about ten metres away. The figure came closer to him and he realised who it was. It was his little sister, Laura. She had disappeared from a beach in Western Australia when Smith was sixteen. Everybody thought she had been attacked by a shark but when Smith met up with her again in Talinn eleven years later, he had found out the truth; she had been abducted from the beach while Smith was surfing. Smith had spent a brief moment with her but had been warned against ever making contact with her again.

Laura swam over to Smith and placed her hand in his. Her hand was cold. Smith smiled. He wanted to hold onto her forever.

"Laura," he said under the water.

He watched the bubbles as they rose to the surface as his words came out. His lungs could not take much more. They needed air.

"Laura,"

She had disappeared again.

"Sir," Smith heard a woman's voice, "Sir, can you hear me?"

"Laura?"

Smith opened his eyes. He found himself staring up at the sky. There was not a cloud in sight and the sun was beating down on his face.

“Can you hear me?” the woman asked.

Smith looked at her bending over her. She was wearing a paramedic’s uniform.

“What happened?” he said.

“Your car took a sudden dislike to that van over there,” she pointed to the white van parked by the side of the road.

Smith tried to look over but the pain in his neck stopped him halfway.

“Don’t move,” the paramedic said, “you could have whiplash.”

“What happened?” Smith asked again.

He could remember skidding over to the other side of the road and not being able to steer the car.

“Looks like your wheel came off,” she said, “you lost control of the car and slammed into the van. You were lucky you weren’t killed.”

Smith managed to look over. His car was being towed away by a tow truck. He tried to stand up.

“Not so fast,” the paramedic said, “you need to be checked over first.”

Smith felt himself being lifted up and he was taken to an ambulance parked nearby. A crowd of people had gathered around. His head was pounding and he was sure the pain in his tooth had returned. He was placed on the bed inside the ambulance and for a few moments he found himself alone. He thought about what the paramedic had told him. How could the wheel have come off? He thought. He had had the tyres replaced not so long ago by a reputable company. It did not make any sense.

Smith's thoughts were interrupted by the sound of heavy footsteps climbing up inside the ambulance. A uniformed police officer stood over him. Smith did not recognise him.

"Sir," the policeman said, "my name is PC Findlay. I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you to take a breathalyser test."

"What?" Smith could not believe what he was hearing.

"Have you been drinking sir?"

"No," Smith sat up on the bed, "but I could certainly use a drink while I listen to your bullshit."

"Sir," PC Findlay said, "there's no need for aggression; I'm afraid it's routine in car accidents such as these."

He took out the breathalyser machine.

"Could you please blow in here?"

He attached the tube and handed the machine to Smith.

"I haven't been drinking," Smith said, "you're new aren't you?"

"That's none of your business," PC Findlay said, "please just blow into the tube."

"What do they teach you in training these days?" Smith said, "Can you smell alcohol on my breath?"

He breathed out.

"No sir," PC Findlay said, "but like I said, it's just routine."

"Blow into the bloody tube Smith;" it was Chalmers, "it'll be the first test you've passed in years."

Chalmers stepped inside. PC Findlay looked confused. Chalmers took out his ID.

"You can leave us now," he said.

“I was just doing my job sir,” Findlay said.

“Leave now,” Chalmers said, “Before you upset Detective Sergeant Smith anymore than you need to.”

Findlay looked at Smith and stomped out of the ambulance.

“What the hell were you doing driving down here in the first place?” Chalmers said, “Where were you going?”

“I got a phone call from the grounds man at Bootham Crescent,” Smith said, “He said he had some information for me.”

“You can’t leave things alone can you?” Chalmers said.

“I met him at the pub round the corner from the football ground.”

He told Chalmers what Sanchez had told him and about the subsequent conversation with Tommy Pike.

“I don’t like this,” Chalmers said.

“The paramedic said my wheel fell off,” Smith said.

“I know. The bloody thing nearly knocked out an old lady. She’s still in shock.”

“There’s no way a wheel can just fall off sir.”

“I suppose I should ask you how you’re feeling,” Chalmers said.

“I’m fine,” Smith said, “there’s something else you should know.”

“There always is isn’t there?” Chalmers sighed.

“While I was talking to Sanchez I received a phone call. I ignored it but whoever called left a message.”

He took out his phone and played Chalmers the message.

“Do you know who this is?” Chalmers asked.

“The voice is familiar but I can’t quite put my finger on it right now.”

“So what do you think he meant?” Chalmers said, “First and last warning? Stay away from matters that don’t concern you?”

“I don’t know sir,” Smith said, “but don’t you think it’s strange that my car just happens to skid off the road minutes after I’ve spoken to Tommy Pike? Something’s going on.”

Chalmers rubbed his nose with his thumb. Smith knew that he always did that when he was thinking hard.

“What do we do now sir?” Smith said, “Tommy Pike knows something. I’m sure of it.”

Chalmers rubbed his nose even harder.

“Christ Smith,” he said, “why do you always do this to me? You know we can’t go anywhere near this case.”

“But sir.”

“But sir nothing. Get yourself checked out and don’t come back to work until they tell you.”

He walked away shaking his head. Smith could hear him talking to the paramedics.

The paramedic who had spoken to Smith earlier got in the back of the ambulance and sat on the chair next to the bed. She leaned over and strapped Smith in. The doors were closed and Smith heard the sound of the engine starting up.

“He doesn’t like you very much does he?” the paramedic said.

“Who?” Smith said.

“Your boss. He told me to make sure we keep you in for as long as we possibly can.”

“He tends to get a bit overprotective at times,” Smith said, “he loves me really.”

The paramedic shook her head and smiled.

ELEVEN

Tommy Pike switched off the television and walked through to the kitchen. He looked at the clock on the wall. It was four in the afternoon.

"Where the hell is that kid?" he said out loud.

His son Alfie had gone to play football in the park across the road. He had been told to be back home by three. Pike opened the fridge and took out a bottle of beer. After his conversation with Smith he felt like something stronger but he knew how that would end up. Badly. His career was almost over; he was coming to the end of his shelf life as a professional football player and he needed to try and stay as fit as possible for as long as he could. Twenty years at York City, he thought. All he had to look forward to was a meagre pension. A coaching position that paid peanuts would be the next best thing. He had not saved during the good years and the recent divorce had put huge pressure on his finances. He took a long sip of the beer and sighed.

"Twenty years," he said to the photograph on the wall; it was a photograph of York City FC in the nineties, "twenty years and what have I got to show for it? A pig sty of a house and a kid who can't even tell the time."

He heard the front door open.

"Alfie," he said, "get straight up to your room. When I say three o clock I mean it."

The house was silent.

"Alfie," he said again, "I mean it. Just because that mother of yours lets you get away with murder it doesn't mean you can do the same here."

Not a sound could be heard. Pike started to get worried. This was not like his son at all.

“Alfie,” he said once more, “is that you?”

“Your boy is safe,” a voice was heard.

Pike knew at once who it was and he started to sweat. A short stocky man walked through to the kitchen. There were two other men standing behind him. He recognised them from the nightclub the week before. The stocky man took the beer from Pike’s hand and finished it in one gulp.

“If you hurt my boy, I’ll kill you,” Pike said even though he was terrified.

It has been proven that the instinct to protect ones offspring almost always supersedes logic. Reason goes out the window. The stocky man started to laugh. It was the same evil laugh Pike had heard when he had pointed the imaginary gun at Jimmy Fisher.

“Like I said,” the man said, “your boy is safe. It’s your job to keep it that way. What did the policeman want?”

“He wanted to know what happened to Jimmy Fisher of course,” Pike said.

The stocky man started to laugh again.

“The brave goalkeeper,” he said, “our money wasn’t good enough for him. No, he would rather take one for the team. You think what we did to Fisher was bad; you should see what a Dragunov can do at close range. To a boy of your son’s size for example.”

“I didn’t tell the police anything,” Pike said, “they don’t know anything about you.”

“There wouldn’t be much left of him,” the man continued, “You should have seen the Colombian. They had to scrape him off the street and take him away in a bag.”

Pike was starting to feel queasy.

“I swear,” He pleaded, “I told the police nothing.”

“I hope so. For your boy’s sake.”

He put his hand in the side pocket of his jacket. Pike winced and closed his eyes.

So this is how it's going to end, he thought, they'll find me with my head blown off in my house.

"This is half of what we agreed on," the stocky man threw a large brown envelope on the kitchen table.

"You'll get the rest in two days time," he said, "together with your son. That is unless we have any more trouble with Jason Smith."

Pike stared at the envelope on the table.

"I just want my boy back," he said.

"Tommy Pike," the man took a step forward, "I'm just the messenger. I just bring the news, good or bad. Our friend Jason Smith seems to have survived his little accident so I hope for your sake that you didn't tell him too much."

"I didn't," Pike said.

"Two days, you'll get the rest of your money and we can put this all behind us. Your boy will be delivered unharmed."

He nodded to the taller of the men standing behind him. The man walked back to the front door and opened it.

"Two days," the stocky man said again.

He walked out through the front door. The other men followed behind him.

TWELVE

"I'm fine," Smith said to the doctor in private room eight at York General Hospital, "I need to get out of here."

"I'm afraid we need to check you out first," the doctor looked at the chart at the end of Smith's bed, "you've had quite a shock. I think it would be best if we kept you in overnight just to make sure."

"Do I have a choice?" Smith said.

"You could discharge yourself," the doctor said, "but I wouldn't recommend it."

"Then that's what I'll do," Smith sat up in the bed.

His vision went black for a few seconds. He took a deep breath and smiled at the doctor.

"Thanks for your help," he said, "I'm feeling much better now. You did a great job."

"If that's what you want," the doctor said, "I can't stop you. I'll organise the forms for you."

"Forms?" Smith said.

"Indemnity forms," the doctor said, "it puts us in the clear if anything does happen to you as a result of the accident. It's getting worse than America here now. People are suing the medical profession left right and centre. Once you sign the forms you are no longer our responsibility. It also makes it absolutely clear that you went against our advice and discharged yourself."

"Where do I sign?" Smith said.

While he was waiting for the doctor to fetch the indemnity forms, Smith took out his forms and dialled Whitton's number. She answered on the second ring.

“I need a lift Whitton,” Smith said.

“I heard about the accident,” Whitton said, “how are you?”

“I’ll be better when I get out of here. Can you pick me up at the hospital? They’re just about to discharge me.”

“You mean you’ve discharged yourself,” Whitton said.

“I feel fine,” Smith said, “can you pick me up or not? I can always ask Thompson.”

“I’ll be there in ten minutes.”

“I need to get over to forensics,” Smith said, “I want to see what Webber can tell me about the wheel that came off my car.”

“You’re impossible sir,” Whitton said, “I’ll see you in ten minutes.”

She rang off.

The doctor returned with the indemnity forms and Smith signed them without even reading them. He put on his shoes and got off the bed.

“Thanks Doctor,” he said, “don’t worry about me. I feel worse than this on a daily basis.”

He left the room. His head was throbbing as he walked through reception towards the exit. His neck was incredibly stiff. He knew that he should have probably done what the doctor had told him but he hated hospitals. Besides, he needed to get to the bottom of the cause of his accident. Wheels don’t just fall off cars, he thought, something strange is going on.

Smith walked outside into the blazing sunshine. The heat wave was in full swing. He could not remember the last time that it had been so warm for so long in York. He spotted Whitton’s car in the car park and walked towards it.

“Are you really ok sir?” Whitton asked when Smith got in the passenger seat.

“I’m fine,” Smith said, “I’ve got a bit of a sore neck but it’s nothing serious.”

“You could have whiplash,” Whitton sounded concerned, “it can be serious you know. You should be resting.”

“I hate resting. Let’s see if Webber has anything to tell us shall we?”

They drove in silence to the new forensics building. Whitton drove very slowly. Smith had forgotten what an overly cautious driver she was.

“Doesn’t this thing go any faster?” he asked eventually.

“I can’t believe you sir,” Whitton said, “you’ve just had a car crash and you want me to driver faster.”

“What are the odds of having two car accidents in one day?” Smith smiled at her. “I’m just a bit irritable and impatient at the moment. Something is going on and I hate it when we don’t have anything to go on. What do you make of all this?”

“All what sir?”

“Two football players are killed,” Smith said, “both of them with the same weapon. A Russian military issue sniper rifle is found across the road from where one of them was shot. My wheel decides to fall off my car just after I’ve questioned someone about the two murders. Someone I’m sure is not telling us everything. I don’t know what’s happening but I don’t like it.”

“Sir,” Whitton said, “what part of stay away from this case don’t you understand? You’re not supposed to be snooping around on this one.”

“Someone left a message on my phone,” Smith said, “They said it was my first and last warning and told me to stay out of this.”

“Maybe you should listen to them.”

“When people are killed,” Smith said, “it’s my job to find out who did it. It’s your job too in case you’ve forgotten. I think somebody tried to kill me too. Wheels just don’t fall off cars.”

“I think you have a concussion sir,” Whitton said, “you’re being paranoid.”

She pulled up in the car park outside the forensics building.

“We’ll see,” Smith said.

He got out of the car and walked quickly to the entrance. Whitton had to run to keep up with him.

Grant Webber was in the large workshop in the basement of the building. It was here where they worked when the evidence was too large to carry upstairs to the main building. Webber saw Smith approaching and rolled his eyes.

“I thought you were in hospital,” he said, “not to sound like I really give a shit but you should really stay overnight to get checked over properly. Concussion and whiplash can be nasty.”

“I’m fine Webber,” Smith said, “Did you find anything out about my car?”

“Give me a chance,” Webber said, “I’m just about to start. They only brought it in about an hour ago.”

He nodded to Whitton in acknowledgement.

“Excuse him,” Whitton said, “he’s had a bang on the head; he’s even worse than usual today.”

Webber shook his head.

Smith's red Ford Sierra had been raised over a pit in the ground by a hydraulic jack. Smith sighed as he looked at his beloved car. The front end had been completely smashed in, the windscreen was smashed and the front axle was bent.

"You were lucky," Webber said, "You could have been seriously injured, even killed."

"I'm charmed," Smith said, "let's get to it shall we?"

"You can stay," Webber said, "but leave me in peace to do my job. I like to work in silence."

"My lips are sealed," Smith said.

"By the way," Webber said, "we checked out the cigarette butt we found at the house across the road from the football ground."

"And?" Smith said.

"Steels," Webber said, "nobody sells them in England. They're only sold in a few places. Latvia, Finland and Estonia."

"Estonia?" Smith said.

"Former Soviet Union," Webber said.

"I know where Estonia is," Smith said.

A forensics technician Smith had not seen before walked in. He was whistling a song that seemed vaguely familiar; it was some country and western song. Webber looked at him and burst out laughing. Smith and Whitton looked on in disbelief.

"Forensics humour?" Smith asked.

"My friend Brian here has a rather warped sense of humour," Webber said.

He looked at Brian.

"Tell him what you were whistling."

“A good old Kenny Rogers number,” Brian said, “Lucille, or in this case Loose Wheel.”

He looked at Whitton, smiled and started to sing.

“You picked a fine time to leave me loose wheel.”

Whitton started to laugh. Even Smith found it hard not to smile.

“Can we get on with it?” Smith said, “This is important.”

Smith and Whitton stood back and watched Brian and Webber as they went through the motions. The wheel that had come off Smith’s car was lying next to the car on a plastic table. Webber opened up his case and took out his fingerprint equipment. He covered the whole wheel in powder. He did a thorough job and when he was finished there was not one part of the wheel that he had not checked.

“Nothing there,” he said, “although I didn’t expect there to be.”

Smith was disappointed. He did not know what to expect to find out but he was hoping Webber would be able to shed some light on the whole thing.

“This is interesting,” Brian said.

“What have you found?” Webber asked.

“How fast were you going when the wheel came off?” Brian asked Smith.

“No more than thirty,” Smith said, “when I realised there was something wrong I slowed right down.”

“Two of the wheel studs are gone,” Brian said, “a car travelling at high speed when a wheel came off would probably lose all the wheel studs but at thirty miles per hour the wheel wouldn’t snap them off like this.”

He took out a magnifying glass and had a closer look.

“Bingo,” he said, “the way the studs have sheared off is exactly the same on both of them. The odds of that happening are out of this world.”

“What does that mean?” Smith asked.

“It means that somebody doesn’t like you Smith,” Webber said, “It means that somebody wanted the wheel to come off.”

He took a look at the wheel studs.

“They’ve been sheared off with what looks like pincers,” he said, “loosening the nuts wasn’t good enough, whoever did this wanted to make absolutely sure.”

“Did you find the nuts?” Whitton asked.

“We found two of them,” Webber said, “with only two wheel studs remaining I would assume that whoever did this took the other two nuts with them.”

He pointed to a plastic bag on the table. In it were two wheel nuts.

“Let’s see if we can get anything from these shall we?” he carefully removed one of the nuts.

He covered the nut in powder.

“When was the last time you changed your tyres?” he asked Smith.

“A few months ago,” Smith said.

“And you haven’t touched the wheel since?”

“Of course not. Why would I?”

“Look at this,” Webber pointed to the nut.

Even to the untrained eye, the fingerprint was clearly visible.

“Fingerprint?” Whitton said.

“I’d say it’s a thumb print,” Webber said, “Let’s get it checked out shall we?”

He took out a small camera and took a couple of photographs of the nut. Then Brian handed him a strip of rubber tape which Webber carefully pressed against the wheel nut. Finally, he pressed some clear tape over the fingerprint on the rubber tape and put it in an evidence bag.

"It's a real beauty," Brian said, "I can see that without even looking at it on the computer."

"Can you do me a favour?" Smith asked Webber.

"What now?" Webber said.

"Can you check it against the prints you found on the sniper rifle?"

Webber's facial expression changed completely. He looked like he had been hit in the face. Smith suddenly understood what he had said.

"Brian," Webber said, "we're done here, can you take this and process it?"

He handed Brian the evidence bag with the fingerprint in it.

"Brian's not stupid," Webber said when Brian had gone, "he's going to wonder what you were on about when you mentioned a sniper rifle. Nobody is supposed to know about the Dragunov. Do you want to get me into trouble?"

"I didn't think," Smith said.

"How do you think it will look if it suddenly gets out that someone in forensics is talking about a sniper rifle?" Webber was not giving up, "They'll think its come from me."

"Sorry Webber," Smith said, "can you still compare the prints though?"

"No," Webber said, "that information is strictly off limits if you know what I mean."

"No I don't know what you mean."

"It is not at your disposal," Webber said, "is that clear enough for you?"

“Somebody tried to kill me today,” Smith could feel his heart starting to beat faster, “all I want to know if it’s the same lunatic that killed two football players with a Dragunov sniper rifle. You still have the prints from the rifle don’t you?”

“I can’t,” Webber said, “I happen to like my job and I would like to keep it if that’s alright with you.”

“Don’t be so dramatic Webber,” Smith said, “please, it’s not like I’m going to be able to do anything about it anyway. The prints from the Dragunov are not on any of our records. I just need to know for a bit of peace of mind.”

Webber walked over to the table and started to pack away his equipment.

“Why do you always do this to me?” He looked at Smith.

“Thanks Webber,” Smith said, “let me know as soon as you know anything.”

THIRTEEN

"What now?" Whitton asked as they drove away from the forensics building.

"I've been told to take some time off," Smith said, "my head feels like the morning after a bottle of Jack and my neck is as stiff as hell. Could you drop me off at home?"

Whitton looked at Smith as if he had grown another head.

"What?" Smith said.

"Are you seriously telling me you're going to go home and rest?"

"Of course," Smith said, "why's that so hard to believe?"

"I know you sir," Whitton said, "you can't just stay at home and do nothing. It's not like you."

"I must be getting old," Smith said.

Whitton parked the car outside Smith's house and turned off the engine.

"Do you need anything?" she said.

"I'll be fine," Smith said, "you'd better get back to work. I'm sure there's some mind blowing case you could be working on."

"Nothing's happening," Whitton said, "this weather seems to have put everybody in such a good mood that they've forgotten about committing crime."

"Something will turn up," Smith said, "This is York. Something always turns up. I'm off to do a bit of research."

"I knew it," Whitton said, "you can't just lie back and take it easy can you?"

"Thanks for the lift," Smith got out of the car, "I'll see you when I see you."

He walked up the path to his house.

“Just let me know if you need anything,” Whitton said but Smith had already gone inside.

Theakston had a strange expression on his face when Smith met him in the hallway. It was as if the bull terrier knew that something was wrong. He did not jump up at Smith like he usually did; he merely sat at Smith’s feet and stared up at him with what could only be described as sympathy in his eyes.

“Hey boy,” Smith patted the dog on the head, “are you hungry?”

He walked through to the kitchen and put some food in the dog bowl. Theakston looked up at him and started to eat. Smith took some painkillers out of the kitchen cupboard and swallowed them with a glass of water. He walked back down the hallway to the living room. Theakston followed him. He had not even finished his food yet. Smith was confused.

“Go and finish your food,” he said.

Theakston never left any food in his bowl. Smith went back to the kitchen and waited for the dog to finish his food.

“You’re not going to let me out of your sight are you?” he said.

While Theakston was busy eating, Smith made some coffee. He took a small sip and waited for the pain in his tooth to hit him. The pain did not materialise; the accident had not done any damage.

When Theakston had finished eating, Smith picked up his coffee and took it to the living room. The dog followed him. Smith sat down at the small desk in the corner of the room and switched on his computer. He had bought it two months earlier after being sick of the constant interruptions at work. He could now do research in peace. Theakston lay at his feet and fell asleep almost immediately. Smith waited for the computer to boot up.

The only sound in the house was Theakston's deep breathing. Smith did not know where to start. He did not really know what he was looking for. He took a sip of coffee and typed in 'Jimmy Fisher' in the search bar. The page that came up showed tributes and news reports about the shooting. He quickly scanned through the news articles. Not one of them mentioned anything about a sniper rifle or a reason for the murder. One of the articles speculated that a rival fan had shot Fisher on the spur of the moment but it stated that there was no conclusive evidence to support this theory and no rival fan had been questioned. Smith sighed. He typed in 'Carlos Rubio' and he saw more of the same on the screen. He opened up a news report from the York Post. Smith could not believe what he was reading. There was nothing that even hinted the two killings were connected. The York Post mainly concentrated on the fact that Rubio was from Colombia and it was obviously drug related. He closed the page and typed in 'Sarah Proud'. There were plenty of people called Sarah Proud but none of them were the person he was looking for.

Smith rubbed his eyes. His headache had gone but he now felt exhausted. He stood up carefully so as not to wake Theakston and walked to the kitchen to make some more coffee. He noticed that the light was flashing on his phone on the kitchen table. He switched the kettle on and picked up the phone. He had received two messages. The first one was from Grant Webber. Smith's heart quickened when he read the message. Webber came straight to the point.

'Fingerprints match,' the message read, 'delete this as soon as you've read it.'

Smith read the message again and deleted it as Webber had asked.

"I knew it," he said out loud.

The same person who had shot Jimmy Fisher had tried to sabotage his car. He made the coffee and was about to go back to the living room when he remembered the other message. He looked at the screen on the phone. The message was from an unknown number.

'Jason Smith,' it began, 'stay out of matters that don't concern you. Remember Talinn? Regards, an old friend.'

Smith's hands started to shake. He had to put the coffee mug down on the table, he was shaking so much. He sat down at the kitchen table and took a deep breath. Remember Talinn, he thought. Of course he could remember Talinn. He would never be able to forget it. An old school acquaintance, David White had helped him to track down his sister. Smith had found her in Talinn. It had ended in the death of a friendly flight attendant who had helped him and it had almost cost Smith his own life. He had not heard anything from his sister since.

Smith took a sip of coffee. He read the message again. Who is this old friend? He thought. Hardly anybody knew about what happened in Talinn. He had told Whitton about it but he trusted her more than anyone else in the world. He went back to the living room and sat in front of the computer. Theakston was still snoring on the carpet. Smith saw he had a new message alert. It was a Facebook alert. That was when it hit him. He took the card out of his pocket and dialled Sarah Proud's number.

FOURTEEN

It was starting to get dark when Sarah Proud knocked on Smith's door. Smith was beyond exhausted now. He knew he should have waited until the next morning but he had to say what was on his mind while his thoughts were still fresh. He opened the door and was surprised at what he saw. Sarah Proud looked nothing like she had done earlier in the day. The formal suit had been replaced by jeans and a white T shirt. The word 'Sprint' was written in pink italics on the front of the T shirt. It was her face that surprised him the most. Her hair was no longer tied up in a tight pony tail and dark wisps hung over her face accentuating her high cheekbones. Her eyes seemed less intense now and her small pointed nose and fine chin gave her an almost elfin appearance.

"Can I come in?" she asked, "or are you going to stand there staring all night?"

"Sorry," Smith said, "of course. Come in."

Theakston walked towards her and wagged his tail. He sniffed her feet and walked back to the living room. Smith was amazed; he had never seen such indifference in his dog before.

"Come through," Smith walked to the kitchen.

Sarah Proud closed the door behind her.

"Would you like something to drink?" Smith asked.

"Yes," she said, "as a matter of fact, I'd love one."

"I have beer or whisky," Smith said.

"Whatever you're having is fine," she said.

Smith still could not believe the change in the woman. She was nothing like the ogre he had met that morning. He took out two beers from the fridge and handed one to Proud.

"Do you want a glass?" he asked.

"Why would I want a glass?" she took a long sip from the bottle.

Smith knew that one beer would probably knock him for a six the way he felt at the moment but he took a sip anyway.

"You realise you're completely defenceless now," Proud said as they sat down.

"What do you mean?" Smith was confused.

"Don't you watch the movies? When you invite a vampire into your house all your defences are lost."

Smith did not know what to say.

"I'm kidding around," she said.

"Sorry," Smith said, "it's been a hell of a day. My sense of humour was lost somewhere between being told I'm not allowed to do my job and finding out that someone tried to kill me."

"That seems to happen to you rather a lot doesn't it?"

"What does?" Smith said.

"The people trying to kill you part," she said.

"That's what I need to talk to you about," Smith finished his beer, stood up and took two more from the fridge.

The first one was starting to make his head spin but he felt like getting drunk. He handed Proud a beer.

"Thanks," she said, "I'm intrigued. What's on your mind?"

“Off the record?” Smith said.

Proud looked at her watch.

“Off the record then,” she said, “but you know I can’t tell you too much.”

“Someone once tried to kill me in Talinn,” Smith said.

Proud’s whole facial expression changed. She looked stunned.

“Outside a bar in the city centre,” Smith continued, “I had a gun pointed at my head. I thought I was going to die. All alone in a cold city. Nobody even knew I was there.”

“I didn’t know,” Proud said.

“That part isn’t on my record,” Smith said, “That’s why you don’t know about it.”

He realised he was starting to slur his words.

“I know what’s going on here,” he said, “I figured it out.”

“What have you figured out detective?” Sarah Proud seemed to be on her guard.

“I had a voicemail left on my phone with a warning,” Smith said, “and I received a message too. It said, remember Talinn? And he signed it an old friend. Come on, it doesn’t take a genius to work it all out. Russian sniper rifles, all this cloak and dagger bollocks. It’s him isn’t it?”

Sarah Proud looked around the room as if she were expecting someone to burst in at any moment.

“They’re not from Russia are they?” Smith said.

“Who are you talking about? You’re not making any sense.”

Smith remembered what Webber had said about the unusual cigarettes found at the house across the road from Bootham Crescent.

“I might have a concussion,” Smith said, “but I’m not stupid. These people are from Estonia aren’t they?”

Proud looked gobsmacked.

“Former Soviet Union,” Smith said, “until ninety one. I know the history very well.”

He was starting to wake up now.

“Friendly people the Estonians,” he said, “most of them are anyway.”

“You’re babbling on now,” Proud said, “I think you should stop there.”

“I haven’t finished yet,” Smith finished the rest of his beer, “two football players are gunned down. I haven’t figured out why yet but I know exactly who did it.”

Sarah Proud finished her second beer in one go.

“Go on,” she said.

She seemed very nervous.

“The Rainbow of life,” Smith smiled, “the Brain of Wolfie.”

Proud looked like she had been knocked over by a bus. She did not know what to say.

Smith put another beer in front of her.

“I’m sorry,” Smith said, “Wolfie is behind this isn’t he? He didn’t pull the trigger himself but he’s smack bang in the middle of all this.”

Sarah Proud shook her head. Theakston walked in and sat at her feet. She patted him on the head.

“Nice dog,” she said, “he obviously likes people.”

“Not really,” Smith said, “but I can tell he likes you. Are you going to tell me what’s going on?”

“You first,” Proud looked in his eyes.

Her eyes were still very alert. The beer had obviously had little effect on her.

“Tell me about Talinn,” she said.

“Ok,” Smith said, “but I’m going to need something a bit stronger than beer.”

He left the room and came back with a full bottle of Jack Daniels. He took out two glasses and poured two healthy measures.

“Here’s to Talinn,” he handed one of the glasses to Proud.

She took the glass and emptied it in one go.

“My sister disappeared when I was sixteen,” Smith said, “We thought she had been attacked by a shark. Her body was never found.”

Proud picked up the bottle of Jack Daniels and filled both their glasses.

“I was sent to England just over a month later,” Smith said, “my mother wanted rid of me.”

Smith realised he had told very few people about this.

“A year or so ago,” he continued, “an old acquaintance from my days in Western Australia got hold of me and told me that my sister was still alive. We tracked her down to Talinn and I went after her.”

Sarah Proud listened on intently. Smith wondered how his first impressions of this woman could have been so wrong. He had never found it easy to talk about his personal life but talking to Proud now it was like he had known her for years.

“Anyway,” he said, “I found her, “I found Laura in Talinn. She handed me a message saying I should meet her outside a bar.”

“So you met up with her again after all those years?” Proud said.

“It wasn’t her who showed up outside the bar,” Smith finished what was left in his glass, “it was Wolfie. The man himself and a few of his robots. Wolfie pointed a gun at my head and I thought it was all over.”

“What happened?” Proud’s accent had changed slightly. It was a subtle change but Smith could not help but notice it.

“One of the friends I had made came to my rescue,” Smith said, “he even came up with a plan to get my sister to England via Finland but Wolfie found out about it and I had to come back alone.”

“And here you are,” Proud said.

She smiled for the first time. She had small pointy teeth. Maybe the vampire comment earlier had not been a joke, Smith thought.

“And here I am,” Smith raised his glass in the air, “so what now?”

“Why are you telling me all this?” Proud asked.

“I have no idea,” Smith said, “I don’t even like you.”

He regretted saying it immediately.

“I have to go,” Proud said, “its late. I’m in no state to drive. Do you have the number of a taxi company?”

“I didn’t mean that,” Smith said, “I meant to say I didn’t like you. At first, that is. I have shit intuition when it comes to first impressions. It’s quite a hindrance for a police detective.”

Sarah Proud stood up.

“Or I could just walk,” she said, “it’s a pleasant night and the hotel isn’t far.”

“You can’t walk,” Smith said.

He was shocked at how high pitch his voice sounded.

“It’s not safe,” he added in a much deeper voice.

“You wouldn’t believe what I’ve been trained to do with just my bare hands,” Proud said.

“Please,” Smith said, “stay for a bit longer. I like talking to you.”

He filled her glass. He realised that his hands were shaking.

FIFTEEN

Tuesday 10 August 2010

When Smith woke up he was not sure where he was at first. He looked to the side and winced; his neck was in agony. He saw his Gran's old sideboard and realised he was in the spare bedroom. He got out of bed and went to the bathroom. He looked at his face in the mirror and was surprised at how well he looked considering the day he had had yesterday. His eyes were slightly bloodshot but they were not as bad as they usually were. He went downstairs and switched on the kettle to make coffee. There was an empty Jack Daniels bottle on the kitchen table. Smith did not usually have memory blackouts but he could not remember much about the previous night. He made the coffee and heard the toilet flush upstairs. Suddenly it all came back to him. Sarah Proud had been to his house. He remembered now that she had asked him to phone for a taxi but after that was still a blur.

Sarah Proud walked in the kitchen. Theakston followed closely behind her. Smith realised she was wearing one of his T Shirts. It was a black one with a faded picture of Jimi Hendrix on the front. He had forgotten he even still had the T Shirt. He could not help but stare at her. She had a slim build and her legs were almost as long as his.

"Coffee," she sat down at the kitchen table, "I need coffee."

She scowled at the empty bottle of jack Daniels.

"How did you sleep?" Smith said and realised how pathetic it sounded.

"I slept," she said.

“Where did you sleep?” he asked her.

“I think I slept in the dog’s bed,” she said, “he seems to think it’s his bed anyway. He snores like crazy by the way.”

“I know,” Smith smiled, “you must have slept in my room. Theakston always sleeps in there.”

He made the coffee and handed her the mug.

“Thanks,” she said, “about last night.”

“What about last night?” Smith said, “We didn’t…”

“No we didn’t. What kind of a girl do you think I am? Besides, not only were you incapable of doing anything; you were the perfect gentleman. You insisted on sleeping in the spare room. I’m talking about what you told me.”

“What did I tell you?” Smith said.

“Don’t act dumb. What you know could be dangerous. Very dangerous. Have you spoken to anyone else about this?”

“No,” Smith said, “I only put two and two together just before I called you.”

“Good,” she said, “how’s your shower?”

“What?”

“Your shower,” she said, “I need a shower but I’d rather wait until I get back to the hotel if it’s like standing under a leaky pipe.”

“The pressure is good,” Smith said.

“Great,” she said and walked out of the kitchen, “I love this shirt by the way.”

You can have it,” Smith said but he was not sure if she had heard him.

"What have you got planned for today?" Smith asked when Proud was out of the shower.

She had changed back into the clothes she had been wearing the previous night.

"Research," she said, "a dreary hotel room; a laptop with the slowest internet I've ever known and room service food."

"Sounds great," Smith said.

"You get used to it after a while. What about you?"

"I'm supposed to be on sick leave," Smith said, "but I feel fine. I think I'll treat this fat feller to his favourite meal."

He pointed to Theakston. He was sitting by Proud's feet.

"Favourite meal?" Proud said.

"Steak and ale pie. There's a pub just down the road that does the best food in York. Are you hungry?"

"I'm starving," Proud said.

"Then research can wait. I'm taking you to lunch. Just give me ten minutes to have a shower. I hope you didn't use up all the hot water."

Sarah Proud laughed.

"Take your time," she said, "I'll make some more coffee."

While Smith was in the shower, Proud looked around the house. She walked to the living room. There were three electric guitars in the corner gathering dust. They looked like they had not been played in a while. She spotted Smith's computer, walked over to it and switched it on. She smiled when she saw she did not need a password to access it. She opened up Internet Explorer and looked through the history. He doesn't delete his

browsing history, she thought as she scrolled down the list of recently viewed websites. She stopped when she saw her own name staring at her from the computer screen. Smith had tried to find information about me minutes before he phoned me, she thought, what was he trying to find out? She knew very well there would be nothing of any interest about her on the internet.

The shower had stopped running upstairs and Proud could hear Smith brushing his teeth. She shut down the computer and went back to the kitchen to make the coffee. Theakston wagged his tail when he saw her. While the kettle was boiling, Smith's phone beeped to tell him he had a message. Smith was still moving around upstairs. Proud picked up the phone and looked at the message. She recognised the number immediately. The message read, 'be careful who you trust. Regards, a friend'.

Proud deleted the message and put the phone down just as Smith walked in the kitchen.

"That's better," he said, "was that my phone I heard?"

"I didn't hear anything," Proud said, "Do you want some coffee?"

"Sounds good," Smith said.

He picked up his phone. There were no new messages.

"I've decided to take your advice," Proud put a mug of coffee in front of Smith, "research can wait. I haven't had a day off in weeks. These people will still be around tomorrow."

Smith found it strange that the group responsible for the death of two footballers and who knows what else always seemed to be known as 'these people' and 'them'. It was as if they were some kind of deities. He was about to say something about Wolfie but decided against it. Sarah Proud was right. It would not hurt to take a day off away from everything.

"So where are you taking us?" Proud patted Theakston on the head.

"To a place like no other," Smith said, "The Hog's Head; a pub that has withstood the test of time and I'm not taking you, you're taking me. My car is a bit worse for wear, remember. These people you talk about made pretty sure of that."

He regretted saying it immediately but Sarah Proud did not seem to notice.

"Let's go then," she finished her coffee and stood up.

Theakston was already waiting at the front door.

The Hog's Head was reasonably full when they walked inside. It was the school holidays and people had taken time of work to spend time with their children. Marge, the owner of the pub had hired temporary staff to help out with the extra customers.

"Jason," Marge said when she spotted him, "where have you been hiding? I haven't seen you for months."

The Hog's Head had been Smith's regular pub for years now but he had not been there in a very long time.

"Sorry Marge," Smith said, "you know what it's like. I haven't been out much in the past months."

Marge looked at Sarah Proud.

"Hello love," she said, "Jason's a decent bloke but he has the manners of an ape. I'm Marge."

She held out her hand.

"Sorry Marge," Smith said, "this is Sarah Proud. She's a work colleague."

"Nice to meet you Sarah," Marge shook her hand.

She spotted Theakston standing behind them.

"You've got fat," she said to the dog, "you need more exercise."

Theakston wagged his tail. He liked Marge. He had stayed with her on numerous occasions when Smith had been busy.

"After today he's on a strict diet," Smith said.

"I've heard that before," Marge said, "and I'm afraid he's not allowed in here anymore. New regulations. Apparently dogs and food are strict no nos."

"He's no trouble," Smith argued, "You know that."

"I do know that," Marge said, "but it's not up to me. Regulations are regulations. It could get me closed down if somebody were to complain. You'll have to sit outside on the beer garden."

"You've got a beer garden?" Smith said.

"Just shows how long it's been since you were here last," Marge said, "It's where the smokers have to sit."

She pointed to a door to the left of the toilets.

"I'll have one of the girls come out and take your order," Marge said.

Smith chose the table furthest away from the door. It was starting to get hot and the breeze outside was very welcome. A man was standing under a small oak tree next to the beer garden. He was smoking a cigarette. Smith was sure he had seen him somewhere before but he could not remember where it was. The smoke was drifting across their table. It smelled very strong. Theakston slumped on the floor and started to breathe deeply. A woman with purple hair approached them.

"Afternoon," she said, "what can I get you?

"Two pints of Theakstons," Smith said.

At the sound of his name, Theakston shot up and looked at the woman with the purple hair.

"Better make that three," Smith said, "and a couple of menus. Do you sell cigarettes?"

"There's a machine in the bar," the waitress said and walked away.

"I never pictured you as a smoker," Proud said.

"I'm not," Smith said, "I'm thinking about starting."

"Those things will kill you, you know."

"I got a funny feeling that smoking is not going to be the cause of my death," Smith smiled and walked inside the pub.

The man smoking under the oak tree looked at Sarah proud and nodded. She nodded back. He stubbed his cigarette out in an ashtray and walked inside the pub. Theakston growled at him as he walked past.

SIXTEEN

"Has anybody heard from Smith?" Chalmers said.

Whitton, Thompson and Bridge were sitting in Chalmers' office. It was incredibly hot; the fan on the ceiling was not doing a very good job of cooling the room down. Chalmers had beads of sweat on his forehead.

"I dropped him off yesterday," Whitton said, "he must be at home resting."

"I don't like it," Chalmers said, "Smith never rests. When we don't hear from him it usually means he's up to something."

"Maybe he's just taking it easy sir," Bridge said, "he had a bit of a rough day yesterday."

"Something's going on," Chalmers said, "I can feel it. I've know Smith for too long."

He picked up an apple from the bowl of fruit on the desk and took a bite. The heat had made the apple rotten. Chalmers threw the rest of the apple in the rubbish bin.

"Did you want to see us about something sir?" Thompson asked.

"The Super has had another one of his bright ideas," Chalmers said.

Everyone in the room groaned.

Superintendant Jeremy Smyth's brainwaves were notorious in the station. They were usually inane dreams that were thought up due to boredom and they seldom reaped results. Only months earlier, Smyth had had the bright idea to remove all of the doors in the station in an effort to improve communication among the ranks. The idea was met with disdain and the doors were all replaced days later.

"What's the old fool come up with now?" Thompson was the first to ask.

“As you’re probably aware,” Chalmers said, “in recent years York has changed drastically. It’s gone from being the sleepy historical town it was to something akin to its namesake. New York.”

“You can’t be serious sir?” Whitton said, “That’s going a bit far isn’t it?”

“Smyth’s words not mine Whitton,” Chalmers said, “and he’s sticking to them. You must admit he’s got a fair point. Ok, maybe comparing us to New York is a bit far fetched but in the past few years we’ve had our fair share of gun toting maniacs. Surely you haven’t forgotten that?”

He looked her in the eyes.

Whitton nodded. She remembered the crazed Chinese man who had held her and Smith at gunpoint on a boat in the North Sea. Then, later on she had been drugged and abducted by the first serial killer in York’s history. A man who had killed nine people. Most recently a young woman had butchered seven men before holding Smith and Whitton at gunpoint at a caravan park in Robin Hood’s Bay.

“What’s the Super’s bright idea?” Whitton asked.

“Training,” Chalmers said, “weapons training.”

Bridge’s eyes lit up.

“We’re not allowed to carry weapons,” Thompson said, “Surely you know that.”

“And you still won’t carry weapons,” Chalmers said.

“So what’s the point of the training then?” Bridge said.

“Smyth has analysed all of the violent crime stats over the past few years,” Chalmers said, “and he claims to have found a pattern.”

“A pattern?” Thompson said.

“He reckons that whenever we’re confronted with an apparently dangerous situation, we have to wait for the armed unit before we can even think of intervening,” Chalmers said, “with the appropriate training, Smyth reckons we’ll be able to cut down the reaction time drastically and nip everything in the bud before everything gets out of hand.”

“His words?” Whitton suggested.

“His words,” Chalmers said.

“I’m in,” Bridge said.

Whitton glared at him.

“Hold your horses,” Chalmers said, “Like I said, it’s just an idea. Smyth still has to run it by the chief constable. It’ll probably not come to anything. I’m just giving you a heads up.”

Nobody said a word. The silence was broken by the sound of Chalmers’ telephone ringing on his desk. Chalmers looked at it as if he did not know what to do with it. Whitton and Bridge stared at him. Chalmers answered it on the sixth or seventh ring.

“Chalmers,” he said.

“I think you’d better come down to the front desk sir.”

It was Baldwin.

“What’s wrong Baldwin?” Chalmers said.

“I’ve got Tommy Pike here,” Baldwin said.

“The football player?”

“That’s right,” Baldwin said, “and he’s in a bit of a state.”

SEVENTEEN

Smith looked at the cigarette machine at the different brands and sighed. He was new to all this. He did not know one brand from the other. Chalmers' Marlboroughs seemed a bit harsh and they had left a bitter aftertaste in his mouth. He decided to take a chance and selected a packet of Benson and Hedges. He put the money in the slot and the cigarettes dropped out. He realised he did not have anything to light them with so he walked up to the bar to ask if they sold matches. Marge was speaking to a man with thick black hair. It was the same man Smith had seen smoking outside.

"Sorry Marge," Smith said, "do you sell matches? I've bought some cigarettes and I don't have anything to light them with."

"You don't smoke," Marge looked quite shocked.

"I'm thinking of starting," Smith said.

The man with the black hair smiled. He took out a black lighter.

"Here," he said, "you can have this one."

He handed Smith the lighter. It was black with a strange blue flag on it. It looked like some kind of coat of arms.

"I have another one," the man added.

"Thanks," Smith said.

He still could not figure out where he had seen the man before; he was definitely familiar in some way.

"Do I know you?" Smith said.

"No," the man walked away from the bar.

“Strange chap,” Marge said, “I wonder where he’s from.”

“What do you mean?” Smith said.

“He spoke with a strange accent don’t you think?”

“I’ve never been good with accents,” Smith said, “This country has hundreds of them.”

“He wasn’t from around here,” Marge said, “He’s a foreigner if you ask me.”

“What were you talking about?”

“He wanted to know if I had a room for the night,” Marge said, “I told him to try one of the hotels in the city centre. I’ve got enough to do with the pub without worrying about paid guests.”

Smith walked back outside to the beer garden. It was even hotter outside now. The waitress had put the beers on the table. Smith opened the pack of cigarettes, took one out and lit it. It tasted much better than Chalmers’ Marlboroughs. He noticed that Theakston had already finished his beer.

“I’ve never seen a dog drink beer so fast,” Sarah Proud said, “I couldn’t believe my eyes.”

“Nasty habit I taught him I’m afraid, “Smith said, “He expects it every time we go out now. Have you decided what you’re going to eat?”

“Steak and ale pie sounds good,” she said, “I’ve never tried it before. You don’t get that kind of thing where I come from.”

“Where do you come from?” Smith said, “I’m useless with accents.”

“Far away from here.”

She finished the rest of the beer in her glass.

Smith decided to change the subject.

“What does SOCA stand for?” he said.

She looked at him as if he had asked her what size bra she wore.

“Why do you ask?” she said.

“Why all the secrecy?” Smith said.

“I hate it when someone answers a question with a question.”

“It’s an unfortunate trait of mine,” Smith said, “it comes with the job I suppose. What is SOCA?”

“It’s the serious organised crime agency,” Proud said.

“Government?”

“Isn’t everything?” Proud smiled.

“Now you’re answering a question with a question.”

“It comes with the job,” Proud said.

“Are we flirting?” Smith said.

“Definitely not. I never flirt,” she said, “I find it a complete waste of time.”

“I suppose you just go out and get what you want?” Smith said, “what do you mean by isn’t everything government?”

“Everybody works for the government in one way or another,” Proud said, “you certainly do. We just do different jobs that’s all.”

“You know what I mean,” Smith said, “SOCA is some kind of secret government department isn’t it?”

“Not really. Serious organised crime is no secret.”

“You guys go up against drug syndicates and people like that don’t you?”

“Sometimes,” Proud said, “drug smuggling, arms running, prostitution rings. Anything that involves huge criminal networks and multi million pound operations.”

“And you have an unlimited budget I suppose?” Smith said.

“Not exactly,” Proud said.

The waitress approached the table to take their order.

“Three of Marge’s steak and ale pies,” Smith said, “and two more pints. The dog’s had enough for today.”

He lit another cigarette.

“Where did you get that lighter?” Proud looked closely at it.

“That guy who was out here earlier smoking gave it to me at the bar,” Smith said, “why?”

“No reason,” Proud said.

Smith looked at the lighter. It was black with what looked like three blue lions on a shield on it.

“Why is SOCA so interested in the death of a local football player?” Smith asked, “Was he involved in something else?”

“You know I can’t tell you anything,” Proud said, “I thought we were both having a day off.”

“Come on,” Smith said, “Give me a clue. I opened up to you last night. I never open up to anybody. Ask anyone who knows me. What’s really going on here?”

“If I tell you I’ll have to kill you,” Proud said.

“I’m serious,” Smith said.

“So am I,” her voice deepened, “I can’t tell you anything.”

"Then let me throw a few of my own theories at you," Smith said, "let me know if I get warm."

The waitress with the purple hair put two pints of beer in front of them.

"Pies'll be about twenty minutes," she said.

"Ok," Smith said when the waitress had left, "a football player is shot in front of thousands of people using a rare Russian rifle. We find the rifle across the road from the football ground. Another football player is shot with the same kind of weapon. As we had the first rifle safe in forensics we know these people are not short on weapons. Why did they shoot the Colombian?"

He lit another cigarette.

"I find out that Jimmy Fisher and Tommy Pike had a cosy chat with a few unsavoury types in a nightclub the week before the shooting," Smith continued, "Pike wouldn't tell me what they talked about but it certainly wasn't football. I got the feeling that Pike was scared of something or somebody. While I was talking to Pike somebody decided to make sure my wheel came off my car when I drove away."

Sarah Proud's facial expression had not changed while Smith was speaking.

"I'm ninety nine percent who was behind the murders of the two football players," Smith said, "it all seems to link up to our mutual friend Wolfie."

Smith was sure he detected a slight creasing of Sarah Proud's eyes when he mentioned Wolfie's name.

"But I still can't figure out why," he said, "why were they killed? Normally we don't have the luxury of knowing who the murderer is this early in the investigation. We start off by looking for a motive. When we find out why someone is killed it usually leads us

to the whom in the end. Why kill two low profile football players? It doesn't make sense."

He stubbed his cigarette out in the ashtray and lit another one.

"You're chain smoking," Proud said.

"Am I?" Smith looked at the cigarette, "Its helping me to think. You're not going to give me anything to go on here are you?"

Sarah Proud smiled in reply.

Three steak and ale pies were placed on the table in front of them. Theakston woke up immediately.

"They're still too hot boy," Smith said to the dog, "just be patient."

"Looks great," Proud said, "can we eat in peace now. Your mind doesn't stop does it?"

"Ok," Smith said, "but I'm going to get to the bottom of this one way or another."

EIGHTEEN

Chalmers could not believe his eyes when he walked through to the front desk and saw Tommy Pike slumped on a chair. He remembered Pike from his glory days in the nineties. He had been one of the best strikers the people of York had ever seen but now he looked like a washed up street bum. His hair was filthy, he had at least a week's worth of a beard and his clothes looked like he had slept in them. When he looked up at Chalmers it was clear that he was inebriated. His eyes were drooped and the whites behind the pupils were a dirty yellowish red colour.

"Can you stand up?" Chalmers asked him.

Pike just stared with a vacant expression in his eyes.

"Come on," Chalmers tried to lift him out of the chair.

He was a dead weight.

"How the hell did he get in here?" Chalmers asked Baldwin.

"He staggered in about ten minutes ago sir," Baldwin said, "He slumped down on the chair. I think he must have caught a taxi here. What are we going to do with him?"

"Can you see if you can organise the strongest cup of coffee you can find and I'll see if I can haul him into my office somehow."

Thompson walked into the reception area.

"Perfect timing Thompson," Chalmers said, "I think I'm going to need a bit of help here. Tommy Pike seems to have put on a bit of weight since I last saw him."

Pike looked up at Thompson and smiled. Thompson could smell the sweet sickly stench of the alcohol on his breath from where he was standing.

“What’s going on?” Thompson said to Chalmers, “look at the state of him this early in the day. It’s a tragedy that’s what it is. He used to be one of the best.”

“We all have bad days Thompson,” Chalmers said in a rare outburst of compassion, “Enough of the melodrama. Help me get him to my office. We can’t let anybody see him like this.”

Between them, Chalmers and Thompson managed to march Tommy Pike, step by step down the corridor to Chalmers’ office. They put him on a chair against the wall so he would not fall backwards. Baldwin walked in with a steaming cup of coffee in her hand. She placed it on Chalmers’ desk.

“Thanks Baldwin,” Chalmers said, “could you close the door please. I don’t want to be disturbed.”

Baldwin closed the door behind her.

“Look at the state of you,” Chalmers said to Pike, “how did you manage to get into such a state this early in the day? You must have been at it all night.”

Pike tried to lift his head but the effort seemed too great and it slumped down again.

“See if you can get some of that down his neck,” Chalmers said to Thompson.

He pointed to the coffee.

“I want to know what he’s doing here. He’s not going to tell us anything until he sobers up a bit.”

Thompson put the coffee cup to Pike’s lips. Baldwin had made the coffee very strong.

“What do you think he’s doing here?” Thompson poured some more coffee in Pike’s mouth.

"I don't know," Chalmers said, "Smith went to see him yesterday. He seems to think Pike knows something about the Jimmy Fisher shooting."

When Pike heard Fisher's name, his head shot up. Coffee was dribbling down the side of his mouth. He said something but neither Chalmers nor Thompson could make out the words. It sounded like he mumbled the word 'Amalfi'.

"Take a deep breath," Chalmers said, "what did you say?"

Pike looked at Chalmers. He looked like an animal caught in a trap begging to be released.

"Alfie," he said so slowly that the two syllables took forever to come out.

The smell of alcohol on his breath made Chalmers take a step back.

"Who's Alfie?" Chalmers said.

"My boy," Pike said, "they…"

Pike gulped twice and Chalmers knew exactly what was about to happen. He ran behind his desk and grabbed his waste paper basket. He emptied the contents on the floor of the office and quickly threw it to Thompson. Thompson caught it and pushed Pike's head inside it just in time. He felt the warm liquid gush into the paper basket. He waited until Pike was finished and put the basket on the floor. The smell was terrible.

"Thompson," Chalmers said, "get that thing out of here before we all start puking."

Thompson glared at him. He carefully picked up the waste paper basket and left the room.

"Tommy," Chalmers looked at the pathetic figure slumped on the chair," get a hold of yourself. What happened to the Tommy Pike who used to win the golden boot season after season in the nineties?"

Pike gazed up at him. His eyes were more bloodshot after vomiting but he seemed slightly more awake.

"They've got my boy," he said slowly, articulating every word the way a drunk tends to do when he does not want to appear drunk.

"Who's got your boy?" Chalmers said.

"Alfie," Pike said, "they took Alfie."

"Who took Alfie? I don't understand."

Pike sat upright in the chair. Chalmers handed him the cup of coffee.

"Tommy," he said, "what's going on here? Do you know something about the shooting of Jimmy Fisher?"

"They've got my boy and it's all my fault," Pike took a long sip of the coffee.

"If someone's taken your son then we'll get him back for you," Chalmers said, "but you need to tell me what this is all about."

"Why couldn't Jimmy manage to do just one thing?" Pike said, "All he had to do was miss one penalty, make it look like an unfortunate miss. I mean, nobody expects the keeper to save a penalty these days anyway do they?"

Chalmers was about to say something but Pike beat him to it.

"Oh no," Pike said, "Jimmy had to be the hero instead. One hundred per cent for the team. Good old Jimmy Fisher. Well, now he's a dead hero and they've got my boy. God knows what they're doing to him."

"Who are these people?" Chalmers said.

"That's the worst part," Pike seemed to be sobering up now, "nobody knows. Ghosts, phantoms. They appear at night out of nowhere and then disappear into the shadows.

They contact you; you never know when they are going to appear. Nobody was supposed to get hurt."

Chalmers scratched his nose and sat behind his desk. He opened the window behind him and took out a packet of cigarettes. He handed the pack to Pike but Pike shook his head. Chalmers took out a cigarette and lit the end. He sat back in his chair and inhaled deeply. "I think you'd better tell me what's going on," he said, "from the very beginning."

NINETEEN

Smith pushed the plate to the side of the table and lit a cigarette. Sarah Proud had finished her steak and ale pie long before him. Smith had never seen a woman eat so quickly. Theakston had only just beaten her.

"Looks like you were hungry," he said to her.

"It's a childhood thing," she smiled at him, "I grew up in a very large family. There were nine of us kids and often there wasn't enough food to go around. If you didn't eat quickly there was always somebody else to help you."

Smith thought this was a strange thing to say. He guessed that Sarah Proud was around his own age which would mean that she was born in the early eighties. Surely there was plenty of food to go round in England at that time.

"We were seven brothers and two sisters," she interrupted his thoughts; "I was the youngest."

"Was?" Smith said.

"I mean I am the youngest of nine children. Anyway, that's why I eat so quickly."

Smith was starting to think there was something not quite right about this government agent. He could not quite put his finger on it but there was something odd about her. His first impressions of her made him think she was a bossy, blinkered career agent whose exterior could not be broken down but the more time he spent with her he realised there was much more to her than that. She had even spoken about her childhood with him. Smith realised he was actually beginning to enjoy her company and he did not know how to deal with it.

“You’re going to burn your fingers,” she said.

Smith could feel the heat between his middle finger and forefinger. He had been so carried away in thought that he had not noticed that the cigarette had burned right down to the filter. He stubbed out the cigarette.

“Thanks,” he said, “I was miles away there.”

“You think far too much detective,” Proud said, “Where I come we have a word for people like you.”

“Where do you come from?” Smith said.

His phone rang in his pocket. He took it out and saw it was Chalmers.

“Hold that thought,” he said to Proud.

He answered the phone.

“Afternoon sir,” he said, “are you checking to see if I’m alright? Right now I’m enjoying…”

“Smith,” Chalmers said, “shut up, “I can hear from that annoying voice of yours that there’s bugger all wrong with you. I have Tommy Pike here with me. He came in a while ago smashed out of his trolley. He’s sobered up a bit now. You might be interested in what he has to say.”

“What’s he said?” Smith asked.

“I’m sending Thompson to pick you up.”

“I’m not at home,” Smith said, “I’m at the Hog’s Head. I’m having lunch with a friend.”

Smith smiled at Sarah Proud.

“I don’t want to know,” Chalmers said, “Thompson will be there in ten minutes.”

He rang off.

"Problems?" Sarah Proud said.

"I don't know," Smith did not know how much information he should tell her.

He did not have to.

"You realise you have no jurisdiction," she said, "If this is regarding the Jimmy Fisher shooting you are treading a fine line here."

Her whole demeanour had changed.

"Like I said," Smith said, "I don't know. Does this mean our cosy lunch is over?"

"I have work to do anyway," she said, "I shouldn't have come here. It was a bad idea."

She stood up to leave. Theakston woke up and started to wag his tail.

"Thanks," Smith said, "I actually enjoyed myself today."

"Did you actually?" She emphasised the last word.

"The lunch is on me anyway," Smith said, "I'm sure we'll be seeing each other again."

He stood up. He did not know what to do so he held out his hand. She took his hand and held on to it longer than Smith thought was appropriate under the circumstances.

"Goodbye," she let go of his hand and walked inside the pub.

Thompson appeared ten seconds later.

"It's alright for some," he said, "pub lunch while we're all working. You wouldn't believe who I just bumped into inside the pub."

Smith did not say anything.

"That government witch," Thompson said, "the one that was at the meeting yesterday. I wonder what she was doing here."

"Having lunch probably," Smith said, "shall we go?"

Theakston stood up and sniffed Thompson's shoes.

“That thing’s not coming in my car,” Thompson said, “I’ve just had it cleaned.”

“That thing has a name,” Smith said, “and a soul. You’re hurting his feelings. Besides, he likes you for some reason; you should consider yourself privileged.

Smith walked inside to pay the bill. Thompson and Theakston stood outside in the beer garden staring at each other.

TWENTY

Tommy Pike had sobered up considerably when Smith walked in to Chalmers office. He was sipping his third cup of coffee.

"Smith," Chalmers said, "this is Tommy Pike. In his day he was one of the best."

"We've met," Smith was still smarting from the car accident after leaving Pike's house.

"Oh yes," Chalmers said, "I forgot. Well, he's decided to come clean. They've taken his son, Alfie."

"I shouldn't be here," Pike said, "I was drunk; I didn't know what else to do. I've had enough. First Jimmy and now they've got my boy. They can do anything to me; I've got nothing to lose anymore but Alfie played no part in this mess."

"Tell him what you told me," Chalmers said, "from the very beginning and don't worry, his bark is much worse than his bite. He happens to be one of the best we have."

Smith sat down in front of Chalmers' desk and took out his cigarettes. He offered the pack to Chalmers.

"Benson and Hedges?" Chalmers looked disgusted, "I don't smoke women's cigarettes."

Smith lit a cigarette and sighed as he felt the nicotine rush through his bloodstream.

"What's the story?" he said to Pike.

"It all started a few weeks ago," Pike's words were very clear, "we'd just beaten Watford at Vicarage Road."

"Vicarage Road?" Smith said.

"Watford's home ground," Chalmers said, "let him talk."

"It was a huge game for us," Pike continued, "I'm not getting any younger and this year is probably going to be my last season in the first team. Beating Watford meant we were not quite in line for automatic promotion but a playoff spot was on the cards. Me and Jimmy decided we would celebrate."

"Sorry," Smith said, "where's Watford?"

"Just north of London," Chalmers said.

"Anyway," Pike said, "we didn't travel back with the rest of the lads; we decided to have a bit of a bash down in London. A bit of a change of scenery if you know what I mean. We planned to get the train back to York the next day, stay in a hotel for the night."

Smith stubbed out his cigarette and lit another. Chalmers glared at him.

"We checked into the hotel," Pike said, "and hit the streets of London with a vengeance. To cut a long story short, a few hours and about five hundred quid later we ended up in this club in the west end. Bloody pricey but we felt like we'd earned it. We were on the top of the world."

"Is this story leading anywhere?" Smith said.

"Ignore him Tommy," Chalmers said, "go on."

"We got chatting to a couple of Millwall players," Pike said, "nobody famous. I can't even remember their names but they were good blokes for southerners. Anyway, I don't even remember how it came up but we got onto the subject of money. One of the blokes showed me his watch. It was a Rolex, a genuine one and he said it had cost him twenty grand. He said he didn't earn that kind of money playing for Millwall, he had a little side earner going. He wanted to know if we were interested.

"Side earner?" Smith said, "Illegal no doubt?"

“Listen copper,” Pike looked Smith in the eyes, “I’m coming to the end of my career; I’ve been well and truly shafted in a recent divorce, any extra way to earn cash is welcome. I told him I was very interested.”

“What about Fisher?” Smith said.

“Jimmy was young,” Pike said, “he was destined for bigger things; he didn’t need extra money. He could have played for one of the top clubs. Besides, Jimmy wouldn’t get involved in anything dodgy. He wasn’t like that.”

Pike started to shake.

“Take your time,” Chalmers said.

“This Millwall bloke introduced me to these three men. Jimmy wasn’t having any of it so he went back to the hotel on his own.”

“Who were these men?” Smith said.

“I don’t know,” Pike said, “but you could hear from their voices that they were foreigners and you definitely wouldn’t want to meet them in a dark alley if you get my point. I need a piss.”

“There’s a toilet down the corridor on the right,” Chalmers said.

While Pike was out of the room, Smith told Chalmers about his lunch with Sarah Proud.

“You’re playing with fire,” Chalmers said, “that is one scary female.”

“She’s alright,” Smith insisted, “she’s quite friendly when you get to know her but there’s something about her I just can’t figure out.”

“It’s her job,” Chalmers said, “You can’t trust anyone in government.”

“That’s better,” Pike sat back down again,” what are you going to do about Alfie?”

"We'll find your son," Chalmers said, "go on."

"These men promised me more money than I could earn in a year," Pike said, "cash too so Martha wouldn't be able to get her stinking hands on it."

"Martha?" Smith said.

"His ex wife," Chalmers said.

"I couldn't say yes quickly enough," Pike said, "It was the easiest money I'd ever earn."

"That's all very well," Smith said, "but what did you have to do in return?"

"The play off fixtures had been decided by then," Pike said, "all we had to do was beat Fulham in the first match and lose to either Darlington or Bury in the final."

"Sorry," Smith said, "you've lost me there."

"Football's not his thing," Chalmers said.

"The Fulham game would be the tricky one," Chalmers said, "but we managed to pull it off. One nil in extra time. The money was practically in the bag."

"I must still have concussion," Smith said, "why would these people pay so much money for you to lose a football game?"

"Let him finish," Chalmers said.

"A week before the final," Pike continued, "me, Jimmy and the Uruguayan upstart were having a few drinks in a club in town when who should turn up but these three goons. Three of them plus some other bloke who always seemed to be in the shadows watching. I knew he was there though. They wanted to know if it was still on and if it was there was a hundred grand in it for me. I said yes of course. A hundred grand is nothing to spit at. I needed the money. Jimmy wasn't interested of course so he left again. That's when they started to get ugly. They said if we didn't do what they wanted there would be

consequences. They scared the shit out of me to be honest. They pointed an imaginary gun at Jimmy as he was walking away. I told them I'd have a word with him."

"What did they tell you to do?" Smith asked.

"Lose to Darlington in the final," Pike said, "it didn't matter what the score was, all we had to do was lose. I thought nothing of it. I mean, losing is a lot easier than winning isn't it? The trouble was bloody Jimmy Fisher had other ideas. I told him there would be other games but he was having none of it. He had to save the penalty didn't he? They must have watched the whole game to make sure we did what we were told."

"I still don't understand what they had to gain from you losing a football game," Smith said.

"Millions," Chalmers said, "that's what they had to gain."

"How?" Smith said.

"Gambling," Pike said, "they put ten million on a game they know they're in control of at five to one and they're fifty million up in the space of two hours. Easy money."

"Match fixing?" Smith said.

"Bloody hell Smith," Chalmers said, "it took you long enough."

"What about the Colombian guy?" Smith said, "Was he involved in this too?"

"Not as far as I'm aware," Pike said.

"Then why did they shoot him too?"

"Because they were pissed off I suppose," Pike said, "because they could. I don't know. These people are like ghosts. They appear and disappear like phantoms in the night. I've told you everything. What are you going to do about my son?"

“There’s one thing I don’t get,” Smith said, “and I don’t mean to be disrespectful but why target a Mickey Mouse team like York? Why not go for one of the bigger clubs? Manchester United or Chelsea for example.”

“Use your head Smith,” Chalmers said, “big teams are high profile; there are eyes on them from every angle. The risk would be too great. Besides when a player earns a million a month he’s not going to risk his career for a measly hundred grand.”

“When was the last time you saw your son?” Smith said.

“Yesterday lunchtime,” Pike said, “he went across the road to the park. He plays football there all the time. He’s useless but I don’t tell him that. He was supposed to be back at three. He’s a good kid, he’s normally back on time.”

Pike wiped a tear from his eye.

“You will find him won’t you,” he said.

“We’ll do everything we can,” Chalmers said.

“They came into my house,” Pike said, “bold as brass. The same three men. It was the stocky one that spoke; it’s always him that does the talking. He chucked an envelope on the table and said if I kept my mouth shut I’d get the rest in two days along with my boy.”

“Why did they give you the money?” Smith said, “You won the game. That wasn’t part of the plan was it?”

“They gave me it to keep my mouth shut,” Pike said, “Taking Alfie was extra insurance I suppose.”

“But you still came to us,” Smith said.

“I didn’t know what else to do,” Pike said, “I couldn’t just sit at home drinking myself into a coma. Anyway, how would they know if I’d spoken to you or not?”

The phone on Chalmers’ desk started to ring. Chalmers sighed and picked up the handset.

“Sir,” it was Baldwin, “you’re wanted at the front desk.”

“Not now Baldwin,” Chalmers said, “I’m busy.”

“It’s important,” Baldwin said.

Chalmers slammed down the phone so hard the whole room vibrated.

“Wait here,” he said to Pike.

Sarah Proud and Brad Friedman were waiting next to the front desk when Chalmers walked in. Superintendant Smyth was standing next to them. He had an inane grin on his face.

“Bob,” Smyth said, “our special guests would like a word with you.”

“I’m busy with a witness,” Chalmers said, “It’ll have to wait.”

“No it won’t,” Brad Friedman said, “is there somewhere we can talk in private? Your office maybe?”

“Chalmers did not know what to say.

“Give me five minutes,” he said, “I just need to finish something off.”

He walked back down the corridor. Chalmers realised that his office reeked of cigarette smoke when he went in. Smoking was strictly prohibited anywhere in the station but Chalmers often bent the rules when he was particularly stressed. He opened all of the windows on the room.

“The two suits from SOCA are waiting for me,” he said to Smith, “you’d better get Pike out of here. They want to have a word with me.”

“What do they want?” Smith said.

“That’s none of your business,” a voice was heard in the doorway. It was Brad Friedman.

“Come on,” Smith said to Pike, “let’s get you home.”

They stood up and walked through to the front desk. Sarah proud was talking on her mobile phone as Smith walked past. He smiled at her but her facial expression did not change. She seemed more interested in the man walking next to Smith. Smith did not see Proud end her call and immediately dial another number.

TWENTY ONE

It was three in the afternoon when Smith dropped Tommy Pike off at home. Smith had borrowed Bridge's old Ford Escort. Bridge had said he would walk home from work; his house was just round the corner from the station. Theakston was fast asleep in the back seat.

"You'll find my boy won't you?" Pike got out of the car.

"We'll do our best," Smith said although he had a feeling it would be a lot harder than Pike thought. They had nowhere to start. Alfie could be anywhere.

"Thanks for the lift," Pike said.

"Get some sleep," Smith called after him as he walked up the path to his house.

Smith was about to drive off when he spotted some activity in the park across the road. A group of young boys were playing football. He switched off the engine and opened the door.

"Come on boy," he said to Theakston, "its time to run off that pie."

Theakston stretched and flopped out of the car. He followed Smith across the road to the park.

The group of boys stopped playing when they saw Smith and Theakston approaching. One of them ran off into the distance.

"Afternoon," Smith said, "Can I have a word?"

The biggest of the boys stepped forward and stared at Smith with suspicious eyes.

"We're just kicking a ball around mister," he said, "We haven't done anything."

"I'm sure you haven't," Smith said.

Theakston had spotted a pair of starlings further up the field and had set off in chase.

“Do you play football here every day?” Smith asked the boy he had spoken to.

“Pretty much,” the boy said, “what’s it to you?”

Smith could never get used to the lack of respect children had for adults these days.

“You sound funny,” one of the other boys said, “you sound like Mel Gibson.”

“I get that a lot,” Smith smiled.

He looked at the boy who had run off. He was standing next to an oak tree about fifty metres away.

“What’s wrong with him?” he pointed to the boy, “Why did he run away.”

“It’s your dog,” the biggest boy said,” his big brother was attacked by one of them. Took half his face off.”

“It wasn’t one of them,” another boy said, “It was a Pit Bull. That’s a Staffie isn’t it?”

“Bull Terrier,” Smith corrected him.

“Same thing,” the boy said.

Smith was about to argue but decided it was not worth the effort.

“Does Alfie Pike play football with you,” he said to the biggest boy. He was obviously the leader of the gang.

“Sometimes,” he said, “but he’s not here today.”

“What’s your name?” Smith asked him.

“Darren,” he said.

Smith did not press him for a surname.

“Was Alfie here yesterday?”

“He’s shite,” another boy said.

Smith could not believe his ears. The boy could not have been more than eight years old.

“Shut up Kev,” Darren said.

“Well he is,” Kev insisted, “his dads supposed to be this famous footie player but Alfie can’t play to save his arse.”

“I said shut up,” Darren said and from the look on his face Kev could see that he meant it.

“Alfie didn’t come home yesterday,” Smith said, “do any of you know where he might have gone?”

None of the boys said a word. They just looked at each other as if they should not be saying too much to this stranger.

“Ask Barry,” one of the other boys said.

He pointed to the boy standing next to the oak tree.

“Barry and Alfie are best mates,” he added.

“Bum chums more like it,” Kev said.

The whole group started to laugh.

Smith walked over to the boy standing next to the tree. He looked terrified.

“Hello,” Smith said, “its Barry isn’t it?”

The boy’s eyes darted around him.

“Where’s the dog?” he said in an unusually high pitched voice.

Smith looked around. Theakston was stalking a squirrel about twenty metres away. The squirrel seemed indifferent to the dog’s clumsy advances.

“It’s alright,” Smith said, “he wouldn’t hurt a fly. See, even the squirrel isn’t bothered.”

A smile slowly appeared on the boy’s face.

“My brother was attacked by one of them,” Barry said, “He still has the scars.”

"That was a Pit Bull," Smith said, "I'm also scared of Pit Bulls. My dog's a Bull Terrier. There's a huge difference. He might lick you to death that's all."

Right on cue, Theakston bounded up to them. Barry immediately stood behind Smith and grabbed onto his shirt. Theakston looked confused.

"Say hello," Smith said to the dog, "and be gentle."

Theakston sniffed Barry's legs and rolled over on his back.

"He wants you to scratch his belly," Smith said, "he's much too lazy to bite."

Barry cautiously stroked Theakston's belly. Theakston started to roll around on the grass.

"See," Smith said, "he won't hurt you."

Theakston rolled over and ran off to look for another squirrel.

"My name is Jason Smith," Smith said, "I'm a policeman. I'm looking for Alfie Pike."

"He's not here today," Barry said.

"I know. Were you playing football with him yesterday?"

"They made Alfie play in goal," Barry said, "Nobody wants him on their side. He always gets picked last."

"What time did Alfie go home yesterday?" Smith said.

"He didn't," Barry picked up a stone and threw it in the distance. He had a good throwing arm for his age.

"What do you mean?" Smith said.

"Some bloke came to take him to the hospital."

"The hospital?" Smith said, "Did you know this man?"

"I don't know," Barry said, "some bloke came and asked which one of us was Alfie Pike. He said Alfie's dad had been taken to hospital and Alfie had to go with him."

"What did this man look like?"

"Tall," Barry said, "like you. He was wearing a city shirt."

"A football shirt?"

"Alfie's dad plays for city," Barry said, "Alfie just thought it was someone from the club. He was driving one of those fancy Land Rovers."

"So he took Alfie to the hospital?" Smith said.

"That's what he said, "Barry said, "I have to go home."

"Is there anything else you can remember about this man?"

"Not really," Barry said, "like I said, he was tall with black hair. He looked like he was out of one of those army films."

"Army films?"

"You know," Barry said, "the war films. This bloke had army hair."

"Thanks Barry," Smith said, "you've been a big help."

Smith walked back to the car. Theakston followed behind him. He was obviously exhausted. Smith had to wait for him to catch up. He made up his mind to put the dog on a strict diet as soon as possible. Smith sat in Bridges car outside Tommy Pike's house. He took out his phone and dialled Chalmers' number. Chalmers answered it straight away.

"Smith," he said, "where are you?"

"Outside Tommy Pike's house," Smith said, "I've just spoken to some kids who were playing football with Alfie yesterday. One of them gave me a description of the man who took the boy. Tall with dark hair cut in an army style. He was driving a Land Rover."

"What do you mean army style?" Chalmers said.

"Crew cut, I would have thought. Like a marine."

“Anyway,” Chalmers said, “go home. It’s all over.”

“What do you mean it’s all over? Have they found Alfie Pike?”

“No,” Chalmers said, “SOCA are on it. It’s not our concern anymore.”

Smith could not believe what he was hearing.

“And you’re fine with that,” he said it louder than he intended, “you’ll just wait until the poor kid turns up dead?”

“Of course I’m not bloody fine with it,” Chalmers said, “and you watch the way you speak to me but my hands are tied. SOCA have been on this from day one, you know that. After this little stunt we’re lucky to both survive with our jobs.”

“But sir.”

“I mean it Smith,” Chalmers said, “you are to leave this one well and truly alone. You will be fired on the spot if they catch you anywhere near it. Have you got that?”

There was silence on the line.

“I said have you got that?” Chalmers said again, “go home. This is where it ends.”

He rang off.

TWENTY TWO

Smith lay back in the bath. He rarely took baths but he decided that his neck still ached and thought a warm bath might help. Tommy Pike must be going out of his mind with worry, he thought. He wondered what it must feel like to have a child to take care of; to worry about. Smith did not have any children and the way things were going he wondered if he ever would. He had turned twenty eight in February; he had less than two years to go before he hit thirty. When he was in his teens, thirty seemed old. At twenty eight, Smith already felt old. His neck was sore, his head was sore and right now, his soul was sore. Chalmers had told him the investigation was over. In Smith's seven years as a police officer no investigation had ever been over until the case was cleared up. What about the promise they had made to Tommy Pike? He thought. They had promised to do everything they could to find Pike's son.

Smith got out of the bath and dried himself off. His neck felt slightly better. He got dressed and went downstairs to smoke a cigarette. He stubbed his foot on the nail sticking out of one of the stairs.

"Fuck," he screamed.

He went to the kitchen cupboard and took out a hammer. He went back to the staircase and tried to pull the nail out with the claw of the hammer. The nail was too thin. He turned the hammer round and hit the nail in so hard that the wood on the step cracked. He had made it ten times worse. He shrugged and went to the kitchen to get his cigarettes. He opened the pack and saw that there was only one cigarette left. He had smoked almost a whole pack in a matter of hours.

"I'm become a chain smoker overnight," he said to Theakston who was lying on the mat in front of the back door. Smith opened the door and went outside to the garden. It was starting to get dark but it was still very warm. There seemed to be no end to the heat wave they were having. Smith finished the cigarette and flicked the butt over the fence into his neighbour's garden. He looked at his watch. It was half past nine. The off license would still be open. He went back inside and locked the back door behind him. Theakston was still asleep on the mat. He picked up Bridge's car keys and left the house.

An uneasy feeling came over him as he was about to get into the car. He stopped and looked around. The air was still; there was not a breath of wind. He heard a noise behind him and turned around. A black cat shot across the road in front of him. Smith could not remember if it was supposed to be lucky or unlucky for a black cat to cross your path. He walked around the car and checked all four wheels. They all seemed to be fine. He got in the car and drove slowly to the off license. He parked the car outside the off license and got out. The uneasy feeling came back to him. It was something the boy in the park had said to him earlier about the man who had taken Alfie pike; something about him looking like someone from a war film. He pushed the thought to the back of his mind and went inside the off license.

"Make it quick," the surly man behind the counter said, "we're about to close."

Smith had never liked him. He had been coming in here for over five years and the man had always seemed annoyed when a customer walked in. He always seemed to be in a hurry to get away from work. He must really hate his job, Smith thought. It was then that Smith realised he was not that much different to this man at the moment. He shuddered when he realised he was getting tired of the police force. He had often thought of doing

something else but every time he came close something happened that reminded him why it was he had joined up in the first place. He was reminded of a song, 'That's Life'. It was a Frank Sinatra song but Smith preferred the David Lee Roth version.

"Are you going to be here all night?" the man behind the counter made Smith forget the line in the song that he liked the most.

Smith bought twenty four beers, a bottle of Jack Daniels and three packets of Benson and Hedges. Whatever Chalmers said about them, Smith still preferred them to Marlboroughs.

"Can I give you a piece of advice?" Smith said while he was paying.

"I'm sure you're going to anyway," the man said.

"Smile once in a while," Smith said, "there are much worse jobs out there."

"Jobs?" the man said, "Jobs? I own this shit hole. Ten in the morning until ten at night six days a week. You show me a worse job than this."

Smith suddenly felt tired. He decided to leave it and walked outside to where he had parked the car.

TWENTY THREE

The woman carefully poured some water in the boy's mouth. The child had not been given enough to drink since he had been brought here and he was showing the initial signs of dehydration. His eyes were sunken and he seemed disorientated.

"How long are you going to keep him here?" she asked the man sitting opposite her.

He was smoking a strong smelling cigarette. Steels, much better than the rubbish they sold in England, the man thought.

"We were going to take him back tomorrow," the man said, "but I received a rather disturbing phone call earlier. One of our friends thought it prudent to inform me of what was going on. The boy's father was seen at the police station. That was not part of the deal. He was seen speaking to none other than Detective Sergeant Jason Smith."

The woman flinched at the sound of Smith's name. A flood of memories seeped through her brain.

"What do you mean?" she said although she already knew what it meant.

"A deal's a deal," the man stubbed out the cigarette in an ashtray shaped like a maple leaf, "Pike knew the score."

"He's just a child," the woman brushed a wisp of hair away from the boy's eyes.

"I wasn't much older than him when I killed somebody for the first time," the man smiled and revealed a mouth full of rotten teeth.

"Not everyone is an evil bastard like you," the woman said.

She was not expecting the blow.

The man slapped her so hard on the side of her face that she dropped the glass of water she was holding. The glass smashed on the floor. The boy's sunken eyes showed the first sign of any emotion they had in hours. He looked absolutely terrified.

"Clean that mess up," the man ordered, "the boy's father will get him back."

"What about the deal?" the woman put a hand to her face. It was stinging like mad.

"I didn't say he'd get him back alive," the man lit up another cigarette, "now clean up that glass. Somebody could get hurt."

TWENTY FOUR

Wednesday 11 August 2010

Smith was dreaming about sharks. He had never dreamt about sharks before. The sharks were circling him. There were five or six of them and with each circuit they seemed to get closer. Eventually, one of them got so close that Smith found himself peering into its black, dead eyes. Eyes that bored into his brain. The rest of the sharks seemed to have given up; they were nowhere to be seen but this one shark just kept circling him, its dead eyes never leaving him. Smith shot up in the bed so violently that Theakston woke up and started to bark at him.

"Shit," Smith said, "sorry boy. That was some freaky dream."

He realised he was covered in sweat. He knew what had woken him up. His phone was ringing on the bedside table. Smith looked at the clock. Eight thirty; he had slept for over nine hours. He answered the phone. It was Chalmers.

"Smith," Chalmers said, "where are you?"

"In bed," Smith said, "what's wrong?"

"They've just pulled two bodies out of the river," Chalmers said, "a young woman and a little boy."

Smith felt sick. This was not happening.

"What happened?" he said.

"We don't know yet," Chalmers said, "looks like they drowned but the woman had a bruise on her cheek."

"Where are you?" Smith said.

"In between Lendal Bridge and St Mary's," Chalmers said, "the poor bastards were tied to one of the barges there. The owners of the barge found them; they're in a right state."

"Give me ten minutes," Smith rang off.

While he was getting dressed, Smith had an uneasy feeling. Who are this woman and child? He thought, people don't just drown in the River Ouse. He went downstairs, picked up the keys to Bridge's car and left the house.

The area of the river between Lendal Bridge and St Mary's Abbey was buzzing with people when Smith got there. The ruins of the Abbey glowed eerily in the morning sunlight. It was promising to be another scorching hot day. Smith pushed past the crowd of onlookers and ducked under the police tape. He spotted Whitton and Chalmers and walked over to where they were standing talking to a middle aged couple. The woman looked like she had been crying.

"Morning," Smith said to Whitton, "what have we got?"

"They're over there," Whitton pointed to a barge on the river. Smith saw it was called 'Great White'. There was an elaborate paint job on the front of the barge that resembled shark's teeth. The barge looked to be immaculately maintained. Smith had always wondered how people could actually live on these floating caravans. He could not think of a worse place to live. There was an ambulance parked in front of the barge and three or four paramedics were mulling around. Smith walked towards them. There were two white body bags on the concrete next to the ambulance. Smith nodded to one of the paramedics. She was the one who had helped him the day before after his car accident. He crouched

over the body bags and opened one up. He recognised Alfie Pike straight away. The boy's face was bloated and his eyes were closed but he knew it was Alfie.

"Jesus Christ," he said.

He suddenly felt queasy. He had seen plenty of dead bodies before but it never got any easier. The sight of this child laying before him in a body bag made him sick to the stomach. He took a deep breath and started to open the second bag. He unzipped it carefully. Whitton had walked over to him but Smith had not noticed. Smith looked at the face of the woman and froze. She was in her early twenties, twenty one to be precise, Smith even knew when her birthday was, and she had mousy blonde hair. Smith touched her cheek. It was freezing cold. Her eyes were open. She had pale blue eyes with long eyelashes. Smith recognised those eyes; they were his eyes.

Smith looked up at Whitton. The tears started to flow.

"Sir," Whitton said, "What's wrong?"

The tears were pouring out now. Smith sniffed and tried to clear his throat.

"Sir," Whitton said, "do you know her?"

"This is Laura," Smith said, "This is my little sister."

TWENTY FIVE

Smith sat in the driver's seat of Bridge's car. He was shaking so badly that it scared him. He could not get the image of Laura's face out of his head. He remembered her most from when she was a child; always smiling and full of mischief. She had a bruise on the side of her face. Smith had nothing left now. Nobody. Even though he had only seen her once in the past twelve years, the fact that he knew she was alive somewhere in the world had made it bearable somehow. Now she was gone and Smith had never felt so alone. His father had hanged himself when Smith was sixteen, his mother had died in a car crash and his Gran had developed pneumonia after breaking her hip in a mugging. Laura had been the only family Smith had left and now she too was gone.

Smith smacked the steering wheel with both hands. He smacked it over and over. The clock on the dashboard showed half past nine but Smith felt like a drink. He felt like getting drunker than he ever had done before.

"Sir," he heard a voice next to the window.

It was Whitton.

"Leave me alone," Smith said, "leave me alone if you know what's good for you. People close to me end up dead."

"They've taken the bodies away sir," Whitton said, "I think you should go home. Are you alright to drive?"

Smith looked at her and she flinched. The expression in his eyes was one of pure hatred.

"I'm going to get this bastard," Smith said, "This is all my fault. He did this because of me and I'm going to make him pay for it. Wolfie is going to wish he'd never met me."

A Land Rover pulled over next to them and Brad Friedman and Sarah Proud got out. Smith watched as they walked over to where Chalmers was still talking to the couple who owned the barge. He smacked the steering wheel once more and got out of the car. Whitton knew it was futile to do anything so she just stood and watched as Smith paced off towards Proud and Friedman. Chalmers could see from the look on Smith's face that something was about to happen. He had seen that look plenty of times before and it never ended well.

"We'll take over from here," Friedman said.

Chalmers winced. Smith did not move.

"Are you deaf?" Friedman looked directly at Smith.

Smith looked over at Sarah Proud. She was walking along the path next to the river. She was talking on her mobile phone. Smith turned back to Friedman. He did not know why but Friedman's hair cut annoyed him more than usual today. Crew cut; army style.

"Friedman," Smith said, "Two more people are dead and it's all because you took over this investigation in the first place."

"You know what your trouble is Smith?" Friedman said, "You take everything too personally and you trust the wrong people."

"What do you mean by that?" Smith could feel that his heart was starting to beat faster.

"It's a job," Friedman said, "that's all. Once you start treating it like one and not a personal mission you'll find you'll be able to sleep better at night. People get murdered. We live in a sick society."

Smith's fists clenched by themselves.

“You’re a fucking arsehole Friedman,” he said, “were you bullied as a child? Is that why you’re such and arsehole now?”

“Be careful Smith,” Friedman said, “I don’t think you’re fully aware of the damage I can do to you.”

“Damage?” Smith said, “Damage?”

He looked at Friedman’s face; crew cut, lifeless black eyes, flat nose and square chin.

“I can do damage too,” he said.

Before Friedman had time to react, Smith hit him underneath the chin. He hit him so hard and with so much rage that Friedman must have been knocked out temporarily. He staggered to the side and only just managed to stay on his feet. Sarah Proud came running over. Friedman assumed a boxer’s stance, legs apart. He was ready to fight.

“Brad,” Proud shouted, “it was his sister for god’s sake.”

Friedman looked at her. His black eyes were glazed.

“It was his sister they pulled out of the river this morning,” she said, “cut the guy some slack.”

Chalmers looked at Proud in amazement. Then he looked at Smith.

“Get out of here,” he said.

His voice had a compassionate tone to it that Smith had never heard before. He walked back to Bridge’s car. His hand stung from the punch. He got in the car, started the engine and drove away.

Theakston knew that something was wrong as soon as Smith walked in the house. Smith filled a plastic bag full of dog food and went through to the living room. He picked up the bottle of Jack Daniels he had bought the night before.

“Come on boy,” he said to Theakston, “we’re going for a drive.

He took out his phone, switched it off and put it back in his pocket. He made sure he had a spare packet of cigarettes and left the house.

TWENTY SIX

Smith parked Bridge's old Ford Escort in the car park of the Moors Centre in Danby. The car park was almost full. When Smith had been here earlier in the year he had always had the place to himself. After his girlfriend, Lucy Maclean had been killed by a serial killer Smith was chasing; he had come here almost every day. Smith and Theakston had wandered the trails across the bleak moors for hours. It was a place he could come to to forget about everything.

Smith sat in the driver's seat and sighed as he looked around him. It was the school holidays and the sunny weather had brought out the tourists in droves. The tea shop was open and it looked like they were doing a roaring trade. Smith hoped that the majority of these holiday makers would stay in the vicinity of the Moors Centre. He wanted to be as far away from people as possible. Theakston was begging to get out of the car. Smith realised he had not brought the dog's lead. He had never had to use it here before but he knew that there was a strict 'dogs must be on a lead at all times' rule around here. He picked up the bottle of Jack Daniels and realised he did not really care about the rule anyway.

"Come on boy," he said to Theakston, "let's get some fresh air in our lungs."

Theakston did not need to be told. He jumped out of the car and dashed off in the direction of the river. He knew the way off by heart. Smith followed quickly behind him. There were a few people using the hiking trails but as they ventured further away from the Moors Centre they had the place virtually to themselves.

A man and a woman in their sixties eyed Smith and Theakston with obvious disapproval as they walked past. Theakston was darting in and out of the heather and Smith was casually strolling along swigging from the bottle of Jack Daniels. Smith stopped by a dead tree stump next to the river. Theakston was nowhere to be seen but he knew this place well and would soon realise where Smith was. Smith sat on the tree stump and stared at the river. It was shallower now and flowing more gently than he remembered. Theakston appeared and rushed down to the water's edge to get a drink. Smith took a long swig from the bottle and closed his eyes. Laura's face was still all he could see. Blue eyes with the long eyelashes. She's died twice now, Smith thought; once in Western Australia and once in York. Both times had been from drowning. He took a packet of cigarettes out of his pocket and lit one. The light buzz of the nicotine flowing through his blood stream mad him wonder why he had not taken up smoking earlier. Two times, Smith thought, drowned twice even though he knew the first time had been faked. The only thing he knew was the same man was responsible for Laura's disappearance on both occasions. Smith did not know what to do. The first time he had tried to confront this maniac in Talinn had nearly cost him his life.

"That thing ought to be on a lead," a whiny voice interrupted his thoughts.

Smith opened his eyes and saw a thin bald man standing only metres away. He was staring at the bottle of whisky in Smith's hand.

"What?" Smith said.

"Can't you read the signs?" the whiny voice was already starting to irritate Smith, "Dogs must be on a lead at all times."

He emphasised almost every syllable. Smith was getting angry.

“He ate it,” he said.

“Excuse me?” the man said.

“His lead,” Smith said, “bloody dog ate his lead; he’ll eat anything this one. I’d make yourself scarce if I were you.”

He took a long drink from the bottle.

“You’re so fucking skinny,” he continued, “he might mistake you for a dog lead and eat you too.”

Smith smiled at the man. His eyelids were starting to feel heavy. The Jack Daniels was starting to work.

“I’m not scared of you,” the man said even though he had stepped back a few paces, “I used to be a police reservist you know.”

“God help us all,” Smith said.

“I’ll report you, you know,” the man was still backing off.

“Leave me alone,” Smith had had enough of this annoying little man.

He wanted to be left in peace.

“We don’t need your sort around here,” the man said and hurried off in the direction of the Moors Centre.

Smith closed his eyes again and tried to rekindle his thoughts of Laura. The pedantic little man had thrown him off track and all he could think about was the gently flowing river beside him. He sat on the grass against the dead tree trunk and took a sip of the Jack Daniels. He held the bottle in front of his face and realised it was empty. The river was trickling over the rocks. It was a constant trickle; not like the sound of the waves breaking on Freemantle beach. He closed his eyes and was asleep immediately.

TWENTY SEVEN

DI Chalmers received the phone call at exactly five in the afternoon. He had packed up his desk and was ready to finish off for the day. It had been an exhausting day. Two people had been pulled out of the river, presumably drowned. One of them had been Archie Pike and the other was Smith's sister. Chalmers still recalled the look on Smith's face after he had punched Brad Friedman on the chin. The ringing phone was not giving up. Chalmers considered ignoring it. Someone else can handle the shit for a change, he thought but the incessant ringing was annoying.

"Chalmers," he answered it on the ninth or tenth ring.

"Sir," it was Baldwin.

Chalmers wondered if Baldwin ever went home; she always seemed to be at work.

"What is it Baldwin?" Chalmers tried to hide his irritation but it was obvious in the tone of his voice.

"Tommy Pike is dead." Baldwin said.

Chalmers thought he had heard incorrectly.

"You mean Alfie Pike?" he said, "Alfie Pike was dragged out of the river this morning. I already know that Baldwin."

"Tommy Pike is dead too sir," Baldwin said, "I've just had a phone call from the hospital. Looks like he killed himself. Overdose. His ex wife found him on the kitchen floor."

"Are you sure?" Chalmers knew already that his day was about to get even longer.

"Positive sir," Baldwin said, "it's Pike. He was dead before the ambulance arrived."

“Thanks Baldwin.”

Chalmers smashed his hand on the desk.

“This just gets better and better,” he said out loud.

Chalmers picked up his phone and walked through to the canteen. Whitton was sitting by herself at the table by the window. She was staring out of the window. She seemed lost in thought.

“There’s rain on the way from the North East,” Chalmers said.

Whitton jumped.

“Sorry sir,” she said, “I was miles away there. Rain did you say?”

“According to the forecast,” Chalmers said, “but you know how those idiots always get it wrong. You’re thinking about Smith aren’t you?”

“No,” Whitton lied, “but now you mention it, how much more do you think he can take before he cracks? First his girlfriend and now his sister. In a matter of months.”

“Smith’s tough,” Chalmers said, “he’ll be fine, besides, we’ve got work to do. Tommy Pike seems to have taken an overdose. He’s dead.”

Whitton did not seem to be able to digest what Chalmers said. She looked at him with a confused expression on her face.

“Tommy Pike’s dead?” she said.

“Afraid so,” Chalmers said, “his ex wife found him on the kitchen floor. We need to get to the hospital.”

Whitton sighed.

“What for?” she said, “If he’s killed himself there’s nothing we can do about it.”

“Wake up Whitton,” Chalmers said, “you of all people should know by now that not everything is as it seems. How many suicides have we dealt with that turned out to be murders?”

Whitton nodded. Chalmers was right. She could remember at least two apparent suicides that turned out to be murders.

“Let’s go,” Chalmers said.

TWENTY EIGHT

The weather forecasters had got it right for once. Drops of rain were starting to fall out of the sky. Smith was woken by water dripping onto his face and into his mouth. He opened his mouth and smiled. His mouth felt incredibly dry and the rain water in his mouth was quite pleasant. He looked up through the trees from where he lay. It was still day time but thick, dark clouds were gathering over his head. Theakston was lying at his feet. Smith took out his cigarettes and lit one. The smoke travelled down his throat through his lungs and seemed to rest in his stomach. He coughed once and felt a spasm in his chest. He could feel the warm liquid as it left his stomach and travelled up to his throat. He stood up and threw up over the dead tree stump. The stomach acids were burning his throat. He threw the cigarette into the river and took a deep breath.
"Come on boy," he said to Theakston, "we're going to get soaked in a minute."
He picked up the empty Jack Daniels bottle and walked quickly in the direction of where he'd parked the car. He did not make it in time. By the time he and Theakston had reached the car park, the rain was coming down in buckets. Smith fumbled for the car keys but he could not find them. He spotted them inside the car. They were still in the ignition.

By the time Smith and Theakston got inside the car they were both drenched. Theakston shook himself and showered Smith with more water. Smith started the car, engaged first gear and took his foot off the clutch. He stalled twice before managing to get the car moving. He drove slowly out of the car park. He drove at ten miles per hour up the narrow road towards the centre of the village. The rain was lashing down now and

the windscreen wipers were struggling to keep up. Smith spotted what looked like a pub further up ahead. The lights were on outside even though it was still daylight. The taste of bile in his throat had gone and Smith felt like another drink. He knew he should not be driving anyway and maybe the pub would have a room for the night. He parked the car outside the pub and turned off the ignition. This time he made sure he took the keys with him. He was about to get out of the car when he realised he did not have any money with him. He had left the house in such a hurry that he had forgotten to take his wallet.

Smith remembered something Bridge had bragged about a while ago. Ever cautious, Bridge had mentioned that he always kept some emergency money in his car just in case. Smith opened the glove compartment but apart from a map of York and a pair of old sunglasses, it was empty. He looked in both side compartments but they too were empty. He looked up at the passenger side mirror and smiled. He pulled it down and, in a slot next to the mirror were two crisp twenty pound notes. Smith took them out and put them in his pocket.

"We'd better run," Smith said to Theakston.

It was still pouring down with rain. He opened the door and ran towards the pub. Theakston ran after him. Smith had never seen the dog run so fast.

The Duke of Wellington pub was packed when Smith and Theakston walked in. Smith shook off the rain water and approached the bar. There was some kind of talent competition going on. A man with a beard and squint eyes was busy killing The Door's 'Five to one'. It was so bad that Smith found himself flinching at every note.

"Old Gus actually thinks he's good," the tall man behind the bar said, noting Smith's pained expression, "we let him go on first to get it over and done with. What can I get you?"

"Pint of Theakstons please," Smith said, "is he alright in here?"

He pointed to Theakston.

The barman looked at the dog.

"As long as he behaves," he said, "what's his name."

"Theakston," Smith said.

The barman laughed.

"Then he's welcome," he said.

He poured Smith's beer and put it on the bar in front of him.

"Two quid," he said.

Smith handed him one of Bridge's twenty pound notes. Thankfully, Old Gus was almost finished massacring the Doors' classic. The bar man handed Smith his change. Smith walked to the only vacant table in the bar and sat down. Unfortunately it was also the table next to a small thin man who Smith knew had an irritating, whiny voice and who also used to be a police reservist. The man scowled at Theakston as he lay down under the table.

Smith took a swig of the beer and watched as a young man picked up an acoustic guitar and launched into the opening chords of Dylan's 'Times they are a changin'. Smith hated Bob Dylan, with his moaning voice and pseudo intellectual lyrics. He took out his cigarettes and was about to light up when he remembered that smoking was banned in pubs.

“They turn a blind eye in here,”

Smith turned round. A woman with short black hair was smiling at him.

“Unless somebody moans,” she said, “we’re all used to people smoking. What’s your name? You’re not from around here are you?”

Smith looked at her. He guessed her age to be somewhere in the late forties, maybe early fifties. He could not tell; she was wearing so much make up. He offered her a cigarette. She took two, lit them both and handed one back to Smith.

“Thanks,” she blew out a mouthful of smoke.

The thin man on the next table glared at them but for some reason he decided to hold his tongue.

Smith finished his beer and went to the bar to get another one. Theakston had fallen asleep under the table.

Smith’s ears pricked up when he heard the opening riff to ‘Whiskey in the jar.’

“Somebody always has to play that,” the barman said, “another pint?”

Smith nodded.

“It’s always the same old stuff,” the barman poured Smith’s drink; “I wish someone would play something different for a change. Clapton, Hendrix, something like that.”

Smith hated Eric Clapton. Slow hand. Always with that smug look on his face.

“I know some Hendrix,” Smith said and regretted it at once. He had not played for months.

“Then you’re up next,” the barman said, “the drinks on the house. What are you going to play? Purple Haze? Voodoo Chile?”

Smith looked at the battered old acoustic guitar on the stage.

“Not on that thing,” he pointed to the guitar, “but I can do ‘Little Wing’.”

“Great,” the barman said.

“I don’t sing though,” Smith realised he was trying to get out of it.

“That’s no problem,” the barman said, “June does.”

He pointed to the woman with the short black hair.

“I’m sure she knows ‘Little Wing’.”

There was no getting out of it.

“June,” the barman shouted to the woman, “You’re doing a duet with…”

He looked at Smith.

“What’s your name?” he said.

Smith thought hard for a moment.

“Bruce,” he said, “my name’s Bruce.”

TWENTY NINE

Tommy Pike was lying on a table in the mortuary. Whitton had forgotten how cold and spooky the mortuary was.

"Bob," the familiar deep voice resonated off the walls as Paul 'The Ghoul' Johnson danced rather than walked towards them. The Ghoul and Chalmers had been friends for years. They used to play poker twice a month but that had died off in recent months.

"And how's the delightful Miss Whitton," the Ghoul said with a smile that showed off his perfect teeth, "still Miss I assume? I hope you're not still a DC. You're much better than that."

"Afraid so," Whitton said.

"Where's the grumpy DS Smith?" The Ghoul asked, "I thought you two were joined at the hip. You two can't see it yet but you're destined to be together someday."

Whitton found herself blushing.

"He's sick," Chalmers said.

"Bullshit," The Ghoul said, "Jason Smith is never sick. I heard about his sister although I've been told I'm not to talk about that."

Whitton looked confused.

"How do you know about her?" She said.

"Sorry," the Ghoul said, "I've said too much already."

He made a theatrical gesture as if he were addressing the whole room.

"The dead can't talk," he said, "but the walls have ears."

He tapped his nose with his forefinger.

Whitton looked at him as though he had lost his mind. She had forgotten about his eccentricities.

"I'm only joking," he said, "You should know me by now. I work by nobody's rules but my own. Especially a pair of so called government agents. Government agents my arse. Did anybody actually check their credentials by the way? I would if I were you. I was told by them to keep quiet and that, by my reckoning is like telling a shark to ignore the scent of blood. It aint gonna happen."

"Do you know something about Smith's sister?" Whitton asked.

"Sharp as usual," the Ghoul smiled, "I know she didn't drown and neither did the boy. They were both stone cold before they even hit the water."

"How do you know that?" Chalmers said.

"Bob, no wonder I always beat you at poker."

"You count cards," Chalmers said.

"Never," The Ghoul said, "maybe once or twice but it doesn't help much in poker anyway. There was no water in either of their lungs. Plus, I found the needle marks. There was enough horse tranquiliser in their systems to knock out an elephant."

"Ok," Chalmers said, "we've been told to stay away from that investigation."

"By the phoney spies," The Ghoul said.

"An order is an order," Chalmers said, "Tommy Pike, what have we got?"

The Ghoul glanced over at Tommy Pike's body.

"That's why I invited you in," he said, "I could have given you a straight forward report but I wanted to show you something."

He opened Pike's mouth.

“The tests we did showed that he did consume a hell of a lot of sleeping pills. Halcion, to be exact. It’s a very potent benzodiazepine.”

“So it was a suicide then,” Whitton said, “what did you want to show us?”

“He also had an impressive blood alcohol level. For a sports star he could certainly hold his drink.”

“Get to the point Paul,” Chalmers said.

“Look here,” The Ghoul pointed to Pike’s mouth.

Chalmers and Whitton moved closer to get a better look.

“See the bruising on the sides of his mouth,” The Ghoul said, “two of his teeth are broken too.”

“What does it mean?” Whitton said.

“It means his mouth was forced open,” Chalmers said.

“Very good Bob,” The Ghoul said, “and we found scratches on the throat and his epiglottis was swollen from the constant gagging while he was trying to regurgitate the tablets.”

“He was forced to take the pills?” Whitton said.

“That’s right,” The Ghoul said, “his mouth was forced open and the sleeping tablets were pushed down his throat. He fought back though.”

“What do you mean?” Whitton said.

“He didn’t give in without a fight. I reckon whoever did this will have a couple of nasty bite marks on his hands.”

“Jesus Christ,” Chalmers said.

“I don’t understand why though,” Whitton said.

“Why what?” The Ghoul asked.

“Why make it look like a suicide? If it’s the same people who killed Jimmy Fisher and the Colombian plus Alfie Pike and Smith’s sister, why not just shoot Pike? These people don’t seem to care. Why go to all the trouble of staging a suicide?”

“Sick people,” Chalmers said, “a has been footballer loses his only son. What has he got left? He decides he’s had enough and ends it all. It’s a very believable scenario. It makes me sick to the stomach.”

“Of course,” The Ghoul said, “I knew it wasn’t a suicide before I’d even examined the body.”

“Don’t tell me,” Chalmers said, “your sixth sense.”

“No,” The Ghoul said, “just common sense. I saw the forensics report. Webber does a thorough job, I’ll give him that. The way the body was lying in the kitchen told me straight away it wasn’t suicide.”

“How do you know that?” Whitton said.

“Come on my dear. Think. If you were going to commit suicide, if you were going to end it all what would you do?”

“I have no idea,” Whitton said, “The thought has never crossed my mind.”

“Sleeping pills,” The Ghoul said, “a peaceful way to go. Add a bottle of whisky and you just drift off and don’t come back.”

“I still don’t get it,” Whitton said.

“You take the pills,” The Ghoul said, “you make yourself comfortable and you wait for them to transport you into oblivion. You lie back in bed, you run yourself a nice warm bath, you sit in your favourite chair. What you definitely do not do is…”

He looked directly at Whitton.

“Of course,” she said, “you don’t lie down on the cold tiles in the kitchen.”

“There’s hope for you yet,” the Ghoul smiled.

THIRTY

Smith picked up the old guitar and frowned. It had been a long time since he had played any guitar let alone a beaten up acoustic like he held in his hands right now. He noticed that the whole room had gone quiet. Everybody was staring at him. He played a simple E major chord and winced. The guitar was badly out of tune. He tuned it as best he could and moved it closer to the microphone. He played the opening sequence to 'Little Wing' and stopped. June, the woman with the short black hair looked at him and nodded in encouragement. Smith started to play again. This time it sounded much better. It was all coming back to him. He closed his eyes and played. June came in at exactly the right time. Her voice was nothing like Smith had expected it to be; it was softer without any hint of huskiness he expected a woman in her forties who smoked would have.

Smith opened his eyes again. The people in the pub were still staring at him but most of them were smiling now. Smith launched himself into the guitar solo and a few people stood up. He could hear that the guitar was starting to go out of tune again so he decided to wind things up. He looked over at June and smiled. She nodded back and Smith played the ending of the song. Everything went quiet and then the whole pub erupted in cheer. Smith put the guitar down and walked up to the bar.

"That was brilliant," the barman put a pint of beer in front of him, "on the house. We don't hear stuff like that around here too often."

"Thanks," Smith took a long sip and walked back to his table."

Theakston was still fast asleep under the chair; the noise in the pub had not fazed him at all. Smith sat down and smiled. He was feeling wide awake now.

"Not bad," a whiny voice was heard from the next table, "I've heard better though."

"Thanks," Smith took this a compliment.

He had a feeling that this short thin man had probably not complimented anybody in years.

Smith finished his beer and stood up. He needed to get home. He knew that after a few beers and a bottle of jack Daniels he should find a place to stay for the night; he should not really be driving but he felt awake and he felt like the drive back to York. He woke Theakston up and waited for the dog to work out where he was. Smith walked out the door of the pub without speaking to anybody. Theakston followed slowly behind.

It had stopped raining as Smith and Theakston walked back to where Bridge's car was parked. It was dark and the moon was hidden behind the clouds so Smith did not see the man who stood in the doorway to the Duke of Wellington. He was talking on a mobile phone. Smith drove carefully along the winding country roads away from Danby. His head felt remarkably clear and he knew these roads like the back of his hand. He turned off Gray Lane onto the A170 and knew he could pick up a bit of speed on the straighter road. He had not seen a single car since leaving Danby. The clock on the dashboard said nine thirty. Smith knew he would be back at home just after ten. He looked at Theakston asleep on the passenger seat and sighed. His dog was all he had left. He had not even thought about the arrangements for the funeral. He realised it would be up to him to organise everything. Even though he hardly knew the young woman who had been pulled out of the river earlier, she was still his little sister.

Smith looked in the rear view mirror. He was sure he could see car headlights about two hundred metres behind him. He turned on to the Malton Road and increased his

speed. A short while later the lights were back again. They seemed to be getting closer. Smith was now about five miles from the Pickering turn off. There was definitely another car behind him and it was gaining. Probably another drunk who wants to get home, he thought but the way the car was driving made Smith think the driver had a purpose. The headlights were only fifty metres behind now.

Smith could see the lights of Pickering up ahead and he hoped there would be more traffic on the roads soon. The car behind him was so close now that Smith was blinded by its headlights. He was starting to feel nervous. There had been plenty of opportunities for the car to overtake him, why did it stay behind him? He decided to take a chance. At the next lay by he pulled over and stopped the car. He held his breath and hoped the other car would drive straight past.

The car did drive straight past. Smith sighed. He realised he was sweating quite badly. The car up ahead had stopped about twenty metres away. Time appeared to pass very slowly. What do they want? Smith thought. The driver's door of the car opened and a stocky man got out. Another man got out of the other side. Smith's heart started to beat faster as they approached his car and he realised who they were.

THIRTY ONE

The Ghoul finished the rest of his third cup of coffee in the space of an hour and frowned. His head was pounding; he had frowned far too much during the day. He had just finished writing the autopsy reports on the two bodies they had pulled out of the river Ouse that morning. He looked at the top of the report. 'Laura Smith' it said, 'Laura Smith, female, twenty one years old.'

He wondered how Smith was handling it all. He had heard about Smith's sister a few times. How she had been taken from a beach in Western Australia when she was just a child. How Smith had met up with her ten years later in Talinn. That episode in Smith's life had nearly broken him. The Ghoul frowned even deeper. How is he going to handle this? He thought.

The initial autopsy report had found nothing untoward; there were no signs of a struggle, no cuts or bruises apart from a small bruise on Laura's face but on further examination they had found needle marks on both Smith's sister and Alfie Pike. The blood tests had shown there to be large doses of a heavy sedative in both blood samples. Smith's sister and Alfie Pike were both dead before they hit the water.

The Ghoul felt like a drink. He thought about phoning Smith but dismissed the thought at once.

He'll be drinking away his regrets on his own, he thought, and I don't blame him.

"Paul Johnson?" A woman's voice was heard in the doorway.

The Ghoul got such a fright that he jumped. He did not normally get visitors at this time of night. He turned round and saw Sarah Proud standing in the doorway. Brad Friedman was standing behind her.

"This isn't an open bloody house," The Ghoul said, "you can't just walk into my office without an appointment. This is a pathology lab you know."

"We're well aware of what it is," Proud said, "We need the reports for the two bodies found in the river this morning."

"On whose authority?" the Ghoul said.

"Mine," Friedman said, "do I have to remind you who we are?"

The Ghoul thought quickly.

"You can have them when I've finished them," he said, "I'll e mail them to the relevant department in the morning."

"I don't think you heard me Mr Johnson," Friedman said, "We need those reports now."

The Ghoul stood up and faced them both. He was surprised at how tall Sarah Proud was.

"No Mr Friedman," he said, "if that's even your real bloody name, I don't think you heard me. Get out of my office."

Brad Friedman took a step closer. The Ghoul found himself taking an involuntary step back.

"Mr Johnson," he said, "I'm afraid you have no choice. Me and Miss Proud outrank anybody you normally deal with. If you haven't finished the reports we'll just wait here until you have."

"You're not SOCA," The Ghoul said, "I'm not stupid. I have eyes in my head and more importantly, I have ears too. Your accents, especially yours Miss Proud."

He looked her straight in the eyes.

"You can fool most people," The Ghoul continued, "but I'm not most people. I can hear that Eastern European twang a mile away."

Sarah Proud's facial expression did not change. Her eyes continued to bore into the Ghoul's until he had to break eye contact.

"I believe you were arrested for murder earlier in the year?" Proud said.

"An unfortunate series of events," The Ghoul said, "they made a mistake."

"York Police department made a mistake," Proud sneered at him, "DS Jason Smith made a mistake?"

"He wasn't around at the time," the Ghoul said, "He was otherwise engaged."

"Yes," Friedman said, "After the murder of his girlfriend I believe he went off the radar for a while. Tragic. Mr Johnson, you're either with or us or against us."

"Of course," The Ghoul found it hard not to laugh, "You're either on the bus or off the bus. That's how it works with you mobsters isn't it?"

"The reports," Proud ignored his comment, "We're not leaving until we get them."

"Do you know what I think?" The Ghoul noticed he had started to sweat, "I think you have everybody fooled. Smith, Chalmers, the whole lot of them. You're very clever but you don't fool me."

"What are you talking about?" Proud said.

"You're not SOCA. You're not even government are you? Do you even have any ID? I think you're involved with the people responsible for all of this; the people responsible for shooting Jimmy Fisher and the same people who killed Smith's sister and Alfie Pike. Not to mention Alfie's father. He didn't kill himself."

Sarah Proud's expression had changed now. She looked like a lioness about to make a kill.

"You have a vivid imagination," Brad Friedman took out his ID card. At the top in bold letters it read 'Serious Organised Crime Agency.' His name was at the bottom of the card. A black and white photograph of Friedman looking much younger was in the centre of the card. He still had the crew cut that annoyed Smith so much.

The Ghoul shook his head.

"The reports are there," he pointed to the computer on his desk, "but I still think there's something else going on. I don't trust either of you."

"You don't need to trust us," Friedman sat down in front of the computer, "you just need to do as we say."

He attached the reports to an e mail and sent them. He then deleted both the e mail and the file the reports were stored on.

"You're not to mention a word of this to anybody," Friedman stood directly in front of The Ghoul, "if you know what's good for you."

"You need to work on your people skills," The Ghoul said, "I thought I was socially inept but you make me look like Mr Popular."

Friedman did not look amused.

"Good night Mr Johnson," Friedman walked out of the office.

Sarah Proud glanced at The Ghoul and followed behind him.

THIRTY TWO

"Could you step out of the car please sir," one of the policemen said to Smith.

Smith still could not believe what was happening. He had never been stopped by the police before.

"Step out of the car please sir," the policeman asked again.

Smith opened the door and got out. Theakston woke up and started to growl; he could sense that something was wrong.

"It's alright boy," Smith said, "we'll be on our way in a few minutes."

"Have you been drinking sir?" the other policeman asked.

"No," Smith said, "I mean yes but I feel fine. Why were you following me like that?"

"I need you to blow into this," the policeman produced a breathalyser.

Smith was gobsmacked. This was the second time this week he had been asked to take a breathalyser test.

"You followed me for miles," Smith said, "why were you following me?"

"We had an anonymous tip off," the policeman said, "Someone at the Duke of Wellington said you were intoxicated. He didn't want you to hurt yourself or anybody else for that matter. He said you drank a whole bottle of whisky earlier in the day."

Smith could feel his blood boiling. Anonymous tip off, he thought, short thin man with a whiny voice no doubt. Used to be a police reservist.

"I'm a detective sergeant in the York Police department," Smith said.

"And I'm Peter Pan," the stocky policeman said, "please just blow into the tube. I can smell the booze on you."

He handed Smith the breathalyser. Smith did not know what to do. He did not have his ID on him and he was not sure it would make a difference anyway. Police officers were not above the law and loyalty within the force had long gone.

Smith knew very well that if he blew into the tube it would all be over for him; instant dismissal, no pension and no prospects of finding a similar job.

"Sir," the stocky policeman said, "you can either do it here or we can cuff you and do things back at the station. It'll be a lot better for you in the long run if you just do what we say."

Smith looked at the breathalyser and put his mouth over the tube. He closed his eyes and breathed in, trying to dilute the alcohol on his breath as much as possible. He knew the exercise was futile; he knew exactly how a breathalyser machine worked. He also knew that some of the alcohol on his system will have evaporated from the liquid he had drunk and moved to the air sacs in the lungs. The legal limit for driving was 0.08 grams of alcohol per 100 millilitres of blood. Smith breathed out slowly and waited. The stocky policeman took the breathalyser and he too waited. He waited for the sulphuric acid in the machine to turn the alcohol from Smith's breath into a liquid solution. He waited for the potassium chromate to change colour from orange to green as it reacted with the alcohol. Finally, he waited for the needle on the dial to move and show the approximate alcohol level in Smith's blood stream.

"Nought point two five," he said, "You're in serious trouble."

"The machine must be wrong," Smith knew he was three times over the legal limit.

"There's nowt wrong with the machine," the other policeman said, "but a blood test will prove beyond any doubt anyway. I'm afraid you're going to have to come with us."

Smith could feel his whole world starting to crumble around him. Bits and pieces of his life seemed to be crashing before his eyes.

“What about the dog?” he said.

“Does he bite?” the stocky policeman looked at Theakston on the passenger seat.

“Only if you upset him,” Smith said.

Theakston jumped out of the car and stood at Smith’s feet. Smith locked up Bridge’s car and walked towards the police car.

THIRTY THREE

The Ghoul stared at the blank computer screen. He was about to switch the computer off when a thought struck him. He had watched as Brad Friedman had sent the reports to the unknown e mail address and then deleted the e mail. The Ghoul could not recall him deleting the message from the deleted e mail folder. He opened up the e mail program and clicked on 'deleted messages'. At the bottom of the list was the e mail Friedman had sent containing the autopsy reports for Alfie Pike and Laura Smith. The Ghoul looked at the e mail address. It was the strangest address he had ever seen. He read the message on the e mail and frowned, 'Koik puhas, Miski ei vita meid. Koik jaljed on eemaldatud.' It was a language he did not recognise. He copied the message, closed the e mail program and opened up his internet explorer. He found the online translator page; he had a fascination for language and had used it many times before. He pasted the e mail message in the box and pressed 'Translate'. The translation that appeared on the screen was vague and The Ghoul had to read it three times for it to make any sense.

'Everything cleared out,' it read, 'there's nothing more to point to we. All puzzles have been removed.'

The Ghoul could not believe what he was reading. He looked at the language indicator on the side of the screen. The language that Friedman had used to write the e mail was Estonian.

The Ghoul forwarded the e mail to his cell phone. He heard the phone beep and knew it had been received. He checked just to make sure and saw it had been delivered correctly. Once he was sure it was on his phone he found Smith's e mail address and

forwarded the message to him. He then permanently deleted the message from his e mail files. He dialled Smith's number but it went straight to voice mail.

"Smith," he realised his voice was shaking, "I've discovered something interesting, nay, sinister about our two friends from SOCA. Check your e mails. Phone me as soon as you get this. Night or day."

He rang off.

He switched off the computer and left the office. He really felt like a drink.

The pathology department was quiet as The Ghoul walked along the long corridor towards the exit. He looked at his watch. It was ten o clock; an hour until the pubs closed. He remembered he had enough beers at home and made up his mind that he would go straight home and drink there. After the encounter with Proud and Friedman he would need some time and space to think anyway. Who are these people? He thought to himself as he walked towards his usual parking space. His gut instinct told him they were trouble. He walked past the lift and noticed that somebody was on their way down to the parking level. He wondered who could be around at this time of night. The car park was empty. He opened the door to his car and got inside. He sat for a moment and thought hard. Smith's sister is found in Talinn after ten years, he thought, she ends up dead in York after Smith gets involved in the murders of two football players. Two so called SOCA agents send her autopsy report to somebody who speaks Estonian.

"Something is going on here," he said out loud, "something evil."

There was a rap on his car window and The Ghoul jumped. He rolled down the window.

"Off home are you Paul?" it was the night security officer Harry.

"Rough day Harry," The Ghoul said, "I'm off to have a few beers."

“Lucky bugger,” Harry said, “I’m here until six in the morning. See you tomorrow.”

“Good night Harry,” The Ghoul started up the car and drove out of the car park.

The streets were wet as The Ghoul drove home. He had been stuck in the hospital all day and had not even realised it had rained. The light on the dashboard was lit up to show he was low on petrol.

That’s odd, he thought, he had only filled up the car a few days ago. He did not feel like driving to a petrol station; he knew he would have enough in reserve to get him home and there would be enough left to make it to the petrol station in the morning. Besides, he needed a drink; a beer or ten to help him forget the awful day he had just had. He crossed the river and knew he would be home drinking beer in less than five minutes.

As The Ghoul turned left into his street, the fuel level in his tank had dropped drastically; so drastically that the engine was basically running on fumes. The float wire that had been placed inside the tank on the top of the fuel made contact with the bottom of the tank for the first time, completing a circuit. The electrical connection was complete. The Ghoul would not have known what was happening as the two, three kilogramme packages of plastic explosive detonated simultaneously underneath his car.

THIRTY FOUR

It was only a five minute drive to the police station in Pickering but for Smith it seemed to take forever. Delaying the inevitable, he thought. He had been three time over the legal limit for driving; he may as well kiss his seven year career in the police force goodbye. It was odd though; Smith did not feel the slightest bit bothered. He did not feel like he was about to lose everything he had worked for. On the contrary, he felt quite relieved. Maybe this was some kind of sign, he thought, maybe it was meant to be. He did not know what he would do when he was no longer a police detective but he did not care. His house was paid for and he had enough money saved up to last him for months. Maybe he could go away for a while; join a commune or go trekking in the Himalaya maybe. He dismissed the idea immediately. The mere thought repulsed him.

Smith took out his phone and dialled Whitton's number. He noticed he had missed a call earlier. The call was answered after the fourth ring.

"What?" Whitton sounded different.

"Listen," Smith said, "I'm in trouble. I've been arrested for drunk driving. I'm three times over the limit. They're taking me to Pickering police station as we speak."

There was no sound on the other end of the line.

"Are you still there?" Smith said.

"Give me twenty minutes."

The phone went dead.

"I must be more drunk than I thought," Smith said to Theakston, "Whitton sounded really weird."

The police car stopped outside the police station in Pickering and the two policemen in the front got out. Smith waited as the back door was opened and he was told to get out. Theakston started to growl again.

"It's alright boy," Smith said, "They won't send me to jail. I'll probably just lose my license."

"Keep an eye on that dog," the stocky policeman said, "I don't trust those things."

"I trust him more than I trust anybody else," Smith said.

"Come on," the comment had fallen on deaf ears.

He led Smith towards the entrance of the police station. The building was in darkness. Smith was surprised at how small the station was; it looked more like a tiny church hall than a fully operational police station. It was nestled between a row of old oak trees and the building looked ancient.

Smith could not believe his eyes as the stocky policeman took out a set of keys and opened up the door to the police station.

"Are you telling me the station is closed?" he said.

"Pickering isn't exactly the crime centre of Yorkshire," the stocky policeman put the keys back in his pocket.

"I know," Smith said, "York is."

They went inside. The other policeman switched on the lights. There was nobody else inside the building.

"You can sit there," he pointed to one of three chairs in the tiny reception area, "the doctor won't be here for a good hour yet."

"Doctor?" Smith said.

"For the blood test. If we're going to process this quickly we need to get a blood test done as soon as possible. I'd offer you a cup of coffee but it'd only interfere with the blood test results."

Smith sat down on one of the chairs and looked out of the window. The rain clouds had drifted off towards the south and the stars were now visible in the sky. He saw the headlights of a car as it approached and parked in the car park outside.

"Looks like the doctors early," the stocky policeman said, "that's good, maybe we can get an early night in."

Smith watched as the car headlights were switched off and a tall figure got out the car. Theakston stood up and started to stare at the door. He seemed excited about something. The door to the police station opened and Sarah Proud walked in. Theakston walked over and jumped up at her long legs. Smith was confused.

"What's going on here?" she said to the stocky policeman.

"This man has been arrested for drink driving," he said, "who are you?"

"Detective Sergeant Smith's boss," Proud said, "he's been helping us with a very sensitive investigation and you may have just jeopardised it."

"I told you I was a DS," Smith said.

Proud took out her ID and handed it to the open mouthed policeman.

"I'll take him off your hands now," she said.

The stocky policeman scrutinised the ID card and handed it back to Proud.

"He was still caught drunk driving," the other policeman said, "he was three times over the limit."

“Occupational hazard,” Proud smiled at Smith, “like I said, he was in the middle of some very sensitive undercover work. He couldn’t exactly say he didn’t want to drink with one of the main suspects for fear of losing his job as a police detective could he?”

Smith was finding it hard not to laugh.

“Let’s go,” Proud said.

She looked at the stocky policeman. She was a good twenty centimetres taller than him.

“Don’t worry,” she said, “I’ll smooth things out with your superiors. We need to go.”

THIRTY FIVE

The blast had shattered the windows of four houses on each side of the street. House alarms were blaring out and lights were switching on one by one in the road. Within minutes, all that was left of The Ghoul's car was a smouldering black shell. The tyres had melted immediately with the intense heat and, luckily for the Ghoul, he had been incinerated straight away. There was no sign that a driver had been present in the car when it had exploded. The sound of sirens could be heard in the distance. Somebody had obviously phoned for the police or the fire brigade.

Some of the doors in the houses opened and curious people were cautiously peering out to see what was going on, half expecting there to be another blast. Luckily for most of the residents, in this part of York the houses had garages attached to them so there had been no cars parked on the street. A fire engine was the first on the scene followed closely behind by two police cars and two unidentified cars. Whitton and Thompson got out of Thompson's Audi and looked around them. The clouds had moved off now and the moonlight cast an eerie glow over the carnage. The shattered windows in the houses gave them a derelict look.

"What the hell happened here?" Chalmers walked over to Thompson's car.

"Looks like a terrorist attack," Thompson pointed to The Ghoul's car.

"We don't get terrorist attacks in York," Chalmers said.

"Cars don't just explode by themselves," Thompson said, "look at it. There's bugger all left of it."

"What do you want us to do sir?" Whitton asked.

"Get that lot back as far as possible," Chalmers pointed to the group of people who were starting to venture out onto the street," bomb squad are on the way just in case and a couple of ambulances have been called out. Find out if anybody has been hurt. There must be a lot of broken glass around."

Whitton and Thompson walked towards the group of people.

Chalmers stood next to Thompson's car and scanned the street. The scene did not seem real. The Ghoul's car was still oozing black smoke. Chalmers could not even figure of what make of car it had once been; it was just a black shell. The dark green reinforced vehicle of the bomb squad pulled up a few metres behind Thompson's car. A short fat man with a bald head walked up to Chalmers.

"I thought this was a piss take when we were called at first," he said in a gruff voice, "a hoax. How are you Bob?"

"Bloody marvellous," Chalmers said, "look at this mess. We're going to be here all night by the looks of things."

Frank McCallum had been a detective constable when Chalmers was a DS many years before. Chalmers could not remember if McCallum had ever had hair.

"Do we know what happened?" McCallum said.

"We got a call to say a car had exploded in the street," Chalmers said, "from what we heard, it had to be a big explosion. When I heard what street it was I came straight away."

"Why's that?"

"I play poker just down the road there," Chalmers pointed further down the street, "a friend of mine lives down there. Looks like he was lucky. His house still has windows."

“You know the drill Bob,” McCallum said, “We need everybody out of the surrounding houses while we check the vehicle over. Not that we’ll find anything; I don’t think I’ve ever seen such a totally obliterated car but you know more than anyone, procedures are procedures.”

“I have two experienced officers on it,” Chalmers said, “How long do you think you’ll need?”

“Looking at that,” McCallum pointed to wreck of The Ghoul’s car, “shouldn’t take more than half an hour. If it was a bomb that did that, the blast will have exploded any secondary devices but we have to make sure.”

He walked off towards the bomb squad vehicle.

THIRTY SIX

"How did you know where I was?" Smith asked Sarah Proud as they drove out of Pickering towards York, "have you been following me?"

"I was actually ready for bed," she said, "I could have ignored the phone call you know."

"What phone call?" Smith was confused.

"You phoned me remember. You said you had been arrested for drunk driving."

Smith realised what must have happened. He had meant to phone Whitton and he had dialled Sarah Proud's number my mistake.

"Sorry," he said, "I was meant to phone somebody else but thanks anyway. You saved my skin there."

"Then you owe me," Sarah proud said, "I may need you to do the same for me one day."

They drove in silence for a few miles. Smith was starting to get a headache and his mouth felt incredibly dry. The walk around the moors of Danby and the fresh air had made him forget what had happened but now everything was starting to hit him hard. His sister had been killed and he was beginning to think it was all his fault. It was a message to him; a sign to make sure he stayed well away. He had the feeling that what had started with the shooting of a couple of football players was only just the beginning of something much bigger; something more sinister than he could ever imagine.

"You've had a hell of a day," Sarah Proud said as if she could read his thoughts, "I'm sorry about your sister."

It all started to come back to him. The phone call about the bodies that had been pulled out of the river; the terror when he had unzipped the body bag and seen his sister's face.

The fight with Brad Friedman. Sarah Proud had stopped Friedman from hurting him. What had she said? Smith thought.

"How did you know it was Laura?" he said.

"What?"

"This morning," Smith said, "just after I'd smacked Friedman in the face you stopped him from doing anything. You said 'it was his sister, cut him some slack'. How did you know it was Laura? As far as I know, Laura hasn't been to York before. I didn't know she was here. Have you met her somewhere before?"

Sarah Proud did not say a word.

"What's going on here?" Smith said, "What has Laura got to do with all this?"

Proud shook her head.

"Not here," she said, "not now. It's late."

Smith looked carefully at her face. She was wearing a pained expression. If he did not know any better he could have sworn she was fighting some inner demon or other.

"My house," Smith said, "I'll make us some coffee and you can tell me everything. I don't mind staying up all night if we have to."

It's over," Proud's expression changed again, "I can tell you that much. It's over."

"Bullshit," Smith said, "it's far from over. When somebody tries to kill me and then kills my little sister I take it rather personally. Believe me, it's only just beginning."

Sarah Proud stopped outside Smith's house. She left the engine running.

"Are you going to leave the engine running all night?" Smith said.

"I'm not staying," she said, "get some sleep. I doubt if we'll ever see each other again."

"Please," Smith said, "one coffee. I need to know."

"Goodbye detective," Proud said.

"I don't feel like being on my own tonight," Smith knew it was a long shot but he was desperate.

Proud switched off the engine.

"One coffee," she said, "but then I have to go. I have to be in London tomorrow."

"Of course," Smith said.

Smith turned on the kettle to make the coffee. Theakston slumped on the dog bed in the kitchen and was asleep immediately. Sarah Proud sat at the kitchen table and rubbed her eyes.

"I'm listening," Smith poured the water into the coffee mugs.

"Where do I start?" Proud said.

"The beginning is usually a good place," Smith put one of the mugs in front of her and lit a cigarette, "what happened to your hand?"

He noticed she had a small bandage around two of her fingers.

"Caught it in the car door," she said, "hurt like hell."

"I want to know everything," Smith said.

"We've been watching them for quite some time now," Proud said.

"Them?" Smith said.

"Gogol," she said, "aka Ivanov aka Wolfie."

Smith's heart started to beat faster at the mention of Wolfie's name.

"Real name Viktor Boronov," Proud continued, "born in Moscow in Nineteen sixty eight. Self proclaimed citizen of the world. His family moved from Moscow in seventy seven. Do you really want to know all this?"

“I want to know everything,” Smith said again, “let me guess the next part. They moved from Moscow to Talinn, Estonia?”

“Half right,” Proud said, “they did move to Talinn but in seventy seven it was still part of the former Soviet Union. Boronov was nine years old when they moved. One year later his parents were both killed. Car crash according to the records but that’s not what really happened to them.”

“What really happened?”

“They were eliminated,” Proud said, “you must understand that in those days very few people knew what went on behind the so called iron curtain. People disappeared on a daily basis.”

She paused to take a sip of the coffee.

“Nineteen seventy eight,” she continued, “Viktor Boronov is ten years old and an orphan. You can’t imagine how terrible it must have been for him; being passed from one barbaric institution to another.”

“My heart bleeds for him,” Smith stubbed his cigarette out on a saucer.

“You said you wanted to know everything,” Proud said.

“Sorry,” Smith said, “go on.”

“Fast forward ten years or so,” Proud said, “the walls have come down and the old Soviet machine has crumbled and fallen to pieces. Free enterprise has taken over but very few people know how to handle it. Enter a man in his twenties with the street savvy that only years in and out of institutions can give you.”

“Wolfie?” Smith said.

“Boronov,” Proud said, “he saw an opportunity and took it. Supply and demand. The barriers between east and west had all but gone; money was flowing in at an alarming rate and suddenly there was a demand never experienced before.”

“Demand for what?” Smith said.

“Demand for what the west had enjoyed for years,” Proud said, “drugs, fast cars, women, you name it. In a very short space of time, Boronov became a wealthy man.”

She drained the last drop of coffee from the mug.

“Do you want some more?” Smith said.

“Ok,” Proud said, “fast forward another ten years and Estonia has broken free of the chains of the Soviet Union. Free in theory anyway. The Russians still controlled pretty much everything but the people had an identity. Boronov had not only amassed wealth over the years; he had gained contacts. Contacts that ensured he was virtually untouchable. Politicians, high ranking police officials, you name it.”

Smith put the coffee mug in front of her.

“There was nobody who could stop him from doing whatever he wanted and it was then he became most dangerous.”

“The man’s a psychopath,” Smith said.

“But also an incredibly intelligent human being,” Proud said, “a paranoid genius is virtually impossible to outsmart. He will always think everything through to the last detail; always be one step ahead. Have you got anything stronger than this?”

She pointed to the coffee.

“I drank all the Jack Daniels,” Smith said, “but I’m sure there’s an old bottle of Brandy around here somewhere.”

He stood up and walked through to the living room. He returned with a bottle of Remy Martin and two glasses.

"In the mid nineties," Proud said, "Boronov became weary of Estonia and hatched a plan to recruit an army of loyal followers in cities all over the world."

"That much I know," Smith said, "The Brain of Wolfie. He recruited my little sister remember although I wouldn't use the word 'recruited'."

"It was nothing personal," Proud said, "he took Laura because she was just the right age to change her; to brainwash her."

"Ok," Smith took a long sip of the brandy, "let's fast forward to today shall we. Wolfie, or Boronov or whoever he really is is now in York. He tried to kill me and then he killed my sister. Why?"

"We all know about Talinn Jason,"

It was the first time Sarah proud had used Smith's first name.

"What do you mean?" Smith said.

"Like I said, we've been following Boronov for a long time. You were nearly killed in Talinn,"

"I guess I'm just lucky," Smith smiled.

"Its more than that," Proud said, "you should not be alive. Boronov showed an uncharacteristic mercy. It doesn't make any sense."

"You said you have to be back in London tomorrow?" Smith said, "then what?"

"Boronov is finished with York," she said, "it's all over."

THIRTY SEVEN

It was past midnight when the bomb squad officers had deemed it safe for the residents of Green Street to return to their houses.

“The double glazing companies are going to make a fortune out of this mess,” Chalmers said to Whitton.

“What do you think happened here?” Whitton said.

“We’ll find out tomorrow,” Chalmers said, “Today I mean. It’s already tomorrow isn’t it? I wonder if Paul heard anything.”

“Paul?”

“The Ghoul,” Chalmers said, “He lives on this street. I think I’ll pay him a quick visit. Knowing him he’ll still be up and he always has a cold beer in the fridge.”

Chalmers walked a short distance down the street and stopped outside a house with a blue tiles roof. The lights were off inside the house. He walked up the driveway and knocked on the door. There was no answer. He must be working late, Chalmers thought. He knew the Ghoul often worked all night; he put in more hours than anybody else in the pathology department.

“He’s not home,” Chalmers walked back to where Whitton was standing. She was talking to Thompson.

“I think we can call it a night,” Chalmers said, “There’s nothing more we can do here.”

“Has anybody heard from Smith?” Whitton asked.

“He’s probably lying drunk somewhere in a ditch,” Thompson said.

“You’re all heart,” Whitton said, “he’s had a rough few days.”

“Haven’t we all?” Thompson said.

“His sister was pulled out of the Ouse this morning,” Chalmers said.

“Oh my god,” Thompson said, “I didn’t know it was his sister. He must be feeling terrible.”

“He’ll be fine,” Chalmers said, “I’m off home. I think tomorrow is going to be just as shitty as today was. I’ve got a sinking feeling the press are going to have our balls on a plate.”

“Why do you say that?” Thompson said.

“Think Thompson,” Chalmers said, “first Jimmy Fisher then Tommy Pike, not to mention Pike’s boy. Three people dead and what have we got to show for it? Absolutely bugger all. The press are going to eat us alive.”

“Our hands have been tied,” Whitton said.

“That means bollocks to that lot,” Chalmers said, “we’re in for a roasting, I can promise you that. Go home, get some sleep. You’re going to need it.”

“I’ll give you a lift,” Thompson said to Whitton.

“Good night,” Chalmers walked towards the bomb squad van.

Frank McCallum was busy packing away his equipment.

“Find anything?” Chalmers asked him.

“Not much left to find,” McCallum said, “the cars totally burned out. We’ll know more when Webber and his team start digging around a bit. There was definitely somebody in the car. It’s not a pretty sight though. I reckon the only chance of an ID is from dental records. Poor bastard was burned to a crisp.”

A truck towing a low bed trailer drove up and parked next to the burnt out car. Two men got out and carefully eased the car onto the trailer. From the light of the street lamps Chalmers could see that the road that had been underneath the car when it exploded would need to be repaired. The blast had made a small crater in the tarmac.

"I'm going home," Chalmers said to McCallum.

THIRTY EIGHT

"It's far from over," Smith finished the brandy in his glass and poured another one, "When he killed my sister he made it personal."

He tried to light a cigarette but his hands were shaking so badly he could not manage it. Sarah Proud took the lighter and lit the cigarette for him. Smith stared into her eyes. The deep hazel colour seemed darker. Proud broke eye contact first. Smith did not know why he did it but he put the cigarette on the saucer in front of him, leaned over and kissed her on the side of the face. Sarah Proud smiled.

"I knew your sister," she said.

Smith did not know what to say.

"I met her just over a year ago," Proud said, "she was a very special young woman; very stubborn. A lot like you I suppose."

"I still don't get why she didn't get away from Wolfie and his mobsters when she had the chance," Smith picked up the cigarette again, "she was the most headstrong person I'd ever met. She wouldn't do anything she didn't want to do when she was a kid."

"Her mind was programmed early," Proud said, "besides, she wouldn't have known any other life."

"When I met up with her in Talinn she was a completely different person," Smith said, "the little girl I remembered was gone. She was cold and unemotional."

"I'm sorry you didn't get to know her better," Proud said, "she was much deeper than that when you broke the surface. She had a kind heart. I think that's another reason why she was so loyal to Boronov."

Smith took a long sip of brandy and stood up.

"I need a shower," he said, "I stink and I need to wash this day off me."

"Do you want me to scrub your back?" Proud smiled.

Smith took her hand and led her upstairs.

The warm jets of the shower woke Smith up at once. Sarah Proud moved the shower curtain to the side and slipped in next to him.

"What happened there?" Smith touched a small scar on her stomach.

"I got in the way of a maniac with a sharp knife," she said, "can we stop with the questions for a while?"

Smith put his hand on the base of her spine and kissed her on the lips. He was not sure what was happening but whatever it was felt right at that very moment. This enigmatic woman had entered his life and something inside him had lit up. He did not believe in fate but this was something close.

As they dried each other off, Smith stared into Sarah Proud's eyes. They seemed different now; they were warmer and more trusting. Smith still could not believe what was happening; this government agent who only days before had seemed like a calculating robot was standing naked in his bathroom.

"I'm tired," Proud said, "god knows what time it is."

Smith finished drying her hair, took her hand and led her to the bedroom. They climbed under the sheets and held each other. They lay there in silence. Smith suddenly thought of something; it was something important but the thought drifted away as he listened to the rhythmic breathing of the woman lying next to him. The last thing he thought about

before he drifted off to sleep was the sound of the waves crashing onto the beach in Fremantle.

THIRTY NINE

Thursday 12 August 2010

Smith shot up in the bed. He was covered in sweat. He had been dreaming about snakes; snakes with dead eyes. He turned and looked at the empty space in the bed beside him. Sarah Proud was gone. He tried to remember what had happened the night before; the brandy, the shower and he wondered if it had all been a dream. He smiled; it had definitely not been a dream. He got out of bed and got dressed. He listened carefully for any sounds in the house but everything was quiet. He ran downstairs and looked around. Sarah Proud was not there. He looked for a note to explain her sudden disappearance but he could not find anything. He picked up his phone and saw he had received a call from The Ghoul. There was a voice message too. He switched on the kettle and opened the back door. He made the coffee and took it outside to the back garden. He lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply. The nicotine flowed through his system and for a few seconds his vision went black. He pressed the message retrieve button on the phone. The message from The Ghoul was eerie. 'I've discovered something interesting, nay sinister about our friends from SOCA. Check your e mails. Phone me as soon as you get this'.

Smith listened to the message again. What did The Ghoul mean by that? He thought. Sinister? He dialled The Ghoul's number but a monotonous voice informed him that the number he had dialled did not exist. He ended the call and dialled Sarah Proud's number. He heard the same monotonous voice again. 'The number you have dialled does not exist'.

There must be something wrong with the network, Smith thought. He put the phone down on the table. It started to ring immediately. Smith picked it up again. It was Whitton.

"Sir," she said, "where are you?"

"At home of course," Smith said, "what time is it?"

"About ten," Whitton said, "I've got some bad news."

"Why doesn't anybody ever phone me with good news?" Smith said, "What's happened?"

"The Ghoul is dead," Whitton said.

Smith did not think he had heard properly. He had only just listened to a message from the man.

"What do you mean he's dead?" he said, "he left a message on my phone."

"His car exploded," Whitton said, "he was burnt beyond recognition. He was identified by his dental records. He was driving when his car blew up. He was metres away from his house."

"How can a car just blow up?" Smith could not believe what he was hearing.

He thought about the message The Ghoul have left him. Something sinister about Proud and Friedman.

"They found traces of plastic explosive," Whitton said, "somebody blew up his car."

"Why would someone want to blow up the car of a pathologist?" Smith said, "It doesn't make any sense."

"Nothing that has happened in the past few days makes any sense," Whitton said.

"Can you pick me up?" Smith said, "I seem to have left Bridge's car just outside Pickering."

"You did what?"

"It's a long story," Smith said.

"Your cars fixed," Whitton said, "Bridge said he'll fetch you in it. He's not going to be too impressed that you left his car somewhere."

"I'll make it up to him,"

Smith rang off.

Smith sipped his coffee and lit another cigarette. He could not believe what was happening. He thought about the message from The Ghoul again. What had he found out about Sarah Proud and Brad Friedman? He thought back to the previous night. He had spent the night with the woman; what could be so sinister about her? He finished the coffee and flicked the cigarette butt over the wall into his neighbour's garden. He made a mental note to buy an ashtray when he had the chance. He went back inside and walked upstairs to the bathroom. He looked at the shower and smiled. He brushed his teeth quickly and went back downstairs. Bridge knocked on the door two minutes later.

"Where's my car?" Bridge asked.

"There's a funny story to that," Smith said, "Morning Bridge. Do you want some coffee?"

"Where's my car?" Bridge asked again.

"I'll tell you on the way to the station," Smith said, "you can drive."

As they drove, Smith told Bridge what had happened. The anonymous tip off. The police arresting him for drunk driving. He omitted the part about Sarah Proud.

"What about my car?" Bridge said.

"We'll fetch it later," Smith said, "and I owe you forty quid."

“So how did you get out of jail free?” Bridge said.

“I used my charm of course,” Smith said, “not a word of this to anyone ok?”

“You’re the boss,” Bridge said, “I want the forty quid back though.”

Smith and Bridge were totally unprepared for what waited for them at the police station. A crowd of people had gathered outside. There must have been over a hundred of them. Some of them were wielding placards that read ‘Police incompetence’, ‘we want justice for our heroes’, and the like. A band of journalists were camped outside in the car park.

“This doesn’t look good sir,” Bridge said as he parked Smith’s car next to Thompson’s Audi.

“Just walk straight past them,” Smith said, “don’t say a word to anybody.”

They walked through the crowd as quickly as they could.

“Detective sergeant,” a man with a long neck shouted as they passed, “why aren’t the police doing anything about the recent murders?”

Smith walked straight past him.

“Jimmy Fisher,” the man was not giving up, “Tommy and Alfie Pike. The people of York want justice.”

Smith and Bridge barged through the station. Two police constables were manning the door to prevent any unwanted visitors. Chalmers was by the front desk talking on his phone.

“What the hell is going on?” Smith said when Chalmers had finished.

“They’re calling for a vote of no confidence in the police,” Chalmers said, “You can’t blame them. They’re angry that we don’t seem to be doing anything about the recent murders.”

“SOCA made sure of that,” Smith said, “they made damn sure we didn’t get anywhere near the investigation.”

“Those people out there don’t care about SOCA,” Chalmers said, “They want results. I told you from the start we were in for shit. When a football player gets killed they take it personally. They’re baying for our blood.”

“What are we going to do?” Smith said.

“We’re going to start all over again,” Chalmers said, “it looks like SOCA are no longer going to be a problem. They seem to have disappeared off the face of the earth.”

Smith thought back to way that Sarah Proud had left without so much of a goodbye.

“With SOCA out of the picture,” Chalmers said, “we can do this our way.”

There was the sound of a cough behind them. Chalmers had spoken too soon. A man with an army crew cut stood behind them. Brad Friedman looked like he needed some more sleep. He had heavy bags under bloodshot eyes. Sarah proud was nowhere to be seen.

“Speak of the devil,” Smith said.

“What do you want?” Chalmers said to Friedman, “where’s your sidekick?”

“Gone,” Friedman said, “and I’ll be gone too in a few moments. I just thought it common courtesy to say goodbye and thank you.”

“Thank you for what?” Smith said, “Bowing down to your orders? Punching you in the face?”

“Do you see what you’ve done?” Chalmers said, “Have you seen that rabble out there? They say we can’t do our jobs. They’re taking it all the way to parliament. No confidence in the police. Do you realise how this makes us look?”

“That’s unfortunate,” Friedman said, “but that’s how things are.”

He turned to face Smith.

“Can I have a word?” he said.

“What about?” Smith said.

“Just give me a few minutes,” Friedman said, “I need to talk to you.”

FORTY

Smith and Friedman went into Smith's office. Friedman closed the door behind him.

"Why the secrecy?" Smith said, "Why couldn't you say what you have to say in front of the others?"

"Detective sergeant," Friedman said, "I can see you are an incredibly competent police detective but I think your gut instincts are a bit out of synch at the moment."

"My gut instinct is telling me to punch you in the face again," Smith said, "I don't think I hit you hard enough the first time."

"I tried to warn you," Friedman said, "be careful who you trust."

"That was you?" Smith remembered the message he had received, "thanks for the concern but I have a pretty good feeling about who I can't trust. You for example."

"And yet you seem to have let your guard down in front of my colleague."

"What are you talking about?" Smith was starting to get angry.

"I know what's been going on between you and Proud," Friedman said.

"Get out of my office," Smith said, "this conversation is over."

"Sit down," Friedman said, "I want to show you something."

He walked over to Smith's computer and turned it on.

"You won't find anything on there," Smith said.

Friedman typed in a web address and a web page Smith had never seen before appeared on the screen. It looked like some kind of government data base. Friedman typed away frantically on the keyboard. Smith was afraid he was going to break it. A black and white photograph of Sarah Proud appeared on the screen.

“I shouldn’t be showing you this,” Friedman said, “this is classified information but I have no choice. Like I said, you should be careful who you trust.”

Smith moved closer to the computer screen and read the words on the screen. Underneath the photograph of Proud was a name.

“I don’t understand,” he said, “who’s Nadia Boronov?”

“You know her,” Friedman said, “If I’m not mistaken, you know her intimately.”

“Sarah Proud?” Smith said, “What the hell is going on here?”

“Sarah Proud does not exist,” Friedman said, “he name is Nadia Boronov. Born in Talinn nineteen seventy eight. Two months after she was born her parents were killed in a suspicious car crash.”

Smith shuddered. He remembered what Proud had told him about Wolfie the previous night.

“Boronov?” he said, “Sarah Proud is Viktor Boronov’s sister. She’s Wolfie’s sister.”

Friedman looked shocked.

“How much has she told you?” He said.

“Not enough apparently,” Smith said, “she told me about Boronov but she left out the bit about him being her big brother. Why are you telling me all this?”

“For your own safety,” Friedman said, “stay away from her. You wouldn’t want to go the same way as your pathologist friend now would you?”

Smith started to pace up and down.

“This is all a bit much to take in,” he said, “why did they kill The Ghoul? He was just a simple pathologist.”

“I don’t know,” Friedman said, “maybe he knew something that made him a threat.”

"What?"

"I don't know," Friedman's left eye started to twitch.

"What is Sarah Proud doing in SOCA?" Smith said, "Is she really a government agent?"

"That's just the thing," Friedman said, "she worked her way up like everybody else. We only found out who she really is a few months ago."

"And you still let her continue with the investigation?"

"You don't understand how we operate," Friedman said, "Everything we do is shrouded in secrecy. We chose to use the fact that she didn't know we knew her real identity to our advantage."

Smith's head was starting to spin.

"How do you use that to your advantage?"

"By keeping an extra special eye on her of course," Friedman said, "by following her every move. She's careful, I'll give her that but she has to slip up sometime. Can you remember the man who kindly gave you his lighter at the pub?"

Smith took out the lighter.

"That's the coat of arms of Estonia," Friedman pointed to the lighter, "beautiful isn't it?"

"This is all too much," Smith said.

"The two police officers who took you to Pickering," Friedman continued, "you must have been very drunk. What kind of policeman takes a suspect to a locked police station in the middle of the night?"

Smith realised that Friedman was right.

"Where is Sarah Proud now?" Smith asked, "Or whatever name she goes by."

"Disappeared," Friedman said, "along with the rest of them. If you're lucky you won't see them again."

Smith took out his cigarettes and lit one. He handed the packet to Friedman although he knew he probably did not smoke. Friedman took a cigarette out and lit it with Smith's lighter.

"A bit lighter than I'm used to," he said, "but it'll have to do."

"Have you seen what's happening outside the station at this moment?" Smith said, exhaling a huge cloud of smoke.

"Human nature," Friedman said, "these people are scared witless. They don't have a clue what's going on and it terrifies them."

"They want to know what we're going to do about the murders," Smith said, 'in the space of a few days, five people have been killed. Six if we include The Ghoul. The people want results."

Smith suddenly remembered something. It was the message from The Ghoul telling him to check his e mails. He did not want to do it with Brad Friedman in the room.

"You won't catch him," Friedman interrupted his thoughts; "God knows we've tried. He covers his tracks; surrounds himself with only the best. He appears out of nowhere and disappears just as quickly. It's as if he's some kind of supernatural being."

Smith sat with his head in his hands. He thought about Sarah Proud and the night they had spent together. He still could not believe she had lied to him.

"There is a way out of this," Friedman interrupted his thoughts.

"I thought you said this Boronov was untouchable," Smith said.

“He is,” Friedman said, “I mean there’s a way to sway public opinion back in your favour.”

Smith looked up at Friedman.

“I’m listening,” he said.

FORTY ONE

"You've got to be joking," Chalmers said, "are you completely out of your mind?"

"Pretty much," Smith said.

Friedman closed the door to Chalmers' office and sat in one of the chairs opposite the desk.

"Do you have any better ideas?" Smith said, "This Boronov character cannot be caught. This is the next best solution."

Chalmers looked directly at Friedman.

"So what you're saying is this," he said, "you're prepared to offer yourself up as a scapegoat for all six murders?"

"It'll work," Friedman said, "I know the details of all the murders inside out. I could very well be the killer. Arrest me, march me out there in handcuffs for all the world to see. Organise a press conference. It'll work."

"He's right sir," Smith said, "I hate to admit it but he's right. The idea is so unbelievable that people will have to believe it if that makes any sense."

Chalmers scratched his nose.

"I'll have to clear it with the super," he said.

"Consider it done," Friedman smiled, "that man is so incompetent that I could persuade him to go outside and dance around naked if he believed it would help his crime stats."

Smith found himself smiling for the first time in days. Maybe this government agent with the annoying crew cut hairstyle was not so bad after all. Maybe my gut instinct was wrong, he thought.

“So what now?” Chalmers said.

Friedman stood up and held out his hands.

“How does it usually work?” he said, “cuff me and say ‘you’re nicked’.”

Five minutes later, Chalmers was ready. He opened the doors to the station and looked outside. The crowd of people have grown substantially in numbers. He took a deep breath and walked towards them.

“Detective inspector,” a woman Chalmers knew worked for the York Evening Post shouted, “the people of York want to know what’s going on.”

The noise from the crowd was deafening. Chalmers was starting to feel quite intimidated.

“We have a suspect in custody,” he said but the noise from the crowd drowned out his words.

“This is hopeless,” he said to the woman from the Evening Post.

She put two fingers to her mouth and produced the most ear piercing whistle Chalmers had ever heard. The crowd were silent.

“Listen,” her voice was almost as loud as the whistle, “DI Chalmers has something to say.”

Chalmers looked at her in disbelief.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he said, “I have some information for you. Please let me finish. We have a suspect in custody. A suspect who, as we speak, is confessing to the murders of Jimmy Fisher, Paulo Rubio, Tommy Pike, Alfie Pike, Laura Smith and Paul Johnson.”

Chalmers could feel his face getting redder. He was a hopeless liar. He hoped that nobody would notice.

“It’s all over,” he said, “There’s no more need to panic. You can all go home now and leave us to do our jobs.”

“Detective inspector,” the woman from the Evening Post said.

“We will be holding a press conference a six o clock sharp,” Chalmers said as if he could read her mind, “We will answer all your questions then.”

He addressed the crowd again.

“You can all go home now,” he said again, “believe me, justice will be served.”

He walked back towards the station and lit a cigarette. He realised his hands were shaking. The crowd of people were starting to disperse. Chalmers realised that Friedman’s scheme could work. Smith was right, he thought, who in their right mind would concoct such a ridiculous plan? He stubbed out his cigarette and went back inside the station. He went straight to the canteen and got a cup of coffee from the machine.

“How did it go?” Smith said.

“I think they bought it,” Chalmers said, “although I don’t like it one little bit.”

“What now?”

“It’s not over yet,” Chalmers said, “we still have a press conference to get through; we’re not quite out of the woods yet.”

“I need some time off,” Smith said.

“Not a chance,” Chalmers said, “we’ve still got a shit load of damage control to organise. I know you too; you’ll only use the time to dig around in things that don’t concern you.”

“I have to bury my sister.”

“Jesus Christ Smith,” Chalmers said, “I’m sorry. I completely forgot.”

“I haven’t had more than two days proper leave in the past three years,” Smith said, “if you don’t include loony leave and suspensions.”

“How long do you need?”

“Two weeks,” Smith said.

Chalmers shook his head.

“I’ll tell you what,” he said, “I’ll make you a deal. You head up the press conference and you’ve got your two weeks.”

“I hate the press,” Smith said.

“Take it or leave it,” Chalmers said, “think about it as a way to get one up on those vultures in the press besides, you know more about this investigation than any of us.”

“I’m being manipulated aren’t I?”

“Completely,” Chalmers said, “what’s it going to be?”

“I’ll be back at five,” Smith said.

“Where are you going?”

“Pickering,” Smith said, “I accidentally left Bridge’s car there last night. I promised I’d go and fetch it with him.”

“You did what?”

“It’s a long story,” Smith said, “I’ll see you at five.”

FORTY TWO

Bridge's car was exactly where Smith had left it; on the Malton Road about five miles outside of Pickering.

"Why did you leave it here?" Bridge said as he got out of Smith's car.

"You don't want to know," Smith handed Bridge his car keys, "I'll see you back at the station later. I'm not looking forward to the press conference."

"At least we've got some good news for them for a change," Bridge said.

"If you say so."

"Where are you going?" Bridge asked.

"There's something I need to check out," Smith said, "thanks again for letting me borrow the car. I'll sort out your forty quid when I get to the bank."

Smith watched Bridge drive away. He started the car and headed off towards Pickering. It took him five minutes to reach the police station. Why had it taken them so long last night? He thought. He parked outside the station and got out the car. The station looked different in the daylight. There was a notice on the wall of the station showing the opening times. 09.00 – 14.30. Smith checked his watch. It was two in the afternoon. He went inside the station. There was a young woman sitting behind the counter. Besides her, the station seemed to be deserted.

"Good afternoon," the woman said as Smith approached, "how can I help you?"

"Hi," Smith said, "could I ask you a few questions?"

"Of course," she said.

"I see the station closes every day at half past two," Smith said.

“That’s right,” she said, “Pickering isn’t exactly a crime hub.”

“What happens if somebody needs the police after that?”

“Of course the switchboard is operational twenty four seven,” she said, “but it isn’t justified to have the station open all hours. Why do you ask?”

“Just curious,” Smith handed her his ID, “I’m thinking of taking it easy for a while. Maybe trying for a transfer to one of the smaller rural stations.”

“You’d be bored within a week,” she said, “I’d give anything to work in a busy station like York.”

“Can I ask you something else?” Smith said.

“I’m not exactly snowed under with work,” she said.

“Let’s say somebody is picked up for drunk driving,” Smith said, “what happens if the station is closed? Would the officers in charge open up the station in the middle of the night?”

“Of course not,” she said, “they’ll take the suspect to one of the bigger stations. Maybe York or Darlington, depending on where the suspect was picked up.”

“So they definitely wouldn’t be brought here?”

“There are only two sets of keys for this place,” the woman said, “I have one and PC Wilkie has the other set.”

Brad Friedman had been right, Smith thought, the police who had brought him here last night were not policemen at all.

“Thanks,” he said, “maybe we’ll be working together some day.”

“Don’t do it,” the woman said.

Smith got back in his car and slammed his fists against the steering wheel. He suddenly thought of something else. He took out his phone and dialled Whitton's number.

"Whitton," he said, "did I phone you last night?"

"I think you need more sleep sir," Whitton said, "you phoned me at about half ten and said you'd been arrested for drunk driving."

"And then what?"

"Then the phone went dead," Whitton said, "I was busy at the scene of the car bombing and when I got the text message a few minutes later I didn't think any more of it."

"Text message?"

"Somebody sent me a message to say the misunderstanding with the drunk driving had been sorted out. I was so busy with the carnage on The Ghoul's street I completely forgot about it."

"Thanks Whitton," Smith said and rang off.

Smith's head was starting to spin. He tried to figure out what had happened the previous night. He had been taken to the police station in Pickering by two fake policemen. Sarah Proud just happened to arrive and smooth things out. He slammed his fists on the steering wheel again. They had spent the night together. After what Friedman had told him about her, Smith felt so stupid. He had been reeled in hook, line and sinker. He recalled Friedman's exact words, 'be careful who you trust'. He had trusted Sarah Proud and been wary of Brad Friedman. It should have been the other way round. He thought again about the message from The Ghoul. What did he know that was so

important that he had to die for it? He made a mental note to remember to check his e mails before he went on leave.

“I’ve been so fucking dumb,” Smith said out loud.

FORTY THREE

The large conference room was full to the brim. There were not enough chairs for everybody and those journalists who had arrived late were resigned to standing room only. Smith could not believe there could be so many press representatives. He hated journalists. He looked at them all. They all looked the same to him; like vultures waiting for the lions to finish so they could pick at the scraps. The bottom feeders of society.

"Are you ready?" Chalmers said.

"Two weeks remember?" was Smith's reply.

"Good luck."

Smith switched on the microphone and scanned the room in front of him. He had headed up press conferences before but this was by far the largest gathering of journalists he had ever experienced. He looked at the faces of the people in the crowd; people waiting in anticipation to hear what he had to say. He found what he was looking for; a woman in her twenties with a pleasant, open face. He had used this method before when addressing large crowds. Concentrate on one face only; talk to the person with the friendliest face. It seemed to make the whole nightmare of public speaking more bearable.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, "thank you for coming here today. Those of you who are accustomed to this sort of thing will already know the etiquette involved but for those of you who are not familiar I'll tell you how it's going to work. You will have the opportunity to fire questions at me at the end. Until then, I'll ask you to please just listen to what I have to say."

He smiled at the woman with the friendly face. She did not smile back.

"Earlier today," Smith said, "we arrested a man we believe to be responsible for six murders in the space of a few days. A combination of perseverance, good old fashioned detective work and a bit of luck have brought this man to justice."

Smith smiled. That last part was Chalmers' idea.

"This suspect has subsequently confessed to all six murders and he is as I speak being detained at an undisclosed high security facility. The people of York have suffered a great loss but we assure you, the perpetrator will receive the full force of the law. He will no doubt spend the rest of his life behind bars."

Smith looked over at Chalmers. He was beaming from ear to ear.

"Any questions?" Smith prepared himself for a barrage of words.

A woman with a wart on the end of her nose put up her hand.

"Moira Adams," she said, "Yorkshire Herald. How can you be so sure you've arrested the right man? Couldn't it just be some kind of whack job confessing to get the attention?"

"Of course we considered that possibility," Smith said, "but this man knows details about all of the murders that only the perpetrator could know. We've got the right man."

"Detective sergeant," a man with an unfortunate lisp put up his hand, "Adrian Killian, Daily Mail. Do you have a name for us?"

"A name?" Smith said.

"Your suspect. Who is he?"

Smith thought hard for a moment. He knew he ought to have been prepared for this question. He decided to do something he knew he would regret.

“Viktor Boronov,” he said, “the man’s name is Viktor Boronov.”

The words stung his mouth as they came out. Viktor Boronov, aka Wolfie. The man who had taken his sister all those years ago; the man who had killed her.

“Viktor Boronov,” he said again.

He could see the frantic scribbling in front of him.

“Russian national,” he continued, “currently living in Estonia.”

“Isn’t that going to complicate things somewhat?” Killian asked.

“Not at all,” Smith knew he had to think quickly.

“Will he be extradited and tried in Estonia?” Killian said.

“He killed six people in Yorkshire,” Smith said, “He will be tried in Yorkshire and found guilty in Yorkshire. Any more questions?”

The woman with the friendly face stood up.

“Detective sergeant Smith,” she said, “Jessica Bowles, York Gazette. Isn’t it true that the woman they pulled out of the River Ouse was your sister?”

Smith felt like he had been hit in the stomach with a sledgehammer. How did this woman find out about that? He thought.

“That’s right,” he said.

There were low murmurs in the crowd.

“How does that make you feel?” Bowles said.

Smith quickly realised that underneath the friendly face lay a cold hearted journalist.

“How does that make me feel?” he said, “How the hell do you think it makes me feel? Angry, devastated. My sister was killed and dumped in the river.”

Smith spotted Chalmers. He was approaching the front of the room. Smith nodded to him to indicate that everything was under control. He looked at Jessica Bowles.

"I have a funeral to arrange," he said to her directly, "and after that I can mourn my sister but right now I have a job to do and unfortunately, part of that job entails indulging parasites like yourself in the gory details of tragedies such as this."

The whole room went quiet. A short fat man stood up and started to clap his hands together. More and more people stood up and did the same. Very soon everybody in the room was on their feet and Smith was facing a standing ovation. He could feel goose bumps all over his body.

Chalmers took the microphone.

"If there are no further questions," he had to shout over the applause, "We'll finish off there."

He turned the microphone off.

"Are you alright?" he put his arm on Smith's shoulder.

"Two weeks?" Smith said.

"Two weeks," Chalmers said, "you've earned it."

FORTY FOUR

Smith sat by the window in his office and lit a cigarette. He watched as the journalists scuttled back to their cars and drove off, eager to write their stories and make the first print in the morning. Smith decided he would not be reading any newspapers for the next few days. He took a long drag of the cigarette and held the smoke in his lungs for as long as possible.

"Are you alright sir?" Whitton was standing in the doorway.

"I've got two weeks off," Smith said.

"Two weeks?" Whitton was surprised; Smith never took time off, "what are you going to do away from work for two weeks?"

"You know me," Smith said, "I'll find something to do. Do you know what I did last night?"

"Do I want to know?"

"I spent the night with Sarah Proud," Smith said.

"As in spent the night?" Whitton said.

"She was gone when I woke up this morning," Smith said, "and then I found out some disturbing things about her; she isn't exactly who she claims to be."

"Who is?" Whitton sighed.

"I'm getting out of here," Smith said, "I think I'll go insane if I spent one more minute in this place."

He threw the cigarette out of the window and watched as it floated down to the car park below.

"Will we see you at The Ghoul's funeral?" Whitton said.

"Probably," Smith said, "I've got a funeral of my own to organise first."

He stood up and left the office.

The sun was dropping behind the York skyline as Smith drove home. It cast an eerie glow over the Minster as it bade farewell to the day.

I love this place, Smith thought, but I hate it just as much. He parked the car outside his house and got out. A man was waiting for him next to the front wall. Smith recognised him as his next door neighbour. He had lived next door for over five years but they must have spoken fewer than two or three times. Smith wondered what he wanted. He had a very angry look on his face.

"I believe these belong to you," the man handed Smith a small plastic bag.

Smith was confused. He looked at the bag. Inside were five cigarette butts.

"I'd appreciate it if you didn't throw your filthy fag ends into my garden," the man said.

Smith was in no mood for an argument so he walked past the man towards his front door.

"I'm talking to you dipshit," the man said.

Smith stopped in the doorway and turned round. He thought for a second, opened the front door and went inside. His next door neighbour stood open mouthed.

Theakston ran to greet him when Smith walked through to the kitchen. Smith opened the back door and let the dog out. He switched on the kettle; he did not feel like drinking anything stronger than coffee. He made the coffee and took it outside to the garden. The air was very still and there seemed to be more stars out than usual. He lit a cigarette and sat on the grass. Theakston lay at his feet. Smith closed his eyes. He could see Laura's face in front of him; her eyes were full of mischief, full of life. He opened his eyes again

and realised he was crying. The tears came at an alarming rate. They ran down his face and into his mouth. The tears stopped as abruptly as they had started and Smith stood up and wiped his face. He finished the cigarette and without thinking he threw it over the wall into his next door neighbour's garden. This simple act made him smile. He lit another cigarette and sat at the outside table with his coffee. This is going to be a week of funerals, he thought. The Ghoul had been a good friend. He had a remarkable mind; Smith had often turned to him for advice when he had hit a brick wall in an investigation. He finished the coffee and threw the cigarette butt over the wall. He went back inside and locked the back door. He went upstairs and lay on the bed. Theakston lay at his feet. Smith closed his eyes. He was sure he could still smell Sarah Proud's perfume on the pillow next to him. He fell asleep before thinking about removing his clothes.

FORTY FIVE

Friday 13th August 2010

The morning of Friday the thirteenth of August dawned exactly as it should with grey storm clouds drifting in from the east. Smith opened the curtains and looked outside. The rain clouds were circling overhead and a downpour was imminent. He sighed. The weather had decided to play its own part on the day of The Ghoul's funeral. He couldn't have chosen a better day, Smith thought, Friday the thirteenth. Only The Ghoul would have a funeral on Friday the thirteenth.

The Ghoul was not religious at all; he was the most anti-religion person Smith had ever met so Smith thought it strange that the funeral was to be held at St Olave's church in the city centre. Maybe it was a final piece of irony on the part of The Ghoul; a macabre joke that would be The Ghoul's swan song. The rain had decided to hold off as the people gathered outside the church but it was coming, there was no doubt about that. Whitton, Bridge, Thompson and Chalmers were standing at the entrance.

"Smith," Chalmers said as Smith walked up to them.

"Sir," Smith nodded in greeting.

Nobody knew what to say.

"Looks like rain," Thompson said.

Everybody stared at him as if he were mad.

"Well," Thompson said, "it does and what else do the British talk about in awkward situations like these?"

Smith started to laugh.

"I'm going to miss him," Whitton said, "I'm going to miss his sense of humour."

"He was one in a million," Chalmers agreed, "a mind like his was wasted on pathology. Do you know he once won ten games of poker in a row without even trying? It cost me a fortune; Mrs Chalmers didn't speak to me for a week."

"Let's get it over and done with," Smith said.

He hated funerals.

They filed inside the church. There were six or seven people already inside. Work colleagues, Smith assumed. The Ghoul rarely socialised outside of work circles. He spent so much of his time in the pathology lab he had little time for friends. Grant Webber walked in and sat in the pew in front of Smith and Whitton. He looked like he had not slept in days. He turned round and looked at Smith.

"Sorry about your sister," he said and turned back round.

A man in a grey suit walked down the aisle and stood at the rostrum in the front of the church. He was in his late fifties and he had an impressive moustache that must have taken years to grow.

"Good morning," he said in a voice that was obviously used to public speaking, "My name's Mike."

He was about to say something else but he was interrupted by the arrival of two more people; two women dressed in black. They took their seats right at the back of the church. Everybody stared at them as they sat down. Smith was sure they had been drinking.

Not such a bad idea, he thought.

"We're all here to celebrate the life of Paul Johnson," Mike said, "a remarkable man by all accounts. You'll be amazed at how many people are remarkable when they're no longer with us but in Paul's case it seems there is no other word to describe him."

There were a few titters from the pews. Even Smith found himself smiling.

"Remarkable," Mike said again, "so remarkable that he even had the foresight to prepare his own eulogy in advance. Paul Johnson wrote his own heartfelt eulogy."

He took out some sheets of paper and cleared his throat.

"This is how Paul would like you to remember him," Mike said, "of course those of you that knew him well will understand that some of it had to be edited for obvious reasons but I don't think I've altered any of his sentiment in doing so."

He opened up the sheets of paper and started to read.

"Ok I'm dead," he began, "now bugger off and get drunk."

Smith started to laugh. He could not help himself. Chalmers also had a huge grin on his face but managed to control himself.

"Wait," Mike said, "there's more. I think that was just the icebreaker."

He turned the piece of paper over.

"I meant that," he continued, "I'm dead so there's no excuse not to go out and get smashed. I'm not going to bore you about me. I'm dead remember. I'm going to talk about you; the people I've had the pleasure of wasting my time on. So there's no fighting amongst you I'm going to this in alphabetical order. None of you are more important than you think you are. Especially you Webber."

Webber smiled. Smith patted him on the shoulder.

“Bob Chalmers,” Mike continued to read, “Chain smoker or non smoker depending on his mood. Always the same old Bob Chalmers. Shit poker player.”

Mike stopped reading.

“Oh dear,” he said, “I must have missed that one.”

He looked at the page again.

“Bob,” he read, “work on your poker face. When you’re holding a couple of kings and another king is laid down try not to jump up and down like your arse is on fire. Brian Davies.”

Smith looked around the church. He assumed Brian Davies was one of The Ghoul’s work colleagues.

“Brian Davies,” Mike said again, “most anally retentive man I’ve ever come across. Should have really joined the police force. Jason Smith. What can I say about detective sergeant Jason Smith? He is his own worst enemy; cursed by the devil himself but if by any chance I’m dead due to suspicious circumstances its Smith I want in charge of the investigation. He’s the one who will work it all out in the end. A paradox in life with an intuition that switches between retarded and astonishing at the drop of a hat. Get him on a bad day and you might as well have stayed in bed but on a good day he’ll knock your socks off.”

Whitton put her hand on Smith’s. He made no attempt to move it away.

“Nearly done,” Mike said, “his words not mine.”

He carried on reading.

“Alan Thompson,” he read, “career policeman and by that I mean career detective sergeant because he’ll be a DS for the rest of his career. Pig headed, ignorant,

chauvinistic and they're just his good qualities. A good man deep down though; his wife always lets him come back home in the end doesn't she?"

The mood in the church had lifted. Smith looked around and realised that everybody except the two women at the back were smiling.

"Last but not least," Mike read, "Erica Whitton. Completely wasted in the police force. Intuitive and loyal. Her loyalty is her downfall sometimes especially her loyalty to the dumb Australian I've already spoken about. Anybody with eyes in their heads can see it. Please, for the sake of all of us, you two just get a room and be done with it."

Whitton blushed and let go of Smith's hand.

"One last thing," Mike continued, "while I have you all here I have something to say. I have no family; no wife, no kids that I know about. Nobody at all to leave my earthly goods to. I have therefore left instructions for my entire estate to be left to charity."

One of the women at the back stood up. She was about to say something but the other woman stopped her.

"Charity," Mike read, "Chalmers, Davies, Smith, Thompson and Whitton; the five saddest charity cases it was my misfortune to know. My assets will be split equally between you for you to do with as you wish but please do not spend it wisely. That would defeat the object."

Mike stopped there.

The church was silent.

"Wait," he said, "there's something else at the bottom of the last page."

He started to read.

“Seeing as though we’re in a church,” he read, “God, I assume you’re present. Isn’t it about time that you realised that your religion is a load of old bollocks?”

The whole church erupted. Even Mike found it hard not to raise a smile. This had been the most unusual funeral he had presided over.

FORTY SIX

The mood after the funeral was remarkably upbeat considering they had just bid farewell to a good friend. The rain had still not made an appearance as they stood outside the church. Smith took out his cigarettes and offered one to Chalmers.

"Only The Ghoul could choreograph his own funeral," Smith lit the cigarette for Chalmers.

"That's the way he was," Chalmers inhaled deeply, "I'm going to miss the old bugger."

"I wonder who would want to kill him," Smith said, "who would want to murder a pathologist?"

"That's typical of you," Chalmers said, "you're on leave; you've just attended a funeral and you're thinking like a detective. We'll find out."

Smith thought hard for a while.

"I'm going to get to the bottom of this," he said.

"I thought you might say something like that," Chalmers said, "while I've got you in this frame of mind, there's something I need to talk to you about."

"What is it?" Smith was intrigued.

"I've been put forward for the DCI job," Chalmers said.

"Do we even have a DCI?" Smith said, "I can't remember ever seeing one around."

"Old Doug Donnelly," Chalmers said, "spent more time on stress related leave than he did at work. Anyway, top brass have had enough and he's being retired for good so it means his position will be up for grabs."

Smith now vaguely remembered a DCI Donnelly from a few years back. He recalled a short timid man. He always seemed to be scared of something.

"Good luck with that sir," he said, "I wouldn't want that job in a million years. Reporting directly to old Smyth; kissing the old goat's arse all the time."

"If I do get the job," Chalmers said, "and it's by no means in the bag, my job will be open. They'll advertise it of course but they always prefer to fill the position internally."

"Not a chance in hell," Smith realised where Chalmers was heading.

"You're ready for it," Chalmers said, "and it'll mean a lot more money."

"I don't need more money," Smith said, "I hate money and I don't want the DI job. Give it to Thompson; he's been here a lot longer than I have."

Chalmers looked around to see if Thompson was in earshot but he was already in the pub across the road from the church with Whitton and Bridge.

"Thompsons old school," Chalmers said, "he's not DI material; he never will be. Think about it and remember, if you do get the job Thompson will have to call you sir."

The idea did seem appealing when Chalmers put it that way but Smith was still adamant.

"The answers still no," he said.

"Think of it this way," Chalmers was running out of carrots to dangle in front of Smith's face, "the position can either go to someone who knows the station inside out; someone who knows the team. Someone everybody already likes and respects or it can go to some stranger who might turn everything on its head. You might even have to take orders from someone."

"I take orders from you," Smith said but immediately realised how ridiculous it sounded, "I'll think about it."

"I've already put your name forward," Chalmers said, "set everything in motion."

"You did what?"

"I recommended you," Chalmers said, "a bit of gratitude wouldn't go amiss."

"Thank you," Smith said, "I'm thirsty. Let's get a drink and talk about something else."

Smith and Chalmers made it across the road to The Old Boar pub just in time. The heavens opened; the rain came down in buckets.

"About bloody time," Thompson said as Chalmers and Smith walked in, "I don't live in York for the weather. It's about time we had a bit of rain; this infernal heat wave we've been having isn't natural."

"Two pints of Theakstons," Smith said to the man behind the bar.

He watched as the man poured the beer.

"That was some funeral," Grant Webber said, "only The Ghoul could give himself a send off like that."

"How much do you think he left us?" Chalmers said, "I believe he was worth a few bob."

"I know he had three houses," Smith said, "and his portfolio of stocks and shares must be quite substantial."

He picked up his beer and emptied half the glass down his throat in one go.

"Who were the two women at the back?" Whitton asked.

"The mysterious woman in black," Webber said, "there's always a mysterious woman in black at a funeral. The Ghoul had to go one better and have two of them at his. I reckon there's a story there but I guess we'll never know."

"We'll never know," Chalmers raised his glass in the air, "here's to our friend The Ghoul. One in a million thank god. Now, let's do him proud and get pissed."

FORTY SEVEN

Smith slumped down on the couch in his living room. He was exhausted but he knew that sleep was out of the question. There were too many thoughts running through his head. He had made arrangements for his sister's ashes to be placed next to his Gran's on a memorial wall in the city centre. He had considered flying out to Western Australia and scattering them on the beach Laura loved so much but he quickly decided that the memory of his sister as a young child standing up for the first time on a surfboard was the one he wanted to remember her by; not some ceremonial scattering of ashes on a beach full of strangers. He lit a cigarette and looked around the room. His three guitars still stood gathering dust in the corner. The photograph of his Gran looked down from him on the mantelpiece.

"What am I going to do Gran?" he said.

He remembered the message from The Ghoul telling him to check his e mails. He had completely forgotten about it when he was finished talking to Brad Friedman in his office. He took out his phone and dialled the central switchboard number for the station. Baldwin answered almost immediately.

"Baldwin," Smith said, "I need you to do me a favour."

"Of course you do," Baldwin sounded tired.

"Go to my office," Smith said, "turn on my computer. I need you to forward an e mail to my home e mail address."

He gave her his e mail address.

"The e mail came from Paul Johnson just before he was killed. My password is Theakston."

"Sounds intriguing," Baldwin said, "I'll do it right away."

"Thanks Baldwin," Smith said, "I owe you one."

"You've said that before," Baldwin said but Smith had already hung up.

There was a knock on the door and Smith jumped. He looked at the clock on the wall. It was eight o clock. He stood up and went to answer it. He was not expecting anybody. Theakston stood at his feet and started to growl. Smith was confused; Theakston rarely growled. He opened the door slowly. Brad Friedman stood outside in the rain. He was soaked through. He looked different; he was wearing a pair of jeans and a black sweater. Drops of rain were running down from his army style haircut.

"Can I come in?" Friedman said, "It's raining."

"Of course," Smith stepped to the side.

Friedman closed the door behind him and Smith led him through to the kitchen.

"Do you want some coffee?" Smith asked, "I was just about to make some anyway."

"Coffee sounds good," Friedman sat down at the kitchen table.

"Is there something wrong?" Smith switched on the kettle, "I thought you were leaving."

"This visit out of the blue you mean?" Friedman said, "I'm afraid its work related. I know you're on leave but I need to ask you a few more questions."

Smith made the coffee and put one of the mugs in front of Friedman.

"Thanks," Friedman took a sip, "Paul Johnson was a friend of yours wasn't he?"

"The Ghoul?" Smith sat opposite Friedman, "We got on well. He was a strange bloke; not too many people really got him. He was one in a million. Why do you ask?"

“This business with his car exploding,” Friedman took another sip of the coffee.

“What about it?” Smith had an uneasy feeling in the pit of his stomach.

“Whoever did this wanted him silenced,” Friedman said, “do you know if he found out anything recently?”

The uneasy feeling had now spread through Smith’s whole body. He thought again about the message telling him to check his e mails. Why did Friedman always seem to be around at just the right time? What had The Ghoul called it? Sinister.

“Nothing,” Smith said, “as far as I know, The Ghoul knew nothing that would make someone want to kill him. Why would he? He was a pathologist; he examined dead bodies.”

He realised Friedman was staring at him. It made him nervous. Smith could tell that Friedman did not believe a word he was saying.

“Are you sure?” Friedman said, “He didn’t mention anything to you about finding anything unusual?”

“No,” Smith said rather too quickly, “what’s this all about?”

“Paul Johnson was almost certainly killed because he discovered something he shouldn’t have,” Friedman said, “and if he passed on that information to anybody they could also be in danger.”

“The Ghoul didn’t tell me anything,” Smith was starting to get angry now.

The Ghoul’s funeral was still fresh in his mind.

Friedman finished the coffee in his mug.

“I’m sorry if this sounds like an interrogation,” he changed his approach, “but I need to know everything if I’m to protect you.”

"Protect me?" Smith could not believe what he was hearing, "protect me from what? I don't know anything, I've already told you that."

He stood up and opened the back door. The rain had stopped and a few stars were visible in the sky. He went outside and lit a cigarette. Friedman followed him.

"Cigarette?" Smith asked him.

"No thanks," Friedman took out a packet of cigarettes, "I'll smoke my own. They're a bit stronger than yours."

He took out a cigarette and lit it.

"Who do you think killed The Ghoul?" Smith said.

"Boronov," Friedman said without hesitation, "it had Boronov all over it. Do you know how he did it?"

"Do I want to know?" Smith sighed.

"Classic KGB method," Friedman said, "Siphon out most of the petrol in the tank. Leave just enough for the car to start and so a thin wire can float on top of the petrol. As the car drives off and the petrol is burned up the wire makes contact with the bottom of the tank and makes a complete electrical circuit. This triggers the detonator and... Boom."

Smith shuddered. He finished his cigarette and flicked the butt into his neighbour's garden. Friedman did the same.

They sat down again at the kitchen table.

"You don't trust me do you?" Friedman said.

"I don't trust anybody," Smith said, "it goes with the job. You're a fine one to talk."

"I was completely open with you about Nadia Boronov," Friedman said, "or Sarah Proud if you prefer. I told you who she was."

"That's right," Smith said, "why exactly did you do that?"

"Because I thought you should know what you were dealing with," Friedman said, "who you were allowing yourself to get close to."

He looked at the clock on the wall. It was past ten.

"I have to be going," he said, "if you think of anything please phone me."

He took out a card and placed it on the kitchen table.

"I told you," Smith said, "I don't know anything."

"If you should think of anything," Friedman stood up, "Anything Paul Johnson might have mentioned, even if it seemed unimportant at the time, phone me."

He held out his hand. Smith did not know why; maybe he was tired but he found himself shaking it.

As he watched Friedman's Land Rover driving away Smith pondered what he was going to do for two weeks. He closed the door and walked through to the kitchen to lock the back door. He walked through to the living room and switched on his computer. Finally he would have a chance to see what The Ghoul had meant when he told him to check his e mails. Smith was about to open up the e mail program when he heard a noise in the hallway. It sounded like something was being pushed through his letter box. It made him jump. He got up and went to see what it was. His heart was starting to beat faster. There was a small plastic bag on the mat in front of the door. Smith looked closer and saw it was full of cigarette butts. There was a note attached to the bag. Smith picked it up and read it.

'If you persist in involving me in your filthy habit, I'll have the law onto you.'

It was from his next door neighbour. Smith crumpled up the note and picked up the plastic bag. He took them both to the kitchen. He was about to throw them in the bin when something caught his eye. One of the cigarette butts stood out from the others; it had a much darker filter. Smith took it out and had a closer look. He could make out a word on the cigarette just above the filter. 'Steels' was written in black. Steels; the same brand of cigarette they had found in the room with the Dragunov sniper rifle. Why had his next door neighbour found a Steels cigarette butt in his garden? Smith went back to the living room and looked through his e mails. He had not checked them in over a week and there were sixty five new messages to read. He scrolled down to the one from The Ghoul and read carefully. There was a message from The Ghoul, 'use an online translator.' There was a forwarded message that was sent to an address Smith did not recognise. He read the words on the e mail. It was in a language that seemed vaguely familiar. He remembered the time he had spent in Talinn and how one of the people he had met, a flight attendant called Stepan had told him how the Estonian language was closer to Finnish than Russian. The words on Smith's computer screen were Estonian. He copied the three sentences and opened up his internet. He found an online translator and pasted the Estonian sentences in the box. The translation that appeared did not make any sense.

'Everything clean,' the translation read, 'nothing more to point to us. All traces have been cleaned.'

"What the hell does that mean?" Smith said out loud.

Why did The Ghoul send me this? Smith thought. He looked at the e mail address. He had never seen anything like it before. He was exhausted now. He switched off the computer and went upstairs to bed.

FORTY EIGHT

Saturday 14 August 2010

Smith woke up and looked at the clock on the bedside table. It was eight in the morning. He felt like he had not slept at all. He had tossed and turned for hours thinking about everything that had happened in the past week. The visit from Brad Friedman had unnerved him. There had been something about him that had made Smith distrust him from the moment he had set eyes on him. He had got out of bed and gone downstairs to make some coffee. He had gone through everything that had happened in his head. Friedman and Proud had conveniently appeared on the scene at just the right time. Jimmy Fisher had been shot and the SOCA hot shots had done everything they could to prevent Smith and his team from investigating. They were not allowed anywhere near the case. Smith had taken out a piece of paper. He found that writing everything down as it happened often helped when he had reached an impasse in an investigation. He had started at the beginning. Jimmy Fisher had been killed with a sniper rifle in front of thirty eight thousand people. Cigarette butts with the word Steels on them had been found in the same room as the rifle. Smith's next door neighbour had posted a bag of cigarette butts through Smith's letter box. One of the butts was from a Steels cigarette. It was only when he had been tossing and turning for a while that Smith remembered Brad Friedman throwing his cigarette butt into the neighbour's garden. Steels are Estonian cigarettes. Why does Brad Friedman smoke Estonian cigarettes? After the murder of Paulo Rubio, Tommy Pike's son Alfie is kidnapped. One of the children Alfie was playing with at the

time remembered a man with a crew cut telling him he must go with him to the hospital. The man drove a Land Rover. Smith had written Friedman's name down again and again. Alfie Pike and Smith's sister are pulled out of the River Ouse the next day. Brad Friedman was one of the first people on the scene. How did he know?

Smith had finished his third cup of coffee before he realised how they had all been fooled. He had to admit to himself that it had been a brilliant plan. Proud and Friedman had done everything they could to divert the attention away from them. They had posed as government agents while they were busy eliminating any potential witnesses and whistle blowers. Friedman had even had the audacity to put himself forward as the guilty party in all seven murders. Smith did not know why but somewhere between two and three in the morning a name had come to him. He had remembered what the chatty dentist had said about police detectives often ignoring what was right in front of their faces. William of Occum, Smith had remembered, the Philosopher. Occum's Razor. He had recalled the dentist's words. In the event of there being various reasons for an event or chain of events it is usually the one with the fewest assumptions that should be selected first. The series of murders were all connected and Sarah Proud and Brad Friedman merely cemented that connection further. It had been almost six in the morning by the time Smith had finally drifted off to sleep. He had only slept for two hours.

Smith rubbed his eyes and got out of bed. He went downstairs and looked at the piece of paper on the kitchen table. Brad Friedman's name was written on it more than six times.

"I've been such an idiot," he said to Theakston, "I let them manipulate me into letting them get away with it."

He did not know what to do. In the eyes of the public, the murders had been cleared up; as far as they were concerned, the guilty party had been arrested and was now awaiting trial. For the police to admit they had made a mistake now would mean nationwide humiliation. The top brass would not let that happen. Smith sighed; his hands were tied. He cursed himself for the major part he had played in this facade. He had been the one to persuade Chalmers that Friedman's idea of putting himself forward as a scapegoat for the murders was a good idea.

"I feel like a puppet," he said out loud.

He opened the back door and went outside to the garden. His next door neighbour was pruning his roses. Smith walked over to the fence.

"Can I have a word?" he said.

His neighbour stopped pruning. He appeared nervous.

"I just wanted to say thank you," Smith said, "thank you for posting cigarette butts through my letterbox last night. You did me a huge favour."

He walked back, sat down at the table and lit a cigarette. His neighbour stood holding his pruning shears in the air with his mouth wide open.

Smith took a last drag of the cigarette and a plan began to formulate in his mind. He looked up at the sky. There were no clouds. The rainfall the day before had given only temporary respite; the heat wave seemed to be back with a vengeance. Seven people have been killed, he thought, seven people in less than a week. One of the people had been his sister. The murderers had got away with it. Smith knew he had a moral obligation. He had to see things through to their natural conclusion. He was on leave for two weeks. Two weeks should give him plenty of time.

FORTY NINE

Smith sat in the security guards' office in the pathology department of the hospital.

"Do you want some coffee?" Harry Towler asked.

"No thanks," Smith said.

"Probably for the best," Towler said, "the stuff they have here tastes like shit."

"Thank you for seeing me," Smith said, "I realise you work nights. I won't keep you long."

"Paul was a good bloke," Towler said, "I still can't believe anyone would want to kill him. He was a bit weird but he was harmless. He always made an effort to speak to me. Some of these doctors can be real snobby bastards."

"What do you do here?" Smith said.

"Security," Towler said, "I'm on six to six. It suits me just fine. I don't sleep too much anyway."

"And you knew Paul quite well?"

"Like I said," Towler said, "he was one of the good ones."

"Did you see him the night he was killed?"

"He left about ten," Towler said, "I might be getting on a bit but there's nothing wrong with this."

He tapped his head with his finger.

"Was he by himself?" Smith asked.

"It was late," Towler said, "He often worked late; there was nothing unusual about that."

“Did you notice anybody unusual hanging around about that time?” Smith said, “Someone you hadn’t seen before?”

“I was doing my usual nine o clock rounds,” Towler said, “same route every night. The director reckons I should vary it from time to time but I don’t see why. Anyway I noticed that Paul had a visitor.”

“A visitor?” Smith said.

“Two actually. A man and a woman. I’m a naturally nosey bastard, I don’t mind admitting it. I suppose that’s what makes me good at my job. Anyway, this man and woman left Paul’s office at about half nine. They paid me no attention.”

“Did you see where they went?” Smith said.

“Down to the parking bays,” Towler said, “I thought it a bit strange at first. It’s normally only the long standing employees that get to park down there but these two had parked in the secure parking. Obviously some big shot consultants or something.”

“What did they look like?” Smith said.

“The bloke looked like he was a bit of a prick if you’ll pardon my French but the woman was a bit of alright.”

“Could you be a bit more descriptive,” Smith said.

“He was about your height,” Towler said, “with short hair. Very short; he looked like one of those army types. She was like I said a bit of a looker. Also tall like you.”

Smith felt like he was starting to get somewhere.

“And you said they left about half past nine?” He said.

"That's right. I followed them down to the car park. It's nice for them to know they're being looked after. I mean, it was late and I make a point of making sure everything's alright."

"Did you see what car they were in?" Smith asked.

"They were in two cars," Towler said, "she got in a dark blue Mercedes and he was standing outside a Land Rover. I watched her drive away. I assumed he would follow her out."

"So the woman left?" Smith said, "But you didn't see the man drive away?"

"Like I said," Towler said, "I assumed he would go after her. I went back up the stairs to my office for a coffee break. By the time I went back down the Land Rover had gone."

"Thanks Harry," Smith said, "you've been a great help."

"Any time," Towler said, "if I could get my hands on the bastard that did this I'd rip his bullocks off."

Smith got in his car and started the engine. The clock on the dashboard read ten in the morning. He had agreed to meet Brad Friedman at The Hog's head at twelve. He had decided he would phone both Friedman and Sarah Proud. He had phoned Proud first but it appeared her number was no longer in service. Friedman had answered on the second ring. Smith knew that The Hog's Head would be full to the brim on a sunny Saturday afternoon. There would be safety in numbers. Friedman would not dare to try anything in front of so many people. Smith drove in the direction of the river. There were some more questions he needed answers for. He headed for the area between Lendal Bridge and Saint Mary's Abbey. It was here they had found Alfie Pike and his sister next to one of the barges on the river three days ago. Smith parked his car in the car park next to the

Abbey and walked down towards where the barges were bobbing up and down in the breeze. The walkway next to the river was buzzing with people enjoying the sunshine. Smith spotted what he was looking for immediately, the barge with the shark's teeth painted on the front. 'Great White'. He shivered in the heat when he thought about his sister lying cold just feet from this boat. The couple who he had seen that day were sitting on the deck of the barge drinking coffee. Smith still did not know what he was going to say to them. He walked over and looked at the barge more closely. He could tell that it was very well maintained. The woodwork looked brand new and there was not a scratch on the paintwork.

"Can I help you?" the man on the barge said.

"Sorry," Smith said, "I was just admiring the paintwork. You must take good care of her."

Smith had never understood why vessels were always referred to as 'her'.

"This is our home," the woman said, "you could say we're house proud."

"I'm sorry to interrupt your coffee," Smith said, "but could I just ask you a few questions about the two drowning we had here a few days ago?"

Both of them now eyed Smith with suspicion.

"Are you a journalist?" the man asked, "we've got no more time for journalists."

"No," Smith said, "I hate journalists. I'm actually a police officer. I need to ask you a few more questions if you don't mind."

He took out his ID.

"We didn't answer any questions," the woman said, "and I thought the man who killed these two people had been caught."

“He has,” Smith knew he had to tread carefully, “there’s just some things I need to tie up. You said my colleagues didn’t ask you any questions?”

“That’s right,” she said.

“That’s strange,” Smith spoke his thoughts out loud, “could I have a quick word anyway?”

“Step on board,” the man said, “would you like some coffee?”

“That would be great,” Smith tentatively stepped onto the barge.

He was surprised at how stable it was.

“It’s more for my own piece of mind,” he said.

“What do you want to know,” the man said, “I’m Chris and this is my wife Rita.”

Rita poured some coffee into a tin cup from a thermos and handed it to Smith.

“Thank you,” Smith said, “Did you notice anything unusual on Tuesday night or early Wednesday morning?”

“Not really,” Rita said, “I’m a very deep sleeper. I could sleep through a hurricane. In fact I did just that when we were travelling through Florida in a camper van. This one’s the light sleeper.”

She nudged Chris on the shoulder.

“There was nothing out of the ordinary,” Chris said, “nothing really happens along here.”

“So you didn’t hear anything strange?” Smith asked, “you didn’t see anyone who shouldn’t be here?”

“There was something,” Chris said, “Like Rita said, I’m a light sleeper. I woke up to go for a pee in the middle of the night. We have a toilet on board but I prefer to pee off the barge into the river.”

"Chris," Rita seemed embarrassed.

"What?" Chris said, "Why not? It saves water and the pee just floats down the river anyway. There was a car parked just up from us. I'd never seen it before. We're quite a community around here. Some of us have been living on the river for years; we're kindred spirits. I'd never seen this car before."

"What sort of car was it?" Smith took a sip from the tin cup. The coffee tasted much better than he had expected.

"It was dark," Chris said but it looked like one of those fancy four by fours everyone's driving now."

"Like a Land Rover?" Smith said.

"That's it," Chris said, "It was a Land Rover. A new one."

"Did you see anybody in the vehicle?" Smith said.

"No," Chris said, "but I wasn't paying much attention. Like I said, I was having a pee. I finished off and went straight to bed."

"Where was this vehicle parked?" Smith said.

"Just up there," Chris pointed to a spot a few metres from where Smith had parked his car.

"Thank you," Smith said, "you've been a great help."

He handed Rita the tin cup.

He stepped off the barge and walked over to where he had parked his car. He was not exactly sure what he was looking for. He scanned the ground for anything unusual and his eyes came to rest on something familiar. Three or four cigarette butts had been thrown

on the ground. Smith knew from the colour of the filters exactly what brand of cigarettes they were from.

FIFTY

Smith sat in the beer garden of The Hog's Head and lit his third cigarette in less than half an hour. He was amazed at how he had become addicted in such a short space of time. He looked at his watch. Brad Friedman was ten minutes late. He had always pegged Friedman as a stickler for time keeping. Maybe he's not coming, Smith thought; maybe he's got wind of what's going on.

"Jason Smith," a man's voice made Smith jump.

He turned round and saw Friedman standing there. He looked different; he had shaved off all of his hair. It made him look like a prisoner of war. Smith could not help but stare at him.

"It's always good to have a change every now and again," Friedman noted Smith's surprise, "It'll soon grow back; it always does."

A waitress approached their table and Smith ordered two pints of Theakstons without even asking Friedman what he wanted to drink.

"Have you thought of something?" Friedman got straight to the point, "I was actually on my way back to London."

"I doubt that," Smith said, "there is something The Ghoul mentioned. I didn't think much of it at the time."

The waitress put the two pints of beer on the table.

"Drink up," Smith said, "I think you're going to need it."

He had thought carefully about what he was going to say.

"What did he say?" Friedman leaned across the table.

“He left a message on my phone,” Smith took a long sip of beer, “I won’t go into too much detail but he told me to check my e mails.”

Friedman’s expression changed.

“He forwarded me a very interesting e mail,” Smith continued, “a very confusing one in fact. Maybe you can translate it for me. How’s your Estonian?”

The colour had drained from Friedman’s face. He now looked even more like a prisoner of war.

“It’s not what you think it is,” he said but even he could see how pathetic it sounded.

“What is it then?” Smith said, “Do you want me to tell you what I think it is?”

He finished the rest of the beer in his glass and looked around for the waitress.

“It’s just an educated guess,” Smith said, “but I think that you and Sarah Proud were involved in this thing from the very beginning.”

The waitress approached their table.

“Another pint of Theakstons please,” Smith said.

Friedman had not touched his drink.

“You were involved the whole time,” Smith said, “when Jimmy Fisher was shot we should have realised. Fisher was shot because he did not do what he was told.”

“You don’t know who you’re dealing with,” Friedman said.

“No,” Smith said, “you don’t know who you’re dealing with. Shut up and let me speak. You killed Paulo Rubio because he threw a spanner in the works; he messed up your plans. Tommy Pike did not uphold his part of the deal so you killed his son and then made it look like Pike had taken his own life out of remorse. The Ghoul saw straight through you from the very start so you made sure he kept his mouth shut.”

The waitress put a pint of beer in front of Smith.

"It all makes sense now," Smith took out a cigarette and lit it, "apart from one thing. There's one thing I don't understand. Why did you kill my sister?"

Friedman smiled. Smith had to look away. What he felt like right now was strangling the smugness out of the man sitting opposite him.

"Laura was too soft," Friedman said, "in the end it was just bad for business. She tried to help the boy escape. They couldn't tolerate that kind of behaviour."

Smith took a sip of the beer.

"You're fucked Friedman," he said a lot louder than he meant to.

An elderly couple on the next table glared at him. Friedman took out a packet of cigarettes and lit one. He offered the pack to Smith.

"Those things will kill you one day," Smith said, "that's a promise. If you hadn't thrown your cigarette butt into my neighbour's garden and if this neighbour hadn't been such a pedantic idiot I wouldn't have figured it all out. I have enough evidence to put you away for the rest of your life."

"Evidence?" Friedman seemed surprised.

"Evidence," Smith repeated, "you were seen taking Alfie pike away; we found cigarette butts in the same room as the rifle that was used to kill Tommy Fisher. They're the same brand as yours. No doubt your fingerprints were all over the rifle too. Is this starting to hit home yet?"

Friedman remained silent.

"You and Sarah proud were seen talking to Paul Johnson just before his car was blown up. Your car was seen in the underground car park just before he left. Your Land Rover

was seen by the river the night before Alfie Pike and my sister were found there. Do I need to go on? This kind of evidence would make any defence lawyer crap in his pants."

Friedman started to laugh. It took Smith by surprise; he was not expecting it. A few of the other people in the beer garden turned to look in their direction.

"Evidence," Friedman said again, "and what exactly are you planning on doing with this evidence? You know as well as I do that the man responsible for all of these murders is behind bars."

Smith realised he was sweating quite badly. He took a long sip of his beer.

"You know very well," Friedman carried on smiling, "there's no way in hell they'll open up this investigation again. You are all heroes; you caught the man everybody in York loves to hate. If you admit you've made a mistake you'll be the laughing stock of every police department in the world. It was you, the great DS Jason Smith who stood up in front of every journalist worth their salt and told them it was all over."

Smith sank back in his chair. He felt dejected. Brad Friedman was right.

"You're not going to get away with this," Smith said.

He could hear the desperation in his own voice.

"They have got away with it," Friedman said, "don't take it personally. You're not the first person to discover the hard way that you can't beat them and you won't be the last."

"Why do you keep saying them?" Smith said, "You're all together in this shit. Why can't you just admit it for god's sake?"

"Things are not always as they seem," Friedman said, "You of all people should know that by now."

He stood up.

"I'm loath to say this," he said, "but it's been interesting knowing you Jason Smith even if it was just for a short while. If you ever consider a career change you'd be more than welcome in our little organisation. Come to think of it, I've got a strange feeling a career change is on the cards for you. We could use someone like you. Of course you do have a bit of work to do on your moralisation. There's no place for sentiment these days."

He walked away towards the car park. Smith noticed he had left his cigarettes on the table. The word Steels was written in red against a navy blue background. Smith wondered if he had left them there on purpose just to rub his nose in the fact that he had outsmarted not only him but the whole York police department.

Smith finished his beer and looked around him. Saturday afternoon on a sunny day in York. Families were enjoying lunch in the open air. Opportunities like these were rare in the North of England. Soon it would be September and the nights would get longer with the onset of autumn. Smith thought about what he was going to do. He had two weeks away from work. He should be enjoying himself. The logical thing to do would be to try and put all of this behind him and move on. That would be the rational thing to do if he thought about it. Logic and rationality are not some of my strong points, Smith thought; maybe I do get too emotionally involved; maybe I do take things too personally. He thought back to Wednesday morning. He still remembered vividly the image of his sister after he had unzipped the body bag; her pale blue eyes gazing up to the sky.

"This is personal," he said out loud.

He stood up, put a ten pound note on the table and walked away from the beer garden. He suddenly stopped and turned round. He walked back to the table, picked up Friedman's cigarettes and put them in his pocket.

FIFTY ONE

Smith was just about to get into his car when his phone started to ring in his pocket. He took the phone out and looked at the screen. It was Chalmers. Smith thought about ignoring it; he was on leave but he decided it must be something important. Chalmers rarely phoned without good reason.

"Sir," Smith answered the phone, "are you checking up on me?"

"Sorry to do this," Chalmers sounded grave, "but I need you back at the station as soon as possible."

"What's wrong?" Smith asked.

"I'll explain when you get here," Chalmers said, "come straight to my office."

He rang off.

Smith put the phone back in his pocket and got in the car.

What's so important that Chalmers can't explain over the phone, he thought.

He started the engine and drove out of The Hog's Head car park.

Chalmers was sitting staring out of the window when Smith walked in. He had a faraway look in his eyes.

"What's wrong?" Smith said, "If this is about the inspectors post I haven't forgotten about it. I'm still considering it."

"Sit down," Chalmers said.

Smith could tell that something was seriously wrong. Chalmers turned to face him. The expression on his face was one of a father whose son has severely disappointed him.

"Sir," Smith said, "what's going on?"

Chalmers took a file out of his top drawer and threw it in front of Smith.

“What’s this?” Smith was confused.

“Read it,” Chalmers said.

Smith opened the file and gasped. It was a police charge sheet. It was from Pickering police station. His name was written in bold black ink on the front.

“How come I’m the last to find out about this?” Chalmers said.

Smith read the details about the charges he was facing. Driving under the influence of alcohol, resisting arrest, perverting the course of justice. He remembered what Brad Friedman had said about a change of career coming his way.

“This isn’t good,” Chalmers said.

“Where did you get this?” Smith said.

“It was sent directly to the Super,” Chalmers said, “Smyth is furious. Apparently one of the SOCA agents got hold of it and thought Smyth should know.”

“This is total crap,” Smith said, “The whole thing is a set up.”

“So you weren’t driving pissed?” Chalmers said.

“A little bit,” Smith said, “but I wasn’t charged with anything. This file is a fake. The SOCA agents are phonies. I had a little meeting with Friedman only half an hour ago. He warned me about this. He knows I’m onto him. We have to stop him.”

“Enough,” Chalmers said, “There’s nothing I can do for you. You realise what this means don’t you?”

“I’m on leave for two weeks,” Smith said, “You can’t really suspend me when I’m on leave.”

Chalmers stood up and walked to the window. The window was open and there was a fresh breeze drifting in from the west.

"It's out of my hands now," he sighed.

"So now what?" Smith said, "What does that mean? Out of your hands?"

"It means that you've had your last chance," Chalmers said, "drinking and driving on duty is a serious offence."

"I wasn't on duty," Smith said.

"Read the report. It's all in there. You were on duty and you were caught driving under the influence."

"Are you firing me?" Smith could not believe what was happening to him.

"Like I said," Chalmers said, "it's out of my hands. I've been told to inform you that your contract with the York police department has been terminated."

Smith did not know what to say.

"This is bullshit," he said eventually, "this is clearly a set up."

"I believe you," Chalmers said, "but my opinion counts for bugger all here. These people are too powerful. It makes me sick to the stomach to be honest. You're a real pain in the arse but you're one of the best I've ever worked with."

"There must be something we can do," Smith was getting desperate.

"You can appeal of course," Chalmers said, "but I doubt it will do any good. It looks like you've been stitched up good and proper."

"So what do I do now?" Smith said.

"I've been ordered to tell you to clear out your office of any personal belongings and leave quietly. If you don't you will be escorted from here and neither of us wants that."

"This isn't happening," Smith said.

"I know," Chalmers scratched his nose, "the whole thing stinks. I managed to persuade old Smyth to let me handle it. He wanted to speak to you directly but I had a feeling that a charge of GBH on a police superintendant wouldn't do you any favours. This is a dark day in the history of this police force I can tell you that."

"Friedman killed all those people," Smith said, "He killed my sister. He killed The Ghoul and he got away with it. It isn't right."

Smith stood up.

Chalmers held out his hand.

"No," Smith said, "I'm not going to take this. I'm going to get this bastard if it's the last thing I do."

Smith waited for an argument from Chalmers but it did not materialise.

"Nail the bastard to the wall," Chalmers said, "but be careful. I've already been to one funeral too many this week."

Smith left the office without shaking Chalmers' hand.

Clearing out his office took Smith less than a minute. He had nothing in there of a personal nature besides a spare packet of cigarettes in the drawer. He was not one for sentimentality. He walked down the corridor towards the front desk. Baldwin was nowhere to be seen. Smith could not remember the last time Baldwin had had a day off. He was glad that he did not have to bump into anybody he knew as he walked out of the station for good.

Smith drove away from the station and lit a cigarette. Brad Friedman's face was in his head. How had he managed to fake a police charge sheet? He thought. He made up his

mind. He was going to make Friedman pay for what he had done. Smith realised he was driving too fast. He eased his foot off the accelerator and slowed down. He thought about what he was going to do. He had lost his job. Only twenty four hours earlier he had been asked to consider the inspector's job and now he was left with nothing. He parked the car outside his house and left the engine running. He ran up to the front door and opened it. Theakston was waiting for him on the mat.

"Come on boy," Smith said to the dog, "you're going to stay with Whitton for a few days. I've got something important to do. I haven't asked her yet but how could anyone resist that face."

Theakston looked up at him as if he had lost his mind. He followed Smith back to the car and got in the passenger side.

Smith parked outside Whitton's house and got out the car. Theakston followed him. He knocked on the door. Whitton answered almost straight away.

"Sir," she said, "is everything alright? You look a bit stressed."

"I need a favour Whitton," Smith said, "I have to go away for a few days. Would you mind looking after this little bugger for me?"

Whitton looked at Theakston and sighed.

"He's not so little anymore," she said, "where are you going?"

"I can't tell you," Smith said, "I wouldn't ask if it wasn't important."

"Come in," Whitton said, "do you want something to drink? I think there's a couple of beers in the fridge."

"No thanks," Smith said, "I have to go."

"Is everything alright?"

"Not really," Smith said, "I'm going after Brad Friedman. He's messed in my life one too many times this time."

"I thought you were on leave," Whitton said.

"I am on leave," Smith said, "I'm on permanent leave from now on. I've been fired."

He told Whitton what had happened.

"That can't be right," she said, "surely the super will realise the mistake and take you back."

"That's the worst part," Smith said, "I'm not sure I want to go back. I always thought the police force would support me; watch my back but now I know that sort of thing doesn't happen anymore. Maybe it's a sign."

"A sign?"

"A sign telling me it's time to do something else," Smith said, "I'll be back to fetch Theakston in a few days."

He patted the dog on the head.

"Thanks Whitton," he said, "you're the only person I can trust. I owe you."

He walked back to his car. Theakston did not even try to follow him. He went inside the house with Whitton.

Smith drove straight home. He sat in the car outside his house and thought about what he was going to do now. Seven years in the police force had been wiped out in seconds. He still could not believe how Friedman had managed to pull the wool over everybody's eyes. The only person who had seen through the whole facade was The Ghoul and now he was dead. He got out of the car and went inside the house. The place seemed too quiet without Theakston. Smith took a beer out of the fridge and went into the living room. He

picked up his old Fender Stratocaster and started to play. The guitar was badly out of tune. Smith put it straight back on the stand; he could not be bothered with the effort to tune it. He turned on the CD player and found the CD he was looking for. He put it in the machine and turned up the volume. Robert Johnson's haunting voice was singing about making a deal with the devil. Crossroads Blues.

Hell hounds on my tail, Smith thought, I've always had hell hounds on my tail. He finished the beer and went to the kitchen to get another. He realised he had not eaten anything all day but he was not in the least bit hungry. The beer was starting to make him feel light headed. He went outside to the garden for a smoke. The sun was low in the sky. It would be dark soon. He finished the cigarette and went back inside to the living room. He lay back on the settee and was asleep within seconds.

FIFTY TWO

Smith was woken up by a strange noise. He opened his eyes and realised the whole house was in darkness. He heard the noise again. It sounded as if doors were being opened upstairs. Somebody was in his house. He was instantly awake. The noise was definitely coming from upstairs. Smith stood up and braced himself. He could hear his heartbeat in his ears. He heard footsteps on the top of the stairs. Whoever was up there was coming down the stairs. Smith tried to remember what he had learned in the police self defence classes but nothing in particular came to mind. The footsteps had now reached the bottom of the stairs and were coming towards him. He prepared himself for an attack. He looked around the room. There was nothing there he could use as a weapon.

The light in the living room was switched on and Smith was blinded for a second or two. Sarah Proud was standing in the doorway.

"You?" Smith said, "What are you doing in my house? How did you get in?"

"For a policeman you're not too hot on security," she said, "your front door wasn't even locked. There's no time to talk. You have to get out of the house."

"What do you want?" Smith said.

"Please," she said, "you have to trust me on this one. We don't have much time. Grab anything you can't afford to lose and come with me."

Smith was about to argue about trust but the look on Sarah Proud's face appeared genuine. Her eyes were pleading with him. He went through to the kitchen and picked up his phone, wallet and cigarettes. Sarah Proud followed him.

"Quickly," she said, "we have to get out of here."

"What's going on?" Smith said.

"I'll explain everything to you in the car," she said, "let's go."

She headed for the front door. Smith did not know why but he found himself following her. He followed her out of the house and down the street where she had parked her car.

"What now?" Smith asked as they got in the car, "are you going to tell me what the hell this is all about?"

"Quiet," she sounded nervous.

A car approached from the opposite direction and stopped outside Smith's house. Smith could see it was a Land Rover. He watched as three men got out and walked up the path to the front door. They were carrying something in their hands. One of the men took something out of his pocket and Smith could see the small flame of a cigarette lighter. He flinched when he realised what they were carrying in their hands. He watched as the petrol bombs were lit one by one. Three of them were sent crashing through the downstairs window and three upstairs. Within seconds the flames were snaking out of the windows. Smith felt sick. It took less than three minutes for his house to burn to the ground.

The three men got back in the land Rover and drove off in the direction they had come from. Smith sat with his mouth wide open. Sarah Proud started the engine and drove off in the opposite direction.

"My house," Smith still could not believe what had happened, "they burnt my house down."

"You were supposed to be inside," Proud increased her speed.

"Friedman?" Smith said.

"Yes," Proud said, "you've certainly upset him."

"Stop the car," Smith said, "let me out."

"That wouldn't be a very good idea," Proud said, "We need to get as far away from here as possible."

Two fire engines passed them on the other side of the road.

Too little too late, Smith thought.

"Where are we going?" he asked.

"I don't know," Proud said, "somewhere safe."

"Friedman told me all about you," Smith said, "Nadia Boronov. You're Wolfie's sister."

"My name is Sarah Proud," she said, "Nadia Boronov died the same day as my brother did. Viktor Boronov is dead to me."

"I don't believe you," Smith said.

"You might not realise this," Proud said, "but I just happened to save your life back there. I don't expect your gratitude but you have to trust me."

"That's exactly what Friedman said," Smith said, "who the hell is he anyway?"

"A man you don't want to cross," Proud said.

They drove in silence for a few miles. Smith did not know where they were going but he had a feeling they were travelling north. He looked out of the window as they lights of suburbia slowly dwindled and they left the city of York behind them. He looked over at Sarah Proud. She was busy concentrating on the dark road and did not notice him staring at her. Smith thought about the three men who had set fire to his house. He thought about Theakston probably tucked up in bed with Whitton. I must have known something was about to happen, he thought. He did not want to think about what would have happened if

Theakston had been in the house when the petrol bombs had come hurtling through the windows. He spotted a signpost on the side of the road : A19 North. Middlesbrough 35 miles. His gut had been correct; they were heading north. He closed his eyes and leaned back further in the seat. The soft purring of the Mercedes' engine was making him feel tired.

"I know where we can go where they won't find us," Proud turned to look at Smith but he was fast asleep.

FIFTY THREE

The fire engines had managed to put out the fire at Smith's house. From the dim light of the street lamp it was clear that there was nothing left inside. The blaze had destroyed everything. The acrid smell of petrol, burnt paint and melted upholstery oozed out the holes in the walls where the widows had been. Smith's next door neighbour's house was relatively undamaged. The reinforced adjoining wall had spared it from too much damage. Whitton and Chalmers were standing outside the house talking to one of the firemen. Chalmers had received the call at three in the morning and he had phoned Whitton immediately. They had arrived together ten minutes later.

Whitton was shaking. She stared blankly into the shell that used to be Smith's house. Surely nobody could survive a blaze like that, she thought, not even Jason Smith. She had left Theakston alone at her house. At least the dog had been spared, she thought. She still could not believe that Smith was dead. It was bound to happen sooner or later, she thought, Smith always seemed to be in the wrong place at the wrong time but she saw him as one of those people who could survive anything.

"Looks like petrol bombs," Chalmers snapped Whitton out of her trance.

"What?" Whitton looked at him.

"Petrol bombs," Chalmers said, "a whole load of them. Upstairs and downstairs. If there was anybody in there at the time they wouldn't have stood a chance. You can smell it can't you?"

"What?" Whitton was not really listening.

“I think you should get home,” Chalmers said, “you’re in no fit state to do anything useful here.”

“No,” Whitton seemed to wake up, “don’t you want to know?”

“Know what?”

“If he was in the house when the fire was started,” Whitton said, “I need to know.”

“The firemen have put out the fire,” Chalmers said, “they had to do it from down here in the street. The heat inside was too intense for them to go in.”

“Didn’t they look inside?” Whitton said.

“Too dangerous,” Chalmers said, “they said the ceiling boards could collapse at any time. They’ll be back at first light. They’ll have a better idea then. We’ll meet up here again then.”

“I’m staying here,” Whitton said, “I’ll wait in my car until it gets light. I can’t go home. I won’t sleep anyway.”

“Do what you want,” Chalmers said, “I’m off to get a few more hours shut eye.”

“Don’t you even care?” Whitton said as Chalmers was about to walk back to his car, “Smith was one of us. He was more than that. He was a friend for fuck’s sake.”

Chalmers was stopped in his tracks. He had never heard Whitton swear like that before. He turned to face her.

“I’ve got a feeling,” he said, “I don’t know what it is, a hunch, a gut instinct, I don’t know but I’m pretty sure Smith isn’t lying in there burnt to a crisp.”

He pointed to what was left of the house.

“How can you know that?” Whitton said, “His car is still parked outside.”

“Like I said,” Chalmers said, “it’s just a feeling. Stay here if you want but I can promise you that Australian pain in the arse hasn’t finished making our lives miserable just yet.” He walked back to his car.

Whitton was not sure if she believed Chalmers or not. Where would Smith have gone so late at night? She thought, what if he was asleep in bed when the petrol bombs were thrown through the windows? He wouldn’t have stood a chance.

FIFTY FOUR

Sunday 15 August 2010

Smith woke up and looked around him. He was alone in the car. Sarah Proud was nowhere to be seen. He started to panic but soon realised the car was parked at a petrol station. The driver's door opened and Sarah Proud got in.

"Sleep well?" She said, "You're not much company on a long drive are you?"

"Sorry," Smith rubbed his eyes, "where are we?"

"Just outside Alnwick," she said.

"Where?"

"Northumbria," Proud said.

"Where are we going?" Smith asked.

"Somewhere they will never find us," Proud said, "have you ever heard of Holy Island?"

"No," Smith said.

"It's beautiful," Proud said, "I stopped at the petrol station for a couple of hours. You can only get to the island when the tide is low."

"I need a cigarette," Smith said.

He opened the door and got out of the car. The sun was poking its head up over the bleak hills in the distance. Smith walked away from the petrol pumps and sat down on a bench next to the car park. He lit a cigarette and closed his eyes. He felt like he was in a dream. What had happened to him did not seem real. He had lost his job and his house in a

matter of hours and now he was miles away from anywhere heading for some island with a woman he knew nothing about.

Sarah Proud walked up to him with two polystyrene beakers filled with coffee. She sat on the bench next to Smith and handed him one of the beakers.

"Thanks," Smith took a sip and winced.

"This is crap," he said.

"I know," Proud said, "but it might wake you up. We have to get going soon. The island is still about fifty miles away from here. I've checked the tide tables and we have to get there before eight otherwise we'll have to wait for the afternoon tide to get across the causeway."

"I don't like the sound of this," Smith said, "why do we have to wait for the tide? Isn't there a bridge?"

"The road is under the water half the time," Proud took a long sip of coffee, "if you don't time it right you could get washed out to sea."

Smith shuddered at the thought. He finished his coffee and stood up. He flicked the cigarette butt into the distance.

"Let's go then," he said, "maybe being washed out to sea isn't the worst thing that could happen after everything else that has gone on recently."

"Where was the dog?" Sarah Proud said as they left the petrol station behind and headed north on the A1.

"Theakston?" Smith said, "I left him with Whitton. I told her I needed to get away for a few days. I must have had some kind of premonition. How did you know they were going to set fire to my house?"

Sarah proud did not say anything. She stared at the road ahead.

"Why did they have to burn down my house?" Smith said, "If they wanted me dead why not just shoot me or stab me in a dark alley?"

"He wanted to destroy you," Proud said, "not just take your life. You don't know him and you don't want to. He wanted to destroy everything about you; your job, your house, everything."

"Boronov?" Smith said.

"No," Proud said, "Friedman. Like I said, he's a very dangerous man."

"But Friedman works for Boronov," Smith said.

"Not now," Proud said, "I can't talk about this now. I'll tell you everything in time. I promise."

They did not talk as the desolate landscape of Northumberland whizzed by. The roads were deserted. Smith shivered as the sea appeared in the distance. They were almost there. A queue of cars was lined up waiting for the tide to drop and give them access to the causeway that linked the island to the mainland.

"We're early," Sarah Proud stopped the car in a car park across the road from the queue of cars, "the causeway will only be passable in about an hour's time."

"I don't like the look of that," Smith pointed to the old road that led to the island. It was partially submerged.

"When the tide goes out its perfectly safe," Proud started the car and drove out of the car park.

"Where are we going?" Smith said, "I thought we were going to the island."

"We need supplies," Proud said, "the shops on the island are fairly limited. I don't know how long we're going to be cooped up on the island. We'd better be prepared."

She drove towards the centre of the small town of Beal and parked outside a supermarket.

Smith's phone started to ring in his pocket.

"Don't answer it," Proud appeared scared.

Smith looked at the screen. It was Whitton.

"It's DC Whitton," he said.

"Please," Proud said, "don't answer it. Nobody must know where we are and please don't phone anyone while you're here. It's very important."

Smith put the phone back in his pocket.

Half an hour later they emerged from the supermarket with five shopping bags full of food, toiletries and anything else they thought they might need on the island. Smith had also insisted on buying two cases of beer and two bottles of Jack Daniels. Sarah Proud had protested at first. She had warned Smith that they needed to keep clear heads but Smith had blatantly ignored her.

The cars were starting to move slowly across the causeway towards the island when Smith and Proud got back. Smith reckoned there to be at least a hundred cars. The procession looked like a centipede hundreds of metres long winding its way along the road.

"Where are all these maniacs going?" Smith said as they followed the giant centipede.

"They're mostly tourists," Proud said, "don't worry, most of them will stay close to the mainland side of the island. We're going to a place called Castlehead. It's on the far north east of the island. We should be completely alone there."

"That's what I'm afraid of," Smith said.

He looked out of the window at the sea only metres away from the car. He wondered what would happen if someone had an accident on this road. There were no barriers; only road and sea connected together as if by an odd mutual bond of respect for each other.

The traffic began to thin out as they left the main tourist areas behind them and headed inland towards Castlehead. Sarah proud had been right. Apart from the odd vehicle every few miles, they were completely alone.

"You seem to know this place well," Smith said.

"I used to come here when I was younger," she said, "the family I lived with used to take their summer holidays here. More recently though I've been coming in the winter. It's much more beautiful in the winter. Cold and bleak."

"Sounds lovely," Smith said, "I thought you grew up in Talinn."

"I did," she said.

She seemed much more relaxed now. It was as if this familiar landscape had calmed her.

"I spent the first few years of my life in Estonia," she continued, "but for most of my life I've been in England. The cottage is just over the next ridge. There's a castle not far from here too."

She drove along the winding road and turned right onto a steep dirt road that led to the top of a cliff. Smith gasped at the view. The North Sea unfolded before them as far as the eye could see.

"Impressive isn't it?" Proud noticed Smith's surprise, "there's nothing but sea between us and Denmark. It's quite soothing when you think about it isn't it?"

She stopped the car outside a small stone cottage.

“You can get the supplies out of the boot,” she said, “I want to park the car where nobody can see it from the road.”

Smith did as he was told. He got out of the car and piled everything up next to the front door of the cottage. Sarah Proud drove off round the back of the cottage.

FIFTY FIVE

Whitton woke up with a sore neck. She had managed to get a couple of hours sleep in the car while she waited for the sun to come up. She stretched her arms out and hit her knuckles on the roof of the car.

"Damn it," she said.

She got out of the car and looked across the road at Smith's house. Smoke was still drifting out of the gaping holes where the windows had been and there was still a slight whiff of petrol in the air. She walked across the road to get a better look inside the house. The full extent of the damage became apparent. Whitton could not see what the upper floor of the house looked like but if it was anything like what she saw through the hole downstairs it was clear that nothing had withstood the blaze. Everything inside the house was black. She saw that the blast from the petrol bombs had taken out the windows at the back of the house as well. She had been warned by the fireman not to go inside the house until they had given it the all clear. The ceiling boards could collapse at any time. A green Land Rover drove up and parked on the opposite side of the road to Smith's house. Whitton recognised it. Brad Friedman and a man Whitton did not know got out. She remembered what Smith had told her about going after Friedman. Had Friedman acted first? She thought, was he responsible for the fire? She pushed the thought aside. Friedman wouldn't be so brazen as to come back and check up on his handiwork would he?

"What happened?" Friedman pointed to Smith's house, "It looks like a bomb exploded in there."

Whitton did not know what to say. She realised she was scared. If what Smith had told her was true, this was the man who had killed Smith's sister, The Ghoul and who knows how many other people.

"I was here just the other day," Friedman said, "DS Smith and I had a nice chat. Do you know if he was at home when the fire started?"

"We don't know yet," Whitton looked at Smith's car parked down the road from the house.

"God help us all if he was," Friedman said.

A fire engine pulled up outside the house. An ambulance and a blue station wagon parked behind it. Brad Friedman seemed to be very interested in the driver of the station wagon. A man with short black hair got out and Friedman walked up to him. Whitton watched as Friedman and this man spoke to each other. Four firemen got out of the fire engine and began checking their equipment. Whitton's phone started to ring in her pocket. She took it out answered it.

"Whitton," it was Smith.

"Oh my God," Whitton said, "you're alive. Where are you?"

"On some island in Northumbria," Smith said, "That's not important. Can you talk?"

"Of course," Whitton looked around her.

Friedman was still talking to the man in the blue station wagon.

"Friedman tried to kill me," Smith said, "He burned down my house."

"I know," Whitton said, "I'm standing outside it now. It's in a right state. Friedman's here. I think he wants to find out if you were inside."

“Listen carefully,” Smith said, “Friedman is going to pay for this. He’s going to pay for everything he’s done but I need you to do something for me.”

“OK,” Whitton said.

“I need Friedman to think I was in the house,” Smith said, “I need him to think I’m dead. It’ll give me a bit of an advantage over him.”

“I think it’s a bit late for that,” Whitton said, “Friedman is all over the scene as we speak.”

“What do you mean?” Smith said.

Whitton looked over at Friedman. He was now talking to one of the firemen.

“He’s with the fire brigade right now,” Whitton said, “he’ll soon find out there was nobody in the house.”

“Think of something Whitton,” Smith said, “try and stall things. Use your charm. He mustn’t find out I’m still alive.”

“I’ll try,” Whitton said, “I’m so glad you’re ok. I spent the night in my car outside your house.”

“Who’s alright?” a voice was heard from a few metres away.

Whitton turned round. Brad Friedman was standing behind her.

“Whitton?” Smith said.

Whitton turned off the phone.

“Who were you talking to?” Friedman asked.

“DI Chalmers,” Whitton quickly lied.

“What’s wrong with him?” Friedman looked her directly in the eyes.

“Nothing,” Whitton started to walk towards her car.

“Then why did you say you’re glad he’s alright?” Friedman called after her.

Whitton turned round and looked at him. His bald head made him look even more of a thug than his crew cut had. She could feel the anger welling up inside her. This maniac had tried to kill Smith. She walked up to him.

“Listen to me,” she said, “you may have everybody else fooled but I know who you are. I know what you are. I know for a fact that this was your doing.”

She pointed at Smith’s house.

Friedman smiled at her.

Whitton remembered what Smith had asked her to do.

“You’re going to burn in hell you bastard,” she said, “you’re going to rot for burning him alive in his own house.”

Friedman was taken aback.

“Nice try,” he said, “what makes you so sure he was inside?”

“His car is still there,” Whitton said, “unless he was sleepwalking down the street in the middle of the night, he’s in there.”

“We’ll soon find out,” Friedman said.

He pointed to the man with the black hair.

“The fire inspector will inform me when it’s safe to go inside,” he added.

“You have no jurisdiction here,” Whitton knew she was really clutching at straws now.

Friedman started to laugh. He took out his ID.

“Do you see this little card?” He said, “This little card gives me the authority to go anywhere I like. Would you like me to phone Superintendant Smyth and have him

explain it to you? I'm sure Jeremy wouldn't mind being woken up early on a Sunday morning for such an important matter."

Whitton wanted to knock the smug smile off Friedman's face. She took a deep breath and backed off. She knew she would have to admit defeat for now.

"All clear," the fire inspector called out from upstairs in Smith's house, "the ceiling boards were very well built. They withstood the whole thing."

Thirty seconds later he emerged from the house. He was covered in black soot.

"We've done a quick scan of the house," he said to Friedman, "it looks like our DS Smith was lucky. There was nobody in the house when the fire started."

Whitton's heart sank.

"Are you sure?" Friedman said.

"Like I said," the fire inspector said, "we did a quick search and there's no sign that anybody was there. The guy must have been out. He's one lucky bastard."

"I'm going to have a look myself," Friedman said.

"You'll bugger up your suit," the inspector said.

Friedman ignored him and went inside the house.

Ten minutes later a blackened Brad Friedman emerged from Smith's house. His bald head was black and he looked very angry. Whitton found it hard not to smile. Friedman approached her.

"I'll be seeing you," he said and walked back to his Land Rover.

FIFTY SIX

Smith had decided to ignore Sarah Proud's pleas and he had called Whitton. He needed to tell her that he was alright; he knew she would be worried about him. He also needed her to make Brad Friedman believe he was in the house when the petrol bombs were thrown through his windows. He looked at his watch. It was eleven in the morning although it felt much later. Sarah Proud was sleeping in the bedroom. She was exhausted after driving all night. Smith went outside and looked around. A cool breeze was blowing in off the sea. He walked along the cliff and looked out at the horizon. What had Sarah Proud said? He thought, there was nothing between them and Denmark but water. For some reason the thought scared him. He wondered if Whitton had managed to come up with something to persuade Friedman that he had perished in the fire. Whitton will have thought of something, he thought.

Smith's stomach was groaning. He realised he had not eaten anything for two days. He made his way back to the cottage. Sarah Proud's low breathing could be heard from the bedroom. She was still fast asleep. Smith found some bacon and eggs in one of the bags of groceries. He looked around the kitchen. There was a small gas stove in the corner. It was a camping type burner with two plates. Smith sighed. He had never been much of a cook; takeaways, frozen pizzas and pub lunches were more his thing. He found a small frying pan in one of the cupboards. He took out his cigarette lighter, turned on the gas and lit the plate. He put as much bacon in the pan as he could fit and put it over the flame. Very soon, the smell of bacon had filled the whole cottage.

“I never pictured you as the domesticated type,” Sarah Proud was standing in the doorway.

Her hair was dishevelled but Smith could not help staring at her.

“I’m not,” he focused his attention back on the bacon in the pan, “are you hungry?”

“The smell of bacon has made me hungry,” Proud said.

After breakfast Smith wondered if he ought to tell Proud about his conversation with Whitton. He decided against it. Both of them were relaxed for the first time in ages and it would only make things tense between them.

“What do we do now?” Smith said.

“We wait,” Proud said, “hopefully Friedman will think you died in the fire and all this will be over.”

“That’s what I said to Whitton,” Smith said and instantly wished he could go back in time ten seconds.

“When did you speak to Whitton?” Proud said.

“While you were sleeping,” Smith realised he might as well tell her everything, “I told her to make Friedman think I was dead.”

“Did you tell her where you were?” Proud had a grave expression on her face.

“No,” Smith lied, “I just told her it was better to make Friedman think I was no longer around.”

“Good,” Proud said, “because if Friedman thinks that Whitton knows something he won’t stop until she tells him. He can be quite creative. I know; I’ve seen him in action.”

“What are we going to do today?” Smith changed the subject.

"I'm going for a swim," Proud said, "there's a little bay just down from the cliff. There's a perfect little beach that nobody knows about."

"The water must be freezing," Smith said.

"It's good for the soul," Proud smiled, "let's go."

As they walked towards the cliff top Smith felt something he had not felt in days. He felt at peace. His whole life had been turned upside down in the past week but as he gazed down at the North Sea from the top of the cliff, he felt safe.

"Can I borrow your phone?" Proud said.

"Ok," Smith looked at her suspiciously.

He handed her the phone. She opened the back, took out the sim card and handed it to him.

"What are you doing?" Smith said.

"Playing safe," Proud said.

She clipped the cover back on the phone and threw it as far as she could into the sea below. Smith heard a quiet splash as it hit the water and disappeared. He was gobsmacked. He just stared at the spot in the sea where the phone had gone down.

"What the hell did you do that for?" he said.

"You put us both in danger by speaking to Whitton," Proud said, "I had to make sure it didn't happen again. Come on. Let's go."

Smith stood with his mouth wide open. He watched as Sarah Proud made her way down the rocky path to the cove below. He walked down after her.

Sarah Proud was already in the sea when Smith reached the bottom of the path. Her clothes lay in a pile on the top of a rock about twenty metres from the surf.

"Come in," Proud shouted, "the water's lovely."

Smith did not know what to do. He had grown up by the beach in Fremantle but he had only been in the sea once in over ten years and that had not been by choice. A deranged Chinese man had taken Smith and Whitton hostage on a boat. Smith had dived over the side to rescue Whitton. He shivered when he remembered how cold the water had been that day.

"I didn't bring anything to wear," he said as an excuse, "I didn't know we'd end up swimming in the sea."

"Neither did I," Proud shouted.

Smith looked at the pile of clothes lying on the rock. He realised that Sarah Proud was swimming naked.

"There's nobody around," Proud said, "don't be such a big girl."

Smith slowly undressed. He took off everything except his boxer shorts. He looked at his body and was disgusted by how pale he had become. His body had not seen the sun in years. He walked up to the edge of the water. Small waves were breaking on the sand. He put one of his feet in the water and flinched. The sea was freezing.

"Just run in," Proud said, "you'll never get in if you walk in slowly."

Smith took a deep breath and through the surf towards the deeper water where Sarah Proud was floating on her back. When the water was deep enough he launched himself head first into a wave. The cold hit him like a sledgehammer. The muscles in his face tensed up and his brain felt like it was turning to ice. He broke the surface and swam over to Sarah Proud.

"See," she said, "it's not that bad when you're in is it?"

"No," Smith lied, "I must be crazy."

Sarah Proud swam over and put her arms around him. Her naked body felt warm in the icy water. Smith looked into her eyes; she looked like she was about to cry.

"I'm sorry," she said.

"Sorry for what?" Smith said.

"I'm sorry you had to get involved in all of this. None of this was supposed to happen."

Smith kissed her on the lips.

"Was that not supposed to happen either?" he said.

She kissed him back. They remained in the sea, treading water, holding onto each other. A fluke wave crashed over their heads but neither of them seemed to notice.

FIFTY SEVEN

Whitton got out of the shower and dried herself off. She got dressed and went downstairs. Theakston was sitting in the kitchen. He was staring at the fridge. Whitton remembered that Smith had not left any dog food when he had dropped Theakston off. There were two chicken legs in the fridge left over from the night before. Whitton had been saving them for later.

"Do you like chicken?" Whitton said to Theakston and realised it was a stupid question to ask a Bull Terrier.

She took the chicken out of the fridge and put it in front of Theakston. In less than a minute it was gone. Whitton sighed. Theakston assumed his position by the fridge. He alternated his gaze between Whitton and the fridge door.

"That's just rude," Whitton said, "Smith obviously hasn't taught you any manners. I suppose we should go and get you some proper dog food. Do you feel like a walk?"

Theakston was out of the kitchen and standing by the front door in a flash. Whitton was amazed at how fast he could move when he wanted to.

The supermarket was a ten minute walk from Whitton's house. She tied Theakston to a lamppost and went inside. She bought a bag of dog food and two dog bowls. Smith had forgotten to give her anything at all. As she was paying she spotted a newspaper headline on one of the Sunday papers. On the front page was a photograph of Smith's house. It had obviously been taken that morning. The photograph showed the full extent of the fire damage. Whitton could not believe how quickly the press had latched onto the story. Above the photograph the headline read 'Police detective's house petrol bombed'.

Whitton felt sick. What if Smith had been inside when it happened? She thought. She wondered how he had been able to get out in time.

"Twelve fifty five," the cashier broke Whitton's thoughts.

"Sorry?" Whitton said.

"That'll be twelve fifty five please," the cashier said.

Whitton took out her purse and paid.

When Whitton stood outside her house and put the dog food and bowls on the step so she could get her keys out she did not notice the Land Rover parked further down the street. She opened the door and went inside. There was a strange smell inside the house. It smelled like cheap aftershave. Theakston started to growl. Something was clearly bothering him. Whitton had an uneasy feeling. She felt like something bad was about to happen. She put the dog food in the kitchen and went to the living room. Brad Friedman was sitting on her favourite chair. Two men were standing beside him. From the look of them Whitton knew straight away that they were no strangers to violence. She had seen their type many times before.

Theakston started to bark at Friedman. He was baring his teeth.

"Get that thing out of here," Friedman said.

"Theakston," Whitton said softly, "Come with me boy."

She led him to the kitchen and closed the door behind. Theakston carried on barking.

"What do you want Friedman?" Whitton said.

"That's no way to treat a guest," Friedman said, "I thought we were friends."

"I'm very particular who I make friends with," Whitton said, "I'll ask you again. What do you want?"

“Just a friendly chat,” Friedman smiled.

Whitton wanted to knock the smug grin off his face.

“I need to find Jason Smith,” Friedman continued, “It is important I speak with him and you’re going to tell me where he is.”

“He’s dead,” Whitton realised she did not sound very convincing, “he died in the fire you caused last night or have you forgotten about that?”

“Erica,” Friedman stood up. “Nice try but we both know that Smith wasn’t in the house last night when the awful fire was started don’t we? His car was outside but Jason Smith was not inside. I have a nasty feeling he was warned.”

“Warned by who?” Whitton said, “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Oh but you do,” Friedman said, “I’m not stupid. I know you spoke to him this morning. I heard you, now where is he?”

“I don’t know,” Whitton said, “he didn’t tell me.”

Friedman stared at her for a few seconds.

“I don’t believe you,” he said.

“I don’t care,” Whitton said, “I don’t know where he is, now get out of my house.”

Friedman took a step closer to Whitton. She flinched.

“Erica,” he said, “I know for a fact that you know where our friend Smith is. It would be better all round if you told me now before I have to show you the darker side of myself.”

Theakston was still barking in the kitchen.

“Very well,” Friedman took out a gun and handed it to one of the other men.

“She won’t talk,” Friedman said to the man.

“Shooting me is not going to get you what you want is it?” Whitton said.

Friedman smiled. Theakston's barking was getting louder.

"No," Friedman said.

He smiled at her.

"Shoot the dog," he said to the man holding the gun.

"No," Whitton screamed.

Friedman said something to the man in a language Whitton could not understand. The man with the gun pushed past her and walked towards the kitchen. Whitton heard him open the door and then she heard a loud bang. She felt like she was going to be sick. Not Theakston, she thought, Smith loves that dog. The man walked back to the living room and handed the gun back to Friedman.

Theakston started to bark again. Whitton felt a wave of relief run through her whole body.

"Ok," Friedman said, "consider that a warning. Now you know what I'm capable of. Are you ready to tell me what I want to know or must I let Andre here really shoot the dog?"

"He didn't tell me where he is," Whitton said.

Friedman shook his head. He nodded to the man known as Andre.

"I'm telling the truth," Whitton said, "he didn't say exactly. He just said he was on some island off the Northumberland mainland. I don't know anything else. Please don't hurt the dog. He hasn't done anything to you."

Friedman smiled. He nodded to the two men.

"That wasn't too hard was it?" He said to Whitton, "After this is over I don't see any reason why we have to bump into each other again."

He walked out of the room. The two men followed him. Whitton winced as the front door was slammed behind them.

Whitton ran to the kitchen and opened the door. Theakston jumped up at her legs. Whitton collapsed to the floor and hugged the dog. She did not want to let go. She looked up and saw the bullet hole in the wall above the fridge. She held on to Theakston and started to cry. Theakston licked the tears that streamed down her face.

FIFTY EIGHT

Smith and Proud lay on the sand drying off in the sun. Smith looked at Proud lying naked on the beach and he could not help thinking how she was not in the slightest bit self conscious of her body. Most people he knew would want to cover themselves up; they would never remove their clothes in a public place. Smith thought how innocent she looked.

"We're all alone," he said, "I think it's about time you explained a few things to me."

"Not now," she sat up and brushed the sand off her back, "let's not spoil a perfect day."

"When then?"

"This evening," Proud said, "I'll make us something nice to eat, we'll get drunk and then I'll explain everything to you."

"You promise?"

"I promise," Proud put her hand on the back of Smith's neck, "you should really get more sun. You're way too pale for an Australian."

Smith closed his eyes. The hand on the back of his neck felt warm. He smiled and moved closer to Proud. They lay back on the sand. The cool breeze from the sea and the gentle lapping of the waves reminded Smith of his childhood. Sarah Proud's breathing was becoming deeper next to him. She had fallen asleep. Within minutes, he too was asleep.

Smith did not know how long he had been asleep when he was woken by a shrill scream. He shot up from the sand. Sarah proud opened her eyes and lay still.

"What is it?" She whispered.

"Did you hear that?" Smith said, "It sounded like a woman screaming.

They looked up the path to the cliff top and spotted a figure hurrying down towards them. Sarah Proud grabbed her clothes and quickly put them on. The figure reached the bottom of the path and approached them. As it came closer, Smith realised it was an elderly woman.

"I wonder what she wants," Smith said.

He was amazed at how quickly she had walked down the path. The woman said something to them but her accent made it difficult for Smith to understand what she had said.

"What are you too up to?" The old woman said.

She spoke more clearly this time.

"Nothing," Smith said, "we were just enjoying the sun."

"Enjoying more than that from what I could see," she said, "frolicking naked on the beach. I saw everything. We're not that kind of island. Holy Island. Doesn't that mean anything to you? The likes of you two would be better off down south somewhere. Brighton or somewhere like that."

Smith could not believe what he was hearing.

"My poor Harold," the woman had not finished yet, "he'll never be the same again. He had his binoculars on you for over an hour before I realised what was going on. I hate to think what it's done to his poor heart."

Smith started to laugh. He could not help himself. Sarah Proud slapped him on the shoulder. She also had a smile on her face.

"We're sorry," she said, "Mrs?"

"McDougal," the woman said, "Mary McDougal. Lived on the island my whole life and I've never seen the like of this before."

"We're sorry Mary," Smith said, "it won't happen again."

"You make sure it doesn't," Mary turned to walk away.

"And give our regards to Harold," Smith added.

Mary McDougal scurried off in disgust.

"You're evil," Sarah Proud said when Mrs McDougal was out of sight.

"Poor Harold," Smith started to laugh again, "I think you've made an old man very happy."

"I'm hungry," Proud stood up, "I'm going to make you the best beef stroganoff you've ever tasted."

"It'll be the first beef whatever I've ever tasted," Smith said.

"Then you're in for a real treat," Proud walked off towards the path up to the cliff.

FIFTY NINE

Whitton sat at the table in her kitchen. Chalmers and Bridge sat opposite her. Whitton had phoned Chalmers as soon as Friedman had left. Chalmers had picked Bridge up on the way.

"That bastard broke into your house?" Chalmers said, "And he threatened Smith's dog?"

"I was terrified," Whitton was still shaking, "he was so calm about it all."

"Where's Smith now?" Bridge asked, "I heard he wasn't in his house when the fire broke out."

"He phoned me," Whitton said, "he just said he was on some island off the Northumberland coast."

"Farne Islands?" Chalmers suggested.

"Why would he go to the Farne Islands?" Whitton said.

"I don't know," Chalmers said, "why does Smith do anything? I've never been able to fathom out what goes on in that head of his."

"I'm sure you need a boat to get to the Farne Islands," Bridge said, "Smith hates boats."

"What other islands are up there?" Chalmers said.

"Holy Island," Bridge said, "you can drive across to it when the tide is low. I went there once when I was a kid."

"Do you really think this Friedman character knows about Holy Island?" Chalmers said.

"Well he seemed quite pleased with himself when he left," Whitton said.

"I don't get it," Bridge said, "how did Smith know to get out of the house before the petrol bombs were thrown through his windows? And if he is on Holy Island, how did he

get there? His car was still outside his house."

"I reckon he had a bit of help," Chalmers said.

"Who would help him?" Whitton said.

"I have no idea," Chalmers said, "but whoever he is, he's on Smith's side. Have you tried phoning him?"

Chalmers looked at Whitton.

"Of course I've tried phoning him," Whitton said, "I tried a few times but I get the same answer each time. The number you are dialling is not available, please try again later. It seems like he's switched his phone off."

"What are we going to do?" Bridge asked.

"It's a tricky one," Chalmers scratched his nose, "Smith's no longer on the force, Friedman made damn sure of that."

"But he's clearly in danger," Whitton said, "You don't know what Friedman was like. He's a psychopath. I think he wants Smith dead."

"He's got connections," Bridge said, "I don't know how he manages to do it but he seems to come up with some way to stop us in our tracks every time we try to get near him."

"We can't just sit here and do nothing," Whitton said, "we can't let Friedman get away with it."

"Bridge is right," Chalmers sighed, "Friedman will just use his clout to get any investigation into Smith's disappearance squashed."

"So then we don't launch an investigation," Whitton said.

"What do you mean?" Bridge said, "You just said..."

“We do this on our own,” Whitton said, “We find Smith before Friedman does. We’re not going to do anything illegal; we’re just looking for a friend.”

“I don’t like this,” Chalmers said, “Friedman and his goons are dangerous. You should know that better than anybody.”

“I thought we were supposed to have some weapons training coming up,” Bridge said.

“I doubt that’ll ever happen,” Chalmers said, “the chief constable is dead against it. A real namby pamby that one. He’s worse than old Smyth.”

“So we just sit here and wait for the phone to ring and let us know that Smith is dead?” Whitton stood up and walked to the sink.

She poured herself a glass of water. She had to hold the glass with both hands, she was shaking so much.

“How far is it to this Holy Island?” Chalmers said.

“A few hours by car I think,” Bridge said, “it’s not too far if I can remember.”

“I’m going to regret this,” Chalmers said.

He looked at his watch.

“It’s too late to set off now,” he said, “We’ll leave first thing in the morning. We’ll go in my car. I’ll pick you both up at six.”

“Thank you sir,” Whitton said.

“Don’t thank me yet,” Chalmers said, “I still don’t have a clue what the hell we’re going to be able to do. Smith isn’t even on the job anymore and he’s still making our lives hell.”

He stood up to leave.

“See you both tomorrow,” he said, “I’ll see myself out.”

Bridge and Whitton sat in silence for a while.

“Do you want me to stay the night?” Bridge said eventually, “I can sleep on the couch if you don’t want to be in the house by yourself.”

“Thanks Bridge,” Whitton said, “But I’ll be fine. I’ve got this little bloke to look after me.”

She patted Theakston on the head. He was snoring under the kitchen table.

“You’d better go home and get some sleep,” she said, “We’ve got an early start tomorrow.”

Bridge stood up.

“Do you think he’ll be alright?” he said.

“Smith?” Whitton said, “Smith will always be alright.”

SIXTY

Smith sat outside the stone cottage on a small wooden bench. He took out his cigarettes and lit one. He took a sip of beer. Sarah Proud was inside the cottage making the Beef Stroganoff. The smell of garlic wafting out of the cottage windows was making Smith hungry.

"The sauce is done," Proud walked outside and sat next to Smith on the bench, "I'm just waiting for the rice. It should be about twenty minutes."

"It smells great," Smith said, "do you want a beer?"

"I'd love one," she said.

"Then get me one while you're in there will you," Smith said.

"You Aussies are such gentlemen," Proud slapped him on the shoulder and walked back inside.

She returned with two beers and handed one to Smith.

"So," Smith opened his beer and took a long sip, "where do we start with the life of Sarah Proud? I'm all ears."

"There's not much to tell," Proud said, "I've already told you most of it. I was born in Talinn and I came to England about ten years after my parents died."

"Who did you live with after they died?" Smith said.

"I've lost count of all the places I stayed," Proud said.

"Did you stay with your brother?"

"At first, yes," she said, "but Viktor started to get out of control. He was very disruptive so when he was thirteen or fourteen he was sent to an institution for other children like

him. You must understand that this was The Soviet Union in the eighties. These places were basically child prisons. It worked for some of the youngsters but Viktor was deemed a lost cause. He came out of there a worse criminal than he was when he went in. That was when we were separated. I was lucky enough to be selected to join a programme that allowed foreign children to be fostered by British parents. There were children from all over the eastern bloc on the programme. I was one of the lucky ones; I ended up with a really nice couple, Rodney and Paula Proud. They were good people."

"Were?" Smith said.

"I mean they are good people," Proud said, "I still keep in touch with them. Anyway, I came to them when I was ten years old. I changed my name and Nadia Boronov ceased to exist."

"What happened to your brother?"

The alarm on the oven told them that the rice was ready. Smith and Proud stood up and went inside. Smith sat down at the table while Proud dished up the food.

"This looks great," Smith said as Sarah proud put the Beef Stroganoff in front of him.

"I told you you were in for a treat," she said.

"Where were we?" Smith said, "You didn't tell me what happened to your brother."

"Viktor?" Proud looked sad, "Viktor became somebody else; somebody I didn't know anymore. I didn't want to know him anymore. We stayed in touch for a while but I don't think he ever really forgave me for moving to England. I think he saw me as a kind of traitor."

"How did you end up working for the government?" Smith said.

"Slow down," Proud smiled, "eat your food. We have all night."

"Sorry," Smith took a bite of the Stroganoff, "I just like to know everything I can about somebody I've just swam naked with."

Sarah Proud laughed. Smith liked her laugh. He could get used to that laugh.

When they had finished eating, Smith and Proud sat back outside on the bench. Smith opened a bottle of Jack Daniels and poured them both a healthy measure. The evening was very warm. The wind had shifted to the South West and the cottage was now sheltered.

"Where were we?" Smith smiled and took a long sip of the whisky.

"I've forgotten," Proud put her hand on Smith's knee, "I think it must be your turn by now."

"What do you mean?"

"Quid pro quo," Proud said.

"What the hell does that mean?" Smith said.

"Well," Proud rubbed Smith's knee, "it's something similar to I've shown you mine so now you have to show me yours."

Smith laughed so hard he nearly choked on the whisky.

"You've definitely shown me yours,' he said, "Ok, what do you want to know?"

"I know all about your investigations," she said, "the deranged Chinese man, the Fulton twins, the Ladybird killer; that's all on file but I don't know anything apart from Jason Smith the detective. Tell me something else."

"There isn't much to tell," Smith finished the whisky in his glass and poured himself some more, "I lived in Fremantle until I was sixteen and then I came to York. Your brother played a huge part in that. If he hadn't taken Laura from that beach I never would

have been sent away and I wouldn't be here now drinking Jack Daniels with the strangest woman I've ever met."

Sarah Proud laughed and slapped him on the shoulder.

"I need to pee," she said and stood up.

"You're not shy are you?" Smith said.

"Life's too short," she went back inside the cottage.

Smith sipped his whisky and stared up at the sky. There seemed to be more stars in the sky in this part of the world. He smiled. Things could be a lot worse, he thought. He did not hear Sarah proud talking on the telephone in the bathroom; he did not hear the conversation she was having in a foreign language. Things were about to get much worse.

SIXTY ONE

The Crag Inn was the oldest pub on Holy Island. It was usually only frequented by islanders but in the summer time, tourists staying on the island often went there to sample the local ales. Harold McDougal had been a regular at the Crag inn for more than forty years. He had seen it change from a predominantly male only hostelry in the late seventies into what it was today; a tourist hot spot where good food was served all day to men, women and children. Smoking, once enjoyed in the bar even after the smoking laws that had hit the rest of the United Kingdom came in, was now banned. Harold stood outside in the doorway smoking his third cigarette of the evening. His wife Mary did not tolerate smoking at home on account of Harold's supposed heart problems but Harold always seemed to find an excuse to escape to the Crag Inn to indulge in a few cigarettes and a pint or two of his favourite Cuillin Ale.

Harold flicked his cigarette butt into the car park and was about to go back inside when he noticed a car pulling up in the car park. Harold did not know much about cars but from the look of this one he knew it was very expensive. It was one of those 4 x 4's a lot of the tourists came to the island in.

Bloody tourists, Harold thought as he went inside the pub, they think they own the place.

Harold returned to his usual table in the corner of the room. His old friends Stan and Derek were mixing domino tiles up on the table.

"Count me in," Harold said, "I'm just off to get another pint."

"Get us one while you're at it will you?" Stan said but Harold seemed to develop hearing problems at that very moment.

“Tight git,” Stan called after him.

The tourists in the 4 x 4 were standing at the bar waiting to be served when Harold got there.

“Two double vodkas,” one of the two men said to the bar man, “on the rocks.”

Southerners, Harold thought straight away, no self respecting man from the North would ever dream of drinking vodka on the rocks.

The man who had ordered the drinks looked Harold directly in the eyes. His expression was neither aggressive nor friendly but Harold did not like the look of him anyway. He was dressed in blue jeans and a golf shirt which emphasised his stocky build. Harold decided he was not a man he would want to cross. The other man was wearing a flat cap and a pair of sunglasses even though it was dark outside. Harold could not really see his face.

“Pint of Cuillin,” Harold said when the two men had paid for their vodka and chosen a table next to where Stan and Derek were waiting to play dominoes.

“I don’t like the look of those two Carl,” Harold said to the aging bar man, “they look like gangsters to me,”

“Don’t be daft Harold,” Carl poured the beer and placed it on the bar in front of him, “they’re just Southerners. They’ve got nowt better to do down there than spend hours at the gym. Did you see that one’s muscles? Anyway, their money’s as good as anybody else’s”

“If you say so,” Harold picked up his beer and returned to his table.

“You’ll never guess what happened to me today,” Harold said as he selected his dominoes.

"What happened?" Stan sighed, "Did you get seduced by a mermaid?"

"Funny you should say that," Harold took a sip of his beer, "I was parked on the top of the cliff there by Castlehead and there was a young couple down on the beach in the cove."

Stan's ears seemed to prick up.

"The young lass was in the water," Harold continued, "I got the binoculars out for a better look and that's when I saw she didn't have a stitch of clothing on."

"You're kidding?" Stan said rather too loudly, "she was naked?"

The two men on the table next to them looked over at him.

"Naked," Harold whispered.

"Are we going to play?" Derek said, "Or do we have to listen to this bullshit all night?"

Harold picked out a double four and placed it on the table.

"I'm telling you what I saw," he said, "these two were frolicking about in the sea and when they got out of the water the young woman just lay there without a care in the world. She was just as nature intended if you know what I mean."

"You lucky bastard," Stan knocked on the table.

He did not have any fours.

"I watched them for almost an hour," Harold said, "until Mary got wind of what I was up to. She gave me a mouthful and then she went down to the cove and from what I saw, she gave them an even bigger ear bashing, poor buggers."

One of the men on the next table leaned over and looked at Harold. It was the one who had ordered the drinks.

“Excuse me,” he said, “I couldn’t help overhearing. In fact I think the whole pub heard but did you say you saw a young couple down on the beach?”

“I might have,” Harold turned his attention back to the domino game, “you shouldn’t be listening in to other people’s conversations.”

“Sorry,” the man said, “what did these two people look like?”

“Bloke in his twenties or thirties,” Harold said, “very pale. I didn’t pay much attention to him though.”

Stan started to laugh.

“And the woman?” the man asked.

“Bit of a looker,” Harold said, “dark hair.”

He played a double six. He only had two more dominoes left to play.

“Can I buy you gentlemen a drink?” the man asked.

Harold had almost a full pint of beer in front of him. He raised the glass to his lips and finished it in one go.

“I am about ready for another one,” he smiled and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, “three pints of Cuillin.”

The man nodded to his friend and the other man stood up and walked up to the bar counter.

“We’re supposed to be meeting some friends of ours on the island,” the man said, “but the silly fools neglected to tell us where they were staying.”

The other man put three pints of beer on Harold’s table.

“Where did you say you saw these people again?” the man asked Harold.

“Castlehead,” Harold took a long swig of his free beer, “it’s at the far north east of the island. There’s a little stone cottage there. They’re probably staying there. It’s very remote.”

The man smiled.

“Thank you,” he put a twenty pound note on the table, “the next few rounds are on me. You’ve been a big help.”

He stood up and walked towards the exit. The other man followed closely behind.

SIXTY TWO

"Tell me about Brad Friedman," Smith said, "what's his story?"

"Friedman?" Proud sighed, "Boronov's right hand man. He's been with Boronov for ten years now. Boronov saw the opportunity and lured him in with the proverbial carrot. An ally in the government is a valuable thing."

She stopped talking for a while and seemed lost in thought.

"I don't want to talk about this anymore," she said, "it's getting late."

"It's not late," Smith kissed her on the forehead, "there's still half a bottle left."

He poured them both a full glass of whisky.

"Look at us," Smith smiled, "too lost causes. No kids, no family and on the run from god knows what. Here's to eternal loneliness."

He raised his glass in the air. Sarah Proud smiled.

"I'll drink to that," she took a sip of the Jack Daniels, "do you want to go for a walk?"

"I thought you said it was late," Smith said.

"Come on," Proud said, "the moon is full; we'll take a walk up to the top of the cliff. Bring the bottle with you."

Smith did not know why but he was suddenly engulfed by a sense of impending doom. He did not know if it was due to the alcohol in his system heightening his consciousness to the reality of what had happened in the past week or if it was something else.

"Let's go then," he pushed the feeling to the back of his mind.

They walked hand in hand along the overgrown path towards the cliff top. The full moon gave them ample light to see by. Smith was out of breath by the time they reached

the top. They say on a patch of grass and looked out to sea. The gentle lapping of waves on the beach was the only sound. Smith handed Proud the bottle of Jack Daniels. She took a long drink out of the bottle and handed it back to him.

"This is nice," Smith lay down on the grass, "I wouldn't mind staying on this island for a while."

"Nice?" Proud said, "I can see you're a man of very few words."

"I'm an Australian police detective living in the North East of England," Smith said, "I don't get much time to express my emotions."

He took a swig from the bottle. The bottle was almost empty.

"Let's go for a swim," Proud said.

"Are you nuts?" Smith said, "The water was freezing in the heat of the day, God knows what it'll be like at night."

"The temperature of the North Sea stays the same all the year round," Proud said, "give or take a few degrees. Come on, it'll sober you up a bit."

"What about Mary McDougal?" Smith said, "What if Harold has night scopes on his binoculars?"

Sarah Proud laughed and stood up.

"Come on," she said, "the moon will show us the way down."

She headed down the path towards the beach.

I must be mad, Smith thought as he stood up and scrambled down the path after her.

When he reached the beach, Smith realised he was sweating. He made a mental note to do a bit more exercise when he had the time. He took off his T shirt and jeans and ran

into the sea. The water felt warmer than it had during the day. Smith did not know if it was just his imagination or the effects of the alcohol.

"Sarah," he shouted.

Sarah Proud was nowhere to be seen. Smith swam out a few metres but there was still no sign of her. He stopped swimming and treaded water for a while. He lay back in the water and gazed up at the cliff top. The moon cast an eerie glow on the craggy rocks.

This is the setting for a horror film, he thought, or a murder. He half expected to see a werewolf pounce up on the rocks and bare its teeth at the moon.

Smith shivered. He was starting to feel the chill of the water. He was about to swim back to shore when he felt something move under his feet. Before he had the chance to see what it was he felt a strong tug on his legs and he was dragged under the water. He swallowed a mouthful of water and his head started to tense up as the cold North Sea water froze his face. He started to panic and a thousand thoughts rushed through his head at the same time. He saw pictures his mind. Laura, Wolfie, The Ghoul, Sarah Proud. The pictures were very clear.

Is this what it's like to die? He thought, with the brain vying for one last moment of consciousness?

He was only under for a few seconds but it felt like much longer. He saw Sarah Proud's face in his mind again. She was smiling at him. She was laughing. It was the same laugh he could listen to all day. She was laughing at him.

"For a cop, you spook pretty easily don't you?" Sarah Proud managed to say between bursts of laughter.

Smith coughed and spat out a mouthful of sea water.

“Me and the sea don’t exactly see eye to eye,” he said and started to swim ashore.

“I’m sorry if I freaked you out back there,” Sarah Proud said when they were back on the beach, “I was just having a bit of fun.”

She started to dry herself off with her shirt.

“I’ve forgotten what fun is,” Smith said.

“Then its time you learned about it again,” she put her arms around him and kissed him hard on the lips. Smith kissed her back. She tasted of salt and Jack Daniels. They fell back onto the beach and as the moon disappeared behind a cloud their bodies appeared to sink into the sand.

Smith did not know how long he had been asleep but he woke with a start. Something had jarred him awake. Sarah Proud was still lying next to him. Her eyes were open and she was trembling. Smith moved closer to her. She was ice cold and he could feel her heartbeat against his chest. It was beating incredibly quickly.

“He’s coming,” she said in a voice that chilled Smith to the bone, “Boronov is coming.”

SIXTY THREE

Monday 16 August 2010

The heat wave that had smothered York for the past week or so disappeared as quickly as it had arrived and a cold North Easter straight from the Arctic pushed the temperatures down drastically. Whitton shivered as she got in the back seat of Chalmers' car. Bridge was sitting next to Chalmers in the front.

"What the hell's that?" Chalmers pointed to Theakston.

He had jumped in next to Whitton.

"It's a dog sir," Whitton said.

"That thing can't come with us," Chalmers said, "Mrs Chalmers is allergic to dogs. She'll sneeze the roof off the bloody car next time she gets in."

"I can't leave him by himself," Whitton said, "he's had a rough time of it recently. He's still traumatised about having a gun pointed at him."

Theakston did not appear traumatised at all. He had his paws on the top of the back seat and he was trying to get a better view out of the back window.

"He's very well behaved when he wants to be," Whitton said, "he has a problem with flatulence every now and again but he has a heart of gold."

"We'd better get going then," Chalmers sighed, "Mrs Chalmers is going to make my life hell when she finds out about this though."

Light drizzle was falling from the sky as they left York behind and headed north. Chalmers inserted a cassette into the car stereo and the haunting bass intro to Metallica's 'Enter Sandman' blasted out of the speakers. Bridge turned round and smiled at Whitton.

"Metallica?" Whitton could not believe it, "really sir. I never had you pictured as a heavy metal fan."

"I'm not," Chalmers said, "but it helps me to think and it's either that or Mrs Chalmers' Barry Manilow collection."

"Metallica," Bridge and Whitton said at the same time.

"Do you think Smith is alright?" Bridge said.

"I don't know," Chalmers said, "what I want to know is what the hell is he doing on Holy Island and who took him there in the first place?"

"I suppose we'll find out soon enough," Whitton said.

They drove in silence for the next thirty miles or so. Theakston had fallen asleep almost immediately and he was now snoring loudly on the back seat.

"That dog's a pig," Chalmers turned up the volume on the stereo.

James Hetfield was singing about the Unforgiven. Whitton closed her eyes and listened to the words. 'What I've felt, what I've known. Never shined through what I've shown. Never free, never me, so I dub thee unforgiven.'

It made her think of Smith for some reason, she did not know why.

"I don't know how he comes through with his sanity intact time and time again," she said what she was thinking.

Bridge turned round and looked at her as if she were insane.

“Look at everything he’s been through,” Whitton said, “It’s a miracle he isn’t locked up in some loony bin banging his head against a wall all day.”

“Women,” Chalmers looked at Bridge, “melodramatic and over emotional. Don’t tell Mrs Chalmers I said that though.”

“It’s true,” Whitton said, “when I spoke to Smith on the phone yesterday he sounded almost normal.”

“The word normal does not apply to Smith,” Chalmers said.

“I’m serious,” Whitton said, “his sister gets killed, he loses his job and his house is burned to the ground. Any other person would have had every reason to crack but not Smith. He sounded quite rational.”

“This Friedman bloke really doesn’t like Smith does he?” Bridge said, “He’s responsible for all of this.”

“I need to pee,” Chalmers said, “this bloody bladder of mine is not like it used to be.”

“I saw a sign for a petrol station back there,” Bridge said, “It should be a few miles from here.”

The rain was falling heavier as they got out of the car just north of Newcastle.

“I knew it couldn’t last,” Bridge said, “I’m thinking about moving somewhere warmer. The South of France maybe.”

“You’ve got to be kidding?” Whitton said, “I like the weather in York. When it’s hot, people only moan. The British are never happy.”

Chalmers got back in the car. He was soaked through. Theakston was still snoring on the back seat. Chalmers started the engine and drove out of the car park. He was about to turn left onto the dual carriageway when a green Land Rover flew past at quite a speed.

“Bloody idiot,” Chalmers said, “did you see that? He must have been going over a hundred.”

He pulled out onto the road. The Land Rover was nowhere to be seen.

“I checked the tide tables,” Bridge said, “we’ll be lucky to make the morning crossing. We might have to wait until this afternoon. We should have left a bit earlier.”

“Why the hell didn’t you tell me this earlier?” Chalmers said.

“I didn’t think,” Bridge said, “I thought we’d make it. I’d forgotten how slowly you drive.”

“Carefully,” Chalmers said, “I drive carefully you cheeky git. This is just great. So we’ve just got to sit and wait for the tide to go down? That’s a great way to spend a few hours while god knows what is happening to Smith on that island. What do you think Whitton?”

Whitton did not reply. She had fallen asleep on the back seat. Theakston was asleep with his head on her lap.

SIXTY FOUR

Smith woke up in the bed in the stone cottage. His memory of the previous night was very vague. He could remember swimming in the sea and the moon shining down over the cliff above him. After that there were just bits and pieces of information that his brain could not seem to sort into the right order.

I must stop drinking so much, he thought.

He got out of bed and went to the bathroom. The cottage was silent apart from a strange dripping sound coming from outside. Sarah proud was nowhere to be seen. Smith finished in the bathroom and went outside. Light rain was falling and the sky was a light grey colour. He walked round the back of the cottage to where Proud had parked her car. The Mercedes Benz was gone.

Maybe she's gone to fetch breakfast, Smith thought.

He lit a cigarette and stood inside the door way where it was sheltered from the rain. He finished the cigarette and went back inside. He switched the kettle on to make coffee and sat down at the kitchen table. He tried to remember more about the night before but his mind was still blank. The feeling disturbed him; he rarely had memory blanks no matter how much he had had to drink.

The sharp click of the kettle turning off made Smith jump. He made the coffee and sat back down at the table. The rain was coming down heavier on the roof of the cottage now. Smith finished the coffee and put the mug in the sink. He looked at his watch. It was seven thirty in the morning. He wondered where Sarah Proud had gone. He went to the bedroom and put on some clothes. They were the same clothes he had worn for two

days. He realised he would have to buy some more clothes if he was going to stay on the island much longer. He looked at the cupboard in the corner of the room and wondered if there were any clothes he could borrow in it. He opened the cupboard. There were a couple of old raincoats and a pair of waterproof trousers inside. He took out one of the rain coats and threw it on the bed. It might come in useful if the rain continued, he thought. He was about to close the cupboard when he spotted something behind the waterproof trousers. He moved the trousers to the side and saw there was a black suitcase standing on its side behind them. He took out the case and laid it on the bed. The case felt heavy; there was obviously something inside it. He opened the four catches on the case and was about to open the lid when he heard the sound of a car outside the cottage. Sarah Proud had returned. He carefully opened the lid of the case. There was a red piece of cloth covering whatever was inside. Smith removed the cloth and gasped.

“Beautiful isn’t she?” Sarah Proud was standing behind him.

Her voice sounded different. She spoke with a strange accent.

SIXTY FIVE

It was half past eight by the time Chalmers, Whitton and Bridge reached the car park across the road from the causeway to the island.

"Bollocks Bridge," Chalmers looked out to sea.

The tide was rising and the causeway was already under a foot of water.

"What time does the tide go out again?" he asked.

"Not until this afternoon," Bridge said, "I knew we should have set off earlier. If you'd driven like a normal person we would have made it."

Chalmers was about to say something but he changed his mind. They were all a bit stressed out at the moment.

"What now then?" he said.

"I suppose we'll have to wait until this afternoon," Bridge said, "unless your car can suddenly turn into Chitty Chitty Bang Bang and float on water."

Whitton was starting to stir in the back seat. She had slept for over an hour.

"What's going on?" she said.

"We've missed the tide," Bridge said, "We're going to have to wait until this afternoon to get across to the island."

Whitton opened the door and got out of the car. She needed to stretch her legs. Theakston fell out after her and headed for a small verge of grass next to the car park. He lifted his leg and urinated against a signpost. He suddenly stopped and sniffed the air. He seemed to spot something on the other side of the car park. He ran over to another car and started to bark. It was a green Land Rover.

"Come here boy," Whitton said but Theakston continued to bark.

She walked up to the dog and stroked him on the back.

"What's up boy?" she said, "come on let's go back to the car."

Theakston obeyed her and followed her back to Chalmers' car.

"What's wrong with him?" Chalmers said.

"I don't know," Whitton said, "I don't think he likes Land Rovers very much."

"I recognise that car," Chalmers said, "it looks just like the one that came flying past us at a hell of a speed. Didn't help him much did it? He's still got to wait for the tide."

"It looks just like Brad Friedman's car," Whitton said.

She walked over to the Land Rover and looked inside. The car was empty. She looked closely through the window. In the compartment between the two front seats she noticed a packet of cigarettes. It was a brand she had never seen before. She took a closer look and saw that they were Steels.

Steels, Whitton thought, they were the brand they found at the house across the road from where Jimmy Fisher was killed; in the same room they found the Dragunov rifle.

"Looking for something?" a familiar voice said.

Whitton turned round and found herself staring into the face of Brad Friedman. His bald head made him look much more sinister than the army crew cut. Another man was standing next to him. Whitton did not recognise him. He was not one of the men Friedman had brought to her house the day before. Whitton felt scared. She looked back to see where Bridge and Chalmers were. Bridge was still sitting in the passenger seat of Chalmers' car and Chalmers had walked down towards the sea. He was smoking a cigarette and staring into the distance.

“Looks like you didn’t make the tide either,” Friedman said.

“What do you want here?” Whitton said, “I’m not scared of you.”

She realised her voice was trembling.

“We want the same as you DC Whitton,” Friedman said, “We want to make sure DS Smith comes to no harm.”

“I don’t believe you,” Whitton said.

“Our friend Smith has a nasty habit of putting himself in dangerous positions,” Friedman said, “we’re here to get him out of one of those situations.”

“You’re a fucking liar Friedman,” Whitton said.

Friedman and the other man looked at her in surprise. Whitton did not know what to make of Friedman’s colleague. He had a friendly face. He did not look at all like one of Friedman’s gorillas.

“Let’s talk,” the man said in a gentle voice.

“I’ve heard enough of his lies,” Whitton said.

“Please,” the man said, “there’s a small coffee shop just up the road. We can get something to eat and explain everything to you.”

“I told you,” Whitton said, “I don’t believe a word that comes out of his mouth.”

She snarled at Friedman.

“I assume your DI and DC Bridge will be joining us?” the man ignored her, “please, just indulge me.”

Whitton walked back to where Chalmers was standing staring at the sea. She half expected to feel the blow of a bullet in the back of her head.

“Sir,” she said to Chalmers, “Friedman’s here and he wants to talk to us.”

Chalmers looked over to Friedman.

“What the hell does he want?” he said, “Is he trying to rub our noses in it again?”

“I don’t know sir,” Whitton said, “he’s here with another bloke.”

“Let’s go then,” Chalmers started to walk towards his car.

“But sir,” Whitton said, “he could be trying to trick us again.

“Whitton,” Chalmers turned round, “if Friedman’s with us he can’t get to Smith can he? The longer we hold him up, the better chance Smith has of staying alive.”

SIXTY SIX

"I don't understand," Smith could not help staring at the Dragunov sniper rifle in the case, "what's going on? I thought..."

"Beautiful isn't she?" Sarah Proud said again, "did you know you could blow somebody's head right off from over a kilometre away with one of these? It's an outstanding weapon."

She had a disturbing look on her face.

"What's the rifle doing here?" Smith said.

"That's the beauty of this particular rifle," Proud ignored his question, "just think, you can kill somebody and you already have a kilometre head start."

"What the hell is it doing here?" Smith looked Proud in the eyes.

"I brought it here of course," she said, "I told you, Boronov is coming."

"I have to go," Smith said, "I shouldn't have come here with you."

He stood up and started to make his way towards the bedroom door. He felt a sharp blow to the back of his head and fell to the floor. He saw flashes of light before his eyes and then everything went black.

When he woke up, Smith did not know where he was at first. The back of his head was throbbing. He put his hand on his head. His hair was stuck together with dried blood.

"Please don't do that again," Sarah Proud was sitting on the bed. She had an even wilder look on her eyes now. Smith saw that she had a small hand gun on her lap. He realised that was what she must have hit him with.

"Who the hell are you?" Smith tried to get up.

“Stay there,” Proud pointed the gun at him, “I don’t want to hurt you again but I will if I have to.”

Smith did as he was told.

“You know damn well who I am,” Proud said, “and you also know who my brother is.”

“Wolfie,” Smith said, “Viktor Boronov. What’s going on here?”

“Boronov is coming,” she said, “I expect he’s already on the island somewhere. It won’t be long before he finds us. My beloved brother thinks he’s here to clear up a few annoying loose ends.”

“Loose ends?” Smith was confused.

“Loose ends,” Proud said, “that will be you and me. Boronov believes he’s coming here to kill us both. I made sure of that.”

“I still don’t get it,” Smith said.

“I planned it all along,” Proud looked at the gun in her hand, “it’s a plan Viktor would have been proud of; a flawless plan.”

“What plan?”

“You’re the great detective,” Proud said, “You’re the one that figures everything out when everybody else is still scratching their noses. Think.”

Smith tried to think but his brain did not seem to be working properly. The bang on the head had made everything a blur.

“It started when I shot the football player,” Proud said, “the whole thing just came to me. You could call it a moment of inspiration.”

“You shot Jimmy Fisher?” Smith could not believe what he was hearing; none of this seemed real.

“I shot him and left the rifle behind,” Proud smiled at him, “I must admit, I didn’t expect you to find it so quickly. When we found out what an unusually adept detective we were dealing with, the plan had to be tweaked. You and your gung ho actions nearly jeopardised everything.”

“It’s an unfortunate habit of mine,” Smith said, “I do that a lot.”

“Lose the charm,” Proud said, “it doesn’t work on me. It never has done.”

“So you killed Fisher?” Smith said, “what about the cigarette butts in the ashtray we found. You don’t smoke. Was somebody there with you?”

“No,” Proud said, “I always work alone but Brad Friedman smokes those cigarettes. I left them there to make you think it was Friedman that killed Fisher. I knew you’d put two and two together in the end. Like I said, you’re a very good detective.”

“What about the second football player?” Smith said.

“The Colombian?” Proud said, “He’d seen me. I couldn’t take the risk of him identifying me.”

“It was you who tried to kill me by tampering with the wheels on my car,” Smith said, “the fingerprints we found on the wheel nuts were the same as the ones on the sniper rifle.”

Sarah Proud looked shocked.

“Grant Webber?” she said, “He was told not to divulge any information about that.”

“Well he did,” Smith said, “I need a smoke.”

Proud took out Smith’s cigarettes and lit one for him. She placed it in his mouth. The gun was pointed at him the whole time.

“Thanks,” Smith exhaled a cloud of smoke, “what about Tommy Pike’s son? What about my sister?”

“I had nothing to do with Laura and the boy,” Proud said, “I kill people when it’s necessary but I draw the line at children.”

From the tone of her voice, Smith could tell she was telling the truth.

“Boronov had her killed,” she said, “her and the boy. Laura was trying to help him escape. It could have spelled disaster.”

“So what now?” Smith said, “What are you going to do with me? Are you going to kill me too?”

“Of course not,” Proud said, “Boronov is going to kill you. Or that’s what he thinks he is here to do. Me and my friend here have other plans.”

She pointed to the Dragunov rifle.

“You’re going to kill your own brother?” Smith said.

“No,” Proud got off the bed and walked over to the window, “you are.”

SIXTY SEVEN

Whitton, Chalmers and Bridge sat opposite Brad Friedman and his colleague in the small coffee shop two hundred metres from the car park. Nobody said a word. None of them seemed to know where to begin.

"What the hell is going on here?" Chalmers broke the silence.

"It's complicated," Friedman said.

"Who's he?" Whitton pointed to the man with the friendly face.

"This is my colleague, Michael Young," Friedman said.

Young took out his ID and placed it on the table in front of Whitton. She looked at the card and then looked at Young. The card was similar to the SOCA ID card that Friedman had shown her.

"What are you doing here?" Chalmers asked.

"We have received some information that informs us that Viktor Boronov is on the island," Young said, "and we also believe that your DS Smith was a big part in getting Boronov here."

"What has Smith got to do with all of this?" Whitton said.

"Smith and Boronov have a history," Friedman said, "they had a bit of a disagreement a few years back in Talinn. Boronov or Wolfie as he is also known wants Smith dead and the woman you know as Sarah Proud wants Boronov dead. Like I said, it's all very complicated."

“This is all a bit much to take in,” Whitton said, “why should we believe anything you say after everything that has happened? You broke into my house. You threatened me. You threatened to kill Smith’s dog.”

“I had to,” Friedman raised his voice.

An elderly couple on the next table glared at him.

“I had to,” he said again, “I’m sorry about everything that you had to endure. It has taken me two years to get inside Boronov’s operations; to gain his trust. The men I was with that day work for Boronov. I couldn’t be seen to be weak in front of them. The whole investigation would have fallen apart.”

“What about Smith’s house?” Bridge said, “Who burned his house down?”

“Who do you think?” Friedman said, “Boronov.”

“But why did Sarah Proud get Smith out of there?” Bridge said, “And why did she take him to Holy Island?”

“I’ve already told you that,” Friedman sounded irritated, “she did it to gain his trust and make him believe she was on his side. She was using him as bait the whole time. She is using him to lure Boronov out of his impenetrable hole. Boronov would never let his guard down otherwise.”

Chalmers scratched his nose.

“If what you say is true,” he said, “there’s still one thing that doesn’t make sense.”

“What’s that?” Friedman said.

“This all started with the murder of a football player,” Chalmers said, “that has been explained. Match fixing and all that. Boronov stood to gain a pile of money from that. You say that you were working undercover in Boronov’s operations. Why does Sarah

Proud or whatever her name is want Boronov dead? If she's part of this operation what would she have to gain by killing its leader?"

"Sarah Proud's real name is Nadia Boronov," Michael Young said.

"Boronov?" Whitton said.

"Yes," Young said, "she's Boronov's little sister. They were separated when she was very young. She came to England and he stayed in Estonia. She changed her name to Sarah Proud when she was about ten years old."

"So she isn't SOCA at all?" Bridge said.

"Oh she's SOCA alright," Friedman said, "we only realised who she really was a few months ago. She's a very dangerous woman. She used her position to get closer to the brother she's hated for most of her life."

Chalmers stood up.

"I'm going outside for a smoke," he said, "would you care to join me?"

He looked at Brad Friedman. Friedman nodded and followed Chalmers outside.

"I don't like this," Chalmers said, "we're not dealing with a couple of drunks knocking the hell out of each other on a Friday night; this is serious shit. Do you and your friend in there carry guns?"

"Of course," Friedman lit a cigarette and handed the packet to Chalmers.

"Bloody hell," Chalmers lit a cigarette, "what's going to happen on that island?"

He looked across the road towards Holy Island in the distance. The tide was showing no sign of dropping.

"If we're lucky," Friedman said, "we'll get there in time. If Boronov has already got to them then somebody will already be dead. It's just a matter of who."

“Why does Smith always get himself into shit like this?” Chalmers took a long drag of the cigarette and coughed.

“We have a few hours,” Friedman said, “I think we’d better use that time to figure out exactly what we’re going to do when we eventually reach the island.”

SIXTY EIGHT

"Put the case on the bed," Sarah proud pointed to the black case containing the rifle, "how much do you know about sniper rifles?"

"The one you shot Jimmy Fisher with was the first one I'd ever seen," Smith admitted.

"Oh well," Proud said, "it's never too late to learn. Take out the rifle frame and lay it on the carpet."

Smith looked at the various components of the gun in the case and suddenly felt dizzy.

"If you're going to shoot one of these you have to learn what each part does," Proud said, "take out the frame and lay it on the carpet."

Smith did not move.

"I can do it for you," Proud said, "but I'm afraid I'm going to have to knock you out again. We don't want you to do anything stupid do we?"

Smith picked up the frame of the Dragunov and placed it on the carpet in front of him.

"Good," Proud said, "now there's a spring and a long bolt rod in there. Take them out and push them inside the middle of the frame."

Smith stared at the various parts in bewilderment.

"I have to warn you," Proud said, "the spring has to be positioned just right."

"I've never done this before," Smith said.

"It has to be in exactly the right position," Proud said, "or when it's fired the cartridge won't go in a straight line."

"Where will it go?"

“It’ll probably just blow the whole mechanism up in the face of whoever is holding the rifle,” Proud said.

Smith concentrated on the spring and bolt rod. He wiped his hands on the back of his shirt; he was sweating quite badly. He placed the rod inside the rifle frame and pushed the spring on as tightly as he could.

“Good,” Proud said, “you’re a natural. You might just come out of this with your face intact. Now clip the front cheeks on either side of the back of the barrel.”

Smith found what he assumed were what Proud was talking about; two metal plates that secured the rod and spring in place.

“Now,” Proud said, “slide the bolt carrier on and clip on the assembly spring.”

There were not many parts left in the case. Smith picked up a rectangular piece of metal and slotted it into the only place where it would fit.

“We haven’t got much time left,” Proud said.

Smith wiped his forehead but his hand was covered in oil and he merely replaced the perspiration with gun oil.

“I told you,” he said, “I’ve never done this before.”

He clipped the final cover on.

“Almost there,” Proud said, “now insert the magazine. Of course it’s not loaded yet. I’m not that stupid.”

Smith slotted the magazine in just in front of the trigger.

“We’ll worry about the scope later,” Proud said, “I need to set it first. It’s time you got in a bit of practice. We can start by shooting at rocks from the top of the cliff.”

Sarah Proud made Smith pick up the rifle and nudged him outside with her own gun. The rain was pouring down as they left the cottage and headed for the cliff top where only the night before they had lay huddled together drinking whisky. Smith looked over the edge of the cliff down to the cove below.

I've been so stupid, he thought, this woman has hooked me in without me even knowing about it. He thought about making a run for it down the path towards the sea but he realised it would be futile. What would he do? Make a swim for it? From what he knew of Sarah Proud, she would shoot him before he even reached the water.

"Put the rifle down," Proud ordered.

Smith laid the Dragunov on the grass.

"Stand back," Proud pointed to a pile of rocks about twenty metres away.

Smith walked over to the rocks, sat down and took out his cigarettes. He lit one and watched as Sarah Proud inserted the cartridges into the magazine and set about aligning the telescopic scope. She had finished before he had even smoked the cigarette half way down.

"Get back over here," she said.

She handed Smith the rifle.

"Rest it on this rock here," she pointed to a flat piece of stone on the top of the cliff.

"We're in luck," she said, "there are a couple of gannets perched on the other side of the cove. Perfect target practice."

Smith was starting to feel sick. He did not want to shoot anything even if it was just a sea bird. He was not sure if he had it in him to kill another living creature.

"Look through the scope," Proud said, "make sure the gannet is in the centre cross and gently squeeze the trigger."

Smith tried to think of something else as he gazed through the scope. A large drop of rain landed on the scope Smith jumped. He was amazed at how clear everything was through this tiny scope. He focussed on the gannet. It seemed to fill up his whole field of vision. He closed his eyes and squeezed his finger on the trigger.

"Wait," Sarah Proud shouted, "I forgot to warn you about the recoil."

It was too late. The report of the rifle reverberated through the cove. The two gannets took flight. Smith had missed.

Smith's heart was beating harder than he could remember it beating before; it felt like it was about to leave his body.

"It's quite a buzz isn't it?" Proud said, "Just wait until you actually hit what you're aiming at. There's no way to describe the feeling; it's better than sex. Now try again and this time I'll try not to distract you."

Smith looked back through the telescopic sight. He spotted something out of the corner of his eye. There was something in the water about two hundred metres offshore. It looked like some kind of tourist vessel. He moved the rifle to the side until the boat was in his sights. He could see the faces of the people on the boat quite clearly. He suddenly came up with an idea. He did not want to hurt anybody so he scanned the boat for something to shoot at far away from the passengers. He spotted a large orange mooring buoy on the stern of the boat. He let the buoy fill the centre of the scope and he pressed his finger on the trigger. He watched as the buoy exploded at the back of the boat. The screams from the tourists could be heard from the top of the cliff.

Sarah Proud snatched the Dragunov from Smith and hit him in the stomach with the barrel. Smith felt like he had been hit with a sledgehammer. He doubled up and lay on the ground.

"Nice shot," Proud said, "but I know exactly what you were trying to do. Every available police officer from the mainland will be on the island soon when the report goes out about some maniac shooting at a tourist boat. That was a very stupid thing to do."

Smith tried to get up but the pain in his stomach was unbearable. Sarah Proud released the safety catch on her handgun and pointed it at Smith's head.

"From now on," she said, "you shoot at only what I tell you to."

SIXTY NINE

The two men drove out of the car park of The Crag Inn and headed north. The rain was falling lightly on the windscreen of their Land Rover.

"The stone cottage is on the far north east of the island," the man known as Viktor Boronov said, "it shouldn't be too difficult to find."

"I've got a map," the man who was driving the Land Rover said, "Just in case. Anyway, this is a small island. How hard can it be to find two people on an island like this? We've tracked down people in large cities before."

"Don't underestimate who we're dealing with here," Boronov said, "Nadia is a born killer; she has the instincts of a wolf and the police detective seems to be bullet proof. I've never come across anybody like him before."

"We'll get them," the driver said.

"Them?" Boronov sounded angry, "We're here for Nadia remember. The policeman is not to be harmed."

They turned left onto a smaller road. A sign for Castlehead was pasted on a small rock by the side of the road. The grey skies and the drizzle oozing out of the sky reminded Boronov of Talinn in November. He stared out of the window and a scene from his childhood played out in his head. It was two years after his parents had been killed. Boronov had been caught stealing cigarettes from a tobacco kiosk in the centre of the city and he had been sent to a juvenile detention centre. It was November and the first signs of winter could be felt all over the city. The days were dark and wet and the night time temperatures plummeted below zero. Boronov had been involved in a fight with an older

boy over something insignificant; an apple or something, Boronov could not quite remember but it had sparked an argument. Boronov had stabbed the boy in the ear drum with a pencil. He still remembered the sound of the boy's screams. In the commotion that followed, Boronov had managed to escape the detention centre. He ran like his life depended on it. He ran until his legs could take it no longer and he found shelter in a shop doorway. As night came and the rain turned to sleet and then to snow, the temperature had dropped to minus fifteen degrees. When they found him the next morning he was barely alive. The doctor in the hospital where he was taken claimed he should not have survived the night in such harsh conditions. After two days in hospital, Boronov was released. He still remembered the words the doctor had spoken before he left. The doctor had asked him how he had managed to survive when anybody else would surely have perished from the cold. Boronov had looked the doctor straight in the eyes and said five simple words.

"I wasn't ready to die,"

Boronov shivered even though the heater in the Land Rover was on full. The clock on the dashboard said twelve thirty.

"We're close," he said, "I can feel it."

SEVENTY

The tide was almost out as Brad Friedman started the engine of the Land Rover. Chalmers, Whitton and Bridge were sitting in the back seat. Friedman had suggested they all go in one vehicle. Chalmers had parked his car in the shade of an old oak tree and Theakston was busy snoring on the back seat, oblivious to what was going on.

"Let's go then," Whitton was getting impatient.

The water had receded and the tarmac of the causeway was slowly emerging from the sea.

"I saw a video on You Tube once," Bridge said, "where a Land Rover crossed a river."

Chalmers looked at him as if he had said something irrelevant.

"The water was up to the windows," Bridge carried on undeterred, "let's go then. Isn't this what these vehicles were designed for?"

Friedman sighed and drove out of the car park. There were very few vehicles waiting to cross the causeway due to the weather. Friedman adeptly manoeuvred the Land Rover round a small Fiat at the front of the queue and headed towards the island.

Small waves were crashing over the road as they drove and when Whitton looked over at Chalmers she noticed he had gone very pale. He was holding on to the grab handles on the door and his knuckles were white.

"I'm getting too old for this kind of adventure," he said, "Give me a few pints and a quiet game of poker any day."

"This is cool," Bridge said, "it's like we're driving through the sea."

Whitton smiled and shook her head. She thought about Smith. She hoped he was still alright and they were not too late. Police sirens could be heard in the distance. Whitton looked out of the back window and saw three police cars with their lights flashing. They were parked at the front of the queue waiting for the water level to drop.

"I wonder what that's all about," Whitton said.

Friedman looked in his rear view mirror and turned the radio on. He adjusted the frequency and voices were heard over the speakers.

"Police frequency," he said, "comes in very handy sometimes."

They all listened to a report of a shot being fired at one of the pleasure cruisers two hundred metres offshore. The report stated that the shot came from the island.

"Who the hell would want to shoot at a bunch of tourists?" Chalmers said.

Whitton smiled.

"Smith's alright," she said.

They reached the island and Friedman parked the Land Rover next to the post office.

"What now?" He said, "Where do you suggest we start looking?"

"Can you talk over that thing too?" Whitton pointed to the radio.

"Of course," Friedman said, "I have full authorisation."

"Then find out where the shot came from," Whitton said, "find out where the tourist boat was. We find that out and we find out where Smith is."

"That's absurd," Friedman said, "we don't even know if he had anything to do with it."

"Just do it," Whitton said and realised how harsh it sounded.

"Whitton's right," Chalmers said, "this is Smith's doing."

Friedman switched on the radio.

“All units,” he spoke into the microphone, “we’re on the island now. Can you give me a location of where the gunshot came from? The one that was fired at the tourist boat.”

There was silence on the radio. Friedman repeated the question.

“The boat was rounding the north east side of the island,” a man with a very high pitched voice said, “We estimate the shot came from Castlehead or thereabouts.”

“Thank you,” Friedman said.

“Who is this?” the high pitched voice asked, “we have no units on the island yet.”

Friedman thought for a second.

“The Incredible Hulk,” he said and turned the radio off.

Michael Young looked at Friedman. He had a puzzled look on his face.

“You won’t like me when I’m angry,” Friedman said, “Do we have a map of the island?”

Young turned on the GPS.

“I’m afraid Friedman is a bit old fashioned,” he said.

He typed in Castlehead, Holy Island and the GPS started to search for satellites. It located their current location and a detailed map appeared on the screen.

“Turn left,” the voice of Daffy Duck was heard over the speakers.

“My daughter,” Young said, “she’s five. She thinks the GPS is cool.”

Friedman followed Daffy Duck’s directions until the cartoon duck announced, “You have reached your destination.”

“This can’t be right,” Chalmers looked out of the window, “there’s nothing here but an old castle. Where’s the cottage?”

“It can’t be far from here,” Whitton looked at their position on the GPS screen, “We’re at the north east of the island; it can’t be too far from here.”

She got out of the car and looked around. She walked up an overgrown path to the top of a crag. The view was breathtaking. The sea in front of her looked wild. The wind had picked up and spray was coming off the waves. She spotted something out of the corner of her eye. There was something shiny lying on the ground in between two small rocks. She bent down to see what it was. It was a metal casing. She picked it up, put it in her pocket and walked back towards the Land Rover.

"Does anybody know what this is?" she took the metal casing out of her pocket.

Friedman took it off her and held it up in front of his face.

"Dragunov," he said, "this is the shell from a Dragunov SV sniper rifle. We're close."

SEVENTY ONE

"They're close," Sarah Proud said to Smith, "I can feel it. They're very close."

They had returned to the cottage. Proud was loading cartridges into the magazine of the rifle.

"You will do exactly what I say," she said, "and if you're lucky you will leave this island with your life."

Smith felt sick. The pain in his stomach seemed to be getting worse. He was sure that at least one of his ribs had been broken when Proud hit him with the rifle.

"This is what's going to happen," Proud slotted the magazine into the rifle, "you're going to stay by the window with the rifle. Don't worry; I'll have my gun on you the whole time in case you decide to do something crazy. Boronov knows we're here and he's not stupid. This is not going to be easy."

"Why don't you just hide behind a tree and shoot him when he appears?" Smith said, "Why do I have to do it?"

"I thought you hated him," Proud said, "He took your sister all those years ago. He killed her. Your life would be totally different now if it weren't for Boronov."

Sarah Proud was right. Smith thought back to his first few months in York after his sister had disappeared and his mother had sent him to live in England. He had hated every single minute of it. The darkness and the cold had depressed him. He had been an outcast at school with his strange accent and Australian ways. He had very few friends when he was younger, growing up in York. If it was not for that day on the beach in Western

Australia, who know what he would be doing now. He would probably be a lifeguard on Fremantle beach.

"You can't do it can you?" Smith said.

"What?" Proud looked shocked.

"You can't kill your own brother," Smith said, "no matter how much you claim to hate him, no matter what you think he's done to you, you can't bear the thought of pulling that trigger and ending his life."

"Nonsense," Proud said, "Viktor Boronov means nothing to me."

"Then why make me do it? What if I miss? I'm not exactly a hot shot with a rifle."

"You managed to hit that mooring buoy perfectly well," Proud said, "the boat was moving quite quickly but you hit it nevertheless."

"Did you use me all along?" Smith changed the subject, "I thought we had some kind of a bond."

Sarah proud laughed.

"You were a means to an end," she said, "any emotions I ever had died when Nadia Boronov died. Now shut up with this nonsense."

Smith realised he had touched a nerve and kept quiet.

Sarah Proud walked towards the window and peered out. She opened the window slightly; just enough for the tip of the rifle to fit through.

"Sit here," she ordered.

Smith did as he was told. He eased the end of the rifle through the gap in the window.

"Shoot at that tree over there," Proud said.

She pointed to an old oak tree about fifty metres away.

“There’s a dead branch on the left,” she said, “see if you can shoot it off.”

Smith rested the rifle on his shoulder and looked through the scope. He centred the scope on the dead branch where it met the tree stump and gently pulled the trigger. The bang of the rifle made him jump. He looked out of the window and saw that the branch on the left hand side of the tree was gone, together with half of the tree. He had hit the target.

“You’re ready,” Sarah Proud said.

SEVENTY TWO

The sound of the gunshot made Whitton jump. Her heartbeat was getting faster. She looked out the window of the Land Rover and saw a grouse take flight from the heather. The gun shot had obviously startled it.

"It came from over there," Friedman pointed to the right.

He took a large handgun from the glove compartment and opened the barrel to double check that it was loaded. Michael Young also took out a gun although his seemed much smaller than Friedman's.

"Wait in the Land Rover," Friedman said to Chalmers, Whitton and Bridge, "we'll let you know when everything is clear."

He started to walk slowly in the direction of where the gun shot was heard. Young followed closely behind him. They came to a hill top and crouched down. Another Land Rover was parked less than fifty metres from them. They spotted the stone cottage a hundred metres further on. They watched as a man walked purposefully towards the cottage.

"I can see him," Smith whispered to Sarah Proud, "he's coming towards the cottage."

Sarah Proud took out a pair of binoculars and focused them on the spot where Smith had pointed. She watched as the man stopped to examine an oak tree. It was the tree that Smith had just shot at. The man was wearing a hat and a pair of sunglasses even though the sun was nowhere in sight.

"I thought you said Boronov was smart," Smith said, "he's a shooting duck out there. He's just waiting for me to shoot him."

"Shoot him then," Proud said, "and make sure you don't miss. You'll only get one chance believe me."

Smith trained the rifle on the man next to the tree. He was still crouched down by the dead branch. He seemed different to how Smith remembered Wolfie or Boronov to be although Talinn seemed a very long time ago now. Smith had him in the centre of the telescopic sight.

"Do it," Proud said.

Smith's finger curled around the trigger but something was stopping him from pressing it. Some subconscious neurone in his brain was sending a signal to the finger to prevent him from killing another human being.

"It's him or you," Proud cocked her gun.

Smith still had the man in his sights. He closed his eyes and pulled the trigger.

The blast of the rifle drowned out the sound of the door of the cottage being opened. Smith opened his eyes and heard a familiar voice.

"Hello Nadia."

Boronov was standing in the doorway. He was pointing a gun at Sarah Proud. Proud said something in a language Smith could not understand but from the intonation in her voice he could tell she was not indulging in pleasantries.

"Nadia," Boronov said, "where are your manners? Speak in English in front of our guest. I'm sure the detective hasn't learned to speak Estonian in the two years since we last met."

"You?" Proud said, "How?"

"You shot a good friend of mine Jason Smith." Boronov stared at him.

His black eyes bored deep into Smith's soul.

"You see," he said, "people are willing to die for me. Are you willing to die for her?"

He hit Proud so hard on the cheek with the barrel of his gun that Smith flinched for her.

"Get out," Boronov said to Smith, "my fight is not with you."

Smith looked into his black eyes. This was the man who had changed the course of his life. This was the man who was responsible for the death of his sister.

"But my fight is with you," Smith said.

He realised it was probably the most stupid thing he had ever said but the blood inside his body felt like it was boiling. The anger that had caused many sleepless nights and even more guilt induced hangovers had taken over. He did not know how he managed to do it but before Boronov and Proud knew what was happening he managed to swing the Dragunov round, point it at Boronov and pull the trigger.

Smith looked down at Boronov. He was lying on the floor of the cottage. Smith sank down to his knees. Boronov started to laugh. It was the most sinister laugh Smith had ever heard.

"The Dragunov is an amazing sniper rifle," Boronov said, "the best weapon for long distance assassinations but at close range it's basically useless."

Smith stood up and looked at the gaping hole in the roof of the cottage where the bullet had entered. He swung the rifle at Boronov with all his strength. Boronov raised his arm in defence and there was a loud crack. Boronov screamed as the bones in his lower arm were shattered. Smith dropped the rifle and ran out of the cottage.

SEVENTY THREE

Smith did not know where he was going; he just ran and ran. He found himself at the top of the cliff overlooking the cove where only the day before he had swam semi naked with Sarah Proud without a care in the world. He heard the sound of a gunshot coming from the cottage and his heart started to beat faster. He was exhausted but the adrenalin was being pumped through his body. He looked down at the beach below. The waves were higher today. For some reason he wondered if the surfing was good in this part of the world. He heard another gunshot. He stepped onto the path down to the beach and started to run. Halfway down he lost his footing and fell. He hit his head against a rock and blacked out for a second or two.

"I must keep going" he said out loud but there was nowhere to hide on the beach.

He thought hard for a second and decided that going back in the direction of the cottage was not an option. Blood was trickling down his face from where he had hit his head on the rock. He reached the beach and looked up to the top of the cliff. There was somebody up there and they were on their way down. The rain had started to fall heavier and he could not see who it was. He ran along the beach and came to the other side of the cove. The rocks were too high to climb. There was no way out. The figure on the path was already half way down. Smith did not know if it was his imagination but he was sure there was a second figure coming down the path after the first. Proud and Boronov, he thought.

Smith looked at the sea in front of him. The angry surf was spitting spray high in the air.

"Fuck it," he screamed and ran as fast as he could towards the water.

He crashed into a wave and carried on running. A flood of memories flashed behind his eyelids as the cold North Sea water splashed in his face. The surf in Fremantle; the pleasure of catching the perfect wave and the feeling of elation on the beach afterwards when he looked out to sea and realised he had conquered one of the monster waves out there.

Smith held his breath and dived into the next wave. He closed his eyes and concentrated on swimming as far out as possible. He broke the surface to take another lungful of air and dived under again. He swam and swam under the water. His lungs felt like they were going to explode. He broke the surface again and looked back towards the beach. Sarah Proud was standing on the beach close to the breaking waves. The second figure was nowhere to be seen. It must have been my imagination, Smith thought.

Smith felt exhausted now; he felt like he could swim no more but he had to keep going. What had Sarah Proud said? He thought. There's nothing but water between here and Denmark. He knew he would never make it to Denmark. It was no use. He could not swim any further; the current was too strong. The tide was coming in and he found himself being pulled back towards the shore. He lay on his back and started up at the sky. A patch of blue sky had appeared and the sun was trying to break through the clouds.

"Boronov is dead," Sarah Proud screamed over the sound of the waves.

Smith realised the tide had carried him right back to the beach. He stood up and collapsed straight away. His legs felt like jelly. He stood up again on his trembling legs and looked straight at Sarah Proud.

"Boronov is dead," Proud said again.

She was pointing her gun at Smith.

"Good bye Jason," she said.

The sound of his name coming from her lips sounded like pure evil. He knew what was about to happen.

Smith heard the click of the gun as it was cocked and closed his eyes. He waited for the bang. All he could think about was his dog, Theakston. He wondered who would be able to look after him. For some reason he suddenly remembered that his house had burned down and he had lost his job. He thought about what would be said about him at his funeral. He did not have The Ghoul's foresight; he had not prepared anything in advance. All of these thoughts were processed in the split second before the blast of the gun was heard. Smith fell onto the sand and felt the waves crashing over his head.

Smith looked up at the sky. The sun was shining down now and the rain had stopped. He turned his head and looked towards the beach. An old lady was standing there. She was looking at something on the sand. She had what looked like a shotgun in her hand. Smith managed to stand up but his vision went black for a few seconds. He waited for the darkness to dissipate and managed to get onto the beach. Sarah Proud was lying on her back. She had a gaping wound in her stomach. The old lady approached Smith and lowered the shotgun.

“I knew she was a baddun,” Mary McDougal sighed, “I knew it as soon as I set eyes on her. We don’t need the likes of her on this island.”

Smith was gobsmacked.

“Come on love,” Mary said, “let’s get you out of here and get you dry; you’ll catch your death down here.”

EPILOGUE

Smith sat opposite the log fire in the small stone house that Mary and Harold McDougal called home. He was sipping on a cup of coffee. He was wearing a woolly jumper of Harold's that was at least two sizes too small for him. Whitton and Bridge were sitting on the other side of the room. Brad Friedman was talking to somebody on his mobile phone. Smith put the coffee mug down on a black table on the middle of the room.

"Have you ever heard of William of Occum?" he said to Mary McDougal, "Occum's Razor?"

"No," Mary said, "does he live on the island?"

"Isn't he that bloke who thought he was clever by stating the bloody obvious?" Harold McDougal walked in and sat in his usual chair, "Phoney bastard if you ask me."

"Harold," Mary cast him an admonitory glance.

"Well," Harold said, "anybody can see what's in front of their eyes can't they."

Smith smiled. Friedman ended his call and sat next to Smith.

"What happened to Boronov?" Smith asked him.

"Gone," Friedman said, "vanished into thin air. No doubt he'll pop up again somewhere."

Smith took a long drink of the coffee.

"How are you feeling sir?" Whitton said.

"I don't know," Smith said, "I've just had my life saved by an old lady with a shotgun."

Mary McDougal laughed.

“Occum’s Razor,” she said, “its funny how we don’t see what’s right in front of us sometimes isn’t it?”

She looked at Smith and then at Whitton. Whitton started to blush.

“Where’s Chalmers?” Smith said.

“Young took him to get his car,” Bridge said, “He should be here just now. He went to fetch something of yours.”

Right on cue, Chalmers walked in. Theakston ran in behind him. He ran up to Smith and jumped on his lap. Smith felt like he was going to cry. He thought he might never see Theakston again.

“Good news,” Chalmers said, “your jobs safe. I spoke to Smyth and he said it was just a simple misunderstanding. Silly old fool. I still need to talk to you about the Inspector post.”

Smith stood up and walked outside. Theakston followed after him.

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