

HAYCHESTER

Security Novels Series - Episode XIII



John M Upton

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Episode I - Hainault	Episode XII – Marylebone
Episode II - Holborn	Episode XIII – Haychester
Episode III – Waterloo	Episode XIV – Bank
Episode IV - Moor Park	Episode XV – Leytonstone
Episode V – Westminster	Episode XVI – London Bridge
Episode VI – Victoria	Episode XVII – Cannon Street
Episode VII – Embankment	Episode XVIII – Bethnal Green
Episode VIII – Earl’s Court	Episode XIX – Turnpike Lane
Episode IX – Lewisham	Episode XX – Star Lane
Episode X – Epping	Episode XXI – St. James’s Park
Episode XI – Liverpool Street	Episode XXII - Aldwych

Coming Soon:

Episode XXIII – Nine Elms
Episode XXIII – Priory Park
Episode XXIV – Tottenham Court Road

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Haychester

"Hello, yes?" Divisional Commander Tracy Caverner, the head of the London Metropolitan Division of the Department of National Security, Police & Civil Defence Service called as the telephone ringing interrupted her intended afternoon of sifting through endless paperwork for the umpteenth time.

"I'm sorry to interrupt again Maam" the switchboard operator downstairs in the main New Scotland Yard communications centre responded apologetically "There is a Commander Al Longton from the Haychester Office on line three wanting to speak to the Regional Administrator General."

"Oh right" Tracy replied, her tone becoming more positive upon recognising the name of an old friend and former colleague in the service although her husband the Regional Administrator General in whose office she was sitting on the top floor of New Scotland Yard knew him far better "Best put him through then."

"Al? It's Tracy, how are you?" she called as soon as the call was put through.

"Oh not too bad thanks" Longton remarked "Haychester is the same as it ever was, a quiet sleepy county town in the middle of a quiet sleepy county."

"I'm jealous" Tracy responded with a wry smile "London seems to have turned into a lunatic asylum of late, every nut, goon and loon seems to have declared it open season since we got rid of Temple-Smythe's bunch" she remarked looked with distain through the larger pile of files on the desk.

"I have to admit I never really liked the big city" Longton confirmed "Always was a country lad myself, so is the Commander in some way, well for as long as I have known him at any rate."

"So what can I do for you?" Tracy asked.

"Well actually I was hoping to get a hold of your husband" Longton explained.

"He is away for the weekend with Jack" Tracy confirmed "Something I can help you with?" she asked.

"Maybe" Longton confirmed "It's about an old case he and I worked on down here a very long time ago, some new information has cropped up and I was hoping he could take a look at it for me as quite frankly we are well and truly stumped."

"Well I have to go and pick those two renegades of mine up later this afternoon" Tracy confirmed "How about I ask him to give you a call when I see him?"

"That would be great thank you" Longton agreed "It is probably nothing but I reckoned it wouldn't hurt to run this by him and see if anything rings any bells."

"This isn't something that is going to wind up with us being shot at by any chance?" Tracy asked with more than a hint of sarcasm "Only we seemed to have got through quite a lot of ruined uniforms of late" she admitted.

"I doubt it" Longton confirmed with a laugh "We have only strictly third rate criminals down in this leafy part of the world these days, we seemed to have sent all the lunatics in your direction."

"There must be something about this crazy city that draws them in" Tracy agreed.

"So where is the Commander then?" Longton inquired "Not like him to take time off."

"Insistence of the Prime Minister" Tracy explained "All three of us were given the weekend off by executive order, I only returned this morning and the two men in my life will be back tonight."

"This Jack" Longton asked "I take it he is the newly adopted son?"

"The same" Tracy confirmed "He is a great lad and at the moment he and my husband are indulging their mutual passion for large metallic objects that run on rails."

"Why am I not surprised?" Longton joked.

"Years of experience?" Tracy remarked wryly.

"Could well be" Longton confirmed "Some things never change really. Look, I will be in my office in Haychester from about five o'clock onwards if you can get him to call me?"

"Will do" Tracy confirmed "Good to hear from you" she confirmed.

"You too" Longton agreed "Good bye." With that Longton hung up and then returned his mobile telephone to the inside pocket of his uniform tunic before leaving the Security Service patrol car and proceeding over to a group of forensics officers by the edge of the Haychester Rife who were proceeding to examine a large suitcase which had been dragged out during dredging work to improve the drainage.

"Barrett!" Longton called to the young female officer supervising the retrieval and examination of the case just as it was opened and those gathered around it all recoiled with shock at what was revealed inside "Is it what I think it is?" he asked.

"Yes Sir" Lieutenant Barrett confirmed "Looks like we have got another one."

"Baynards and Christ's Hospital only!" the Commander called as he looked up and down the platform of Slinfold station on the preserved steam railway that linked Guildford and Christ's Hospital along the Surrey and Sussex border.

This weekend the Commander was enjoying a rare weekend off as a volunteer on the line, today dressed in full 1950's British Railways guard uniform and in charge of the 16:45 departure from Slinfold bound for Christ's Hospital.

Watching from the footplate of the M7 class 0-4-4T type steam locomotive was the Commander's recently adopted son Jack, a very intelligent and ever resourceful twelve year old who was enjoying himself thoroughly that weekend as driver's mate.

The only missing member of the family was of course Tracy and even she had been on duty as the Station Master at Baynards the rest of the weekend, returning to London just that morning to resume duty leaving the two men in her life to enjoy playing with their big steam trains.

"Ok" the porter on the platform called up to the Commander who responded by checking his old pocket watch before blowing his whistle and climbing aboard the guard's compartment door at the rear of the packed three coach train.

"Let's go then" the Commander called and with a further two blows on the whistle and a wave of the traditional green flag, he signalled the right away.

Amidst a cloud of steam, the brakes were released and with the locomotive being brought to life like the sudden awakening of a sleeping dragon, the train began to move off.

With Jack helping out on the footplate shovelling coal as furiously as he could despite his small stature and the Commander walking through the train checking tickets, it did not seem long before the train was pulling into the immaculately restored station serving the small village of Baynards.

"Your next stop on this service is Baynards" the Commander announced over the rather basic public address system on board that dated back to the early 1930's before leaning out of the guard's compartment window to observe the approach to the very rural single platform station.

The Commander was enjoying himself immensely and his joy increased significantly when he noticed as the train drew in a familiar lady in full Security Service uniform waiting for his arrival on the platform.

"Hello love" the Commander called as the train juddered to a halt whereupon he stepped out onto the platform where he and Tracy greeted each other with a hug and a kiss "You're early" he remarked.

"I thought I would surprise you love" Tracy explained amid a beaming smile "Don't tell anyone but I sneaked off a little bit early."

"I have always taken the attitude that as long as you are in uniform, you are never off duty, speaking of which" the Commander remarked as he dutifully opened a carriage door to allow Tracy on board before proceeding to check up and down the platform to ensure all were aboard prior to departure.

Tracy settled back in the lovingly restored interior of the 1930's styled First Class compartment and watched through the open droplight window as her husband duly signalled with whistle and green flag to depart before boarding himself and joining her.

"So where's Jack then?" Tracy asked as they sat together holding hands whilst the train proceeded onwards.

"Up front shovelling his heart out" the Commander confirmed "I don't think I have seen anyone more enthusiastic or happy as he has been this weekend."

"After what he has been through the last couple of years" Tracy remarked "He deserves the chance to enjoy himself and have some fun for a change."

"Indeed" the Commander agreed "I have virtually had to drag him away at the end of each shift, the only thing that gets him to move is the thought of ringing a certain young lady."

"Do you think I should ring Megan's parents and warn them to start saving up for the wedding?" Tracy joked.

"Probably not a bad idea" the Commander admitted.

"Speaking of ringing" Tracy remembered "Al Longton called looking to talk to you."

"Interesting" the Commander remarked "Did he mention what it was he wanted to talk about?"

"Apparently he has found something that maybe related to an old case from your days down at Haychester" Tracy explained "He asks if you wouldn't mind giving him a call so he can run it by you?"

"Yes, I'll do that, thanks love" the Commander confirmed as he thought back to the past speculating on which of the many cases he has dealt with over the years it could possibly be.

"Is there any chance you can get me at least some idea by the morning?" Commander Al Longton, Area Commander of the National Security & Police Service for the district of Haychester and greater Sussex asked as he entered the main reception area of the Haychester office walking briskly alongside Dr Stephen Grant of the Regional Forensic Science Division.

"If we work through the night, we can have at least the preliminary data for you by first thing" Dr Grant confirmed.

"Thank you" Longton responded, the sense of major urgency readily apparent "I will settle for times and cause of death for the moment but an early positive I.D. will earn you extra brownie points Doctor."

"I will see what I can do" Dr Grant readily agreed.

"Anything you find, call me as no one here is going to be getting any sleep tonight" Longton confirmed before the two men headed off in different directions whereupon Longton met up with one of his best young officers, Lieutenant Barrett who was waiting to intercept her superior officer by the Reception Desk.

"Lieutenant Barrett" Longton declared "Do you use some form of teleport to flit from place to place unnoticed?" he joked.

"No Sir" Barrett confirmed "but I did just get back from the River Authority office" she explained as she handed across a battered looking old file "I managed to find out when the last time any heavy dredging and other maintenance was done on the Haychester Rife."

"Let me guess" Longton responded as they walked together up the main central corridor of the site towards the main operations command building "About eighteen years ago?" he asked.

"Spot on Sir" the Lieutenant confirmed.

"Oh Lordy" Longton looked upwards seemingly in a moment of despair "I hate it when I am right."

"Excuse me Sir?" Barrett asked, slightly confused by her superior officer's reaction to this information.

"It is a long old story Lieutenant" Longton confirmed "One I had hoped was long since buried."

"Commander Longton" an announcement came over the public address system "Call for you on line three."

"Whisky Hotel Alpha One Zero One to Control" Longton called into his radio "Is that call from who I think it is?" he asked as they entered the main office building and began to head up the stairs to the second floor.

"Yes Sir" came the confirmation "He is apparently calling from a railway station somewhere."

"No surprises there then" Longton remarked "All right I will take it in my office in a minute" he confirmed.

"Something I should know about Sir?" Barrett asked as they proceeded along the second floor corridor until they reached Longton's office.

"Maybe later" Longton confirmed as he opened the door "Meantime, you had best call your boyfriend, cat, dog, mother, budgie, whoever you share your social life with and

tell them you are likely to be rather late getting home" he confirmed before entering the office and closing the door.

"You get a social life in this job?" Barrett remarked to herself with amusement before heading off to the general investigation office down the corridor.

Jack was proudly showing his adopted mother Tracy around the resting M7 class locomotive number 30049 at the north end of the Guildford branch platforms at Christ's Hospital Station whilst they waited for the Commander who was using the vintage public telephone on the platform to make his call.

"Hello, Al?" the Commander called "It's your old boss, I heard you were looking for me."

"Hello Commander" Longton responded as he relaxed just a little in his office chair "Thanks for calling. Sorry to be dragging you away from your trains on your rare time off but something has cropped up and to be honest I need your help."

"Do tell" the Commander asked, sufficiently intrigued.

"Operation Chimera" Longton responded ominously.

"Now there is a blast from the past" the Commander confirmed "What of it dare I ask?"

"To kick off" Longton explained "a suitcase was dragged out of the City canal basin at about lunchtime, nothing unusual about that you might think, there is crap of all sorts from old bottles to brass bedsteads dumped in there all the time."

"Except when you opened the case..." the Commander responded.

"...we found two dismembered limbs" Longton confirmed "Ring any bells?"

"Yeah..." the Commander confirmed with regret "Same as the Operation Chimera case" he admitted.

"About two hours ago another case turned up, the other two limbs but this time dredged up out of the Haychester Rife" Longton explained "Of course there is a sting in this particularly unpleasant little tale."

"Go on..." the Commander prompted.

"Do you recall at the time what happened?" Longton asked "Two major cases at the same time."

"How could I forget" the Commander recalled "My first day on the job and the entire Department is running around trying to nail this serial killer when some klutz decides

to use the opportunity to do some particularly violent wages snatches and so I get to spend my first days chasing armed robbers across the county."

"You remember that idea you floated back then" Longton asked "The possibility that the two cases are connected in some way?"

"Oh yes I remember" the Commander confirmed "I also remember Divisional Commander Bordon shooting that idea down in flames when I suggested it."

"Well how about this for a phoenix like rise of an old idea" Longton explained as he picked up a clear plastic evidence bag from his desk and looked at the badly damaged banknotes contained inside "Both of our body part discoveries were carefully wrapped in old banknotes of exactly the same type, age and issue as those that went walkies in your wages snatch incidents."

"Good God..." the Commander responded with astonishment.

"I don't suppose you fancy popping down to your old stomping ground and helping a friend with a problem?" Longton suggested.

"Have a gander over the evidence and see if anything rings any bells?" the Commander asked.

"Something like that yes" Longton confirmed.

"I'll be down on the first train" the Commander agreed "Make sure the kettle is on when I get there."

"Will do" Longton confirmed "and thanks again."

The Commander hung up the telephone and went over to the locomotive where he found Tracy and Jack standing on the platform alongside the cab.

"That's ironic" the Commander remarked as he saw them standing there "I have a family photograph from when I was about six with me standing in that very spot."

"Life has a habit of dishing up little coincidences like that from time to time I tend to find" Tracy commented "Speaking of which, what's up?"

"Is it that obvious?" the Commander asked even though he knew full well Tracy possessed the ability to read him like a book.

"Short of a large flashing sign over your head and a chorus line passing through singing 'there may be trouble ahead' yes" Tracy confirmed with a knowing smile.

"I will explain on the way" the Commander confirmed.

"On the way to where?" Jack asked looking between his two adopted parents wondering what was going on.

"I do believe young Jack me lad" Tracy concluded "We are off to Haychester."

"Initial forensics report on our first suitcase full of body parts" Barrett confirmed as she came into Longton's office and handed over a file.

"Is this going to make me grumpy and irritable Lieutenant?" Longton asked.

"It depends on how grumpy and irritable you already are having told your wife you are going to be late tonight Sir" Barrett admitted.

"That bad huh?" Longton confirmed as he picked up the file and opened it to find one single sheet of paper which he held aloft with a look of some surprise "Edited highlights I take it?" he asked.

"They haven't been able to find much on it" Barrett admitted.

"They have had it in their lab for the best part of six hours now" Longton remarked as he began to read the rather scant report "Usually by now we get something a little more entertaining than this even if it is just vague guesswork."

"Two arms, no fingerprints as they had been sliced off" Barrett summarised the already brief report "The bank notes they were wrapped up in were definitely early 1980's issue according to Jerry over in the Forgery Division."

"Tell me Lieutenant" Longton asked as he put down the report "What do you know of an investigation once conducted in this very Department called Operation Chimera?"

"Rather nasty murder case about eighteen or twenty years ago I think" Barrett recalled "I think my dad was one of the officers involved with it."

"This is exactly the same as the way those body parts were found all those years ago" Longton confirmed "Trouble is the guy who did it was caught, jailed and the hung himself down at the Crown Court half an hour before the trial was due to start."

"What about the money?" Barrett asked "That seems a bit odd?"

"Well spotted" Longton responded "The old banknote wrapping is a new twist but with an old connection."

"I'm sorry, I don't understand" Barrett responded clearly confused.

"So am I Lieutenant" Longton confirmed "That is why I am expecting the arrival of an expert, he should be arriving at Haychester Station in about an hour."

"Who is it?" Barrett asked.

"You will see" Longton replied knowingly as he sat back with a knowledgeable smirk.

"Passengers for Haychester and stations to Portsmouth Harbour must travel in the front four carriages of this eight car train" the Conductor aboard the service to Portsmouth Harbour and Bognor Regis announced as it set off from the southbound main line platform at Christ's Hospital Station.

As the eight car formation of Class 377 Electrostar stock accelerated away, Tracy, Jack and the Commander took their seats around a table in the front car.

"Tell me love" the Commander asked "Did you ever come across the Operation Chimera investigation?"

"I remember some of it" Tracy recalled "It was towards the end of my training and it was all the talk of the academy at the time."

"Al has got two suitcases of bodies, well bits of at any rate" the Commander explained "The way they were disposed of and found is identical to the Chimera victim."

"You were involved with that investigation?" Tracy asked.

"Well yes and no" the Commander responded "It's complicated you see. On the day that the inquiry really took off, I was a very new arrival, in fact it was my first day in the job."

"Oh now this I want to hear" Tracy declared full of interest "Please do go on love" she prompted eagerly.

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For Samuel Edwards, the Commander's adopted name ever since he was taken into the care of his foster parents at the age of thirteen, the new uniform tunic still did not feel quite right despite having had it adjusted three times now.

Even as he looked at himself in the mirror resplendent in the neatly pressed uniform of a junior Lieutenant of then embryonic Security Service, he was still not entirely comfortable.

"Hey Sam, you ready to go?" the Commander's adopted father Divisional Superintendent Jim Edwards called as he looked around the bedroom door.

"I'm not absolutely sure if I were to be perfectly honest" Sam admitted "The shoulders don't feel right."

"Oh that is just the standard issue cheap tailoring" Edwards confirmed "All of our officer uniforms are the same, utterly useless in the field."

“It will have to do I guess” Sam admitted as he went over to the bedside cabinet and from the drawer retrieved his Service issue six shot revolver which he then secured in the belt mounted holster on his left hip.

“You still got that old thing?” Edwards asked with a bit of astonishment. Even back then many of the Service's officers were going over to more modern handguns so for any officer especially a youngster to choose the old six shooter was most unusual.

“This saved my life once not so long ago” Sam confirmed recalling with some discomfort the day almost a year earlier when he had used it to defend his life and that of his colleagues during what would later be known as the incident investigated through the Hainault Inquiry.

Sam took one final look in the mirror and removed a small bit of fluff that had caught on the row of four medal ribbons before with a deep breath, leaving his room and proceeding downstairs where both his adopted parents were waiting to see how he looked in full uniform for the first time.

“So what do you think?” Sam asked slightly nervously.

“You will do fine lad” Edwards confirmed with a firm reassurance “Now are you sure you don't want to travel into Haychester with me?” he asked.

“With all due respect” Sam explained “I think it may be better if I arrived on my own, I may be your adopted son but I don't want anyone to think that there is anything special about me because of who my adopted father is within the service. I hope you understand?”

“Absolutely” Edwards agreed “No special treatment just as we agreed.”

“Right” Sam declared “I best be off then” and with that and a deep breath he left the house, walked through the typical country garden to the rural track at the end of the path and then turned left before walking the two hundred or so yards to the bus stop.

Half an hour later as the National Bus Company corporate leaf green painted Bristol VR type double deck bus of the grandly titled Southdown Motor Services company headed in towards Haychester, the spire of the City's cathedral could be seen on the skyline growing larger and more imposing as they got nearer.

Looking from the raised section of seating towards the rear of the lower deck, this was not the first time that Sam had been to Haychester by any stretch of the imagination but it was his first time that he had arrived there as an armed and fully qualified officer of the National Security Service and this meant he saw the City for the first time through slightly different eyes. He was however still unaware of exactly how much this place, its people and surroundings would shape him into the man known to all as the Commander over the coming years.

After calling at the Bus Station on the southern edge of the City Centre, the bus proceeded to travel up South Street before bearing left past the medieval Market Cross

and stopping in West Street opposite the Post Office and in the shadow of the cathedral.

The chimes of the cathedral bell tower clock struck eight as Sam alighted from the bus, thanking the driver as he stepped onto the pavement where he took a few moments to look around him, the serene and calm nature of the city broken only by the echo of the numerous buses that were passing through there at that early part of the morning rush or at least what passed for it in what was essentially a small provincial city in the heart of the Sussex countryside.

It was a ten minute walk through the streets at the west end of the city to reach the new regional offices of the fledgling National Security & Police Service and this was reflected as Sam arrived by the state of the buildings which were still largely under construction with areas taped off and encased in scaffolding.

The automatic door at the main entrance nearly caught Sam out as its two glass leaves slid shut almost upon him.

“Sorry Guv!” the engineer responsible for installing them apologised “Some idiot insisted we get these new fangled electric things and no matter what I try they won't bloody work!”

“I suppose we could always use them for cruel and unusual torture and interrogation” Sam mused wryly.

“New around here are you Sir?” the engineer asked as he got up from kneeling on the floor and switched off the power to the door mechanism having decided it was a non starter and best left turned off

“Is it that obvious?” Sam asked.

“Neatly pressed uniform and that slightly apprehensive look?” the engineer commented “Yep, I would say it was pretty obvious despite them four medal ribbons on you there.”

“I don't suppose they have finished the building the major investigations section of this place reside in yet have they?” Sam asked.

“Oh dear...” the engineer responded “Finished building yes, finished decorating, no” he confirmed “That neatly pressed uniform won't last long down there in C Block. I passed by there earlier, I tell you the way everyone was running around it was like the fall of Rome down there.”

“Something big on?” Sam asked.

“You tell me mate” the engineer admitted “I just work here.”

“So now do I it would appear” Sam admitted “Err which way?”

“Past the reception desk, down that corridor” the engineer pointed directly ahead
“Then keep going but if you reach the swamp, err I mean the car park then you have passed it.”

“Thanks” Sam responded.

“Good luck” the engineer called after him “You are going to need it.”

When Sam reached the separate building towards the back of the site, all seemed calm on the outside of the rather unimposing 1970's concrete office block which despite having been completed structurally still showed signs of several areas requiring finishing touches.

“Ah Lieutenant Edwards” called a voice from behind Sam as he was looking up at the exterior of the building.

“Superintendent Bordon” Sam responded saluting his superior officer who he knew well, as whilst back at the training academy Bordon had specifically asked for Sam to be allocated to the Haychester Division as soon as he was available on account of his proven excellence.

“You picked a hell of a day for your first assignment” Bordon remarked as he met up with Sam and shook his hand “Come on, I'll give you the tour” he confirmed as he led the way inside.

“Good grief” Sam remarked as he and Bordon emerged from the stairwell onto the second floor where they were greeted by the sight of numerous officers and civilian staff busily running up and down the corridor between the various offices and the area control room on that floor “Is it always as busy as this?” he asked.

“In sleepy Haychester?” Bordon responded “You must be joking, normally it is a pretty quiet part of the world but since last night things seemed to have changed just a tad.”

“It really does look like the fall of Rome” Sam commented.

“Haychester was originally built by the Romans so what did you expect?” Bordon remarked “Come on, I'll show you around.”

Superintendent Bordon duly led the way to his office a few doors down the corridor and invited the slightly apprehensive young officer inside before closing the door and taking his seat behind the large imposing desk that filled the small room almost to capacity.

“Sit down lad” Bordon instructed “If there is one thing I cannot stand it is people standing when there is a perfectly serviceable tax payer's funded chair available.”

“Err yes Sir” Sam confirmed as he sat down.

“Right” Bordon began “As you may have gathered, things are happening around here. We have had two particularly nasty murders in the last twelve hours and it looks like we have a serial killer on the loose.”

“Like you said Sir” Sam remarked “A hell of a day for a first assignment.”

“Oh you will be all right” Bordon confirmed “I know you didn't get those four medal ribbons on your chest for being studious with the paperwork, actually I hate paperwork, much prefer to be out there on the street feeling collars of bad guys and ensuring the safety and security of the citizens of this admittedly slightly strange City.”

“Yes indeed Sir” Sam agreed.

“Anyway, as a result, your section Commander is tied up with this investigation so that just leaves an old war horse like me to give you the tour” Bordon explained “In fact with so many of our people tied up to this serial killer thing, it means eyes have been taken off the ball in more domestic areas.”

“With the Service being only a matter of months old” Sam commented “There are a lot of people, particularly in the press still waiting with baited breath for our first major slip up as a unified Service, this serial killer investigation thing could be the making or the breaking of us.”

“I am glad you see it that way” Bordon agreed “Look I will be honest with you lad, I know what you went through recently and I know that you can look after yourself, I have been fully briefed on your colourful history by a certain mutual acquaintance from Thames House and quite frankly I need you intelligence and skills right now.”

“I will endeavour to serve to the best of my ability Sir” Sam confirmed.

“Good” Bordon responded “That is all I will ever ask of you. Now, you have your file?”

“Err yes Sir” Sam confirmed passing across his details in a file to the Superintendent who took and then laid them carefully on the desk before opening and studying the file for a few moments.

“I.Q. of 149, no political affiliations, doesn't suffer fools gladly and ready to lay his life on the line for the Service if necessary” Bordon summarised from the file.

“I would rather not put that last bit to the test if possible” Sam admitted “At least not on my first day, I have been shot once in my life already.”

“Twice” Bordon reminded him.

“Only once in this life” Sam responded “The other business was a different person technically.”

“Tell that to your foster father” Bordon remarked “He was the one who insisted we have your George Cross ribbon put on your uniform.”

“Sir” Sam asked “Could I ask you to be candid with me please?”

“What's on your mind lad?” Bordon asked.

“Do you believe I have what it takes to be an officer of this service or is this just some fool's errand?” Sam asked sincerely.

“Sam” Bordon responded with deep honesty that was clearly broadcast from his expression “If you were not the best candidate for an officer of this service I have ever seen we would not be sat here together having this conversation. You were born to wear that uniform, be a part of this Service.”

“I see” Sam responded.

“You are behind with your weapons training though” Bordon remarked as he checked through the file “In which case our next stop is the firing range” he declared as he got up and escorted Sam to the door “Come on” he encouraged.

Superintendent Bordon duly strode purposely ahead, leading the way back down the corridor to the far end of the building where after passing through a set of heavily reinforced metal doors, they arrived at the armoury.

"Weapon please Mr Edwards" Bordon requested as they proceeded into the firing range.

"Here Sir" Sam duly responded as he retrieved his six shot revolver and passed it across.

"Jim Edwards mentioned this antique" Bordon remarked as he examined the gun carefully "Much as I quite like these old things myself, it is a violent world out there and there will be times when six shots before a rather complicated reload will handicap you in the field."

"Err yes Sir" Sam confirmed.

"Get yourself issued with something a little more up to date for the 1980's" Bordon instructed as he handed back the weapon "But keep old faithful here handy as a backup though."

"I will Sir" Sam agreed with a definite hint of reluctance.

"Right" Bordon declared "Let's see what you are like on the firing line."

With Bordon watching, Sam duly stepped up to one of the firing lanes, drew his gun, took aim and fired all six shots in quick succession before holstering the weapon again.

"Mmmm" Bordon remarked wryly as he surveyed the result "Well the good news lad is you have six shots all in the paper target, the bad news" he informed the young officer as he moved his finger to the left to indicate the adjacent target "is that you were actually aiming at that one."

"Ah..." Sam responded.

"Well nobody is perfect" Bordon commented "maybe it is something you can work on lad. Come on."

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"So you couldn't shoot straight for toffee even back then" Tracy remarked with a wry smile.

"Thanks for that overwhelming vote of confidence my love" the Commander responded sarcastically.

"So there you are" Tracy summarised "Dropped into the middle of the most important murder investigation in the early history of the Security Service and the Divisional Chief has you not on the team? Kind of odd isn't it?"

"Oh don't worry" the Commander confirmed "Things got lively with my duty pretty quick."

-o-o-o-

The weekly wages delivery to the County Council offices was a bit late that morning with a traffic accident out on the city's ring road having held it and all other inbound traffic for the best part of an hour.

"Blimey Frank" Dave the driver called across to his colleague as they turned into West Street and approached the cathedral "I thought we were never going to make it for a while there."

"I told you the ring road was a bad idea" Frank confirmed "But does anyone ever listen to me?" he jokingly asked.

"All right, point taken" Dave admitted as they proceeded along West Street approaching the entrance to County Hall, their ultimate destination with their precious cargo of wages cash.

"What's this joker doing?" Dave asked as they caught up with a tourist coach, seemingly lost and moving slowly until its driver decided to pull into the side of the road, blocking the County Hall entrance.

"Well that puts the mockers on it" Frank remarked "Bloody tourists."

"Plan B then" Dave confirmed as he put the van into reverse gear and prepared to turn around in order to return back the way they had come to try the rear entrance instead.

As the security van was about half way around its turning manoeuvre, at right angles to the flow of traffic both Dave and Frank realised something was not right when a second tourist coach came along the street and pulled across the road at the same time as the first coach did likewise, boxing them in.

"So what do you know about this quaint little city?" Superintendent Bordon asked as Sam drove them around the Southgate Ring Road in a brand new fully marked Ford Sierra patrol car.

"I have lived in the area with my foster parents since I was about thirteen" Sam admitted "Been here a lot but I have to admit it does seem slightly different to the eyes as an officer."

"You'll find that happens a lot in this job as you go on" Bordon confirmed "Even if you make the dizzy heights of Administrator General, all the time you wear that uniform with pride and dedication in your heart, the world will never quite seem the same again."

"Somehow I don't think I shall see the plush offices and fitted deep pile carpets of the top echelons of the service in my lifetime Sir" Sam commented.

"Let's head up South Street" Bordon indicated whereupon as soon as the traffic lights permitted, Sam turned up the busy shopping street.

"Don't be so sure" Bordon remarked "I have been in the service and the old Police before that for nigh on twenty years and I know potential when I see it lad."

"A tenner says I never make it past Commander" Sam commented as he steered around a bus that had stopped half way up South Street.

"All right then *Commander*, you have yourself a bet" Bordon agreed.

"Control to all units, urgent message" came the slightly crackly call over the radio "Armed robbery in progress, West Street."

"Whisky X-Ray Alpha Three Two Three" Sam responded "We are less than a minute away."

"Floor the bugger" Bordon instructed although by then Sam had already switched on the sirens and lights and accelerated up the street at high speed.

It was only a matter of moments later that they arrived near the scene where as soon as the car stopped and the two officers were out, the sound of gunshots rang out sending passers by running for cover screaming.

"Keep down and get as far away as you can" Sam called as he quickly helped to usher the public out of harms way.

Having made sure the public were out of the way, the two officers moved in, using the coach parked across the street blocking the scene as cover against the random gunfire.

"Looks like I could wind up paying you that ten quid lad rather sooner than I thought" Bordon remarked as a gunshot came through the body of the coach and shattered a window showering them with broken glass.

"On three?" Sam suggested as he drew his gun with his superior officer doing the same.

"After you lad" Bordon confirmed "You have to get your feet wet sooner or later."

"Thank you Sir" Sam responded with a definite hint of sarcasm before with a deep breath he proceeded around the front of the coach and saw the full scene for himself for the first time.

"I said..." the leader of a gang of six armed robbers declared before firing a shot from his sawn off shotgun into the air to emphasise his seriousness "...get out of the van and hand over the cash right now!!"

"Armed Security Officers!" Sam declared as he brought his weapon to bear on the leader "You are surrounded, put your weapons down!"

"I don't think so my friend" the gunman who appeared to be the second in command of the group responded before coldly turning towards Sam and opening fire.

"Oh hell..." Sam responded as he dived for cover behind an abandoned car just moments before a gunshot struck the side of it and narrowly missed him.

"The cash, now!!!" the leader of the gunmen demanded once again.

Seeing that these men were sufficiently determined to casually open fire upon a member of the Security Service, the crew of the cash shipment gave in and came out of their vehicle.

As they were being bundled to the ground, Bordon ducked down and skipped across to the cover of the car Sam was behind.

"That could have gone better..." Sam admitted.

"In which case if at first you don't succeed..." Bordon suggested.

"Shoot the buggers..." Sam concluded.

"No flies on you lad" Bordon remarked.

"Graduate of the south east London University of Life" Sam confirmed before he jumped up, aimed at the nearest gunman and fired.

Realising that one of their colleagues was down, three of the gang turned their actions into a defensive posture as the others proceeded to empty the van of the cash bags, loading them into their own vehicle.

"Last chance gentlemen" Sam declared with grim determination.

"Sorry" one of the defending gunmen responded with a warning shot.

"I'll say this for you *Commander*" Bordon remarked as the exchange of gunfire recommenced with both sides ducking out from behind cover, firing and then ducking back down again "You a nothing if not exceedingly polite under fire."

"Thank you Sir" Sam responded between gunshots "Something my old Uncle Roger once taught me."

Although the two officers were just about holding their own, they were still far outnumbered by the gang and with little if any backup likely to be available, it was clearly evident that this was one battle they could not win.

"Come on, we got the cash!" the leader of the gang declared as he threw the last bag in the rear of their getaway vehicle "Let's get out of here!"

"Covering fire!" one of the other gunmen declared whereupon they duly launched a barrage of gunfire whilst falling back to their getaway van and another car and quickly getting in.

"If you will excuse me Sir" Sam declared as he saw the gang about to depart and quickly returned to the patrol car.

Before Superintendent Bordon realised what was happening, the two vehicles forming the gang's getaway accelerated away down the street. Moments later the patrol car came around the end of the coach by way of mounting the pavement before Sam set off in pursuit of the robbers.

"Stupid boy" Bordon remarked as he got up from behind the car he had been using for cover during the gunfight and amid the bullet ridden wreckage, watched as the pursuit disappeared off into the distance "You'll get your head blown off before the day is out."

"Whiskey X-Ray Alpha Three Two Three to Control" Sam called into the radio as he pursued the robbers vehicles out of the end of West Street and north around the City's ring road "In pursuit of armed robbery suspects north on the ring road heading towards the Fire Station."

"Can you issue any descriptions X-Ray Alpha Three Two Three?" the Control Room asked.

"Five or six IC1 males" Sam confirmed as he was forced to swerve around a bus that despite its driver's best efforts to get out of the way was still half way across the narrow city street "Two getaway vehicles, a green Vauxhall Cavalier index number

Romeo Charlie Delta Five Seven Nine Yankee and a tatty white Ford Transit index number Romeo Uniform Foxtrot Four Three Four X-Ray, driving like buggery" he confirmed "Some backup would be appreciated."

"Nearest backup is about five minutes from your current location" the Control Room regretfully informed.

"Oh great" Sam remarked to himself as he swerved around the top end of the large north gate roundabout.

"Continue to feed us reports please" Control requested.

"Thank you" Sam responded with a subtle hint of sarcasm.

The getaway and pursuit continued at high speed northwards through the affluent Springdale area before reaching the outer extremity of the city and emerging into rural countryside.

Sam's patrol car was well matched by the power and driving skills of those he was pursuing as they weaved at high speed in amongst the traffic on the twisty rural roads.

"These guys drive professionally" Sam remarked to himself now that he had observed the driving style of the gang, the precision with which they made their turns relatively safely whilst maintaining a constant high speed was telling him a fair bit about them.

"Control, where is that god damm backup?" Sam asked directly into the radio "We are already half way to Fittleworth."

"Still some distance away I am afraid" the duty Control Room supervisor confirmed with an apologetic tone "Nearly everything we have is tied up in this murder business."

"This is Superintendent Bordon to Lieutenant Edwards" came the familiar voice of his superior over the radio "How are you doing lad?" he asked in a momentary break from supervising the cordoning off of the crime scene.

"I've been better Sir" Sam admitted as the small village of West Dean flashed by at well over eighty miles per hour "Whoever these guys are, they drive professionally, they do this for a living."

"Well how can you tell that?" Bordon asked.

"Call it experiences from a previous life" Sam confirmed "Their driving style is too perfect."

"I read you" Bordon agreed "Damm you are way too intelligent for your own good" he remarked thoughtfully to himself for a few moments.

"What was that Sir?" Sam asked as he was forced to make a handbrake turn to get around one particularly sharp corner.

"Err where are you now?" Bordon asked after a few moments of thought.

"Just come off the main road and heading east over the old Midhurst branch line" Sam confirmed.

"Hold tight lad and stay with them" Bordon confirmed "I'm rolling to you, even if I have to take the bus."

-o-o-o-

"I kept pursuing them through twisty country lanes for another ten or twelve miles" the Commander confirmed "They couldn't shake me off for as long as I had the fuel and I certainly was not going to let them get away as long as I was able to do something about it."

"So you got them then?" Tracy asked.

"Err no" the Commander admitted "I just found myself in a position to no longer be able to do anything about it..."

-o-o-o-

As the pursuit approached a secluded crossroads intersection in the middle of an area of dense forest, Sam noticed that the two vehicles he had been pursuing were slowing down, not a lot but just enough to close the gap between them.

"Ok, now what are you up to?" Sam remarked as the distant crossroads appeared as he drove over the brow of a hill during which he had momentarily lost sight of the gunmen's vehicles but quickly re-established visual contact again.

"Control..." he called into the radio only to answered by crackly static indicating the radio signal in that very rural area was practically non existent, a common problem with radios in those days, particularly in this area.

"Can today possibly get any worse?" Sam asked casually as ahead the two vehicles he had been pursuing, veered violently to the left at the crossroads.

As he emerged from the exit a few moments later, Sam suddenly became aware of two masked gunmen standing in the middle of the road to his right.

Before he could react, the two men opened fired, instantly shredding both tyres on the right hand side of the car, perforating the surrounding bodywork and shattering the rear windows.

"Oh hell!" Sam exclaimed at that moment for he knew that even with his advanced driving course qualifications and experience, the sudden combination of damage and his current speed meant he was now just a passenger on his way to the accident.

With a near total loss of control, Sam could do nothing but brace himself as the car lurched forwards, slewed around and rolled over and over into the dense woodland that lined the roads until it came to a rest lodged on its side in a ditch.

Dazed and disorientated but still conscious, Sam looked out through the open deformed aperture of the driver's side window when he heard the footsteps of the two gunmen who had sent his car off the road approaching.

As they appeared in sight, Sam realised that he was unable to release his seat belt and his gun was out of reach having fallen into the opposite foot well meaning he was trapped and defenceless.

"Wait!" the voice of a third gunman called as the original two reached the wreckage of the patrol car "He said no Service casualties."

"Yes boss" the two original gunmen confirmed before they turned and left, their final departure from the scene being heralded by the slamming of car doors before the getaway vehicles were heard to accelerate away hard at high speed.

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"Who said?" Jack asked as their train was divided into two sections at Barnham Junction.

"Never found out" the Commander confirmed "But I am getting ahead of myself here."

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Sam was not sure exactly how long he was there before help arrived. There was certainly enough time to finally release the seat belt and clamber out of the car though.

When the sound of approaching sirens became audible echoing through the distant woodland, Sam was sat up against the side of the wrecked car, a bit dazed, cut and bruised but as far as he could ascertain, still largely in one piece.

"Hi..." he gestured as a pair of Security Service patrol cars came into view, screeching to a halt across the centre of the crossroads whereupon Superintendent Bordon, joined by a number of other officers he had eventually managed to round up came running over to Sam's aid.

"Are you all right lad?" Bordon asked clearly concerned for his junior officer's welfare.

"I'll mend Sir" Sam confirmed with a bit of weakness as the crash had been quite a jolt to his system, "I think the motor may be snafued though."

-o-o-o-

"Hell of a first day" Tracy remarked as arm in arm, she and the Commander with Jack alighted from the train at Haychester and proceeded off the platform.

"Oh it wasn't over yet" the Commander confirmed as having passed through the brand new ticket barriers, they exited to see a Security Service patrol car waiting for them "I was duly carted off to Haychester General Hospital which is where I first met this dubious looking fellow" he joked as they were met by Longton.

"The residents of Haychester will be quaking in their boots when they find out you two are back in town" Longton commented with a wry smirk.

"How have you been old friend?" the Commander asked as they exchanged warm handshakes.

"Pretty good" Longton confirmed "Wife is expecting our third baby in six months."

"Congratulations" Tracy responded.

"Thanks" Longton confirmed "I hear on the company grapevine you two have been expanding your little family as well."

"Jack, this is Al Longton" the Commander duly performed the introductions "The chap I was about to tell you about."

"Oh, nothing libellous I do hope" Longton remarked.

"The Commander was just telling us of his first day at work" Jack explained "He had just had his car bundled off the road."

"Ah, the hospital, I remember it well" Longton recalled "Hop in the motor and I will give you a lift whilst I tell you all about it."

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"Ah, Lieutenant Longton" Superintendent Bordon called as he entered the main reception area of Haychester General Hospital "Are you doing anything for the next half hour?" he asked.

"I was about to head back to the office Sir" Longton confirmed "Just finished in the mortuary with the latest victim, well bits of them anyway."

"Grim business" Bordon remarked sincerely yet somehow with a hint of evasiveness "Look, I have our new fellow over in the casualty department."

"The one who pursued those armed robbers?" Longton asked.

"The same" Bordon confirmed "Tough little fella I must say, could you pop over there and make sure he is all right and give him a ride back to the office when the docs give him the all clear, or he decides to discharge himself which I sense is the more likely."

"No problem Sir" Longton confirmed before Bordon duly departed leaving him to make his way through the hospital complex to the casualty department where after asking a nurse, he duly found Sam lying on a bed in one of the treatment cubicles in a badly wrecked uniform and holding an ice pack to his head.

"You must be the chap who the Chief Super has officially nicknamed 'the Commander' I guess" Longton remarked as he entered the cubicle "Lieutenant Al Longton" he duly introduced himself.

"Ed.. err I mean Sam Edwards" Sam responded "Do I look as bad as I feel if I may ask?"

"Depends on how you feel" Longton remarked.

"Like I have been run over by a bus" Sam admitted.

"Then you can rest assured mate" Longton confirmed "You do indeed look as bad as you feel."

"Very reassuring..." Sam responded.

"Well you have managed to break a few Department records I will give you that" Longton commented "One public fire fight, an armed robbery, the longest single vehicle pursuit we have ever had, oh and totalled a patrol car, all in your first morning. That is the makings of a legendary reputation there I reckon."

"You make it sound like there is a book running on me" Sam joked.

"There is" Longton confirmed with a wry smile as he produced a notebook from inside his uniform tunic "If you get killed before the end of the day, I stand to lose some serious cash."

"Put me down for a tenner" Sam confirmed as he tried to sit upright rather uneasily "I'm good for it, besides I have always played the hunches and long odds."

"Steady there mate" Longton stepped in to help Sam as the duty doctor arrived.

"Ah, Mr Edwards" the Doctor declared "I gather this is your first day at this job?" he asked.

"And it has certainly not been dull I can say that for certain" Sam agreed.

"Looks like we had better keep a bed on permanent standby" the Doctor remarked "I have the strangest feeling you are going to become a regular customer based upon your form so far."

"So what's the damage?" Sam asked.

"Walking wounded just about sums it up" the Doctor confirmed "You can leave at anytime."

"Thanks Doc" Sam confirmed as he lifted himself up off the bed and back onto his feet before grabbing his uniform tunic that he was about to put on until he saw the badly torn and distressed state it was in and decided not to bother.

"I would tell you to rest and take it easy but I have the feeling I would be wasting my breath" the Doctor remarked.

"I'll keep an eye on him" Longton confirmed "Thank you Doctor."

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"And that ladies and gentlemen was how two of the three most notorious Security Service officers in the history of the City of Haychester met" the Commander confirmed as Longton drove them through the streets of the city as dusk began to descend.

"I guess I do not need to ask who the third one was" Jack remarked looking across at Tracy who responded merely by looking upwards all innocently.

"So what is the S.P. on these body parts then" the Commander asked as the car pulled into the long driveway leading up to the now familiar Haychester regional offices of the Service.

"Two suitcases, two limbs each one dragged from the canal basin or the Haychester Rife" Longton confirmed "Practically a carbon copy of last time except for the weird monetary element."

"I don't understand" Tracy cut in as they pulled up outside the office building and got out of the car "You said you were not involved with the original murder case at Superintendent Bordon's insistence."

"Officially no" the Commander confirmed as they headed inside by way of the notoriously wayward automatic sliding doors "However on the way back from the hospital I got Al here to fill me in."

"At the time, your beloved husband put forward a theory that somehow the bodies turning up may have had some relationship to our armed robberies" Longton explained "No one else could see it though and if I recall Superintendent Bordon was rather overly insistent that it was dropped."

"That always bothered me" the Commander remarked "Another odd thing was I didn't see him again for nearly two days after that."

"Well the cash that the body parts were carefully packaged in are of the same issue, even the same print batch as those which were snatched in the County Hall job" Longton confirmed "and as far as I am concerned that puts you and your eighteen year old theory firmly back in the field of play."

"Who is your bag man on this case?" the Commander asked.

"Lieutenant Barrett" Longton confirmed "She's turned into a bloody good officer in the two years since she arrived. If there are hidden secrets anywhere, she'll nose them out."

"What goes around comes around" the Commander commented as they arrived in Longton's office "Weren't you her father's bag man the first time around?"

"I was indeed" Longton recalled "I wish her dad was around now though."

"You tried contacting him?" Tracy asked.

"He's fly fishing in Ireland" Longton confirmed "Won't be back for a couple of days at least."

"And with National Administrator General Bordon safely tucked up in a log cabin in the Canadian Rockies, I guess it's down to us renegades again?" the Commander remarked.

"Just like old times" Tracy remarked.

"Just this time without anyone making rude remarks about the state of my uniform" the Commander confirmed.

-o-o-o-

"Well young man, I am glad to see you are still in one piece" Commander David Barrett remarked as he met the rather batted looking Sam in the corridor.

"I apologise for my appearance Sir" Sam admitted as he attempted to brush some mud off his thoroughly wrecked uniform tunic.

"Oh don't worry about that" Barrett confirmed "Step into my office, you have had a hell of a morning and you need a sit down whilst I need to talk to you, so lets solve both problems at the same time" he suggested before showing Sam into his office.

Sam stood nervously in front of Barrett's desk as his Commander sat down behind it and proceeded to leaf through a personnel file he had brought in with him.

"You can sit down you know" Barrett confirmed "I suggest you do it before you fall down."

"Yes Sir" Sam confirmed and duly sat down with a bit of reluctance.

"So" Commander Barrett declared as he read through the personnel file "I.Q. of 149, top of your class, already decorated for bravery but cannot shoot straight for toffee" he summarised.

"Nobody's perfect Sir" Sam admitted sheepishly.

“So far today young man you have made quite an impression” Commander Barrett remarked “You acted above and beyond the call of duty on your very first call.”

“But I still lost them” Sam responded with regret.

“I understand from Lieutenant Longton that you have proffered a theory on our particularly unpleasant murders?” Commander Barrett remarked.

“Which I understand before he left the office Superintendent Bordon rubbished straight out of hand Sir” Sam confirmed.

“Well at the moment I will clutch any straw I can” Barrett admitted “Besides it never hurts to hear the fresh opinion of a new face so let’s hear it lad.”

“I have lived around Haychester since I was about thirteen” Sam began “In addition I have been reading up on case records of the area prior to my assignment here and in the last twenty years there have been what three armed robberies, two murders and one kidnapping case in terms of major incidents?”

“Pretty much yes” Barrett confirmed “I’ve been here ten years, started as a fresh faced young Lieutenant like yourself, only with a far less colourful not to mention secret history.”

“And yet despite the fact that Haychester has to be the quietest little city in Southern England, in the last twenty four hours we have had three suitcases of body parts on the deck” Sam remarked “The largest serial murder case in the history of the Security Service let alone this City and then just as we are in a position to make some progress into finding the killer, someone decides to drop a huge wages snatch complete with spectacular press friendly public fire fight right in our laps, well mine and Superintendent Bordon’s anyway, actually now I come to think of it mostly mine.”

“Could be a coincidence” Commander Barrett commented “However I don’t believe in them and regrettably both you and I are under orders to respect the chain of command which means if Superintendent Bordon say’s to forget it...”

“...then we forget it” Sam finished.

“Well at least you will have something to do considering that for some unfathomable reason our beloved Superintendent Bordon has decided you do not need to be brought into the murder investigation” Barrett remarked “It looks like we have ourselves a nice genuine band of armed robbers on our patch so nuts to Bordon, I want you to head up the investigation.”

“It’s still only my first day Sir” Sam pointed out.

“You worked on a number of serious cases when you were in training” Commander Barrett remarked as he referred once again to the personnel file on the desk “and as a result you have some very good experience and qualifications, an analytical mind plus you were there when it happened so as far as I am concerned you are perfect for the job.”

“Very well” Sam agreed “I won't let you down Sir.”

“Excellent” Barrett responded as he rose back to his feet “Come on, I'll come with you down the uniform store and smooth their ruffled feelings which I can assure you they will have in spades when they see the state of you when you walk through the door.”

“I will try not to make a habit of wrecking uniforms Sir” Sam admitted wryly as they left the office.

“Oh and if you have any more thoughts about our murder case, feel free to let me know and lets keep Superintendent Bordon out of it shall we?” Barrett suggested.

“Absolutely Sir” Sam agreed.

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“Well there it all is” Longton admitted as he led the Commander into the Investigation Room, “Every trace of evidence we have from the two suitcases and the limbs they contained.”

“In other words” the Commander remarked as he looked through the scant information present “Sweet Fanny Adams just like last time.”

“That pretty much sums it up” Longton admitted scratching his head “Unless the forensics guys can give us something in the morning, we are down to dredging the canal and you know what that means.”

“Half a dozen brass bedsteads, two dead cats and enough shopping trolleys to start our own supermarket as usual” the Commander confirmed “Have you recalled the evidence from the last time?”

“It is buried somewhere deep in the archives” Longton confirmed “I have my best bloodhound working on it now, speaking of which...” he remarked as Lieutenant Barrett arrived in the room.

“Ah” she responded with some surprise at seeing the Regional Administrator General present “Good evening Sir, it is a pleasure to have you here.”

“Lieutenant Barrett” the Commander responded in greeting “I do hope Al here hasn't been teaching you any bad habits?”

“Only the useful ones Sir” Barrett confirmed “The rest I learned from the stories my Father told, oddly most of them involving you Sir.”

“Ahem” the Commander responded “So Lieutenant Barrett, have you managed to find the old files on the murders yet.”

“Not yet Sir” Barrett confirmed “I have managed to find where they are though, I was just on my way down to collect them.”

“We are coming with you” Longton confirmed.

“I’ll meet you two out the front in a couple of minutes” the Commander declared “Little family matter to deal with first” he admitted as he left the room and popped back along the corridor to Longton's office where Tracy was looking after Jack.

“Solved it yet?” Tracy asked wryly.

“Strange case of deja-vu by the looks of it” the Commander admitted.

“That deja-vu bloke gets the blame for everything” Jack remarked.

“Listen love” the Commander continued “I am going to head down to the archives, trawl through some long dead and buried memories. Al has said you and Jack can have the spare bedrooms at his place if you two want to get some rest and a bite to eat.”

“I thought I would show Jack what passes for night life in Haychester” Tracy wittily remarked “Then two minutes later we’ll go and get a bite to eat.”

“I’ll see you later” the Commander confirmed with a kiss for Tracy before leaving the office and heading down the corridor, then down the stairs and through the infamous automatic doors to where Longton and Barrett were waiting by the car.

“You know in all the years I have known you Sir” Longton admitted as they got in the car “I never once dreamed you would ever become a family man and now look at you.”

“Yes” the Commander admitted as with Lieutenant Barrett behind the wheel, they set off “I’m still getting used to it myself as a matter of fact. You’ve got kids, how do you find them?”

“You mean when being a loyal officer of the service actually lets me see them you mean Sir?” Longton wryly responded “The secret is to give them all the time they need that you can spare.”

“I’ll bear that in mind” the Commander confirmed “I hope you are making notes Lieutenant” he remarked to Barrett.

“I think the chances of me ever finding someone with the hours I work Sir are extremely remote” Barrett admitted “Never mind the chances of ever having any children.”

“So if you don't mind me asking Lieutenant” Longton asked “Where exactly are we going?”

“The files from the case and pretty much everything from the early days were archived about ten years ago” Barrett confirmed “It took some tracking down and a lot of telephone calls to various collators past and present but I found them in the old records office over on the north side of the City.”

“Like I said” Longton confirmed to the Commander “A bloodhound, no secret is safe from her.”

They continued to drive through the city which was as normal for Haychester, quiet for that time of the evening in stark contrast to what the Commander was used to nowadays working in the maelstrom that is central London.

With the quiet nature of the traffic, it was not long before they were pulling into the entrance gate of the former military barracks now used as a secure document facility amongst other roles for the Security Service and other agencies.

“Lieutenant Barrett” she declared to the guard on the gate “I called earlier, we are expected.”

“Go ahead, follow the signs to the archive building and you will be met there” the guard confirmed lifting the barrier and allowing the patrol car to enter.

“Thank you” Barrett confirmed as she drove on.

“I remember when this place was an Army barracks” the Commander recalled “Got called to a fair few bar brawls over the years if I recall.”

“Oh yes” Longton confirmed with a wry grin “I believe a few of the participants still have the limps that we gave them.”

“Happy days” the Commander admitted.

“This looks like the place” Barrett confirmed as she brought the car to a stop outside the rather dull utilitarian exterior of the storage facility, a converted former military warehouse outside which was waiting for them as they got out of the car its diminutive supervisor.

"Lieutenant Barrett?" the Supervisor asked as they met in the shadow of the doorway.

"Yes" Barrett confirmed "This is Section Commander Longton and Regional Administrator General Regent. I believe you are expecting us?"

"Indeed, indeed" the Supervisor responded excitedly as he led the way inside "Please pardon my over enthusiasm, it is extremely rare that this humble and seeming long forgotten dusty corner of the Service receives such important visitors."

"I don't doubt it" the Commander marked as he looked around the equally dull and utilitarian interior of the premises.

"I have located the files and material you were seeking Lieutenant Barrett" the Supervisor confirmed as he consulted one of his armada of clipboards on his ramshackle old desk "You need section 'C', follow the signs and then bear to the left."

"Thank you" Barrett cheerily responded despite the late hour and her tiredness before they headed off in the direction required.

"I wonder how many dark buried and long forgotten secrets lurk down here" the Commander pondered as the three officers headed down the narrow murky corridor until they reached the large door on which was painted an ornate 'C' which was far more stylish than its setting required.

"On three" Longton declared as between him and the Commander they pulled open the heavy metal door and looked inside through the opening, the light from the corridor illuminating rows of dust covered shelves heaving with boxes of files and other objects.

"Anyone afraid of spiders?" Barrett asked as she squinted into the gloomy interior.

"Yes" Longton and the Commander responded simultaneously.

"Men..." Barrett muttered in disbelief "Well I guess its ladies first I take it?"

"As a gentleman I wouldn't have it any other way" the Commander wryly confirmed before they proceeded inside.

"Didn't he say down to the left somewhere?" Longton asked as they made their way along between narrow gaps that separated row after row of dusty shelving, barely visible in the scant light afforded by the few bulbs that were working in there.

"Wherever they are" the Commander remarked as he randomly pulled out a file box, blew the dust off of it and checked the barely legible date on it "they must be further in as this lot is even before my time."

"This place gives me the creeps" Barrett admitted with more than a hint of nervousness.

"Getting warmer I think" the Commander confirmed as he looked at another file "We are up to the legendary Haychester flasher" he indicated one box of files as they passed it.

"More of a faint glimmer than a flash if I recall correctly" Longton remarked with a chuckle.

"Here are your armed robberies Sir" Barrett confirmed as they reached the far end of one set of shelves where on the upper level were a couple of large boxes clearly marked with a case number.

"Yep, these are they" the Commander confirmed as he pulled one of the boxes off the shelf, blew away the accumulated layer of dust and revealed the 'County and

Davenport Wages Snatches' description along with the name of its lead investigating officer 'Lieutenant Sam Edwards a.k.a. The Commander'.

"Well if the armed robberies were at the same time" Longton concluded then the murder files should be just about here" he remarked as he scanned along the shelf only to find a large empty space, the large square space in the dust on the shelf showing clearly where there had been a number of boxes until very recently.

"Ah..." the Commander remarked as all three of them looked at the empty space "It would appear someone has beaten us to it."

"None of my lot" Longton confirmed "Lieutenant?" he asked.

"As far as I am aware the only record of the location of these files is on the inventory ledger upstairs and a note on my desk back at the office" Barrett confirmed "They should be here."

"Life really is never simple" the Commander remarked "Well at least that is what my wife is always telling me."

"They could just have been misfiled" Barrett remarked as she started looking around in the immediate vicinity just in case.

"Save your energy Lieutenant" Longton confirmed "The murder investigation was well and truly got at from the off all those years ago, somehow I am not all that surprised that the same is happening again."

"Home time boys and girls" the Commander declared "We will take the armed robbery stuff just on the off chance it jogs something I have forgotten but apart from that I think we are done for the night."

"Dear oh dear, this rubbish doesn't improve much does it?" Tracy remarked as she read the latest edition of the Haychester Gazette, the weekly local paper which was more commonly known to the Security Service in the area not to mention the residents of the city as the 'Whingers Weekly' in the front living room of Al Longton's house

"I take it this is what passes for entertainment in this little rural backwater then?" Jack asked as he read the second section of the paper, one of the few local rags still produced in unwieldy broadsheet format these days.

"Generally anything interesting in Haychester always happens on a Thursday just after the Gazette goes to print" Tracy explained "That way by the time the next issue comes out, the news is a week old so no one is interested, therefore it gets shoved to page fourteen which leaves the way clear for three pages of readers letters complaining about gravel extraction, late night drinking which around here is after four in the afternoon and the usual complaints about the fortnightly rubbish bin collections."

“And I thought Bethnal Green was dull” Jack agreed as he stifled a yawn just as the front door opened and in walked Longton and the Commander.

“I was beginning to wonder when you two reprobates might show up” Tracy joked as the Commander entered the front living room and joined her on the sofa where they kissed much to Jack's disapproval.

“Oh we were playing hunt the file” the Commander explained “However unlike Simon's modern methods of searching the world's computers, we had to track down some good old fashioned paper ones.”

“Any luck?” Tracy asked.

“I managed to find the original incident reports from the armed wages snatches” the Commander confirmed as he placed a large old faded file on the coffee table “However it would appear all the original case files about the murders has gone walkies.”

“Someone covering their tracks by any chance?” Tracy asked with a look of concern.

“Maybe” the Commander agreed “The thing that is troubling me most though is that those files were only accessible by someone with high level clearance or the ability to pull off an outrageous bluff.”

“So this was your very first case as leading investigation officer” Tracy remarked as she picked up the incident report file and opened it carefully as many years of storage had not been kind to its rather cheap and cheerful paper and card construction.

“Once I had been assigned the case by Commander Barrett” the Commander explained “I decided to do some poking around up near where I had lost them.”

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“Nice parking” Longton joked as he and Sam arrived at the crossroads in a fresh patrol car just in time to see a recovery crew winching away the wrecked remains of the one that Sam had crashed a few hours earlier.

“Shotguns fired at both wheels on the off side” Sam confirmed “Shredded the wheels, wrecked the offside brakes and the engine compartment. After that I was a passenger with nothing more than a one way ticket to those trees over there.”

“Ouch...” Longton remarked as the wrecked car was lowered onto the back of a flat bed truck.

“I reckon whoever these guys were, they must have been going somewhere specific” Sam concluded “What is around here?” he asked.

“Got a map in the car” Longton remarked “Hang on a second mate.”

As Longton returned to the car to get the map, Sam looked around and listened to the quiet background noise which was permeated only by bird song and the wind moving gently through the surrounding trees.

“Here we go” Longton confirmed as he unfolded the map and placed it flat on the bonnet of the patrol car just as the flat bed truck departed leaving them alone.

“All right” Sam declared as he studied the map closely “We are here and these two roads don't really go anywhere long distance.”

“So wherever they were going it may have been fairly close to where we are standing right now?” Longton asked.

“That would be my reasoning” Sam confirmed “Going down that way takes you to here” he indicated on the map “Forestry Commission car park and a dead end so nothing there, besides I am pretty certain they went that way” he moved his finger back across the map.

“Nothing that way either except old gravel pits” Longton remarked “Used to play up there with my mates when I was a kid.”

“The wonderful thing about old gravel pits is you are highly unlikely to be disturbed” Sam remarked “Let's go and check it out.”

“You're the boss” Longton agreed as they got back in the car before heading off up the road.

Twenty minutes later after a lot of driving around seemingly long forgotten track ways and back roads they stopped and Sam got out to take a look around as if in search of inspiration.

“Does the words wild goose chase ring any bells perchance?” Longton remarked from the driver's seat of the patrol car.

“Maybe” Sam agreed only for him to suddenly change his expression to one of deep concentration as he began to listen intently to something he had caught in the background.

“What's up?” Longton asked seeing Sam's expression.

“I have an idea” Sam confirmed “Listen, you head back to the office, I want to check out a hunch.”

“What, leave you out here in the middle of nowhere?” Longton asked slightly astonished.

“I'll be fine” Sam confirmed “You get going, I will see you later.”

“If you say so” Longton confirmed, not entirely convinced as he started the patrol car before heading off back the way they had come leaving Sam alone on that narrow rural road.

Sam waited until the patrol car was out of sight before heading off up an adjacent footpath which led through the woods. As he continued on, the noise he thought he had heard became clearer now, the sound of an engine of some kind throbbing away to itself somewhere up ahead.

Turning to his left and then proceeding down a fairly steep embankment brought Sam to the source of the noise, a Class 73/1 Electro-Diesel locomotive standing on the spur of the old Haychester to Midhurst branch line at the head of a rake of eleven tatty and battered looking gravel hopper wagons.

“Hello!” Sam called as he looked for the train crew, climbing up the cab steps and into the front cab where he found the controls abandoned before stepping back down onto the line side again.

“Someone there?” came a response from the other side of the train as the driver who had been changing the points at the far end of the train returned to his locomotive where to his understandable surprise he found the uniformed young officer standing there.”

“You look a bit lost officer if you don't mind me saying so” the driver remarked as he climbed back up into the locomotive cab “Something I can do for you?”

“I don't suppose you have seen any odd or unusual activity around this way in the last day or two have you?” Sam asked more out of hope and expectation.

“Nowt much happens around here lad” the driver confirmed “The only new thing lately has been that survey team up at the old north pit, arrived yesterday.”

“Whereabouts may I ask?” Sam inquired.

“About a mile and a half up the line” the driver confirmed “Hop aboard and I'll take you there as the line goes right past it.”

“Thanks” Sam confirmed as he climbed the cab steps and got on board the locomotive before the driver released the brakes, moved up the throttle and with a throaty growl from the engine, moved the train off slowly up the rather ramshackle line with the eleven loaded hopper wagons creaking and groaning behind it.

At a speed barely above walking pace the train proceeded up the line until the point where they approached an over bridge seemingly in the middle of nowhere.

“This is the place” the driver confirmed as he brought the train to a halt just ahead of the bridge “Go up the embankment there, keep to the right and you will walk straight into the old north pit, you can't miss it.”

“Thanks” Sam confirmed as he duly got down from the locomotive and proceeded to clamber up the weed strewn embankment.

It took a bit of doing but after some effort, he found himself at the top edge of the old north gravel pit looking over the edge into the large mile wide crater below in the centre of which were some rusting and abandoned old industrial type sheds and outbuildings.

“Let's see if anyone is home” Sam remarked as he checked all around to ensure he was not being observed before clambering down the inside of the pit to the crater floor. There he used the cover of the shrub vegetation in the old pit workings to make his way across to the area around the outbuildings before ducking down behind a couple of old rusting oil barrels for cover.

Looking around the seemingly deserted site, there were few signs of any recent occupancy bar a couple of fairly fresh looking vehicle tracks in the mud leading up to the large door of the main building. All around was simply a picture of industrial dereliction from where the gravel workings had been abandoned some years before.

Ducking out from behind the oil barrels, Sam skipped across the shrubby ground to the side wall of the main building and took the opportunity to look through an old cracked and rusting window frame inside.

Contrasting with the decrepit surroundings were the two vehicles that Sam had pursued from the armed wages snatch that very morning, parked up and empty.

“Bingo” Sam remarked quietly to himself as cautiously he proceeded along the side wall of the building to a side door which he managed to force open quite easily thanks to its elderly deteriorated state before cautiously proceeding inside.

It was obvious from looking around that despite the presence of the two getaway vehicles, there was no one around bar a couple of nesting pigeons in the roof space and a few mice crawling about along with a lot of spiders

“Charming little hideaway” Sam remarked to himself as he proceeded to look around what was really little more than a large old tool shed where apart from the two vehicles, the only sign of recent activity seemed to be the old workbench where he found little except a hacksaw and the sawn off long barrel from a shotgun.

Sam was about to leave when just as he turned around, his foot stubbed against something underneath the desk which made him bend down and look at what it was he had stumbled upon.

A large metal case of the type that the army used to use for the transportation of small equipment lay beneath the workbench which was not that unusual as at that time there were thousands of these to be found up and down the country used by people long after they had been sold off by the military.

The thing that set this case out from being just part of the background was though that it was clean, there was no dust muck or dirt deposited upon it meaning it must have been placed there very recently.

With a fairly hefty heave, Sam was able to pull the case out from underneath the workbench so that he could open it and see what was contained inside. The weight of the thing as he pulled it indicated it certainly was not empty and sure enough as soon as he released the catch and opened the lid, he discovered that it contained not only two shotguns, a small box containing ammunition and two revolvers but also a large quantity of bundled cash, all twenty pound notes in their small paper wrappers as issued by a bank.

“Oh my...” Sam remarked quietly to himself realising the significance of this find. He thought quickly, there being no way he could take this with him on the account that firstly it was too heavy for him to carry alone and secondly, its removal may tip off the armed robbers that he was now on to them.

Instead he elected for another idea, taking out a notebook and a pen, Sam proceeded to make a note of the weapon makes, models and serial numbers as well as a rough estimate of the quantity of cash present before closing the box and returning it carefully back to its original position.

At that point the sound of a vehicle approaching could be heard, the scrunching of its wheels on the gravelly surface of the old quarry pit becoming louder as it came nearer. Swiftly Sam made a discrete exit, using the same side door he had come in by before moving along the length of the outside side wall so that he could peer around the front edge of the building to observe the arrival.

As the car which seemed to contain approximately three or four individuals came into sight and slowed to a stop just short of the building, Sam suddenly became aware of someone coming up behind him, however before he could react something was brought down across the back of his head rendering him unconscious as he collapsed to the ground.

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“It just wasn't your day was it love?” Tracy remarked wryly as they lay together on the bed in the guest bedroom.

“You know it's strange” the Commander commented “But now that I am retelling the story for the first time, it is occurring to me that all the way during that investigation they seemed to be one step ahead of me.”

“So what happened to you after your knockout?” Tracy asked.

“I'm not entirely sure to be honest” the Commander confirmed “The next thing I can remember I was coming around in the driving cab of the gravel train locomotive. Apparently the crew were on their way back when they found me dumped by the line side so they duly patched me up and gave me a lift to Haychester Station.”

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The waiting passengers on the platform at Haychester Station stood well back as the dusty freight train with its eleven gravel wagons came to a stop allowing Sam to alight from the locomotive much to the amazement of many present.

Sam duly signalled his thanks to the locomotive crew before heading off the platform past the equally surprised ticket inspector and out of the door where outside he found Commander Barrett waiting for him.

“I’ll say this for you lad” Commander Barrett remarked with a wry smile “You are nothing if not dedicated.”

“How did you know...?” Sam began.

“Loco crew called ahead when they found you” Commander Barrett explained “I was in the area so thought I would come and meet you. Come on, I’ll give you a lift.”

“Thank you Sir” Sam responded as he duly accompanied his superior officer to the patrol car parked over on the opposite side of the road in the shadow of the bus station as the freight train clanked and squeaked its way slowly across the adjacent level crossing.

“That’s odd” Sam remarked as he looked down at himself before getting in the front passenger seat of the patrol car.

“What’s odd Lieutenant?” Commander Barrett asked as he joined him alongside in the driver’s seat and started the car.

“My gun is still here” Sam commented as he drew the six shot revolver from its holster and checked it, “It’s still loaded as well. Usually when someone gets boffed over the head by crooks they are at the very least disarmed.”

“Perhaps they were feeling generous?” Commander Barrett remarked as he pulled the car out into the traffic that was starting to move now that the freight train had passed and the level crossing gates were now raised.

“Well they had enough weaponry floating around already” Sam confirmed “There was a case containing shotguns, revolvers and a substantial amount of cash.”

“What, just left there lying around?” Commander Barrett asked with a hint of confusion as he turned left and proceeded past the canal basin.

“An unlocked box in an unlocked shed in the middle of an abandoned gravel pit” Sam confirmed “Anyone could have walked in there and swanned off with it.”

“Sounds like your classic drop to me” Commander Barrett remarked “These armed robbers of yours strike me as being well informed and organised which suggests to my experienced mind that there is someone behind them organising it.”

“And the case was what?” Sam asked “Fresh untraceable weapons and the payment for the job?”

“Or the next job” Barrett confirmed.

“Pity for them I made a note of the serial numbers then wasn't it Sir” Sam confirmed with a knowing smile.

“Nice one lad” Barrett complimented him “I'll take you back to the office so you can get to work on it, I meanwhile have another pile of body parts to deal with.”

“Another one?” Sam responded “That makes what three now?”

“Four” Barrett confirmed “This one turned up in the Lavant River about thirty minutes ago, torso this time, packed into a suitcase just like the last discoveries.”

“And we still have no idea who the victim or victims are Sir?” Sam asked.

“Not a clue” Barrett responded with clear regret “All identifying marks have been comprehensively erased by someone who knows what we and the forensic boys look for in identifying. All we do have is just enough body parts to make up one complete dead corpse minus the head.”

“That rules out dental records then” Sam confirmed “It would appear that both cases are being committed by clever people who know exactly what they are doing and everything we do to detect them.”

“Exactly what I was thinking” Barrett agreed “Only don't tell Superintendent Bordon that if you should see him, he was very specific that you are not supposed to be anywhere near this murder case.”

“Well if I have any more thoughts I'll let you know Sir” Sam confirmed as they approached the driveway entrance to the Security Service offices “I will just have to remind myself not to sign the note with my name that is all.”

“Here we are” Barrett declared as he brought the car to a stop outside the main entrance and Sam got out “Be careful laddie. As my old grandmother used to say, this is the sort of situation that could turn very nasty very quickly.”

“I will, thank you Sir” Sam confirmed before closing the car door and proceeding inside.

“Well I never” the engineer still trying to fix the errant automatic door commented as Sam arrived “If it isn't *the Commander* himself. Your reputation is preceding you Sir.”

“So it would appear” Sam agreed with a wry smile “I just wish it didn't involve so many injuries” he admitted as he felt the lump on the back of his head with a rueful smile.

A few minutes later Sam walked into the general office to find only Longton present at his desk over by the window which backed onto his own.

“At the rate you are going we are going to have a whip around to buy you a bullet proof vest” Longton joked as Sam sat down at his desk across from him.

“I shouldn't worry about it” Sam confirmed “Once you get shot a couple of times over the years you tend to get used to it.”

“I'm sorry?” Longton asked, unaware of Sam's past exploits much of which was covered by the Official Secrets Act for his own protection.

“Eh?” Sam replied “Oh never mind, long story as they say.”

“Well anyway” Longton confirmed “The office has a book going on you and I would appreciate it if you could stay alive until at least tomorrow morning otherwise I stand to lose twenty quid.”

“I'll try my best” Sam agreed with a wry smile before something occurred to him “Twenty quid...” he remarked thoughtfully.

“Yeah” Longton confirmed “One less than twenty one, one more than nineteen.”

“Have you got a twenty pound note I could borrow?” Sam asked “Just for a minute.”

“Am I going to get it back?” Longton asked as he slightly reluctantly got out his wallet and extracted the only twenty pound note he had before passing it across “Only I have a fiancée and I don't get to see those kinds of denominations very often.”

“This is one of the old issue notes” Sam commented as he examined it carefully.

“Yes, so?” Longton responded still uncertain as to what Sam was going on about “Haven't you seen one before or something?”

“All mine tend to go straight to the nearest model railway shop” Sam admitted “Expensive hobby.”

“Right...” Longton confirmed.

“The twenties in the case at that gravel pit were the new issue ones” Sam explained.

“Hang on mate” Longton responded “You've lost me here. What gravel pit, what case and for that matter what twenties?” he asked.

“I found the place where the armed robbers went to after they did the wages snatch in West Street” Sam explained “It is the outbuildings of an old gravel pit about fifteen miles north west of here. In the shed were the two getaway vehicles plus this case containing wrapped banknotes, all twenties from the new issue set that the Bank of England started issuing a couple of weeks ago.”

“The wages cash would have been already divided up into pay-packets prior to the delivery and for that matter the snatch” Longton confirmed “You say these twenties were still in their bank wraps?”

“Yes” Sam confirmed “Which means it's not the money from the robbery, it must be some kind of payoff for doing the job.”

“And the weapons?” Longton asked.

“I've got the serial numbers here” Sam confirmed as he extracted his notebook and found the right page “Are you any good with computers, I can barely turn the damn things on?” he asked slightly sheepishly.

“Chuck that here and I will see what I can do” Longton confirmed whereupon Sam passed across the notebook to him before he started entering the details into the green screen computer terminal on the desk.

“These two revolvers you have listed here” Longton remarked as he continued to enter the details “Aren't they old Service issue?”

“Same model as my old antique” Sam confirmed showing him his own six shot revolver “Superintendent Bordon was most uncomplimentary about my gun this morning.”

“Superintendent Bordon wouldn't know a decent gun if he sat on it” Longton confirmed “He is a middle manager who spends his days shuffling papers across a desk, never on the front line.”

“He was this morning” Sam confirmed “In fact if I recall correctly this antique of mine was all that stopped him from getting his arse shot off.”

“Bordon in a fire fight?” Longton remarked “That doesn't make any sense. Well anyway” he declared as the computer beeped “Looks like I have found your revolvers.”

“Tell me about them” Sam prompted.

“Found at the site of an armed robbery in Bromsgrove about three months ago” Longton confirmed reading from the screen “Which is odd as that means either someone put the wrong serial numbers into the computer in Bromsgrove or these somehow got back out into circulation without anyone noticing.”

“One wrong serial number put into the system I could forgive but two?” Sam responded “No, I don't buy it.”

“Your three shotguns are registered as having been stolen from a farmhouse in Kent last week” Longton confirmed.

“There were shotguns used at the wages snatch but no revolvers” Sam remarked “That means these must be fresh weapons.”

“Another job?” Longton pondered.

“Possibly” Sam agreed “And they are still in the vicinity if the gravel pit is still their general base of operations, drop off point, whatever” he confirmed.

“Something doesn't add up here” Longton commented “Why would someone pay a gang to commit an armed wages snatch in fresh notes when all he, she or they would need to do would be to simply take a percentage of the takings?”

“Less traceable” Sam explained “He pays the gang in fresh money and if it were to go pear shaped there is none of the wages snatch cash floating around the organiser's gaff to link him to the crime.”

“There speaks the voice of experience” Longton commented.

“Like I said, long story” Sam confirmed wryly “I was born and brought up in Lewisham where armed blags were pretty much a national pastime.”

“You are a city lad” Longton commented “What are you doing in this rural little backwater?” he asked.

“As an old friend of mine who works for a certain Government agency with a number in its name would say” Sam wryly admitted “Avoiding answering those kinds of questions.”

“And speaking of rural little backwater” Longton continued “Why would someone actually pay a group of armed robbers to perform a wages snatch in sleepy Haychester of all places when the place is crawling with the Service's finest on this murder investigation and then drop you right in the middle of it?”

“Like I said mate” Sam confirmed “I don't believe in coincidences, these two cases are linked somehow, I don't care what Superintendent Bordon says and for that matter neither does Commander Barrett.”

“Ooooh, conspiracy, treason and plot” Longton remarked rubbing his hands together with glee “This sounds like it could be fun.”

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“That evening as I was on my way home on the bus” the Commander confirmed “A call came over the radio confirming that the body parts that had turned up all belonged to the same body but still with no identification, not even any match with missing persons.”

“Male or female?” Tracy asked.

“Male, approximately twenty five to thirty” the Commander confirmed “That doesn't match the new body though, the parts of this fresh one are female although about the same age.”

“No armed robbery this time though” Tracy mused “I guess they do not need the distraction this time.”

“Yes but who” the Commander asked “We got the murderer the very next day at the same time I nabbed the armed robbers. Indeed the murderer was banged to rights, there was no way any jury could not find him anything but guilty and he even admitted to the whole shebang in the interview.”

“So where is the murderer now?” Tracy asked “Still in prison?”

“Hung himself in his cell two hours before he was due to come to trial” the Commander confirmed “That means we either have a copycat or we were fed a patsy in the first place.”

“What about the armed robbers?” Tracy enquired.

“Ah yes” the Commander responded “Them...”

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“Bloody hell, you are early” Longton remarked as Sam came into the office forcing him to look up at the clock to confirm it really was seven in the morning.

“I've been thinking” Sam responded as he sat down at his desk opposite Longton's “If this robbery is linked in such a way as to distract us from the murders...”

“Or you specifically” Longton cut in “It seems awfully funny that a talented chap such as yourself is being kept out of the murder loop to tackle a bunch of armed loonies.”

“Maybe” Sam agreed “However thinking about it carefully, what do you suppose are the chances that sometime in the next day or so there will be another wages snatch?” he asked.

“What, to keep you busy and on your toes for example?” Longton remarked.

“Well yes” Sam confirmed “The last robbery was dropped right into my lap from the off on day one, it was nicely spectacular and public and muggins here got dropped right slap bang in the middle of it.”

“Trouble is what would be the target” Longton remarked “County Hall gets their wages deliveries on a Monday and a Thursday so it won't be them.”

“It would be someone obvious” Sam remarked “Remember I reckon whoever is running this show wants me there to make sure I am not poking my nose around in this murder investigation.”

“One of the big employers perhaps?” Longton remarked “Trouble is that does not leave much, Haychester is not exactly the industrial capital of the south and many firms are now going over to cashless straight to bank account wages systems nowadays.”

“So who would be the person to ask?” Sam asked.

“Superintendent Bordon has been here since the stone age, trouble is he is on some high level junket today” Longton confirmed “Commander Barrett is a possibility but I reckon your best bet would be Lieutenant Commander Freddy Redfern, he has been around this city since the dinosaurs moved out.”

“A week ago last Tuesday then” Sam joked “Where would I find him?”

“At this hour?” Longton checked the time again “Probably enjoying the dubious pleasures of that excuse for a staff canteen we have.”

“Thanks” Sam responded as he got up “I could use some breakfast, I just hope they do something sensible on the menu.”

“Depends how you define sensible mate” Longton responded.

“Oh I’ll settle for something from the four essential food groups” Sam remarked as he departed “Cakes, chips, chocolate, caffeine.”

“You may be in luck then” Longton confirmed with a wry smile.

“Good grief” Sam remarked to himself a few minutes later as he entered the staff canteen which to him seemed to resemble the aftermath of an explosion at a greasy spoon café. “Definitely not to be found in the Good Food Guide I guess” he commented to himself as he ventured bravely to the serving area.

“Morning Sir” the chef behind the counter remarked begrudgingly “If you can't smell it we ain't got it.”

“Right...” Sam responded as he surveyed the predominantly grease laden offerings which despite his penchant for unhealthy food even he was finding potentially unpalatable “Any chance of a bacon buttie?” he asked more out of hope than expectation.

“Yep” the chef confirmed as he passed across two bacon sandwiches burnt to a crisp to him.

“Thanks” Sam responded before he grabbed a cup of barely drinkable liquid that was supposed to be tea from the vending machine.

“Good God lad, you're brave” the voice of Commander Barrett remarked as he joined Sam in the queue “Here, let me get this” he confirmed as he paid for Sam's meal at the same time as his own which didn't look much more palatable either.

“Well yesterday Sir I tried getting shot at and being bashed over the head” Sam admitted wryly “Today I thought I would try something safer, like food poisoning.”

“So, you managed to nab these armed robbers yet lad?” Barrett asked as they walked through to the seating area.

“Not yet Sir” Sam confirmed “I do however have a working theory I wanted to run past you and a Lieutenant Commander Redfern if I can find him.”

“He's over there” Commander Barrett indicated an elderly looking officer trying to enjoy his breakfast over by the window that looked down on the car park “Come on.”

Sam followed Commander Barrett over to the table where Lieutenant Commander Redfern was sitting and joined him.

“Morning” Commander Barrett declared “May I introduce Lieutenant Sam Edwards” he confirmed “Sam, this is the father of the Service Freddy Redfern.”

“Ah, the young whippersnapper who nearly got his head blown off saving our beloved leader's backside on his first day in the job” Redfern confirmed as he and Sam shook hands “You should be careful lad, you are starting to build a reputation for yourself.”

“I didn't mean to get shot at” Sam admitted “I just happened to be there.”

“Now the question you need to ask yourself young man is what Superintendent Bordon was doing there” Redfern responded “It is not like him to be touring around the town when there is a perfectly good centrally heated desk to polish.”

“Maybe he fancied some fresh air” Barrett remarked “Either way, it would appear yesterday morning's shenanigans have scared him off for the rest of the week. Conference on modern security apparently.”

“Playing golf without his wife finding out more like” Redfern responded to which he could tell Barrett agreed by the reaction in his expression “So what can I do for you young man?” he asked Sam.

“I'm told that between the two of you, you have the longest service knowledge of this city” Sam explained “So I was wondering if I wanted to lay my hands on a significant quantity of cash by usages of the old fashioned methods of violence with a sawn off, where would I go which could come up with the reddie's in the say the next twelve hours.”

“If I recall” Redfern thought for a few moments “The only large employer other than the County Council that still has a major cash payroll delivery in the Haychester area is the meat paste company out the far end of East Street.”

“So considering that last night another body part was washed up” Sam concluded “What would be the chances if my outrageous theory is correct that the meat paste company has their wages delivery scheduled for today?”

“If recent events are anything to go by lad, I would say anything is possible” Commander Barrett admitted.

“So who do I ask?” Sam inquired.

“Access to money delivery schedules is extremely restricted” Redfern remarked “It is still a profession where it definitely does not pay to advertise.”

“Interesting” Sam concluded “I think I can feel a good old fashioned stake out coming on.”

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“Would it be fair to assume that your hunch was unnervingly correct?” Tracy enquired.

“Naturally” the Commander confirmed “I managed to check with the wages clerk at the company and sure enough they were scheduled to receive a cash delivery for the wages at one o'clock so I borrowed Al Longton for a couple of hours and we put up some discrete surveillance.”

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“Ten minutes to go” Longton confirmed as he looked at his watch whilst he and Sam observed from a first floor office window overlooking the Davenport Meat Paste Company head offices and factory across the other side of East Street “This hunch of yours had better be right, I am missing my lunch for this and you know how I like my food.”

“Trust me” Sam confirmed “I know I am right about this.”

“Whisky X-Ray Alpha Control to all units in the Haychester area” Sam's radio declared “Report of a suitcase being found in a car park near the technology college.”

“Well now there is a surprise” Sam remarked with a mocking tone.

“All right” Longton responded “I'm convinced, the trouble is how do you prove that this is nothing more than just an unhappy coincidence?”

“I don't think we can to be honest” Sam admitted “Which is why it is important to nab these robbers and squeeze out of them who has been feeding them info and the payment to pull off these jobs.”

“Aye, aye” Longton declared indicating down the length of East Street in the direction of the centre “Blue Transit van approaching slowly.”

“Hello there...” Sam remarked as he duly picked up a pair of binoculars and trained them on the approaching vehicle “Could be our guys” he admitted.

“And here comes the money” Longton indicated in the opposite direction as a security van pulled into the end of the street and began its approach.

“Showtime my friend” Sam confirmed as he checked his weapon before they departed the office and headed down the stairs to street level.

No sooner had they reached the exit to the street and were about to come out of the door than there was a loud gunshot as a sawn off shotgun was fired into the air by the gang of robbers who piled out of their two vehicles, the initial van plus a second car that had helped to box in the security van from both sides.

“Armed Security Service officers” Sam declared loudly as he and Longton arrived on the scene weapons drawn and pointed directly at the gang “Don't even think about it mate.”

“ARU Units from Whiskey X-Ray Alpha Two Three One” Longton called into his radio “Go, go, go!”

At that point both Sam and Longton were expecting the specialist Armed Response Unit officers they had requested to be on standby nearby to come racing in and help contain the situation but instead there was a deafly silence and no one arrived.

“Missing something are we officer?” the leader of the armed gang asked wryly as he brought his shotgun to bear on them.

“Oh no not again” Sam remarked as he and Longton both instinctively ducked for cover behind a nearby parked car just as a number of gunshots rang out and narrowly missed them.

“What's missing from this picture?” Longton asked.

“Whisky X-Ray Alpha Control from Three Two Three” Sam called into his radio as they continued to come under fire from some of the gang whilst the rest were extracting the money from the security van “Where the hell is the ARU backup?”

“Control here” came the response “No such request was filed that we know of. Oh by the way if you are in West Street we have had a report of shots fired.”

“Oh thanks a bunch” Sam responded tersely before casually tossing his radio away.

“Is this the moment where we do our Butch and Sundance impressions?” Longton asked slightly nervously.

“I am afraid so” Sam confirmed as he rechecked his gun to ensure it was fully loaded “You take the two on the right, I'll take the two on the left.”

“What about the other two?” Longton asked.

“Details, details” Sam dismissed the problem “On three?”

“One, two...” they called together “and three!”

Both Sam and Longton rolled out from behind the vehicle they had been taking cover behind and quickly took aim from a lying down position. Longton aimed and fired two shots quickly disabling two of the robbers, Sam following likewise although his lousy aiming meant that his two were just wounded in the arms or legs but it was sufficient enough to bring them down and out of the fight.

The two remaining robbers in response dropped the bags of cash they were carrying to their car and took aim at the two officers but before they could pull the trigger help arrived in the form of Commander Barrett and Lieutenant Commander Redfern who had raced to the scene.

“Freeze!” Commander Barrett demanded of both the remaining robbers whilst Redfern proceeded to check the four disabled ones, disarming them in case any of them got any ideas.

“All right” one of the robbers still standing duly surrendered.

“You two all right?” Barrett called over to Sam and Longton as he proceeded to restrain the prisoner.

“Nice timing Sir” Sam remarked but then the other robber decided to make a run for it, offering a random gunshot to cover his escape, he managed to hurdle over the car and run away down East Street.

“I got him” Sam confirmed who promptly gave chase.

“That kid is going to get himself killed before the end of the day” Redfern remarked as he, Longton and Barrett rounded up the prisoners.

“I hope not” Commander Barrett remarked “I need him to survive until at least tomorrow morning to claim my ten quid in the office sweepstake.

“Any unit from Three Two Three” Sam called into his radio as he pursued the suspect as fast as his admittedly short legs could carry him “Armed robbery suspect escaping along East Street heading towards the Market Cross, armed and dangerous, any help would be appreciated.”

As the suspect came running down the busy shopping street waving his sawn off shotgun wildly around, many shoppers and other passers by ran for cover although this being sleepy Haychester a few residents still managed to carry on along the street not noticing the dramatic events that were speeding past them.

“Get back!” the suspect called loudly as he paused in the shadow of the Market Cross in the centre of the City where the four main streets meet before turning around and firing a shot at Sam who instinctively ducked, throwing himself to the floor.

“Oh great” Sam remarked to himself as now on the ground he observed the suspect begin to run again, now in a different direction.

“Three Two Three to Control” Sam confirmed as he got up and resumed the pursuit whilst it seemed half of Haychester was looking on amazed “Suspect now proceeding up North Street, am continuing pursuit, shots fired.”

With a little justifiable caution Sam rounded the corner from East into North Street and saw that the suspect was some one hundred or so yards ahead and making good progress as the crowds of shoppers were wisely staying well clear.

The suspect was still thinking through his options for escape as he continued to run up North Street with Sam in pursuit, indeed his thoughts were so concentrated on his escape that he was taken by surprise when as he reached about half way up the length of North Street in the shadow of the impressive City Council Assembly Rooms, the crowds ahead of him cleared to reveal three patrol officers all with guns drawn standing in the middle of the street blocking his escape.

“Nowhere left to run pal” Sam called as he closed in behind the suspect cutting off any possibility of an escape back the way he had come “Put the gun down before anyone gets hurt.”

“I can't” the suspect responded sincerely and with a tone of fear and trepidation in his voice.

“Yes you can” Sam confirmed casually “All you have to do is put the gun down and surrender. After that we go back to my place for a nice fresh cup of tea and a chat before you call you lawyer. I am sure this isn't your first time at this sort of thing.”

“If I talk then I am dead” the suspect confirmed obviously deeply afraid of the consequences that appeared to be in store for him if he talked to the authorities.

“We can protect you” Sam responded picking up on the man's worried demeanour “You have my word as an officer of the service, besides, you've run out of ammunition.”

All around the on looking crowd were watching nervously as the tense standoff continued, there now being an awkward period of silence as the suspect considered his options, neither of which really had any great appeal to him. The other thing he took into account was Sam's statement about his ammunition, he was indeed out, the last shot he had having been fired in warning a few minutes before.

“I want a lawyer present and I speak to you only” the suspect confirmed with clear insistence.

“I'll even throw in a cup of tea and a plate of biscuits” Sam confirmed with sincerity.

“All right” the suspect confirmed as he slowly laid his weapon on the ground and stepped towards Sam, putting his hands on his head whereupon Sam put his gun away and proceeded to handcuff him.

“There you go” Sam declared as he prepared to lead the suspect away “That didn't hurt did it. Come on, it's time you and I had a nice cosy chat.”

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“So you got him then” Tracy remarked.

“Don't I always?” the Commander responded wryly.

“So did he talk?” Tracy asked “I assume that was the end of the armed robberies at least.”

“Oh indeed” the Commander confirmed “That was the last armed robbery in Haychester for the best part of five years and when I got chummy inside a nice cosy interview room back at the office, that was when he started to spill the beans and things got really interesting.”

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“There you go” Sam confirmed as he put the mug and plate on the table in the interview room back at the Haychester Office Custody Suite “Tea and biscuits just as I promised.”

“Thanks” the suspect confirmed as he duly took a sip of the drink and munched on a biscuit.

“Ok then” Sam declared as he produced a file with various slightly disorganised papers inside it, opened it on the desk and proceeded to go through it “So far I have two armed wages snatches, a case of fresh twenty pound notes, several weapons with shall I say an interesting history and your associates who are at this moment being very very quiet.”

“Hardly surprising” the suspect confirmed “They were all recruited by me for these jobs, only I dealt with Falcon.”

“Falcon?” Sam asked “That would be the guy who is paying you to do these robberies I suppose?”

“Yes” the suspect slightly reluctantly confirmed “All contact was by calls made to one of a number of telephone boxes at a pre agreed schedule and time” he continued to explain “We never actually met.”

“When was the first contact?” Sam asked.

“Two days ago” the suspect responded “I got a call from some guy calling himself 'Falcon' who claimed he had inside information on wages deliveries in the area and that we would received twenty grand plus forty percent of the takings if I put a team together and carried them out.”

“The information, payment and weapons being dropped off in an old outbuilding in a gravel pit about fifteen miles north west of here” Sam confirmed.

“Yes” the suspect confirmed “There were certain conditions attached to the deal though” he added.

“Go on” Sam prompted.

“This Falcon guy confirmed that there would be certain other requirements that we would have to fulfil otherwise he was going to drop us into you lot at the click of his fingers” the suspect confirmed “One of these was that when you guys showed up at the first job, we were to ensure that you got well and truly shot up.”

“Well your boys certainly managed that all right” Sam admitted ruefully.

“Oh that was you was it?” the suspect asked “Sorry...” he sheepishly admitted.

“A rather odd attitude for someone in your line of work” Sam remarked casually, intrigued by the suspect's apology.

“This Falcon guy was most insistent that you be kept well and truly occupied, his words” the suspect confirmed “Seemed well weird at the time I must say.”

“There are a lot of things that seem to be like that around here lately” Sam admitted.

“For this afternoon's job” the suspect continued “I received the details over the telephone and then he added something else to the equation, something which gives me the shakes just thinking about it.”

“Go on” Sam prompted, intrigued by this developing line of enquiry.

“Falcon specifically mentioned that we were to expect to be interrupted by two Security Service officers” the suspect confirmed “Now what he asked us to do nearly made me sick, he requested that if necessary we were to shoot to kill those two officers. I was stunned, it goes against the unwritten rules.”

“Well I am glad you missed” Sam responded with a look of concern at this shocking revelation “I will tell you one thing though, I would dearly like to meet this Falcon chap” he remarked “Any chance you can arrange an invitation?”

“If he finds out I have been talking to the authorities, he will have me killed in an instant” the suspect confirmed.

“In that case we had better not tell anyone then” Sam responded with a knowing smile.

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“So anyway we put out a story that afternoon that all bar one of the suspects in the meat paste factory wages snatch had been arrested” the Commander confirmed “Then that evening I waited in a telephone box out near the Festival Theatre which was the next scheduled call location for this Falcon guy and waited.”

“Let me guess” Tracy remarked “Nobody called?”

“Got it on one love” the Commander confirmed “I was certain this guy was telling the truth though but with no call from this Falcon guy to prove it, the case was considered wrapped up, the robbers were duly charged amidst a blaze of publicity the very next morning and that was that.”

“But what about the murders?” Tracy asked “It seems awfully convenient that in the middle of all this, they were conveniently lost down the back of the proverbial sofa?”

“Murder, singular” the Commander confirmed “The press assumed that just because we had four discoveries of body parts it equals four bodies, as it turned out they were all part of the same person who to this day still remains unidentified. Anyway, that all came to a head the following morning.”

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“Lieutenant Edwards” Superintendent Bordon called as Sam entered the general office to be welcomed by the entire duty staff of officers “Congratulations on a case solved.”

“Err thank you Sir” Sam responded slightly mystified before the Superintendent duly left and Sam sat down at his desk.

“Another record broken” Longton remarked as he passed a copy of the local paper to Sam “Front page news after only two days on the job.”

“Good grief” Sam remarked as he looked at the front page of the Haychester Gazette which had a picture of himself standing in the centre of North Street the afternoon before, during the standoff with the armed robber. Alongside was the story of how this 'brave and commended' new officer had single handed, managed to apprehend the armed robbers and bring them to justice in what was probably the biggest story to make the front page of the Gazette in years.

“The Mayor apparently wants to give you the freedom of the City” Longton remarked with a chuckle.

“Does that get me a free lunch or something?” Sam asked as he continued to read the paper with a stunned look.

“I think it means you have the right to drive sheep through the streets without question or hindrance” Longton confirmed.

“Oh very useful” Sam remarked “Of course all this has pushed the far more vital murder investigation down to page...” he flapped through the pages past the usual letters of complaint about irrelevant subjects until he found what he was looking for “...page twelve!”

“Well that is all over bar the shouting now” Longton confirmed “Whilst you were chasing armed robbers all over town, the murderer gave himself up.”

“What just like that?” Sam responded, not entirely convinced “Seems a tad too convenient doesn't it?” he asked.

“He's coughed to the whole thing apparently” Longton confirmed “A couple of patrol officers got an anonymous tip about five o'clock last night and when they got to the part of the canal they were told to go to they caught him dumping a suitcase with cutting tools and blood stained clothing in.”

“So he admitted it then?” Sam asked.

“Apparently so” Longton confirmed “Superintendent Bordon came all the way back from his golf err I mean conference course to do the interview especially.”

"Blimey" Sam remarked "That was all a bit quick wasn't it?"

"The Superintendent is happy" Longton confirmed "and he is the boss in chief around here so that as they say is the proverbial that."

"No arguing with that I suppose" Sam agreed.

"Oh by the way, I meant to ask" Longton enquired out of curiosity "How did you know that guy yesterday had run out of ammunition?"

"I didn't" Sam admitted with a rueful smile.

"Bloody hell..." Longton responded with astonishment.

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"Ok ladies and gents" Commander Longton declared at the front of the briefing room as the officers under his command gathered for the morning briefing "There is a lot to get through and as usual no time to actually do it in."

"First thing" he continued "No doubt you will have noticed that we have been blessed with the presence of greatness" Longton indicated the Commander who with Tracy was standing over in the corner of the room "I am sure I do not need to introduce the Regional Administrator General and his lovely wife, both former residents of this infamous city."

"Morning" the Commander declared with a slightly reluctant wave of the hand.

"For those of you not up to date on the complex history of the City of Haychester" Longton explained "he was a humble if notorious junior officer here the last time this murder M.O. came up and is helping us I hope to try and sort out the mess so, Lieutenant Barrett, any further progress finding our missing evidence files?" he asked.

"No trace of anything related to the original murder either here, in the regional archives or central" Lieutenant Barrett regretfully confirmed "Someone has buggered off with the lot and fairly recently too Sir."

"I hate it when that happens" Longton remarked "Forensics?"

"Still working on it" Barrett confirmed "It has been an all nighter apparently."

"Ok" Longton declared "Three fronts I want to tackle this on. One, the original murder, where the hell is the original evidence, who has waltzed off with it and why?"

"And what did we miss if anything last time" the Commander suggested.

"Exactly" Longton agreed "Lieutenant Barrett, it is about time you got your feet wet with a major case load, pick a team and get to work."

"Yes Sir" Lieutenant Barrett confirmed with enthusiasm.

"Second" Longton continued "The armed wages snatches that took place at the exact same time as the original murder and body parts disposal."

"Sounds like my bit of the jigsaw" the Commander remarked.

"I was hoping you would say that" Longton confirmed "You put forward the potential of a link at the time and I reckon it is time that theory got a closer inspection."

"I'll go and metaphorically kick some doors in" the Commander remarked with a wry smile.

"Thirdly and of course most crucially" Longton concluded "Who is our deceased and do they have any connection to the original murder, that means we check forensics, missing persons, door to door, media wide appeals, the works."

"We are checking with all the usual sources" Lieutenant Barrett confirmed "With DNA, I should think the forensics boys will find someone who matches the bits we have."

"All right everyone" Longton concluded "Make it happen. If we can have an I.D. on the deceased before lunch then I will be a happy bunny. Let's go to work."

With that declaration, the officers either returned to their desks or filed out of the room.

"Sounds like we are going to do some good fashioned leg work" Tracy remarked as she accompanied the Commander down the corridor.

"Wouldn't have it any other way" the Commander confirmed "It will be nice to get reacquainted with Haychester and its little idiosyncrasies."

"So where do we start?" Tracy asked.

"West Street" the Commander confirmed "But first I need to make a telephone call."

"Duty Office, David Collins speaking" declared the operations director of MI5 upon answering the telephone that was ringing away to itself.

"David, I need a favour" the Commander declared over his mobile telephone.

"Is this the point at which I cancel all leave, put the entire Service on red alert and notify the Prime Minister?" Collins apprehensively asked.

"Fortunately not this time" the Commander confirmed "I need a name and an address for an old lag I put away a very long time ago."

"Witness Protection I assume?" Collins asked.

"How did you know that?" the Commander wondered.

"You don't call me to find the whereabouts of any Tom, Dick or Harry" Collins confirmed "I know full well that kind of information you can find out easily yourself."

"I'm looking for the current name and address of a chap who back in days of old was called William Simon Arnold Syrimis" the Commander confirmed "At a rough guess he was probably released from jail about ten years ago after a stretch for armed robbery although I would not be in the least bit surprised if he has been back inside since then."

"Give me ten minutes" Collins confirmed as he noted down the details "Where can I find you?"

"On Tracy's mobile standing in the shadow of Haychester Cathedral" the Commander confirmed as he looked up above and behind him at the tall imposing medieval spire that dominated both the City and the surrounding countryside.

"I'll call you back" Collins confirmed "Be seeing you" he declared before hanging up.

"So this is where the first armed wages snatch happened then?" Tracy remarked as they walked down West Street together beneath the trees lining the cathedral side of the street.

"Just down there" the Commander indicated ahead "Near the entrance into County Hall."

"So how many people at the time had access to the route and schedule information for the wages delivery?" Tracy asked.

"You know what" the Commander realised "I never did find out. The case kind of resolved itself so quickly that some things were never checked, more so because the evidence was packed off to the Crown Prosecution Service in double quick time."

"The CPS processing a case quickly?" Tracy remarked "That must be a first."

"Well the morning after, they received the entire case file of both the robberies and the murder before lunchtime" the Commander confirmed "Of course being a young rookie officer at the time, I was none the wiser."

"And now someone has spirited all the evidence about the murder case away into the night" Tracy remarked "Kind of odd don't you think?"

"Indeed" the Commander readily agreed as Tracy's mobile telephone in his hand began to ring "Hello?" he answered.

"I found him, now better known as one Graham Turnball" Collins confirmed "Currently to be found working in a book shop in west Haychester, number eighty one North Street."

"Happily convenient" the Commander remarked "I think it is time we dropped in on an old friend."

"If there is anything else I can do to help" Collins confirmed "Give me a shout mate."

"I might just do that" the Commander responded "Thanks."

"Any luck?" Tracy asked.

"Indeed" the Commander confirmed "When was the last time you visited a book shop?"

"When did this case happen?" Lieutenant Barrett remarked as she rifled through a large pile of old heavily dust laden files on her desk "The stone age?"

"Back in the day young lady" Longton informed her like a wise old sage "Before the days of computers, this is how criminal cases were solved, lots and lots of good old fashioned paperwork."

"Wonderful" Lieutenant Barrett remarked, coughing heavily as the dust being blown off the files affected her "I just wish they had invented the computerised filing system by then" she admitted "It would make my life an awful lot easier."

"What computers we had back then were very basic" Longton explained "The only real modern technology we had back then was the automatic doors, and even they didn't work properly most of the time."

"Well according to this mess Sir" Barrett confirmed as she finally started to make some sense of the old records "The files on both the original murder case and the armed robberies were dispatched by secure courier to the CPS the day after the suspects in both cases were arrested and charged."

"Your father will have signed off the murder paperwork" Longton confirmed "I expect the Commander probably did the robberies files."

"Err no actually, well not according to this anyway" Barrett responded.

"What?" Longton expressed surprise.

"According to this the then Superintendent Bordon processed the lot" Barrett confirmed showing her superior the file processing details "He signed them out and then afterwards signed them back in again when the dust settled."

"Perhaps we should call him and ask if he lost the files down the back of his sofa?" Longton joked.

"You know what Sir" Lieutenant Barrett remarked as she reached across the desk to extract the telephone from beneath the huge pile of old papers flowing all over the place "That's not a bad idea."

"Sir, I do believe you owe me a drink" one officer declared as he entered the office proudly holding aloft a yellow piece of paper.

"Lieutenant Franklin" Longton responded "This had better be good."

"It is Sir" Franklin confirmed as he handed across the paper "The initial tests have confirmed that our new body and our original one were brother and sister."

"Start a tab" Longton confirmed as he read the report "I'll up it to a bottle of Scotland's finest if you can attach a name to this."

"There cannot be many female missing persons in the Haychester area who have also lost their brother somewhere along the line" Franklin remarked "I'll get right on it Sir."

"At last" Longton remarked as he returned to Barrett's desk just as she got off the telephone "Progress."

"The National Administrator General is apparently mountain climbing in the Canadian Rockies" Lieutenant Barrett confirmed "No estimate on when he is due back."

"Mountain climbing?" Longton remarked with a definite hint of surprise "In Canada of all places?"

"I checked with Bordon's office and Sir Richard Crowthorne" Barrett confirmed "Unless someone is telling porkies or he is lost somewhere in an airport, he is definitely out of contact until further notice."

"Pity" Longton responded "We could have used his input, I thought this morning was going too well."

The traditional shop door bell heralded Tracy and the Commander's arrival in the antique bookshop whereupon they proceeded to the counter where he instantly recognised the now somewhat older form of reformed armed robber William Syrimis, a first edition in his hand rather than a sawn off shotgun.

"Ah good morning" Syrimis declared as he put the book down and took off his reading glasses "I have been expecting you."

"I thought you might" the Commander admitted "From which I can safely assume you heard about our infamous little murderer then?"

"Indeed" Syrimis confirmed "and your return to town. The Haychester Gazette has been going nuts about the whole affair" he confirmed as he passed across that morning's edition of the paper.

"Some actual genuine news on the front page of the whingers weekly, whatever next?" Tracy wittily remarked.

"We never had the chance to finish our little chat all those years ago" the Commander continued "Before any of us knew what was happening it was case closed thank you very much and goodnight."

"The wheels of justice certainly moved unusually quickly that night" Syrimis confirmed "At least I still got my witness protection."

"So" the Commander remarked "The last time we spoke, you sent me to a telephone box outside the Festival Theatre to await the call of our mysterious friend Falcon."

"Let me guess, he didn't call did he?" Syrimis asked.

"Nope" the Commander confirmed "However given how fast the whole matter was shut down, packed away and disappeared into the night, on reflection it was not that surprising."

"Well whoever he was" Syrimis remarked "it was someone with access to a lot of cash, well connected and with an unnatural ability of finding out when the local firms were wheeling around vast quantities of money."

"Which if I recall despite the arrest of all of your gang" the Commander commented "none of which was ever seen again."

"Well we never saw much of it after we paid this Falcon guy his percentage" Syrimis confirmed "It was placed in the drop off location in that old gravel pit and that as they say was it."

"This guy had to be a local I reckon" Tracy remarked "He would have needed to have had local knowledge to pull this off."

"I'll assume that you are not planning any more armed robberies in the near future?" the Commander joked.

"At my age?" Syrimis responded "Besides I am what those Muppets in the Home Office like to call a reformed criminal, I even managed to get a degree in prison."

"Blimey" the Commander responded impressed "and there was me thinking I had done well to get four 'O' levels!"

"Duty investigation office, Lieutenant Barrett speaking" she responded upon answering the telephone.

There were a few moments of silence as Lieutenant Barrett listened to the urgent message being re-laid to her which judging by the way her expression changed was obviously of serious importance and relevance.

"And you are sure it is her?" Barrett asked for clear confirmation of the message.

"Well done" Barrett declared a few moments later "You just made my morning. Get as many of the details as you can to me by yesterday please."

With that triumphant moment of revelation, Lieutenant Barrett duly hung up the telephone, tore off the note she had made and ran from the office and down the corridor weaving in between surprised officers until she had reached Longton's office.

"Come in, preferably whilst I still have some varnish left on the door" Longton called from inside in response to Barrett's intensive and rapid knocking.

"Sir!" Barrett declared with triumph.

"Is this something that is going to make me jump for joy or just resort to head butting my desk in frustration?" Longton asked.

"Definitely the former Sir" Barrett confirmed "We now have a name for our corpse."

"Well do tell" Longton prompted "The tension is unbearable."

"Sarah Tweedle" Lieutenant Barrett read out "She was reported missing late last night by her boss, the editor of the Haychester Gazette."

"And can I assume that the deceased in question had a brother?" Longton asked.

"She did indeed" Barrett confirmed "Robert Tweedle, both of them investigative journalists on the Gazette."

"I don't know which is the more extraordinary" Longton remarked "The discovery of the deceased's identities or the unbelievable possibility that the Haychester Gazette actually does investigative journalism."

"It is just possible that both of them were killed because of something they were investigating" Barrett remarked.

"Get someone over to the Gazette's office and go through this journalist's effects, desk, etc" Longton requested "We have a break here, let's make the most of it."

"Would you believe it" the Commander remarked with a hint of dismay "They've demolished it."

"This was where the meat paste factory was wasn't it?" Tracy recalled.

"It was indeed" the Commander confirmed "Every morning the city would awake to the smell of cooking meat. Fine providing you were not a vegetarian or they were doing bloaters which they always seemed to cook on a Wednesday."

"Lima Alpha Zero One from Whisky X-Ray Alpha Control" the Commander's radio declared interrupting their recollections.

"There is no escape" the Commander remarked "This is Lima Alpha Zero One, pass your message" he responded.

"Divisional Commander Longton asks if you are in the vicinity of the Haychester Gazette offices" the Control Room dispatcher informed him "Could you pop in and see the Editor and make enquiries about one of their journalists who has been positively identified as the victim."

"We are within sneezing distance of it" the Commander confirmed as he and Tracy turned to look down the road towards the offices of the paper some two hundred yards distant "We are on our way."

"If the same guy did both murders" Tracy asked as they started up the road together "Then why the hell did that guy confess so easily to the first one all those years back."

"That is a question I think only National Administrator General Bordon can answer" the Commander admitted "He did the confession interview and the only transcripts of it have seemingly gone walkabout."

"I wish we could ask him" Tracy remarked "It would help clear up some of the fuzzy grey areas we have."

"He is still on holiday in some remote part of the Canadian Rockies" the Commander confirmed as they crossed the busy City ring road and arrived at the main entrance of the office of the Haychester Gazette where he duly opened the door for Tracy before following her inside.

"Err can I help you?" the Receptionist at the enquiries desk asked as the two uniformed officers arrived.

"I need to see your editor" the Commander confirmed as he duly produced his warrant card in identification.

"Do you have an appointment?" the Receptionist duly responded in that manner that all receptionists do.

"Oddly enough no" the Commander admitted "but trust me, he will see me."

"Yes Sir" the Receptionist confirmed as she picked up the telephone and called the extension for the editorial office. "Excuse me Sir, there are two Security Service Officers here to see you?" she declared before leaning forward to check the epaulettes on their shoulders "LA01 and LM01" she confirmed.

The Commander could hear the response of shock and exclamation from the other end of the telephone conversation clearly.

"He will be right down Sir" the Receptionist duly confirmed.

"Told you" the Commander whimsically confirmed.

Within the space of less than thirty seconds the Editor duly appeared having run all the way down the stairs from his office on the second floor.

"Good morning" the Editor declared as he joined them "I'm Evan Grainger."

"Morning" the Commander responded "We are here about one of your journalists" he explained.

"Ah yes" Grainger confirmed "Sarah Tweedle, no one has seen sight or sound of her for almost a week now."

"We need to take a look through her stuff, anything she may have been working on, talk to her colleagues, that kind of thing" Tracy explained.

"You had better come with me" Grainger agreed whereupon he duly led them upstairs to the editorial office which was fairly quiet as the weekly edition of the paper had only just been published and there was the best part of a week before the next one was due.

"This is her desk" Grainger confirmed as they arrived at an enclosed desk cubicle where Tracy quickly noticed in amongst the personal mementos and photographs pinned on the wall, one picture which appeared to have been taken sometime in the early or mid 1980's.

"Is this her?" Tracy asked Grainger indicating the photograph and a more recent one of a young woman with a typically journalistic looking camera alongside her.

"Yes, that's her" Grainger confirmed.

"Which would suggest this chap" she indicated the older photograph of a younger looking girl with a young man "could well be the missing brother."

"Before my time I am afraid" Grainger remarked.

"Build and description look about right" the Commander confirmed as he looked up at the photograph before returning to his own problem of trying to open the desk drawer which was locked "I don't suppose anyone has a key for this thing do they?"

"No sorry" Grainger responded "I am surprised a gentleman of your notable reputation lets such an obstacle as that get in your way."

"Fair enough" the Commander admitted before he decided to be more direct and administered a swift kick to the desk drawer which had the desired effect of breaking it open, the resultant crash and the sound of splintering wood causing everyone in the office to look up momentarily.

"Do you have any idea what she was working on when she disappeared?" Tracy asked as the Commander proceeded to unceremoniously go through the drawers contents.

"Aside from our usual cats stuck up trees stories" Grainger admitted "I believe she was working on one of her pet projects."

"That would be this little lot I would guess" the Commander remarked as he pulled out an intriguing looking old box file and after laying it on the desk, opened it to reveal it was full to overflowing with old papers, newspaper clippings and other material.

"That looks like it goes back a few years" Grainger remarked as they started to go through the varied material.

"Now there is a familiar face" Tracy commented as she came across a faded clipping which was the front page of the Haychester Gazette which covered the original arrest of the armed robber in North Street by a very young looking Commander.

"Well I think we can safely say we have a connection here" the Commander confirmed "Looking at this we've got background material on the original murder, the wages snatches and also the disappearance of her brother."

"Audio cassettes" Tracy remarked as she extracted a couple of clear plastic boxes from the box containing tapes, some rather elderly looking whilst a few were definitely of more recent origin.

"Whoa..." the Commander exclaimed as he flicked through one elderly file only to stop when he recognised an old style manual typewritten form "How the hell did she get a hold of this?" he asked showing Tracy the document.

"Suspect interview transcript?" Tracy responded "I suppose she could have got it from the guy's defence lawyer."

"He never had one" the Commander confirmed "The guy confessed and then topped himself in quick succession."

"Or at least that is the official story" Tracy confirmed.

"You are starting to get as cynical as me my love" the Commander remarked.

"So it's crossed your mind as well then?" Tracy asked.

"That the entire murder case was carefully stage managed and we were led up the proverbial garden path?" the Commander admitted "Well it is certainly becoming clear that something is far from right."

"This lot needs some proper analysis" Tracy remarked as she finished looking through the wealth of material before them "Maybe cross referencing with what we have on file, which admittedly isn't much might throw up a lead or two."

"Agreed" the Commander confirmed "Also I think it is time I called upon an old friend" he added.

"Well I'm stumped" Lieutenant Barrett commented to herself as over a cup of coffee in the canteen she tried to work out how the archived evidence had managed to disappear seemingly without trace.

During the course of the morning she had ploughed through more records and files than she had ever thought possible trying to solve the mystery and all she had to show for her efforts was a small post-it note with four names on it.

"You look like a young lady with a problem" a voice more than familiar to Lieutenant Barrett remarked causing her to look up and to her surprise and delight to see her father, the retired Divisional Superintendent Thomas Barrett standing there.

"Dad?" Lieutenant Barrett responded with surprise "Aren't you supposed to be catching fish in Ireland."

"The blighters weren't biting" he confirmed as he sat down opposite his daughter "Besides I got a call for help from an old friend and came straight back."

"Well you are just in time" Lieutenant Barrett declared "I am trying to work out who walked off with the evidence and even more importantly why?"

"The Commander mentioned it" he confirmed "Who have you managed to narrow it down to?"

"Me, you, the Commander, National Administrator General Bordon, Divisional Commander Longton and that is it" she confirmed.

"Well I have an alibi" he confirmed "I assume you are beyond reproach?"

"I should hope so" she confirmed "Divisional Commander Longton and the Commander are clear of course which just leaves National Administrator General Bordon and he is in Canada."

"That's a bit odd" he marked quizzically "The bag of uselessness that is Bordon is afraid of flying."

"You think I should check more closely?" the Lieutenant asked in a moderately hushed tone.

"Couldn't hurt to check" her father confirmed "If he objects you can always say you were being thorough and if he does create a stink, get the Commander to have a go at him, Bordon may out rank him but he won't let such a little nicety as that get in the way."

"Now that sounds like it could be fun" the Commander remarked as he joined them, exchanging warm hand shakes with his now retired former commanding officer.

"You are looking well old friend" Barrett remarked.

"Considering my career in this service started with getting shot at by armed robbers and then went downhill from there" the Commander admitted ruefully "I am hardly in a position to disagree."

"You never did tell me how you knew that guy in North Street had no ammunition left" Barrett remarked.

"That's probably because I didn't know myself" the Commander admitted "Anyway, Tracy and I just got back with a veritable mountain of stuff from this journalist's desk and I need the analytical expertise of Barrett Junior here to give it the once over."

"Sounds like it could be fun" Lieutenant Barrett confirmed.

"Mind if I tag along?" Barrett asked as he and his daughter got up from the table and prepared to follow the Commander out of the canteen.

"Join the party old friend" the Commander confirmed.

Sir Richard Crowthorne was just settling down in his seat behind his new desk in his new office as head of the new Central Security Operations & Intelligence Agency, a department that already had the unofficial title of Section 14.

This was a brand new venture instigated at the behest of the Prime Minister and was about to commence operations as an overseeing agency with a wide brief.

As he settled back into the comfy chair that was so new it still had the protective plastic on the arm rests, the telephone rang.

"Greetings" he responded as soon as he had leaned across the vast empty desk and answered it.

"Sir Richard" the Commander declared "I see you have moved into your new offices already."

"Three floors of finest London Docklands property complete with south facing View and very handy for the Docklands Light Railway" Sir Richard confirmed with a wry smile "and that is in addition to some of my unlisted facilities."

"Inevitably I need a favour" the Commander came to the point of his call "National Administrator General Bordon" he explained "Where the hell is he?"

"I take it you are not convinced either that he is relaxing in a quiet log cabin in the Rockies then?" Sir Richard wondered.

"Well it doesn't fit him at all" the Commander admitted "and to be honest I need an urgent word in his shell like and last week you had two of your lads guarding him over there during that Phoenix Committee debacle."

"I'll give them a call" Sir Richard confirmed "Gives me an excuse to test my new systems."

"Give me good old fashioned paper based files any day" the Commander admitted.

"Believe me I do sympathise" Sir Richard confirmed "Don't worry, wherever he his, I'll find him."

"What do we know about this guy that confessed to the original murder?" Tracy asked as they went through the paperwork and tried to make some sense of the material collated from the deceased journalist.

"Not much" Lieutenant Barrett admitted "He had previous form for robbery apparently and was certainly known to the Service at the time."

"Then he apparently promoted himself up to murder" Barrett remarked "Hell of a leap for a guy who was little more than a petty thief and not a very good one at that."

"Is this the guy?" Tracy asked as she came across an elderly looking black and white photograph which had all the hallmarks of some sort of admittedly rather amateurish surveillance picture.

"That's him" Barrett confirmed as he looked at the picture "Who is that with him I wonder?"

"Could be anyone" Tracy remarked "The picture is so poor it could be Lord Lucan."

"I think we have more chance of finding Lord Lucan than our infamous National Administrator General" the Commander admitted as he joined the group "Anything from this mess?" he asked.

"An educated guess love" Tracy confirmed "Our dead journalist's brother must have been investigating something that got him killed and then all these years later using his original material the younger sister met the same fate doing the same."

"But nothing to indicate what that was or who is behind it all I assume?" the Commander asked.

"Nope" Lieutenant Barrett confirmed "The only thing that strikes me as worth following up is our dead murder suspect. See if anything turns up in his background."

"Come on, it's only Canada" Sir Richard remarked as he paced up and down his new office waiting impatiently for his call to be answered "Pick up for crying out loud."

He was about to give up when finally his man in Canada answered, Sir Richard having failed to take into account the fact it was still very early in the morning over there.

"Rogerson" came a very tired sounding response from Sir Richard's associate.

"Not sleeping on the job are we?" Sir Richard asked with a chuckle.

"No Sir" Rogerson confirmed "Hardly likely given Mr Bordon's snoring which let me tell you is so loud I can hear it through two walls."

"He was the reason why I called actually" Sir Richard responded "Just wanted to make sure our revered National Administrator General was safe and sound."

"Well I don't know about him" Rogerson confirmed "but when you see him you can tell him his little brother is safe and sound, just a pity about the snoring."

"Err hang on" Sir Richard responded "I sent you out there to look after the National Administrator General Sir William Bordon. Where the hell did his younger brother come from?"

"Sir William was recalled to the UK about a week ago" Rogerson confirmed "On your orders I might add Sir."

"Bloody hell..." Sir Richard remarked "Get your collective arses back here as soon as you can, we have work to do."

"I'll be on the first flight Sir" Rogerson confirmed before Sir Richard hung up, paused for a moments thought and then directly dialled the internal switchboard.

"Get me a secure line to Regional Administrator General Regent, code two" he instructed with a clear sense of urgency.

"Ah, there you are" Lieutenant Barrett remarked as after over an hour of searching, she finally managed to find a record for the original murder suspect which had been misfiled, the main reason why her file search had taken so long.

She relaxed back a little and took a sip of now slightly cold black coffee as the information she had been seeking scrolled across the screen in front of her.

"Not exactly a stunning career criminal" the Lieutenant remarked as she read the summary of the man's arrest history from all those years ago, a seemingly endless procession of petty offences dating back all the way to the 1960's, none of which really gave any useful insight into anything Barrett was investigating.

"Whoa..." Lieutenant Barrett suddenly called out as just when she was about to give up, something caught her eye at the very bottom of the file. Quickly she wound the text on the screen back up to the point that had attracted her attention whereupon she leaned forward more closely to read a reference to a different file.

"Record transferred to file WP1365896, Alpha Priority Eyes Only" Lieutenant Barrett read from the screen "What the hell is a 'WP' file when it is at home?" she asked.

After a few moments thought, Lieutenant Barrett rolled across on her chair to another officers desk nearby and proceeded to scramble through the drawers until she found an old reference guide to the service which she brought to her own desk and proceeded to flick through the tatty and dog-eared pages until she found a reference list of file prefix codes for the service.

"Lets see" Barrett declared to herself for she was all alone in the office as she ran her finger down the list of codes "There are the W's, 'WA', 'WE', 'WP'.... Witness Protection?"

Lieutenant Barrett thought again for a few moments before turning back to her computer and calling up a file search and access program where she proceeded to

enter her father's name, hoping that despite his retirement a couple of years earlier that he and most importantly his high level clearance was still on the system.

As it turned out her hunch was correct, his username was still valid, the only question remaining was what the password would be.

"Mmm" she pondered "If I were my father, what would my password be?" After a few moments thought she decided to try her own first name Rosemary.

"There goes my faith in data security" she remarked as sure enough her guess proved correct and she was allowed in.

Once in, Lieutenant Barrett input the file number and was pleasantly surprised when the system found it, bringing her a strictly classified dossier on the long deceased murder suspect which listed two hitherto unknown and important facts.

"So lets see my friend" Barrett remarked as she read from the screen "You gave evidence against an armed robbery gang and then..." she scrolled down "...you became a registered paid informant. Interesting..."

The Lieutenant made a few notes before she wondered about something else, wondering if there was any possibility that a thought that occurred to her at that moment may help to explain one or two things.

"If you were a registered informant" Barrett asked herself "Who was your handler?" In search of the answer, she proceeded to another section of the online file where she duly found the answer to her query.

"I love it when I am right" Barrett declared triumphantly as she afforded herself a moment of satisfaction as she looked on at the name of the handling officer at the time, a certain Superintendent William Bordon.

Quickly Barrett realised that she needed to tell her superiors this potentially important link as soon as possible and so reached for the telephone and proceeded to call Longton's office but after waiting patiently for over a minute without answer decided to take the initiative.

Proceeding quickly out of the general office, Lieutenant Barrett headed downstairs, out of the building and across to the administration block.

"There's no doubt about it" the Forensic Services officer confirmed as she stepped back from the microscope to allow the Commander to have a look for himself "They are genuine banknotes all right and definitely the same issue as those taken in your County Council wages snatch all those years ago."

"But why use them to wrap and dispose of body parts almost twenty years later?" the Commander asked.

"Well these notes ceased being legal tender ten years ago" retired Superintendent Barrett remarked as he casually picked up one of the notes and instinctively held it up to the light to check its authenticity "Essentially they are nothing more than scrap paper now."

"The amount in the cases with the body parts that we found amounted to eight thousand four hundred and twenty pounds" the Forensic Services officer confirmed.

"Which means whoever is behind this either didn't need the cash or was a complete whacko" the Commander concluded.

"Or both more than likely" Barrett added as the Commander was distracted by his mobile telephone ringing.

"Ah, a missive from Sir Richard Crowthorne" the Commander remarked as he looked at the caller display.

"You with a mobile phone?" Barrett remarked "There is something I thought I would never see!"

"Hello?" the Commander answered.

"Do you want the bad news or the really bad news?" Sir Richard asked with an obvious sense of urgency in his voice.

"I'll think I will take it as it comes considering I get the impression that I am not going to like either very much" the Commander responded.

"National Administrator General Bordon left Canada, assuming he was even there in the first place the best part of a week ago" Sir Richard confirmed "It transpires he pulled a fast one, my guys have spent the last two weeks keeping an eye on his younger brother."

"Do we know where he is?" the Commander asked "I would be mildly content with having it narrowed down to a country."

"Can't even tell you that" Sir Richard confirmed "I have however got Customs & Immigration going through the records for all ports and airports for the last fortnight but that is going to take time."

"In which case we go to plan 'B' then" the Commander responded "Grab Commander Fuller and his bag of tricks and go over to Bordon's office, kick the door in with my blessing and turn it, his computer and his life inside out."

"More your forte really" Sir Richard responded "However you may consider it done" he confirmed.

"As soon as you find anything..." the Commander began.

"...I'll give you a call" Sir Richard agreed "If you will excuse me, I have to go and put my best door kicking boots on."

"Speak to you later" the Commander confirmed before hanging up.

"Well that sounded interesting" Barrett remarked.

"It was indeed" the Commander confirmed thoughtfully "Does Bordon still live around these parts?" he asked.

"I think so" Barrett confirmed "That information might be available from the Personnel Office."

"In which case that should be my next stop" the Commander confirmed "Is Personnel still in that grotty wooden hut around the back?"

"It is indeed Sir" the Forensic Services officer confirmed "Only please call them Human Resources, they just had a makeover recently."

"You would think they had better things to do wouldn't you?" the Commander remarked.

"I'll head back to the office and chew some fat with Longton" Barrett confirmed "Also I had better make sure that daughter of mine has not gone and done anything silly."

"A hunch?" the Commander asked.

"More like years of experience" Barrett confirmed with a wry smile "See you later."

The Commander duly offered his thanks to the Forensic Services officer before he too left, bumping into Tracy in the central corridor outside.

"Oh hello love" Tracy greeted him with a welcoming cheery smile "Uh oh..." she added with a tone of foreboding once she had seen the look on her husbands face "I know that look..."

"How do you feel about tagging along with me whilst I investigate one of my infamous hunches?" the Commander asked her as they proceeded along the main corridor arm in arm.

"Well someone has got to be along who can actually shoot straight if or should I say when it all goes pear shaped" Tracy joked.

"I'll try not to take that personally" the Commander agreed as they exited out of the end of the central corridor and proceeded by way of the car park and the vehicle engineering section to the northern perimeter of the site where there was to be found a row of old 1960's wooden temporary buildings which were far more permanent a feature than had originally been intended many decades earlier.

The head of Administration & Personnel looked up from behind her rather battered old desk as the door creaked open and to her surprise saw Tracy and the Commander enter.

"Good morning" the Personnel Officer remarked "Something I can be doing for you officers?"

"Indeed" the Commander confirmed "I need the home address of National Administrator General Bordon."

"That's the second one today" the Personnel Officer casually remarked "Don't any of you officer types ever actually communicate with each other from time to time?"

"Who else asked then?" Tracy asked as equally bemused as her husband that someone appeared to have been ahead of them.

"That young girl from 'A' section" the Personnel Officer confirmed.

"Lieutenant Barrett?" the Commander asked.

"Aye that would be her" the Personnel Officer confirmed.

"Oh hell" the Commander responded as he reached across the desk for the telephone which he picked up and dialled the extension number for Longton's office.

"Can you give me Bordon's address?" Tracy asked as the Commander waited to be answered.

"Al?" the Commander called as soon as his call was answered "If you are within shouting distance of old man Barrett, tell him his hunch about his over enthusiastic daughter may be right."

"I've got the address" Tracy confirmed holding up her piece of paper.

"We are heading on up to Bordon's place now" the Commander confirmed "Hopefully we will get there before his lass treads in 'owt."

"I'll let him know" Longton confirmed.

"We need some wheels" Tracy remarked as they exited from the Personnel Office and headed back across towards the vehicle engineering area.

"Indeed" the Commander confirmed "Excuse me?" he called ahead to a couple of local officers who had just pulled up outside the garage in a patrol car "Mind if we borrow your motor?"

Lieutenant Barrett's patrol car scrunched its wheels on the neatly maintained gravel driveway surface as she slowly approached the large circa seventeenth century country cottage with its traditional thatched roof.

She duly pulled up immediately in front of the small wrought iron gate that led to the ornamental front garden and the front door of the house.

"I guess this is the place" she remarked as she stopped the engine and got out of the car where she stood for a few moments and looked around at the rustic rural idyll in which the cottage was located with its constant soundtrack of bird song prominent to the ears.

With a deep breath, Lieutenant Barrett proceeded through the gate and up the garden path, lined either side with excellently tended flower beds until she reached the front door. There she found an old fashioned bell pull which she pulled down whereupon the sound of a bell could be heard ringing inside the house.

"Hello?" Lieutenant Barrett called clearly "Administrator General? I am Lieutenant Barrett from the Haychester office. I was wondering if it would be possible to have a word?"

There was no response either to her calling or the second ringing of the bell pull.

"Hello?" she called again but by now it was clear there was apparently no one home.

Thinking for a few moments as to what to do next, Barrett went on her instincts and knelt down to look beneath the ornamental flower pot in the porch where sure enough she found a front door key.

"Administrator General" Lieutenant Barrett remarked with a wry smirk "We really must talk about crime prevention" she commented as she took the key and proceeded to try it in the front door whereupon it duly opened.

"Hello?" she called confidently as she entered through the front door into the hallway.

There was no response to her call as she closed the door behind her before proceeding to walk through the house which, apart from the ticking of an old antique clock in the front room appeared to both silent and deserted.

Lieutenant Barrett made her way through the house to the traditional style country kitchen at the back where she placed her hand over the kettle on the stove which she discovered was warm indicating that someone had been there very recently.

"Administrator General Bordon?" Lieutenant Barrett called again "Are you here?"

Again her enquiry elicited no response as she proceeded to move through the house until she reached the ornate dining room.

"I am definitely in the wrong business" Lieutenant Barrett remarked to herself as she admired the medieval hall with its original oak beams.

Unfortunately she did not have the opportunity to go any further as a tall figure appeared from the shadows behind her and before she could react, a large piece of wood was brought down across the back of her head sending the Lieutenant crashing to the floor unconscious.

"Admit it love, we're lost" Tracy remarked as she and the Commander looked around the rural crossroads trying to work out where they were.

"Well all the roads have changed in the last twenty years" the Commander admitted as he consulted a map laid out on the bonnet of the borrowed patrol car "It doesn't help that this area seems to have become home to the national roundabout collection in the last few years, I think the County Highways Department must have a farm where they breed them."

"Well we came up here" Tracy confirmed as she retraced their journey so far on the map "Down there just leads you to the wilds of Fittleworth I think so lets try down here" she suggested.

"Sounds a good a plan as any love" the Commander agreed as they got back in the patrol car and with Tracy driving, headed off westwards down another of the seemingly endless rural country lanes that dominated the area to the north of Haychester.

"Try taking the next left" the Commander suggested as he struggled with the map "The embarrassing thing is I was an officer in these parts for over ten years and I am lost."

"It happens to the best of us love" Tracy reassured him as she turned left "I managed to go completely the wrong way around the Circle Line the other day and I am meant to be a London girl."

"Ah this looks like the place" the Commander remarked as they approached the outskirts of a rural hamlet before pulling up outside the gated entrance to a neatly tended gravel driveway which led up to a large medieval cottage.

"Well if this is Bordon's place then he must have a very good savings plan" Tracy commented as they both got out of the car before proceeding to walk up the driveway towards the house itself "It takes the combined salary of my Divisional Commander and your Regional Administrator General's pay to afford a penthouse apartment in Vauxhall Cross."

"Hello, someone has left the front door open" the Commander remarked as they reached the porch and discovered the door ajar.

"I don't like it" Tracy commented.

"You go around the back love" the Commander instructed as he drew his gun from its holster.

"No problem" Tracy confirmed as she drew her own gun and proceeded around the side of the house to the back door.

With caution, the Commander proceeded inside at the same time that Tracy entered through the back door into the kitchen.

Both officers made a sweep methodically through the ground floor until they met up again in the lounge.

"Anything?" Tracy whispered.

"Nope" the Commander confirmed "I don't much care for Bordon's taste in interior décor either" he admitted.

"Did you check the dining room?" Tracy nodded towards the adjacent ornate room.

"My next stop" the Commander agreed as he proceeded through into the dining room where he noticed that unlike the immaculate interior of the rest of the house, the rug on the floor and some of the furniture had been disturbed. It was then he noticed the small pool of blood.

"Tracy" the Commander called back "Come and take a look at this" he requested as he knelt down to examine the small patch of fairly fresh blood.

"Ominous" Tracy remarked as she joined her husband kneeling down on the floor.

"I'll check upstairs" the Commander confirmed as he stood back up "Have a look around the out buildings and see if there is anything to indicate to whom this belonged."

"I'll get a paramedic unit put on standby just in case we find the owner of the blood as well" Tracy added as she left the Commander to proceed cautiously with his gun drawn up the stairs which with some inevitability, creaked loudly about two thirds of the way up.

"I hate it when that happens" the Commander remarked to himself before continuing upwards until he reached the upper landing.

With a cautious approach, he proceeded to check every room on the floor but much like the rest of the house, wherever he went he encountered the same neat and tidy almost house proud condition but no persons present.

Back outside, Tracy had already called for backup and a paramedic unit when she proceeded to check the few outbuildings, a garden shed that contained little of note and the garage.

She was forced to rub off the cobwebs from the side window before Tracy could peer inside whereupon she caught a glimpse of something that definitely should not have been there.

Back inside the house, the Commander ascended a small almost ladder like set of steps that led up into the roof space which it turned out had been converted into a sumptuous office and study, an ornate desk dominating the centre of the room bathed in the sunlight from the dormer window.

"Are you there love?" Tracy's voice was heard to come from below.

"In the attic" the Commander called back as he proceeded to look through the desk drawers before Tracy came up the steps and joined him.

"There is a Security Service patrol car parked up in the garage, engine is still warm" Tracy confirmed.

"Any sign of any other vehicles?" the Commander asked "Bordon used to have an old 1960's Bentley."

"Well it's a two bay garage and the other half is empty but judging by the patch of oil on the ground I would bet something was there recently" she confirmed.

"Well this is a blank" the Commander confirmed as he shut the desk drawer and looked around until his eyes caught an old style cast iron safe of the type with a cast huge makers plate on the front "Do you think you could get into that thing?" he asked.

"Ah, a Whitworth & Abercrombie model twenty two" Tracy remarked as she went over to the safe "I haven't seen one of these in a long time."

"Can you pick the lock and work out the combination?" the Commander asked.

"Of course I can dear" Tracy confirmed "Trouble is, it is quicker to do this" she remarked as she calmly took a fire iron from nearby and proceeded to lever off the back of the safe, exposing its contents.

"What the...?" the Commander exclaimed.

"That is why I haven't seen one of these for a long time" Tracy explained "They had a rather obvious design fault."

"Let's see what we have here" the Commander remarked as he and Tracy extracted the contents of the safe and placed them on the desk just as the sound of a vehicle arriving in the gravel driveway was heard.

"It's Barrett senior" Tracy confirmed as she looked through the window to see him arrive in another borrowed patrol car.

"See what you can make out of this lot love" the Commander asked "I'll go down and see him."

As Tracy proceeded to look through the papers and other items from the safe, the Commander headed back downstairs and met Barrett in the front doorway.

"Any sign of her?" Barrett asked with obvious concern for the welfare of his daughter.

"Nothing here except a trace of blood in the dining room and a hidden patrol car in the garage" the Commander confirmed.

"Lets check out the car" Barrett suggested before he and the Commander went around to the garage and levered open the door to reveal the marked Security Service patrol car which showed signs of having been moved in there out of sight and abandoned in a hurry.

"Keys are still in the ignition, even the side lights are still on" the Commander confirmed.

"Definitely sounds like my daughter was driving then" Barrett confirmed as he looked inside the interior from the front passenger side door.

"Release the boot will you?" the Commander asked whereupon Barrett reached across the dashboard and flipped the switch which allowed the boot to be opened to see what was inside.

"Anything?" Barrett asked.

"Borderline legality on the tread on the spare" the Commander confirmed "but that's all unfortunately."

"Eddie!" Tracy was heard to call loudly from the attic roof dormer window of the house.

"Can I safely assume when your wife calls you Eddie it is likely to be somewhat serious?" Barrett asked as they both exited the garage.

"Indeed" the Commander confirmed before looking up at the roof "You screamed my love?" he responded.

"Get up here" Tracy called from the window "I've found something."

"You heard the lady" the Commander confirmed as he and Barrett duly headed inside and then made their way up through the house until they had rejoined Tracy in the attic study.

"Take a look at this guys" Tracy explained as she duly kneeled down and opened the bottom drawer of one of the filing cabinets to show a large collection of elderly official looking files "These ring any bells?"

"Well, well, well" the Commander confirmed "If I am not mistaken, these look like our missing evidence files."

"But what are they doing here?" Barrett asked as he helped Tracy extract the files from the drawer.

"Whoa..." Tracy remarked as the files were removed to reveal something tucked in at the very back of the drawer which the Commander duly pulled out into the light to reveal it to be a cash box.

"Drat" the Commander remarked as he tried to open it "Locked. Can you do anything with it?" he asked passing it to Tracy.

"We have a motto in New Scotland Yard" Tracy explained to Barrett as she took the cash box, extracted her lock picking tools from her inside uniform tunic pocket and proceeded to work on it "Never leave home without a locksmiths daughter."

"It looks like our friend Bordon was into nature as well" the Commander marked as he looked through another filing cabinet drawer and came across a folder of photographic slides which he held up to the light to see that they appeared to be views of trees and countryside views of some sort, however without any form of proper projector, it was difficult to make out any specifics.

"He goes fishing" Barrett confirmed "He isn't very good at it mind despite his usually outrageous claims in the pub."

"Got it" Tracy declared as she successfully managed to defeat the lock on the box and opened it to reveal a significant quantity of cash.

"Something for a rainy day?" Barrett commented.

"Not with this lot" the Commander confirmed "This is old type bank notes, no longer in circulation."

"Which added to the original evidence files here" Tracy remarked "would suggest that our friend Bordon knows a lot more than he should."

"First things first" the Commander declared "Lets get a specialist team in here and turn this place upside down, squeak the proverbial pips, secondly we need to get this lot back to Haychester and get it all analysed, cross referenced and catalogued."

"I'll take care of that" Tracy confirmed as she started to gather together the evidence material.

"Meanwhile" the Commander turned to Barrett "Let's go and find that wandering daughter of yours."

"Sir Richard Crowthorne" the distinguished looking man introduced himself formally to the Personal Assistant "I have a warrant to search the office of National

Administrator General Bordon" he confirmed producing the official looking document.

"Err right" the Personal Assistant confirmed as she examined the document "The door is locked I think."

"Not a problem my dear" Sir Richard confirmed "I've been taking lessons from the Commander."

"Oh dear..." the Personal Assistant remarked before her fears were confirmed when Sir Richard duly stepped up to the office door and kicked it in, wrecking the door frame in the process.

"Ok, let's see what we have got here" Sir Richard declared as he and his two associates proceeded to systematically search the opulently appointed office.

"Hello?" came the voice of Commander Simon Fuller as he joined them in the office carrying with him his case containing various tools and his laptop that never left his side.

"Oh, hello Simon" Sir Richard responded "Welcome to the party."

"I heard you wanted me to take a shuftly through something?" Fuller asked.

"Yes indeed" Sir Richard confirmed as he pulled back the sumptuous chair behind the desk "Take a seat."

"That's the seat of the National Administrator General" Fuller responded "Just a tad over my pay scale to be sitting there don't you think."

"Enjoy the moment" Sir Richard advised with a wry smirk whereupon Fuller, with some trepidation duly sat down.

"Hmm" he remarked as he settled back in the chair "I could get used to this. So which poor sod do you want me to go through the life of today?" he asked as he got out his laptop, opened and switched it on.

"The usual occupant of that there seat" Sir Richard admitted.

"Whoa..." Fuller responded with understandably stunned surprise "Are you insane?"

"Quite probably" Sir Richard confirmed "However the Commander believes National Administrator General Bordon has been a very naughty boy and wants you to do one of you specials on any and every file and e-mail he has."

"You do realise that we are talking about some of the highest level encryption and security in the whole system?" Fuller asked.

"Yes" Sir Richard confirmed "Is that going to be a problem?"

"No" Fuller confirmed with a knowledgeable smirk as he started work "I designed the encryption, besides I know all of Bordon's passwords."

"I am not even going to ask..." Sir Richard commented as he left Fuller to his work.

The next twenty minutes saw frenzied activity as Sir Richard and his associates went through every paper based file they could find in the office whilst Fuller continued to work through the computer.

"What do you suppose that is Sir" one of the associates asked Sir Richard as he showed him a file he had found hidden in the bottom drawer of one of the filing cabinets.

"Perhaps he was thinking of investing in some property" Sir Richard commented as he looked at the file which contained plans, maps and photographs of a rural looking area.

"Does this place have a name?" Fuller asked.

"North Quarry" Sir Richard confirmed "Looks like some sort of development site or something."

"There are some e-mails here from a property development company" Fuller confirmed "Looking through this it would appear that our Mr Bordon had an interest in some piece of property near Haychester."

"Well that fits" Sir Richard confirmed "Anything else cluttering up his inbox?" he asked.

"It looks like he recently had some lengthy correspondence with some journalist" Fuller read from the screen.

"Not from the Haychester Gazette by any chance?" Sir Richard asked.

"Give the man a gold star" Fuller remarked.

"Hmm" Sir Richard mused "The plot thickens..."

"Your daughter was about half an hour ahead of us" the Commander summarised as he and Barrett walked down the driveway to his patrol car "Tracy and I arrived here about fifteen minutes ago so in theory wherever she went, she has a forty five minute head start on us."

"There are so many rural back roads around here" Barrett remarked "the words needle and haystack come readily to mind."

"What we need here is some divine inspiration" the Commander admitted as they got in the car just as his mobile telephone began to ring.

"That will be God calling now" Barrett commented wryly.

"Hello all mighty one" the Commander declared upon answering the telephone.

"Eh?" Sir Richard Crowthorne responded with some understandable surprise.

"Private joke old friend" the Commander confirmed "Found anything?"

"We are methodically wrecking Bordon's office now" Sir Richard confirmed as behind him one of his men made a crash as he levered off the front of a cabinet.

"This method wouldn't involve a couple of your more muscular colleagues and a crowbar by any chance?" the Commander asked in response to the background noise.

"And Fuller as well" Sir Richard confirmed "It would appear our old friend National Administrator General Bordon is getting interested in property investment, there are details here of various sites around the Haychester area with potential for property development."

"Anything near his place?" the Commander asked as he and Barrett got in the patrol car.

"Various places" Sir Richard confirmed "A development of retirement apartments in west Haychester, a couple of housing estates, an old aggregates depot out in the sticks, an old factory someplace, even part of an old World War Two airfield."

"That old aggregates depot" the Commander asked as a possibility occurred to him "That wouldn't happen to be the old north pit near Fluteham would it?"

"Err yes, that's the one" Sir Richard confirmed "Do you know it?" he asked.

"You could say that" the Commander admitted as Barrett started the car "Anything else turn up?"

"There appears to be a lot of detailed e-mail correspondence between Bordon and some journalist from the Haychester Gazette" Sir Richard confirmed "Could that be relevant?"

"Absolutely" the Commander confirmed "Can you send Tracy a copy of it all?"

"Just the relevant e-mails or the whole lot?" Sir Richard asked.

"Let's have the lot" the Commander requested "Send them to Tracy though, if I receive them it will take me weeks to figure out what to do with them."

"Sending them now" Sir Richard confirmed "Anything else I can do for you?"

"Yes" the Commander responded "Go and see the Prime Minister and give him the potentially unpleasant news that he will probably need a new National Administrator General before the day is out."

"Oh he'll love that" Sir Richard remarked "Be seeing you" he confirmed before hanging up.

"All right then" the Commander turned to Barrett "Lets burn some rubber."

"No problem" Barrett confirmed as he released the handbrake and accelerated away down the narrow country lane.

"Turn right at the end here" the Commander confirmed as they approached a junction whereupon Barrett duly executed a handbrake turn with the lights and sirens in full cry.

"Been a long time since I have done this" Barrett admitted as they headed up the lane at full speed.

"You don't appear to have lost your touch though" the Commander confirmed.

Lieutenant Barrett began to slowly regain consciousness as she lay on the dirt covered floor of an old industrial building of some kind.

As her senses began to return, she was able to lift herself up and look around her new and very unfamiliar surroundings whilst feeling the sore patch on the back of her head where she had been struck earlier.

There was no way for the Lieutenant to know how long she had been unconscious as her watch had been broken at some point, probably during the time that she had been moved and subsequently dumped in the miserable rundown surroundings she now found herself in.

"Oh my head..." Lieutenant Barrett groggily remarked, feeling the back of her head.

A quick check once she had managed to get herself together revealed that not only was her gun missing but also her radio set and mobile phone had been taken as well.

"How the hell did I get into this mess?" she asked herself as she got back to her feet slightly unsteadily before going over to the ramshackle door which she then discovered was secured from the other side meaning she was trapped.

"Great..." Lieutenant Barrett commented with a resigned sigh.

Suddenly the sound of footsteps somewhere nearby could be heard moving through some adjacent area of the near derelict building.

"Who's there?" the Lieutenant demanded to know, calling directly through the door with authority.

"Believe me Lieutenant" a voice she did not recognise responded with a hint of both regret and implied menace "You do not want to know."

"You are aware no doubt" Lieutenant Barrett informed her unseen captor "that so far I can arrest you for assault, kidnapping, false imprisonment and obstruction of justice."

"Under different circumstances maybe" the voice confirmed "However I regret to inform that you will not be in a position to execute your duties as an officer of the law for the foreseeable future."

"So I see" Lieutenant Barrett remarked as she tried the door once again on the off chance but it was still firmly locked from the other side.

"Unfortunately you are one of those Security Service officers who are far too clever for their own good" the mystery captor responded "Your Herculean efforts mean I need to keep you out of the way indefinitely until I can finalise my solution to this little crisis."

"Well the least you could do would be to supply some water or something?" the Lieutenant suggested.

"Agreed" the captor confirmed following a brief silent pause for consideration.

"Bloody hell!!!" the Commander exclaimed as Barrett drove the patrol car over a humped back bridge that crossed the former track bed of the long since abandoned Haychester to Midhurst railway line.

"It's definitely been a while since I done this" Barrett admitted "I suppose technically since I am retired, I shouldn't really be doing this."

"I think we need to go right just ahead here" the Commander confirmed.

"Got it" Barrett confirmed as amid the din of sirens and blue flashing lights, he executed another perfect handbrake turn and headed down the narrow gravel track sending up a massive cloud of dust in their wake.

"Al Longton is not going to like this" the Commander remarked as they bumped and lurched along the rough track, the undergrowth on either side encroaching on the sides of the car and at one point nearly claiming the wing mirrors.

"If I recall in your time" Barrett commented "You got through a fair few patrol cars whilst under my command."

"Guilty as charged" the Commander admitted "Slow up a bit, it's just up here" he indicated ahead to a rusting old gate off to one side.

"How big is this site?" Barrett asked as he brought the car to a standstill in front of the dilapidated old gate, the faded remains of the old quarry company sign being the only indication of this remote location's former purpose.

"Roughly twenty acres I would have thought" the Commander confirmed, getting out of the car before they both looked through the gate into the dense undergrowth encroached site.

"Terrific..." Barrett commented.

"You still authorised to use one of these?" the Commander asked as he produced and handed across his spare gun, a nine millimetre semi-automatic hand gun.

"Probably not" Barrett admitted as he took the weapon as the Commander drew his faithful old six shot revolver "You still got that old thing?"

"Bordon advised me to get rid of this 'antique' the first day I started" the Commander confirmed as he and Barrett together managed to get the gate open before entering the site "Never regretted holding onto it so far."

"So where did this come from then?" Barrett indicated the weapon he was carrying.

"Tracy said it was time I got some additional backup" the Commander explained "and when Tracy tells me to do something, oddly enough I listen" he wryly admitted.

Cautiously they made their way up the barely visible overgrown track the hundred or so metres until they reached the edge of the main pit, itself now festooned with shrubs and undergrowth following several years of dereliction and abandonment.

"There was an old aggregates processing plant over towards the west side somewhere" the Commander confirmed as he surveyed the surrounding area looking for some clue as to the best way to continue "Come on, lets try this way" he suggested before leading the way down into the pit itself.

"I've got a bad feeling about this..." Barrett remarked as he duly followed the Commander down, being careful not to slip on the loose gravel surface of the pit sides until they reached the near level bottom some fifty feet into the ground.

"You always say that" the Commander commented as he began to move on through the dense thicket of silver birch trees.

"You were never this cynical under my command" Barrett remarked as he followed closely "It must be something to do with attaining the lofty heights of the higher ranks."

"Maybe" the Commander admitted "I'll ask the wife when I see her."

After a few minutes of struggling through thick trees and shrubbery, they emerged onto a rudimentary rough track that ran through the site whereupon the Commander noticed something which prompted him to kneel down for a closer look.

“Tyre tracks” he confirmed “fresh ones too by the looks of it.”

“Could be our guy” Barrett commented.

“First things first” the Commander responded as he checked his gun again just to be sure “Let's find that over enthusiastic daughter of yours first.”

Their footsteps crunched on the soggy gravel covered surface of the track as they made their way along its length until the surroundings opened out to reveal the approaches to the long abandoned aggregates processing complex, rusty conveyor belts, derelict machinery and old rusting corrugated metal sheds in various states of dereliction dotted around the place like long forgotten guardians of an industry long since consigned to history.

“You would have thought they could have tidied the place up a bit if they were expecting guests” the Commander wryly remarked to which Barrett merely smirked in response “I'll take the left hand side, you go down to the right and no heroics.”

“That's my line isn't it?” Barrett responded.

“Not any more” the Commander confirmed “Now I am the Commanding officer and technically you are a civilian my old friend.”

“Point taken Commander” Barrett agreed readily before heading off.

Reaching one of the dilapidated buildings, the Commander brushed some of the years of cobweb deposits off a cracked and rusty window to peer inside but saw nothing, it was only as he proceeded down the side of the building that he was suddenly stopped in his tracks when he detected a knocking noise coming from inside part of the building.

“Hello?” he called out “Security Service Officer, is there anyone there?”

“In here!” the slightly muffled voice of a female called back followed by a series of bangs as whoever it was hammered their fists against a wall or a door somewhere inside the complex.

The Commander followed the noise and had to clamber through a partially collapsed section of the building until he reached what was clearly the former workshop area, once home to numerous tools and pieces of equipment but now only housing hundreds of spiders, a few rats and a collection of old rusted through abandoned oil cans.

“Hello?” the Commander called again.

“I'm in here” the voice confirmed again with an accompaniment of banging against a door over on the far side of the former workshop.

“I’ve got you” the Commander confirmed as he duly made his way amidst the debris over to the door which was secured with a fresh new padlock which he proceeded to examine before bringing his gun to bear upon it. The subsequent gunshot that the Commander fired to remove the padlock quickly caught the attention of Barrett who appeared just moments later gun pointed ahead just as the Commander was about to open the door.

“Whoa, it’s me” the Commander called realising that Barrett was almost about to shoot him.

“Sorry” Barrett apologised “I thought when I heard the gunshot...”

“Padlock” the Commander explained as he tossed the shiny but now disabled lock to Barrett before releasing the catch and opening the door to reveal the Lieutenant standing there looking more than a little bemused.

“Hi dad!” she called with a wry smile and a wave “What brings you to this charming little neighbourhood?”

“We had the strangest feeling you had gone and done something rather rash all in the name of duty” Barrett explained.

“You may not be far wrong there” the Lieutenant confirmed as she felt the back of her head which was still sore before going over to her father and giving her a hug.

“I hate to break up this little family reunion” the Commander cautioned “But might it not be a good idea if we got the hell out of here?”

“Very good idea” the Lieutenant agreed to which her father merely nodded before they proceeded together to the exit where she noticed her gun and holster lying on an old workbench.

“Oh hell” the Commander responded as no sooner had they emerged into the daylight than a gunshot rang out, striking the door pillar alongside them and forcing them to duck back inside the building again.

“Ever get the feeling someone doesn’t like you?” the Lieutenant remarked as she reloaded her gun and checked it.

“Occupational hazard my dear” the Commander confirmed as he looked through the adjacent window, trying to gauge whereabouts the shot had originated from.

“Perhaps I had better lead” the Lieutenant suggested.

“Why?” Barrett asked.

“Because when I last looked you two gentlemen were not exactly known for your marksmanship skills” the Lieutenant explained to which the Commander merely shrugged his shoulders in admission.

“I can shoot straight” Barrett responded as another shot was fired by the unseen gunman shattering the window and sending glass into the room.

“Dad, do I really need to remind you of the elephant incident?” the Lieutenant asked.

“Err what elephant?” the Commander asked.

“This is no time to be discussing past case histories” Barrett declared.

“Where is the motor?” the Lieutenant asked.

“Parked at the south entrance to the pit about a mile and a half from here” the Commander confirmed.

“Now I don't suppose you gentlemen have a plan 'B' by any chance?” the Lieutenant asked.

“Erm” the Commander thought for a few moments “Yes” he then declared “Come on, follow me” he insisted as he led them away from the door back inside the old workshop and towards the back where they cautiously exited out of the remains of the rear entrance, clambering over some old abandoned rusty oil barrels in the process.

“Looks clear” the Lieutenant agreed as she scanned around the immediate area “Lead on Sir.”

“Ok” the Commander confirmed quietly “Stick close to me and if you see anything, shoot it.”

As fast as the dense brush would allow, the three made their way to the edge of the pit and then proceeded up the side to the top.

“Looks like we made it” Barrett commented as they looked back down into the pit to see in the distance a dark coloured car making a swift exit in the opposite direction.

“There goes our boy” the Commander confirmed as the dust cloud sent up by the escaping vehicle disappeared off into the distance.

“Now where do we go?” the Lieutenant asked.

“This way” the Commander confirmed as he duly led them down a rough path towards some sort of cutting which as they reached it and stepped onto a recently laid tarmac pathway, the Commander looked up and down with distain and disbelief.

“I don't believe it” the Commander remarked.

“The Centurion Way Cycle Path” the Lieutenant confirmed.

“They ripped up a perfectly useable railway line to put in a cycle path?” the Commander asked.

“It is what the District Council calls progress apparently” the Lieutenant confirmed.

“For which read photo opportunity” Barrett added cynically.

“Ah well” the Commander declared “Looks like we are walking.”

"What on earth...?!" Tracy exclaimed as she read through the transcript of the original murder investigation confession in it's badly hand typed form on one of those pre printed forms where there was never quite enough space to fill everything in that was required.

"Found something?" Longton asked as he came into the office with a worried look on his face.

"This confession statement" Tracy explained "We found our one and only copy, and a badly photocopied one at that in the desk drawer of our dead journalist and it's very, very strange."

"I don't suppose the original tape recording is around is it?" Longton asked.

"In theory it should be on here" Tracy confirmed as she leant forward and picked up an audio cassette from the desk "however..." she announced as she inserted the cassette into the tape player and pressed the play button whereupon Longton looked on with some bemusement as from the speakers came an outburst of military brass band music until Tracy pressed stop a few seconds later.

"Ah..." Longton remarked.

"If you ask me" Tracy commented "and you haven't, I would say this case was well and truly got at right from day one. None of this so called evidence makes any sense and this 'confession' for want of a better word reads like both sides of the conversation were spoken by the same person."

"The armed robberies were real though" Longton confirmed "I should remember, I was there in person for the second one."

"That is the other thing that bothers me about this whole thing" Tracy responded "Look at the facts and we have precious few of those available, two major cases in this sleepy old city at exactly the same time?"

"Can happen I suppose" Longton admitted "but your husband did comment on that odd coincidence at the time but Bordon took no notice."

"Everything comes back to then Divisional Superintendent Bordon" Tracy concluded "and he seems to have gone AWOL at the moment."

"Old man Barrett and the Commander left Bordon's place to look for our missing Lieutenant over an hour ago" Longton confirmed "Odd they haven't checked in though" he remarked.

"Nothing unusual there" Tracy wryly admitted as she returned to going through the collection of old paper files "Do you mind if I float a theory that is in danger of sounding completely off the wall, maybe even good old fashioned outrageous?" she asked.

"Given the way this investigation has been going" Longton admitted "I'll take anything at the moment."

"What if Bordon is the one who set the whole thing up?" Tracy asked.

"Go on" Longton prompted, intrigued by the way Tracy's thought process was taking them.

"He had access to all the evidence" Tracy went through her reasoning step by step "he was the only Security Service officer present in the interview when the alleged confession was supposedly made and he suddenly seemed to take, and correct me if I have got the wrong impression here, an unusually large interest in two major investigations at that time."

"You're not wrong" Longton confirmed "Bordon has always been a desk and golf course man, it was extremely rare to see him get his hands dirty."

"So why did he volunteer to show my husband the ropes on his first day as an officer?" Tracy asked "For that matter why did he insist that he was not put on the murder investigation team from the off?"

"All questions that can only be answered by one man" Longton concluded "Any answers we come up with now would only be speculative at best."

"There it is" the Commander triumphantly declared as they finally came across the patrol car still parked where he and Barrett had left it almost an hour earlier.

"Do you want the good news or the bad news Sir?" Lieutenant Barrett remarked as she looked through the driver's side window.

"I'll take the good first" the Commander confirmed.

"The keys are still in the ignition" she confirmed.

"And the bad?" Barrett asked

"The bad news is that someone has let the tyres down" the Lieutenant indicated the flat tyres on her side, prompting the Commander and Barrett to look down at the opposite side and see the same problem.

"Charming..." the Commander responded as he went to the back of the car to extract the foot pump.

"So why were you chasing Bordon around then?" Barrett asked his daughter as he helped the Commander restore the right rear wheel back to normal.

"I was working through some classified files that I found some connections to" the Lieutenant explained "Just don't ask how I did it as it might not stand any overly ethical examination."

"I get the gist" the Commander confirmed as he and Barrett finished the first wheel and moved onto the next one "What did you find?"

"I used dad's old login to gain access to the Witness Data Files" the Lieutenant explained.

"I really must change my passwords" Barrett wryly admitted.

"Well after working through some carefully laid balderdash and piffle that had been thrown in there" the Lieutenant explained "obviously by someone who was anxious to cover their tracks, I came up with something very interesting."

"Well go on" the Commander prompted as they moved around to the other side and started re-inflating the third wheel "The suspense is unbearable."

"You remember the patsy who coughed to the murder?" the Lieutenant asked.

"A confession witnessed solely by our absent National Administrator General?" Barrett asked.

"That would be the one" the Lieutenant confirmed "Well how about this, for almost ten years prior to his alleged confession and suicide, he was a registered and paid informant."

"That never came up in any of our original inquiries" Barrett confirmed with a look of amazed revelation.

"And for ten bonus points" the Lieutenant confirmed "See if you can guess who his handler was?"

"You have got to be kidding me?" the Commander responded as he reattached the hub cap cover on the last wheel before getting up off the ground.

"I never joke about my work Sir" the Lieutenant wryly responded.

"Ok boys and girls, saddle up" the Commander confirmed as he casually threw the foot pump in the boot of the patrol car and closed it "Lieutenant, you're driving."

"Yes Sir" the Lieutenant confirmed as she duly went around to the front and got in with the Commander alongside and her father in the back.

"The problem is" the Commander remarked as they set off "the only way we can get the answers we need is to track down our missing National Administrator General, drag him into a soundproof interview room and apply a little pressure."

"We do that and the press find out about it" Barrett warned "the media would have a field day."

"Not to mention that the reputation of the Service would be dragged through the mud into the bargain" the Commander confirmed.

"We need to handle this discreetly" the Lieutenant remarked.

"Discretion is my middle name" the Commander confirmed.

"Along with subtlety, diplomacy and discretion no doubt" the Lieutenant cheekily remarked.

"Have you been talking to my wife?" the Commander retorted as they continued on back towards Haychester, now visible on the near horizon, the distinctive tall spire of the cathedral visible against the darkening sky.

"Whoa!" Lieutenant Commander Alvin Johnston of the Haychester Traffic Division remarked as a car sped past his stationary patrol car "Where do you think you're going mate?" he wondered as he got back into his vehicle and started the engine.

"Control from Whiskey X-Ray Alpha One Three Five" Johnston called into the radio as he set off in pursuit down the western arc of the Haychester ring road.

"Control receiving" the response came from the Haychester control room.

"I am in pursuit of a dark silver BMW five series, looks like it is on a 52 plate doing the best part of seventy southbound on the western ring road approaching Market Corner" Johnston reported "He doesn't show any sign of stopping neither."

"Do you have a number off of it?" the Control Room officer asked.

"Sorry, not close enough" Johnston confirmed as he looked ahead to the speeding car in the distance that was refusing to respond to his sirens and lights "I would appreciate some backup though as this chap is definitely on his way to an accident sooner or later."

The pursuit continued, slicing its way through the traffic with surprising ease.

"Where are you going?" Johnston asked as they approached the large roundabout at the southern perimeter of the city that offered numerous different possibilities of direction.

"Approaching Centurion's Roundabout" Johnston called into the radio "I could really use that backup pretty quick."

"Nearest unit is two minutes away" the Control Room responded with a strong hint of regret.

"Thank you" Johnston replied rather tersely as he approached the roundabout and was forced over to the right side at the exit to get past the queue of stationary traffic whilst the suspect car some distance ahead was over the other side.

Fortunately the position of a large articulated lorry over on the far side of the roundabout held up the speeding suspect vehicle just long enough for Johnston to close the gap a little and see not only that it had ducked down the road to the coast but also its registration number for the first time.

"Gotcha..." Johnston remarked "Control from One Three Five" he called "Suspect car is heading south on the Selsey road" he confirmed "It is a dark grey-silver BMW registration number Hotel Victor Five Two Sierra Pappa Hotel and it definitely has no intentions of stopping for a chat."

Southbound traffic, already sent scattering all over the place moments before when the speeding BMW had come through quickly moved out of the way as Johnston duly followed through in the patrol car.

"This guy is heading straight to an accident at this rate" he commented with clear concern.

"Whisky X-Ray Pappa One Three Five from Control" came the call over the radio "Your registration number check Hotel Victor Five Two Sierra Pappa Hotel is confirmed as a dark grey-silver BMW Five series registered to a private property development company in Haychester."

"Somehow I don't think he is trying to get ahead of the property market" Johnston remarked "I could really use that backup though."

A couple of miles away the Commander had been listening to this radio traffic as Lieutenant Barrett drove him and her father back to Haychester, now approaching the eastern side of the city near the ring road.

"Didn't you say Lieutenant that National Administrator General Bordon had interests in a property company?" the Commander asked.

"Err yes Sir" the Lieutenant confirmed.

"And that car that we saw leaving the quarry was a dark grey-silver BMW" Barrett added.

"I feel another one of my infamous hunches coming on" the Commander admitted as he reached for a radio.

"Uh oh..." Barrett wryly remarked.

"Lima Alpha One to Haychester Control" the Commander called "What is the name of that property company that owns the BMW involved in that pursuit?" he asked.

"Phoenix Properties & Construction of 14 Crane Street, Haychester Sir" the Control Room confirmed.

"Is that...?" the Commander asked, looking across at the Lieutenant.

"That's the one Sir" she confirmed by which time she had already activated the lights and sirens and was pulling out of the line of traffic.

"Control" the Commander called over the radio "Where is that pursuit now?"

"Just passing the old Tramway Bridge heading south" the Control Room officer confirmed.

"Take this next left" he duly instructed the Lieutenant, indicating a narrow muddy lane, little more than a farm track off of the main Haychester approach road.

"Come on, lets move people" the Lieutenant called ahead to the traffic that only slowly moved out of the way in response to the wail of her siren, delaying them for a few moments before she was able to enter the top end of the narrow lane.

"Have you done the advanced driving course?" the Commander asked.

"Absolutely Sir" the Lieutenant confirmed as she promptly accelerated hard down the track.

"All right then" the Commander declared as he recalled from his memory the local back roads of the area "Hopefully if we keep going down here until just before a farm, then turn sharply right and head along the old canal road we should be able to get ahead of them."

"How sharp a turn are we looking at dare I ask Sir?" the Lieutenant enquired as she continued at high speed down the narrow lane, skipping quickly over the ruts and potholes of the little maintained road surface as if they were not there.

"Err that sharp by the looks of it" Barrett remarked pointing ahead with some concern as they approached a junction ahead that not only had a very acute, indeed near blind turn but also a lot of mud and agricultural debris on the road surface as well.

"Hold on tight gentlemen" the Lieutenant declared as they approached the turn "this is likely to be a little bit slippery."

A loud squeal of tires and sending up of a spray of water heralded the moment as, barely slowing down the Lieutenant braced herself and expertly performed a double hand brake turn, swinging the patrol car sharply around the corner before resuming her previous speed and carrying on westwards.

"Very nicely done" the Commander remarked with more than a hint of relief "I'm glad you don't drive like my wife otherwise we would probably have been on our roof in that cow field by now."

"Thank you Sir" the Lieutenant responded.

"Did you mention the hump backed bridge?" Barrett asked with some concern.

"What bridge?" the Lieutenant asked only to round a corner at that moment and suddenly come across the humped bridge where it went over the course of the old canal.

"Oh hell..." the Commander exclaimed as they duly leapt over the bridge at a much higher speed than they should have before landing heavily on the other side, causing the rear view mirror to fall off in response.

"Whoops..." the Lieutenant remarked as she carried on "Sorry."

"I always kept forgetting that bridge myself" the Commander admitted "Last time I wound up almost landing in the canal."

"I remember the bill for the repairs to the car" Barrett admitted "Not to mention the grief I got from the Garage Sergeant."

"We got a junction coming up" the Lieutenant commented nodding ahead to a tee junction which they were rapidly approaching with traffic crossing in front of them.

"Left and then the first right" the Commander confirmed "I hope..."

"Hello?" the Lieutenant called ahead to the non-responsive traffic "Big red patrol car, blue flashing lights, sirens, isn't it obvious?"

A few sharp blasts on the horn duly elicited the required response as the vehicles ahead moved out of the way allowing them to pass around before heading up the road and then thanks to a bus coming the other way stopping short, turning right and continuing on.

"Control from Lima Alpha One" the Commander called into the radio "How far is the pursuit from the end of Gogarty Lane?" he asked.

"Lima Alpha One from Control" came the response "They are about ninety seconds shy of that location."

"Floor the bugger" the Commander instructed.

"Flooring the bugger Sir" the Lieutenant confirmed as she accelerated back up to full speed along the quiet flat and relatively straight stretch of road.

They were closing in rapidly on the pursuit which was now approaching the same roundabout that they were, almost to the point where there was a serious danger of a collision.

"Hold onto your hats gentlemen" the Lieutenant warned as they reached the exit onto the roundabout just as to their right they observed the suspect BMW reach the roundabout itself with the other patrol car right on its tail.

The driver of the BMW confidently entered the roundabout and rounded its first quarter but suddenly was forced to swerve sharply when the second patrol car appeared from the left in front of him.

"This guy drives like a professional" the Lieutenant observed as the BMW went around them effortlessly despite its high speed and she duly set off in close pursuit with the other patrol car falling in line immediately behind her.

All three vehicles running practically nose to tail went around the roundabout as far as the third exit whereupon the suspect car peeled off around a bus and continued in a westerly direction.

"Where the hell is this guy going?" Barrett asked generally as at a speed in excess of eighty miles per hour the pursuit continued causing other traffic to rapidly pull out of the way in any way they could as the pursuit bared down on them.

"I would say he was heading for the harbour at a guess" the Commander remarked as he consulted a map of the area as his knowledge of the local geography was getting a little rusty.

"Ah hell!" the Lieutenant exclaimed as she was forced to suddenly brake when the car she was pursuing swerved sharply around an articulated lorry causing her to slew sideways and stop only a matter of inches from the rear of the lorry's large trailer.

"Nicely parked" the Commander remarked wryly as the Lieutenant resumed the pursuit with some aggressive acceleration.

"Did anyone see which way this guy went?" the Lieutenant asked.

"Left I think" Barrett confirmed noting a distant cloud of dust down an access track to their left.

"Someone tell me where this leads to" the Lieutenant requested as she pursued the vehicle now in the near distance.

"Not much shown on the map" the Commander confirmed "Having said that if we keep heading along at this rate we will hit the sea sooner or later."

Up ahead it was just possible to make out the silver BMW make a hard right turn whereupon the Commander consulted the map again before the Lieutenant made a handbrake turn onto what turned out to be the approach road to a yacht marina.

"Whoa, where did he come from?" the Lieutenant exclaimed as unexpectedly they came across the car they had been pursuing only a short distance ahead and starting to pull away from them again.

Initially her reaction was to put her foot hard down on the accelerator in pursuit but then the BMW, without any sign of braking launched itself off the end of the docking pier and plunged into the harbour.

"Slam the anchors on lass" the Commander quickly called by which time the Lieutenant had already braked sharply but with their speed, they continued towards the end of the pier unable to stop in time.

"Deep breath everyone" Barrett suggested as they reached the end of the jetty and the patrol car toppled over the end and stopped with the front half dangling precariously just above the surface of the water.

"Out!" the Commander called as all three got out of the car carefully yet swiftly before they stood on the edge of the dockside jetty and looked out ahead to see the rear of the silver car disappear beneath the surface of the water amid a large amount of bubbles.

"Hold this" the Lieutenant declared as she took off her uniform tunic and holster belt, passing them to the Commander before diving into the water.

"Well go on then" the Commander prompted.

"I've got a gammy leg old friend" Barrett confirmed.

"And I can't even float let alone swim" the Commander responded.

"Good thing my daughter was a school swimming champion then" Barrett remarked.

Beneath the water, the Lieutenant swam down to the car as it embedded itself nose down in the muddy harbour bed.

Reaching the car, she climbed down along its side until reaching the drivers door which she forced open, releasing a cloud of air bubbles which blinded her already limited vision in the murky water for a few moments.

With her air supply from holding her breath running low, the Lieutenant made a quick examination of the interior of the car before heading back up to the surface.

"Are you all right?" the Commander called when the Lieutenant resurfaced.

"There's no one in it" she confirmed mystified before swimming back over to the dockside whereupon they helped her back up onto dry land "The accelerator was jammed down with an umbrella."

"Which means he is around here somewhere" the Commander concluded "You get yourself dried out, I'll take care of this" he confirmed before turning to a couple of other officers who had just arrived.

"Ok ladies and gents" the Commander declared "I know rural little Haychester does not have the same resources as the big smoke but between us we need this whole area sealed off and searched right now."

"I'll send for the cavalry Sir" one of the officers confirmed.

A little over half a mile away a slightly apprehensive looking tall elderly gentlemen joined the back of a small queue of predominantly pension aged persons at a bus stop.

As the man pulled in his overcoat to shut out the chill wind that was blowing in from across the sea, the headlights and orange illuminated scrolling destination display of a route 51 bus bound for Haychester appeared around the distant corner and approached before slowing to a stop in front of them.

The queue duly filed on board with the mystery stranger remaining at the rear and like the others presenting a bus pass to the driver before he moved to the back of the saloon and took a seat in the raised area at the back.

As the driver closed the doors and pulled the bus back out into the traffic flow, the stranger observed a number of Security Service vehicles scream past in the other direction and afforded himself a brief smile of satisfaction at having evaded the authorities one more time.

"Found anything?" Al Longton asked as he got out of a patrol car and joined the Commander by the quayside.

"One soggy young officer" he indicated the towel wrapped and shivering Lieutenant sitting in the back of an ambulance nearby with her father "one submerged car, no suspect and a partridge in a pear tree."

"Have you been jumping off the deep end again darling?" Tracy asked as she joined her husband and they kissed.

"How is your backstroke my love?" the Commander jokingly remarked.

"Not great if I were to be honest" Tracy admitted "There is a tow truck and the diving team on the way over now."

"Good thinking" the Commander responded "It's freezing, lets find a cup of tea" he suggested.

"An excellent idea" Longton agreed.

"I'm paying" the Commander added.

"Even better" Longton responded gleefully.

For the owner of the quayside tea shop, it turned out to be the busiest day of the off season for her as, overlooking the scene, she found her small but cosy establishment had become full to overflowing with Security Service officers and local onlookers all of whom had come out to the incident.

The Commander duly lumped his customary three sugars into his tea as he, Tracy and Longton sat down at a table by the window overlooking the quay.

"It's been a hell of a day" the Commander admitted.

"You can say that again" Barrett confirmed as he joined them.

"How's Rosemary?" Tracy asked.

"On her way to hospital" Barrett confirmed "Purely precautionary, the water she dived into is bitterly cold so they just want to be sure she warms up all right."

"Enthusiastic lass isn't she?" Tracy remarked.

"Oh she takes her job very seriously" Longton confirmed "Reminds me of a certain young whippersnapper of a junior officer I once knew."

"Yes indeed" Barrett agreed with a knowing smirk as he too recalled with some fondness the earliest days of the Commander way back when he joined Haychester as part of his first ever assignment.

"Was I really that over enthusiastic when I started?" the Commander asked as he huffed on his mug of tea in an attempt to take the edge off its heat.

"You still are" Tracy mused "You name me any other officer in the Service who if required would happily kick down the door of Ten Downing Street?"

"Probably just you my love" the Commander remarked with a wry smile.

"Touché" Tracy confirmed with a wry smile.

"Tow truck's here" Longton nodded over his mug of tea out of the window.

"Showtime ladies and gents" the Commander declared as he gulped down the last few drops of his tea.

Ten minutes later the specialist diving team were in the water attaching the lifting chains to the car before their leader surfaced, lifted his mask and breather off and gave a thumbs up to the officers and the recovery crew on the quayside.

"Ok, let's wheel it up" Longton declared.

"Right you are Guvnor" the recovery truck driver confirmed as he turned back to his vehicle and started the winch.

The gathered audience consisting of both Security Service officers and interested spectators watched as slowly the sunken car began to emerge from the depths of the harbour.

"Has anyone contacted the registered owner yet?" Tracy asked.

"A couple of Haychester's finest are on their way around there now my dear" the Commander confirmed as they stepped back whilst the car was lifted clear of the surface but still draining large amounts of water from its interior.

The tow truck crane operator let the car hang over the water for a few moments to allow most of the excess water to drain away before bringing it back over dry land and carefully setting it down.

"It's all yours mate" he confirmed once he had released the lifting gear from the car.

"Thank you" Longton responded before he and the others went over to the car and proceeded to conduct a cursory examination.

"Well the interior is ruined I think it is safe to say" the Commander remarked as he looked in and around the interior of the drivers area.

"Any keys in it?" Tracy called from the back of the car.

"Not that I can see" the Commander confirmed.

"Nothing this side either" Longton confirmed as he put on a latex glove and opened the glove compartment.

"Any objection to doing this the old fashioned way then?" Tracy asked.

"Go on then" the Commander responded whereupon Tracy drew her gun from its holster, aimed squarely at the lock on the boot lid and fired a single shot.

"We're in" Tracy confirmed as she opened the boot and looked inside where the contents had not only been reduced to a soggy mess but also had been up-tipped all over the place as a result of the recent events.

"Well there isn't much up front" the Commander confirmed as he joined her and peered inside the boot.

"Hello..." Tracy responded as she lifted back an old soggy atlas revealing something of interest.

Carefully she took out a handkerchief from her tunic pocket and reached down to pick up the object that as she brought it into the light revealed it to be a large serrated knife.

"You don't use that for changing a tyre" the Commander remarked "That's what? A six inch blade?"

"More like eight" Tracy confirmed as she carefully replaced the knife back exactly where she had found it so that it could be recorded and photographed in situ for evidence purposes.

"I think it would be a good idea to get this motor to the forensic guys double quick" Longton suggested.

"I concur" the Commander agreed as he helped Tracy close the boot lid again "Also I think it is time we got together in a judgely huddle somewhere and banged some heads together" he suggested "We need to get all our evidence on a table and see where it all connects as there has to be a common factor in all this somewhere."

The number 51 bus pulled into the bay at Haychester Bus Station and as soon as it came to a stop, the door opened and its load of predominantly elderly passengers duly filed off, many of them armed with the seemingly standard issue tartan pattern wheeled shopping trolley bags.

One of the last passengers to alight was the tall mystery man who as he stepped off of the bus, momentarily removed his tweed hat to reveal the heavily haggard and drawn face of National Administrator General Bordon, however his revelation was brief as he quickly replaced his hat again, closed in tightly the flap of his overcoat against the bitterly cold wind that was brewing up and then headed away.

Bordon discreetly left the crowd of pensioners sheltering in the cover of the Bus Station awning and slipped away down the side alley alongside the railway line to Haychester Railway Station.

Hoping to avoid detection, Bordon purchased a ticket with cash from the automatic machine in the tall 1960's booking hall rather than using the electronic travel pass that formed part of his warrant card which in an instant would have given away his location.

Passing through the newly installed ticket barrier's, Bordon arrived on platform one just as the train, a four car Class 377 Electrostar unit forming the Southern service to London Victoria drew in.

Throughout his time in the station until the moment he boarded the train, he was careful not to have his face towards any of the CCTV cameras in either the booking

hall or on the platform itself, so concerned was he that his departure remained undetected.

Only once Bordon was safely aboard the lead carriage and sat down with a copy of the free daily paper did he dare relax as the conductor closed the doors and gave the right away to the driver, signalling their departure.

"A pair of two's?" Jack remarked as for the first time in over an hour he had been outfoxed at poker by one of Longton's sons who merely responded by smiling broadly as he laid his hand upon the kitchen table.

"Don't tell me you actually lost a hand lad?" the Commander remarked as he came into the kitchen.

"I think I taught these guys too well" Jack admitted.

"A pair of two's against a busted up and down straight flush draw" the Commander remarked looking at the cards "I see what you mean."

"I got what you wanted by the way" Jack confirmed nodding over towards the side table "Strangely enough no one seemed to think to ask what a twelve year old such as I was doing carrying the spare uniform of a senior Security Service officer on a train all the way from London."

"And I am willing to bet on the way to the yard" Tracy remarked knowingly as she joined them "you took the opportunity for a little diversion on the way to see a certain young lady of your acquaintance?"

"I am saying nothing without my lawyer" Jack responded with a smirk "I did bring someone with me though" he confirmed.

"Evening" Sir Richard Crowthorne declared as he entered the kitchen from the other side door and joined them "Anyone miss me?" he jokingly asked.

"This is becoming a bit of a reunion" Longton remarked as he joined them "Long time no see, good to see you again Sir" he greeted Sir Richard.

"Does anyone else want to be shown how to play poker by an expert?" Jack asked as he expertly shuffled the deck and looked around the room with an expectant look.

"You have managed to drain me enough of the readies today as it is" Sir Richard confirmed wryly.

"That's better" the Commander remarked as he put on his fresh uniform tunic "That other one has the contents of half a quarry in it."

"Everyone back to the office then?" Tracy asked.

"Absolutely" the Commander confirmed "It is time we had a collective brain storm. Is Commander Fuller on his way?"

"Should be meeting us at the office" Sir Richard confirmed "I have asked him to bring everything we found in Bordon's office, see if anything matches up and goes ping."

"Very well then" the Commander declared "Tracy my love, you're driving."

"We are now approaching London Victoria where this train will terminate" the Conductor called over the pa system as the train clattered its way across Battersea Bridge in the shadow of the ruined power station.

With a sigh of reluctance, Bordon sat back up, moved his newspaper aside and prepared to alight as the train snaked its way into the murky approaches of platform eighteen.

A minute later he was walking briskly and now more confidently up the length of platforms 18 and 17 before passing through the ticket barriers and heading along the connecting walkway towards the main South Central side of the concourse.

As he passed by the newspaper vendor, a discreetly watching gentleman in a casual coat spoke quietly into a radio receiver hidden in his collar before proceeding to follow Bordon at a distance across the busy concourse.

Approaching the taxi rank outside the station, Bordon was fortunate in being able to climb straight into a taxi. As the cab pulled away from the rank, the man who had followed Bordon across the concourse and out of the station was collected by an anonymous saloon car that then continued to follow the taxi on its journey to a destination as yet unknown.

"There is no substitute for good old fashioned leg work and rummaging through paper based files" the Commander declared as he read through some of the amassed material.

"I think it is safe to say modern technology has most definitely passed you by" Tracy confirmed with a wry smile.

"Achoo!!" Lieutenant Barrett promptly sneezed rather loudly, still suffering the after effects of her water borne efforts earlier.

"Bless you" Sir Richard responded in his typical gentlemanly like manner but was then interrupted by an incoming text message that he duly read with an interested expression before returning his mobile telephone discreetly back to his jacket pocket.

"Sorry I'm late" an exasperated Commander Fuller declared as he came in "Some time in the last three years some sod reorganised the entire Haychester ring road system and to end it all the car park has moved."

"It's called progress apparently" the Commander admitted wryly as he held an open file in each hand comparing their retrospective contents side by side.

"Well in the interests of efficiency..." Fuller declared.

"Eff.. Who?" the Commander remarked jokingly.

"I have put all the files, e-mails and other material we found at National Administrator General Bordon's office into a database" Fuller continued as he sat down and opened his laptop.

"We are missing one vital bit somewhere here" the Commander confirmed.

"Well we have two armed robberies, one successful, the other interrupted by the two amigos over there" Tracy summarised, indicating Longton and her husband "Two dead and dismembered bodies almost twenty years apart whose connection are one, they were brother and sister and two, they were both reporters for the local rag."

"Investigative reporters at that" Longton reminded everyone "The really nosey variety who dig up well hidden facts from the darkest of places that many usually hope had been long since forgotten."

"We know that Bordon had been in e-mail correspondence with your dead reporter" Fuller confirmed as he brought up the relevant e-mails on his laptop screen "The second one that is."

"If you were investigating something connected with the Security Service in Haychester back then" Tracy asked "Assuming we didn't have the potentially dubious services of a press officer back then, who would have dealt with any inquiry received from the Haychester Gazette?"

"That sort of stuff was usually handled by the duty senior officer" the Commander recalled.

"Which if I am correct" Longton confirmed "at that time was a certain Divisional Superintendent Bordon."

"Anyone want to declare the chances of random coincidence here?" Sir Richard declared.

"My opinions on coincidences are often quoted and much debated points of law" the Commander admitted.

"So I gather you clever lot have no idea where our beloved National Administrator General is right now?" Sir Richard asked.

"He's the key piece in this puzzle" Longton confirmed "We need to talk to him urgently."

"Subject number one being this great work of fiction" Tracy declared with disdain as she held up the faded yellow copy of the old confession "I've seen more honesty in Parliament than this load of tosh."

"Hello, what's this?" Longton asked as a slip of paper fell out of the back of a file he had picked up and fluttered serenely to the floor before he could catch it.

"Got it" Tracy confirmed, stooping down to collect it before examining the piece of paper which revealed itself to be half of an old Security Service compliments slip on the reverse of which was handwritten two nine digit alpha-numeric code numbers, beneath which had been added in a differently coloured pen the letters 'ER/TC'.

"Anything interesting love or is it just Bordon's lottery numbers?" the Commander asked.

"I could just be going mad" Tracy admitted "but do these look like case numbers to you?" she asked passing the slip of paper to Fuller.

"MT1306554A and HYC256381C" Fuller read from the piece of paper.

"Give me that first one again" the Commander asked as he extracted a notebook from his inside tunic pocket and consulted it's tired and well thumbed looking pages.

"MT1306554A" Fuller confirmed "Metropolitan Division code that."

"Ah" the Commander confirmed as he found a match in his battered notebook which he tapped with his finger "I thought that rang a bell."

"Anyone we know?" Tracy asked.

"Ever heard of a ruthless bastard by the name of Frank or Franklin Rogers?"

"Wasn't he that crime boss from the east end that finally got put away about ten years ago?" Longton asked.

"That's the fella" the Commander confirmed.

"I was the officer who put him away" Tracy confirmed, recalling a rather uncomfortable memory that she chose at that point to share no more of with her audience.

"What was it the press christened him?" Longton recalled.

"The Lord of Leytonstone" the Commander confirmed.

"Or the Butcher of Bethnal Green" Sir Richard added "Depending upon which Service you were in when he was out and about with his merry band of extortionists, thieves and thugs."

"But Bordon was never anywhere near that case" the Commander confirmed "He was up in Manchester at that time making a complete balls up of things up there if I recall. What file did this fall out of?" he asked.

"Err this one" Longton confirmed as he returned to the file in his hand and looked at the front cover "Looks like some sort of briefing document from Section CT23."

"The attic raiders" the Commander responded with a thoughtful look.

"I think you will find the correct term my dear" Tracy declared "is the Discontinued Cases Review Committee."

"You know this guy who Bordon got to confess to the original murder" Lieutenant Barrett commented "We know he was a registered informant and that Bordon was the registered handler, who was the second officer on the register?"

"Got that here" Tracy responded as she rummaged through some of the files in front of her in search of the answer "It was a Lieutenant Commander Adrian Brennan."

"Simon?" the Commander called.

"On it Sir" Fuller confirmed as he tapped away furiously on his laptop keyboard for a minute before pausing with a worried look.

"Well?" the Commander asked sensing that something wasn't right.

"Straight banana" Fuller confirmed "Doesn't exist and according to central and divisional records he never did."

"All right" the Commander declared as he held his forehead in his fingertips in thought for a moment "Let's back track a little and get a sequence of events on a chart here."

"I've been working on something like that since Sir Richard called me in" Fuller confirmed "Hang on a minute" he requested before plugging his laptop into the connections for the ceiling mounted digital projector so that everyone could see what he had so far.

"So..." the Commander began as he started to trace the timeline Fuller was now showing on the wall "All the way back here, our infamous confessor becomes a registered informant."

"Bordon recruits him but for some reason files him in the system with a fictitious co-handler" Lieutenant Barrett added.

"Cut to eight years later when one afternoon a fisherman pulls a pair of arms in a suitcase out of the Haychester canal basin" Longton continued.

"That was the afternoon of the 15th of July" Lieutenant Barrett confirmed as she consulted her slightly soggy notes as they had been in her uniform tunic pocket when she had dived into the water earlier.

"We know from the sister's notes that our victim was last seen on the 14th" Longton added "Then more parts turned up on the 16th courtesy of the rivers authority dredger."

"I start work on the morning of the 17th" the Commander confirmed "Which is when the first wages snatch occurs when I am travelling with Bordon."

"Who either deliberately or sub-consciously managed not only to keep you well away from the murder enquiry" Tracy remarked.

"At a time when fresh eyes were the one thing we desperately needed" Barrett added.

"But also under Bordon's direction he manages to steer you straight slap bang into the middle of the largest wages snatch in Haychester for years" Tracy concluded.

"The rest of that day for me at least" the Commander continued "largely consisted of chasing armed robbers around the countryside and getting shot at."

"Started as you meant to go on then?" Barrett wryly mused.

"Next day, the 18th" the Commander continued "More body parts turn up but before I can lend my thoughts to the enquiry along comes an anonymous tip off about a second armed robbery leading to Longton and I spending an entertaining afternoon nearly getting our heads blown off."

"Until I turned up to save your backsides" Barrett reminded them "Just what the hell Bordon was thinking allocating two fresh out of the box officers alone to that I will never figure out."

"Perhaps he wanted you out of the way Sir" the Lieutenant remarked casually.

"It was nearly permanent had the guy with the shotgun been just a little more accurate" the Commander responded.

"So that evening whilst you were processing our armed robbery suspects" Tracy carried on the time line "conveniently distracting the attentions of the press in the process, Bordon rolls into the custody suite..."

"Well it was more a draughty wooden hut in the car park back then" Barrett admitted.

"...with a suspect, a bag of evidence and before anyone realised what was going on there was a fully typed confession attached and winging its way to the Prosecution Assessment Office" she concluded.

"So I take it that the then Superintendent Bordon conveniently failed to mention this confessed suspect he had dragged in had been his paid and registered informant for the proceeding eight years then?" Sir Richard asked.

"The first any of us knew about that was when the young lady here" Longton indicated Lieutenant Barrett "used her initiative to break into some secure files that should have been way beyond her pay grade."

"Hmm" Sir Richard mused for a few moments before turning to Fuller "How easy would it be for you to access Bordon's financial records?"

"Give me a couple of minutes and some fresh coffee and I should be able to come up with something" Fuller confirmed "Just don't enquire too closely about how I do it" he wryly added.

"Please don't tell me you are thinking the same thing as I am?" the Commander asked with a strong tone of dread combined with regret.

"Unlike you good gentleman" Sir Richard began to explain "I have never served for any great length of time under Bordon, indeed the nearest I have got to him is whenever he bothered to turn up for the Joint Security Chief's meetings which was rarely."

"I keep getting sent in his place half the time" the Commander confirmed.

"Rather you than me mate" Longton remarked.

"So of all the people in this room" Tracy concluded "Your judgement is most likely to be the least influenced and more independent?"

"With the possible exception of young Miss Barrett here, yes" Sir Richard confirmed.

"You think he is what?" the Commander asked "Bent? On the take?"

"There is definitely something slippery about our Mr Bordon" Sir Richard responded as he once again checked his pager as another message came through "and if I were a betting man..."

"...which you are..." the Commander added.

"...then I would be willing to lay a substantial wager that all this dates back some considerable time" Sir Richard confirmed "and when a few weeks ago if these e-mails are anything to go by, this journalist girl decided to root around in the past, she disturbed a proverbial sleeping dragon."

"How much does a National Administrator General earn in a year?" Fuller asked quizzically as he called up an electronic bank statement on his laptop screen.

"About sixty two grand a year before tax" the Commander confirmed "Plus the pension that isn't worth the paper it is printed on."

"Interesting..." Fuller responded as he read the bank account details with keen interest "Because by my workings out he was raking in at least a couple of hundred grand minimum through three different accounts, and that is per year by the way."

"That's a lot of money" Longton remarked.

"That's a hell of a lot of money" Tracy agreed as they all gathered around the laptop screen.

"Income from those property investments perhaps?" Sir Richard asked.

"I don't think so" Fuller responded "What little from it he claimed through the Inland Revenue though was all processed via his wife's accounts according to this."

"Err I hate to drop the hand grenade of provocation into an otherwise beautiful theory" Sir Richard interrupted "But his wife divorced him twenty years ago, she's been dead for the last seven."

"I think we have here a classic case of what an old friend of mine would call creative accounting" the Commander remarked.

"I just had a horrible thought" Longton remarked "Simon, can you go back through accounting history and call up the funds used by the Security Service here for paying informants when Bordon was Divisional Superintendent?"

"You are in luck" Fuller confirmed "I put all the archives on computer files a few years ago."

"You remember that cash that you found at the Quarry after you had pursued the wages snatch suspects there?" Longton asked the Commander.

"Yes" the Commander confirmed "It was the payment from whoever set up the job to the robbers, we never worked out where it came from though."

"Ruddy hell" Fuller suddenly exclaimed.

"Found something?" the Commander asked.

"How many registered paid informants did we have on the books back then?" Fuller asked.

"Good grief" the Commander scratched his head, thinking back a lot of years "The only one I can recall was old Bob Harlow."

"Wasn't he that old tinker bloke who fingered that counterfeiting ring?" Longton recalled.

"That's him" the Commander remembered.

"Were we paying him twenty grand a month?" Fuller asked.

"You must be joking" the Commander confirmed "He usually tipped us off in exchange for a couple of pints and a free lunch from the canteen."

"I don't suppose anyone knows where this guy is now by any chance?" Sir Richard "Purely for elimination purposes?"

"Died of old age about ten years ago" Longton confirmed "I remember we all had a whip round for the funeral."

"Well whoever was the authorised signatory on the account was paying out twenty grand a month in cash every month for the best part of eight years" Fuller declared as he showed the others the accounts.

"Do I win a prize for guessing correctly who the owner of the aforementioned authorised signature was?" Sir Richard asked.

"See me afterwards" Fuller confirmed wryly.

"We need to find Bordon immediately" Longton declared "What was his last confirmed location?"

"On vacation in Canada about three weeks ago" the Commander confirmed.

"Might I press you to call in any favours you might have?" Longton asked.

"I'll give my opposite number in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police a call" the Commander confirmed as he reached across the desk and picked up the telephone "He owes me twenty quid from a particularly tense poker game at the last international security conference."

"Could I suggest he gets his lads to give every location from the tarmac at the airport onwards that Bordon came into contact with a very thorough going over as quickly as possible?" Sir Richard suggested as he checked another message he had just received on his pager.

"Will do" the Commander confirmed as he finished dialling a lengthy number which he had obtained from an elderly battered leather notebook whereupon it was clear he had been quickly answered "Phil, its Eddie, sorry to trouble you but I need a favour..."

"What is it you keep doing on that infernal contraption of yours?" Tracy asked Sir Richard, no longer able to contain her curiosity.

"Insight's, revelation, subterfuge..." Sir Richard responded which whilst sounding philosophical and deep, still resulted in Tracy being none the wiser.

"Whoa..." Fuller suddenly declared as something on his screen clearly caught him by surprise.

"You got something?" Longton asked.

"Cash withdrawal about five minutes ago from Bordon's main account" Fuller confirmed, indicating the transaction on the screen "Fifty grand in readies."

"Brenthaven Bank in Buckingham Palace Road SW1 by any chance?" Sir Richard responded.

"How the hell did you know that?" Fuller asked.

"I have a hotline direct to a couple of my little pixies I have had shadowing him since he popped up on the proverbial radar at Victoria Station about fifteen minutes ago" he confirmed, holding up his little pager messaging unit in explanation.

"If we are going to do this we need to make it quiet and discrete" the Commander declared as he finished his call to Canada and rejoined the discussion.

"Not exactly you're best known speciality dear" Tracy amused.

"Granted" the Commander conceded with a wry smile towards his wife "I admit I tend to be a kick the door in first and ask questions later type normally but on this occasion, circumstances call for something a little more subtle."

"I'll alert my people to keep him and anyone he comes into contact with under surveillance" Sir Richard confirmed as he picked up his mobile telephone and speed dialled a number.

"While you are about it" Tracy suggested "Put a call into Commander Cassini and invite his team to the party, I think their services may come in useful."

"Next on my list of calls to make" Sir Richard confirmed.

"Right, Al, Lieutenant Barrett" the Commander declared "If you two keep working on this case from the Haychester end, I'll head back up to London with the lovely wife here and try and confront Bordon myself."

"Mind if I tag along?" Sir Richard asked.

"Join the party" the Commander confirmed "and remember everyone" he warned sincerely "the less people know or even have the merest hint that the National Administrator General is up to his neck in this mess the better."

"Keep in touch" Longton remarked as Tracy, the Commander and Sir Richard left the office.

"Will do" the Commander confirmed with an apprehensive smile before disappearing from view down the corridor.

The back door into the Cardinal Place offices were always the more discrete way of getting into the National offices of the Security Service which even at this time of the evening meant a much more preferable means for Bordon to get to his office than using the public entrance around the front in Victoria Street.

Making his way through the lower ground loading area, Bordon slipped over to the goods elevator which would take him up the rear of the building to the sixth floor from where he used the fire exit stairs to ascend the last two storeys to the top floor and the relative safety of his office.

Upon arrival however Bordon was immediately concerned to find the door frame between the outer and his own office badly damaged from where Sir Richard and his team had affected their entry some hours earlier.

With caution, Bordon entered the office and instantly saw that the place had been thoroughly searched.

Cursing under his breath at another turn of bad luck in what was becoming an increasingly desperate situation for him both personally and professionally, his eyes went immediately over to the bookcase on the left hand wall where much to his relief he saw that the pot plant on the top of it was exactly where he had left it and remained undisturbed.

Lifting the pot plant up revealed an indentation in the underside in which was carefully secreted a USB memory stick which he quickly extracted and placed in his jacket pocket before going over to the sideboard and pouring himself a large drink of scotch from the crystal decanter.

Voices in the corridor outside as a couple of people passed momentarily caused Bordon to pause for a few moments in trepidation until letting out a sigh of relief as the voices faded away into the distance.

From the bottom drawer of the desk Bordon extracted a weapon and two clips of ammunition which he also hastily shoved in his coat pockets before taking a last look around and then leaving the office, being careful to check outside in the corridor to ensure that his presence as he made a discrete exit would go unobserved.

Using the back stairs once again, Bordon exited out into the street where after looking to his right he saw a free taxi approaching.

"Taxi!" he called loudly with his arm raised whereupon the driver duly pulled in to the side of the road in front of him.

"Nevis House, Leytonstone please" Bordon requested as he got in the back "and there is an extra twenty in it if you make it quick."

"Right you are Guvnor" the taxi driver confirmed as he duly set off.

As the taxi pulled away, turning left to head up Victoria Street, a figure emerged from the shadows which as soon as he stepped into the glow from the street light revealed it to be Commander Cassini.

"Control this is Osprey One" Cassini spoke discreetly into a hidden radio set, "Target one has just left Cardinal Place in a cab, heading east."

"I've decided that if and when we find Bordon" the Commander declared as their train departed Clapham Junction with just its final destination of London Victoria remaining "I am going in to talk to him alone."

"What are you going to do?" Sir Richard asked "Hand him a glass of whiskey, a revolver and suggest he do the decent thing?"

"It is a fair bet that Bordon's state of mind must be a right old mess by now" Tracy commented "He's liable to do anything."

"Do you ever meet anyone 'normal' in this job?" Jack asked out of curiosity as the train passed the now long silent edifice of Battersea Power Station before crossing slowly over Grosvenor Bridge across the River Thames.

"Now and again" the Commander wryly admitted.

"This train is now approaching London Victoria where this service terminates" the Conductor announced over the on board public address system. As the Conductor continued with the usual unattended articles warning, the group of four rose from their seats and with Jack leading, made their way to the door vestibule as the enclosed view of platform 18 appeared and the train slowed to stop only a couple of feet shy of the buffer stops.

Once the automatic plug doors had been released they alighted onto the platform and made their way up to the ticket barriers where the gate line staff quickly waved the party through the side gate.

"Do we have a plan by any chance or are we just winging it as usual?" Tracy asked as they walked across the main concourse towards the exit.

"Well let's just say we have the early foundations of a plan" Sir Richard confirmed as he consulted a new message on his mobile telephone "First, someone wants a word."

"Ah..." the Commander exclaimed in realisation as they saw waiting for them immediately outside the station an ominous yet discrete black saloon car with darkened windows, alongside which was stood the familiar figure of Tracy's identical twin sister Jennifer, Divisional Commander of the Security Service's VIP Protection Division which meant that there was someone very important waiting for them inside the car.

"Good evening boys and girls" Jennifer declared as they met up beside the car.

"I take it someone wants a word then?" the Commander asked indicating the rear of the car.

"You could say that yes" Jennifer wryly admitted "Can I assume it is going to be another of those sort of evenings?" she asked.

"The night is but still young my dear" Sir Richard remarked with a knowing grin.

At that point the rear window wound down electrically and the familiar face of the Prime Minister appeared.

"Commander, Sir Richard Crowthorne" the Prime Minister declared "Would you care to join me for a few moments of your precious time?" he requested.

"Unless anyone has any objections" Tracy responded "I'll take Jack home, freshen up and catch up with you gentlemen later?"

"Sounds good to me" the Commander agreed before kissing her.

"See you later" Tracy confirmed before leaving with Jack and heading down into the Underground Station entrance.

"Good evening Prime Minister" the Commander called once he and Sir Richard were safely inside the back of the ministerial escort car "What chaos can we create for you?" he asked wittily.

"I hate to disappoint you two" the Prime Minister confirmed "but actually I was rather hoping to avoid some."

"Where to?" Jennifer called from the front having now got back in the drivers seat.

"Ministry of Justice" the Prime Minister confirmed "Back door please if you would be so kind my dear."

"Yes Sir" Jennifer confirmed as she started the car.

"So" the Prime Minister began with some hesitant awkwardness apparent in his voice "National Administrator General Bordon, can I assume it is not good news?"

"In a nutshell, yes" the Commander confirmed "So far I can wheel him in for suspected double murder, fraud, various offences under the Justice Act as well as the Security & Police Act, conspiracy to pervert the course of justice and that is just for starters."

"I see..." the Prime Minister responded as he realised that the situation they were facing was even worse than he had at first feared.

"We have a tail on him right now" Sir Richard confirmed as once again he checked his messages "The question is how do we go about this without the press finding out that the supreme head of the law enforcement agencies in this country has become a potentially psychotic cuckoo case."

"The potential damage to the reputation of all law enforcement bodies in this country doesn't bear thinking about" the Commander added.

"Evidence or no evidence, there is enough smoke without fire to turn it into a tabloid fuelled feeding frenzy" the Prime Minister agreed "Just the sort of ammunition that could be used by certain powerful groups to their own advantage and that of their agendas."

"We can find him no problem" Sir Richard confirmed "The question is what we do then?"

"I want to talk to him alone" the Commander declared.

"If he will talk" Sir Richard cautioned "In his current mental state he could wind up doing something very rash."

"I cannot stress how important it is to handle this scenario with kid gloves" the Prime Minister insisted "No kicking in doors and threatening to kneecap people until they co-operate."

"Well there goes half my act" the Commander joked which raised an amused smile amongst those present.

The black saloon car slipped through the streets of Westminster virtually unnoticed by those few who were still around at that time of what was becoming a rather cold and wet evening as Jennifer duly pulled off the main Horse Ferry Road and into the back entrance to the Justice Ministry building, a site it shared with the Government's Home Office from whom it was split into a separate agency a few months earlier.

"We're here Sir" Jennifer duly declared from the front as she brought the car to a stop.

"Thank you my dear" the Prime Minister responded before he, the Commander and Sir Richard got out of the car and proceeded inside the building.

"Fourth floor please" the Prime Minister called over to the Commander as they got in the freight elevator.

"Err no can do" the Commander responded as he looked at the button panel which was blank, a locking plate in place over the floor selection buttons.

"I knew I had forgotten something" Sir Richard remembered as he duly fished around in his pocket and produced a small plastic bag containing a security key which he passed to the Commander.

"Key to the executive bathroom by any chance?" the Commander asked as he looked at the key in his hand.

"Not quite" the Prime Minister confirmed "Fourth floor, down" he indicated the panel which the Commander, suitably intrigued accesses by unlocking with the key he had just received before pressing the button for this mysterious fourth floor.

The inertia of the lift moving could be felt as it quickly descended the four levels before the door slid open to reveal a dimly lit modern looking office corridor that judging by the building materials and scaffolding lying around were only in a partial state of completion.

"If I were you, I would seriously consider firing your internal designer" the Commander remarked as they exited out of the lift car into the corridor before the Prime Minister led the way through to a set of brass finish double doors which were so new they still had their protective plastic film on them.

"Commander" the Prime Minister announced as they entered a meeting room where sat at a large table was a tall distinguished looking man in his late forties who rose from his seat as they entered "It's not been officially announced yet but allow me to introduce to you the new Justice Minister Adrian Clancy."

"It's been a while" the Commander responded as the two men met and shook hands.

"It has indeed" Clancy confirmed "You are looking well I must say."

"All that healthy living" the Commander confirmed with a hint of well intended sarcasm to which Sir Richard just managed to suppress a moment of laughter "So how did you managed to get conned into taking this particular poisoned chalice? After all you predecessor had a somewhat less than glorious departure."

"Sir Richard here persuaded me during one of his infamous fireside chats" Clancy explained "Besides I was getting bored with Security Service admin, needed the feel of the front line beneath my feet once more."

"I know exactly how you feel" the Commander agreed "So what is little charming if slightly unfinished little boudoir in aid of then?" he gestured around the partially completed surroundings.

"This is a little something we have had in the pipeline for a few months now" the Prime Minister explained as they all sat down around the table "Effectively what you see now is the nucleus of a new covert centrally co-ordinated intelligence agency which given recent events has become even more relevant to this country's needs."

"Nice of you to let me know in advance" the Commander remarked wryly.

"Well you little facility at King William Street was the inspiration really" Sir Richard confirmed "We are just taking the concept forward a stage, we call it Section 14."

"Catchy, all it needs is a logo in marble on the floor" the Commander remarked "So who knows about this place?" he asked.

"Only us four, the operations chiefs of MI5 and MI6, Simon Fuller and the Home Secretary" the Prime Minister confirmed.

"So why was I kept out of the loop?" the Commander politely enquired.

"For the same reason we kept National Administrator General Bordon off the radar" Sir Richard explained.

"Part of this Office's brief is to monitor all Security agencies and related associates in order to stamp out corruption" Clancy began "About six months ago during routine monitoring, MI5 randomly stumbled across an e-mail sent to Bordon from a journalist on the Haychester Gazette which appeared to imply that she had evidence indicating transgressions on the part of Bordon stretching back over twenty five years" he passed across a printed copy of the e-mail in question over to the Commander from a sealed file.

"We couldn't bring you in straight away as you served under Bordon at Haychester" Sir Richard added "We were 99.9% certain you had nothing murky in your past but we couldn't take the chance that Bordon would find out that we were nosing about if he should bump into you inadvertently."

"I see" the Commander responded in understanding "Of course events of the last few days and the things we have discovered about what happened all those years ago has I assume thrown a collective spanner in your work ."

"We had managed to get hold of copies of *some* of the original evidence in the Haychester murder case as soon as we realised the significance of what the journalist had" Sir Richard explained "Some cross referencing with other information we already had threw up some interesting links, some of which you and your colleagues have also discovered in the last couple of days, then when I discovered Bordon had done a midnight flit from his climbing holiday in Canada...."

"If he was ever there in the first place" the Commander added.

"Coupled with Longton and the Haychester boys and girls discovering the identity of our two stiffs as being our journalist and her brother" Sir Richard continued "That was when the panic button got pushed."

"No doubt given the esteemed company I currently find myself in" the Commander gestured respectfully around the room "You have the same concerns as I am as to how much damage the public disclosure of a renegade, indeed potentially psychotic National Administrator General will look in the popular press, especially in light of recent events."

"Just the sort of job for which this currently embryonic organisation has been put together" Clancy explained.

"Well if we can find him" the Commander explained "Then I want to talk to him alone."

"In which case" the Prime Minister responded as he produced another sealed file and passed it across "You had better take a look at this."

"We have been watching Bordon for over four months now" Clancy explained as the Commander took the file, opened it and after putting on his small steel framed reading glasses, began to look through its extensive contents carefully "In addition we gave his life including anything and anyone connected to it a through audit."

"Extremely thorough I would say" the Commander agreed as he continued reading with some surprise and deep concern readily apparent on his face.

"That was when some disturbing facts become to come unravelled" Clancy continued "I understand you are already aware of some potential financial irregularities regarding our old friend Mr Bordon?"

"From what we discovered earlier" the Commander confirmed "It does appear that Bordon was siphoning off considerable funds from the informants budget whilst not actually having any real live informants."

"Sadly just the tip of the iceberg" the Prime Minister confirmed regretfully as he passed across a red file with the crest of Her Majesty's Treasury emblazoned upon it.

"It would appear that Bordon has somewhat of a gambling debt problem" Clancy explained.

"I am not surprised" the Commander agreed "I've seen him play, and he still owes me fifty quid now I come to think of it."

"Current gambling debt we estimated was at the end of last week approaching a hundred grand" Sir Richard confirmed "That's the accounts that one of the Treasury's best laundry experts managed to dig up."

"That however appears to be the least of his problems" Clancy continued "Ever heard of a guy named Franklin Rogers?"

"The self proclaimed 'Lord of Leytonstone' who finally got banged up about eight years back?" the Commander recalled "We found a slip of paper with two case file numbers on them in Bordon's place, one of which was a case involving the much unloved Mr Rogers."

"Well he may be behind bars but there is a lot of admittedly hearsay rumours in some of the more murkier parts of the back channels that say he and some 'associates' are moving a lot of cash at the moment" Sir Richard explained "and blackmail of a couple of quote 'very senior' Security Officers has been mentioned."

"Well the only way we are ever going to find out" the Commander responded "is to ask the man himself."

"That's my Department" Sir Richard confirmed as he reached across the desk and picked up a telephone before speed dialling a number, his call being quickly answered.

"Do you have any idea how you are going to approach this" Clancy asked.

"My usual tact, diplomacy and subtlety" the Commander confirmed with a wry grin.

"Oh hell, we are in trouble now" the Prime Minister muttered under his breath, rolling his eyes upwards in amusement.

"First things first gentlemen" the Commander cautioned "Lets find him first and then let me take it from there."

"Does anyone here, not including the Commander of course, not believe in coincidence by any chance?" Sir Richard asked as he hung up the telephone.

"Not any more" the Prime Minister admitted wryly.

"I hoped you packed your Oyster Card then" Sir Richard confirmed "We are off to Leytonstone."

"Control, this is Angel Three" came the call over the dedicated secure radio frequency for Commander Cassini's specialist undercover surveillance team "Target has arrived at location Echo, time 23:02."

"Roger that" Cassini responded as, using binoculars he looked out ahead down the street from his position in the front passenger seat of the unmarked Transit van parked discreetly out of sight in a suburb of South Leytonstone.

"I don't like this boss" Ziggy, Cassini's second in command of the Specialist Undercover Surveillance Division commented from the drivers seat as he adjusted his position causing the battered seat to creak as uneasily as he felt.

"What's there too like?" Cassini responded in total agreement "This isn't some dodgy low life we are tracking after all."

"No" Ziggy confirmed "Just the National Administrator General, no-one special" he mocked.

"So who's running the book on who will be the next National Administrator General then?" Cassini asked "It looks like we may well need one by tomorrow morning."

"Seems a bit of a one horse race to me boss" Ziggy remarked.

At that moment the rear door of the van opened and the Commander got in before closing the door quietly behind him.

"Evening gentlemen" he declared "Nice night for it."

"Evening Sir" Cassini responded "We were just talking about you."

"Nothing bad I do hope" the Commander asked wryly.

"Just a small wager being placed, nothing that unusual" Cassini confirmed.

"No prizes for guessing what that was about then" the Commander admitted "Ok, so where is our boy then?" he asked.

"Three doors up" Cassini indicated up the street towards an anonymous looking five storey office building of typically uninspired mid 1960's concrete and glass construction.

"Not Nevis House by any chance?" the Commander asked.

"Err yes Sir" Cassini confirmed checking his notebook "Thing is I called it into Property Registry but they were unable to trace any registered key holders or landlords."

"I am not surprised" the Commander responded as he looked ahead through the front windscreen of the van "It used to be one of our more obscure and discrete training facilities until it was decommissioned and became just a high security storage facility about five years ago."

"Angel One to all units" Cassini called over the radio "Any sign of movement within the structure?" he asked.

"Angel One from Angel Five" came a quick response "There is a light just come on on the fourth floor and a shadow is visible moving within."

"Somebody is at home by the sound of it" Cassini confirmed.

"Give me one of your hidden radio sets" the Commander requested "Can you set them to permanently receive?"

"Sure can Sir" Cassini confirmed whereupon Ziggy reached into the back of the van, extracted a secure looking case which when he opened it revealed a large selection of radio and electrical components.

"Everything a senior Commander could possibly need on holiday Sir" Ziggy declared.

"I have to admit I failed 'O' Level electronics" the Commander admitted sheepishly "When I was fourteen I wired a three pin plug the wrong way around and wound up blowing the trip switches in the entire Science Block."

"Fortunately this system runs only on coin cell batteries" Ziggy explained as the Commander took off his uniform tunic to allow the radio equipment to be fitted where it would not be easily seen.

"How long are the batteries good for?" the Commander asked as Ziggy finished fitting the set allowing him to put his uniform tunic back on.

"These should last at least twelve hours" Cassini confirmed.

"Well I hope not to be that long" the Commander confirmed "If I am too late back, Tracy will give me hell, or at the very least no breakfast."

"Just don't get it wet Sir" Cassini advised as the Commander opened the side door of the van.

"Don't worry lad" the Commander confirmed as he got out of the van "I'll be my usual careful and diligent self."

"Oh dear..." Cassini and Ziggy remarked in unison as the Commander closed the door of the van before heading up the street.

The main entrance into Nevis House was as innocuous and uninviting as the rest of the building, a grotty but secure metal and glass door with a combination key pad and secure lock giving any passer by only the vaguest clue as to the buildings purpose or owner.

Even the sign declaring its name was worn and neglected, a fact the Commander casually noted as he inserted a key into the lock, turned it and then entered a six digit alpha-numerical code into the key pad before successfully opening the door and entering the building.

As soon as he entered, a bleeping noise began to emit, this being a burglar alarm countdown.

"Oh great" the Commander remarked to himself in irritation as he looked around for a solution to this new and thoroughly unwelcome problem.

With just three seconds of the countdown left until the burglar alarm would be triggered, the control unit was disabled as the Commander struck it with the fire axe he had taken from the emergency equipment cupboard in the foyer.

"That was close" the Commander commented as the shattered remains of the alarm control box fell silent before falling off the wall and crashing to the floor whereupon the Commander casually chucked the axe on top of the remains before proceeding into the interior of the building.

The Commander had to admit to himself he was a bit relieved when he discovered the lift was not working, an 'Out of Order' sign draped casually over the lift control buttons which meant he had to resort to using the stairs to ascend to the fourth floor where he found that someone had indeed switched the lights on, however because of

the general neglect the building had received in recent years, over half of the ceiling mounted light units were either not working at all or flashing intermittently in an eerie yet irritating manner.

Drawing his gun from its belt mounted holster, the Commander proceeded from the fire exit stairs along the dusty and slightly damp corridor, checking the offices to his and right as he went.

In most of the former offices he found little except old storage boxes stacked sometimes ten deep or abandoned broken and dusty furniture now little more than home to a thousand spiders judging by the amount of cobwebs present.

As the Commander checked another clutter filled abandoned office about two thirds of the way down the corridor, his attention was caught by a distant noise from somewhere up ahead down the far end where it was darkest due to there being no operational lights whatsoever.

With caution, the Commander advanced slowly down the corridor towards the dark end where one door was ajar on the left

Squinting to see inside the room as he carefully pushed the door further open with his gun trained ahead, the Commander quickly realised he had been duped the moment he felt a weapon held to the back of his head and a familiar voice from a person who had emerged from the dark office door immediately opposite.

"Good evening Commander" the visibly aged, stressed riddled and haggard Bordon announced "The gun if you wouldn't mind please."

"Of course" the Commander reluctantly agreed as he lowered his gun and passed it behind him to Bordon.

"Let's take a seat shall we Commander?" Bordon suggested, indicating the old chairs in the room with a wave of his gun.

The Commander duly sat down in one chair nearest the wall facing the doorway as Bordon moved the other chair to sit down opposite him, between the Commander and the exit.

"I see you still have this old thing" Bordon remarked as he put the Commander's six shot revolver on the table.

"It's been through a lot I will admit" the Commander agreed "Speaking of which, you are a hard man to catch up with."

"Circumstances change Commander" Bordon admitted "I am no longer that officer who you looked up to all those years ago."

"From what I have seen, read and heard over the last forty eight hours" the Commander responded "I would say that what I saw back then was not exactly the real you either."

"Damm it" Bordon retorted semi-complimentary "I always knew you were too good to fool."

"Signed confession taken by yourself from someone who it turns out was a registered informant who you ran" the Commander listed just some of the damning evidence he had managed to amass so far "e-mails between you and the second victim, who by the way was the sister of the first, both journalists who were poking around in your background, missing Service funds from accounts you controlled and now I am informed, strong rumours of gambling debts and links to some very dodgy people. Need I go on?"

"No" Bordon admitted "I owe you an apology though, if things had gone according to my original plan all those years ago, I would be back at the office right now whilst you would have been a long forgotten line on the memorial plaque at Haychester."

"It nearly was if you recall" the Commander reminded him "Those two armed wages snatches were nearly the end of me."

"I'm sorry" Bordon admitted "Actually they were supposed to be the end of you."

"Too clever for my own good I suppose?" the Commander responded not entirely surprised at this admission.

"For the benefit of the audience" Bordon declared with a manic laugh for he was well aware by assumption that the Commander was wearing a wire "Let me relate the sorry tale. This story starts ten days before your arrival at Haychester and for me started with a meeting in a car park."

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Superintendent Bordon already had a lot on his mind as he parked his Ford Granada in his assigned space in the staff car park of the Haychester office.

Once he had parked and turned off the engine, he sat there for a moment looking at his reflection barely visible in the windscreen before taking a deep breath, grabbing his leather briefcase from the front passenger seat and getting out of the car.

"Superintendent Bordon!" came a call across the car park which caused him to look up with a somewhat less than enthusiastic look to see a young man, the source of the voice coming towards him.

"Ah if it isn't young Mr Tweedle" Bordon remarked "Fearless journalist from the Haychester Chip Wrapper" he mocked, his tone reflecting his general dislike of journalists "Dare I ask if this unexpected pleasure has some purpose or are you just fishing as usual."

"How about potential allegations of fraud and financial malpractice within the all mighty National Security Service?" Tweedle asked as he walked alongside a fast moving and clearly irritated Bordon.

"Really?" Bordon responded, continuing to try and appear uninterested even though deep down he knew full and well exactly what he was on about, the only question being exactly how much he knew and whether he could be connected with it.

"I don't suppose you have what we call in the trade evidence by any chance?" Bordon asked.

"I wanted to bring these allegations to you before I take any potential story to my editor" Tweedle confirmed as he reached into his case and produced a file "A copy of my research Superintendent, I would appreciate your input."

"All right" Bordon reluctantly agreed as he took the file and put it in his briefcase.

"I can be contacted through my office" Tweedle confirmed "Thank you Superintendent" he called before leaving Bordon and making a hasty departure.

"You're welcome I'm sure" Bordon remarked with concern before heading towards the main office building.

A few minutes later he was exiting from the lift on the top floor and heading towards his office when he passed the office of Commander Barrett.

Through the glass partition beside the door, he could see that Barrett had company, two significant looking people joining him in a meeting, one being Divisional Commander Edwards, the other being someone he did not recognise but from his stature and appearance, he appeared to be someone of some importance.

Bordon decided to continue on towards his office only for Barrett's office door to open behind him.

"Divisional Superintendent Bordon" Commander Barrett called from the doorway "I don't suppose you could join us for a couple of minutes of your time Sir?"

"Yes certainly" Bordon responded as cheerily as he could manage before returning to the office door and following Barrett inside.

"May I introduce Divisional Superintendent Bordon" Edwards declared as he arrived "This is Richard Crowthorne, he is err..."

"Lets just say I work for another Government agency that specialises in the same line of business" he explained as he and Bordon shook hands.

"So to what do we owe the pleasure?" Bordon inquired, hiding his concern as to any potential threat to him that this development may mean.

"Close the door" Edwards motioned behind Bordon which just served to emphasise that whatever was being discussed was as important as he had feared, although he kept these feelings to himself for fear of raising any further suspicion.

“Ok gentlemen” Bordon declared once he had closed the door and joined the others sat around the desk “You have me suitably intrigued.”

“I don't know if you are aware or not” Edwards began “but my adopted son Sam will be starting here next week as a fully qualified officer Lieutenant in the Haychester Division.”

“I vaguely recall something crossed my desk” Bordon responded, however truth be told with the way his life was going at that point a transfer request for a purple elephant could have landed on his desk and he would not have noticed “Of course I leave specific recruitment down to you gentlemen, I trust your instincts and your judgement 100%.”

“Well this isn't just any ordinary young fellow joining the service” Crowthorne explained slightly hesitantly “Wet behind the ears is certainly not one description I would use to describe him.”

“What is your involvement may I ask Mr Crowthorne?” Bordon inquired.

“It's complicated” Crowthorne admitted “Lets just say I am his guardian angel in a slightly strange sort of way and our boy here” he indicated a personnel file on the desk in front of him “Comes with very high recommendations but also a very colourful history, especially for someone of his young tender years.”

“I take it by this that you felt we should be made aware of this colourful background before he begins his tenure here then?” Bordon asked, completely mystified by this discussion yet also relived that it had nothing to do with him personally and any problems he may be having.

“Indeed” Crowthorne confirmed “Commander Edwards and myself are of course already well aware of what I am about to disclose however I must stress that what is said in this office remains within these walls and is shared with no one.”

“Understood” Barrett confirmed.

“Yes of course” Bordon agreed.

“Very well” Crowthorne continued now that he had everyone's full attention “As has already been mentioned, our young Mr Edwards here” he indicated the file “was adopted by Jim here when he was thirteen years old. This followed on from an incident which meant he was required to have his identity changed and placed under the care of our witness protection service with I as his overseer.”

“What was this 'incident' of which you speak?” Barrett asked.

“The Lewisham Diamond Heist” Crowthorne confirmed with sincerity.

“But the only witness to that was that lad who got... Ah...” Barrett tailed off as he realised the significance “So whatever his name was, Regent or something?”

“Eddie Regent” Crowthorne confirmed.

“I take it he didn't actually die then as was bandied around at the time after all?” Barrett asked.

“Oh he died all right” Crowthorne opened the file and showed them a death certificate dated 7th March 1969 “Thankfully he was revived, we just decided in the interests of his safety and the wheels of justice not to tell anyone about it that's all.”

“The trouble is gentlemen things get even more complicated than that” Edwards confirmed regretfully.

“Eddie, err I mean Sam decides from an early age that he wants to join the fledgling Security Service like his adopted father” Crowthorne continued “We were OK with that, no major problems that we could see. The trouble was two days before Sam was scheduled to graduate from the Academy, this little disaster pops up and throws a spanner in the works” at which point Crowthorne produced an official looking report from his briefcase, over three hundred bound pages with the words 'Top Secret' emblazoned across the front cover which made for a loud thud as it hit the desk.

“Oh joy” Barrett remarked whilst Bordon just looked on in stunned silence “The Hainault Inquiry Report.”

“Don't tell me he was...?” Bordon began to ask.

“Yep” Crowthorne confirmed “Sam was the one who duly leapt in, stopped the gunman and got himself shot, yet again. You would not believe the trouble we had to go to in order to keep his identity out of the official inquiry. Lord Hainault is going to have a ball on all the free drinks MI5's expenses account owes him now.”

“Leaving aside this colourful history for a moment” Barrett inquired “The only reason I asked for him to be assigned here was that he is a damm good young officer who will be a credit to the service.”

“I agree” Crowthorne responded “He'll go far.”

“Just how good is this fellow?” Bordon asked, intrigued by much of what he was hearing.

“In his eighteen months at the Security Service Academy” Barrett consulted Sam's training record in the file on his desk “He single handed solved two major fraud cases and has already been decorated twice for bravery.”

“To which you can add the technically posthumous George Cross he got for his bravery in the Lewisham incident” Crowthorne added.

“Doesn't get much better than that I will admit” Bordon agreed “So when does he start?”

“Next week” Barrett confirmed “Should be interesting.”

“Indeed” Bordon responded “Well if you will excuse me gentlemen” he declared as he checked his watch and rose from his seat “There is much to do and as usual very little time to do it in, good day gentlemen.”

With that Bordon left and immediately proceeded down the corridor to his own office where he quickly went inside and secured the door behind him before lowering the blinds.

His first reaction was to pour himself a drink from the decanter on the side table before going over to the window and looking out upon the world outside with some trepidation in his mind. Despite his earlier demeanour he did in fact already know how good Sam was, the one thing he had not expected however was that he would be coming to Haychester and added to the journalist sniffing around meant that Bordon was going to have to act quickly and decisively to save his own neck.

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“That night” Bordon continued to retell the story “I took a good look at the copy of the evidence that Tweedle had given me and it quickly became clear that there was enough there to hang me well and true, all it needed was for some expert young officer to add the correct name, i.e. mine to the facts and that would have been me done for.”

“So what happened to Tweedle then?” the Commander asked “Before he started turning up in several different places at once that is.”

“I arranged a meeting with him for that evening” Bordon confirmed “Bit of an old cliché really but I set it up for a meeting in a deserted car park.”

“How original...” the Commander mused.

-o-o-o-

Bordon drove around the perimeter of the deserted car park situated on the outskirts of Haychester twice before deciding it was safe for him to enter, proceeding directly over to the far side in the shadow of a high wall where he brought his car to a stand and turned off the engine leaving him alone in the dark and the silence of the late evening.

As he lit a cigarette, Bordon became aware of another vehicle entering the car park over on the far side before approaching slowly, coming to a stop approximately a hundred yards away from his own position. Before getting out of the car himself, Bordon reached across to the glove compartment and extracted an old revolver which, after checking it was loaded he put in his coat pocket.

Just as he was getting out of the car, Bordon recognised Tweedle sitting in the drivers seat of his own rather battered looking Mini Cooper before he went over to him whereupon the two men met in front of the car, both with very serious expressions but with apprehension on Tweedle's part, fear and loathing on Bordon's.

“Good evening” Bordon declared “Actually more like Good Morning I should really say” he added as the chimes of the City Cathedral clock could be heard in the distance ringing out for midnight.”

“Thank you for coming Sir” Tweedle responded slightly nervously “Did you get a chance to read my file?”

“I did indeed” Bordon confirmed “Some interesting facts you have uncovered here” he indicated the file which he had brought with him “If these documents are authentic then you could have the scoop of the year here young man.”

“That is just the edited highlights” Tweedle confirmed “This” he produced a box file from the front passenger seat of his car and placed it on the roof before opening it “This is where we get down to the nitty gritty.”

“You have been doing your homework haven't you” Bordon remarked admirably whilst at the same time keeping any fears he may have had firmly suppressed. “So what have you got?”

“Have you ever heard of a guy named Franklin Rogers?” Tweedle asked slightly nervously.

“Particularly unpleasant gangland villain from East London somewhere” Bordon confirmed, there being no point in denying this particular fact “Leytonstone way if I recall correctly.”

“The 'Lord of Leytonstone' is what some people call him apparently” Tweedle responded “Over the last ten years he and his gang have been linked to over a dozen brutal murders, countless armed robberies and other serious crimes nationwide but yet no one had ever been able to get him behind bars.”

“A proverbial thorn in the side of the Service” Bordon confirmed “So what's the connection between him and your allegations of corruption then?”

“I have a friend in the Government Treasury Department” Tweedle continued “For the past six months he has noted oddly large sums of cash passing through certain accounts that are linked to key areas of the Security Service as well as the Secret Intelligence Services, in particular those relating to covert operations, witness protection and paid informants.”

“So someone has been lining their pockets I take it?” Bordon asked.

“In a word, yes Sir” Tweedle confirmed as he showed Bordon some very roughly copied samples of accounts, some of which could clearly be seen to bear the symbol of the UK Treasury Department.

“Right...” Bordon commented as he looked through the paperwork “So who do you suspect is behind this on the good side?”

“It has to be someone fairly high up” Tweedle commented “At the very least one of the senior Commander's, maybe even someone you know.”

“This is the 1980's son” Bordon remarked “Anything is possible. Who would have thought we would send an entire armada to the South Atlantic to rescue three hundred islanders and several thousand sheep? With logic like that running around Whitehall anything is possible.”

“These are strange times Sir” Tweedle agreed.

“Who exactly have you told about these discoveries of yours?” Bordon asked “Only I think in the current climate the less people that know about this the better for now.”

“My editor knows I am working on something though he has no idea what” Tweedle confirmed “There is also my contact at the Treasury but even he has no idea of the level of material I have managed to accumulate here. Apart from that there is just you and me.”

“Excellent” Bordon responded as on impulse he pulled his revolver from his pocket, aimed and shot Tweedle twice killing him instantly.

As the echoes of the gunshot rang about, Bordon bent down to check that Tweedle was indeed dead before putting all the paperwork back into the box file and tucking it under his arm. Looking around he could see that there was no one about and so Bordon dragged Tweedle's body around to the boot of his own car before loading him inside.

Bordon had to act quickly if he was to avoid being discovered. The body needed to be quickly and effectively disposed of as well, as any identification of Tweedle could just lead the authorities down the same evidence path he had been following which would in turn lead them straight to Bordon's front door.

With the boot lid of his car shut firmly, the body now out of sight within, Bordon looked back across the car park to Tweedle's car which would also have to be disposed of in order to avoid any detection of the murder.

A few minutes later Bordon arrived in a telephone box a few hundred yards from the car park where illuminated only by the poor quality lamp inside the traditional red box, he picked up the handset of the payphone, inserted ten pence and dialled a local number.

“It's Bordon” he declared as soon as he was connected “I need to speak to your boss right now.”

As he waited, Bordon looked around nervously through the thin panes of glass that made up the door and sides of the telephone box to see if anyone was about, however as was usually the case in Haychester at that time of night, all was silent.

“Yes it is bloody important” Bordon confirmed before waiting another minute during which time the pips over the line meant he had to put another ten pence in the telephone as he had been kept waiting for so long.

“Ah at last” Bordon declared as the man he needed to speak to finally came on the line “You know that journalist I told you about earlier? Well he's dead.”

There was silence for a few moments at Bordon's end as the person he was in communication with absorbed this news.

“He had enough evidence to nail not just me but you as well” Bordon confirmed “Anyway we can discuss that later, I have his body in the boot of my car, I need it and his motor removing tonight and in no way must he be identifiable in any way when he turns up.”

A further pause followed as the person at the other end of the conversation duly took in this information before deciding on a course of action.

“North Haven Car Park in Haychester” Bordon confirmed “Don't be late” he added before hanging up and leaving the telephone box to return to the car park.

Rather than returning to his car, Bordon remained in the shadows of the trees overlooking the car park for over an hour before he became aware of a white Ford Transit van arriving, its headlights extinguished.

Slowly with its engine running at little more than a tick over rate, the van proceeded across the car park until it stopped alongside the Mini Cooper where a man was seen to get out of the passenger side and proceed directly to the small vehicle and get in the drivers seat.

“Good evening Mr Bordon” a voice called from behind the Divisional Superintendent causing him to jump with shock before looking around to see the flame from a lighter illuminate the face of Franklin Rogers as he lit a large cigar from which he inhaled a large amount before stepping forward and joining Bordon “We appear to be having a few little problems this evening don't we.”

“Lets just say I have had better days Frank” Bordon admitted “Anyway I am surprised you are down this way.”

“I fancied a drive out into the country” Rogers confirmed philosophically “Fresh air, I find it helps clear the mind.”

“Thanks for this” Bordon confirmed as the Transit Van moved on from the Mini Cooper as it was being driven away to come to a stand alongside his own car whereupon two more men emerged from the van to deal with the body in the boot.

“You have done me a few favours over the years so I think it is safe to say I owe you this one” Rogers confirmed as they both watched his men at work, carrying the body of Tweedle away into the back of the van and clearing up any residual mess before driving off again into the night as quietly as they had arrived.

"I need that body to be never identified" Bordon responded "Let alone linked to me."

"I think we can arrange that" Rogers confirmed "There are one or two conditions attached of course."

"Naturally" Bordon confirmed with a sigh of inevitability.

"We'll come to that later" Rogers reassured him as he escorted Bordon back to his car "One thing is for certain my friend, we are going to have a very long and productive business partnership, after all it would be a pity if your exploits here tonight were to become public?"

"Indeed it would" Bordon agreed.

"I am so glad we had this chance to have a chat" Rogers confirmed as he opened the drivers door of Bordon's car for him to get inside "We'll talk again very soon old friend" he emphasised with a knowing smile which merely reflected his delight that he had one of the most senior Security Service officers there was over a barrel and effectively his servant.

"Good night" Rogers declared before disappearing once more into the night leaving no trace except a dissipating cloud of cigar smoke in his wake.

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"So you were in deep with that fruit loop Rogers then?" the Commander remarked "If only we had known."

"I had no choice, please you have to understand that" Bordon defended himself although he could tell from his expression that the Commander was far from impressed by this defence.

"You could have said something" the Commander responded "Gone to someone before it got out of hand."

"Maybe" Bordon admitted "But remember this was back in the old days where sympathies were short and the baying press eager to get their teeth into some fresh meat."

"You have a point" the Commander agreed "So how the hell did we get from a dead journalist to armed robbers running amok and nearly blowing my head off on my first day?"

"I realised as the body parts began to turn up that Rogers's boys were being very careful to keep my little problem still firmly encamped on my doorstep" Bordon explained.

"At which point I duly arrived" the Commander remarked.

"It was obvious that your arrival could present a bit of a problem" Bordon admitted "So the evening before, I made a house call to set up something to keep you occupied."

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The rain pouring down acted as an extra distraction to anyone who may have been about as Bordon, dressed in a flat cap and long dark overcoat alighted from the train of 1959 type tube stock on the east bound Central Line platform at Leyton.

Outside the station as the rain continued to pour down was a dark blue Rover saloon into which Bordon got in the back of before the car pulled away.

"It was a dark and stormy night..." Rogers remarked philosophically as he looked across at the rather damp not to mention worried looking Bordon sitting alongside him.

"Eh?" Bordon responded.

"Sorry" Rogers explained "I have always had a literal mind with a fondness for the melodramatic. So what can I do for you my friend?" he asked.

"I need a distraction for one of my new officers" Bordon explained "Thanks to your boys leaving the remains of our late journalist all over my patch, the arrival of this new officer who according to all reports is excellent at what he does, means there is a real danger that he could find out about our little arrangement."

"Does this young gentleman have a name perchance?" Rogers asked as he produced a leather-bound notebook and an antique gold pen.

"Lieutenant Sam Edwards" Bordon confirmed.

"Hmmm" Rogers commented as he made a note of the name in his notebook before returning it to the inside jacket pocket "I must make a point of looking into him."

"Well don't look too deep" Bordon warned "He comes with some interesting overseers."

"So what can I do for you then?" Rogers inquired "Some sort of major incident in that quaint little back water of yours perhaps?"

"I was thinking a nice public armed robbery which I could then allocate this lad to investigating" Bordon confirmed "There is a major cash wages delivery scheduled for tomorrow morning."

"Into which no doubt you will drop this young man so he hits the ground running as it were" Rogers remarked "Do you want him damaged or undamaged?"

"I am not too bothered if I were to be honest" Bordon admitted "As long as you get his attention that is all I require."

"Very well" Rogers agreed "That will be £20,000 arrangement fee please."

"What?!?" Bordon stammered in reaction.

"I can't just provide the valuable services of my people, equipment and expertise for free you know" Rogers calmly explained "Especially at this short notice, I am a businessman and I need to see returns on my investment."

"Where am I going to find that kind of cash?" Bordon asked.

"The same place all the rest of your most generous donations have come from I would expect" Rogers confirmed.

"It is lucky for me that I am the guy that has exclusive signature authority for the account and audit rights as well" Bordon admitted.

"A very amicable arrangement" Rogers agreed "Please have your payment waiting for my people after the job has been carried out."

"Remember I need this to be headline grabbing spectacular" Bordon reminded Rogers with clear insistence.

"You can be assured of my employee's total lack of discretion" Rogers confirmed "I'll even waive my usual expenses for the ammunition used."

"I just hope it works" Bordon commented as the car slowed down to stop outside Stratford Station.

"Just make sure this young fellow is there on time" Rogers confirmed "My people will do the rest. I believe this is your stop by the way" he indicated the station entrance outside barely visible amidst the torrential rain.

"Right..." Bordon reluctantly agreed, seeing this was his cue to leave.

"Have a pleasant evening" Rogers called after him as Bordon got out of the car.

Pulling his overcoat in tight around him in an effort to try and keep the worst of the torrential weather out, Bordon discreetly slipped away inside the station to begin the long journey back to Haychester.

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"So you got your old pal Rogers to set up a violent armed robbery then dropped me right in the middle of it?" the Commander asked, the feeling of disbelief all too apparent.

"Desperate times often call for desperate measures" Bordon was forced to admit.

"So when it became clear your little diversion plan was not as effective as you had hoped" the Commander continued "That's when armed robbery number two was set in motion I presume?"

"I made myself scarce for a few days only to receive a call from Rogers" Bordon continued "Turns out his lads had been keeping their ears close to the ground in Haychester and discovered just how close you were getting to linking the robbery with the murder so he offered me another deal."

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Bordon looked around for any following traffic before he discreetly drove his car into the gravel pit access road.

It took him the best part of ten minutes bumping along the rough track before he arrived at the old workshop buildings in the centre of the vast pit where there was parked a white Ford Transit van and a dark Rover saloon.

Standing in front of the car waiting for Bordon was the tall distinguished yet business like looking figure of Rogers, flanked either side by two of his ever present associates who stereotypically were on guard dressed in identical black overcoats and sunglasses.

"You are a hard man to catch up with my friend" Rogers remarked as one of his accompanying goons stepped forward to open Bordon's door and escort him out before searching him by way of a pat down.

"Let's just say I thought it wise to keep a low profile for a while until this mess blows over" Bordon responded as the goon finished his search and returned to his previous position alongside his vile boss.

"Unfortunately my sources tell me that you're young Lieutenant..." Rogers paused as he consulted his notebook "Edwards has proved to be even more intelligent than either you or I had given him credit for."

"I'd heard rumours to the effect yes" Bordon confirmed "It would appear your little diversion has not had the desired effect."

"At least not as well as you had hoped it would appear" Bordon responded "So I was thinking..."

"Is this going to cost me money?" Bordon asked apprehensively.

"A one time special offer" Rogers confirmed "Another spectacular robbery, only this time using some of my less useful people."

"All right" Bordon agreed with obvious reluctance as he could see he had no options left, a fact Rogers knew all too well.

"And our young friend?" Rogers asked "I have over the years developed quite a talent for spotting those who in the future will become an incorruptible pain in the neck to those in my line of business."

"I hate to say it" Bordon reluctantly admitted "but I fear it may be time that young Mr Edwards was terminated, permanently."

"Very well" Rogers agreed with a firm nod of the head "Here is what you are going to do. Firstly, I will arrange for some of my more trigger happy employees to conduct a raid on the wages delivery that will take place this afternoon at a meat paste factory in the centre of your quaint little backwater."

"That should grab someone's attention" Bordon agreed.

"Just so" Rogers confirmed "One of my associates will provide an anonymous tip off to you whom you will pass on to this Edwards chap who will ensure he is there when it all kicks off."

"What makes you think he will fall for it?" Bordon asked nervously.

"Given his dedication that led him to this very spot after the last raid" Rogers remarked "I think we can safely assume his undying if somewhat annoying dedication to his duty will ensure that he is there. Once things get busy, one of my associates will then carry out his orders to shoot him which will solve problem number one."

"Still leaves me with a murder investigation floating around" Bordon reminded the seemingly very relaxed Rogers.

"Which is problem number two" Rogers explained "This is as they say where the plot thickens. Whilst our young friend and indeed the rest of the service are busy being distracted by him getting his head blown off, you will apprehend the killer, or at least someone who you get a very convincing confession out of anyway."

"I think that is something that could be arranged" Bordon confirmed "So I take it as everyone is running around, I drag A.N.Other in, grill him, get a water tight confession on paper and have the case nicely sealed up before anyone realises what has happened."

"I would suggest you use that snout of yours you have been using as an excuse to drain the informants fund dry for the last ten years" Rogers suggested "One of my associates can ensure that he say nothing else further once you have him safely in jail somewhere and that as they say will be the end of that my friend."

"And the evidence?" Bordon asked "Supposing someone goes though it and starts nosing around again?"

"Get it all packed off to the Prosecutions Directors Office as fast as you can" Rogers confirmed "I have a contact who will ensure that it will magically disappear never to be seen again. It is not as if it is the first time evidence has mysteriously vanished into the mists of time."

“And then we are even?” Bordon asked nervously.

“What?” Rogers laughed out loud in response with a deep raucous almost evil laugh that echoed all around the deserted old gravel pit, merely emphasising his hold and power that he had over not only Bordon but many others as well “Let us call this a down payment my friend. We are going to be doing a lot more business in the years to come, believe me.”

“Oh...” Bordon responded, his face dropping noticeably with disappointment, maybe even fear as the magnitude of what he had managed to get himself into began to become clear.

“You may go now” Rogers casually dismissed the Divisional Superintendent with a wave of the hand which Bordon duly took as his cue to leave, being shown back to his car by one of the minders who held the door open for him before Bordon duly drove away.

As he drove out of the old gravel pit workings and reached the paved road once more, his mind was full of thoughts, many of dread and many more of fear as he wondered just how much deeper into this he was going to sink before he would be able to see some light at the end of the tunnel.

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“Thanks a bunch” the Commander responded with a distinct lack of sincerity.

“Like I said” Bordon casually admitted with almost a manic tone of madness apparent in his voice “Desperate times....”

“...call for desperate measures, yes I kind of got that bit” the Commander confirmed, distinctly unimpressed. “Pity for you they missed then wasn't it?”

“Still worked out though” Bordon admitted “By the time the dust had settled over the second armed robbery I had the murder sewn up in a large sealed evidence box and the case was effectively closed.”

“So where does Tweedle's sister come into all this?” the Commander asked.

“She contacted me by e-mail about three weeks ago” Bordon confirmed “It turns out that she had found copies of her brother's evidence in her attic or something. Now of course she was a journalist on the Haychester Gazette and she decided to follow it up.”

“I bet that came as a bit of a shock” the Commander remarked wryly “The National Administrator General potentially implicated in murder, perverting the course of justice, armed robbery, conspiracy, need I go on?”

“Yes all right” Bordon responded, clearly agitated and in some ways desperate for a way out of this mess “Well anyway I ignored the problem for a week or two, planned a nice holiday to Canada to stay out of the way.”

“You weren't there for very long” the Commander remarked “Sir Richard's people did a double check and all they found was your brother.”

“Well anyway, there I was in Heathrow, Terminal 5 on my way out” Bordon explained.

“Which probably means your bags are still there” the Commander remarked aside.

“There I am in Passport Control and my mobile rings and you will never guess who was calling” Bordon continued to explain.

“Old Frankie Rogers himself perchance?” the Commander made an educated guess.

“In person” Bordon confirmed with a sense of disbelief “Anyway he said I should stay low for a few days and that he would deal with the problem, his words.”

“His definition of dealing with the problem being having this young lass duly done in and disposed off in the same way as her brother I take it?” the Commander asked.

“Apparently so” Bordon agreed “Trouble was that two faced bastard wrapped the body parts in bank notes from those original two bank raids. As soon as I heard about that I headed home on a false passport on the first flight I could get. Fortunately when I arrived back in the UK, you and your good lady wife were busy taking on that bunch of political pillocks in London so I was able to slip unnoticed back into the country.”

“That was when you paid a visit to the Haychester Storage Facility and removed all the old evidence that was still around” the Commander concluded.

“Rogers got locked up about ten years ago” Bordon explained “Because I ignored his requests to get him out of that mess back then, he has just been waiting for an opportunity to get back at me. As soon as Tweedle junior appeared on the scene he had the opportunity he was looking for.”

“Throwing in the money from the old wages snatches was a nice touch” the Commander remarked “Guaranteed to get my attention I would say.”

“He may be inside now” Bordon confirmed “but unfortunately Franklin Roger's influence still extends far outside the walls of his prison cell.”

“He was right about one thing” the Commander admitted “He knew I would find about you and your murky involvement eventually” he remarked.

“And here we are” Bordon held his arms out around him “You and I in the same room. Unfortunately for your sakes you are still too good at what you do.”

“It's a curse I have come to live with” the Commander wryly admitted “So what's next in your grand plan to save your own worthless neck?”

“It would appear I need to be ready to lead a new reinvigorated Security Service following the tragic death of one of its most popular senior officers” Bordon explained with a more manic tone.

“Ah...” the Commander responded, not really liking the sound of where this was heading.

“How do you know I am not wearing a wire and we have the entire confession on tape then?” the Commander asked “My death would be irrelevant then, you would still be bound for a cell in the same block as that fruit loop Rogers.”

“I think your tragic demise would provide enough outpouring of press coverage to hide behind as any evidence you and your associates may have accumulated once again disappears” Bordon confirmed “Then it's some extended gardening leave for me followed by a nice quiet retirement, leaving your wife to take over as National Administrator General once the smoke has settled.”

“Control!” Sir Richard called urgently into his mobile telephone as the relayed conversation coming over the radio speakers in the back of Commander Cassini's van came to a halt “This is Crowthorne, get me direct line through to HL15 at the Yard.”

“Hostage Rescue?” Cassini remarked, recognising the Department Code for their Division “It'll take them the best part of twenty minutes to get here I would have thought.”

“What the hell was that?” Ziggy asked as a loud explosion followed by the crashing of glass was heard.

Cassini and Sir Richard quickly got out of the van and ran up around the corner to see the building into which the Commander had gone some thirty minutes previously well alight with flames emanating from the second floor.

“Stuff Hostage Rescue!” Sir Richard exclaimed “We need the bloody fire brigade.”

“Sorry it has to end like this” Bordon manically declared to the Commander who merely looked on with some concern as well as anger whilst tugging at the handcuffs that were binding him to the rickety wooden chair.

“Parting is such sweet sorrow” the Commander wryly remarked “However a word of advice before you go.”

“Do tell Commander” Bordon responded, intrigued “however I do suggest you hurry as I have something of a deadline to meet” he remarked sarcastically, gesturing towards the glow of the flames emanating from a couple of floors below.

"If I don't survive this" the Commander warned "Get on a very fast plane, boat, carrier pigeon, whatever as soon as you can because if my wife ever catches up with you, let me assure you it will not make for pleasant viewing, well not from your point of view at least."

"I'll bear it mind" Bordon agreed "See you in the next life" he declared before making a hasty departure.

"I'll look forward to it I am sure" the Commander remarked by which time Bordon had disappeared into the haze of smoke that was starting to filter through to the upper floors where he was.

Quickly the Commander looked around for some way to extricate himself from the chair to which he was handcuffed however he quickly realised there were no tools or anything else he could use to hand so carefully he leant forward and stood up as best he could with the chair still attached to him.

"Well here goes nothing" the Commander decided before ramming himself backwards into the wall which had the effect of breaking the old wooden chair into pieces.

"I will never say anything rude about the poor quality of Government issue furniture ever again" the Commander remarked as he freed himself from the remains of the chair.

By this point, the fire had taken a firm hold of the second floor where Bordon had set alight the large deposits of tinder dry old paper files and long disused furniture.

The smoke was starting to filter up throughout the building now as the Commander looked around the fourth floor, the thin haze of smoke obscuring what few lights were working.

At this point he wondered why the sprinkler system had not activated as the intensity of the fire roaring below the Commander's feet intensified and he made his way coughing to the far end of the corridor and the fire exit stairs.

"Not good..." the Commander remarked to himself as he felt the fire exit door with the palm of his hand where it was warm to the touch, a concern soon reinforced as he opened the door just a little to be confronted with flames roaring up the stairwell, forcing him to quickly close the door again.

"Definitely not good..." the Commander confirmed before remembering he still had the hidden radio set on.

"Hello guys" the Commander called as he looked around in the increasingly thick smoke for another way out "If you can hear me, I could use a little help here as things are getting a tad warm up here for my taste."

Down in the street outside, Sir Richard and Commander Cassini had reached the front door of the building and shielding themselves from the debris raining down from above, tried initially to kick the door in without success.

"Ah damn" Sir Richard exclaimed as the door refused to budge despite their best combined efforts "The only way we can get this open is with dynamite I reckon."

"What about around the back?" Cassini suggested.

"Worth a try" Sir Richard agreed "You stay out front and organise the cavalry when they get here, I'll take care of this."

"Yes Sir" Cassini agreed as Sir Richard headed off into a side alley that ran between the buildings.

Sure enough there was a loading bay at the rear of the building which Sir Richard discovered by chance in the dark alleyway, a large roller shutter door obstructed by a row of abandoned industrial sized wheelie bins which he had to move aside to reach it.

The aged and neglected nature of the roller shutter type door contrasted with the brand spanking new padlock that secured it which unbeknown to Sir Richard had been fitted by Bordon only a matter of a couple of minutes before as he had made his escape.

"Here goes nothing" Sir Richard remarked as he drew his revolver from deep inside his overcoat pocket, released the safety catch aimed and fired two shots which saw the heavy duty padlock disabled and easily removed.

With caution, Sir Richard lifted up the roller shutter door just enough to see inside before rolling underneath it, the door returning to the closed position by dropping back down as soon as he had entered.

Finding himself in the dark, he used his lighter to find a light switch that when activated revealed a cargo loading area that was not alight fortunately but was noticeably hazy from smoke.

Sir Richard was about to make for what he hoped was the stairwell when a sign caught his eye.

"Ah ha..." Sir Richard commented with a raised eyebrow as he opened a door in the wall to reveal the buildings sprinkler controls where a quick survey of them revealed they had been sabotaged, most likely by Bordon to ensure the fire was sufficiently fierce enough to cover his escape.

By now the Commander had managed to make his way up to the fifth floor by way of a second set of fire exit stairs that fortunately were not so badly affected by fire and smoke as the first one he had tried even though it was still not possible in its current condition to go down.

The smoke was intensely thick now, causing him to cough uncontrollably and was now reaching a stage where he was beginning to become overwhelmed by it.

After fumbling around in the near total darkness for a while, the Commander found he could go no further and collapsed to the floor, coughing uncontrollably.

He was starting to think now that this was seriously the end, his thoughts turning to Tracy, her face beaming with that smile that could illuminate the darkest room or situation now the only thing in his mind.

It was as the Commander, slumped nearly motionless on the floor and about to pass out that a loud hollow thumping noise started to throb apparently through the ceiling panels.

It sounded for all the world like the structure of the building was about to give up its fight with the fire now consuming much of it and start to collapse.

In fact it was the air trapped in the sprinkler system being forced out as the water supply to it was restored and the sprinkler heads in the ceiling burst into life, proceeding to quench the heat, smoke and fire throughout the building.

The effect of the water splashing down on him had the effect of reviving the Commander a bit but he was still suffering badly from the effects of smoke inhalation as a couple of minutes later he saw the outline of a rather soggy looking Sir Richard appear.

"How many more times do I have to save your ass?" Sir Richard jokingly remarked as he checked the Commander over.

"Is the building still on fire?" the Commander managed to ask albeit weakly.

"I managed to fix the sprinklers, going to be a hell of a job filling in the insurance claim mind" Sir Richard remarked as the sound of approaching emergency services could be heard coming in from outside in the street.

It was clear to Sir Richard that the Commander was in a bad way and would need to be moved on a stretcher with medical services in attendance, therefore he was mightily relieved when two members of the fire brigade appeared from the stairwell a couple of minutes later to provide assistance.

Outside, Commander Cassini and a couple of uniformed Security Service officers were busy keeping onlookers well back from the scene when Tracy arrived on her motorbike with sirens and lights in full cry.

"What the hell is going on?" she demanded as she parked up, removed her helmet and joined Commander Cassini at the edge of the cordoned off area.

"Three doors down Maam" Cassini indicated the building where the Fire Brigade were in the process of fighting the numerous pockets of fire that had not been extinguished by the activation of the sprinklers.

"Good grief" Tracy looked on astonished "Is everyone out?"

"Err no Maam" Cassini confirmed "Sir Richard went in there about ten minutes ago to rescue the Chief and as far as I know there is no sign of National Administrator General Bordon anywhere."

"Alright" Tracy declared with typical determination as she lifted up the tape barrier, ducked beneath it and started walking briskly towards the scene "I'm going in there."

"Oh dear..." Cassini remarked to himself as he looked on from the edge of the cordon.

"Now where do you think you are going my dear?" the Fire Brigade chief asked as he quickly stood in Tracy's way to prevent her from entering the building, sections of which were still visibly on fire.

"In there" Tracy responded sharply.

"I think not" the Fire Brigade chief calmly replied.

"But my husband could be dead in there for all we know" Tracy protested in vain.

"And you going in all John Wayne like will only add to the problems" the Fire Chief coolly reminded her "So let my guys take care of it, we will have him out in good time."

"I don't want to add to the workload but Sir Richard Crowthorne is possibly in there as well" Cassini advised as he joined them in the debate.

"What about Bordon?" Tracy asked looking around.

"Best guess he is using this little disaster as a distraction to get our attention whilst he makes a discreet exit Maam" Cassini commented.

"Well I would say it's worked" Tracy remarked slightly manically as she continued to look up at the still burning building with deep concern "I don't know about anyone else but this has certainly got my attention!"

Further fire appliances and a couple of ambulance units arrived on the scene at that point just as the Fire Brigade chief turned away to take a message on his radio.

Tracy and Cassini both looked on apprehensively before the Fire Brigade chief duly called over to the Ambulance crews nearby.

"Two survivors reported" he called over to them with a sense of business like urgency "First one is coming out now, second one is in a serious condition."

Immediately the Ambulance Paramedics got to work just as a fire fighter emerged in breathing apparatus escorting Sir Richard who was clearly suffering some ill effects from inhaling the smoke.

"Are you Ok?" Tracy asked as she met up with Sir Richard as a Paramedic assessed him before leading him over to a nearby waiting ambulance.

"I've had better days my dear if I were to be honest" Sir Richard admitted between gasps of oxygen from a mask.

"What about my husband?" Tracy asked, obviously anxious for news, reassurance, anything to indicate he was going to be all right.

"He's going to be all right I think" Sir Richard confirmed, now feeling a bit better for having been given the oxygen "Unfortunately, he is going to be a stretcher job by the looks of things."

"Second casualty coming down the stairs now" the Fire Brigade Chief was heard to call over to the paramedics.

It seemed to be a very long few minutes, especially for Tracy as they all watched the main entrance into the building with trepidation, waiting for someone to appear from within the buildings blackened and smoke filled interior.

Then a light appeared, that of a fire fighter's lamp as he approached the exit. For a moment it looked like he was alone but then as he stepped outside, he moved to one side to reveal the Commander being carried out by two other fire fighters.

Within moments, the Paramedics had stepped forward with a stretcher to receive him whereupon the fire fighters who had carried him down all the way from the fifth floor gently lowered the Commander onto the stretcher.

"Can you hear me love?" Tracy asked semi-frantically, taking and holding his hand tightly in hers.

The Commander managed to open his eyes just a little bit, enough to see Tracy before he mouthed something so quietly, Tracy had to lean very closely to him to make out what he was saying.

Whatever it was he said before slipping into unconsciousness must have amused Tracy if the wry grin that appeared on her face in response was anything to go by. It certainly reassured her that he was going to be all right in any case.

"What did he say?" Sir Richard asked as Tracy joined him in the back of the ambulance when the stretcher bearing the Commander was loaded safely aboard.

"That's another ruined uniform I guess" Tracy confirmed with an amused smile.

"Fire fighters have spent the night dampening down a Security Service building on the outskirts of Leytonstone in East London" the BBC regional news presenter announced to camera from the street outside the badly damaged building where in the first light of dawn, the smoke could still be seen serenely drifting from the blackened and charred windows of the third, fourth and fifth floors.

"Reports of persons being trapped in the premises when the fire started at approximately ten o'clock yesterday evening have not been confirmed by the Service" the news reporter continued "however a spokesman for the Service did confirm that this was an inactive site used only for storage."

Four storeys above the reporter, Sir Richard and Commander Cassini, both wearing hard hats for safety were being escorted around the scene by a senior Fire Service officer.

"Well I suppose we can still look on the bright side" Sir Richard remarked as he looked despondently in a burnt out filing cabinet which now contained nothing more than ashes "At least we can make a few quid out of the insurance."

"Do we know how this started?" Cassini asked the fire officer as they picked their way through the debris.

"I was just coming to that" the fire officer confirmed "The primary seat of the fire was through here" he led them through to a large file room that dominated the floor but now was little more than a burnt out ruin littered with the soggy charred remains of furniture and filing cabinets which had been severely twisted and distorted by the heat of the fire.

"This is only an initial assessment mind" the fire officer warned them "but it looks like someone used the files specifically in this room to start a slow burning fire that would then explode into a far bigger conflagration once your mystery arsonist had made a discrete exit."

"Leaving the Commander to eventually burn to death" Cassini grimly concluded.

"If the smoke didn't finish him off first" Sir Richard added as he looked all around the badly burnt room.

"I would not be so sure about that" the fire officer remarked.

"Looked pretty clear cut from where I was standing" Sir Richard responded.

"Then why did he start the fire down here with your Chief tied to a chair two floors up?" the fire officer asked "Your arsonist would have known the cavalry would be here well before any fire reached up there."

"Excuse me Sir" another fire officer interrupted them as he entered the room "We just found this" he passed across a rather badly crumpled and smoke damaged garment to Sir Richard which despite the damage from smoke and soot, was still recognisable as a Security Service uniform tunic.

"Thank you" Sir Richard responded as he went over to the window and used the early morning light to make an inspection of the garment.

"Is that the chief's?" Cassini asked.

"Lets see" Sir Richard declared as he began to go through the pockets and listed the contents he found "two half eaten packets of Maltesers, three Burger King receipts, the mangled remains of a Scotland Yard identity card and..... interesting."

"Found something?" Cassini asked seeing Sir Richard remove and examine with a very interested look something which he clearly did not expect to find.

"Indeed I have" Sir Richard confirmed "When I last looked, the Commander was not exactly on top of his game when it comes to modern technology."

"A USB memory stick" Cassini remarked upon recognising the small object in Sir Richard's hand "Definitely not something I would expect to find in the chiefs repertoire, rumour has it he hasn't been able to open his e-mail since before it was invented."

"I wonder..." Sir Richard pondered.

"If you don't mind me saying" Cassini remarked "You look like you are on the verge of formulating one of those theories that usually gets us all into trouble, not to mention overtime."

"Which hospital did they cart the Commander off to?" Sir Richard asked.

"Leytonstone General" Cassini confirmed.

"Stay by your phone" Sir Richard suggested as he placed the USB stick in his pocket "I may well require your services again before the evening is over."

"I knew you were going to say that" Cassini remarked wryly as Sir Richard, clearly in some deep thought, swiftly departed.

"Oh no, not again" Jack remarked as he entered the single bed ward at Leytonstone General Hospital to see the Commander lying on a hospital bed, Tracy at his side holding his hand with a firm reassuring grip.

"Morning lad" the Commander responded, still a bit weak but certainly better than he had been thanks to the rapid treatment he had received earlier.

"What are you doing here?" Tracy asked.

"Bored, couldn't sleep, naff all on the telly" Jack explained "So I thought I would swing on by and see how you were."

"How did you know...?" the Commander asked.

"You're not the only people in the crazy town with access to a pretty efficient intelligence network you know" Jack confirmed "Speaking of which" he remarked as they were joined by Sir Richard.

"You look like a man who can't figure out his sudoku" Tracy remarked seeing the puzzled look on Sir Richard's face when he came in.

"Your insight serves you well" Sir Richard confirmed as he produced the badly smoke damaged uniform tunic "This is yours I believe?"

"Well there can't be many Security Service uniform tunics around in that state with a George Cross medal ribbon on it" Tracy remarked "so I think it is fairly safe to say it's yours love" she confirmed.

"However I would be happy to make an educated guess that this" Sir Richard held up the USB memory stick he had discovered "I believe never was."

"What the hell is that?" the Commander asked with an understandably quizzical look.

"It's a computer memory stick" Sir Richard confirmed.

"What are you supposed to do with it?" the Commander asked as Sir Richard passed it to him so he could look at it more closely.

"Think of it as a very high capacity floppy disk for computerised files" Tracy confirmed.

"Oh those things" the Commander recalled vaguely "I think I saw one once, couldn't get it to work though."

"Why am I not surprised?" Jack remarked.

"Where did you find it?" Tracy asked.

"In the pocket" Sir Richard explained "Knowing your husbands shall we say rather poor form with anything even remotely resembling modern technology, it did rather stand out like a sore thumb."

"So where did it come from?" Jack asked.

"And for that matter, what is on it?" Tracy pondered.

"Whilst we are on the subject of mystery solving" the Commander added "where the hell has that stupid sod Bordon sloped off to."

"I have some of my people checking through his regular haunts now" Sir Richard confirmed "If he appears anywhere, we'll find him."

"Tracy love" the Commander asked, help me off this thing will you?"

"Did you two ever consider a career that didn't involve being bashed, shot, crashed, mangled and burnt to a crisp with an alarming frequency?" Jack casually asked as Tracy supported her husband whilst he got up off the bed and back onto his feet once more.

"Yeah, but think of all this excitement we would miss out on" Tracy remarked wryly.

"Let's get back to Scotland Yard before anything else goes awry" the Commander suggested.

"I'll get the car" Sir Richard confirmed "Then maybe we can solve the mystery of what is on this thing" he remarked as he returned the memory stick back to the safety of his pocket before leaving the room.

"So did Bordon say anything whilst he was busy toasting the place?" Tracy asked as, hand in hand, she and the Commander left the small single bed ward and headed down the corridor towards the main exit of the hospital with Jack just ahead of them leading the way.

"Apparently he got himself involved pretty deep with this chap Franklin Rogers" the Commander explained.

"Oh..." Tracy responded with a clear sense of worried hesitation.

"Something wrong love?" the Commander asked, quickly picking up on Tracy's concerned demeanour that she had exhibited at the mentioning of Rogers name.

"Just a shadow from my past" Tracy admitted sheepishly.

"That's usually my line" the Commander commented "Diamond robberies, witness protection, a couple of near deaths and a long lost brother, I seem to have accumulated a whole attic full of them ever since I was about twelve."

"Well in this instance, it is my turn to have skeletons popping out of the closet" Tracy admitted as they reached the automatic door which slid serenely open so they could exit.

Ahead of them, Jack despite his small stature looked out all around before opening the car door for them, maintaining a constant watch for any problems.

"Thank you Jack" the Commander remarked as he and Tracy got in the back of the car before Jack closed the door and then got in the front passenger seat alongside Sir Richard who started the car and moved off.

"Oh, I have been taking lessons from Auntie Jennifer" Jack explained upon seeing the slightly quizzical expressions from the others at his rather excellent bodyguard impression despite his somewhat small stature.

"Next thing he'll be wanting to go on the payroll" the Commander remarked aside "anyway, you were saying love?" he prompted Tracy to continue.

"Well you know that despite the best efforts of the Fraud Squad, Serious Crimes and pretty much every other part of the Security Service, no one was ever able to slap the cuffs on Rogers not even once in twenty years?" Tracy asked.

"Twenty six different investigations, millions spent, God knows how many witnesses who just disappeared never to be seen again" Sir Richard recalled "It was a miracle when we finally got him."

"Rogers was finally convicted and put away about a year before I moved to Haychester" Tracy explained, clearly troubled.

"It was a hell of a job though" she continued to explain "The number of witnesses we lost, disappearing evidence, knobbed jury Members, dodgy lawyers, you name it, we had it."

"I'm almost afraid to ask" the Commander ventured "but how did you fit into this little jurisdictional disaster?"

"I was the one who arrested him and it was the evidence that I identified and presented that got Rogers finally put behind bars" Tracy confirmed "and believe me his people tried every trick in the book to try to get him off."

"So how come that doesn't appear on your personnel record then love?" the Commander asked.

"Certain high ranking members of the Service and the Home Office at the time thought it best not to leave too much of a paper trail lying around once the dust had settled" Tracy explained "There was all sorts of hell to pay before, during and after the trial."

"It was interesting I must admit" Sir Richard remarked "to see who amongst the various political and security agencies involved were sent on extended gardening leave when the official inquiry report began to hit various high ranking in trays."

"Does this Rogers chap know of your involvement in his eventual incarceration?" the Commander asked.

"No" Tracy confirmed "Well at least..." a doubt began to creep into her voice at that point "I don't think so, but then again..."

"If he is capable of corrupting someone of Bordon's standing" the Commander remarked "then anything is possible."

"Bordon as National Administrator General would have had access to all sorts of documentation including stuff even you are not entitled to read" Sir Richard warned.

"That would be the files that I am not allowed to see that I have copies of in my office safe I presume?" the Commander asked.

"That would be the ones yes" Sir Richard confirmed with a knowing grin.

"I do think it is about time this Franklin Rogers and I met" the Commander remarked "unofficially of course."

"I'll see what I can set up" Sir Richard confirmed.

"Good morning, Haychester Incident Room" Lieutenant Barrett declared upon answering the telephone with the best level of cheeriness she could manage given that she had had virtually no sleep in the past forty eight hours.

"Boss!" Barrett called loudly across the room towards Longton who was leafing through various files but not really paying a huge amount of attention as his concentration levels were not much better than Barrett's.

"If it is the wife, tell her I am in a meeting" Longton responded.

"Worse" Barrett called over "It's the Commander calling from Scotland Yard."

"Oh right..." Longton responded as he attempted to locate the telephone on the desk as it had become buried beneath the files.

"Line three" Barrett confirmed once Longton had successfully managed to find the telephone beneath the paperwork. "Hello?" he finally answered.

"Al, sorry to disturb you but I have some more information I would like Simon to out through that electronic box of tricks of his" the Commander called from his desk in his office at New Scotland Yard.

"He's downstairs at the moment" Longton confirmed "Last I saw of him was about a half hour ago, he was muttering something about going to hit the main server with a hammer apparently."

"Sounds too technical for me" the Commander admitted "Anyway, we can consider the presumably soon to be ex National Administrator General Bordon to be a wanted felon now."

"We heard about that fire" Longton remarked "Was that really Bordon's work?"

"Indeed" the Commander "First time in years he has actually shown any initiative or imagination, I just wish he had chosen to use his creative skills on something a little less dramatic."

"Ah here is the computer genius himself now" Longton remarked as a clearly exhausted Fuller arrived back in the room.

"Events are conspiring against me I presume?" Fuller asked upon hearing Longton's comment.

"Good guess" Longton confirmed as he passed Fuller the telephone "It's the chief for you."

"Hello boss" Fuller responded once he had taken the telephone "What can I do for you?"

"Can you put anything we have concerning a certain Mr Franklin Rogers, any of his known associates and his 'business interests' through your computer thingy and see if anything we have on Bordon matches up?" the Commander asked.

"Franklin Rogers as in the 'Lord of Leytonstone' by any chance?" Fuller asked as he sat down behind his laptop and started to tap furiously at the keyboard.

"The same" the Commander confirmed "The two would appear to inextricably linked."

"You sure about this Sir?" Fuller asked somewhat surprised.

"Oh yes" the Commander confirmed "My information comes from a very reliable source."

"Right..." Fuller responded as he continued to work on the computer. "This could take an hour or two you know Sir."

"Another thing to toss into your general area of expertise" the Commander added as Sir Richard passed him the memory stick had been recovered earlier "I've got this thingy."

"Err define 'thingy' please Sir" Fuller asked.

"Excuse my husband's flat earth level of technological understanding" Tracy interrupted after taking the telephone from the Commander for a few moments "It's a USB memory stick."

"Oh, that sort of thingy" Fuller responded by which time Tracy had passed the telephone back to the Commander "Very technical. Plug it into the USB port on the side of your computer" he instructed.

"The what...?" the Commander replied, completely mystified as he had barely ever switched the computer in his office on since it was installed a couple of years previously let alone actually used it.

"Oh give it here love" Tracy responded, taking the telephone and the memory stick from her husband in an effort to expedite the situation. "Ok Simon, its Tracy, what do you want me to do?" she asked.

"If you have a standard networked workstation there" Fuller explained "You will need to insert the memory stick into a USB port on the side of the monitor unit."

"Ok, it's in" Tracy confirmed "Now what?" she asked.

"Log onto that workstation using your usual username and password" Fuller instructed "Then just sit back, relax and watch an expert at work."

"Ok" Tracy confirmed once she had successfully logged on "I'm in, it's all yours."

"Here we go" Fuller declared as he commenced work on his laptop where he called up a real time diagram of the entire National Security Service computer network where after closing in on the part which was New Scotland Yard, he duly found the workstation he was looking for identified by its identification and Tracy's username logged on there.

"Is that you doing that?" Tracy asked as suddenly the mouse cursor on the screen in front of her began to move of its own accord.

"Affirmative" Fuller duly confirmed as he concentrated intently on what he was doing "Let's see what we have here" he declared "One gigabyte memory stick, four hundred and thirty files totalling fifty six megabytes."

"Does any of this make any sense to you?" the Commander, duly baffled asked Sir Richard.

"All Greek to me mate" Sir Richard confirmed with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Same here" the Commander agreed.

"Well from what I can see so far" Fuller confirmed over the telephone which was now on speakerphone at both ends of the conversation "There seems to be a large number of digital photographs here. Do any of these dodgy looking gentlemen ring any bells with anyone?" he asked, showing an image on the screens at both ends.

"There's a dodgy looking bunch if ever I have seen one" Longton commented as he and the others gathered around the monitors where they looked at a surveillance type photograph which showed a group of people gathered around a car in what appeared to be a deserted industrial building of some kind.

"Trench coat second left is our boy Rogers" Tracy confirmed "Guy with the muscles next to him was his number two, name of Asquith if I recalled."

"Thames River Division pulled his remains out of the Thames beneath Hammersmith Bridge about eight or nine years ago" Sir Richard confirmed. "I only recall it because the Coroner ruled it as suicide which always struck me as odd."

"What was odd about it?" the Commander asked.

"Well somehow he had managed to garrotte and hang himself several hours *after* having a very close encounter with a chainsaw" Sir Richard explained.

"Ouch..." Jack remarked.

"Third from right looks like Sir Rodney Chamberlain" the Commander commented.

"The hunched chap in the black overcoat?" Sir Richard asked.

"Yes it is him" the Commander confirmed once he had a look more closely at the image on the screen "Deputy Attorney General up until he was killed in a car accident a few years back."

"Mind if I venture another possibility?" Lieutenant Barrett asked "Far right, is that not that defence lawyer, Reeves-Thornberry who died in a yachting accident in the Solent last year?"

"Could well be" Longton agreed "He had that distinctive moustache which looks pretty similar to this chap.

"Well so far" the Commander remarked "all of those we have identified so far except Rogers all have one thing in common."

"They're all brown bread" Jack concluded.

"And I am willing to bet" the Commander continued "that if we were to identify the rest of this rogues gallery, we would probably find that many of them have also met various suspicious ends."

"Are there any more views of this little gathering by any chance?" Longton enquired "only I was wondering if we could identify it."

"Oh plenty" Fuller confirmed as he began to scroll through the images until Lieutenant Barrett suddenly leaned forward and stopped him.

"Go back a couple" she requested whereupon Fuller duly moved back through the images. "Stop there" she called "That thing above the buildings there in that corner, can you clean that up a bit?"

"Well at this distance with this photographic quality, zoom in enough and all you get is a few very large pixels but let me have a go" Fuller confirmed as he highlighted the area and managed to clear it up a bit "Any good?" he asked.

"There" Lieutenant Barrett confirmed "Unless I am very much mistaken that looks like the spire of Haychester Cathedral."

"Well spotted lass" the Commander agreed "Lieutenant, I want you and a couple of volunteers you can round up to start studying maps. Find out where these and all the other images we have here were taken, who is in them and why."

"Consider it under way" Barrett confirmed.

"What else have we got?" Tracy asked.

"Lots and lots of documentation" Fuller responded "Some of this looks financial, there appears to be some passport applications here as well."

"Looks like someone has been making up some fake I.D.'s I would wager" Sir Richard commented.

"Let me try something" Fuller suggested as he read the names stated in the suspect passport details before entering them into a database search and processing them.

"Found anything?" the Commander asked after a minute where the only thing to be heard besides the rapid tapping of keys was Fuller muttering quietly to himself.

"These names match accounts that large cash deposits were transferred to by Bordon at various points over the last fifteen years" Fuller explained his findings.

"Nice little retirement slush fund perhaps?" Tracy suggested.

"Ooooh nice" Fuller was suddenly heard to say "Air Miles and a very tidy Platinum credit card on this account by the looks of it."

"When were any of these accounts last accessed?" Longton asked.

"The UK banking industry really ought to beef up its computer security" Fuller wryly remarked as he easily accessed the account details using his specialist computer skills.

"Someone remind me to change my passwords" Sir Richard remarked.

"The way I work, trust me you don't need passwords" Fuller commented "Here we go..." he then declared.

"Anything interesting?" the Commander asked.

"That platinum credit card on this phoney account was activated about ten days ago" Fuller confirmed "Looks like it has been mostly used for fairly humdrum cash back withdrawals that is if you call upwards of a grand a day humdrum."

"Not on what I get paid I don't" the Commander admitted.

"Oh hang on" Fuller suddenly remarked as a new transaction came to his attention "This card was used about two minutes ago so someone is definitely making use of this account somewhere."

"Can you trace it?" Sir Richard asked.

“Checking the merchant ID now” Fuller confirmed whereupon there was a hesitant pause as he accessed the information. “Err how quick can you get to Victoria Station?”

“Why?” the Commander asked.

“Because whoever is using this card account just forked out twenty three quid in train fares at the Victoria Station ticket office about two minutes ago” Fuller explained.

Tracy was already on the next stage of the hunt as she picked up her mobile telephone and speed dialled a number which connected her directly with the Transport Division’s CCTV monitoring unit.

“Hello, it’s Commander Caverner” Tracy declared “Can I have your duty supervisor on the line, Alpha Priority please.”

“It’s a long shot” Fuller remarked at that point “But I may just be able to get hold of the ticket number that payment was for and see where our mystery guest is going.”

“Do it” the Commander confirmed “I’m heading down to Victoria now.”

“Simon” Tracy interjected at that point “I am having the boys and gals at the Transport Division send you the feed from the Victoria Station CCTV to your laptop in the next couple of minutes. If you can, see if you can get us a face from it.”

“Will do Maam” Fuller confirmed.

“I had better make a couple of calls myself” Sir Richard admitted as he headed out of the office, his mobile telephone already to his ear.

“What am I supposed to do whilst you are all gallivanting around the countryside?” Jack asked sensing correctly everyone was leaving him there.

“Keep an eye on the shop” the Commander confirmed with a wink.

“I’ll try not to make a mess” Jack confirmed with a wry grin as the others left hurriedly.

"Platform seventeen for the 10:32 Southern service to Southampton Central and Bognor Regis" the automated announcer declared across the South Central side concourse of Victoria Station which resulted in a large flow of expectant passengers moving from there, down to the ticket barriers and on to the platform where their twelve coach train of Class 377 Electrostar stock was waiting for them.

"Aye, aye" the Conductor of the train remarked to the platform dispatcher as they observed the throng of passengers, many of them with large suitcases bound for Gatwick Airport proceed through the ticket barriers and begin to board the train "This looks like it will be busy."

"Bank holiday weekend coming up I suppose" the platform dispatcher commented.

"Excuse me" a tall gentleman in a long black overcoat and large brimmed hat enquired of the Conductor "Which coaches of this train are going to Haychester?"

"Front four Sir" the Conductor confirmed with a helpful smile, indicating into the distance towards the front of the train whereupon the man nodded in thanks and set off down the length of the platform towards the front some distance away.

"He stands out a bit" the platform dispatcher remarked "No luggage or anything."

"Probably going in First Class I expect" the Conductor commented "he has Gold Card Season Ticket Holder written all over him."

With just a couple of minutes left to the scheduled departure time, the Conductor checked his watch before stepping off the door ledge and looking up and down the length of the platform as the stream of boarding passengers continued to clamber aboard the train.

As the last late running passengers came through the ticket barriers and ran quickly towards the last coach of the train where the Conductor was waiting, the platform dispatcher duly blew his whistle and signalled with his white lamp for the doors to be closed.

"Ok, here we go then" the Conductor remarked as he pressed the blue button on his control panel which saw all of the doors except the one he was standing at close all down the length of the twelve coach train and the orange indicator lights on the coach sides extinguish.

"Hold it a minute mate!" came a call from the Conductor's left which caused him to look up back towards the ticket barriers.

"What the heck is this?" the Conductor remarked, expecting to see the usual late running tourists with large suitcases who were just about to miss the train. What he in fact saw was Tracy, the Commander and Sir Richard Crowthorne coming hurriedly towards him.

"This door please!" the Conductor called, recognising them and the two officer's Security Service uniforms and quickly realising these were no ordinary passengers.

"Cheers" the Commander declared as he and the others quickly bundled on at the door before the platform dispatcher gave the final signal with his lamp which meant the Conductor could close his own door whereupon he gave the two bell starting signal to the driver to proceed.

"That was close" Tracy remarked almost out of breath but in a better state than the two men who looked exhausted from the run they had just had to perform from the concourse in order to reach the train in time.

"So to what do we owe the honour?" the Conductor inquired, curious as to what this was all about.

"You should have a passenger on this train heading for Haychester" the Commander explained, "late fifties, quite tall and likely to be fairly well covered up."

"Could be the guy who asked me which part of the train was going to Haychester about five minutes ago" the Conductor remarked "If he was listening then he should be in the front four coaches."

"This is coach number twelve of twelve" the automated on board announcer interjected at that point.

"That is a long way through a lot of people" Tracy commented as she looked through the carriage connecting doors into the next car and seeing that much like the one they were in, it was full and standing with a lot of baggage in the aisles blocking any possible progress through the train towards the front end.

"He is likely to be in First Class" Sir Richard added.

"Well that narrows things down a bit then" the Conductor confirmed "Your guy will most likely be in either the very front of coach number one or the rear of coach number four."

"But how are we going to get down there?" Tracy asked "and without Bordon knowing we are on to him."

"It should thin out a bit once we have done East Croydon and Gatwick Airport" the Conductor explained "As long as you are at least near the front four as we come into Horsham you should be all right."

"We are now approaching Clapham Junction" the automated announcer declared "Please mind the gap between the train and the platform."

"I suggest guys and gals we remain here until we can both move more freely and summon reinforcements" Sir Richard suggested as he duly intercepted the refreshment trolley as it arrived alongside with impeccable timing whereupon he duly bought a drink.

"Good idea" Tracy agreed.

"I knew it was going to be one of those mornings" the Conductor remarked to himself as he prepared to see the train into and out of Clapham Junction.

"We've looked at seven sites so far and come up with absolutely nothing Sir" Lieutenant Barrett confirmed on her radio to Longton "Three of them had been demolished long ago, apparently there is a major demand for retirement apartments in this part of the world."

"I suppose there is always the possibility that it could have been pulled down long ago" Longton admitted.

"That would be my best guess Sir" Barrett agreed "However I'll keep looking just in case."

"Sir!" Fuller called towards Longton from across the office.

"Hang on a moment Lieutenant" Longton requested "Please tell me you found something."

"It's a bit of a long shot I'll admit" Fuller remarked "However I did find a reference in Bordon's service history to a planning dispute he mediated in when it got a bit heated some years back. It appears to have been a proposal for a major new housing and retail development at an old cement works near Haychester Minton, it doesn't look like it was ever built though."

"Worth a try I suppose" Longton admitted "Lieutenant, are you still there?"

"Here Sir" she confirmed.

"Are you anywhere near Haychester Minton?" Longton asked.

"About half an hour away I would say" Barrett confirmed as she got out of the patrol car and looked around the picturesque vistas of the South Downs all around with a clear view to the spire of Haychester Cathedral visible some miles in the distance to the south.

"Apparently there is an old cement works up near there somewhere that may be worth a look" Longton explained "As we are doing this discreetly on the QT I can't send too much backup for fear of anyone asking any questions but if you find anything, don't go in with your size tens..."

"...size four's Sir" Barrett interjected.

"Size four's then without consulting me first, then I'll rustle up what I can and get to you" Longton confirmed "Be careful Lieutenant" he urged.

"I'm always careful Sir" Barrett wryly responded as she checked her gun before getting back into the patrol car, starting the engine and setting off down the narrow rural country lane.

"We are now approaching Three Bridges" the automated announcer declared only a matter of a minute or two after leaving Gatwick Airport "This is coach number six of twelve".

"Nearly there" the Commander declared to Tracy and Sir Richard as they followed the Conductor through the train, a feat made possible thanks to large numbers of the train's passengers having alighted at Gatwick Airport a couple of minutes earlier.

"Only here and Crawley left to go before this train divides at Horsham" the Conductor confirmed as the train slowed to stop at Three Bridges whereupon the Conductor prepared for his station despatch duties in the customary manner.

"Right" the Commander confirmed "We'll take a seat at the front of coach number five and then sneak forwards once the train has divided.

They left the Conductor to his duties seeing the train off before heading through to the fifth coach where they gathered in the small first class section at the front end.

"Here comes Crawley" Tracy remarked as the train made the short journey between the two stations where upon arrival there were few passengers either boarding or alighting which was normal for a train out of London immediately after the peak hours.

"Always used to call it creepy Crawley when I were a lad" the Commander recalled as a passenger boarded the train by the set of doors immediately adjacent to the First Class section they were in.

Just for a fleeting moment as the Commander looked up at the passenger, they exchanged glances and something in the back of his mind made him think momentarily that there was something familiar about this man but he could not think what it was.

The Commander quickly dismissed the thought as the mystery passenger turned away and headed up the train out of sight as the train doors closed and they moved off.

"Good morning ladies and gentlemen" the Conductor announced over the trains P.A. "The next station is Horsham where this train will be divided."

As the Conductor continued to inform his passengers as to what part of the service would be going where and the train continued on into the rural countryside that lined both sides of the tracks between the sprawling conurbation of Crawley and the smaller historic town of Horsham, the man who had boarded the train minutes earlier extracted a mobile telephone from his coat pocket and speed dialled a number.

"Condition green" the stranger declared as soon as his call was answered "Coach five, heading towards your position" he confirmed whereupon he then listened carefully to further instructions before hanging up without saying another word.

"Horsham in about five minutes" the Conductor confirmed as he joined Sir Richard and the two officers in the first class section.

Suddenly there was a jolt as the train began to decelerate rapidly, sending the Conductor who had been standing up almost to the floor.

"Will the Conductor please contact the driver" came an announcement over the P.A. system as the train screeched to a halt.

"What the hell was that?" Tracy asked, a sentiment reflected by most of the people on the train in reaction to what had all the hallmarks of an emergency stop.

"That is what I intend to find out" the Conductor confirmed as he got back to his feet assisted by Sir Richard before proceeding through the end doors to the intermediate driving cab to call the driver.

"Mind if I tag along?" the Commander asked.

"Sure" the Conductor confirmed as he unlocked the access to the intermediate cab door allowing him access to a communications handset to the driver.

"Hello mate, what's occurring?" the Conductor asked.

"Someone just pulled the emergency egress lever in coach number one" the driver was heard to confirm "Emergency stop in about ten seconds."

"I'll look into it" the Conductor confirmed.

"What's happened?" the Commander asked.

"You reckon your suspect was in coach number one?" the Conductor asked.

"Yes" the Commander confirmed.

"In which case it looks like he is about to jump off" the Conductor explained.

"He's been tipped off" Tracy quickly concluded as the train screeched to a halt.

"That guy that got on at Crawley" the Commander exclaimed "Get him."

"Consider him nicked" Tracy confirmed as she checked her gun before heading off back down the train with clear determination.

"Where are we?" the Commander asked as he lowered the cab door window and looked out down the length of the train where he could see near the front a pair of the double doors were being opened wide before a figure was seen jumping from the doorway down onto the trackside.

"Err Roffey Road I think" the Conductor confirmed.

"Right" the Commander declared as he pulled the door lever and opened the cab door "Get the power turned off and summon any Transport Division officers that can be rounded up."

"Here" the Conductor passed the Commander a high visibility orange safety vest "Good luck."

"Thanks" the Commander responded before carefully climbing down using the cab access steps until he reached the ballast of the line side.

Looking down the length of the train the Commander could just make out a fleeing figure in the distance now just passing the end of the train.

"Get off the line you lunatic!" the driver was heard to call as the figure passed his cab.

Some two coach lengths behind now, the Commander was making his way as quickly as he dared using the flat concrete cable trunking as a footpath, not wishing to fall onto the live rail even though by now it was almost certainly isolated.

"Here, what the hell is going on?" the driver called from his cab as the Commander reached the front of the train.

"That is a question I fully intend to ask him" the Commander admitted indicating ahead to the fleeing figure in the distance that was now running down the middle of the track.

The Commander was about to continue beyond the end of the train when a gunshot rang out, striking the side of the train which caused the Commander to duck down behind the front end whilst the driver also quickly dived back inside and shut his door.

"What is this, a convention?" the Commander asked himself as with the echo of the gunshot dying away, he looked cautiously around the front corner, down the length of the train where he noticed that another door, this time a couple of coaches from the rear of the train had been opened.

Tracy too had heard the shot as she was making her way through the train when she came upon much confusion and consternation amongst the passengers in the tenth coach.

"Some guy just jumped out" one of the passengers informed Tracy as she arrived at the open doorway.

"Ok, stand back everyone" Tracy confirmed as she duly sat down on the open door ledge before launching herself off down to the trackside.

With the left hand curve of the track at that point, she could see the whole scene with what she took to be Bordon fleeing off into the distance, a figure that was almost certainly her husband at the front of the train and a third figure running along the length of the train, a firearm clearly visible, approaching him.

More gunshots were heard to echo through the air as the gunman once again took aim and fired at the Commander's position.

"Oh no you don't" Tracy declared determinedly as she took aim and fired a single shot which even at that distance thanks to her good aim struck the gunman in the back and

caused him to fall, rolling off the line side down the embankment side before coming to rest in a muddy ditch at the bottom.

"Lima Mike Zero One to my darling husband" Tracy called into radio "You can get after him now."

"Thanks love" the Commander responded as he set off down the track in pursuit of the fleeing suspect.

Bordon was becoming increasingly desperate as he could see behind him that the Commander was still following and the gunman who had been sent to watch his back was now well and truly out of the equation.

He did however have one hope remaining which if the gunman had done his job should be waiting for him at the Roffey Road level crossing that was just up ahead.

"Come on, be there" Bordon muttered in hope under his breath as he approached the level crossing, having to be careful to negotiate the wooden slats of the cattle grid that guarded it.

Sure enough as Bordon ducked under the barriers and onto the road a dark blue van with its number plates obscured pulled into the narrow country lane. No sooner had it stopped than two men appeared from the back of it, quickly bundled Bordon into the vehicle and slammed shut the door.

By the time the Commander reached the level crossing, all he got to see was the dust being thrown up by the van as it made a hasty escape down the lane, up onto the bypass in the distance and away out of sight.

"Great..." the Commander remarked out of breath as he leant on the level crossing barrier.

"Well I guess that settles that then" Tracy remarked as she joined her husband at the barrier "He has definitely got someone providing backup for him."

"It would appear so love" the Commander agreed, kissing her "Come on, let's get out of here."

"Well this must be the place" Lieutenant Barrett remarked as she stopped the car in the entrance way to the disused cement works, a forty acre site of industrial dereliction located on the outskirts of the small hamlet of Haychester Minton.

The rusty gates that were firmly closed and the old Cement Works company sign now badly faded and leaning at a precarious angle still looked down on the site's non-existent visitors. Alongside it in an equally battered condition was a big advertising sign advising those interested that the site was at one time proposed to become a major housing and retail development, something that like many proposed projects of its type in the Haychester region over the years came to nothing.

One thing that most certainly caught Barrett's attention as she approached the gates was that the lock securing them was far and away much newer than anything else here which seemed to indicate someone had been visiting the site recently at least so maybe this little investigation was not going to prove fruitless after all.

She looked around for a couple of minutes around the weed strewn perimeter of the site for another way in through its ten foot high wire mesh fence and eventually found a section where the fence had given way, one of the posts supporting it being broken through a combination of years of subsidence and neglect.

"Ah rats!" Barrett exclaimed as she squeezed through the hole in the fence only to tear her uniform tunic on a protruding bit of wire which left a bit of the material behind and then to add insult to injury she stung herself on a stinging nettle just inside.

Once inside she looked over to the south where the city skyline and the dominating spire of Haychester Cathedral could be seen in the distance. A quick check against a copy of the recovered surveillance photograph that she produced from her pocket showed the view to be just about right with the position of the skyline so it was reasonable to assume that this was the place where that picture and the others from the set had been taken.

Barrett duly pulled her mobile telephone from her pocket and speed dialled the direct number to her superior where in the Haychester office Longton quickly answered.

"Go" Longton simply responded.

"Looks like that old cement works is our location" Barrett confirmed "The spire in the distance looks about right, also it would appear someone has been here lately as there is a very new lock on an otherwise very old gate."

"All right" Longton replied as he made a few notes "Stay there, I am on my way over to the station to pick up the Commander, apparently Bordon has done a runner somewhere. Once I've got the Chief we will head over your way so hang tight."

"Understood Sir" Barrett responded only to be interrupted by a loud smashing noise from the near distance "Have to go Sir, something has come up."

"What, Lieutenant?" Longton called but it was too late as by then she had hung up and was making her way back to the perimeter fence to see what the noise was about.

As she reached the fence, Barrett ducked down out of sight but was still able to see down the road towards the main gate into the site where her patrol car was being examined by a group of men who had arrived in a dark blue Ford Transit van.

"Ever get the feeling you are being followed?" the driver of the van called back to Bordon as they got out of the vehicle and went over to Barrett's patrol car which was blocking their way.

“Engine is still warm” Bordon confirmed as he ran his hand on the bonnet “Look’s like it is one of Haychester’s youngsters having a nose around. My bet would be on Thomas Barrett’s daughter.”

“Jim, get this thing shifted” the van driver instructed his associate who had already managed to get in by smashing the drivers side window and was attempting to start the car.

“You got it boss” the other man confirmed whereupon he managed to start the patrol car and once the van driver had unlocked and opened the gate, drove it inside the site with the van following a few moments later as Bordon locked the gate again behind them.

As the two vehicles made their way slowly through the site along rough tracks towards the main cement production buildings that dominated the place, Barrett made her way quickly through the brush and undergrowth constantly trying to keep a watch on the suspects.

She found herself a vantage point overlooking the main buildings as the van and her patrol car came to a stop in front of the main doorway into the buildings whereupon the men duly stepped out of their vehicles and gathered around the patrol car.

“Oh hell” Barrett exclaimed as her mobile telephone went off, forcing her to suppress it to muffle the ringing and avoid detection “Hello?” she answered in a low voice.

“Lieutenant” Longton was heard to call from his car as he was approaching Haychester Railway Station “What’s happening?”

“A van with three men just arrived on site” Barrett confirmed “One of them appears to be Bordon” she confirmed “Hang on a moment please Sir” she added as she saw that the men were doing something to her patrol car.

“Sling it down there” the leader of the men instructed “the amount of rusty wrecks around this place, no one will notice another one.”

“Right boss” the other man confirmed as he released the hand brake of the patrol car before he and the other two including Bordon helped push it over a precipice whereupon it tumbled down into an old sand pit with a loud crash before it caught fire at the bottom.

“What the hell was that?” Bordon asked over the telephone hearing the crash and explosion in the background of the phone call.

“The Garage Chief’s heart breaking” Barrett wryly admitted “I’ve got to go Sir.”

“We should be there in about fifteen minutes” Bordon confirmed “Is there any point in me telling me you not to go and do anything silly Lieutenant?” he asked.

“Of course not Sir” Barrett admitted before hanging up.

“Services between Horsham and Three Bridges are being delayed due to an earlier trespass incident” the station supervisor announced over the public address system as the somewhat late train arrived at the platform whereupon Tracy, the Commander and Sir Richard along with a number of other passengers, some rather disgruntled at the delay they had suffered alighted onto platform two.

Outside the entrance to platform two, the south side of Haychester Station, Longton was already waiting in an unmarked car for them.

“What’s occurring?” the Commander asked as he got in the front passenger seat with Tracy and Sir Richard getting in the back.

“A certain young Lieutenant of our mutual acquaintance has found the location in that photograph” Longton confirmed as he gunned the engine and accelerated away out of the car park “Your blue van with Bordon and two goons in it showed up about five minutes ago, needless to say she is probably doing something dumb again.”

“Reminds me of the old days” the Commander admitted wryly “If I recall we got into some obscure scrapes ourselves when we were younger.”

“We still do from time to time” Longton admitted.

“As the endless angry memos from the uniform issuing office duly testify” Tracy added.

“The Transport Division boys have the gunman from the train who aided Bordon’s getaway on ice over at Horsham” the Commander added “We’ve brought along his effects to see if they show up any interesting leads but no names that we could ascertain. I would like a name on that joker as soon as possible.”

“I think I can arrange that” Longton confirmed as he put the blue flashing light out of the side window onto the roof of the car and activated the sirens sending Haychester’s usually slow and plodding traffic out of the way.

“You do realise that the Security Services probably know about this place by now?” Bordon asked the two men as they entered the large warehouse part of the abandoned complex.

“Relax mate” the leader of the men responded “If as you say that car belonged to one officer, then she not only has a very long way to walk but if she shows up we can easily take care of her, its not like it would be our debut at this sort of thing.”

“And anyway” the second man confirmed “We are in the process of moving operations to a new location.”

“All right” Bordon reluctantly agreed after a few moments of clearly hesitant and regretful thought.

Outside the building, Barrett had made her way from the dense undergrowth over to the wall where there was a rusty access ladder that led to the roof.

“This is a really bad idea” she remarked to herself as she made sure her gun was secure in its holster before climbing up the fifteen or so feet to the roof of the building above.

At the top a walkway led along the extensive length of the roof between the pitched sections, alongside of which were a series of equally spaced dusty and cracked skylights.

Walking softly along the walkway so as not to alert the men inside to her presence, Barrett reached one of the skylights that looking through a hole in the glass she could see gave her a good view of what was happening below.

“Where has it all gone?” Bordon asked looking around the vast empty space in amazement.

“Like I said” one of the men confirmed “We are moving to newer bigger premises, it’s a growing market and our boss wants to keep up with demand.”

“Well I hope you still have some of it here” Bordon replied “I need to make a hasty exit out of the country within the next twelve hours.”

“Oh it’s not all been moved yet” the man explained “We still have the factory set up in the basement, follow me.”

“Damm it” Barrett remarked to herself as she saw the men disappear from view heading towards another part of the building. Looking around she saw that one of the skylights further along was partially open allowing her a way in.

With care she opened the rusty skylight and climbed inside, placing her feet on the roof of an internal set of offices at one end of the vast building. From here a rusty ladder down the side of these offices allowed her to reach the upper balcony before with caution and her gun drawn, she made her way down the steps to the former cement plant’s main production floor.

Over in a darkened corner of the building she could see a door that was open which led down to a sub level and as she approached the door the echoes of voices and the clanking of machinery in operation could be heard filtering up from below.

“Hello Garry” the voice of the leader of the two men accompanying Bordon was heard to call as Barrett approached the doorway “Very special guest here, wants us to run off a special batch for him. The boss has okayed it.”

“If the boss says so” a new voice, one Barrett took correctly to be that of the man she heard being referred to as Garry confirmed.

The echoing voices of the men intermingled with the machinery noise continued as Barrett made her way cautiously down the stairs into the basement level whereupon reaching the bottom, she looked around the corner to see the four men gathered around a large piece of machinery that was in operation, however her position and the poor light down there meant she was unable to see exactly what it was it did.

“So how many do you want?” the man referred to as Garry asked of Bordon.

“Twenty five” Bordon confirmed “Preferably non-sequential numbers as well.”

“All right then” Garry was heard to agree as he turned back to his machine and stopped it. Once the mechanical aspects of its operation had come to a standstill, he was seen to make some adjustments to the computer interface that controlled it before setting it in motion once again.

For the next couple of minutes the Lieutenant observed as the men gathered around the machine and watched it work, producing something that came out of one end and dropped onto a small conveyor belt of some kind before the machine was stopped.

“Let those dry for ten minutes” Garry was heard to declare “Perhaps we should grab a drink while we wait?” he suggested.

“Good idea” the other two men agreed whilst an anxious Bordon merely shrugged his shoulders.

“Whoops” Barrett remarked to herself as she realised the men were coming out of the basement and that meant they would be heading straight for her. Quickly she looked around and saw an opportunity to evade detection by ducking behind some old packing crates in the nearby corner.

Keeping low out of sight as the men passed, Barrett managed to avoid seen and once the men has left, going back up the stairs to ground level, she looked up and came out from behind the crates before going over to the machine and looking at it.

“Well I’ll be dammed” she remarked as she picked up one of the items on the conveyor belt from where it had been produced by the machine moments earlier. Bringing it directly into the light of an overhead lamp clearly showed that the object was a printed sheet of banknotes of twenty pound denomination and also of extremely good quality right down to the presence of a metallic security strip.

Carefully Barrett replaced the sheet back on the conveyor belt exactly as she had found it before thinking about what to do next. There was no way she could get a radio or telephone signal down there in that dingy basement but she needed this evidence so quickly accessed the computer interface to print off one more sheet which she took and stuffed it in her tunic pocket.

Up on ground level the men with Bordon still looking thoroughly anxious were now in one of the old offices having a drink.

“So where are you moving this little enterprise to then?” Bordon casually inquired.

“Somewhere safe” the leader of the men confirmed slightly evasively “We have a whole new method of working being lined up, it will take a few months to come together but when it does our boss stands to make a fortune.”

“I thought he was raking it in with that little set up downstairs already” Bordon commented.

“That’s just small fry” Garry remarked “Strictly kitchen sink level production, what our Guvnor has planned will make that look like a cut potato in a Primary School.”

“I wish I could be here to see that” Bordon admitted.

“You’ll be all right” the leader of the men confirmed “Our Guvnor says you are a very special friend and if there is one thing he always does it is stand by his friends.”

“Yeah well I wish I could believe that” Bordon remarked as he finished his drink which he more than needed to fuel his courage for what he planned to do next.

“Seeing is believing” Garry remarked “Actions always speak louder than words.”

“I thoroughly agree” Bordon confirmed as suddenly he drew his six shot service revolver and opened fire.

Down below in the basement access stairwell, Barrett heard the gunshots echo through the building which prompted her to quicken her pace up the steps and check her gun once more just in case.

As she exited out into the main part of the old works, a few pigeons, disturbed by the gun shots flapped about and flew through and out of the main door, apart from that however there was nothing.

Then the tinkling of glass came from above her which caused the Lieutenant to look up at the upper level office balcony where she saw Bordon come out of one of the offices, the gun shot damaged door shedding its shattered glass as he exited.

“Hold it right there please Sir!” Barrett called loudly and clearly with her gun firmly trained on Bordon who froze almost in mid step and looked down from the balcony and the diminutive young female office below him.

“Good afternoon Lieutenant” Bordon declared, not overly surprised by her presence there “What can I do for you?”

“Put your hands on your head and come down the stairs slowly and quietly will be fine for a start Sir” Barrett confirmed.

“And if I refuse young lady?” Bordon asked casually thinking he was more than a match for this young girl.

“Well so far you have been involved in murder, perverting the course of justice, conspiracy, forgery and any manner of other crimes” Barrett informed him, not taking her eye or her gun off him at any point “in addition it would appear we can now add forgery to the list but not before I have given you a piece of my mind as mainly thanks to you and your associates I have spent the last three days being shot at, knocked unconscious, nearly drowned and had my car blown up so you will understand Sir if I don’t come across as anything remotely approaching sympathetic.”

“But I am the National Administrator General” Bordon informed her, his booming voice echoing around the vast interior of the old building “Your superior officer and I think you will find that I somewhat out rank you.”

“I think we can safely say you are fired Sir” Barrett responded back “Now about those hands?”

“Oh yes of course” Bordon agreed as he duly put his hands on his head and slowly began to walk down the steps to the ground floor level.

As he approached the ground floor and was about to step off the bottom of the staircase some twenty yards ahead of the Lieutenant, a groan and a creak was heard from up above as one of the men Bordon had gunned down minutes earlier appeared at the office doorway, covered in blood but still just about alive and also still armed as he shakily aimed towards Barrett and opened fire.

“Oh no you don’t” Barrett responded instinctively as she rolled to the ground, quickly took aim and fired three shots finishing off the gunman who crashed over the balcony edge and to the floor below with a thud.

Bordon used this as his opportunity to make his bid for escape only to be stopped short in his tracks just feet away from the door to the outside as Barrett brought her weapon to bear on him once more.

“Think again Sir” Barrett warned sincerely.

“I have” Bordon responded turning around to reveal his own revolver in his hand which he aimed squarely at the Lieutenant and pulled the trigger only to be answered by the classic click of an empty chamber.

“You fired six shots up there” Barrett explained to him and there was no way you had time to reload it.

“And there was me thinking that these sort of things only happened in movies” Bordon wryly admitted with an almost desperate chuckle as he casually tossed the gun away.

“Hands up” Barrett instructed, gesturing with her gun still firmly pointed at Bordon as she approached him.

“All right then” Bordon agreed reluctantly as Barrett spun him around and put the handcuffs on him where once he was secured, she put her gun away “Move!” she instructed as she escorted him outside.

“Aren’t you going to read me my rights Lieutenant?” Bordon asked as they came out of the building into the sunlight.

“You have the right to remain silent, so please do us both a favour and shut up will you?” Barrett responded.

“Sounds like you have been taking lessons from Commander Caverner” Bordon commented wryly “Of course you do realise that I will never come to trial, certain interested parties will see to that plus of course think of the embarrassment of having the National Administrator General of the Security Service up on charges as serious as the ones you are proposing.”

“I’m just one of Her Majesty’s officers of the law” Barrett confirmed “I don’t make the decisions, I just track down scum bags such as your good self, so just stand there where I can see you and be quiet. The cavalry is on its way.”

“Tell me young lady” Bordon asked seemingly changing the subject “Did your father ever tell you about my little party trick I used to do to entertain my fellow officers at those endless conferences I had to go to?”

“Can’t say I recall him mentioning anything” Barrett admitted not really interested in the small talk, instead looking around with a bit of anxiousness wondering when help was going to reach her.

“I have always had a talent for it” Bordon continued.

“A talent for what?” Barrett asked out of idle curiosity.

“Picking handcuff locks” Bordon confirmed holding his hands out casually before tossing the now disabled handcuffs to Barrett.

With Barrett distracted by this revelation for a moment, Bordon took his chance and charged at her forcing her to the ground where he tried to put his arm around her neck to strangle her but she was having none of it.

The Lieutenant quickly responded by kicking back, badly injuring Bordon in the shins and causing him to loosen his grip and fall back however he quickly recovered as he grabbed the nearest item to hand, a length of old metal pipe that he wielded towards her.

“You know I could just shoot you?” Barrett remarked as she took a defensive posture facing her opponent.

“I think not” Bordon nodded over to the left where in the initial struggle Barrett’s gun had fallen out of its holster and was lying in a muddy puddle a few feet away.

“All right then Sir” Barrett challenged Bordon directly “Give it your best shot.”

“I wouldn’t normally hit a lady if I were to be honest” Bordon admitted.

“Who said I was a lady?” Barrett quickly retorted.

“Touché” Bordon agreed as he duly made a swing at her with the pipe only for Barrett to duck below it as it whistled past.

“Was that the best you could do?” Barrett asked.

“Plenty of life in the old bastard yet” Bordon responded and took another closer swing at her only for Barrett to grab hold of the pipe as it passed her, wrestle it from Bordon’s hands and then grab him, throwing him to the ground as she tripped him up.”

Bordon tried to get back up but was soon defeated again as Barrett responded by kicking him very hard in the crotch to which he gave out a very loud yell of pain.

“The stories are false then” Barrett admitted “You do have some balls after all, well what’s left of them now anyway.”

With Bordon lying crippled on the floor, Barrett went and retrieved her now rather soggy gun from the muddy puddle just as Longton, Tracy, Sir Richard and the Commander arrived on the scene.

Barrett looked up rather weakly and smiled, the fight having taken a lot out of her.

“If you are looking for the National Administrator General” Barrett confirmed wryly “He is the one clasping his nuts in agony over there. I’m going to find a pot of strong black coffee” she declared.

“Having trouble old chap?” the Commander asked with a grin as he stood over the lying figure of a badly battered and bruised Bordon.

“Up yours” Bordon managed to just about say.

“You’re nicked” the Commander responded as he and Tracy duly dragged him to his feet before he was handcuffed again and then bundled unceremoniously into the back of the car.

“All right, we got him so now what do we do with him?” Longton asked generally

“Don’t let him anywhere near me” Lieutenant Barrett strongly suggested “You’ve heard of angry young men? Well right now as far as he is concerned I am a very angry young woman!”

“I am sure I can arrange a nice quiet room in the company funny farm” Sir Richard commented “Out of sight, out of mind so to speak as I think the less publicity over this matter the better.”

“Whilst you have him enjoying the hospitality of the loony bin, you may want to ask him how he would like to pay for it” Barrett suggested “as I would strongly recommend against accepting cash” she produced the sheet of freshly printed forged banknotes and passed it to the Commander.

“Where the hell did this come from?” the Commander asked.

“There is a printing press set up in the basement of this place” Barrett explained “From what I heard it’s only a small part of a far larger operation.”

“You and I are going to have a very nice long chat” the Commander informed Bordon through the open side window of the car “For the moment he is all yours chaps” he called to Longton and Sir Richard as they got in the front of the car.

“See you guys back at the office” Longton called before starting the engine and driving away leaving the Commander with Tracy and Lieutenant Barrett.

“It is this way Sir” Barrett led the way into the building and on down the steps into the basement where the printing press was to be found.

“Good grief” Tracy exclaimed as they saw the printing press and the freshly printed banknotes that had been run off it “There is at least fifty grand’s worth of funny money here that I can see.”

“This is too clever for Bordon” the Commander remarked “Someone with some serious clout is behind this little operation.”

“Franklin Rogers?” Tracy asked “It’s just his sort of thing I would have thought.”

“But he’s been inside for the last several years hasn’t he?” Barrett asked.

“An expert villain of Mr Rogers talents never lets such niceties as imprisonment get in the way of business” the Commander explained “legal or illegal, no I am willing to bet that the dead guys here plus our friend from the train earlier are on Roger’s payroll or at least connected to one of his dubious enterprises in some way.”

The echoing noise of sirens approaching from outside heralded the arrival of uniformed backup that could now enter and officially seal off the scene now that Bordon had been safely removed.

“Come on” the Commander declared as he took a sheet of the fake notes “Let’s get back to the office, I need to pay someone a visit but I suspect I need to book an appointment first.”

“You are a traitor to this country, a traitor to yourself, those who served under your command and the uniform” Sir Richard declared as he commenced his formal interview in a darkened room located deep in the lower levels of Section 14.

“You can’t put me in jail” Bordon responded defiantly “The scandal would be all over the press plus I very much doubt certain acquaintances of mine would let me live very long.”

“That would be this Mr Franklin Rogers” Sir Richard remarked “Currently a long term resident of one of our more secure prison facilities on the Isle of Wight.”

“For now” Bordon admitted “Believe me he has a lot of talented legal eagles looking into ways of getting him out, legitimately or otherwise.”

“Yes well” Sir Richard dismissed this threat casually “Let me safely assure you that he, much like you won’t be going anywhere anytime soon.”

“So how are you going to explain the sudden disappearance of the National Administrator General?” Bordon asked “Only that sort of thing can lead to all sorts of awkward questions in the press not to mention the more murkier corners of the corridors of power.”

“I’m glad you asked me that” Sir Richard confirmed as he reached into his briefcase and produced a document that he presented to Bordon by placing it carefully on the table facing him. “With this as it happens.”

“Sorry” Bordon responded mockingly “I forgot to bring my reading glasses.”

“This is your resignation” Sir Richard explained “albeit not actually written by you I will admit but in fact penned by the Prime Minister no less and before you ask, yes your resignation has been accepted by him, all you have to do is sign and then its extended gardening leave for you.”

“And if I should tell you to stick it?” Bordon asked aggressively.

“Well we can always forge your signature I suppose” Sir Richard calmly concluded “I believe you know quite a bit about forging things don’t you?”

“I don’t know what you are talking about” Bordon tried to deny any knowledge.

“Oh you mean you were blissfully unaware of being in a building with three of Franklin Rogers’s goons who had themselves a very tidy little printing operation in the basement then?” Sir Richard responded “A printing operation I may add that was producing some very nice forged twenty pound notes that I believe you intended to use to fund your way out of this country and consequentially out of this long standing mess you have managed to get yourself into.”

“Let me assure you that already wheels are in motion to ensure that the little operation that little cow Barrett stumbled upon, any tenable at best links to me and any evidence of its very existence will disappear like a moth into the night” Bordon assured Sir Richard with a confident expression.

“One thing that does not make sense” Sir Richard changed the subject slightly “You gave the Commander a memory stick containing plenty of evidence against Franklin Rogers. Why?”

“Because I want my last laugh” Bordon explained “That man has ruled over my life for twenty five years and I was determined that my last act would be to ensure he is sunk into a very dark hole from which he will never rise ever again.”

“I can see your point” Sir Richard admitted.

“There is not a cats chance in hell that when the Commander becomes National Administrator General” Bordon explained “and lets face it, that is inevitable now, that Rogers will ever be able to corrupt him in any way.”

“Good thinking” Sir Richard admitted.

“And then when Franklin Roger’s ashes are floating free in the breeze through Leytonstone, I shall be wherever I am, probably in some dark forgotten corner of the world laughing manically knowing that eventually I had the upper hand on that bastard” Bordon concluded with manic triumph.

“Sign here” Sir Richard reminded him, passing Bordon a pen which with a little reluctance he took and signed a rather shaky signature on the bottom of the document.

“Thank you” Sir Richard responded taking the pen and document from the table and returning the latter to his briefcase, “enjoy your gardening leave” he remarked before getting up from the table, turning smartly on his heels and leaving the room.

Outside in the corridor with the door closed behind him, Sir Richard paused for a few moments as if in deep thought before turning to his left and going into the adjacent room where a couple of men had been monitoring the interview through sophisticated recording equipment as well as the two way mirror that looked into the room where Bordon sat rocking back and forth slightly in his seat.

“Well Doctor, I admit I don’t have your level of medical or psychiatric expertise but I would say our boy here is definitely in the region of Upton Park” Sir Richard remarked.

“A couple of stops short of Barking” the Doctor agreed “There is no way you could even prosecute him on the basis of his mental state, more so if these records you have shown me are anything to go by.”

“He’s all yours Doc” Sir Richard declared “Take good care of him.”

“Certainly Sir” the Doctor confirmed as he stood up to leave “Oh one thing I ought to point out before I go Sir” he added with some worry.

“Go on, I can probably guess but tell me anyway” Sir Richard responded.

“Due to your Mr Bordon’s mental state, I would reckon it almost certain that any evidence he has amassed and passed on to the Commander would not be admissible in a court of law” the Doctor confirmed.

“That was what I was afraid of” Sir Richard admitted “I just was hoping no one would notice” he added with deep regret.

“So anyway” the Commander continued “the next thing I know there is half a dozen little grey haired old ladies, handbags drawn chasing this guy out of Tesco’s and down the street straight into the waiting arms of myself and half a dozen officers who had responded to the alarm call.”

“And there was me swearing blind you said Haychester was always quiet and hum drum” Tracy remarked as they shared a bag of fish and chips on a bench in West Street in the shadow of the City Cathedral as early evening drew in.

“Like everywhere” the Commander admitted “this place does has it moments from time to time.”

“Usually involving you getting shot at back in those days” Tracy remarked with a giggle.

“It would appear that Haychester has now got a successor to my old crown of Security Officer who keeps getting into strife” the Commander remarked.

“Lieutenant Barrett I presume?” Tracy asked.

“Absolutely” the Commander confirmed “Look at the number of scrapes she has managed to get into over the last few days and she’s what only twenty one?”

“Twenty” Tracy confirmed “Were we ever that young?”

“Actually I think we were younger now I come to think of it” the Commander admitted as he downed another chip with enthusiasm. “You mark my words, she will make Administrator General by the time she is thirty five.”

“Speaking of which” Tracy motioned down the street towards a Security Service patrol car that was approaching them “Here comes the Angel of Calamity herself now.”

“Oh yes” the Commander agreed as the patrol car came to a halt in front of them and Lieutenant Barrett got out along with her father.

“Evening you two” the Commander called as they joined them on the bench “This had better be good as I am enjoying breakfast.”

“It’s half five in the evening Sir” the Lieutenant responded mystified.

“And?” the Commander asked wryly.

“Never mind Sir” the Lieutenant admitted “Superintendent Longton sent me, apparently there has been a problem with the evidence from the old cement works.”

“Let me hazard a wild guess” Tracy responded insightfully “the printing press and all its associated evidence mysteriously disappeared in transit so to speak.”

“Exactly” the Lieutenant confirmed.

“Sounds like our boy Rogers has been busy again” Barrett remarked as he too joined them on the bench, taking the opportunity to steal one of the chips from the wrapper.

“Or his little pixies at least” the Commander agreed.

“Hello?” Tracy answered her mobile telephone at that point “Ah yes Sir, he’s right here” she then confirmed.

“More little pixies” the Commander remarked as Tracy passed him the telephone “Anyone I know love?” he asked.

“The Prime Minister” Tracy confirmed.

“He can buy his own chips” the Commander remarked wryly as he took the telephone “Good evening” he answered.

“Commander” the Prime Minister called from behind his desk up in Downing Street, London “You are a hard man to catch up with today.”

“Well’s it has been a fairly busy day” the Commander confirmed “What can I do for you?”

“With the err retirement shall we say of Bordon, we need a new National Administrator General” the Prime Minister explained “and we need to announce the new holder of the post quickly to ensure the continuance of public confidence in the service.”

“I think I can guess where this is going” the Commander responded with apprehension.

“You are the only person for the job” the Prime Minister explained “Indeed I and Sir Richard are insisting upon it.”

“All right then” the Commander reluctantly agreed, looking across at his wife for support as he made a vital decision “Two conditions though.”

“Let’s hear it” the Prime Minister agreed.

“My current post of Regional Administrator General is merged into the National position and I keep the same office, position and power” the Commander confirmed

“Also my usual autonomy in running the service without political interference as you know how I feel about that sort of thing.”

“Well I guess Commander you are all out of excuses” the Prime Minister responded.

“Yeah I guess so” the Commander agreed as he put his arm around Tracy for a reassuring hug “So how is Sir Richard and his Section 14 boys getting on with our old friend?” he asked.

“Officially on gardening leave as of now” the Prime Minister confirmed “Unofficially he is sectioned for the duration.”

“A sad end to a tragedy filled life” the Commander remarked.

“Indeed” the Prime Minister agreed “Anyway I have to go, meeting with the King of somewhere or other in half an hour.”

“Sounds riveting” the Commander commented.

“Believe me it won’t be” the Prime Minister confirmed as he looked at a file on his desk for a few moments “Meantime, have a pleasant evening, we will talk again soon.”

“Goodnight Sir” the Commander replied before hanging up and passing the telephone back to Tracy.

“Congratulations I take it?” Tracy asked.

“Depends upon your point of view” the Commander admitted with a wry grin “At least I can get the office redecorated I suppose.”

“What happened?” Lieutenant Barrett asked.

“Meet the new National Administrator General” Tracy gestured towards her husband with a sense of pride although the Commander was not exactly over excited by the prospect of the position he now found himself in.

“Couldn’t have picked a better person for the job” Barrett agreed “Just think of the power under your hand now.”

“I think my first act as National Administrator General will be to pay a long overdue visit to the Isle of Wight” the Commander declared thoughtfully.

“Well we best get going” the Lieutenant confirmed “my father is in need of a bed for the night and he has just volunteered my front room sofa.”

“Don’t go stepping in owt” the Commander advised the Lieutenant as she and her father got back in the car “You are a very good young officer, watch your back, always.”

“I will Sir” the Lieutenant agreed as she started the car “Goodnight” she and her father both called before they departed.

“This little visit you have in mind, would that be business or pleasure?” Tracy asked.

“Strictly business my love” the Commander confirmed “Can I borrow that telephone of yours again?” he asked.

“Sure” Tracy agreed as she passed the telephone back to her husband “Who are you calling?”

“Sir Richard Crowthorne” the Commander confirmed as he dialled the number for Sir Richard’s mobile which was quickly answered.

“Congratulations old friend” Sir Richard answered “The news of your rise to god hood is just breaking on the BBC News Channel now” he confirmed.

“That Prime Minister doesn’t waste any time does he?” the Commander remarked “I only said yes, reluctantly I may add about three minutes ago. Must have had some bad statistics to have buried I guess.”

“Wouldn’t surprise me” Sir Richard agreed with a chuckle as he turned the television in his office off with the remote “What can I do for you National Administrator General.”

“Oh don’t rub it in” the Commander replied “I need you to set up a meeting of the it never officially happened variety.”

“I don’t have to guess who with do I?” Sir Richard asked as he began to look through his little black notebook of contacts, probably one of the most comprehensive documents of its type in the country.

“I just think it is about time he and I met” the Commander confirmed “After all, according to Bordon he has been anxious to meet me ever since I was a mere wet behind the ears Lieutenant.”

“You have been many things over the years my friend” Sir Richard remarked “I have known you since you were a small lad and one thing you definitely never were was wet behind the ears, not by any stretch of the imagination.”

“I’ll take your word for it” the Commander admitted.

“I can have a helicopter pick you up from Haychester in thirty minutes” Sir Richard confirmed as he worked out the details “The warden there is an old friend of mine so getting in should not be a problem.”

“All right” the Commander reluctantly agreed, the thought of having to travel in a helicopter not exactly filling him with any enthusiasm given that even standing on a chair was enough to make him queasy, but there was a job to be done “I’ll send the

lovely wife home on the next train back to London and meet you on the helipad in half an hour.”

“See you there” Sir Richard confirmed before hanging up.

“Don’t you want me to come with you?” Tracy asked, slightly surprised and clearly concerned.

“If I had my way you would never leave my side at any time for as long as I live” the Commander reassured her “however this is something I must do alone.”

“If you are sure” Tracy reluctantly agreed.

“Come on” the Commander declared “I’ll walk you to the station, someone has to go home and tuck Jack into bed.”

“Last I saw of him he was in your office running Scotland Yard” Tracy reminded him as they got up off the bench and they walked together towards the medieval City Cross that marked the centre of the city before turning right down South Street towards the railway station.

“Hey I just had a wild idea” the Commander jokingly responded “Let’s make Jack the new National Administrator General, he’d love it.”

“I think he wants to be a lawyer” Tracy admitted “Apparently the pay is better, you are less likely to be shot at on a fairly frequent basis and I gather it is also what a certain young lady of his acquaintance wants to do as well.”

“Relationships based on the same working conditions rarely work out” the Commander joked “years of research have told me that, I mean look at us, the exception that proves the rule.”

“Damm right about that my love” Tracy agreed as they kissed.

A few minutes walk later they arrived at the main north side entrance to Haychester Railway Station where a service to London Victoria was just coming into the platform.

“Oh no, not you two again” the Conductor of the train, the same one that had been on the train Bordon had escaped from earlier in the day remarked as he opened the door of the train and stepped out onto the platform to see Tracy and the Commander standing there.

“Don’t panic, nothing will go wrong this time” the Commander reassured him as he helped Tracy on board “Just see to it my wife reaches London safely.”

“You got it Sir” the Conductor readily agreed.

“I’ll see you later love” the Commander informed Tracy before they kissed goodbye.

“Be careful” Tracy advised her husband sincerely. She knew there was no danger in what he was planning but in the back of her mind was always a niggling little doubt that one day fate would intervene and part them forever.

“I will” the Commander confirmed as the platform dispatcher signalled the train’s departure and the Conductor closed the doors.

The Commander watched as the train departed, remaining on the platform until the red tail lights of the train had disappeared into the distance out of sight.

Two hours later with the last rays of the setting sun disappearing below the horizon, Tracy arrived back home in the apartment she and the Commander called home on the rare occasions their busy working lives actually allowed them to reach it.

Jack was already home, fast asleep on the sofa where he had obviously been waiting up for his adopted parents to come home, his school homework intermingled on the coffee table in front of him with the takeaway he had picked up on his way back from New Scotland Yard for his supper.

“I wonder if ‘like father, like son’ applies to adopted children as well?” Tracy quietly mused to herself as she reached for a blanket, carefully removed the remains of the takeaway meal from Jack’s lap and put the blanket over him where she elected to let him sleep on the sofa rather than disturb him.

Turning out the light Tracy went to the kitchen to make herself a cup of coffee when she heard a noise and returned to the front room to see Jack had woken up.

“Oh hello mum” Jack responded upon seeing Tracy although him calling her mum was very unusual for him which took her pleasantly by surprise “When did you get back?” he asked with a stifled yawn.

“About five minutes ago” Tracy confirmed “I was going to ask you if you wanted something to eat but it seems you have self catered.”

“I had no idea what time you two were coming home” Jack admitted “and Megan is out for the night at her grand parents place in Shropshire so I was all alone.”

“Sorry” Tracy responded apologetically “We really should be spending more time with you as your adopted parents.”

“Not your fault” Jack reassured her “Anyway I got used to being alone after my real parents were killed I guess.”

“Well I am afraid there is just me tonight” Tracy again apologised.

“I heard the news about the Commander getting the National Administrator General’s post” Jack confirmed “It was on the news although I am willing to bet the Prime Minister was more pleased about this than the Commander was.”

“And you would be correct” Tracy admitted frankly as she sat on the sofa alongside Jack.

“Sir Richard called while I was still sat in the office” Jack remarked “Asked for a uniform in the Commander’s size to be sent over to his place with appropriate amendments. So where has he gone?”

“To visit someone” Tracy confirmed “Laying an old ghost to rest I would say.”

“Not another one?” Jack remarked “He does seem to collect them doesn’t he? Mind you I do have some experience in that sort of thing too you know.”

“Aye” Tracy agreed “the difference being this time it’s not one of his ghosts” she remarked looking straight ahead with a look of worry “it’s one of mine.”

With the time having already passed ten in the evening, the high security prisoner wing of Hanthorpe Jail on the Isle of Wight was fairly quiet now, all of the prisoners were back in their cells and the lights were out bar those in the main cell hall and a few desk lamps in individual cells.

In one of these cells, working on a journal by the light of a desk lamp sat Franklin Rogers, the antique ink pen he was using being something seemingly from a different era but then again so was he, his style of thuggery led gangland crime having been supposedly exorcised from the area around Leytonstone when he was finally put behind bars some seven years earlier.

One thing that Rogers could always be credited with was a very high intelligence which coupled with a photographic memory made for a very formidable foe for anyone who over the decades had dared to go up against him which made his incarceration all the more frustrating for him.

He made the best of it though, continuing by back channels and secret messages to run a decent sized crime empire that was secreted across the south east of England with further interests under development further a field including a particularly large project that had just had to be rearranged slightly due to the recent Bordon business.

Rogers continued to work on his papers when he stopped and listened intently to the background noise filtering through the cell block. He knew the routine of everyone in that building from the inmates through the guards to the governor of the prison himself and what had caught his attention was the sound of someone approaching along the metal walkway that did not fit in with the standard schedule of internal patrols, which signalled something out of the ordinary.

He paid particular attention to this sound however as whoever’s footsteps it was approaching were coming steadily closer to his own cell door, the footsteps on the metal grating echoing ominously as they got close until they stopped immediately outside.

“Come in, the door’s open” Rogers joked with sincerity.

At that moment the jangling of some keys were heard before the door was unlocked and opened and in walked a figure that as he came into the light revealed to be a visitor that somehow Rogers was not in the least bit surprised to see.

“Good evening Commander” Rogers declared standing up out of respect. They may have been on opposite sides but Rogers was always a gentleman who respected those he deemed worthy and the Commander was certainly one of the most prominent members of this small category.

“Of course that should be National Administrator General now” Rogers added “or would you prefer Samuel Edwards, maybe even Eddie Regent Junior GC. One face, so many names and a very colourful history that I have followed with some considerable interest.”

“I’ll just settle for Commander” the Commander agreed “Like you say, my life has been a wee bit complicated.”

“I’ve been expecting you ever since news reached me of Bordon’s err retirement” Rogers remarked “In fact I have been anxious to meet you for a very long time.”

“So I gather from our mutual old friend Bordon” the Commander confirmed “Indeed I recall he tells me you have had my name down in your little book since I was a young Lieutenant.”

“Indeed” Rogers confirmed indicating the battered aged black notebook on the desk “I always keep copious notes about everyone I deal with, do business with or just meet on a professional level or at least intend to one day.”

“From what I have been led to understand, it would appear that despite your current detention at Her Majesty’s pleasure” the Commander remarked as he looked around the cell “you still seem to have been keeping yourself busy with other shall we say not strictly legitimate enterprises.”

“I’m just an innocent businessman who was the victim of a failure of the justice system” Rogers casually declared with palms held open in a gesture of false honesty.

“We both know exactly what you are” the Commander responded.

“Would I be correct in thinking, given the late hour and the lack of legal representation at this little meeting that this is strictly off the record and unofficial?” Rogers asked.

“Indeed it is” the Commander confirmed “Even as National Administrator General now” he indicated with a sideways nod of the head the ‘A1’ lettering on his epaulettes complete with small silver crossed swords below and a royal crown above “I cannot do anything about you at the moment, unless that is I use this of course” he produced the memory stick.

“And what would that be then Commander?” Rogers asked.

“Well I admit my technological expertise isn’t exactly up to scratch” the Commander admitted “but apparently this is what they call a memory stick, Bordon gave it to me. You see he may have had many faults but one thing he was remarkably good at apart from covering his tracks or getting your boys to do it for him was keeping meticulous records of everything he ever did that involved you and your associates.”

“I am sure that my extremely expensive and highly qualified legal counsel will be the first to tell you that due to Bordon’s registered mental instability” Rogers remarked casually “Oh yes, I know about that already, any evidence that you may possess that has him as the source would be immediately ruled inadmissible in evidence in any court you care to name.”

“And you would be correct” the Commander confirmed “However this isn’t in the possession of a court of law” he added “it is in my possession now and I am the big fish around here that runs the entire law enforcement operation of this country. That puts a whole different perspective on it don’t you think?”

“Threats do not impress me Commander” Rogers calmly warned as he relaxed back in his chair.

“Let me assure you I am not in the business of making idle threats” the Commander responded directly yet calmly “I make promises. You like deals don’t you? Well here is one I propose to you here tonight.”

“I’m listening” Rogers agreed.

“You pack up your little operation” the Commander “tell your little pixies to leave the country never to return and in return I will see that this memory stick with its very interesting contents stays very firmly locked in a safe never to see the light of day again because if I find out you are up to any of your old tricks, I will use this and every other resource I have at my disposal to make sure you are crushed like a bug before you know what has hit you.”

“I’m impressed” Rogers complimented the Commander “A worthy adversary indeed, you have not let down my expectations. Of course your position is only valid for as long as I remain unjustly within these walls and I do plan to be out of here one day, maybe sooner than you think.”

“And I’ll be waiting and watching” the Commander confirmed “Think of me as the landlord and you the tenant, you’ve just had your lease renewed but with a strict warning not to do anything silly.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it Commander” Rogers responded with fake sincerity “However we will be meeting again, of that I have no doubt. Now if you will excuse me, I’m tired and have a lot of work to do in the morning.”

“Sleep tight” the Commander concluded as he headed out of the cell door however he stopped in the doorway momentarily when he heard Roger’s last remark to him, made casually but with a deep implied menace lingering under the surface from his desk as he resumed his writing.

“Give my regards to your lovely wife” Rogers remarked.

The Commander looked back over his shoulder at Rogers for a moment before leaving the cell whereupon the guard on duty outside closed and locked the door.

As the Commander walked away down the metal walkway with Rogers last words still echoing in his mind, Rogers himself paused from his writing and retrieved a mobile telephone from beneath the desk where it was secured in a hidden compartment to prevent it being found by the prison authorities.

“Sir John Chambers QC please” Rogers requested after dialling and having his call answered almost instantaneously.

There was a pause for almost a minute as the person Rogers wanted to speak too finally came to the telephone.

“Evening John” Rogers declared “You were right, our glorious new National Administrator General has just paid me a visit, and he does have Bordon’s files, notes, the works.”

“Well my sources are extremely reliable” Chambers confirmed from the comfort of his luxuriously appointed office in Central London with a view out of the ornate main window across the floodlit Trafalgar Square.

“I’d like to move Operation Penny up to phase two as of the beginning of next week” Rogers confirmed “I know it means a bit of a rush getting the right people in the right places in time but I think it can be done.”

“I think that can be arranged” Chambers confirmed with a slight hesitation in his voice “I spoke to the Attorney General earlier today and if what I have been led to believe is correct and with a bit of luck you will be out to enjoy the fruits of your labour before the end of the year.”

“Excellent” Rogers responded “Then I can personally take care of another matter that has been bugging me, after which I think it will be time for me to slope off to the sun for a well deserved retirement.”

“This matter you want to personally take care of” Chambers responded with some hesitation “Are you aware of the storm you could bring down on yourself if you target this individual? It sounds way too close to cold bloodied revenge to me and those sort of things can lead to blinkered thinking and nasty downfalls.”

“It is a matter that must be sorted” Rogers insisted “However first we have some more pressing business to take care of. Tell my people to get things rolling, I will be here if they need me.”

“I’ll get on to it first thing in the morning” Chambers confirmed “after that I would say your favours are going to be all used up.”

“Plenty more where they came from” Rogers responded with an almost evil chuckle “Money opens more than just doors you know.”

“Ssshsh” Tracy quietly indicated to her husband as with the clock in the hallway chiming in midnight, he came in the front door and hung up his uniform tunic before joining her in the front room.

“Ah I see” the Commander responded as he saw the sleeping Jack still on the sofa only now safely snuggled beneath a warm blanket.

“I didn’t want to wake him up” Tracy explained “He wanted to stay up until we were both safely home.”

“Very nice of him” the Commander mused as he and Tracy left the sleeping Jack alone and went through to the kitchen.

“So how did it go?” Tracy asked as she made her husband a much needed cup of tea “or shouldn’t I ask?”

“We met” the Commander confirmed. “Interesting fellow I must say, sort of a cross between an old country gentleman, a ruthless businessman and a wise old sage with a bit of good old fashioned implied menace thrown in for desert.”

“Sounds like he hasn’t changed much then” Tracy remarked as she passed a cup of tea to her husband before sitting down alongside him where they put their arms around each other for much needed mutual support.

“I get the feeling we haven’t heard the last of our Mr Rogers” the Commander admitted “You can see behind the eyes so much going on in there, plans within plans, yet on the outside there is nothing. He didn’t even flinch when I confronted him with Bordon’s files on that stick thing. He had the legal argument already lined up ready to be launched.”

“Apparently he has an I.Q. of over one hundred and sixty” Tracy recalled from the original investigation she had done on Rogers some years earlier.

“I can believe that” the Commander confirmed “There was one thing about him though that unnerved me, it was the very last thing he said as I left and in particular the way that he said it that sent a shiver down my spine.”

“What was that?” Tracy asked sensing the worst.

“Give my regards to your lovely wife” the Commander quoted “His words exactly. There is no way he could know you could he?”

“My name was kept out of all the prosecution evidence when he went to trial” Tracy confirmed “It was decided that as the officer who was responsible for bringing the evidence that got him finally sent to jail, it was in my best interests to remain anonymous.”

“So the only files that can connect you with Rogers’s case are those that would only have been available to the highest ranking personnel in the Service?” the Commander asked.

“I guess so” Tracy agreed “One thing though, Bordon would have had access to those files...”

“...which given Bordon’s unique relationship with Rogers, we can safely assume there is a danger that anything Bordon came into contact with could very easily have passed under Rogers nose as well” the Commander concluded grimly.

“Well he can’t do anything behind bars” Tracy tried to reassure her husband but deep down she was unsettled herself “I have an assurance from the Attorney General all but signed in his own blood and sworn on his mothers grave that Rogers will never see the outside of a prison cell for at least the next twenty years.”

“How the hell did you get involved in this mess?” the Commander asked.

“That is a very long story” Tracy admitted “One I think we can save for another time as I don’t know about you but I am tired.”

“Yes, me too” the Commander admitted as he downed the remains of the cup of tea in one gulp “I have a meeting with the Prime Minister, Sir Richard and his Section Fourteen lads tomorrow and I just know something is going to crop up to ruin my day.”

“Come on love” Tracy declared as she and the Commander got up and headed for the bedroom “Time for bed.”

“Absolutely” the Commander agreed.

To be continued....

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MMVIII