

LIVERPOOL STREET

Security Novels Series - Episode XI



John M Upton

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Alternatively, you can contact the author at:

jmupton2000@yahoo.co.uk

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Liverpool Street

"Well that's odd" young Jack Thornton commented as he noticed what appeared to be a distinctive red Royal Mail van pull into the grounds of the disused former factory and come to a halt by the loading ramp.

Watching from the old factory offices up above through a cobweb covered cracked window, Jack watched with bemusement as the uniformed postal worker got out of the drivers seat and after looking around slightly nervously, proceeded to the side door of the vehicle and opened it.

"Now what are you up to?" Jack wondered as he moved down the office to a different window for a better view.

Brushing aside more cobwebs, he watched with curiosity as he saw the postal worker examine a number of packages inside the back of the van. It was clear he was doing something to them but his body obstructed Jack's view making it almost impossible to see exactly what it was he was doing.

After a couple of minutes of activity, the postal worker completed his mysterious task, returned the packages he had been working on back to their grey plastic container and stepped back out of the vehicle.

"Where is my pen?" Jack asked himself as he scabbled around looking for it.

As the postal worker returned to the drivers seat, Jack found his pen and made a note of the registration number of the van before it reversed and headed back out of the old factory gates and away.

Early morning in central London is always chaotic on a week day and around Victoria and Westminster it was even busier than usual thanks to road works which were causing long tailbacks throughout the area.

In the middle of the heavy traffic that was seemingly going nowhere fast, Divisional Commander Tracy Caverner of the National Security & Police Service was drumming her fingertips on the steering wheel of the marked patrol car which for the last ten minutes had been stationary in Buckingham Palace Road amongst the traffic.

"Lima Mike Zero One to Control" Tracy called into her radio, her patience now finally running out "What the hell is going on with this traffic?" she asked.

"Control" the response came "Traffic Division reports that one of the JCB drivers at the Victoria Street road works apparently sliced through the traffic light power cables about twenty minutes ago."

"Clever boy" Tracy remarked "Look there is no way I am going to make Sir Richard's National Anti-Terrorist Committee meeting in Westminster at this rate, I am going to

park the motor up somewhere and walk it but someone better inform him I am going to be late."

"I'll make sure he gets the message Maam" the Dispatcher confirmed "Control out."

Tracy looked around for somewhere to park up and noticed a side road nearby which she managed to access by sounding the siren for brief bursts to get some of the traffic to ease out of her path.

A few minutes later and Tracy found herself making far better progress than any of the vehicle borne traffic as she walked up Victoria Street towards Broadway and her destination of New Scotland Yard.

It took her ten minutes to reach the turn off for Broadway in the shadow of the tall structure of the New Scotland Yard building. As she turned to her left, the passing by in the opposite direction of a Royal Mail van as it turned across the junction into Victoria Street did not even register being a scene repeated across the city a thousand times every day.

However this scene of normality was suddenly interrupted a few moments later when a loud explosion and fireball erupted from the Royal Mail van, sending burning debris in all directions.

Instinct saw Tracy throw herself to the ground as many others around did the same. Only once the echo of the explosion began to subside, replaced by the sounds of alarms, screams and sirens approaching did Tracy pick herself up and look back at the unfolding scene of chaos and confusion amid the destruction.

"You two" Tracy called to a couple of uniformed patrol officers who had run to the scene "Get the roads closed off and give me a two hundred metre exclusion zone all around."

"Yes Maam" they confirmed.

"Lima Mike Zero One to Control" Tracy called into her radio as she ran to the centre of the scene where already a number of volunteer passers by including off duty medical personnel were rendering assistance "Declaring a major emergency, explosion in Victoria Street right outside the office, full response and evacuation procedures please and notify the gold list contacts."

Within moments further emergency service personnel arrived on site with Tracy co-ordinating efforts on the ground ensuring that casualties were taken care of and the area evacuated safely in case there may have been secondary devices.

Above the unfolding drama on the top floor of New Scotland Yard, Tracy's husband the Administrator General of the National Security & Police Service, commonly referred to simply as the Commander went over to his office window that overlooked the street as soon as he had heard the explosion, the shockwave having rattled his window.

"Well there goes my quiet morning" the Commander remarked wryly before grabbing his uniform tunic and hurrying out of the office.

Quickly he proceeded down the corridor to the main control room for Central London which was a busy hive of activity, even more than usual as a flood of emergency calls were coming in.

"What the hell was that?" the Commander asked as he took the seat at the main desk in the room and surveyed the status of events on the large wall screens at the front of the room.

"Post van just blew up" the duty supervisor confirmed "Full serious incident procedure is now in place."

"Senior officer on site?" the Commander asked.

"Your wife Sir" the duty supervisor confirmed.

"Why am I not surprised" the Commander remarked wryly as he picked up a radio head set "Gold two from gold control" he called using the standard call signs for a major incident "What's occurring?"

"Gold Control from Gold Two" Tracy responded as she stepped away from the scene to one side to take the call "Looks like some kind of concealed explosive device of some kind detonated."

"Casualties on the ground?" the Commander enquired.

"The driver is dead" Tracy confirmed looking back at the wreckage which the Fire Brigade were now attending to "We've also got a couple of dozen walking wounded but nothing more serious fortunately."

"Well at least that is something" the Commander remarked.

"I could do with losing some of this traffic backlog though" Tracy added as she looked down the road beyond the hastily erected tape barrier lines to the open but congested streets beyond "The ambulance service is having a hell of a time battling through."

The Commander extended his arm in the direction of the Traffic Division dispatcher and clicked his fingers which instructed him to sort it out.

"Ok love" the Commander confirmed "It's being taken care of."

"Thanks" Tracy responded "Better get the forensic and anti-terrorism guys warmed up and roll out the bomb squad" she advised.

"They aren't going to like that" the Commander wryly commented as he checked his old pocket watch "It's their breakfast time."

"Well that's the trouble with terrorists these days" Tracy remarked "They have no consideration for anyone's social schedule."

Across the other side of the City in the heart of the financial district, the morning rush hour was its usual busy self with some of the most highly paid men and women in the country, mostly from the financial, trading and banking industries coming into work at some of the most well known and longest established businesses in the world.

One such place was the imposing global headquarters of the United Bank International or UBI which was located in an extensively modernised classic building in Threadneedle Street just up the road from the Bank of England and within easy walking distance of Liverpool Street Station.

At the rear of the premises on the ground floor, the morning postal delivery, the first of four they are scheduled to receive each weekday had arrived in the usual grey sacks which had been brought to the extensive post room for sorting and delivery internally.

As the postman bid farewell to the post room staff as he did every morning, they got to work opening the first of the large sacks of mail, emptying it out onto the main sorting table in the centre of the vast room.

"Blimey, a bit heavy on the post this morning" the Supervisor commented as he looked over the packets and letters spread out on the table.

Being experienced in the types of post that was normal for the company, the supervisor immediately picked out the large brown posting tube addressed to the Chief Executive which stood out as unusual.

"Has the boss been buying crap on EBay again?" the Supervisor asked as he reached across the table and pulled out the tube, giving its exterior a cursory inspection.

"Wouldn't surprise me" one of the post room staff remarked as she gathered a wadge of letters and proceeded to sort through them.

To the Supervisor however, something did not seem quite right, he was not sure exactly what it was that was bothering him about the tube though until he realised that the exterior surface of the package appeared to be warm to the touch.

"What the...?" the Supervisor exclaimed as he felt a sudden increase in the temperature coming from inside the tube.

"Something wrong Geoff?" another of the post room staff asked, sensing his concern.

"Everybody, out, out, OUT!!" the Supervisor suddenly declared as he realised that they were all in danger.

Quickly, the post room staff dropped what they were doing and evacuated while the Supervisor, still holding the tube waited until everyone was out before running for the fire exit.

Bursting through the fire exit door into the car park, the Supervisor had only moments during which he tossed the package into a large industrial dustbin in the corner, closed the lid and ducked for cover behind a car.

No sooner had he retreated than the dustbin exploded. While the body of the bin contained most of the explosion, the lid flew off and it and a quantity of refuse and debris were thrown up before raining down.

"Definitely not EBay" the Supervisor remarked as he peered nervously over the car at the smouldering bin.

"Thank you ladies and gentlemen" declared Sir Richard Crowthorne, former Divisional Head at MI5 and now the Chief of the newly formed National Anti-Terrorism and Organised Crime Committee.

"This meeting was scheduled to be as per your circulated agenda" he continued as the Commander discreetly sidled in the door and sat down at the large conference table next to Tracy "However in the light of the earlier incident in Victoria Street, I believe the Regional Administrator General wishes to bring a matter to the fore."

"Thank you" the Commander confirmed as he got back to his feet and consulted a set of hastily scribbled notes he had brought with him however after staring at them for a few moments, he found himself unable to decipher his own hand writing so gave up and decided to wing it.

"At eight thirty two this morning, a little under forty minutes ago" he began "an explosion occurred involving a Royal Mail van in Victoria Street right outside our back door."

"The driver appears to have been killed instantly" he continued "Other casualties were fortunately slight amounting to cuts and bruises."

"Any warnings, claims or suspects?" Sir Richard asked.

"Nothing on the usual channels" the Commander confirmed.

"Gary and the guys from the forensic services branch are about to start raking through the wreckage now" Tracy added "It's well and truly stuffed the morning rush though."

"It doesn't fit the M.O. of any of the usual suspects on our books" David Collins, Sir Richard's successor at MI5 added.

"It is going to be at least late this afternoon before we know anything certain about the device" the Commander added "We can only hope this is a one off event, even still it is probably a good idea to brief the Prime Minister."

"All right" Sir Richard agreed "I can take care of that, no doubt he will jump at the chance to make one of his deep concern type speeches to the nation."

It was then that the sound of two pagers bleeping interrupted proceedings, causing everyone present to check theirs.

"Oh, its me" the Commander confirmed, failing miserably to hide his joy at an opportunity to escape the meeting and get out there into the front line "Who else has got the bad news?" he asked.

"Looks like me darling" Tracy responded.

"There goes the neighbourhood" Sir Richard remarked, knowing full well from past experience that when both Tracy and the Commander are ever put on alert, something major was in progress.

"Caverner" Tracy called having picked up the telephone on the table and called internally to the Control Room three floors above her "Yes, he is here with me" she confirmed "Right, we'll be there in a few minutes."

"I'm not going to like this am I?" the Commander asked once Tracy had hung up and he had seen the expression on her face.

"Looks like we may have another one" Tracy confirmed "Big bank in the City just had something unpleasant delivered to their post room."

"Here we go..." the Commander declared as he and Tracy got up from the table.

"Mind if I join the party?" Collins asked "Only whenever someone so much as notices a paper clip has been stolen in the city, the Treasury are on the telephone within milliseconds nowadays."

"Feel free" the Commander confirmed "I have the feeling that we may be requiring the skills of your guys as well before the day is out."

"I guess that is meeting adjourned then" Sir Richard declared as half the occupants of the room quickly departed.

"Morning" the receptionist of Walther, Athearn & Broadway Solicitors called as the postman arrived in the well appointed reception area of the company's offices in Canary Wharf, located in the heart of London's docklands area.

"Here you go love" the postman confirmed as he handed across two bags of mail and a couple of packets "Nothing exciting today by the looks of it."

"The day we get something exciting in a solicitors office will be the day hell freezes over" the receptionist admitted with a chuckle to which the postman agreed.

"We I'll see you tomorrow then" the postman called with a friendly wave as he left through the stylish and expensive looking glass doors.

As he headed down the corridor towards the lifts to leave the building, the postman was suddenly startled by an explosion that blew out the glass doors of the solicitor's office, wrecking the corridor.

Outside, screams could be heard as the explosion also blew out the windows of the office on the fifth floor of the tower and showered people below with broken glass and debris.

"For ten points, see if anyone can spot the connection" the Commander commented as he, Tracy and Collins gathered around the main console in the Control Room and observed unfolding details on the screen at the front of the room.

"One post office van followed by one post room" Tracy remarked "Looks like we have ourselves a good old fashioned mail bomber."

"Makes a change from the usual loonies I suppose" the Commander responded.

"Two coincidences do not a theory make" Collins cautioned philosophically.

"That's deep" the Commander remarked "Freud?" he asked.

"Actually my grandmother" Collins confirmed with a wry smile.

"Sir" one of the despatch officers called up as she took a new call "Fire Brigade just got called to reports of an explosion in the Canary Wharf tower, building evac in progress."

"Show me as on the way" Tracy responded "See you later darling" she added as she left, kissing her husband.

"Unless anyone has any objections" the Commander suggested as he looked around at the various section heads who had all gathered in the Control Room in the light of what was unfolding "I am going to declare a code five and transfer operations to the major incident room."

"I think you mean a code three" Collins commented "A code five is a Royal wedding."

"I'll take your word for it" the Commander admitted "I am a bit rusty on the various scenario codes."

"I'll put a team of my lads and lasses together and get them here in twenty minutes" Collins confirmed.

"And someone better extract Commander Fuller from the arms of his wife and get him up here" the Commander announced "If it's down to me to run the computer we will be well and truly stuffed before we have even started."

"Shall we say briefing in thirty minutes?" Commander Greg Philips, Chief of the Bomb Squad suggested "I should have some preliminary results from the mess out front by then."

"Right, lets get this party started" the Commander called, rubbing his hands together in expectation.

The cacophony of sirens echoing between the forest of modern skyscrapers that makes up the Canary Wharf area of the city was almost deafening.

Tracy arrived amid the frenetic activity on her Security Service motor bike, the tape sealing off the area being lifted by one of the patrol officers on duty to allow her to enter the scene.

"Well this is a circus" Tracy remarked to herself as she parked up alongside one of the attending fire appliances and removed her crash helmet.

"Morning Maam" the officer on site supervising the incident called as he joined her.

"Morning" Tracy responded "What's the situation?" she enquired.

"Everyone is out and our friends from the Fire Service are damping down the wreckage" the supervising officer confirmed "Explosion occurred in a solicitors office on the fifth floor up there" he indicated upwards to the blown out windows in the side of the building.

"That made a hole" Tracy commented as she looked upwards and observed the damage.

"Watch out for the debris" the officer cautioned "Quite a bit of broken glass about."

"Ok then" Tracy confirmed "Keep the usual audience well back and send the bomb squad and forensics guys straight up as soon as they get here."

"Do we have an ETA on them Maam?" the officer asked.

"God only knows" Tracy admitted "I passed them on my bike about three miles back so unless they get out and walk..."

"I'll send a traffic unit down and try to exact them" the officer confirmed.

"Good idea" Tracy agreed "I'm heading on in."

"Oh by the way Ma'am, the lifts are out" the officer called as Tracy departed "Explosion blew the power trips."

"Good thing it's only the fifth floor then" Tracy remarked wryly.

Heading inside the large entrance area of the massive tower block building, Tracy found the foyer full of Fire Service personnel as this was the area being used for their incident control point.

"Divisional Commander Tracy Caverner" she announced to the Fire Service officer in charge, brandishing her warrant card in identification even though there were few people in the city who were not aware of who she was "Is it safe to go up yet?" she asked.

"Pretty much" the Fire Chief confirmed "The place is a bit of a mess but there appear to be no secondary devices that we can detect."

"Right then" Tracy declared "Mind if I go up and take a look?"

"You'll need one of these" the Fire Chief called passing her a fireman's hard hat.

"Not really my colour" Tracy remarked as she put it on.

"With the mess up there, it won't be staying that colour for long" the Fire Chief confirmed.

It took a few minutes for Tracy to make her way up to the incident floor. As she opened the fire door from the stairwell and entered the corridor, she was confronted by a scene of devastation, generator powered portable lights illuminating the damage with broken glass, blackened battered walls and light fittings hanging at angles from the ceilings.

"What a mess" Tracy remarked as she carefully made her way through the wreckage to what remained of the solicitors office where she found a couple of fire fighters damping down isolated pockets of smouldering.

"Watch out on the floor there" one of the fire fighters cautioned "It's been weakened a bit just there."

"Seat of the explosion?" Tracy asked looking around but not being able to make much out of the blackened mess.

"The reception desk just to your left" the fire fighter confirmed "Word is it was some sort of parcel that detonated."

"That's three in over an hour" Tracy responded with a grim feeling in her stomach that this was not the last such incident that was likely to occur "What casualties were there?"

"A lot of cuts and bruises inside and out caused by falling debris plus four serious injuries" the fire fighter confirmed "The receptionist and the postman are critical, the other two were lawyers, stable apparently."

"Ah, a postman" Tracy picked up on a key fact "Now there is a coincidence."

"Did I miss something?" the fire fighter asked.

"Someone keeps blowing stuff up this morning" Tracy explained "This is third such incident in just over an hour."

"And it was looking like such a nice pleasant day this morning" the fire fighter remarked.

"Control from Lima Mike Zero One" Tracy called into her radio "Someone there patch me through to the incident investigation room if there is one set up yet."

"Gold Control" came Simon Fuller's voice over the radio.

"Ah there you are" Tracy responded "How are things at that end?" she asked.

"Slight panic at the moment" Fuller admitted as he looked around from his heavily computer laden desk at the major incident control room which was in the midst of being made operational "It is the first time we have used it for two years and we just discovered half the furniture is missing and some of the electrics don't work."

"Typical Government contract installation then" Tracy admitted "Anyway, I can confirm our Canary Wharf incident is definitely suspicious so chalk up another one."

"The Commander is on the telephone to the Prime Minister right now giving him the good news" Fuller confirmed "Unfortunately he is out of the country which means..."

"...we get that dumb cow of a Justice Minister" Tracy concluded with a depressed sigh "Brace yourself for fireworks."

"The bets are already being placed" Fuller confirmed.

"The guys from the Bomb Squad are arriving now" Tracy announced as behind her, white full body suited officers with their forensic equipment arrived "I'm heading back to the office."

"Is everybody here?" the Commander asked from his position at the front of the Major Incident Control briefing room as in front of him sat numerous representatives of various divisions of the Service as well as other agencies.

"In the last hour and a half we have had three explosions across London" the Commander began as alongside him, Fuller projected a map showing the locations of

the incidents onto the screen behind him "One right outside in Victoria Street at eight thirty, a second in the post room of a finance company in Threadneedle Street fifteen minutes later and the third in the offices of a Solicitors in Canary Wharf half an hour ago."

"What's the connection?" one of the officers asked.

"Well apart from big bangs" the Commander responded "one was in a post van, the second in a post room and the third after a postman had delivered a parcel so best guess is we are looking at a good old fashioned mail bomber."

"We haven't had one of those in a while" Sir Richard commented "Do we know anything about the devices?" he asked.

"Small but powerful devices" Philips, the head of the Bomb Squad confirmed "We have a good description of the Threadneedle Street device and initial reports suggest the Canary Wharf one may have been similar."

"Trouble is" the Commander continued "as all three devices exploded, there is very little left to examine which means we need a break and recovering one of these devices in tact will do for a start."

"Has the Royal Mail said anything yet?" Collins asked.

"The Postmaster General was on the telephone ten minutes ago" the Commander confirmed "He is not a happy bunny."

"There has to be a connection between the bank and the solicitors" Collins remarked "If we find that then we may be able to get somewhere with this."

"Sounds reasonable" the Commander agreed "Let's concentrate on three key areas. One, the bomber, who is he and what does he want. Two, the devices, lets find out everything we can about how they were made. Finally three, the targets, what is the link and who else is likely to be receiving an unpleasant surprise."

"I'm having records crosschecked and any histories that may be relevant chased up" Collins confirmed "Just in case this joker is someone we have encountered before."

"I checked with my opposite number in Belfast" the Commander added "Just on the off chance this is one of our Irish friends taking up their old hobbies."

"What's the casualty count at the moment?" Sir Edward asked.

"One confirmed dead and a load of minor walking wounded from the Victoria Street incident" the Commander confirmed as he consulted his notes "No injuries from Threadneedle Street and two seriously injured plus more walking wounded from the Canary Wharf job according to the wife."

"We've been lucky so far" Collins commented "I've seen devices like this in the past do a lot of damage."

"Well then" the Commander declared "Until we come up with something more concrete and some doors for me to kick down, I will leave you guys to it, I have a desk load of tedious paperwork to sort out."

"We'll call you if we come up with anything" Collins confirmed "I just know you will be itching for an excuse to leave the paperwork and get out there."

"Indeed" the Commander confirmed.

Outside in Victoria Street, the forensic suited officers of the Scenes of Crime and Bomb Squad teams were continuing their minute investigation of the scene with the street firmly sealed off and the remains of the post office van now enclosed inside a blue portable tarpaulin tent.

Instead of going directly to his office as he had originally intended, curiosity had got the better of the Commander and he had come down to have a look at the scene for himself where he looked on from the inner tape barrier cordon, not proceeding any further so as to avoid any potential contamination of evidence.

"Found anything yet?" the Commander asked the supervising forensic officer Doctor Jane Fredericks who was showing minute interest in a small item lying in the road and marked by a sign with a number on it.

"I think I may have found part of the device" Doctor Fredericks confirmed as with her gloved hand she carefully picked the object up once her colleague had photographed it in situ.

"I'll take your word for it" the Commander remarked as the Doctor brought over the badly burnt object in the palm of her hand "What am I looking at here?" he asked as he put his reading glasses on.

"Possibly part of the detonator" the Doctor confirmed "There are some moulded markings just about readable on the other side which means we may be able to trace it."

"Guard that with your life" the Commander strongly suggested as the Doctor placed the object in a clear plastic evidence bag to preserve it, "It's the only lead we have at the moment."

As the Doctor returned to her work, the Commander looked up as he heard the engine of a powerful motor bike approaching to see Tracy returning.

"Did I miss anything?" Tracy asked as she came to a stop alongside her husband and dismounted, taking off her helmet.

"We may have part of the device" the Commander confirmed "How was Canary Wharf?" he asked.

"Smouldering quietly" Tracy responded "In a confined space it made a hell of a mess. I would be very surprised if we find anything in that mess."

"Well so far my love it's been nearly an hour without anything going bang" the Commander consulted his old pocket watch "Maybe its over."

"Nothing is ever that simple" Tracy confirmed as they took each others arms and walked back towards Broadway and the main entrance of New Scotland Yard.

"The trouble with cases like this is we wind up spending an endless eternity searching for some faceless unknown individual" the Commander remarked as they reached the entrance in the shadow of the famous revolving three sided sign.

"We'll get him" Tracy reassured him "or her for that matter...." her voice tailed off as she saw a post van pass them by in the street.

"What's wrong?" the Commander asked.

"Sorry love" Tracy returned to her husband "After getting showered with wreckage this morning, I was just getting a bit apprehensive that's all."

"It's your imagination" the Commander responded as they turned to head inside.

Suddenly an explosion broke out, blowing out a number of windows on the second floor almost directly above.

"What the...?" the Commander looked up but reacted quickly, pushing Tracy ahead of him through the doors inside and then covering her with himself as debris came raining down.

No sooner had the echoes of the explosion which shook the building started to die down than the fire alarm started to screech loudly.

"Are you all right love?" the Commander asked Tracy as he helped her back to her feet.

"I think so" she confirmed "So much for imagination."

"Make sure the roll call is taken" the Commander insisted as he looked around making a visual assessment of the situation "and get as far away from the building as you can."

"And where are you going?" Tracy asked as she realised her husband was not leaving but heading into the building.

"Where angels fear to tread as usual" he admitted as he disappeared from sight.

As Tracy organised the evacuation of the building at ground level with a tidal wave of personnel emerging from various exits around the site, the Commander proceeded

directly to the second floor where he found the scene of the explosion to be the devastated corridor and surrounding offices centred around the post room.

"Is there anyone in there?" the Commander called down the corridor as he surveyed the wreckage where a number of small secondary fires were taking hold.

There was no obvious response to his enquiry so being careful amid falling debris, the Commander made his way through the wreckage to the post room where a fire was burning quite fiercely with such a bright intensity that he had to shield his eyes from the glare of the flames as well as the heat.

"Hello?" he called again whereupon a low groan was heard from the far corner.

"Hang on mate" the Commander responded as he saw some form of movement come from the location that was the source of the groan.

Kicking some burning wreckage out of the way, the Commander managed to reach the person buried under a collapsed shelf, lifting it up and revealing a badly burnt officer beneath.

Normal procedure at this point would have been to leave the casualty in situ until medical help arrived but here it was obvious that the surrounding area was dangerously unstable and likely to collapse at any time.

"It's ok, I got you" the Commander reassured the officer as he carefully picked him up off the floor before heading back across the room to the corridor.

As he reached the corridor the Commander reacted with sudden shock as he came across a second casualty near the corner of the room, clearly dead from having been very close to the source of the blast.

"Sorry friend" the Commander called regretfully as he passed on out of the room carrying the survivor to relative safety.

Outside, Tracy had got everyone who had evacuated the building together out of harms way in the designated area just as the Fire Brigade appliances arrived.

"What's the situation?" the Fire Chief asked as he was joined on the pavement in front of the building by a worried Tracy.

"As far as I can work out all bar three are out" she confirmed "Two officers never came out and one went back in to get them."

"I don't suppose I need to ask who that is" the Fire Chief remarked as he gathered his people together "Right guys, we've got persons reported, lets get this under control quickly, find the missing and confirm building evac quickly please."

With well practiced efficiency, the fire fighters proceeded into the building, led by a team equipped with breathing apparatus.

As they reached the second floor, the leading fire fighters met the Commander dragging the casualty he had rescued to the top of the fire exit stairs as in the corridor beyond the fire and thick smoke was visibly growing in intensity.

"It's all right, we've got him" one of the fire fighters confirmed as he took over carrying the casualty from the Commander.

"Any sign of the other one?" the Fire Chief asked the Commander.

"Down there very much dead I am afraid" the Commander responded between severe coughing as the effects of inhaling the thick acrid smoke were overcoming him.

"Right, you out" the Fire Chief ordered whereupon the Commander who was in no real condition to argue was helped down the stairs to safety.

Outside, quite a crowd was gathering drawn by the unfolding drama as they watched from behind hastily erected barricades as more Fire Brigade appliances arrived.

"What happened?" Tracy's identical twin sister Jennifer asked as she joined her outside the main entrance having run all the way up the road from her VIP Protection Division offices in Cardinal Place as soon as she heard that there had been an incident.

"Best guess is we had one of those unpleasant deliveries that seem so popular today" Tracy confirmed as they looked up at the smoke billowing from the blown out windows on the second floor.

"Where's the boss?" Jennifer asked as she looked around having expected to see the Commander around.

"Take a wild guess" Tracy nodded towards the building.

"Oh no not again" Fuller remarked as he joined them.

"Hang on, looks like someone is coming out" Jennifer commented as they saw a team of fire fighters coming out of the entrance bearing a stretcher.

"Paramedic!" one of the fire officers called as they emerged into the open air whereupon a team of medical personnel moved forward to meet them.

"What have we got?" the Doctor with them asked as he began to examine the badly burnt patient on the stretcher on the way to a waiting ambulance that had been brought forward.

"Serious burns and blast injuries" the fire fighter confirmed "No identity or medical history though."

Tracy and the others looked on concerned as the stretcher passed them before she proceeded up to the entrance where she encountered the chief fire officer at the doorway.

"I believe this is yours" he informed Tracy as he stepped aside to allow the Commander past, covered in soot and coughing badly.

"Are you all right love?" Tracy asked concerned as she took her husband and escorted him away from the building.

"I think I need a cup of tea" the Commander confirmed as he began to recover a bit now he was out in the open air.

"That I think I can arrange" Tracy confirmed as she comforted him.

"Chaos in central London as a number of explosions result in major road closures" the newsreader on BBC News 24 declared at the top of the eleven o'clock news headline round up.

Watching as the sketchy details that the media had of that morning's events were relayed was a small man in his late fifties hunched over a workbench in a converted garden shed.

He looked up from what he was working on to watch the news broadcast as it continued on his elderly twelve inch portable black and white television set with its makeshift wire coat hanger aerial.

"So far four separate incidents have been reported" the reporter for the BBC continued "The first was in the midst of the morning rush hour when a post office van exploded in Victoria Street in the heart of Westminster."

"Well that's annoying" the mysterious man remarked under his breath before taking a gulp of tea from the thermos flask cup on the bench.

"This was swiftly followed by two further incidents in quick succession" the reporter continued "an unconfirmed parcel bomb to the rear of the premises of the United Bank International in Threadneedle Street and a further explosion that has reportedly destroyed a solicitor's office in Canary Wharf."

"You missed one" the man remarked.

"We also now have reports of an explosion at New Scotland Yard in the last half hour with the building evacuated and fire appliances on the scene" the reporter continued.

"Ah there it is" the man responded with a smirk of satisfaction as the television showed a brief shot taken from a distance of a haze of smoke in Broadway amid a large cluster of emergency service vehicles.

"There are casualties reported at the Victoria Street and Canary Wharf incidents whilst unconfirmed reports say there is one badly injured, one dead and one serious smoke inhalation at Scotland Yard" the reporter confirmed.

"I wonder who?" the man asked quietly.

"The National Anti-Terrorism Committee is now in session" the reporter carried on "A meeting of the COBRA Cabinet Committee is to be called later and we are expecting a press conference fronted by the Regional Administrator General of the National Security & Police Service in approximately half an hour."

"Damm..." the man responded, chucking the screwdriver he was holding onto the workbench with clear irritation.

The mystery stranger in his shed workshop was not the only person playing close attention to a television at that point for across the other side of the city, young Jack Thornton was passing an electrical retailer in Leyton when he noticed the news report on the television in the window.

"What's occurring?" he asked as his curiosity got the better of him and he stuck his head around the door.

"Oh morning Jack" the store keeper responded "Some kind of parcel bomb explosion apparently" he confirmed "They seem to have been going off all over the place."

"Nasty" Jack commented "Any idea who is behind it?"

"Just the usual twenty four hour news service idle speculation" the shopkeeper confirmed "I.e. repeat the same three scant facts and twenty seconds of fuzzy footage ad infinitum until someone actually declares what is going on."

Jack continued to watch the television as the news presenter announced they were going live to New Scotland Yard in a few moments for a live statement.

"How do I look?" the Commander asked as Tracy helped him smarten up his uniform as best as they could.

"Like a mackerel" Tracy confirmed "Lightly smoked yet still full of flavour."

"I'm not sure quite how to take that" the Commander remarked.

"Watch out" Fuller marked aside as he passed them on the pavement with an earnest warning "Klingons off the starboard bow."

"What the...?" the Commander responded, matched by a quizzical look from Tracy until her eyes alighted on the reason for Fuller's warning which was getting out of a ministerial escort car nearby.

"Oh bugger" Tracy responded "It's that cow of a Justice Minister. Will that woman do anything that doesn't involve beaming her mug in front of the media?"

"We are a media driven society apparently" the Commander confirmed as he brushed himself down "Beside she doesn't have the talent or intelligence for anything else unless you count sitting in a think tank trying to devise pointless mission statements."

"Well here she comes" Tracy confirmed with regret as the Justice Minister Baroness Jacqueline de Wente approached with purpose.

"Shields up and phasers on stun" the Commander quietly suggested.

"Ah Administrator General" the Justice Minister declared as she joined them near the New Scotland Yard sign which was stationary for a change as the power to it as well as the building itself was currently cut off.

"Mrs de Wente" the Commander responded.

"Ms actually" she reminded him not that Commander cared one jot "So, Islamic extremists?"

"Just because they are the subject of this weeks bandwagon does not automatically mean that its them" the Commander cautioned her sternly "Besides the evidence points to this being home grown talent."

"And how exactly did you fathom that one out?" the Minister demanded.

"Its my job in case you hadn't noticed" the Commander responded "Besides, unlike the inept 'B' list Islamic extremists we have had lately, these devices were professional and most importantly they actually worked as you can see" he indicated the blown out windows above them through which were visible fire fighters damping down the smouldering remains of the room.

"Well let's get this news conference done" the Minister declared rubbing her hands with grateful expectation "I'll lead off shall I?"

"Wouldn't want to deprive you of your thirst for publicity" the Commander sarcastically remarked under his breath.

"I'm sorry?" the Minister responded having not heard what he had said.

"Just thinking aloud" the Commander responded as they approached the media scrum of reporters and photographers who were being held back but immediately started calling out questions before they had even taken their positions.

"Ladies and gentleman" the Minister called with a shrill voice, clearly enjoying the oxygen of publicity "The spectre of terrorism once again casts its foreboding shadow over our community."

The Commander looked on and much to the amusement of those watching rolled his eyes upwards as the Minister went into full flannel mode.

"Any minute now she'll turn into Winston Churchill" Tracy remarked as she watched from the sidelines.

"We shall fight them on the streets..." the Minister continued.

"Told you..." Tracy confirmed.

"...and as a combined inter service community orientated crime defeating unit we will stand together and defeat these extremists and show we shall not let policy be dictated by wanton violence and destruction" the Minister babbled on "This is our time to stand up and be counted as the righteous God fearing loyal majority and send a clear message that we shall not be defeated either now or in the future."

The Minister duly finished with a flourish, so completely enveloped in her own self importance that she failed to notice that everyone watching had not a clue what she was going on about.

"I'll now hand you over to the Regional Administrator General, Edward Regal" the Minister declared.

"Regent" the Commander corrected her but she completely failed to notice.

"Right, enough of the flannel, lets get down to facts" the Commander declared, effectively dismissing the Minister's speech in one fell swoop, much to the amusement of the press.

"So far today, four explosive devices which we believe were all delivered via the postal system have detonated across the City this morning" the Commander explained.

"The first destroyed a Royal Mail van in Victoria Street in the City of Westminster killing the driver and causing injuries to a number of passers by" he continued "This was followed by a non casualty causing explosion in the post room of a banking firm in Threadneedle Street and then a Solicitors office in Canary Wharf, the latter incident causing two serious and several less severe injuries."

The media paid closer attention to the Commander's informative and direct briefing than they did the Ministers pointless ramblings a few moments earlier.

"The fourth and so far last explosive incident" the Commander carried on "occurred approximately one hour ago in the post room on the second floor of New Scotland Yard."

Many at that point looked up at the blown out windows visible above from which only a few wisps of smoke were now gently emanating.

"At this time there is one fatality, one seriously injured and a number of walking wounded" he continued "Most of these being smoke inhalation. At this time all operations at the Yard are suspended with Control Room services, command and control now operating out of alternative premises in Cardinal Place and Holborn."

A brief look to his left saw that the Minister was looking off into the distance trying to project an image of self imposed over importance and failing miserably.

"At this time no form of contact has yet been received from any group or individual who may be responsible for these devices" the Commander carried on with his best deep authoritative voice which Tracy always found incredibly sexy "Until such a time as we have completed forensic examination of the scenes, we will not be releasing any further details just yet, I do however ask that the public remain vigilant and alert, reporting any package received that they consider suspicious in any way."

"Do you expect there to be any further devices?" one reporter asked from the crowd.

"Anything's possible, chance decides" the Commander responded.

"Could this be the responsibility of some form of Islamic extremists?" another reporter asked.

"Unlikely I would have thought" the Commander confirmed "These don't match their M.O., too professional for a starter."

"Do you expect to make arrests soon?" came the next question.

"I can assure you that as soon as names are in the frame" the Commander confirmed with insistence "I shall be diplomatically kicking in doors and dragging people away for a quiet little chat."

This last remark was classic Commander and provoked a laugh from the press as he brought the briefing to a close.

"Right if that is all" he declared "I'll go and see what the damage is."

The Justice Minister had got herself all built up to launch back into another of her incomprehensible political speeches when the press took the Commander's closure of the briefing as read and moved off, taking the wind firmly out of her sails.

"Oh thanks..." she responded before turning around to see she had been abandoned.

"You can go in now Sir" the Fire Chief confirmed as Tracy and the Commander arrived at the main entrance where various fire fighters were gathering up their equipment, their job now largely complete.

"Thanks guys" Tracy confirmed.

"Has anyone seen the Building Manager around?" the Commander asked.

"Steve is up on the damaged floor" the Fire Chief confirmed "Be careful as you head up the stairs" he cautioned "The power is still off and there is water coming down the stairwell down there."

"Where angels fear to tread once more love?" Tracy asked.

"Indeed" the Commander confirmed as they headed inside, crossing the darkened reception area and then accessing the stairwell.

A couple of minutes later they were up on the second floor examining the damage along with the scientific officers from the forensic services division and the large figure of Steve, the building manager.

"Best put these on" Steve insisted as he passed the two officers hard hats "We've got loose ceiling panels all over the place."

"What are the chances of getting the rest of the place running?" the Commander asked.

"Well I've got the power company down in the switch room now trying to bypass this section" Steve confirmed "Most importantly we should have the water and gas on in the canteen within the hour so I reckon we can be near fully operational by the end of the day."

"Sounds good to me" Tracy responded "What about our scientific boffin friends?" she asked.

"Well it's a mess" the leading forensic officer admitted as he continued to sift through the charred wreckage littering the floor "However I think we can safely say it's the same type of device as the others."

"Well that's a relief" the Commander wryly remarked "For a while there I was beginning to worry."

"I've got a couple lab rats swabbing at various locations" the forensic officer confirmed "With a bit of luck we should be able to work out the chemical composition of the explosive used."

"Well I will take any lead you can find" the Commander admitted as he was looking at a hampered investigation with few leads but a lot of damage.

"Watch out!" Commander Brian Forrester, the chief of the traffic division warned as he popped his head around the door as he was on his way to his own department on the sixth floor "Madam is on her way up."

"Oh not her again" the Commander remarked quietly as the Justice Minister appeared and gingerly walked through the wreckage, trying not to ruin her very expensive designer shoes.

"You ran off Commander" she admonished him as she joined them, not even noticing the scene of devastation around her.

"Well in case you hadn't noticed" the Commander responded with a noticeably irritated tone which had Tracy nearby bracing herself to leap in and diffuse the situation if necessary "I am kind of busy at the moment."

"Yes indeed" the Minister responded "I am still waiting for your response to our community positive crime focus committee."

"Oh for crying out loud..." the Commander muttered under his breath as Tracy made a silent indication across the hall to Forrester who went off to one side to make a discreet radio call.

"It is essential in this day of modern policing and the current political environment that we have a positive image, tag line and mission statement and so far I have heard nothing useful from your office" the Minister continued as the Commander was forced to guide her out of the way of two coroner officers who were trying to get past.

"Hang on, I did submit a suggestion" the Commander recalled off hand.

"I appreciate that you are 'old school' but somehow Commander I feel that 'Nick the bastards' isn't exactly what we are looking for" the Minister sternly responded.

"Well that was my second idea" the Commander admitted "I felt that 'Kneecap the buggers' might have been pushing the envelope a bit too much as you would say."

"We need to be concentrating our resources on key objectives in this consumer led justice sector" the Minister continued.

"Any minute now..." Tracy remarked aside to Forrester.

"Would you please go away?" the Commander asked directly "In case you haven't been keeping up on current affairs, I am trying to run a major section of the National Security & Police Service here including catching a mad bomber."

"There is no need to be negative with me Commander" the Minister responded still blissfully unaware that the Commander could not stand her.

"Hold it a second" the Commander called to the two coroner's officers as they carried their now loaded stretcher past them.

"Come here" the Commander insisted "Meet Lieutenant Royce, a career officer of fifteen years" he lifted back the plastic body cover to reveal the badly burned face "In half an hour's time I have to go and visit his wife to tell her and his two kids their dad will never be coming home so if you don't mind, kindly take your mission statements, initiatives, highly spun political double talk bollocks and any thinking outside of boxes you wish to waste your time on and get out of my building before I have you arrested for obstruction."

"I'd get out of here before my husband loses his temper" Tracy advised the Minister.

"Surely you wouldn't seriously consider arresting a serving member of her majesty's government?" the Minister asked, obviously unaware of the Commander's reputation and through dislike of politicians.

"Oh I am serious" the Commander confirmed with a wry smile as he went over to the broken window and looked down at the street below "and don't call me Shirley."

"Unbelievable..." the Minister remarked.

"Here, is that your motor getting carted off by the bomb squad?" the Commander pointed outside.

"Oh hell!" the Minister responded as she made a rapid exit.

"Nicely done guys" the Commander responded as he and Forrester exchanged a high five in celebration at getting one over the Minister.

"Well after all that, I think I had better go and see if my office is still in one piece" the Commander confirmed as he and Tracy arm in arm proceeded to the stairs.

At a property developers office in Mayfair, the postman had just arrived with the usual sack of mail but being well aware of events elsewhere in the city, he decided to check the contents before handing it over to the secretary.

"I bet you guys are nervous today" the secretary commented as the postman looked in the sack.

"You can say that again" the postman agreed "That's why I thought I would just check on the off chance."

"Do you know what these things look like?" the secretary asked.

"My mate Gary delivered the one that went off at Bank" he confirmed "He reckons they are posting tubes with a warm to the touch feel to it."

"Well that narrows it down" the secretary remarked as the postman suddenly stopped looking in the bag "What?" she asked as she saw the postman step back slowly.

"Get out of here" he insisted "and call the fuzz."

"Is there anybody there....?" Tracy asked spookily as they arrived in the near totally dark corridor of the top floor where the batteries of the emergency lighting had now run out.

"Anyone got a shilling for the meter?" the Commander remarked "That's what my old grandmother used to say, odd thing was she only had gas lamps."

"There is even a smoky smell up here" Tracy commented as they entered the Commander's office.

"Actually I think you will find that's my uniform after my earlier exploits" the Commander admitted as he lifted and sniffed the left lapel of his uniform tunic.

"It is kind of romantic up here in the dark though" Tracy looked around the darkened office with only the sparse daylight coming through the slats of the window blinds providing any illumination.

"I love you" the Commander admitted before they kissed only to have this loving moment interrupted by the telephone ringing.

"Must be the physic hotline" Tracy joked with her characteristic giggle as the Commander reluctantly let go of his wife and went over to the desk to pick up the telephone.

"Hello" the Commander answered.

"Good afternoon Administrator General" came a polite voice "I see you have been having fun with my little toys."

"Good afternoon" the Commander responded with a polite but business like stance as he sat down behind his desk "May I enquire as to whom I am talking?"

"I think it would be unwise to disclose my name at this point" the caller confirmed as the Commander put the call on speakerphone so Tracy could also hear it "However for the purpose of this and future conversations you may call me..." he paused for thought "...Babylon."

"Catchy" the Commander admitted "I hope there aren't five of you. How do I know you are genuine and not some mad hoaxer."

"A fair point" Babylon conceded "My proof will be arriving in your office any moment now. I am monitoring many forms of communication and I can see now that a call is making its way through the system and should be reaching the radio of your good lady wife around about..... now."

"Lima Mike Zero One from Beta Control" came a call over Tracy's radio.

"See, would I lie to you?" Babylon remarked.

"Lima Mike One" Tracy responded as she and the Commander exchanged concerned looks "Err go ahead."

"Report just came from a property company office in Mayfair" came the call from the reserve Control Room down the other end of Victoria Street in Cardinal Place "Looks like they may have a device that hasn't gone off."

"Get the bomb squad boys down there fast and confirm building and surrounding area is evacuated" Tracy confirmed as she gave her husband a wave of farewell before leaving the office "Show me on the way."

"Ok then" the Commander returned to the conversation with the mysterious Babylon "How did you manage that?" he asked.

"In this day and age of interconnected global communications" Babylon explained "You would be surprised at how easy it is to access the global digital communication matrix across its many plains."

"Blimey" the Commander commented on the double talk "Are you a politician or something?"

"Oh no, I actually work for a living" Babylon confirmed.

"So assuming that you are our local friendly purveyor of explosives" the Commander asked "What is it you want?"

"All in good time my friend" Babylon confirmed "Today has been merely a demonstration of my talents, I just wanted to let you know that there will be more if my instructions that I shall be delivering tomorrow are not carefully followed."

"What's this all about?" the Commander asked.

"Just a little good old fashioned collection of debts owed" Babylon confirmed "All will become clear in time."

"So when can I expect your call?" the Commander enquired.

"There will be no further telephone conversation between us" Babylon explained "The telecommunications network has a habit of springing leaks, you know walls have ears and all that. No, my next communication will be through the personal column of tomorrow morning's Standard."

"I hope this doesn't preclude the possibility of a meeting in person" the Commander remarked "I'd look forward to a little one to one chat."

"Anything is possible" Babylon admitted "Until later, goodbye."

Jack brushed down his rather battered school uniform as he alighted from the Central Line service at Bethnal Green before heading along the recently restored platform to the escalator landing and ascending up to the sub surface ticket hall.

"Afternoon Jack!" the station supervisor called as the school boy passed through the ticket barrier with his Oyster Card.

"Hello Geoff" Jack responded, not his usual cheery self as he clearly had something on his mind, a sense he had had since picking up and reading a discarded copy of the Standard newspaper on the journey back from his school.

"You all right mate?" Geoff asked sensing the young lad's worry.

"It's probably nothing" Jack confirmed "I've got a lot on my mind it seems at the moment."

"I know what you mean" Geoff agreed "Then again I am not the one trying to juggle school, a major black economy trading business and home life all at the age of twelve."

"Eleven" Jack responded "I am not twelve until the day after tomorrow, besides what home life?"

"Oh yes, sorry I forgot" Geoff replied "So how's life at that children's home place?"

"Oh can't complain" Jack confirmed evasively, hiding the fact that since his parents had been killed in a hit and run car crash almost two years previously he had been living off his own wits and initiative, avoiding certain elements of the authorities wherever possible.

"Anyway I had best get going" Jack confirmed "I have two cases of chocolate to try and find for some friends of mine before the morning."

"Take care" Geoff called as he watched Jack leave the station, heading up the steps, emerging outside on one corner of the busy road junction outside.

No one in the bustling street outside took any notice of the boy as he walked up the street, reading the Standard as he went, Jack's ability to merge into the background making him go unnoticed which was the way he preferred life.

The old factory complex which for the time being he called home was twenty minutes walk from the station and much like himself, was a slightly down at heel forgotten building that no one ever took any real notice of.

Entering the sealed off site via a hidden access behind some corrugated steel sheeting, Jack quickly made his way up through the long disused building to the old offices on the top floor which was his impromptu home and the head office for Jack's little trading sidelines.

Looking out of the window, he had a great panoramic view across the east end of the city with the high vaulted roof of Liverpool Street mainline railway station in the distance.

As it began to rain with the gentle tapping of the raindrops against the dusty cracked glass, Jack looked down below into the street where he noticed a red Royal Mail van approaching which was unusual for that time of day.

Even more unusual was the fact that it was pulling into the old vehicle access to the disused factory.

"Now would you be our friend from this morning perchance?" Jack commented as he watched the driver, a rather elderly looking man in full postman's uniform alight from the van, unlock and open the old gate and then return to his vehicle before driving it through and around to the old deliveries bay.

Jack reacted quickly by heading across the old office floor to the opposite side and looking through the fire exit door which lead to a rusty external staircase and afforded a better view of what was going on.

"Hello again" Jack remarked quietly under his breath as now he had a closer view he recognised the registration number of the van to be identical to that which visited in mysterious circumstances earlier that morning.

The man in the postman's uniform got out of his van and went around to the side door of the vehicle where, once open he was seen to extract a large grey box that, using his coat to shield its unseen contents from the drizzly rain, he took inside the old north wing of the building.

"I think this warrants a closer inspection" Jack remarked as he grabbed his school uniform blazer and headed out, down the fire escape until he reached the roof of the connecting building.

Walking carefully along the length of the neglected and tatty roof to the north wing, Jack was able to use a broken roof light to look down into the old factory floor area where he could see the man in the postman's uniform unpacking the box he had brought inside on an old table that also had some sophisticated looking tools carefully laid out on it.

Unaware he had an audience, the mysterious man sat down at the table on an old packing crate and proceeded to assemble something from the components on the desk, however his body was between Jack and the table obscuring his line of sight.

Jack continued to observe as best he could despite cold rain trickling down the back of his neck as the stranger could be seen to use a soldering iron along with other tools to assemble something that was then packed into a card posting tube.

A second item was then assembled by the stranger identical to the first which, once completed was also placed inside a grey mail sack.

When the stranger had finished working on what appeared to be a third similar object, he got up from the table, neatly placed his tools back in the case he had brought them in before picking up the mail sack and departing.

Jack moved across the roof to the other side to watch as the stranger duly got back in the post office van, started the engine and reversed back down the way he had come, through the gates and off the site.

Once the stranger had closed the old gates and locked them, Jack got down from his rather precarious viewpoint and made his way down another flight of external fire exit steps to the old loading dock area where the van had been parked a few minutes before.

“What were you up to?” Jack wondered as he cautiously climbed up onto the loading dock ramp before entering the old factor floor area, the large decaying old door creaking eerily as he pushed it aside to gain entry to this part of the old complex where normally he did not go.

The table at which the stranger had been working was still there and with a number of items still present on it which Jack proceeded to go over to and examine.

Along with the neatly presented tool box there was also a wooden case containing various electrical components including as Jack looked through them switches, reels of cable and twelve volt batteries.

The metal case next to it was sealed with a very firm latch to keep the contents air tight and it was this that Jack looked at next. He struggled initially to release the latch with his small fingers but after a minute or so of struggling, it released and he was able to open it to reveal a number of carefully wrapped packages containing what appeared to be some sort of putty.

He prodded one of the paper encased packages gently with his finger and found that whatever it was contained therein was quite soft to the touch but also slightly warm which was surprising. Looking around Jack also then noticed the box containing empty cardboard posting tubes beneath the table and it was then that he realised what all this added up to.

“Oh hell!” Jack suddenly responded as he slammed shut the lid of the metal case and quickly secured its latch before stepping back slowly.

“Ok Jack mate, get a grip” he told himself as he tried to regulate his breathing but deep down there was no getting over the feeling of extreme worry and fear that was building up inside him.

“So I have a mad bomber in my basement” Jack concluded wryly “Happens all the time hereabouts doesn't it?”

Making sure that everything had been left exactly as he had found it, Jack left the building and headed back out into the old loading dock area where he looked around as the incessant rain continued to fall around him.

He was in a dilemma here, the right thing for Jack to do would be to call in the authorities but then that would have meant leaving his rather impromptu home and being found by the Social Services, not to mention others who may be looking for him but yet he had to do something.

Reaching into his front blazer pocket, Jack produced his Oyster Card holder in the other half of which were a number of cards and bits of paper, one of which he

removed to reveal a business contact type card with the crest of the National Police & Security Service on it and the direct dial telephone number at New Scotland Yard for the Regional Administrator General.

“Time to cash in a favour I think” Jack concluded before moving off.

“For the fourth and final time, get back behind the barrier please or you are likely to be blown to pieces!” Tracy called as she stood in the middle of the road waving pedestrians back away from the office building where the latest bomb alert call had come from.

As a number of patrol officers struggled to keep the rush hour commuters and curious passers by back behind the taped line, the armour plated van of the Bomb Squad arrived under full escort and amid a cacophony of sirens and blue flashing lights.

“Well you guys took your time” Tracy remarked as the head of the Bomb Squad team disembarked his vehicle looking somewhat tired and the worse for wear.

“It's been a hell of a day” he admitted as he grabbed a case containing his tools from the back of the van.

“I know what you mean” Tracy agreed.

“Most of our squad is spread right across the City at the moment” the Bomb Squad officer confirmed “Is the traffic always this bad in Piccadilly this time of the evening?” he asked.

“Usually its worse” Tracy admitted “I take it you are new around here then?” she asked.

“Lieutenant Commander Alan Shine” he introduced himself “Transferred from Wessex and West Country last week, wish I hadn't now though.”

“Device is in an office on the third floor” Tracy pointed ahead to the sealed off and evacuated Edwardian style office building a short distance down the road “Everyone is out and we have an exclusion zone for two hundred metres in each direction” she confirmed.

“I suggest Maam we make it five hundred metres” Shine suggested as he gathered his team together, some of them in full armour blast protection suits “These bombs have been getting steadily more powerful each time as the day has gone on.”

“Consider it done” Tracy confirmed “I'll leave the tricky stuff to you guys.”

“Thanks... I think” Shine confirmed as he proceeded to lead his team up the road to the target building at the centre of the alert.

“Ok ladies and gentlemen” Tracy called over her loudhailer, her voice echoing all around the tall buildings that lined either side of the street “Let's move everyone right back please, remain calm and do not panic.”

Reluctantly under the guidance of further officers who had now arrived to reinforce the perimeter of the scene, the crowds began to move back whilst vehicles in the surrounding streets were stopped and either abandoned or diverted out of the new enlarged exclusion zone.

“Someone find me a map!” Tracy called generally as another patrol car arrived on the scene and to her surprise her twin sister Jennifer got out and joined her.

“Here you go” Jennifer brought the A to Z from the car “Having fun are we Sis?” she asked.

“Like my friend from the Bomb Squad just said” Tracy admitted “It’s been a hell of a long day, anyway what are you doing here?” she asked.

“We are now officially down to the 'all hands to the pump' level” Jennifer confirmed “Besides, any VIP's and politicians worth their salt tucked themselves safely away in their country constituencies, their mistresses bedrooms or a bunker somewhere hours ago so I and some of my guys are filling in wherever we are needed.”

“Welcome to the party” Tracy confirmed as she took the A to Z map and consulted “Oh bugger!” she suddenly exclaimed.

“Something wrong?” Jennifer asked.

“Five hundred metres included Green Park Station” Tracy realised.

“Close Green Park Tube in the height of the evening rush?” Jennifer exclaimed “Boy are we going to be popular!”

“Ok, who gets to deliver the bad news?” Tracy wondered.

“I'll go and do it” Jennifer confirmed “If the Line Manager or Station Supervisor complains, I can always claim I am you!”

“Thanks...” Tracy responded as Jennifer set off down the road, collecting a couple of officers as she passed them to go and close the station.

Looking around the now empty street, Tracy turned back towards the building at the centre of the alert where inside the Bomb Squad team were in the creaky old wooden lift heading up to the third floor.

“Looks like we will be clocking the overtime something serious today” one of the Bomb Squad team remarked as the lift slowed for the third floor and the doors opened gently.

“The bean counters won't be exactly having a nice day that is for certain” Shine agreed as he looked around into the lift landing before exiting the car, his team following cautiously.

“Old fashioned way or shall we get Doris here to do the honours?” the member of the team asked.

“Ladies first” Shine agreed whereupon his team of technicians proceeded to unpack one of the cases they had brought up with them whilst he consulted a floor plan.

From the case a small remote controlled robot with a built in CCTV camera and a manipulator device was produced, wired up to its battery pack and tested with a quick circuit of the hallway.

“Doris is up and raring to go boss” came the confirmation.

“Ok then” Shine declared as he showed his team the floor plan “If our information is correct, the device is located in this room here three doors down that corridor on the left.”

“Ok then Doris” the technical officer responsible for controlling the remote robot device “Away you go my lovely.”

As the robot headed up to corridor towards the target room, Shine reached for his radio to pass on news of their progress.

“Lima Bravo Zulu One Five to Control” he called “Be advised we are on site and sending in the robot now.”

“This is Divisional Commander Caverner” Tracy called in response from outside in the street where it was now starting to rain heavily, causing her and several officers to retreat to the shelter of a bus stop on the opposite side of the street “Can you feed the CCTV to the Mobile Operations Unit?” she requested.

“Should be all live and as it happens on channel seven Maam” Shine confirmed.

“Come on” Tracy called to her officers as they made a dash for it across the street in the pouring rain and boarded the Mobile Operations Unit that was parked some two hundred metres from the centre of the incident.

“Do we have any live feed?” Tracy asked as she clambered aboard, shaking off the rain from her uniform tunic now she was back undercover.

“Just coming through now Maam” one of the technical officers confirmed as on the main screen the live CCTV footage from the remote robot came through showing its viewpoint as it approached the door of the target room.

“Ok, gently does it” Shine called to the robot operator as he manoeuvred the robot through the partially open doorway and approached the office desk to the left on which was the suspect package.

“Right now approach with caution then lift the arm up over the desk so we can get a good look at it” Shine confirmed.

Everyone watching was holding their breath as the extendable manipulator arm was raised and the camera attached to it showed the top of the desk and the suspect package slowly coming into view.

“That must be it just there” Tracy pointed to the posting tube now visible on the desk sticking out of a small red post office bag.

“Did I miss anything?” Jennifer asked as she rejoined them on board the Mobile Operations Unit having run through the rain back from Green Park Station.

“Just getting out first look at the package” Tracy confirmed nodding to the screen “How were things at Green Park?” she asked.

“Well the evening peak is shot to hell and the Station Supervisor is a tad pissed” Jennifer confirmed.

“He'll get over it” Tracy responded as the screen showed the manipulator arm approach the package slowly and with extreme caution.

“Right, lets get it clear of the bag first” Shine instructed whereupon the robot operator carefully manoeuvred the grappling arm up to the protruding end of the package and gently pinched its rim until it had a firm but subtle grip on it.

“Careful” Shine advised although such caution was second nature to the members of his team, it never hurt to remind them anyway.

There were some nervous moments as the operator carefully pulled the package away out of the mail bag onto a clear area of the desk, a sense of dread not helped when as the package left it, the bag fell to the floor.

“Phew” Shine remarked, a feeling echoed by sighs of relief all around “That was a close one.”

“I'll try to rack up the tension a bit more next time” the operator remarked wryly, a sense of humour being an essential qualification in their highly dangerous chosen profession.

“Roll it forward just a tad so we can see the label on it” Tracy called over the radio.

“Ok, here we go” the operator confirmed as he very carefully rolled the posting tube forwards a small distance until the address label and most importantly the franking were visible to the camera.

“What does that say?” Tracy asked around as they all twisted their heads and squinted to make out the location stated on the postmark franking which was partly smudged.

“Liverpool?” Jennifer suggested.

“Could be” Tracy agreed “In which case someone had better give my opposite number in Merseyside a bell.”

“Give me a pan across the length of this thing” Shine instructed his operator “Let’s see if we can get into it with Doris.”

“Here we go” the operator confirmed as he panned the camera to the far left end of the package and then followed its length from one end to the other.

“Damm and blast” Shine commented with quiet irritation “Its tape sealed at both ends, that means we need to do this the old fashioned way.”

“Should you be really saying words such as blast around this thing?” Tracy asked over the radio.

“Probably not Maam” Shine confirmed as he put on his bomb disposal armoured suit along with one of his colleagues “Ah well, here we go” he declared as he picked up his tool kit and headed off down the corridor.

“This thing is going to give me a heart attack before it’s over” Tracy remarked.

“I hope not” Jennifer responded “Things are supposed to happen to identical twins at the same time.”

Inside the building, Shine and his assistant approached the door with caution before passing through it into the room where they had to climb around the robot which was against the desk still clutching the package in place.

“Derek” Shine called over the radio to the robot operator “Keep Doris absolutely still while we try and get inside this thing.”

“Yes boss” the operator confirmed.

“Ok ladies and gentlemen” Shine provided the commentary as he proceeded to examine the device as closely as the large heavy shield of his protective suit would allow “We have ourselves a standard brown posting tube, approximately two feet in length and with white plastic lids inserted into each end. Each of these lids is secured with brown parcel tape of indeterminate strength and written on the edge of the right hand end are the words 'Open this end', an invitation I shall respectfully refuse I think.”

“Scalpel?” the technician suggested as he opened the tool kit to reveal a plethora of tools and instruments.

“Thank you nurse” Shine confirmed as he took the scalpel handed to him before moving closer to the package “Ok, the Doctor is in, lets see what wee little secrets you have my little friend.”

With everyone who was watching either in the room or via the live camera feed holding their breath, Shine approached the package and with great care and dexterity began to cut the tape securing the left hand end of the package closed. He took his time with the package, constantly feeling through the scalpel blade for any possible trips or wires that may have been secreted beneath the tape to prevent him doing exactly this.

“All right pop pickers” Shine declared a couple of minutes later as he finished slicing the tape all around that end of the package and withdrew the scalpel “No surprises so far so lets see what we have lurking in here.”

“Lights and infra red goggles Sir?” Shine's assistant suggested.

“Good idea” Shine agreed as he picked out a pair of infra red goggles from his toolkit whilst his assistant closed the curtains and turned out the light leaving them in complete darkness.

“I am opening the package now” Shine confirmed over the radio, using his infra red vision goggles to see what he was doing whilst everyone else was forced to watch a dark screen.

“Hi there...” Shine was heard to say a few moments later after the sound of the end cover of the package being opened had been heard “Whoever you are, you are one clever cookie.”

“What is it?” Tracy asked over the radio as she, like the others were wondering what on earth Shine was talking about.

“Light sensor located just inside the package” Shine explained “A little surprise package for curious people like me, if any light had got onto it, the device would have detonated.”

“Is there any way to get around it?” Tracy asked.

“Some insulating tape over the sensor should do it” Shine confirmed as the sound of him scrabbling around in his tool kit came over the radio “Here we go” he declared as he tore off a section of black insulating tape and very carefully placed it over the light sensor so that he could now switch on the lights without the device detonating.

“Turn the lights on lad” he then was heard to call. Once the lights had been switched on, the viewers on the live camera link from the robot were now able to see the interior clearly for the first time.

“Can you disarm it?” Tracy asked as she looked closely at the screen.

“I think so” Shine responded with some slight apprehension as he was seen on the screen to reaching inside the package and carefully pull out the device onto the table “Very nice, we have about a pound, maybe a pound and a half of some form of high explosive linked to a feedback loop detonator, timer and any one of half a dozen different types of triggers.”

“Looks decidedly unpleasant” Tracy remarked.

“That it is” Shine confirmed as he looked over the device “However if I bypass the battery with my own power supply and then disconnect the detonator connections then it should be rendered as safe as its ever going to be.”

“Good luck” Tracy responded.

“Thanks” Shine replied as he reached once more into his toolkit from where he retrieved a twelve volt battery and some crocodile clips “Right my little beauty, time for bed.”

“Do you have to have a sense of humour for that job?” Jennifer asked aside.

“An essential qualification I would guess” Tracy responded as they continued to watch Shine working on the device, holding their breath as he proceeded to cut some of the wires.

“Clear!” he was then heard to declare “Someone get this thing to the lab and whilst you are about it, put the kettle on.”

The door of the rickety old garden shed creaked as it was opened by the stranger before he came inside, took off his post office uniform jacket and hung it on a hook on the inside of the door.

Sitting back in the moth eaten arm chair in the corner of the shed, the stranger reached down to the bottom drawer of an old desk that doubled as a workbench for both DIY and gardening activities. Unlocking the drawer before opening it, he extracted a number of card folders and files, all neatly placed and ordered as was his usual method of doing most things.

Laying these folders and files out on the desk, he opened a pale green one and from within it extracted a number of building plans, these he then compared with a couple of typewritten lists which he produced from his pocket, having to use a magnifying glass to read them as the limited light from the single electric bulb plus his steadily failing eyesight were giving him trouble.

“Five” he concluded after taking a couple of minutes to study the various items of documentation before he then reached across for another yellow card folder from which he proceeded to extract a rather badly photocopied but still legible personnel file of some kind.

“Revenge is a dish best served cold my old friend” the man commented to the poorly reproduced photograph on the file in front of him before returning all bar the list he had brought with him and the plans to the drawer. Before locking it however he reached down the side of it and produced an old wartime service revolver, lovingly

maintained and in full working order if it's exceptional appearance was anything to go by.

“And tomorrow my beauty, we shall have our pound of flesh” he commented as he checked his gun, loaded it with the full capacity of six rounds of ammunition and then placed it in his jacket pocket before locking the drawer and relaxing back in his chair to spend the rest of the evening listening to Radio 4 and enjoying the calm of working on his bedding plants.

“Let there be light” the Commander remarked to himself as the lights and power came on in his office for the first time. Now able to see properly for the first time in the half hour that he had been in there, the Commander reached straight for the bottom right hand drawer of his desk and extracted the packet of biscuits which he promptly proceeded to consume.

Within moments he was already on his third when the telephone on the desk rang much to his annoyance.

“Hello?” he answered with a hint of reluctance that soon melted once he heard Tracy's voice on the other end.

“Hello love” she responded “Do you want the good news, the really good news or the bad news?” she asked.

“Well the power just came back on here so as things are looking up, I'll take it from the top love” the Commander responded.

“Well the good news” Tracy confirmed as she stepped off the Mobile Operations Unit vehicle back out into the street “It's stopped raining at last and the guys from the Bomb Squad managed to diffuse the device, the really good news is that we have the device recovered intact which means we should get some useful information from it.”

“Wonderful” the Commander responded, this being one of the few bits of really positive good news he had received all day “So what's the bad news then?”

“Someone is going to have to placate London Transport” Tracy explained as she observed the Bomb Squad team carefully manoeuvring an armour plated steel box containing the now diffused device out of the building and into the back of a waiting van “I am afraid I had to close Green Park at the height of the evening rush.”

“Ouch” the Commander responded “Ken's going to be mightily cheesed off.”

“And then some” Tracy agreed “Look, the Bomb Squad guys are heading back to their place with the device but its going to be tomorrow morning before they can get a look at it and tell us anything about it.”

“In which case I think its home time” the Commander confirmed.

“I’ll see you in about half an hour” Tracy responded “I love you.”

“I love you as well” the Commander confirmed with a pleasurable smile before hanging up.

In the silence of the near deserted building, the Commander looked around his office casually taking in the surroundings from the antique silver photo frame containing the picture of Tracy on his desk, past the old Lewisham station sign on the wall to the painting next to it of a Bullied light pacific type steam locomotive waiting at the platform end of Waterloo Station in early 1967.

The Commander was enjoying the unusual peace and tranquillity in what was usually a busy and hectic place but knew it wasn't going to last, a fact confirmed as a few moments later there was knock at the office door.

“Come in” the Commander reluctantly called.

“Sorry to intrude” Collins confirmed as he came in with a bunch of papers under his arm along with a somewhat out of breath Sir Richard Crowthorne as they just had to come all the way up to the top floor of New Scotland Yard by way of the stairs as the lifts were still out of use.

“Oh it's all right” the Commander responded “Pull up a seat and have a biscuit.”

“Cheers” Sir Richard responded as he duly helped himself to a biscuit from the packet on the desk before passing them to Collins.

“Nice loco” Collins commented on the OO scale model of a British Railways Class 4 2-6-0 locomotive that was sitting on a plinth mounted section of track at the front of the Commander's desk.

“She's a beauty isn't she?” the Commander remarked “Anyway assuming you two didn't come all the way up the stairs to discuss model railways and eat my biscuits, I take it you have something for me?”

“Bomb Squad just rang through from that Mayfair job” Collins confirmed.

“Tracy just filled me in, apparently we have the device intact which is good news” the Commander responded.

“Indeed” Collins agreed “They are going to start looking at the device itself in their labs in Highbury at seven tomorrow morning and we are all invited.”

“Look forward to it” the Commander confirmed.

“Also they should have a chemical break down and analysis of the explosive used by then as well” Sir Richard added “It may give you guys a lead.”

“Don't you miss all this stuff now you are a glorified civil servant?” the Commander asked Sir Richard.

“Well I have managed to go three months now without being either shot at or involved in any major incidents” Sir Richard admitted wryly “I'd say the job has its perks.”

“Also while the investigation was without a home during this mess we did some ringing around” Collins added “You know the usual names and pack drill, see who is active on the big bang scene at the moment.”

“Anything come up?” the Commander asked.

“Well we can rule out our Irish friends” Collins confirmed “They are all mostly retired and respectable now.”

“Only took thirty five years” Sir Richard remarked with some regret.

“Also MI6 are pretty certain it's not any of our Islamic Extremists friends either” Collins continued “For one thing this isn't their style and like you said earlier, these devices actually exploded unlike their pathetic efforts of late.”

“So we are looking at a lone domestic nutter with a grudge then?” the Commander concluded.

“That's what we reckon” Sir Richard agreed “Worse kind of nutter to try and track down.”

“Yep” the Commander confirmed “Ordinary bloke in the street who blends in and nobody takes any notice of, I think the works needle and haystack spring to mind.”

“We may get something from putting together a connection between the target addresses” Collins responded “Fuller is likely to be working overtime cross referencing every file he can find, trouble is he couldn't get started until the power was back on.”

“Nothing grumpier than an IT expert in a power cut” Sir Richard admitted.

“The only confirmed contact we have had is the one phone call here” the Commander continued “added to which we apparently will be contacted through the personal column in the morning edition of the Standard.”

“I thought all calls through this place were recorded and traced?” Collins asked.

“It would have been if the power was on” the Commander explained “Without it, the call went through unnoticed by the best monitoring equipment in the business.”

“Clever” Collins commented “Very clever, ring at just the right time and no one can trace it.”

“This strikes me as a very traditional old fashioned way of doing things” Sir Richard remarked “None of your high tech nonsense, just mysterious telephone calls and cryptic messages in newspapers, you should be in your element.”

“The nightingales fly at midnight?” the Commander joked with a brief laugh “That'll annoy the Justice Minister, she is all into everything computerised and high tec.”

“Nice put down by the way” Sir Richard remarked “My congratulations, it was only a matter of time before one of the Regional Administrator General's lost patience with madam iron knickers and tore her off a strip.”

“Don't tell me you were running a book on it?” the Commander asked.

“Just collected a hundred and fifty quid on it” Sir Richard confirmed with a wry smile of satisfaction.

“Listen, could you do me a favour?” the Commander asked “Have a couple of your best PR guys drown that woman in so much flannel that she keeps well out of my way for the foreseeable future?”

“Consider it done” Sir Richard confirmed.

“Hello, I seem to be popular today” the Commander remarked as his telephone rang and he reached across to answer it.

“Not the Justice Minister calling then” Collins remarked with a smile and the Commander picked up the handset.

“Hello?” he answered.

“Good evening” Jack Thornton called from inside a telephone box in Bethnal Green High Road, having to raise his voice to make himself heard above the traffic noise immediately outside “It's Jack Thornton, would now be a good time for a word in your ear Sir?” he asked.

“Jack?” the Commander responded “You are a difficult lad to track down you know.”

“Well I do tend to slip quietly into the background so to speak” Jack admitted “Necessary hazard of my situation I am afraid.”

“Come again?” the Commander inquired.

“Another time maybe” Jack responded slightly evasively “I was wondering if you could meet me, there is something I need to show you which may have some bearing on this post bombing business.”

“Erm yes certainly” the Commander confirmed as he checked his old pocket watch “Where are you?” he asked.

“Meet me at Liverpool Street Underground Station, Old Broad Street exit in one hour” Jack confirmed “And can I ask you come alone as I think the less people who know about this the better.”

“All right” the Commander agreed still none the wiser as to what any of this was about “One hour” he confirmed as the sound of telephone pips began.

“Until later Sir” Jack confirmed before hanging up.

“What was that all about?” Collins asked, reflecting the equal amount of curiosity being expressed by Sir Richard seated next to him.

“A call from an old friend” the Commander confirmed “It's a long story, anyway I have to get going.”

“Well I had better head back to the office” Collins declared as he got up and finished his biscuit in one bite “I'll see you tomorrow morning at the Bomb Squad labs.”

“Good night” the Commander responded as Collins left, after whom Sir Richard was about to follow when the Commander raised his hand and silently asked him to remain for a moment.

“So who really was on the telephone just now then?” Sir Richard asked once Collins had left and the door was closed.

“You remember Jack Thornton, the lad that we met in the hospital during all that Devlin business a few months back?” the Commander asked.

“The lad with the roving black market business empire and saved our lives that time?” Sir Richard asked “Hardly likely to forget him!”

“Well that was him” the Commander confirmed “Apparently he has some information that may be related to our mysterious bomber.”

“And I guess he doesn't want to push the full panic button in case the entire authorities turn up?” Sir Richard confirmed “Which given his position is understandable I suppose.”

“His position?” the Commander enquired, picking up on Sir Richard's tone.

“Well after our first encounter with him, you remember I pulled in a few favours and checked what we had on him” Sir Richard began to explain “When I enquired about the incident where his parents were killed in that hit and run on the Marylebone Road a couple of years back, I got the distinct impression that someone high up is very anxious to find him and have him disappear.”

“Did you ever find out anything else?” the Commander asked.

“No” Sir Richard confirmed “From what I gather, everything connected with his parents and their deaths are firmly locked away in a vault somewhere with so many restrictions on it that no one is going to see those files for at least a thousand years.”

“No one was ever caught for the hit and run were they?” the Commander recalled.

“Traffic Division had an unpleasant visit from a couple of suited goons who waltzed in the day after with a gilt edged warrant and seized everything to do with it” Sir Richard confirmed “Nothing has been seen or heard about the case ever since and Jack headed out of sight pretty damn quick so if there is anyone who knows anything about what happened, he is the only one in circulation.”

“Interesting” the Commander confirmed “Well I had better get going, I have to be outside Liverpool Street Station in fifty minutes.”

“Do you want me to put some surveillance out?” Sir Richard asked.

“No” the Commander responded as he grabbed his uniform tunic and put it on “I gave Jack my word I would be alone, I guess I am the only chap in authority he trusts and we need this lead, besides I and you for that matter owe him our lives.”

“Give him my regards” Sir Richard confirmed as they proceeded out of the office where they met Tracy coming out of the lifts which had only just been restarted.

“I know that look” Tracy remarked as soon as she saw the Commander's expression “I take it home time is cancelled then?” she asked.

“I am afraid so” the Commander confirmed as he kissed her “Well for me anyway, I've got to pop out for an hour or two but you head home.”

“And there was me looking forward to an early night” Tracy responded suggestively as they looked into each others eyes lovingly.

“Now why do I never get a welcome like that whenever I leave my office?” Sir Richard wondered as he looked on with bewilderment.

“I'll see you later love” the Commander confirmed “I won't be long.”

“You had better not be” Tracy suggested “And try not to get into any trouble” she requested as the Commander and Sir Richard got into the lift.

“Trouble? Me? Surely not?” the Commander responded sarcastically with a wink as the lift doors closed leaving Tracy alone in the corridor before she headed to her office nearby.

“This is a Central Line train calling at all stations to Epping” the on board automated announcer called as the doors of the eight car train of 1992 type tube stock opened at the eastbound platform of Liverpool Street Station.

The Commander alighted in full uniform from the front car of the train and proceeded directly to the exit, travelling via the escalators to the ticket hall located below the concourse of Liverpool Street main line station which was still busy with the last of the evening rush traffic.

Reaching the ticket barriers that led towards the exit into the main station itself, the Commander paused before putting his Oyster Card on the reader and looked around, catching the attention of on the Underground staff on duty.

“Excuse me mate” the Commander called over “Where is the Old Broad Street exit?” he asked.

“Back that way Sir” the member of Underground staff confirmed “Head for the Metropolitan platforms and then follow the signs.”

“Thanks” the Commander responded as he turned smartly on his heels and headed back across the ticket hall, in the direction of the subsurface platforms of the Metropolitan, Circle and Hammersmith & City Lines from where the echo of a departing train of elderly A62 type stock could be heard.

A minute later he was emerging up the steps and out of the curved frontage of the original Old Broad Street exit to the Underground Station as instructed where he found Jack chatting to the Evening Standard seller by his stand adjacent to the entrance.

“Ah he's here” Jack remarked as he noticed the familiar figure of the Commander appear “I'll see you later Des.”

“You take care mate” Des the newspaper vendor called after.

“Evening Sir” Jack called to the Commander as they met beneath the awning of the station entrance “Lovely weather for it” he joked looking back into the pouring rain that had now resumed, sending the last few commuters of the evening rush scattering about towards the main line station opposite using newspapers to try and stave off the worst of the weather.

“You are a hard chap to keep up with” the Commander remarked “Apart from a trace on your Oyster Card you don't appear on the grid anywhere.”

“Trust me Sir” Jack sort of explained evasively “There is a very good reason for that.”

“I'm all ears” the Commander responded.

“Another time perhaps” Jack continued to evade further questioning “Shall we proceed only time is pressing” he indicated the interior of the station.

“Where are we going?” the Commander asked as Jack led him through the ticket barriers and into the station interior.

“Central Line to Bethnal Green” Jack explained “Don't worry Sir, you will see the point of this little charade when we are done.”

“I'd better had” the Commander remarked as they proceeded through the station complex and down the escalators to the Central Line platforms “Tracy was hoping for an early night.”

“So was I” Jack admitted “I've got school in the morning.”

“Hang on a minute” the Commander commented as they arrived on the eastbound Central Line platform where the indicator showed there was three minutes until the arrival of the next through train “Ho does a chap like you with no fixed abode get a place in school.”

“I've got a mate who runs a fruit and veg shop in Leyton” Jack explained “He lets me use his place as a mailing address and collects my post for me.”

“Parents evening must be interesting” the Commander remarked as they sat down on a bench to await the next train.

“I admit it is a little tricky juggling commitments when you are in my situation” Jack admitted “But I've managed for the last two years so far without too much bother.”

“In other words your School think they are still alive” the Commander concluded.

“Well sort of” Jack confirmed “I just forgot to tell them they were dead, it seemed easier in the long run.”

“After we met last time” the Commander continued as their train approached, a fact announced by the increasingly turbulent air coming from the far running tunnel portal and the accompanying rumble “I tried to pull the files relating to the hit and run that was responsible for your parents death and anything on you.”

“Let me guess” Jack responded “You met the informational equivalent of a keep off the grass sign?” he asked as the Central Line train appeared and slowed to a halt before opening its doors.

“Apparently anything related to the death of your parents, who they were, what they did and your background is buried under so many restriction orders and red tape not even the combined efforts of myself and the head of MI5 can access them” the Commander confirmed as they boarded the train.

“Now I am sure you can begin to understand why I keep such a low profile and always keep moving” Jack explained as the train doors closed with their warning beep and the train moved off “That's why when I found out I had an unpleasant guest in my basement I came straight to you. You and Sir Richard Crowthorne are the only two people in authority I can trust not to bring all hell breaking lose upon me.”

“Well I hope your confidence in me is not misplaced” the Commander confirmed as the train slowed and the on board automated announcer declared their imminent arrival at Bethnal Green in the heart of East London.

“As do I” Jack agreed with some hint of apprehension in his voice as they both got up and headed to the nearest set of doors to alight.

“This is Bethnal Green” the automated announcement declared as the train came to a halt and the doors opened allowing Jack and the Commander to alight onto the newly restored platforms which had recently seen its original 1930's pattern cream tiling restored to its former glory.

“Done a nice job of this one” the Commander admitted as he looked around whilst behind them the train doors were closed and it set off again, “So where are we going then?” he asked as they headed for the escalators and ascended to the sub surface ticket hall.

“A little place I call home” Jack confirmed “Well for the moment at least anyway” he admitted as he passed his Oyster Card over the yellow reader and went through the ticket barrier with the Commander passing through the adjacent one.

Emerging out into the failing daylight of early evening from one of the subway entrances, the Commander followed Jack's lead as they went down Bethnal Green High Road. Some twenty minutes later they arrived in a side street in the shadow of the old printing works that Jack called home.

“Down here” Jack prompted as he led the Commander down a blind alley, an appropriate reflection of how he was feeling at that point, especially after the day he had had so far.

“Through here but mind your head” Jack advised as he lifted open a section of old corrugated iron that covered an entry point into the vast dark old industrial site.

“What a dump” the Commander commented as he looked around where despite the failing light and lack of illumination, he could still make out the decaying and abandoned old industrial type buildings that made up the complex of the old printing works.

“It may not look much but it has its benefits” Jack admitted “Follow me but keep your head down in case we have company.”

Jack duly led the way across the courtyard and towards the old loading bay on the west side of the site before coming to a stop in the shadow of an overhanging wall.

“This ii?” the Commander asked as they looked around the corner cautiously.

“Through that old loading bay there” Jack confirmed indicating ahead “Then inside, turn left, cross the old factory floor and then right again, you will find a table and some crates with some materials in them.”

“Right” the Commander confirmed as Jack was about to lead off only to be stopped by him “I think I had better lead the way don't you?” he suggested.

“Actually now I come to think of it” Jack responded as the Commander drew his gun and checked it “You probably have a point Sir” he admitted.

“No lights on so I guess no one is home” the Commander commented.

“Not entirely reassuring” Jack confessed “There isn't any power in this section.”

“Now you tell me” the Commander remarked he led Jack across the Yard, using the cover of the darkness and the shadow of the overhanging walls to mask their approach to the loading bay area.

“Looks clear” the Commander confirmed as he scanned around the area before lifting himself up onto the top of the old vehicle loading dock ramp with Jack following in close formation.

“Through there” Jack confirmed indicating the old doorway ahead.

With caution the Commander entered the building and following Jack's directions they proceeded through the dilapidated and deserted building until they rounded a corner and came across the cases and the work bench table that Jack had mentioned.

“Is this it?” the Commander asked Jack as they approached the bench and the Commander looked on at what was neatly laid out on it.

“Yep” Jack confirmed nervously “That box there is the one you really don't want to be messing with I think.”

“This metal one?” the Commander looked at it with a little apprehension having seen Jack's feelings towards it “What's in it?” he asked.

“Well I am no expert on these things but I am willing to be it isn't plastiscene” Jack confirmed.

“Hello...” the Commander remarked as he switched on his torch and shone it down on the ground to reveal a box containing empty posting tubes “These look strangely familiar.”

“The guy who came here earlier” Jack explained “He put something together on the bench with wires etc and put them in three of those tube things.”

“Congratulations lad” the Commander announced “I think you just found my missing bomb factory.”

“You're welcome I am sure” Jack responded still understandably nervous at being this close to explosives and the equipment needed to turn that into viable devices “Would you mind just getting it out of my basement?”

“First things first” the Commander confirmed “Now all this is still exactly as the guy left it when you saw him?”

“Yes” Jack confirmed “I heard his van come into the site and then he came in here and worked on this lot.”

“Description?” the Commander asked.

“Six foot, late fifties, grey hair going a bit thin on top” Jack recalled “Oh and he was wearing a post man's uniform which is not really surprising.”

“Why not surprising?” the Commander asked sensing correctly a key piece of the puzzle was here.

“Because he was driving a Post Office van” Jack confirmed “I made a note of the reg number too.”

“Jack my lad, you are a genius” the Commander complimented him “Do you have the number.”

“It's upstairs in my place” Jack explained “Follow me.”

The Commander duly followed Jack back through the complex old factory site until they reached the back external fire exit stairs which they ascended to the top floor.

“Step into my office” Jack declared as he unlocked the door and opened it allowing the Commander to enter the former office floor which was now Jack's home.

“Good grief!” the Commander remarked as he entered and when Jack switched on the few lights that still worked, saw the impromptu living quarters “You live here?”

“Well like I said earlier” Jack admitted as he hung his coat up next to his school uniform blazer “Its not much but its home, I've got a rather nice sofa bed, telly, cooker, running water and take a look at that view across to Central London.”

“What's all this stuff?” the Commander asked seeing the pile of boxes in one corner of the old office.

“That's my little retirement nest egg” Jack confirmed “I've got a few friends in the import trade who let me have cheap anything that's been damaged in transit. Here you are not in the market for a Baby Belling are you?” he asked.

“I didn't know they even still made them” the Commander admitted.

“They are made in China now” Jack explained “Only some klutz of a crane driver dropped a whole container load of them a few weeks back and dented half of them and I have a dozen to shift if you are interested.”

“I wouldn't know one end of a saucepan from the other” the Commander was forced to admit.

“That I can believe” Jack agreed “Take a seat and I'll go and find that reg number for you Sir.”

“Is all this stuff legit?” the Commander asked as he looked around.

“Totally above board” Jack confirmed as he went through a pile of papers at his rather wonky looking old desk “Ok so I am not exactly registered for VAT or anything but I don't touch anything hot, counterfeit or otherwise iffy.”

“Very noble of you” the Commander remarked as he returned to the living area and noted some exercise books protruding from Jack's school bag that was lying on the elderly sofa.

“Here we go” Jack confirmed as he found the piece of paper and brought it over to the Commander “LG51 RTH” he announced as he passed the paper over “Not a legit number though.”

“How did you fathom that one out?” the Commander asked as he looked at the note in his hand.

“The Royal Mail like most big organisations, especially the Government run ones always book their vehicle registration numbers in big blocks of five hundred or a thousand” Jack explained “Take your lot for a starter, this year all your new purchases for the Metropolitan Division have been in the LM56 registration series whilst the Transport Division boys have been using their usual LT prefixed numbers, the Royal Mail used Preston PM and West London LR numbers for their 51 series intake which means that your man here is running on phoney plates.”

“Which to the untrained eye i.e. anyone except maybe you, me and the missus” the Commander concluded “would go by completely unnoticed?”

“Exactly” Jack confirmed “Whoever your mad bomb making friend is, he certainly is clever.”

“Right” the Commander declared “I don't suppose you have a telephone as well in this place do you?” he asked.

“Of course not” Jack responded “I know someone who could get you a hundred mobiles for a grand if you don't want to ask too many questions.”

“I guess I'll have to do it the old fashioned way then” the Commander admitted as he reached for his radio set “Lima Alpha Zero One to Control” he called.

“Who are you calling?” Jack asked.

“You are going to get a couple of house guests tonight” the Commander explained “Don't worry, you can trust these guys. They are nothing if not very discrete.”

“They had better be” Jack remarked “This is a very exclusive neighbourhood you know” he joked.

“Control receiving, go ahead Sir” came the response.

“Can you patch me through on a secure frequency to Commander Cassini please” the Commander requested.

“One moment Sir” the Control Room operator confirmed.

“Undercover Surveillance Division, Cassini speaking” came the response a few moments later.

“Evening” the Commander responded “How do you and one of your guys fancy a little overtime?” he asked.

“I had this feeling you would be calling upon my Division's services at some point Sir” Cassini admitted with a wry chuckle “What can I do for you?” he inquired.

“Got a little job for you that requires some discretion” the Commander explained “As in please tell absolutely no-one about where you are going or the identity of the young gentleman you are going to be meeting in due course.”

“Understood so far” Cassini confirmed more than used to the Commander's penchant for awkward missions that were thrown his way with alarming regularity.

“I've got a possible location for our mad bomber's little factory” the Commander continued to explain “I need a couple of reliable eyes to watch it with no questions asked and then follow whoever turns up once they leave the premises.”

“I think I can arrange that” Cassini confirmed as he got up from behind his desk and grabbed his jacket from the back of the office door “Where do you want us?”

“There's an old printing works complex in Scammell Lane, about ten minutes from Bethnal Green Tube” the Commander confirmed “Park your van in the street around the back and use the impromptu entrance you will find there. The location you need to get to is the old offices on the top floor, the back door is open and your host for this evening is putting the kettle on.”

“They had better bring some biscuits” Jack called from the cooker as he was filling the kettle.

“I heard that” Cassini confirmed “I'll get Iggy to raid the company canteen on the way out.”

“Careful now” Shine advised his colleagues as they very carefully manoeuvred the deactivated device recovered from the Mayfair incident into the Bomb Squad

laboratory, placing it still contained inside the secure metal case gently on the workbench.

“Nicely done lads” Shine confirmed as they all breathed a sigh of relief. Even though it had been deactivated, there was always a chance that it could still detonate as until it was completely dismantled there was no way of telling how unstable any and all of its components could be.

“Do you want us to hang around boss?” one of the officers asked as Shine approached the case with some trepidation.

“No, you lot have done enough tonight, you get on home” Shine suggested “I'd like a little time alone getting to know our new friend here.”

“Good night boss” the three officers called as they left the laboratory and Shine alone to examine the device.

As the officers were leaving, they passed in the corridor the Divisional Commander of the Bomb Squad Commander Greg Philips.

“How do lads” he called as he met them going in the opposite direction “Is he still in there?” he inquired.

“Yes Sir” came the confirmation.

“Ok” Philip responded “Listen you guys have done very well today so make sure you get plenty of rest, you've earned it Ok?”

“Yes Sir” they all responded.

“All right, good night” Philips bade them farewell before entering the darkened laboratory in which the only light was from a pair of high intensity desk lamps at the work bench Shine was using to examine the device.

“Mind if I join the party?” Philips asked as he entered the room with a quiet discreet knock on the door frame.

“Feel free Sir” Shine confirmed before indicating the device on display still inside the now open case on the work bench “Meet our bomb” he declared.

“Nice compact looking device” Philips remarked as he looked inside the case at the posting tube and its exposed contents lying in place on shock absorbing packing material.

“Well the posting tube is bog standard” Shine confirmed as he returned to carefully examining the device “However not only do we have a bomber with a sense of humour” he showed the 'Open this end' label on the tube “but also a very technical mind, there was this little beauty waiting inside for me when I opened it.”

“Whoa...” Philips remarked as Shine showed him the light sensor he had disabled and removed earlier, now sealed inside a small plastic evidence bag “So we are not talking amateur hour here by any degree of the imagination.”

“I haven't seen anything this well put together in twenty years” Shine confirmed “I mean look at that electrical work, the way its all been meticulously installed and tidied together.”

“What about the explosive?” Philips asked.

“This I think is going to tell us more about the bomber than anything else” Shine declared “It's going to have to wait until morning for the chemical analysis guys to come in though, however have a sniff of that” he proffered a small sample of the explosive material on the end of a pair of tweezers “What do you reckon?”

“Home brew?” Philips asked.

“That's what I reckon” Shine agreed “Certainly not commercial and definitely not your average idiot with flour and peroxide either.”

“I'd like to meet whoever created this little beauty” Philips remarked “Whoever he or she is certainly has talent.”

“Well if the Commander gets his way I reckon we will find out who is behind this sooner or later” Shine agreed.

“Evening Ali” the Commander called to the Station Supervisor at Vauxhall Underground Station as he passed through the ticket barriers on his way out.

It was now well after ten o'clock in the evening and not only was he now somewhat later than he had planned getting home, he was also very tired. In addition to this he was having a lot of worried thoughts about work, the ongoing bombing inquiry and also little Jack's situation.

A few minutes later the Commander turned the key in the lock of the door to the penthouse apartment that he and Tracy called home when they were not spending all hours of the day at work.

“Honey I'm home” the Commander jokily called out as he entered the hallway, closed the door and hung his uniform tunic on the coat hook next to that of his wife's.

“I'm in the kitchen love” came the call of Tracy's voice whereupon the Commander duly followed it to find Tracy cooking his supper for him.

“How did you know I was coming in now?” the Commander asked as Tracy set his supper out on the table and placed a fresh steaming cup of tea in his hand the second he came into the kitchen.

“I had Fuller trace your Oyster Card” Tracy confirmed with a wry smile before kissing him “Call me paranoid but I find that if I know where you are you live longer that way.”

“She loves me” the Commander remarked to himself as he sat down before taking a much welcome gulp of fresh tea.

“Anyway” Tracy continued as she sat down alongside him with her own mug of tea “As soon as he called to say you had popped up on the grid at Victoria I knew I had fifteen minutes before you got here.”

“Clever girl” the Commander commented before kissing her on the cheek.

“So what were you doing in Bethnal Green of all places then?” Tracy asked.

“I grant this to you my dear” the Commander admitted “You are good.”

“Yeah well I get paid for this sort of thing you know” Tracy remarked wryly.

“We get paid for this?” the Commander commented “Blimey...”

“And can I assume that the dispatch of Cassini has something to do with this as well?” Tracy asked.

“How did you...?” the Commander began.

“I ran into Iggy on the way out as he was raiding the canteen” Tracy explained “So why is the world gathering in Bethnal Green then?”

“Well that's a long story” the Commander admitted “It may need a refill for the whole thing” he indicated the empty mug.

“You begin and I'll sort out the refreshments” Tracy agreed as she took her husband's mug and got up to make a fresh cup of tea for him.

“You remember Jack Thornton?” the Commander asked.

“That little wise eleven year old with the nice line in illicit poker games and discounted black market goods we met back at the hospital a few months back?” Tracy asked as she boiled the kettle.

“That's the one” the Commander confirmed “Only he's about twelve now admittedly, well anyway I got a call from him this evening out of the blue straight to my office direct number.”

“Didn't you give him your card and tell him to call you if he ever needed help back after that hospital and Devlin incident?” Tracy commented as she poured the water into the mug.

“Yep” the Commander confirmed “Well now he had a problem, he's been holed up in the old offices of a disused printing works a short distance from Bethnal Green tube station however early this morning and then again this afternoon he had a visitor.”

“Anyone we know?” Tracy asked as she continued to make the tea.

“Well not yet but whoever it was is using part of Jack's printing works to manufacture explosive devices” the Commander explained “And to top it all his mystery caller drives a Royal Mail van on suspect plates.”

“Clever boy” Tracy remarked as she brought over the Commander's fresh mug of tea which he accepted with a grateful nod of thanks.

“When Jack saw the guy turn up this afternoon, once he had left he took a look around and found the work bench with all sorts of bits and pieces” the Commander continued “Unfortunately his seeming unique situation meant he couldn't just call up our regular plod so he gave me a call.”

“What's the story with all that?” Tracy asked as she sat back down.

“You tell me” the Commander admitted “Anyway, I meet him at Liverpool Street and we proceeded to Bethnal Green and his old printing works and when I checked the work bench there was components, tools and explosive along with a box of empty unused posting tubes.”

“So you called in Cassini and his merry men to watch the place in case our mad bomber makes a return visit” Tracy concluded “All strictly off the worksheet log of course.”

“Well naturally” the Commander admitted “Jack is a lad who values his privacy you know.”

“You were going to try and find the files on his parent's death in that hit and run weren't you?” Tracy asked “Did you get anywhere with that?”

“I asked Sir Richard to look into it, as we both owe Jack our lives I figured it was the least we could do” the Commander responded “It turns out that two hours after the incident that killed his parents and his sister on the Marylebone Road, two hefty goons turned up at the Traffic Division office with a gilt edged warrant and seized all the evidence, materials, the works.”

“What?” Tracy responded astounded.

“As far as I can tell there are only two places in the world where the truth behind that exists” the Commander concluded “One is locked deep in a vault somewhere so deep even Simon would not be able to find it, the other is in Jack's head which is probably why he has kept off the grid living off his own wits for almost the last two years.”

“So what is he surviving on?” Tracy asked as the Commander finished his second mug of tea and his supper and they got up from the table before heading for the living room to relax together on the sofa.

“Guile, cunning, the lucrative profits of a business empire Arthur Daley would be proud off and a few contacts dotted about the place” the Commander confirmed as they sat down and snuggled up together on the sofa “If you are in the market for a slightly shop soiled Baby Belling Cooker he's your man.”

“It's no way for a clever lad like him to live” Tracy remarked.

“I couldn't agree more” the Commander confirmed “You should see the place he is living in, the old offices on the top floor of that printing works, I mean its got a great view across London and he's made it home with some comforts but really its no life for a young fella.”

“You weren't all that different at his age” Tracy remarked.

“Maybe” the Commander admitted “But then again I had what that awful Justice Minister woman would call nowadays a 'support structure' or a family as we used to call it. I had my father, Field, friends at school and a few others up until I got mixed up in that Lewisham gig and the rest is history, Jack well he has nothing at all and shows no sign of improving that situation anytime soon.”

“He must have something going for him to have survived this long” Tracy commented “What about school?”

“He's going to school as far as I can work out” the Commander remarked “When I was up there tonight I saw his school bag with the books in, saw the name of his school too so I might go and pay a discrete visit sometime tomorrow if things quieten down and see what the S.P. is.”

“Isn't there anything we could do for him?” Tracy asked.

“Depends if he wants to be helped” the Commander responded “Aside from keeping an eye on him and making sure he is OK I can't see we can do much more for him until such a time as he comes to us for help.”

“Well I guess he knows who to call if he needs anything, there is that comfort I suppose” Tracy concluded.

“Aye love” the Commander agreed “There is that, besides tonight he is entertaining house guests.”

Commander Cassini had a bit of surprise when he knocked at the door to the old offices at the top of the fire escape ladder and was answered by Jack, causing him to look down at the little lad especially as Cassini himself was extremely tall.

“Evening” Cassini declared “Would you be Mr Thornton by any chance?” he asked.

“Commander Cassini I presume?” Jack asked which was confirmed with a nod of the head from the somewhat surprised undercover specialist officer “Come on in, the kettle is on.”

“This is Iggy my constant shadow in the art of all things sneaky” Cassini introduced the other officer with him as they came in “So where are we setting up?”

“Over there” Jack indicated towards the far end of the windows overlooking the centre courtyard of the large industrial site “You get a complete view of the loading area from there which is the way my mystery guest in the basement usually comes in.”

“This is good boss” Iggy confirmed as he took a look with the aid of some night vision goggles through the window to the loading dock visible below.

“Ok” Cassini responded as he put a large case he had brought with him on top of a box and opened it to reveal his tools of the trade “You get things up and running up here while Mr Thornton shows me downstairs and I get the hidden cameras set up.”

“You are aware there is no power in that section of the building aren't you?” Jack advised “Just a generator that whoever our bomb making friend brought with.”

“I shouldn't worry about that my friend” Cassini confirmed as he extracted a number of miniature cameras and leads from the case “It's all taken care of.”

“All right then, follow me and watch your step” Jack warned as he opened the door and led Cassini down the fire exit stairs. They proceeded through the site and after a couple of minutes were in the old printing works factory floor on a balcony overlooking the location where the workbench and materials were set up.

“This looks promising” Cassini admitted quietly as he looked around the vast near empty room “If I put one up here that gives us a view across this whole section and then another one over there pointing that way towards the way in should give us a nice view of this guy's face when he comes a calling.”

“Marvellous” Jack responded “All we need now is a deck of cards.”

“...and a freshly boiled kettle of course” Cassini added “Trust me from years of experience there is nothing grumpier than a couple of undercover surveillance specialists without caffeine at regular intervals.”

“Way ahead of you my friend” Jack confirmed “Way ahead of you...”

The customary smell of burning toast told Tracy that her husband was already awake and attempting to make breakfast in his usual clumsy but well meaning manner.

"What time is it?" she asked herself somewhat blearily as she turned over and looked at the alarm clock "Five fifteen, wonderful."

Tracy got up, rubbed her eyes and put on a dressing gown before heading out of the bedroom down the corridor to the kitchen where she found the Commander, already dressed in his best uniform furiously trying to wave the smoke from the burnt toast out of the window.

"Sorry love" the Commander called as he saw Tracy enter the kitchen, not in the least bit surprised by the scene she was being confronted with "I was trying to make you breakfast in bed but things went a bit awry."

"Nothing new there then" Tracy remarked wryly as she joined the Commander and they kissed.

"I got distracted" the Commander explained "Its just I had a rather outlandish idea and was giving it some thought."

"Well there is a coincidence" Tracy responded "Whilst you were snoring at three this morning I was having a few thoughts as well."

"Business or pleasure?" the Commander asked, intrigued.

"Not business" Tracy confirmed "Well not directly anyway, certainly nothing to do with our local friendly bomb nut that is for certain."

"Speaking of which we had better get a move on" the Commander remarked as he checked his old pocket watch with a look of concern "We are supposed to be over at the Bomb Squad Lab first thing before all hell breaks loose."

"In which case" Tracy confirmed "I'll get into something a little more business like whilst you have another go at making breakfast, I'll settle for just a cuppa so we don't get smoke inhalation again."

"Deal" the Commander agreed as he kissed her before she left the kitchen but turned back at the doorway with a suggestive look "We can talk about outrageous ideas a little later" she added with a wink.

"Should be interesting..." the Commander remarked as he turned to the kettle and gave it a hard stare as he did not want anything else going wrong this morning.

"Here you go gents" Jack called as he passed Cassini and Iggy cups of freshly made coffee whilst they continued their vigil looking both out of the windows and at the CCTV feeds they had set up to monitor the site.

"Ah cheers" Cassini responded whilst Iggy nodded in thanks as he was chewing on his pen as usual.

“Any visitors overnight?” Jack asked.

“Nothing so far” Cassini confirmed “There was a fox through here at about four o'clock though.”

“Oh yes” Jack responded “I quite often see him around in the early morning.”

“You mean to say you actually live here?” Cassini asked somewhat astounded.

“Well its not much” Jack looked around with some admiration for his surroundings “But you have to admit that is some view out there” he nodded ahead to the city skyline ahead, the glass towers of central London, the roof of Liverpool Street Station and the City's financial institutions including the famous 'Gherkin' building now starting to reflect the light of the rising sun.

“Blimey” Cassini commented “If this place were proper apartments or flats it would be worth a fortune.”

“Well I doubt it's going to be anything modern any time soon” Jack confirmed “Apparently the owner got banged up in jail a few months back for tax evasion or something.”

“Leaving just you and a passing fox around” Cassini remarked.

“Not to mention a mad bomber in the basement” Jack added “No sensible home should be without one.”

“Well I have to say I have had less pleasant assignments” Iggy suddenly remarked, a rare occasion indeed as normally he was silent as a lamb “At least here there is a roof over our head and a hospitable host with coffee on tap.”

“You're welcome” Jack confirmed “If you could take the mad bomber in the basement away with you when you leave though it would be appreciated.”

“We have to see if he even makes an appearance first” Cassini remarked as he picked up his binoculars and scanned around. “Hello, speak of the devil...”

“Where?” Iggy responded as he joined Cassini in scanning around with Jack looking over their shoulders adding his eyes to the search.

“Red Post Office van coming down the road” Cassini pointed ahead to the street just visible in the distance over the high wall surrounding the site “A little early for the postman don't you think?”

“Not necessarily” Iggy remarked as he looked at his watch “It is gone six you know.”

“Except for one thing my friend” Jack commented “Its turned into this street and there are no occupied premises down here, with the exception of here, most of this lot is scheduled to be pulled down for the East London Line extension.”

"Jim, Garry, are you there?" Cassini asked over his radio using his unit's own dedicated secure frequency.

"Morning boss" Garry, one of Cassini's surveillance team seated in the drivers seat of a discretely parked tatty Transit Van just up the street confirmed "Would this be about that post van I can see turning in ahead of us."

"That's the one" Cassini confirmed "Its just gone out of our view up here so watch and tell us where it goes but for God's sake don't be seen otherwise it will be game over."

"You got it boss" Garry confirmed as he watched the post office van move slowly up the side street in his direction until it pulled into the partially obscured and dilapidated entrance to the site where upon the driver of the vehicle got out.

"Here Jim, get a few pics will you" Garry called to his colleague in the back of the van who used a telephoto lens camera to quickly photograph both the vehicle and its apparent owner.

"Boss" Garry called over the radio "Suspect is entering the premises now."

"Have you got a good eyeball on him?" Cassini asked as he leaned forward and twisted his head to try and get a better view of the entrance into the site.

"I've got Jim taking some snaps for the family album but unfortunately this guy is wearing a large sun hat" Garry confirmed as he watched the suspect open the tatty old gates before returning to his vehicle.

"He's coming in now" Garry announced.

"Yep we see him now" Cassini confirmed "Stay put and prepare to run the usual tailing service when chummy emerges."

"Looks like he is heading for the old loading dock all right" Iggy announced as he followed the slow progress of the suspect van as it crunched through the loose gravel and debris that littered the ground.

"Ok my friend" Cassini remarked as they observed the van stop at the old loading bay and the driver emerge before disappearing inside the building "Lets get a look at you."

"Step into my parlour said the spider to the fly" Jack commented as he joined Cassini at the screens.

"Hello there..." Cassini called as one of the cameras caught the suspect rounding a corner and passing by. Attention then turned to the second camera feed as the stranger could be seen from above and behind approaching the makeshift work bench.

"What's he carrying?" Cassini asked as all three of them gathered around the screen and watched intently.

"Shoulder bag of some kind" Iggy remarked.

"Well he is dressed as a postman so that in my admittedly smaller book indicates something" Jack commented.

"Point taken" Cassini conceded "It's a bit early in the morning for me" he admitted.

"Speaking of which" Jack remarked "I hope our new friend here hurries up I've got to get to school."

"You don't exactly strike me as the school attending type" Cassini remarked aside as they continued to monitor the suspect on the screen.

"School is more than an education" Jack confirmed wryly "Its business."

"In other words you've got a nice racket in cheap chocolate bars going" Iggy concluded.

"Yep" Jack confirmed "These new healthy eating in schools regs have meant it's a lucrative market for a jobbing entrepreneur such as myself."

"This doesn't look too good" Cassini nodded to part of the screen where it could be seen that the suspect had got up and extracted a couple of posting tubes and placed them carefully on the bench before starting to work on something which he was putting inside them.

"Looks like someone will be receiving some unpleasant post today" Iggy agreed.

"Control from Cassini" he called over his radio "Anyone there?"

"Morning Sir" the duty officer back in Cassini's Divisional Office responded.

"Alan, get some bodies together in a company van and roll them towards Bethnal Green as soon as you can" Cassini requested.

"On the way boss" came the swift confirmation as the trio watched, not taking their eyes off that screen.

"I'd say he is about to move" Iggy remarked.

"Looks like it" Cassini agreed "Garry, start the motor and prepare to roll" he called into his radio.

"Here we go" Iggy confirmed as the suspect was seen to finish his work, place the two packages into his shoulder bag and rise from the bench before turning and leaving the room.

"Garry, Jim" Cassini called over the radio as he looked down towards the loading bay where the suspect had emerged from the old building and was proceeding to get into

his vehicle "Be ready guys, he's just about to roll towards you, follow him discreetly with the usual commentary, we will be right behind you."

"You got it boss" Garry confirmed as he started the van, a move reflected a short distance away by the suspect as he started his own vehicle before turning through the deep puddles and debris and then heading out towards the gate.

"Here we go" Garry called to his colleague as the suspect vehicle emerged from the gateway out into the grotty side street.

Everyone watched with baited breath as the suspect got out of the van and went to close and lock the gates behind him before returning to the vehicle and setting off down the street back the way he had come.

"And it's off, off, south down the street" Jim confirmed over the radio as Garry driving alongside set off, following discreetly.

"We got to go" Cassini confirmed as he grabbed his radio and got up, "Thanks for the coffee!" he called as he and Iggy left quickly.

"Anytime" Jack called after them as the two officers rapidly departed.

Cassini and Iggy ran across the old works complex and out the back way to their car which was still parked in the back alley where they quickly got in and Iggy started the engine.

"Mobile One to Mobile Three" Cassini called into his radio as Iggy floored the accelerator and reversed at high speed out of the alley and back into the main street before driving off "Do you have an eyeball on the package?" he requested.

"Mobile Three" Garry responded "Suspect vehicle is heading down Bishopsgate approaching Liverpool Street Station" he confirmed as up ahead in the early morning rush hour traffic that was beginning to build, the red postal van could be just seen.

"What's around that area?" Cassini asked as he pulled out an A to Z atlas and flicked through the pages until he found the one covering the Bishopsgate, Liverpool Street and Bank area.

"A few stations, Liverpool Street obviously" Iggy remarked as they rejoined the main flow of traffic and headed west "If he's going for the City itself we will never find him in that mess at this time of the morning."

"Oh I don't believe it!" Garry's voice was heard to exclaim over the radio at that moment.

"That didn't sound too good" Iggy commented as Cassini reached for the radio knowing this was going to be bad news.

"Go on then, what's happened?" he asked with a distinct hesitation.

“How many postal vans would you like?” Garry was heard to respond “Only the target vehicle turned into a side street and there are about a dozen of them.”

“Liverpool Street Sorting Office” Iggy confirmed “I had forgotten about that.”

“We will be with you in four or five minutes” Cassini confirmed “Get on foot and check every single post office van you can find, we may get lucky.”

“So who gets to give the bad news to the boss then?” Iggy asked with concern.

“With any luck he is on the Underground somewhere out of contact” Cassini remarked “Either way he won't like this too much that is for certain.”

“This is King's Cross St Pancras” the tinny automated announcer declared on board the northbound Victoria Line service which heralded a mass movement of people out of the packed train of elderly 1969 tube stock.

As soon as the crowds cleared and the doors were closed, only a handful of passengers were left on board including in the front section of the lead car, Tracy and the Commander.

“Well come on then” Tracy nudged her husband as the train moved off “What was this outrageous idea of yours then?”

“Ladies first” the Commander responded “I want to see if we are working on the same wavelength here.”

“All right” Tracy agreed as she leaned forward a bit and cleared her throat “I was thinking about the plight of our little friend” she explained “and I wondered if we shouldn't at least try and do something to help, after all he saved your bacon a few months back.”

“I was thinking along similar lines” the Commander admitted.

“I mean we have always talked about adopting or something” Tracy continued “I can't have children, he has no family and we can at least give him a home, a roof over his head and support.”

“It could work” the Commander admitted “We have a spare room and if worse came to the worse and one of us got done in thanks to our choice of employment, its not like he can't look after himself is it?”

“It would have to be his decision of course” Tracy added “Perhaps we should at least look into it, what do you say?”

“I’ll make a few discreet inquiries” the Commander agreed “Start off with his school and then see if there are any family still around although from what I understand I don’t think there is anymore.”

“The next station is Highbury & Islington” the automated announcer declared although it was barely audible above the noise the train was making on the worn track work on this section of the line.

“Here we go” the Commander declared as he and Tracy got up and headed for the doors to leave the train just as the platform appeared in view and the train slowed to a stop before the doors were opened.

Outside the station they were met by Commander Shine of the Bomb Squad who was waiting for them with a car to take them to the laboratory where the device was about to undergo its examination.

“Morning Sir, Maam” Shine greeted them as he opened the rear door of the car to allow them to get in.

“Morning” Tracy responded whilst Shine went to the front and got in the drivers seat where with the engine already running they were quickly on the move “Have you started yet?” she asked.

“I gave it a cursory look over with my boss last night” Shine confirmed “We held off doing anything drastic until the full lab team was in and you had arrived.”

“I don’t suppose there are any first editions of the Standard floating around yet by any chance?” the Commander asked.

“Be another hour or so yet I would have thought” Shine remarked as he negotiated a complicated traffic light controlled junction to access what looked like from the outside an ordinary late 1980’s style industrial estate but was in fact the discreet home to a number of facilities used by the Security Service and other related agencies for analysis and secure storage.

“Here we are” Shine called as he pulled into a gateway where the officer on guard duty gave a cursory check to the occupants before lifting the manual barrier and allowing them through.

“Nice discrete location” the Commander remarked, this being the first time he had been to this facility despite his title and position.

“Given the nature of our and others work here” Shine confirmed “an air of anonymity with a discreet high security presence keeps the tourists away” he explained “Nice and peaceful down here too.”

“I don’t doubt it” the Commander agreed as Shine brought the car to a stop outside an fairly anonymous looking building before getting out and opening the door so that the two officers could get out.

“Follow me please” Shine led the way into the reception area of the building where both Tracy and the Commander noted the discrete but tight security measures that could be made out only to a trained eye that knew exactly what it was looking for.

“So where is the device?” Tracy asked as they headed into the heart of the building before proceeding down a flight of stairs.

“Our explosives lab is in the basement” Shine explained “Self contained within an eight foot thick concrete box buried in the ground beneath us.”

“So if anything goes off, it’s all self contained I suppose” the Commander concluded.

“Well that’s the theory anyway” Shine confirmed “I’d rather not put it to the test mind you.”

In the depths of the building, they arrived at a large heavily armoured metal door which was opened with the assistance of a mechanism, it being far too thick and heavy to ever be able to be opened by hand. On the other side as they passed through the door, they met the head of the Bomb Squad Division, Divisional Commander Greg Philips.

“Morning Greg” the Commander called as they met “Nice place you have down here” he joked.

“Sorry about the décor Commander” Philips admitted as they continued on inside, the large heavy metal door closing firmly behind them “The War Office built this place about twenty five years ago and they were never hot on interior design.”

“So where is my bomb then?” Tracy asked.

“Through here” Philips confirmed as Shine left them to join the analysis team in the examination room “We will be observing from next door.”

“What if it goes off?” Tracy inquired as they entered the observation room from which they could see the technical team gathering in the adjacent examination room around a large green metal case presumably containing the device.

“See this” Philips knocked on the window between the two rooms “Eight inches of thick bullet proof glass” he explained “It won’t contain a large blast but it will protect us from the worst of it.”

“That’s very reassuring...” the Commander remarked with a tone of voice indicating he felt the exact opposite.

“Ok then” Philips called over an intercom link into the examination room “Let’s see what we have to play with today.”

“Right then” Shine declared as he began the commentary “August 23rd, seven fourteen a.m. The subject is a class three explosive device recovered from a scene in Mayfair yesterday evening which was diffused on scene as best as we can tell.”

Tracy, the Commander and Philips all strained to see inside the case as Shine opened it to reveal the partially dismantled device nestling securely inside. Everyone held their breath as it was carefully removed from its case and placed in full view in the centre of the examination table.

“Initial examination of the device shows it to consist of a regular card posting tube, two feet in length and eight inches in diameter” Shine continued “The exterior of the package has only three sets of markings visible, one is a typewritten address label, probably computer generated, in addition we have a partial franking mark which reads 'Liverpool' and a neatly handwritten notice in blue ink at one end requesting that the bearer of the package opens it at that end only.”

“I take it the end which you should open contains a nasty surprise?” the Commander asked.

“Correct” Shine confirmed “There is a wire running around the inside edge of the lid at that end which means that if it had been opened, the wire would have broken and bang as we say in the trade.”

“Nasty...” Tracy remarked.

“In addition to the wire trigger in the right hand end, there was also a photo electric cell, a light sensor located in the left hand end which was removed during defusing” Shine added showing his audience the small black sensor he had removed the previous evening, now safely sealed in a marked evidence bag “Whoever built this thing was expecting us to open it at the wrong end and left this for us.”

“Well that rules out you average run of the mill nutter” the Commander concluded.

“Agreed” Shine responded as he continued the examination by carefully exposing the contents of the package amid much pensive holding of breath from the audience.

“The contents of the package” Shine continued “consists of approximately five to six pounds of an as yet unidentified explosive substance, three separate detonators including remote and timed plus battery and associated electronics.”

“What's your impression of the workmanship?” the Commander asked.

“Professional I would say” Shine concluded “The way this has been meticulously assembled indicates an experienced person who definitely knew what they were doing.”

“And the explosive?” the Commander inquired.

“Definitely home brew” Shine confirmed “Very powerful and very nicely made too.”

“What's in it?” Tracy asked.

"Well we did the chemical analysis last night" Shine confirmed "Common household chemicals in carefully measured proportions, effective, cheap and very difficult to trace as it's all effectively over the counter."

"Another dead end then" Tracy remarked with a resigned sigh.

"How potent is it?" the Commander asked.

"Debbie our chemical expert took a small sample to the firing range last night" Philips responded "One gram of the mixture inside a biscuit tin, blew the lid off and imbedded it in the ceiling."

"Ouch..." Tracy responded.

"We'll get any forensics off it if we can" Shine added "Fingerprints, fibres and so forth but I wouldn't get your hopes up, this guy is just too careful to make mistakes like that."

"Thank you ladies and gentlemen" the Commander responded having seen enough and not likely to be seeing any more information come from the device. He was just about to leave with Tracy however when a thought suddenly occurred to him and he turned back "Hang on" he asked "Why didn't it go off?"

"You tell me" Shine was forced to admit "So far all of the devices we have encountered have been near perfect, exploding within ten minutes of delivery with the exception of the one in the van which I assume never got to where it was supposed to be going."

"Then just as we need some information on a device, we get it handed to us on a plate with this" Tracy remarked.

"Arrange the words garden path and being led up the, into a well known phrase or saying" the Commander commented.

"We had better get going" Tracy remarked as she noted the time was pressing and the first edition of that day's Standard newspaper was due to be on sale within half an hour.

"Very well" the Commander agreed "I'll leave you to your little toys ladies and gentlemen, I have to go and find out what the maker of this device actually wants."

"It's here" Collins declared as he entered the investigation room that had been set up at New Scotland Yard for the current situation. He placed four copies of the Standard newspaper, freshly delivered from the print works onto the conference table.

"Any sign of the Commander?" Sir Richard asked as he leaned over and picked up a copy of the paper.

“On his way back from the Bomb Squad now” Fuller confirmed “His and Divisional Commander Caverner's Oyster Cards passed through the barriers at St. James's Park about a minute ago.

“So in summary we have five devices” Collins began a round up of where they were so far with the joint investigation “Three went off at what we assume to be their intended destination, one went off prematurely in the back of a post van and the fifth one failed to detonate.”

“We are assuming it failed to detonate” the Commander remarked as he entered the room and caught a copy of the paper as Sir Richard tossed it to him “Whoever this bomber guy is, he's too clever and thorough to make mistakes.”

“You think it's a message of some kind?” Tracy asked as she joined her husband at the head of the conference table.

“Perhaps” the Commander admitted “And I am not convinced that the van explosion was a random accident either. What do we know about the driver of that vehicle?”

“Francis Beaufort, fifty three, Supervisor at Mount Pleasant Sorting Office and filling in as there was a staff shortage yesterday apparently” Fuller confirmed, reading from his laptop screen.

“Do a search on him” the Commander requested “I want to know everything about the late Mr Beaufort and if he had any connection with any of the other premises targeted.”

“I am still cross referencing all the data we have on the targets so I'll just add it to the mix” Fuller confirmed “Trouble is I am a bit behind schedule thanks to yesterday's shenanigans.

“Right, where is this message?” the Commander asked as he placed the paper on the table and began to leaf through it furiously.

“Here we go” Sir Richard declared “Page 46, third column, fifth one down by the looks of it.”

“Babylon rises to meet those who oppose him at nine o'clock” the Commander read out “Four messages striking at the heart of they who betrayed me.”

“What a load of bollocks...” Collins remarked.

“I couldn't agree more” the Commander was forced to admit “Did anyone at the Standard remember anything about the person who placed this?”

“Someone rang up the personal's booking clerk, paid on a credit card and the message was input into the system” Fuller confirmed “and the credit card turned out to be one stolen in the post last week when it was checked.”

“That is what is linking all of this” the Commander concluded “The Post Office system, all delivered through the Royal Mail plus we have a suspicious van which all fits.”

“So what are these four messages then?” Collins asked.

“Four explosive devices would be my guess” Tracy admitted “Where, heaven only knows.”

“I know I am going to regret this” the Commander asked “but how soon can I get on the television and make an urgent appeal?”

“I can have the BBC down here inside of ten minutes” Fuller confirmed “Actually hang on a minute” he tapped on his laptop and called up the live CCTV feed from the street outside New Scotland Yard “In fact they have a crew downstairs outside the front door right now.”

“I have an idea” the Commander confirmed “Simon, get a description and photograph of our unexploded device sent to all the media and news agencies right now, I want to see it on every TV and radio station within thirty minutes.”

“Doing it now” Fuller confirmed.

“How do I look love?” the Commander asked as he stood up and brushed down his uniform tunic as best as he could.

“You've looked worse” Tracy admitted with a wry grin.

“Thanks I think...” the Commander responded before kissing her on the cheek and hurrying out of the room.

As the Commander headed downstairs he met a very worried looking gentleman coming the other way who stopped him as they met in the middle of the Reception Area on the ground floor.

“Mr Administrator General?” the worried looking man asked.

“Indeed” the Commander confirmed.

“Sir William Berresford” the man introduced himself with a nervous shake of the hand “Postmaster General.”

“A man with a problem” the Commander commented “I know the feeling, what can I do for you?”

“I think the recent incidents over the last twenty four hours could be an attempt to extort money from certain key Post Office employees” Berresford informed him “My head of Postal Security has come to me this morning with express concerns and I think we ought to be joining forces.”

“Good idea” the Commander agreed “Look I am about to confront the press and issued a description of the suspect packages, hopefully avoid anyone else getting blown to bits before the day is out. See the Receptionist and ask to be escorted to the Investigation Control Room and I will see you back up there in a bit.”

“Very well” Berresford agreed “Thank you for your time.”

“Here we go” the Commander remarked to himself as he checked his uniform one more time before taking a deep breath and heading out of the door, down the path to the street outside where the media were gathered behind crowd control barriers awaiting his arrival.

Jack arrived at his school early as usual, well ahead of the rest of his classmates and after acknowledging the site manager who had let him in the front gate, he went inside the typical 1950's brick and concrete school building.

Once inside he made directly for the Sixth Form Common Room on the third floor of the main block where he found a couple of the upper sixth form watching the television whilst scoffing copious amounts of breakfast cereal as per usual.

“I thought I would find you here Kyle” Jack remarked as he looked around the doorpost “I managed to find that CD you were looking for” he informed him.

“Oh great mate” Kyle, the taller older of the two students in the room responded “What do I owe you?” he asked.

“Call it a tenner” Jack confirmed but his attention was already being drawn to the television which was showing a live news broadcast “What's occurring?” he asked nodding towards the set.

“Apparently there is going to be some big announcement about these bombs that have been going off” Kyle explained.

“Mind if I hang around for a couple of minutes?” Jack asked as normally uniformed junior pupils were not usually allowed in the hallowed interior of the Sixth Form Common Room.

“Yeah, come on” Kyle agreed and Jack cautiously entered just as the Commander appeared on the television looking slightly flustered as he was being bombarded by numerous rapidly fired questions all at the same time.

“I have an important statement” the Commander declared, having to raise his voice to be heard above the din “After that I will take some questions, so do you mind?”

Once the noise and confusion had died down, the Commander cleared his throat and began.

“As you are all aware” he declared in his best authoritative voice “Yesterday four explosive devices detonated at various locations across the City. Yesterday evening a fifth device was found in offices in the Mayfair area of the city and safely diffused by the Bomb Squad.”

The Commander paused for a moment as the press either listened intently or furiously scribbled notes, then he continued.

“This appears to be the work of a lone individual” the Commander carried on “No established or suspected terrorist organisation is believed to be involved at this time, however we have reason to believe that further explosive devices may be in circulation at this time.”

That revelation shocked everyone watching both outside New Scotland Yard and on the television and radio, except Jack of course as he was well aware of what was going on but said nothing as he continued to watch the live news broadcast.

“We ask that the public, particularly those who are in the city of London and handle mail on a regular basis keep a close eye out for suspect devices” the Commander requested “All of the devices are believed to be very similar in appearance, in the form of card posting tubes approximately two feet in length with neatly presented address labels and marked 'open this end' on one leading edge of the package.”

“On no account” he stressed “should you attempt to open any packages such as what I have described. Analysis of the unexploded one we recovered has shown that these devices have been designed and assembled by someone who is meticulous and highly professional, incorporating a number of trigger devices within the package.”

The press were furiously writing details down as on the television, a summary of this information was appearing across the bottom of the screen on one of those scrolling banner graphics that news organisations seem to be so fond of nowadays.

“If you receive a package that matches this description” the Commander carried on “Do not touch it in any way, step away from the package, evacuate the immediate area and call the emergency services. Please don't try to be heroic or do anything silly, that's our job.”

“Being heroic or doing something silly?” Tracy wondered as she watched the broadcast from the Control Room in New Scotland Yard.

“I also take this opportunity to appeal to the individual behind these attacks” the Commander continued “Talk to us and we can work this out, whatever your grievance. You can talk to one of our trained negotiators, hell you can even talk to me if you so wish.”

“In addition I appeal to the general public to remain calm” the Commander added with honest sincerity “I appreciate that these are difficult times and people are frightened but I ask you all to remain calm, go about your daily business and try not to worry. If you suspect anything, pick up the telephone and report it no matter how

insignificant it may seem as every little shred of evidence helps in our investigation. Any questions?"

"Now there is a chap with his hands full" Kyle remarked as they continued to watch the television in the Sixth Form Common Room as the Commander was bombarded with questions, most of them rather trivial which was unfortunately the nature of news media coverage these days with its leanings more towards the sensational than the factual.

"I know the feeling" Jack admitted as he got up and left "I'll see you later" he called as he departed.

"Morning Jack" the Head Teacher called as he came out of his office just in time to see the familiar short form of Jack pass him in the corridor.

"Morning Boss" Jack responded as he went by "Lovely weather for it" he remarked as he carried on down the corridor, the hunch of his shoulders and worried look clearly telling the Head Teacher that something was on his mind as he disappeared from sight.

"Well what do you know" Fuller remarked as a number of details came up on the screen after he had done a file search.

"Did I miss something?" the Commander asked as he entered the Investigation Room and joined him and Berresford the Postmaster General by the computer.

"Well I would have done if it weren't for Sir William here" Fuller explained "Tell me Sir, do you remember the City Road GPO Van Robbery ten years ago?"

"Before my time up here" the Commander admitted.

"Wasn't that the armed blag up near Angel?" Collins remarked as he joined the conversation "Couple of million in cash went walkies and two guards wound up in hospital if I recall."

"That would be the one" Berresford confirmed "Two million, three hundred and sixty eight thousand, three hundred and forty five pounds and sixty five pence to be exact."

"Good memory" the Commander complimented him.

"Well I was the Supervisor at the Liverpool Street cashiers office when it happened and it took me two weeks to work out exactly how much we lost. I plan to have that number etched on my tombstone."

"Classy..." Fuller remarked.

"So what's the connection?" Collins asked.

“There were two Security Guards travelling in an unmarked armoured van on their way to make a cash delivery to the City Road Post Office when it was raided just north of Old Street” Berresford explained “The driver of the van that day was none other than a Mr Francis Beaufort.”

“The post office worker who got blown to bits in his van in Victoria Street yesterday?” the Commander asked.

“Give the gentleman a gold star” Fuller confirmed “and for a bonus point, guess what yesterday was?”

“Wednesday?” Collins asked.

“The tenth anniversary of that very armed robbery” Berresford confirmed “It could just be a coincidence of course.”

“...except I don't believe in them” the Commander added “Besides it confirms my suspicion that Beaufort was a target rather than an unlucky bystander.”

“And then there is this” Berresford rather reluctantly produced a letter sealed in a clear plastic bag and passed it to the Commander.

“Babylon is coming” the Commander read from the neatly typewritten letter “Two million and change is owed and its time to collect. Watch for my messages” he studied the letter for a moment before passing it to Collins for him to have a look.

“That turned up in the internal mail across my desk first thing this morning” Berresford explained “I have no idea where it came from other than it passed through Liverpool Street Sorting Office sometime yesterday if the postmark is correct.”

“Could I venture a theory?” Collins asked as he reached across to the large desk in the centre of the room and after a bit of rummaging in the papers there produced the evidence photograph of the unexploded device that had been recovered and looked at it again.

“Shoot” the Commander responded.

“That franking mark that is visible on the outer package” Collins explained “It's not Liverpool, its Liverpool Street, London not Merseyside.”

“It fits” the Commander agreed.

“May I have a look at that?” Berresford asked.

“Yes sure” Collins confirmed and passed him the photograph which he proceeded to examine closely.

“Liverpool Street would just have been the place where the mail that this package was in was sorted” Berresford explained as he took out a small magnifying glass and

examined the photograph more closely “Where it was posted is the crucial bit which is in this bit here.”

“I have an electronic version of the picture if that is any help?” Fuller suggested.

“It would yes” Berresford confirmed.

Fuller duly swivelled back to his computer and called up the image and enhanced the franking and electronically produced sticky label that has replaced stamps on most posted mail these days “Here you go” he declared.

“That's the office issuing ID right there” Berresford pointed to a number on the screen “and if I cross reference it with my little black book I can tell you where this was posted.”

“Well it was prior to nine o'clock yesterday morning” the Commander commented as he noted the just visible time and date on the package franking “All we need to know is where?”

“St. James's Park” Berresford declared consulting his little black book he always carried around with him for reference purposes.

“Hang on a minute” the Commander responded “That's right outside here” he went over to the window, pulled up the Venetian blind and pointed down into the street of Broadway below where visible opposite New Scotland Yard was the Broadway St. James's Park branch of the Post Office.

“Cheeky bugger” Collins remarked “He's laughing at us and the Post Office in one fell swoop.”

“Simon” the Commander returned to Fuller “Work with Mr Berresford and his people and pull everything you can on the City Road job, I want names, original statements, physical evidence, the works and preferably all before ten o'clock.”

“I'll see what we got” Fuller confirmed as he began to type away furiously on his computer.

“I'll give my office a call” Collins added “See if we have anything on organised armed blaggers working in London ten years ago.”

“And if you find the money along the way it would be appreciated” Berresford commented.

“None of it was recovered?” the Commander asked.

“Not a penny of it” Berresford confirmed “No suspects, no evidence, nothing. It has been a black mark on the Post Office Security Branch books ever since.”

“One avenue worth trying” Fuller suggested as he began to have some success in accessing details “The chief investigating officer was a Commander Alexander Stewart of the Serious Crimes Branch as was over at the old Islington Office.”

“Right, thank you” the Commander responded as he left the room only to turn back briefly at the doorway “If anything happens I want to be one of the first to know about it” he instructed.

“Yes Sir” Fuller confirmed as the Commander left, heading down the corridor and then up one flight of stairs to the next floor up and into the main Control Room where he found Tracy running things from her usual seat at the top main control console.

“Hello love” Tracy called as the Commander entered and joined her “Nice performance for the press I thought” she remarked “Pity about the toast crumbs on your sleeve though.”

“Oh rats” the Commander responded as he brushed off the crumbs from his uniform tunic “Why do these things always happen to me my dear?” he asked.

“The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune?” Tracy remarked with a wry smile.

“Could you do me a small favour love” the Commander requested.

“Cost you lunch” Tracy confirmed.

“Deal” the Commander agreed “I need to track down one of our officers who was with the old Serious Crimes Branch at Islington about ten years ago” he explained “A Commander Alexander Stewart.”

“I’ll see what I can find” Tracy confirmed “Anything else?”

“See if you can rustle up a couple of plain clothes armed officers and have them discreetly placed in and around the Post Office outside.”

“What the one in Broadway” Tracy responded “As in right outside here? The safest Post Office in the country on account of who its neighbours are?”

“The same” the Commander confirmed.

“Cassini has a couple of fully trained ARU guys on his team” Tracy responded “I’ll put in a call to him, it will give him something to take his mind off that Liverpool Street cock up earlier. Is there something I should know about?”

“Let’s just say this little problem of ours may just have got a tad more complicated” the Commander admitted with a hint of reluctance that Tracy quickly picked up on.

“Ah” Tracy responded “Its going to be one of *those* days isn't it?” she asked.

“I fear so my dear” the Commander admitted before kissing her on the cheek “See you later love.”

Jack was just one of a number of otherwise similar school pupils heading up the stairs at ten to nine for the first class of the day. Having a lot on his mind, he was falling behind the crowd a bit and so as he ascended to the third floor, he had a clear view out of the large windows of the stairwell down into the world outside.

Despite the rain that was starting to fall, Jack could clearly see when he looked to his right going up the stairs over into the large allotments that occupied a five acre site next to the school grounds. Initially he did not give the view which he had seen a hundred times or more before a second look but then did a double take as he noticed a Post Office red van was pulling into the rough track off the road and proceeding through the allotments.

Postal deliveries are not made to garden sheds in the middle of allotments so immediately Jack realised something was not right as he stopped half way up the flight of stairs and after clearing the developing condensation off the glass observed the van as it made its way between the patchwork quilt of different allotments to a large well tended one towards the northern edge of the site.

“Something wrong Jack?” Megan, one of his classmates asked as she passed him on the stairs.

“Sorry?” Jack responded when he realised she had been addressing him.

“Hello, Earth to Jack” Megan waved “You looked like a boy with a problem that's all.”

“Oh erm right” Jack replied “Look, can you do me a favour?” he asked.

“As it's you” Megan agreed.

“Can you tell Mr Bridger I have gone to the nurse ill” Jack explained “I'm not feeling too well.”

“You, ill?” Megan remarked “That'll be a first. All right then but you owe me one” she confirmed before heading off to class.

Jack returned to looking out of the window down at the allotments and confirmed that the van had come to a halt and its location, unfortunately his conversation with Megan plus the poor visibility now being offered by the rain meant that he did not see the occupant of the vehicle get out and head into the garden shed that was in the allotment.

“Right...” Jack concluded to himself as he thought of the best route out of the school without raising suspicion and headed off back down the stairs.

A few minutes later, pulling his blazer tighter in over himself to try and keep out the worst of the rain, he slipped out of a side gate and discreetly crossed the road to the entrance into the large allotment site.

Contained within its rusting and poorly maintained chicken wire fence, the allotments were a patchwork quilt of identically sized patches of land. Some had vegetables and flowers carefully nurtured growing within them, others had bare earth and a garden shed of varying descriptions whilst some were long abandoned and overgrown.

Jack knew from his earlier observations that the allotment at which the van stopped was over the far side and so he quickly made his way between the allotments across the site until he was approaching the location where the van was parked adjacent to a well maintained plot dominated by one of the largest and most imposing of the garden sheds to be found on the entire site.

A decaying partially collapsed greenhouse on the adjacent plot provided ample cover for Jack to observe the site with some shelter. From there he could see through the Perspex window of the shed that someone was moving around inside judging by the shadows flitting backwards and forwards as if its occupant was pacing up and down, a suspicion confirmed by the distant sound of hard soled boots moving on a wooden floor coming from that direction.

Looking over towards the Post Office van, Jack could see it was the same vehicle that he had observed in Bethnal Green the previous day which confirmed his hunch was right. However he quickly ducked down when the man emerged from the shed holding a mobile telephone, the expression on his face seeming to indicate that he had reluctantly come out into the rain in an attempt to get a better signal.

Jack strained to listen to the conversation once the stranger had managed to get a signal and dialled a number.

“It's fourteen” was the stranger's rather odd opening greeting as soon as he had been answered “Yes its all in place, just need you to give the word” he confirmed.

There was a moment of silence as the stranger received a response from the person he had called. It was clear to Jack as he continued to observe that there was a lot more to this business than just a lone individual with a grudge, there were more people involved than it had at first appeared.

“Ok then” the stranger agreed “I'll give our man the nod and then get the rest of the project rolling. I take it you are dealing with the financial issues?”

“Some project...” Jack remarked to himself as the stranger listened to the response on the telephone.

“Very well Sir” the stranger confirmed “Until later then” he concluded before terminating the call and then proceeding to dial a new number.

”Twenty three, this is fourteen” the stranger declared simply as soon as he had been answered “Proceed as soon as doors open and make it look convincing” he ordered “Good luck mate” he concluded before hanging up and returning back inside the shed.

Jack retrieved a notebook from his inside blazer pocket and made a note of the numerical identifications that the stranger had used during his two telephone calls before returning the book to his pocket for safekeeping.

A couple of minutes later the stranger emerged again from the shed carrying a canvas bag which he took over to the Post Office van. There he proceeded to remove the Post Office markings from the side which were in fact realistic looking facsimiles printed onto magnetic sheets which he tossed casually into the back of the van before getting in the drivers seat and starting the engine.

Jack realised that if he was going to see which direction the van was going to depart in, he was going to have to be quick and move briskly across the allotment site to the gateway. Fortunately as he set off, geography was on his side as the route on foot was far more direct than the rough track the van was forced to take which looped around the interior of the site.

Even still it was a close call and Jack emerged out of the gateway only seconds before the van reached the same location. As the vehicle came out of the gate the driver caught sight of the soggy school boy standing on the pavement immediately outside the gate and for a split second the two were looking straight at each other before the stranger turned out into the road and headed off westwards in the general direction of central London.

“There's never a cab when you need one” Jack wryly remarked looking around for a solution to the problem of how he was going to keep tabs on the mystery van and its driver. The sensible thing would have been to put a call into the Security Service and let them deal with it but not only was their a good chance that his information would take time to get to the right people, he also had no telephone on him and in this day of extensive mobile communication, there were no public payphones around anymore.

“Where are you going?” Jack asked himself as he saw the van disappear from sight at the end of the road but then a thought occurred to him, it was just a hunch but it was worth a try.

Quickly Jack set off on foot in the opposite direction down the road as quick as his little legs could carry him.

“Looks like quite a queue this morning” the Sub Post Master of the St. James’s Park Post Office remarked as she looked through the glass doors with just a minute until the office opening time of nine o'clock.

“Do you know most of your regular customers?” Commander Cassini asked as he joined her at the door and surveyed the queue of customers waiting patiently outside.

“You get to know most of the regulars” the Sub Post Master admitted “We get a lot of business mail from the various companies based around here and they usually send their regular admin staff down.

“Is it all right if I and my lads hang around over there?” Cassini, dressed like his colleagues in Post Office uniforms to blend into the background asked.

“Feel free” the Sub Post Master confirmed with a friendly smile “Just if anyone asks anything, the postal rates are on that poster on the wall.”

“Right...” Cassini responded looking around before nodding to his three colleagues to get to their positions and be as discrete as possible. “Ok then” he declared “Better let them in, it looks like its tipping down out there.”

The Sub Post Master duly unlocked and opened the doors, allowing the procession of customers bearing packages and letters to flow in and form the usual orderly queue for the cashier's windows whilst Cassini withdrew to the side to discreetly observe each customer in turn looking for anything suspicious.

“Cashier number two please...” the automated queue announcement system declared backed up by an illuminated red arrow pointing down the line of cashier windows indicating they were ready for the first customer of the day, a little grey haired old lady with a large parcel that judging by its shape, form and address Cassini reckoned was probably bound for a grandchild somewhere.

“Cashier number three please...” the announcement called, this being the cue for the next person in the queue, a young lady with a bag of franked mail to hand in to come forward. The Sub Post Master gave a discreet nod to Cassini at that point which was their pre agreed signal for her to indicate anyone as they came forward who were known regulars and therefore more than likely to be above suspicion.

Cassini scanned the various individuals in the queue and so far out of the fifteen or twenty people either already being served or already in line, none really stood out as anything more than ordinary everyday customers waiting to either post something or use one of the Post Office's many other services.

The automated next cashier announcements continued to echo around the large public area of the Post Office and as soon as customers had been served and left, they were replaced at the cashier windows by the next in line whilst in turn their place in the queue was filled by further arrivals.

By ten past nine nothing untoward had occurred or showed any sign of occurring, most of the initial customers with the exception of the little old lady who was having trouble with decimal coinage, not unusual for ladies of her advanced years, had gone and there was a constant flow of people both in and out of the door.

“Are you sure about this boss” Iggy asked having crossed across the floor to Cassini and joining him “This lot look pretty harmless to me.”

“So was Hannibal Lector until he bought a cook book” Cassini responded.

“You've been around the Commander too much boss” Iggy commented “You are getting cynical.”

“Comes with the job description I think” Cassini admitted with a wry smile but all the time maintaining a discrete watching brief on everyone coming in and going out. “Dear oh dear, Doris is making a meal of it isn't she?” he remarked nodding towards the old lady who was still at the cashier's window.

“You know her?” Iggy asked.

“Yeah, she's me auntie” Cassini explained “She sometimes helps me when I need someone inside a building where no one would notice a little old lady.”

“Game old bird” Iggy remarked.

“Used to be a Police Woman and an Air Raid Patrol officer during the war” Cassini explained.

“Whoa...” Iggy suddenly commented quietly as he noticed two people come in that caught his attention “There is a face that looks out of place, green jacket and holdall, four o'clock just came in behind that business suit guy.”

"I got him" Cassini confirmed and withdrew behind a shelving unit to make a discrete call over his hidden radio.

"Game time ladies and gentlemen" Cassini called "We have a potential suspect now five from the front of the queue, IC1 male in a green jacket carrying a large holdall."

Cassini and his officers positioned all around the interior of the Post Office watched the suspect intently as one by one he advanced to the front of the queue of waiting customers.

After a couple of minutes the suspect had made his steady way forward until he was the penultimate person in the queue immediately behind the man in the business suit that had preceded him in.

"Cashier number three please" the automated queue system announced causing the businessman to move forward leaving the green jacketed suspect at the front of the queue.

All the eyes of Cassini's team were on the suspect at the head of the queue so they were understandably surprised when the business suit man at the cashier's window suddenly produced four posting tubes from the briefcase he was carrying along with a handgun.

"What the hell?" Cassini exclaimed as he realised the situation was unfolding rapidly and not to the original script either.

"Put these in the postal system right now and fill the bag with the cash" the business suit man suddenly demanded of the surprised cashier.

"Green jacket guy was a diversion" Iggy remarked.

"Eagle one to Control" Cassini discreetly called into his radio "Code red, send in the cavalry."

Up in the incident investigation room in New Scotland Yard, the Commander was looking over some intelligence reports with Collins and Berresford when Tracy came running in having run from the Control Room down the corridor.

"Balloon is going up" Tracy exclaimed making everyone stop what they were doing and look up "Armed robbery in progress, St. James's Park Post Office and the suspect has four posting tubes with him."

"Saddle up ladies and gents" the Commander declared as he drew his gun, checked it and with everyone else, headed out the door.

"All the cash" the man calmly demanded, waving his gun pointedly at the cashier.

Behind him, Cassini and Iggy were about to move in to surround them when the green jacketed man at the head of the queue suddenly produced a pump action sawn off shotgun from the holdall, cocked it and fired one shot into the air, shattering a light fitting and causing everyone to immediately react by ducking down.

"Everyone on the floor" the green jacket man demanded "NOW!!!"

"What is this, a convention?" Cassini remarked quietly as he joined the others in getting down onto the floor as to identify himself as an undercover officer now with all the civilians present would have been inviting a blood bath.

"All the cash, come on now darling don't hold back on me" the man at the cashiers window demanded.

"Here" the cashier pushed the bag back over "That's all we have."

"Now do the postage on those" the man insisted whereupon the cashier processed and printed four postage labels and affixed them to the posting tubes.

"In the mail bag" the man demanded.

"There" the cashier responded as she put the tubes carefully in the large grey posting sack next to her.

"Thank you" the man responded before turning to his colleague "Ok let's go" he called as they left together.

"Everyone stay down" the shotgun man insisted as they reached the door.

Opening the door they quickly exited into the street only to be confronted by the best part of a hundred armed Security Service officers including at least three Armed Support Unit specialist teams, all with weapons drawn and surrounding them in a wide arc.

"An armed robbery in a Post Office right next door to the headquarters of the largest law enforcement agency in western Europe" the Commander remarked from the front and centre of the surrounding arc of officers "So tell me, what's it like being a rocket scientist?"

"Don't..." Tracy strongly suggested as she stepped up alongside the two men and held her gun to the green jacket man's head "You're outgunned, outnumbered and out of luck so drop the gun and the bag and come quietly."

Slowly and with a resigned reluctance, the two men dropped their weapons and put their hands whereupon they were quickly seized, turned to face the wall of the post office and searched by several officers.

"You can't do this" the business suit man demanded as he was handcuffed and was about to be led away.

"Listen, it's already been a bad week" Tracy responded "You have the right to remain silent so please do me and yourself a favour and shut the hell up?"

"What?" the green jacket man responded.

"I think what the good lady wife is trying to say is you're nicked sunshine" the Commander confirmed with a wry grin as the two men were unceremoniously led away.

"Right, get those two comedians processed and in an interview room" Tracy ordered "and get the Bomb Squad in here."

Having run the mile or so to Leytonstone Underground Station and taken the first available westbound Central Line Service, Jack emerged fifteen minutes later from the south west subsurface exit of Bethnal Green Station just as the weather started to take a turn for the worse and it began to rain again.

"This is just not my day" Jack remarked to himself as he headed down the road and turned left into Bethnal Green High Road and took shelter beneath the main line railway over bridge.

"What am I doing?" Jack asked himself as he looked across the busy traffic light controlled junction towards Roman Road. This was a complete hunch as to where the red van may be going and the tube trip the only option to try and get ahead of it if he was right.

The odds that he was right were slim and Jack knew that, however despite his young age, he was a very accomplished poker player so knew very well that sometimes a gamble on slim odds paid off.

Five minutes passed, the rain kept coming down and the passing pedestrian and vehicular traffic went by not noticing the little schoolboy sheltering beneath the railway bridge.

Jack was on the verge of giving up and heading back to what passed for the nearest thing to a home he had known for almost two years when suddenly across the junction he saw it.

Pulling up to the traffic lights at the Roman Road exit next to the church was the red van. He could tell even at this distance it was the same one as although its unidentified driver had removed the realistic yet false markings earlier, he had left the yellow fleet numbers on and these were just visible.

"Am I good or what?" Jack remarked to himself as in the distance the traffic lights changed and the van moved off heading towards him with a number eight bus just behind.

The next problem for Jack was how to maintain his rather unorthodox pursuit of the van as it approached and passed him, causing to look away for a moment in case he might be recognised.

A solution to Jack's problem lay in the vehicle immediately behind the van in the form of the all red painted East London Trident type double deck bus on a number eight route duty.

Quickly Jack ran to the nearby bus stop only a short distance down the road and managed to flag down the bus, boarding it and passing his Oyster Card over the yellow reader on the driver's ticket machine before heading to the upper deck.

As the bus pulled away from the stop, Jack took the vacant front offside seat and wiped away the condensation from the windows to see the van now a couple of vehicles ahead in the slow moving rain hampered traffic. Indeed the traffic congestion was so bad that morning that despite calling at three bus stops along the way, Jack was able to keep the van in his sights ahead all the way along Bethnal Green Road.

He prepared to get off the bus when he saw they were approaching the turn off that led via the back streets to the abandoned printing works which was where he predicted that the van would be going. Sure enough just ahead it indicated to turn right and this was Jack's cue to head down the stairs and get off at the next stop which was just ahead.

Stepping out into the rain, Jack had a quick look around before heading across the road through the rain that was now pouring down as much of Greater London was

now being subjected to a cloud burst from the ominous dark clouds above that seemed to stretch solidly for miles in every direction.

Knowing the maze of local side streets and seemingly long forgotten alleys well, he was able to take a short cut back to the old printing works and enter via the hidden gap in the back fence before heading over to a vantage point in one of the buildings on the opposite side of the old yard to the loading dock area where he found the red van parked.

He did not have to wait long however for no sooner had Jack made himself comfortable than the man emerged once again and made straight for the van carrying a canvas holdall that he placed carefully in the front passenger seat foot well before getting in the drivers seat and restarting the rather rough sounding engine.

“Oh here we go again” Jack remarked as he watched the van begin to move off. Quickly Jack headed back the way he had come in and was able to just beat the van to the street outside, emerging out of the main gate only moments after he got there himself and forcing him to quickly duck out of sight to avoid detection.

The van turned out and headed past, back towards Bethnal Green High Road forcing Jack to cut back through the network of back alleys to cut it off. As luck would have it the traffic was so heavy that when the van reached the main road and tried to turn left to head in the direction of Shoreditch and Liverpool Street, it was not able to achieve anything more than a slow walking pace which meant Jack was able to get ahead of it.

Walking briskly through the incessant rain, Jack headed to the end of Bethnal Green Road at the junction with Shoreditch High Street in the shadow of the major building works which were being done for the northern extension of the East London Line.

Despite it being a traffic light controlled junction, the sheer volume of traffic coupled with a problem with a delivery lorry that was turning across the carriageway just ahead meant that the van took some ten minutes to make the half mile journey from where it had re-entered Bethnal Green Road to the junction where Jack was waiting for it in the shadow of a shop doorway to see which way it was going to go.

“Ah so we are Liverpool Street bound then” Jack remarked as he could see from the lane the van had eventually managed to get into at the junction that he was intending to turn left and head south towards the centre of the City.

Once he knew where the van was likely to be heading, Jack wasted no time in walking quickly down Shoreditch High Road so that he could get as far ahead of it as possible, indeed such was the slow moving nature of the traffic that he managed to reach Liverpool Street Station in Bishopsgate before the van managed to catch him up and pass him by before pulling off ahead to the left hand side of the road and coming to a halt.

Unexpectedly the driver emerged from the nearside out of the passenger side door but paused momentarily as he was opening when in the wing mirror on the door he caught

sight momentarily of something or someone reflected in it that made him do a double take for a split second.

Jack, seeing that the driver was stepping out of his vehicle onto the pavement ducked behind a telephone box and observed what the driver did next through its rather badly scratched windows.

The stranger looked up and down the street for a few moments before extracting his canvas bag from the vehicle and shutting the door and then heading up the road on foot. By this point the rain had eased off and the number of pedestrians about had increased which meant Jack was able to follow by mingling into the crowd where he hoped he would remain undetected.

Up ahead the stranger turned to his left into a side street and Jack was forced to increase his pace to reach the corner before he lost contact. Looking around the corner into what appeared to be an unremarkable side street running between the backs of two rows of buildings, he saw the stranger approach a large anonymous black painted steel double door and proceed to unlock it.

Once the door was open, the stranger took a moment to look around before extracting his mobile telephone from his pocket and speed dialling a number.

“This is Fourteen” the stranger declared as soon as he had been answered and he was sure that no one was overhearing his clandestine conversation “About to enter Alpha now and set things in motion, how did it go with the ducks?”

Jack continued to observe from the corner but was too far away to hear the conversation, only having the stranger's business like and insistent body language as he continued his telephone conversation to go on as to what was being said.

“Excellent” the stranger confirmed “That should keep them busy for a while. One minor problem though, I seem to have picked up a tail, a rather small one admittedly, do we have any assets in the area who could eliminate this little inconvenience?”

The stranger continued to check around to ensure that he was not being overheard as he received a positive response from whoever it was he had called.

“That will do nicely” the stranger agreed after receiving the news he had wanted to hear in response to his request “Van can go at anytime you feel is convenient and I will call you in about twenty minutes when the fun begins.” With that the stranger terminated the call and proceeded inside the building through the ominous looking steel doors, closing them with a firm and insistent bang behind him.

Jack headed into the side street and walked up to the door through which the stranger had just disappeared. It was obvious as he reached it and checked the handle that it was firmly secured from the inside and that there was no way he was going to be able to get through it. There were also no markings or any signage whatsoever to indicate what may be on the other side or what that building's purpose was.

As he contemplated the door, Jack became aware of a dark saloon car pulling into the side street from the opposite end. Its blacked out windows and dipped headlights presented an ominous sight as it approached slowly before coming to a stop approximately ten feet from where he was standing.

After a brief moment all four doors of the car opened simultaneously and a group of four identically black suited men of heavy build stepped out into the street and proceeded purposefully over to Jack.

“Morning” Jack responded looking up at the extremely tall men who were looking down at him through dark sunglasses with stern expressions “Something I can do for you gentlemen?” he asked only then to notice as they reached him that there were gun holsters just visible beneath their carefully tailored suits.

“Come with us please” the leader of the sinister group announced as he produced his weapon with silencer attached and pointed it at Jack with clearly implied menace.

Jack was ready for this however and quickly made a run for it causing the two of the men to give chase whilst the other two returned to their vehicle and followed.

“Excuse me please!!” Jack called as he rushed out of the end of the side street through the pedestrian traffic and straight out into the busy Bishopsgate road where his sudden appearance in the road along with his two pursuers forced two buses to make emergency stops, missing them by a matter of inches.

It was clear that whoever Jack's pursuers were, they were determined to get him so he quickly ran, weaving between the pedestrians who looked on wondering what on earth was going on until he entered the upper level of Liverpool Street Main Line Station and headed around the upper balcony above the main concourse towards the large blue destination indicator board that dominated the centre.

“Great, a copper when you need one for a change” Jack remarked when he saw a uniformed member of the Security & Police Service Transport Division ahead and headed straight for him.

“Hello!” Jack called as he approached the officer almost out of breath “Can you help me please?”

“What's up mate?” the officer asked as Jack reached him whilst in the distance the two men entered the station and looked around trying to track him down having lost sight of him.

“You see those two goons over there in the natty suits?” Jack indicated back towards the east entrance where he had just come in.

“Oh yes” the officer responded “Not exactly the weather for sunglasses is it?”

“Yeah well, they are trying to grab me” Jack explained as they saw the two men split up and proceed one each around each side of the upper level. Meanwhile the sound of a commotion coming from the bus station area at the other end with squealing tyres

and the sound of horns saw them turn around to see a moment later the other two men enter from the opposite end.

“Look I got to go” Jack explained “Tell the Commander that Jack is in a spot of bother and I’ll give him a call” he declared before heading off.

“What the...?” the officer responded as Jack headed off having realised that the man heading around that side of the upper level had seen him and with his associates were about to head him off.

“Excuse me Sir” the officer turned to confront the man as he approached “Can I have a word?”

The sinister suited man said nothing, merely pulled out his silenced gun and fired twice, striking the officer before he had a chance to go for his own weapon. As the officer fell forward over the balcony and crashed to the concourse below to screams from people who witnessed the plunge, the assassin continued without so much as a pause for breath in his pursuit of Jack who by now was heading down the intermediate staircase to the lower level, pausing only when he heard the commotion and saw the officer he had speaking to only moments before descend to the concourse below.

“Oh hell!” Jack exclaimed and despite what was going on, kept going as he now had all four of the suited men closing in on his location. Quick thinking was called for and so upon reaching the bottom of the stairs, Jack turned and headed as fast as he could to the Underground Station entrance, entering the modern ticket hall and hiding in amongst the crowds around the ticket barriers before passing through them with his Oyster Card.

The crowd of people in and around the top of the escalators that led down to the Central Line meant there was no way he was going to be able to get out that way so Jack headed for the subsurface platforms directly ahead and quickly descended down to the eastbound platform.

Unfortunately as he moved along the platform, the four men were on his trail as they barged through the side access gate of the ticket barriers and proceeded to split up and circulate throughout the station in search of him.

“There are severe delays to all Metropolitan, Circle and Hammersmith & City Services due to a signal failure at Aldgate” the announcement boomed over the eastbound platform, causing Jack to look up at the next train indicator to see that the next service from there was not going to be for at least another ten minutes.

“This is just not my day!” he declared and headed back towards the platform exit only to turn back onto the platform when he saw through the crowd one of the men approaching. Jack was desperate now and looked around for somewhere to hide until his eyes alighted on a possibility at the west end of the platform.

A few moments later the man who was charged with the job of checking the eastbound subsurface platform for Jack appeared and began to look up and down its length but could see nothing, a fact confirmed by his colleague when he looked across

at him on the opposite platform. A few moments later the distant sound of emergency service vehicle sirens approaching started to echo through the station complex and forced the four men to make a swift and discrete exit before the authorities arrived.

“Did the weather man actually forecast this muck?” the Commander asked as he looked out from the St. James’s Park Post Office doorway across the street towards New Scotland Yard as the rain teemed down once again.

“Occasional showers were what the BBC were saying this morning” Tracy admitted as she and the Commander huddled together in the doorway waiting for the rain to ease so that they could make a run for it across the road “Wrong again I guess.”

“Something doesn’t add up here” the Commander remarked.

“Yes I know” Tracy agreed “The forecast hasn't been right in three weeks.”

“I meant about our Keystone Robbers actually dear” the Commander responded.

“I know” Tracy confirmed “I was being rhetorical, at least I think that is the word for it.”

“There used to be a time when criminals, even the dumb ones had some common sense” the Commander commented “I mean if you were going to hold up a Post Office, this would be the last one I would pick.”

“Sir” came a call from behind them inside the Post Office causing the two officers to turn to see Philips, the head of the Bomb Squad approach with one of the posting tubes in his hand.

“What have you got?” the Commander inquired.

“The devices were the real deal all right but the explosive is nothing but good old fashioned linseed window putty” Philips confirmed “They were never going to harm anyone unless they were going to be used to hit someone over the head with.”

“Ever get the feeling we have been taken up a garden path?” Tracy remarked.

“Funny you should say that love” the Commander agreed “See what you can do with any forensics off those and let me know what you find” he instructed Philips.

“Will do Sir” Philips confirmed before heading back to the cashier's counter area where the rest of his team were continuing to work on the now confirmed safe devices.

“Hey the rain is easing off a bit” Tracy remarked looking skywards where a hint of blue sky and sunshine could be seen trying to break through the dark grey cloud blanket “I reckon it's now or never” she admitted.

“Ladies first” the Commander held the door open for her before they headed out into the drizzle and ran across Broadway, weaving between various parked up emergency service vehicles that were attending the incident until they were safely back undercover in the welcome shelter of the reception area of New Scotland Yard.

“Bleugh..” the Commander remarked as he took off his sodden uniform tunic and shook it to try and get the worst of the rain off it, Tracy doing likewise.

“A little damp are we?” Sir Richard Crowthorne remarked as he strolled casually in from his car having had the sense to bring an umbrella with him which he lowered as soon as he was inside.

“Just a tad” Tracy admitted “What brings you to the land of chaos and mayhem?” she asked.

“I needed a word with your husband” Sir Richard confirmed a little evasively.

“Sounds ominous” the Commander remarked as an officer from the Control Room arrived in Reception and brought a message to Tracy.

“So does this” Tracy added as she read the message “Some sort of bizarre incident at Liverpool Street Station about ten minutes ago.”

“Anything to do with our bomb touting friend and his two dumb associates?” the Commander asked.

“I don't think so” Tracy remarked “As you two seem to have something interesting to talk about, I'll go and take a look at this and catch up with you later.”

“It's a date” the Commander agreed as they kissed before Tracy left.

“What's going on at the Post Office?” Sir Richard asked as he and the Commander strolled together through the Reception area towards the rear staircase before heading up.

“A couple of idiots from the planet Pratt showed up at nine o'clock with a revolver, a sawn off and four posting tubes” the Commander explained.

“A sawn off, how uncivilised” Sir Richard remarked.

“Well they were at the right time for the four messages from our mad bomber friend however the bombs were nothing more than putty apparently” the Commander confirmed as they slowly headed up the back stairs bound for the top floor.

“I take it these two criminal masterminds are in custody?” Sir Richard asked.

“Robbery Squad and a couple of Collins's boys have got them downstairs now where they are having a nice cosy chat” the Commander confirmed “Plus I have got Fuller tearing apart their lives to see if it throws up any leads.”

“An interesting development” Sir Richard commented “However you have the appearance of a gentleman who remains unconvinced.”

“Well take a look at the facts” the Commander explained the reason for his disbelief “We have an unexploded device that just conveniently leads us to the fact it was posted from St. James’s Park, then we get this message about something happening with four messages at exactly nine o'clock and low and behold these two jokers turn up.”

“A diversion?” Sir Richard asked.

“Well you know what they say about something sounding like a duck...” the Commander admitted.

“Or alternatively our mystery man with the bombs is hoping that as you have two guys with bombs it will be case closed and he can go on his merry way” Sir Richard concluded.

“Something interesting did turn up earlier though” the Commander confirmed “Did you know that yesterday was the tenth anniversary of a major Post Office armoured car hold up in City Road?” he asked.

“Vaguely recall it” Sir Richard confirmed “Two or three million in loose change wasn't it?”

“About two and a half” the Commander confirmed “and apparently not only was the post van driver who got blown up outside here yesterday the chap who was driving that armoured car on the fateful day but the money was never seen again.”

“What a complicated web we weave” Sir Richard remarked “Is there any connection between the robbery and the other bomb targets?” he asked as they reached about half way up.

“Not yet but I wouldn't bet against it” the Commander confirmed “Either way there is a lot more to this than just some chap who's handy with explosives showing off his handy work. Anyway what was it you wanted to talk to me about?” the Commander asked.

“I think that conversation is better undertaken in your office with a nice single malt to hand” Sir Richard suggested.

“Ah...”

“What the hell is going on at Liverpool Street?” Tracy asked as she entered the Control Room and surveyed the large screens at the front of the room to ascertain current operational status throughout the City.

“Officer down on the main concourse” one of the Control Room Dispatchers confirmed passing over a clipboard with some details on it to her “Some sort of shooting incident about fifteen minutes ago but no one is really sure what happened.”

“Senior officer on site?” Tracy asked as she grabbed a radio headset and put it on.

“Lieutenant Commander Carlson from the Transport Division” the Dispatcher confirmed “He was in the area when the garbled call came through and diverted to investigate.”

“Control to Lima Tango, Two, Two, Five” Tracy called over the radio headset “Are you receiving? Over.”

“Control this is Carlson” came the response amid a background noise of some chaos and confusion.

“This is Divisional Commander Caverner” Tracy declared “What's occurring up there?” she asked.

“Morning Maam” Carlson responded as he moved back from the line of station staff and Service personnel who were trying to keep the crowds evacuated from the station back with not an awful lot of success “Someone shoved one of our officers off the upper level concourse about fifteen minutes ago and he fell over the balcony to the concourse below.”

“Any witnesses?” Tracy asked as she silently indicated to the nearest Dispatcher to put the CCTV feed from Liverpool Street on the main screen so she could see what was going on for herself.

“Nothing that we have found yet” Carlson confirmed “The first most knew of it was when the officer landed down on the concourse, since then we have been trying to keep the crowds back but we could do with some reinforcements up here.”

“On the way” Tracy confirmed “Try and keep things under control until we get there.”

“Will do Maam” Carlson confirmed before returning to the line of officers.

“Maam” the Dispatcher called, indicating the CCTV feed as Tracy was about to leave.

“Well at least the Paramedics are there” Tracy remarked as she saw the live shot of the evacuated main concourse of Liverpool Street Station with only a group of bright day-glo jacketed medical and Security Service personnel attending to the officer who was down “Show me on the way please” she confirmed as she left the Control Room.

“You been rummaging around in the CIA's toy box again?” the Commander remarked as Sir Richard produced a small electronic device from his pocket, switched it on and placed it on the Commander's desk.

“A little precaution” Sir Richard explained “You'll understand once I have had a drink and told you the story.”

“The domestic or the good stuff?” the Commander proffered both crystal decanters from the side table.

“Definitely the good stuff” Sir Richard confirmed whereupon the Commander poured them both a drink before passing Sir Richard his glass and returning to his seat behind the desk.

“So what does this little contraption of yours do then?” the Commander indicated the strange electronic device on the desk that was beeping quietly away to itself.

“It scrambles signals within a five metre radius” Sir Richard explained “Sends out some sort of broadband gibberish apparently that renders anyone listening completely confused.”

“Pocket battery powered politician” the Commander joked “Should get these in the shops for Christmas.”

“Indeed” Sir Richard jokily agreed.

“Come on then” the Commander declared “I've plied you with the Service's best scotch, its time to repay the favour.”

“I was having breakfast with my old counter part from MI6 this morning” Sir Richard explained with some hint of reluctance “I thought as we were chatting I would make a few discrete inquiries about our little friend who you asked me to look into.”

“Not good then” the Commander remarked.

“Lets put it this way” Sir Richard confirmed as he got up and recharged his glass “When I mentioned the name Jack Thornton to my colleague, he had a sudden change of expression as if his bowels had just involuntarily moved three feet to the left and back again.”

“He's heard of him then” the Commander commented.

“Indeed” Sir Richard confirmed as he returned to his seat and began his second drink “It was at that point he produced one of these little beauties” he indicated the electronic jamming device on the desk “The word up at the ivory towers of MI6 and certain other agencies is that Jack Thornton's dad, the chap from the Foreign Office who died in that hit and run on the Marylebone Road a couple of years back apparently found out something and had to make a very swift exit.”

“Except in his escape he gets clipped by a hit and run and its game over” the Commander concluded.

“Officially our friend Jack is classified as dead, indeed he was registered as deceased at the Westminster Register of Births, Deaths and Marriages along with his sister and his parents just two hours after the so called accident” Sir Richard explained.

“About the same time a couple of goons showed up and impounded all the incident evidence about the hit and run from the Traffic Division” the Commander added “Someone was clearly very anxious to cover their tracks in a hurry.”

“Well the word from my friends over at Six is that if Jack is still alive...” Sir Richard continued.

“...which he most definitely is...” the Commander confirmed.

“...then it would be strongly advisable for him and anyone who knows he is alive to remain dead and off anyone's radar until doomsday at the earliest” Sir Richard confirmed.

“Bloody hell” the Commander responded.

“That was pretty much my reaction” Sir Richard agreed “and at that point the subject was very firmly closed for fear that walls have ears if you get my meaning.”

“I do indeed” the Commander confirmed “Whatever Jack's late father was involved in must have been a real doosie.”

“Do you have any idea where Jack is now?” Sir Richard asked.

“I think I can find him” the Commander confirmed with a clearly worried yet thoughtful look as he tried to recall the name of the school he had seen on Jack's books the previous evening.

“Then I suggest you go and get him and make sure he is holed up somewhere safe for the duration” Sir Richard insisted “I am going to have a nose around in some of the darker corners of the world and see what is buried about this.”

“If you find anything, come back to me and don't forget your little gadget” the Commander agreed “I'll go and see if I can find him and bring him in.”

Tracy arrived outside the Bishopsgate entrance to Liverpool Street Station to find a large crowd gathered all waiting to get back into the station, indeed the crowds were so dense that she had trouble, despite being a uniformed officer of the service in getting through to the tape barrier cordon and into the evacuated Main Line station.

“Commander Carlson around?” Tracy asked as she arrived in the lower main concourse and approached the location where the paramedics were in the process of stabilising the officer on the floor, a process that had taken the best part of half an hour owing to the severe and critical nature of the injuries suffered.

“Yes Maam” Carlson called from over the other side of the concourse whereupon he jogged over to join Tracy at the scene.

“How is he?” Tracy inquired.

“Broken everything apparently” Carlson confirmed “He fell from up there” he indicated up towards the overhead upper concourse balcony where a couple of officers could be seen guarding the taped off area from where he had fallen “They are going to move him off now as soon as he has been turned onto his back.”

“Everyone got a piece?” the lead Paramedic called to his colleagues as they all prepared to turn the heavily bandaged and trussed up officer over onto his back upon a stretcher so that he could be taken away. “Ok now” he called whereupon the medical staff and a couple of Security Service officers carefully turned the injured officer over only to reveal something very unexpected.

“Gawd, would you look at that” Carlson exclaimed as turning the officer over revealed that he had two bullets imbedded in the front of his bullet proof vest which was worn as standard kit by key patrol officers these days in certain parts of the city and probably saved the man's life.

“He's been shot?” Tracy remarked “What the hell is going on around here?” she asked.

“Right, lets get him out of here” the lead Paramedic ordered as the stretcher bearing the injured officer was carried away out of the west entrance of the station to a waiting ambulance parked outside.

“We definitely don't have any useful witnesses?” Tracy asked Carlson as they walked across the deserted concourse towards the Bishopsgate exit.

“Whatever happened it was over before anyone knew about it” Carlson confirmed “Must have been a silenced weapon used as no one reported hearing any gunshots.”

“All right” Tracy declared looking around “I guess we can't keep the hordes locked out for much longer. Have an ARU team do a sweep of the station then seal the area above where he fell off. Then we can let the public back in.”

“Right you are Maam” Carlson confirmed as he headed off to sort out Tracy's orders.

“This is Leytonstone” the automated announcement declared as the doors of the eight car train of 1992 type tube stock opened and the Commander alighted onto the platform “This is a Central Line train to Epping.”

The Commander walked along the platform and down the steps to the ticket hall before passing through the ticket barriers using his Oyster Card. He paused briefly at the leaflet rack by the subway exit/entrance to the ticket hall to pick up a 'Continuing your journey from Leytonstone' leaflet that had inside it a useful map of the local area

which he took a moment to study before turning right and heading up the subway ramp to the west exit by the bus stops.

A few minutes walk brought the Commander to the front gate of Leytonstone High School where he checked his uniform was neat and tidy before heading up the path and into the main reception. There the two ladies behind the reception desk looked up with a rather surprised expression when they saw a Security & Police Service officer of such a senior rank arrive.

“Good morning Sir” one of the ladies called in a helpful and friendly broad Irish accent “How can I help you?”

“Can I speak to your Head Teacher?” the Commander enquired “I don't have an appointment I am afraid” he apologised.

“If you would like to take a seat” the lady responded indicating the visitors waiting area nearby “I'll see if he is free Sir.”

“Thank you” the Commander responded before going over and taking a seat. It had been a very long time since he was last in a school and it appeared to him as he looked around that a lot had changed in education in the intervening years.

A couple of minutes later the Head Teacher appeared, a slightly worried looking man in his early sixties, worried mostly because he had an unannounced visit from one of the most senior law enforcement officers in the country and that was not something that happened everyday by any stretch of the imagination.

“Administrator General” the Head Teacher called as he greeted the Commander with a handshake “An honour to have you here, shall we go through to my office.”

“By all means” the Commander agreed before the Head Teacher led the Commander down the corridor where they were forced to duck out of the way as a couple of over enthusiastic pupils came running through the other way.

“Walk, don't run!” the Head Teacher called after them although they had by then stopped anyway doing a double take to make sure they had not imagined passing the Commander himself in the corridor.

“I guess some things in education don't change after all” the Commander remarked as they entered the Head Teacher's office.

“When was the last time you were in a secondary school Sir may I ask?” the Head Teacher asked as he showed the Commander to a seat in the plush well appointed office.

“When I was about fifteen” the Commander admitted “Let's just say my school years were a little complicated.”

“So what can I do for you Sir?” the Head Teacher asked.

“I’m looking for one of your pupils” the Commander explained.

“Nothing bad I trust” the Head Teacher enquired with a hint of concern.

“Oh no” the Commander reassured him “I just need to find this lad before anything winds up happening to him.”

“And the name of this pupil?” the Head Teacher asked as he went over to his computer and prepared to look up the details once the Commander had given him the name.

“Jack Thornton” the Commander confirmed.

“Ah Jack” the Head Teacher responded “There is someone I know well.”

“What can you tell me about him?” the Commander asked, seeing this as a useful opportunity for a bit of background research.

“Well he works hard, always the first one in through the gate in the morning and seems rather adept at selling ice to Eskimos” the Head Teacher admitted “Always want to meet his parents but they never seem to turn up to parents evenings, send their apologies every time.”

“Interesting...” the Commander remarked.

“He’s definitely in” the Head Teacher confirmed “I saw him first thing this morning, although it did look like he had a lot on his mind.”

“So where is he scheduled to be now?” the Commander inquired.

“According to the system” the Head Teacher read the timetable details for Jack off the screen “He should be upstairs in Geography.”

“Do you mind if I go and see him?” the Commander inquired “He’s needed as an eyewitness in a case that we are working on only we need to be a bit discreet about it.”

“I’ll take you up there” the Head Teacher confirmed as he got up from behind his desk “If you would care to follow me?”

“Lead on” the Commander confirmed.

The Head Teacher duly led the way down the corridor from his office, up one flight of stairs and on to classroom number six where he knocked politely on the door before entering.

“Sorry to intrude” the Head Teacher apologised as he and the Commander entered the back of the classroom causing everyone to look around at their visitors “Is Jack Thornton here?” he inquired.

“Haven't seen him Sir” the Geography teacher confirmed “He certainly never turned up for this lesson anyway.”

“Right, thank you, carry on” the Head Teacher confirmed before he and the Commander left.

“Does he usually disappear like this?” the Commander asked as they stood in the corridor outside the classroom.

“Not usually” the Head Teacher confirmed “The occasional days off here and there, probably when he is selling somebody something on the black market I wouldn't be surprised but never usually a middle of the day vanishing act like this.

“Well thank you anyway” the Commander responded “If you see him can you ask him to call me most urgently?” he asked handing the Head Teacher his card.

“Certainly” the Head Teacher confirmed.

A minute or two later as the Commander was heading back down the stairs, he stopped and looked around when he became aware of a small person coming up behind him with a clear urgency in their step.

“Sir!” the girl called as she caught up with the Commander half way down the stairs “I am sorry to trouble you Sir but it's about Jack, I'm Megan, his friend.”

“I am all ears” the Commander responded “and don't worry he is not in trouble or anything, I just need to talk to him rather urgently.”

“Well that is just the thing” Megan confirmed clearly worried “I think he is in trouble.”

“Go on” the Commander urged her.

“I saw him up at the top of these stairs earlier this morning just before first lesson and he was looking out there towards the allotments as if he had seen something suspicious” she duly pointed outside.

“What, up here?” the Commander indicated upwards whereupon they both headed back up to the top of the stairs where the large windows of the stairwell afforded a view over the adjacent street and allotments outside.

“Just here” Megan confirmed whereupon the Commander cleared the condensation from the window glass for a better view.

“What was he looking at?” the Commander asked as he surveyed the view outside.

“There was a red van or something I think” Megan recalled “It headed over towards the far side of the allotments and he was watching it quite intently.”

“Then what did he do?” the Commander asked.

“He asked me to say he had been taken ill and then dashed off and that was the last anyone saw of him” Megan confirmed “I hope he is all right.”

“Don't worry, I'll find him” the Commander reassured her.

“I hope so” Megan responded “Jack is one of the few things in this place that makes it bearable.”

“Thank you” the Commander responded.

“You're welcome Sir” Megan confirmed before departing to head back to her lesson.

A couple of minutes later the Commander was crossing the street outside, stopping at the gateway into the large allotment site. If there was a clue to be found here it could be in any one of about a hundred sheds, greenhouses and other structures dotted across the site and there was no time for him to conduct a search.

“Lima Mike Zero One to Control” the Commander called into his radio as some rare rays of sunshine broke through the cloud cover above “Patch me through to Commander Cassini please.”

“Cassini here Sir” came the response of a familiar voice a few moments later.

“Can you do me a favour on the Q.T.” the Commander requested “Go over to the old Printing Works in Bethnal Green and have a look around to see if Jack is there or has been back there sometime today.”

“Can do Sir” Cassini confirmed “If I find him?”

“Call me on my mobile and keep him with you until I get there” the Commander confirmed “If you don't find him, let me know as well. Whilst you are at it, see if you can get the Stratford office to rustle up a couple of uniformed officers and ask them to give the West Leytonstone Allotments a good look over, particularly the various sheds over on the west side.”

“I'll get Iggy to co-ordinate that whilst I check out Bethnal Green” Cassini confirmed “See you later Sir.”

As the tape barriers were lowered to the entrances of Liverpool Street Main Line station, Tracy looked on as the crowds flocked back inside and some sense of normality returned to the area.

“Have we any news from the hospital?” Tracy asked seeing that Carlson had just come off the telephone to someone there.

“He's listed as stable but in need of a lot of surgery to put him back together, he should pull through though” Carlson confirmed.

“Well at least that's something” Tracy remarked.

“Agreed” Carlson responded “If you will excuse me Maam I am going to check all is well inside.”

“Carry on” Tracy confirmed before Carlson headed back into the Station.

As things returned to normal in and around the Station and Bishopsgate area, Tracy gave the area one final look around before heading across the street to her motorcycle parked on the opposite side. As she reached it as was about to climb aboard it though, a red van caught her eye parked at a rather odd angle some one hundred metres away.

Her well trained mind told Tracy something wasn't quite right about the apparently empty vehicle and as she approached it slowly, the registration number seemed to ring a bell in her mind as well.

“Lima Alpha Zero One from Lima Mike Zero One” Tracy called into her radio “Are you there darling?”

“Hello love” the Commander was heard to respond amid a background sound of a train slowing to a stop somewhere.

“You remember that red van we were discussing” Tracy explained “Can you recall the registration number and description?”

“It was a Post Office red Sherpa on a 51 series plate I think” the Commander recalled as the westbound Central Line train he was travelling on came to a halt in the open air at Stratford.

“Well it may be nothing” Tracy commented as she took a closer look at the van including peering in through the cab windows “Only I am looking at a seemingly abandoned 51 plate red Sherpa parked in Bishopsgate, across the road from Liverpool Street Station.”

“That will be sitting right on top of the sub-surface lines” the Commander remarked “Lets not take any chances, seal off the road, close the Station and get the Bomb Squad in to take a look, I'll be there in about ten minutes.”

“Right you are love” Tracy confirmed as she stepped back from the van cautiously before blowing a shrill whistle to attract the attention of a van load of uniformed officers on the opposite side of the street and beckoning them over.

“Something wrong Maam?” one of the officers asked as they came over to her.

“Sorry guys, tea break has been postponed” Tracy informed them “We need to seal the area off and get the Station closed and evacuated, again.”

“Ladies and gentlemen” the driver of the westbound Central Line service announced over the PA system as it stood in the platform at Bethnal Green “Due to a security alert, Liverpool Street is closed, we will not be stopping at the next station Liverpool Street.”

Upon hearing the announcement, the Commander alighted from the lead car of the train and made his way to the drivers cab at the front where he knocked on the door.

“Problem Sir?” the driver asked as he recognised the Commander through the window and opened the door to allow him to board the cab.

“I need you to drop me off at Liverpool Street” the Commander explained “The security alert in question was at my instigation.”

“I wouldn't tell that lot back there if I were you mate” the driver wryly remarked as he closed the doors and started the train on its journey into the pitch darkness of the running tunnel. Two minutes later the light of the platforms at Liverpool Street grew larger ahead until the train emerged into the artificial light whereupon the driver brought the train to a brief halt at the near end of the platform to allow the Commander to alight.

“Thanks for the lift” the Commander responded as he stepped out of the cab door onto the deserted platform.

“No problem” the driver confirmed before closing the sliding cab door and restarting the train. As it disappeared into the running tunnel, the Commander followed the signs for the exit to street level and soon found himself emerging through the ticket hall out onto the main concourse before turning to his right and heading out the east exit into Bishopsgate.

There he found Tracy with a group of other officers maintaining a safe distance from the suspect van which was now on its own with the street around it for two hundred metres in each direction now empty and deserted save for a small team of armour suited technicians from the Bomb Squad who were approaching the vehicle cautiously.

“Well it's certainly has been an eventful morning” Tracy admitted as the Commander joined her and they linked arms together.

“And its not even lunchtime yet” the Commander agreed as he checked his antique pocket watch which showed the time as approaching ten to eleven.

“Do you think this van is connected to the bombs and the incident in the Station?” Tracy asked as they continued to observe the Bomb Squad team who had now reached the vehicle and were proceeding with a preliminary inspection.

“What was the incident in the Station?” the Commander asked.

“Some tall guy in dark sunglasses and a black tailored suit along with at least two more identically outfitted chums come running into the station apparently chasing

some kid who had run across the road out here and when he encounters one of our officers, shoots him with a silenced weapon and tosses him off the balcony” Tracy explained “Its only in the last ten minutes we have managed to piece enough of the fragmentary witness statements together to work out what the hell happened.”

“Did anyone manage to describe the boy involved?” the Commander asked, clearly beginning to sense a connection forming here between various events of that day so far.

“Four foot seven, brown hair, school uniform blazer which was a bit tatty” Tracy consulted her notebook “Do you know that sounds like our Jack?”

“I have a nasty feeling it was” the Commander confirmed “Has there been a thorough search of the Station, above and below ground?” he asked.

“The main line station was checked thoroughly about twenty minutes ago” Tracy confirmed “I had to pull most of the officers out to deal with this little problem before we could complete a search of the Underground section.”

“Can I borrow your telephone?” the Commander asked whereupon Tracy passed her mobile telephone to him.

“Keep it local” she joked.

“If I press the button with 'Fuller' highlighted will that dial automatically?” he was forced to ask as technology was still not his best subject.

“As simple as that love” Tracy confirmed “Welcome to the twenty first century.”

“Simon?” the Commander asked when he was answered, still not sure if he had done it right “No, it’s her husband. Listen, can you access the Oyster Card system for me please, I need to check a hunch.”

“Usually your hunches have a habit of going bang alarmingly quickly” Fuller remarked with irony as he turned to a different computer from the one he had been working on “Here we go, I’m in the system, what are the details?”

“It will be a young persons concessionary Oyster Card probably issued in the Bethnal Green or Leytonstone area to a Jack Thornton” the Commander confirmed “It will certainly have been used sometime this morning.”

Using these details, Fuller searched the Oyster Card travel details database until he found a match between name and location.

“And there he is” Fuller declared as he looked closely at the screen “It was recorded passing through the barriers at Bethnal Green tube and then exited at Leytonstone early this morning. Later it went from Leytonstone back to Bethnal Green at about nine fifteen before being used again on a westbound number eight bus from Bethnal Green Road ten minutes later.”

“Anything after that?” the Commander asked.

“Well the bus Oyster readers only record boarding not alighting points however it did appear again at the barriers of the north ticket hall of Liverpool Street Station about the same time as that incident there” Fuller confirmed.

“Has he reappeared anywhere else on the system since then?” the Commander asked.

“Doesn't look like it” Fuller confirmed “That means he either failed to touch out somewhere or else he is still floating around in the Underground network.”

“Thanks” the Commander responded “If he pops up again, give me a call.”

“Will do Sir” Fuller confirmed.

The Commander returned the mobile telephone to Tracy and she immediately picked up on his rather concerned look that obviously had more to do with matters than just the suspect van nearby that was now in the process of being carefully examined by the Bomb Squad.

“Jack did come through here at about the right time and he hasn't resurfaced yet” the Commander explained as once again he checked his watch.

“Well if he was being chased by those goons for whatever reason, is it possible he is hiding in the station somewhere?” Tracy suggested.

“That would be my guess” the Commander agreed “I'm going to take a look, let me know if anything happens up here.”

“Be careful” Tracy urged as the Commander left.

“Aren't I always love?” he asked.

“Not usually no...” Tracy remarked to herself by which time the Commander had left, heading into the main entrance to the station.

Jack rubbed some of the years of accumulated cobwebs and grime off the window to look outside to the passing tracks of the sub surface lines when it occurred to him that no trains had stopped for the best part of half an hour now, merely passing through the station at the mandatory five miles an hour before carrying on.

As another train passed through, Jack clambered over the pile of engineers equipment that were stored in the old long disused Liverpool Street signal box and cautiously approached the door that opened out onto steps that led down to the end of the eastbound platform.

Opening it just a little bit, Jack looked through the crack to see that the platform was completely deserted and so he made his way out, stepping down the steps and back

onto the platform through the gate that guarded the platform ends and marked where the public access stopped.

He could still hear the sirens and chaos of the emergency services filtering down from street level above so knew that something was still going on. The problem now was how to get out of the station undetected.

As he walked down the platform cautiously, Jack stopped dead in his tracks when he heard the echo of well soled shoes approaching from the platform entrance just ahead. Looking around quickly revealed that there was no place to hide or duck behind in time, the signal box refuge being too far away and so it was with a deep breath and a look of resigned inevitability that Jack stood there as the approaching footsteps grew louder until the shadow of someone reaching the corner projected itself across the platform surface in front of him.

“You are a hard man to catch up with” the Commander remarked as he emerged from the platform entrance and saw Jack standing there with a look of utter relief.

“Well it's been a bit of a complicated morning if I were to be honest” Jack was forced to admit “Aren't you a bit high ranking to be in the truant squad?”

“Just a tad” the Commander agreed “Anyway what happened to you?” he asked.

“I saw that red van at School pulling into the allotments next door” Jack explained “So I decided to follow it and see where it went. The Post Office names are fake, he removed them at the allotments and then headed over this way.”

“We found the van” the Commander confirmed “It's parked up top with the Bomb Squad crawling all over it now.”

“Well the driver got out and went inside this building nearby” Jack explained “However before he went inside he made a telephone call then not two minutes later four cloned loons in suits with guns and sunglasses turn up and try to cancel my Oyster Card, permanently.”

“We have some sketchy eyewitness reports about a young lad being pursued through the station by just such loons and a shot officer tipped off a balcony as well” the Commander confirmed.

“How is he?” Jack asked.

“Pretty badly bashed about but his body armour saved him, he'll make it but is likely to be in hospital for some time” the Commander admitted.

“All I did was ask him for help” Jack remarked “He tried to stop the guy who was chasing me and they wiped him out without so much as a thought or a care.”

“It looks like our friend with the van and the talent for explosives may be more than a one man band” the Commander agreed “I think this thing is bigger than we thought.”

“So how do we get out of here?” Jack asked “The front door probably isn't the best idea at the moment.”

“According to MI6 you are dead apparently, I've been advised to get you discreetly off everyone's radar as soon as possible” the Commander responded.

“I have been dodging everyone's radar for two years” Jack admitted “Ever since that night in the Marylebone Road.”

“You will have to tell me about it sometime” the Commander responded “Come on, lets get you out of here” he suggested as he led the way off the eastbound sub-surface platform and back into the heart of the station.

“Where are we going?” Jack asked as they headed down the escalators that led to the Central Line platforms.

“You are going to disappear for an hour or two” the Commander confirmed “Get yourself to Scotland Yard, go up to my office and stay there until I get back.”

“One small problem” Jack remarked as they entered the eastbound Central Line platform just as a train passed through without stopping.

“Easily sorted” the Commander confirmed as they headed up to the top end of the platform and the Commander opened a panel in the wall marked 'Signal Telephone' which he used to make a call to the line controller.

“Morning” the Commander called “This is the Regional Administrator General of the National Security & Police Service, authorisation access number Echo Romeo Three One Nine Five, I need the next eastbound service to stop at Liverpool Street to pick up one special passenger.”

“He'll have to get on in the cab” the slightly confused line controller responded as he looked at the CCTV screens that showed the two at the end of the Liverpool Street platform.

“Shouldn't be a problem” the Commander agreed “He only has to go as far as Mile End.”

“All right” the Line Controller agreed “the next service should be with you in just over a minute.”

Both Jack and the Commander looked around the edge of the running tunnel portal as a click and a hiss of air heralded the changing of the signal from green back to red along with the raising of the train stop device set alongside the track immediately below.

“Thank you” the Commander responded before hanging up.

“I'm impressed” Jack admitted “Do you have any other tricks up your sleeves?”

“One or two” the Commander confirmed with a wry smile as the headlights of the approaching train became visible in the far running tunnel before with a burst of forced air ahead of it and the squealing of brakes, the Central Line train of 1992 type tube stock slowed to a halt and the cab access door opened in front of them.

“Did someone want a lift?” the driver asked having been advised as to what was going on by the Line Controller over the radio.

“The young gentleman here needs a lift as far as Mile End” the Commander confirmed before turning to Jack “Right, change at Mile End and then head down the District to St. James’s Park and I am sure you will find the rest of the way from there.”

“Got it” Jack confirmed as he boarded the train and sat down on the vacant second man’s side tip up seat “See you later I hope.”

With that the driver closed the door, the signal changed to green and the train departed leaving the Commander alone on the platform to head back up to the surface and rejoin the operation at street level.

“Well?” Tracy asked as the Commander remerged from the Bishopsgate entrance of the station and rejoined her.

“Found him” the Commander confirmed quietly “Just put him on a train out of here. How are things up here?” he asked.

“Bomb Squad boys are about to open the side door now with their remote robot contraption” Tracy confirmed nodding ahead to the continued activity around the van.

“Now we find out if there are any unpleasant surprises awaiting us” the Commander remarked with a sense of foreboding.

Over in the distance, the remote controlled robot under the control of one of the Bomb Squad technicians approached the side door of the van that was facing the pavement side of the street and then lined up its manipulator with the door handle.

“Ok, we are ready to go Sir” the technician operating the robot confirmed.

“Right” Philips agreed “Now that everyone is well back, lets open her up and see and what lurks within.”

“Philips to Lima Mike Zero One” came the next call over Tracy's radio as above them the clock of Liverpool Street Station began to strike the chimes leading into the main chimes signalling eleven o'clock.

“Go ahead” Tracy responded as she, the Commander and everyone else looked on.

“We are ready to go now” Philips confirmed “If we find anything you will be the first to know about it one way or the other.”

“Roger that” Tracy confirmed.

“Not exactly very reassuring” the Commander remarked wryly as the chimes of the clock above them finished their initial sequence and that long pause before the first chime of the hour came.

“Ok lad, open her up” Philips confirmed to his technician who proceeded to use the manipulator to open the side door of the van and reveal what was inside.

“What the hell is that?” the technician remarked as on the video link from the robot, the door slid away to the right to reveal a large box on which was mounted a screen which had a clock face upon it and a counter set to eleven.

“That's not counting down in seconds, they are too long” Philips remarked as he saw the counter change from eleven to ten just as the first chime of the hour sounded from the Liverpool Street Station clock causing him to look up at the clock above him then look back to the screen again as the counter changed once more from ten to nine at the exact same time the second chime was heard.

“Oh hell, Code Red, Code Red!!” Philips called into the radio as the chimes of the clock and the counter continued in unison.

“Ok everyone, move back quickly and quietly!” Tracy commanded to the crowds behind them.

“Everyone move!” Philips called to the members of his team as the counter reached three and in the distance he could see the panic and confusion of the public as they were forced further back down the street by a line of officers under Tracy's supervision.

As the various members of the Bomb Squad ran across the street to get as far away from the van as possible, the final chime of eleven o'clock sounded from the clock and at that moment the van exploded in a huge fireball that sent burning debris everywhere which combined with the shockwave to shatter windows in buildings and abandoned vehicles all around the immediate area.

The Commander's first instinct was to push Tracy to the ground and cover her with his body to protect her as the explosion rang out. Like others nearby who had ducked down in response, he could feel the blast of heat from the explosion pass over him almost as if in slow motion before getting up and helping Tracy to her feet.

“What the hell is going on around here today?” Tracy asked as she and the Commander looked back towards the burning wreckage where the van was and the bits of debris that were continuing to rain down all around it.

“I don't know love” the Commander admitted “But I am bloody well going to find out.”

In the depths of the Mount Pleasant Postal Sorting Office, the silence of the deserted lower basement was suddenly disturbed by the sound of a door opening and then the echoing of footsteps on a cold hard floor moving around in the dark.

Emerging into the illumination of a bulkhead light mounted on the wall revealed the visitor to these normally empty lower levels of the building to be the stranger in the postal workers uniform. Checking his watch by the light confirmed that a few minutes earlier the van he had left near Liverpool Street Station should now be in a thousand pieces, effectively throwing the authorities still further off his trail, the only thing he did not know the outcome of however was what had happened to the young lad he had spotted after whom he had sent the four armed men.

There was however no time to dwell on such matters for four of the final five devices had now been planted and it was time to plant the fifth before moving on to a new safe location. The stranger moved up through the Mount Pleasant building confidently, seemingly knowing where he was going well until he reached the hustle and bustle of the main postal sorting area which was a hive of activity being the central sorting office for most local as well as International mail coming into or going out of the Central London area.

No one noticed the stranger as he passed in amongst the mail trolleys and the workers as they went about their business, his postal uniform ensuring that he blended into the background with ease and was able to go unnoticed as he then proceeded to the upstairs offices.

Within a few minutes he was entering the upper most floor and making his way down the corridor until he reached the office of the Postmaster General where he politely knocked on the door.

“Come in!” came a voice from inside whereupon the stranger entered and found the Postmaster General, just returned from New Scotland Yard behind his desk looking through various files.

“Hello old friend” the stranger declared as he stood before the Postmaster General's desk forcing him to look up.

“Good God!” the Postmaster General remarked “I thought you were dead” he exclaimed with some shock upon seeing the man before him who despite a ten year gap, he recognised instantly.

“My employers and I find death a very fluid concept” the stranger remarked casually “Being dead can be fun sometimes too” he admitted “Very restful, no phone calls.”

“And who exactly are these 'employers' of which you speak?” the Postmaster General asked with concern.

“Oh I think you know” the stranger confirmed “They asked me to pass a message to you to give to the Security Authorities” he declared retrieving a brown padded envelope and placing it on the desk “It comes in two parts.”

“So what is the other part then?” the Postmaster General asked clearly nervous at these foreboding developments.

“This” the stranger calmly declared as he pulled a gun with silencer attached from inside his jacket, pointed and fired twice without even flinching and rendering the Postmaster General dead in an instant.

“See you around” the stranger remarked wryly before placing the gun back inside his jacket and leaving the room.

A few minutes later the stranger was exiting from the rear entrance to the Mount Pleasant complex and getting into an anonymous black saloon car that was waiting for him in a nearby side street. As soon as he was inside the back and the door was closed the driver, one of the four identical men who earlier had chased Jack through Liverpool Street Station proceeded to drive off whilst his identical associate in the front passenger seat passed a telephone back to the stranger.

“This is Fourteen” the stranger confirmed over the telephone “Message delivered, presents in place, you may fire when ready.”

“Well that was more than a parcel bomb” Philips remarked as he joined Tracy and the Commander over on the pavement outside Liverpool Street Station whilst in the background the Fire Service had arrived to put out the fire caused by the explosion.

“All your guys all right?” the Commander asked.

“Gary and I are likely to have ringing in our ears for a week or so I expect plus our one and only remote robot is toast but apart from that we were bloody lucky I reckon” Philips confirmed.

“Well we have a few cuts and bruises from flying debris over this side but nothing serious” Tracy confirmed “I would have thought lucky doesn't even come close. Mind you” she pointed over to part of the wreckage on the other side of the road “My bike is a write off.”

“Oh dear” the Commander noticed the badly burnt and mangled remains of his wife's Security Service patrol motorbike beneath part of the van “Well at least you weren't on it at the time I suppose.”

“It's going to be a good hour or so before the area is declared safe and we can get a closer look at the wreckage” Philips confirmed “I'll let you know what we find.”

“Thanks” Tracy responded before Philips left to rejoin and regroup his Bomb Squad team.

“Whoa, what was that?” the Commander remarked as they all looked around upon hearing a distant but distinct thump noise followed by a slight tremor through their

feet, swiftly followed by the sound of car and premises alarms sounding in the distance.

“Good question” Tracy agreed reaching for her radio “Lima Mike Zero One to Control, what the hell was that?”

“Not sure” the lead Dispatcher at the Control Room back at New Scotland Yard confirmed as suddenly the incoming emergency calls status indicator became very active “The system just lit up like a Christmas Tree so something just happened.”

“Carlson” Tracy called to the officer from the Transport Division nearby “Find us some wheels!”

“Yes Maam” Carlson responded before heading off to get a car for them.

“There it is again” the Commander called as he listened intently whilst a second similar sounding noise rippled through the air only quieter this time as if it was coming from further away.

“Lima Mike One from Control” came a call over Tracy's radio accompanied by a background noise of the Control Room that was extremely busy.

“Go ahead” Tracy responded as Carlson arrived alongside them with a Patrol Car as requested and the two senior officers proceeded to get in the front, the Commander swapping places with Carlson in the driver's seat.

“Reports are of an explosion in the sorting office at Mount Pleasant” the Dispatcher back at the Control Room confirmed “There is also reports coming in of a possible secondary explosion at Tottenham Court Road sorting office as well.”

“We are on our way to Mount Pleasant” Tracy confirmed as the Commander put on the sirens and lights before pulling away and executing a hand brake turn in the middle of Bishopsgate to face south and head off towards the centre of the City.

“Someone find the Postmaster General” the Commander suggested “And get every Post Office facility in the city out as far as Willesden evacuated ASAP.”

“Did you get that?” Tracy asked over the radio.

“Postmaster General and evacuate all Post Office buildings in Greater London ASAP” the Dispatcher confirmed “I'll get right on it now.”

“Come on, shift it!” the Commander called ahead to the traffic through Threadneedle Street as they approached Bank where the streets were narrower and it was difficult for the heavy traffic to move out of the way of the approaching Security Service patrol car.

“This is going to take ages at this rate” Tracy remarked “Even with your driving.”

“Time for some unsafe manoeuvres I think” the Commander admitted as he pulled over to the right hand side of the road and accelerated forcing oncoming traffic to move very quickly out of the way anyway they could.

“Fire engine coming in from the left” Tracy called as she reached the Guildhall and Bank of England and were about to turn sharply to the right.

“Let's hope he's going the same way we are” the Commander remarked as he stopped at the junction to let the fire appliance by and then followed it into Cheapside heading west towards St Paul's and the West End of the City.

With wider roads and a large fire appliance to follow, progress was noticeably faster through the streets past St Paul's station and on towards Holborn Viaduct.

“By the way, whose motor is this we have nicked?” the Commander asked as they turned sharply right at Chancery Lane Underground Station into Grays Inn Road to head north and avoid the tailbacks and jams being caused in the High Holborn and Kingsway area by ongoing long term road works.

“One of Transport Division's” Tracy confirmed “So let's try not to wreck it darling” she suggested.

A couple of minutes later they arrived in amongst a scene of utter chaos and confusion as the crews of six fire appliances tried to fight their way through to the large Mount Pleasant Post Office building with the staff of it heading in the opposite direction trying to get to a safe distance immediately outside the danger area.

“It's a circus” Tracy remarked as they got out of the patrol car and joined the scene “All right” she called “Who's co-ordinating this mess?”

As Tracy went about organising the few officers she had available on site to cordon off the area and get everyone back as far as possible, the Commander watched as the Fire Service personnel headed inside the loading area of the main sorting office from which smoke could be seen emitting.

“Lima Alpha One to Control” the Commander called into his radio set “I'm at Mount Pleasant, what's occurring with that reported Tottenham Court Road incident?” he enquired.

“Looks like a parcel bomb of some kind at TCR” the dispatcher responded “Big bang but no injuries or serious damage fortunately; however there is a report something similar just happened at both Oxford Street and Paddington.”

“Right” the Commander declared “Get senior officers on site to each incident and confirm building evacuation and then someone find me the Postmaster General as fast as possible.”

At that point Tracy who had now got the scene sealed off came back over to the Commander and immediately saw the grim look on his face.

“There have been at least two further devices” the Commander confirmed.

“Yeah I head” Tracy responded “Just spoke to some of the Post Office staff, they say this device was in a sorting crate in a lower level, looks like a similar size in terms of explosion to the other devices we have encountered over the last day or two.”

“Lima Alpha One from Control” the Commander's radio called.

“Go ahead” the Commander responded as he noticed that the Fire Service personnel were starting to emerge from the building.

“Devices at Oxford Street and Paddington confirmed with no serious injuries and only local damage” the Control Room Dispatcher confirmed “The Postmaster General apparently left the Yard about half an hour ago and was heading back to Mount Pleasant so assuming he didn't get stuck in traffic, he should be with you there somewhere Sir.”

“Right thanks” the Commander confirmed before looking around “Tracy, do me a favour love and ask if anyone has seen the Postmaster General.”

“Sure” Tracy confirmed and headed back over to the cordon tape where the Post Office staff were gathered looking on with ominous expressions.

“What's the damage?” the Commander asked the Fire Service Chief as he joined him outside the main gate.

“Well the fire is out” the Chief confirmed “Basically the explosion seems to have destroyed a couple of those big sorting trolleys they use and blackened the immediate surrounding area but it was fairly well contained in a sub level so fortunately no injuries.”

“Darling” Tracy called as she came running back over to the Commander “One of the office staff reports seeing the Postmaster General coming in about fifteen minutes ago and heading up to his office though no one has seen him since.”

“Is it safe to enter?” the Commander asked the Fire Officer, sensing urgency was required now in light of this new information.

“As long as you are happy to accept the potential of secondary devices” the Fire Officer confirmed.

“I'll take the risk” the Commander agreed “Tracy, stay here, I'm going in.”

“Is that entirely wise love?” Tracy asked with concern.

“Probably not” the Commander admitted as he kissed her on the cheek before heading inside the building.

The lingering smoke that was still filtering up through the building caused the Commander to cough a bit as he made his way up to the offices on the upper floors.

A directory on the wall by the staircase informed him that the Postmaster General's office was on the top floor and so he headed straight there.

As expected he found the floor deserted, only hastily abandoned desks in side offices giving any indication of recent occupation where tasks in progress had been interrupted by the alert and subsequent evacuation. To the Commander's experienced mind something seemed wrong as he proceeded cautiously down the corridor to the Postmaster General's office down the end of the corridor, it was the only office whose door was still firmly closed, all the others had doors ajar where they had been left open whilst their occupants had departed in a hurry.

Reaching the door, the Commander tried the handle and found it locked but yet through the frosted glass he could see the outline of someone sitting at the desk inside but yet they appeared motionless.

The Commander drew his gun in anticipation but was about to try the door again when he heard footsteps coming up behind him, causing him to swing around and bring his weapon to bear on whoever it was who was approaching.

“Careful” Tracy urged as she appeared in the corridor to be confronted by her husband's gun which he lowered quickly in response.

“What are you doing up here love?” the Commander asked.

“Oh you know me” Tracy admitted “Where angels fear to tread and all that.”

“We should have that as the Service motto” the Commander remarked.

“Suggest it to that daft cow of a Justice Minister” Tracy suggested “She might even give you a few brownie points for it.”

“I'd prefer a key to this door” the Commander admitted as he tried the handle once again.

“Do you want me to...?” Tracy began, suggesting using her lock picking skills.

“Oh stuff it” the Commander responded “Let's do it the old fashioned way” he declared as he unceremoniously kicked in the door, shattering the glass and revealing the Postmaster General to be sat in his chair dead from two gunshot wounds, one to the middle of the forehead and the other to the chest.

“Well there goes the neighbourhood” Tracy remarked seeing the dead body “Am I imagining things or does that look like a professional hit to you?”

“You are not imagining things” the Commander agreed as he went around the desk and checked for a pulse even though he was certain there would not be one.

“There's a package here” Tracy commented looking at the items on the desk.

“It's a Post Office love” the Commander remarked wryly “Where else would you expect to find a package?”

“Yes but this one has your name on it” Tracy indicated the brown A4 sized padded envelope.

“For the attention of Edward James Regent, Regional Administrator General, National Security & Police Service, New Scotland Yard, Westminster, London, SW1” the Commander read from the envelope the address in neatly presented italic handwriting “Knowing my luck it's probably the Readers Digest Prize Draw or an advert for grotty wallet.”

“And it could be a bomb” Tracy suggested as she moved the Commander's hand away from the package just as he was about to touch it.

“Good point” the Commander agreed “We need to regroup and work out just what the hell is going on around here and find out what's in this if its safe.”

“I'll get the Scenes of Crime, Coroner and Bomb Squad sniffer dog up here” Tracy confirmed “Then we should head back to the Yard, maybe by now Fuller will have found something.”

“I hope so” the Commander commented as he took a last look at the dead body in the chair “At the moment this is starting to look more and more like a well organised group rather than a lone individual and that can only mean more trouble as far as I am concerned.”

“Standard! Standard!” the newspaper vendor called in a strong east end accent from his stand outside the main entrance of St. James's Park Underground Station “Vendetta against Post Office maybe behind attacks!”

“Here you go, thanks” Jack responded as he came out of the station entrance and handed fifty pence to the vendor before taking a copy and reading the front page which was all about the events of the last twenty four hours accompanied by a photograph of the damage to New Scotland Yard that had been suffered the previous day.

Indeed the scars of that explosion could still be seen with three windows blown out and blackening all around the edges which Jack looked up at and noted as he walked up Broadway. As he approached the front entrance to New Scotland Yard he noted the ever present on duty Armed Support Unit officer near the famous three sided rotating sign and realised that he was not going to be able to slip past him without being noticed.

Fortunately at that point a gaggle of excited Japanese tourists came down the road towards him and began to gather around the entrance each taking it in turns to have their picture taken in front of the famous sign. This was the distraction that Jack

needed and skilfully he slipped behind the crowd of tourists past the officer on duty and up the path to the main entrance.

The automatic sliding doors opened and Jack nervously entered where he was promptly noticed by the ever present and eagle eyed receptionist who was understandably surprised to find a somewhat overawed school boy standing in the reception area of one of the most famous and well guarded law enforcement agency buildings in the world.

“Erm, can I help you?” the receptionist asked.

“Possibly” Jack admitted as he went over to the reception desk where because of its height and his rather short stature the Receptionist was forced to stand up and look over the edge to see him properly “Would you believe me if I said I was here to see the Regional Administrator General?”

“Oddly enough no” the Receptionist admitted “Besides he's not in at the moment, some thing at Mount Pleasant apparently.”

“Oh...” Jack responded, now unsure of what his next move should be.

“Don't worry, he's with me” a familiar voice called which made Jack turn around to see Sir Richard Crowthorne coming through the doors “Jack, good to see you again.”

“Indeed” Jack agreed much to the Receptionist's amazement.

“You do move in high circles don't you?” she remarked.

“What can I say?” Jack admitted wryly “Friends in high places.”

“Sir!” the Bomb Squad officer called from the Postmaster General's office as he emerged along with his specially trained explosives sniffer dog “Its clean, you can open the package at your leisure.”

“Thank you” the Commander responded, whereupon he allowed the officer and the dog to pass him before heading back into the office where a Scenes of Crime officer was taking photographs of every detail of the room before the body was removed.

“Have you finished with this?” the Commander indicated the padded envelope on the desk.

“Yes Sir” the officer confirmed.

“Right then” the Commander declared as he produced a large clear plastic evidence bag from his pocket and very carefully placed the package inside before taking one final look at the dead body of the Postmaster General, in particular the positioning of the shots which had killed him.

“Are you ready love?” Tracy called from the office doorway.

“Yeah” the Commander confirmed as he stepped out of the office and together they walked off down the corridor to the stairwell at the opposite end.

“You know the more I think about all this” Tracy remarked “The more I think that City Road robbery is the key to all this.”

“Did Fuller manage to find the original investigating officer on that?” the Commander asked as they headed down the stairs.

“Died of lung cancer about three years ago” Tracy confirmed “However apparently one of his team heads up the Devon & Cornwall Robbery Squad now and is on her way into town as we speak.”

“Well at least that is something” the Commander agreed.

“She should be at the Yard by the time we get back” Tracy confirmed “Then I strongly suggest we all sit around a very large conference table, go through every file and piece of evidence we can find, eat lunch and try and work out what is going on here.”

“You forget something my dear” the Commander held up the evidence bag containing the package “I reckon this could be a key calling card from whoever or whatever is behind this.”

“So, who's driving?” Tracy asked as they exited out though the loading bay area into the street outside.

“I'll let you have the honour love” the Commander confirmed “I have some post to open.”

“Go on then, what have you got?” Sir Richard asked as he saw Jack sitting in the Commander's office chair maintaining a look of utmost confidence.

“Full house” Jack declared placing his two hole cards on the desk face up “Kings full of nines.”

“Two pair” Sir Richard admitted defeat for the third straight hand in a row “I must be getting old, losing my touch.”

“Come in” they both called in unison as there was a knock on the door whereupon they were joined by Fuller.

“Is the Chief about?” Fuller asked as he came in looking rather happy.

“On his way back from Mount Pleasant apparently” Sir Richard confirmed “You look very pleased with yourself if you don't mind me saying so.”

“Well that is probably because I just found out who Tweedledum and Tweedledummer our Post Office thieves are” Fuller admitted.

“Oh do tell” Sir Richard responded “You will save me from Little Fish the Poker Devil here.”

“Robbery Squad have as you know had our two muppets locked up downstairs for one of their trademark one to one chats for the best part of two hours and thus far they have not said a thing” Fuller explained “A check of our files revealed no previous for these two's descriptions on our patch however I did a cross reference with our colleagues in Scotland and it turns out they had a similar botched Post Office robbery up that way three years ago and these two clowns are an almost exact match in appearance and mannerisms.”

“But no names?” Sir Richard asked.

“That's the odd bit” Fuller continued “There is no way these two with the way they went about that attempted robbery could possibly have not had their collar felt before somewhere but when I ran their prints through the system it came up a total blank, not a thing.”

“Which either means they have been very lucky...” Sir Richard commented.

“Which is unlikely given today's performance” Fuller remarked.

“...or someone has deleted their records for whatever reason” Sir Richard concluded.

“I suppose these guys could be on someone's payroll” Fuller admitted “Anyway who is this chap” he indicated Jack still seated at the Commander's desk.

“Commander Fuller” Sir Richard declared “Meet Jack Thornton, poker genius, lad about town and subject of a lot of jittery people in dark places if my friend from MI6 is correct.”

“I make people jittery?” Jack asked with a look of concern.

“Indeed” Sir Richard confirmed “and I don't just mean those who you play poker against either but we can talk about that another time.”

“Should be interesting...” Jack remarked quietly to himself with a hint of foreboding as Tracy came into the office.

“Ah there you are” Tracy called “my esteemed husband has something downstairs we all need to see” she announced before noticing Jack sitting in the Commander's seat.

“Hi!” Jack responded with a wave and a slightly nervous smile.

“Glad you made it” Tracy responded “You best stay here, just don't eat all the biscuits.”

“I’ll watch the shop” Jack confirmed seemingly rather at home behind the huge desk that pretty much dwarfed his small frame “What should I do if someone calls?” he asked.

“Use your imagination” Tracy responded with a wry smile.

“Briefing room one I assume?” Sir Richard asked as he got up and joined Tracy and Fuller who left the office.

“Indeed” Tracy confirmed “To bring you two up to speed, someone just assassinated the Postmaster General, in his office I might add.”

“Bloody hell” Sir Richard remarked.

“His office is in Mount Pleasant isn’t it?” Fuller asked as they headed down the stairs to the next floor below.

“Yes” Tracy confirmed “Someone calmly went up to his office and executed him, a professional hit too, one to the head and one to the heart.”

“Nasty...” Fuller remarked “Trouble is I have a nasty feeling there isn’t much CCTV in that place which could make life difficult.”

The three of them entered the briefing room to find a large number of personnel from various sections of both the Service and other agencies present, many gathered around a table at which Collins and the Commander were opening and examining the padded envelope that had been found in the Postmaster General's office.

“Is it safe?” Collins asked nervously.

“After the last couple of days” the Commander admitted “I doubt it, however no explosives were detected, besides I think whoever left this meant for me to read it without any form of harm or assault.”

“May all your beliefs be right” Collins commented as he and everyone else watched the Commander tentatively open the envelope.

“Here we go” the Commander declared as with the envelope now open, he carefully reached inside to extract the contents which when they emerged into the light proved to be a neatly typewritten letter together with a compact disk in a plastic case.

“One for you I think” the Commander duly passed the disk to Fuller who took it over to his laptop to analyse it whilst everyone else took a look at the letter.

“Dear Sir” the Commander duly read the letter out loud “We are owed a long term debt of Two million, three hundred and sixty eight thousand, three hundred and forty five pounds and sixty five pence which with interest amounts to a total payable to us of over three million.”

“We and us” Tracy picked up on the grammar used in the letter “Definitely not a lone individual then.”

“Fits the facts” the Commander agreed before reading on “However as a show of good faith, we are happy to round off this debt owed to a square three million which is payable according to the instructions you will find on the enclosed disk.”

“Better have a whip around then” Sir Richard remarked wryly “That's a lot of loose change.”

“Certain organisations and traitors to our cause have been introduced over the last couple of days to a demonstration of our far reaching power, talent and abilities” the Commander continued to read “We have no desire for further loss of life at this time. Follow the instructions on the enclosed disk to the letter and pay off the debt owed and we will trouble you no further, failure to pay however will result in us taking forceful foreclosure procedures against the Post Office, Government Departments and certain elements of the Law Enforcement agencies.”

“We apologise for the inconvenience” the Commander finished reading the letter “Yours sincerely, One.”

“One?” Tracy remarked.

“Inconvenience?” Collins also remarked.

“Charming jokers aren't they” the Commander agreed “Simon, what have you got?”

“A video CD” Fuller confirmed “Give me a few minutes and I'll get it sorted for you all.”

“Well in that case” the Commander responded “Whilst we are waiting, if everyone would like to find themselves a seat?”

There were murmurs and much comment amongst those present as they all rearranged themselves and sat down facing the front of the large briefing room whilst the Commander took the stand and cleared his throat which had the effect of bringing silence and their full attention before he began.

“To bring you all up to speed” the Commander began “That little surprise package was found addressed to yours truly on the desk of the Postmaster General at Mount Pleasant where after an explosion in the lower levels, he was found dead, executed in a professional hit.”

This prompted further murmurs and discussion for a few moments that the Commander let pass before continuing.

“At this time” he carried on “The news of the Postmaster General's death has been black flagged and does not leave these walls until I say so. Prior to his death, a series of explosions took place at four Post Office locations across the centre of the City plus

a van used we believe by the bomber was detonated in Bishopsgate, immediately outside Liverpool Street Station.”

“Up until this morning, all the evidence pointed to a single obsessed loon bent on extortion” the Commander continued “That was until these two goons turned up at the St. James’s Park Post Office” he duly showed on the big screen behind him photographs of the two robbers apprehended earlier “By clever bluff the bomb maker diverted us to concentrate on the Post Office right outside this building and then we were fed these two clowns at just the right moment to throw us well and truly off the scent.”

“Did they have any bombs on them?” one officer asked from the audience.

“Four packages, identical to the ones that detonated yesterday were brought in by them” the Commander concluded “However they were filled with putty, I believe the term is non-viable device.”

Philips the Chief of the Bomb Squad duly nodded in agreement before the Commander continued.

“Now this as they say is where the plot thickens” the Commander continued “We have a witness who when he was recognised by the man we believe to be the bomb maker suddenly found himself confronted by these men.”

At that point four still shots from the CCTV cameras at Liverpool Street Station were shown on the large screen.

“These four suited goons with silenced weapons appeared after our suspected bomb maker made a telephone call and tried to cancel out our witness” the Commander explained “They turned up in a dark saloon car, wore identical black suits and sunglasses and were clearly on standby somewhere nearby to provide cover in case of just this sort of problem.”

“That suggests a well financed and carefully structured support network of some kind” Sir Richard commented “We have encountered such types a few times before.”

“Fortunately our witness got away but unfortunately our four goons here melted away into the crowd after shooting a Transport Division patrol officer with no hesitation” the Commander carried on “Meanwhile any potential evidence from the bomb makers van went up in smoke on the dot of eleven o'clock when it exploded.”

“Any trace on the van?” another officer asked.

“Traffic division are working on it but we know the plates were false” the Commander admitted “It's an outside possibility we could get something though the chassis number assuming the Bomb Squad can find it in amongst the mess.”

“And that was when the Post Office explosions started?” Collins asked.

“Greg” the Commander turned to Philips, the Chief of the Bomb Squad “Do you want to talk about that?”

“Yeah sure” Philips confirmed as he got up and took the stand with the Commander stepping aside.

“Ok then” Philips declared as he put a map of central London up on the screen with five locations marked upon it with red stars “First explosion you know about, the van in Bishopsgate, outside Liverpool Street which went off at the stroke of eleven o'clock and pretty much shredded everything within a twenty metre radius.”

“Including my motorbike...” Tracy remarked.

“Ten minutes later a device apparently similar in power to the parcel bombs exploded in the lower levels of the main Post Office facility at Mount Pleasant” Philips continued “This was then followed by similar incidents, fortunately with no excessive damage or injury at the Post Office facilities at Tottenham Court Road, Oxford Street and Paddington, all of which took place within a period of just over twenty five minutes.”

“I've got a couple of Simon's lads pulling all the CCTV from the different locations to see if we can find the same person or persons at each location prior to the blasts” Collins confirmed “There is also the question of who shot the Postmaster General as well.”

“And why” the Commander added as he replaced Philips back on the stand “One thing is for certain is that all this in some way links back to an armed robbery on a Post Office cash transport in City Road exactly ten years and one day ago. Is the officer here who worked on the case?” he asked looking around hopefully.

“Here Sir” a female officer in the uniform of the Devon and Cornwall Division of the Service called from the back of the room.

“Hi” the Commander responded “Would you mind coming up and giving us the briefing on that?”

“Certainly Sir” the officer responded as she got up and made her way to the front of the room.

“Good morning” she declared as soon as she was in place “I'm Commander Ellie Marin, ten years ago I was on the team that investigated the City Road cash raid.”

“At precisely eleven o'clock on that day an unscheduled cash delivery of over two and a half million pounds was travelling northbound on City Road north of Old Street approaching Islington” Marin explained “It was stopped at traffic lights when it was surrounded by two unmarked vans from which masked armed men numbering six or more emerged and forced the driver and guard on board to surrender before using an explosive charge to open up the back of the vehicle.”

“One minute later the gang had loaded all of the cash on board into their own vehicle and tied up the crew before departing at high speed, the two vans used disappearing off in opposite directions” Marin continued “They were found empty and abandoned with no forensics on them whatsoever in the Bethnal Green area twenty four hours later.”

“Sorry to interrupt” the Commander asked at that point “Whereabouts in Bethnal Green just out of curiosity?”

“An old printing works if I recall” Marin confirmed, an answer that intrigued the Commander.

“And I am right in thinking none of the cash stolen was ever recovered?” Tracy asked.

“Correct” Marin confirmed “Not a penny of the cash, the robbers or any other evidence was either seen or heard of again” she admitted “Until today that is.”

“Come again?” the Commander responded with surprise.

“The two idiots who held up the Post Office this morning” Marin explained “On my way up I bumped into an old colleague from the Robbery Squad who searched them, they both had on them one thousand pounds in cash, all with serial numbers of notes stolen in the City Road job.”

“Curious” the Commander remarked.

“Now prior to that little bombshell, no pun intended” Marin continued her briefing “There were a number of other admittedly slightly tenuous connections between the explosions of the last two days and the City Road robbery. Firstly personnel involved, Berresford the now deceased Postmaster General was the cashier who counted and checked the cash consignment before it left, the Post Office employee killed in the Victoria Street explosion yesterday morning was the driver of the City Road van and then there is the communication the Administrator General received which mentions the exact amount of money that was taken from that van exactly ten years ago yesterday.”

“This is the communiqué in question” the Commander retook the stand and held up the letter received, now safely encased inside a clear plastic evidence bag “There is also some sort of disk that hopefully Commander Fuller will be playing for us in a minute.”

“Nearly there Sir” Fuller confirmed from over the side where he was still furiously working on his laptop “One minute I should think.”

“Whilst we are waiting, anyone got anything to add to this little discussion?” the Commander asked.

“My lab rats have been doing further chemical composition tests on the explosives recovered plus residue from some of the earlier explosion locations” Philips announced “No surprises in that they were all of the same recipe of very effective

home brew explosive mixed by someone who knows a hell of a lot about bombs. Also I think we may have got lucky, according to our database, this particular mix has turned up at least twice before.”

“Tell me one of them was the explosive charge used in the City Road job?” Tracy asked.

“Got it on one” Philips confirmed with a smug smile “The other occurrence we found refers to a case that MI6 and Special Branch were working on but when we asked them, we were told unceremoniously to take a walk.”

“Sir Richard?” the Commander turned to Sir Richard Crowthorne sat to his left.

“I’ll see what I can do” Sir Richard confirmed “Its amazing how many tongues can be loosened and files mysteriously appear when a few bottles of finest single malt change hands.”

“Don’t forget the receipts for the expenses claim” the Commander jokingly reminded him.

“We are ready to go Sir” Fuller declared with a wave of the arm.

“Ok then” the Commander responded “Play...”

With that Fuller dimmed the lights and began to play the video CD contents on the large screen at the front of the room.

The format of the video was simple but well produced and took the form of a series of still images along with some film clips obviously taken with a small camcorder or similar. Accompanying this giving the instructions was an electronically disguised voiceover.

“By now you will appreciate our skills and our determination in wishing to achieve our goals” the voiceover began as a video clip of a table with at least a dozen explosive devices, very similar to those that had exploded so far was shown followed by an amateur clip of the van explosion at Liverpool Street.

“We have no wish for further loss of life” the voiceover continued “Those who have betrayed us and our cause have now been largely dealt with. Now there is the matter of funds owed to us which will be paid if you do not wish to see further such incidents.”

“Here we go...” Tracy remarked quietly.

“At precisely five o’clock this afternoon a senior member of the National Security & Police Service in full uniform and in the highest possible visible profile will proceed to the London Transport Lost Property office at Baker Street where they will collect this mobile telephone” this was backed up by a close up photograph of a pale blue coloured Nokia mobile telephone “This particular telephone can be identified by having been found on a Metropolitan Line train from Watford yesterday morning.”

“Be aware that the telephone has been carefully modified so that if any of the more discreet Security and Intelligence Agencies try any of their usual tricks we will be fully aware” the voice warned “This will be deemed as non-compliance of our instructions and a series of penalties will ensue in the form of further explosive devices, more powerful than those encountered so far being detonated in key public places around the country.”

“When arriving at the Lost Property Office” the voice carried on backed up by a general shot of the entrance to the office in Baker Street “He or she will be carrying a red leather briefcase in which must be placed the sum of three million pounds sterling in non-sequential used notes of twenty and fifty pound denomination. No tracking devices, paint bombs or other traps are permitted within the case and we will be checking. Failure to observe this condition will also be considered non-compliance and the penalties previously mentioned implemented immediately.”

“At precisely seventeen hour ten minutes” the voice instructed “a call will be made to the telephone which the officer will answer. This will contain the first of a series of instructions which must be followed to the letter, again failure to do so will result in the penalty for non-compliance.”

“When we are satisfied that there are no tricks being entered into on your side” the voice insisted “arrangements will be made via the telephone for the payment to pass to us whereupon it will be checked by a representative of our organisation. When we are satisfied that all is present and correct, your officer will be allowed to go about their business and this will conclude our arrangement. At this point we will withdraw our threats and you will not hear from us again.”

“I wouldn't bet on it” the Commander remarked with a distinctly unpleasant feeling about the whole thing.

“We regret these desperate measures” the voice came to a conclusion as the message reached its end “However these are desperate times. If it had not been for the greed of certain individuals all those years ago, none of this would have been necessary. Good day.”

With that the message ended and Fuller put the lights back on.

“Comments, thoughts, reactions?” the Commander asked generally.

“The impression I get” Sir Richard remarked “and call me Mr Thicky if you think I am mad but how about this for a theory? This organisation, gang, whoever staged an armed robbery ten years ago to get their hands on two and a half million and change yet ten years later they talk about being betrayed and to cap it all two of the key people involved are killed, the original van driver and the Postmaster General.”

“Commander Marin” the Commander turned to the officer still sat nearby “How long did you say the witnesses reported the gang took to empty the armoured van in the City Road job?”

“Less than a minute” Marin confirmed “That includes the time it took to set up the explosive charge and blow the lock off.”

“Now when I last looked” the Commander remarked “Two and half million in cash...”

“...some of it in bagged coins as well...” Tracy interjected as she checked the details she had in a file in front of her.

“...is a very large sum of money to shift in under a minute even with what five of them?” the Commander continued.

“Four” Marin confirmed “the explosives man did not handle the cash, just did the big bang and then moved back.”

“So let me float a theory here” the Commander explained “What if the van was empty and the cash never left the Post Office in the first place?”

“What?” Tracy responded “Someone trousered the cash before it even left the vaults?”

“It’s been done before” Collins remarked “and it's a theory that fits the facts.”

“How about I take a shuftly through Berresford and the driver's finances?” Fuller suggested.

“Do it” the Commander agreed before returning to addressing the rest of the room “Right, this is how we are going to work this.”

He went over to a desk and picked up a notepad before continuing his briefing “Commander Marin, I would like you to stay a while if that is all right with you?”

“Certainly” Marin agreed.

“Put together a team of people here and work through the original City Road case files” the Commander requested “If necessary re-do all the witness statements, look under any rocks, squeeze the pips in anyone who turns out to be shifty.”

“Will do Sir” Marin confirmed.

“Sir Richard, Mr Collins” the Commander turned to the former and current Divisional Heads from MI5 “I want to know who this organisation is, find me some names, check with all our sister agencies to see if they have anyone on their usual nutter lists that may be who we are dealing with.”

“That could be a hell of a long list” Collins remarked “Pretty much everyone is looking to secretly acquire funding for nefarious activities these days from terrorist cells to anti congestion charge protestors.”

“Commander Fuller” the Commander turned to Fuller who was busy on his laptop “Sorry to burden you but whilst you are doing your search of financial records, have a good look through any and every CCTV tape you can find that covers the bombing locations this morning and see if the same face crops up anywhere.”

“There is one thing bothering me about that” Sir Richard commented “Four locations, five if you include Liverpool Street and all indications of one bomb maker and setter who always times his devices to explode within five minutes of delivery to avoid detection”.

“He's right” Tracy agreed as she looked at the explosion locations on a map of central London “Somehow our mad bomber friend managed to get from Liverpool Street via the West End to Paddington and back to Mount Pleasant in less than forty minutes if this is right. There is no way he could have done that in the traffic we have, it's an hour and a half one way minimum with the mess we had this morning.”

“The Central Line?” one officer suggested.

“Paddington is on the Bakerloo” the Commander responded “Besides when our witness saw the guy at Liverpool Street, he disappeared into some unmarked building and by the time whoever he was would have been on the move, the Central Line platforms were closed.”

“And then there is the small matter of the four suited goons with guns” Tracy mentioned.

“Indeed” the Commander agreed “I want another team to work on identifying these jokers and find them before they do anymore damage, plus at the same time see if we can work out how our bomber friend moved through London seemingly undetected.”

“He must be on CCTV somewhere” Collins confirmed “You cannot sneeze in this City without MI5 knowing about it.”

“Right” the Commander declared “I think that covers just about everything, half an hour for lunch then all senior officers in my office at two o'clock and we will plan how we are going to handle the payment handover.”

With that declaration everyone in the room rose from their seats and began to file out back to the Incident Investigation Room next door where Fuller went straight to his desk of computers and got to work.

“How do you manage to work on four computers at once?” a familiar voice interrupted him whereupon he looked up to see the much welcome face of his wife Jennifer observing him over the top of the main central monitor.

“Skill?” Fuller wryly responded getting up and kissing her before she joined him alongside “Anyway aren't you supposed to be guarding the political no necks of this great country today?” he asked.

“All these explosions plus the fact it's the annual Commons holiday has sent them all running for their country retreats with nothing but a couple of spin doctors, a press relations advisor and their mistresses for company” Jennifer admitted “So I thought I would drop by and see how you guys were doing.”

“Not well would be a good description at the moment” Fuller reluctantly admitted “So far we have a ten year old robbery that might have been a dud, half a dozen bombs, someone who wants us to casually toss he, she or they three million quid in loose change before teatime, oh yes and a dead Postmaster General as well.”

“Sir William Berresford?” Jennifer asked “He's dead?”

“Two shots in his office up at Mount Pleasant” Fuller put up an evidence photograph on one of the monitors for her to see “One to the head, the other to the heart, very nasty.”

“Ouch” Jennifer remarked “I guess that is what you get for buying your honours from disgraced MP's I guess.”

“Excuse me?” Fuller responded “You knew the guy?”

“We carted him around a few times when he was travelling with any Cabinet Ministers” Jennifer confirmed “Word is he inherited a large amount of money about ten years ago, promptly made a significant cash donation to certain political parties and six months later he just happens to get a prominent mention in the New Years Honours List and a swift promotion to Postmaster General. Not bad for someone who started out as a solicitor's clerk from Camberwell.”

“Hold on to that thought for a minute” Fuller remarked as he delved into some paper files on one side of his desk and rapidly flicked through old yellowing pages of typewritten paper, some with scribbled corrections and notes in pen that had faded with age until he found one specific page and ran his finger down a list of details.

“Yes!” Fuller declared loudly and with great triumph that resulted in everyone stopping what they were doing and looking at him for a moment “Jennifer darling, I owe you lunch.”

“Glad to be of service” Jennifer confirmed “What did I do exactly?” she asked.

“Made a connection” Fuller confirmed “The then Mr William Berresford started out as a clerk but later became a full partner in a firm of solicitors attached to a city finance firm before he later joined the Post Office” he showed Jennifer the file in front of him “The very same solicitors and city finance firm that received parcel bombs yesterday, our connection is him.”

“Great, I think...” Jennifer responded still uncertain exactly what it was her husband was going on about “I tell you what, you can explain it to me over lunch in the canteen.”

“Let me just get this file cross referencing program up and running...” Fuller remarked as he pressed a number of buttons which set in motion a sequence of search parameters scrolling across two of his screens “Done, right lunch.”

“So who do you have in mind to be the bag man?” Sir Richard asked as he, Tracy and the Commander headed down the corridor of the top floor.

“Well me of course” the Commander responded.

“Oh no you're not” Tracy insisted as they reached the Commander's office and proceeded inside.

“Why not?” the Commander asked as they arrived at his desk behind which was still sat Jack who was listening intently to the conversation.

“Oh no you're not what?” Jack asked out of curiosity.

“Going to get his head blown off most likely” Tracy responded “Jack, you are a sensible lad, you tell him.”

“I would be able to offer a more accurate opinion if I knew what on earth we were discussing here” Jack responded.

“All right” the Commander remarked “The message specifically asked for a senior uniformed officer of the Service to do the money drop, so if not me who then?”

“I'll do it” Tracy declared “Think about it for a minute, I have two unique advantages over you. One, I have training in hostage negotiation if things get sticky and two, I have an identical twin sister.”

“There are two of you?” Jack asked.

“It can give us a unique advantage at times like this” Tracy admitted.

“All right” the Commander conceded after a moments silent pause for thought as he knew full well once Tracy had set her mind on something, no one, not even him was going to be able to make her change her mind.

“Right, that's settled then” Tracy confirmed with a satisfied smirk before turning to Jack “Afternoon, comfortable are we?”

“Oh yes thank you” Jack confirmed with a smile “One thing though, is there anything to eat around here only I seem to have run out of biscuits?” he produced the now empty biscuit packet from the Commander's desk drawer.

“You have a point” the Commander checked his old pocket watch “We have been going at this business since the crack of dawn and its almost two and so far we haven't had a break.”

“Come on” Tracy urged Jack who duly got out of the Commander's chair, probably the most powerful seat in the City if not the entire country and joined them.

“I'll make some telephone calls” Sir Richard confirmed “Can I use your phone?” he asked.

“Be my guest” the Commander confirmed “Only don't eat all my biscuits.”

“Err too late” Jack reminded him.

“Oh...” the Commander responded “Come on then lad, let us introduce you to the dubious delights of the New Scotland Yard staff canteen.”

“The thing I can't fathom out is how he managed to get across the city so fast” Fuller remarked as he and Jennifer were sat at a table in the packed staff canteen eating lunch “I mean you drive fast around the city, how long would it take you at your best rate to get from Liverpool Street to Paddington in the mid morning?”

“Assuming sirens and escort bikes” Jennifer thought for a few moments, drawing on her years of experience of escorting politicians and VIP's across the area “At least forty five minutes I would have thought and that is without going via Oxford Street, that alone would add at least another twenty to thirty minutes to the clock.”

“I know I am missing something but what is it?” Fuller asked.

“Wish I could help love” Jennifer responded “Are you sure he didn't take the Underground?”

“Two of the locations are ten minutes walk from the nearest station plus he would have had to dodge around Liverpool Street which had been closed by that time because of Jack's little run in and then he would have had to have changed onto the Bakerloo at some point to reach Paddington” Fuller explained.

“Who is Jack?” Jennifer asked.

“You remember that little lad that saved Sir Richard and the Commander's bacon at the hospital during that Epping business?” Fuller explained.

“Oh yes, I remember now” Jennifer recalled “How the hell did he get mixed up in this mess?” she asked.

“He is living at the old Printing Works in Bethnal Green which the bomber...” Fuller tailed off as a thought suddenly struck him.

“What?” Jennifer asked seeing the look in her husband's eyes “Something wrong?”

“The old printing works” Fuller responded “The Bomber's workshop or whatever is the same building that the getaway vans from the City Road job were found in, it has to be.”

“So who owns it?” Jennifer asked as she tucked into her second sandwich.

“Probably some greedy property developer looking to cash in on the 2012 Olympics boom I expect” Fuller confirmed “I can probably find out even if it's some front of an investment company.”

“Oh, here comes the boss” Jennifer motioned over to the door where she could see Tracy, the Commander and Jack entering and heading straight to the serving counter queue.

“Good grief” Jack remarked upon seeing the staff canteen for the first time “It's like the school dinner queue only with slightly better chairs.”

“You won't find it in any Good Food Guide that is for certain” the Commander was forced to agree “Anyway, what's everybody having?”

“Stuff it” Tracy remarked as she helped herself to a cream cake and a hot chocolate “After the last couple of days I think the healthy living routine can take a rest.”

“Usual please Gladys” the Commander called to the canteen supervisor who with a smile duly served up a large portion of chips.

“Same for me thanks” Jack confirmed “How come you still get the decent stuff in your canteen, my school got done over by the Food Police and now its all healthy options.”

“Could have something to do with the fact the last time the Food Standards Minister was up here he got stuck in the lift for two hours” Tracy explained “I still never figured out how that happened though.”

“You couldn't do the school kids of my generation a favour and arrest Jamie Oliver could you?” Jack asked wryly.

“Don't even tempt me lad” the Commander advised with a chuckle.

“I'll get this” Jack insisted as they got to the cashier at the end and he produced a wadge of ten pound notes from his uniform blazer pocket.

“I don't want to know where you got that little lot from do I?” Tracy asked.

“Eight hands of heads up no limit holdem with your Mr Crowthorne actually” Jack explained as he paid the canteen cashier who was rather surprised to see a twelve year old school boy in the canteen queue of New Scotland Yard.

“Thought he was looking a bit defeated” the Commander remarked as they headed over to the table next to where Fuller and Jennifer were sitting.

“Good grief” Jack remarked as he looked back and forth between the two twin sisters for a few moments “There really are two of you?”

“Jennifer” Tracy did the introductions “Meet Jack Thornton, Jack this is my twin sister Jennifer, head of the VIP Protection Division.”

“Hello” Jennifer responded as she shook Jack's hand.

“Actually I am glad I caught up with you as it happens” Fuller remarked “You know that old printing works you are holed up in?” he asked.

“You mean my spacious post modernist business premises and penthouse apartments in up and coming Bethnal Green with vista views to the City and ample storage space?” Jack joked in response.

“That would be the one” Fuller confirmed “Assuming it's not your name on the title deeds, I don't suppose you know who owns it do you?”

“Some property developer guy I gather” Jack confirmed “He got banged up for tax evasion apparently about six months ago which means no one is touching that place anytime soon so I moved in.”

“Don't you have a home to go to?” Jennifer asked.

“It's a long story” Jack evasively explained “Lets just say it suits my needs of being out of sight and out of mind of certain people.”

“We need to have a chat to you about that at some point” the Commander remarked as he and Tracy exchanged a knowing and agreeable look “By the way, do you know MI6 think you are dead?” he asked.

“So I gathered” Jack confirmed “I saw the death certificate and the announcement in The Times.”

“I've got Sir Richard looking into it” the Commander reassured Jack “See if we can find out just what the hell is going on with you.”

“Tell him to tread carefully” Jack warned “I saw what happened when my father stumbled on to something I think was probably too hot for him to handle and it was then end of him and very nearly me too.”

“Err change of subject I think...” Tracy suggested “Anyone got any ideas where we can rustle up three million in cash from in just under three hours?”

“The cash isn't the problem” the Commander confirmed “The problem is how do we hand it over without either actually losing it or whoever it is we are giving it to?”

“We've got a whole vault full of fake notes in the stores” Fuller suggested “We could give them some of that.”

“No” the Commander responded “These guys whoever they are, they would spot that and that would result in a penalty for non-compliance to use their vocabulary.”

“Is this anyone we have encountered before?” Jennifer asked “After all they seem very well organised and the way they have gone about their business suggests some form of training in one of the Services at some point.”

“Nothing came up in the search of the usual nutter lists” Fuller confirmed “Excluding non matches, deceased, jailed and discontinued leaves us with no major groups that we know of so I am reckoning this lot are something new.”

“Well whoever they are” the Commander confirmed “We have to appear to pay them three million in loose change and dance to their tune until we can neutralise the threat.”

Commander Marin was looking through files on the City Road job she had not seen for nearly ten years but because it was her first serious armed robbery all that time ago, much of the details were still fresh in her mind and the files merely served to fill in the vague grey areas where her memory could not cover.

“Ok then” she declared to her small working party of officers who were going over the old case notes in minute detail “If it was an inside job, who is in the frame?” she asked.

“Berresford was the guy who authorised the money transfer and accounted for every penny before it left the secure vault” one officer summarised “He then handed the money to the two security guards in the van and of those three, two are dead, Berresford himself and the driver.”

“There wasn't a security guard in the van” Marin responded recalling clearly a report from the time for which she went searching through the pile of paper until she found it “Yes, here it is, James Romsey was the guard assigned to the duty at short notice but was taken ill the day before and no replacement could be found.”

“Which is odd” the officer responded “as Romsey's signature is on the original docket that Berresford issued when the money was withdrawn from the vault so someone was lying.”

“Do we have Romsey's file around anywhere?” Marin asked.

“Not that I can see” the officer confirmed “I guess as he was supposedly not there, no one bothered to do a check on him.

“Well we are doing one now” Marin declared “Keep working on this material, I'll be back in a minute.”

Marin duly left the side office and proceeded across the incident investigation room to Fuller's desk where he had just returned from lunch.

“Commander Fuller” Marin called as she arrived at his desk.

“Commander Marin” Fuller responded “What can I do for you Maam?” he enquired.

“James Romsey” Marin explained “He was the assigned security guard for the cash shipment in the City Road job except he was ill that day but yet magically was able to sign the document for the cash withdrawal.”

“What would you like to know about him?” Fuller asked as he turned to one of his many computer screens and input the name into the search system “You would be surprised what I can find out about people.”

“So I have heard” Marin confirmed “For the moment I will settle for what he has been doing for the last ten years, where he is now and anything you reckon may be relevant to this inquiry thanks.”

“Give me ten minutes Maam” Fuller confirmed with a smile of reassurance.

“Senior officers in Briefing Room One in three minutes please” the Commander declared across the room from the main doorway before heading off there himself.

“I guess I'll be next door” Marin confirmed to Fuller “If you find anything...?”

“I will bring it straight along” Fuller confirmed.

“Darling” Tracy called from the Briefing Room door “I just spoke to the Treasury, they say you can have your three million at four o'clock but they want it back when you are done with it.”

“Thanks love” the Commander responded “Take a seat, I think I am going to need some support for this one.”

“Plus I am the nominated bag man” Tracy confirmed as she sat down alongside her husband and gave him a reassuring hug “Well bag woman actually now I come to think of it.”

“Am I interrupting something?” Sir Richard asked as he came in to see the two officers embraced much to his embarrassment.

“Oh no, sorry” the Commander confirmed as they both regained their composure “Anything from your part of the world?” he asked.

“Both the CIA and Interpol have drawn a blank” Sir Richard confirmed as he sat down at the large briefing room table.

“Ditto from MI6 and my lot as well” Collins confirmed as he entered the room and took the next seat “That means we are dealing with either an individual or a group who are off our radar and home grown to boot.”

“And that makes me nervous” the Commander responded “I like to know who I am dealing with” he remarked as the door opened once again and Commander Marin came in.

“Not too late am I?” she asked.

“Come on in” the Commander gestured “I do hope you have brought something to the party?”

“There is an anomaly over the City Road job” Marin confirmed “There were supposed to be three people from the Post Office involved in that cash transfer. Berresford the then Chief Cashier, the driver and the on board guard assigned to the shipment.”

“And the anomaly is?” Tracy asked.

“The guard was only assigned to the shipment at the last minute because it was a short notice unscheduled cash movement” Marin explained “However according to the original investigation statements, he was taken seriously ill the previous day and so was not on board when the raid happened. One slight problem though, he signed the docket when he and the driver of the van took the money from the vaults.”

“Do we have a name for this guy?” the Commander asked “He may be in danger if the fate of his two colleagues is anything to go by.”

“James Romsey” Marin confirmed “I've got your Commander Fuller working on his bio right now. He's good isn't he?”

“One of the best” the Commander admitted “Ah, speak of the devil” he announced as Fuller arrived in the room having run from next door with a print out in his hand.

“I think you need to see this” he declared as he put the printout on the table for everyone to see “James Franklin Romsey, born 1947, retired from the Post Office a couple of months after the City Road job.”

“Where is he now?” the Commander asked.

“We don't know” Fuller admitted “This guy disappeared off the planet about five years ago. All we have is an identical name on a council register from five years ago renting an allotment in Leytonstone.”

“Bingo...” the Commander muttered under his breath.

“However it gets better” Fuller continued “Prior to joining the Post Office he was in the Army. For ten points guess what his specialist subject was?”

“Bomb disposal and security protocols for explosives?” Tracy asked.

“Correct, and he was also in the Royal Engineers where his interests included field communications, telephone systems and railways” Fuller confirmed “If I were a betting man I would say this guy is our bomber.”

“It also explains how he was able to ring us up without being traced yesterday” Tracy concluded.

“Right, this changes things” the Commander declared “Simon, I want you to work with Commander Marin, find the latest mug shot you can of this guy, his description, everything. Get into his life, his finances, pets, the works and get his description out on every newspaper, website, TV news bulletin, billboard, everywhere. Also cross reference him with every bit of relevant CCTV you can find, I want this guy tracked down to the last inch.”

“Consider it done” Fuller confirmed as he and Commander Marin departed to carry out their assignment.

“At last a face in the frame” Tracy remarked as she looked at the picture that Fuller had brought of their new prime suspect “Do you suppose he has changed much in the ten years since this was taken?”

“Probably” the Commander remarked “However there is one way of finding out” he reached for the telephone on the desk and speed dialled an internal number “This is the Administrator General” the Commander declared “Can you have Divisional Commander Caverner, the other one escort a Mr Jack Thornton from my office to Briefing Room One please as soon as possible, thank you.”

“Whilst we are waiting” Collins continued “I had a couple of my guys go into the Lost Property Office at Baker Street” he passed across a couple of surveillance photographs from a manila folder he had brought with him “There is indeed a blue Nokia mobile telephone in there recovered yesterday from a Metropolitan Line service from Watford and its got anti-tamper measures all through it which means we cannot do anything with it.”

“Clever” the Commander remarked “Leave in on a Metropolitan Line service, the 'A' stock doesn't have any CCTV so no way of tracing who left it on there.”

“Sneaky buggers” Tracy agreed “I guess I am going to have to be wired up like a telephone exchange for this then?” she asked.

“I've got my best team on the way over now” Collins confirmed “They will have you wired for sound in everyway possible with the utmost discretion and secrecy.”

“So if you were thinking of running off to Barbados with the Treasury's three million, think again” the Commander joked.

“Drat” Tracy jokingly responded.

“Delivery!” Jennifer declared as she opened the Briefing Room door and showed Jack inside.

“Take a seat lad” the Commander instructed “Jennifer, would you mind joining us as well if you are free?”

“Certainly” Jennifer confirmed as she sat down alongside Jack.

“This face ring any bells?” the Commander asked as he passed across Romsey's archive photograph to Jack who took it and stared at it intently for a few moments.

“That's him” Jack confirmed “The allotments, Bethnal Green, Liverpool Street, same guy. He is a little older though I would say.”

“Well that was taken ten years ago” Tracy remarked “So you are definite this is the guy who summoned up his little on call goon squad back at Liverpool Street?”

“Absolutely” Jack confirmed “It's those eyes that give the game away, you can always tell a lot from looking in someone's eyes. That's how I am so good at poker” he explained “Take you two for example” he indicated Tracy and the Commander “I can tell that you two have a plan of some kind, radical, a little off beam shall we say but you are reluctant to bring it up in case it sounds ridiculous.”

“Do you want a job at MI5 when you are available?” Collins joked although really he would be happy to have someone as talented as young Jack on board later in his life.

“For the lousy pay you lot get?” Jack responded with a chuckle.

“Anyway, moving on” the Commander decided to move proceedings on “Jennifer, could you please escort our friend Jack here to a safe house of your choosing and keep him guarded at all times until we have this matter settled.”

“I know just the place” Jennifer confirmed as she got up to leave with Jack “Any special instructions?” she asked.

“Just make sure no harm comes to him” Tracy instructed.

“And what ever you do don't play poker with him either!” Sir Richard suggested.

“Come on then” Jennifer urged Jack “Lets get you settled somewhere nice and quiet.”

“See you later guys” Jack declared as he departed “I hope...”

As soon as the unlikely pair had left and the door was closed, the Commander returned to matters in hand.

“Right then” he declared “How do we go about handing over three million in cash without actually handing it over?” he asked.

“Baker Street is our starting point” Collins remarked as he put a map of central London up on the screen at the front of the room and indicated Baker Street with a red dot “I think we can safely assume that whoever they are, they are going to bounce us all around town using a variety of different transport methods which from there could mean anyone of several different directions.”

“Underground links go to pretty much everywhere from there” the Commander remarked as he checked a London Underground tube map he produced from his inside tunic pocket “Metropolitan heads out to Harrow, Watford and beyond into darkest Buckinghamshire, Jubilee can take you across London to Docklands and the east, Bakerloo up to the sleaze pit that is Queens Park and beyond or down to the heart of south London at Elephant & Castle and the Circle and Hammersmith & City Lines cover pretty much everything east and west.”

“Then there is the buses, taxis, you name it” Tracy added.

“Plus they are kicking this thing off at five o'clock” Sir Richard commented “Just as rush hour is about to kick in and it gets very easy to lose someone or something in that mess.”

“With the added bonus of the threat of detonating an explosive device in a crowded location at the height of the peak just to make doubly sure of our co-operation” the Commander concluded.

“I can have teams flood the Underground and surrounding streets” Collins confirmed “I'll need Cassini's team as well to co-ordinate it though.”

“Feel free” the Commander confirmed “What about the roads?”

“How about we sprinkle some of our special black cabs about the place?” Sir Richard suggested.

“Excuse me?” Tracy asked.

“We have a number of regular black cab drivers in the city on a retainer on our books” Collins explained “One of Sir Richard's little initiatives, that way if a suspect or someone we want to keep an eye on needs a cab, we get them in one of ours and follow them all the way home.”

“I like it” the Commander agreed “We'll go with that” he declared as Collins's mobile telephone beeped with an urgent message.

“Ah” Collins declared as he checked the message before returning the telephone back to his pocket “My wiring team is here setting up next door. We should get started on wiring you up” he suggested to Tracy.

“Lets go then” Tracy agreed whereupon she and Collins left the room.

“What are we missing here?” the Commander asked Sir Richard now that they were alone in the Briefing Room.

“Three million quids worth of questions for a starter” Sir Richard admitted “I'd still like to know how this bomber guy has been getting around so easily without being noticed by anyone other than young Jack.”

“The answer is there somewhere” the Commander remarked “The question is can we find it in time?”

“Who is this guy, Houdini?” Fuller remarked as he continued to search through endless files on one computer whilst at the same time he and Marin were scanning through CCTV footage on the other.

“Well he never came through the Underground that is for certain” Marin confirmed “That could be him leaving Mount Pleasant two minutes before the alarm went off but I can find no evidence he actually entered the building.”

“What?” Fuller remarked as he gave up on the file search for now and joined Marin at the other screen.

“Look” Marin replayed one section “There is our man coming out of the main entrance of Mount Pleasant” she indicated one still frame “Now I am no expert with these things but as far as I can see he never entered the building in the first place.”

“I have an idea” Fuller remarked as he got up and was about to leave his desk “See if you can find him on CCTV at any of the other Post Office sites that were targeted, I am going to find a plan of Mount Pleasant and check a theory.”

“Here we are” Jennifer called as she drove the black VIP Protection Division car into the driveway of a seemingly ordinary suburban detached house in a leafy suburb of Finsbury Park.

“Nice” Jack remarked as he looked up from the car window at the frontage of the modern looking two storey house, only the sophisticated door entry system signalling it out as being any different from the hundred or so otherwise near identical houses on the modern estate.

“Come on” Jennifer urged as she got out of the car and went around to the passenger side, opening the door to let Jack out before they headed to the front door of the house.

“So what do you call this place then?” Jack asked as Jennifer entered a five digit code into the keypad before unlocking the front door and showing him inside.

“Welcome to safe house Foxtrot Seventeen” Jennifer declared.

“Wow, catchy name” Jack remarked wryly. “I can tell this place was furnished by a Government agency” he commented as he went through to the living room and surveyed the uninspiring furniture and fittings.

“How is that?” Jennifer asked as she went through to the kitchen and put the kettle on.

“Bog standard out of a catalogue cheap and cheerful sofa suite for a start” Jack confirmed “Oh and those energy saving light bulbs that don't give out any decent light and you can't actually recycle” he noted the lamps.

“Are you a tea or a coffee man?” Jennifer asked.

“Better make it tea please” Jack confirmed as he tried the sofa, sitting down on it but finding it lumpy and uncomfortable “Chances are if its Government issue coffee it will be that cheap recycled powder stuff that tastes like reconstituted camel's droppings.”

“How come you know so much about these things then?” Jennifer asked as she rejoined him in the front room whilst waiting for the kettle to boil.

“My father was in the Foreign Office” Jack explained “Some overseas project or something. We got shipped from pillar to post around the world for the best part of most of my life until...” he tailed off.

“Ah...” Jennifer realised.

“Well anyway” Jack continued “I have seen enough Government buildings from London to Port Stanley to know that the political bean counters are nothing if not cheap and stingy. I guess it's probably even worse since they got that Scottish chap in charge now.”

“I'll ask him next time I see him” Jennifer remarked wryly.

“Of course, you get to escort the cabinet and the Prime Minister around don't you?” Jack realised.

“I do indeed” Jennifer confirmed “The great, the good plus a whole bunch of muppets as well.”

“Must be interesting work” Jack remarked.

“It has its moments” Jennifer admitted as she got up upon hearing the kettle was approaching boiling point “But boil it down to the basics and it's just a glorified taxi service really.”

“Well now you get to protect little old me instead” Jack declared with an amused smirk “Being guarded by the escort to the Prime Minister, that would earn me a few points at school if it weren't for the fact they probably wouldn't believe me.”

"Right try that" one of the specialist technicians instructed as she finished securing the discreet listening device inside the lining of Tracy's dress uniform tunic before handing it back to her.

"What's the range on this thing?" Tracy asked as she put the uniform tunic on and checked to see if she could detect any of the tracking devices now installed.

"We can hear anything you say plus anyone on a telephone to you from a maximum of two miles above ground or a mile, maybe a bit more below" Collins explained "Plus we can track your location at all times from anywhere through GPS."

"Very clever" Tracy admitted "You should get them in the shops for Christmas, every house wife will want one fitted to their husbands!"

"I'll forward the idea to our merchandising department" Collins joked "Didn't you know, since we got the website we sell MI5 branded tea towels, mugs and not forgetting our indispensable range of lunch Boxes and thermos flasks for the kiddies."

"So how are we playing this?" Tracy asked.

"Cassini, your Husband and I will be tracking your progress from a discreet van" Collins explained "Commander Fuller meanwhile will be here at the Yard ready to access any information you might need and cause any required mayhem wherever needed."

"You will hear me but can you speak to me?" Tracy asked.

"We cannot risk direct contact in case anyone is watching for whom by the way we will be keeping a look out for as we go along" Collins explained "However where possible we will get messages to you using good old fashioned trade craft where necessary."

"Could be fun" Tracy remarked, shielding her understandable apprehension.

"It could be dangerous" Collins warned "but you will have upwards of a hundred of mine and Cassini's boys filtering about the place so if things go pear shaped, we call it off and get you out of there as fast as possible."

"Terrific" Tracy remarked "I think..."

"Well everything is in place" Collins confirmed "Now all we need is Sir Richard and the Commander to con the Treasury into letting us 'borrow' three million in cash for the evening."

"Do the words 'blood' and 'stone' mean anything to you?" Tracy remarked.

The Treasury Clerk looked up at the Commander over the top of his small horn rimmed glasses as though he had received an improper suggestion.

“I’m sorry Sir” the Clerk responded with disdain “This is Her Majesty’s Government Treasury, we just can’t go out and hand money to all and sundry who come through the door you know, this is the public purse.”

“Listen chum” the Commander decided the time for the diplomatic approach was over as Sir Richard looked on with an understandably worried frown “If I don’t have three million in readies available, there is every chance people are going to die tonight. Is that enough reason for you?”

“Anyone important?” the Clerk asked.

“I don’t know do I?” the Commander responded.

“Well if you cannot give me specifics then there is no way I can authorise the cash withdrawal” the Clerk clearly stated. It may have been the public purse he was protecting but he was very adept at not actually letting anyone, least of all the public to whom it technically belonged anywhere near it.”

“Look I don’t have time to argue” the Commander surrendered “Take it as a credit out of the Security & Police Service Special Contingencies Fund if you insist but please hurry up.”

“Oh very well then” the Clerk agreed “Do you have signed authorisation from the Regional Administrator General.”

“Oh for crying out loud...” the Commander remarked to himself “I am the Regional Administrator General for your information. Who were you expecting? The tea lady?”

“Well we get all sorts of people in here everyday requesting money you know” the Clerk explained as he filled in a form on his desk with an old fashioned ink pen “Why just last week we had the Prime Minister come through here looking for a grant to put a solar panel on his house would you believe?”

“In my line of work Sir” the Commander responded as the Clerk finished filling in the form and handed it to him with some reluctance “I believe anything.”

“Third door on the left down the corridor there” the Clerk instructed “Make sure you get a receipt” he insisted.

“Thank you” the Commander responded before he and Sir Richard set off down the ornate marble and wood panel lined corridor to the cashier’s office where they duly entered to find a man behind a serving window of the kind they used to have in old 1930’s banks.

“Monetary request please” the Commander placed the form on the counter.

“Blimey, three million eh?” the Cashier remarked as he read the form “And good old fashioned hard currency too. How would you like it?” he asked.

“Non sequential twenties and fifties” the Commander confirmed “It's a ransom job.”

“Haven't had one of those through here for a while” the Cashier remarked, clearly far more co-operative than his colleague who they had met earlier “I keep the randomised stuff in the back, won't be a minute” he reassured them before disappearing from sight into a back office.

“How come every crackpot, lunatic and environmental researcher that comes through the Government's door gets cash thrown at them no questions asked” the Commander remarked “Yet when we need a sum of money to save peoples lives they give us the third degree?”

“Welcome to the corridors of power” Sir Richard remarked with a dry chuckle “Believe me I have been treading these hallowed halls of Whitehall in one capacity or another for over thirty years and I still haven't fathomed out how it works yet.”

“Right, here we go” the Cashier declared as he remerged with clear plastic sacks containing bundles of cash “You've got two million in fifties and one million in twenties. If you could just sign here to say you are taking responsibility for it Sir?”

The Commander duly signed the official release form before the Cashier opened a side gate and handed through the money bags “Here you go Sir, don't spend it all at once!”

“I'll try not to” the Commander agreed “Thank you” he called as he and Sir Richard left the office.

“Is all this going to fit in one briefcase?” Sir Richard asked as they carried a bag each down the corridor to the front exit past the unhappy Clerk still sitting on guard at his little desk and enclosed in his own little world of self imposed over importance.

“It's a pretty big briefcase” the Commander admitted before reaching for his radio “Cassini, is the van ready?”

“We are parked right outside the door Sir” Cassini confirmed.

“Ok” the Commander responded “We are coming out now.” With that declaration, he and Sir Richard emerged from the main door of the Treasury Office in Whitehall where flanked by waiting heavily armed Security Service officers, they proceeded directly to a waiting armoured van before climbing inside.

“Here you go” the Commander duly passed the money to Cassini “Best get packing.”

“That's never going to fit is it?” Cassini remarked as he and his colleague began to take the packs of banknotes out of the bag and start to pack them in tightly into the large briefcase.

“Just about I reckon” Sir Richard did a quick mental bit of arithmetic “Going to be a squeeze though” he admitted as he leant a hand at packing the case.

“You never see this in the movies do you?” the Commander remarked as the van drove off under heavy motorcycle escort back to New Scotland Yard “Its always neatly fitted into a slim line briefcase and when they open it even though the case has been set fire to, dropped out of a plane, run over by a bus, every note is always millimetre perfect and undamaged.”

“How many do we have left?” Cassini asked as he got to the stage where they were now jamming in the remaining packs where ever they could inside the case.

“Err six, no five” Sir Richard confirmed as he passed the last ones across.

“Ok then” Cassini remarked as he shoved the last packs in and attempted to close the lid “This isn't going to be pretty but it should work” he declared as he got up and proceeded to sit on the case, using his bodyweight to close it whilst Sir Richard attended to the catches.

“Yep, that's got it” Sir Richard declared after some considerable effort with accompanying groaning and grunting.

“Blimey...” the Commander remarked as the van stopped outside New Scotland Yard and the Commander got out with Cassini and Sir Richard and headed up into main reception where they found Tracy waiting, attired in her full best dress uniform.

“Ready?” the Commander asked with apprehension.

“As I will ever be” Tracy admitted “Oh I had better give you this” she took off her gun holster and passed it to the Commander who in exchange gave her the rather heavy briefcase containing the money.

“Here, do you a trade” the Commander responded “You won't believe what that money had to go through to get here.”

“Well I won't let it go without a fight” Tracy confirmed as she produced a small four shot gun and proceeded to hid it in the lining of her uniform cap before putting it on.

“I was wondering why you brought you hat” the Commander remarked “Are you sure you won't get it searched?”

“You would be surprised what greed can make people forget to do” Tracy confirmed “Besides if I am rumbled I can always leave it in a cab or on a train somewhere.”

“We had best get into position” Cassini suggested indicating his watch.

“Ok” the Commander agreed “Right now is everyone clear on how we are running this?”

There were nods of agreement from the officers present before the Commander turned to Cassini to hand over the operation to him.

“Right” Cassini declared “Teams one through five are to circulate around Baker Street Station, surrounding streets and I want a couple of Collins's boys from Five posing as staff inside the Lost Property Office when Commander Caverner goes in. I will be running the thing from our usual tatty Transit Van, my associate from MI5 here has given me carte blanche to use you good ladies and gentlemen as well plus we have Commander Fuller up in the Control Room running the CCTV show.”

“We have a dedicated frequency for this operation?” the Commander asked.

“Yes Sir” Cassini confirmed “To be used sparingly, plus we have bodies in play already at various strategic points around town so that we can pass on discreet messages to Commander Caverner en route and the usual friendly cab drivers available on call should we need them. Any questions?”

“Do I give the cab drivers a tip?” Tracy joked.

“Don't forget to get a receipt” Sir Richard remarked jokily.

“A reminder that we are on the look out for this character in particular” the Commander produced and showed the pictures of the suspected bomber, one being a CCTV still, the other the archive photograph from ten years earlier but both definitely the same man “Also his four trigger happy chums should they make an appearance” he added “If anyone sees any of these then they are to notify operations control immediately whereupon Commander Cassini who is Eagle One for this operation will attach a shadow.”

“I had better get going” Tracy declared.

“I wish it wasn't you” the Commander remarked as they held each other for comfort for a moment.

“I will be back before you know it” Tracy reassured him before kissing him “See you later guys” she declared with a friendly wave before leaving to head to the nearby St. James's Park Underground Station.

“Remember this is a TNTNC operation” Cassini declared “So let's roll.”

“Err, a what?” the Commander asked as he joined Cassini and Collins heading out to the operation control vehicle, a very anonymous and slightly battered looking Transit Van parked outside.

“According to the MI5 handbook as written by my illustrious predecessor” Collins confirmed as they got in the back of the van “It apparently refers to what will happen if the operation goes pear shaped, in this case 'Testicles Nailed To Nelson's Column' as it happens.”

“Oh...” the Commander remarked as Cassini took the seat nearest the front at the control and observation desks fitted inside the vehicle and banged on the bulkhead that formed the back of the cab.

“Ok Iggy” he called up front “Let’s go to position one mate, and try not to get any speeding tickets this time please.”

“Constantinople” Jack called at the television as the daytime quiz programme contestant appearing on it got the third straight question in a row completely wrong.

“No, the answer is Constantinople” the presenter on the television confirmed.

“See, told you” Jack gestured at the television as he and Jennifer shared a large packet of crisps “I’ve been there, admittedly long after they renamed it though.”

“You’ve been to Istanbul?” Jennifer responded.

“When you have, sorry had” Jack corrected himself “a Dad in the Foreign Service you get to see a bit of the world, albeit usually briefly and from behind a seemingly endless procession of security glass windows in anonymous embassies. What did you Dad do if I may ask?”

“He was a locksmith in Camden” Jennifer admitted “Never ventured further than Bognor Regis I think and that was his honeymoon.”

“Still around?” Jack asked tentatively.

“Oh yes” Jennifer confirmed “Mum too plus my twin sister and my brother. Few uncles and aunts dotted around the place as well.”

“You are lucky” Jack responded “I’ve got no one left now, not since...”

“Sorry...” Jennifer apologized “I didn’t mean to...”

“Don’t worry about it” Jack replied with a false smile “Two years on your own living off your wits has a habit of making you grow up awful fast and in my circumstances, I couldn’t afford to stand around for too long.”

“What about friends, you know at School?” Jennifer asked.

“A few” Jack confirmed as it became clear that something was occurring to him at that point “Oh hell...” he realised.

“What?” Jennifer asked sensing Jack’s sudden sense of urgency as he got up and grabbed his school uniform blazer.

“Come on, we’ve got to go” Jack urged “I have to collect something.”

“You can't just leave” Jennifer remarked “I am supposed to be protecting you.”

“I'll be all right” Jack reassured her “Look you can come with me if you insist. It'll save me the tube fare for one thing.”

“Are you sure about this?” Jennifer asked directly.

“Trust me” Jack responded “I have to do this.”

“All right” Jennifer reluctantly agreed as she got up and turned off the television, “Let me just get my keys and I'll take you where you want to go.”

“This is Baker Street” the on board automated announcement declared as the doors of the seven car train of 1996 type tube stock opened. “Change here for Hammersmith & City, Metropolitan, Bakerloo and Circle Lines” the announcement continued as Tracy alighted from the rear most carriage and made her way up the platform to the way out marked by the signs.

As she headed up through the station complex, Fuller back in the Control Room at New Scotland Yard monitored her progress via the live CCTV feed from the cameras throughout the complex. “Eagle One from Control” he called over the dedicated radio frequency “Kestrel is rising to the nest.”

“Will someone please tell me what is wrong with 'Tracy is coming through the Station?’” the Commander asked generally as he, Collins and Cassini monitored the initial progress of the operation from the van which was now parked in a side street just around the corner from Baker Street Station.

“It's what they teach at the academy these days” Cassini admitted “All my recent new guys use these calls and so do our MI5 brethren so it at least means we are all singing from the same hymn sheet.”

“Here she comes” Collins noted as one of the CCTV feeds showed her passing through the ticket barriers in the ornate original Metropolitan Railway ticket hall before heading for the exit.

“Attention all positions from Eagle One” Cassini called over the radio “Be aware that Kestrel is topside and in play heading for the start point. Iggy, you all set to go in there?”

“Roger boss” Iggy responded as he looked through a clipboard behind the reception counter of the Lost Property Office “We are ready here” he confirmed as he then looked around at his two colleagues who were mingling with the regular staff of the office.

“Ok, here we go” Tracy was heard to declare from the feed that ran to her wire system when she reached the entrance to the Lost Property Office in Baker Street itself before proceeding inside and making directly for the enquiries counter.

“This is unit twelve in Baker Street North” one of the pairs of undercover officers on foot reported “She has gone inside, also there is a gentleman who has gone in just behind her, tall, business suit, probably a customer himself.”

“Someone grab a shot of that chap just in case” the Commander suggested whereupon the sound of a camera shutter clicking a couple of times was heard over the radio.

“Hi” Tracy called as she went up to the counter where she recognised Iggy immediately but did not draw any attention to this fact “I'm looking for a blue Nokia mobile telephone left on a Metropolitan Line train that would have come in from Watford yesterday afternoon.”

“If you would like to wait here a minute, I will go and have a look for you” Iggy confirmed with a reassuring smile before heading into the vast stores area behind him where seeming years of lost property was stored.

As Tracy was waiting, she noted the gentleman who had come in just after her who was discussing with the clerk behind the desk his lost umbrella which he was claiming he had lost on a train at St Paul's on the Central Line that very morning.

“Here you go” Iggy suddenly announced to Tracy bringing her attention back to the desk and away from her neighbour's umbrella problem, placing the blue telephone sealed in a clear plastic bag with an attached label on the desk in front of her “If you can confirm this is the one then all you need to do is sign for it and its back to you.”

“Yep, that's the one” Tracy confirmed as she examined the telephone briefly, noting it was the identical one to the picture she had seen “Sign here do I?”

“Just at the bottom there” Iggy confirmed “You ought to be more careful, nice phone that Madam.”

“Cheeky...” Cassini remarked with a wry laugh at Iggy's comment as they all heard it over the system.

“Done” Tracy declared as she handed the pen back to Iggy.

“Copy for your reference” Iggy separated the pages of the form Tracy had just signed and passed the top copy to her “It's all yours again.”

“Thank you” Tracy responded.

“Have a safe evening Maam” Iggy bid farewell as Tracy picked up the telephone prior to leaving.

“Oh I intend to” Tracy confirmed with a knowing wink before leaving.

Outside the entrance of the Lost Property Office, Tracy extracted the telephone from its bag and switched it on just as the chimes of a nearby clock began to ring for five o'clock. With a slight bit of trepidation, she waited for it to ring.

“Come on...” the Commander muttered under his breath

“There goes umbrella man” Cassini remarked as he noted the gentleman who had been in the Lost Property Office leave “Guess he wasn't so lucky.”

“Oh yes, no umbrella” Collins remarked “Better luck next time mate” he commented only for the sound of the mobile telephone in Tracy's hand to start ringing.

“Here we go” Collins declared as Tracy was heard to press the button to answer the call before putting it to her ear.

“Hello?” Tracy was heard over her link to answer.

“Good Evening Divisional Commander Caverner” the disguised but well informed and calmly spoken caller responded whilst everyone on the radio surveillance circuit listened in intently. “You have the money as requested with you I assume?” the voice asked.

“Yes” Tracy confirmed looking down at the rather heavy red leather briefcase in her hand “Where would you like me to shove it?” she remarked a little tersely.

“That's my girl” the Commander remarked.

“Take a black cab to Great Portland Street Station” the caller instructed “Upon arrival, wait outside the station entrance until you receive further instructions” whereupon the call promptly terminated.

“Hope everyone got that” Tracy remarked quietly before looking down the road to see a black cab that was available hovering into view in the distance.

“Gold Control to TX05” Cassini called over the radio to one of the specially positioned cab drivers, this one being the one that was approaching Tracy's position from the north “You have a pick up, usually friendly service please.”

“Control from TX05, that's a roger” the cab driver confirmed.

The Commander moved across the van and looked out of the window with its blacked out glass so that you could see out clearly but not in and watched as the black cab passed the end of the road. It was then he also noticed something else unusual.

“Cassini” the Commander called back “Umbrella man back there wasn't one of yours was he?” he asked.

“No” Cassini confirmed “and not one of the MI5 guys either, why?”

“Because he just got into the back of an unmarked white Mercedes Sprinter van parked just across the street” the Commander explained.

“What?” Cassini looked out of the window for himself at the white van that the Commander had indicated “No, not ours for certain. For a starter my lot only use old tatty Transit vans and MI5 prefer DAF's or Renaults.”

“Great Portland Street please” Tracy was heard to call to the cab driver over her wire feed.

“Ok Iggy” Cassini called up front to the driver “Let’s get this circus rolling.”

“White van man is pulling off in pursuit as well” the Commander confirmed as he watched the white van move off ahead of them and enter the traffic immediately behind the black cab with Tracy in it.

“Well nothing unusual so far” Tracy commented over the wire link “Even you guys wouldn't be silly enough to have an undercover man on site trying to claim an umbrella lost today at a station that is closed for refurbishment all this week.”

“Oh hell...” the Commander remarked as he and the others all came to the same conclusion instantaneously before he nodded to Cassini to declare this latest development to the rest of the officers involved.

“All units from Eagle One” Cassini called generally “Be aware that we have another player on the plot contained in a white Mercedes Sprinter panel van registration number Lima Echo Zero Five Golf Echo Delta. One individual sighted so far last seen wearing a dark grey business suit and overcoat referred to from here on as 'Umbrella Man'.”

“Fuller” the Commander called over the radio “Get a CCTV still of our friend without the umbrella and see if you can put an identification to him, also run the plates of the van although I am guessing they may be phoney.”

“I'm on it” Fuller confirmed as if he didn't already have plenty of other things to do and monitor.

It took several minutes for the cab and its following vehicles to make its way along the busy Marylebone road as far as Great Portland Street. If it was the intention of whoever was behind this plot to make best use of the initial rush hour traffic then it looked like it was succeeding.

“Thank you” Tracy called to the cab driver as she got out on the opposite side of the road to the ornate building of Great Portland Street Station whereupon she proceeded across the road and to the station entrance itself.

“Eagle One from Team Seven” came the call over the radio link in the van “Kestrel has reached Great Portland Street and is awaiting instructions.”

“What are our friends in the white Sprinter van doing?” Cassini asked.

“They are pulling across the junction to the south side of the road nearby” came the confirmation, a fact checked by the Commander as he leaned across the vehicle to check out of the windows on the other side.

“Ah there they are” he confirmed “Looks like we have a decamp from the back door” he declared as a man in a delivery company overall alighted from the rear of the van and began to walk slowly along the pavement towards the station entrance. As he passed Tracy standing patiently by the entrance, the mobile telephone rang again.

“Hello?” Tracy called as she answered it.

“Take the next Hammersmith & City line eastbound and alight at Moorgate” the voice of the caller quickly instructed before hanging up.

“Not exactly chatty are we?” Tracy remarked wryly before putting the telephone back in her tunic pocket and heading into the station.

“Ok Dave, you are up, give her the signal” Cassini instructed over the radio link to one of his men at the Evening Standard newspaper stand at the station entrance.

“Standard! Standard!” the newspaper vendor called as Tracy was passing “Rival team linked to inquiry” he called.

Tracy discreetly nodded in understanding at the covert message as she passed him and headed into the station where she put her Oyster Card on the yellow reader to pass through the ticket barriers and then head down to the platform level.

“Simon” the Commander called over the radio to Fuller back in the Control Room “When...” he began.

“Next eastbound Hammersmith & City is due in three minutes” Fuller confirmed from his screen having already anticipated the question.

“Overall man just headed into the station” came a report from Cassini's man on the newspaper stand.

“He doubled back, very sneaky” Cassini commented as he surveyed the scene for himself through the window with the aid of binoculars.

“Have you got anyone at platform level?” the Commander asked Cassini.

“Three guys and gals waiting down there already” he confirmed “Team Four, you're up.”

As Tracy entered the eastbound platform of the station, she looked up and down noting the half dozen or so waiting passengers there of which three of whom were Cassini's people, one was from MI5, two were Underground staff and just one was an ordinary member of the public.

A westbound Metropolitan Line service formed of eight cars of soon to be retired 'A60' stock arrived and departed in the couple of minutes that Tracy was waiting for the Hammersmith & City line train which the next train indicator counted down to the arrival of seemingly very slowly.

She noted out of the corner of her eyes all who also joined her on the platform over the space of the couple of minutes she was waiting, noting in particular the courier driver in his overall uniform which to her did not seem quite right for both that location and the time of day.

“Chariot approaching” came a call over the radio from one of Cassini's people on the platform to confirm that the train was approaching, the twin headlights piercing the gloom of the running tunnel as it got closer and closer.

“Ok” the Commander called up front to the van driver “Let's leapfrog ahead to King's Cross.”

“Yes Sir” their driver confirmed as he gunned the engine and pulled away across the traffic light controlled junction the instant the lights turned green and headed off down the Euston Road.

Below ground Tracy boarded the six car train of 'C' type stock, taking a seat in the rear as Cassini's team of three with their MI5 colleague each boarded one of the other cars. The only car they did not occupy was the second one from the rear which was where the follower in the overalls duly boarded.

“Where have our friends in the white van gone?” the Commander asked looking around as they proceeded swiftly down the Euston Road, speeding past Euston Square station as below ground Tracy's train was approaching it.

“I've got them” Fuller confirmed as he watched live traffic camera feeds “After dropping off Overall Man they headed south and then east. Looks like they are taking the back roads to get ahead of this travelling circus.”

“Team Three stand down” Cassini called to his people at Baker Street which they were now leaving far behind them “Get yourselves east as fast as you can and get ready to rejoin this party later.”

“You have anyone at King's Cross?” the Commander asked as they bumped past Euston Station itself, weaving through the usual traffic problems that often plagued the area.

“Already done” Cassini confirmed “Being an island platform I thought I would have two teams standing by down there in case they pull a cross over of some kind.”

Below ground, Tracy looked casually down the length of her carriage forward as the train pulled away from Euston Square continuing its journey east. Tipped off about the presence of watchers from whoever was behind this plot, she had already picked out the man in the overalls in the next car as being almost certainly unfriendly.

Whilst he had the right appearance overall for a delivery driver, there was something to her experienced eye that made him stand out from the crowd as not quite right somehow.

“I may be going off on a bit of a flyer here” Tracy remarked discreetly over her link “but there is a guy in overalls in the next car that looks decidedly shifty. Probably related to our friend without the umbrella if I was laying a bet here.”

“Well done love” the Commander remarked in response even though there was no way she could hear him but he knew that she would be thinking of his response at that moment as the train began to slow and arrive in Kings Cross St Pancras Station.

As the train came into the platform, the mobile telephone in Tracy's hand rung again and she answered it.

“Change of plan” the now familiar disguised voice politely informed her and by way of her link everyone else following the operation as well “Alight here and head for the end stairs to the tube lines and then up to the main concourse.”

“Tickets please...” Tracy remarked quietly to herself as the train stopped and the doors opened allowing her and other passengers to alight.

“What did she say?” the Commander asked around inside the van as they watched the CCTV feed from the platform showing Tracy making her way in amongst the rush hour commuter crowds as the train closed its doors and departed.

“I think I know what she has in mind” Cassini confirmed as he reached for his radio “Team Five, are you anywhere near the Kings Cross ticket hall?”

“Team Five” came the swift response “We are on the Euston Road entrance steps.”

“Get down to the tube lines ticket hall concentrating on the section where the link corridor from the sub surface lines come through” Cassini informed them “Lets play the old Revenue Protection Hit Team trick.”

“Roger that” the team leader confirmed.

Tracy managed to reach the steps at the end of the platform and took a little time going up them before bearing left along the link corridor and into the tube lines ticket hall where she noted that as she approached the barriers a number of Cassini's people were now waiting in London Underground uniforms ready to conduct what would seem to all except her to be a routine revenue protection check exercise.

“Ok” Cassini informed his people “Our friend in the overalls is about ten feet behind Kestrel. Let her pass without question but pull the tickets of our new friend and pick a few others at random including a couple of our guys so it looks genuine.”

“If one of you guys who are coming up behind and get pulled could make a nice public fuss about getting your ticket checked it would be appreciated” the Commander added “The more public the better.”

As Tracy passed through the ticket barrier she nodded in acknowledgement of the Revenue Protection Inspector as she passed him with a cursory showing of her warrant card as she went by.

Immediately behind her the overall dressed man found the ticket barrier he attempted to pass through refused to let him pass on the first attempt thanks to a little fiddling with the computer by Fuller who was monitoring events on the CCTV link, and then to add to his problems no sooner had he managed to get through than he was stopped by the Inspector.

“Excuse me Sir, can I check your ticket please?” the Inspector requested of the Overall Man, showing him an RPI identification badge.

Meanwhile as Tracy carried on out of the Station up to the concourse exit, one of Cassini's men who was stopped by one of his own colleagues just ahead of the barriers duly started kicking up a fuss as requested.

“Look mate, the ticket is perfectly valid all right?” the officer declared as loudly and publicly as possible.

This duly had the desired effect of attracting the attention of the overall man so much so that by the time the Inspector had checked his ticket and was happy enough with it to let him go, Tracy had disappeared out of sight up the exit steps and into the concourse of the main line part of Kings Cross Station.

“You could lose an elephant in this mess” the Commander commented as he looked at the CCTV feed showing an overhead view of the massed crowds waiting for trains on the main concourse.

“There she is” Collins pointed to part of the screen where with a bit of squinting as he had left his reading glasses back in his office, the Commander was able to make out Tracy making her way through the crowds towards the back near the exit to the street.

As she approached the street exit, the telephone rang again and Tracy duly answered it although she had to strain to listen as the background noise of train passengers and echoing announcements was almost drowning out the voice of the caller.

“Remain where you are for exactly three minutes” the voice informed her “Then leave the telephone in the planter behind you and leave via the door to your right. Cross the street to the station entrance on the south side of the Euston Road and head down to the westbound platform. There you will catch the next Hammersmith & City Line service all the way to Hammersmith where you will wait on the platform until you receive further instructions.”

“Well if they wanted to check to see if anyone was following her” Cassini remarked as they continued to watch on the screen the CCTV view that showed Tracy waiting patiently by the planter and looking up at the clock on the destination indicator board nearby “They are doing a pretty good job about it.”

“Classic double back manoeuvre” the Commander agreed “But how are they going to get further instructions to her if she loses the telephone?” he wondered.

“Plus they must know we are tracking her in some way” Collins remarked “How are they going to get around that?”

Tracy checked the clock again and then her watch before discreetly reaching behind her and placing the telephone in amongst the plants in the large pot behind her. A few moments later a high pitch scream came from the telephone and in an instant all the CCTV views from the concourse overlooking her position suddenly went dead.

“What the hell was that?” the Commander asked.

“I’m not sure... yet” Cassini confirmed “Team Six, we have lost visual on Kestrel, can anyone see her?” he asked.

“Six Charlie” came a response quickly from one of Cassini’s people on the concourse “Kestrel is leaving and heading out towards the Euston Road.”

“Close proximity surveillance please” Cassini requested “We just lost visual up here for some reason.”

“That’s not all we have lost” Fuller called from the Control Room with a sense of urgency “When that noise happened it looks like it was some sort of magnetic burst. It’s taken out her link and the GPS tracking device too.”

“Well that answers one question I suppose” Collins remarked “These are clever buggers we are dealing with here.”

“Magnetic pulse anti surveillance device” Fuller explained “Very sophisticated stuff.”

“Who has access to that kind of equipment?” the Commander asked.

“Usual suspects” Fuller confirmed, “MI6, CIA, Mossad, anyone with a credit card and an EBay account.”

“There she goes” Collins pointed to one screen once Fuller had managed to re-establish links to the CCTV feeds “Euston Road south entrance as per instructions.”

“Team Six” Cassini called over the radio “Confirm Kestrel in view please?”

“Six Alpha, Kestrel now in ticket hall approaching barrier” came one confirmation.

“Six Charlie” came a second response “Now in position on westbound Circle, Met and H&S platform with Six Echo.”

“Ok guys” Cassini confirmed “Stay with her no matter what. Any sign of unfriendlies?”

“Five Delta at the ticket barriers” came a further response “Umbrella Man is back now in a grey suit heading towards the Met platforms.”

“Hi there...” the Commander remarked as one of the screens changed to show the live shot of the individual now referred to as 'Umbrella Man' duly heading down the steps to the same platform where Tracy was now waiting.

“We have got to get a message to her somehow” the Commander remarked “Simon, you have any ideas?” he asked.

“Working on it now” Fuller confirmed “I just hope she gets it that's all.”

Tracy made her way to the far end of the platform where it was quieter and looked back down its length towards the new next train indicator board which showed that the next Hammersmith & City Line service to Hammersmith was due in a couple of minutes after the imminent Metropolitan Line service which judging from the rumbling noise that was starting to build to her left was approaching now.

“Come on” Fuller remarked as he watched over the CCTV link “Just a little further down” he urged as for his quickly put together plan to work, it needed Tracy to be at the very end of the platform right by where the front drivers cab of the approaching Metropolitan Line train was going to be when it stopped in a few moments.

As the train came into the platform and slowed, Tracy noticed that oddly the front destination was still set to 'Aldgate' as if it had not been reset when the train had headed back west. Instinctively she made for the far end of the platform and reached it just as the train stopped and the doors opened to allow passengers to board and alight.

The train driver duly moved across his cab to the platform side and opened the door as Tracy reached it. Using the large crowds on the platform as cover, the driver gestured discreetly for her to come over closer.

“Message from line control” the driver re-laid the message from Fuller that had been sent via the Metropolitan Line control room at Neasden thanks to Fuller's quick thinking “Your tracker and wire are dead, some sort of magnetic pulse. Four friends will be travelling with you on and off the rest of the way.”

“Thanks” Tracy responded as the driver nodded and returned to his seat before closing the train doors and moving off. As he entered the running tunnel, he picked up the radio handset. “Line Control, message received and understood” he confirmed.

As the crowds of passengers who had alighted from the Metropolitan Line service filtered off the platform, Tracy casually looked down the length of it to see that amongst the five or six dozen people still waiting or just arriving on the platform were at least three of Cassini and Collins people plus a now familiar face further down, casually leaning against the wall so as not to attract any attention.

“Hello again” Tracy remarked to herself as she recognised the familiar figure of umbrella man who despite the different suit as well as ironically having now acquired

an umbrella, looked to all intents and purposes to be a regular commuter on his way home.

The six car train of 'C' type stock soon came into the platform and stopped whereupon Tracy duly boarded the front most car and stood in the opposite doorway as there was no seats and indeed little standing room left on this packed rush hour service.

“Six Delta to Eagle One” came the call over the radio back in the van which was now parked up in Pentonville Road, just a short distance from Kings Cross Station.

“Go ahead” Cassini responded.

“Kestrel on car one of train” the confirmation came “I am on car two with Six Echo. Six Charlie and Six Alpha are in car four keeping our friend with the umbrella problem company.”

“Roger that” Cassini confirmed “We are going to jump ahead, follow the line above ground and put a nice tight lid on Hammersmith for when you get there.”

“Right” the Commander called up front to the van driver as he climbed through and took the front passenger seat “Lets get this piece of junk moving” he ordered.

“Oh that's ironic” Collins remarked as he checked an A to Z map of Central London whilst they began to make swift progress back along Pentonville Road before turning into the Euston Road once again heading west “If we had kept going that way we would have past right outside both Mount Pleasant and Liverpool Street.”

“Life is full of little coincidences” the Commander remarked as they slowed approaching Euston Station where the traffic was particularly heavy.

“We are never going to get there in this” the driver remarked “That train must be at least at Euston Square by now.”

“Simon” the Commander called over the radio back to the Control Room “Two things, both of them urgent.

“You wish is my command Sir” Fuller confirmed.

“Let's have a problem with the points at Baker Street junction just before Tracy's train gets there to slow them down a bit” the Commander suggested.

“I can arrange that” Fuller confirmed “Its going to bugger up the evening peak well and true mind.”

“Any sign of our friends in the white van?” the Commander asked.

“Curious” Fuller remarked as he checked “After umbrella man decamped at King's Cross it headed off empty eastwards away from your position.

“In which case rustle me up some marked escort” the Commander requested “Patrol car, traffic division, motorcycle, anything with blues and twos on it and get us out of this traffic.”

Tracy looked up at the line diagram on the cove panel above her head and counted the number of stations remaining between Great Portland Street where they were now standing and her destination for this leg of the journey at least at Hammersmith.

Ten stops she counted including the next one at Baker Street which they were experiencing some difficulty in reaching at that moment. The train had made only slow progress since leaving Euston Square and had now been stood in the station at Great Portland Street waiting for a clear signal for over three minutes now.

Some commuters around her in the front carriage looked a bit irritated as they checked watches or rustled their newspapers impatiently whilst Tracy just remained calm, assuming correctly that this delay was more by design and for her benefit than a mere technical problem.

“Sorry for the delay ladies and gentlemen” the driver called over the PA “There are currently delays owing to a points problem at Baker Street Junction. We should however be moving off in just a few moments.”

Sure enough, less than half a minute later the signal cleared, the doors of the train were closed and it moved off slowly into the running tunnel for the short section to the Baker Street Junction where the Metropolitan main line branched off from the Circle and Hammersmith & City lines.

Standing up in the door pocket of the packed train, Tracy was forced to brace herself against the door frame as the train clattered and jolted as it passed over the junction at Baker Street before coming into the original platforms and stopping.

Quite a significant number of people got off here which included Tracy herself as she needed to step onto the platform for a few moments to let the large quantity of passengers alight. As she stood by the door, she took the opportunity to observe the length of the fairly dimly lit platform where she noted that some of Cassini's undercover officers were also getting off, being replaced by a couple of fresh faces she recognised who boarded the second car from the front.

As the crowds died down, Tracy got back on board the train and was able to take a seat in the now noticeably emptier carriage. As she sat down and the train doors closed, she glanced casually up the length of the interior of the car she was in where she noted visible in the window through the end into the next carriage, Umbrella Man had been joined by a second individual who were both discreetly observing her.

“The next stop is Edgware Road” the driver announced over the PA system “Please stand clear of the closing doors” she declared as the doors closed before the train moved off.

Above ground, a combination of the gradually reducing traffic levels as the peak began to subside plus an escort of two high speed patrol cars meant that rapid progress was being made through the streets by the Control Van with Cassini and Collins in the back continuing to run the operation whilst the Commander held on for grim death in the front passenger seat as they lurched through the area around Wood Lane and White City.

“How are we doing?” the Commander called back.

“Just pulling into Edgware Road about now” Cassini confirmed as he checked the latest reports from his team on board the train “Looks like our friend Umbrella Man now has someone else with him.”

“Have we got Hammersmith encircled yet?” the Commander asked.

“Most of my people are tied up in the traffic” Cassini confirmed “However my learned colleague here is rushing to the rescue.”

“Its lucky for you guys I have a couple of teams based down that way” Collins remarked “They should have the station staked out by now and I have asked for a couple of units of your uniformed boys to be on standby around the corner just in case.”

“You are staking out the right Hammersmith Station aren't you?” the Commander asked “Only there are in fact two, one is the Hammersmith & City one, the other beneath the Bus Station is for District and Piccadilly.”

“I think so” Collins responded “I'll check anyway just in case.”

“Now leaving Edgware Road” Cassini called as he received an update “All parties still aboard” he confirmed.

“So what is their next move?” the Commander asked.

“And why are we heading west?” Collins commented “I mean pretty much everything so far, the explosions, the old printing works, etc have all been to the east end of the City, I mean aren't we going the wrong way?”

“Great minds think alike” the Commander confirmed.

“Eagle One from Control” Fuller's voice suddenly called over the radio with a clear and unambiguous sense of urgency.

“Go” the Commander responded before Cassini could respond himself.

“Someone has pulled the emergency cord on the train” Fuller responded “Line Control say its all stop at Paddington in one minute.”

“I think an old saying about garden paths springs to mind here” Collins remarked.

“And they knew we would by now have all our resources heading towards Hammersmith” the Commander confirmed before turning to the driver “Stop this thing” he requested.

“Where are you going?” Collins asked as the van was brought to a stop by the side of the road and the Commander got out.

“I’m going to Paddington” he confirmed “Meantime get yourselves to Hammersmith just in case it’s a double bluff.”

“Right” Collins confirmed before the Commander shut the door and went over to one of the escorting patrol cars and got in the front passenger seat.

“Turn this thing around and burn rubber” the Commander requested of the officer driving.

Tracy picked up that something was wrong almost instantly as she heard the passenger alarm sounding in the drivers cab not far from where she was sitting in the leading carriage which was followed by the muffled sound of an urgent conversation on the part of the driver.

Indeed because of this distraction as the train slowed for its stop at Paddington, Tracy failed to notice until it was too late that Umbrella Man and his associate had passed through the connecting doorway into her car.

“Please remain calm and don't do anything silly” the voice of Umbrella Man called from behind Tracy as he sat down alongside her whilst his associate stood above her on the other side.

“Evening” Tracy responded casually “I see you found your umbrella then?” she commented.

“Never leave home without it” Umbrella Man confirmed calmly.

“So who's he” Tracy nodded back to the man's associate “Hat Stand Man?” she remarked commenting on the man's extreme height of at least six foot five towering over them.

“Well if it pleases you” the Umbrella Man responded “You may call him Number Twelve and I am Number Four.”

“I think I preferred Umbrella Man” Tracy remarked as the train came into the platform at Paddington and stopped “Sort of covers everything” she joked.

“This is our stop” Umbrella Man confirmed as he got up and guided Tracy to her feet.

“Due to an emergency on board the train” the driver called over the PA system “this train will terminate here. All change please, all change.”

“And I was so looking forward to seeing Hammersmith...” Tracy remarked wryly as the doors of the train opened and the two men escorted her out onto the platform where they were quickly lost in the crowds of people, all of whom were being evacuated from the platforms there at quite a rapid pace.

“Another time perhaps” the Umbrella Man commented as they moved briskly amongst the crowds towards the exit.

“When an alert like this goes up” Tracy commented “This place gets surrounded by an awful lot of my officers very quickly you know so I for one would be very interested to know how you intend to get out of here unmolested?”

“All in good time” the Umbrella Man confirmed “Just follow our instructions and no one gets hurt, we get our money and you can go back to your husband for a nice quiet evening on the sofa.”

“Good plan” Tracy remarked “Except for the bit about handing over the money that is.”

Outside the station there was an understandable sense of chaos and confusion as passengers were evacuated from the building but having to pass through a cordon of uniformed officers in order to do so.

For some ten minutes the thousands of people who has been in the mainline and two parts of the Underground Station passed through out into the street and it was as the very last of these emerged that the Commander's patrol car arrived on the scene having travelled at high speed from White City.

“What's occurring?” the Commander asked a couple of the officers who were guarding the main entrance into the station, sealed off with tape.

“Emergency cord was pulled on a Hammersmith & City service just before it arrived in the platform” the officer explained “Reported a bomb on board so basically in light of the last few days, we decided that it was everyone out.”

“Right, lets go and take a look then” the Commander urged as he duly led the way into the station and was greeted by the eerie sight of the evacuated concourse beneath the vast overall roof through which silently filtered wisps of train exhaust smoke.

“Over there Sir” the officer pointed over to the Hammersmith & City Line platforms where the train could be seen with its doors open and empty.

“Did anyone see my wife in the middle of all this?” the Commander asked as they went over to the platform and the Commander looked inside the train.

“She didn't come out of the main entrance Sir” one of the officers confirmed “I can check the others if you wish.”

“Please” the Commander confirmed.

“Lima Tango Three One Nine to all Paddington officers” he called into his radio
“During the evacuation, did anyone see Divisional Commander Caverner pass through?”

As the officer made his enquiries, the Commander boarded the abandoned train and looked around carefully.

“Sir!” one of Cassini's undercover officers called as he joined them having been allowed back into the Station after identifying himself as an officer of the service.

“Please tell me you know where she is” the Commander asked.

“Two goons including our friend with the umbrella picked her up and escorted her off the train during the evacuation” the undercover officer confirmed “We lost them in the crowds I’m afraid.”

“Well she never left here” the uniformed officer confirmed “I just checked and no one in uniform or matching her description came through any of the exits.”

“Right” the Commander declared “Round up as many officers as you can find and start tearing this place apart.”

“But what about the suspect bomb?” the officer asked.

“I think you will find that was a ruse my friend” the Commander confirmed “We have all been well and truly had.”

“You live here?” Jennifer remarked as she got out of the car in the back alley behind the old printing works in Bethnal Green.

“Well the rent is cheap” Jack admitted “Getting in isn't so easy though assuming you do not use the front door. This way” he indicated.

Jennifer followed Jack down the back alleyway and then climbed through the hidden breach in the perimeter fence to gain access to the grounds inside.

“You know you should be honoured” Jack remarked as he led her through the old decaying and semi-abandoned buildings that made up the vast former works “I don't invite many people back to my place that often you know, especially a lady.”

“I'm honoured” Jennifer responded although she was not exactly in awe of the surroundings she found herself in.

“Here we are” Jack declared as they reached the top of the fire escape ladder and proceeded inside the top floor offices which Jack called home.

“I like what you have done with the place” Jennifer joked as she looked around the murky interior that was made bit more visible when Jack lit an oil lamp and hung it up.

“I am told that the retro look is in apparently” Jack commented as he went over to an old filing cabinet and unlocked the bottom drawer before rummaging around inside it.

“There's retro and then there is decaying ruin” Jennifer retorted as she jumped back when a large spider skipped across the floor in front of her.

“Ah this is it” Jack declared as he extracted a very battered metal brief case from the bottom of the filing cabinet and went over to the old sofa and sat down, placing it on the packing crate formed coffee table.

“We came all the way here for that?” Jennifer asked as Jack opened the case by its one remaining working catch, the other having been damaged beyond repair some time before.

“Very important this case” Jack explained “Or rather what is in it. Take a seat and I'll show you.”

“All right” Jennifer agreed as she sat down alongside him.

“Here we are” Jack extracted a photograph album from the case and opened it “That was my dad, mum and sister taken about three years ago. All I have left of them now except memories.”

“Who is that?” Jennifer noted another photograph in the album that was loose of Jack with a girl of about the same age.

“Oh that's Megan” Jack explained as he picked up the photograph and looked at it. Jennifer could tell from the way Jack was looking at it that it meant more to him than just a picture.

“Girlfriend by any chance?” Jennifer asked knowingly.

“Erm, well lets just say the jury is still out on that one” Jack responded.

“And what's all this then?” Jennifer looked inside the case at a large amount of official looking papers and files.

“My fathers papers” Jack confirmed “Maybe insurance against... Well let's not get into details now.”

“And your Birth Certificate” Jennifer remarked as she saw the official document tucked into the lid of the case.

“Yes indeed” Jack responded “It matches this” he extracted a second folded document from inside the lid of the case and passed it to her. “Not many people see their own one of these.”

“It's a death certificate” Jennifer remarked as she unfolded it and looked at it.

“Take a look at the name” Jack insisted.

“It's yours” Jennifer responded with surprise “But how?”

“That is a very long story” Jack admitted as he sat back “How long have you got?”

“Well as long as you are with me then as much time as you need” Jennifer confirmed.

“In which case I had better put the kettle on” Jack confirmed as he got up “This could take a while.”

“Evening Simon” the night shift Control Room supervisor declared as he entered and saw a yawning Fuller still sat at the main station working his way through endless streams of CCTV footage.

“Oh hi Paul” Fuller responded looking up “Is it shift change already?”

“Not quite” Paul admitted “But in light of today's excitement I thought it prudent to check in a bit early. How are things?”

“Divisional Commander Caverner and three million in cash have vanished into thin air in the middle of Paddington Station” Fuller confirmed “This group that have been setting the bombs off have had us running all over town most of the evening and to cap it all I still cannot fathom out how this bomber guy got from Liverpool Street to Paddington and back to Mount Pleasant in less than forty five minutes in morning rush hour traffic.”

“Easy” Paul remarked as he took over the central station of the Control Room “Take the train.”

“Sorry, wrong guess” Fuller responded “No sign of this guy on any Underground CCTV footage anywhere.”

“Wrong sort of train” Paul responded “Anyone with a knowledge of Post Office history could spot the connection between the locations.”

“Do tell” Fuller asked.

The search of Paddington Station was almost complete and not a single shred of evidence that either Tracy or the two men who abducted her had been found.

“Is this going to take much longer?” the Station Manager demanded to know as he and the Commander met in the middle of the empty concourse “Our timetable is shot to pieces.”

“That's normal service for First Great Western isn't it?” the Commander retorted, managing a small smile in the face of his deep concern for Tracy's well being at this time.

“Lima Alpha One from Control” Fuller's voice came over the radio with a sense of urgency as well as revelation.

“This had better be good” the Commander responded.

“Paddington, Liverpool Street and Mount Pleasant along with the other targets hit this morning are all linked by the old Post Office underground mail rail system” Fuller declared “That's how he managed to travel so quickly across town and also not appear on any CCTV coming into Mount Pleasant.”

“Because he came up through the basement” the Commander responded “Perhaps Collins was right and we should have been heading east all along. Where is the Paddington entrance to the system?”

“No idea” Fuller responded.

“I know” the Station Manager interrupted.

“Lead the way” the Commander instructed, rounding up a couple of uniformed officers to travel with him as he passed them “Simon, check CCTV and any reports from every possible exit out of the Post Office Railway system.”

“Already on it” Fuller confirmed as he returned to his desk “I'll start by finding out where Umbrella Man's white van went to I think.”

"Come on, you've done well so far so lets not spoil it now" the Umbrella Man prompted as he and his associate escorted Tracy from a doorway to the waiting white van parked in a side street just off Bishopsgate.

"You know for extortionists" Tracy remarked as the door was held open for her to climb into the rear of the van "You are exceedingly polite."

"Well you have brought us three million in cash so it doesn't hurt to show some gratitude" the Umbrella Man admitted as he got in the front passenger seat and indicated to his associate to commence their journey.

"So if you have the money" Tracy nodded towards the briefcase "Why this little mystery tour then?"

"Management wants to count it before we reach any agreement" the Umbrella Man explained calmly "After all we wouldn't want to be short changed now would we?"

"Perish the thought" Tracy responded wryly.

The van continued on up Bishopsgate as the early evening dusk began to descend.

"My back will never be the same again" the Commander remarked as the Post Office mail train rattled through the loading platforms below Mount Pleasant.

"This thing wasn't designed to carry passengers I take it?" one of the officers travelling with him remarked.

"The whole system was based on fully automated driverless trains for mail across the city" the Commander explained "It's been mothballed for a few years though."

"Now I know what a parcel feels like" the officer commented.

"This looks like it" the Commander motioned ahead as the dimmed lights of the Liverpool Street loading platforms appeared ahead and under the control of the automatic system, it began to slow.

"Lima Alpha One from control" the Commander's radio crackled as they emerged and came to a stop in front of a personnel inspector car that was already present in the platform.

"Go ahead" the Commander responded as he clambered out of the mail bag container and onto the platform.

"That white van just reappeared at Liverpool Street" Fuller confirmed "Looks like your hunch was right."

"In which direction was it heading?" he asked as they headed back up to ground level and the exit.

"North up Bishopsgate towards Shoreditch" Fuller confirmed.

"If you were a betting man, where would you put your money on them heading right now?" the Commander asked.

"Well that's everything" Jack confirmed as he finished packing his belongings into the battered metal briefcase.

"It doesn't look much" Jennifer remarked as they prepared to leave.

"I like to travel light" Jack explained "Just the bare essentials, anyway shall we go?"

With that they exited through the old fire exit door and started down the external stairway only to stop suddenly when they heard the sound of a vehicle entering the site, crunching along the ground and heading towards the old loading bay area.

“Expecting visitors?” Jennifer asked as they both looked across the rooftops of the site with some concern as the lights from the vehicles headlights could be seen between the buildings.

“It’s getting like Piccadilly Circus around here lately” Jack remarked before considering the best way to proceed. “Come on, follow me” he urged.

“Where are you going?” Jennifer asked as she started after the little lad.

“Trust me” Jack responded as he led the way across the rooftops walkways over to the west side of the site from where they could see down into the courtyard below where the white van was now parked.

Below them inside the old factory floor area, Tracy was escorted inside by the Umbrella Man and two of his associates to a desk that had been set up. Behind this desk sat a very official looking gentleman in a smartly tailored suit with waistcoat and gold pocket chain fob watch, all of which contrasted with the less than salubrious surroundings.

“Ah good evening Ms Caverner” the gentleman declared as they reached the impromptu desk “I do hope you have brought something for me.”

“Ask your friend with the umbrella fixation” Tracy indicated the tall man to her right who proceeded to put the red briefcase on the desk and turn it so the catches faced the gentleman.

“Any sign of company?” the gentleman asked.

“According to our sources they are still floundering around Paddington and Hammersmith” the Umbrella Man confirmed with a satisfied grin.

“Good” the gentleman responded “I wouldn't want anyone to interrupt us and ruin my concentration. It takes quite a bit of effort to count three million in cash you know.”

“I'm sorry, I didn't catch your name?” Tracy asked directly.

“You may call me Mr Jones” the gentleman confirmed as he released the catches on the briefcase “Not my real name of course but for the purposes of this conversation...”

“Yeah...” Tracy confirmed.

“Now isn't that a thing of beauty” Jones confirmed as he opened the briefcase and was confronted by the sight of the money. He took in the view of the packs of bank notes tightly laid into the case for a few moments before proceeding to unload it.

“Oh, would you mind fetching the lady a seat?” Jones prompted his men as he proceeded to start counting.

“Like I said, exceeding polite for a bunch of terrorists” Tracy remarked as a chair was produced for her and she was invited to sit down.

“Terrorists?” Jones responded with a surprised look “Nothing of the sort my dear.”

“Well when I last looked, demanding money with menaces” Tracy responded “In this case through the usage of explosive devices came pretty close to domestic terrorism when I last looked.”

“Let me assure you” Jones explained “That we are merely a collective of like minded individuals and organisations who work together to ensure the greater good.”

“Very cryptic” Tracy responded “So I take it this collective of yours is a little strapped for cash then?”

“Oh no” Jones confirmed “This consignment is merely the repayment of a debt owed by certain former members of our little association.”

As Jones continued to count the money, above them viewing through the overhead roof light was Jack and Jennifer who looked on with concern at the scene below them.

“This doesn't look good” Jennifer remarked.

“I would say the odds aren't too good at the moment” Jack agreed “I make it four of them and only three of us.”

“Time to call in the cavalry” Jennifer confirmed as she reached for her radio “Victor Pappa Zero One to Control” she called only to receive a response of heavy static.

“Hello, is there anyone there?” Jennifer tried again, adjusting the controls but to no positive effect. “Damm” she concluded “Either this is a radio black spot or someone has a jamming system in the area.”

“Probably this guy” Jack motioned over to the far side where approaching the scene was the familiar face of the bomb maker who he recognised instantly.

“Is that Ramsey, our guy with the big bangs?” Jennifer asked.

“I reckon so” Jack turned his head to try and get a better look at him “And if he is here I personally advise that we should be somewhere else based on the events of the last day or two.”

“Oh hell” Jennifer suddenly exclaimed as Ramsey suddenly indicated upwards to his associates whereupon they saw her looking through the roof light and opened fire, shattering the glass and causing her to fall forwards, only stopping herself by grabbing the rusted window frame, leaving her dangling in mid air.

“Give me your hand” Jack whispered as he tried to grab her.

“No, get out of here” Jennifer ordered whilst below the Umbrella Man looked up and addressed her.

“Jump down please” he instructed “Don't worry, we will catch you.”

Jennifer's grip on the old window frame was slipping so reluctantly she let go and jumped down whereupon two of the men quickly grabbed and disarmed her before showing her to a chair alongside Tracy.

“Nice of you to drop in” Tracy remarked wryly.

“I just popped out for a walk and thought I would say Hi” Jennifer responded as she dusted off the remains of dust and broken glass from her uniform.

“Well that's two million so far” Jones confirmed as he continued to count the money.

“So who are you then?” Jennifer asked Jones.

“We were just discussing that as it happens” Tracy explained “Weren't getting very far though, suffice to say that this is Mr Jones and the three goons plus mad bomber man over there are his brain trust.”

“Evening” Jennifer called.

“Two million five” Jones continued.

“I don't suppose anyone knows you are here by any chance?” Tracy asked her sister just out of curiosity.

“I'm afraid not” Jennifer confirmed, choosing wisely not to alert any of the men to Jack's presence on the site although she hoped that by now he would have had the sense to get out of there and raise the alarm somehow.

“Three million” Jones declared with satisfaction “All present and correct which means our business is concluded my dears.”

“Great” Tracy responded “Come on a deal is a deal, where are the other explosive devices?”

“Withdrawn from circulation” Jones responded as he clicked his fingers at one of his men who stepped forward with handcuffs and proceeded to secure the two sisters to the chairs they were sat in “I am nothing if not honourable, however if you will excuse me, I am rather pressed for time.”

With that, Jones and his men proceeded to pack the cash into holdalls. As they were doing this, Tracy noticed looking around in the surrounding shadows that Ramsey was now missing which in her mind was rather worrying.

“Goodnight” Jones declared as he rose from the table and smiled “Do give my regards to the Commander if you ever see him.”

With that the men proceeded to leave carrying the holdalls of cash and leaving the two sisters stranded, handcuffed to their seats and looking around.

“I’ve got a bad feeling about this” Jennifer admitted.

“Funny you should say that Sis” Tracy agreed as they both looked around once the men had disappeared from sight.

“What’s that noise?” Jennifer asked as she listened intently to a distant bleeping sound that could be heard in amidst the near dead silence of the abandoned site.

Suddenly they were aware of footsteps approaching them from the dark shadows to their right and both of them prepared for the worst until suddenly Jack emerged into the light.

“What the hell are you doing here?” Tracy asked.

“It’s a long story” Jack admitted as he proceeded to examine the handcuffs “And one that will have to wait until later as this building is wired.”

“Are you sure?” Tracy asked.

“I followed our mad bomber friend” Jack explained “He has demolition charges all over the place. Anyone got a key?”

“Right hand tunic pocket” Tracy confirmed whereupon Jack investigated and found the key before quickly releasing them.

“Lets get the hell out of here” Jennifer remarked as they ran for the nearest exit.

“No wait, my case” Jack called out, pointing to a side office where he had left his battered briefcase whilst rescuing them.

“We don’t have time” Tracy responded.

“I got it” Jennifer confirmed understanding the important nature of the case’s contents and running over to the side office to retrieve it.

“Come on” Tracy urged. Jack led the way guiding them through the myriad of buildings and side alleys until they reached the main front gate. Looking back down the main drive way into the site they noted that Jones and his men could be seen in the distance climbing into the white van.

“Its now or never” Jennifer remarked as they used the shadows of the overhanging wall to make good their escape, coming out of the gate and into the road where their sudden appearance in the middle of the street forced a car approaching to brake sharply.

“Tracy!” the Commander called as he got out of the car and went over to them where he and his wife embraced warmly before he turned to Jennifer and Jack “What the hell are you two doing here?”

“We’ll explain later” Jennifer confirmed “They are still in there and have the place wired to blow.”

“Right” the Commander declared “Lets get back over here then” he suggested as he escorted them over to the opposite side of the road before reaching for his radio.

“Lima Alpha One” the Commander called “I need a ring of officers surrounding the old Bethnal Green Print Works site within the next minute.”

No sooner than he had given the order than the surrounding area started to echo with the sound of approaching sirens and Security Service vehicles appeared from all sides having been put on standby by the Commander prior to his arrival.

As the best part of a hundred uniformed and plain clothes officers took position all around the perimeter of the site joined by the low hovering of a helicopter with a powerful searchlight overhead, the white van approached the outer gate and stopped in the gate way.

“You in the van” the Commander called over a loudhailer “Stop your engine and come out. Drop your weapons and put your hands on your head.”

There was no response from the occupants of the van, the vehicle just sat there, indeed it was hard to tell who and how many were inside the vehicle through a combination of its tinted windows and the poor evening light.

“Lima Alpha One to all units” the Commander called into his radio as he sensed something was seriously wrong here “Any sign of anyone coming out?” he asked.

A number of responses from officers encircling the site proved negative, no one other than Tracy, Jennifer and Jack had left the site in the last twenty minutes it appeared.

“Move in” the Commander called to a specialist Armed Response Unit who proceeded to the white van and with guns pointed ahead examined it carefully.

“Sir” the leader of the ARU team called over from the van “I think you need to see this” he indicated the interior of the van at the driver’s side.

The Commander duly jogged across the street and joined the ARU team leader and looked inside where to his surprise he found Ramsey sat bolt upright in the driver’s seat with a bullet wound in his forehead and another to his chest.

As the Commander leaned forward for a closer look inside the vehicle, the telephone mounted on the dashboard started ringing. With some slight hesitation the Commander leaned forward and picked it up to answer it.

“Good evening Commander” the voice of the mysterious Mr Jones called “I do hope we have not put you to too much inconvenience this evening?” he asked mockingly.

“That's very nice of you to be so considerate” the Commander returned the sentiment.

“I wanted to thank you for the generous financial donation to our association” Jones explained “And to assure you that we will be talking again soon.”

“You do know we have the entire place surrounded don't you?” the Commander responded “There is no escape.”

“In my position Commander” Jones explained “I always like to think there are always alternatives. If I were you I would step back a bit.”

“Why?” the Commander asked as he looked around with more than a little concern and silently indicated to the ARU team to pull back to the opposite side of the road.

“This...” Jones responded before hanging up. At that moment a series of explosions rocked the old printing works site and shook the ground.

“Move!!” the Commander called as he ran across the street and with Tracy ducked down behind a parked car, Jennifer doing the same with Jack alongside as in a deafening cacophony of noise, dust, smoke and flame the buildings of the site came crashing down like a deck of cards.

As the rumble of the buildings collapse died down and the huge dust cloud started to clear, the Commander looked up in astonishment.

"Is everyone ok?" he asked as he helped Tracy to her feet.

"I think so" Tracy confirmed.

"A bit dusty but otherwise all well here" Jennifer added whilst Jack, coughing somewhat from the dust, gave a thumbs up.

"I don't get it" Tracy commented as they surveyed the wreckage now emerging from beneath the dust cloud "Did the explosives go off prematurely or something?"

"I don't know" the Commander admitted as the Fire Service moved in to the site "They never got out though which means they probably got flattened."

"Looks like I am going to have to go house hunting" Jack admitted "and I had got the place just as I wanted it too."

"A spokes person for the National Security & Police Service confirmed this morning that the explosion that destroyed a disused industrial site in East London yesterday evening is being connected with the recent series of parcel bomb explosions across the city" the news broadcast on the television in the Commander's office declared.

As the broadcast continued, Fuller entered carrying a file that without saying a word he placed on the desk in front of the Commander.

"Just got confirmation from the site" Fuller confirmed as the Commander turned down the volume of the television so that they could talk "No survivors found in the rubble."

"No surprise there then" the Commander agreed "The east end hasn't seen as comprehensive a demolition job as that since the war."

"...and no bodies either" Fuller added as they were joined by Sir Richard Crowthorne.

"What?" the Commander responded.

"I gather you had a fun evening from what I hear" Sir Richard remarked.

"Losing three million quid wasn't part of the plan" the Commander replied with regret "How the hell I am going to explain that one to the jobsworth at the Treasury heaven only knows."

"You won't have to" Sir Richard responded coyly.

"Sorry, did I miss something?" the Commander asked completely baffled.

"Say hello to the little known, rarely used and seldom seen 'D105 Notice'" Sir Richard explained as he produced an envelope with a crown symbol embossed upon it and passed it to the Commander.

"Good God" the Commander exclaimed "The last one of these I saw was back when Lord Hainault got his inquiry report canned."

"What's a 'D105 Notice' when it is at home?" Fuller asked.

"Effectively it is a cease and desist all investigations order" Sir Richard explained "Issued by the Prime Minister in special circumstances where he or she deems it necessary to call a halt to any investigation by a law enforcement agency where its continuation would be of potential danger to national security."

"Did he give any reason?" the Commander asked as he opened the neatly folded document and examined it carefully.

"Officially no" Sir Richard confirmed.

"And unofficially?" the Commander asked.

"As far as the world is concerned, the recent explosive incidents were the efforts of a lone individual who died in his vehicle at Bethnal Green last night" Sir Richard responded "For now until the PM specifies otherwise to you only, this case is very firmly closed."

"This smells of back channel diplomacy and political back scratching" the Commander commented as he tossed the notification casually onto the desk in contempt.

"Well if you want a little revelation Sir" Fuller remarked "Take a look in that file at the name of the man who owns the old printing works."

"Ah, the penny drops" the Commander confirmed as he opened the file and read the name on the copy of the title deed inside before rotating it around to show it to Sir Richard.

"Back channel diplomacy and friends in low places indeed" Sir Richard remarked upon seeing a familiar name "If that is a coincidence then I'm Arnold Palmer."

"Very well then" the Commander declared "If the Prime Minister wants this case dead and buried then that is what we will do, for now at least."

"I'll do some discrete sniffing around when the dust settles in a couple of weeks" Sir Richard commented.

"Simon" the Commander addressed Fuller "Gather up everything we have on this case and make sure copies are filed in our special project archive."

"Something for a rainy day Sir?" Fuller asked.

"Precisely" the Commander confirmed with a wry grin "I am willing to bet the official records of this case get mysteriously 'lost' in the next week or two probably never to be seen ever again."

"Consider it done Sir" Fuller confirmed before leaving the office.

"The PM also mentioned that there was another matter about which he had some concern" Sir Richard continued once the office door was closed and they were alone.

"Anything in particular?" the Commander asked.

"Nothing specific" Sir Richard admitted "He said he will contact you in a couple of days for one of his cosy fireside chats."

"If that isn't ominous then I don't know what is" the Commander remarked "Last time I was summoned to Number Ten for a one to one with the Chief all hell broke loose."

"Would someone mind telling me what the hell is going on?" Tracy asked as she walked with determination into the office brandishing a press release newly issued just a few minutes earlier "Apparently it's now case closed and the bomber was the only person involved?"

"Rumbles from above my dear" the Commander explained regretfully as he passed across the 'D105 Notice' to her. "We have been canned from on high."

"So that's it?" Tracy responded "Case closed?"

"Officially yes, I am afraid so my dear" the Commander admitted "But I am filing this one away in a nice safe place for future reference."

"Along with all the rest I take it then love?" Tracy remarked.

"Between the three of us we must be quite a knowledge base of dark secrets and hidden files now" Sir Richard commented "I just hope we never find ourselves in the situation where we have to use it."

"Agreed" the Commander responded "However I have the nasty feeling that something is coming, maybe not tomorrow, maybe not even this year but sooner or later all these little cliques and whispering clubs in the civil service, Government and big business will come together and declare their hand."

"All the more reason to keep as many good cards as possible stacked away for that rainy day" Sir Richard confirmed "Anyway, time is pressing and I have to go and give my successor at Five a debrief. How do you think he is doing by the way?"

"What Collins?" the Commander replied "Yeah he is good. Are you thinking of trusting him with what we suspect?"

"Maybe not just yet" Sir Richard confirmed "Soon perhaps as I think we can trust him."

The intercom on the Commander's desk buzzed and the voice of the Personal Assistant outside called "Commander, they are here. Shall I send them in?"

"Please do" the Commander confirmed "We are finished here I think?" he looked across at Sir Richard who nodded in agreement as he rose from his seat and prepared to depart.

"Ah, we meet again" Sir Richard declared as at the office door he met Jack coming in being escorted by Jennifer.

"Sir Richard" Jack responded "You are looking worried if you don't mind me saying so."

"Comes with the job I am afraid lad" Sir Richard admitted wryly "See you around" he declared before leaving.

"Do you still need me?" Jennifer asked.

"No it's all right" the Commander confirmed "We can take it from here."

"See you later Jack" Jennifer called as she left.

“Am I in trouble?” Jack asked as he looked at Tracy and the Commander, the latter sat in his seat behind his desk with Tracy standing alongside him holding his hand.

“No” Tracy confirmed “Possibly quite the opposite in fact.”

“Well this is all mysterious and cryptic” Jack commented, still uncertain exactly what was going on here.

“We’ve got a proposal for you” the Commander explained “Tracy and I have been talking over your situation and would like to make you an offer.”

“I take it we are way beyond cut price Baby Belling Cookers now?” Jack responded.

“Indeed” the Commander confirmed.

“I’m listening” Jack replied as he leaned back in his seat but the way he was grasping the arms of the chair meant he was still uncertain about where this was leading and therefore was unable to relax.

“If it is agreeable with you” the Commander continued as he looked up at Tracy to see her agreement “Tracy and I would like to formally adopt you as our own son.”

“Blimey...” Jack responded after a few moments of total silence as he took in the momentous nature of what was announced.

“You can come live with us” the Commander continued “Room of your own, secure future and a roof over your head plus the knowledge that if your past ever comes back to haunt us then I can have the entire Security Service kicking in someone's door inside of five minutes.”

“...and what do you ask of me?” Jack responded, still clearly in some shock at this more than generous offer.

“Be yourself” Tracy responded “It’s all we can ask of you but please no more trading iffy goods across the suburbs of East London?”

“Yes” the Commander agreed “I don't think we have the room for your sales stock at home” he joked.

“All right...” Jack responded after a moments thought “I accept!”

“Welcome to the family” the Commander declared as he and Jack both got up and shook hands across the desk.

The intercom on the desk buzzed again at that point with an ominous warning from the PA outside.

“Yes?” the Commander answered.

“The Justice Minister is apparently on her way over here to congratulate you on the conclusion of the parcel bomber case” the PA declared “You wanted to be warned if she was seen heading this way?”

“Yes thank you” the Commander responded.

“That was awfully quick wasn’t it?” Tracy remarked “The press release hasn’t even hit the news editor’s desks yet.”

“Friends in low places I suspect” the Commander concluded “Talent less political double talkers like her only ever get to such high positions through a combination of outrageous bluff and connections in key places.”

“Nothing changes then” Tracy confirmed.

“Come on, let’s get the hell out of here” the Commander suggested “Before she gets here and I wind up calling something unprintable in front of Jack.”

“I’m from the east end, I’ve heard it all before” Jack confirmed as all three left the office.

“Almost time for lunch” the Commander remarked as he checked his watch.

“So now that I have agreed to come and live with you guys, what does that mean I become?” Jack asked as all three of them walked together down the corridor to the lifts.

“Well once the paperwork is sorted out” the Commander responded “I guess you will become Jack Regent, assuming that is you are happy about changing your name that is.”

“Does this mean you are actually Tracy Regent?” Jack asked Tracy as the lift doors opened just as they reached it.

“Well yes actually but I kept the maiden name for sake of clarity” Tracy explained.

“Confuses the hell out the Personnel Division” the Commander admitted with a wry smile as they entered the lift.

“Should be interesting at school parents evening” Jack commented wryly as they descended in the lift to the ground floor.

As the lift doors opened the family exited the car and crossed the reception area heading for the exit only to run into the Justice Minister heading the other way.

“Oh no, here we go again” the Commander remarked under his breath before putting a brave but false smile on to greet her.

“Commander” the Justice Minister declared in that high pitched voice that all politicians seem to adopt when they greet someone as though they were firm old friends when they definitely were not.

“Minister...” the Commander responded as they met in the middle of the reception area “What brings you to the glass towers of St James’s Park?” he asked.

“I wanted to be the first to congratulate you on the successful outcome of the inquiry” the Justice Minister explained “A first rate job that I am sure will be of great news to all involved.”

“Err right, thank you” the Commander responded, rather unsure about the Minister’s insinuations.

“I thought you and I should find a spot in our collective time schedule for a collaborative cross curricular strategy defence planning consultation” the Justice Minister continued

“Does she speak English?” Jack asked aside to Tracy causing her to suppress a sudden giggle and try and look innocent.

“Well I am sure I can fit you in somewhere” the Commander responded, hoping that the somewhere in question was well into the future “In the meantime I have to take the family out to lunch.”

“Oh really?” the Justice Minister commented with a raised eyebrow of surprise.

“Of course I forgot, you haven't been introduced” the Commander continued “May I present our adopted son Jack Thornton” he introduced the young lad “This is Ms de Wente, the Secretary of State for the Justice Department, what we used to call half of the Home Office.”

“Maam” Jack responded with a nod of acknowledgement.

“A pleasure to meet you” the Justice Minister confirmed although there was something in her expression that she quickly tried to hide that suggested this meeting meant something more to her than was at first obvious.

“Well, we must be going” the Commander declared “Have your P.A. call my P.A. and when they have finished arguing and come to an agreement on a date and time we will have our little chat, good day.”

With that, the Commander and Tracy departed with Jack through the automatic doors of the main entrance and headed down the footpath to the street outside where all three paused for a moment in the shadow of the famous revolving three sided New Scotland Yard sign.

Jack thought for a few moments and looked back briefly at the entrance behind them to see the Justice Minister just visible in the doorway observing them only for her to quickly duck back out of sight as soon as she saw him see her.

Inside the reception area of New Scotland Yard, the Justice Minister thought to herself for a few moments before looking around for a quiet corner to make a telephone call. Over the far side was a visitors waiting area with chairs and a couple of tall ornamental plants but at that time it was vacant.

Looking around to see if anyone was watching, the Justice Minister moved discreetly over to the visitors waiting area and stood in the shadow of one of the tall ornamental plants before extracting a mobile telephone from her inside pocket.

Speed dialling a number, she was quickly connected to the person she had called and cupped her hand around her mouth so as to further avoid anyone eavesdropping on the clandestine conversation.

“Hello, its de Wente” she confirmed quietly “We need to talk urgently; you will never guess who I just ran into.”

There was a pause as whoever it was she had called gave their response.

“Philip Thornton’s son Jack no less” de Wente confirmed “We may need to bring forward the timetable dramatically.”

There was a further pause as the person on the other end of the telephone re-laid a series of instructions, the result of which was the expression on de Wente’s face becoming more serious with each passing moment.

“All right” de Wente agreed “I’ll set the wheels in motion. Assemble the council at location two in one hour as we are going to have to move quickly.”

With that she hung up and after a moment for urgent and deep reflection, left the reception area with a purposeful business like stride.

To Be Continued.....

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