

MOOR PARK

Security Novels Series - Episode IV



John M Upton

The Episodes of the Security Novels Series:

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Alternatively, you can contact the author at:

jmupton2000@yahoo.co.uk

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Moor Park

"Any more fares please?" the small lady bus conductor called out in her broad Northern Irish accent as she passed along the centre aisle of the red London Routemaster bus while it meandered its way from traffic light to traffic light along the busy thoroughfare of Oxford Street.

Whilst most of her passengers thoughts where on their journey plans or shopping or looking out through the comparatively small windows of the vehicle at the bustling street scene outside, two of those under her care, seated together across the nearside rear lower deck bench seat that was positioned lengthways over the rear wheel arch, had only each other on their minds.

The little Irish bus conductor did not need to see their passes or collect any fares, the uniforms that the couple where wearing signified their status in the world as officers of the Department of National Security & Civil Defence, the organisation responsible for policing the Untied Kingdom.

Specifically the epaulette insignia signalled this couple as no ordinary patrol officers either but the LT01 of the man and the LT02 of the lady meant that the humble bus conductor had a couple of major celebrities on her bus that late spring afternoon in the form of the Commanding Officer of the London Capital Transport Division, commonly known simply as 'The Commander' even though he was now a Divisional Superintendent, and with him his deputy in the Division, Deputy Divisional Superintendent Tracy Caverner.

Today was a very special day for them and by the same token a very ordinary one as well for despite the fact they had finally got married not two hours earlier, they where back on duty again as a shortage of senior duty officers that day meant a very short honeymoon spent eating chocolate acquired from a Underground station vending machine in their office half an hour earlier.

"Tottenham Court Road!" the bus conductor called out which became the cue for a flurry of activity as passengers alighted and boarded through the open rear platform of the bus despite the fact it was still moving albeit slowly across the main crossroads and still some distance from the next official bus stop.

"So where *are* we going to have the honeymoon then?" Tracy asked her new husband who now seemed a little distracted as he looked out of the rear bulkhead window of the bus at something that had caught his attention behind them.

"Berkeley Square" he muttered in a slightly incoherent reply.

Tracy quickly realised that something was distracting him and he had quite clearly not heard the question properly. "And there was me thinking Pentonville Road" she replied casually with a sarcastic grin.

"Not likely, its not on Route 8" he replied, his attention still away on what ever it was that had caught his ever watchful eye.

Tracy was used to surreal moments like this, despite or perhaps because of the serious and highly important nature of their jobs, moments like these were not uncommon especially with their serious dedication to the service.

"HMV and Burger King!" the conductor called from the rear platform so that her voice could also be heard up the stairs on the upper deck as well.

The thought of the ready availability of fast food unusually went unregistered by the Commander whose dreadful chip dominated diet, despite Tracy's best efforts to persuade him otherwise, was still a primary feature of his character.

"Blimey, it must be serious" she remarked seeing his lack of reaction to the conductor's announcement.

The Commander swung back round to face his wife. "Sorry" he responded "but something's bugging me".

"Oh welcome back!" Tracy remarked.

"I was away?"

"Well we just passed a burger joint and you didn't flinch once so something was definitely on your mind".

"Behind the bus behind us" the Commander explained leaning back slightly so Tracy could see over his shoulder at whatever it was that had caught his attention. "Black four door Vauxhall saloon, two suited gentlemen in the front seat trying not to attract any attention".

With the bus now stationary at the traffic lights that guarded the complicated crossroads where Oxford Street met Regent Street, the bus behind pulled out and alongside revealing the car that had attracted the Commander's attention.

"Could be just out for a drive" Tracy commented.

"Something doesn't feel right though" he added "they have been following us since they pulled out of the Bloomsbury Court lay-by back there".

"Oxford Circus!" the Conductor cut in "Alight here for Victoria, Bakerloo and Central lines and Regent Street!"

"You could have a point" Tracy observed as she noticed the car went over Oxford Circus and continued to follow the bus to the route 8 stop whereupon it discreetly drew in to the side of the road despite the opportunity being there to overtake the bus and carry on.

The Commander discreetly picked up the radio from his belt clip and with his back turned to the rear of the bus, contacted the divisional control room back at their head office in Holborn.

Lieutenant Commander Simon Fuller was the number three officer in the chain of command within the Transport Division and that afternoon was where he could most commonly be found, the duty controllers desk in the large control room at the Holborn office.

He was still feeling a little tired having rushed both to and from the Commander's and Tracy's wedding a couple of hours earlier, he too was affected by a general shortage of duty officers that day and had been on duty since 7 am.

It was with a little resigned reluctance that he reached across the desk to pick up the radio headphones when he heard the Commander call in.

"Control from Lima Tango Zero One, receiving over."

If it had been anyone else then Fuller would have let one of the despatch officer's deal with it but as it was the Commander, he decided it ought to be he who dealt with it.

"Control receiving over, what's up Chief?"

"We are on a number 8 bus about half way between Oxford Circus and New Bond Street" the Commander explained "and we seem to have picked up an uninvited guest on our tail".

"That wouldn't happen to be a black Vauxhall Omega about fifty yards behind Routemaster RML2706 would it per chance?" Fuller enquired as he called up and found the appropriate CCTV camera view on his console.

The Commander was suitably impressed at Fuller's expertise but to him it was second nature in his other job as the Division's computer expert.

"Run the number through the computer will you?" the Commander asked.

"Will do" by which time Fuller was already running the registration number of the suspicious car through the system. He raised a surprised eyebrow however at the result which he received and immediately passed it on to his superior.

"Err boss" he announced "that number has a black flag on it".

"A what?" Tracy asked.

"Black flag" the Commander explained, "That means it belongs to someone who doesn't want us knowing who they are".

"Hang on a second, I'll consult my special files" Fuller added.

"What do you reckon, MI5 or Special Branch?" Tracy asked.

"My money would be on MI5, motor is too new and tidy to be Special Branch" the Commander replied wryly.

"MI5" Fuller announced, "Just don't ask how I found out," he added as he quickly disconnected his computer terminal in order to evade any hacking detection.

The Commander looked back out of the rear window, observing that the car was still discreetly following them. "Any chance of a reception committee in Berkeley Square then?" he asked Fuller.

"On the way."

Progress down the length of Oxford Street towards New Bond Street where the scheduled route turned left, was slow with the throng of late Saturday afternoon traffic, shopper laden buses and wandering pedestrians for whom traffic lights just changed colour and seemed unperturbed by approaching vehicles as they wandered across the road without a care.

By now the Conductor was aware that they were being terminated short of their destination and so announced once again for the public benefit the current situation of her service.

"New Bond Street!" she cried out "Now terminating at Berkeley Square!" This news prompted some shuffling of the passengers as those who wished destinations further down Oxford Street towards Marble Arch and those for the original destination of Victoria alighted for other services.

Amongst those alighting was Tracy who discreetly hid among the more suicidal passengers who jumped off the bus as it rounded the corner into New Bond Street and thus evaded the watchful eyes of their mysterious pursuers.

On board the bus, the Commander with more than a hint of reluctance, removed his rather elderly and battered departmental issue revolver from its holster and checked the chamber, raising a slightly surprised eyebrow to see that he had actually loaded it for once.

A couple of the passengers sitting on the bench seat opposite him began to feel a little uneasy at the sight of a live firearm in their presence but the bus conductor was not bothered in the slightest.

"I'm from Northern Ireland, I'm used to it" she joked aside still standing proud like the captain of the ship on the rear platform with a firm presence that her short and small stature should have denied her.

The Commander was not exactly one to be judged on size either, it was always reckoned that at just a shade under 5 foot 7 he must have been the shortest man with the most power in the country, even his wife Tracy stood above him but in her case by just an inch or two.

The nervous passengers decided to make a discreet exit at the first available stop a short distance down New Bond Street, a road with an extensive number of highly appointed designer clothes and jewellery shops which made for an atmosphere that seemed to require the production of a platinum credit card as a form of passport to enter.

"Lima Tango Zero One from Lima Tango X-Ray" Fuller's voice over the Commander's radio initially blasted out through the lower saloon of the vehicle forcing the Commander to make a quick adjustment to the volume setting, a manoeuvre made all the more difficult by his rather troublesome habit of not being totally up on anything remotely resembling modern technology.

"Go ahead but quietly ok?" he responded once he assumed that the twiddling he had just performed on the radio had had the desired effect.

"Unit X-Ray is ready along with a few chosen officers at your desired destination" Fuller replied.

"Very well" the Commander confirmed, "You box them in from behind".

The last stop before the Square was arrived at and the Conductor flashed the interior lights to usher out the last remaining passengers while the Commander looked on.

"Yes I know it says Victoria but we are terminating here" the Conductor insisted to a couple of passengers who attempted to board as she had left the destination blinds at their original terminus in order to avoid letting the pursuers know that they had been rumbled.

The Conductor looked understandably surprised as they pulled away and went around the corner to see the driver of her vehicle standing discreetly by the roadside.

"Who actually is driving this bus?" she demanded to know.

"My wife" the Commander explained "You may want to hold on tight, this might get a bit rough".

The car pursuing them followed them around the corner at a distance only to come to a screeching halt as the Routemaster bus suddenly swung across in front of them blocking the road.

The squealing of hastily applied brakes was joined by the thud of something hitting their car from the rear. Realising that they had been ambushed, the two male occupants tried to exit the vehicle quickly but before they could even open the doors, found themselves face to face with several security officers.

Leaning forward against the driver's window, the Commander tapped the barrel of his gun against the glass and with a sense of resignation; the driver lowered the electric window.

"Afternoon" the Commander greeted them "I do hope you guys are just trainees as that was some of lousiest tailing I have ever seen".

"I dunno what you're talking about mate," the driver stammered, clearly looking for a way out of this fix.

"Alright then" the Commander "lets put it this way" he stepped back and opened the driver's door. Hauling out the driver, he quickly frisked him and removed his wallet in order to establish some identity; in the process he found a gun, which he held in his hand.

"Service issue" the Commander added "So if the central computer is wrong and you guys are not MI5 spooks, then I'll just have to nick you for several serious offences" he looked at the gun still in his hand as Fuller disarmed the passenger on the other side of the vehicle. "We'll start off with driving illegally in a Bus Lane and go from there shall we?"

With a discreet almost undetectable nod of the head, the large elderly man in the long sheepskin coat indicated to the dealer that he wished to call the bid. The overhead light and the glow of a cigar were the only illumination in that small room, the light shining down on the table covered in green baize.

The dealer dealt the flop, three cards that formed the community cards for the players still in, to make the best hand possible. There were only two players left in the hand now, the others having now passed and folded.

With a casual inhale on the huge cigar that always seemed to be permanently smouldering between his fingers, Roger Field casually pushed all of the cash he had in front of him forward.

"All in" he calmly declared.

The other remaining player lifted up his head from the table, his brow which had up until now been hidden beneath the lowered trilby hat coming into the sparse light for the first time.

"Your call friend" Roger added.

The second player who was the stranger in the room and who unbeknown to him was being set up, had the slightly smaller amount of money of the two remaining players and he knew it. He pondered his next move with care knowing full well that if he played and lost, his opponent's slightly larger call would put him down and out.

He looked at the two cards in his hand and the three on the table, a king and a jack in his hand, a king and a jack on the flop with a queen kicker. He had to bet; he may never see another hand like this again.

Coolly calmly and with purpose, he pushed the stack of money forward. "Call" he replied.

"Show your hands please" the dealer called and the two men turned their hands face up on the table.

The second man's expression changed from one of confidence to shock as his opponent threw up two kings, three of a kind beat two pairs at this stage and it would be down to the final two cards to be dealt by the dealer.

The fourth card on the table appeared, a jack of spades which now meant both players had three of a kind but the first man was now commanding with three kings and two jacks meaning a full house.

For the second man it was all but over, the final river card was shown, a three of diamonds and it didn't make any difference, he just sighed with an air of resignation and tossed his cards in before getting up and shaking his opponents hand.

There were murmurs from those in the room who had up until now been silent with the tension of the game as the second man left. Roger stood up, brushed down his jacket and stubbed out his cigar in the ashtray alongside his winnings.

"Much obliged Charlie" Roger told the dealer with a wry smirk and gathered together the packs of bank notes in his hands "Same time next week?"

By now the dealer was the last person in the room and with his departure Roger was now alone. He walked across the room and switched on the main room lights revealing that this was a well appointed antique style office, a slightly careworn but loved sheen generally surrounding and permeating the atmosphere.

An antique oak desk sat at the far end of the room and it was behind this that Roger sat back and tossed the money into the bottom left hand draw that he then secured with a key.

Laid neatly on the desk was the latest edition of the Evening Standard that as Roger poured himself a whisky from the cut glass decanter, he studied the front page of casually at first but as he took the first sip from the glass, a picture accompanying the second article on the front page jogged something in his mind and caught his attention.

He put the glass down and picked up the paper to study the picture more closely almost disregarding the accompanying article that it was actually concerning. After a few moments of careful pondering, he sat back and reached across to the old 700 series telephone and dialled a seven-digit number.

After a few moments his call was answered "Hello Dave?" he asked.

"Yes its Roger" he confirmed "Do you still have that contact at the Standard's photo department?"

There was a short pause as the person on the other end replied.

"Great, can we arrange a meeting, I want to have a look at a better copy and any other photos from the Commander's wedding story on today's front page".

A couple of waiting passengers stepped forward when they saw what they thought was a red single deck service bus approach their stop but quickly sat down again disappointed when the vehicle got closer.

The mistake was understandable though as the Transport Division's mobile operations unit Lima Tango X-Ray was actually constructed just like a modern single deck London bus, only the blue flashing lights on the roof and the Security Service branding on the outside really differentiated it from any of the hundreds of other similar vehicles around the city.

One short-sighted elderly lady ran down the path to the now stationary vehicle and as she attempted to board, met the Commander and Tracy alighting.

"Is this the number 436?" she enquired.

Tracy duly did her public duty and pointed the confused lady in the appropriate direction where a suitable bus could be picked up before running after the Commander who was making for a distinctive colonnaded building a few yards down the road with clear purpose and intent.

"Look love" Tracy tried to intervene "I appreciate that you have all the diplomatic skills of a hedgehog with a speed gun"

"Nice quote, almost could be one of mine"

"Yeah well I learnt from the best. Anyway even you, despite being one of the most powerful Security Service Officers in the country cannot just walk into MI5 headquarters and expect to be seen" Tracy tried to explain "With or without an appointment".

They reached the big heavy cast iron doors that guarded the entrance and the Commander paused momentarily and turned to his wife.

"Trust me" he replied with a wry smile.

"This is usually the point at which the Administrator General starts to get nervous" she added as they proceeded through the doors into the high marble floored entrance hall inside whereupon two security guards stepped forward firmly but politely to try and impede the Commander's progress.

"Good evening Sir" they politely enquired with a hand forward "Do you have an appointment".

"What do you think?" the Commander replied sarcastically brandishing his identity card.

"Then you will have to sign in at reception" the guard directed them to a large marble and oak desk towards the rear of the foyer, behind which sat an incongruously small receptionist whose sole purpose in life was to tell uninvited guests to go away in the politest and most customer friendly manner possible.

It was with this cheery if determined disposition that she waved a fountain pen like a baton as she entered into battle against the Commander. "Can I help you?"

"I would like to see Sir Richard Crowthorne please" the Commander replied leaning forward on the desk and looking around the vast interior of the building.

"And you are?" the receptionist responded even though she knew exactly who her opponent in this little battle of wills was, especially as his picture had been on the front of the London Evening Standard at least three times over the last week.

The Commander duly produced his identification once again as Tracy looked on observing the battle continue. "No my dear I don't have an appointment but yes he will see me" the Commander gave the receptionist one of his Paddington Bear style hard stares that usually had the desired effect on even the most stubborn of jobsworths.

"You are sure he will see you?" the receptionist asked by now about ready to admit defeat.

"Trust me".

The roar of the constantly running printing presses practically drowned out even the possibility of conversation between Robert Field and the other two men who were with him, instead hand signals were required from one of the men to usher the other two into a side office, where with the door closed behind them, the double glazing of the office walls sealed them from the worst of the background noise.

"Right then Roger" the first man spoke properly for the first time, "this is George and what he doesn't know about press photography can be fitted on the back of a stamp".

"What do you want to know?" George asked.

Roger removed the rolled up front page of the Evening Standard from inside his overcoat pocket and passed it across to George who had now sat down at the photograph office computer terminal, dominated by a huge 21 inch flat screen that was every bit as powerful as it was impressive.

"I am trying to identify this chap in the background of the Commander's wedding photograph" Roger explained indicating the elderly slightly frail gentleman who could just be made out standing behind the happy couple in the picture.

Roger had barely finished his sentence before George began working on the computer, calling up the photograph from the central Library. "Here you go" he announced before using the software to zoom in on the person that Roger had expressed an interest in, bringing his face into sharper focus, much clearer than would have been possible just with the news printed image.

"It's him I think" Roger murmured before turning back to George. "Can you call up the pictures from the coverage of the Lewisham Diamond Robbery in 1970".

"Blimey that's going back a bit" George commented as he began his search "It might not even have been put on the computer". It took some minutes of searching through the vast database before he reported bad news.

"Only available from the manual archives" he announced, "Follow me".

Roger followed George through the back office door and down a flight of steel stairs into what appeared to be a long forgotten darkened basement. In the gloom Roger could just about make out vast shelves that seemed to stretch off into the distance, and the only main source of light, a solitary desk lamp and computer monitor on a tatty desk in the midst of the gloomy shelving.

A steaming hot cup of coffee indicated that the usual occupant of the desk was around somewhere, either close by or at least had been recently and George duly attempted to summon him.

"Dave?" he called, his voice echoing indicating the room was more cavernous than could be seen.

"Yes?" a young man suddenly appeared around the end of the nearest shelving unit, a pair of half round glasses perched characteristically on the end of his nose.

"Lewisham Diamond Robbery, January 1970" George inquired.

"Section fourteen, shelf twenty three B I think" Dave quickly replied, briefly consulting the computer, its ancient green screen monitor indicating that despite its advancing years it still provided just what anyone actually needed to know and nothing else.

"Yep" Dave confirmed "right down there" he pointed away towards the far end and with the other handed them a torch.

"Fuses gone again?" George asked taking the torch.

"Don't they always" Dave replied as he led the way, his own torch shining ahead into the darkness "Of course in this day and age, no one cares about old printed archives anymore so it takes weeks to get anything fixed".

"We ignore old ways at our peril" Roger commented.

"Here we are" Dave announced shining the torch up and along one particular shelf alongside them.

George reached forward and pulled the thickly dust laden manila coloured box file from the shelf, just a tatty label of the old fashioned style with indented corners, peeling and faded with faint old brio markings differentiated this from any one of the probably hundreds of thousands of similar files in that vast library

Back at the main photograph library office, the table lamp afforded better light for Roger as he leafed through the old cuttings and photographs, now nearly thirty five years old but still clearly readable.

Two of them in particular caught Roger's attention, a mug shot issued by the then Police service, long since replaced by the National Security Department of course, of a man in his thirties complete with the prisoner number along the bottom.

The other was of the same gentleman again and youngsters, aged between ten and fifteen Roger Estimated. It was the youngest of these three in particular that caught his attention as he thought he recognised something or someone familiar.

"This is the getaway driver from the 1970 Lewisham Diamond Heist" Roger started to lay out some of the contents of the box file on the desk before them, starting with the Police issued mug shot that had attracted his attention earlier, "This is the man in the background at the Wedding" he pointed to the computer screen where the zoomed in shot from the front page photo was still displayed.

"One and the same guy I'd say" George commented "But he died in prison before the trial so it can't be him".

"There was a rumour that he turned Queens evidence in return for his kids getting Witness Protection" Roger explained "Never had it confirmed though but now....." he continued to leaf through the photographs.

"I know this is going to sound daft" George commented "but your getaway driver in 1970" he moved one of the photographs aside to demonstrate his point "looks remarkably like the Commander does now".

Something in Roger's mind clicked and with a scurry he put the Commander's picture from his wedding alongside that of the ten-year-old son of the getaway driver.

"What do you think?" he asked sensing whether the other two men had reached the same conclusion he had.

"I don't believe it...." George's jaw drop clearly showed that all three men where in agreement.

"Evening Richard" the Commander announced as he entered the sumptuous office of Sir Richard Crowthorne, the Director General of the Secret Service section MI5. As

the Commander went over to him and warm handshakes were exchanged, Tracy discreetly slipped in behind him deciding on a more subtle entrance.

To her surprise the welcome from Richard to his unexpected and indeed uninvited guest was actually warm and welcoming. "Hello, what brings you into my little fish pond then?"

"Two of your elite undercover surveillance unit were tailing the missus and me earlier" he casually sat back in the sumptuous leather chair in front of the desk "and I want to know what these gentlemen were doing there".

"Where are they now?" Richard casually asked.

"Down at my place being processed for driving in a Bus Lane" the Commander advised "Then I'll let them stew overnight before letting you give them a lecture on undercover surveillance techniques".

"You spotted them then?"

"Quite frankly they were terrible" the Commander commented "I'd seriously consider revising your training arrangements if I were you".

"So I guess you would like to know what it's all about then?" Richard enquired with some noticeable reluctance in his voice. It was obvious that although he had planned to let the Commander in on the situation, it was originally meant to be at a time and place of his own choosing.

"Well let's hear it then" the Commander asked as Tracy sat down alongside him, clearly also eager to hear the story.

"Your father is what it's all about".

"Which one?" the Commander "Adopted or real?"

"Real one" Richard continued, "We have an intelligence source in the local Mannierie crime mob that your real father gave evidence against in 1970, that they now are aware he is still alive".

"Ah..."

"Exactly, and although they cannot get to him, he's too heavily guarded by our Witness Protection guys, they can get to you now they know that you are his son with a new name".

"I think I can take care of myself" the Commander replied.

"I know that, but we need to have someone watching in case they try anything and get them, you know how slippery these guys are".

"Yeah" the Commander recalled "I am willing to bet old man Mannierie is probably livid since he spent twelve years behind bars".

"Its not so much him we are worried about" Richard passed across some surveillance photographs from the folder on the desk in front of him "Its his oldest son Edwin who wealds the power now that his old man is lying in a rest home, different style young Edwin has. His old man just broke legs of anyone he didn't like, Edwin breaks in skulls".

"What's up with the old man then?" Tracy asked.

"Cancer, hasn't got long now apparently".

"Anything else I should know?" the Commander enquired.

"Word has it" Richard continued "that there may be some big job on with the Mannierie mob providing the muscle but beyond that we know nothing".

"Well I am supposed to be co-ordinating this American visit tomorrow" the Commander explained "so that should keep me off the streets for a while".

"All right if I keep a couple of guys shadowing you for a while just in case?" Richard asked.

"As long as they are a damm sight better than those two you had earlier".

"Don't worry, you'll never see them".

He was a stout burly fellow was Edwin Mannierie, much like his father, he was a strong-minded villain with a clever brain for planning and executing crimes.

Now that he was head of the family clan in all but name with the hospitalisation of his father, he wielded the power of control over one of the largest criminal gangs in London and the South East of England, a power he relished and brandished at will.

"This is nice" he commented as he looked around the cavernous interior of the industrial like building in which he was standing, two henchmen nearby keeping an eye open for any uninvited guests.

"All we need to sort Boss is the chopper" one of the henchmen replied.

"Lets roll then" Edwin replied as he climbed into the back of his dark Mercedes car and raised the blacked out electric window.

Inside he turned to his number two, a man known simply as Sandy although that was not his real name, and issued further instructions.

"About that matter we discussed" Edwin spoke quietly and softly "This job we are doing may very well deliver our mutual friend on a plate".

"And if we encounter him"

"Don't damage him yet" Edwin insisted "I want him kept busy until I can deal with him on a more permanent basis".

"The next station is Vauxhall" the rather tinny internal recorded announcement was almost drowned out on its passage through the interior of the carriage by the shuffle of passengers and the squealing of brakes as the train of 1967 tube stock burst from the end tunnel portal and slowed to a stop at the southbound platform face of the Victoria Line's Vauxhall station.

As the doors slid open, Tracy was one of the first off, her new husband and superior officer the Commander was some distance behind. It had been a long day for both of them, indeed a long week and the general lack of sleep from the past few days had now finally caught up with him.

"You know love I was thinking..." Tracy tailed off when with a glance over her shoulder, she realised that the Commander was not there. She turned around and was not in the least bit surprised that he was at one of the platform chocolate vending machines.

"Well I guess married life isn't going to change your diet then" Tracy mused as she rejoined her husband just as a dull thud in the lower compartment of the machine indicated the delivery of his chosen product.

"I need chocolate" the Commander explained as if there was ever a time when he did not, which was rare.

"Come on" Tracy encouraged, taking him by the arm and leading him through the warren of tile-lined corridors and up bound escalators to the ticket hall where the bleeping of automatic ticket barriers in operation filled the air.

Still being dressed in his full dress uniform from the wedding earlier that day, the Commander still had an impression of authority even though he was supposedly off duty. He casually glowered at a couple of dodgy looking characters in the corner of the ticket hall who seeing they had been spotted, took a wise decision to make a quick and discreet exit.

"Did I mention we are off duty?" Tracy asked, sarcasm being hinted at in her voice.

The Commander looked across into Tracy's eyes "The thought did occur to me" he replied.

With a pass of his warrant card over the magnetic reader, the ticket barrier opened and Tracy followed before they stepped out into the semi darkness of the early summer

evening, the clear sky with some of the brightest stars now becoming visible adding to a wonderful atmosphere that was only spoiled by the ever present noise of traffic trying to navigate the local complicated traffic light controlled one-way circulatory system.

It was a few minutes by foot from the station's north entrance across the myriad of traffic lights to the large glass dominated modern apartment block that contained the couple's home.

They had only moved in a few days earlier, a fact that was accentuated by the spare room full almost to the ceiling of sealed cardboard boxes that had laid there virtually untouched since the removal men had put them in there last week.

"On the left!" Tracy shouted from the kitchen as the Commander, still unfamiliar with the internal layout fumbled around in the dark for the front room light switch.

"Oh yes" the Commander mumbled with embarrassment as he successfully switched on the light and looked across at the grandfather clock in the corner.

"Half eleven" he commented as he slumped down on the sofa, the medals on his dress uniform clinking as he landed "I supposed to be at Chesham and some ungodly hour tomorrow for this briefing".

"Oh yes the American President visit" Tracy came into the room clutching two mugs of hot steaming tea, the one with the five sugars she passed to her husband.

"Thanks love" he responded huffing on the hot liquid to try and reduce its temperature to something a little more comfortable.

"Do you suppose we could have a quiet week next week?" Tracy asked.

"I thought it was quiet this week" the Commander responded with a giggle.

"Oh yes now, let me see, in the last week" Tracy concluded "You have had your car wrecked, I've lost one motorbike, my twin sister was stabbed, we almost single handily broke up the largest riot in the history of Central London, been shot at, at least three times, almost been blown up by a bomb that has left a huge hole in Westminster Bridge and oh yes got married".

"Well..."

"You're right, pretty normal week then" Tracy burst out into laughter and the Commander duly followed.

"Trouble is" the Commander continued "now I seem to have MI5 and some old friends from my school days lurking in the background, things are likely to get a bit lively I fear".

"That will be a nice change" Tracy's tone was suitably sarcastic "Speaking of which where are our friends from the 'intelligence' services?"

"Green Rover parked in the bus stop lay-by on the end of the bridge" the Commander smiled with wry amusement as Tracy got up and looked through the balcony windows at the street some four floors below.

"Oh yes" she observed the car described, parked exactly as her husband had just described. "They aren't exactly getting any better at this are they?"

With no response, Tracy turned back to see the Commander had nodded off to sleep, something he had barely managed for the last forty-eight hours.

"Well I know I suggested an early night love" she commented "but this was not exactly what I had in mind!"

The sudden winding up of a turbine broke through the early morning silence, up until then just the first twitterings of a few birds in the scarce trees thereabouts and the distant sound of a few items of early morning traffic was all that was permeating the dark blue sky, the very first few rays of sunshine just starting to lighten up the sky of the east end of the city.

The turbine noise increased and the distinct chop of rotors broke the calm atmosphere. In the space of a few seconds a large white helicopter lifted off from its pad at the back of the modern glass office building.

With the increase in the volume level from the take off, the two security guards who emerged from the building at that point had no chance in stopping the helicopter's unscheduled and illegal departure, for it had been stolen, but for what would remain a mystery for now.

At the same time, there where some more strange movements going on, anonymous unmarked white vans began to make their way in a convoy down the main Harrow Road heading north west out of the City bound for an unknown destination.

Whatever was happening, it had begun.

"Oh terrific!" the Commander casually remarked looking down at the badly crumpled uniform jacket, "I spent my wedding night unconscious on the sofa in my uniform!"

"You where definitely out of contact I'll say" Tracy handed him a large mug of tea which contained the Commander's usual five sugars.

"Yuck!" he remarked.

"Are you casting aspersions on my tea making skills?"

"No" the Commander calmly replied as he located a couple of sugar sachets from the local burger bar in his pocket and poured them in to Tracy's astonishment, "Just not enough sugar".

The Commander's diet was the stuff of legend; it wasn't by coincidence that the staff canteen back at their office in Holborn was the only one in the entire UK Security Service that offered chips on the early breakfast menu.

"You know they'll name a coronary care unit after you one day" Tracy remarked. She had often tried to change his attitude towards anything remotely healthy but eventually she had to simply give up, her husband was nothing if not stubborn on certain matters and hated change.

"We are going to be late!" Tracy called from the hallway, an announcement that enlisted no response. She decided to up the anti with a threat of a fate worse than death.

"If you don't hurry up, I'll have to drive."

The Commander, potentially terrified by the prospect of Tracy being let out loose on the public highway on anything with four or more wheels was at the door, and soon down stairs in the car park opening the door of the red marked Security Service patrol car at light speed.

"That got you moving didn't it?" Tracy smirked as she sat alongside the Commander in the passenger seat.

"It's going to be one of those days isn't it?" the Commander remarked.

"Oh probably..."

"On behalf of the British Airports Authority Ambassador, welcome to Heathrow Airport". The words of the British Foreign Secretary were almost drowned out by the sound of the Boeing 737 jet aircraft from which Donald Ingram, the newly appointed US Ambassador to the United Kingdom had just alighted with his party.

"Thank you Ken, its a pleasure" The warm handshake between the two men sealed the welcome to the tall stately if slightly heavily built man in his late fifties who had arrived to assume his post. He proceeded to introduce the key members of the rest of his party.

"This is my wife and daughter" he signalled to the two ladies of the party, "CIA liaison Robert Black and my Chief of Staff David Rollinson". All of those introduced stepped forward and shook hands, in the case of Black, somewhat reluctantly.

"We have a full briefing on the Presidential visit with all the Capital Divisional Chiefs and other key people at Chesham Manor in an hour" the Foreign Secretary advised. "Shall we" he pointed towards the ministerial Jaguar car which was awaiting with its

engine running nearby along with a veritable fleet of other vehicles and a Security Service escort.

Within a matter of moments the entire party was safely entombed inside bullet-proof vehicles and with the wail of sirens from the eight escorting motorcycles, the convoy left the airport.

"All right ladies and gentlemen, wakey, wakey!" the Commander called from the front of the Holborn Briefing Room. His wake up call was more necessary than usual today as the requirement of his presence at the Presidential Visit Briefing meant an earlier start for the day shift than usual.

"Item 1" he continued as he scanned around the room to see that he had everybody's attention "The United States President will be paying the good folk of London a visit tomorrow including for some unknown reason a guided tour of the new Jubilee Line Extension which puts him slap bang in the middle of our patch".

"Oh wonderful!" Simon Fuller, the number three in the Transport Division and resident IT expert mumbled. He knew as well as anyone that there was bound to be trouble.

"Well that means the usual drill" the Commander continued "So be on the look out for the usual lunatics, terrorists, suspicious packages, abandoned sandwiches, etc. The US President has made so many enemies of late that we are likely to have the usual round of security alerts, demonstrations and axe grinders".

The usual dry humour of the Commander's delivery provoked giggles from certain areas of the two hundred plus officers and civilian staff in the room.

"Second item" he continued "Our colleagues from the Metropolitan Division drugs squad have a surveillance operation outside Camden Town Tube Station and would appreciate it if any uniform presence from us could be kept to an absolute minimum so as not to frighten off the potential customers".

The Commander looked down at the briefing notes in front of him "On a similar theme, the investigation team from the Southwark office are going to be kicking in a few doors around South London later today in connection with our ongoing anti-graffiti operation so watch out for any reprisal vandalism from about midday onwards".

"If anyone sees this delightful gentleman on their travels" he showed a slightly scruffy photograph of an even more scruffy black down and out man on the screen "Don't arrest him, he is our best undercover surveillance officer and is currently working on nabbing some particularly nasty beggars in the Marble Arch and Kings Cross areas" the Commander explained.

"Feel free to help him if he is athletically chasing someone down the street whilst waving a gun or indeed get him a cuppa if you are feeling generous".

The gathered crowd were amused as always at the Commander's typical mannerisms and his wry sense of humour.

"Finally, myself and Superintendent Caverner will both be out of the office for much of the morning while we attend this god awfully boring briefing about the Presidential Visit out at Chesham Manor" he added "So therefore Fuller is in charge until we get back".

Fuller waved his arm at this point from the back of the room "Needless to say" the Commander added "that by about eight o'clock, I will be bored as hell and so if anything under our jurisdiction occurs in the area I would appreciate the distraction".

The Commander looked around the room at the attentive faces "Right if that is everything, go and get on with it!"

"You know I think you missed your calling" Tracy commented as together they headed down the back stairs to the High Holborn street exit, a discreet two leaf aluminium fire exit door innocuously hidden between the supermarket and the bank.

The Commander's marked patrol car was parked in the old lay-by on the opposite side of the road and carefully dodging the one way traffic that was rushing through High Holborn on their way through into the West End of the City, they reached it and were quickly off and away.

"We are never going to get there at this rate" Tracy commented as she looked out at the typically crawling traffic, even though it was a Sunday, some weekend road closures had seen to it that the traffic was busier than normal causing bottlenecks throughout the West End.

The traffic soon reacted to the sound of sirens and the sight of blue flashing lights from the Commander's patrol car as he upped the ante in typical style. "Care to place a bet on that my dear?" he asked as their progress increased rapidly.

"I wouldn't want to be down in that mess" the pilot of the helicopter commented as he looked down on the lines of traffic below him.

"Couldn't be better" Edwin Mannierie commented as he too surveyed the scene whilst they continued to fly towards their destination, at that time only known to himself and the pilot.

"Do we know what time the intercept will be?" the pilot asked having to raise his voice over the sound of the rotor blades despite their radio sets and the soundproofed cabin.

"I am waiting on a phone call" Mannierie replied indicating his mobile phone "Lets just circle for a while".

"Roger".

"This train is ready to depart" the driver of the four car train of London Underground A60 stock announced over the tannoy to the small number of passengers who had just boarded the Metropolitan Line shuttle service.

"This train is for Chesham only" the driver added "Chesham only, stand clear of the doors".

A shrill whistle heralded the closure of the passenger doors before, with a hiss of escaping air, the train moved off from the bay platform at Chalfont & Latimer station, on its short six-mile trip along the little used rural branch to Chesham.

Although this was the London Underground, this rural outpost was many miles from the centre of the City the system served, forests and fields lined the embankments of the single track branch, the overhanging branches encroaching above the track, the nearest you could find to tunnel conditions out here.

What little there was of a Sunday early morning rush hour had ended almost an hour earlier and the branch had now reverted to its normal off peak light traffic levels. So light was the number of passengers during this time, the service could be easily operated by a single four car unit as opposed to the full length eight car trains used everywhere else on the Metropolitan Line throughout the day.

It was a genteel trundle through a rural backwater. The driver had made this journey hundreds of times in the past and the only major incidents he had ever had usually involved the local wildlife straying onto the track, and even that was rare.

He barely noticed the white pick-up truck parked in a field alongside the wire fence that separated the track bed from the rest of the world. Probably a farmer's vehicle he assumed and anyway there seemed to be nobody around so he thought nothing further of it.

When he saw the obstruction ahead however, he realised something was not right and immediately executed an emergency stop. The relatively slow speed of the train meant it came to a halt in a fairly short distance but still only a matter of feet from the large piece of metal that had been placed right across the track in front of him.

It could only have been put there in the last ten minutes as that was the last time he passed through there and there was definitely nothing there then. Quickly the driver grabbed the radio-telephone and called the Line Controller.

"Control, this is Chesham 123, receiving over".

"Chesham 123, pass your message" the Control Room at Neasden replied.

"I have just encountered an object on the track about three miles north of Latimer Junction, over".

"What is the train's condition, over?"

"Well I didn't hit it but whatever it is, I think it has gone and welded itself to the ruddy live rail" the driver concluded, the irritation clear in his voice.

"All right" the Controller replied, "I'll send an engineering team and the law. Drive the train from the rear cab back to Chalfont and we'll have to get a replacement bus up and running".

"Cheers" the driver responded, "Chesham train 123, over and out".

"Ladies and Gentlemen, you are reminded that this briefing is classified" advised Divisional Chief Superintendent Jeffries, the Commander in Chief of the VIP Protection division of the Department of National Security & Civil Defence.

His audience was a boardroom of Security Officers representing most of the major divisions of the service in London and the surrounding Home Counties as well as a number of dignitaries from the American Embassy. The reason for their presence at this meeting, which contained some of the country's most distinguished, and well-respected Security Service personnel, would soon become clearer.

"As you are no doubt aware, the President of the United States, the US Ambassador to London, the US Secretary of State for Defence plus a few others are later today embarking on a tour of NATO military facilities and other premises prior to the NATO conference in Docklands which commences later this evening".

The Commander had almost nodded off at that point, leading Tracy to give him a dig in the ribs to wake him up.

"Wake up love" she murmured aside to her husband.

"I am going to need resuscitation before long" the Commander murmured back in reply. He hated formal briefings such as this, especially seeing that the chances of the President of the United States travelling around the Circle Line or indeed any other part of the London Underground railway system should have been highly remote. This in his mind seemed to make his and Tracy's presence there rather pointless.

"How about the kiss of life?" Tracy asked.

"Later, but nice thought."

"Needless to say" Jeffries continued "with the current political climate and the ever present threat of global terrorism..."

"...plus all those people who just don't like the guy..." the Commander mumbled at that point.

"...the security required for this visit for all parties involved, including their relatives, will need to be even more watertight than usual" Jeffries continued.

"For the main part of this briefing, may I introduce you to the head of the CIA London Unit, Agent Robert Black".

Jeffries sat down and a tall slim gentleman in an expensive suit that the Commander estimated probably cost more than a junior Security Officer earns in a month, stood up.

"Good morning" Black began. His accent was very much rural American, probably from the south-western states.

"If you will all look at the briefing packs in front of you, you will see that a very tight schedule is planned". There was a rustle of papers around the room as everyone began to look through the documentation that Black had just referred to.

The Commander granted the schedule for each VIP a casual run through; his memory ability when it came to Security matters was such that it only took him a brief glance at a document to commit all of it to memory very quickly.

"Leading the front line team of protection will be Commander Jennifer Caverner of the Security Service VIP Division" Black continued. Tracy looked up at the mentioning of her twin sister at that point.

As Black continued the briefing, the sound of a pager beeping suddenly interrupted him. Looking for the source of the unauthorised interruption, his eyes came to rest on the Commander seated at the opposite end of the table.

"Ahem" Black coughed.

"What?" the Commander enquired as he silenced the bleeper that was attached to his belt.

"I do not appreciate interruptions in my briefings" Black remonstrated. He knew nothing of the Commander's reputation as a no nonsense Security Officer or the exemplary level of respect everyone had for him, even some of the City's criminal fraternity.

"Yes well, whilst you are out saving worthless politician's" the Commander replied frankly as he rose from his seat having read the message on the pager before giving Black one of his Paddington Bear like hard stares "some of us have some genuine work to do".

The Commander smiled sarcastically at Black before leaving the room, leaving the American looking red and flustered. Meanwhile most of the officers in the room

where having great difficulty suppressing their laughter at the latest typical example of what Tracy called a 'Commanderism'.

The US Ambassador grinned from ear to ear, delighted that at last someone had finally burst what was in his and many others opinions Black's over inflated ego and sense of self-importance.

Outside the room, the Commander picked up the radio off his belt and called up his Control Room many miles away in the centre of the City of London in Holborn.

"Lima Tango Zero One to Control, receiving over?"

It was Fuller who answered the call from within the modern high-tec control room.

"Lima Tango Control, go ahead".

"You bleeped?" the Commander enquired.

"Did I?" Fuller replied slightly confused for a few moments. It was only when one of the Despatch Officers seated in the row of control desks in front of him, started waving a piece of paper at him that he remembered.

"Oh yes" he added as the mists of his memory cleared "We have had a report of an object being placed on the line on the Chesham Branch".

"Wow, exciting!" the Commander responded sarcastically.

"Well I figured that as you where just up the road and you would probably welcome any excuse to get out of that meeting, I figured I'd give you a call".

"Simon, I owe you a drink.

"Bloody vandals!" the on site engineering supervisor remarked as he shielded his eyes from the brightness of the flame and sparks from the cutting gear. He was supervising his small emergency engineering team who where in the process of cutting away the offending section of discarded rail that had blocked the path of the earlier train.

"Something odd about this Guv" one of the engineers called as he finished cutting through the welds.

"Oh yes?" the Supervisor enquired, leaning on his shovel and really not particularly interested.

"Well normally I would have expected this to have welded itself to the power rail, but this is welded to the running rails as well" he pointed towards the remains of the weld marks which marred the bright shiny top surface of the running rails.

"Well it's shifted now" the Supervisor replied as he helped the two engineers to unceremoniously throw the short length of rail into the hedge.

As the rail was flung down into the hedge and shrub alongside the track bed, the Supervisor picked up his radio telephone and prepared to announce the all clear.

"There are no services on the Chesham branch this morning" the station tannoy announced as the Commander's red marked patrol car pulled into the forecourt of Chalfont & Latimer Station. "A replacement bus service is in operation".

"Security Service, what's occurring?" the Commander inquired as he met the Station Supervisor on the platform immediately beyond the booking office.

"One of our drivers reported an obstacle being placed on the track" the Supervisor explained, pointing out the driver who was sitting on a bench drinking coffee near the front cab of the four car train stabled in the bay platform.

"Line control to Chalfont". The Station Supervisor broke off his conversation with the Commander to take the call on his radio.

"Yeah go ahead mate".

"Line's been cleared" the Controller informed him "Can you send the unit up at slow speed to test the track and pick the engineers up on the way? Over".

"Consider it done" the Supervisor replied before turning back to the Commander.

"Mind if I tag along?" the Commander enquired.

"Be my guest" the Supervisor replied as he led the way up the platform towards the front of the train. "Aren't you a bit high ranking for something as mundane as this?"

"Well I was in the neighbourhood" the Commander replied as they reached the driver and together the three men boarded the train.

The driver went through the carriage end door into the cab and took the left hand drivers position, inserting the control key in preparation to move off. The Commander pulled down the tip up seat mounted on the back wall of the right hand side of the cab and sat down while the Station Supervisor watched from the open communicating door.

"All right gentlemen" the driver announced upon seeing the green signal aspect appear ahead of him "here we go".

The sudden furious banging of fists on the side windows however caused the driver to stop almost before the train had even started, the expulsion of air from the brake system sounding like an elephant with a chest cold.

"Now what?" the driver wondered as the Supervisor and the Commander went back into the carriage to see what the fuss was all about.

"Open the doors!" the Commander called when he saw the uniform of the person who had just interrupted their practically non-existent progress up the line.

With an almost depressed groan, the set of doors nearest the cab slid open and an out of breath Security Officer in full Metropolitan Division uniform staggered aboard.

"This had better be good" the Commander began.

"Orders from that CIA bloke" the young officer explained, still panting for breath.

"What, Director Black?" the Commander replied, wondering if this was some kind of revenging wind up for earlier, a thought he quickly dismissed as he felt that Black simply did not possess the imagination.

"He wants you to escort the US Ambassador's wife and daughter to Chesham Manor" the officer indicated two ladies, one in her fifties tall and distinguished, the other what could be described as a typical American teenager, not that British teenagers looked that much different these days.

Both of them were standing a short distance away up the platform, with two plain clothes officers who the Commander guessed were from the VIP Protection Division.

"Are you having a laugh?" the Commander retorted.

"Apparently the roads are blocked by a major RTA" the officer explained "Using the train was the best we have available at the moment".

The Commander looked on down the platform for a few moments wondering if this was going to be one of those days when he wished he had just stayed in his office.

"All right, come on then" he beckoned to the two ladies and their minders who came up to the carriage and boarded the train.

"Right driver" the Commander called as he retook his seat in the cab "Lets get on with it".

The uniformed Officer looked on as the train pulled slowly away and banked around to the right onto the Chesham branch. He watched until the red painted cab end of the last carriage had disappeared from view amongst the trees before leaving the station.

"Hi Sis!" Jennifer Caverner called across the entrance hall of Chesham House. Tracy looked up and smiled before going across to join her near identical twin sister.

"Heard you were in on this shindig" Tracy replied.

"Yeah, me, you and about every Security Officer in Greater London" Jennifer retorted "They even had to draft some extras from Manchester into my section to cover all these dignitaries".

"Well that's VIP's for you I suppose" Tracy mused.

"You've got it easy" Jennifer added, "At least no-body ever tries to assassinate senior politicians on Tube Trains".

"Oh but the day is young" Tracy responded with friendly mocking sarcasm.

The driver sounded the train's whistle when he saw in the distance ahead the three day-glow orange jackets being worn by the three engineers waiting on the track bed ahead.

As the train slowed to a halt, the Commander got down onto the track bed through the side cab door and went over to the man wearing the hard hat that he took to be the Supervisor.

"Morning" the Commander called.

"Err good morning" the man replied, seemingly surprised by who it was who was standing in front of him. He had expected some local patrol officer, certainly not the Divisional Commander of the entire London Transport Division.

"This where the rail was?" the Commander asked looking down at the track.

"Err yeah" the man replied, still seemingly ill at ease "It got itself welded to the live rail" he explained, pointing out the section of track, still marked from where the obstruction had recently been removed.

"Lets get out of here" the Commander suggested as he looked up at the sky, threatening grey clouds starting to gather and mar what had been a bright mid summer morning.

With that the engineering team went around to the side of the train, hoisted their toolboxes on board and clambered up into the passenger seating area, whilst the Commander reboarded via the side cab doorway.

As he sat back down, the Commander noticed the driver looking a little sceptical. He had been listening out of the window to the conversation outside and it was obvious from his body language that this experienced veteran of the London Underground system could feel something was not right.

"Something wrong?" the Commander asked as he leant back and closed the communication door thus ensuring that the driver could express his concerns without their passenger's eaves dropping.

"I've been working on the Met for over twenty years" the driver began "and I know everyone and everything about the line, its people and operations".

"Go on" the Commander motioned as the driver released the brakes and started to move off.

"Well, I may be going crazy" the driver continued "but if those three blokes are Underground rail engineers, then I am the Queen Mother".

"You know what" the Commander replied, "I was thinking exactly the same thing". He reached down to his belt and removed his radio.

"Lima Tango Zero One to control". The Commander spoke in hushed tones so that anyone listening against the bulkhead wall would not become aware of his suspicions.

"Lima Tango Control, go ahead" came the rather loud reply that forced the Commander to quickly adjust the output volume on the radio.

"Can I have a meet and greet party arranged for Chesham station in about ten minutes?" he asked.

"Will do".

"If you can't get enough of our lot, get the Met Division to send over anyone they have lying around" the Commander added "Might as well make use of them".

Tracy waved goodbye to her sister as she drove away in the lead escort car of the convoy that was taking the US Ambassador back to his residence, the convoy of eight vehicles, including two limousines and two marked Security Service patrol cars, making for quite a sight as it proceeded down the driveway and out onto the main road beyond.

"Lima Tango Zero Two from control". The call to Tracy's radio distracted her from thinking about her sister and brought her attention back to matters of work.

"Lima Tango Zero Two, receiving over" she responded.

"Got a message from the Chief" Fuller back in the Holborn Control Room advised "He asks if you can meet him with some discrete back-up at Chesham Station in about ten minutes".

"Why?" Tracy asked as she looked around in search of some suitable transport. To her the request seemed a little unusual, especially for such a domestic and indeed sadly common incident as an object on the track.

"Apparently he has a hunch" Fuller replied.

"Ouch!" Tracy responded sarcastically "Last time he had a hunch, it finished up with a large hole being blown in Westminster Bridge".

"What's that?" the Commander enquired as he pointed through the front cab windows at the track ahead.

"Trouble" the driver murmured as he began to apply the brakes in response to the obstruction ahead. As the train braked from its already slow running speed to a standstill, the Commander opened the side cab door and removed his gun from his belt holster, clearly sensing that if something was going to happen, now was the time.

"What do you think?" the driver asked looking across nervously.

"Well we have the family of a targeted diplomat aboard" the Commander concluded as he backed out of the door ready to climb down the steps to the track bed "We are in the middle of nowhere and someone is making damn sure we are being held up so it doesn't take a degree in astro physics to work out something fishy is occurring".

The undergrowth alongside the track was particularly dense at this point approximately half way along the length of the branch between Chalfont & Latimer and Chesham stations. As a result, the Commander was not aware of the armed men in camouflage gear hiding in the bushes until he heard a rustle behind him and the barrel of a rifle press into the back of his head.

"I'll take that thank you officer" the voice of a second gum man announced as he stepped forward and took the Commander's gun from him, as he offered no resistance. Fighting back at this point when he was clearly outnumbered and with important innocent civilians on the train would have been futile, not to mention brief with the gun still pointing at him.

"Eagle, this is Falcon" the man who had first addressed the Commander and clearly the leader of the group called on a radio.

"Eagle here" a female voice responded.

"You can come down now" the man announced.

"On way" came the swift business like reply.

As the Commander looked up at his captors, he saw the three engineers emerge from the train, now armed with guns that he concluded were probably hidden in their tool boxes when they originally boarded. They were escorting the US Ambassador's wife and daughter carefully down the cab side steps on to the track.

They were swiftly followed by the two bodyguards and the train's driver and together the small group were gathered at the side of the track.

With the group under armed guard, one of the engineers reboarded the train and the Commander could just make him out performing some sort of technical modification to the driving controls. As he continued his work, the sound of a large helicopter coming into land just beyond the trees filled the air both with the noise of the rotors and the turbulence that they produced, causing the surrounding trees to wave wildly and stirring up a torrent of dust and leaves.

"So who is working for whom?" the Commander enquired, maintaining his cool stature in the midst of what was a very tense scenario.

"Well I would say we were right about those engineers" the driver concluded with a wry smile.

"Yep!" the Commander replied "Pity I didn't spot those two phoney Security Officers" he pointed towards the two bodyguards who had now joined the three camouflaged men on the opposite side of the track in some sort of discussion.

"Right then!" the leader of the group Edwin Mannierie announced as he turned to the Commander.

"Problem?" the Commander asked sarcastically.

"Well it seems we have an unexpected guest here today" Edwin responded.

"Let me guess" the Commander enquired "You where expecting some ordinary patrol officer who you could get rid of without too much bother?"

"Something like that" he replied "Instead we have your distinguished company and not enough space in our helicopter to take you".

"Life is full of small challenges, isn't it?" the Commander responded.

"Well let no-one say I ever let someone's reputation get in the way of getting a job done" Edwin responded indicating with a nod of the head to one of his accomplices standing right behind the Commander.

The next thing the Commander felt was a sudden blow to the back of the head before he fell to the track bed and blacked out.

"Nothing personal you understand".

"We really must stop meeting like this" Tracy commented as she arrived on the single platform of Chesham Station. The only other person on the well-kept platform was her twin sister Jennifer.

"Well apparently someone had the none too bright idea of putting the US Ambassador's wife and daughter on the test train from Chalfont" Jennifer explained,

"I am supposed to meeting it" she looked down the track into the distance "If it ever turns up that is".

"They usually run slowly on test runs after objects have been removed" Tracy explained, her experience of the Transport Division showing through.

"Even still" Jennifer responded as she looked at her watch "They seem to be taking an awfully long time."

"Well you know that mad husband of mine" Tracy mused.

"How was the wedding night then?" Jennifer asked with a wry grin.

"He fell asleep."

"Tell me at least he managed to take his uniform off first."

"Nope" Tracy responded "But given the last week during which neither of us have got much sleep, it's hardly surprising is it?"

"I see your point" Jennifer agreed.

"Been a ruddy long ten minutes" Jennifer commented as she looked down the track into the distance.

"I expect that mad husband of mine is probably arresting someone for travelling outside zone 6 without a travel card" Tracy mused wryly. "He's good at that sort of thing".

"Mass murderers, armed robbers and fare evaders, he does them all doesn't he?"

"He is a man of many talents"

"Oh yes?"

"Can't cook to save his life though but he does make up for that elsewhere".

Jennifer was curious to find out more but the sound of an approaching train brought her thoughts back to the job in hand.

"Looks like we have company at last" Tracy commented as she slightly gingerly stood up and joined her sister over by the platform edge.

"There she blows!" Jennifer announced as the red painted front of the four car train, its twin high intensity headlights piercing ahead even in the bright daylight, appeared around the corner at a speed of about twenty miles an hour.

"What the devil is he playing at?" the Station Supervisor commented as he looked out of the booking office window and noticed that the train was not making any attempt to slow for the buffer stops that marked the end of the line at the far end of the platform.

"There's no driver" Tracy called out.

"Don't panic" the Supervisor called, seeing the concern on at least Jennifer's face
"Signal tripcock will stop it".

The two officers stood back as the train pulled into the platform, still making no real attempt to slow down until a loud clunk was heard from below the front carriage, and with a sudden squealing of brakes and releasing of air, the train stopped, just short of the sand drag that guarded the buffer stops.

"Stay in there" Tracy instructed the Station Supervisor who was about to come out onto the platform.

Both officers looked at each other and simultaneously reached for their guns before Tracy, the younger of the twins by just a few minutes, reached down to the door release switch mounted in the lower side of the bodywork of the leading carriage.

As the doors slid open, they both proceeded inside, Jennifer looking down towards one end of the carriage, Tracy towards the drivers cab end.

"Security service, nobody..." Tracy tailed off and looked around in surprise. There was no one in the passenger saloon whatsoever, only a few muddy footprints, a discarded newspaper and an old ticket gave any indication that any human life had been on board recently.

"What's wrong with this picture?" Jennifer murmured.

"I'll check the cab" Tracy announced as she proceeded towards the front, leaving Jennifer to check through the three other carriages of the seemingly empty train.

Tracy's cautious entry into the drivers cab was unwarranted however as she found the small compartment empty, just a few engineers tools lying on the floor in front of the driving controls.

Unlike her sister however, Jennifer was to find something unexpected in the driving cab at the opposite end. Opening the communicating door, she discovered the unconscious driver and the Commander lying on the floor of the cab.

"Trace, get down here quick!" Jennifer yelled into her radio. Tracy responded by running out of the train and down the platform as fast as she could even though she was feeling a bit unwell.

"Get an ambulance!" Tracy yelled back down the platform to the Station Supervisor once she had quickly surveyed the scene through the side cab window.

Jennifer turned the driver over onto his back whilst Tracy attended to her husband, the Commander.

"Come on love, give me a sign here" she called to him. There was a momentary stirring as the Commander began to move his head slightly; it was then that Tracy noticed the blood from the impact wound on the back of head.

"If this was done by fare dodgers then I am the Administrator General" Jennifer commented.

"Yeah and where is the Ambassador's wife and daughter" Tracy added.

"Where indeed?"

"Move!" The leader of the kidnap gang's orders where brisk and to the point as the Ambassador's wife Susan and her daughter Melissa where pushed out of the back of the white van that had brought them the short distance from the heliport where they had landed, to their new location.

Blindfolded and gagged, neither of the two women could make out where they where and with the blindfolds tied around their heads over their ears, most identifiable background noise was muffled as well.

The two women could feel that they where being led inside a building by their unseen captors. What little sound they could hear was echoing as though the room they where in was very large. Underfoot, a hard concrete like surface was covered with grit or dirt that crunched beneath their feet as they walked briskly onwards.

After a short distance, they became aware of being bundled into what at first appeared to be a small room but as their blindfolds where removed, they could see it was the interior of an old cargo container. As their eyes became adjusted to the dark interior, they were confronted by a well built man in his late thirties, his large frame neatly dressed in tailored light fawn suit with matching waistcoat, dark grey overcoat and a trilby hat.

"Good morning my dears" Edwin Mannierie spoke with a definitive accent typical of many residents of South London.

"What do you want with us?" Susan asked. Her calm attitude was however only skin deep and a complete contrast to that of her daughter who was clearly trembling as her mother held her.

"Let me first assure you ladies" Edwin responded calmly "that is not our intention to harm either of you at any point".

"Then what is your point?" Susan inquired with clear insistence

"You are merely part of a little plan that I have been employed to help organise. As a little bonus, you also get to become the bait in a little game of revenge that I have set in motion" he explained.

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"All in good time, but let me assure you that this is nothing personal" Edwin assured them. "Until later" he added before turning smartly and walking away.

One of the gang clipped a lamp the side wall and turned it on, the light revealing that the container had been furnished with some rudimentary furniture, a couple of camping beds, two chairs and a table. Some food and bottled water had also been made available so they were certainly not going to be too badly treated.

Melissa started to sob as she realised the hopelessness of the situation that she and her mother had unexpectedly found themselves in, a fear that was enhanced as the doors of the container were closed and then a lock was heard being applied to the outside.

"Eight years I have been in the VIP Protection Division and I have never lost a client yet" Jennifer fumed, "My Guvnor is going to go bananas when he hears about this".

"You didn't lose him, I did" the Commander replied by way of condolence as he looked up from the hospital bed in the casualty department of Amersham General Hospital.

"It will still be my head on the block when he hears about it".

"I always thought Divisional Commander Jeffries was a nice understanding bloke" Tracy commented as she passed a polystyrene cup of tea to her sister.

"Where's mine?" the Commander asked, his hand outstretched.

"Not until the doctor has cleared you" Tracy insisted. Anyone observing would have clearly identified them as husband and wife but never as Divisional Commanding Officer and his Deputy.

"Well yes" Jennifer replied between sips of tea "but Jeffries is not in charge of my section at the moment while he is heading the US operation, so we have got this temporary Chief from Manchester in at the moment".

"He wouldn't be about six foot three, thin as a rake and a health food fanatic with a penchant for 'Mission Statements' and 'Pro-active Security' would he?" the Commander inquired.

"How did you know that?"

"Sounded like him, Divisional Commander Graham Walker" the Commander announced, "Prize plank of the highest order".

"Yeah I get the impression he doesn't like you either" Jennifer advised the Commander.

"The feeling is mutual believe me, indeed I do believe it is the only thing we agree on."

The curtains of the cubicle being tossed aside and the arrival of the Duty Casualty Consultant interrupted their conversation.

"Right, then Commander..." he sifted through his notes.

"Just Commander thank you" he coolly replied. He disliked doctors, although he respected all the work they did, he just did not like being treated by them.

"Right then, you have received quite a nasty bump to the back of your head" the doctor explained "but nothing broken".

"My father always said I was thick skinned" the Commander commented causing Tracy to chuckle.

"You will however have to be a bit careful for a couple of days" the doctor added.

"What?" the Commander inquired as though he had just been confronted by some alien idea. He was a born workaholic, so was his wife which is probably why they were so right for each other and the concept of 'taking it easy' just did not compute.

"And no driving" the doctor added.

"Can I at least have a cup of tea now?" the Commander asked now annoyed beyond reasonable redemption.

The Doctor nodded in agreement and left the cubicle.

"Tracy my dear, milk and five sugars if you would be so kind".

"Right I want heads on a platter, and I want them right now!" the forceful American accent of Robert Black boomed across the briefing room in which just hours earlier he had been stressing the importance of high security and vigilance.

Divisional Commander Walker, looking like a man who would rather not have been there, which given that he was temporary head of the VIP Protection Division and they had lost not one but two VIP's barely minutes after the largest operation for years had begun, sighed and slumped back in the chair.

"Who is responsible for this cock up?" Black demanded, banging his fist on the table with fury.

"Well the officer who was supposed to collect them from Chesham and bring them here was my Head of Operations, Jennifer Caverner" Walker explained, "However the officer accompanying them on the train, at the request of two of your guys may I add, was Jennifer's brother in law".

"Cosy" Black commented "And who is this itinerant little flat foot?"

"The Chief Divisional Superintendent of the Transport Division" Walker replied.

"That little git who was in here earlier?" Black spluttered pointing vaguely in the direction of the seat where the Commander had been seated.

Jeffries walked in at that point, all the time fixing a strong glare on the still fuming Black.

"Let me mark your card pal" Jeffries calmly advised "The Commander is one of the highest ranking and most well respected officers in the entire Security Service and if you start going around bad mouthing him, you are quite likely to find yourself alienated by every member of the Security Service, from the Tea Lady at Scotland Yard right up to the National Administrator General".

Black looked across the table in stunned silence for a few moments before he quietly sat down and humbly looked through the paperwork on the desk.

"I'll still want to talk to both officers" Black responded now somewhat calmer.

"Well the Commander will probably be back down at his office in Holborn by now" Walker replied as he picked up the phone on the desk "I'll get Jennifer Caverner to drive us down there"

"Right, what's happening at the moment?" the Commander inquired as he arrived in the Control Room at Holborn.

Commander Fuller, the Operations Co-ordinator looked up from behind the main console in the room armed with a clipboard.

"Well someone stole a bus from Norwood Garage last night" Fuller advised but it only got as far as the railway bridge at Norwood Junction.

"Double decker?" the Commander asked.

"Not any more" Fuller replied with a chuckle before he realised that something or rather someone was missing from the usual picture.

"Where's Commander Caverner?" he asked.

"Downstairs with the Medical Officer" the Commander explained as he took the seat alongside Fuller "She said she was feeling a little faint".

"Well anyway, you will be delighted to know that the Chesham Branch has now reopened" Fuller added.

"Oh, wonder what happened there" the Commander smiled ruefully as he felt the bandaged wound on the back of his head.

"And some bloke from the CIA along with a few other people are apparently on their way for a full debrief" Fuller announced.

The Commander looked down at his uniform, slightly battered as a result of that morning's events, "I'll want you in on that" the Commander told Fuller "I want to go through the personnel records and find three officers".

"I'll be there".

"You are absolutely sure it was him?" the elderly gentleman insisted. Edwin Mannierie shifted slightly uneasily in the leather armchair before replying.

"No doubt about it dad" he replied, "It's his son all right".

"I must have done something right in a previous life" the elderly gentleman commented with an evil grin as he lit a huge cigar in flagrant defiance of the rules of the rest home in which he had been incarcerated.

"Dad, you know the doctor said no smoking" the younger man insisted even though he knew full well that his words would be falling on deaf ears.

"I'll worry about my lungs son, you just make sure you do your job properly". He paused to take another heavy intake of smoke before exhaling, the cloud from which almost made him disappear from view.

"And our mutual friend?"

"Let's lead him on a merry dance shall we?" the elderly man replied as he pondered the possibilities of a little light revenge "and then we'll wheel him in for a chat".

"This is not a witch-hunt" Jeffries advised the gathered officers in the Transport Division briefing room "This is merely a debrief to find out what everybody knows".

Around the table with Jeffries were Tracy, the Commander, Jennifer Caverner, Black, Walker, Fuller, the South Eastern Area Security Administrator General and the train driver.

The Commander seemed annoyed at all this fuss, his method was to get out into the field and get on with the case in hand, but here he was under higher authority and so it was with reluctance he sat back in the chair at the head of the table.

"Right you are up first" Jeffries indicated to the driver.

"Me?" he seemed somewhat startled, never mind the fact he was now confined in a secure room with some of the highest-ranking Security Service officers in the land.

"Err well there is not really much to tell" he continued "I took the shuttle service from Chalfont up the Chesham branch and got about half way up when I saw the object across the track".

"Did you see anyone about?" the Commander asked.

"I thought I saw a white pickup truck parked in a field a little back down the track from the obstruction but apart from that, no nothing".

"All right" the Commander asked "Then what?"

"I called the line controller at Neasden on the radio, advised him what was occurring and then drove the train back to Chalfont again. Little while later the engineers turn up and head off down there before you arrived".

"That was when I assume you arrived Commander" Jeffries inquired.

"Yes, I arrived just as the all clear had been given from the engineers so I boarded the test run from Chalfont".

"That's when the Ambassador's wife and party arrived?" Jennifer asked.

"About to pull away when there is this hammering on the door and there is an officer from the Metropolitan Division there".

"Did you see a name badge or anything?" Jeffries asked.

The Commander pondered for a moment as he tried to recall a mental picture of the young officer he had seen albeit briefly on the platform a few hours earlier.

"Robinson or something I think, tall, early to mid twenties I'd say".

Fuller began to work his way through the personnel records on his laptop, using what had just been said as the means of narrowing down the potentially complicated search.

"Got anything?" the Commander casually inquired.

"Three male officers called Robinson allocated to Metropolitan Division offices in that area" Fuller replied. "Any of these faces ring any bells?" he asked as he turned the laptop screen towards the Commander.

"Too old..." the Commander commented on the first one, "Too blonde..." was the response to the second photograph on the screen before the third appeared.

"That's him!" the Commander pointed to the screen. "Acquaint me with the gentleman".

"Lieutenant David Robinson" Fuller announced as he read off the screen. "Works out of Harrow for the Metropolitan Division. Been a patrol officer for two years and decorated for bravery no less".

Tracy picked up the phone on the desk and dialled the internal extension number for the Control Room on the floor below them.

"Hello, Its Caverner" she announced "Call the Divisional Commander at Harrow and have them hold onto a Lieutenant David Robinson for us".

"What about the two plain clothes officers?" Jeffries asked.

"Phoney's" the Commander confirmed "Only someone on the inside would have been able to set them up considering where they were."

"Them engineers where wrong as well" the Driver added "The ones that were sent up there were genuine enough but they subsequently disappeared, probably after they had sent back the all clear."

"And there has been no sign of them since then either" the Commander added "They certainly have not reported back to Neasden at any rate."

"So they are probably lying in a ditch somewhere or carted away?" Tracy asked.

"Looks like it" the Commander confirmed before turning to Black.

"And tell me" he demanded to know "Which of your two brain cells had the overheating problem when you decided to have two target protection subjects put on a public train service with minimal protection."

"What are you accusing me of?" Black leapt to the defensive.

"Stupidity above and beyond the call of duty?" Tracy wryly put in.

"The line was closed, the train was not in public service" Black responded.

"No way you could have known that though was there?" the Commander retorted back quickly.

"Are you insinuating something Commander?" Black's attitude became more angry and confrontational.

"Not yet, just warming up" the Commander's response was calm, he was not going to be reiled by this idiot and this he made very clear to everyone else in the room.

"Gentlemen!" Jeffries cut in "This does not help our situation, we have two missing VIP's and we need to find out who kidnapped them, what they did with them and why, and quickly."

"Well let's get on with then" the Commander rose slightly gingerly from his seat "Jennifer, get back to Chesham House and make sure we don't lose anyone else."

"Yes bruv" Jennifer responded causing both Tracy and the Commander to raise a chuckle.

"Fuller" the Commander continued "Pull any CCTV footage we have at Chalfont and Latimer and id the two goons."

"I'm on it" Fuller responded almost out of the door before he finished his sentence.

"Tracy my love, you are with me" the Commander took his wife's arm in his "And you are coming with us as well" he indicated Black.

"What?" Black suddenly looked up surprised.

"Get up off your arse and do something useful" Jeffries reinforced the Commander's order.

With obvious resigned reluctance, Black rose from his seat and begrudgingly followed Tracy and the Commander out.

"You know that sometimes people are born with greatness?" Superintendent Michelle Charles, the duty commander at the Metropolitan Division's Harrow office explained to Lieutenant Robinson who, now at the end of a nine hour shift was looking a little jaded as he stood in front of her desk.

The look on his face turned to one of slight puzzlement at his superior's slightly out of character tone and the nature of the words with which she had greeted his arrival in the office.

"Well my lad" she continued, "Some simply have greatness thrust upon them." At that point she handed across the written copy of the phone call message that the Control Room there had received half an hour earlier, "The pleasure of your company has been requested".

Robinson read the note fairly casually at first until his eyes alighted upon the names mentioned at the end, the names being those of the officers who had requested his presence.

"Bloody hell...." he began to murmur.

"That there" Superintendent Charles continued "is the Security Service equivalent of a Royal Command, which begs the question, what have you been up to laddie?"

"I am not entirely sure" Robinson replied slowly, clearly still taking in the shock of having being summoned by two of the most senior and well respected Security

Service officers in the country as well as a senior member of the United States Central Intelligence Agency.

"Well whatever you have done" Superintendent Charles added "You had better get down to the Tube Station in fifteen minutes to pick them up".

"Yes Maam!" Upon which Robinson headed quickly out into the corridor and through to the car park outside.

It was raining now, not merely your normal mid summer kind of drizzly rain, but an incessant downpour that was seeing huge amounts of water cascading off buildings and flowing down the streets.

"Oh charming!" Robinson thought. When he had returned to the office to end his shift twenty minutes earlier, there was no sign of this weather; indeed there were even a few rays of sunshine visible through the clouds above.

Now, all that overshadowed the patrol car that Robinson drove away in were dark grey clouds and rain that still blocked his vision ahead despite the wiper blades being on their fastest speed.

Driving through the centre of Harrow, he could see that many of the shoppers and pedestrians normally to be found in the Town Centre had already either headed for home or sought shelter as the streets were noticeably empty, even for a late Sunday afternoon.

He paused momentarily at the pedestrian crossing that although green for traffic, still had several people running across it, trying to bridge the open and distinctly wet gap between the combined Bus and Railway Stations and the shopping centre directly opposite.

A gap appeared in the stream of pedestrians allowing him to move off slowly. He decided to park on the left hand side where the overhanging roof of the adjacent Bus Station afforded a little shelter from the incessant inclement weather.

As he turned off the engine, Robinson looked out across the car through the passenger side window at the steps that led down from the entrance to Harrow-on-the-Hill Underground Station and the small numbers of people that were making their way to and from the Station in a small but constant stream.

On platform 4 of the six platform Station, a typical eight-car formation of London Underground 1960 'A' stock arrived. The whirring of its electrical motors that powered its progress, coming to a stop amid the squeal of brakes and the sloshing of collected rainwater being propelled forward by the momentum of the train stopping.

The red painted doors along the sides of the eight carriages slowly slid open, the hollow metal of their construction adding to the sound effects.

"Oh great!" the Commander commented rather abruptly as he stepped out into the rain from the rear most carriage which on westbound services like this one bound for

Uxbridge, was some distance from the shelter of the station buildings at the opposite end of the platforms. The Commander's extensive knowledge of the complex London Underground railway system meant that this must have been a rare mistake on his part.

Fortunately Tracy had had the foresight to bring an umbrella and put it up over herself and her husband as she followed him out onto the platform.

"Where's that FBI bloke?" the Commander asked looking around them as they made brisk progress down the platform in the direction of the exit.

"CIA" Tracy corrected "and he had the sense to get on the front carriage" Tracy muttered under her breath as they reached the edge of the platform awning and the limited shelter it afforded.

"What was that?"

"He's over there" Tracy pointed to Black who was standing looking a little impatient by the stairway that led up from the platform to the ticket hall.

The Commander mumbled something unintelligible under his breath but Tracy guessed it was probably something uncomplimentary about Agent Black as they walked up the left hand side of the stairwell, battling against oncoming passengers who, as is customary were walking down the side of the stairs reserved with large wall mounted signs for those travelling up.

Having successfully passed through the ticket barriers, the Commander smirked with amusement as he looked back to see Black merrily sail towards the ticket barrier with smug confidence, slide his ticket in, proceed forward expecting to be allowed through then coming to a grinding and sudden halt as the ticket was rejected, the quaint 'Seek Assistance' message came on and the barrier refused to open.

"Problem?" the Commander enquired. Black looked back at him with a scornful scowl as he extricated himself from the firmly closed barrier and retreated, snatching his ticket from the rejection slot.

"Your ticket is invalid for this zone Sir!" the Station Supervisor on duty informed Black as he examined the small piece of pink coloured card.

"Relax, he's with me" the Commander assured the Supervisor, flashing his identification. Much as he would have loved to have seen Black being humiliated by having a Penalty Fare slapped on him, he resisted the opportunity to indulge in the pleasure.

"My God..." Robinson murmured as he recognised the Commander coming down the steps that led from the Ticket Hall. Up until now he still was not convinced that all this was just an elaborate wind up by his colleagues who were known for that sort of thing.

The Commander had already seen the red Security Service patrol car parked nearby and was heading towards it when Robinson got out, brushed down his uniform which was looking by now a little damp from the weather and approached with appropriate serenity and respect.

"Lieutenant Robinson Sir" he introduced himself with a salute.

The Commander however was never very fond of such formality and quickly indicated as such with a wave of the hand.

"My car is over here" Robinson explained.

"Hey laddie" the Commander pointed generally at his eyes "These work you know" he jokingly informed him. This comment made Robinson relax a little as he opened the passenger side door for the Commander whilst Tracy and Black clambered into the back.

"Right then, drive on lad" the Commander instructed at which Robinson turned the key in the ignition. With an unmistakable groan from the engine, the car failed to start, so with the rain still beating down incessantly, Robinson tried again.

"Don't tell me" Tracy mused as the engine failed to start for the second time.

"Well I for one am not walking!" Black protested with indignancy.

"Pipe down will you?" the Commander barked over his shoulder.

Robinson was understandably a trifle embarrassed at this unfortunate and sudden turn of events that was exacerbated even more by the presence of such high authority in his vehicle.

He cringed inside when he heard himself feebly suggest, "We could always take the bus".

Roger Field opened the driver's door of the Rolls Royce and casually tossed the Sunday papers onto the front seat before taking his place behind the wheel.

Parked outside the newsagents in Lewisham High Street, the Rolls Royce was no longer as conspicuous and out of place as it was when Roger acquired it some thirty years earlier, paid for in full in cash from the proceeds of a particularly eventful evening of poker between himself and a number of the senior members of South East London's organised crime fraternity.

As he sat back, the elderly leather of the seat creaking as it remoulded itself to his body shape, his mind was jarred from his thoughts of the previous night's discoveries by the ringing of the car telephone mounted below the dashboard.

"Field" he replied. "Oh hello Dave, how are you?" David Witherington was Field's number two in his 'business empire', the more modern posher London parlance for organised crime syndicate. He was calling from Field's company offices in the luxurious modern surroundings of the Canary Wharf complex in London's extensively redeveloped docklands area.

"Fine thanks boss" he replied before expressing the concern about which he had called "The Mannierie's may be involved in something big".

"Any word on what it is?" Field enquired.

"Don't know but I also heard a whisper that your discovery last night, they worked it out just this morning".

"Does young Mannierie know yet?" Field's concern was clearly growing judging from the change in his tone of voice.

"I reckon so" Witherington replied "and apparently the op that their lot is currently on is likely to bring your old friend and Mannierie together".

"An explosive combination" Field concluded "We need to set up a meeting immediately".

"Try it now" Tracy called from beneath the bonnet of Robinson's patrol car. With a further turn of the ignition key the car thankfully burst into life leading Tracy to slam closed the bonnet and return to the rear passenger seat.

"I may not be the world's best driver on four wheels," she boasted "but at least I know what makes them tick".

Black who was still seated in the back just mumbled something incomprehensible; it was clear he was not comfortable about the situation and that he really didn't want to be there.

"Cheer up" the Commander tried to cheer up Black without much success "at least we don't have to walk now" he added as Robinson pulled back out into the traffic flow that was still methodically plodding through the centre of Harrow-on-the-Hill's rain soaked streets.

"Lima Tango Zero One from control, receiving over?" the radio on the Commander's belt burst into life.

"Yeah go ahead?" the Commander enquired just as the car pulled into the rear yard of the Harrow Security Service offices.

"A Mr Sandy Lodge seeks an urgent audience with you at the earliest opportunity" the despatch officer replied.

The Commander's mood changed from one of casual relaxation to one of concern at the mentioning of the name, something that Tracy noticed immediately.

"Tell him twelve o'clock" the Commander replied.

"What was all that about?" Tracy asked as they got out of the car having arrived at their destination.

"Eh?" the Commander suddenly became unusually evasive "Oh just a little unfinished business".

Within a few moments the three officers and Black were inside the office building and Robinson showed them upstairs to the general office.

"We can talk in here" Robinson announced as he opened the door and showed his guests inside the pretty typical general duty office, the various desks and walls covered with notices and papers of every hue and description.

"Right then lad" the Commander began as they sat down around one of the desks "Chalfont & Latimer station earlier today and from the top please".

"Oh right" Robinson replied now realising not only what all this was actually about, but also realising who the senior officer he had briefly spoken to earlier that day actually was.

"Well" he began "I was just coming back from looking into a burglary in Latimer when I get a call to go and meet two blokes from the VIP division who needed a lift".

"Mmm" the Commander mused whilst Black just looked oddly disinterested "Go on".

"Well anyway, I go and pick up these two guys and the two ladies with them, sling them in the motor, bit cramped mind you, and drive them down the road to the station".

"Whose idea was it to use the train?" the Commander mused.

"Some idiot named Black" Robinson replied clearly unaware who the third man in the room actually was.

Tracy braced herself to grab Black but strangely he didn't seem to react as Robinson continued.

"Well anyway I drive them to the station, speak to the Station Master then handed them over to you and that was the last I saw of them, why what happened?"

"Well" the Commander continued "The two ladies were kidnapped and the two officers were phoney".

"Thought something wasn't right about them" Robinson replied

"Where did you pick them up?" Tracy enquired.

"Couple of miles down the road" Robinson continued "They said their helicopter had broken down and that a car couldn't get through from Chesham because of an RTA"

"All very convenient" Tracy muttered.

"Except for one odd fact" Robinson added, "there wasn't any RTA's this morning around there".

"Can you describe the two phoney officers?" the Commander asked. Despite having also been in their presence earlier that day, his memory of that mornings events had been rendered a little fuzzy by the blow to the back of the head.

"Tall, broad shouldered, bit thick looking" Robinson recalled "Have to admit I wasn't really paying a huge amount of attention to them to be really honest".

"Would you recognise them again?" the Commander enquired.

"Possibly" Robinson replied, "I could give the artists impression boys a go as well if that would help"

"Go for it" the Commander encouraged "and stay in touch".

"Sir, this is hot off the press" the office assistant placed a communiqué on the desk in front of Sir Richard Crowthorne who was about to go for lunch. He silently thanked the deliverer as she left, quietly closing the office door behind her.

Crowthorne let out a heavy sigh as he looked at the yellow piece of paper in front of him wondering whether to leave it for now and seek the mysteries of the canteen's menu offerings or read it now and wing it.

"In for a penny..." he thought to himself as he picked up the note, deciding that the canteen could wait for now. His attitude was casual and relaxed as he began to read the poorly reproduced type that had come from the department's well used and indeed worn out teleprinter down the hall.

He held it closer to his eyes to make out some of the text, at the same time making a mental note to authorise some new equipment for the communications section. Despite the teleprinter's deficiencies however, the message was readable and the sudden tenseness that he showed as he read on clearly demonstrated that its impact was none the less for it.

Crowthorne quickly picked up the phone and called down to communications coordination section. "Get me our two agents shadowing Echo 1 on the phone and hurry".

He tapped his fingers on the leather inlay surface of his desk in worried impatience as he waited to be connected through.

"Geoff? Yes it's your boss; please tell me you still have sight of Echo's 1 and 2" he enquired with clear concern.

The reply was crackly and slightly distorted as it was being partly sent over portable radio sets but the message itself was unfortunately clear enough "We still have Echo 2, she is on her way back to Holborn" Geoff replied.

"And the Commander?" Crowthorne was dreading the answer to this and his fears were quickly confirmed.

"Gave us the slip about ten minutes ago".

"Damm!" Crowthorne responded as he slammed down the phone. All remaining thoughts of lunch were now confined to history as he grabbed his coat of the hook on the wall alongside his desk, "Terri?" he called to his secretary through the door of the office "Have my car brought around the front pronto!"

"This is a communication from the AANF" Tracy read from the printed out e-mail on the desk in front of her "All American domination of the world must stop" she continued "The US President is an idiot and the relatives of his UK patsy will die if he signs any NATO treaty, we will be in touch".

"Sounds like a charming bunch of people" Fuller commented from the other side of the desk in the Commander's office "Thing is" he added, "no one has ever heard of the AANF, not even that CIA idiot Black".

"Yes, and why send it to us" Tracy wondered "or more precisely the Commander".

"Sent by someone who doesn't know him very well" Fuller chuckled "He hasn't a clue how to work the e-mail system, that's why you do it".

"Ah well, get copies of this to Jeffries and Black and see if you can trace where this came from, it might give us a lead" Tracy passed the paper across to Fuller.

"I'm already on it" Fuller responded as he turned to leave.

"And find out where that husband of mine has got to will you?" Tracy asked "He's been gone nearly three hours now".

"Nice afternoon for a walk" Field commented as through the gloom of a torrential downpour, he recognised the uniformed figure of the Commander who, umbrella over his head, was peering off into the misty obscured distance from the end of the up

island platform off down the long length of the four track formation that stretched off beyond out of sight.

"It's been a while" the Commander replied looking around.

"Oh about twenty years" Field replied with a wry smile as the two men exchanged warm handshakes.

"So to what do I owe the pleasure?" the Commander inquired as the rain continued to pour down incessantly hard.

"The Mannierie's" Field replied, an answer that he could tell by the Commander's body language he was expecting "They know who you are".

"Well" the Commander responded with a slight sigh "I guess it had to happen sooner or later".

"Yeah well Mannierie Junior is who you should be worried about" Field advised.

"Yes so I heard".

"From MI5?" Field asked

"How did you know that?"

"Friends in low places mate, friends in low places".

The Commander leaned forward on the metal barrier that guarded the end of the island platform, "Tell me" he asked as he saw the piercing high intensity beam of an approaching train's headlight pierce the gloomy mist from some distance away "Do they have anything to do with this American business?"

"They are the hired muscle" Field explained "I have a friend on the inside of their organisation"

"Who on the side works for MI5?"

"Exactly and he reckons the whole operation is being co-ordinated by someone on the inside" Field added.

"What MI5, Security Service, CIA?"

"You tell me" Field responded as the train in the distance drew closer "but whoever it is, they are well covered and connected, not to mention financed".

"I suppose I better go and play spot the phoney then" the Commander mused, his words almost drowned out by the noise of the eight car train of northbound 1962 'A' stock pulling into the station.

"This is getting a little public" Field commented as he watched a small number of people get off the train.

"Stay in touch" the Commander urged.

"You can bet on it".

With a parting smile, the Commander tagged along on the rear of the passengers making their way off the platform by way of the down subway steps to the tiled subterranean passage that ran beneath the platforms and four running lines, intending on crossing over to the up southbound platforms to head back to the City centre.

With most of the passengers turning left and leaving the station, the Commander turned right, however before he had even taken a couple of steps in his intended direction, the pressing of a gun barrel into the small of his back signalled that he was not alone and that someone had other ideas.

"Lima Tango Zero One, this is Lima Tango Control, are you receiving over?" For the umpteenth time Fuller's call went unanswered, just static where he had hoped for the last half hour that there would be a reply from his superior officer.

"Lima Tango Zero One, respond please" Fuller's tone was becoming increasingly frustrated.

"Any joy?" Tracy enquired making Fuller jump as she suddenly appeared over his shoulder.

"Not a proverbial sausage" Fuller responded "Something's wrong, it's been five hours now".

"Err Divisional Superintendent Caverner?" came the voice of Robinson from the doorway of the control room.

"Yes lad?" Tracy replied.

"I have finished with the sketch artist" he added "Think I got them pretty good too".

"Great!" Tracy responded before a thought occurred to her "Are you doing anything right now?" she asked.

"Err no..." came the slightly reluctant reply.

"Terrific, consider yourself seconded to the Transport Division for a while".

"Come again?"

"I need someone to ring round and see if anyone has seen that mad husband of mine" Tracy explained.

"I'm on it" Robinson responded as he sat down behind the desk alongside Fuller and grabbed the phone.

"And see if you can find out who Sandy Lodge was whilst you are about it" Tracy added "I think if we find him, we find the Commander"

"Aye Maam."

"Meanwhile" Tracy turned to Fuller "Pull all the ticket barrier records and station CCTV records, he must have turned up on the trains somewhere".

"I'll start with Harrow and work along the Metropolitan line" Fuller announced as he called up the interactive Underground map on the large screen in front of him and began entering commands, "If he's here, I'll find him".

"And when you have exhausted that possibility" Tracy added "try all the local model railway shops and branches of Burger King".

"Hmm this must be the garden spot of, well where ever we are" Field commented as he looked around inside the darkened prison that he now shared with the Ambassador's wife, daughter and the Commander.

"Battersea" the Commander replied with his ear placed against the wall listening carefully.

"How the hell did you know that?" Field asked.

"Trains going by" the Commander explained indicating the direction through the wall he had been listening "I can hear Networker type electrical motors and the Gatwick Express, only half a mile of track has that combination in the central London area".

"Fascinating...." the Ambassador's wife commented distinctly unimpressed although now much calmer about the situation.

"So how do we get out of here then?" Field commented.

"Oh I have a few ideas"

"The money in the bag, lady!" the voice was violently insistent and backed up with the waving of a six shot revolver.

"Any unit in the St Paul's area" Tracy's radio announced in the basement car park of the Holborn office "Silent alarm, robbery in progress at the Lloyds TSB bank at

Cheapside, advise caution as three or more suspects believed to be armed and still on the premises".

"Lima Tango Zero Two, show me on way" Tracy called as she mounted her red Security Service Honda Pan-European motorcycle and started the engine; "I'm two minutes away tops".

"Ere!" Robinson called "There's some lunatic hearing up High Holborn the wrong way on one of our motorbikes". He pointed out the speeding red motorcycle, two-tone sirens and blue lights in full use, disappearing off across the crossroads and into the distance.

Fuller looked up from his coffee as he sifted through the files on the table in the staff canteen, its windows looking down across the High Holborn, Southampton Row and Kingsway intersection.

"Probably Superintendent Caverer" he remarked casually "Happens all the time around here".

"Oh...."

"All right what have we got?" Tracy asked the two City of London Division patrol officers who were against the front wall of the bank, staying out of sight of the gunman or men inside.

"Two, possibly three gunmen" the first patrol officer replied in a hushed tone before a more obvious question occurred to him "Transport Division?"

"Feel that rumbling under your feet?" Tracy asked casually as she looked carefully around the corner to see what was happening inside the bank "That's the Central Line, besides I was in the neighbourhood".

More Security Service vehicles arrived without sirens and pulled in out of sight of the bank's interior and its occupants.

"Hello" the second patrol officer with Tracy commented as he pointed across the other side of the road at a colleague who was secreted in a doorway. She was waving her arm frantically to attract their attention.

"Hasn't she heard of a radio?" Tracy asked

"Flat battery probably" one of the patrol officers commented.

"Well what is she signalling then?" the second patrol officer wondered.

"Down!" Tracy called out as the door of the bank swung open and the first gunman through the door, realising they had been quietly surrounded, let out a volley of shots

from a semi-automatic weapon that riddled the street and the vehicles within it with gunfire.

No sooner had the echoes of the gunfire begun to die down than the gunmen had retreated back inside, Tracy however was not in the best of moods and as senior officer on site, decided to do something rather rash.

"Right that's it, now I am annoyed!" she announced to all and sundry as she drew her gun from the belt holster and checked it was correctly loaded.

"Well now what are we going to do?" one of the obviously less experienced gunmen asked as the senior most one let off a fresh volley of bullets in the direction of the front windows, sending a stream of shattered glass fragments cascading onto the pavement outside.

"Security Service!" Tracy's voice called from outside "You are surrounded!" she continued "Put your weapons down and come out with your hands up!"

"With all due respect lady, up yours!" the lead gunman responded, his message backed up by a further volley, some of which narrowly missed Tracy who was stood with her back to the front door pillar, her gun ready.

"All right then, if that's how you want to play it...." she commented to herself, before all her pent up aggression from the day culminated in Tracy swiftly turning into the bank, through the shattered remains of the glass doors and with a single swift shot, taking out the lead gunman who fell instantly to the ground in a crumpled heap, his weapon falling from his hand and crashing to the floor.

A gunshot ricocheted past Tracy as one of the other two gunman instantly reacted but before the echo of his attack had even faded away, he too was falling to the ground after she quickly reacted by rolling to the ground and firing off a second shot.

In an instant, the third gunman was disabled, having been distracted by what was happening to his accomplices, he found himself bundled to the ground by bank employees.

"Now then" Tracy remarked as she stood over the now disarmed surviving robber, one foot firmly placed on his chest "are we going to be a problem?"

"Hey excuse me!" Field called "We got a medical emergency in here!"

Field's accompanying banging on the steel walls of their confinement location duly brought him the attention he was seeking as the clang of the clasp holding closed the door from the outside, was heard as it was cautiously opened.

"Back away from the door!" came the stern call from the other side.

"Ok!" Field confirmed as the door was opened and two of the men who earlier had been involved in the kidnapping, entered, proceeded only by the barrels of guns pointing forwards cautiously.

"What's wrong?" the taller of the two henchmen asked.

Field indicated over to the far corner of the room where the Ambassador's wife was knelt over the still and lifeless Commander who it appeared had collapsed.

"It's the Chief here" Field indicated.

"He suddenly clasped his chest and passed out" the Ambassador's wife confirmed as she continued to nurse him.

The lead henchman thought about the situation for a few moments, the Commander's well know diet of chips and little else was well publicised and therefore this scenario certainly seemed more than a little credible.

As the henchman went over and knelt over the Commander to look at him, his accomplice followed close behind upon which Field took his chance and stepped in behind the second man.

"Evening" the Commander suddenly commented as he grabbed the gun from the first man's hands, his action accompanied by the Ambassador's daughter bringing down the full force of a length of timber across the back of the man's head.

Before he could react to what was happening, the second man followed unconsciously to the floor thanks to Field's similar efforts.

"I can not believe they fell for that old one" Field commented as he picked up the two men's guns and tossed one over to the Commander who by now was back on his feet.

"An oldie but a goldie" the Commander replied "Shall we?" he indicated the way out.

"Great" the Administrator General mumbled mostly to himself as he got out of the back of his car outside the bank and surveyed the scene before him "This is all I need".

As he made his way through the mass of Security Service vehicles from various divisions from the City of London through to the Scientific and Forensic Service, that where parked all over the place, he espied Tracy's distinctive patrol motorcycle parked up nearby and quickly realised who the senior officer involved in the report he had received was.

"All right Superintendent Caverner" he called in his loud booming voice as he entered the bank "What's happened then?"

"Well" Tracy began the tale of woe "We've got two dead robbers, one in Casualty with the mother of all headaches, rush hour has just begun, most of the main road between the West End and the City is shut and then there is this mess" she looked around her at the floor covered with shattered glass fragments and spent bullet casings which were being looked over by the white suited experts from the Scientific & Forensics Division.

"Sir" one of the Forensics' Division called causing both Tracy and the Administrator General together to go over to where the officer was kneeling down and picking up a revolver off the floor, carefully placing it in an official clear plastic evidence bag.

"Security service issue" the Administrator General commented as he took it from the Forensic officer and looked it over in his hands "old one too, not many of our guys use the old six shooters anymore".

"Err what's the issue number?" Tracy enquired, her look of concern obvious.

"810514" the Administrator General read from the embossed stamped digits along the spine of the handle grip, "Ring any bells?"

"Oh yes" Tracy responded with a grim look.

"Excuse me". Before the henchman could respond to the tap on the shoulder he suddenly found himself confronted by the Commander who swiftly rendered him unconscious. As he fell backwards, Field caught him and dumped him gently into the chair from which the man had arisen just a few moments earlier.

The Commander picked up the unconscious man's gun and passed it the Ambassador's wife who reluctantly took it, "I know" he replied seeing her reaction "I don't like them either".

Opening a secured door that the recently despatched goon had been guarding revealed the three missing Underground Engineers who were understandably surprised by the Commander's arrival.

"Evening gents" the Commander commented.

"Would someone mind telling me what the hell is going on?" the engineering supervisor commented as he rose from the bench he had been lying on and stepped out into the light.

"A very good question" Field commented as together the rather peculiar looking party headed for the exit.

"Bloody hell, you were right" Field called as he opened the door of the building and surveyed the scene outside, the four tall white washed chimneys of the disused Battersea Power Station dominating the scene opposite the abandoned open concrete and weed covered ground.

"Told you" the Commander replied with a wry smirk.

"So what's the plan?" the Ambassador's daughter asked.

"Firstly we need to get you two ladies to a place of safety" the Commander concluded "And we need to make sure we make the most use of the time we have before the Mannierie's realise they have lost their hostages, to find out exactly what the hell they are up to."

"Take my telephone" Field handed the Commander his mobile telephone "I am going to call in some favours and as soon as I find out something, I call you."

"Meanwhile" the Commander turned to the three engineers "You three make yourselves scarce until tomorrow and I will have to do the same."

"There's never a cab around when you need one" Field commented as he surveyed the surrounding desolate industrial wasteland.

It was getting late now, the darkness of early evening began to draw a dark blue hue across the city skyline and the street lamps flickered into life as Tracy surveyed the scene from the window of the office she shared with her currently absent husband.

"Right" Fuller announced, "This is what we have got"

"Shoot" Tracy urged as she sat behind the Commanders desk and lifted a mug of coffee from the desk.

"The Chief gets a message at some time this morning mentioning something about a Mr Sandy Lodge" Fuller began. "We have him on the CCTV system at Harrow station shortly there after but then after that nothing"

"Tried a trace on his ID Card at ticket barriers?" Tracy asked.

"Yep, turned up didily squat" he replied. Fuller was about to continue when a knock at the office door interrupted his train of thought.

Sir Richard Crowthorne was at the door "Mind if I join the party?" he enquired.

"Feel free" Tracy urged indicating the spare seat in the room on the opposite side of the desk.

"The gun was his wasn't it?" Richard asked.

Tracy nodded in a seemingly regretful manner "Trouble is we don't know who our three robbers are as City of London have them" she responded "They don't come under our jurisdiction".

"Well you didn't hear this from me" Crowthorne responded in a more hushed tone "but all three are on our surveillance list, Mannierie's more younger employees".

"Which means he is either dead or trussed up somewhere" Tracy added as she rose from her seat and went over to the window and surveyed the city skyline outside, in reality however she was trying to hide the fact she was nearly coming to tears.

"Robinson?" Tracy asked without turning away from the window "Did you find any references to a Sandy Lodge in the computer?"

"One" Robinson replied "but it was not a person".

"Say that again?" Tracy asked.

The last remnants of rush hour were dying down now in the lower passageways of Tottenham Court Road tube station, now being replaced by the evening passenger traffic mostly consisting of people on their way to a night out at one of London's many theatre's and other entertainment night spots.

Almost unnoticed by the crowds milling through the tubular shaped tile lined corridors that linked the Central and Northern Lines, was a slightly scruffy looking busker, his saxophone by his side and looking a little careworn through years of constant use.

He looked down at the instrument case on the floor and did a spot of mental adding up of the coins that lay therein, his result caused him to smile a little, a nice bonus he reckoned and there should be a pint out of that lot at least.

"Do you know anything by Derek and the Dominoes?" a voice asked. The busker looked up, revealing the face of the Transport Division's undercover specialist Lieutenant Cassini, a very tall black man with a gentle but serious demeanour.

"You do know Sir, half the world is looking for you, you know?" Cassini told the Commander who had managed to hide his uniform in a much more inconspicuous long raincoat and hat.

"Well I heard something that means I need to be somewhat discrete for a while" the Commander explained, "Can you get this message to its recipients?" he passed over a small slip of paper with a number of names written on it.

"What's happening?" Cassini asked.

"A game my friend, a very dangerous game" the Commander warned as he tossed a five pound note into the case "so watch your back". As the Commander turned to leave and head off down the tiled corridor, he smiled with amusement as Cassini launched into the opening bars of the song 'Layla' by Derek and the Dominoes.

"What are we doing here?" Fuller asked as he, Tracy, Robinson and Sir Richard Crowthorne stepped out onto the up island platform of an outer suburbia Metropolitan Line station.

"Sandy Lodge isn't a man, its a place" Robinson explained.

"Come again, this is Moor Park?" Tracy replied.

"Which until about the mid 1930's was called Sandy Lodge".

"That's how the Chief knew where the meeting was even though it apparently wasn't mentioned in the message" Fuller responded as the party made their way down the length of the platform to the stairway that led downstairs to the subway and the booking hall.

"How can we be sure he was here though?" Robinson asked.

By this time Fuller already had his laptop open and was calling up the CCTV camera footage for the station. "Well working on the theory that he took the first train north from Harrow after he was seen there, that would put him at Moor Park around about here". He tapped a final key seemingly in triumph.

"Can't see anything" Robinson commented as he looked over Fuller's shoulder.

"Well it was incessant rain at the time and with the mist and a slightly fogged camera into the bargain, its not the clearest I'll grant you, but there are definitely two men at the south end of the down island platform" Fuller pointed to two rather obscured figures just visible in the gloom on the freeze framed view.

"Superintendent Caverner?" Crowthorne called. Tracy went over to the kneeling man who was using a pen to poke around in the accumulation of dust and dirt at the side of the subway passageway.

"I may be going mad" he lifted up his pen with something dangling on the end of it.

"Well you are the head of MI5" Tracy added.

"Mmm" he mused "Well anyway but that looks suspiciously like a Security Service uniform insignia letter"

All four officers and one of the station staff who had joined them to see what all the excitement was about, looked at the gold plated metal letter 'L' that was hanging just on the end of the pen.

Fuller pulled out a clear plastic evidence bag from his pocket and opened it, allowing it to be dropped in and bagged up.

"Did you see anything around lunch time today?" Tracy asked the station supervisor.

"No one around here at lunchtime's" he replied "place is quiet as a grave at that time".

"Meaning if anyone came through here" Tracy added, "it is possible they could have gone unnoticed?"

"Pretty much so yes" he added, "There was a car though".

"Car?" Fuller asked.

"Yeah" the station supervisor continued as they made their way towards the ticket office "Moor Park is pretty much one long exclusive private estate so if anyone strange is about, they notice it".

"Fuller...." Tracy began.

"I'll start knocking on doors" he quickly replied, by which time he was already heading outside.

Robinson went back up the subway in search of any more clues that may be there whilst Tracy turned to Sir Richard.

"The Mannierie gang?" she asked.

"Probably" came the grim reply.

"Superintendent Caverner!!" the shout of the duty night shift officer called down the hallway from the direction of the control room.

"This had better be good" Tracy remarked clearly tired and worried although still trying to maintain a sense of authority in trying circumstances.

"Good news and bad news" the duty officer replied.

"Ok shoot"

"The Ambassador's wife and daughter just appeared at the US Embassy in the back of a pre paid taxi" the duty officer advised.

"And my husband?"

"Wasn't with them" came the grim and unwanted reply "but he's OK apparently, he's with some guy named Field".

"Roger Field?" Crowthorne asked as he popped his head around the door.

"Erm yes" came the confirmation.

"You know him?" Tracy asked.

"He is or was the head of the Mannierie's main competition in South London" Robinson explained "In the 1960's and 1970's the two families were great rivals in the London Underworld Criminal Community".

"So what is the Commander doing in the company of a known criminal mastermind dare I ask?" Fuller asked.

"Roger Field" Crowthorne explained "is the Commander's Godfather, his natural father used to work for him"

"So where do the Mannierie's fit in all this"

"Back in 1971, the two families buried the proverbial hatchet and joined forces for the largest robbery ever attempted in London at that time" he explained.

"The Lewisham Diamond Heist?" Tracy asked.

"Hole in one, anyway, the Commander's natural father was the getaway driver but later when arrested, turned Queens evidence against the Mannierie's" he continued "Upshot of all this was that the Commander, his brother, sister and father all were put into protective custody under our Witness Protection Programme".

"Funny old world isn't it?" Fuller commented.

"So where does Field fit into this then?" Tracy asked.

"Wrong place at the wrong time I expect" Crowthorne commented.

Tracy's train of thought was torn away for a moment when another knock on the door heralded Lieutenant Commander Cassini's arrival in the office, looking a bit tatty and the worse for wear.

"Don't tell me" Fuller commented "washday tomorrow!" His comment elicited a smile from Tracy that was a good sign at the very end of a bad day.

"A message from an old friend" Cassini commented as he passed across the small piece of paper he had received from the Commander earlier, across to Tracy.

"There seem to have been a lot of those sort of messages today" she commented with a nod of thanks to the message's deliverer.

After a few moments looking at the message she turned to her staff and Crowthorne gathered therein. "If you gentlemen will excuse me, this is something I need to take care of alone".

"The Presidential motorcade will leave Grovesnor Square at precisely 4 o'clock this afternoon" Commander Jeffries announced. It was the morning briefing for everyone

involved in the Presidential Visit and today was going to be the first full and indeed most complicated day of the three-day operation.

There were however a number of notable absentees from that meeting, a fact not unnoticed by the US Ambassador as he lent across to Jennifer Caverner beside him.

"Where are the Commander and Black?" he asked concerned.

"No-one has seen either of them since yesterday" she replied.

"Pity" the Ambassador mused "I was hoping to thank the Commander in person for the safe rescue of my family".

"Your chance will come Sir".

Tracy seemed better that morning and when the briefing got to an area in which she was responsible, she dutifully looked up and waded into battle by taking up position at the front of the room.

"Right" she began "For reasons best known to the absent Mr Black, the US President will travel between the houses of Parliament at Westminster by way of a specially secured train via the Jubilee Line to Canary Wharf where the NATO conference is taking place this evening".

It was clear Tracy was unhappy at this scenario as she continued her part of the briefing "The train we will be using will be a standard six car train of 1996 Tube Stock, the train itself currently being held in Stratford Market Depot under secure quarantine, an operation being overseen by my second, Commander Fuller".

"Westminster Station will be closed to all in and out bound traffic on both the Jubilee and Circle and District Line's." Tracy continued with her well-practised air of authority.

"District and Circle lines will non stop and Jubilee line services will be suspended between Green Park and Waterloo, a ten minute envelope of no trains will follow the President's train either side".

She could tell that her briefing was receiving the complete and undivided attention of her audience and so she continued. "Upon reaching Canary Wharf, the Presidential party will proceed out of the unused east entrance to the motorcade and there will end the Transport's Division's responsibility for him upon which we'll be left to sort out the mess the early rush hour service will have landed in".

Tracy's last comment raised chuckles as it became clear where her priorities lay, maintaining the transport service was more important in her and her absent husband's mind than some political photo stunt.

"If anyone has any further questions?" Tracy enquired as she surveyed the room.

"Oh good!" she added at the lack of response. "Bye!"

Her indecent haste at departing from the front of the room was noted by many and caused her twin sister to comment when Tracy briefly returned to her seat to collect her briefcase.

"You off somewhere?" Jennifer asked.

"Urgent job on" Tracy offered no further explanation as she discreetly left.

Outside, Tracy strapped her briefcase to the back of her patrol bike and put her helmet on. As she started the engine of the powerful Honda Pan European, she took a casual look around to see where her shadows from MI5 had got to.

Sure enough a slightly suspect car in the corner of the car park caught her attention and she smirked with amusement as she pulled away down the gravel driveway on her way back to the city centre.

Tracy made sure that her shadows were still there discreetly behind her a few car lengths back as she made her way via the Harrow Road into central London. Usually she would have used the advantage of her narrow vehicle to skip through the early morning rush hour but this time took her time, knowing that her pursuers did not have the benefit of that luxury and would have to suffer the normal traffic conditions that plagued the city at that time of an average weekday.

Despite the traffic, it was not long before Tracy was pulling up in the High Holborn lay-by directly opposite the Transport Division Office building. Looking back down towards the traffic light controlled Kingsway Crossroads; she gave a casual cheeky wave towards the MI5 men in their car at the red traffic light in the distance who instantly reacted with bemused expressions.

Standing on the opposite pavement, Tracy reached into her jacket pocket and took out the small scrap of paper that she had received from Cassini late the previous night. The message was simple yet cryptic and designed so that were it to have fallen into the wrong hands, its true meaning would not be discovered.

'234 High Holborn - Ask for Arnold Sands' Tracy read. She looked up at the number above the doorway of the Transport Division Office Building, it was close but not near enough.

Looking down the road in the direction of New Oxford Street, she could see the bank next door. Walking down as far as the bus stop immediately in front of the Bank, she looked at the brass plaque on the wall that gave the formal address of the establishment.

"Getting closer" she muttered.

She looked up at the bus stop flag that proclaimed its location as 'Holborn Station' with the underlining information 'Alight here for Security Service Transport Division Building' seemingly in search for inspiration.

As a large low floor double deck TAL class Trident bus pulled away on a route 55 working, Tracy watched the red rear end of it pull over to the right hand side of the road and enter New Oxford Street before her attention returned to the front of the properties down the left hand side of High Holborn.

On the opposite side of the side street that met High Holborn at that point, the building number 232 was clearly visible so with all the odd numbers on the opposite side of the street, Tracy knew she was close.

Somehow she was not all that surprised when she arrived and stood in front of the establishment that occupied number 234, the toy and model shop, a place the Commander quite often visited when things were quiet at the office nearby so he could add to his model railway collection.

Tracy ventured through the folding glass doors with a little caution, she well remembered the glass sliding doors at her old office in Haychester which would often trap the unwary, since when she always had a slight suspicion of these potentially rather wayward devices.

Inside, the plethora of toys and models of all types, colours and sizes made Tracy feel nostalgic for when she was a child herself. She was tempted to have a look around but there was work to be done.

She approached the model railway section; a plethora of red and dark blue window boxes of scale wagons and coaches filling the shelves alongside the locomotive display cases. Behind the desk and cash register stood a knowledgeable looking man with a grey beard who judging by his body language at seeing a fully uniformed Security Officer walking towards him, seemed to be anticipating Tracy's arrival.

"Morning madam, how can I be of assistance?" came his polite enquiry.

"Arnold Sands please" Tracy requested expecting that the man probably was the person she was seeking.

"Ah yes" came the reply as he knelt down behind the counter and produced a small red window box which contained a 4mm scale Hornby open wagon with the name of Arnold Sands on the side.

"Oh" Tracy responded slightly quizzically as she took the box in her hand and looked at it, clearly she did not see that one coming.

"Shall I put it on your husband's account?" the gentleman asked.

"Might as well" Tracy replied still slightly puzzled.

"Oh and let him know his 08 shunter is in" the man added.

"I will" Tracy added not having a clue what an 08 shunter actually was, "Thanks!"

'SECURITY QUARRINTINE AREA - KEEP OUT' read the signs that surrounded the No 1 road of Stratford Market London Underground Depot.

The six-car train of 1996 Jubilee Line Tube Stock ticked quietly to itself as surplus air bled from the braking system and the motors hummed quietly in readiness for the call to service.

"Morning!" a shrill American accent called down the length of the shed. Fuller popped his head out of the leading drivers cab to see who it was.

"Morning!" he replied "And you are?" he asked the tall black smart suited gentleman who was approaching.

"Morgan Davidson" he responded with a friendly smile that matched the cheery disposition "Presidential Security Advance Party".

"Commander Fuller, Security Service Transport Division" The two men exchanged a warm handshake before Fuller passed an orange hi visibility vest to the American.

"Safety rules" Fuller explained "Whilst you are in the depot, you need to wear one of these".

"Righty-o!" Davidson quickly put on the vest and after checking that he could still easily reach the discreetly hidden automatic weapon beneath his jacket, proceeded to walk with Fuller down the length of the train.

"A few things you need to know" Fuller continued "The train has been fully swept for anything and anyone undesirable and quarantined and there will be a final check over by the dogs before departure from the depot".

By now they had reached the third carriage "This car will be where the President and his party will travel" Fuller continued "and you guys will have a control unit set up in the leading car up the front".

"Terrific" Davidson was clearly impressed "Now all we need is a deck of cards!"

"By the way" Fuller enquired as an aside "I don't suppose you have seen Agent Black by any chance?"

"She's back in DC on maternity leave" Davidson replied which provoked an understandably surprised look from Fuller "Why, do you know her?"

"Well in a way" Fuller was clearly newly puzzled by the response to his enquiry "Would you excuse me for a few moments".

He quickly sought the discreet privacy afforded by the front drivers cab of the train alongside as he reached for his radio. "Lima Tango Zero Three to Lima Tango Zero Two", Fuller paused for a moment and looked around to ensure there were no eavesdroppers during which Tracy responded.

"Zero Two, what's up?" she replied.

"You're not going to believe this"

It was back aboard the No 8 bus for Tracy as she made her way through the West End of Central London by way of Oxford Street and then New Bond Street.

Sat on the bench seat over the rear nearside wheel arch, she opened the red and yellow window box and pulled out the model wagon. Tracy admired it for a few moments, impressed with the reproduction of even the finest printed details in such a small scale.

Just as she turned over the beige plastic packaging in her hand, a slip of paper fell to the floor of the bus that Tracy quickly stooped down and picked up. Unfolding the paper, a hand written message appeared in a familiar hand writing, which Tracy scanned quickly.

The change in her facial expression saw that she was in some way relieved by what she read in front of her and she seemed to relax a bit more.

"You are going to Green Park?" Tracy asked the conductor who nodded in confirmation as she leapt majestically from the lower deck floor to the first step of the rear staircase before ascending upstairs to collect more fares.

Familiar territory was covered for Tracy as the Routemaster bus turned into Berkeley Square, fortunately with passengers and without incident this time much to the relief of the Irish lady conductor who had suddenly felt somewhat worried when she saw Tracy board her vehicle back at Holborn.

Tracy noted the discreetly parked green Toyota car by the end of the road that led from the Square to Piccadilly immediately opposite the famous Ritz Hotel, two suited gentlemen inside and she also noted a second vehicle, a white transit van again with two well dressed gentlemen inside, parked on the other side of the road.

She smirked with amusement at the way MI5 now appeared to be doubling their efforts to keep track of her, it was a pity, she thought, that they managed to lose the Commander.

"Green Park, alight here for Buckingham Palace!" the conductor called out in a shrill distinctive Irish tone. Tracy alighted from her seat and, having tucked the now repacked wagon in her uniform pocket, stepped off the rear platform of the bus onto the pavement and surveyed the scene as behind her the bus pulled away continuing on to its intended ultimate destination of Victoria Station.

The green Toyota had started to pull out onto Piccadilly in casual pursuit of Tracy, the Transit Van was soon following closely behind. Turning away, Tracy discreetly

pressed the call button of her radio three times, a move which to anyone observing her would seem to be of no relevance.

Looking up and down the road, she carefully stepped out as a gap in the traffic allowed her at least across the first half of the road before pausing, taking a brief look aside to ensure her pursuers, now all out of their vehicles and gathering behind her on the pavement, were still following.

Now on the opposite side of the road, Tracy paused to purchase a copy of the Evening Standard from the newspaper seller before taking the steps down through the main entrance and into the main ticket hall of Green Park Underground station.

She strode casually through the bustling ticket hall, acknowledging the presence of the Station staff looking on from the Station control room.

At the ticket barrier, she looked up at the tall black man in bright blue London Underground uniform who opened the gate to let her through. Once again the many undercover talents of Commander Cassini was proving useful as he smiled at his Commanding Officer and discreetly passed to her a set of keys.

"I would take the Jubilee and then change for the Piccadilly" he advised as though he was passing on train running information.

"Thanks!" Tracy responded before striding off in the direction of the Jubilee Line escalators. Once Cassini had seen her disappear out of sight down into the bowels of the station, he retreated to the small staff control cabin and picked up the telephone.

"Fuller? She's on her way, two grey suits about twenty yards" Cassini looked around for any more uninvited guests "And there are two more gentlemen in tee shirts and jeans lurking by the entrance".

Cassini looked up as one of the CCTV cameras nearby moved around under the remote control of Fuller over at Holborn's control room, in the direction of the two men indicated.

"Hello there" Fuller responded with a wry smile as he saw the two men on his screen.

"They ain't ours" Sir Richard Crowthorne commented as he looked over Fuller's shoulder.

"And the two suits?" Fuller enquired.

"Two of mine" Crowthorne confirmed "But as to who these two characters are, I've no idea".

Tracy stepped out onto the Jubilee line northbound platform just as a train arrived. Looking up at the next train indicator beneath the 'Wembley Park 2 Mins' was a scrolling message concerning the forthcoming closure of the line between Green Park and Canary Wharf later that day for the Presidential Visit.

She paid it no mind as she walked a short distance down the platform and ensuring her shadows were still in tow, made it look like she had boarded the train, just as the doors where closing.

As the disembarking passengers dispersed and the train pulled away, Tracy peered around the corner from one of the exit cross passageways in the platform wall and smiled as she saw the two if not confused then at least annoyed suited gentlemen.

What she did not see however as she discreetly made her way up the small flight of steps leading to the passageway to the Piccadilly Line, were the two men in tee shirts from earlier enter into a scuffle with the two suited men.

The large passageway that linked the Jubilee and Piccadilly lines within the lower level's of Green Park station was the newest part of the complex, a recent addition to delete the additional mileage that used to be needed by going up to the surface and back down again.

As she confidently strode down the length of the passageway, Tracy noted the tile work on the wall, a mixed random pattern of silver-grey and dark blue little tiles. It was as she continued along its length that she noticed that the proportion of Jubilee line silver-grey coloured tiles which where in the majority reduced in number the Piccadilly line dark blue ones increased as she headed closer towards the other end.

Finally at the other end, Tracy turned briefly to check to see if anyone was still following, apparently not was the conclusion she drew as she turned right and proceeded through the narrower older passageway around the corner to the top of the stairs leading down to the Piccadilly line platforms, the sound of an arriving train with its accompanying turbulence coming up towards her.

However unlike the rest of the procession of people methodically progressing down to the platform level, Tracy stopped at the top of the stairs and lent up against a dirty dark metal gate that blocked off the way ahead, a darkened corridor whose old style tiled walls where covered in a thick layer of dust and dirt through years of disuse.

The keys she had received now came into play as she calmly looked around whilst discreetly unlocking the gate. When a brief pause in the pedestrian traffic went through, Tracy quickly opened the old gate and passed through.

Closing the gate and locking it again, she quickly disappeared within the darkened gloom of the old Dover Street part of the station.

Unseen by her however as she vanished where the two tee shirted men who instinctively headed past the gate and down to the platform, not even noticing the often forgotten old passageway down which their intended quarry had made her escape.

"Well that definitely isn't him is it?" Fuller looked at the fax that the US Ambassador had just received from the United States containing a brief summary of the real Agent Black's details.

"So who the hell was that other guy?" the Ambassador asked.

"I don't know" Fuller mused "But one thing is for certain, security has been compromised, he knows everything".

"Where's your chief?" the Ambassador enquired "Any sign of him?"

"Nope" Fuller's response seemed grim "And I have a nasty feeling that Tracy's done a runner now as well".

Green Park's massive ventilation and electrical substation equipment occupied much of the area of the old abandoned lift shafts that lay at the end of the dusty and disused corridors that Tracy now found herself in.

Despite the provision of some working bulkhead lights on the bare tiled walls, she still had to squint to see much detail in the gloom. Whilst two of the old lift shafts were bricked up or occupied by electrical equipment, the third was empty and Tracy noticed that someone had drawn an arrow in the dust on the wall pointing towards it.

Inside the empty shaft, the lift equipment having long since gone back when Green Park used to be called Dover Street, was a cardboard box with a neat lid, its cleanliness making it stand out from the general detritus that surrounded and covered everything else.

Inside the box Tracy found a torch, a ticket and a change of clothes together with a note, once again in that same familiar handwriting.

Quickly she took off her uniform tunic and put on the leather jacket that had been provided. Transferring her gun and holster, radio and identification card to the inside pockets, she then placed her uniform tunic in the box, picked up the torch and shone it upwards towards the top.

There would have been a time not so long ago when being in such a dark and enclosed space would have scared Tracy, she had however learnt to overcome her few fears in life but even still with turbulent air from the pressure of trains running through the station, flowing through where Tracy was and up the shaft, she still felt a little nervous.

The only way out however was up that shaft, going back was not an option in case the shadows were still following, or someone worse. So it was with a heavy sigh that she took hold of the first metal rung set in the shaft wall in front of her and began the long climb to the surface.

When the media and a US President come together in central London, you can guarantee chaos will reign supreme. Today was no exception as the presidential motorcade, flanked by a number of Security Service motorbikes, swept majestically out of the courtyard of the Houses of Parliament amid a blinding sea of flashbulbs from both the gathered press and the throngs of onlookers who had joined the usual sea of tourists that regularly clogged up Westminster at this time of the year.

Jennifer Caverner had just finished her last sweep of the lower Jubilee Line platform level, walking from the base level of the vast escalator hall, its numerous levels and numbers of escalators stretching high up to the sub-surface District & Circle line level above.

With all the station occupants bar a few members of London Underground staff and some Security Officers, now out of the station, only the hum of the continually moving escalators, some air circulation equipment and the buzz of the lights broke the eerie silence of what is normally a busy packed and bustling station.

Jennifer walked through to the platform itself, looking along at the far end slightly nervously for a few moments as she recalled the last time she was on this very platform, an experience she would rather forget if she could.

Walking down the length of the deserted dark grey coloured platform, she looked around for anything out of the ordinary. At the far end she checked the wax seal on the emergency exit doors were still secure before reaching for her radio.

"Ok Trevor, we're clear down here" she called, her voice echoing around the vast emptiness of the lower levels of the station.

The usual bustle and chaos of Victoria's main line railway station was added to today by the redevelopment of the adjacent bus station site, demolition of the old metal roof that covered the bus stop bays meant the air directly outside was not only filled with confused passengers and London Buses officials but also was thick with dust and the noise of jack hammers.

Amidst this chaos, Tracy emerged from the other side of Terminus Place and made her way through the throng of people and chaos and on into the main line station itself.

The echoing cavernous nature of the vast overall station roof meant that the concourse echoed with the sounds of trains arriving and departing, tannoy announcements and a hundred different conversations.

Tracy had responded to the message, thinking this was all very cloak and dagger. Trouble was she was now standing there unnoticed amongst the crowds on the concourse and was now unsure as to what she was expected to do next.

As she looked up at the large screen adjacent to the departure boards that was displaying news headlines and weather updates, the usual plethora of tannoy announcements was interrupted by one that stood out. It was in particular the name being paged that caught Tracy's attention.

"Would Arnold Sands please report to platform 20" boomed out the tannoy system echoing all around the station. Pretty much everyone there didn't take the blindest bit of notice as it was not directed at them, Tracy on the other hand quickly realised who the message was actually intended for.

Making her way towards the platforms, Tracy veered towards the right hand side of the station where the highest numbered platforms could be found, passing through the Brighton and South Central lines ticket barriers she came to the buffer stops of platforms 16 and 17, a Brighton Express and an Arun Valley dividing service awaiting the right away.

Around the corner was another pair of platforms, 18 and 19. Eighteen was empty whilst 19 had the East Grinstead service awaiting departure. Tracy looked across and then realised as she looked at the solid wall that ran down the side of the station that there was no platform 20 at Victoria.

At that moment the station platform supervisor signalled the right away to the East Grinstead service and the four car train of elderly 1960's VEP type slam door stock, now with but a few months of service remaining, creaked and squealed as the brakes were released and the train departed, leaving the platform empty.

"Can I help you madam?" came a familiar voice causing Tracy to jump with surprise and turn to see the Commander, dressed in the green uniform of the train operator and smiling with clear delight at seeing his wife again.

"Well love" she replied with clear delight and surprise "you could direct me in the direction of Platform 20".

"Where's your chief?" came the direct questioning of the Administrator General of the Security Service as he entered the control room "And his wife for that matter?"

Fuller looked up from the control desk, quickly changing the CCTV live feed that was on Victoria Station. "No idea Sir" he replied standing up to attention.

"You must have *some* inkling?"

"You are welcome to look through the system Sir" Fuller offered his seat at the console desk before leaving the Control Room as calmly as possible.

Outside in the corridor, Fuller checked to see he was not being observed as he slipped quietly into the electrical room next door where much of the connecting cabling for the Control Room came in.

Inside with the door firmly closed behind him, Fuller searched through the grey cable runs across one section of the confined room, with its air filled with the buzz of electrical equipment and the flashing of a multitude of green and orange indicator lights on the various patch panel units.

Fuller muttered under his breath as he looked through the labels on the groups of cables in one section, "Hainault, Holborn... Waterloo....., Victoria!".

With a firm tug, the Victoria cables were pulled out from their panel connections.

"Whoops...." Fuller commented sarcastically.

Back in the Control room the Administrator General was having trouble with his console controls as he managed to call up all the wrong images.

"Where the heck is this?" he wondered as Fuller returned and looked over his shoulder.

"Hammersmith Bus Station" Fuller, one of the Department's walking encyclopaedias on locations responded "Out of focus and skew whiff mind".

"I was trying to call up the main line railway stations but all I got for Victoria was some weird error message".

Fuller successfully pretended not to know what was occurring as he called up the Victoria cameras and was presented with the same error message that the Administrator General had also arrived at a few moments earlier.

"Must be mice in the cables again" Fuller responded with a gleeful smile.

"Mice?" came the incredulous reply.

"Oh yes Sir" Fuller replied with a wry smile "big buggers, they chew on the cables".

The Administrator General did not look too convinced.

"I've missed you" the Commander murmured in Tracy's ear as they held each other in a warm embrace.

"Pretty much everyone has been looking for you" she replied "Especially me".

"Well it's a long story" the Commander continued as they walked together arm in arm down the length of platform 19, the blaring of announcements and the odd passing pigeon the only interruptions in this otherwise temporarily quiet corner of the station.

"Basically whilst we were being carted about from Moor Park to Battersea" he explained "it was made clear that something is being planned for this evening".

"The President?" Tracy asked.

"I'm afraid so" the Commander sighed "Anyway, apparently the Mannierie's are just the hired help but whoever is employing them has a contact high up either in the Security Service or some group linked to this shindig".

"Hence why you decided to disappear?"

"Exactly. Field is using his contacts in the South London underworld to try and find out who is paying the Mannierie's expense accounts" the Commander added as the rumble of an approaching train began to fill the air, the headlamp on the front of the leading car piercing the gloom as the eight carriages began to snake their way across the point work and into the platform throat.

"Agent Black may be phoney" Tracy advised.

"I knew there was something dodgy about him" the Commander mused.

"Oh here" Tracy passed the Commander's gun from her jacket pocket "You might need this".

"Thanks, where did you find it?"

"Being used in an armed robbery in the City yesterday afternoon" Tracy explained as the front end of the train passed them.

"In here" the Commander motioned towards a doorway in the platform wall that he opened before following Tracy inside.

"Mmm cosy" she responded with amused sarcasm as she looked around the cramped interior of what really was little more than a cupboard.

"Yes but less public" the Commander pulled out a chair for his wife that she gratefully accepted before sitting down himself.

"So when are you hoping to return to the world of the living?" Tracy enquired.

"I am just waiting on a phone call" No sooner had the Commander finished his sentence than the sound of a mobile phone ringing in Tracy's pocket interrupted.

"Now that is what I call comedy timing" she commented as she retrieved the phone and answered it.

"Hello, yes?" There was a brief pause before Tracy removed the phone from her ear and passed it to her husband, "It's for you".

Still even now not being totally comfortable with modern technology, he still had to look at the phone to double-check which way was the correct way up before answering the call.

"Hello?" There was a short pause as the caller introduced himself. "Oh hello Roger".

Tracy made a quizzical look to which the Commander responded by mouthing to her it was Roger Field reporting back on his subversive investigations.

"Right, I owe you a drink" the Commander replied "I'll speak to you later, cheers!" He handed the phone back to Tracy who still looked a little puzzled.

"We have a problem" the Commander announced.

It was like a block of conjoined people as the US President, the British Prime Minister and around 30 agents and security guards arrived in the ticket hall. The two principals could barely be seen in amongst the throng of accompanying individuals as the party swept its way through to the escalators down into the bowels of the station.

For the purposes of the visit, all of the escalators to and from the Jubilee Line platforms were altered to be running down allowing the various members of the party to filter easily and speedily through the station.

The swiftness with which the entourage were swept through the station to the platform where their train was waiting was breathtaking, even Jennifer Caverner waiting on the platform itself was impressed.

Having reached the lower level, the party became more formalised as members of the press awaited the arrival of the two leaders on the platform, the throng of flashbulbs filling the air as they stepped through onto the platform waving and smiling at the publicity. As ever the accompanying CIA agents and British Security Service officers were positioned immediately behind them, ever watchful.

Once the two leaders had been introduced and shaken hands with the Station Master and Head of London Underground, they were shown onto the waiting train.

Within moments all were aboard whereupon Jennifer gave the right away to the driver who closed the doors, the platform edge doors sliding closed in sync with the train's own doors. With all the door open indicator lights going out along the length of the platform, the train pulled away into the running tunnel returning the station to the silence of before.

"Hello Sis!" Tracy called causing Jennifer to almost jump out of her skin as she thought in the silence she was alone down there.

"Blimey its Mad Maxine" Jennifer commented seeing Tracy in her leather jacket. It was unusual for either the Commander or Tracy to be seen out of uniform.

Tracy looked down at her smart if casual attire "It's a long story" she added.

"Your boss around?" the Commander enquired.

"He's at Waterloo" Jennifer replied, "The train is scheduled to make a pause there".

Anyone could see at that moment various trains of thought go through the Commander's mind "When is the President scheduled to head back here?" he asked.

"About three hours time, its a bit of a flying publicity stunt really" Jennifer explained "Why?"

"I need to ask a little favour."

"Right" Fuller announced as he put the phone down and looked across at Tracy and the Commander "They'll all be here inside of twenty minutes".

"Throw them in the main briefing room and get someone to fill them with coffee" the Commander advised, "It's going to be a long night and they are going to need it".

"Right you are" Fuller promptly left the Commander's office to see about the task in hand, closing the door behind him and leaving Tracy and the Commander alone once more.

"I seem to have misplaced my uniform" the Commander commented looking down at himself in slightly battered shirtsleeves.

"Well I better lose the MFP outfit myself" Tracy replied.

"I seem to be rapidly running out of uniforms again" the Commander added as he looked through the somewhat sparse wardrobe in the small annexe of his office.

"Well if you took more care of them you wouldn't have the problem" Tracy sarcastically replied as she joined her husband in the annexe and proceeded to bathe her face at the small sink.

"Ouch! That was low" the Commander added as he stood behind her and put his arms around her.

"I am joking you know" she responded looking up in the mirror at her husband standing behind her.

"I love you" the Commander added kissing Tracy on the side of the neck.

"Whoa!" she responded, this show of affection was unusually impromptu for her husband, "Usually when you get like this, people start shooting at us!"

"The night is young...."

"You're the Administrator General of the entire Security Service darling" came the cry of the Administrator General's wife from the back of the car as he got out immediately in front of the Holborn offices.

"Yes but even then when The Commander calls" he tried unsuccessfully to explain "I am obliged to attend my dear".

"Well don't be late" came the grumpy response from a woman whose leisurely evening that was originally to include the rare event of her husband actually paying for dinner, was now in ruins.

"Yes love" the Administrator General responded closing the car door barely moments before it pulled away. It was obvious who wore the trousers in that family.

"Pleasant evening?" the Commander asked, who had seen the Administrator General arrive and come down stairs in time to witness the whole exchange.

"Thank you!"

"For what?"

"For saving me from the dinner date from hell!" the Administrator General chuckled.

"You're welcome" the Commander responded "But I don't think you will like the substitute plan somehow".

As the two men walked up the back fire escape stairs the Commander, now correctly attired in full uniform had to pause to respond to a radio call.

"Hello yes?"

"How long do you want me to delay the president?" Jennifer asked.

"I need him to be on a train leaving at precisely nine o'clock" the Commander advised "but make it look normal, if you know what I mean".

"Got it!"

The two men arrived on the fourth floor and the quiet of the stairwell was sharply interrupted with the entry into the main corridor where a major hub-bub was in progress as Fuller tried to round up the top brass from several Security Service Departments along with some other organisations and get them collectively into the main briefing room.

"It's like herding sheep" Fuller called over the din "Very highly ranked sheep mind but sheep none the less".

"Good grief!" Tracy commented as she emerged from her office into the midst of the chaos. The Commander looked at his wife in her full dress uniform.

"Best I could find in ten minutes" she explained seeing her husbands look of curiosity
"Besides" she indicated the crowd now starting to file into the briefing room
"considering the company we are keeping tonight, I felt it might be appropriate".

"So who's giving the briefing?" the Administrator General, asked.

"I am" the Commander responded reluctantly.

"Oh now this should be good!"

"Ladies and gentlemen" the Commander began "The last thirty six hours have seen a number of noticeable events connected with the visit to the City of the President of the United States".

"We believe" he continued looking around the room at the amazing array of top brass there present "that an as yet unidentified terrorist group have hired a local old east end family firm the Mannierie's to provide the organisation and muscle for some aspects of this operation".

The director of MI5 took the stand at this point "For some time now we have had surveillance teams following the Mannierie's and we now have identifications on all of them and their likely locations at this time".

"The recent kidnapping of the US Ambassador's family and later of myself" the Commander continued "has been positively linked to them".

He paused for a sip of water before continuing "However at this time the Mannierie's do not know they or I have escaped, with thanks to Sir Robert we has been feeding them false info for the last twenty four hours".

"We are planning to knock not very politely on the Mannierie's doors all across the city at just the moment that they will think they are intercepting the President" the Commander continued. "Needless to say when we hit them, they will be aware they have been rumbled which is why it is essential that we get them all at the same time, Tracy?"

Tracy stepped forward for her part of the briefing "While we are about it, we are looking for this man" she showed the only image available of the man who called himself CIA Agent Black.

"He posed as a CIA Agent called Black, except he skimped a bit on his preparatory research as the real Agent Black in actually in the US and eight months pregnant" A flutter of laughter swept through the room.

"He is the key man in the whole operation we believe" the Commander added "and if anyone finds him" the Commander felt the back of his head still a bit sore from earlier clashes "I owe him a piece of my mind!".

"We also want to find the head elect of the family firm" Tracy stepped forward again with an accompanying picture on the view screen behind her. "Be aware that he is a nasty piece of work who likes to break legs when annoyed and kill people verbatim when moderately provoked which means if you see him, approach with extreme caution, not to mention a lot of guns".

The Commander then returned to the fore "With the entire VIP and several large chunks of the Metropolitan and Transport Divisions on this Presidential junket, we are calling in everyone we can muster, basically the more armed bodies the better, with location assignments being co-ordinated by our friends from MI5" he indicated Sir Robert who was looking a little sceptical now, not to mentioned worried.

"Questions?" the Commander prompted sincerely hoping there wouldn't be, he was to be disappointed however.

"All right Commander" Jeffries enquired, "What do you have in mind?"

The Commander rose from his seat slowly with some clear reluctance. He was in no doubt that what he was about to suggest to the various officers and officials gathered in the Holborn briefing room was either going to be scoffed at or just plain laughed out of the room.

"I want to kidnap the President of the United States" the Commander responded straight out.

The sound of jaws dropping through the floor into the staff canteen below was almost audible.

"Are you insane?" the Administrator General enquired, "That's the barmiest idea I have heard since London Transport suggested articulated buses for route 73!"

"Oh come on, its not quite that bad" the Commander replied not really all that surprised by the reaction.

"Commander?" the new Chief of the Metropolitan Division called from the back, "What about the old man Mannierie?"

"Good question" the Commander responded quite impressed that he was holding a briefing where everyone was actually paying attention for once "He's in hospital, not expected to leave it either except in a coffin from all reports so we are going to leave him be".

"Does the US Ambassador know his family are safe?" another officer asked.

"Yes" the Commander responded coolly "however if anyone asks him, he is under instruction to make them believe they are still missing".

The Commander surveyed the room, he could tell by the expressions that many of the senior brass present were quite happy at the opportunity of getting out from behind a desk and into some action for a change.

"What exactly did you have in mind?" Jeffries enquired.

"The old Canary Wharf two step" the Commander responded "We make a big public display as requested of the President and his party sweeping majestically into the station. The place is big enough so that should not be a problem".

The Commander paused and sat down before continuing with the plan, which at that moment only existed in his head.

"We sweep them onto the train in the full glare of publicity then at the next station Canada Water, an identical train with seemingly identical personnel on board will travel ahead of it while the proper train is unloaded and the President discretely whisked away via the East London Line through to Chesham on a special train that will to all intents and purposes appear to be an out of service driver training run with just a few people on board".

"And what is supposed to happen to the President's train?" Jeffries asked.

"It will be hijacked by a large number of unpleasant people at Westminster where they will find that the entire train is in fact occupied by ready and armed Security Service officers" the Commander explained.

"We may get a few holes in the paintwork but the bad guys will not be travelling any further other than straight to jail". The Commander was triumphant in his response.

"You know if this goes wrong, all hell will break loose" Tracy warned.

"When does anything else ever happen around here?"

"Finally" he added "What has been revealed in this room, stays in this room" he paused for a little dramatic effect and to judge that his final message had been clearly understood "Right, lets go!"

Despite it being early evening, it was still light and the streets were still filled with tourists, many of them hanging around for the events surrounding the US Presidential visit. Many of them suddenly found themselves having to run out of the way as a veritable convoy of Security Service vehicles with sirens and lights blazing at their fullest extent passed.

This scene was repeated across the Greater London area as numerous officers and members of other Services headed to their assigned targets.

Heading down Whitehall at the head of the convoy bound for Westminster Underground Station, the Commander was starting to regret letting Tracy drive his patrol car. On two wheels she was probably the best driver in the Service, however on four wheels, she never really mastered it quite right.

"Steady love!" he called out clinging on to the handrail above the passenger side door as if for life itself.

"Lamppost" he called out "LAMPOST!!"

"Minding the lamppost..." she responded with an appropriately timed swerve that caused the Commander to fall forward and knock open the glove compartment.

"Great!" he called out as he looked down at his uniform trousers, now covered with crushed biscuits and old chip wrappers that had descended from the glove compartment where he had stashed them over previous weeks.

"When we get back to the office, I am booking you on the advanced driving course!" the Commander added

"It'll never work!" Tracy enthusiastically added as she slammed on the brakes outside Westminster Station.

"Well..." the Commander mused as he retrieved his gun from the holster and checked there was actually some bullets in it "It was worth a try".

Having entered the ticket hall of Westminster Station, the Commander stopped abruptly at the ticket barriers and spun around to look back behind him at the entrance.

"That should do it" he commented.

"Do what?" Tracy enquired.

"Make whoever is behind this, think we have taken the bait".

"Ok" Tracy responded clearly confused, the Commander often had moments when he made little sense but this was up there with the best of them.

"So now what?" she asked.

"Get to Canary Wharf as fast as possible" the Commander announced "Only this time I'll drive."

"The package is approaching the west entrance now" Jennifer Caverner advised into the radio as she led the Presidential entourage towards the top of the bank of escalators that leads down into the bowels of Canary Wharf Underground station.

It seemed like there were a hundred people all tightly held together in the group that approached the large curved glass canopy entrance of the station, only the flow through the four down escalators and the ticket barriers beyond forcing any momentary break up in the packed throng.

The Commander had engineered it so that there would be waiting passengers held back to one side behind a wall of patrol officers, this being to ensure that as far as the world was concerned, the President did indeed get on the train.

Jennifer led them down the last escalator that led from the vast cathedral like ticket hall down to the lower level and the westbound Jubilee Line platform.

With lots of waving and smiling at the gathered press as they photographed him, the President and his party boarded the train. Remaining on the platform for a moment, Jennifer looked up and down the length of the platform before making for the rear most door and raising her arm as a signal to the driver to close the doors, managing to jump aboard just as the door alarm began and the doors with their accompanying platform edge doors, slid closed.

Spot on schedule, the train began to pull away and quickly picked up speed, plunging into the running tunnel and on to the next stop up the line.

On board the third car, the Commander instructed the President as to what would be happening.

"Take your jacket off" the Commander instructed him.

"Well you had better hold this then" the President replied handing the Commander the smart briefcase he was carrying.

"What's this?" the Commander asked as he took the case allowing the President to get on with removing his jacket.

"It's the nuclear bomb key system" the President advised with a smile "Now you really are a Commander of the Apocalypse!"

"Yikes!"

The Jubilee Line platforms of Canada Water station were quiet that evening. As Tracy stood on the platform looking around, all there was with her were a couple of patrol officers, Robinson and the station supervisor. The only sounds the twin escalators and the sound of an East London Line train pulling away from the sub surface platforms above.

Tracy rocked backward and forwards on her heels and tapped a little tune with her fingertips on her belt mounted gun holster as she waited patiently for the arrival of the train.

Gradually a breeze of cool air began to filter through from the far tunnel portal and accompanying it the low thundering that signalled the approach of a train. Tracy walked a short distance down the platform towards the portal from which the sound was beginning to appear and looked into the distance through the glass platform edge doors.

'Train Approaching' suddenly began to flash up on the next train indicator mounted above the platform and Tracy drew her gun from its holster in anticipation. As she braced herself, the six car train of 1996 series tube stock emerged from the tunnel portal and with its accompanying squeaking of brakes and turbulence gradually came to a stop with its doors neatly lined up with those of the platform edge.

A two-tone beep accompanied the opening of the sets of doors and the Commander, the President and one CIA officer stepped out of one of the middle carriages onto the near deserted platform.

"Robinson" the Commander called beckoning the young officer over.

"Yes Sir?" he enquired slightly nervously.

"Take your jacket off and put this on" the Commander urged handing the young officer the President's suit.

"Sir?" Robinson responded understandably confused.

"Consider yourself promoted to President" the Commander explained.

"Err why me?"

"Because you are the only one here who matches the real ones height and build" the Commander explained as Robinson brushed down his newly acquired suit.

"Nice threads" he commented.

"Careful with that son, that's Government property" the President advised with a smile.

"Here" the Commander passed Robinson's uniform tunic to the President.

"What's this for?" he asked.

"You have just been deputised".

"One minute!" Jennifer called causing a sudden increase in the activity as a significant number of armed Security Service officers from the Special Firearms Unit marched down the escalator and boarded the train as directed.

"Right lets go" the Commander ordered as he watched Jennifer reboarded the train and with a wave indicate it was time to move off.

The Commander watched the train close its doors and depart, accelerating rapidly into the running tunnel, before he led the small party up the escalator to the upper level East London Line platforms.

"Your carriage awaits" the Commander announced as they approached a four car formation of 1960 'A' type London Underground stock that was empty and waiting for them.

"All aboard!" the Commander added as he looked up and down the platform, ensuring that their boarding and departure went unwitnessed except for the station supervisor at the far end and Fuller observing through the CCTV system from the control room at Holborn.

The forty plus year old electric motors wound into life as the train began to move off. At the front, the Commander sat on the second man's side seat in the cab whilst the rest of the party in the carriage immediately behind put on Underground orange high visibility safety vests.

"I thought this was supposed to be a discreet getaway?" the President asked.

"Apparently we will be less noticed if we look like Underground employees on a driver training run" one of the President's aides informed him "at least that is what the Commander said anyway".

The train rumbled on at a modest speed down the line through Rotherhithe and the Thames Tunnel.

"Just passing through Wapping" Fuller announced across the control room. On her perch at the main control console at which she had just arrived having driven at high speed back from Canada Water, Tracy looked on with slight apprehension as she watched the train's progress marked by a red dot moving steadily across the large Underground Network map displayed on the large main wall screen.

"What about the decoy?" Tracy asked.

"Pulls into Westminster in three minutes" Fuller advised.

"Control to Victor Papa X-Ray one zero two" Tracy called.

"Go ahead" Jennifer's voice came over the speakers in the Control Room.

"Your show begins in three minutes, stand by".

"Roger that, wish me luck" Jennifer responded.

"Control to Lima Tango One" Tracy called.

"Go ahead" the Commander responded having to raise his voice above the sound of the elderly train as it lurched onwards, approaching Shadwell.

"Balloon is about to go up" Tracy advised.

"Roger that love, let me know how they get on."

"Are you sure about this?" Robinson asked Jennifer as the train began to slow for its arrival at Westminster.

"What could possibly go wrong?" Jennifer responded with a wry smile.

"I get shot?"

"You'll be fine, trust me".

"If you say so" It was clear that Robinson was still somewhat sceptical about all this. However he had no time now to dwell on it as the train began to arrive at Westminster.

As was expected, the platform was deserted. All intelligence pointed to the intercept probably taking place in the escalator hall that was accessed from the alcove in the platform wall immediately opposite.

Carefully, Jennifer led the armed officers down the platform and towards the alcove. In one swift move they deployed into the tall almost cathedral like escalator hall.

"Freeze" Jennifer called out. However only the sounds of moving escalators and the hum of electrical equipment were there to greet her words and the gun barrels of almost a hundred officers.

"What the..." Jennifer began.

"Maam!" Robinson called from by the chocolate vending machine set into the wall "Something I think you should see here".

He indicated a hand written note taped to the front of the machine addressed to the Commander.

"Nice try. See you later" Jennifer read.

"Ever get the feeling we have been set up?" Robinson responded looking around.

"Sweep the station" Jennifer urged the officers "Now!!"

The officers quickly deployed searching every passageway, stairwell, alcove and platform in the complex as Jennifer and Robinson made their way up through the banks of escalators to the ticket hall level.

Only a slightly surprised Station Supervisor was there, about to open the front gates and reopen the station.

"Victor Papa X-Ray one zero two" Jennifer's radio called.

"Give me some good news" she responded.

"This station is dead, nobody's home!"

"Damm!!" Jennifer's exclamation echoed throughout the near deserted station.

"This isn't on the map is it?" one of the President's aides enquired as the train lurched to the left and began a slow squealing manoeuvre around a tightly turning running tunnel.

"St Mary's Curve leading to St Mary's Junction" the Commander explained, calling back through the cab. "It is the access line between the East London Line and the District but is only used for empty stock moves so officially no one knows anything about it".

"Now where?" the aide asked as he gave up surveying the line maps mounted above the passenger saloon seats and came up to the front cab.

"We take the right hand curve at Aldgate East then follow the Metropolitan Line all the way through to Chesham". The Commander indicated their current location and intended destination with the route between on the track plan he was carrying.

"Well, they are on the upper circle" Fuller announced in the hope of making Tracy relax a little. His efforts where initially successful as she sat down and let a small smile of satisfaction appear, however this moment of positive thinking was about to prove short lived.

"Victor Papa X-Ray one zero two to Control" Jennifer's voice called, laden with obvious irritation and concern over Tracy's radio.

"This is not going to be good news is it?" Tracy responded.

"In the words of that mad boyfriend of mine" Jennifer replied making Fuller look up from his desk with surprise expressed in wide eyes "Euston, we have a problem!"

"No bad guys?" Tracy enquired beginning to see where this conversation was heading already.

"Not a sausage" Jennifer confirmed as she stood outside the main entrance to Westminster Station "Just a note addressed to the Commander saying 'see you later' or words to the effect".

"Fuller!" Tracy called loudly "Where is that train now?"

"Just passed Liverpool Street approaching Moorgate" Fuller responded.

"Lima Tango One from control receiving over?" Tracy called over the radio.

An uneasy silence descended over the room, as there was no response.

"Lima Tango One, where the hell are you?" Tracy's concern was obvious.

"What?" came a mumbled reply.

"Are you eating?" Tracy enquired of her husband although the answer was obvious.

"Of course not" the Commander replied now clearer having swallowed the custard cream biscuit that he had been munching when the call came through.

"Well anyway as much as I hate to take you away from matters of your stomach darling but we have a potential problem" Tracy responded.

"Let me hazard a guess" the Commander mused as the train passed through Moorgate and headed on for Barbican "Our bad guys failed to put in an appearance".

"Got it in one".

The Commander closed the door connecting the driver's cab to the passenger saloon before returning to his radio.

"Get Jennifer to requisition a helicopter" the Commander responded "Anyone's will do, Met Division, RAF, Coastguard, whatever and shadow this train to our destination from Baker Street onwards".

"Got it" Tracy responded, "Where do you want me?"

"Stay put there" the Commander replied "If this goes pear shaped, you will be in charge of getting us out of it".

"Fuller!" Tracy barked across the Control Room.

"Yes Maam?"

"Tell that girlfriend of yours my sister to haul her arse down to Scotland Yard and steal their helicopter!"

"Victor Papa X-Ray one zero two from Control" Fuller calmly called.

"Go ahead" a slightly despondent Jennifer responded as she sat on a bench in the middle of Parliament Square observing the rest of the officers she had arrived at Westminster with load themselves and their considerable weaponry back into armoured Security Service vans ready to depart.

"Urgent message from Commander Caverner" Fuller responded wondering whether to deliver the message as announced or to put it more diplomatically. He decided on the former.

"Shoot" Jennifer urged as she waved off the departing vans leaving just herself, Robinson and a few passers by around.

"Message reads" Fuller responded before briefly pausing "Get your arse over to Scotland Yard and steal their helicopter".

"All received" Jennifer responded arising from her seat. The slight surrealism of the order did not really come as any surprise to her after the day she had had so far.

With a shrill whistle, Jennifer attracted Robinson's attention and he came over to her.

"I don't suppose by any chance you can fly a helicopter can you?" she asked more out of hope than expectation.

"No Maam but I probably could crash one quite well given the chance".

"Come on" Jennifer beckoned as they began to make their way across the square in the direction of St James Park.

"Fuller!" Tracy once again called across the control room "Get yourself down to Euston Square fast".

"Yes Maam" Fuller responded as he relegated any thoughts he had of a quiet night to the proverbial dustbin and headed quickly for the exit.

The Commander looked out of the cab door at the near deserted platform of Euston Square as the train slowed to almost walking pace in anticipation of the signal at the far end clearing, but travelling slow enough to be able to come to a halt in time if it did not.

Only a couple of waiting passengers and one of Metropolitan Division's patrol officers where around as the train braked to a halt at the signal. The officer was there to make sure the train passed through without incident and one of a number of similar officers that the Commander had had discreetly allocated along the length of their journey at each station they passed through.

"According to line control at Neasden" the driver confirmed, "We are going to be here about five minutes".

"Right then" the Commander responded and stepped out onto the platform where the officer joined him.

"Evening Sir" he acknowledged. He easily recognised the Commander even though he was dressed in a hybrid uniform that oddly combined London Underground with the Security Service.

"Any trouble about?" the Commander enquired.

"All quiet apparently" the officer confirmed as the Commander looked up and down the platform.

"Blast!" the Commander commented.

"Something wrong sir?"

"No chocolate machine on the platform" the Commander responded with a slight irritation creeping into his voice.

"Try this Sir" Fuller called as he entered the platform and joined them. Evidently he was thinking ahead as he passed a bar of chocolate to him. "A present from your wife."

"She's a dear isn't she?"

"We're clear" the driver announced indicating the green aspect being displayed by the signal.

"Hop aboard" the Commander stepped aside, allowing Fuller to climb inside and through the connecting doorway from the cab to the passenger saloon.

Closing the cab door behind him, the Commander waved in acknowledgement to the officer standing on the platform before retaking his seat on the far side of the cab.

"Right then, lets go" he indicated at which the driver released the brake and with the hum of electric motors, the train pulled away.

"Flight operations?" Jennifer enquired as she entered the front foyer of New Scotland Yard, brandishing her warrant card at the slightly surprised civilian receptionist seated behind the desk.

"Top floor" the receptionist responded wondering what on earth was going on "Do you have an appointment?"

It was too late for her to get an answer as by then Jennifer with Robinson in tow, were already in the lift with the doors closing before progressing rapidly up the building.

"My wife is going to kill me" Robinson commented as he looked despondently at his watch.

It being early evening, the late shift had already clocked on and many were dispersed throughout London attending to the usual night time incidents that were always to be found around the city. As a result there were but one or two officers on the top floor to witness Jennifer's hurried arrival in their office with Robinson, despite his youthful age, struggling to keep up with her.

"This may sound distinctly daft" Jennifer began to explain to the duty pilot who she had found by the coffee machine, "But I need to borrow your helicopter".

The pilot looked down at the plastic cup of slightly oddly coloured coffee that he had spent the last few minutes trying to get out of the machine. Judging from his reaction to the liquid he had obtained, it was clear that his efforts had not really been worth it, therefore he welcomed this new distraction.

"Do you have any authorisation?" he enquired.

"Will the word of the Deputy Chief of the Transport Division suit you?" Jennifer asked trying to see if she could get away with pretending to be her twin sister.

"That will do nicely". The pilot promptly binned the unsatisfactory cup of liquid and guided the two officers up a flight of stairs to the roof, grabbing his dozing co-pilot from behind his desk as he went by.

"That's not a helicopter!" Robinson exclaimed as he saw the large impressive red and blue helicopter sitting on the roof awaiting its call to duty "That's a lawnmower with delusions of grandeur".

"Don't like to fly then?" Jennifer asked as they boarded through the rear set of doors.

"What ever gave you that idea?" a slightly nervous Robinson responded.

"Right lets go before my colleague here changes his mind" Jennifer urged as the pilot started the twin turbine engines and prepared to take off into the darkening night sky.

"Coming up on Baker Street" the driver called back through the cab doorway into the passenger saloon.

The Commander clambered forward back into the cab, monetarily having to brace himself as the train lurched over the point work that connected the main Metropolitan Line with the north half of the Circle Line.

"Wasn't that a song by Gerald Raffety?" he casually asked as he retook his seat in the cab.

"I think so yes".

The train slowed to a crawl and squealed through the tight curvature of the down main platform of Baker Street Station, a few passengers on the platform observed the train's passing as they huddled beneath the canopies, sheltering from the damp insipid rain that had recently begun again.

It was only a brief sojourn into outdoor air for the Commander and his train as it once again plunged into the tunnel at the opposite end of the station and accelerated having now cleared the curve and the point work at the north end.

Up above, the Metropolitan Division's helicopter, with Jennifer giving directions, hovered overhead and then proceeded off in the same direction as she recognised the

four car train below, standing out from others as all the usual services on this section where normally formed of longer eight car trains.

"Move on up to Finchley Road" Jennifer urged as she looked back and forth between an A to Z map and out of the window at the ground below. Her job was being made steadily more difficult however by the darkness and the beginnings of heavy rain that was distorting her view through the glass.

The Commander looked out as the train continued, passing the ghostly shells of the former Marlborough Road, Lords St John's Wood and Swiss Cottage stations before emerging back on the surface in the down Metropolitan Line platform 4 of Finchley Road.

"There they are!" Jennifer exclaimed as she saw the four grey roofs, illuminated by the station lighting, emerge from beneath the semi protection afforded by Finchley Road's station canopies.

Looking up at the dark sky, the lights of the helicopter were clearly visible to the Commander as they continued to track the train's course steadily down the line.

"Lovely weather" the Commander commented seeing the rain now beating heavily and incessantly on the second man sides windscreen partially obscuring his view ahead despite the best efforts of the wiper blades.

There where a few passengers huddled on the platforms of the stations they passed by who where concentrating more on keeping out of the blustery wet weather while waiting for their own service to arrive than watching the train pass by, its high intensity headlight and light cast from the saloon windows all that separated it out from the dark.

"Approaching Harrow-on-the-Hill" the driver announced. Despite the slightly rough ride from the forty plus year old suspension design of the train, the Commander had in fact managed to nod off and it was only the driver's announcement that brought the Commander back to his senses.

"What?" he asked slightly blearily.

"We where approaching Harrow" the driver repeated as the lights from the station flashed past. "Now we are leaving Harrow instead" he added as the train lurched from side to side as it passed over the complicated point work at the north end of the station and then across the junction that marked the point where the Uxbridge branch went off to the left.

"Oh right" the Commander responded and looked out of the window. Seeing the distant lights of the helicopter still shadowing them was a good sign.

"Lima Tango Control from Lima Tango One receiving over?" the Commander called into his radio.

"Control receiving" one of the despatch officers back at Holborn responded.

"Plan B" the Commander announced, "Re-route all traffic to Sandy Lodge".

"Affirmative".

"What's plan B may I ask?" Fuller enquired as he put his head through the connecting doorway.

"Just a little extra insurance" the Commander responded as he removed his gun from its holster and checked it.

"In case we still have a leak I take it?" Fuller added.

"Exactly" the Commander surveyed the darkened rain stricken gloom outside
"Especially as no one has seen that creep Black for some time now".

In the distance, the platform lights of Moor Park station could be seen, getting clearer as they approached, until finally the train slid almost silently into platform four, stopping with the front car beneath the island platform canopy.

There awaiting their arrival was Jennifer and Robinson, the only people on the platforms in fact. Usually Moor Park was quiet at this time of night anyway and what few potential customers that might have been intending to travel had probably been put off by the awful weather.

"I have two cars and full escort downstairs" Jennifer confirmed "and I will shadow you in the helicopter".

"Right then, if everyone is ready for a little drive in the country" the Commander looked around to confirm everyone was present "Lets go!"

With that Jennifer led the party off the platform down the steps into the subway below, the Commander bringing up the rear having thanked the train driver who had brought them there.

Turning to the left, the party easily passed through the small ticket hall where the barriers had been opened for faster access. Outside, as Jennifer had said, there waited two black saloon cars and four Security Service patrol bikes, their blue flashing lights reflecting off the rain soaked surfaces that where all around.

"President and CIA second vehicle" the Commander indicated "Fuller, Robinson and our friend from MI5 here" he pointed to one of the President's entourage from the US Embassy who just looked upwards with disbelief "You are with me".

"How long?" the MI5 agent enquired as he clambered into the back of the vehicle.

"Since I first saw you looking in the wrong direction back at Canary Wharf" the Commander smirked in response.

The Commander looked around at the convoy and seeing all were safely aboard, climbed into the front passenger seat of the front vehicle and signalled it was time to depart.

Jennifer watched the convoy disappear into the stormy rain before making for the helicopter perched on a grass open area not too far away.

"As days go, I have had better" the Commander commented as he watched the road ahead through the constant backwards and forwards movement of the windscreen wipers that were struggling to shift the huge quantities of water that were falling from the sky.

It was a twenty minute drive through near deserted rural back roads to reach Chesham Manor, the wrought iron gates creaking open eerily like in an old cheesy 1970's horror movie as the convoy passed through.

There was even a few rumbles of thunder now to accompany the additional sounds of howling wind and rain beating through the trees that lined the avenue leading up to the mock Georgian frontage of the manor house where a reception committee of house staff and CIA officers were waiting to receive the President and his party.

Briskly the car doors opened and the Commander led the group inside with the waiting officers and staff bringing up the rear. Once across the marble floored hallway, one aide showed them all into a large room where they gathered.

It was then that the heavy antique oak doors of the room were slammed shut unexpectedly behind them. The Commander standing next to the President swung around to see what at first had appeared to have been CIA Agents and house staff were now aiming automatic weapons at the group.

Agent Black got up from a leather armchair in the corner of the room, an automatic pistol in his hand and smirked as he approached the Commander.

"Good evening Commander" he greeted them "Have a seat please".

"Knew I should have brought a brolly" Jennifer commented as she pulled the collar of her jacket up to try and keep out the worst of the incessant rain that was being thrust around even more thanks to the turbulence still being put out by the helicopter from which she was alighting.

"Evening Sis!" Jennifer looked up to see Tracy approaching, a large golfing umbrella sheltering her from the worst the weather could throw at them.

"Are they in there yet?" Jennifer enquired as she thankfully joined her sister beneath the umbrella.

"Went in about three minutes ago" Tracy confirmed causing her sister to reach for her radio.

"Victor Papa one zero two to Eagle Control" she called.

"Eagle Control" the response came slightly hesitantly from the site control room in the house itself.

"Can you confirm package delivered and wrapped?" Jennifer asked as with Tracy they began to walk across the grass lawn in the direction of the house some five hundred yards away.

"Err yes he's in" the control room responded, "What is your current location please?"

"By the helicopter" Jennifer confirmed as a clear look of puzzlement began to appear across her face, it was clear she and Tracy were of the same opinion that something was not right.

There was a long pause of silence with no reply, just the sound of the wind and rain as Tracy and Jennifer looked at each other, the concern mirrored in their faces obvious.

"Run!" they both said to each other in unison as they ran for the cover of the patrol car Tracy had arrived in which was parked nearby a couple of hundred yards in front of the manor house.

As they ran, an automatic weapon was fired in their direction from a window or balcony high up on the front of the house, the impacts of multiple rounds following the two officers as they ran to the car and ducked down behind it.

"I hate guns!" they both exclaimed in unison as a large explosion rocked the air. They looked across to see the helicopter explode, sending dangerous burning shards of shrapnel in all directions, narrowly missing the crew who had reacted to the gunfire of moments earlier by making a run for cover just in time.

"We are the good guys!" Tracy called angrily in the direction of the house.

"We know, we're not!" came the almost amusing reply which was backed up by another couple of rounds of gunfire that made short work of the side windows of the car the two officers were hiding behind.

"Well thank you for clearing that up!" Tracy called back.

"You're welcome!"

"The Met Division Chief is going to have a fit when he sees his helicopter" Jennifer mused as she observed the smouldering wreckage.

"My husband is going to go nuts when he sees the holes in his car!"

"Lima Tango Two from Control" Tracy's radio suddenly blurted out "Be aware shots fired in the vicinity of Chesham Manor".

"No shit Sherlock!" Tracy responded as she cowered behind the car whilst another riddle of bullets hit it.

"You do know that it's not like in the movies you know" Jennifer advised.

"What?"

"Well you know where they always hide behind cars in movies and they block the path of the bullets?" Jennifer explained.

"So?" Tracy asked.

"Its cobblers" Jennifer explained as a couple of bullets shot out through the door side either side of which the two officers were positioned "Bullets are not actually stopped by cars, its a Hollywood plot device".

"Bugger! Now you tell me!" Tracy responded as she reached for her radio.

"Lima Tango One to Control" she called "Get as many people as you can, patrolman, officers, traffic wardens, librarians, whatever in full body armour and armed to the teeth outside the Manor House gates in fifteen minutes".

"Roger, on way".

"May I make a suggestion?" Jennifer urged.

"Yes?"

"Lets get the hell out of here?"

"Good idea" Tracy agreed as another couple of bullets ricocheted off the ground close by.

"Ready?" Jennifer asked.

"Go!" Barely had the echo of Tracy's command died down than the two officers where running off in the direction of the gates at the far end of the driveway, the semi-darkness and a few gunshots fired behind them as they ran as fast as they could, keeping their heads bowed down.

Thankfully they managed to reach the gates and get out of harms way even though they where both now soaking wet from the ongoing rain.

Already a couple of local Metropolitan Division patrol cars had arrived at the gates and Tracy indicated to the officers to head for the pub on the opposite side of the road.

"Last orders please!" the barman of the Horse & Groom called.

"Two double whisky's" Tracy called as she arrived at the bar "In the same glass!"

A couple of the local regulars of this traditional oak beamed rural establishment looked up from their drinks at the two soaked officers leaning against the bar looking exhausted.

"Wet outside?" the barman enquired in typical small talk type banter as he passed the drink across to Tracy.

"Just a tad" she responded as she downed the whisky in one gulp "I am going to have to commandeer your premises for a while" Tracy added, "We've got a bit of a problem".

"That's putting it mildly" Jennifer commented as Tracy reached for her radio.

"Lima Tango One to Control" she began "Direct all our chaps and someone from the US Embassy to the Horse & Groom".

"Roger, on way" Control confirmed before Tracy turned to one of the Metropolitan Division officers.

"I want all the plans, maps and blueprints that you can find of the manor house" she instructed "and find someone who knows the place, wake them up if you have to and get them here pronto. Now got all that?"

"Yes Maam!"

"Well away you go then" Tracy urged "And don't let anyone give you any nonsense. You have a problem, call me and I will read them the riot act".

"Have you ever had the feeling you wished you had stayed in bed?" the Commander commented as he sat on the floor alongside the side wall of the conference room, the rest of the hostages seated similarly to his left and right.

"Now you come to mention it" Fuller replied "I'd much rather be lying next to Jennifer right now than sitting next to you".

"Subtle, you have a point though" the Commander's response was muted yet amusing.

"Commander?" the gruff voice of a henchman called.

"Hello, yes?" he looked up and recognised one of the men who had hijacked the train on the Chesham Branch which set this whole thing in motion.

"Boss wants to see you" he waved a gun in the direction of an oak doorway set into the far end wall of the conference room.

"Give my regards to Tracy when you see her" the Commander mentioned aside to Fuller with a hint of foreboding as he got up. "Lead on lad" he indicated.

The henchman led the Commander to the door and opened it for him before waving the Commander in with a menacing waggle of his gun.

"Thank you my good man" the Commander replied wryly "Sorry I don't have any change on me for your tip".

He stepped through and looked back as the door was closed firmly but politely behind him, apparently leaving him alone in the room. It was dark in what appeared to be an antique wood panelled study, just the light from a nearby desk lamp on the corner table providing any illumination.

"Good evening Commander" a voice echoed from the darkest corner of the room.

The Commander turned to the direction of the source of the voice as the click of a light switch suddenly revealed who had spoken.

"Been a long time" the Commander responded as he recognised Edwin Mannierie seated relaxed in a leather armchair that was so large it almost seemed to engulf the large man.

Much like his father, a large cigar moved back and forth from his mouth, perched between two fingers of his left hand, the aura of tobacco smoke around him adding to his foreboding presence.

"Your looking well" Edwin commented.

"Yeah well, marriage can do that for you so I am told" the Commander coolly replied "See you haven't given up the cigars, you must have been smoking those since you were eleven".

"Ten" Edwin confirmed with a grin "but I am digressing from the main point of our little conversation here tonight".

"Oh yes? What would that be about then?" The Commander's attitude on the outside at least was relaxed and quizzical but deep down he was wondering if he would ever see his beloved Tracy again.

"My father" Edwin began, menace now readily apparent in his voice as he stood up to come face to face with his opponent "He went to jail for fifteen years thanks to your father".

"Three innocent members of the public were shot dead in that diamond raid" the Commander responded pointedly "and four others were badly wounded including one who nearly lost her unborn baby!"

"Casualties of war" Edwin shrugged.

"Innocent casualties" the Commander retorted, the anger clearly building.

"It happens" Edwin continued to exude an atmosphere of not really caring.

"Dam it man!" the Commander was fury unusually came to the surface "I was brought up in the same neighbourhood as you with the criminal fraternity all around me and even when I was five years old I knew there where rules".

"Rules where made to be broken"

"The first most important rule of the community, you do remember that don't you?" the Commander insisted.

"Maybe..."

"Never involve, harm or by inaction allow harm to be caused to innocent civilians" the Commander reminded him.

"They where in the way, I had no choice" Edwin began before tailing off in realisation that he had let something slip.

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

"Know what?"

"Come on, I was there when it happened and trust me, when you are twelve years old and people are firing guns left right and centre you tend to notice things you know"

Edwin looked decidedly uncomfortable at that moment which led to the Commander's next realisation.

"You!" he pointed at the cigar smoke enclosed man standing now but a few inches before him "It wasn't your father there that day was it, it was you?"

"So what of it?"

"You are trying to tell me your father took the blame for your stupidity and you did not even have the decency and honour to own up?"

"See if I care" Edwin's manner was becoming very dismissive and matter of fact.

"So what do you want of me then?" the Commander enquired.

Edwin was about to respond when the telephone on the desk behind him began to ring. He went over to it and picked up the receiver.

"Yes, what?" he was clearly still highly irritated.

"This is Divisional Commander Tracy Caverner of the National Security Service" came the reply "Who am I speaking to?"

"The man who is holding a loaded gun at your husbands head" Edwin responded as he produced a semi automatic pistol and pointed it directly at the Commander.

"You are advised that the entire premises is surrounded" Tracy informed him "There is nowhere you can go so lets end this right now before anyone is hurt".

"I do not take orders from you lady!" Edwin barked.

"Here watch your language" the Commander cut in "That's my wife you are talking to".

"You keep out of this" Edwin re-aimed the gun forcefully at the Commander to emphasise his point.

"I should point out its not just the National Security Service you have on to you now" Tracy advised "You also now have the undivided attention of the CIA, MI5 and several other organisations you really don't want to be messing with".

"Bring them on" Edwin defiantly responded before slamming down the telephone "I like a good fight."

"Subtle" the Commander commented with a wry smile as the door opened and in walked the man who had been posing as Agent Black.

"You the one holding young Edwin's leash I suppose?" the Commander enquired.

"I could be considered to be his employer yes" Black replied calmly.

"May I suggest you advise him to calm down before someone takes exception and blows his head off?" the Commander suggested.

"Edwin, a word" Black beckoned him over with the calm wave of a finger.

"A couple of things for you to keep in mind" Black began "I am in charge here and what happens is entirely at my discretion. When we have achieved our aims and the President has been traded, then you can have the Commander and do with him what you like but not before, got that?"

"Yes Sir" Edwin conceded.

"Right" Black sat down behind the desk and pointed at the Commander "Get him out of here and lets get this party started."

"This is a bloody circus!" Sir Richard Crowthorne remarked as he got out of the back of his official car, one of his few perks as head of MI5 and surveyed the chaotic scene in the road and car park of the pub.

"Not exactly what I call quiet and discrete I will grant you" Roger Field agreed as he got out of the other side.

"I thought you guys all drove around in Aston Martins" Field added as he looked back at the rather dull looking official car that had brought them there.

"I wish!" Crowthorne laughed, "All we get is standard Government pool cars that break down every twenty minutes".

The two men made their way through the throng of Security Service vehicles, ambulances and a variety of personnel from numerous agencies which were parked all over the place, a plethora of blue flashing lights reflecting off the surrounding walls of nearby houses and other buildings.

"No not here, around the back!" Tracy called as loud as she could over the din whilst waving her arms at one minibus load of armed Metropolitan Division Security Officers who had just pulled up and were about to disembark into the chaos.

"Lovely evening for it" Richard commented as he approached Tracy who was looking slightly exasperated.

"Well I did not have anything else to do this evening" she wryly commented before showing the two men the way into the Pub's saloon bar, the temporary headquarters of this operation.

"I thought you guys had one of those snazzy mobile operations units" Field commented as they entered the welcome warmth of the interior of the building.

"We do but it's stuck in the traffic jam behind this lot somewhere" Tracy replied as they went over to the main table at which Jennifer Caverner was studying a pile of large pieces of paper along with a distinguished looking young gentleman in Army uniform.

"Tracy, meet Major Forsyth" Jennifer introduced him "He's our man from the services".

"Let me guess, black Ford Transit van out the back?" Tracy remarked.

"That's us" he confirmed with a shake of Tracy's hand.

"Maam!" one officer called from behind the bar, the telephone receiver held against his ear "It's them".

At these words, the room fell silent as Tracy indicated to the officer behind the bar to put the call through to the telephones set up on the table before them. Within moments, all the key officers were present, the call put through to a speaker phone system and a tape recorder running.

"Good morning" Tracy answered, highlighting the fact it was in fact early morning now.

"We have a series of instructions to be carried out to the letter" Black's voice boomed around the room.

"Go ahead, we're listening" Tracy prompted.

"We request the immediate release of all political prisoners currently being held in US controlled prisons on foreign soil" Black began. "As soon as we are guaranteed through our sources within the US Government that our demands are being met, two bullet proof Presidential cars will be brought to the front door".

"All right so far" Tracy urged as others around her scribbled notes.

"The driver of the first car is to be Sir Richard Crowthorne, the driver of the second is to be Roger Field" Black instructed.

"And if we cannot find them?" Tracy enquired.

"Should not be too much of a problem, they are standing right next to you" Black replied causing everyone to look around in surprise and shock.

"I don't suppose you would care to tell me how you know that by any chance?" Tracy asked out of curiosity.

"No one here is exactly what they appear" Black warned, "When we have confirmation of our demands being met, I will call you again. Failure to comply will result in the execution of the President, his aides and your husband". With that final ultimatum, Black abruptly hung up.

"Charming fellow" Crowthorne remarked, "Any idea how he knows I am here?"

"Must be a hidden camera around here somewhere" Jennifer commented as she began looking around the room until her eyes alighted on something hidden above one of the old oak beams that made up the framework of the building.

"Hello there" she wryly smiled as she pulled out a small cylinder with a wire attached to it, away from its discrete resting place. From her inside jacket pocket, Jennifer produced a small screwdriver with which she proceeded to disable the camera device and cut it away.

"Where did you learn to do that?" Tracy asked bemused at her sister's apparently increased technical knowledge.

"That mad man of mine Simon taught me a few things" she explained as she looked over the device in her hands "One rule of which is never leave home without a screwdriver".

"Right then" Tracy turned to the bar and sat up on one of the stools before reaching for her radio.

"Lima Tango Zero One to Control" she called "Get me someone from the US Government here as soon as possible and tell them to bring a couple of limos with them".

"You are not going to give in to them are you?" Richard enquired.

"Nope" Tracy confirmed "I am just going to string them along for a while."

"How was your evening" Fuller casually remarked to the Commander as he rejoined them in the main room.

"Conversation was a bit below par I thought" the Commander remarked "The catering around here is a bit on the disappointing side as well" he added as he looked around.

"Perhaps some chocolate would be in order" Fuller looked across at his superior officer with a clear hint in his voice and expression.

The Commander reached back into his jacket pocket and removed from it the chocolate bar he had been given by Fuller earlier. He quickly slit open the foil wrapper to reveal the six chunks of milk chocolate beneath, three of which had moulded letters impressed into their upper surface.

"A present from Richard Crowthorne by any chance?" the Commander asked as he broke up the chunks and passed Fuller the one marked with a letter 'F'.

"What ever gave you that idea" Fuller inquired as the Commander swallowed with a little difficulty the chunk lettered 'C'.

"Here have this" the Commander proffered the 'P' lettered chunk to the President who had seemingly dozed off alongside him "And don't complain about it".

"Superintendent Caverner?" one of the Army men called from his seat on board the Transport Division's mobile control unit where he was monitoring a screen, the console of which had just started beeping.

"You yelled?" Tracy called from the other end of the converted single deck bus.

"Their tracking signals just came online" the officer indicated three dots on a plan of the manor house being displayed on the screen.

"Right then" Tracy turned back to the main table at the rear of the vehicle around which were sat the major players in this scenario.

"Major Forsyth, you may put your men in position" she commanded.

"Yes Maam" he saluted and immediately departed.

"Mr Field and Mr Crowthorne, you may start your engines" Tracy added.

"I hope there is a stiff drink in this" Roger Field commented as he led Richard Crowthorne out of the door into the dark damp drizzle outside.

"I'll second that" Richard added.

"Mr Florence" Tracy quickly added as the representative from the US Government was about to make a protest "You may shut up".

He duly and silently conceded defeat and returned to his seat.

"Jennifer, take team 1 and get in position around the rear" Tracy commanded "I'll take team 2 and head for the front."

"Hey Sis" Jennifer called as they were about to go their separate ways "Be careful".

"You too."

"Yes?" Black answered the telephone. "And this is confirmed by our man in Washington?"

There was a short pause whilst his contact confirmed and relayed the details.

"Right, thank you". He hung up and as he looked up, a smile of relief and delight came across his face, before he proceeded to dial out again.

"We have an agreement" he announced once he was connected "I want the cars brought to the front doorway inside of two minutes or you can start counting bodies".

"On their way" Tracy confirmed over the telephone, as she was about to leave the mobile control room.

Outside, she gathered the officers who made up her entry team around her.

"Listen carefully" she called over the background noise "The cars will be going in, in two minutes and when the President is inside, we will be given a signal to move in".

She looked around to ensure she had everyone's undivided attention "The Army guys will be taking care of the vehicles whilst we take the west entrance of the building and sweep the ground and first floors, team two meanwhile will take the back door and proceed directly to the upper second and third floors and the roof. Any questions?"

A quick look around duly proved that everyone present understood her before Tracy delivered her final instructions.

"Until I say otherwise, I want radio silence from everyone and no-one fires without my authorisation."

"Come on" Edwin urged with the usual unfriendly wave of a gun, now a fully automatic weapon rather than the pistol of before.

"Just the Commander" he re-iterated as the others were led away by Black and his men towards the front door "You are coming with me".

"Simon" the Commander uttered quietly aside to him "Tell Tracy I love her, and make sure you make an honest woman of that sister in law of mine".

"Err yes Sir" Fuller responded as he was led away.

"Shall we?" the Commander enquired of Edwin who with four of his own heavies led the way to a back servants staircase.

Outside, Tracy, Jennifer, the Army and the various officers were in position out of sight all around the grounds. Up the driveway approached the two limousines, their requested drivers at the wheel, and as they pulled up outside the ornate stone front entrance of the manor, the doors opened.

"Everyone stand by" Tracy announced quietly over her radio. However her plans were about to be altered dramatically as the doors of the manor house opened but accompanied suddenly by the sound of suppressing gun fire.

"Are any of our guys firing?" Tracy demanded over the radio as a shower of bullets rained down all around, accompanied by falling broken glass, against which they were forced to shield themselves.

"Fire is coming from the upper floor windows" a message crackled over the radio, barely audible with the noise.

"These guys are serious!" Jennifer Caverner called out as around the back, further gunfire erupted from the manor house.

Amidst the chaos, several people emerged from the manor and quickly clambered into the limousines which in the space of a few moments were pulling away down the drive.

"Go! Go! Go!" Tracy called over the radio upon which the various officers surrounding the building moved in by way of side and back entrances.

"I bet she has always wanted to say that" Jennifer mused as she led her team in the back door and through the kitchen into the large dining hall area beyond.

Upstairs, Edwin, the Commander and the rest of the party were moving up through into the attic, dry and dusty with abandoned moth eaten furniture stored and showing many decades of disuse.

"Must be the cleaning lady's day off" the Commander commented wryly as he surveyed the dark room.

"Move it matey" one of the heavies shoved the Commander towards the small doorway that led out onto the roof.

"Oh no not again" the Commander muttered to himself with resignation as he saw a helicopter come in and land carefully between the tall chimneys that guarded the edges of the central flat roof section.

In the distance he observed the Army intercepting the cars at the end of the driveway, it appeared to be a quick professional and successful operation from what he could see at that distance.

Downstairs, Tracy and her team had completed the sweep of the ground and first floors and made their way up to the second floor where they were greeted with the sound of gunfire and the sight of Jennifer and her team shielding themselves against a wall whilst occasionally offering gunshots down the corridor at unseen heavily armed assailants.

"Are we having problems?" Tracy enquired as she went to the front and examined the scene before them.

"You could be saying that" Jennifer responded as she vaguely aimed and fired down the corridor before ducking back again, "There are at least three of them and they are well and truly stuck in there".

"Any more about?" Tracy enquired.

"All the rest either surrendered or were shot" Jennifer explained "But we need to do something about this lot as we are rapidly running out of woodwork" she indicated the wooden panelled wall behind her, the end of which was being rapidly eroded by the gunfire that was impacting into it.

"Is there a problem ladies?" Major Forsyth inquired as he joined the group.

"We could use a little assistance from your guys" Tracy responded as she too joined in the firing at the enemy.

Major Forsyth looked around the corner of the wall briefly and surveyed the scene before returning to the relative safety of the wall.

"We can take care of this" he confirmed with a friendly smile "Jenkins, Howard" he called to a couple of his men "Stun grenades please".

Quickly the two Army officers he had called stepped up. With everyone else providing covering fire, they calmly stepped forward and tossed a number of stun grenades down the corridor before ducking back again.

After a brief pause, a number of small sharp explosions accompanied by flashes of light emitted from the corridor whereupon the gunfire stopped.

"Silence is golden" Jennifer commented as she stepped out into the corridor, gun aimed forwards where she was quickly joined by Tracy, Forsyth and the other Security Service officers.

"Don't even think about it!" Tracy urged as one of the enemy groggily attempted to get up unsuccessfully. He and the two others quickly surrendered and they soon found themselves handcuffed and being led away.

"I'll take the left" Jennifer suggested "You take the right" and with that they split up heading off in different directions to sweep the rest of the floor.

She could only assume she was getting sleepy as Jennifer rounded a corner and came face to face with a gunman who quickly turned around and was about to aim when he suddenly found himself being rendered unconscious as a plant pot was struck across the back of his head.

Jennifer looked on slightly stunned and wondering why she had not been shot when into view came Fuller smiling meekly and holding the remains of the pot's handle in his hand.

"Evening love" he called.

"Simon?" Jennifer called still slightly in shock as Tracy appeared at the opposite end of the corridor.

"I managed to slip away from them" Fuller explained as he stepped forward and embraced Jennifer, both clearly relieved to see each other again.

"Have you seen the Commander anywhere?" Jennifer asked still holding onto Fuller with a vice like grip.

"They took him away separately with that mad Edwin and his mob."

"I hate to interrupt you two lovebirds" Tracy interjected "Simon, take Jennifer downstairs and get her checked over".

Once she had seen Fuller and her sister were safely off the scene, Tracy, along with three Security Service officers and two of the Army officers proceeded to the back staircase that led to the attic.

"After you" Tracy indicated to Major Forsyth who took the lead up the creaky staircase where at the top all they discovered was the empty dusty attic and the open door onto the roof.

Quickly exiting out onto the flat roof, they were just in time to see a helicopter disappearing off into the distance. Within moments of realising that their prey had eluded capture once again, Tracy was heading back downstairs and through the house as fast as her legs could carry her.

As she vaulted over some debris lying in the middle of one corridor, she reached for her radio.

"Lima Tango Zero Two to Control" She did not bother to wait for a response "Helicopter heading south east from Chesham Manor, I want it followed by Air Traffic Control and tracked".

By now she had reached the front door where a fleet of ambulances and other emergency service vehicles had arrived. Those captors who had been in the limousines and were still alive, were being loaded up into Security Service vans under arrest, whilst medical staff dealt with any other injuries.

Quickly Tracy looked around, where her eyes alighted on a Security Service motorcycle parked nearby. Before anyone had realised what had happened, she had commandeered it and was heading off at high speed down the driveway.

"Oh no not again" Jennifer wryly commented as she saw her sister disappear off into the distance at great speed.

"I think we should get back to Holborn" Fuller suggested.

"Good idea".

"You do know I am none too keen on flying?" the Commander asked Edwin from his seat in the rear of the helicopter.

"Now do you really think that I actually care one iota?" Edwin responded barely turning from his position in the front seat to respond.

"The way my luck has been today, probably not" the Commander grimly replied with a stifled yawn.

"Oh blindfold our guest please" Edwin called back.

"Just as I was beginning to appreciate the sunrise" the Commander commented as his view went to black with the application of a simple blind fold across his eyes that was carefully tied around the back of his head.

The first red rays of sunrise were piercing the sky as Tracy rushed through the near empty roads of South Harrow. Although a weekday, it was still significantly early and rush hour had yet to begin which meant she had a fairly free reign of manoeuvre through the streets on the commandeered motorcycle.

Ahead of her and a little to the south east, the distant speck of the helicopter could still be seen. As she hopped over a roundabout, Tracy's radio sparkled into life.

"Go ahead" she had to practically shout over the roar from the engine although she did cut the sirens for a few moments.

"Jennifer and I are on our way back to Holborn" Fuller called as Jennifer expertly steered the patrol car they had managed to borrow, around towards the North Circular road at well above a 100 miles per hour.

"When you get there" Tracy yelled, "Have Metropolitan Division seal off wherever they land. I want a 500 metre exclusion zone all around and every man, woman, child, dog and budgie evacuated from the area immediately".

"Consider it done" Fuller responded as he held on for grim death when Jennifer executed one of her trademark hand brake turns around a queue of cars and set off towards the inner part of London.

For Tracy, Hammersmith went by in a bit of a blur, just a slightly surprised route 211 bus driver who saw this flash of blurred red speed past him, the only tenable sign that she had been there.

With Hammersmith Bridge now starting to become busy with the first rush hour traffic of the day, Tracy was forced to slow and make use of the footpath, sending a few surprised pedestrians ducking out of the way.

Meanwhile, with a huge squeal of brakes, Jennifer executed another hand brake turn to make an illegal right turn from Southampton Row into High Holborn and pulling up sharply in front of the Bus Stop.

"If the Commander sees that parked there, he will most likely put a ticket on it" Fuller mentioned as he got out of the car and with Jennifer ran for the back entrance, the nearest way into the Holborn office building.

They quickly made their way up the back emergency staircase to the Command Floor and the Control Room where the night shift were about to clock off.

"Morning Gwyneth" Fuller called as he entered the room.

"Top of the morning to you!" Gwyneth the night shift supervisor called from the main control console "Nothing much to report, all been a bit quiet considering" she added.

"Can you get me Air Traffic monitoring at Drayton please?" Fuller requested as he took the seat alongside Gwyneth who was already at work on the request.

After a few moments, the call was connected and Gwyneth handed the headset to Fuller.

"Air Traffic Monitoring this is Holborn Control, where is that helicopter now?" Fuller enquired.

Jennifer looking on somewhat tired, could tell by the look on his face that he did not like the answer he was receiving, a fact confirmed by his next outburst.

"What do you mean you lost it?"

"Whoops..." Jennifer commented as she picked up one of the headsets off the adjacent desk.

"Lima Tango Zero Two from Victor Papa X-Ray One Zero Two, are you there?" she called.

"Go ahead" Tracy's voice was somewhat crackly and distorted but still understandable.

"Drayton tracking lost the helicopter, I don't suppose by any chance you have had any better luck?"

Tracy, who was now stationary and standing alongside the motorcycle by the side of the road, looked over into the distance approximately in the direction she had seen the helicopter last.

"Not exactly" Tracy responded with hints of despondency in her voice "I last saw it about ten minutes ago somewhere near Clapham".

"Did she say Clapham?" Sir Richard Crowthorne inquired as entered the room.

"Yes Sir" Jennifer looked up from the desk to see the man from MI5 majestically glide into the room almost living up to his Chief Spook nickname.

"Well how about the tracking device?" Richard asked.

Fuller leant over the computer console and accessed the scanning system to the slight surprise of Richard.

"How the hell have you managed to access an MI5 system so easily?" he enquired slightly worried that the supposedly most secure IT Network in the country was so easily accessed.

"Oh lets just say I am familiar with your security systems" Fuller responded with a grin.

"Come again?"

"I designed it" Fuller added with a flourish.

"Any sign?" Jennifer asked.

"Hello there" Fuller commented as a bleeping noise began to emit from the console indicating that his search had been success.

"This has to be the first time in his life that the Commander's unhealthy appetite for chocolate has really paid off" Jennifer remarked with a chuckle.

"Mount up gentlemen" Fuller ordered "and notify Tracy."

As the Commander was led from the helicopter, still blindfolded, he listened to the background noise and gave a discrete smile, there being something about the combinations of sounds he could hear that indicated where he was.

The subtle change in background light, coupled with the more echoey background sounds told the Commander he had been led into a large industrial type building, possibly even the same he had been held hostage in with the US Ambassador's family some days earlier.

"Take a seat" Edwin insisted as the Commander was shoved rather roughly into a chair, the blindfold quickly removed soon after.

"Like what you've done with the place" the Commander commented sarcastically as he looked around what appeared to be an old control room of some kind, dusty equipment with ancient style dials and indicators covered in years of dust and dirt deposits making up a large part of the room.

"I think you will find that the most important thing is what we are going to do with you" the voice of Black echoed around the large dusty room as he stepped into the light shining through a broken window like a spotlight highlighting the main player on a theatre stage.

"Would you mind telling me how you gave us false information to our sources in Washington?" Black enquired with a forceful stare.

"You skipped a bit on your preparatory research matey" the Commander smiled "The real Agent Robert Black is in fact Roberta Black and is currently on maternity leave" he explained.

"But the records said the name was Robert" Edwin cut in confused.

"Well that's typing errors for you" the Commander responded, "Once we realised you were phoney, we got the real Agent Black to chase the paperwork trail in the US and then misinform your moles".

"So give me one good reason why I should not just shoot you and dump you in the river right now" Black asked clearly irritated.

"I can think of two reasons" the Commander rose to his feet, he was not going to be able to do anything however as there were at least four heavies lurking in the shadows with guns pointed and ready in his direction.

"One" the Commander began "The last time a high ranking Security Service officer was shot in the United Kingdom, the assailant had Security Service officers and undercover agents coming out of his ears and when they caught up with him, and

believe me that will happen, he suddenly and mysteriously lost the use of his kneecaps".

"And number two?" Black demanded to know.

"Our old friend Edwin here I think has some more pressing matters he wishes to discuss with me and I don't think he would take too kindly to you terminating me before he has had the chance for his pound of flesh, to coin a phrase".

"All right then" Black gestured Edwin over "He's all yours" and with that Black retired to the dark background of the old control room.

"Morning" the Commander responded as Edwin stepped up, a gun in his hand and a look of hatred in his face. He stood almost face to face with the Commander, having to look down a bit though as the Commander's short stature was overshadowed by Edwin's six-foot tall frame.

"Your father is responsible for my fathers jail sentence" Edwin began with a low menace creeping through his voice.

"All pretty good so far, just that the wrong man was sent to jail for the crime" the Commander responded remaining calm.

"Irrelevant" Edwin stated.

"I do not call the slaughter and injuring of unarmed civilians irrelevant!" the Commander snapped back "Further more you did not even have the guts and the honour to take the blame, instead you let your father go to jail on your behalf."

"He volunteered" Edwin replied.

"Only because he was afraid of the public disgrace your actions, that of his own son, would have brought upon him".

"You can talk" Edwin quickly snapped back.

"I think you've lost me."

"The gangland culture of South London is in your blood Commander" Edwin pointedly stated with firm prods of the fingers "By the age of ten you were playing poker with the likes of the Krays."

"And winning if I recall" the Commander remarked with a wry smile of satisfaction that even Edwin could not disagree with.

"Then you sign up with the filth?" Edwin demanded answers "Betrayal swings both ways you know".

"That's deep" the Commander mused.

"You know of course what the penalty for betrayal is don't you?" Edwin enquired brandishing the gun with further menace.

"I can hazard a vague guess" the Commander was realising now that this could be the end and his thoughts were now of Tracy, indeed his thoughts were so much with her at that moment that he failed to notice a number of discrete background noises in the dark shadows.

"Unlike my friend here" Edwin gestured behind him to where Black had been standing a few moments before "I have absolutely no compulsion about killing you."

"What does your father think about this?" the Commander enquired as Edwin pressed the gun to his temple.

"Do you think I really care?"

"Why don't you just ask him?" the Commander suggested "He's standing right behind you."

"What?" Edwin spun around in shock to see his father and also Roger Field standing there, the discreet noises heard earlier having been the heavies being disabled and removed.

"Put the gun away son" Edwin's father Edward Mannierie encouraged "It's over."

"I think not!" Edwin grabbed the Commander and stood behind him, using him as a shield and with his gun pointed firmly up into his jaw.

"There is nowhere you can run to" Edward added.

"Sorry but I am out of here" Edwin announced before suddenly pushing the Commander to the ground, firing a shot at him and running off into the dark cavernous interior of the building.

Roger and Edward quickly rushed forward to assist the Commander to his feet having seen that the shot Edwin had fired had missed by just inches.

"Well that was fun" the Commander commented as he looked down at his dust encrusted uniform.

"On behalf of the Mannierie Family" Edward offered his hand to the Commander "My sincere apologies."

"None necessary" the Commander acknowledged taking Edward's hand "But thanks for the thought."

"Next time you see him, give your father my regards, he's a good man." Edward added.

"I will" the Commander confirmed as Edward departed with an acknowledging dip of his hat before turning away.

"What about Edwin?" the Commander asked after him.

"Do your duty lad" Edwards voice echoed from the darkness.

The Commander looked around the dusty old control room and took in the atmosphere before he and Field began to head for the exit.

"Let me guess" the Commander asked "Battersea Power Station?"

"How the hell did you know that?" Roger enquired as they made their way along a forgotten dusty dark corridor in search of a way out.

"I could hear a Gatwick Express accelerating past every fifteen minutes" the Commander explained "Plus there is the sound of boats running along the river, couple that with the control room back there and there was only one possible place we could be."

Both men suddenly stopped dead in their tracks when they heard running footsteps approaching from somewhere, however the echoing acoustics of the vast abandoned building made it difficult to identify where they were coming from, let alone tell if they were friend or foe.

"Here" Field passed a gun to the Commander before they took up a position on either side of the corridor they were in, ready for whoever it was to make an appearance and take whatever action was necessary.

The Commander's highly sensitive hearing meant he managed to identify the direction the footsteps were approaching from as they neared ever closer and indicated this to Field through hand signals.

Suddenly they were both aware of a shadow passing behind them and swung round, guns pointed straight ahead at a figure standing silhouetted in a doorway.

"It's me!" Tracy called as she stepped into what little light was down there.

The Commander lowered his gun and breathed a tired sigh of relief as he stood up and embraced Tracy tightly.

"I love you, I missed you" the Commander barely whispered under his tired breath before the happily reunited couple passionately kissed.

"I hate to break up this romantic little party but Edwin is getting away" Field urged although he could understand the Commander's wish to be with his beloved at that time.

"Err yes" the Commander quickly regained his composure.

"The quickest way out is back this way" Tracy indicated.

"Lead on" the Commander urged.

Together the merry little party made their way through the dusty and seemingly deserted building, being cautious as they rounded corners or went through connecting doorways in case their quarry was waiting.

Soon they were to find themselves outside, the Commander in particular having to shield himself from the bright sunlight for a few moments as his eyes adjusted from the darkness that he had been in for a few hours previously.

"Anyone see him?" the Commander asked as Tracy and Field scanned the deserted abandoned concrete covered area outside the old power station, just a plethora of unkempt weeds that had forced their way up through weak spots providing the only contrast.

The Commander reached for his radio only to find he had in fact lost it some time earlier and so reached across and borrowed Tracy's from her belt clip much to her surprise.

"Lima Tango Zero One to Control" he called, having to turn slightly to shield the radio from the wind that was blowing incessantly across the area and intruding on the broadcast.

"Control go ahead, good to hear you are back Sir" came back the enthusiastic response.

"Never knew I went away" the Commander remarked as an aside "Anyway, I don't suppose anyone has reported anything unusual in the Battersea area in the last ten minutes by any chance?"

The dispatch officer dealing with the call leaned over and called up a list of calls on the computer screen adjacent to her. She scanned it for a few moments and also checked a second list on an adjacent screen further over just to make sure.

"Nothing for Transport Division" she responded, "Oh hang on, apparently a Metropolitan Division officer just reported someone vaulting the line side fence near Battersea Park. Would that be what you are looking for Sir?"

"Sound as good a place to start as any" the Commander responded as he, Field and Tracy began to break into almost a jogging pace in the direction of the main exit gate and the public highway immediately outside.

"Where do you think he is going?" Tracy asked as they reached the gate and looked up and down the road outside.

"Could be anywhere, remember he is wanted by at least two international agencies now" the Commander concluded as he pointed the way up the road towards Battersea Park railway station, "So one thing is for certain, he won't be hanging around."

Within a few moments they were in the high ornate Victorian main booking hall of the station and looking around as if in search of inspiration.

"Security Service" the Commander panted almost out of breath to the member of Southern station staff on duty at the ticket barriers.

"You don't say" the member of staff remarked seeing the uniforms of the two officers.

"Anything unusual happened around here in the last ten minutes?" Tracy asked as the Commander, somewhat exhausted, propped himself up on one of the ticket barriers.

"Apart from you lot arriving, no not really" the member of staff responded thoughtfully "Hang on a minute."

With that the member of staff disappeared into the adjacent office for a few moments before suddenly returning with a worried look.

"Some loon just jumped down onto the tracks" he announced.

"Which way is he heading?" the Commander asked by now already through the ticket barrier having swept his warrant card over the reader to open it.

"Towards Clapham Junction" the member of staff confirmed.

"Lima Tango Zero Two to control" Tracy called into her radio as they left Field standing in the ticket hall and headed up the stairs to the platform level.

"Go ahead" Fuller back in the control room responded.

"Get Network Rail to shut off the power between Victoria and Clapham Junction right now" Tracy called as they ran out onto the platform much to the surprise of some of the waiting passengers "And get an armed response team down to Clapham Junction Station right away."

"On way" Fuller responded.

The Commander looked down at the track bed then up at the slightly tired looking two-car train of Class 456 stock that was stopped immediately to his right. Suddenly the train's electrical equipment fell silent indicating that the power to the third rail had now been turned off.

The Commander donned a high visibility orange safety vest over his uniform that he had retrieved from his pocket and jumped down onto the track bed before turning and helping Tracy down, she too now also being similarly highly visible.

"You do realise we rather stand out in the crowd" Tracy remarked as the two officers began to jog along the track bed southwards in the direction of Clapham Junction.

"Well we can either wear them and be more easily shot at" the Commander concluded the catch 22 situation "Or alternatively not wear them and risk being run down by a train".

"Terrific!" Tracy commented as they reach a lattice work bridge that took the South Central Victoria lines over the main Battersea Road.

"Who's that?" the Commander pointed ahead at some sort of movement some two or three hundred metres ahead, partially obscured by the curve to the right of the track and an adjacent stranded train on the up fast line.

Suddenly a bullet zinged past the two officers and shattered the rear windscreen of the adjacent train causing them to duck momentarily.

"I think that answers that one" the Commander responded ruefully.

Tracy looked ahead and observed a running figure some distance ahead, at which the two officers duly resumed their pursuit along the tracks.

"So where are we going on honeymoon then?" Tracy enquired as they rounded the curve and descended down to Longhenge Junction, their quarry still making good speed ahead.

"How about Wandsworth Common?" the Commander joked in reference to the next station south of Clapham Junction.

"You know you are the last of the great romantics" Tracy commented sarcastically.

Soon they were parallel with the point where the South Central division lines from Victoria which they were following met the South Western division bank of tracks that came down from Waterloo and Vauxhall.

Extra care was required here because unlike the shut down line on which they were walking, the South Western lines were still live with running trains both local slow and fast expresses.

"I think he has jumped up onto one of the platforms" Tracy commented.

It took just a couple of minutes more for them to reach the ramped platform ends and walk up onto platforms 12 and 13 of the huge Clapham Junction Station, recorded as the busiest station in the country.

Thankfully the platforms on the South Central side had been emptied swiftly by station staff who had in the preceding time either dispatched south bound passengers on the first train out of there or thrown all the north bound passengers over to the South Western side and onto any train heading to Waterloo instead just to get them out of the way.

Indeed only a few railway enthusiasts and one or two members of station platform staff were present to witness the Commander and Tracy's somewhat unorthodox arrival.

"I don't suppose anyone saw a passing lunatic did they?" the Commander enquired around about.

"Some nit leapt off platform 12 about three or four minutes ago" one of the railway enthusiasts pointed in the direction in question. "Headed over into the yard".

With a quickening of pace, Tracy and the Commander proceeded down the length of platform 13 and then up the flight of wooden stairs to the over bridge that linked all the platforms in the complex station.

Up there, they had to fight their way through a throng of confused tourists and annoyed commuters that were milling around looking for trains that were probably if not delayed then not departing at all for the foreseeable future.

It seemed to take an eternity to make their way through the mass of bodies to the steps that led down to platforms 7 and 8, and then down to the platform level itself which was packed as these served the South Western division lines to and from Waterloo which were still operating.

"Oh blimey!" the Commander commented as he viewed the scene, before rounding the corner and heading to the south end of the platform with Tracy following his lead.

"Lima Tango Zero Two to control" Tracy called into her radio as she too made her way through the mess.

"Go ahead"

"Please tell me that the armed backup we ordered is somewhere in the station" Tracy asked as she looked around the chaotic scenes that were engulfing the place. Somehow deep down she already knew the answer she was about to receive.

"Stuck in traffic" the response came just confirming her fears "ETA about ten minutes".

"Thank you!!" Tracy responded sarcastically and looked down over the edge of the platform at the track bed below where the Commander had already jumped down.

"I take it that was our backup" the Commander called up.

"You guessed it darling" Tracy called back down.

"Go up over the bridge to the opposite side of the yard and try and head him off" the Commander indicated with a wave of his gun, making all the waiting passengers on the platform looking on, momentarily duck.

"Right!" Tracy confirmed and began to fight her way back through the thronging crowds again as the Commander stepped carefully over the running lines and electrical third rail before heading into the main carriage yard that sat in a large triangle of land between the two halves of the station where they divided off into different directions.

As a predominantly white painted five-car Portsmouth Express train arrived behind him bound for Waterloo, the Commander surveyed the scene before deciding to head for the carriage shed directly ahead.

Being early rush hour, most of the trains in the yard had departed and the many sidings there were all but deserted with just an engineers train and a withdrawn rake of eight coaches of old style slam door stock occupying the place.

As the Commander peered around the corner into the carriage shed, a gunshot rang out, echoing around the near deserted yard. Hearing the shot, Tracy up above the yard on the main bridge, looked out of one of the windows looking down into the sidings area to see if she could tell where it had come from.

Suddenly she noticed movement, a door swinging freely on the side of the old retired stored slam door train in the yard and quickly communicated her sighting to her husband.

"Lima Tango Zero One from Zero Two" she called over the radio "There is a door swinging open on the old relic ahead of you".

"I assume by old relic you mean the vintage item of prime York built hardware standing over there?" the Commander corrected her. He always did have a fondness for the old style railway rolling stock and preferred it to the newer rather plastic variety.

The Commander skipped lightly over the railway lines across the yard to the stationary eight car train, the door leading up into the north end drivers cab was clearly open and its slight swinging indicated someone had very recently passed through it.

Clambering up the access steps, the Commander entered the cross passageway that ran behind the drivers cab, the cab itself showing itself to be vacant after a brief inspection through the glass in the locked doorway.

Turning back to the main body of the train itself, the Commander proceeded along the short side corridor that served the four first class compartments. Checking each one in turn proved they too to be empty which led him on into the second half of the first carriage and the open plan standard class accommodation.

Again there was no one there, the two toilets as well were empty, having said that the terrible stench within that had built up through weeks of disuse would probably have driven out anyone who had unwisely chosen this as a hiding place before they had even entered.

The next carriage was a long open plan standard class coach, rows of red covered seats and a few discarded newspapers. He was about to move forward when the Commander heard a click coming from ahead somewhere.

Instantly the Commander ducked sideways into one of the seating bays as a bullet shot punched the seat squab adjacent to where he had been standing, sending a cloud of stuffing and dust up into the air.

"Come on man, give it up" the Commander called as he took cover behind one of the double seats.

"Never!" Edwin called back, a statement he reinforced with a second shot that whizzed over the Commander's head and smashed a window.

"There is nowhere left to run!" the Commander called.

There was a sudden silence, no response either verbal or through the application of a firearm which gave cause to the Commander to cautiously look around the edge of seat along the aisle to the end of the carriage.

From there he could see the sliding connecting door to the next carriage was ajar whereas it had been closed a few minutes before, indicating the quarry had fled.

"Blast" the Commander muttered to himself as he got up and jogged along the length of the carriage, all the time keeping his gun trained ahead.

Through that connecting doorway led to the spartan guards van including the small room off the side corridor where the guard would normally be accommodated in a rather pokey little grey green painted room with nothing more than a worn out chair, a speakerphone system that rarely worked properly and a couple of electrical equipment cabinets for company.

The most significant thing as far as the Commander was concerned though was that the external door was open. Quickly he crossed the compartment and looked outside where the sign of slightly disturbed ballast immediately below the door way indicated that Edwin had taken this way out.

Looking across the yard, trains still passing close by on the Richmond lines across the back, the Commander could see Edwin hopping over rail lines without giving much thought to the possibility he might get run down.

Looking back, he quickly realised that the Commander had resumed his pursuit of him and so increased the pace of his attempted escape, heading towards the main running lines.

As he reached the edge of the four tracks of main running lines, their shiny surface from constant use contrasting with the rustier surfaces of the yard sidings, Edwin became aware that Tracy was at the ramp end of platforms 3 and 4 and heading onto the running tracks towards him with a number of armed Security Service officers right behind her.

The Commander had a moment which caused him to look on with understandable shock as Tracy narrowly avoided being run down by a Reading to Waterloo service. Thankfully she judged her crossing to perfection and lost no time confronting Edwin who was now stood still in the middle of the down local line.

"Hold it right there chum!" Tracy called, her word reinforced by the point of not only her own gun but the weapons of those officers with her.

By this time the Commander had caught up and with him blocking off any possible escape to his rear, Edwin found himself boxed in with nowhere to run.

"Your move" the Commander called.

Edwin looked around in search of inspiration, maybe a train coming he could duck behind, however he was foiled by the fact that all services had just been stopped for the moment whilst this was going on.

"It would appear you leave me no choice" Edwin casually remarked with a chuckle that took everyone else's attention from what he was doing with his feet.

"Eeek!" the Commander remarked as suddenly Edwin jammed his foot on the electric third rail and absorbed 750 volts of direct current through his body.

It was over in a few moments, very few can take that kind of sustained shock for long and soon Edwin crashed to the ground dead.

"Nasty..." Tracy wryly commented as she re-holstered her gun.

"Positively shocking my dear" the Commander added as he joined her, sneaking a quick kiss in the process.

"Well that's the morning rush hour well and truly screwed" Tracy remarked as she looked across the area of Clapham Junction where the platforms were still heavily crowded, although some northbound services to Victoria appeared to have restarted now that the power had been restored.

As they stepped up onto the end of platforms 5 and 6, the Commander put his arms around Tracy and held her; she returned the gesture in kind.

"Now about that honey moon you owe me" she began.

"Day trip to Richmond suffice?" the Commander jokingly enquired as he looked up at the next train display on platform 4 "Alternatives are Woking or some place called Egham."

"You are nothing if not romantic" Tracy sarcastically responded.

The man who was Agent Black squirmed uncomfortably in the spartan chair in the dismal and dreary interview room at Holborn.

"Good morning" the Commander announced as he entered the room "You are going to jail!"

"I think not" Black commented.

"Well lets put it this way" the Commander took the seat directly opposite Black and momentarily looked across at Black's appointed legal representative before returning his stare straight to Black himself.

"I have here" the Commander dramatically dumped a pile of papers on the desk "depositions and requests for your deportation from Interpol, the CIA, the FBI, Mossad and a whole variety of other wonderful people" he announced.

"And that is nothing compared with the endless numbers of UK agencies who would like a piece of your proverbial backside" he added.

"Oh what a joy it is to be so popular" Black responded.

"So unless you have a platinum Get Out of Jail Free card hidden about your person" the Commander informed him with a grin of glee "the only place you are going is a miserable Government run concrete monstrosity with no ventilation, bars on the windows and lousy catering".

"The Department of Transport in Marsham Street?" Black asked by way of amusement.

"I like that" the Commander responded with a wry chuckle "Very funny!"

"I can guarantee you my stay in any of those cold dark Government run locations you are aspiring to will be extremely short" Black advised, all trace of his American accent that he had been using now long gone and revealing a more western European Germanic twang in his voice.

"Well I can assure you my nameless friend that you will be taken from this place and escorted by some of the CIA's finest to Heathrow Airport where they have a special jet on standby just for you" the Commander informed him "And then its up, up and away from here and into the welcoming arms of the US Justice system."

"In your dreams Commander" Black responded with a smug grin.

"Have a nice day" the Commander added as he got up turned to leave.

"Be seeing you..." Black ominously responded.

"Give me a decent old fashioned honest villain any day" the Commander commented as he looked through the cards he had in his hand. "Call" he added.

"Who's winning?" Tracy enquired as she peered around the office door at the Commander sat behind his desk. Around the desk with him were sat Roger Field and Sir Richard Crowthorne, intently concentrating on their hand of Texas Five Card Holdem Poker.

"I'll give you three guesses" a slightly disgruntled Field put in nodding in the direction of the Commander. The last time he played poker with him was the night before the infamous Lewisham Diamond Heist when the Commander was only twelve years old and in all that time he had not lost his touch at this game.

"I'll see you ten digestives and raise you five custard creams" Crowthorne tossed casually a pile of biscuits into the centre of the desk.

"Call" Field urged matching the pile of biscuits with those from his own stack.

"I'll see some of that" the Commander added and nodded to Fuller who had been volunteered to be the dealer, to deal the flop of three cards.

There was a nervous silence as the first three community flop cards appeared face up on the table in the form of a queen of spades, a ten of spades and a seven of hearts.

"Another ten digestives to see me" the Commander put in.

"Too hot for me" Crowthorne announced as he folded and withdrew from the hand.

"You know you still owe me fifty quid from when I was eleven years old" the Commander casually remarked to Field as he studied his cards carefully.

"All right then" Field announced with a confident smirk "All in" and with that he pushed the remaining biscuits on his pile into the centre.

"Call" the Commander responded calmly and with that both men laid their two cards on the table, his hand being the jack and king of spades. Field did likewise producing a queen of hearts and a ten of diamonds.

"Two pair for Mr Field plays potential spade flush for the chief" Fuller announced as he dealt the river card which appeared in the form of a ten of hearts.

"Now Mr Field has a full house playing a potential royal spade flush" Fuller announced as he dealt the final card of the five.

"Oh nice one!" the Commander commented as the required ace of spades appeared giving him a royal flush which beat a full house any day.

"Are you sure you haven't marked these?" Field asked out of curiosity as the Commander began to set about eating his winnings.

"In my experience, I have always found" the Commander mumbled between mouthfuls of biscuits "that accusing a senior Security Service officer of deception only leads to severe trouble."

The Commander paused in mid biscuit and looked up when there was a knock on the office door and a young officer entered with a message.

"Thank you" the Commander acknowledged as the officer delivered a slip of paper with the message and then discreetly departed.

"Ah!" the Commander announced, "We have some good news and some bad news."

"Give me the good news" Tracy urged.

"Our friends at Interpol have identified the mysterious Agent Black as a Mr Wilfred Edgbascher, formerly of Munich Germany" the Commander announced.

"And the bad news?" Sir Richard Crowthorne tentatively enquired as he rose from his seat.

"The jet carrying him and two of his associates departed Heathrow as planned but never arrived in the US" the Commander finished with a semi resigned tone almost as though he had been expecting this development, or at the very least it did not come as a major surprise.

"Terrific!" Tracy responded with an unhappy semi smile that registered her irritation, not to mention deep disappointment.

"Did you notice the ring he was wearing?" Crowthorne commented.

"You mean the one with Omega symbol on it?" the Commander asked, "Yes, I've seen that particular symbol before and it usually spells trouble."

"You know there is something I have always wondered" Tracy enquired "What ever happened to the diamonds from the Lewisham Diamond Heist?"

"Pretty much all of them where never recovered" the Commander responded as he and Tracy left the office and walked down the corridor, arm in arm.

"So Edwin probably buried them somewhere then?" Tracy asked.

"Yep" the Commander responded "I am willing to guess they never appear again for a long time."

"You said nearly all of them where never found" Tracy remarked as they began to descend the fire escape stairs "What happened to the rest of them?"

"Well four of the small ones are in the possession of the Security Service" the Commander grinned knowingly.

"Where?" Tracy asked wondering what on earth the Commander was going on about as they reached the bottom of the stairs and exited through the fire doors into High Holborn outside.

The Commander paused and held Tracy's left hand up to her "You are wearing them!" he responded with a wry grin.

Tracy looked down at her wedding ring with its four set diamonds with sudden surprise.

"You mean I am wearing stolen goods?" she inquired.

"A little legacy from father to son" the Commander explained "The witness protection guys let him keep the eight diamonds he received as payment for being the getaway driver seeing as the vast majority were never likely to be recovered".

"So what now?" Tracy asked as they walked in the direction of the nearby bus stop.

"One small item of unfinished business" the Commander responded "Well more a checking of a theory really".

"Huh?" Tracy was a little nonplussed.

As they reached the bus stop, the Commander looked on down the road toward the High Holborn crossroads where a Routemaster bus on route 8 to Victoria Station was just crossing the junction and approaching towards them.

As it pulled in, a small number of passengers alighted, once the platform was clear, the Commander and Tracy boarded and took their usual seats on the lower deck across the nearside rear wheel arch.

"Hold very tight please" the small Irish lady bus conductor called from the platform, pressing the bell button twice to signal the driver to pull away "Museum Street next stop".

Once clear of the bus stop and heading for the Museum Street stop, the conductor turned and proceeded into the lower saloon of her bus.

"So tell me my dear" the Commander looked up at the conductor with a knowing smile "How long have you been working for Richard Crowthorne at MI5?"

"How the..." the young lady began in wonderment.

"Logical my dear" the Commander responded as he passed his warrant card over the conductor's Oyster Pass reader "Richard has had someone shadowing me throughout this little episode and you seemed to be popping up remarkably regularly".

"So much for my undercover skills" the conductor remarked as the Commander smiled knowingly "Perhaps I should stick to public transport."

"Your secret is safe with me" the Commander confirmed.

"Thanks" she responded before looking on down the saloon of the bus as it pulled into the next stop "Museum Street!" she called out "Alight here for the British Museum!"

"We could do with her on our undercover team" Tracy commented as the conductor made her way back to the rear platform and signalled with the bell to recommence their journey.

"Excuse me my dear" the Commander called to the conductor as she returned back inside the lower saloon "You don't fancy a job do you?"

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